

THE METAL AGES AND MEDIEVAL PERIOD

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KHOLYATO-1 RITUAL COMPLEX ON THE YAMAL PENINSULA

The ritual complex of Kholyato-1 was situated at the Yuribei River mouth on the Yamal Peninsula. It was represented by an anthropomorphic figurine located in front of a semi-circle of arrowheads, and a concentration of reindeer bones and antlers. The ritual complex was placed over a burial. The site is dated to the turn of the 17th–18th centuries and has been interpreted as a warrior burial containing part of the body or as a cenotaph constructed for a warrior, possibly a chief, that was subsequently used as a ritual place. The ritual site was used for post-funeral ceremonies and then as an assembly place for the local home guard.

Keywords: Northwestern Siberia, Yamal-Nenets Autonomous District, Yamal Peninsula, Yuribei River, Samoyedic peoples, sanctuary, burial, military rituals.

Currently, a total of 112 archaeological sites have been discovered on the Yamal Peninsula, including seven long-term settlement sites with the rest being short-term stations (Kosinskaya, Fedorova, 1994: 33–48; Kardash, 2006: 98–100). Large-scale excavations were carried out at twelve sites, and only five of the excavated sites have been published. Every well-studied archaeological site is very important in studying the ancient history of the sub-arctic regions of Western Siberia. Very few ritual and cult places of the late Middle Ages (the 16th–18th centuries) have been studied over all of northwestern Siberia.

The Kholyato-1 archaeological site was discovered in 1989 and was preliminarily determined as a medieval site, on the basis of several medieval ceramic fragments (Sokolov, 1989: 10). The site was excavated in June 1990 by a team of the Tobolsk State Pedagogical

Institute under the supervision of A.V. Sokolov. The works were carried out by Lengiprotrans OJSC under the project of rescue archaeology in the Labytnangi–Bovanenkovo railway construction area (Sokolov, 1991; 1992, fol. 3].

The site is located 308 km to the northeast of Salekhard, 262 km to the north of the municipal center of Yar-Sale, and 18.4 km to the north of the outpost of Ust-Yuribei in the Yamal District of the Yamal-Nenets Autonomous District (Fig. 1). The ritual complex was found on top of a terrace remnant on the left rock bank of the Yasavei-Yakha River, 20.5 km to the northeast of the river mouth and 1.5 km from the current riverbed. This terrace forms the northern bank of the flood-plain lake Khalyato and the site is located at an elevation of 100 m from the water level (Fig. 2). The terrace remnant represents a gentle hill surrounded by a flood

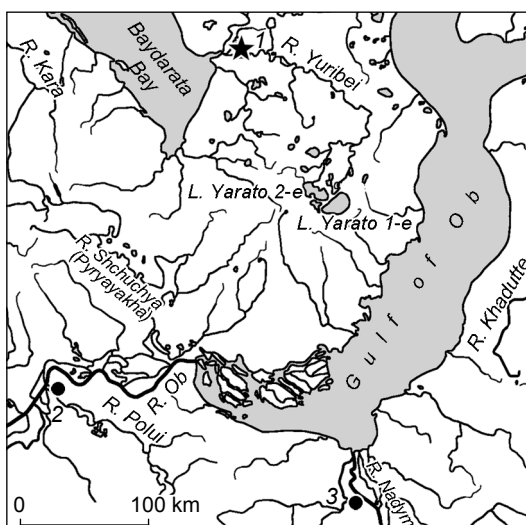


Fig. 1. Location of the late medieval sites over the Yamal Peninsula.

1 – ritual complex of Kholyato-1 (17th to the middle of the 18th century); 2 – Fort Polui (Obdor) (end of the 16th–17th century); 3 – Fort Nadym (end of the 16th to the first third of the 17th century).

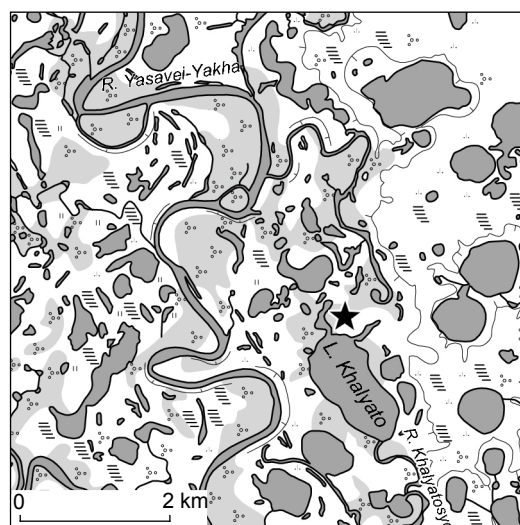


Fig. 2. Situation plan of the Kholyato-1 ritual complex (marked by an asterisk).

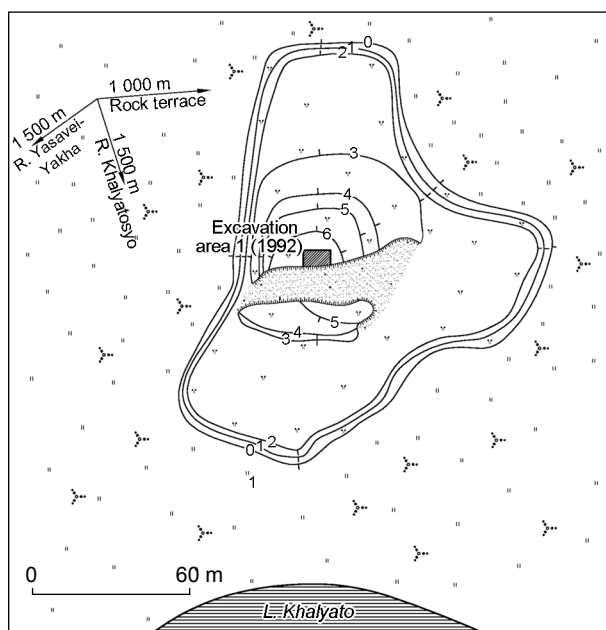


Fig. 3. Plan of the archaeological site of Kholyato-1.

plain marsh. The remnant surface is partially weathered; some part of the surface is vegetated by tundra plants (Fig. 3, 4). The flood plain around is vegetated by bushes and grasses.

In 1990, the excavations began with a trench of 10×6 m at the terrace edge oriented with its long axis along the E-W line (Sokolov, 1992, fol. 11). The coordinate grid was formed with units of 2×2 m; the zero mark was established at the southeastern corner of the



Fig. 4. The southern view of the site.

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