

ANTHROPOLOGY

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THE BURIAL AT AK-ALAKHA-3 MOUND 1, GORNY ALTAI: NEW FINDINGS*

Osteological and archaeological facts concerning burial 1 at Ak-Alakha-3 mound 1 in Gorny Altai, are presented. The barrow is famous for the mummy of a woman (burial 2). Burial 1 was situated immediately above the timber frame with the mummy, and contained the remains of a male and a juvenile. Features of the funerary rite shed light on the social status of the so-called Kara-Koba burials associated with the Pazyryk culture. Pathological symptoms detected in the man's skeleton indicate physical disability. The individual died a violent death.

Keywords: *Pazyryk culture, Kara-Koba burials, spina bifida occulta, enthesopathies, ARS-syndrome.*

Introduction

The Pazyryk mound 1 at Ak-Alakha-3 was excavated in 1993. Two burials were found inside of it. The excavators' attention was first drawn to an undisturbed and frozen burial of a woman's mummy—burial 2 (Polosmak, 2001), owing to which the cemetery became known, and which largely overshadowed burial 1.

To gain a better understanding of the very unusual mound 1 as a whole, one needs to examine burial 1, situated on the roof of the timber frame with burial 2. Inside the vault, which is constructed from stone slabs and logs, two individuals were buried—a male and a juvenile. The burial rite was of the Kara-Koba type. This study

focuses on the biological and archaeological analysis of human remains found in that burial.

The burial

Having been arranged after burial 2, burial 1 was not intrusive. To all appearances it had been made simultaneously with the principal burial and only after that was the mound erected. By 1993, when excavations were launched, the mound had been destroyed by construction works. After the mound was demolished and the surface area, delimited by an enclosure made from large stones and slabs, was cleaned, sharp outlines of a large grave pit emerged. In the center of that rectangular spot there was another distinct pit, dug by the looters. Excavations, which were started within the second, square spot, revealed stones from which the mound had been made.

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The looters' trench in the center of the mound offered them direct access to the burial chamber. Being oriented along the west-to-east axis, it was made from thin poorly preserved blocks and covered with eight thin densely arranged stone slabs. The wooden frame was trapezoid and measured 1.0 m at the head, 0.7 m at the feet, and 2.2 m in length. Two small planks, supporting the stone slabs, lay across the burial chamber (one at the head, another at the feet), and one along the chamber.

One of the slabs in the southern part of the roof had been displaced by the looters. The resulting opening was used to drag the body out by the legs—the lower part of the skeleton was discovered outside the chamber. Judging by the position of bones, they were articulated during looting, so the looters had to dismember the corpse. None of the accompanying artifacts were found during the excavations.

Nearby, in the so-called utility compartment annexed to the northern part of the burial chamber and consisting of two vertically placed stone slabs, there were two crushed clay vessels, two iron knives with ring tops, and bones of a horse (several ribs and vertebrae). These had apparently been laid on a wooden dish, which had decomposed.

As the laboratory examination revealed, human remains belonged to two individuals—a male and a juvenile, which agrees with the accompanying artifacts. After the burial chamber with that burial had been covered with ground, two bodies of horses were placed above it along the northern side of the grave, 0.5–1.0 m from its edge (from the virgin soil level), heads facing east, and one more horse directly behind them, across the grave. The horses were harnessed, judging from the iron bits and pieces of golden foil from the wooden ornaments of the harness (these had decomposed).

Human remains

As the revision of the remains indicated, two individuals are represented—a male aged 25–30 and a juvenile aged 9–10.

The male skeleton is relatively complete. Feet bones are missing and the middle thoracic vertebrae are destroyed. The possible reason is that the looters sought to steal the footwear and some objects placed on the man's chest. Of the juvenile skeleton, only heavily damaged fragments of parietals and temporals have remained as well as a lower molar. The latter is badly damaged too—nearly all the enamel is missing, but certain diagnostic traits are preserved. Apparently, the juvenile's body had been thrown out of the vault.

The male cranium has fallen into fragments. The facial skeleton is especially heavily damaged—only the left zygomatic bone, the maxillae with missing parts of

the anterior walls and without the right frontal process as well as the mandible are preserved. The man was killed with a blow to the occiput inflicted with a heavy weapon. The blow was heavy enough to crush the occipital squama, knocking out a pentagonal or hexagonal piece (its precise shape cannot be assessed because the lower edge is destroyed). The apex of the piece lies virtually on the median sagittal line, 40 mm from the lambda, whereas the mid-cross-section of the opening, whose size at that level measures about 34 mm, coincides with the upper nuchal line (Fig. 1). Inflicting such a blow was possible provided the victim's head was bent, and the assailant met no resistance, suggesting that the man buried in a vault above the main burial of a high-ranking woman was sacrificed. The cause of death of the juvenile buried with him cannot be ascertained.

Measurements of the cranium are given in Table 1 alongside comparative data relating to other male Kara-Koba individuals (Chikisheva, 2012). Cranial length and height are medium whereas the transverse diameter and cranial base length are large. Cranial length was measured not directly to opisthocranium, which coincides with the center of the opening, but 15 mm away from the median sagittal line, so the actual diameter could be 2–5 mm larger. The cranial index in that case would indicate mesocrany rather than brachycrany in case the direct measurements were used. In any event, the index is close to the meso-brachycrany boundary.

Comparing these dimensions and proportions with those in other Kara-Koba males suggests that the Ak-Alakha-3 specimen falls within the variation range of that group in most traits, being quite distinct in several



Fig. 1. Male cranium with sign of a lethal injury.

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