



Transformation of Upper Taz Selkup funeral rites according to paleoecological data

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1. Introduction

The Selkup are a small ethnic group numbering 3649 people. According to the 2010 population census, 1988 of the Selkup live in the basin of the Taz River (Fig. 1, 1). The Upper Taz Selkup are descendants of the Narym Selkup, who migrated from the Tomsk-Narym area of the Ob River basin in the 17th and 18th centuries for political, economic, and probably environmental reasons (Fig. 1, 2) (Pelih, 1981, pp. 8–74). Linguists consider the Upper Taz Selkup to be native speakers of the Upper Taz dialect of the Selkup language, which is thought to belong to the Samoyedic group of the Uralic language family (Kazakevich and Budyanskaya, 2010, p. 3). The area of the Upper Taz Selkup's settlement is located in the northern taiga zone and ranges from the Ratta River to the issue of the Tolka River. The Upper Taz Selkup leads a semi-nomadic way of life based on fishing, hunting, gathering, and herding reindeer. Despite the long-standing contacts with the Russians, the Upper Taz Selkup have managed to maintain their language, traditional way of life, and material and intellectual culture (Fig. 1, 3). The Selkup live in small seasonal settlements of one to three families along the banks of the Taz River far from civilization. Although the Upper Taz Selkup moved to the north three to four centuries ago, their process of adaptation to new conditions has not yet come to an end. In the course of several generations of scientists studying this small ethnic group, ethnographic and historical data on the 19th and 20th centuries have been collected. However, the first archaeological data relating to the Upper Taz Selkup appeared only in 2013 during the excavations of the Kikki-Akki burial ground (18th–19th centuries CE). The unique preservation of organic materials, specific to the northern latitudes, provides us with a rare opportunity to gain knowledge regarding certain elements of traditional Upper Taz Selkup funeral rites. In particular, this analysis aims to examine the remains of funeral food to reveal preferences in the choice of wood species in the construction of funerary structures and in the production of arrow shafts and to identify the composition of the clothes and shoes found with the buried people.

This study aims to investigate the transformation of certain elements of the Upper Taz Selkup funeral rites in the process of adaptation to new conditions. To achieve these goals, several tasks were set. First,

an initial set of data obtained from archaeological excavations concerns Upper Taz Selkup funeral rites in the 18th and 19th centuries. Second, modern ethnographic material addressing the issues under consideration are assessed and compared. Third, this study identifies the similarities and differences between then and now for selected elements of Upper Taz Selkup funeral rites.

2. Materials

The materials were obtained during excavations of a burial ground dating to the 18th and 19th centuries, specifically at Kikki-Akki (Russian Federation, Krasnoselkup region of Yamalo-Nenets Autonomous District, the upper reaches of the Taz River, the mouth of the Koralky River) (Poshekhonova et al., 2015). The dating of the graves with artifacts proved to be difficult. Many items were found that were several centuries older than the necropolis. Only lasher's bells, clothes with gold embroidery, thimbles, and a number of finger rings and knives made in Russia were reliable materials for dating as *termini post quem* because the listed items were made only in the 18th and 19th centuries. This time frame was confirmed by the results of radiocarbon dating (Table 1).

The materials of the 2013 excavations at six burials were analyzed. According to the data of these paleoecological studies, the preliminary results on certain elements of Upper Taz Selkup funerary rites in earlier times were obtained (Poshekhonova et al., 2015). However, the small number of observations created a need for continued research. Twelve collective and individual burials were investigated in 2016. To search for funeral and sacrificial complexes, large areas between burials were included in the excavation space. All 18 burials were made according to the rite of inhumation in ground pits with a depth of 50 cm to 70 cm. The deceased were stretched out on their backs with their heads to the southeast, east, or northeast inside the funerary constructions that were placed on the floor of the burial pit (Fig. 1, 5). The pits were filled with earth and covered with wood and birch bark. Burials were both single and collective (two or three individuals) (Table 2).

As a result, a representative collection of artifacts made of organic materials was available for analysis. In accordance with the goals and

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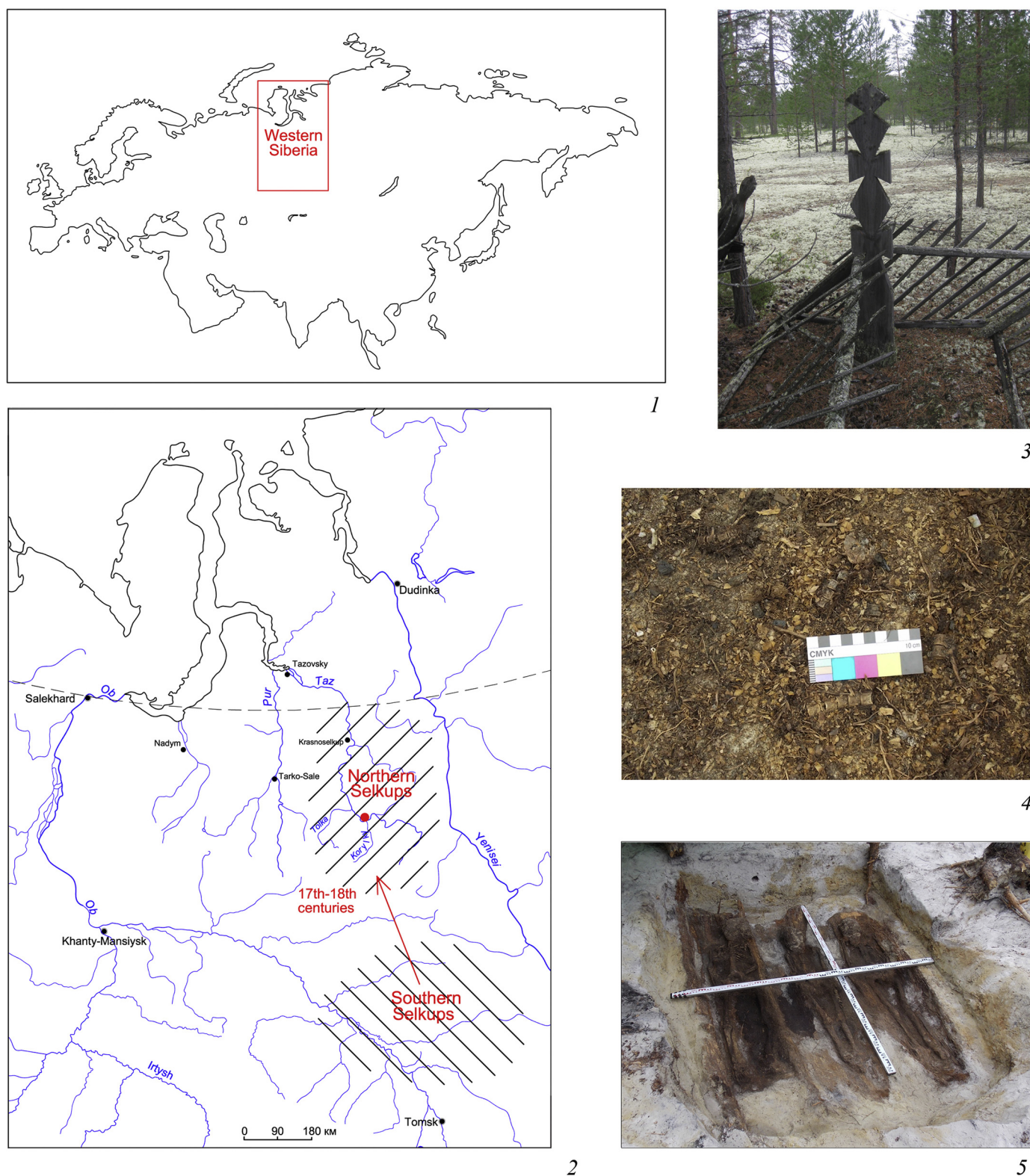


Fig. 1. Location of Kikki-Akki burial ground, traditional and modern Selkup burials; 1 – Western Siberia on the Eurasian continent; 2 – migration of the Selkup and location of the Kikki-Akki burial ground; 3 - carved pole located above grave and fallen fence (Upper Taz Selkup, modern cemetery Kikki-Akki village); 4 – accumulation of bones and scales (funeral feast) in upper part of 14th burial of Kikki-Akki burial ground; 5 – individual funeral wooden constructions (a hollowed-out woodblock and a facing frame) on the floor of burial pit 14.

tasks of the study, several of the following were selected: the bone remains of birds, fish, and mammals (Fig. 1, 4), the different parts of funeral constructions and wooden arrow shafts, and the fragments of upper winter clothing and footwear made of animal skins.

2.1. Zooarchaeology materials

This is the most numerous category of objects found in two burial pits (14 and 16). Three males (30–40, 25–35, and older than 50 years)

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