

Lots of Comments on The Monuments of Eilatan-Oktom Culture (On the Example of Burial-Mounds)

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Abstract: The article briefly describes the history of the study of Mazar-kurgans belonging to the early Iron Age of Eilatan-Aktam culture, which provide an idea of the material culture and funeral rites of the population of the Fergana Valley of this period.

Keywords: Fergana Valley, Early Iron Age, Eilatan culture, Aktam-type Mazar-kurgans, agricultural communities, Saks, funeral rites.

INTRODUCTION

The Fergana Valley is one of the most beautiful oases in Central Asia, where from ancient times there were very favorable natural conditions for human life and productive activity. Surrounded by mountains on almost every side, different climatic conditions can be observed in different parts of the valley - from the hot desert of the Central Fergana Valley to the permafrost in the majestic mountains.

The fact that the valley is surrounded by high mountains not only created excellent conditions for the development of agriculture, but also for the development of animal husbandry rather, the masters of culture, who have been developing in the Fergana Valley for a long time, followed the path of independent development without being negatively affected by the great kingdoms and glorious states that appeared on the ancient historical stage of our country [1: c.3]¹.

Regular archeological excavations in the Fergana Valley began in 1930 with field research by the SAHMC (State Academy of the History of Material Culture) expedition and expanded after World War II as a result of attempts, many findings on the chronological period from the Stone Age to the

Middle Ages have been obtained by archaeologists. With the proliferation of archeological finds, it has become increasingly clear that the Fergana Valley has been inhabited by humans since ancient times and has a history of several thousand years of irrigated agriculture. After all, most of the archeological materials obtained from the valley monuments during field research date back to the II-I millennia BC, and, of course, the monuments of such a large historical period were not the same.

The diversity of the monuments of material culture of ancient Fergana indirectly reflects the complex history of the farming and pastoral peoples who lived together in the valley. This situation, in turn, has led to the formation of different cultural and ethnic branches of the interaction of two different farming tribes. That is why the need to separate archeological cultures from the rich findings of the last 70-80 years in order to understand the history of the middle of the first millennium BC has caused a lot of discussion and debate among scientists, and these debates are still going on.

It is known that by the VII century BC, the Chust culture disappeared and the new - the first Iron Age of development gave way to the monuments of Eilatan culture (in some sources called Eilatan-Aktam culture). In the materials of this period, the process of harmonization of agricultural and steppe livestock cultures is clearly visible. [21: 9-p]².

The term Eilatan culture is named after the first monument opened in 1934 by B.A. Latinin, the founder of Soviet-era Fergana archeology. Great strides have been made in the study of this culture, especially its burial mounds. There is a separate article about this by Yu.A. Zadneprovsky [17]³.

Separate tombs containing Eilatan pottery were first found in 1940 near the villages of Kaskanyor (Chek) and Naimancha on the route of the North Fergana Canal. The handmade semicircular bowls found in these tombs were identified by TG Oboldueva as Usun pottery and dated to the III-II centuries BC[23]⁴.

In the course of research, it became clear that they were identical to the bowls found in the ruins of the city of Eylaton, so the author of this article recalculated them and attributed them to the monuments of the Eylaton period. Such monuments include individual graves and individual finds on the route of the Greater Fergana Canal in the Tuleykan cemetery near Osh[4]⁵, excavated by A.N. Bernshtam in 1947. Their chronology is marked by patterned pottery and two bronze Scythian-type pawns found in the Shart cemetery complex in the Alay Valley, which A.N. Bernshtam traces back to the V-III centuries BC.

The dramatic changes in the study of the monuments of Eilatan culture were connected in 1954 with the opening of the Aktam cemetery in Southern Fergana by B.Z. Hamburg and N.G. Gorbunova[6]⁶. As a result of the mass opening of the forts in the Oktom-type cemeteries, materials were obtained that allow a comprehensive description of the culture of the Early Iron Age population. They were primarily burial-related artifacts, which made it possible to periodize the castles and the Eilatan culture in general. The greatest contribution to the study of these cemeteries was made by NG Gorbunova, who proposed to call the Eilatan culture Eilatan-Aktam culture[7]⁷.

Since 1967, E.D. Saltovskaya has been carrying out large-scale work in the Dashti Asht cemetery near the village of Asht in northwestern Fergana[24]⁸. Another cemetery of the period in question was explored in 1981 by G.A. Brikina in the south-west of Osh oblast, where he discovered 6 burial mounds in the Andarkhan cemetery in the Khojabakirgan valley[5]9. Yu.A. Zadneprovsky was also engaged in the study of similar burial mounds in eastern Fergana[16: c.55]¹⁰. He determined the age of the tomb found in Ashkoltepa by looking at pottery

made on a wheel, which differed sharply from the hand-made Chust pottery.

In terms of material, workmanship, and shape, these vessels are similar to the pottery made of a wheel found in the ruins of the city of Eilatan and the tombs of Aktam. The resemblance to the vessels made in the wheel at Eilatan, the main aspects of the funeral, that is, the similarity of the corpse lying to the west with the back, and the vessels placed to the right of the shoulder, allowed the tomb found in Ashkoltepa to be included in the list of Aktam cemeteries of the VI-V-III centuries BC.

This burial was placed between the cultural layers of the Late Bronze Age, which allows an important conclusion to be drawn about the relative chronology of the Chust and Eilatan cultures, as the site of the Chust culture had been abandoned, albeit partially, by the time of burial. Thus, a new tomb of the Eilatan period was discovered in Ashkoltepa, a new type previously unknown, that is, a burial in the ruins of the site of the previously existing Chust culture.

Another monument is the Ozgar II cemetery in the Osh oasis. It is located on the left bank of the Akboyra River, 12 km southwest of Osh. In one part of the hills there are randomly 25 not-so-high forts. Excavations were carried out here in 1979, 1980 and 1982[17]¹¹. A total of 19 burial mounds were unearthed, in which the bodies were buried in shallow Ora-type tombs, facing from west to east. All the graves were looted. Nevertheless, many pottery vessels, bronze and iron paycons, jewelry (bracelets, rings and necklaces), and bone items were found in them. Significantly, the pottery on the wheel found here is similar to the pottery in the ruins of the city of Eilatan. In Ozgar, a lot of hums made on the wheel have been identified. Handmade pottery comes in a variety of shapes, among which there are types that are new to the period.

In terms of the structure of the tombs, burial ceremonies, and artifacts, the Ozgar Eilatan culture is similar to other burial monuments (cemeteries in the Oktam complex)[6; 11; 13]¹². However, it does not contain the painted and patterned vessels typical of the Oqtom complex. The local and chronological

difference of the Ozgar cemetery is also evident in the discovery of iron packs.

The materials found in Ozgar expand the understanding of the culture of the Eilatan period in the Osh oasis, as it was previously known only from the findings in the Tuleykan cemetery studied in 1947 by A.N. Bernstam.

Also, new monuments belonging to the nomadic Sak tribes in the remote areas of Fergana in the Early Iron Age were studied in 1978 in the Ketmontepa and Karasuv valleys by I.Khojamberdiev[18: c.484] and K.I.Tashbaeva[25]¹³.

The fortress of this period was excavated in 1980 in the Temir-Korut II cemetery in the Navkat valley[15: c.89]¹⁴. A corpse with two backs and a head facing west was found in a large grave. Among the corpses was a handmade bowl.

Summarizing the data available in the literature, it can be said that the number of identified cemeteries of Eilatan culture has increased fivefold since 1954.

Approximately 250 graves have been excavated in 20 burial mounds, which help to give a sufficient picture of the material culture and burial features of the early Iron Age people of Fergana.

For a long time, these cemeteries were considered to be located only in the south-east of Fergana[3]15. This does not take into account the fact that the first tombs with Eilatan pottery were found by T.G.Oboldueva in northern Fergana.

They were later found in the northwest, east, and southwest of the valley. The monuments under consideration were identified mainly in 7 areas:

- 1) North-west Fergana - near the village of Asht;
2. Northern Fergana - on the banks of the Syrdarya, west of the Kosonsoy River (the village of Naymancha in the northern Fergana Canal);
3. Northern Fergana - on the right bank of the river Naryn (Kaskanyor);
4. East Fergana - in Ashkoltepa;
5. South-eastern Fergana - in the Osh oasis (Tuleykan, Ozgar II);

6. In the central part of Southern Fergana - the main group of Aktam cemeteries;

7. South-western Fergana - in the valley of the Khojabakirgan river (Andarkhan).

Hence, the settlements and burial monuments of Eilatan are widespread in the valley, which indicates that during the Eilatan period the population was scattered throughout the territory of Fergana.

Initially, the Aktam cemetery was marked by the V-III centuries BC [6]¹⁶ and V-IV centuries BC[7]¹⁷, and later appeared in the VI-IV-III centuries BC[8]¹⁸. Today it is dated to the VI-III centuries BC[9]¹⁹. This date can be applauded because, due to the conservatism of the funeral, it retained its properties until the 3rd century BC, even after the disappearance of the Eilatan culture in the 4th century BC. Although TG Oboldueva proposed to change the upper limit of Eilatan culture from the IV century BC to the II century BC, we believe that there is no reason to agree with his opinion.

The burial of the body with its back facing west was recorded at the Dalvarzin settlement of the Chust culture, and in appearance was peculiar to the local peasant tribes. Based on the similarity of burial and pottery, the existing cemeteries of the Eilatan pottery considered can be considered as burial monuments of the first Iron Age of the peasant population settled in Fergana.

As early as 1952, A.N. Bernstam suggested that the Sak tribes lived in Fergana. He was later supported by B.A. Litvinsky[19]²⁰. N.G.Gorbunova writes, "The issue of the residence of the Saks in the Fergana region cannot be resolved at present due to the inaccuracy of the information provided in the written sources".[7: c.16]²¹. The sharpest point in this discussion was expressed by B.A. Litvinsky, who believed that the settlement of Eilatan belonged to the Saks, who inhabited different groups of Saks in Fergana: nomads (slopes of the Qurama ridge of the Alay Valley, etc.), semi-nomads and settlers. They all belonged to a large confederation called the saka-khaumovarka. He also argues that the influx of Seleucids into Central Asia in the 3rd century BC was supposed to lead to the settlement of nomadic

Sak tribes in Fergana and the subsequent disappearance of the Aktam burial[20]²².

In fact, during the Early Iron Age, peasant tribes lived in Fergana, they were descendants of tribes belonging to the Chust culture of the Late Bronze Age[22: 12-p]²³.

The remote areas were inhabited by Saxon herdsmen (nomadic and semi-nomadic), who preserved the cultural traditions of steppe bronze. At the same time, it is necessary to take into account the integral development of the agricultural culture, which is characterized by embossed pottery, during the entire first millennium BC. The main part of the population of the Dovan state (II-I centuries BC) were settled peasant communities, which were direct descendants of the population of the Early Iron Age. The assumption that the Saks lived in Fergana is based on inaccurate written information about the Saks living in Sogdiana.

It was also based on the similarity of the burial structures and burials in the cemeteries of the Eilatan culture with the monuments of the Ettisuv and Tien-Shan nomads of that period. Although their similarity is not in doubt, its origin can be interpreted differently. It should be noted at this point that it is usually said that the Oktam cemeteries are similar to the Sak-Usun monuments, and the differences between them are not taken into account. In the Fergana cemeteries no animal-style items of the Scythian style were found at all, the weapons items were limited and consisted of only a few paikons. The armor of the horses was not found at all. They also differ from sak tombs by their unusually long forts and some features. Hence, it is impossible to speak of a complete resemblance between the burial monuments of the Fergana settlers and the nomadic Saks, and they cannot be considered as monuments of the Saks.

The origin of the first Iron Age burial structures in Fergana has not been fully resolved. But it is clear from the available data that the emergence of the above-mentioned similarity is explained by the cultural influence of the neighboring steppe bronze tribes and the relatively later Sak tribes.

Because in the earlier stage of Chust culture burials in castles and separate cemeteries were not known[2: 179-p]²⁴. At the same time, it is possible that some of the Sak tribes settled in Fergana and became part of the peasant population.

Thus, a comparative study of the burial monuments of the nomads in the context of the ancient Fergana and Saks reveals their general and specific aspects, it also makes it possible to determine whether there are permanent cultural and trade ties between peasant communities and nomads.

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