

A TOMB OF THE TURKIC PERIOD IN NORTHERN MONGOLIA

A REPORT ON ONE OF THE DISCOVERIES OF THE
MONGOL-HUNGARIAN ARCHAEOLOGICAL
EXPEDITION OF 1963

ISTVAN ERDÉLYI

Hungarian Academy of Science

In 1963 Hungarian archaeologists in collaboration with scholars from the Institute of Historical Studies of the Mongolian Academy of Sciences had their fourth season of excavations in Northern Mongolia. Work was carried out in the valley of the Huní river in the Hangai mountains, to be more precise, in the district of Erdenemandal Sumun, in the county of Archangai Aimak, the centre of which is the town of Cecerleg. The river belongs to the system of the Selenga river. On a site about 90 km (by air) north of Cecerleg, on the terrace of the left bank of the river, we succeeded in excavating the kurghan of a warrior of the East Turkic Empire.

After leaving the cooperative centre of Ih Tamir we followed the valley of the Tamir for a while, then reached the valley of the Huní to the north. On the directions of C. Dorjsuren we found the site of excavations made in 1956 on the bank of the Bartın Súdú, a right-hand tributary of the Huní river.

The finds made nearby by C. Dorjsuren in 1956¹ were published only in Mongolia. As they belong to the same period I should like to say a few words about them. In one of the three small stone kurghans on the Bartın Súdú, he found a wooden box and a miniature belt with gold mountings. The other kurghans were empty. A low semicircular stone dike "defended" the kurghans from the river. Dorjsuren dated the mountings in the 5th-6th centuries and attributed them to the Jwan-jwans or the Turks. Parallels for these mountings occur amongst the finds from the early Avar period in the Carpathian

¹ Negen bulshni tuhai. Sinjleh Uhaan 46. 4. (1956) pp. 39-41.

Basin, for instance in the region of Kiskörös-Vágóhid², in Baja³ and in a very rich tomb at Zsitvatorok⁴.

The period between the 6th and the 8th centuries is a very eventful one in the history of Mongolia and the surrounding regions. For this reason and due to the scarcity of finds it is very difficult to relate these tombs and mounds to ethnic groups. The territory of the present Mongolian People's Republic was ruled by the Jwan-jwans (or Jwans) from the end of the 4th century to the middle of the 6th⁵, when they were defeated by the Turks coming from the Altai⁶ (between 552 and 554).⁷ They were in possession of the land until the victory of the Uyghurs in A.D. 745. The latter were defeated by the Kirgiz tribes from the Yenisei in A.D. 840.

During the Turkic rule of almost 200 years several crises occurred, and in 581 the Empire split into two parts (the Western Khaganate existed only until A.D. 660). Since the finds from our excavation are all from the territory of the Eastern Turkic Empire we are here concerned only with this part. The Eastern Khaganate reached the peak of its power in about A.D. 619. We have to note that its main ethnic groups were Uygur and Tölösz tribes.⁸

Our survey in the region was very successful since we found on the left bank of the Huní river, about 2.5 km from the kurghans excavated by Dorjsuren, near a rocky peak to the south-west called Dicht, a stone kurghan of the same period (Hana 1.). Its centre was slightly sunk. The kurghan is rather far away from the two gigan-

² *Horváth, T.*, The Cemeteries of the Avars at Úllö and Kiskörös. *Archaeologia Hungarica* Vol. XIX (1935).

³ *Hampel, J.*, Alterthümer des frühen Mittelalters in Ungarn. Vol. II. (Braunschweig 1905) p. 841, in the *Archaeologiai Ertesítő*, Vol. 23 (1903) erroneously under Szeghegy.

⁴ *Budinski-Krička, V.*, Pohrebisko z neskorei doby avarski Žitavskei Toni na Slovensku. *Slovenska Archaeologia*. Vol. IV. 1. (1956) Tabl. XXVII. From the tomb with horse No 26.

⁵ *Barthold, V.*, Oчерк истории Семиречия Ed. 2. (Frunze 1943) p. 15.

⁶ *Gumiliov, L.*, considers the Turks consisting of many ethnic groups coming from Hesi to the Altai in 439 A. D.: *Drevnie turki VI-VII. vv. (autoferatum)* Leningrad 1962, p. 4.

⁷ *Istoria Mongolskoi Narodnoi Respubliki*. Part 2. Paragraph I. p. 66. (Moskva 1954).

⁸ *Gumiliov, L.*, op. cit. p. 22.

tic prehistoric "Kereksurs" ("Kirgiz nest" in Mongolian, actually a stone mound) to the south-south-west and is in no way related to them (Fig. 1).

4 km south of the kurgans were three small stones lying side by side. The stone mound measured 8.80 by 9.50 m in width and was about 1 m high. First we removed the stones from the centre of the kurgan in an area of 3×2 m. Down to 150 cm depth there were no remains except three horse's teeth and the fragment of an animal bone. On the north side of the excavated section traces of the digging of grave robbers could easily be recognized. At a depth of 160 cm we found fragments of a quiver made of birch bark with parts of wood bracing. In the north-west part of the excavated area, near its east wall, at a depth of 60 cm a human heel bone was found. Further down there were stones. At 165 cm a hobble-pin with a tamga (personal identification mark) carved in bone (fig. 3a) and an iron arrow-head equipped with a hollow spherical bone attachment to make a whistling noise when shot came to light. The stones continued further down. At a depth of 175 cm a small fragment of an iron arrow and a human metatarsal bone were found. Next to it at the south wall of the trench there was a horse's bone and a human vertebra and near the former a wooden fragment. Near the vertebra we found a heart-shaped bronze mounting with three rivets—one of them broken—the reverse undecorated and with a sharp centre. Nearby were the tibia of a horse and metatarsal bones. At this depth ice crystals began to appear in the frozen ground. The next finds were the hip bone of a horse, a complete horse's rib and parts of a second one (at the north wall of the trench, widened here to 2.50 m), further a piece of a long thin wooden staff. In the centre there were broken pieces of birch bark: a strip 5 cm wide, 12.5 cm long, curved-in at both ends and with a nail hole at one end; and a piece 12 cm wide in very bad condition. These fragments could have been part of the quiver. We found here also human toe bones, and vertebrae, tail bones and two more ribs of a horse. At a depth of 190 cm the mouth of a drinking vessel carved in bone was found. The vessel itself was made of animal skin (fig. 3 b). At 195 cm two more arrow heads came to light, one with a whistling device, the other three-edged with a long shaft and narrow feathering. They were both in poor condition. It can easily be seen that the holes of the

bone-balls are between the edges. At a depth of 210 cm there were more horse bones. It is obvious that the burial was made complete with the horse which, to judge by the position of the skull, the hip and the rump bones, had its head to the west. At or near the region of the flanks were two heart-shaped bronze buttons. The grave robbers had smashed the skeleton of the horse from the neck to the hip bone. A fragment of one of the bit rings was next to the horse's mouth. Further down in the south corner of the trench lamb bones were found and a large rectangular iron girth buckle next to them. In about the centre of the trench to the right of the horse was a fragment from the centre of a bow of bone with tracings at the end and at one of its edges. It was not in its original position. Between the skeletons of the warrior and the horse there were shreds of skin and pieces of a knife. Alongside the body was a piece of wood, part of the bow. Near it were silk rags, a very thin bronze belt-end, a fragment of a very thin belt-end, a heart-shaped mounting, a small belt-end of white bronze with a rather high tin content, like the other belt-ends with a rivet on its reverse and a sharp thin ridge in its centre, another heart-shaped mounting with leather, and a bone hobble-pin with a tamga similar to those found higher up.

On reaching the floor of the tomb it appeared that the skeletons of the warrior and the horse were placed into two separate pits. Moreover, when counting the horse bones, we found that they belonged to two horses, but only one skull has remained. The warrior was buried in a niche grave dug from the pit for the horses. The ground above the niche was undisturbed. The human skeleton was placed 10-15 cm deeper than those of the horses. It was in good condition. Along the right side of the skeleton was a 38 cm long and 8 cm wide tile-like wooden plank with a sharp edge. In the region of the loins were fragments of bronze mountings (hole-rings). The left hand was on the hip bone and the right near the thigh bone. His head was facing west. The skeleton was 160 cm long. The grave niche was 245 cm deep. Around the pelvis of the dead man a piece of Chinese silk damask, a small piece of a rough woven material and pieces of felt were found. His belt was decorated with rectangular and semicircular bronze mountings (fig. 2). Under the skull was a plain flat stone slab. At the outer side of the right shin was a bronze ring and a piece of leather with a tiny heart-shaped mounting (fig. 5). His leather pouch was

decorated with a gold loop mounting. In the pouch we found the fragment of a comb of bone (Fig. 4) with hair, two flint stones and a crumbled piece of iron for striking. On the rim of the pouch was a chain like thread-crochet work. The orientation of the body was to the east, the skull showing a deviation of 20 degrees to the south. Under the right rib cage were lamb bones.

The interpretation of our Mongolian finds of 1963 is not easy. The dating is within wide limits. As there is hardly any published material from the Mongolian region that could provide parallels, we can only refer to finds from the Altai and Yenisei regions. With regard to the burial custom, we have to note first that the orientation of the grave differs from that of graves of the same period excavated at Hutag Úl in Mongolia where the skeletons lay with their skulls to the north⁹. The semicircular undecorated belt mountings and the bone hobble-pins were identical. We were the first archaeologists to find a niche grave in Mongolian territory. Further parallels of the rectangular belt mountings can be seen among the finds from a stone kurghan without stone fence in Tuva¹⁰, where there were also remains of a horse, but only of one.

G. Borovka discovered in 1925 in the Tola valley in Mongolia the only other tomb of a warrior of the 6th-8th centuries buried with two horses¹¹. The human skeleton lay with the skull to the east. Burying with horses was a typical Altai custom. Belts decorated with identical or similar mountings appear also on stone sculptures of the Turkic period. The most beautiful of these is from Tuva¹², from the bank of the Ham-Dit river in the neighbourhood of the village

⁹ In 1959 7 kilometers north from Hoccho-Tsaidam under the direction of Ser-Odiav, Navaan D. and E. A. Novgorodova discovered five tombs of the Turkic Period. The materials are unpublished and are deposited in the Archaeological Laboratory of the Institute of Historical Sciences of the Mongol Academy of Sciences together with the diary.

¹⁰ *Grach, A. D.*, *Arheologicheskie raskopi v Mongun Taige i issledovanija v Centralnoi Tuve. Trudy Tuvinskoi Komplexnoi Archeologicheskoi - etnographicheskoi Expedicii*. Vol. I. 1961. p. 17.

¹¹ *Boroka, G.*, *Arheologicheskoie obsledovanie srednevo techenia reki Toly. Severneia. Mongolia*. Vol. II. Leningrad 1927. pp. 73-74.

¹² *Kyzlasov, L. r.*, *Tuva v period turkskovo Kaganata (VI - VIII vv.) Vestnik Moskovskovo Gosudarstvennovo Universiteta*. Ser. IX. 1960. Vol. I. p. 58-59 or 2 a-b.

Handagayti. The figure wears a belt decorated with rectangular and semicircular mountings in a mixture similar to that on the belt we found. Men wearing belts with similar mountings appear also on Altai and Mongolian sculptures¹³. In Tuva these mountings were found together with other objects, e.g. at Mongun taiga they occurred with hobble-pins similar to the Hanai ones¹⁴.

In the Yenisei regions similar rectangular mountings came to light in a 6th-8th-c. *tsaat* in Kopion, which Mr. Kiseliiov linked with the ancestors of the Khirgiz¹⁵.

We can trace these mountings to Eastern Europe: in one of the 7th-c. tombs in the cemetery of Brod in the Kama region a belt buckle of the Hanai type was found¹⁶, and we know the semicircular mountings from the cemetery of Nievolino¹⁷.

Numerous mountings of similar types are known from the Altai, e. g. hobble-pins from the 6th-8th-c. cemetery of Kurai (groups II and III), where there are also burials with two horses (kurghans II/4 and III/2). Here the orientation of the dead was to the east. In this cemetery was also a stone sculpture showing a figure wearing a belt with similar semicircular mountings¹⁸. These graves were also covered by simple stone kurghans without fences or dikes. In group IV of this cemetery parallels of the small heart-shaped bronze mountings were found¹⁹, and similar pieces came to light recently in the valley of the Tshui river²⁰.

The birch-bark quiver of which we only found small fragments, was also known in the Altai during this period²¹. The "Whistling arrows" were also used in this region and they are equally known

¹³ *Ievtiuhova, L. A.*, Kamennye izvaiania Iushnoi Sibiri i Mongolii. Materialy i Issledovania po Arheologii SSSR. Vol. 24. 1952. pp. 74. 3, 97., 45-46., 100. 49.

¹⁴ *Grach, A. D.*, Op. cit. pp. 126-a127. Kurgan No MT 58 x.

¹⁵ *Drevniaia istoria Iushnoi Sibiri.* Moskva - Leningrad 1952. p. 617. Taf. LIX. 13.

¹⁶ *Gening, V. F.*, Brodovskii mogilnik. Kratkie Soobschchenia Instituta Istorii Materialnoi Kultury. Vol. 52. 1953. 34/7 respectively.

¹⁷ Unpublished. Tomb 17. Manuscript by: I. Erdélyi - E. Ojtozi, Der Friedhof von Niewolino. The excavation of A. W. Schmidt in 1926-27.

¹⁸ *Kiseliiov S. V.*, Op. cit. Taf. XLVIII. 2. XLVIII. 5. and pp. 530, 533.

¹⁹ In the same Taf. L. 3.

²⁰ *Sher, Ia. A.*, Pogrebenie s koniom v Tshuiskoi Doline. Sovietskaia Arheologia 1961. Vol. I. p. 280-282.

²¹ *Kiseliiov, S. V.*, Op. cit. Taf. L. Group IV of the Kurai cemetery.

from representations of this time in the Turfan Basin²² We find parallels for them also in Tuva²³, at the Yenisei and in the cemetery of Kaptstal²⁴.

The piece of silk found near the waist of the skeleton is at present under a technical textile examination. Finds like this are very rare. Mr. G. Borovka is the only scholar so far who has found silk of this period in Mongolia: in 1925 in the Tola valley. Silk was also found in cemetery II at Katandai²⁵. It was probably not difficult to buy silk in the trade posts at the Chinese border, which were especially established for trade with the Turks (known from A. D. 588, 624, and 730²⁶).

The edge of the pouch with golden loop mounting is purely archaic in character and has folkloristic parallels in southern Kirghizia²⁷.

All these parallels help to define the place to be assigned to our finds among Turkic or early Kirghiz cemeteries. The time of these burials cannot be fixed precisely, since none of the finds help towards a closer dating; at the moment we can only suggest the 7th or the first half of the 8th c²⁸.

Our expedition was the second international excavation after the Second World War to discover Turkic relics in Mongolia. It was undertaken within the framework of Mongol-Hungarian Cooperation. Our 1963 expedition was the fourth Mongol-Hungarian expedition. It was followed by a fifth one in 1964. The continuation of our research may bring many further important results for the study of the history of the Turkic nomadic peoples²⁹.

²² *Le Coq A.*, Chotscho. Berlin. 31. Taf. I. Bāzāklik.

²³ *Grach, A. D.*, Op. cit. p. 132. 75. Kurghan No MTIV.

²⁴ *Kiseliou, S. V.*, OP. cit. Taf. LIX. 21.

²⁵ *Zakharov, A.*, Materialy po arheologii Sibiri. Trudy Gosudarstvennogo Istoricheskovo Muzeia. Vol. I. Moskva, 1926. (Material discovered in 1865).

²⁶ *Bichurin, Ia.*, Svedenia o narodah obitavshih v Srednei Azii. Vol. I. Moskva-Leningrad 1949 pp. 239, 240, 251, 276.

²⁷ *Antipina, K. I.*, Osobennosti materialnoi kul'tury i prikladnovo iskusstva iushnyh kirgizov. Frunze 1962. p. 109.

²⁸ The first was discovered by the Czechoslovak Expedition in 1958 under the directorship of L. Jise. (The memorial of Kül-Tegin). Arheologicke Rozhledy 1959.

²⁹ The archaeological excavations in Mongolia - in which two experts took part up to now on the Mongolian side (D. Navaan and C. Dorjsuren) - being parallel to the more and more stepped up Hungarian archaeological researches, make the joint local examinations of the beginning and ending points of the Migration Period possible.

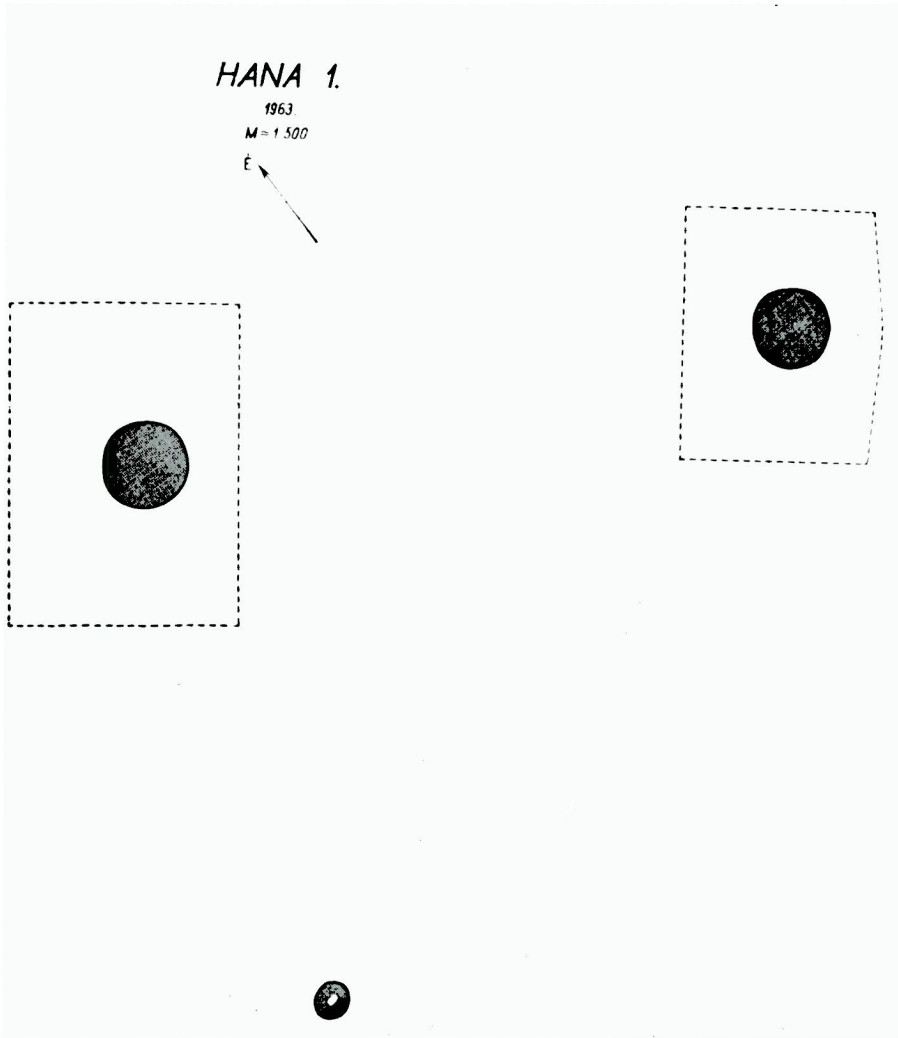


Fig. 1 — Site of Kurgan Hana 1. with Kereksurs.

I. Erdelyi

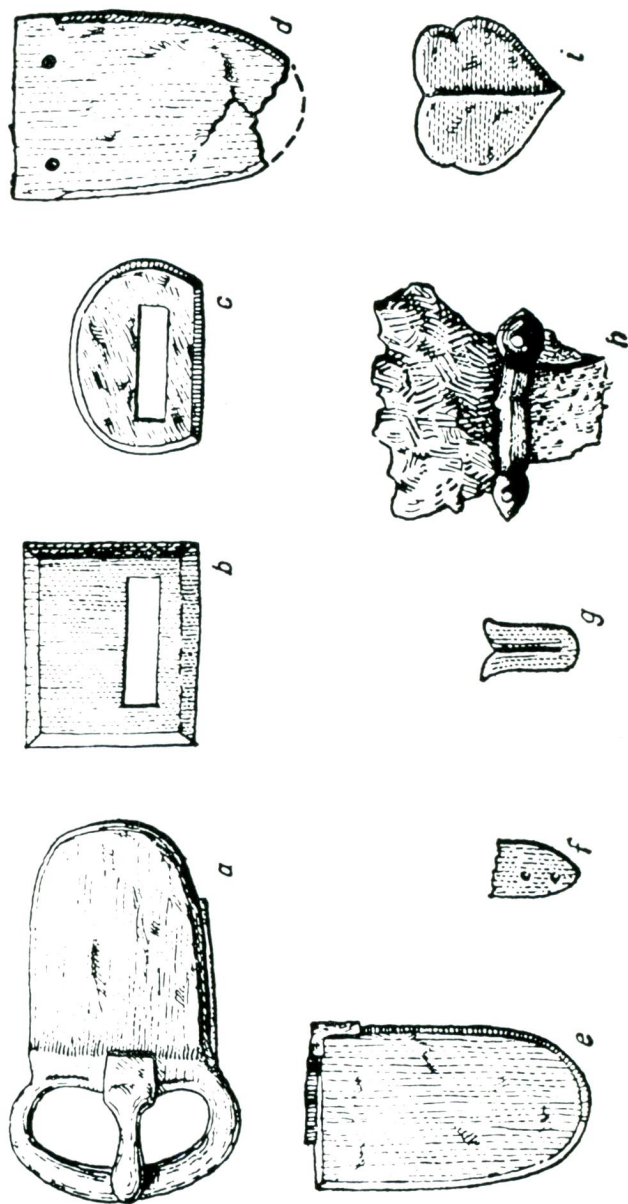


Fig. 2

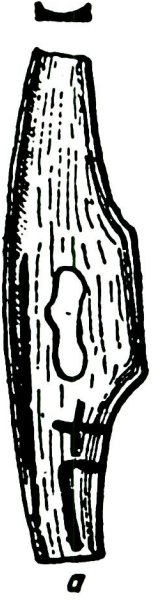


Fig. 3

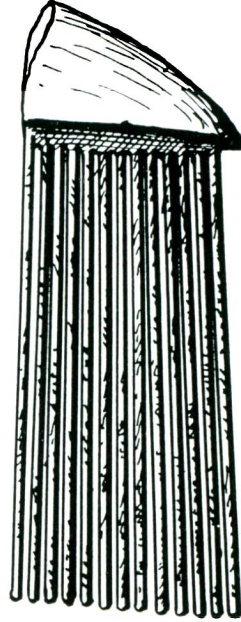
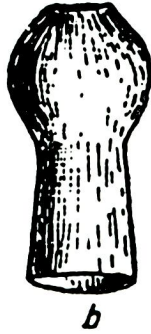


Fig. 4

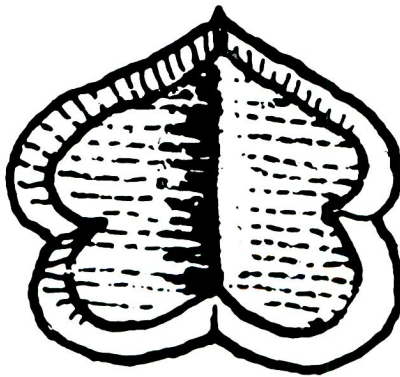


Fig. 5

