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**Elements of Burial and Mourning Ceremonies of Paleo-Selkups
Southern Group “Shieshgula”**

The study of the burial ceremonies of Narymsk Selkups, in the late Middle Ages, was initiated by A.P. Dulzon in 1950s and has continued up until now. Abundant material allow us to have, if not an absolute, but a relatively complete understanding of the ceremonies, their process per se and the relevant semantics. Nevertheless, new excavations provide more and more new information on specific elements of the rituals, such as forms of burial practices and the objects that were used to perform them. New discoveries stimulate us to additionally verify the old facts, and perhaps even reconsider the worldview of the ethnic groups which populated the banks of the Ob' river.

The results we now have clearly demonstrate the diversity of methods and forms of Paleo-Selkups burial ceremonies. However, it is still not clear why there were different types of rituals within the same period of time and space.

The diversity is probably caused by different reasons. Some of them are general and relevant to all of the local-dialect groups, others are connected to ethnic specifics of every group. (Pelih, 1972b, p.93-107; 1981, p. 11)

Dispersing of the diverse substrate elements within the scattered population led to the cultural diversification of the seemingly homogeneous ethnicity.

Being a result of ethnogenesis, linguistic and cultural isolation of some groups even caused diversification of their mythology. Dividing mythological heroes according to the geographical location into “lower” and “upper” G.I. Pelih made an example of different levels of Turkeyfication among the local-dialect groups, and thus their cultural separation. For example; The Shosh-gula group' (Middle Ages Shieshgula group) was regarded as a part of the bigger group, however the kinship was almost forgotten.

In this case it is very possible that researchers who deal with Paleo-Selkups objects often in reality are working only with local-dialect culture. They probably can't be identified as new types of culture yet, but can be classified as variants of Paleo-Selkups culture. It's important to differentiate the Paleoculture in this case, since traditions of Paleo-Selkups and Selkups differ a lot during the pre-Russian and early Russian periods. Without merging into a large area of research, it's necessary to point out that the burial ceremonies were one of the examples of the local variants of the culture. Thus the diversity of the burial rites can be reflected in the archaeological finds.

General and Particular Elements of "Shieshgula" Burial Rites

The archaeological excavations of 16-18 centuries nekropolises in the area populated by the local-dialect group "Shieshgula" allows us to characterize the burial tradition of this ethnicity. This paper is based on the materials from four burial grounds of "Shieshgula": Barklaj at the Chaya river, Kustovo (aka Yamki burial ground), Grebenshnikov and Suhaya Rechka at the Kjongra river (170 burials in total). Materials from the biggest among the researched "Shieshgula" burial ground, Tiskin necropolis, have been partially published by A.I. Bobrova and also are analyzed in this paper. In comparison with other local-dialect groups, "Shieshgula" has the largest amount of archaeological evidence that constitute the basis for various types of studies. At the same time it is used as a marker for comparative analysis of the materials related to other local-dialect groups. The possibility to separate general and local elements in the ceremonies of eight groups in the South, as well of one group in the North, helps us to analyze a general worldview of Paleo-Selkups.

Burial Pits and Burial Mounds

One of the common aspects of burial ceremonies in the Tomsk-Narymsk region, near the Ob' River is simultaneous use of burials with and without mounds. The area of burial mounds cemeteries stretches to the North until the confluence of the Ob' river with the Vasjugan River on the left and with the Tym River on the right. Both types of burials are located in the area further up along the Ob' River. For example; Kustovo burial site has some graves without mounds, they are located between burial mounds. There is also a single burial pit with a mound added much later (mound № 15).

The combination of such different types of burials in Samoyedic culture can be explained by the process of adopting mound tradition from the southern ethnic groups. The tradition of burial mounds among the ethnic groups in the South started during the Bronze Age and continued until the Late Turkic period. The reason for the two types of burials to be combined is the idea of constructing a house for the diseased, as it is introduced in the Rigveda (Akishev, Akishev. 1981, p.147). There were small wooden houses constructed above the burials, in the same way as mounds would imitate a dwelling for the deceased. It's important to say that these believes have a very long history, dating back to early Egyptian mastabas (Smirnov, 1997, p. 192).

Intrusion of the mound tradition coincided with the period of the Turk migration to the territory of Tomsk-Narymsk area near the Ob' river that at the same time initiated Early Middle Age Rjolkkin culture. Coexistence of two types of burials continued among "Shieshgula" until the middle of 20th century. The latest burial mound found in Tiskin necropolis dates back to 1957. During the Christianity period the tradition of digging burials in already existing mounds was very common. This practice finished a century earlier at Barklaj burial site, where numismatic finds date it to the 1840s.

Inhumation and Cremation

Coexistence of inhumation and cremation is another peculiar aspect of burial tradition of Samoyedic Selkups. What's more, the two types of ceremonies could be performed on the same burial site. There are no examples where this duality would be broken on the territories of "Shieshgula" group. Cremation could be complete or partial. At the moment it is still not clear how one of the two burial methods were chosen. A common theory established in scientific circles about using cremation only for representatives of the elite classes doesn't always reflect the facts. According to A.I. Bobrova, cremation was used for all ages and among both females and males. However, adults were prevailing among the cremated (1995, p.48). It is clearly reflected even on the example of one burial site. There were five cremated adult men at Barklaj burial site. Kustovo burial site had a young man and a man of 50-60 years old, who were both cremated. Cremation at the mentioned burial sites was performed during the 16-17 centuries. There were no cases of cremation before and after this period.

The same conclusion was made by A.I. Bobrova who analyzed cremations of 10-17 centuries in Tomsk-Narymsk region and the area near Chjulym river (1994, p.50). There were also cases of burning the surface of the ground and smoking over the burial site, apart from the cremation ceremonies. According to A.P. Dulzon, fire rituals were brought by Chjulym Turks (1957, p.414). However, this theory and the mechanism of the adoption of this tradition require additional verification.

Decarnation (escarnation)

Among the cremation sites of Barklaj burial site was the only scientifically documented case of decarnation: a fragment of a thigh-bone had some marks chiseled by a sharp object. It was determined that the ceremony was carried out soon after the death of the person in order to remove the soft tissues (Zajceva, Ozheredov. 2005, p. 362-363). According to the traditions in the South region, removing of the flesh was important since it allowed the skeleton to be exposed and to free the spiritual core of the person from the mortal body. Leaving the body for wild animals to eat pursued the same goal. (Akishev, Akishev. 1981, p. 146). The first documented signs of decarnation were found on a child's skeleton at Mousterian culture site (Smirnov. 1997, p.242). The fact that similar a practice was performed by Paleo-Selkups hasn't been explained yet.

Selkups burial mounds are distinctive for the way they are formed, unlike usual mounds, they were the result of repeated burials exercised at the same limited space on different layers. The new burial layer was based on the previous one. There could be up to three tiers that were subsequently filled in with Christian burials during the 19th -20th centuries (Ozheredov. 1993, p.89-90; 2000).

Burial Constructions

The diversity of burial ceremonies is represented by the types of burial constructions, which are similar for inhumation and cremation. Differences are more noticeable among burial mounds. Burials of the first layer (12-14th centuries) represent boxes made of planks. In 16-17th centuries common burial construction represented a log frame, covered by cloven planks. Often the frame was attached to a floor made of planks. Outside and inside of the construction, as well as the deceased, were covered by the pieces of birch bark sewn together. In some cases, a block of wood was put inside the frame. Old Selcups said that this tradition was adopted from the Russians (Pelih. 1972 a, p.76). In the beginning of 19th century Selcups started using boxes made of planks again, which were replaced by coffins tapering at the lower part. The latter were found in the children' burials added to the original mounds.

In the 19th century large log fences with boxes inside them were put on the top of the old burial mounds at Barklaj necropolis. Sometimes additional burials were made at the same construction, which would lead to a double layer of boxes inside the fence, even though there was enough space within the fence to put the boxes next to each other. The construction would stay uncovered for some time, perhaps representing the idea of a temporary presence of the soul near the former house. After some time the construction was covered by the ground.

In 1960-1970 G.I.Pelih distinguished "Kienkum" cultural components within the "Shieshgula" group. It was different because of the use of boats, polls and stones in burial ceremonies. (1972a, p.13). Archeological results fully correlated with ethnographical materials based on the folklore studies: interments in boats, with memorial polls and sacral stones were found at Barklaj and Kustovo burial sites, which are located in "Shieshgula" territories of the 16-17 cen. (Ozheredov. 2002, p. 220-224; 2006, p. 16-21).

Funeral Boats

Two boats were found in two single-tiered mounds at Kustovo burial site. The burial ground #13 had a boat with a slotted body expanding at the bow; it also has a thickened bottom and trapezium-shape protuberance on the stern. Its length was 230 cm, max width – 70 cm, width of the stern – 20 cm, thickness of the boards – 4-5 cm. The burial ceremony with the boat was performed on the previously burned ground: wooden bars were used as props for the boat standing on the hot coals. The construction of this kind corresponds to the boat, which is called "laba kvishand" (Pelih G.I. 1972 b. p.16). This type of the boat is considered to be the oldest in West Siberia (Bel'gibaev E.A. 2004, p.219). There is some mentioning in ethnographic literature of Hants sailing in "wash-tubs", which could be the type of the boat from the burial site (Kulemzin V.M., Lukina N.V. 1977, p.53).

Another kind of boat was found in the adjacent mound № 13-A. It was pointed at both ends, with a short round stern and a long high bow ascending to one third of the length of the bottom. Its length was

280 cm, max width – 57-60 cm, height – 30 cm, thickness of the boards and bottom was not more than 2 cm. The details of the construction listed above are similar to Selkups' boat called "rontyk". Its bow had an oblong or a triangular projection, and its stern had a figure in the form of half of a volute (Pelih G.I. 1972 a. p.111). A big section of rotten wood dust found in the forebody of the boat at the burial site probably represented remains of the stern projection. The boat was placed in a shallow oval pit, which was later covered by planks.

In both burials the bodies were put face up, heading towards the bow of the boat. This is very usual for Selkups burial ceremonies. Both boats were placed in accordance with northwest – southeast directions. The boats were directed downstream of the Kjonga river.

As it was established by G.I. Pelih, the boat "rontyk" was not only used by shamans, it also represented the mythological "boat of the dead". Analyzing the universal practice, of burials in a boat, it is possible to assume the existence of special "burial vessels" in Egyptian, West Asian, Pacific and West American burial traditions, and that these boats were not just utilitarian vessels. Selkups used "rontyk" as this type of vessel. "Rontyk" has southern type construction: special outline of the bottom, projections and volutes in the forebody and at the stern (Ozheredov. 2002, p. 222, 223).

Archaeological materials confirmed E.D. Prokof'eva's reconstruction of the burial ceremony in the intact boat, not in the sawed one. Usually ethnographical materials describe rituals with the boats that were sawed in half. One half served as a lid for the whole burial construction. It is possible that the burial in the intact boat symbolizes an archetype of an ancient rite, where the deceased was not just buried in a boat but supplied by all necessary means for trespassing a real body of water (a river, lake or an ocean). Specific details of the idea behind the rite were probably lost over the time, and only appearance of the transformed idea remained. Sawed boats became a symbol of former perception of the world and turned into pragmatic sarcophagi and coffins. "Shieshgula" obviously had preserved the idea of the ancient forms and the meaning of the rituals up until the 17th century. (Ozheredov. 2006, p.18)

Memorial Poles

Archaeological studies of two burial grounds allow us to trace an archaic tradition of placing memorial poles and offerings during the burial ceremonies (Ozheredov J. 2001, p. 224-227). The remains of a pole in the upper part of the barrow № 4 at Kustovo burial ground and remains of, supposedly, a similar pole found at Barklaj burial ground provided the main information for the research. The first was placed in the center of the multilayered mound, in the space between 4 interments. Judging by the remains, there was a bunch of birch twigs with offerings fixed on the top of the pole: a tin mirror with a hole and grafitto on the rim, a jingle, iron ax-adze, fragments of iron and copper objects, a rock, two groups of glass beads that perhaps were attached to one of the objects and several fragments of ceramics. An ivory arrowhead was found fixed in the middle part of the pole. Judging by its position it was originally stuck into the pole.

A large accumulation of birch twigs at Barklaj burial ground was originally taken for fuel for the ritual fire. However there was an icon, an iron nail and a glass bead found among the twigs. Besides, fuel wasn't usually put on top of the mound. Probably it was a pole with birch twigs, or perhaps a birch tree with offerings was growing there. Sacral trees (birch trees) "lozyl'-kassil-po" were placed at the border of the next world for protection. The iron nail is quite a symptomatic discovery. G.I. Pelih wrote that Selcups hammered iron nails into sacral poles "aldton-tybyl" to hang offerings for spirits. Perhaps the ivory arrowhead found at Kustovo burial ground was used for the same purpose.

Discussions about memorial poles are quite common in Selcups' ethnographical materials. G.I. Pelih and A.V. Baulo described them in burial practice of northern Selcups. (Pelih G.I. 1972 a. table XXX; Baulo A.V. 1980, fig. 6). A pole placed at the feet of the body showed one of the underworlds where the soul would travel to. To specify this place special symbols were put on the pole. The soul of a shaman could go directly to the upper world, the soul of an average person - to the one of the underworlds. If the end of the pole was rounded the soul would go to the third world, the world of the ancestors. Pelih mentioned different round objects "sange" hung on the poles that symbolized the Sun and the Moon. It is quite significant, since the round saucer found at Kustovo can be one of those objects. It's interesting that similar orbed poles with discs, symbolizing the Sun, were mentioned by Frobenius L. in his study of North-American Indians (1914, p.243).

Sacral Rocks

G.I. Pelih noticed that stone objects or even simple rocks were significant parts of Selcups utilitarian and sacral life up until modern time. Isolated massive boulders were specially honored; some offerings were brought to them. Rocks were one of the most important parts of the burial ceremony as well. They were used to cover the bottom of the grave, and in case there was not enough of them for the whole surface, at least one or two would be put inside. Sometimes in the absence of rocks one could put ceramic debris. Barklaj and Kustovo burial sites have rocks inside, as well as outside of the burials. Inside the graves they were usually put at the feet of the body, sometimes next to a ceramic vessel. Rocks and debris of some objects outside the graves probably didn't have any utilitarian purpose and were part of the ritual as well (Ozheredov. 2003, p. 218-224).

Usage of rocks in burial rituals sends us back to the Mesopotamians and Vedic Indo-Aryans, who believed that a layer of rocks at the bottom of a grave would protect sacred ground from spiritually dirty bodies. Besides, many other cultures honored rocks as transformed ancestors, they believed that their ancestors turn into rocks or mountains after death, that rocks are vessels for ancestors' souls (Obryady...2002, p.98). Selcups who lived far from mountains honored rocks through their mythology, which described their Mother Land as a territory in the South, where mountains and rocks were. Thus the idea of G.I. Pelih about Selcups' adoption of rocks rituals from the Southern ethnicities is quite reasonable (Ozheredov J.I. 2006, p.21).

Cenotaph

Barklaj burial site has a well-preserved burial of the 16-17th century that happened to be a cenotaph: only one ceramic vessel was found on the wooden base attached to a frame and covered with planks.

First symbolic burials without the deceased appeared during the 3rd century B.C. (two Snefru tombs) (Smirnov. 1997, p.176). According to the ancient beliefs, the purpose of cenotaphs was to preserve the soul of the deceased in the society for its further reincarnation (Akishev, Akishev. 1981, p.146). Different objects were used to contain the soul (Smirnov. 1997, p.176). Turks-Pechenegs built cenotaphs if soldiers didn't come back from the battle, Hants – if they couldn't find the body of deceased. Both ethnicities would put objects owned by the person in cenotaphs; Pechenegs also would put a stuffed horse (Pletnjova. 1988, p.36; Martynova. 1998, p. 134). Selkups started using cenotaphs very early, first of them was found at Turgaj burial site, where one of the burials had only objects. V.I Matjushhenko interpreted it as an adaptation of the traditions from Samus' burial site (1961, p.51). The vessel in Barklaj burial perhaps indicates that the deceased was a woman, since vessels in general symbolize females.

Animal Sacrifices

Fish Bones and some domesticated animals found in burial mounds represent the evidence of a funeral feast and can also be explained. On the contrary, sizeable fragments of a ram or a goat (according to P.A. Kosincev's expertise) found next to the human burial were quite unexpected. An animal body without a head and legs was put next to the body of the deceased in the identical pose on its back according to the same geographical orientation. The size of the log fence (16-17 centuries) surrounding the bodies was big enough for two of them. G.I. Pelih wrote about cases where horse bones were found in a burial (1972a, p.75). The tradition of burying animals in the same grave with people has not been scientifically explained. Southern ethnicities believed that the ram symbolizes the "sun" animal, that has "hvarnah" (destiny) and represents some sort of a "double" for the person (Obryady...2002, p.99). It is possible that the mystery of animal sacrifices in Selkups burials is connected to the Southern cultures.

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