RECONSTRUCTION OF FEMALE COSTUME AMONG THE NOMADS OF THE HUN PERIOD IN THE ALTAI MOUNTAINS

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An important part of the ethnographic culture of nomad peoples is their costume. Yet, at the archaeological sites of the nomad culture in the mountainous parts of the Altai region, objects relating to costume are only seldom in a state that makes it possible to establish the cut of garments or the shape of head-dresses. As a rule, in nomad burials metal jewellery and belt parts survive, but all that survives from clothes are small remnants of textiles. The exception to this rule is provided by burial-mounds of the Pazyryk culture that are preserved by the frozen earth below the burial mounds, which has made possible the wonderful state of preservation of garments, footwear and head-dresses of ancient nomads made from cloth, leather and felt.¹ Until recently similar finds had not been made at sites of the Hun period relating to the 1st and 2nd century AD.

In 1989 a burial was discovered for the first time in the burial-ground of Ust-Edigan in the mountains of the Altai, in which thanks to the special features of the construction of the funerary structure many articles made of organic materials were well preserved, including a head-dress and an outer garment.

The Ust-Edigan burial-ground is in the Chemal district of the Altai Republic. It is located on a high terrace on the east bank of the Katun River 3 kilometres to the South of the mouth of the Edigan River, west of the Elanda-Kuyus River, 8 kilometres from the town of Kuyus. Excavation of the site began in 1988.² In 1988-1994 over 105 features within the territory of the burial-ground were excavated and of these 76 related to the Hun period.³ Among them were adult and child burials in flat graves, wooden frames, stone cysts: some of the burials contained the remains of just one individual, in others an individual had been buried together with his horse. On the basis of the distinctive details of the

¹ S.I. Rudenko, Kultura naseleniya Tsentralnogo Altaya v skifskoye vremya (The Culture of the Population of Middle Asia in the Scythian Period), Moscow-Leningrad, 1960, p. 5.
funerary rite the objects could be identified as belonging to the Bulan-Kobin culture and dated to the 1st and 2nd centuries AD. One of the burial mounds of the Hun period, excavated within a whole group investigated in 1989, stood out conspicuously from the rest on account of its low spherical mound.

Burial-mound 10. It was located in the northern part of the burial-ground. The mound had gently sloping sides, curved at the top and was spherical in shape: it measured 4 metres in diameter and 30 cms in height. The surface of the mound was overgrown with thick grass, moss and pea-shrub or karagana. As the mound was being cleared it was possible to determine the shape of the structure. The mound had been made of massive river boulders and pieces of rock. Clearing the mound and its crest made it possible to establish more thoroughly how the mound had been constructed, the fact that it had a krepida round its outer edge and an outer layer of boulders and pieces of rock. Under the outer layer there was a filling of small pebbles (Fig. 1) that had been strewn over the grave-pit in the centre of the burial-mound: the grave-pit was in the shape of an elongated oval oriented NW-SE along its long axis.

The grave-pit measured 2.2 × 1.1 metres. The pit was filled with river pebbles, fine broken stones and sand. When the upper layers of the grave-pit’s in-fill had been cleared, the cover of the grave-pit consisting of massive slate-like slabs and boulders was revealed. There were two overlapping layers of these slabs one above the other. The lower of the two layers was supported on the top ends of slabs forming a stone cyst (Fig. 2).

When the lid of the grave had been cleared, a stone cyst or burial-chamber was found consisting of massive slate-like slabs and boulders. The slabs of the stone cyst or chamber had been arranged vertically almost right up against the walls of the grave-pit. In some places the space between the slabs of the stone cyst and the walls of the grave-pit was filled with stones, whose long axis was along a NW-SE line. The cyst measured 1.9 × 1 metres. In view of the fact that the slabs over the grave had been fitted close up against each other and had been arranged in two layers, the cyst had not filled up with earth. Inside the cyst was a hollow chamber. Thanks to this, many articles in the grave made of organic materials had survived and the body had undergone a process of natural mummification. On the floor of

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