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## The architecture of the Early Iron Age funerary barrows in Central Kazakhstan

A complex community of the early Iron Age in Eurasia is represented by the Tasmola archaeological culture, which was mainly spread in Central Kazakhstan. In the last decades, new research directions have appeared which are mainly related to the analysis of massive burial mounds. These latter, preserving the human remains and the material culture associated to the Tasmola high class and nobility, share features with several cult and commemorative structures spread across the Eurasian steppe. Their architecture and building layout provide different evidences about their modeling and the reconstruction of ancient ceremonies and activities, as well a better understanding of the past material and spiritual culture. The study of massive barrows is today carried out with new methods and approaches, which are aimed at reconstructing the whole funerary construction: unexpected details show a very complex structure and open new perspectives both in the architecture knowledge of the ancient Eurasian tribes, as well as in identifying some features of the Saka funerary mythology. A detailed and careful study allows to determine substantial evidence of ritual practices in the structure of large funerary monuments. The purpose of the article is to provide a characterization of the building structure of large funerary barrows and, on the basis of diverse construction features, to present some worldview and cosmological ideas of the Tasmola community. The article then provides a brief description of the main characteristics of the Tasmola archaeological culture, and outlines the main historiographic information on the reconstruction of ethno-geography, namely the ethnic names, of the early Iron Age population in Central Kazakhstan. Based on the analysis of the burial architecture of large mounds located along the Ishim River, in the Nur-Sultan region, it is proposed here a reconstruction of some worldview ideas and mythology of the ancient Saka tribes.

*Keywords:* Ishim, Central Kazakhstan, Eurasia, sanctuary temples, Kazakhstan Archaeology, Tasmola culture, Saka period, Barrow architecture, Reconstruction, Remodeling.

### Introduction

Early Iron Age in Kazakhstan is dated from the 8<sup>th</sup> century BC to the 4<sup>th</sup> century AD, and is divided into two periods: Saka (8<sup>th</sup> – 5<sup>th</sup> centuries BC) and Sarmatian – Wusun (4<sup>th</sup> century BC – 4<sup>th</sup> century AD). The first millennium BC was an epic period in the history of the Eurasian steppe, a time when the world map was redrawn, the first world powers appeared and after some centuries disappeared: Assyrian, Median, and Achaemenid. The first world religions formed, spread, and developed. On the southern borders of the Eurasian steppe four cradles of farming civilizations arose, the history of which was shaped and re-shaped through constant and long-lasting, social and cultural interactions with the mobile cattle breeders communities occupying the grass pastures of Eurasia. In the west, there were the Greek and Roman civilizations, in the Middle East the Achaemenid Empire, while in the east of the ecumene the Han dynasty was established in China. These socio-political entities preserved in their annals and other literary sources, different written information about the mobile peoples who lived in the steppe zone of the Old World. The interpretation and comparison of these different written sources are troublesome.

The reconstruction of the ethnic map of Eurasia during the Scythian and Saka periods was a relevant subject of study in the last centuries. Various interpretations about the ethno-geographical distribution of the Eurasian tribes provided in the Histories of Herodotus, mainly in his fourth book, were proposed. In the second half of the 20<sup>th</sup> century, according to ancient Achaemenid sources and archaeological discoveries, the Issedones were presumed in Central Kazakhstan [1; 308], [2; 138–140], [3; 115–196], [4; 160–164], [5; 326]. According to another proposal, Central Kazakhstan could have been the homeland of the Arimaspi. In the last decade, the meaning of the ethnonym Arimaspi was clarified: the explanation proposed by Herodotus – men with only an eye – is incorrect. The ethnonym Arimaspi is almost certainly an Iranian lexeme, composed of *aspa*- “horse” and a first term with an unclear meaning [6; 637], [7], [8]. According to some schol-

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ars, this word literally means “(possessing) horses of the desert” [9; 68], [10; 30]. K.A. Akishev was inclined to translate this word as “horse of the Aryans” and following his assumption, the word Arimaspi could be more appropriate for the tribes of the early Iron Age of Central Kazakhstan. This interpretation could find corroborations in the noticeable cult of the horse and horse rider witnessed by the archaeological material brought to light in the Saryarka (Central Kazakhstan) steppe [11; 42], [12; 107, 108], [1; 430, 431]. The bright discoveries from royal burial mounds recently made, allowed to advance another interpretation regarding the name of the people bearing and diffusing the Tasmola culture. According to R.Kh. Suleymanov [13; 428–430], the mysterious and powerful people of the Massagetae inhabited the Central Kazakhstan territory in the first millennium BC.

However, these are all hypotheses. The ethnonyms of the descendants (Issedones, Arimaspians, and Massageti) of the ancient Aryans of Central Kazakhstan, as well as the ethnonym of the community bearing and diffusing the Tasmola culture, are not yet known.

The archeologists suggested a conventional name for the Central Kazakhstan community: the bearers of the Tasmola archaeological culture. This locution comes from the site of the first most significant discovery, which started the scientific study of the already mentioned culture: the Tasmola burial ground along the Shiderty river. The community lived three thousand years ago, between the 8<sup>th</sup> and the 5<sup>th</sup> centuries BC. They were coeval with the Scythians, Saka, Sauromatians, and Sarmatians: the most important military nomadic associations that posed a threat to the Asian civilizations and ancient states. They firmly guarded the borders of their homeland, and even the mighty armies of the Achaemenid Kings Darius I and Cyrus II, and the Macedonian phalanxes of Alexander the Great, who conquered half of the known world, could not penetrate the Eurasian expanse. Among these fearless peoples were the bearers of the Tasmola culture. Their participation is especially vivid in the formation of two ethno-tribal divisions that ruled across Eurasia from the end of the 1st millennium BC to the middle of the 1st millennium AD: the Sarmatians and Xiong-nu [14; 48–51].

### *Experimental*

The burial mounds of the Tasmola archaeological culture were studied carefully because they represent the main source of modern knowledge about the Saka period in Central Kazakhstan. The material from these barrows highlighted a bright historical and ethnographic community with distinctive characteristics and peculiar features.

At an early stage of its history (8<sup>th</sup> – 6<sup>th</sup> centuries BC), the Tasmola culture occupied a territory far beyond Saryarka. In the west, its evidence was found till the Southern Urals, while the eastern border of diffusion ran along the Irtysh river. In the north, it reached the southern edge of the forest-steppe zone of Western Siberia, and in the south the Lake Balkhash area. In the border regions, local variants of the core Tasmola culture were identified. Moreover, the work on the Altai mountain carried out recently by some Russian archeologists allowed us to identify in the Dzungarian region of northwest China a culture similar to the Tasmola [15; 81]. In the 6<sup>th</sup> and 5<sup>th</sup> centuries BC, the boundaries of the whole culture shrank at its western edges. Perhaps this was due to the movement of the Scythian tribes to the east, after their return from the Middle Eastern military campaigns. The contact in the south Ural region between the Scythians and the Tasmola bearers had the consequence that the first tribes pushed the second, who were forced to abandon the southern Trans-Ural territory. After it, the influence of the Tasmola bearers began to spread in a northeasterly direction, to the Ob-Irtysh forest-steppe. These pulsating changes appeared mainly in the boundaries, while the main core of the culture, the territory of the Kazakh uplands, remained substantially unchanged.

The Tasmola culture of the 8<sup>th</sup> – 5<sup>th</sup> centuries BC stands out among the simultaneous Saka communities for some peculiar ethnic and distinct cultural features. Firstly, unlike all their neighbors, the Tasmola bearers buried individuals with skulls oriented to the north. Their graves were spacious. On the deposition floor, close to the deceased, a large amount of food for the dead was laid in form of heads of horses and sheep. In the 5<sup>th</sup> burial ground of Tasmola, the barrows numbers 2, 3, and 6 contained seven animal heads [1; 319–333]. The horses were bridled and the metal details of the headband were well preserved, as well as bronze bits, cheek-pieces, and numerous buckles. Close to the horse skulls, bronze bells, and sculpted argali-shaped tops were found. The burials of male individuals were accompanied by weapons: a quiver with arrows, an iron knife, and sometimes, an iron dagger was also buried. The warrior's dress was equipped with metal elements of the belt, on which a whetstone for sharpening arrows and knives once hung. Jewelry was usually found in female burials: earrings, beads, bone or bronze hairpins were often found near the skull. Consequently, there were some headwear or special hairstyles that required the use of hairpins.

For studying the spiritual conception of the Tasmola culture, different methods have been used which involved philosophy, semantics, and semiotics. In ancient times, the artifacts surrounding an individual in a grave carried not only a utilitarian function. Unlike modern ideas, in ancient times, there were no “disposable” artifacts and objects. Each item was endowed with a special meaning and often accompanied not only a single human life: it could be passed down from man to man, from generation to generation. An object could “save”, “cure”, and “protect” its owner. Therefore, each artifact was decorated with zoomorphic figures and images, and these zoomorphic representations had a sacred meaning, highlighting the power, strength, and courage of the owner: they were mainly aimed at intimidating the enemy. There is a lot of mystery in unraveling the true subjects embodied in the design of weapons, horse harness, and jewelry. Reading this meaning and penetrating the spiritual world of an ancient community, one has to pay attention to ethnographic comparisons, mythological models, and ideas as well.

The Tasmola art belonged to the so-called Saka animal style, the favorite motives of which were zoomorphic representations. The preeminent images of the Tasmola art were sculptures of argali, deer, wild boars, tigers, and birds of prey. The artistic style of the Tasmola culture explains the characteristics of the spiritual culture and mythological representations of that ancient community. In the last centuries of the 1st millennium BC, the art of the Early Iron Age tribes experienced a wide diffusion of the subject portraying the struggle between predatory and hoofed animals. The theme reflects the changes (the appearance of the first Turkic – Mongolian tribes in Central Kazakhstan, moving westward toward Eastern Europe) in the political and ethnic situation across the Kazakhstan steppes and meets new aesthetic requirements of the culture.

Funerary architecture is a multi-component, structurally complex concept, which includes the archaeological material from the architecture of a religious or commemorative building found on its surface as well as under it. Differently from the past when only the central part of the barrow was excavated avoiding the surrounding area covered by the mound, in recent decades the study of a funerary barrow includes a careful and precise analysis of the entire sacred space around the cult and commemorative structure.

### *Results*

Data regarding the funerary architecture are mainly provided by large mounds. The construction of massive and labor-intensive burial structures reflects the stratification process of the society, as well as the emergence of a military or priestly elite. These events took place in the first half of the 1<sup>st</sup> millennium BC.

The most striking examples of architecturally complex burial mounds were studied on the right bank of the Ishim, in the territory around the modern city of Nur-Sultan. The Kuygenzhar burial ground consisted of five large mounds. Two of them, dated by radiocarbon analysis to the 6<sup>th</sup> – 5<sup>th</sup> centuries BC [16; 118], were excavated in 2005 and 2018 [17], [16; 93–118]. Barrow 1 was 42 m in diameter and 2.5 m high; it had a striking architectural layout. The mound was surrounded by a moat. Unfortunately, the barrow was robbed in antiquity; however, despite this, its excavations provided crucial material for understanding the construction principles and the architecture of the royal barrows in the middle of the first millennium BC.

The study of the first barrow of Kuygenzhar confirmed the real complexity and laboriousness of the building process and the complication and ambiguity in the reconstruction of the ritual actions and ceremonies of the funerary rite. The thoroughness of the excavations made it possible to understand the stages of construction and the semantics of the funerary monument. The place chosen for the mound was outlined with a stone ring: 32 m in diameter, 4 m wide, and 0.4 m high. Stone blocks and slabs were laid on the ancient surface. In the inner area delimited by the stone ring, the humus was completely cut off and the surface was lined with a thin layer of pure clay.

Before the construction of the mound, the underground burial chamber and dromos were built. The dromos was also underground, of trench type. The beginning of the dromos was 8 m east of the center of the burial chamber. The entrance to it was closed with clods (or blocks) of light grey-blue clay and then littered with stones. The diameter of the entrance shaft was 1.2 m. It descended vertically down to a depth of 1 m, then a hole 0.5 m high was dug in its western wall, which, deepening, led to the center of the mound. The dromos floor was at a depth of 2.5 m below the level of the ancient surface, while its length was 7 m. At the end of the dromos, a burial chamber was excavated perpendicular to the axis of the dromos. The dimensions of the funerary chamber were 2.4 x 1.6 m, while its height was approximately 0.7 m. It was oriented along a north-south axis. Clay blocks were also used for sealing the entrance. Unfortunately, the burial chamber was repeatedly robbed in the deep and recent past. Despite it, scattered bones of a male skeleton and a skull cut in two parts by a metal weapon were found in it.

Thus, the burial pit was not visible on the ancient surface and its entrance, through the dromos, was located at the edge of the mound. After the deposition of the individual and the end of the funerary services for sacralizing the area outlined by the stone ring, the artificial mound was erected above the burial chamber and the dromos, using light grey-blue clods of wet clay covered and sometimes interspersed by thick layers of yellow clay.

The most outstanding feature of the barrow was its “colored” mound. It consisted of clods of light grey-blue clay collected from the Ishim floodplain. These lumps were irregularly rounded, about 45 cm in length, about 30 cm in width and approximately 30 cm in height. The space between them was filled with gray sandy loam. During the cleaning of the mound’s infill, the clods fell out in separate solid blocks of amorphous shape; on their surface, there were twig imprints of the container in which they were prepared and preserved. Their preserved quality indicates that they were set when in a whole wet condition. The diameter of the structure made by the clods was about 30 m and its height was 1.8 m.

The building process was approximately the following: rows of people with wicker baskets on their shoulders came from the Ishim floodplain, up to the mound. Inside the containers several light grey-blue clods. As the embankment grew, to avoid the damage to the clods already set on the surface, the positioning of other clods was carried out probably along specially prepared paths, which were possibly void of clods but covered with wooden boards or reed mats. Against the background of the blue sky and the surrounding expanse of the yellow steppe, the artificial half-sphere of the mound characterized by a yellow layer of clay and grey-blue clods gradually rose. The color of the soil that was fixed by the clods was then combined with the gray color of the stone ring. Thus, the color scheme identified in the mound was tightly associated with the natural colors of the surrounding landscape.

The final act of the building process was the coating of the half-spherical mound with clay and the strengthening of its slopes with stone blocks and slabs. However, over the centuries the upper part of the mound shifted down and covered the stone ring at the base of the man-made hill. No artifacts and other finds were discovered during the excavation: for this reason, the dromos represents the only chronological element. In total, 30 burial mounds with dromos, a basic element of large barrows, have been discovered so far in Central Kazakhstan [18; 388]. The distribution of such funerary monuments in the Scythian-Saka sites of Eurasia indicates that massive barrows provided by dromos were the burials of the highest social class in the wide architectural panorama represented by complex multifunctional cult objects of the early Saka time [19; 178, 179], [20; 474].

The semantics and the symbolic meaning of these labor-intensive architectural structures still remain mysterious. Sometimes dromos were connected to pits without human burial, as in the case of the first barrow of Baikara [21]. Interesting details were identified in the layout of the dromos: they do not have a free through passage and a free connection (entrance) with the burial chamber. As exemplified by some cases, the corridor leaned against the closed wall of the grave: a stone slab was set specifically in the connection point (Akbeit, room 3; Kosoba, room 2), or a lintel made of virgin soil, or steps. Behind all these architectural elements lies a certain canon of ritual and ceremonial practice, a kind of cult, a theatrical action completely free from utilitarian functions.

On the right bank of the Ishim, on Sagynak Street, 400 m east of the Palace of Peace and Reconciliation, a large barrow was excavated, which we conventionally called Sygnak barrow. The excavation was made by the Esil archaeological expedition, started in 2007 and was completed in 2010. The diameter of the barrow was 44 m, while the height was 3.5 m. At the top of the mound there was a large ditch made by the robbers: it was 8 m in diameter and 1.5 m deep [17; 582–589].

The stratigraphy of the Sygnak mound gave a picture of a complex structure, confirming then the opinion that the barrows were not just burial structures, but peculiar temples. Their construction was a non-one-act process, it lasted years. Such observations were noted more than once by other researchers [22; 148], [23; 11], [24; 303].

Judging by the structure of the Sygnak barrow, great importance was devoted to the space around the grave. Humus was cut here, perhaps to give a smooth surface. Traces of some cult actions with pure clay were recorded in its covering, and moreover there were burnt areas, indicating the kindling of fires and their long-term burning.

In the center of the area under the mound, the investigation concerned some constructions, the combination of which was unusual for a “grave pit”. It should be pointed out that the mound was erected on the root terrace of Ishim, composed of stony-gravelly geological layers. Therefore, the ancient builders of the mound did not have to dig all the recesses and pits, but gain them in gravelly soil. With the technical equipment of

those distant times, it was for sure not an easy task. In the rocky virgin soil, a “grave” was carved 2.5 m deep from the level of the ancient surface. It had dimensions of 2.5 x 1.5 m in its upper layer, while it narrowed at the bottom and took on a rectangular shape of 2.0 x 0.6 m. The long sides of the pit were oriented along the northwest-southeast axis. A small stone was found at the bottom of the grave. Neither human skeleton nor artifacts were found. Two meters north of pit number 1, a second rounded spot was recorded. As the pit deepened, it acquired a round shape with a diameter of 1.45 m, and in its section it became similar to a “well”. Small corroded iron fragments were encountered during the excavation and cleaning of the filling. The depth of the “well” was 4.0 m and small coals were recovered in the lower layers where the soil was very wet. Both pits were carved in the rocky-gravelly soil of the Ishim root terrace. The depth of the round pit was especially impressive; the natural structure of the river terrace was imprinted on its walls in the form of rocky and gravelly layers. No finds except the iron fragments were found.

In the space between the pit and the well, at a depth of 1 m from the ancient surface, a dog skeleton with the skull oriented to the north was found. The origin of this “burial” is completely unclear and possibly it was associated with the repeated attempts of plundering carried out in the centre of the barrow by unknown robbers. A massive plundering trench 8 m wide in its upper layer and 1.5 m wide in its lower, i.e. at the level of the ancient surface, was identified in the section of the archaeological excavation. A two-bladed iron arrowhead with a long stem was found in the upper layers of the dig. When sampling the infill of the pit and well, fragments of the bones of large animal and amorphous pieces of diverse iron products were identified. Only a small fragment of a human skull testified to the possible burial of an individual here. No other human bones were found. If the grave was repeatedly robbed, then how could be preserved the skeleton of a dog? Maybe the dog was buried by robbers? These questions remain unresolved. As well as the combination of a well and a grave pit. Why was it necessary to excavate a round vertical well shaft in rocky soil? In general, it is difficult to be completely sure that the mound was erected over the burial of a person. Even the robbery was repeated several times, some parts of the skeleton should have remained.

The exact date of construction of the mound is difficult to establish. Its complex structure and two other evidences could testify that the barrow was built in the second half of the 1<sup>st</sup> millennium BC: firstly, an iron arrowhead found in the infill of a plundering trench and, secondly, a later burial of a young individual found on the northwestern perimeter of the mound. The iron arrowhead was stemmed with a triangular feather head. Its head was 3.4 cm high, while its total length was 14 cm [17; 596, fig. 5, 5]. Arrowheads of this type were found in early medieval complexes. Its discovery in a plundering trench may indicate the date of the original construction or the robbery of the barrow and, consequently, it represents the *terminus ante quem* for the funerary barrow.

The burial of the young individual was excavated in the already erected barrow. This tradition represented by inhumation in already built barrows was typical for the Hunnic and Sarmatian tribes. The grave was oval and measured 1.1 x 0.42 m. On the floor of the pit, an 8-10-year-old individual was buried lying on its back with the skull oriented to the northeast. Close to its right temporal bone was found a pendant consisting of three beads: one of bronze composed of a whole wrapped sheet and two of vitrified glass. Near the left forearm, there was a whetstone. Near the feet stood a fragmentary flat-bottomed ceramic vessel with a swollen body and a high neck characterized by a slightly bent rim. Close to the vessel, there were sheep bones and a heavily corroded iron fragment. The northeast orientation of the burial and the shape of the vessel date this secondary burial to the 3rd–5th centuries AD [17; 589].

Every large mound is then like a “text” containing information about the religious system of ancient societies. The study of the Sygnak mound confirms this hypothesis. The unusual combination of a well located next to an empty grave pit and the burial of a dog between them indicate that this is not just a funerary structure, but a true temple or sanctuary [25; 139, 140].

Judging by the structure of the infill, initially, a quadrangular hollow structure was excavated exactly in the center of the funerary space, under the mound. It was surrounded by some constructions in clay of undetermined function. The length of the hollow structure along the east-west axis was 20 m, while the width of its inner space was 6 m. Inside the hollow structure, there was a wall, 7 m wide at its base and about 2 m high, which was made of turf layers coated with a thick layer of clay. Analyzing its cross-section, the wall tapered upward. Perhaps a passage was left in the wall. Having this shape and look, the uncompleted mound stood for some time, while magic or funerary rituals were carried out all around. Then, the second stage of the barrow construction began. The space inside and around the wall was laid with clay clods. The mound was shaped like a cone, with a diameter at its base of 24–26 m, while its height was 2.5 m. The slopes of the mound were strengthened with clay bricks. There was one more stage, the final one, which was represented

by the completion of the mound. In its final stage, the barrow took the form of a truncated cone with a diameter of about 40 m and a height of 4 m.

The Sygnak barrow is then the embodiment materialized in a visible labor-intensive construction of the myth of creation and rebirth: the main core of the entire religious and mythological system of the Scythian-Saka tribes. Kurgan Sygnak was a sanctuary erected in honor of a priest, possibly a shaman. The status of the priest in the archaic society was high, because its main function was to maintain stability and order in the society. The death of a priest meant chaos, a violation of stable balance and rule. To eliminate chaos and restore an ordered world, it was necessary to build a sanctuary (a model of the macrocosm), in which the soul of the priest would be reborn [26; 121].

It is difficult for a modern person with a rational perception of the category of time as an irreversible unidirectional process to understand the mythological worldview of an ancient person, for whom time was characterized by cyclic events, repetition, and simultaneity of phenomena. Such consciousness was based on the perception of cyclical changes in nature. Therefore, death meant rebirth, a return to the *beginning* through the union of the upper (heavenly) deity and the deity of the lower (underground) world. In the architecture of the mound, which was perceived as a starting point, were established all three spheres of the universe, which were characteristic of the archaic worldview. The part on the surface, shaped as a cone directed upward, was the reflection of the upper world, or, in other words, the path along which the soul ascended to heaven [26; 132, 133].

The ancient surface (covered by the mound) was the middle world, in which holes were made for descending into the underworld. For the first time, in the layout of a mound, a well was recorded, which, according to the mythology of the ancient Eastern Iranian tribes, as a source of water, corresponded to the female deity Api. The word *api* itself, from Iranian, can be translated as water. As stated by the prominent linguist V.I. Abaev, among the Eastern Iranian peoples there was a mythological tradition concerning the marital union between Heaven and Water, which was conceived as an embodiment of the lower world, meaning in other words rebirth [27; 449], [9; 46].

The discovery of a fishing net in the center of barrow 1 of Baykara was not accidental at all. The net was left rolled up, as suggested by the position of 27 stone sinkers registered by the archaeologists. This find, according to researchers, reflected the ethnogenetic myth of the Scythian-Saka tribes about the ancestor and the rebirth through the union of the supreme deity of Heaven with the deity of Water [21; 219–230].

The presence of a dog between the “grave” and the well is a fascinating subject matter. The dog is a dual being: it guards and defends and, at the same time, is the herald of death. For many nations, the image of a dog is associated with the idea of death, as well as the path to the afterlife. In the most ancient religious systems (in ancient Indian, in Zoroastrianism), the dog is an indispensable companion of Yama, the deity of death, and it also protects the souls of the dead when they cross a dangerous place, the Chinvat Bridge, leading to the world of the dead [28; 62]. These ideas allow a better understanding of dog burial in the ancient burial mounds across the Eurasian steppe. Thus, the Sygnak mound, despite the absence of burials and finds, was a model of the macrocosm and a vivid illustration of the mythological ideas of the population that lived in the middle of the 1st millennium BC in the Nur-Sultan region.

Thousands of excavated mounds of Eurasia revealed the social structure and political system of the Scythian-Saka tribes. These were deciphered through the study of the mound architecture, the construction of which was a long process in time due to the requirements and canons of ritual and ceremonial practices. An analysis of the funerary rite, artifacts, and written sources made it possible to distinguish three classes in Saka society: warriors, priests, and ordinary members of the community. According to the scholars studying the Saka culture, the priests were not only an independent social stratum but also an independent tribe, separated or isolated from the other social classes or tribes. Not necessarily all members of a tribe performed only priestly or military or other functions, but also the labor social division took place within the framework of individual tribal groups [29; 41]. In this regard, it is necessary to pay attention to the fact that the cultural appearance of the Tasmola tribes is marked by evidence of shamanistic activities. In their graves, for example in the burial ground of Karamurun, grave number 5, stone altars, hairpins, bottles with “ink” were found in association with skulls with trepanation. In the same cemetery, excavated by M.K. Kadyrbaev, burial number 10 contained the remains of an elderly woman, in whose nasal septum a bone hairpin was threaded [29; 362]. In the first half of the 1<sup>st</sup> millennium BC, the bearers of the Tasmola culture stood out as a tribe of “magicians” or priests. Although the military class in the same community is represented vividly.

### *Discussion*

The architecture of cult memorials of the Saka period has become the subject of active study in recent decades. Several factors contributed to this development. Large-scale excavations of massive barrows across the Eurasian expanse have revealed the complex structure of their architecture. It turned out that the upper part of the burial structures, on the surface, was a solid architectural volume with its own characteristics and construction rules. Variations in their implementation were associated with different stages of funerary rituals. Judging by the evidence found during the excavation, the rituals were extended in time and divided into separate chronological stages.

Methodically thorough excavations of large barrows spread across the Eurasian steppe revealed their multifunctional purpose not only as burial structures, but also as some sort of sanctuary or temple. Their building features were connected with special cults, rituals, and possibly seasonal ceremonies which are completely unknown. It was established that these sanctuaries were built in several stages, and after all cycles of ritual actions were finished, the same builders destroyed the previous structures and blocked the area under the mound with a massive artificial hill.

Building a massive funerary structure was not only a labor-intensive construction but also a theatrical representation of each building stage. Double rows of fences, stone rings, the erection of stone stelae, and sculptures in the infill of mounds created special sacred zones that decorated the rituals and processions associated with sacrifices and passage rites. Such sacral areas provided with stelae and stone slabs with petroglyphs were organized on the flat area, corresponding to the ancient surface, of the Arzhan 2 barrow [24; 303].

On the other hand, it was determined that some constructions stood for some time in an unfinished form [30; 50, 51]. The grave pit of barrow 4 of the sixth burial ground of Karaspan stood open for a long time before the organic remains of the buried people became skeletal remains. After that, the burials were destroyed, the grave pit was filled with clay, a shaft was excavated around it and a clay dome was built. Moreover, the grave was covered with several layers of wet clay: when the first layer of damp clay dried, the second layer was spread, and so on several times. As a result, a dense and hard clay structure was realised over the grave pit [31; 265–267]. The authors of the excavations gave examples of similar funerary and post-burial rites from various regions of Eurasia [31; 267, 268].

The “royal” barrows of Eurasia were complex architectural structures that reflected the religious ideas of the ancient mobile communities of the Eurasian steppe. The structure of the barrow embodies the model of the universe, as well as it embodies the mythological picture of the universe. The creation of a funerary monument was a long, multi-stage and regulated process, in which significant masses of people participated.

### *Conclusions*

The changes in the sociological sphere of the life of the Tasmola tribes are reflected in the archaeological material. In the first half of the 1st millennium BC, large mounds appeared for the first time: they were erected over the burials of the Tasmola nobility. The architecture of large burial mounds, carefully and methodically analyzed, is a source for the reconstruction of several economic, ethno-cultural, as well as ideological aspects of the history of the Tasmola population.

At present, extensive archaeological excavations of massive burial mounds on the territory of Kazakhstan and Eurasia have revealed that the concept of “barrow architecture” is composed of several elements. The underground part of massive mounds was a specific structure characterized by its own canons for the complex rituals and funerary ceremonies: some of them were of funerary nature, and others were devoted to the structure and the multi-stage construction. Their real content is only fragmentarily reflected in the architectural structure and building details of the steppe cult memorials.

Large barrows were built out of the territory of family cemeteries, deep into the steppes and they stood isolated from each other. In this tradition, one can consider it a peculiar way of securing the territory of nomads for individual clans, or in other words the determination of their borders. The concentration of royal burial mounds in the area of the middle course of the Ishim river gives reason to consider this territory the sacred center of the early nomads of Saryarka, the place where powerful ancestors were buried, whose spirit defended and protected the descendants living on the earth.

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## Қазақстанның ерте темір дәуіріндегі қорған сәулет өнері

Еуразияның ерте темір дәуірінің үлкен тарихи-этнографиялық қауымдастығы Орталық Қазақстанның Тасмола археологиялық мәдениеті болып табылады. Соңғы онжылдықтарда оны зерделеуде ірі қорғандарды зерттеуге байланысты жаңа бағыттар пайда болды. Тасмола билеушілеріне арналған ірі қорғандары Еуразия даласының ғұрыптық ескерткіштерінің жалпы жүйесіне сәйкес келеді. Ескерткіштердің сәулеті мен құрылысы ежелгі дәуірдегі тарихи оқиғалар бойынша модельдеу және қайта құру, материалдық және рухани мәдениеті туралы алуан түрлі ақпарат береді. Оларды зерттеуде ежелгі тайпалардың сәулетшілігінде де, сақ жерлеу мифологиясының алуан түрлі аспектілерін анықтауда да күрделі құрылымды көрсететін және күтпеген қырларын ашатын жерлеу архитектурасын қайта жаңартуға бағытталған жаңа әдістер мен тәсілдер қолданылады. Мұқият зерттеу барысында жерлеу рәсімдерінің материалдандырылған іздері жерлеу ескерткішінің құрылымы мен сәулетінде көрінеді. Мақаланың мақсаты — ірі мемориалдардың қорған сәулетіне сипаттама беру және құрылыс ерекшеліктері негізінде Тасмола тұрғындарының кейбір дүниетанымын, космологиялық ұғымын көрсету. Сонымен қатар Тасмола мәдениетінің археологиялық ерекшеліктеріне қысқаша сипаттама беріліп, Орталық Қазақстанның ерте темір дәуірі халқының этногеографиясының, этникалық атауларының қайта құрылуына қатысты негізгі тарихнамалық мәліметтер көрсетілген. Есіл өзенінде зерттелген ірі қорғандардың жерлеу архитектурасын талдау негізінде сақ дәуіріндегі ежелгі тайпалардың кейбір дүниетанымдық идеялары мен мифологиясын модельдеу ұсынылған.

*Кілт сөздер:* Есіл, Орталық Қазақстан, Еуразия, ғибадатханалар, Қазақстан археологиясы, Тасмола мәдениеті, сақ дәуірі, қорған архитектурасы, қайта құру, моделдеу.

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## Курганный архитектура раннего железного века Казахстана

Крупной историко-этнографической общностью раннего железного века Евразии является тасмолинская археологическая культура Центрального Казахстана. В последние десятилетия в изучении ее появились новые направления, связанные с исследованием крупных курганов. Крупные курганы тасмолинской знати вписываются в общую систему культовых мемориалов степной Евразии. Архитектура и конструкция их представляет разнообразные сведения по моделированию и реконструкции исторических событий античного времени, по материальной и духовной культуре. В изучении их используются новые методы и подходы, направленные на реконструкцию погребальной архитектуры, которая показывает сложную структуру и открывает неожиданные ракурсы, как в зодчестве древних племен, так и в выявлении многообразных аспектов сакской погребальной мифологии. При тщательном исследовании материализованные следы ритуальных практик проявляются в структуре и архитектуре погребального памятника. Цель статьи — дать характеристику курганной архитектуры крупных мемориалов и на основе конструктивных особенностей представить некоторые мировоззренческие, космологические представления тасмолинского населения. В статье приведена краткая характеристика археологических признаков тасмолинской культуры, изложены основные историографические сведения.

ния по реконструкции этногеографии, этнических наименований населения раннего железного века Центрального Казахстана. На основании анализа погребальной архитектуры крупных курганов, исследованных на реке Ишим, предложено моделирование некоторых мировоззренческих представлений и мифологии древних племен сакского времени.

*Ключевые слова:* Ишим, Центральный Казахстан, Евразия, храмы-святилища, археология Казахстана, тасмолинская культура, сакская эпоха, курганная архитектура, реконструкция, моделирование.

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