

Botay. At the sources of steppe civilization

In 1980, during an archeological survey, Viktor Zaybert discovered an ancient settlement, with an area of more than 20 hectares. Its dimensions, rich archaeological and osteological material, multiple cavities left by foundation trenches of ancient dugouts indicated that the settlement had been a unique historical and archaeological phenomenon. The author named this culture Botay.

As a result of thirty years of researches, conducted by Viktor Zaybert and his colleagues from Kazakhstan, Russia, Great Britain, USA and Germany, it has been proved that in the end of Stone Age on the Kazakhstan territory, within the interfluvies of Ural and Irtysh, for the first time in the world horse had been domesticated by ancient representatives of Botay culture. The scientists' surveys have been supported not only by mere logic of historical processes, but also by instrumental laboratory methods in Universities of Bristol and Exeter. Examination of multiple dwellings and more than 300 thousand artefacts provided a basis for developing fundamental problems of manufacture-based economy's origination, its evolution and transformation in Eurasian steppes on the basis of horse-breeding, as well as for defining peculiarities of steppe tribes' culturogenesis, and main mechanisms of ethnogenesis, anthropogenesis and language origin.

Viktor Zaybert, Doctor of Historical Sciences, Archaeology Professor, corresponding member of the German Archaeological Institute shared his experience in archaeological researches of Botay culture with Mangi El correspondent.

For several years, national TV has been broadcasting a documentary "The first horseman". The title for the documentary has been chosen after complicated and continuous archaeological analysis, which included typological statistics, review of inventory morphological traits, its sketching, photographing, reconstruction, modelling, etc. Subsequent mythologization of archaeological information was based on strictly scientific cause-and-effect logic. Researchers managed to identify main discoveries, achievements, definitions and functions of archaeological information with a high level of verification in the process of excavations, analysis and synthesis; they defined cultural identity of the Botay settlement as Botay culture, determined absolute and relative chronology (IV- III B.C.), reconstructed economic, social-and-ethnic, spiritual constituents of Botay culture, described forms and directions of inner and external development, reasons of cultural crisis and vectors of culture's transformation: horse domestication and kumiss origination were proved with the help of instrumental methods, and finally the theory of archaeological Botay culture was developed.

Botay culture had existed for about 1000 years, during that time human ideology concerning ambient environment had undergone an evolution. 12 equine skulls, surrounding mass human burial, as well as ritual lying out of equine skulls in two parallel lines vividly illustrate the fact of sacrificial offerings on the territory of Botay settlement. Peculiarity of people's attitude to animals, particularly to horse is quite notable: on the one hand, horse had been a feed source, but on the other hand it had been a cult and object of ritual ceremonies.

V. Zaybert associates origination of patriarchal relations in Kazakh steppes with horse domestication and refers to multiple artefacts for proof. More than dozen stone and argillaceous sandstone artefacts with phallic symbols had been found in Botay. Those artefacts have been analyzed together with biconical stone items, known in archaeological science as arrow smoothers. It is notable, that many smoothers had been smashed, while others had had an additional linula, symbolizing feminine womb. In the process of transition to patronymic system, due to emergence of a new horse cult and male cult, arrow smoother could have been ritually smashed by phallic pestles during initiations and nuptial ceremonies.

Since the sources of horse-breeding as a basis of cattle husbandry in steppes had been founded in Chalcolithic period, it is only natural that conversion to heavenly and earthly values had passed through definite magic rites and rituals. The instruments had been represented by different artefacts made of bones, argillaceous sandstone and ceramics. Images of hemispheres on the second horse phalanxes, probably symbolize rainbow, crosshatched triangles may symbolize dwellings or mountain tops, while small vertical and horizontal undulated zigzags, symbolizing rain, may serve as a possible reflection of legends about place of a human being between the earth and cosmic space.

The book of Viktor Zaybert, “Botay. At the sources of steppe civilization.”, a graphic, fascinating edition, rich with colorful photos, recounts one of the most important scientific discoveries of Kazakhstan archaeology and ancient culture — Botay culture of the Chalcolithic epoch, IV-III B.C.

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