Interactions of pre-Xiongnu and transition of Slab Graves

Daisuke NAKAMURA*

Recent research started to reveal the burial styles in the Bronze Age of Mongolia. Especially, it is noteworthy that such study outlined appearance of regionality in southern and western Mongolia. However, activities of Iron Age nomad and transition to Xiongnu still have not been revealed. Therefore, author attempted to seek the interaction of central area of Mongolia with other areas in pre-Xiongnu period through the results of excavation in Khustyn Bulag site, Tuv province.

Keywords: pre-Xiongnu, Slab graves, interaction

1. Introduction

Xiongnu is widely known as the people who established the first nomadic empire in the eastern steppe area and was the most terrible enemy against the Han Dynasty in China. Hence, many researchers have studied Xiongnu, regarding such as history, political system, and the origin. Before and in 1980's, Xiongnu was identified as the same people in the Great Wall region where is the border area between Mongolia and China (江上, 1948; 田・郭 1982). Then, many Slab graves have excavated and researched in Mongolia and Buryatia (Цыбиктаров, 1998; Төрбат нар., 2003), and it was also focused as an origin of Xiongnu. Some researchers noted that Xiongnu was formed by mixing people of Slab grave culture and ones of the Great Wall region (Төрбат, 2004; Tumen, 2006), while there are many differences in dating and features between Slab graves and Xiongnu burials (Цыбиктаров, 1998).

One of the oldest burial of Xiongnu is Ivolga cemetery in Buryatia, and its dating is from the latter half of 2nd century to 1st century BC. We could not find certain examples dating back before 3rd century BC. As Slab graves was remained until around 5th-4th century BC, there is about 200 years gaps between slab graves and Xiongnu burials. Incidentally, recent research (Kovalev and Erdenebaatar, 2009; Eregzen eds., 2016) started to reveal various burial styles and regional developments in the Bronze Age of Mongolia; some of these are related with pre-Xiongnu interaction. Especially, the relationship between Slab graves in central Mongolia and hourglass shaped burials in southern Mongolia is expected to have had an important role for the forming of territory consciousness of Xiongnu.

Therefore, to understand the activity of pre-Xiongnu period, author and research colleagues started to excavate the cemetery at Khustyn Bulag site (KBS); this is in the core area of the Xiongnu period. The notable points of Bronze-Iron Age cemetery in KBS has already reported (中村・他, 2018, Эрэгзэн нар.,

* Associate Professor, Graduate School of Humanities and Social Sciences, Saitama University. Archaeology.

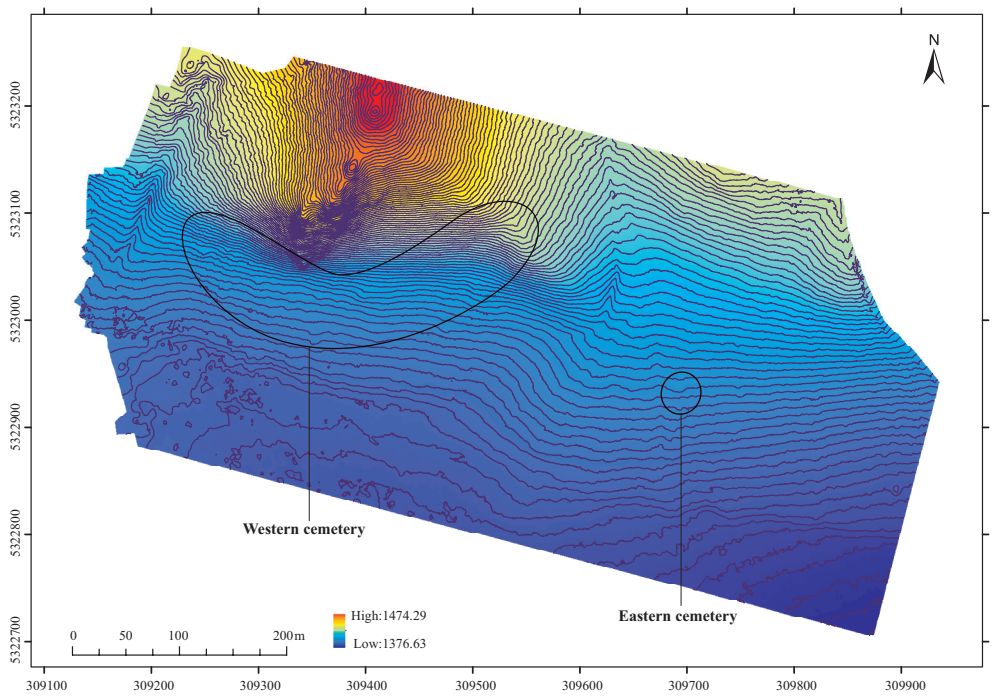


Fig.1 Locations of the Bronze-Iron Age cementeries of KBS BI (contour map by Tetsuo Shoji)

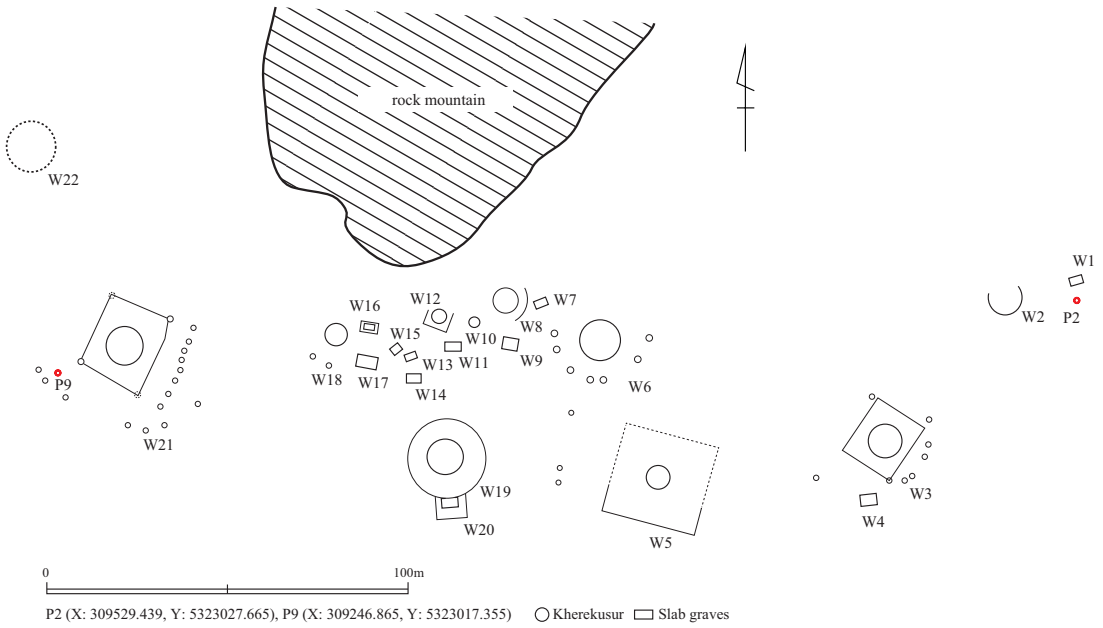


Fig. 2 Plan of Western Cemetery (S=1/1800)

2018), and we found a good example to understand the interaction in pre-Xiongnu period. In this paper, I explain the outline of Bronze-Iron Age cemeteries in KBS, and then hope to examine the formation and change of Slab graves.

2. Bronze-Iron Age cementries in KBS

2.1. Location

Along the Baidlagiin river, kilns and iron furnaces of Xiongnu period are distributed in KBS. Bronze-Iron Age cemeteries are located to the north and the west of these; the northern one is Burhant Uul, and the western one is Kustyn Bulag site Bronze Age I (KBS BI). KBS BI is divided into two cemeteries, the west and the east.

KBS BI cemeteries were located on a gentle slope from north to south and consist of Khereksur (khirgisuurs) and Slab graves (Fig. 1). The western cemetery is composed of about 21 burials: measures 50 m from north to south, 250 m from east to west. The eastern cemetery is composed of about 3 burials: measures 30 m from north to south, and 20 m from east to west.

2.2 Western cemetery

Khereksur and Slab graves are distributed around the rock mountain. It seems that stone materials of burials were gained from this rock mountain. The layout of burials is divided into two groups: A) group in semi-circle around the rock mountain, B) group under foot of the rock mountain (Fig. 2). A group consists of some large Khereksur with some small slab graves. Khereksur in KBS are composed of circle or square stone fence, and some of these have the outer stone circles. According to the Amgalantugs's chronology in the western area of Mongolia (Амгалантөгс, 2015), Khereksur with outer stone circles have been dated around 1000 BC.

Most of Slab graves destroyed a part of Khereksur, but Khereksur No. W19 associated with a circle fence seems to be destroying Slab grave No. W20 (Fig 3). If that is correct, we can presume to regard this kind of Khereksur as the latest type. To confirm the relationship between them, of course, we need to excavate.

On the other hand, Group B consists of small Khereksur and Slab graves. Slab grave No. W16 and W17 destroyed the circle fence of Khereksur No. W18. This burial is the same type of No. W19, but the relationship

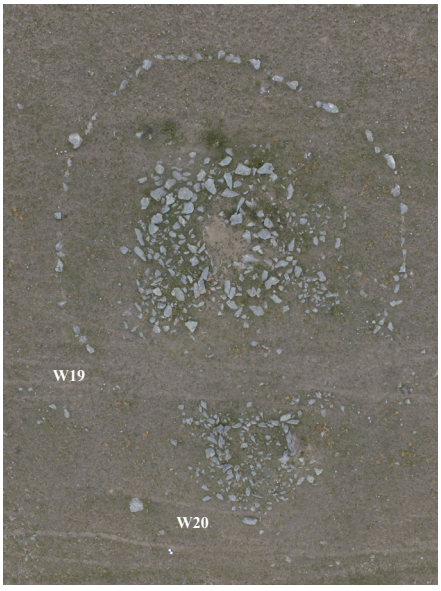


Fig. 3 Overlapping of KBS No. W19 and No. W20

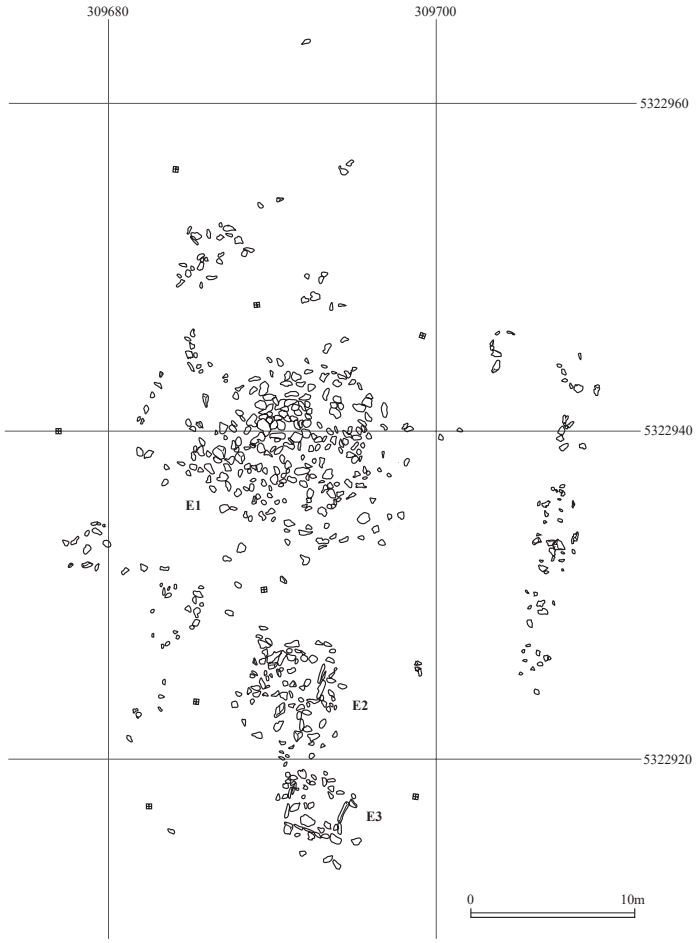


Fig. 4 Plan of eastern cemetery KBS BI before excavation

with Slab graves is the opposite.

2.3 Eastern cemetery and Slab Grave No. E2

A middle size Khereksur (No. E1) and two Slab graves (No. E2, E3) were found on the survey (Fig. 4). There is possibility that a few more Slab graves exist at this cemetery, but not sure under the remaining conditions. Khereksur No. E1 does not have a fence but have a square shaped outer stone-circles. Besides, we identified additional square stone lines in the direction of northwest attached with the cairn of No. E1. Unfortunately, the cairn of No. E1 has already broken and seems to have been robbed.

Slab grave No. E2 was built destroying the southern apart of outer stone circles of No. E1. No. E3 is located to the south of No. E2. It has a square slab stone fence and corner milestones. Before excavation, it appeared that No. E2 is a common type of Slab grave because parts of a square fence have remained. However, No. E2 have had a semi-circle shaped stone pavement after removing the surface soils (Fig. 5, 6). Arc-shaped part is on southside. The paved stone measures 7.5 m from north to south and 7.5 m from east to west, but the fence and the burial pit were made a little to the north from the center. In addition, we confirmed that the northern edge of paved stone of No. E3 placed on that of No. E2, that is, No. E3 was built later than No. E2.

The fence of No. E2 has a structure which was made by rubbles and slab stones, and slab stone was used only for the eastern and southeastern parts (Fig. 5, 6). This kind of fence is found in Daram site in Khentii province which is located along the Khelren River (Miyamoto and Obata, 2016). The inner space of fence measures 3.3 m in length and 2.1 m in width. Filling soils (layer 7) inner the fence was under about 25 cm under the surface and a thickness of filling soils measures about 20 cm (Fig. 6). It covers

a. after removing surfical soils

b. exposure of stone covers

c. exposure of a burial pit

e. pottery from southeastern part of the stone pavement

d. east-west trench to confirm the section

Fig. 5 Plans of KBS Grave No. E2 and pottery found at southeastern part of stone pavement

over the cover-stones of the burial pit.

Burial pit of No. E2 is small: measures about 150 cm in length, 50 cm in width, and only 25 cm in depth. The main axis of the burial pit is 11° down toward the right from the east-west axis. The burial pit had cover-stones which consisted of three plates, but the western plate has been broken and the middle

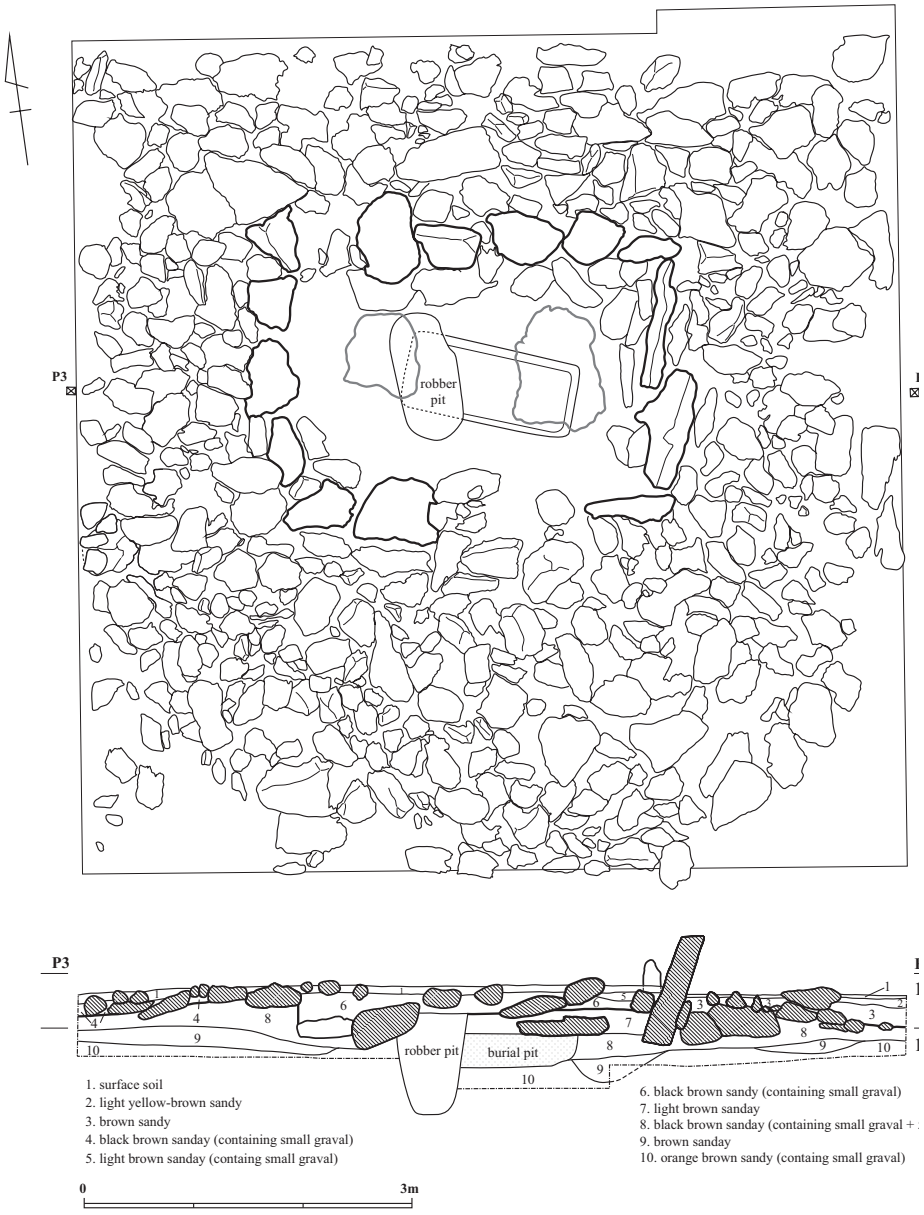
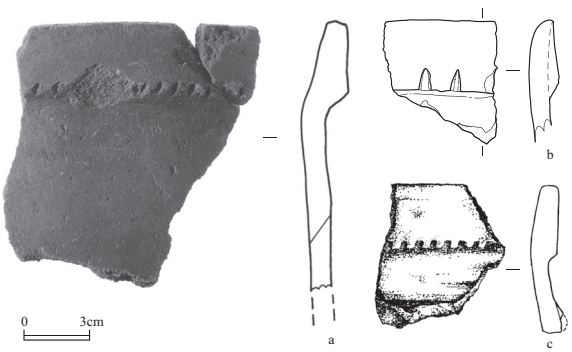


Fig. 6 Plan and section of KBS No. E2

one has been removed (Fig. 5b, 6). As we found the round robber's pit of 90 cm in depth on the western edge of the burial pit, cover stones were moved and broken at that time. Unfortunately, we could not find any bones and burial goods inner burial pit.

Some small sherds of pottery were found from the east of fence on the stone pavements. The other sherds of pottery, colored dark brown, with rim was found on the southeastern part of outer stone pavement (Fig. 5e, 7b). This is only clue to know the dating of No. E2. The pottery has a band-decorated rim with

notches, and similar example was found from the burial facility of Khereksur at Morin Tolgoi site near KBS (Fig. 7a). There are some differences such as the form of rim-edge and shape of the notches, but these pottery seem to be same family. If that is correct, it can be said that the people who built Khereksur came to build Slab graves in this area. The other example of the pottery of E2 was reported by Tsybiktarov (Цыбиктаров, 1998). It was found at Bilchir SG 4 in Buryatia and thought as 7th -5th Century BC (Fig. 7c).



a. Morin Tolgoi (Khentii), b. Khustyn Bulag No. E2 (Tuv), Bilchir SG 4 (Zabaikal)

Fig. 7 Sherds of band-decorated rim pottery
(a: after 국립중앙박물관·기타 2001, 2002, c: after Tsybiktarov 1998)

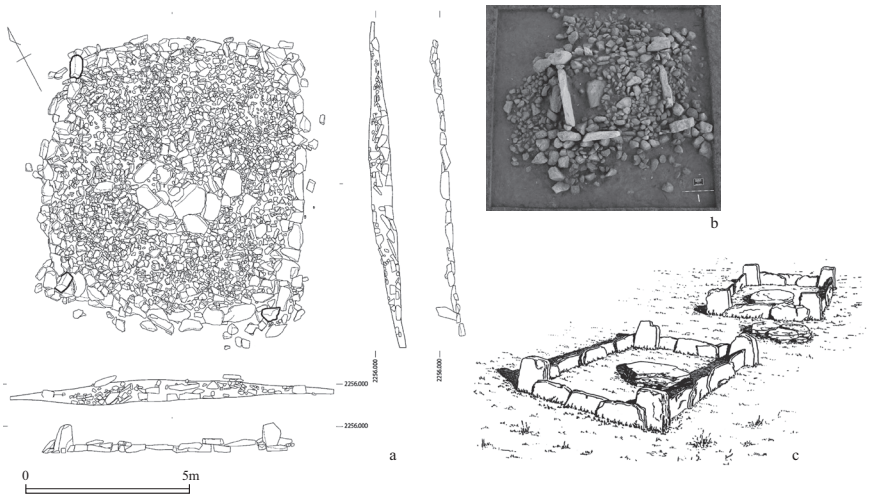
3. Discussions

3.1. Interactions between central and southern Mongolia

Semi-circle shaped graves like KBS E2 are often found accompanied with hourglass shaped graves, and both seem to belong to the same culture (Kovalev and Erdenebaatar, 2009; Fig. 9a, b). Although there were some opinions that hourglass shaped graves do not form their own culture, nowadays it became prevail that they form own culture before Slab graves (Цыбиктаров, 1998). Hourglass shaped graves were distributed from Yinshan area of inner Mongolia to Buryatia. Taking the study of Ma Jian (2017) and Amartuvshin (2016) into consideration, its major distribution regions are from the Yinshan area to southern and southeastern Mongolia.

Kovalev and Erdenebaatar (2009) named hourglass and semi-circle shaped graves the Tevsh culture, while Honeychurch (2015), adding Ulaanzuukh culture in southeastern Mongolia (Tumen et al., 2013), called these Ulaanzuukh-Tevsh Culture because of the peculiar posture of the buried persons. The persons were buried lying face down in these kind of graves (Tumen et al., 2013; Амгалантөгс нар, 2015), namely custom of prone burying. In present, there are four types of burial among that custom: semi-circle shaped type (Tevsh SC type), hourglass shaped type (Tevsh H type), Ulaanzuukh type, and Chandmani Khar Uul type, which were distributed from southwestern to southeastern Mongolia.

The graves of Chandmani Khar Uul type is shaped rectangular and the edge of the fence was built by paling slab or putting rubbles. Ulaanzuukh type is also shaped rectangular, but have the fence surrounded by the slab stones leaning against the piled slabs. Regarding the AMS dating, Ulaanzuukh type is 15th -13th century BC, Chandmani Khar Uul type is 15th -12th century BC, Tevsh H type is 13th -11th century BC and Tevsh SC type is 10th -9th century BC (Kovalev and Erdenebaatar, 2009; Tumen et al., 2013; 宮本, 2016).



a. Grave No.1 at Cemetery Unit No. 2 of Khyar Kharaach (Sagsai type, Govi-Altai province),
b. Ar Bulan grave No. 2 (Slab grave, Uvurkhangai), c. Grishkin Log I (Tagar culture, Minusinsk, scale unknown)

Fig. 8 Burials with corner milestones (after Miyamoto 2017, Ерөөл-Эрдэнэ et al 2015, Максименков 2003)

Incidentally, Kovalev and Erdenebaatar (2009: 163) mentioned that the hourglass-shaped Slab graves in Transbaikalia and Central Mongolia have emerged under the influence of Tevsh type. Considering KBS No. E2, interactions of northern and southern areas seems to have continued for long period.

3.2. Transition of Slab graves

Tsybiktarov classified Slab graves into two phases: Chulut phase (13-8th century BC) and Atsai phase (8-6th century BE), and indicated that Slab grave culture formed in parallel with similar monuments in such areas Southern Siberia, Altai and a part of Kazakhstan (Цыбиктаров, 1998: 120). He presumed the transition of Slab graves from the low fence in Chulut phase to the higher one with four corner milestones in Atsai phase, as same changes as in the Minusinsk basin from Karasuk to Tagar culture.

Miyamoto classified Slab graves from the other viewpoint (宮本, 2016). He defined Slab graves as burials with slab fence and four corner milestones; presumed that it changed from a type without outer stone pavement to one with outer stone pavement. Besides, he considered the origin of Slab graves as Sagsai type graves in Altai mountains. Sagsai type graves have circle or square fence made of rubbles and corner milestones (Fig. 8a). Inner space of the fence is filled with rubbles, and the burial pits sometimes have the stone covers.

Referring to Bokovenko (2006), the square fence with corner milestones and the pit burial with stone covers of Sagsai type are similar to the barrows in early Tagar culture (Fig. 8c): Bainov phase and early Podgornovo phase, except that the fence of Tagar barrows was built by vertical slabs. As dating of the Sagsai type graves is 1500-980 BC (Gantulga, 2016), these are earlier than Tagar culture. Therefore, regarding corner milestones, it has a high possibility that Sagsai gave an influence on surrounding areas such as Minusinsk, central Mongolia, and Eastern Mongolia (宮本, 2016: 50-51; 2018: 75). It can be said

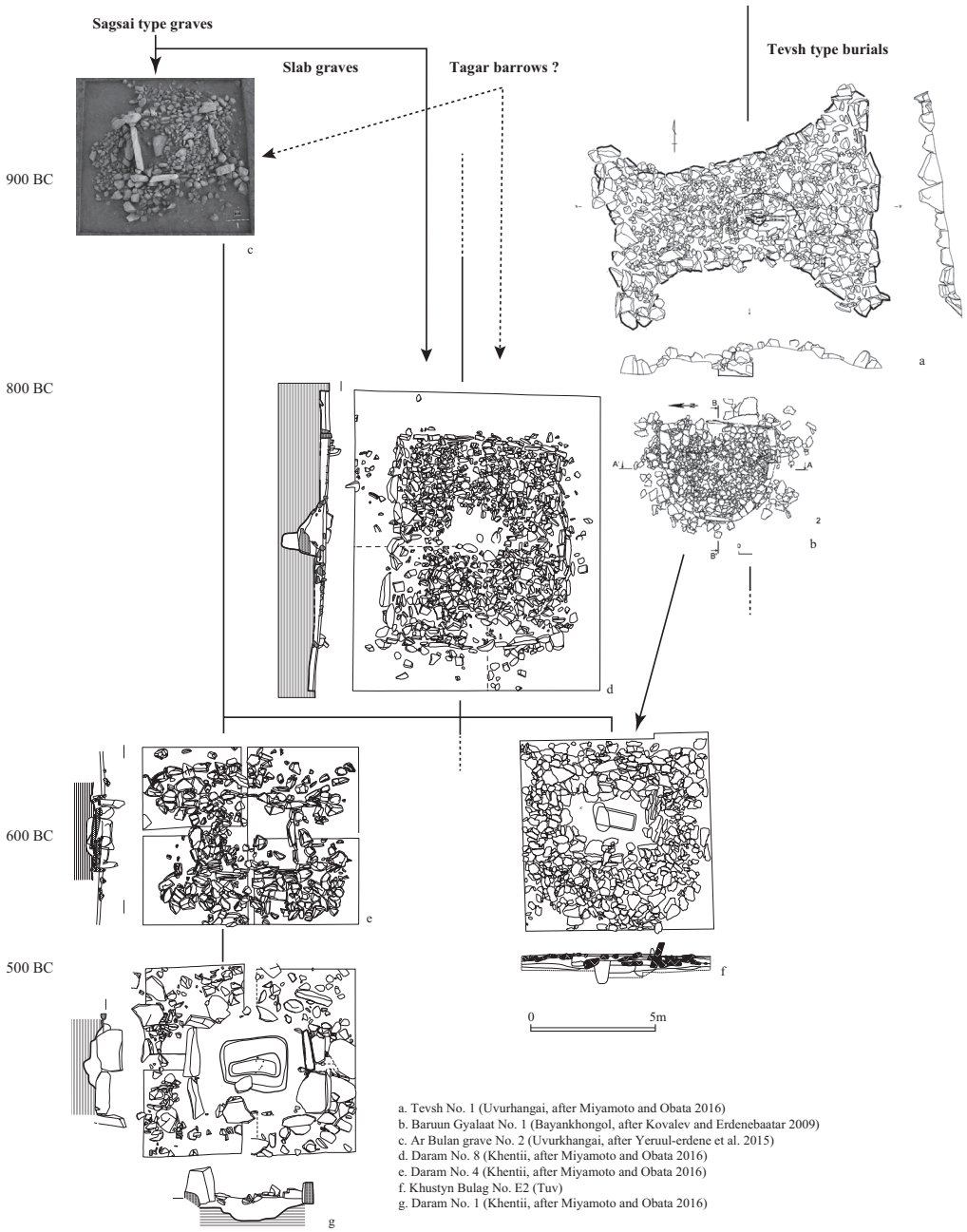


Fig 9. Transition of Slab graves and influence from other burials

that Altai mountain was the core area that influenced the parallel formation of the similar monuments from a part of Kazakhstan to all over the Mongolian plateau[1]. However, some problems still remain

[1] Some researcher consider Slab grave is originated from southern and southeastern Mongolia. Miyamoto assumed Slab graves changed from Chandmani Khar Uul type except for corner milestones (宮本, 2016：51) because he considered Chandmani

regarding the emergence of the fence made of vertical slabs.

Miyamoto (2016), as mentioned previously, presumed the change of Slab graves from without outer stone pavement to with outer stone pavement based on the AMS dating, and indicated the emergence of the type with outer stone pavements as around 7-6th century BC (Fig. 9e). However, Ar Bulan grave No. 2 at the upper Orkhon valley in Uvurkhangai province is the type with outer stone pavement and the dates: 1030-905 BC (Ерөөл-Эрдэнэ нар., 2015; Fig. 9c). Referring the Daram grave No. 4 (Fig. 9d) in Khentii province and Usti-Tsoron in Zabikal, the shape of fence is similar to the barrows of Tagar culture. If we assume that Slab grave is originated from barrows of early Tagar culture, it is persuasive that the type without outer stone pavements is the oldest. However, the data of AMS do not permit such a simple assumption. Although there still remains a possibility of the influence on forming of the vertical-slab fence from Tagar culture, the local responses seem to have been various.

Slab graves with outer stone pavements have smaller fence and fewer slabs used than these without outer stone pavements. The range of outer paved stone is often as same in size as the range of fence filled with rubbles of non-outer pavement type. Around Khustyn Bulag site, rubbles are easier to obtain rather than slabs. Therefore, we should take the source environments of stone materials into consideration. In present, we had better to admit that Slab graves emerged as two kinds of type at the beginning.

3.3. Formation of KSB No. E2

KSB No. E2 was a kind of Slab graves from the viewpoint of having the fence made partly by vertical slabs. Its shape of outer stone pavements was, without doubt, formed under the influence of semi-circle graves of Tevsh type (Fig. 9f). The attributes of Slab grave such as the slab fence and the corner milestones originated from the Sayan-Altai area and western Mongolia, while semi-circle shaped stone pavements originated from the southern and southeastern Mongolia. This fact shows the central Mongolia was the crossroad of the interaction between each people who had indigenous cultures and graves in the transitional period from Bronze to Iron Age. Referring to Miyamoto's research in central Mongolia (Miyamoto and Obata, 2016), the slabs of the fence became enlarged in the Iron Age. The representative grave is Daram No. 1, dates; 479-381 BC (Fig. 9g). Whereas, the shape of it is different from Xiongnu burials. The origin of the Xiongnu burials is not able to pursuit directly from Slab graves, and we should presume other influence.

4. Conclusion

In the core area of the Xiongnu period, we could find a grave of interest in the transition period from

Khar Uul type existed also in Daram site, northern Mongolia. However, examples in Daram site are more than 200 years newer than Chandmani Khar Uul type. In addition, the custom of prone burying has not been clear yet in northern Mongolia.

Bronze to Iron Age. The grave, KBS No. E2 shows the interaction between central and southern Mongolia. We should remind that one of major distribution area of the hourglass-shaped graves is Yinshan mountain in inner Mongolia. The area is the southern limit of Xiongnu before Modu Chanyu, that is, it is possible that the interaction in the Iron Age influenced on the emergence and the territorial consciousness of early Xiongnu.

Incidentally, we can often find the stone pavements of Slab graves which not seen as square and rectangular in central Mongolia. Of course, some of them seems to have such shapes because of destruction in the later period. However, in case that stone pavements spread wider on a side, it is highly possible to find semi-circle shaped graves. If we can excavate and confirm their shapes, the interaction of pre-Xiongnu would be clearer.

Acknowledgements

Archaeological research was funded by Grant-in-Aid for Scientific Research (B) of JSPS, Number 18H00736. I would like to thank for the supporting to Dr. Chunag Amartuvshin, Dr. Gelegdorj Eregzen, Dr. Isao Usuki, Dr. Tetsuo Shoji, Dr. Katsuhiko Kiyama, Dr. Sasada Tomotaka, M.A. Lochin Ishitseren, Wataru Honzawa. I am deeply grateful to Dr. Kazuo Miyamoto for sending many articles.

References

Amartuvshin Ch. 2016, Hourglass-shaped graves and prone burials, *Ancient funeral monuments of Mongolia*, 72-87, Ulanbaatar.

Amartuvshin Ch. and Jargalan B. 2008, Early Bronze Age burial study in Baga Gazaryn Chuluu, *Studia Archaeologica Instituti Archaeologici Academiae Scientiarum Mongolicae*, tomus XXIV: 77–91. (in Mongolian)

Bokovenko N. 2006, The emergence of the Tagar culture, *Antiquity*, Volume 80, Issue 310: 860-879.

Eregzen G. eds. 2016, *Archaeological relics of Mongolia III: Ancient funeral monuments of Mongolia,* Ulanbaatar

Gantulga J. 2016, Sagsai-shaped graves, *Ancient funeral monuments of Mongolia*, 58-71, Ulanbaatar.

Honeychurch W. 2015, *Inner Asia and the spatial politics of empire: archaeology, mobility, and culture contact*, springer, New York.

Kovalev A. and Erdenebaatar D. 2009, Discovery of new cultures of the Bronze Age in Mongolia according to data obtained by the International Central Asian Archaeological Expedition, *Current archaeological research in Mongolia*, 149–170, Rheinische Friedrich-Wilhelms-Universität, Bonn.

Ma J. 2017, The survey and study of Slab burials in the Yinshan Mountains, *Eurasian studies*, vol. 5: 54-85.

Miyamoto K. and Obata H. 2016, *Excavations at Daram and Tevsh Sites: A Report on Joint Mongolian-Japanese Excavations in Outer Mongolia*, Department of Archaeology, Faculty of Humanities, Kyushu University, Fukuoka.

Miyamoto K. 2017, *Excavations at Bor Ovoo and Khyar Kharaach Sites: The second Report on Joint Mongolian-Japanese Excavations in Outer Mongolia*, Department of Archaeology, Faculty of Humanities, Kyushu University, Fukuoka.

Tumen D. 2006 Paleoanthropology of ancient population of Mongolia, *Mongolian Journal of Anthropology, Archaeology and Ethnology*, 2: 90-108.

Tumen D., Khatanbaatar D. and Erdene M. 2013, Bronze Age Graves in the Delgerkhaan Mountain Area of Eastern Mongolia and

the Ulaanzuukh Culture, *Asian archaeology*, vol.2: 40-49.

Амгалантөгс Ц. 2015 Хиргисүүрийн гадаад хэльэр, ззохион байгуу лалтын ангилал, *Археологйн Судлал* XXXV: 122-139, Үлаанбаатар

Амгалантөгс Ц., Батболд Н., Эрдэнэ Г., Батдалд Б. 2015 *Чандманъ Харуулын археологийн дурсгал.*Үлаанбаатар.

Төрбат Ц. 2004, *Хүннүгийн жирийн иргэдийн булш*. Улаанбаатар.

Төрбат Ц., Амартүвшин Ч., Эрдэнэбат У. 2003, *Эгийн голын сав дахь археологийн дурсгалууд*, Улаанбаатар.

Цыбиктаров А. Д. 1998 *Купьтура плиточных могил Монголии и Забайкалья*, Улан-Уде.

Эрэгзэн Г., Д.Накамүра Д., Күрибаяши С., АмартүвшинЧ. 2018 булшны малтлага судалгаа, *Зүүн Байдлагийн голын сав дахь археологийн дурсгалууд*, 157-204, Улаанбаатар.

Ерөөл-Эрдэнэ Ч., Гантулга Ж., Бемманн Я., Бросседөр У., Макглынн Ж., Рөйхерт С. 2015 Орхоны хөндий дэх Монгол-Гарманы хамтарсан “Баркор” төслийн судалгааны урьдчилсан үрдүн. *Археологйн Судлал* XXXV: 198-227, Үлаанбаатар.

Максименков Г.А. 2003, *Материалы по ранней истории тагарской культуры*, Санкт-Петербург.

江上波夫 1948『ユウラシア古代北方文化：匈奴文化論考』全國書房，東京.

中村大介・Eregzen Gelegdorj 2018「ホスティン・ボラグ遺跡の特殊な板石墓」『第 19 回 北アジア調査研究報告会 発表要旨』63-66.

宮本一夫 2016「モンゴル高原における青銅器時代板石墓の変遷と展開」『史淵』第 153 輯, 31-57.

宮本一夫 2018「モンゴル青銅器時代墓制の展開：ヘレクスール文化の位置づけを中心に」『史淵』第 155 輯, 53-80.

田広金・郭素新 1982「匈奴墓葬的類型和年代」『内蒙古文物考古』1982-2: 8-17

국립중앙박물관，몽골국립역사박물관，몽골과학아카데미 역사연구소 2002 『몽골 유적조사 5 년』국립중앙박물관

국립중앙박물관，몽골국립역사박물관，몽골과학아카데미역사연구소 2001『몽골 모린 톨고이 흉노 무덤』국립중앙박물관