This article analyzes a unique anthropomorphic image on a ceramic vessel used as a container for liquids, which was found at the 1st–4th-century CE site of Ush bastobe in the valley of the Ugam River, Southern Kazakhstan. A multi-disciplinary approach explores various semantic interpretations of the image, the key one of which is that it represents farn-xwarnah (X’aranah), a domestic deity connected with kinship and clan and associated with good fortune, health, abundance, protection from evil forces, etc. Its iconographic sources are related to the representative art and religious beliefs of the ancient ethnic groups of Eurasia of the late Iron Age but also have features specific to the sedentary agricultural population of the local mountain region. On the ethno-cultural level, as farn-xwarnah, this image is connected with the Kangju state and as well with the circle of Iranian language tribes of the Scytho-Sako-Sarmatian world, where this cult was widespread in antiquity.

The micro-region and the site of Ush bastobe

The Ugam region, located in the far southeastern part of South Kazakhstan oblast’, includes middle and high mountain relief of the Karzhantau and Ugam Ranges (up to 2000 and 3195 m in altitude respectively) and the middle reaches of the Ugam River valley, where loess terraces above the flood plain and a level landscape cover a territory of more than 50 km² [Fig. 1]. Bordering this area on the north and south are the canyons of the Ugam River, which thus contribute to its self-contained nature [Fig. 2:1,2]. Administratively, the Ugam area is on the territory of the Kazygurt district in South Kazakhstan oblast’, where the Sairam-Ugam national nature reserve is located.

The uniqueness and variety of the ecology in the Ugam valley—the availability of practically unlimited water resources both of the Ugam River and numerous mountain streams and springs, the presence of productive loess terraces, and the self-contained micro-region’s stable mountain climate—favored the exploitation of this territory by humans beginning in deep antiquity. Archaeological evidence of human settlement in different eras includes that from the Kangju state of the 1st–4th centuries.
The site of Ushbastobe is located 55 km southeast of the city of Shymkent on the left terrace at an altitude of 1237 m above the flood plain of the Ugam River, with GPS coordinates of 41°41’55.04” N, 70°02’03.95” E. It is a tripartite settlement with a developed system of fortification, in which the decisive role is played by the natural factors of the site’s location (the steepness of the slopes) (Podushkin 2000, pp. 28-31). The citadel of Ushbastobe (whose name translates from Kazakh as “three-headed mound”) occupies three levels on a hill of irregular rectangular shape. The main (central) hill (No. 2) at the base measures 20 x 45 x 22 x 45 m; the upper platform (No. 1), 15 x 30 x 30 x 15 m; the lower platform (No. 3) at its base, 25 x 20 x 15 x 20 m, and located 5.5-7 m above the flood plain. The site is almost perfectly oriented along a NE to SW axis. It has powerful natural defenses, since there are precipitous slopes on all sides and only from the southeast is connected by a narrow neck with the terrace of the flood plain [Fig. 3:1,2].

The results of excavations at Ushbastobe

In 2015, the expedition of the Central State Museum of the Republic of Kazakhstan carried out studies on the upper Platform No.1 of the citadel of Ushbastobe, the excavation of more than 20 m² on the level of the first construction horizon uncovering a mass of ceramic material and other artefacts (tools, decorations, ritual objects of stone, bone and metal) dated to

Fig. 2. Landscapes of the Ugam River Valley: 1) View from Kyzylkuc Pass; 2) The Ugam River in the northeastern part of the valley.

Fig. 3.1. The Ushbastobe citadel, exterior view from the northeast.
Fig. 3.2 Topographic map of the site.
the Kangju period (1st-4th centuries CE) [Fig. 4:1,2].

There were shards of more than 60 vessels for various domestic and ritual purposes, among them large and medium-sized cooking pots, kettles and mugs, large and small khum vessels (capacious jars for storing and carrying water), and table ware including large jars and vases and several kinds of cups. Other ceramic wares included frypans, spindle whorls, stands for dishes, scoops and more—all told more than 1000 ceramic artifacts.

Some of the cooking kettles are footed, others have flat bottoms; there are flat-bottomed cylindrical jars with two horizontal petal-like handles on the shoulder of the vessel [Fig. 5:1-4]. These vessels are for the most part undecorated, but some are coated with a dark brown glaze and have applied cone-shaped projections on the shoulders or arc-shaped “moustache-like” plain and striated tubes imitating either a vine or a snake. Analogous
tubes forming a spiral composition of “moustache-like” elements are to be found where the petal-like handles are attached and also between them. The small khum vessels and jars are all pear-shaped, with weakly articulated necks, hand-thrown or formed on a slowly turning stand. These and the other ceramics for domestic use may be decorated with a light brown or gray glaze used to depict so-called oval “eyes” with a dark border or masks, with a band of dark slip around the mouth, or with protruding appliqués [Fig. 5:5-7, 14—a scoop, 17—a spindle-whorl]. The tableware (jars, pots and cups) is both wheel-turned and thrown by hand, made of quality clay and high-fired. Decorative effects include: coating with black, reddish-brown, and purplish slips of various shades; designs in red glaze on the neck and body along the outside of the vessel; concentric wide lines on the mouth; scrolls, which create a focused composition; glaze spots; polishing in the slip; projecting conical appliqués on the shoulder; and concentric lines with vertical notches (incisions) drawn on the raw clay [Fig. 5:8-13]. The ritual ceramics consist of miniature cup-like footed vessels and stands [Fig. 5:15-16,18].

In addition to the ceramics, the excavation uncovered tools and ornaments, including sickles with a bone handle and iron blade [Fig. 6:1,2]; stone grinders [Fig. 6:3,4]; a cosmetic implement (sur’matash) for applying...
mascara [Fig. 6:5]; an iron needle [Fig. 6:6]; bone game pieces of sheep knuckle-bones (astragali) [Fig. 6:7]; and a bangle made of mountain crystal mounted in silver [Fig. 6:8].

The vessel with the anthropomorphic image

The vessel with the anthropomorphic image was found in these same strata. It had been shattered in antiquity into many pieces and scattered over a large area of the ancient surface among the debris of a large mass of other dishes. Hence, the image—drawn on the wall of the vessel in the central, widest part of its body—has been preserved on more than ten large and medium-sized ceramic fragments [Fig. 7]. Probably tableware or a water jar, the vessel is quite massive and could have held a considerable amount of liquid (more than 10 liters). It measures 46.2 cm high, 32 cm maximum diameter of the body, 11.7 cm diameter of the mouth, with a neck 9.5 cm high, and diameter of the base 23.3 cm. The vessel is pear-shaped, with a short neck; it has a petal-shaped vertical handle, whose upper end was attached to the neck just below the mouth and the lower to the shoulder [Fig. 8:1]. The vessel was formed on a slowly revolving stand (on the bottom can be seen concentric furrows inscribed with the finger). The body is a sandy-textured high-quality clay almost free of inclusions and hard fired. It is somewhat misshapen, slightly asymmetrical. On the upper part of the handle there appears to have been a zoomorphic appliqué which was broken off in antiquity. The entire surface of the vessel was coated with a yellowish-light brown slip and also glazed spots (“eyes”) of a darker brown color. The under side of the bottom was touched up with a comb while the clay was still wet.

The image

The human-like image was inscribed on the side of the vessel by drawing on the wet clay using a relatively sharp object with a smooth, rounded tip (a bone stylus or polished wooden stick). The lines are 0.45 to 0.3 cm wide, sharply delineated; they cut into the surface of the jar to a depth of up to 0.15 cm, which means that the image and even fine details are easily visible [Fig. 8:2].

The measurements of the image are impressive: its height (from the crown of the “hair” in the shape of an upper “ribbon” to the lower tip of the “leg”) is 21.5 cm; the maximum width (from the tips of the “fingers” of the left hand to the outer right extremity of the torso) is 14.8 cm.

The image is that of a standing human figure with the contours of the main parts of the body clearly articulated: the head, the shoulders of the torso, hands, waist and lower part of the body with with an indication of a “leg”. The head (and “leg”) are shown in profile to the left, and the rest of the body, apparently that of a clothed male, is outlined by two triangles in a direct frontal pose [Fig. 8:3].

Preliminary traceological analysis suggests that the image was inscribed in several stages: first the head was sketched with several lines (and its details: an eye with its pupil, eyebrows, “hair”, a nose, a “beard”), then the neck on which is
some kind of an accessory (a torque?) [Fig. 9]. Next was
to be separated from the body and slightly shifted
to the left from the shoulders of the torso (no lines
connect them) [Fig. 8:2-3]. Some 12 lines form the head,
"beard", "hair/ribbons", eye with pupil, "eyebrows",
neck and accessory; two lines outline the triangular cut
of the clothes; another 7 lines shape the right shoulder,
right hand and end of the sleeve of the garment, while
10 lines form the left shoulder, hand and end of the
sleeve of the garment. Four lines complete the torso
DQGJHQHUDOVLOKRXHWWHRIWKHÀJXUH,QDOODWRWDORI
35 lines. The least fully articulated elements are the
"chin" (one line, the continuation of the contour of the
head) and "leg" (also one line, the continuation of the
contour of the lower part of the body). While the image
is not overloaded with graphic detailing, apparently
the ancient artist was well acquainted with his subject
and the relevant iconographic traditions and had full
command of the techniques to enable him to inscribe
30 strokes on the rapidly drying clay of a vessel that
had just been shaped.

In spite of the somewhat schematic treatment, there
can be little doubt that we have here a complete
anthropomorphic image with male characteristics. We
note the double triangle contours of the figure with
a slender waist and powerful torso, the stylized head
and neck, the long arms, and the tunic-like garment
in which the individual is shrouded. The garment
would seem to be a fastened, long waisted and closely
fitted caftan, with a triangular cut on the breast but
no collar, and sleeves without cuffs. The long line at
the bottom of the garment (a fold?) suggests that it
had a generous cut. This is a frightening individual
with unnaturally large "arms" extended forward and
wide-spread long "fingers" moving toward an object
or trying to make contact with someone: the body is
markedly inclined forward, and the lower hem of the
garment appears to be fluttering. At the same time,
the dynamism, expressiveness and lightness of the
figure is evocative of its flying or wafting in the air
over the earth. The figure exudes a certain stylized
archaism, which prevents its being understood as a
completed image, but also suggests a mass of possibly
contradictory cultural-historical and ethnographic
interpretations.

Interpretations

As is well known, archaism, primitiveness or highly
schematic graphic execution, which by their very
nature exclude any convincing conclusion regarding
the semantics, artistic and functional content of one
or another image, are fertile ground for all kinds of
fantasy. While we will attempt to avoid such idle
speculation, there are details in the image from
Ushbastobe which raise doubts as to whether it is
definitely that of a human being.

Consider first the depiction of the head. While
on the whole it is similar to a human head, it is
slightly stretched and deformed in the sincipital part
horizontally and lacks such important elements as
ears, lips, mouth or a prominent chin. There is but
a hatched line imitating, it seems, a wedge-shaped
“beard”. The round eye, very large in comparison
with the profile of the face, looks flat. That is, there
is no indication of the eye-socket, something which is
hardly in keeping with commonly accepted variants
of the graphic depiction of human eyes. Also of note
is what passes for very sharp beak-shaped “nose”
with a slight bump, formed by two lines that are not
connected. It is something of a stretch to interpret
three lines, descending from the head, as hair; they
resemble rather ribbons or large feathers. Yet there is
no indication of any kind of head covering.

A second observation is connected with the depiction
of the hands, or more precisely the fingers on the
hands, in that palms as such are missing. The human-
like figure directly thrusts out from under the sleeves
of its garment fan-like, wide-spread fingers of huge
splayed “fingers” as the feathers at the tips of a bird’s wings.

Finally, the dynamism of the entire figure, akin to that of a bird taking flight, argues in favor of interpreting the Ushbastobe image as a zoo-anthropomorphic one with birdlike elements.

Possible analogies

While there are no direct analogies to the Ushbastobe image across all of Central Asia and Kazakhstan, there are at least some parallels worth noting.

The technique of depicting the contours of the head in left-facing profile by drawing with a sharp object on wet clay can also be found on a vessel with a cylindrical neck from the site of Kairagach, SW Ferghana, 1st half of the 1st millennium CE [Fig. 10:1] (Brykina 1982, p. 126, Figs. 64, 65). However, even though there is a certain congruity in the deformed stretching of the length of the sincipital part of the head, the Ushbastobe and Kairagach images otherwise differ markedly from each other. Other examples of left-facing profiles are to be found primarily in numismatic materials and which depict ribbon-like “hair”. For example, we see analogous “hair” on figures depicted on the coins of Parthian rulers of the first centuries CE [Fig. 10:2] (Abduallaev 2010, p. 41, Fig. 10.2). An image close to the indicated profile with analogous slightly loosened “hair” is on a coin from Kesh of the 3rd-6th centuries [Fig. 10:3] (Rtveladze 2002, pp. 75-76, Fig. on p. 75). Lastly, a similar subject (the profile of a head from the left, with ribbonlike “hair”) is on a painting fragment from the Varakhsha palace of the 7th century illustrating a horseman shooting from a bow [Fig. 10:4] (Pugachenkova and Rempel’ 1960, p. 75, Fig. 79).

The next set of analogies, also rather distant, is with depictions suggesting the silhouette of a figure by two intersecting triangles and also ones which display the triangular cut of the garment on the breast. For example, note the Scythian armored footsoldier confronting a cavalryman on a gold plate from the 4th-century BCE Geremesov barrow on the northern Black Sea littoral [Fig. 10:5] (Alekseev 2012, p.170; Gorelik 1971, p. 238, Fig. 4). The soldier and the Ushbastobe figure have frontally posed torsos, outlined by two triangles at the same time that the heads are depicted.
in profile. Both display a kind of forward movement with the hands extended, in the case of the Geremesov figure for defense against the spearman. What I would suggest is the leather or cloth lining of the armor has the triangular cut on the breast, as does the garment of the Ushbastobe anthropomorph. Even if, as Gorelik posits, the Geremesov image shows a metal breast-plate here, it still would appear to have a triangular cut. A nearly analogous decorative gold armor plate, mounted on a lining of an open, short, leather caftan, one that has a real triangular cut on the breast formed by the folding of the right side over the left, has been documented for the Sakas of Semirech’e in the Issyk kurgan of the 5th-4th centurie BCE (Akishev 1978: pp. 47-49; fig. 3.1).

There are other somewhat distant parallels in carvings on ivory and horn, the most pertinent being:

• some cataphracts depicted on the Orlat belt plaques: the silhouette of the figures, the position of the left hand [Fig. 11:1-3] (Pugachenkova 1987: pp. 57-58);

• an anthropomorphich depiction on a bone plaque from the Kuiu-Mazar cemetery, Kurgan No. 19: the silhouette of the figure; the triangular cut in the clothing on the breast [Fig. 10:6] (Obel’chenko 1956, p. 223, Fig. 20);

• a depiction on the lower part of a horn plaque from the Ak-Tam cemetery: the double triangular contour of the figure [Fig. 10:7] (Gorbunova 1960, pp. 93-94, Fig. 22);

• depictions of mounted and seated male figures on horn “end-caps” from the Kalaly-Gyr 2 site: the contours of the figures, clothes with the triangular cut on the breast [Fig. 11:4-5] (Il’iasov 2013, pp. 96-100, Fig. 1.1);

• two anthropomorphich “birdlike” figures on an astragalus from the Kalan-Mir (Kobadian) site, one of which is either in a cataphract or in plumage [Fig. 10:8] (Guguev 1992, pp. 120-21, Fig. 8; Zasetskaia 2011, p. 178, Ill. 89a).

• Among a somewhat different set of images, note the seated man wearing a garment with a triangular cut on the breast depicted on a torque from the Kobiakov barrow [Fig. 11:6], S. A. Yatsenko (2011, pp. 56-57) classifies the dress of the man as a shirt “with a deep triangular cut,” characteristic “for Sarmatians of any period.”

• And note depictions of soldiers in a battle scene on a silver vessel from a burial near the village of Kosika: the general silhouette of the figures and the triangular cut of the clothing on the breast [Fig. 11:7-9] (Dvornichenko and Fedorov-Davydov 1994, pp. 148-50, Fig. 5).

• Somewhat more distant analogies might be seen in depictions of elite Bactrian horsemen hunting, on a bone plaque from Takht-i Sangin of the 3rd century.
CE: the general contours of the figures, the triangular cut of the clothing (Litvinskii 2002, pp. 181-82, Fig. 34, p. 201).

All of the above-cited analogies to a greater or lesser degree are connected with the artistic, cultural and ideological traditions of Eurasian Iranian-language peoples and groups such as Scythians, Sakas, Sarmatians and Kangju of the period of the last centuries BCE to first centuries CE. Hence one should seek a semantic interpretation for our anthropomorphic image in this milieu and in particular in the Kangju state, whose political and administrative center was located at that time on the territory of southern Kazakhstan (the middle Syr Darya and the Arys’ River basins).

Archaeological studies of recent years that have examined numerous monuments of the Arys’ culture, ones which reflect the main traditions of the material culture of Kangju, have determined that this state was polytheistic and included in its most flourishing period (from the 2nd century BCE to the 2nd century CE) late Saka, Sarmatian, Xiongnu and its own Kangju ethnic elements (Podushkin 2000, pp. 147-61; 2010, pp. 207-17; 2015, pp. 501-14). Convincing evidence regarding the Iranian-language population of Kangju is in the unique Kultobe writing on ceramic brick-plaques found in southern Kazakhstan, which scholars classify as linear and alphabetic (with the inclusion of ideograms), created on the basis of Aramaic and marking one of the dialects (Sogdian/Kangju) of the ancient eastern Iranian language (Sims-Williams 2009; Podushkin 2013, pp. 93-94).

Semantic interpretations

The absence of direct analogies to the Usbhabstobe image complicates any effort to arrive at its semantic interpretation. For example, all of the cited indirect and remote parallels are connected with the militarized elite images showing foot soldiers and cavalrymen (or hunting bowmen) who have either protective armor (a cataphract), a single weapon (bow, dagger) or a complete set of weaponry. There are no weapons connected the image discussed here. The Usbhabstobe image in no way can be included among the basic anthropomorphic images of Iranian-language Sarmatia of the 2nd-1st centuries BCE, a large part of which involves horsemen and armed individuals (Yatsenko 2000, pp. 255-62, Figs. 2, 3).

While of Sarmatian cut without any accessories (if one excludes the band below the neck that possibly represents a torque) its caftan gives the impression of ordinary clothing and can in no way be understood as royal or elite. Everything suggests that the ancient artist who created the given image emphasized its other components, connected with traditions of the population in the religious sphere and mythological concepts in specific pagan rituals.

The theme of syncretic, “birdlike” anthropomorphs is extremely broad and leads back through the millennia to civilizations of antiquity (to the gods of Babylon, Assyria, Egypt, and the Hittite state) so widely dispersed across the ancient Near East, Anatolia and Central Asia as to render it unlikely direct connections can be established for the Ushabstobe image (see, e.g., Sarianidi 1989, pp. 18-19, Figs. 1-3; Samashev et al. 2005, p. 89). If one adopts a regional approach, very approximate analogies can be found in the Bronze-age petroglyphs of Kazakhstan depicting people in “birdlike” and horned masks (Samashev et al. 2004, p. 105, Fig. 161; pp. 132-33, Figs. 106, 145; p. 137, Figs. 159, 167). Closest of all to our “birdlike” being are the “strange elongated birdlike faces” of female figures (goddesses) on the Bronze Sarmatian mirror from the Mechetsai cemetery of the 6th-5th centuries BCE on the Ilek River (Smirnov 1968, p. 119, Fig. 2).

Notwithstanding the difficulties presented by the lack of direct analogies, I would propose that the Usbhabstobe image personifies a syncretic divinity of autochtonous origin from the pantheon of gods related to Zoroastrianism that were venerated among ancient Iranian tribes. It is most probable that what we have here is the farn-xwarnah (X’aranah), known to have embodied many different characteristics, and worshipped among all the Iranian-language peoples of Eurasia, including Sarmatia and the Kangju state.

We note at the outset that X’aranah, according to the Avesta, is connected in the closest fashion with “water, flowing water, rivers” (Litvinskii 1968, p. 50), “with reservoirs and water flows” and possibly originally was an attribute of the divinity Apam Napat, “Son of Water”, whose role was that of a protector. In Bakhman-Iashte 2.1 is the indication that farn is the all-knowing wisdom in the form of water which Zoroaster drinks (Litvinskii 1968, p. 110; Shenkar’ 2013, p. 428). Thus we can appreciate the significance of the fact that the Usbhabstobe image was inscribed on a vessel intended for storage, use and transport of water as the most important factor in human life. The fan-like “fingers” of the creature can be understood to be rivulets, streams of water, which issue forth from the hands, emphasizing abundance of that water resource, its accessibility and the possibility of unending use of it [Fig. 8:2-3]. Apart from the Ugam River itself in the region of Usbhabstobe, the findspot for our image, there are dozens of large and small streams and hundreds of springs, which personify the abundance of water sources and in a way guarantee that the population will flourish and enjoy a fortunate life (one of the hypostases of farn).
In the iconography of the ancient Iranians (in Kushan Bactria and Sogd), X’aranah can appear both in human guise and as an anthropomorphic image, the most ancient of which is the divinity Pharro, depicted on coins of two Kushan rulers, Kanishka and Huvishka (Shenkar’ 2013, pp. 434-37, Fig. 1). However, with its everyday dress, the Ushbastobe figure can in no way be suggestive of royal status. Of greater interest are the instances where X’aranah is in the form of a bird (Shenkar’ 2013, p. 438). Among Iranian-language peoples the bird is the symbol of the sky and sun; certain birds (the cock) play the role of protectors against “all impurity, evil, chaos” (Akishev 1984, pp. 40-42). We note as well that only birds “are referred to in Zoroastrian literature as the incarnation of X’aranah”; moreover, they sometimes are decorated with “fluttering royal ribbons, and often are depicted on Sasanian seals,” specifically as raptors (Shenkar’ 2013, p. 433). In our variant, the ribbonlike “hair” descending from the head of the Ushbastobe “bird-person” would be difficult to associate with royal ribbons, even if there is a superficial similarity.

The Ushbastobe anthropomorph is hardly a benevolent being. On the contrary, the huge eyes with vertical pupils, the widely spread and unnaturally long “fingers” which suggest flashes of fire exploding out of the hands, the figure itself, rushing forward, all create the impression of threatening action intended to ward off or scare away someone. Indeed, a similar semantic meaning is attached to the farn-xwarnah: often it appears in the role of the defender of the clan, the blood, the family, man, and even the magical protector of the contents of the vessel from “evil forces” (Litvinskii 1968, pp. 110-11).

Zoo-anthropomorphic parallels in the ceramics of the Arys’ culture

Furthermore, the interpretation of the Ushbastobe image with the same semantic content as the divinity farn-xwarnah definitely intersects with materials of a zoo-anthropomorphic character found on the ceramics of the Arys’ culture in southern Kazakhstan of the 4th century BCE to 4th century CE which embodies the traditions of the Kangju state. Among the most important hypostases of farn-xwarnah among the Sakas, Sarmatians and Kangju, with almost a complete array of corresponding semantic content, are such popular images as the mountain sheep (markhor), the noble stag (and roe deer), the dog (or wolf) and the snake. Almost all of these incarnations of farn-xwarnah are to be found on ceramics of the Arys’ culture in incised, relief-sculpted, and appliquéd variants. Such an emphasis on zoo-anthropomorphic imagery is one of the specific characteristics of that culture (Podushkin 2000, p. 96). Thus, the well-articulated contours of the noble stag (maral) are to be seen on a seal imprinted, it seems, by means of a stone stamp on the neck of a khum vessel found at the Tulebaitobe site [Fig. 12:3]. On the handle of the same vessel is a wonderfully articulated snake, an image that is remarkably realistic both in the pose of the body and in the depiction of the head [Fig. 12:2]. Among the images of wild animals are a depiction of

![Fig. 12. Zoomorphic imagery in the ceramics of the Arys’ culture of southern Kazakhstan: 1-2) from the Ushbastobe citadel; 3) from the Tulebaitobe citadel; 4) from the Karaulboite settlement; 5) from the Karakobe citadel; 6-7) from the Altyntobe settlement.](image_url)
a mountain roe deer “in flight”, inscribed in outline on wet clay, and what resembles a dog or wolf on the handle of a cup [Fig. 12:6-7].

But above all, the farn-xwarnah on ceramics of the Arys’ culture is to be connected with the image of the mountain-sheep (argali: *Ovis ammon* or *Ovis orientalis*), found not only in realistic three-dimensional artefacts but also numerous partial derivatives such as a stylized snout, curling horns and their imitations (the conical appliques on the upper part of the handles of vessels). Especially noteworthy are the beautifully conceived and strikingly realistic execution of the neck and head of markhor on the handle of a vessel from Karultobe [Fig. 12:4] and the upper part of a handle with the spiral horn of a sheep from Ushbastobe [Fig. 12:1]. A three-dimensional image of a horse in a markhor mask with the characteristic curved and spiral horns, found at Karatobe is unusual in its execution and function [Fig. 12:5].

Finally, among the ceramics of the Arys’ culture are parallels to the Ushbastobe image which may be indirectly related to the divinity farn-xwarnah. For example, there is yet another anthropomorphic artefact found at Ushbastobe in 2013, drawn on the body of a large vessel resembling a jug for storing and transporting water or an ossuary, covered with cherry-red slip and polished. Depicted on it in relief and with lines that had been inscribed in the wet clay is a person, apparently either sleeping or dead: with a precisely and artistically executed, stylized, large and slightly downward bending nose, and well-articulated eyes and mouth [Fig. 13:1]. In the iconographic sense—especially in the profile—and more importantly, in the technique of inscribing the lines and depicting the eye by means of an impressed opening, this second Ushbastobe image recalls the expressive depiction of a human face drawn on raw clay on the side of a jug found at the Kairagach house complex in southwestern Ferghana dated to the first half of the 1st millennium CE (Brykina 1982, p. 126, Figs. 64, 65). An anthropomorphic image found at Kul’tobe was executed in approximately the same punched-relief technique [Fig. 13:2]. No less interesting is a relief-drawn human figure with a half-numbus over the head, the image seeming to “fly off” upwards as depicted on the side of a *khum* vessel found at Altyntobe [Fig. 13:3]. The nimbus (or person with a nimbus over the head) in part is connected with the so-called “royal” farn (“divine nimbus of rulers”), an attribute of highly placed individuals and rulers of states of ancient Central Asia (Litvinskii 1968, p. 51).

We note that the tradition of depicting human figures, or their faces in relief and inscribed variants on the walls of ceramic vessels was common in the Zhetyasar/Arys’ culture of the first centuries CE (Levina and Chizhova 1995, p. 187, Fig. 2; Podushkin 2000, p. 42 and figure). There are anthropomorphic images of the face and part of the figure of a person executed in relief appiquéd and covered with red slip that have been found in the cultural layers of the Zhetyasar site of the 3rd century CE (Levina 1996, p. 247, Fig. 170:2-3).

**Conclusion**

The unique anthropomorphic image on the vessel from Ushbastobe undoubtedly should be regarded as one of the meaningful examples of plastic arts embodying the personification of a human-like divinity, farn/xwarnah. To date it is the only one that has been found across the entire region of Central Asia and Kazakhstan. In its semantic content and ritual functions, it is closely connected with the artistic and religious traditions and the ideological understandings of ancient Iranian-language populations of the Sako-Sarmatian world and the Kangju state. This expressive, unusual and to a certain...
degree contradictory image undoubtedly embodies some specific local characteristics of Zoroastrian religious ideas, even as it must be understood in the framework of more widespread beliefs common to nomadic and sedentary agricultural Iranian-language peoples of Eurasia. As a work of plastic arts, the Ushbastobe image undoubtedly will occupy an important place among Avestan/Zoroastrian icons and stimulate new scholarly analysis. This especially, given the fact that, paradoxically, for all we have so far been able to establish about the image, its real meaning and function, as intended by the artist some two thousand years ago, is still very much a mystery.

ABOUT THE AUTHOR

Aleksandr Nikolaevich Podushkin holds a doctorate in history and is a professor at the Southern Kazakhstan State Pedagogical Institute in Shymkent, Kazakhstan. He is a specialist on the archaeology of Southern Kazakhstan in the period of the tribal confederations of the Saka, Sarmatians and Kangju of the 4th century BCE – 4th century CE and has published four monographs and more than 90 articles.

REFERENCES

Abdullaev 2010

Aleksseev 2012

Akhishev 1978

Akhishev 1984

Brykina 1982

D’akonov 1953

Dvornichenko and Fedorov-Davydov 1994

Gorbunova 1960

Gorelik 1971

Guguev 1992

Il’iasov 2013

Levina 1996

Levina and Chizhova 1995

Litvinskii 1968
Boris A. Litvinskii. Kangiisko-sarmatskii farn (k istoriko-kul’turnom sviaziam plemen łužnik Rossi i Srednei Azii) [The Kangju-Sarmatian farn (on the cultural and historical connections of the tribes of Southern Russia and Central Asia)]. Dushanbe: Donish, 1968.

Litvinskii 2002

Obel’chenko 1956
Podushkin 2000

Podushkin 2010

Podushkin 2013

Podushkin 2015

Pugachenkova 1987

Pugachenkova and Rempel’ 1960

Rtveladze 2002

Samashev et al. 2005

Samashev et al. 2014

Sarianidi 1989

Shenkar’ 2013

Sims-Williams 2009

Smirnov 1968

Yatsenko 2000

Zasetskaia 2011

70