

ART AND RELIGIOUS BELIEFS OF KANGJU: EVIDENCE FROM AN ANTHROPOMORPHIC IMAGE FOUND IN THE UGAM VALLEY (SOUTHERN KAZAKHSTAN)

Aleksandr Podushkin

*South Kazakhstan State Pedagogical Institute
Shymkent, Kazakhstan*

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 Ushbastobe 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^varənah), 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 Ushbastobe

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.

Fig. 1. Satellite image showing the South Kazakhstan oblast' and the location of Ushbastobe.

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



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

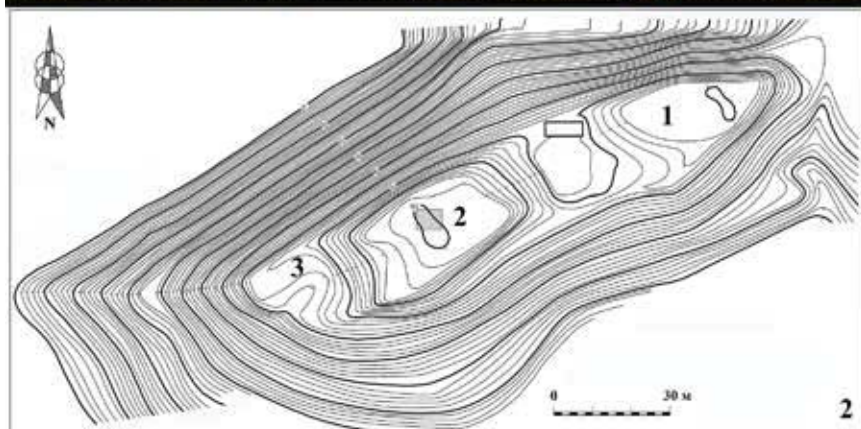


Fig. 3:1. The Ushbastobe citadel, exterior view from the northeast.

Fig. 3:2 Topographic map of the site.



Fig. 4:1. Ushabastobe, northern part of 2014 excavation.

Fig. 4:2. Excavation of 2015, view from west.

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

Fig. 5 (continuation on next page). Ushbastobe ceramics: 1-4) cooking pots; 5-7) domestic ware; 8-13) table ware; 14) scoop; 15-16) miniature vessels; 17) spindle whorl; 18) ritual stand for a vessel.





tubes forming a spiral composition of “moustache-like” elements are to be found where the 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 appliques [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 appliques 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



Fig. 6. Ushbastobe tools, objects and decorations from stone, bone and iron: 1) bone handle from a sickle; 2) tip of an iron sickle; 3-4) fragments of stone grinders; 5) bone cosmetic implement (*sur'matash*); 6) iron needle; 7) asragali game pieces; 8) pendant of mountain crystal, mounted in silver.

Fig. 7. Part of the excavation at Ushbastobe in 2015, showing the fragments of the vessel with the anthropomorphic image.

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 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

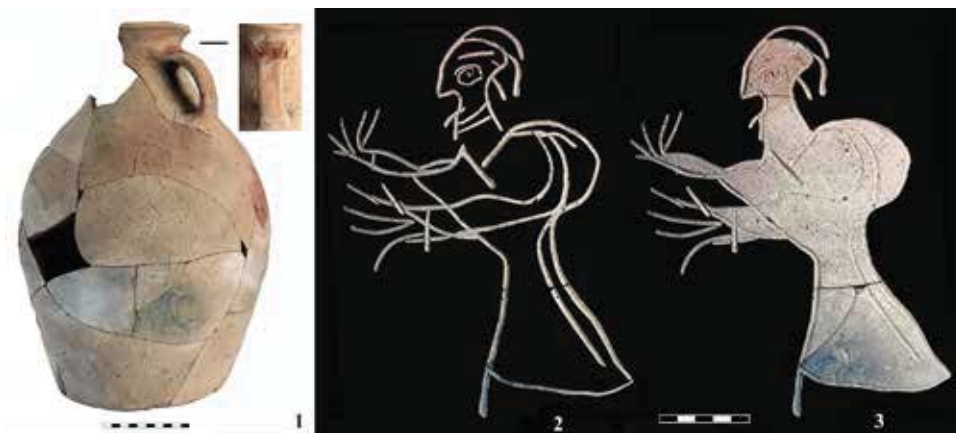


Fig. 8. The anthropomorphic image: 1) the vessel with the image after restoration; 2) the image outline as inscribed on the vessel; 3) the image with the body filled in.

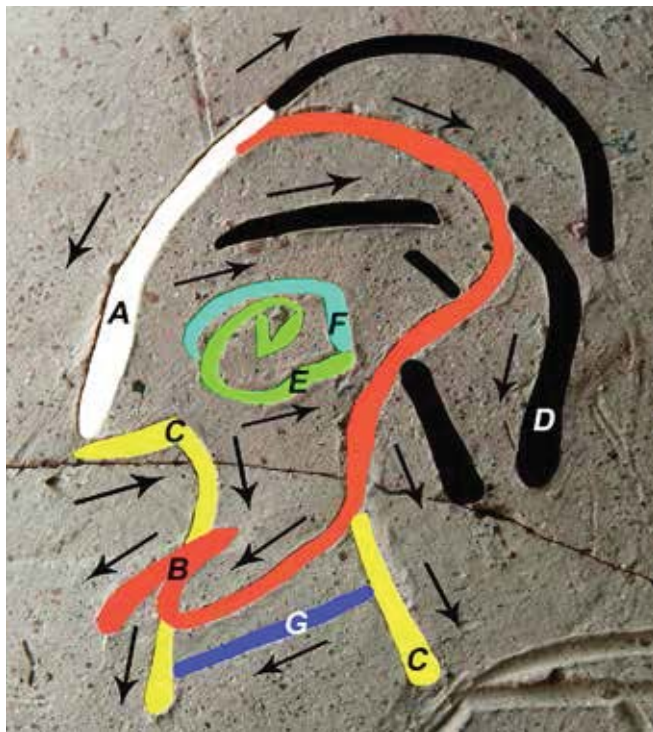


Fig. 9. Traceological scheme of the head and neck of the figure (letter designations identify colors for those viewing picture in gray scale): 1) white (A), red (B) and yellow (C) – lines forming the contours of the head, neck and “beard”; 2) black (D) – eyebrows and “hair”; 3) green (E) and turquoise (F) – eye and pupil; 4) blue (G) – lines suggesting certain details on the neck (accessories?); 5) arrows indicating the direction of the movement of the stylus.

some kind of an accessory (a torque?) [Fig. 9]. Next was drawn the rest of the entire figure. The head appears 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 and general silhouette of the figure. In all, a total of 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 the figure quickly with a confident hand in more than 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



Fig. 10. Depictions of heads, bodies and full length figures of anthropomorphs in profile on artifacts: 1) a table jug, Kaigarach dwelling (after: Brykina 1982, p. 127, Fig. 65); 2) Subarshakid coin (after Abdullaev 2010, p. 41, Fig. 10); 3) Coin from Er-Kurgan (after Rtveldadze 2002, pp. 75-76, Fig. on p. 75); 4) fragment of painting from the Varakhsha palace (after Pugachenkova and Rempel' 1960, p. 75, Fig. 79); 5) armed cataphract (a footsoldier) on a gold plaque from the Geremesov Barrow (after Alekseev 2012, p. 170); 6) bone plaque from the Kuiu-Mazar cemetery, Barrow 19 (after Stawiski 1979, p. 70); 7) lower part of a horn plaque from the Ak-Tam cemetery (after Gorbunova 1960, pp. 93-94, Fig. 22); 8) astragalus from the Kalan-Mir citadel (after D'iakonov 1953, p. 286, Fig. 21).

size even for what is a rather large figure overall. Furthermore, if on the right "hand" five "fingers" are delineated by five lines (which corresponds to human physiognomy), on the left "hand" things are different: it has six "fingers" drawn using seven lines.

Such details then pose an entirely reasonable question: is this image a human one in the full sense of that word? Or did the ancient artist depict some other kind of human-like being? A reasonable hypothesis is that he is representing a syncretic, polymorphic (or zoo-anthropomorphic) personage, very similar to a "bird-human" or a person in a bird mask (a cock or pheasant). In favor of such an interpretation is the head, which has beaklike profile, as suggested especially by the "nose", and bird-like round eye. The "eyebrows" suggest folds of skin common to species of fowl; the "beard" coming out of the neck could be a cock's wattles. There are a long birdlike neck and feathered "neckpiece" below the head (a characteristic detail for a cock-pheasant), which graphically one can fully equate to a bird's comb (or crest). It would be only a bit of a stretch then to see the gigantic, widely

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] (Abdullaev 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] (Rtveldadze 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

Fig. 11. Silhouettes depicting clothing of armed men: 1–3) bone belt plaques from the Orlat Cemetery (after Pugachenkova 1987, pp. 57-58); 4–5) deer horn finial from the Kalaly-Gir citadel (after Il'iasov 2013, pp. 96-100, Fig. 1.1); 6. detail of a pectoral from the Kobiakov Barrow (after Zsetskaia 2011, p. 178, Fig. 89a); 7–9) Silver mug from Kosika (after Dvornichenko and Fedorov-Davydov 1994, pp. 148-50, Fig. 5).



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 breastplate here, it still would appear to have a triangular cut. A nearly analogous decorative gold armorplate, 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 centuries 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 anthropomorphic 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 anthropomorphic "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; Zsetskaia 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 Kobiakovo 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 polyethnic 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 Ushbastobe 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 cavalymen (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 Ushbastobe 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 Ushbastobe 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 Ilel River (Smirnov 1968, p. 119, Fig. 2).

Notwithstanding the difficulties presented by the lack of direct analogies, I would propose that the Ushbastobe image personifies a syncretic divinity of autochthonous 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^varənah), 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^varənah, 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 Ushbastobe 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 Ushbastobe, 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^ʷarənah 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^ʷarənah 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^ʷarənah"; 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 appliqué 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

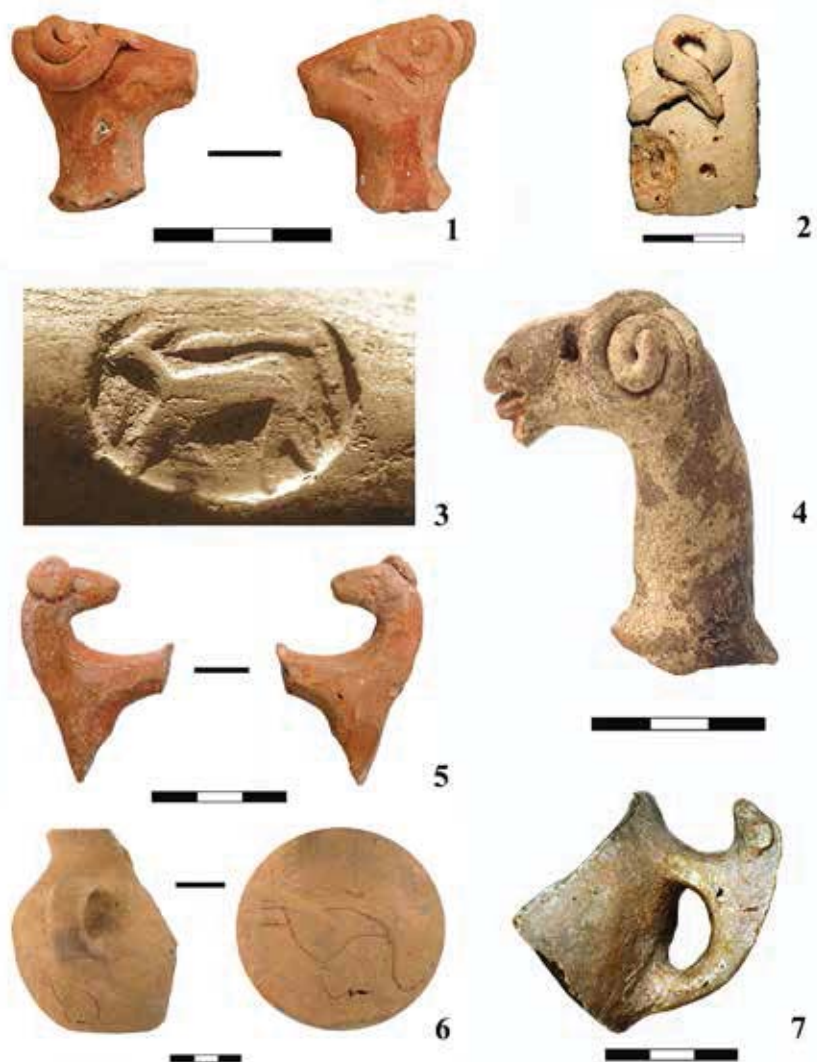


Fig. 12. Zoomorphic imagery in the ceramics of the Arys' culture of southern Kazakhstan: 1-2) from the Ushbastobe citadel; 3) from the Tulebaitobe citadel; 4) from the Karaultobe settlement; 5) from the Karatobe citadel; 6-7) from the Altyntobe settlement.

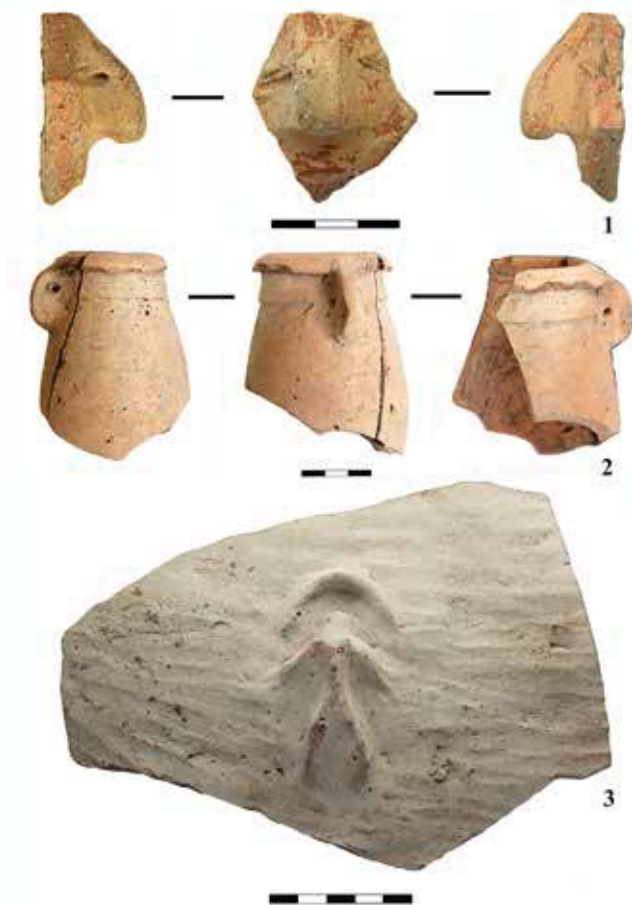


Fig. 13. Anthropomorphic relief images on ceramics of the Arys' culture of southern Kazakhstan: 1) from Ushbastobe; 2) from the Kul'tobe citadel; 3) from the Altyntobe settlement.

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-nimbus 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).

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

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 appiqué 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/xaranah*. 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

Kazim Abdullaev. "Traditsii Vostoka i Zapada v antichnoi gliptiki Nakhshaba (Po materialam gorodishcha Erkgurgan i ego okrugii)" [Traditions of East and West in the ancient glyptics of Nakhshaba (from materials of the Erkgurgan site and its surrounding territory)]. In: *Traditsii Vostoka i Zapada v antichnoi kul'ture Srednei Azii. Sbornik statei v chest' Polia Bernara*. Samarkand: "Zarafshan", 2010: 32-44.

Alekseev 2012

Andrei Iu. Alekseev. *Zoloto skifskikh tsarei v sobranii Ermitazha* [Gold of the Scythian rulers in the Hermitage collection]. Sankt-Peterburg: Gos. Ermitazh, 2012.

Akischev 1978

Kimal' A. Akischev. *Kurgan Issyk: iskusstvo sakov Kazakhstana* [The Issyk Barrow: Art of the Sakas of Kazakhstan]. Moskva: Iskusstvo, 1978.

Akischev 1984

Alisher K. Akischev. *Iskusstvo i mifologiya sakov* [Art and mythology of the Sakas]. Alma-Ata: "Nauka" Kazakhskoi SSR, 1984.

Brykina 1982

Galina A. Brykina. *Iugo-Zapadnaia Fergana v pervoi polovine I tysiacheletia nashei ery* [Southwestern Fergana in the first half of the 1st millennium CE]. Moskva: Nauka, 1982.

D'iakonov 1953

Mikhail M. D'iakonov. "Arkheologicheskie raboty v nizhnem techenii reki Kafirnigan (Kobadnan) (1950-1951 gg.)" [Archaeological work in the lower reaches of the Kafirnigan (Kobadnan) River (1950-1951)]. *Materialy i issledovaniia po arkheologii SSSR*, No. 37 (Moskva-Leningrad, 1953): 253-93.

Dvornichenko and Fedorov-Davydov 1994

Vladimir V. Dvornichenko and German A. Fedorov-Davydov. "Sarmatskoe pogrebenie skeptukha I v. n.e u s. Kosika Astrakhanskoi oblasti" [A Sarmatian burial (*skeptukha*) of the 1st century CE at the village of Kosik in Astrakhan oblast']. *Vestnik drevnei istorii*, 1994/3: 141-79.

Gorbunova 1960

Nataliia G. Gorbunova. "Rogovaia plastinka iz Ak-Tamskogo mogil'nika" [A horn plaque from the Ak-Tam cemetery]. *Kratkie soobshcheniia Instituta istorii material'noi kul'tury*, vyp. 80 (1960): 93-94.

Gorelik 1971

Mikhail V. Gorelik. "Opyt rekonstruktsii skifskikh dospekhov po pamiatniku skifskogo izobrazitel'nogo iskusstva – zolotoi plastine iz Geremesova kurgana" [An attempt at a reconstruction of Scythian armor based on a monument of Scythian plastic art, a gold plaque from the Geremesov barrow]. *Sovetskaiia arkheologiya*, 1971/3: 236-45.

Guguev 1992

Vladimir K. Guguev. "Kobiakovskii kurgan (K voprosu o vostochnykh vliianiiakh na kul'turu sarmatov I v. n.e.-nachala II v. n.e.)" [The Kobiakovo barrow (On the question of Eastern influences on the culture of the Sarmatians in the 1st–beginning of the 2nd centuries CE)]. *Vestnik drevnei istorii*, 1992/4: 116-29.

Il'iasov 2013

Dzhangar Ia. Il'iasov. "Ob izobrazhenii na rogovom predmete s gorodishcha Kalaly-Gyr 2" [On the depictions on a horn object from the Kalaly-gyr 2 site]. *Rossiiskaia arkheologiya*, 2013/2: 96-104.

Levina 1996

Larisa M. Levina. *Etnokul'turnaia istoriia Vostochnogo Priaral'ia (I tysiacheletie do n.e. – I tysiacheletie n. e.)* [The ethno-cultural history of the eastern Aral region (1st millennium BCE–1st millennium CE)]. Moskva: Vostochnaia literatura, 1996.

Levina and Chizhova 1995

_____, and L. V. Chizhova. "O nekotorykh zoomorfnykh i antropomorfnykh izobrazheniiakh v dzhetysarskoi kul'ture" [On some zoomorphic and anthropomorphic depictions in the Zhetyasar Culture]. In: *Nizov'ia Syr-Dar'ia v drevnosti*. Vyp. V, ch. 5. Moskva, 1995: 185-201.

Litvinskii 1968

Boris A. Litvinskii. *Kangiuisko-sarmatskii farn (k istoriko-kul'turnom sviaziam plemen Iuzhnoi Rossii 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

_____. "Baktriitsy na okhote" [Bactrians on the hunt]. *Zapiski Vostochnogo otdeleniia Rossiiskogo arkheologicheskogo obshchestva*. N. S., Vol. I (XXVI) (2002): 181-213.

Obel'chenko 1956

Oleg V. Obel'chenko. "Kuiu-Mazarskii mogol'nik" [The Kuiu-Mazar cemetery]. *Trudy Instituta istorii i arkheologii AN Uzbekskoi SSR*, vyp. VIII (1956): 205-27.

Podushkin 2000

Aleksandr N. Podushkin. *Arysskaia kul'tura Iuzhnogo Kazakhstana IV v. do n.e.–VI v. n.e.* [The Arys Culture of southern Kazakhstan 4th century BCE–6th century CE]. Turkestan: Izdatel'skii tsentr MKTU im. A. Iassavi, 2000.

Podushkin 2010

_____. "Sarmaty v Iuzhnom Kazakhstane" [Sarmatians in southern Kazakhstan]. In: *Drevnie kul'tury Evrazii. Materialy mezhdunarodnoi nauchnoi konferentsii, posviashchennoi 100-letiiu A. N. Bernshtama*. Sankt-Peterburg: Institut istorii material'noi kul'tury RAN, 2010: 207-17.

Podushkin 2013

_____. "Epigraficheskie artefakty gorodishcha Kul'tobe" [Epigraphic artefacts of the Kul'tobe site]. In: *Sogdiitsy, ikh predshestvenniki i nasledniki*. Trudy Gos. Ermitazha, T. LXII. Sankt-Peterburg: Gos. Ermitazh, 2013: 82-95.

Podushkin 2015

_____. "Siunnu v Iuzhnom Kazakhstane: arkeologicheskii i istoricheskii konteksty" [Xiongnu in southern Kazakhstan: archaeological and historical contexts]. In: *Drevnie kul'tury Severnogo Kitaia, Mongolii i Baikal'skoi Sibiri. Materialy VI mezhdunarodnoi nauchnoi konferentsii*. T. II. Khukh-Khoto (China), 2015: 507-14.

Pugachenkova 1987

Galina A. Pugachenkova. "Obraz sogdiitsa v sogdiiskom iskusstve (Iz otkrytii Uzbekistanskoi iskusstvovedcheskoi ekspeditsii)" [The representation of Sogdians in Sogdian art (from the discoveries of the Uzbekistan art-historical expedition)]. In: *Iz khudozhestvennoi sokrovoishchnitsy Srednego Vostoka*. Tashkent: Izd-vo. literatury i iskusstva, 1987: 56-65.

Pugachenkova and Rempel' 1960

_____, and Lazar' I. Rempel'. *Vydaiushchiesia pamiatniki izobrazitel'nogo iskusstva Uzbekistana* [Outstanding examples of the fine arts of Uzbekistan]. Tashkent; Gos. izd-vo. khudozhestvennoi literatury, 1960.

Rtveladze 2002

Edvard V. Rtveladze. *Aleksandr Makedonskii v Baktrii i Sogdiane* [Alexander of Macedon in Bactria and Sogdiana]. Tashkent: Akad. khudozhestv respubliki Uzbekistan, 2002.

Samashev et al. 2005

Zeinolla Samashev, Feodor Grigor'ev, and Gul'nara Zhumabekova. *Drevnosti Almaty* [Antiquities of Almaty]. Almaty, 2005.

Samashev et al. 2014

_____, Sagynbai Murgabaev and Madiiar Eleuov. *Petroglify Sauyskandyka* [Petroglyphs of Sauskandyk]. Astana: Institut arkeologii im. A. Kh. Margulana, 2014.

Sarianidi 1989

Viktor I. Sarianidi. "Siro-khettskie bozhestva v baktriiskom-margianskom panteone" [Siro-Hittite divinities in the Bactro-Margiana pantheon]. *Sovetskaia arkeologiya*, 1989/4: 17-24.

Shenkar' 2013

Michael A. Shenkar. "Ob ikonografii x'arənah i ego roli v ideologii drevnikh irantsev" [On the iconography of x'arənah and its role in the ideology of the ancient Iranians]. In: *Poslednii entsikopedist (k iubileiu B. A. Litvinskogo)*. Moskva: Institut vostokovedeniia RAN, 2013: 427-51.

Sims-Williams 2009

Nicholas Sims-Williams. "The Sogdian Inscriptions of Kultobe: text, translation and linguistic commentary" *Trudy Tsentral'nogo Muzeia*. T. II. Almaty, 2009: 153-71 [also, co-authored with Franz Grenet, in *Shygys: Nauchnyi zhurnal* (Institut vostokovedeniia im. F. E. Suleimenova), 2006/1, 95-111 + 2 plates, where Part I is Sims-Williams' text translation and linguistic commentary and Part II Grenet's additional historical commentary.]

Smirnov 1968

Konstantin F. Smirnov. "Bronzovoe zerkalo iz Mechetsai" [A bronze mirror from Mechetsai]. In *Istoriia, arkeologiya i etnografiia Srednei Azii*. Moskva: "Nauka", 1968: 116-21.

Yatsenko 2000

Sergei A. Yatsenko. "Antropomorfnye obrazy v iskusstve iranoiazychnykh narodov Sarmatii II-I v. do n.e." [Anthropomorphic images in the art of Iranian-language peoples of Sarmatia in the 2nd-1st centuries BCE]. *Stratum plus*, (Sankt-Peterburg, Kishinev, Odessa, Bucharest), 2000/4: 251-71.

Yatsenko 2011

_____. "Sidiashchii muzhskoi personazh s sosudom v ruke na saksnoi bronzovoi "kuril'nitse" iz Semirech'ia" [A seated male personage with a vessel in his hand on a Saka bronze "ashtray" from Semirech'e]. In: *Istoriia i arkeologiya Semirech'ia. Sbornik statei i publikatsii*. Vyp. 4. Almaty, 2011: 48-66.

Zasetskaia 2011

Irina P. Zasetskaia. *Sokrovoishcha kurgana Khokhlach. Novochoerkasskii klad* [The treasure of the Khokhlach barrow. The Novochoerkassk hoard]. Sankt-Peterburg: Izd-vo. Gos. Ermitazha, 2011.

-- translated by Daniel C. Waugh