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THE IMAGE OF ANTELOPE (SAIGA)
IN THE EARLY IRON AGE ART OF KAZAKHSTAN*

Dedicated to the memory of Mir Kadyrbayev (1932—1982)

The aim of the study was to analyze images of antelope, specifically *Saiga tatarica*, among Early Iron Age artworks in Kazakhstan. The research is based on archaeological record from the so-called ‘Zhalauly hoard’, as well as from Taldy-2, Tasmola-5, Baike-2, Tagisken, and Issyk barrows to mention but a few. Antelope-shaped motifs appear on artifacts such as headdress, belt, bone case, weapons, and horse harness. It is Saryarka, the most spacious region of Kazakhstan, which provides the biggest sample of antelope representations. The widespread occurrence of saiga images lasted from the 8th to 5th century BCE, with some cases, like Issyk and Tasaryk, dating back to the 4th century BCE.

Key words: archaeology, Kazakhstan, Early Iron Age, art, antelope, saiga.

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ОБРАЗ АНТИЛОПЫ (САЙГАКА)
В ИСКУССТВЕ РАННЕГО ЖЕЛЕЗНОГО ВЕКА КАЗАХСТАНА

Целью исследования явился анализ образа антилопы (в частности, сайгака) в искусстве РЖВ Казахстана. Привлечены данные из т.н. «Жалаулинского клада», курганных могильников Талды-2, Тасмола-5, Байке-2, Тагискен, кургана Иссык и др. Образ антилопы использовался в декоре костюма (головного убора, пояса), оружия, ёмкостей, конского снаряжения. Большинство анализируемых изображений происходит из Сарыарки — самого обширного региона Казахстана. Хронологические рамки распространения образа сайгака охватывают VIII—V вв. до н.э., однако отдельные памятники (Иссык, Тасарык) относятся к IV в. до н.э.

Ключевые слова: археология, Казахстан, ранний железный век, искусство, антилопа, сайгак.

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Introduction

Due to the implementation of various state strategic projects, there is a positive trend in the study of new sites, the systematic introduction of materials into academic sphere, and the analysis of the data obtained in the archaeology of the Early Iron Age of Kazakhstan (Bazarbayeva, Jumabekova 2017; 2021a: 19—20).

The image of the steppe antelope, one of the most common images of ancient nomadic art, is depicted in small statuary of the Saka era. The purpose of this study was to analyze the available data on antelope (saiga) images in the materials of the Saka time sites located in Kazakhstan.

The sites discussed in this article are located in Zhetysu/Semirechye (the Issyk Barrow, Zhalauly 'hoard') (Akishev 1978: 105; Samashev et al. 1997), Eastern Aral sea region (Tagisken) (Itina, Yablonskiy 1997: 161), Saryarka (Tasmola-5, Baike-2, Kaindy, Kyzylshilik, and Taldy-2) (Kadyrbayev 1966: 397; Beisenov et al. 2017: 136; Seitov 2015: 267; Beisenov, Kasenalin 2013: 397; 2018: 96), Tarbagatay (Tasaryk, Eleke sazy, Ushbiik) (Baitanayev 2019: 14—15; Akhmetov et al. 2019: 2019: fig. 10), and Altai (Berel) (Samashev 2011: fig. 23) (fig. 1). They were studied by expeditions of the Ch. Valikhanov Institute of History, Archaeology and Ethnography (headed by K. Akishev, M. Kadyrbayev), Ust-Kamenogorsk Pedagogical Institute (headed by F. Arslanova), Margulan Institute of Archaeology of the Committee of Science of the Ministry of Education and Science of the Republic of Kazakhstan (headed by Z. Samashev, A. Beisenov, T. Smagulov), N. Miklukho-Maclay Institute of Ethnology and Anthropology (Khorezm archaeological and ethnographic expedition headed by S. Tolstov).

Also, there are several stray finds from various parts of Saryarka representing saiga images in their décor: a pierced bead from Turgay (Artamonov 1973: 32), a dagger from Temirshi in Central Kazakhstan (Beisenov 2014), and a badge from the Irtysh River region around Pavlodar in Northeast Saryarka (Arslanova 1963).

It is by no means possible to skip the finds of the steppe antelope images obtained in Western Kazakhstan during excavations by M. Kadyrbayev of the burial ground of Syntas-1 situated on the Ilek River in Aktobe region (Kadyrbayev 1981). The *Urysay-2* complex, the same region, has recently yielded a decorated object shaped like a triple saiga image (Lukpanova 2022: fig. 9). The results of M. Kadyrbayev's excavations are especially relevant and in demand of modern researchers as they analyze the latest finds from the Sarmatian sites in the Zhaiyk River region (Lukpanova 2021; 2022).

While analyzing materials from Besoba and Syntas, M. Kadyrbayev has indicated parallels among the Saka-Sarmatian sites of other regions, which he traced in the features of burial structures as well as in individual items of the accompanying complex of grave goods. In particular, he assumed the existence of a genetic connection between the tombs of the Sarmatians and the Saka of Zhetysu and Saryarka, arguing about the dromoi of the Sarmatian burials in Western Kazakhstan and comparing such sites as Syntas, Besoba, Begazy, Besshatyr, Uygarak, Tagisken, and Shilikty.

K. Akishev (1998: 6), in his memoirs, briefly and succinctly describes the milestones of M. Kadyrbayev's work and identifies three facets in the archaeologist's scholarly biography, which are the following:

- (1) the Tasmola site, which enabled identification of a new Early Iron Age archaeological culture,
- (2) the Late Bronze Age Atasu settlement of metallurgists, with the most remarkable copper-smelting furnaces thereof, and
- (3) a collection of statuary bronze items.

An overview of the archaeological evidence

Here, a brief description of the complexes is given, in which the analyzed objects were found.

The barrow No. 1 of the *Syntas-1* burial ground (late 6th — 5th century BCE) had 26 m in diameter and 1.4 m of height. There were four burials in the barrow: a chief one, designated by archaeologists as a ‘military commander’s grave’, and three more graves dug in the buried ground, east, west, and north of the central grave (Kadyrbayev, Kurmankulov 1976: 140—141). The fact that 22 saiga talus bones were found in the grave of a ‘commander’ is, of course, of particular interest.

The burial of a ‘military commander’ was accompanied by a variety of items, such as horse harness bronze buckles, an iron knife and acinaces, iron bits and cheek-pieces, 14 bronze pieces from a bridle set, a quiverful of 49 bronze three-pronged arrowheads with wooden shafts, next to which was a miniature bone spoon with a handle decorated with an image of a wolf’s head, his jaws bared (Kadyrbayev, Kurmankulov 1976: 142).

The skeletons of the western and eastern warriors seemed to frame the central grave. An iron quiver hook, corsac bones and a horse’s rib, two clay vessels, a grindstone, one iron acinaces and a knife, 89 bronze arrowheads, a glass paste bead, iron bits and cheek-pieces, as well as four bronze pierced beads and three buckle badges were among the elements of the accompanying complex of the western grave (Kadyrbayev, Kurmankulov 1976: 143).

The warrior buried east of his chief was accompanied by 76 bronze arrowheads, a grindstone, an iron quiver hook, and three iron plates, which functions are still unclear. Next to the arrowheads, was a bone spoon with carvings depicting a wolf, an eagle, and a saiga head. The following items were also found: two figured buckles, a grindstone with a hole for hanging, two conical strap finials made of bone, a pair of cylindrical iron clips for cross straps, iron bits with two-hole S-shaped cheek-pieces, another pair of bits with two-hole in one case and two-loop, in another, cheek-pieces. A triple buckle and six pierced beads were also found there, including a massive pierced bead decorated with images of the wolf and jeyran (goitered gazelle) heads (Kadyrbayev, Kurmankulov 1976: 144—147) (fig. 2: 7).

The northern burial preserved partially. There were many things among the preserved elements of the accompanying complex of grave goods, such as a vessel and a round stone, a bone spoon depicting a wolf, an eagle, and a saiga head (Kadyrbayev, Kurmankulov 1976: 147, 144, fig. 12: 1), a massive pierced bead decorated with bas-relief images of the heads of a wolf and a jeyran (fig. 2: 8) (Kadyrbayev, Kurmankulov 1976: 146—147, 154, fig. 6: 4).

Barrow 2 (late 6th—5th century BCE) of the *Syntas-1* burial ground had a diameter of 21 × 16 m, and its height was 1.6 m. The central burial appeared to be plundered. Two pairs of iron bits with S-shaped two-hole cheek-pieces and three massive buckles, 48 bronze arrowheads, two quiver hooks, a bone spoon, of which a handle decorated with a bas-relief saiga image has only survived (fig. 2: 4) were found. Horse and ram bones, as well as a fragment of an iron knife were also found there (Kadyrbayev, Kurmankulov 1976: 147—149, 154, fig. 15).

The second burial contained an iron knife, a grindstone, a lower part of a ceramic vessel, and a series of white paste beads (Kadyrbayev, Kurmankulov 1976: 149).

There is also a pierced bead from the *Besoba* burial ground, barrow 5, in Western Kazakhstan (5th century BCE) (Korolkova 2006: tabl. 13: 12, 14: 6). The bead is shaped like a pair of saiga heads, with their horns directed towards each other.

Barrow 13 (late 6th — early 5th century BCE) of the *Urysay-2* burial ground had 26 m in diameter and 1 m of height. Five graves were studied there. Burial 2 was a collective grave for a male and a female. It contained a stone altar decorated with three saiga images, which was placed close to the female’s head (Lukpanova 2022: 81—83; Lukpanova et al. 2023: fig. 2, 3) (fig. 3: 12).

Among the stray finds from *Turgay* of the period before 1917, there is a pierced bead shaped like saiga head. Obviously, the find was from predatory excavations (Gryaznov 1956) (fig. 3: 1, 2). Currently, it reposes in the State Hermitage. The image is known from a number of publications dating back to the Soviet era. Specifically, the pierced bead from *Turgay* is captured on the pages of

M. Artamonov's 'Hoards of the Saka' (Artamonov 1973: 32). It is noteworthy that the 'Hoards' indicate that the find comes from the Turgay area (Artamonov 1973: 28). M. Artamonov referred to a similar object in N. Witzén's collection compiled in the early 18th century. It is suggested that the items of the so-called 'Siberian Collection of Golden Items of Peter I' could come from the Tobol River basin and not from Siberia as such (Artamonov 1973: 28).

The *Kaindy* hoard (8th — 7th century BCE) was found in the 1970s by Kaindy villagers while digging the foundation for their workshops and transferred to the Arkalyk Museum (currently the Regional Museum of the History of the Steppe in Arkalyk). The hoard is full of items of horse equipment, including bits, cheek-pieces, pierced beads, a pommel, belt distributors, clasps, a fragment of a chin clasp, as well as two items resembling the butts of weapon heads (Seitov 2015: 264). The hoard contained a pair of pierced beads made in the form of a stylized image of the head or, rather, horns of a saiga (fig. 2: 2).

From the early Saka period, a bronze badge from *Northeastern Saryarka* should be mentioned (8th — 6th century BCE; the Irtysh River region around Pavlodar, found by F. Arslanova). Here, three 'panthers' surround a saiga: they are shown in the pose of a 'scraping' predator, while the antelope is in agony. The saiga lies on its back, its hind legs drawn up to its head (Akishev 1976: 183—184, fig. 1, tabl. I: 4) (fig. 2: 3, 3a).

Barrow 66 (7th — 6th century BCE) of the *Tagisken* burial ground was a collapsed mound about 40 cm high. The grave was robbed in antiquity. A beak-shaped stone altar, six saiga figures with bent legs (fig. 3: 4), a bronze mirror with a central loop and a border, as well as small turquoise beads were found there (Itina, Yablonskiy 1997: 27, fig. 65: 3—5).

Barrow 7 (7th century BCE) of the *Baika-2* burial ground was the main burial structure of the complex with stone ridges. It had a diameter of 12.5 m and a preserved height of 0.35 m. A case with a zoomorphic decoration made of cattle bone was found there (identified by P. Kosintsev and D. Gimranov). There were an altar, a mirror, and two paste strap finials among the finds that accompanied the buried person (Beisenov et al. 2017: 135). The bone case is decorated with a multi-figure composition consisting of 16 animal images. They are made in the technique of artistic bone carving. The central element of the plot is the scene of saiga being torn by three predators (fig. 2: 9, 9a).

Barrow 8 (8th — 6th century BCE) of the *Kyzylshilik* burial ground had a diameter of 17 m. The burial of an 18—25-year-old female was robbed in antiquity. In the refill of the grave, nine stone beads, gold details of a pommel, an overlay in the form of a saiga, and two small badges with loops were found (Beisenov, Kasenalin 2018: 95—96). The animal is depicted in the so-called sacrificial pose, highlighting its most characteristic features such as hook-nosed neb, horns, etc. (fig. 3: 5).

Barrow 3 (8th — 6th century BCE) of the *Tasmola-5* burial ground, where a zoomorphic deer antler belt buckle was found, was 20 m in diameter and 1.5 m high. Two skulls and two shoulder blades of horses and five skulls and five shoulder blades of rams, on top of which rested a skeleton of a ram, were recovered together with the buried (Kadyrbayev 1966: 324—325, fig. 62). More than 30 finds have been there, on the surface of some of which a spiral-vortex ornament was applied, which has already become the subject of a special study (Jumabekova, Bazarbayeva 2018; Fedorov 2020). The multi-figure composition decorating the clasp includes a collective animalistic image in the center, with a wild boar surrounded by five herbivore heads in profile, including the one of an antelope. In fact, it is a 'mysterious picture' (fig. 2: 1, 1a).

In the barrow No. 5 (8th — 6th century BCE) of the *Taldy-2* burial ground, the grave was dug in the buried ground and framed by six pits, which, according to A. Beisenov, may be left after the wooden posts that stood there (Beisenov 2010: 77). Finials, the surfaces of which were decorated with images of the heads of eight saigas, were found among the materials of the barrow (Beisenov, Bazarbayeva 2013: fig. 1: 7) (fig. 3: 9).

Barrow 10 (4th — 2nd century BCE) of the *Berel* burial ground was 32 × 25 m in diameter and 2 m high (Samashev 2011: 60). A wooden artifact with a three-dimensional composition (possibly an element of a headdress), made in the technique of highly artistic carving, is among the finds

(fig. 3: 10). The wooden object is in the form of a herbivore, the shoulder blade and rump of which are filled with the images of two more ungulates representing the heads of an antelope and an argali.

Barrow 4 (6th—5th century BCE) of the *Eleke sazy* burial ground had a diameter of 77.25 m and a height of up to 2.5 m (Akhmetov et al. 2019: 16). The hoard, which contained images in the form of an antelope's head carved of sheet gold (fig. 2: 6), was discovered in a small niche while studying the structure of the tomb (Akhmetov et al. 2019: 18, fig. 10). It is assumed that there was a felt bag there containing jewelry for men's and women's clothing, such as badges, a pendant in the form of a deer figurine on a chain, a bracelet, images of feline predators, beads, etc. All these are supposed to be rehidden at one time by the robbers (Samashev 2021: 39—40, fig. 2: 49—56). It is noteworthy that this site is multi-temporal and also includes a unique Kagan complex (Samashev et al. 2022).

The *Tasaryk (Urjar) Barrow* (5th—4th century BCE) had 7 m of diameter and the preserved height up to 0.6 m (Baitanayev 2019: 9). The headdress of a woman buried there was decorated with a composition of a central element in the form of a phoenix image and two saiga figurines, located symmetrically on both sides of it (fig. 3: 3).

In the *Zhalauly Hoard*, there were badges depicting a scene of an antelope being torn by a feline predator, lying in a calm position, its legs bent and its head turned back (fig. 2: 5) (Tasmagambetov 2003: 186; Samashev et al. 2007). It is assumed that the complex also represents barrow items reconcealed by robbers.

The *Issyk Barrow* (5th—3rd century BCE) had 60 m in diameter and was 6-meter high. In the side burial, various implements were found together with a young man buried there, including decorations of his clothes, headwear, shoes, weapons, toiletries, and other utensils (Akishev 1978: 10, 17). Narrow plaques of gold with miniature images of animals were located on both sides along the blade of an iron dagger. The antelope (gazelle? saiga?) image (fig. 3: 7) is located in a line of animals in the following sequence: a snake, a fox, a hare, a leopard, a goat, a wild boar, a wolf, an argali, and a tiger on one side, and a snake, a fox, a hare, an argali, a gazelle (roe deer), a wild boar, a wolf, an argali, a hare, a wolf, a wild boar, and a half-body of some animal on the other (Akishev 1978: fig. 40). Animals are shown in 'scraping' poses, with the exception of images of argali and mountain goats.

Another example of the use of the saiga image are metal artifacts from Eastern Kazakhstan, from the area of *Ushbiik* station (fig. 3: 6). They are in the form of a profile head of a wolf in a grin and four paired antelope heads turned in opposite directions (Arslanova 1981; Samashev et al. 2007: 75).

The direct saiga's presence in the funeral rite is indicated by talus bones in the barrow no. 1 of the Syntas-I burial ground. Another example comes from the *Karabie* burial ground in Central Kazakhstan, consisting of 16 barrows, two of which have had 'moustaches'. Here, the object No. 15 consisted of a central and eastern burial mounds and two ridges, with a robbed burial in the central one and horse teeth and limb bones and a clay vessel under the small one. There were no finds under the end facing. The southwestern barrow contained a burial pit with a child buried on the right side, head to the north; northwestern barrow had a burial pit with a saiga skeleton on the left side, head to the northwest, forelegs half-bent, and hind leg bones absent. Possibly, there was a leather collar there decorated with bronze plaques (Kadyrbayev 1959: 169—170, 174—176) (5th—3rd century BCE according to Kadyrbayev 1959: 192).

Results and discussion

In a generalized form, the results of studying saiga images can be presented as follows (Table 1).

Table 1. Antelope images in the antiquities of the Early Iron Age of Kazakhstan

Contexts	image	element	character	References
Urysay-2, barrow no. 13	whole	+		Lukpanova 2022
Syntas I, barrow 1, burial 3	head		+	Kadyrbayev, Kurmankulov 1976
Syntas I, barrow 1, burial 3	head	+		
Syntas I, barrow 2	head	+		
Besoba, barrow 5	head		+	Korolkova 2006
Tagisken, barrow 66	whole		+	Itina, Yablonskiy 1997
Kaindy, stray find (hoard)	stylized		+	Seitov 2015
Tasmola-5, barrow 3	head	+		Kadyrbayev 1966
Kyzylshilik, barrow 8	whole		+	Beisenov, Kasenalin 2018
Taldy-2, barrow 5	head	+		Beisenov, Bazarbayeva 2013
Baike-2, barrow 7	whole	+		Beisenov et al. 2017
Ushbiik, stray find	head	+		Arslanova 1981
Tasaryk (Urjar)	whole		+	Baitanayev 2019
Eleke sazy, barrow 4, hoard	head		+	Akhmetov et al. 2019; Samashev 2021
Berel, barrow 10	head	+		Samashev 2011
The Issyk Barrow	whole	+		Akishev 1978
Zhalauly, stray find	whole	+		Samashev et al. 2007
Almaty, stray find	whole	+		Bazarbayeva, Jumabekova, 2021b
Temirshi, stray find	stylized		+	Beisenov 2014
NE Saryarka, stray find	whole	+		Arslanova 1963
Turgay, stray find	head		+	Gryaznov 1956; Artamonov 1973
Total:	21	12	9	

The sequence of sites in the table coincides with the numbering of objects on the map (fig. 1). Turgay region stands out among the others presented in this study, since both finds from there are stray ones. To find objects with antelope images in closed complexes in this area is a matter of the future research, since the systematic study of the Early Iron Age sites in Turgay is still at an early stage (Onggaruly et al. 2020; Seitov et al. 2021; Evdokimov, Seitov 2021; Sasaki et al. 2022).

The research sample consists of 21 cases of finding the saiga (antelope) images depicted in small statuary items and found in the Early Iron Age sites of Kazakhstan. A total of 9 cases depicts them as whole figures, another 9 cases represent heads, and stylized images are reported twice.

In terms of compositions, there are three cases of saigas shown as victims being torn by predators, a plot based on finds from Baike-2, Zhalauly, and North-Eastern Saryarka. Saiga images were represented twice within the lines of animals. In the decoration of the sword from Issyk, there are various animal species, while in Taldy-2, the line is formed by the heads of eight saigas. It is curious that on items from Tasmola-5 and Syntas-I, when creating multi-figured compositions, the entire surfaces of the items were carefully used.

We should pay more attention to the saiga image on a dagger from Temirshi (6th — first half of the 5th century BCE). The Table 1 indicates that the animal represents a separate character. However, if we disassemble the décor of the object, then the saiga (in fact, highly stylized head and horns) on the crosshair of the acinaces can be considered as part of the composition incorporated into the design of the entire weapon, including its pommel in the form of two heads of eagle griffins.

Saiga images have been rendered in various raw materials such as metals and alloys (gold, bronze, iron), bone, antler, wood, and stone. In functional terms, the analyzed objects refer to

weapons, elements of horse equipment, costume, and utensils, including ritual ones (an altar and a cauldron).

The presence of antelope images on the dishes is curious. A special study is devoted to the analysis of the ritual character of bone spoons (Fedorov 2002). On the fragment, which is the sidewall of a metal cauldron, there is a figure of a predator on the rim and profile antelope images on the wall of the vessel. We probably deal with a variety of zoomorphic décor containing the key idea of the early nomadic art, namely the one of confrontation between ungulates and predators, the idea of a sacrifice to the gods and the spirits of ancestors.

Apparently, the fact that the plot with a predator and herbivores decorates a metal cauldron suggests the sacral nature of the object. The figure of an animal on the rim of the cauldron conveys a generalized image of a predator, which has deep roots in the nomadic culture of the early Scythian period. The antelope conveys an image of a sacrificial animal. In contrast to the classical sacrificial pose of the antelope image, or the 'reduced' one, a solid image of an ungulate on straightened (!) legs is placed on the side of the cauldron.

In this respect, saiga is, of course, a sacrificial species, like other herbivores. It is an object of tearing and hunting. For example, a vessel binding with a scene of a rider hunting for saigas is known outside of Kazakhstan (Pshenichnyuk 2012: fig. 160) (barrow 1, the Filippovka burial ground). There are five saiga images there, three of which are at the top of the plate and other two are standing below in calm poses (4th century BCE) (Zolotye oleni Evrazii 2001: fig. 30a, 30б). In general, there are at least three times that the saigas were noted as sacrifices. The predator is usually feline.

The binding of the rims of a wooden vessel is known as well. It is made in the form of two saiga figures, their legs bent and heads turned back, and at the head of the left figure is the head of another saiga (Zolotye oleni Evrazii 2001: fig. 84).

The décor of the Filippovka vessels also contains gold binding and handles with scenes of deer being torn by a feline predator or a wolf (Zolotye oleni Evrazii 2001: 31—33, 70, 79, 83, 84, 85 et al.). The Filippovka vessels, the bronze cauldron from Zhetysu, and a stone altar from the barrow no. 13 in Urysay-2 seem to express the same idea with the depiction of saiga hunting. The décor of the vessels obviously displays their ritual character.

In addition to the Tasaryk Barrow, with saiga images incorporated into a headdress system (Jumabekova et al. 2022), the image of this animal is recorded in the decoration of wooden headdresses from the Ak-Alakha 3 burial ground, barrow 1. Saigas are located along the edges of the composition, which contains an image of the head of a fantastic creature with a curved beak of a griffin and a saiga horn, made in the technique of artistic carving (Polosmak 2001: 153, fig. 101; Polosmak, Barkova 2005: 72, fig. 2.44.1). The design of the woman's headdress from Ak-Alakha 3 also contains a fantastic deer with ibex horns, a hairpin with a deer figure on a ball, and sculptural images of birds (Polosmak, Barkova 2005: 72, fig. 2.43—2.46).

Despite the curious posture of saigas, reminiscent of newborns, it is possibly young animals who were depicted at the badges of Tasaryk: the horns of small saigas grow from birth to a year and a half. This looks symbolic for the decoration of the headdress of a young woman, a priestess. The *pars pro toto* principle is most clearly manifested in the use of the antelope image; horns, a symbol of the animal as a whole, were only practiced on objects.

A pair of saiga or multiple saiga pairs appear more often on one and the same object. This is logical for the décor of daggers, but it is also evidenced on other items such as finials from the barrow no. 5 in Taldy-2 and the barrow no. 5 in Besoba. A cone-shaped gold belt finial from Arzhan-2 (mid-second half of the 7th century BCE) is decorated with a relief of eight highly stylized animal heads (Chugunov et al. 2017: tabl. 14: 9, 42: 3).

Saiga (antelope) takes its place among sacrificial herbivores in the system of the world picture of nomads for centuries. This is evidenced by the décor of daggers from Arzhan-2 and Issyk. Iron daggers decorated with gold onlays from the barrow of Arzhan-2 contain images of beasts of prey,

including tigers, and herbivores, including antelopes, rather saigas (Chugunov et al. 2017: 45, tabl. 8, 9: 1: a, 40: 1, 2, 4, 5; 61).

Antelope images are quite numerous in the object complex Arzhan-2. A torc, ornaments of gorytos belt finials, hairpins, and figured plaques from a belt and scabbard of a dagger should be mentioned (Chugunov et al. 2017: tabl. 3, 32: 1—12, 55: 1, 56: 1, 62: 8, 9). Particularly expressive is the iron arrowhead with gold overlays depicting a scene of tearing made in negative (Chugunov et al. 2017: tabl. 24: 3).

Also, there are items decorated in the artistic style of a ‘mysterious picture’ in Arzhan-2. These are a decorative plaque with a flat loop of a dagger’s belt and another decorative plaque at the end of the dagger’s scabbard, which display antelopes among the images of various animals (Chugunov et al. 2017: tabl. 14: 1, 13: 8). The same is evidenced in Tasmola.

There are antelope images on some objects of a later date (6th — 3rd century BCE) in Tuva, including a ‘mysterious picture’ as an element of the composition. These are the antler plaque from the barrow no. 3 of the Dagan-Teli I burial ground (Grach 1980: 79, fig. 62: 1), an overlay made of antler from the barrow no. 8 of the Sagly-Bazhy II burial ground (Grach 1980: 79, fig. 40), and a comb from the burial no. 9 of barrow no. 1-2 of the Khemchik-Bom III burial ground (Grach 1980: 78, fig. 110: 1).

The linear composition in the decoration of artifacts was preserved in the art of the early nomads of the late Saka time, while what we call a ‘mysterious picture’ is typical of the early Saka Culture.

Artistically decorated items with the antelope images are known in the Minusinsk steppe and Ordos, northern China (Artamonov 1973: fig. 125, 162; Bogdanov 2006: 60—61, tabl. XLVI: 1, 4, 5, 7; XLVII: 1) (the late 6th—5th century BCE), as well as in the sites of the Pazyryk Culture in Altay (Bogdanov 2006, табл. LVIII и др.) (6th — 3rd century BCE).

Of interest is the iron dagger from the village of Rogozikha, Altay (the second half of the 6th — the first half of the 5th century BCE). It displays the usual pattern of weapon décor, with animal images inscribed into the shapes of the elements of the dagger: its pommel is shaped like the heads of two mythical eagles, and its hilt is decorated on both sides with two saiga images; the find is similar to the Temirshi dagger. The decorations of daggers, including those from Arzhan-2, Temirshi, Issyk, Rogozikha, and elsewhere, seem to highlight the purposes of the weapons, especially their ritual (?) use, and emphasize the status of the users. An important role was also played by antelope/saiga in the sign system, reflecting the ideology and worldview of the population of the steppe and mountain-valley stripes of Eurasia in the 1st millennium BCE.

In this respect, the assumption of H.-P. Francfort (2020) seems seminal, who, based on the Nisa rhyton, suggests that the frieze depicts the saiga hunting scene with the help of a net that has a long tradition in Central Asia. The frieze depicts the three-level world of the Steppe nomads, where hunting symbolizes the lower level, an underworld, and death.

Saiga (antelope) images are characteristic of the animal style art and are found throughout the steppe. Tuva and Central Kazakhstan are probably those regions of the eastern steppes, where a significant number of images of this animal of the early Saka period were found.

In terms of plot, there are obvious parallels in the system of organization of the composition, in particular, in the art of Tuva, Saryarka, and Zhetysu. Significant is the fact that the décor of products from the complex II (‘exquisite’ animal style) and complex III (‘imitative’ animal style) of the Arzhan-2 barrow testifies the adherence of the craftsmen both to the norms of the animal style and the mastery of artistic achievements by the nomads of other cultures. Some images have been elaborated by those who were not nomads at all. Specifically, the king’s dagger was “decorated by a smith brought up in Chinese artistic traditions” (Kisel 2019: 96—99).

There were representatives of the nomads and Xinjiang and other regions of northern China who worked together in a workshop, which provided products for the highest nomadic nobility (Kisel 2019: 112). Thus, the craftsmen who made decorated items for those buried in the Arzhan-2 barrow took into account all the requirements of the nomads, including compliance with their

worldview, which led to close cultural ties between the population of Kazakhstan, Mongolia, Tuva, Northern China, and Xinjiang (Kisel 2019: 93).

Conclusions

In general, the antelope/saiga image complements the similarity of the cultures throughout the vast territory of Zhetysu — Saryarka — Tuva, as well as the Southern Urals, as it is revealed by the Early Iron Age artworks. Even dynastic marriages are supposed to take place among the tribal elite of Tuva and Saryarka in the 8th — mid-6th century BCE (Chugunov 2017: 495).

Both the saiga burial in the small barrow of the ‘moustached’ object no. 15 in Karabie and saiga talus bones in the barrow 1 in Syntas-I deserve special attention. There are, however, some doubts that the small barrows of Karabie were the ones of the Tasmola Culture. The idea of a special role of antelope in nomadic culture looks nonetheless too attractive, as one considers the above assumption according to which the barrow complex with stone ridges was built in several stages in time and that it has repeatedly been used in rituals. Here, the long chronology of construction and veneration is evident, with the dominant mound of the Tasmola times and a series of adjacent mounds and ridges dating back to the Huns period and even the Kazakh modernity.

M. Kadyrbaev noted that: “<...> the closest ties can be traced between the mountain-steppe tribes that left the Uygarak-Tagisken, Tasmola, Mayemir-Pazyryk, Tagar, Uyuk and other complexes of sites on the territory of Kazakhstan and South Siberia. These sites characterize cultures of the second order or local varieties of the Saka cultural community” (Kadyrbayev 1968: 36).

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Fig. 1. Localization of sites on the map of Kazakhstan: 1 — Urysay-2; 2 — Syntas I, Besoba; 3 — Tagisken; 4 — Kaindy; 5 — Tasmola-5; 6 — Kyzylshilik; 7 — Taldy-2; 8 — Baike-2; 9 — Ushbiik; 10 — Tasaryk; 11 — Eleke sazy; 12 — Berel; 13 — Issyk; 14 — Zhalauly. The map was prepared by M. Antonov.

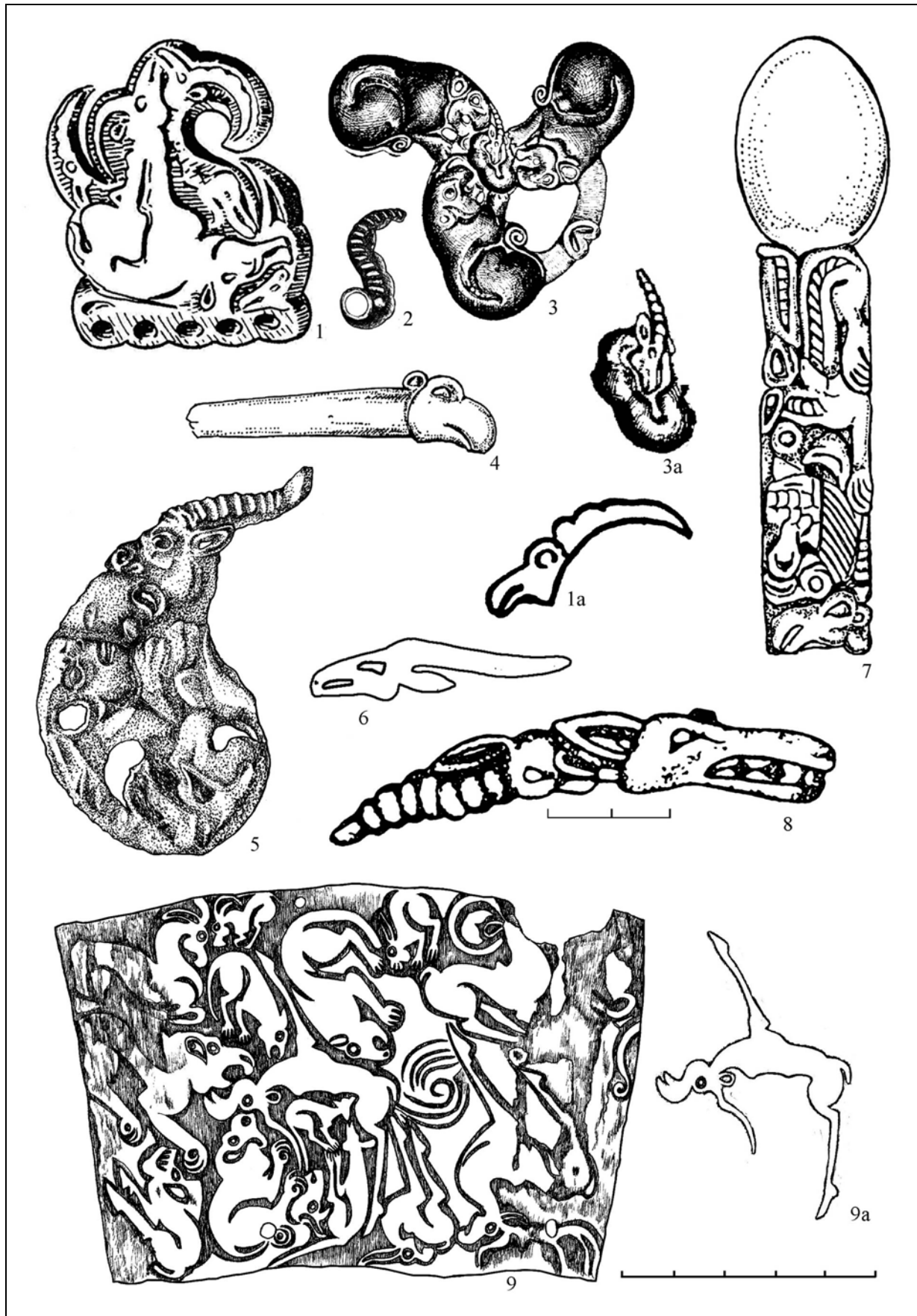


Fig. 2. Antelope images: 1, 1a — Tasmola-5; 2 — Kaindy, hoard; 3, 3a — Northeastern Saryarka, a stray find; 4, 7, 8 — Syntas I; 5 — Zhalauly, hoard; 6 — Eleke sazy, hoard; 9, 9a — Baike-2.

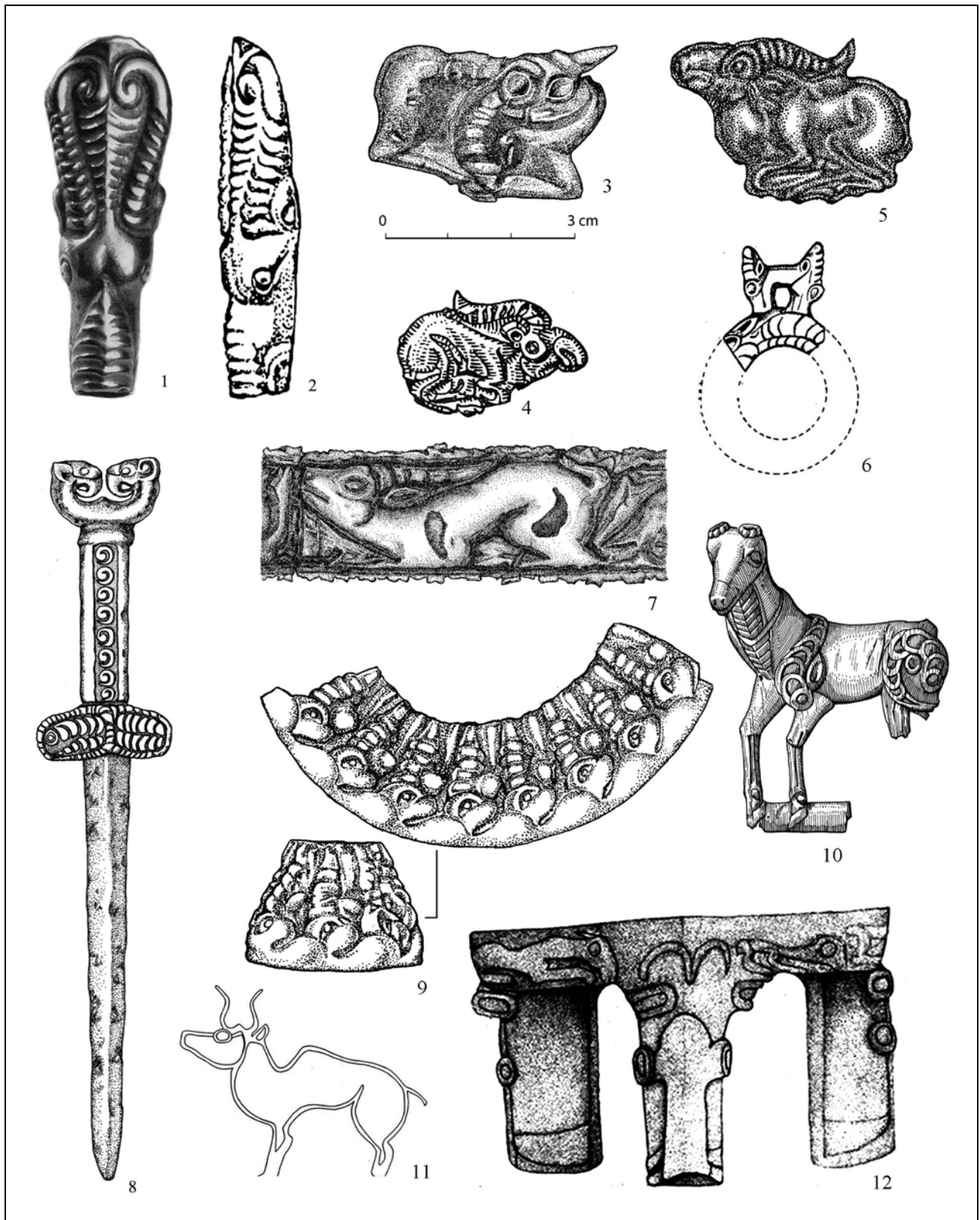


Fig. 3. Antelope images: 1, 2 — Turgay, a stray find; 3 — Tasaryk; 4 — Tagisken; 5 — Kyzylshilik; 6 — Ushbiik; 7 — Issyk; 8 — Temirshi; 9 — Taldy-2; 10 — Berel; 11 — Almaty, a stray find; 12 — Urysay-2.