

Children in the Bronze Age societies of the Southern Trans-Urals (Sintashta, Petrovka and Alakul' cultures)

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This study concerns the Sintashta, Petrovka and Alakul' cultural groups. They are dated from the 21st to the 15th century cal. BC and the sites are located in the Southern Trans-Urals. One of the most impressive traits of the Sintashta, Petrovka and Alakul' burial grounds is that the sub-adults constitute between 50% to 80% of all the deceased. Comparing the variations of children's burial rites, we can conclude that children's status was probably different in these cultures. We can suppose that the Sintashta rite reflected first of all the vertical stratification while the Petrovka and Alakul' ones, the kinship relations.

KEY-WORDS: Bronze Age, Southern Trans-Urals, Sintashta, Petrovka and Alakul' cultures, children's burials, archaeology of childhood, socialization

INTRODUCTION

The territory under study is the southern part of the Ural Mountains, presumably the Trans-Urals (Fig. 1). The Ural area can be defined in terms of its geographic location as a natural boundary between Europe and Asia. In terms of administrative divisions, this area covers several provinces of the Russian Federation: Chelyabinsk and Kurgan regions as well as the north-western part of Kazakhstan. It is characterized by great expansive landscape and environmental diversity: steppe, forest-steppe, forests and mountains. The beginning of the Bronze Age in the steppe and the southern forest-steppe is marked by the emergence of food-producing forms of economies. They were primarily on livestock breeding which periodically changed its form over a period of almost two thousand years.

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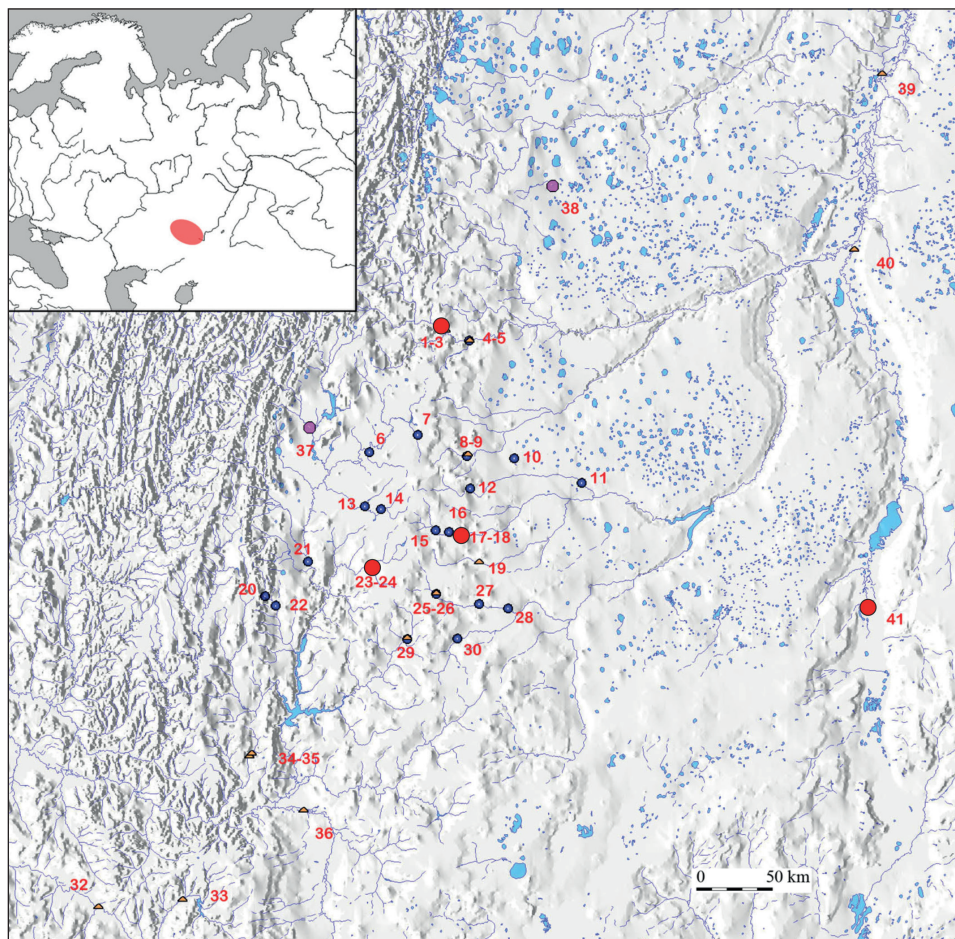


Fig. 1. Map of site localization. Settlements: 1 – Stepnoye; 4 – Chernorech'e III; 6 – Bakhta; 7 – Parizh; 8 – Ust'e; 10 – Chekatay; 11 – Isiney; 12 – Rodniki; 13 – Kuisak; 14 – Sarym-Sakly; 15 – Konoplyanka; 16 – Zhurumbay; 17 – Kamenny Ambar; 20 – Ulak; 21 – Kizilskoe; 22 – Sele; 23 – Arkaim; 25 – Sintashta; 27 – Sintashta II; 28 – *Andreevskoe*; 29 – Alandskoe; 31 – Bersuat; 37 – Malo-Kizilskoe; 38 – Shibaevo I.

Burial grounds: 2–3 – Stepnoe; 5 – Krivoje Ozero; 9 – Solnze II; 18 – Kamenny Ambar-5; 19 – Knyazhensky; 24 – Bolshekaraganchy; 26 – Sintashta; 30 – Solonchanka Ia; 31 – Gerasimovskiy II; 32 – Tanabergen II; 33 – Zhaman-Kargala I; 34–35 – Ishkinovka I and II; 36 – Novokumaksky; 39 – Tcharev kurgan; 40 – Ubagan I; 41 – Bestamak; 42 – Kulevchi VI; 43 – Khalvai III

The beginning of the Bronze Age (the 3rd millennium BC) is connected with the Yamnaya (Pit-Grave) 'family' of cultures in the steppe zone of the Urals. The Yamnaya sites are very well represented by barrows. However, only a few barrows are known on the eastern slopes of the Ural Mountains and adult male burials make up approximately 80% of the interred population. During this period (the Early and Middle Bronze Ages) this territory was sparsely populated. At the end of the Middle and in the Late Bronze Age, these areas were occupied by the Sintashta, Petrovka and Alakul' populations. Their economies were based on livestock breeding and bronze metallurgy. No unquestionable traces of agriculture have been found so far. In fact, these peoples could be called settled pastoralists.

The end of the Bronze Age is at present dated between the 13th century BC and the 10th century BC. This period is primarily represented by open settlements. Burial sites are very rare (only several burials). In the Iron Age, this territory was occupied by early nomads, the Sarmatians. The Iron Age sites are represented by burial mounds only. Children comprised less than a quarter of all buried.

It is important to note that in the South Ural steppes a large number of children's burials (more than 50%) is typical only of the Sintashta period (21st–18th century BC) and especially (up to 80%) for the next Petrovka – Alakul' periods (18th–15th century BC). This unique material is an excellent basis for investigations on ancient childhood.

Thus, we have a great opportunity to study and reconstruct children's sub-cultures and stages of their life-cycle basing on the materials from these related cultural groups living in the South Trans-Ural area during the End of the Middle – Late Bronze Ages. Also, we can try to see the dynamic of changes in the burial rites concerning the sub-adults in these societies.

ARCHAEOLOGICAL PICTURE

The most impressive culture of the final period of the Middle Bronze Age is the **Sintashta** culture. The discovery of the Sintashta sites has allowed archaeologists to raise a wide range of questions. The settlements and cemeteries of the Sintashta type are concentrated in the northern steppe of the South Urals. The settlements were organized into regular blocks of houses and they had monumental systems of fortification.

The Sintashta burial rites were also impressive. The cemeteries had the form of burial mounds comprising up to 10 barrows, also, at least two flat burial grounds are known. A Sintashta 'barrow' was a small cemetery in itself; its mound was shaped from individual mounds heaped over separate graves after their destruction (Fig. 2A). The mound was not very high (up to 1 m). Each barrow contained from one or two up to

30–35 burials, both individual and collective, and was usually surrounded by a ditch. The burial architecture was quite complex. Vast pits were dug into the virgin soil (down to 3.0 m deep), and there was a wooden ceiling, sometimes supported by posts.

The deceased were placed on the left (Fig. 2B) (rarely on the right) side in a curled up position with the hands near the face. One of the most outstanding characteristics of the Sintashta funeral ritual was the abundance and variability of animal sacrifices, chiefly domestic animals: horses, cattle, sheep and dogs (Gening *at al.* 1992). On average, up to five animals were sacrificed per person in some Sintashta cemeteries (Zdanovich 2002). One very interesting Sintashta feature was the so-called ‘chariot complex’ in burials: combinations of the remains of two-wheeled chariots. The chariots found in the burials were mainly represented by wheel holes and horn cheek-pieces.

An important trait of the Sintashta burial ritual were paired and collective tombs. These were not crypts with consecutive interments but communal graves in which all the dead persons were placed at the same time. In the South Trans-Urals about 55% of all the Sintashta dead were buried in non-individual burial pits.

Grave goods usually included many categories: weaponry, horse trappings (shield-like cheek-pieces), clothing attachments and ornaments, tools, and artefacts related to metallurgy. Hand-made pottery was especially numerous.

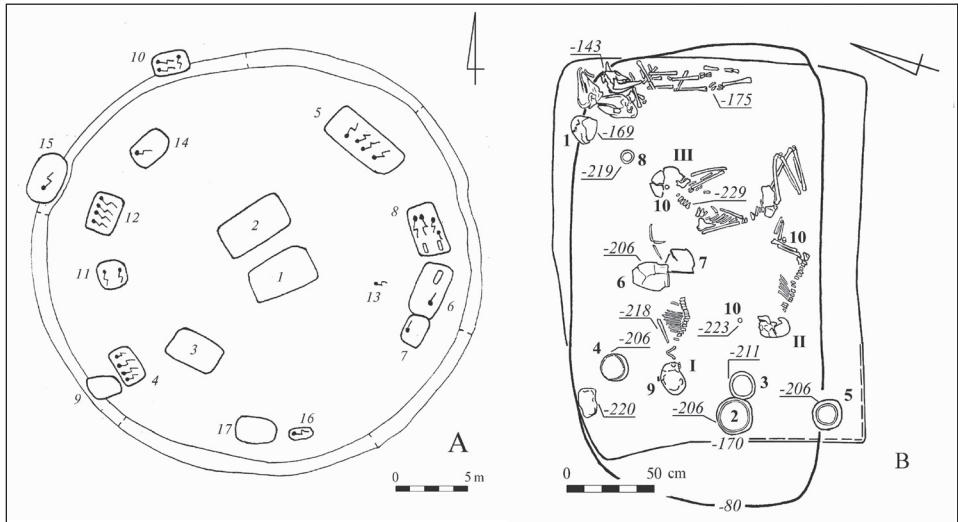


Fig. 2. Kamennyi Ambar-5 cemetery. A – Barrow 2. Plan. B – Barrow 2. Grave 10. Plan. I – an individual of 0.5–2 years old; II – an individual of 2.5–4.5 years old; III – an individual of 3–5 years old. C – grave goods (after Epimakhov 2005)

The Late Bronze Age is represented by the **Petrovka** (19th–18th century BC) and **Alakul'** (17th–15th century BC) cultures which continued the Sintashta traditions.

The territory of the Petrovka culture covers the Trans-Uralian steppe and forest-steppe, Central Kazakhstan, and the Middle Tobol area. About a dozen large settlements with rectangular fortifications have been described well so far. In several cases, the Petrovka fortified settlements overlaid the Sintashta settlements. The stratigraphy of some sites clearly demonstrated the later position of the Petrovka deposits with respect to those of Sintashta. The ground within the defensive line was densely built-up. Blocks of several houses having a common roof, separated by streets or walls, were recorded there. Fortifications varied greatly: from the practically symbolic to full-scale defensive systems. The above ground and mainly rectangular houses at the Petrovka settlements were of the frame-pillar construction and were adjacent to the defensive walls like at the Sintashta sites. Child burials were found underneath house floors. Each house had a well and an oven.

The Petrovka-culture burial sites have been studied quite well. The kurgans are relatively small: 0.5–0.7 m in height and 20–25 m in diameter (Fig. 3). The people were buried in a curled up position on the left side and oriented either to the west or to the east. In some paired burials, the deceased laid facing each other. The tombs had wooden constructions: roofing, frames and wall coverings, which were held up by vertical pillars. Like the Sintashta cemeteries, the Petrovka kurgans produced abundant animal sacrifices, the essential parts of which were outside the burial chamber, either on the paleo-surface or in special pits. Wild animals were not used for sacrifice. Male burials produced weaponry: spearheads, battle-axes, bone and stone arrowheads, stone maces; the female graves produced ornaments: grooved bracelets, double twisted pendants, oval and cross-like pendants, metal and glass paste beads. In addition all the graves yielded an abundance of pottery (Koryakova and Epimakhov 2007: 82–85).

The **Alakul'** sites were found across a huge territory within the steppe and forest-steppe zones of the Trans-Urals, northern, western and central Kazakhstan. The Alakul' remains comprise settlements and cemeteries. The structure of the settlements was predominantly linear; the houses were arranged into one row or, rarely, into two rows running along the river bank. Wells, storage pits, and hearths were typical elements of the Alakul' house interiors.

The Alakul' funerary sites are represented by kurgan cemeteries (the mounds were often surrounded with stone enclosures) (Fig. 4), flat burial grounds, and a series of sporadic child burials within settlements. The first mentioned ones were usually quite poor and grave goods were basically limited to pottery. The Alakul' funeral ritual is characterized by the absolute domination of inhumation. All central graves, except for a few cases, had been plundered. The majority of the graves contained single individuals placed in a contracted position on the left side with the hands in front of the face. There is a series of paired (male and female) burials where the deceased were placed

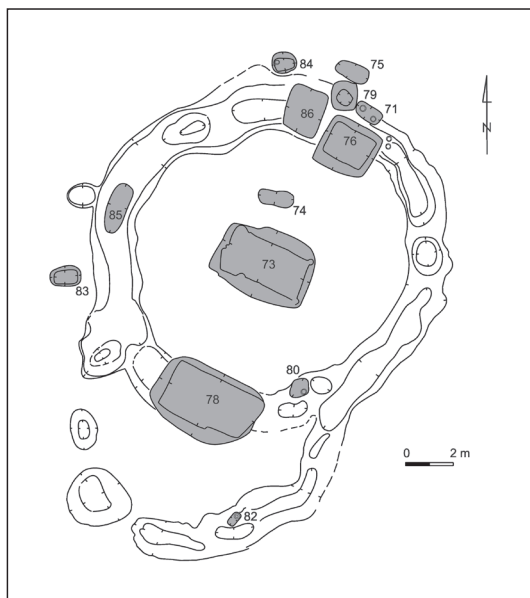


Fig. 3. Stepnoe-VII cemetery. Complex 7. Petrovka period (after Kupriyanova and Zdanovich 2015)

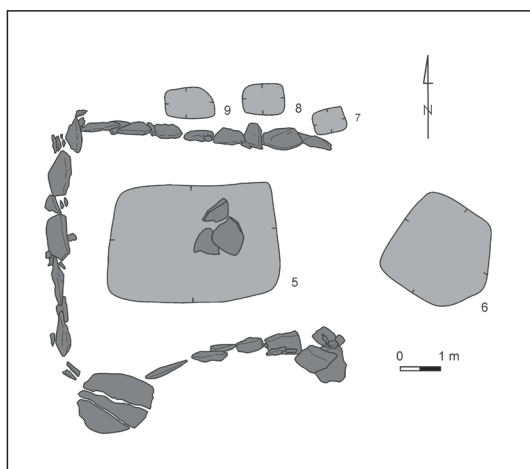


Fig. 4. Stepnoe-VII cemetery. Complex 2. Alakul' period (after Kupriyanova and Zdanovich 2015)

face to face (man – on the left side, woman – on the right side, as a rule) sometimes with a child. There were also paired and collective graves with children. Compared with the preceding period, the sacrifices were represented by separate animal bones and their assemblages. Pottery is the most frequently found artefact but the ornaments were also numerous: beads, amulets made from animal canines, gutter shaped bracelets of two types (with spiral-like ends and with open ends), rings, cross-like and

spectacle-like pendants, flat plaques, forged hollow earrings, and other items (Koryakova and Epimakhov 2007: 128–130). The complex female hair decorations included pendants for braids, which should be especially noted (Kupriyanova 2008). Very often the burials, especially those of children, produced only some pots.

CHILDREN'S BURIALS

Sintashta culture

In the Sintashta burial grounds sub-adults¹ (individuals up to 14–15 years old) constituted more than 50% of all the buried (Berseneva 2010) (Tab. 1)². Most of children were buried in non-individual graves (62%).

Table 1. The age structure of the population buried at Sintashta, Petrovka and Alakul cemeteries

	Sub-adults			Adolescents	Adults	
	Infants	Children	'Teens'	Adolescents	Adults	
	up to 1-2 years old (%)	1-2 – 10 years old (%)	10 – 14 years old (%)	14 – 17 years old (%)	17 – 25 years old (%)	More than 25 years old (%)
Sintashta	24.7	19.3	8.9	5.0	19.8	23.3
Petrovka	39.0	14.3	20.0	12.0	10.7	3.6
Alakul	80.0	3.0	3.0	0.0	8.0	6.0

The burial rites were the same for the Sintashta children as for the adults, and the internal space of children's burials was organized much in the same way (Fig. 2B). The body position and the location of grave goods for adults and sub-adults were also the same, but children were usually given small horned animals and dogs as animal sacrifices. The majority of individual children's pits were smaller in size than the adults' ones whereas the collective children's tombs with up to eight individuals were, of course, larger (Epimakhov 2005). A small number of Sintashta graves contained pairs of lying adult individuals facing each other. Sometimes a child was buried in such

¹ In this work we used terms accepted by some anthropologists (Lewis 2011: 1, Tab. 1): infant – birth to 1 year; child – up to 14–15 years old; adolescent up 14–15 to 17 years old; adult – more than 17 years old.

² All of age identifications were conducted by anthropologists. However, it should be noted that it was difficult to establish the same age categories and gradations for all the sites because of different accuracy of the anthropological identification related to the different preservation bone remains. We have many identifications made in quite broad limits, for instance 8 ± 2 years old.

a position along with an adult. A good example is grave No. 8 (the Kamennyi Ambar 5 cemetery, barrow 2) where a 16-22 year old male individual 'embraced' an 8 year old individual (Epimakhov 2005: 35).

It is necessary to note that the burials of sub-adults less than 3 years old did not contain any tools or bronze items. Their grave goods were chiefly ornaments, mainly beads, so-called amulets (drilled fangs of small predators), pottery and also astragals which were often found in large numbers.

Some of the 3 to 10 year old children were buried with weaponry, which is quite intriguing. Children's graves with weaponry were extremely rare in the steppe cultures of the Bronze Age Eurasia. Of course, there was a relatively small number of weapons in the Sintashta children's graves, but armaments were totally absent at pre-Sintashta and post-Sintashta Ural sites during the Bronze Age. 'Weapons' in children's burials were found in four cemeteries: Kamenny Ambar 5 (Epimakhov 2005), Stepnoe 1, Bolshekaragansky (Zdanovich 2002) and Bestamak (Shevnina and Voroshilova 2009). Altogether, stone and bone arrowheads (nine cases), a bronze spearhead, horn parts of a composite bow and horn cheek-pieces were discovered in children's graves (Berseneva *in press*).

I. Shevnina and S. Voroshilova divided the sub-adult burials of the Bestamak cemetery into two groups: infants and young children (up to 7 years old), and adolescents (between 8 and 15 years old) (Shevnina and Voroshilova 2009). The infant group was characterized by the following grave goods: ceramic vessels, sacrifices of small horned cattle, ornaments (mainly beads) and astragals. The rare items included bronze knives. Older children were accompanied by more varied grave goods including horses and cattle among the sacrificed animals, metal and bone tools, and arrowheads. Astragals were found in all the burials of children up to 10 years of age.

Petrovka culture

An interesting example of the co-existence and change of the Late Bronze Age cultural traditions is the Stepnoye VII cemetery located in the South Trans-Urals (Chelyabinsk region). It consists of six burial complexes containing Petrovka and Alakul' materials. More than 90 archaeological structures (graves and sacrificial pits) have been investigated so far. The overwhelming majority of them (over 70) are individual and collective children's burials or sacrificial pits with children's burials.

The Petrovka child burial rites were rather more modest than the Sintashta ones but they looked very similar. Petrovka people often used the Sintashta burial complexes. The Alakul' population in its part used Petrovka cemeteries as well. So, in the Stepnoye VII cemetery, the Alakul' population continued constructing earlier Petrovka burial mounds and using sacrificial pits created by the Petrovka people.

The age structure of the buried population at the Petrovka necropolises varies insignificantly between the sites, but there is no sharp difference from the Sintashta

culture. However, we can observe one strong tendency. The number of infant burials (up to 1–2 years of age) gradually increases (39%) and the number of the other age categories diminishes (Tab. 1). The number of the adolescent and ‘teen’ graves seems to be too high (32% in total) for a normal demographic profile. It is interesting that the graves of children of up to 4 years old were totally absent in the cemetery Stepnoye VII. The adults were also represented by an extremely small number. It is quite possible that some post-mortem selection of the deceased took place in the Petrovka society or there was an alternative way of interment used for some groups of people, which distorted the normal structure of the buried population. However, we still do not know what criterions might have been used for this selection.

Children’s burials in the Petrovka cemeteries were discovered in individual, paired, children’s collective pits and in ‘mixed’ graves with adults. The cases when the children’s burials were made in pits which had been used for animal sacrifices before that, are well-known (Fig. 5). So, for instance, in pit burial 33 (Stepnoye VII cemetery) the animal sacrificial complex containing 12 whole carcasses of animals (three cows, three

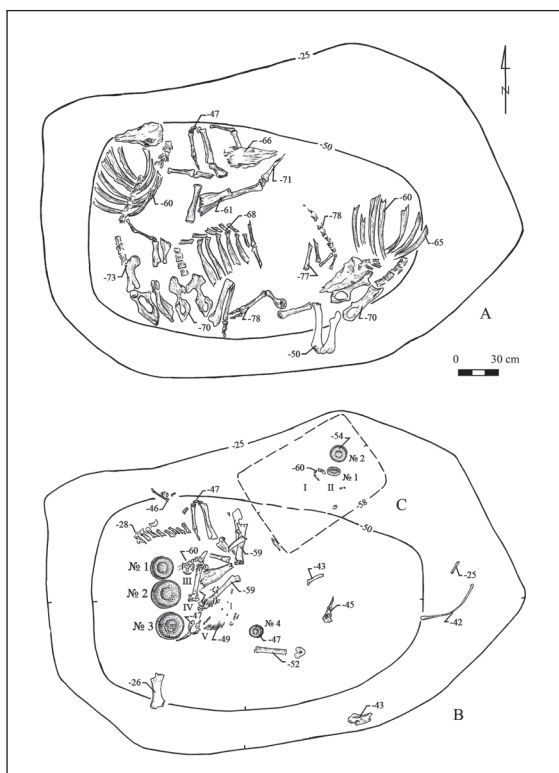


Fig. 5. Stepnoye-VII cemetery. Complex 4. Grave 33. A – sacrificial deposit of the Petrovka period. B – burial 33 (Alakul’ period). Three individuals (up neonate to one year old). Grave goods: four ceramic vessels and one faience bead. C – burial 33a (Petrovka period). Two individuals: a foetus and 6–7 month old. Grave goods: two ceramic vessels (after Kupriyanova and Zdanovich 2015)

calves, three sheep and three lambs) occupied the lowest level (Fig. 5A). Then two Petrovka infants (up to 1 year old) were buried above it (Fig. 5C). And finally, this pit was reused in the Alakul' period for the next animal sacrifice and interment of three Alakul' infants (again up to 1 year old) (Fig. 5B). This specific trait – the use of the sacrificial pits for infant burials – was discovered only for babies and may, in our opinion, demonstrate the low social status of this age group.

In total, the burial rite for infants up to 1–2 years was distinguished by its absolute simplicity, or even crudity (Fig. 6). The grave-pits containing burials of one – three children were small, shallow and rectangular in outline. The remains of a grave ceiling were rarely supported. The overwhelming majority of the deceased were rested the left

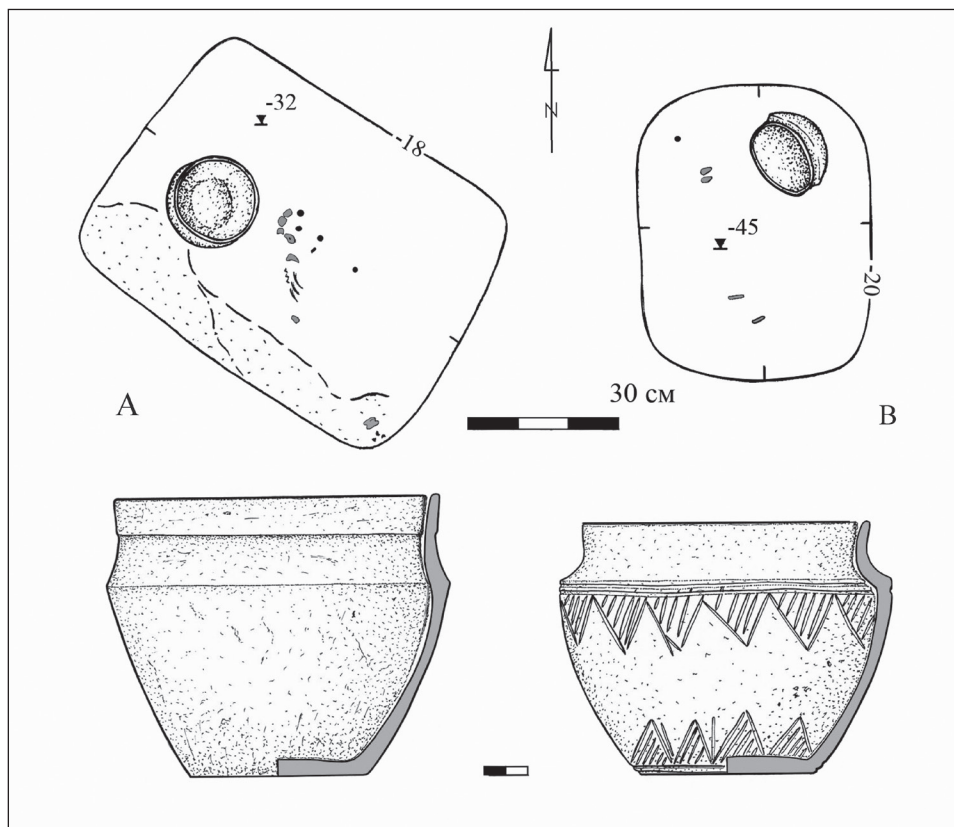


Fig. 6. Stepnoe-VII cemetery. Complex 4. Petrovka period. A – Burial 13. Two individuals: a neonate and a foetus. Grave goods: one astragal, one faience bead and the ceramic vessel. B – Burial 14. An individual of 6 month old. Grave goods: the ceramic vessel (after Kupriyanova and Zdanovich 2015)

side in the contracted position. Grave goods usually included only pottery – one, rarely two pots, located near the head of the deceased. Sometimes small ornaments (beads, pendants from animal fangs and shells) can be found. Other grave goods are extremely rare. Animal sacrifices did not accompany these small infants if they were interred without the elder children or adults.

Burials of the older children (up to 9–10 years old) demonstrate more varieties in the burial treatment. The dimensions of the burial chambers increase significantly and vary according to the body proportions of the deceased. Tombs are square or rectangular in shape. The children are laid in contracted position, on the left, or, very rarely, on the right side. The number of grave goods increases but not so considerably. We can find bronze knives, awls, small stone tools in the graves of 4–5 year old children. There appear such types of ‘adult’ ornaments as bronze bracelets and strings of beads decorating the shoes. Sets of playing bones (astragals) are quite common but the artefacts related to hunting and weaponry are almost completely absent. The burials of these children are sometimes accompanied with sacrificial complexes consisting of heads and distal parts of small horned animals.

The teens’ and adolescents’ (between 9–10 and 17 years old) burial rites are almost the same as those of the adults as regards the total number of grave goods, costume attachments and animal sacrifices. Children of this age were often interred along with adults in big collective tombs. Sometimes they ‘participated’ in a pair along with an adult individual forming ‘burials in embracement position’, when one individual ‘folded’ another in their arms. In grave 19 (Stepnoye VII) three children at the age of 9–10 were arranged in that way (Kupriyanova and Zdanovich 2015: 51). All of interments were secondary: the soft tissues had been cleaned off and then the bones were replaced in the pit. The bones of two skeletons were assembled in the anatomical order – face to face, on the left and on the right sides. The bones of the third individual were discovered some distance away from them as a small disordered heap. A child, lying on its right side (possibly a girl?), was accompanied by a great number of ornaments (bronze bracelets, a complicated headdress, beads on her ankles, strings of fangs-amulets). Near the third deceased a bronze knife and astragals were found. Six ceramic vessels were put into this grave.

The Alakul’ culture

The most widespread type of the Alakul’ burial grounds are barrows with one central pit burial where one–two adult individuals were placed, surrounded by several peripheral, presumably children’s, burials. The latter occupied a subordinate, peripheral, location. In contrast to the Sintashta and Petrovka cultures, there is an obvious tendency to increasing the number of individual burials (especially children’s ones). In the Alakul’ period there appeared exclusively infants’ cemeteries. They contained up to several ten small shallow flat graves located near the barrows where the adult

individuals were buried. As before, the collective and multiple graves of small infants (1–2 years old) sometimes in the sacrificial pits were also common.

The age structure of the buried population is totally different from the Sintashta and Petrovka ones (Tab. 1). Infants up to 1 year old were about 80% of all the buried³. The other categories were represented insignificantly: children up 4 to 10 years old – only 3%, teens and adolescents up 10 to 17 years old – also 3%, and adult individuals between 17 and 25 years old and older were extremely underrepresented – only 14%.

We can clearly see the dramatic changes in the age structure of the buried population in the Alakul' period. The number of individual graves sharply increases, on the contrary, the number of huge collective tombs falls down. This may reflect the changes in the life of the living society as well. Also, much less attention is paid to the deceased and the burial rites become considerably simplified. We can presume that in the Sintashta and Petrovka cultures the post-mortem selection was used and that there may have existed alternative ways of interment for some categories of people. But the Alakul' mortuary profile is abnormal as well. Yes, child and especially infant mortality rates used to be very high, more than 50% in traditional societies, but the proportion of 88% of the deceased below 1 year of age is too high for survival of any society, let alone one composed of only 6–14% of adults. Judging by the huge territory occupied by the Alakul' population during at least three centuries, it was a stable and successful society. So, we can conclude that the burial grounds do not reflect real demographic situation again.

However, a small amount of older children and teens looks normal, because this group was one of the most viable categories of the population. Huge central tombs at the Sintashta and Petrovka necropolises could be the evidence of the hierarchical (vertical) organization of the society while the Alakul' model of the funerary sites seemed to be horizontal organized and based on age or kinship. Probably, Alakul' burial grounds were 'family cemeteries' or were intentionally arranged to look like them.

The rites used to bury infants (up to 1) were very similar to those in Petrovka: small rectangular pits sometimes with wooden ceilings. The buried were laid in the contracted position on the left side. The main category of grave goods was pottery. The second widespread category was ornaments (up to 70% of all the buried infants). It is interesting to note that the total number of the ornaments and the complexity of their combinations is much greater than in Petrovka graves (Fig. 7).

Astragals were also often found in infant pits. In all the described cultures, the Sintashta, Petrovka and Alakul', astragals were related to presumed children's burials. In the Sintashta and Petrovka graves they generally belonged to older children and teens but at the Alakul' burial sites, 90% of astragals were discovered in the graves of infants and they were absent from the adult ones. Obviously it can be explained by

³ So, in the Alakul' part of the cemetery of Stepnoye VII the number of such burials reaches 88% (!).

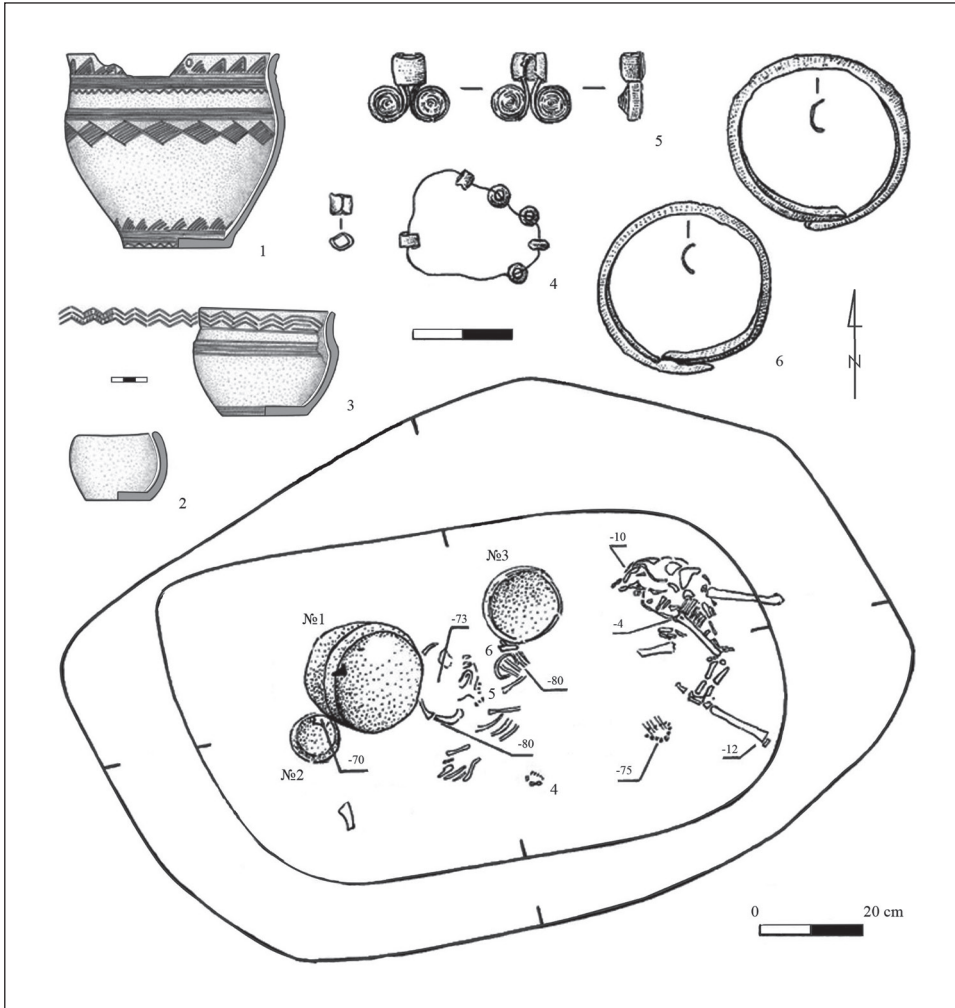


Fig. 7. Stepnoe-VII cemetery. Alakul' period. Burial 63. Alakul' child burial (9–12 month old). Grave goods: 1–3 – ceramic vessels; 4 – beads; 5 – bronze pendants; 6 – bronze bracelets (after Kupriyanova and Zdanovich 2015)

the overwhelming majority of infant interments in the buried population. Other types of artefacts were quite rare.

Sometimes, the infants were accompanied by sacrificial deposits of the heads and extremities of the small horned cattle. As a rule, they were found in the collective children's tombs and in 10–20% of cases they were uncovered in individual graves.

The burials of children were in general the same as the infants' ones. The amount of ornaments increased a little, but tools were still exceptional. Unfortunately, graves of teens and adolescents were rather rare in the Alakul' burial grounds and their small number makes it difficult to distinguish between the sub-adults' and adults' burials.

CHILDREN'S CLOTHES IN THE LATE BRONZE AGE

The unique information about children's attire was obtained from more than 60 children's burials at the Stepnoye VII cemetery. Firstly, the difference in the number of the ornaments in the Petrovka and Alakul' graves should be noted, whereas the female costume of these cultures is relatively the same as regards its opulence. There were not so many decorations in Petrovka children's interments. 69.2% of Alakul' children's burials contained ornaments and only 29.5% of the ones from Petrovka did. The composition of ornaments and their arrangement on the skeletons were generally the same. The ornaments included faience, rarely bronze, beads, fang amulets, shells and bracelets. They were situated in different combinations in five zones of the body – the head, neck, waist, wrists and ankles. In the overwhelming majority the ornaments

of the Petrovka burials were located in one of the body zones only, whereas in the Alakul' ones, in several zones simultaneously.

We can consider belt decorations as the specific trait of the children's attire in the Stepnoye VII cemetery (Fig. 8). It is interesting to note that belt ornaments were not necessary in the adult costume either in the same cemetery or in other Late Bronze Age burial grounds (Kupriyanova 2008). In Stepnoye VII the majority of the buried Alakul' infants had waist decorations. According to the data obtained from several burials they consisted of three strings of beads on the waist, sometimes with bronze decorative elements. We may reconstruct these ornaments as the strings joint on the belt at the front. One more interesting detail: in several evident cases the neck decoration can be reconstructed as several strings of beads sewn onto the 'plastron' at the front or on the dress directly. Quite often



Fig. 8. Reconstruction of child's clothes

bronze bracelets can be found in the Alakul' burials, much rarer – shoe or headdress decorations. The most complete decorated child' dress included the ornaments in all the five zones of the body mentioned above resembling the adult female dress. But the composition of the decoration was simpler and generally consisted of small ornaments. It is necessary to note that the belts with three bead strings were a distinctive trait of the children's burials in the Stepnoye VII cemetery.

CONCLUSION

Comparing the variations of the child's burial rite, we can conclude in general, that the social status of sub-adults in the Sintashta, Petrovka and Alakul' cultures was lower than that of the adults, judging by the smaller amount of work invested in their interment, the total number and structure of the animal sacrifices, the bigger standardization of the ritual and the smaller number of grave goods, yet the children's status was probably different in each of these cultures. Children's burials simplify along the line Sintashta – Petrovka – Alakul' and have a decreasing number of ornaments. Nevertheless the same trend should be noticed for the adult graves, in general. It is quite possible that the burial rites of the Sintashta, Petrovka and Alakul' cultures represented different types of social relationships. The Sintashta rite reflected first of all the vertical stratification whereas the Petrovka and Alakul' ones, the kinship relations. This seems to be confirmed by the increasing number of children's burials and the sharp growth of the babies' proportion among them.

In general, we may suppose that the sub-adult category in the Sintashta society was limited to 14–15 years. Only a very small number of children's graves included weapons, tools or a great amount of jewellery used to mark the gender of the sub-adult. We have noticed that the individuals older than 14–15 years of age were often provided with a greater quantity of grave goods, which were also more varied. Tools appeared in these graves in mass quantities.

The sub-adult (up to 14 years of age) burials have much in common with the female ones in terms of grave goods. The following features are common for the burials of women and sub-adults: the absence of weaponry, the predominance of ornaments and astragals among the grave goods and small horned animals in the sacrificial deposits. The similarity of the females and children in terms of grave goods can be observed in many societies. Probably, most of the children were obliged to perform the domestic work that often was considered as the 'female sphere'. According to the ethnographic sources, boys (like girls) usually belonged to the 'mother world' until their initiation (Bocharov 2001: 89). Often small boys (up to 6–10 years of age) did tasks that were otherwise allocated to women (like girls), for example: cleaning, looking after the youngest children, etc. (Kamp 2001: 16).

However, we may suppose that the age of ‘getting adult clothes and ornaments’ in these cultures was quite different. In the Sintashta cemeteries, children’s burials rarely included large metal ornaments. ‘Adult’ type clothes can be found in the graves of individuals not younger than 10–11 years of age. At the Petrovka and, especially, Alakul’ sites the most complete and complex variants of dress decoration can be found with the deceased as young as 1 year old. But we should not forget that in the burials we can see only the children’s ‘funerary’ attire. Probably, it was different from the everyday garments.

To conclude, we can clearly see that the archaeology of childhood (especially in such vast and insufficiently explored regions as the steppe Eurasia) is an area that requires a good deal more attention and study. Our investigation only begins this huge work.

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