Ancient Grave Looting Reinterpreted

Reopened Xiongnu Tombs from the 3rd century BC to 2nd century AD in Mongolia and Russia

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Preface

During my life as a student at Leiden University, I became intrigued by archaeological cultures in East Asia. When the chance came to apply for an excavation in Mongolia at the Shombuuzin Belchir cemetery from the Xiongnu period I reacted immediately. This excavation was with Bryan Miller, whom made me enthusiastic about the archaeology of the Xiongnu period and the contacts that the culture had with the Han empire in China. This excavation has motivated me to do further research, write my bachelor thesis about the Xiongnu and now my master thesis.

When I began to formulate my ideas I had contact with Bryan Miller and Ursula Brosseder, whom are both specialists in the archaeology of the Xiongnu. They gave me some input and advise for this thesis and their work has strongly influenced my understanding of the Xiongnu. I would like to thank both of them for the opportunities they gave me and their input.

Ilona Bausch was my supervisor during this thesis and put me in the right direction and provided great advise and input. She really motivated me when I did not know what direction I should go with my thesis. With David Fontijn I exchanged my ideas about my theoretical framework. He gave me useful ideas about mortuary archaeology and references which I could use to support my theoretical framework. Michiel Petersen, my girlfriend and my father supported me as a last reader. their insights and support with my thesis where of great value to me. Michiel also joined me on the excavation in Mongolia and my journey to India and he has become a good friend since then.

My girlfriend, family and friends also supported and helped me where necessary. Without all those whom helped me I doubt if I would have ever finished this thesis and I am really thankful!

Chapter 1: Introduction

In large parts of the world graves are being excavated that are recorded as looted because they are heavily disturbed (Steuer 2006). In recent literature reopened graves are often seen as looted graves, for example in Parker Pearsons' (1999) book 'The archaeology of death' a chapter about looting only deals with the modern problem, but this process could also have taken place in earlier times. Moreover, Brosseder (2009) suggested to avoid to call these graves looted, because the nature of this process is not yet researched and that the term looting suggests that tombs were reopened for economical and personal gain. Graves could provide evidence that they were reused in later time periods. Objects from these graves can be retrieved and placed in a different context (Artelius 2013). This is an indication that people might have had other motivations than looting to reopen a grave. I think that the nature of grave reopenings can only be explored by comparing the grave goods and human remains of 'pristine' with reopened graves. I shall use graves from the Xiongnu period (209 BC-150 AD) to get insight in these processes, because in publications graves that belong to the Xiongnu culture are often interpreted as 'looted', this might be unjust. The recent research (Brosseder 2009; Artelius 2013) had shown that tombs might not have been looted, but indicate that a different ritual took place in the centuries after the deceased in the graves were buried. In this thesis I would like to do a reinterpretation of this reopening problem with the data from Xiongnu graves. The reason why I use the Xiongnu is that next to the archaeological information from excavations, there are historic sources from the Han empire from China that provide information about the social organisation of the Xiongnu, power struggles and trade. These factors are important for the interpretation of the reopening process, because they provide a historical background and specific details that are related to this topic.

The Xiongnu is the first historically documented nomadic empire that existed from the third century BC until the second century AD (Honeychurch & Amartuvshin 2006, 261). However, there is a recent debate about whether the material culture, in and around Mongolia, can be ascribed to this empire (Brosseder & Miller 2011). The name Xiongnu appears in the historical records of

the Han empire, the *Shiji*, the *Hanshu* and the *Hou Hanshu*. However, it is still unclear if the material culture that has been linked to the Xiongnu is the same as the Xiongnu in the historical sources, because 'Xiongnu' might be a name for barbaric tribes that lived north of the Han empire and not that of a single tribal confederacy (Ibid. 2011, 19-33). Graves, settlements and material culture have been linked to the Xiongnu and are located in Mongolia, South Siberia and North-eastern China. The Xiongnu empire was structured in a hierarchical way with a 'supreme' leader, the *chanyu* as the head of the state.

Chapter 1.1: Grave reopening in Xiongnu graves

Most graves of the Xiongnu culture are disturbed by a reopening process. To get insight in the nature of the reopening processes I shall focus on the differences between 'pristine' and reopened graves from the Xiongnu period in Mongolia and Russia. With pristine I mean that they where not disturbed by people who reopened the grave. However, these may have been disturbed by bioturbation that may have moved elements inside the grave.

The reopening of graves could have happened from the moment of deposition to present day. For my case study there are strong indications that this happened between the Xiongnu period and a few centuries later. The culture that was responsible and the motivations behind the reopening are unknown. With a theoretical framework I want to review the evidence that is found in reopened Xiongnu graves and compare these with pristine graves. To do this I will both explore the general meaning of artefacts and graves, because of the possibility that these were retrieved for other reasons than economical gain. Moreover, in Denmark Bronze age graves were reused in periods after the deposition and objects were moved as well (Artelius 2013). In Kazachstan Iron age graves were reopened shortly after their deposition and might be interpreted as secondary rituals (Bendezu-Sarmiento 2006). These rituals might be friendly or hostile which might be reflected in the disturbance of artefacts and human remains, or their absence.

The burials Xiongnu that were reopened are treated as a secondary burial practice. This opens up possibilities for the reinterpretation about the goal of this process. I shall investigate the human remains and artefacts in a grave from

different theoretical perspectives, because this could give insight for the motivation behind these secondary burial practices. To do this, the notions of monumentality, territoriality and memory of a grave are researched. These are closely linked to what human remains and objects represent. Because the objects, human remains and the grave form one object of study and are all linked together. This problem can not be assessed with a single model, for this reason different models and theories will be used that focus on different aspects. In this study I assume that graves are territorial markers, not simply because they are monuments in a landscape, but because the person and objects that are buried in it still have the possibility to act as a protector of the land as a ancestor spirit.

Excavation of Xiongnu tombs shows that the coffin is the main target of this reopening process and is often heavily disturbed. According to Brosseder these graves were reopened not too long after their construction because the grave chamber had often collapsed (Brosseder 2010, 267). This is important because it shows that the reopening did not happened in recent years. The coffin often contains only fragments of human remains and artefacts. These remains might have had a significant role in the life of the deceased and after a person was interred in the tomb. Placing the objects in a grave meant that they were probably supposed to stay there forever. If the graves are reopened and objects or human remains were retrieved, it might be an indication that these were significant. The objects in the grave could also be interpreted as prestige goods, which will be further explained in chapter 4.5. With this concept, the reopening of graves can be explained only as personal gain. However, it is not yet clear if these graves where reopened for the objects, human remains or other reasons.

I will look at the social significance of graves and the role that the interred might have played in society. I think that these perspectives are crucial for understanding why a grave is reopened. Because the interred might have had a high position in society or the society itself may have had different feelings toward the interred person. The society chooses what to remember and what to forget and in a shift of power these conditions are renegotiated by the new elite (Fairchild Ruggles 2011). Surrounding societies could play a role in this process in the form of warfare and diplomacy. These can have different reasons to reopen the grave.

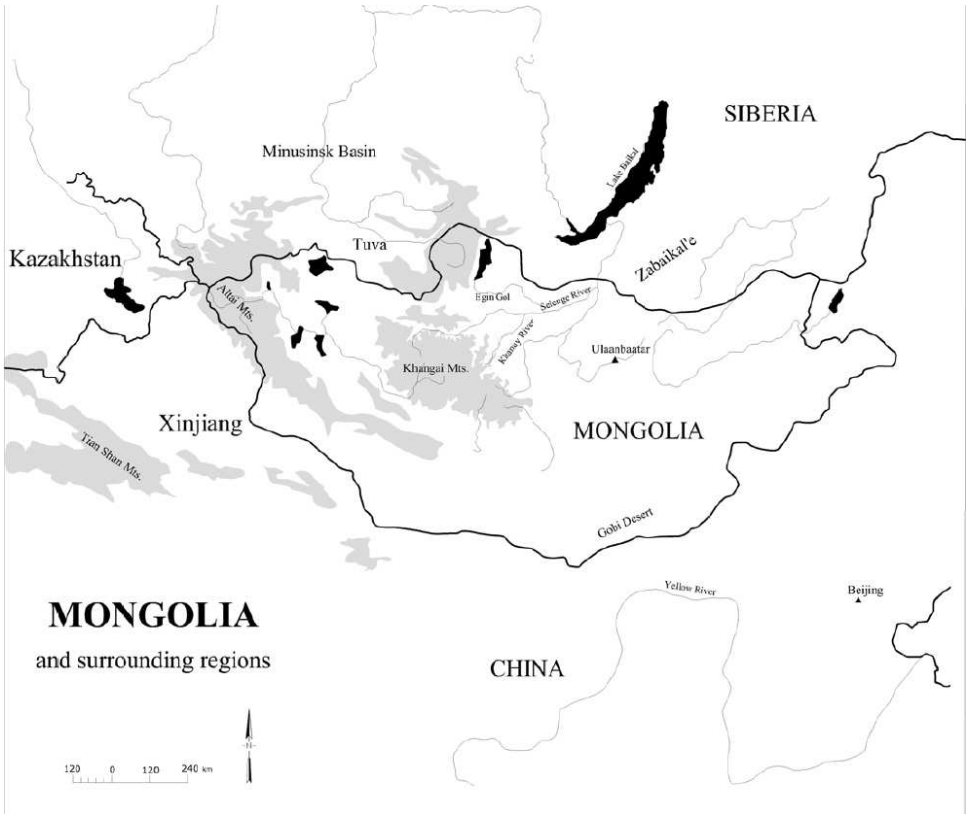


Figure 1: Mongolia and surrounding regions (Houle 2010, 3).

Chapter 1.2: Evaluation of research

This thesis is strongly influenced by the research done to monumental Xiongnu graves by Brosseder (2009), because it brings most important Xiongnu graves together in a comparative framework that shows the similarities and differences between elite graves. She questions the term looting in graves, but does not come with an interpretive framework to give an insight into the reopening processes. The skeletal remains in the graves are also ignored in this publication, which I think, are important to understand the reopening process. Only monumental tombs are included in Brosseders' research. However, the circular burials are also the subject of reopening processes and the proportion of pristine graves makes this category more suitable to compare.

Drobyshevs' (2006) research to rulers in the Mongolian period has strongly influenced my thinking about the death of these persons in the Xiongnu period. A great time span exists between the Xiongnu and the Mongolian period, but I think some cultural traditions might have survived through time. This is supported by a genetic study, which shows that people in Xiongnu graves are

closely connected to people in the Mongolian period and modern Mongolians (Lee 2009). Drobyshev sketches how the sacral rulership of the Mongol Khan was organised and what was done to its body after his death. For example strategies to prevent that enemies to find the place where a ruler is buried and strategies that were used to gain control over conquered people. Because I try to give an interpretive framework to the reopened graves of the Xiongnu these strategies in the Mongol period might be used to sketch what can be expected in Xiongnu graves. However, sacral rulership can not be proven in the Xiongnu period and it can not be assumed that the highest elite were buried in the largest tombs, which is argued by Brosseder (2009). The reopening of graves happens to all grave types and sizes, for this reason it can not be expected that all these graves are build for the highest elite.

In graves from the Xiongnu period a large amount of graves have been reopened. Johannesson contributed to this debate with his analysis of tombs from one relatively small area (Johannesson 2011). This phenomenon had not yet been studied in a broader view. This is where this thesis will fit in.

The (partial) presence or absence of human remains and artefacts has not been researched yet in combination with the results of these large square burials. And neither for circular burials. For these monumental burials there is not much left to research than to add to what extent they contain a human body or not. The circular burials are not yet researched in such a way. For this reason I choose to look into data of an archaeological site which was recently published in English (Miller *et a*l. 2009b). The data that I use comes from a burial ground with only circular burials, Strombuuzin Belchir. This site is interesting because there is a relatively high amount of graves that were not reopened compared to other sites (Miller 2011).

The archaeology of the Xiongnu is flourishing at this moment; in 2007 a conference was held about Mongolian archaeology and in 2008 a conference was held about the Xiongnu. These conferences led to the publication of two volumes that made a large amount of data available for this period (Bemmann 2009; Brosseder and Miller 2011). In 2011 the 2220th anniversary of the Xiongnu empire was celebrated with an exhibition and a museum catalogue. The president of Mongolia referred to a quote from Genghiz Khan who stated that the Xiongnu state were the great ancestors of the Mongol empire. Because of this he claims

that Mongolians have the right to possess their own history, because the nomadic way of life is still practiced today (Erezgen 2011). This indicates that the research into the remains of the Xiongnu is of great importance to the Mongolian state. These recent publications Xiongnu archaeology can also provide new input in the global debates about 'barbarians', mortuary archaeology and heritage management.

Chapter 1.3: Research questions and theoretical framework

In my bachelor thesis I suggested that grave reopening was mainly focussed on the coffin and that in some graves only the body and artefacts might have been removed, while the inner and outer coffins where left relatively untouched in the reopening process (Van der Veen 2011, 61). In this thesis I want to compare pristine graves with reopened graves to research to what degree these differ. What I want to test is, to what extent the objects and / or human remains still remain in the tomb and in what space of the tomb they are in. This is important to discover what the motivation for the reopening was, because no valuable items are expected if looting would be the reason to reopen a grave. In other words; what was the motivation behind the reopening of the graves?

To research this I need to know what is the difference between pristine and reopened graves is and in what way they deviate. Does the archaeological data from reopened graves show patterns that might reflect stages in a secondary ritual in reopened tombs? If such a pattern exist, what category is the target? A consequent pattern for one of the categories in the reopened tombs is evidence that these actions might have been part of a ritual. Such a ritual could be performed during the Xiongnu period or after that. This might have consequences for the interpretation of this secondary burial process, because this might have been carried out by the Xiongnu, one of their rivals, or a culture that was in control of the area after the Xiongnu period. After all, the looting of objects could still be a possibility.

In order to investigate these questions I want to look at what was found in the graves that were reopened, because it is hard if not impossible to make claims on what was taken away from it. What was left behind can be an important aspect

that might give insight in the disposition of the process. These tombs are then compared to pristine tombs to show in what way they differ.

Chapter 1.4: Primary data and methodology

To research how reopened graves compare to pristine graves, I will look at the circular burial site of Shombuuziin Belchir in the West of Mongolia. The C14 dates that have been acquired from this site place it in the Late Xiongnu period (47 BC – 91 AD) to as early as the beginning of the second century AD. This site, containing 36 burials, is partially excavated and published in several sources (Miller 2009; Miller 2011; Miller *et al*.2008; Miller *et al*. 2009b). The issue of reopening is not directly addressed in these excavation reports, but these publications are published in a way that makes them suitable to compare the reopened with pristine graves, because the places where the burial inventory and skeletal remains are found is described in detail. These factors make this archaeological site suited for further interpretation. Two burials from other sites from the Western part of Mongolia are added to this research to compare with the burials of Shombuuzin Belchir: Khökh ürüüriin Dugui-II and Takhiltin-khotgor. Furthermore, a rich reopened 'satellite' burial from the Gol Mod 2 site is included, as well as monumental tombs from Il'Movaia Pad, Tsaaram Valley and Noin Ula to indicate what traces of reopening are left behind in the monumental tombs. These sites are located in Central Mongolia, which is interpreted as the core of the Xiongnu territory, contains both monumental square tombs and circular (satellite) burials. However, I do not tend to draw conclusions on the spatial distribution of reopened tombs.

I will look at the burial inventory, human remains and signs of reopening. To explore the possibilities of why the tombs where reopened I shall look from different perspectives. I shall discuss what (mortuary) monuments are and follow with some different perspectives on material culture in graves. I believe that a contextualisation of the Xiongnu culture, a historical framework, a framework of different Xiongnu tombs and evidence for the reopening of these tombs is required to interpret the reopening of graves.

The actual data from the cemetery sites in table 1 will be presented in chapter 5 and an interpretation of this data will follow in the discussion chapter. At this point I shall present the model of what to expect in the grave.

Table 1: Cemeteries from case study **(TB = Total number of burials; EB = Excavated burials; CS = Burials included in case study; numbers in first column represent the number that correspond to the site number presented in the case study chapter)**

Nr.	Sitename	Region	Grave types	TB	EB	CS	Reference
1	Shombuuzin Belchir	West Mongolia	Circular	36	12	11	Miller *et al*. 2009b; Miller 2011; Miller 2012
2	Tahiltin-Hotgor	West Mongolia	Mixed	?	?	1	Miller *et al*. 2008 ; Miller *et al*. 2009a; Miller 2009; Brosseder 2009
3	Khökh Ürüüriin Dugui-II	West Mongolia	Circular	6	1	1	Kovalev *et al*. 2011
4	Gol Mod II	Central Mongolia	Mixed	400	?	1	Erdenebaatar *et al*. 2011; Brosseder 2009
7	Noin Ula	Central Mongolia	Mixed	212	?	1	Brosseder 2009
8	Tsaaram Valley	South Siberia	Mixed	?		1	Miniaev & Sakharovskaia 2008; Brosseder 2009
9	Il'Movaia Pad	South Siberia	Mixed	?		1	Konovalov 2008; Brosseder 2009

The relation of the artefacts with the space in which they are found might also be an important factor. My model is based on the Xiongnu graves which are presented in the next chapter and consists of both monumental and circular tombs. I distinguish the following spaces inside a tomb:

- Inner grave chamber (only in the larger tombs)
- Outer grave chamber (only in the monumental tombs)
- Coffin or cist
- Niche (the small space north of the coffin or grave chambers, where animal bones are deposited)
- Tomb structure (anything that is not found in relation to a reopening and situated inside the filling of the grave)
- Reopening hole (objects that are related to the reopening activity)
- Outside coffin / chambers (objects where I was not able to place them in a space)

I designed my database in this way, because I wanted to get insight in the spatial distribution of objects and human remains inside a grave. In chapter 3 and 4 the theory shall be discussed in more detail, as well as the mortuary rituals in chapter 2. For this reason I decided not to spend too much space in this chapter.

Most of the monumental tombs show that the surface demarcation is more or less intact. The circular tombs show a slightly different picture, because the

ring seems to have been disturbed. With common sense I can say that the surface size of the burial strongly influences the degree of disturbance. When a small grave is reopened it can be expected that the stones on the surface were disturbed. The hole should be about one meter wide to fit a person inside and enable him to dig down. However, when I participated in the Khovd project with Bryan Miller at Shombuuziin Belchir it was hard to tell if the surface demarcations were disturbed. Only when the cist or coffin was opened it became clear that a grave had been reopened or not. If it was disturbed it could be due to bioturbation or human reopening. Bioturbation is disturbance that is caused by animals that dug their holes in the grave or plants. In the case studies bioturbation can be ruled out. These graves were disturbed by human actions, because an animal would probably not be able to toss aside large stones.

Chapter 1.5: Limitations and problem identification

A lot of important publications are in Russian and Mongolian, therefore I am dependent on overviews of these sources in English, German and French publications or forced to neglect this, because not all data I need is available.

Only from the past twenty years onwards Xiongnu tombs are fully excavated to get more information about the context of these graves. Before this period tombs were excavated using a shaft to get to the burial chamber as fast as possible. Because of this, a lot of contextual information had been lost (Brosseder 2009). For this reason I have chosen to rely on recent English publications. The implication is that the dataset does not represent the entire spectrum of Xiongnu tombs.

Xiongnu tombs have been excavated by various researchers with their own goals. Therefore the excavation strategies are different as well as the data presentation in the publication. This might present difficulties for the adaption of this data for my research question. The publications do not go into detail on the evidence that was left behind in the reopening process. I shall therefore use these publications only as supporting evidence.

Some major excavations still need to be fully published. However some scattered articles about these excavations have appeared in journals (e.g. Polosmak *et al*. 2008a; Polosmak *et al*. 2008b).

Historical sources about the Xiongnu are not reliable because they were written from the Han perspective and the equation of the Xiongnu material culture with the historical culture is difficult. The information that the Han Chinese empire had, was only recorded for the purpose of informing the political sphere (Brosseder and Miller 2011). The sources will only be used as a framework and background to interpret the political situation through time.

Unfortunately a good chronological framework is missing because the paradigm of the Xiongnu elite graves changed and not enough C14 dates have been acquired to see this represented in the category of circular burials (Brosseder 2009). For this reason not too much attention will be paid to determine whether the tombs are elite or not and what exact time period they were built. The historical sources (*Shiji*; *Hanshu*; *Hou Hanshu*) tell that there was a highly hierarchical state structure and I assume that this is represented in the archaeological record.

Chapter 1.6: Thesis structure

A historical and archaeological background for the Xiongnu culture will be given in Chapter 2, because some historical events during the Xiongnu period might provide a further understanding of the reopening phenomenon. In Chapter 3 the theory about what graves are and how they are perceived will be discussed. Chapter 4 discusses theory on how to interpret material culture in graves. Both chapters will give the reader a background for the understanding of the reopening problem. I will discuss contradicting or overlapping theories and their implications, which shall be used in the discussion chapter to answer the research questions. Chapter 5 will be dedicated to a discussion of the evidence and data will be presented to demonstrate how the reopened burials compare to burials where no traces of reopening were recorded. Here I will discuss the contradicting theories and try to define what theory is most plausible. In the conclusion I will try to answer the research questions and evaluate this thesis.

Chapter 2: The Xiongnu

In this chapter I shall outline the current understanding of the Xiongnu empire and its people from different perspectives. This is important because this background knowledge gives an idea about how the Xiongnu functioned.

After the Xiongnu research has been introduced I shall briefly introduce some important historical periods within the Xiongnu period and the relation of the Xiongnu with the Han empire in China.

Chapter 2.1: The Xiongnu – archaeology and subsistence

The Xiongnu were always described as the classic example of nomadic pastoralists, which mean that the people make extensive use of cows, sheep, horses and goats. These animals need a pasture to graze on, which is the reason behind the migrations in a nomadic pastoralist society. However, also remains of millet, wheat and barley have been discovered (Honeychurch and Amartuvshin 2006). At a survey in central Mongolia, traces of agriculture, fishing and gathering of plant materials were found (Wright *et al*. 2009, 385). The remains of walled settlements have also been excavated, which make the classification of a nomadic pastoral society problematic (Honeychurch and Amartuvshin 2006). The walled settlements are small in number and were probably only used by a small portion of society that needed protection.

Some settlements have been found without a walled enclosure and with traces of permanent habitation (Ramseyer *et al*. 2009, 231-6). Several large settlement sites have been identified that had seasonal occupation. The local population was probably buried near the settlement, because they are from the same period (Wright *et al*. 2009, 385).

From historical sources from China, which are briefly discussed in the next section, it becomes clear that the Xiongnu had a strong hierarchical society with a chanyu at the highest position.

The centre of the Xiongnu empire was probably in Central Mongolia and the Baikal area in Southern Russia, because the biggest cemeteries, graves and density of archaeological sites is located in this area (Miller 2009, 354). This was probably also the place where the chanyu's resided.

Through comparative analysis of ‘elite’ graves in surrounding countries it becomes clear that there is some homogeneity in the treatment of these burials. They all contain grave goods that originate from places far away from the burial place. It seems that there was an extensive exchange network active in the Xiongnu period (Brosseder 2011).

In the next section I shall give an historical overview of what is considered to be the Xiongnu period.

Chapter 2.2: Historical sources and periods

As stated in the previous section there are historical sources from China that narrate about the Xiongnu. However, these descriptions are fragmentary and do not cover the entire period (Brosseder and Miller 2011). They only describe how the Han empire was looking at them through three timeframes.

The first record that narrates about the Xiongnu is the *Shiji*. This was written at the end of the second century BC to the early first century BC (Sima Qian 1959). The second is the *Hanshu*, which was written *i*n the late first to second century AD the *Hanshu* was written (Ban Gu 1962). The third is the *Hou Hanshu* and was written in the fifth century AD (Fan Ye 1965).

These books are encyclopedic histories of the ‘Chinese’ empire. The Hanshu and Shiji both focus on the centuries before the Eastern Han dynasty (25 – 220 AD). The Hou Hanshu an the other hand deals with the later period and with the ‘Southern Xiongnu’. This new polity was situated along the Northern frontier of China and rivalled the ‘Northern Xiongnu’ for the claim of rulership (Brosseder and Miller 2011, 20). However, the Northern Xiongnu rulers did not accept a title and the historical sources only narrate the history of the Southern polity (*Ibid*., 20).

This section will deal with a narrative of the Xiongnu empire in three time periods that are described by Miller (2009), their internal organisation as known from the historical sources and their contacts with foreign cultures to give an introduction to what is told about the Xiongnu. Figure 1 shows how the Xiongnu territory was organised in different periods. However, the book where this map comes from does not tell whether this image is based on historical documents, archaeological culture or a combination of both. This is an important distinction

because the area that was called ‘North Xiongnu’ has the almost the same spatial distribution as the monumental tombs.

In the three periods described by Miller, some major changes appear in the territory of the Xiongnu. I shall follow his periodization in the next sections.

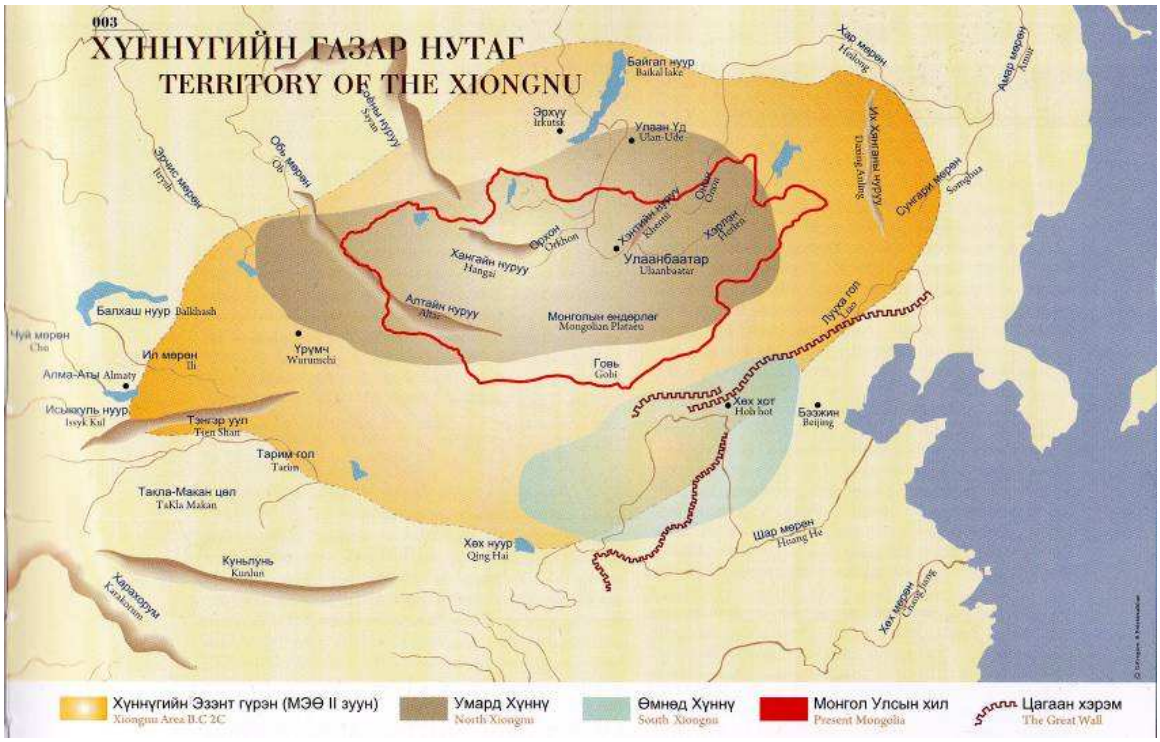


Figure 2: Xiongnu territory (Erezgen 2011, 25).

Chapter 2.2.1: The Early Xiongnu (209 – 58 BC)

Starting with the assassination of the father, the new chanyu gained the power of the polity that his father ruled. Also the stepmother, brothers and chiefs loyal to his father were killed. This is seen as the historical start of the Xiongnu. This happened because there was a pressure from surrounding powerful polities and the expansion of the Qin empire to the North. Administrative ranks for ruling members and a governing structure were created. This enabled the Xiongnu to incorporate and manage new territories and people. The newly established Han empire, that came to reign after the fall of the Qin empire, had to pay tribute to the Xiongnu after a defeat against the Xiongnu (Di Cosmo 2002, 174 – 187). This tribute that was paid might have ended in Xiongnu graves.

These developments created a structure where the “sacred supreme ruler” (Miller 2009, 81), the aristocratic clans and the royal lineages had the hegemony over the steppe (Di Cosmo 2002, 187).

At the top of the hierarchical organisation stands the “*Chenli Gutu Chanyu*” which can be translated as ‘magnificent son of Heaven’. This concept might have been borrowed from the title of the Chinese rulers, Son of Heaven (Di Cosmo 1999).

At the death of a chanyu the important chiefs were called together to appoint a successor. This was in most cases someone from the royal lineage. There were three other aristocratic lineages, where a king of the right and left was appointed from. The kingdom was divided into a central court where the chanyu held his centre of power and a left and right court where the kings resided. Other titles were both military and administrative (Miller 2009, 82-88).

During the aggressive expansion of the Xiongnu the leaders of other tribes had the choice between subordination or to be destroyed. If they were subordinated, the leader could take the title ‘named king’ (Shiji 111, in Miller 2009, 88-93).

There was a ‘peaceable agreement’ between the Han and Xiongnu that is called *heqin.* This agreement was renewed when there was a change of rule on either side. Goods that were sent to the Xiongnu included imperial chariots, horses, clothes, food and princesses. This was done until the Han court declared war to the Xiongnu around 140 BC. The Han initiated military campaigns against the Xiongnu with the help of tribes that had their territory next to them and did them great damage (Miller 2009, 93-96).

After the death of the Han emperor Wu in 87 BC and some defeats for the Xiongnu in battle, the border tribes that were subordinated by the Xiongnu began to rebel. In 78 BC the Wuhuan (a former subordinated border clan) invaded Xiongnu territory to open the tomb of a chanyu. The Xiongnu asked help from the Wusun. This was seen as a sign of weakness and the Wusun assaulted the Xiongnu with help from the Han Chinese and succeeded to capture the camp of the ‘king of the right’. These attacks further weakened the Xiongnu reign. Royal lineages and local kings made claims for becoming the next chanyu, which led to a civil war (*Ibid*., 96-122).

Chapter 2.2.2: Civil War (58 – 47 BC)

In this period several aristocratic people claimed the title of chanyu, which caused chaos in the territory. This led to a temporary split in territory. They all claimed to hold the title of supreme ruler and were dispersed through the Xiongnu territory. In this tumultuous period one of the powerful chanyus submitted to the Han in 51 BC. The chanyus' brother whom was made brother Luli King of the Left, saw this as a sign of weakness and made himself chanyu. He joined forces with other clans and changed the location of the court (Miller 2009, 122-125).

Chapter 2.2.3: Late Xiongnu (47 BC – 91 AD)

The chanyu whom submitted resided in Han territory to seek support from the Han emperor. He was the first chanyu who did not try to get the heqin treaty. Material support was found to reclaim his sovereignty against the price of a status beneath the Chinese Son of Heaven [the emperor]. He was not given an official name, and according to Miller (2009) he was above the Chinese lords. The Xiongnu could maintain their territory and would not be placed under control of the Chinese court. The chanyu travelled to a frontier town to make preparations for reclaiming the Xiongnu court. A new agreement that ensured support and military assistance was signed. He returned to the Xiongnu court in the north with the help of a Han Chinese general that attacked the court with help from the Wusun. The head of the chanyu who resided in the court was sent back to the Chinese court. The submitted chanyu reasserted his power as chanyu in his own territory thanks to the Chinese general and the Wusun. In 31 BC the lateral succession of the eldest son was being questioned, which lead to tumult again (*Ibid*., 126-134).

This period was traditionally interpreted as the end of the Xiongnu and the split of Xiongnu territory. However, Miller argues that the 'Southern Xiongnu', might have a different character than what was described by others. The split into a Northern and Southern polity might not have been a northern and a southern group, but rather a division between the groups that were allies to the Han and the groups that allied with the other chanyu (*Ibid*., 134). However, this raises the question on how to interpret the monumental tombs in the 'core area' of the

Xiongnu, because these are dated in the Late Xiongnu period (Brosseder & Miller 2011).

During the Wang Mang (9-24 AD) period in China there were some regulations for the Xiongnu that prohibited defecting people from the Han states, the Wusun and Yushi to join the Xiongnu. The Xiongnu also got the title on a seal that said 'new dynasty'. However, the chanyu did not respect these regulations and sent back the old agreement. This ended in a dispute that was won by the Xiongnu. After a civil war within Chinese borders in that period and Wang Mangs' death, the Eastern Han dynasty was established. They restored the old title of the Xiongnu chanyu. During this time the chanyu expanded the territory to proportions that were comparable with that in the heyday of Xiongnu.

After the death of the chanyu in 46 AD, crisis hit the empire again. There was huge competition between the royal families as to whom should succeed as chanyu. One of these competing chanyus moved to the south and established there as a new chanyu with Han officials.

This period did not have the same turbulent character as the Civil War period, because there were no widespread wars and no border states that invaded Xiongnu territory. However, it ended with a widespread war against the Xiongnu in Mongolia by the Han, Southern Xiongnu, Xianbei, Dingling, Wuhuan, Qiang and other groups. The chanyu was flayed by the Xianbei and a stone stele was erected at a sacred mountain (Miller 2009, 126-152).

Chapter 2.3: Introduction to Xiongnu mortuary archaeology

As stated in the introduction, the Xiongnu had two grave types: the circular burials and the monumental tombs. The monumental tombs were not built throughout the entire Xiongnu period and are often connected to the highest elites (Honeychurch and Amartuvshin 2006).

Honeychurch and Amartuvshin summarize the models of social organisation of the Xiongnu. This social organisation could, for example, be represented in the spatial organisation of graveyards, different grave types and sizes. In earlier research there was the assumption that the largest tombs could be those of the highest persons in society in the Xiongnu empire (Honeychurch & Amartuvshin 2006). This shifted when Brosseder did research on the monumental

Xiongnu tombs and did radiocarbon dating on some of them. These monumental tombs that, in the earlier research, were attributed to the highest elites in society were not built before 50 BC and after 50 AD (Brosseder 2010, 269). Thus they can not represent the status of people for the whole Xiongnu period, but might only reflect the status during this short period (*Ibid*., 271). This shows that the models of social organisation in mortuary context cannot be applied before 50 BC and need to be altered. I assume that the highest elite are to be found in the larger circular burials. However, for this thesis it is sufficient to state that there were several elite ranks in the Xiongnu society, because my intention is not to create a new chronological framework with hierarchies. I follow Bresseder (2010, 275) in defining that "military power, power trough kinship, economic power and also religious power" as statuses that need to be considered when looking at these graves.

The burial equipment that is found in Xiongnu graves does not necessarily indicate the gender of an interred person, because bow and arrow are also found in female and child burials (Brosseder and Miller 2012, 120). Elsewhere Brosseder (2009) states that weapon equipment is not found in the monumental tombs. This might be because almost all of the monumental burials that she included in the research were all reopened. In pristine circular burials these weapon equipment is mainly found inside the coffin. However, this could also be a gender related issue.

In a lecture Brosseder gave at Leiden University she stated that the chronology of different grave types does not match with previous models of social hierarchy for the Xiongnu period (Brosseder 2012, personal communication). The graves that are called square monumental, ostentatious or elite graves are linked to the highest persons in society. These graves do not appear before 50 BC (Brosseder 2010, 268-270). This means that, in the time before the introduction of this grave type, the highest elite might also be represented in different grave types that where previously interpreted as lower in rank. The burials with a circular surface demarcation appear through the whole Xiongnu period. For this reason I assume that the larger circular graves were used as the burial places for the elite. After 50 BC this grave type might be mixed with the monumental graves. In the next chapters I shall present the data for both circular and monumental burials to show what is generally found inside these graves and what the theories behind the graves are.

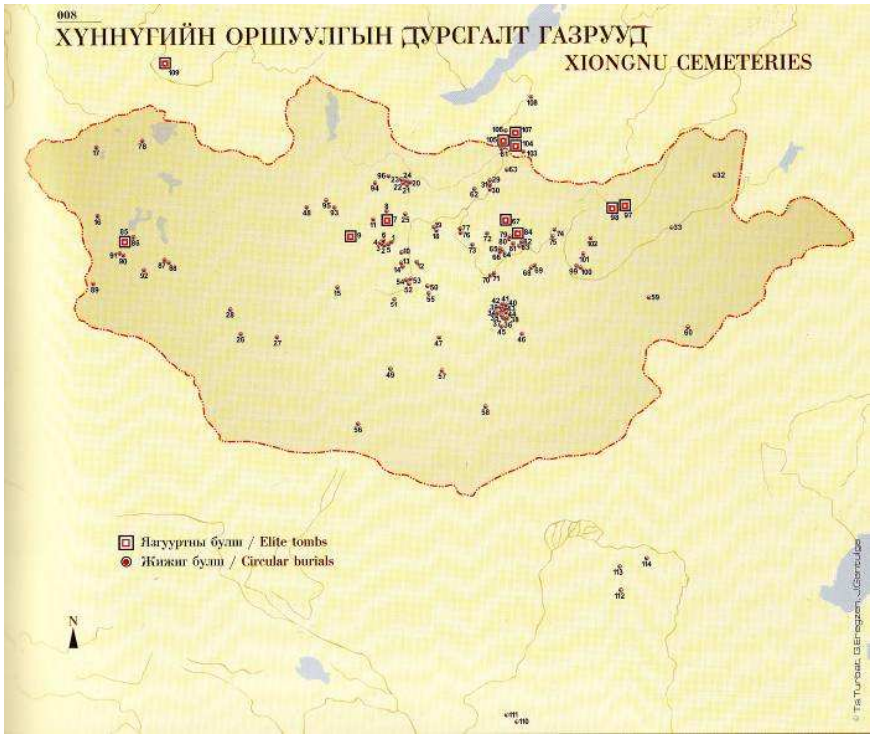


Figure 3: Distribution of Xiongnu graves in Mongolia, Russia and China (Erezgen 2011, 35).

Chapter 2.3.1: Circular burials

The circular burials, or surface burials, are visible on the ground as a ring of stones that have variable diameters. Beneath, the stone ring, at variable depths, a wooden coffin or stone cist is placed, which has the human remains. They are the dominant types of Xiongnu burials on the Mongolian steppe (Miller 2009, 233-5). According to Johannesson (2011) the major investment was in the mortuary assemblage and not in the monument itself. The circular burials share the same characteristics and do not convey individuality. This was different in the periods preceding the Xiongnu, when these structures showed much more variability in grave lay-out and accompanying grave goods. The persons interred in Xiongnu tombs could be remembered for only two generations, because they lack the variability and visibility in the landscape (*Ibid*., 250). A contrary view is presented by Miller who states that the graves are significant because they "mark the landscape and remain a visible testament to the deceased beneath" (Miller 2009, 236). I tend to follow Millers' approach, because the burials (in a cemetery) were quite well visible in the field when I volunteered at the excavation of Shombuuzin Belchir in 2010. However, when these burials are compared to the

monumental tombs or burials of the preceding periods, it becomes clear why Johannesson comes to this conclusion which is that circular burials are far less visible than monumental tombs. I think that the society would also have forgotten who is buried in the huge burial mounds within a few generations, because these were only build near the end of the Xiongnu empire. And after the fall of the empire the territory was invaded by other cultures.

The burial grounds that contain circular burials are dated between the third century BC and second century AD. These burials appear in earlier dates than the 'historical Xiongnu' and also after the fall of the Xiongnu (Miller 2009).

When these graves are placed in historical context the reopening could make sense. When a new ethnic group or lineage comes to power they can break with the old burial customs. They try to forget what was 'before' them. However, it is to early in this stage of research to draw such conclusions.

Structure

At the surface the burials are visible as a ring of stones (fig 4). This ring can be up to 14 meters in diameter.

Figure 4: Surface demarcation of a 10 meter wide circular grave at Shombuuzin Belchir, 16 (after Miller *et al*. 2009, 9).

There is some variability in the size of these burials. Following Miller, there are three groups of circular graves.

- Large graves with a diameter around 11 meters
- Small graves with a diameter around 5 meters
- Graves with a small circular cluster of stones (Miller 2009, 233-5).

These grave groups are based on the comparison of circular graves. But do these statistical ‘facts’ represent an actual hierarchy for this grave type? The larger burials seem to have a larger number of artefacts and animal sacrifices inside, which could be related to a higher status. The circular graves are found in large parts of the Xiongnu territory which is illustrated in figure 3.

There also is a fourth group of burials with no surface demarcation. This was recorded at Ivolga and Derestuy cemetery. These two excavations are published in Russian, and are therefore not covered in this thesis. Following Miller, the survey of Xiongnu graves do not represent the entire portion of society, because unmarked burials are rarely found in surveys, have less grave goods and are smaller in size (Miller 2009, 235). However, the fact that they are not found in surveys does not mean that these graves are not abundant. Because they have no surface demarcation they are probably harder to find during a survey.

At sites with square monumental graves these circular graves are often considered as satellite or sacrificial burials that accompany the person in the large grave (Minaev 1998 in Miller 2009, 362; Murail *et al.* 2000). Some of these burials have remarkable rich grave goods. But first I shall discuss the human remains that are found inside circular burials.

Internment

Primarily a wooden coffin was used to bury the deceased in. In the Western part of Mongolia, stone cists were used next to wooden coffins and sometimes these two methods were combined. In these graves where the two are combined a wooden cart was disassembled and parts were put in the grave (Miller 2012).

The skeletal remains are buried in a flexed supine position and sometimes with the legs bent. This is important, because the possibility exists that the reopening of graves are targeted at the human remains. If the skeleton has a different position it could have been moved during a reopening or by bioturbation.

Grave goods

There is a wide variety of grave goods that are found in the circular graves. These can be divided in weaponry, personal adornment, vessels, eating and horse riding gear. There are also objects that do not fit in these categories like bronze mirrors. The research of Bryan Miller suggests that there is an overlap in both grave size and burial equipment between the smaller monumental tombs and the larger circular tombs (Miller 2009). This overlap might also be visible in the traces of reopening. Status could be involved as a criteria for reopening burials. If status is indeed reflected in burial size and type, this could be a reason why circular burial sites with pristine graves are a lot easier to find than pristine monumental tombs These monumental burials are discussed below.

Chapter 2.3.2: Monumental tombs

The spread of the monumental tombs is limited to the Northern part of Mongolia and the Buryat area in Southern Russia. Two cemeteries are found to the west (Tahiltin Hotgor) and northwest (Bai Dag 2) of this 'core'. The distribution of monumental tombs becomes clear in figure 3.

Structure

The monumental graves consist of a terrace, which can be up to 46 by 46 meters, a stone walled enclosure, and a downward sloping passageway (fig 5). Almost all terrace burials have an internal structure of stone or wood on the surface and stone layers at various depths in the pit. Most of these burials have circular satellite burials around them (Brosseder 2009).

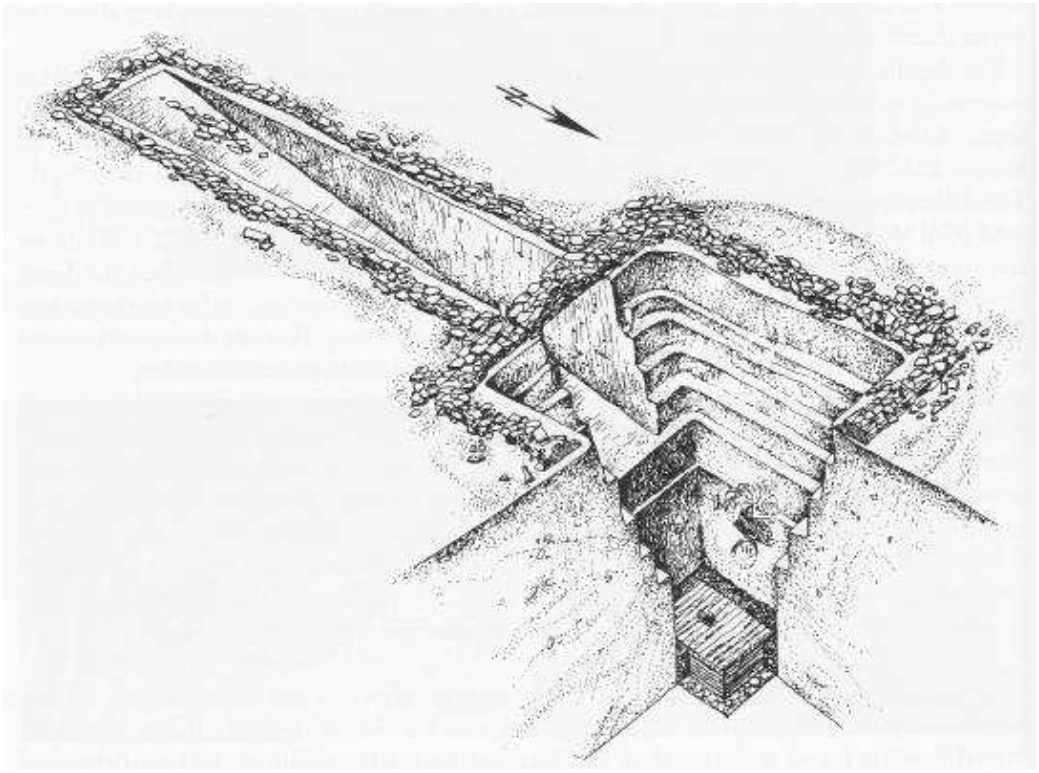


Figure 5: Monumental grave lay-out of Il'Movaia Pad tomb 54 (Polosmak et al. 2008).

Internment

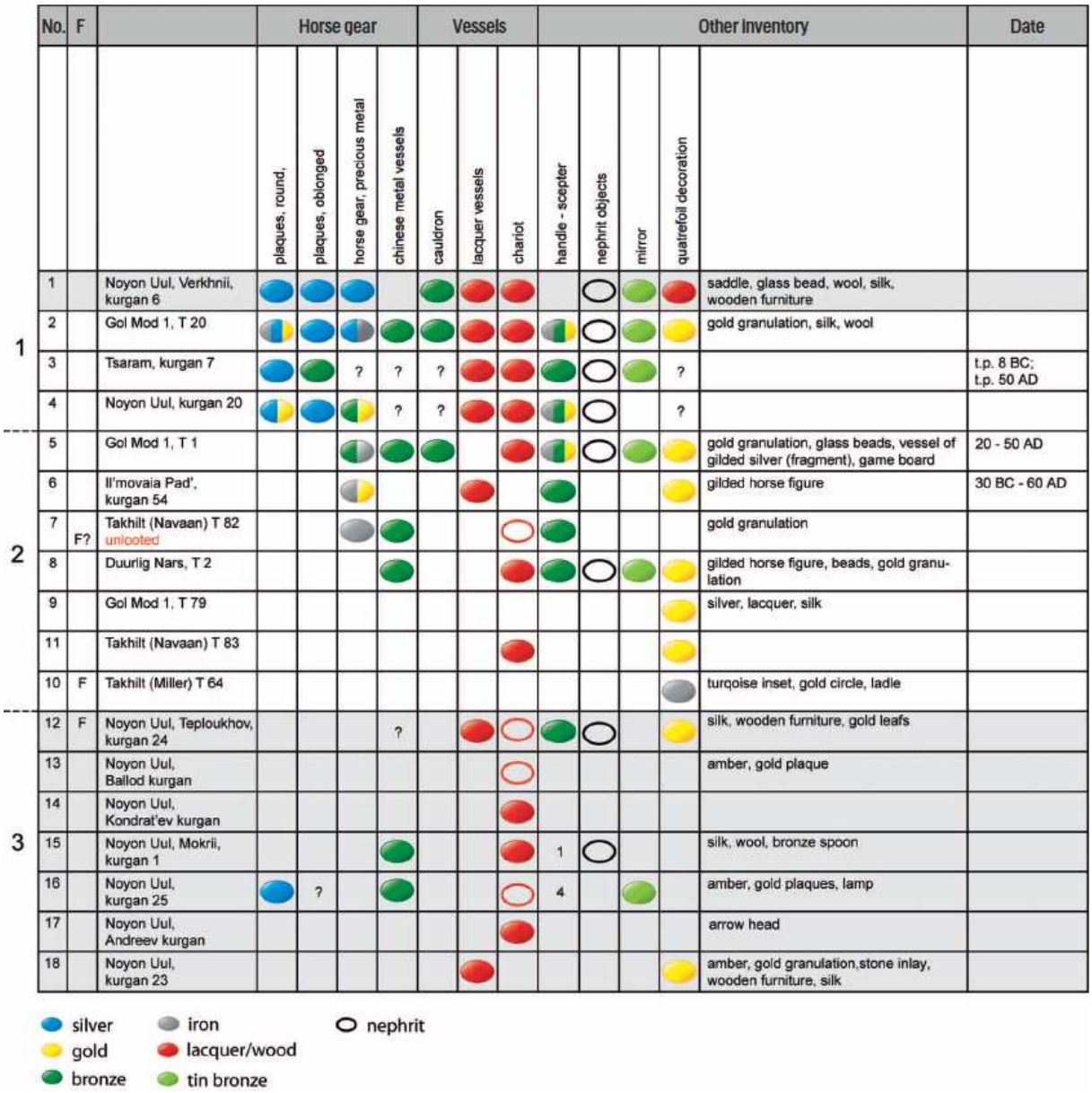
The burials contain a wooden coffin and an inner and outer chamber at the bottom of the pit. However, most of these burials do not contain a (complete) skeleton due to reopening of the graves or other reasons. I think the research into human remains is undervalued. This could be due to the fact that most graves were considered as 'looted' and therefore the human remains were neglected.

The excavation strategies and goals were aimed at the excavation of the grave chambers where a funnel shaped shaft was dug to directly reach the chambers. This had the implication that the processes, like traces of a reopening, were not visible (Brosseder 2009).

Grave goods

Artefacts are mainly found in the inner or outer chamber, whereas the coffin often lacks artefacts. Brosseder distinguishes between two groups of burials on basis of the artefacts in figure 6. The first grave group contains the same artefact types and were accompanied by a chariot. The artefact types ranged from

precious horse gear, Chinese lacquer, Chinese vessels, bronze cauldrons, coffin handles, nephrite stones to bronze mirrors (Brosseder 2009, 263).



	No.	F		Horse gear				Vessels			Other Inventory					Date
				plaques, round,	plaques, oblonged	horse gear, precious metal	chinese metal vessels	cauldron	lacquer vessels	chariot	handle - scepter	nephrit objects	mirror	quatrefoil decoration		
1	1		Noyon Uul, Verkhnii, kurgan 6	●	●	●		●	●	●		○	●	●	saddle, glass bead, wool, silk, wooden furniture	
	2		Gol Mod 1, T 20	◐	●	◐	●	●	●	●	◐	○	●	●	gold granulation, silk, wool	
	3		Tsaram, kurgan 7	●	●	?	?	?	●	●	●	○	●	?		t.p. 8 BC; t.p. 50 AD
	4		Noyon Uul, kurgan 20	◐	●	◐	?	?	●	●	◐	○		?		
2	5		Gol Mod 1, T 1			◐	●	●		●	◐	○	●	●	gold granulation, glass beads, vessel of gilded silver (fragment), game board	20 - 50 AD
	6		Il'movaia Pad', kurgan 54			◐			●		●			●	gilded horse figure	30 BC - 60 AD
	7	F?	Takhilt (Navaan) T 82 unlooted			●	●			○	●				gold granulation	
	8		Duurlig Nars, T 2				●			●	●	○	●	●	gilded horse figure, beads, gold granulation	
	9		Gol Mod 1, T 79											●	silver, lacquer, silk	
	11		Takhilt (Navaan) T 83							●				●		
	10	F	Takhilt (Miller) T 64											●	turqoise inset, gold circle, ladle	
3	12	F	Noyon Uul, Teploukhov, kurgan 24				?		●	○	●	○		●	silk, wooden furniture, gold leafs	
	13		Noyon Uul, Ballod kurgan							○					amber, gold plaque	
	14		Noyon Uul, Kondrat'ev kurgan							●						
	15		Noyon Uul, Mokrii, kurgan 1				●			●	1	○			silk, wool, bronze spoon	
	16		Noyon Uul, kurgan 25	●	?		●			○	4		●		amber, gold plaques, lamp	
	17		Noyon Uul, Andreev kurgan							●					arrow head	
	18		Noyon Uul, kurgan 23						●					●	amber, gold granulation,stone inlay, wooden furniture, silk	

silver · gold · bronze · iron · lacquer/wood · tin bronze · nephrit

Figure 6: Inventory of monumental graves (Brosseder 2009).

The second group is not only different in the categories of artefacts that were deposited, but they also differ in size and depth of the burial. The graves in this category do not contain prestigious horse gear made out of silver and Chinese metal vessels. Brosseder suggests that there is an overlap of inventory between this second group of monumental tombs and circular burials (Brosseder 2009, 264). This overlap does not mean that these graves were the same, because the monumental tombs were only in use for a relatively short period of time, while the

circular burials were used throughout the whole Xiongnu period and lack a good chronology.

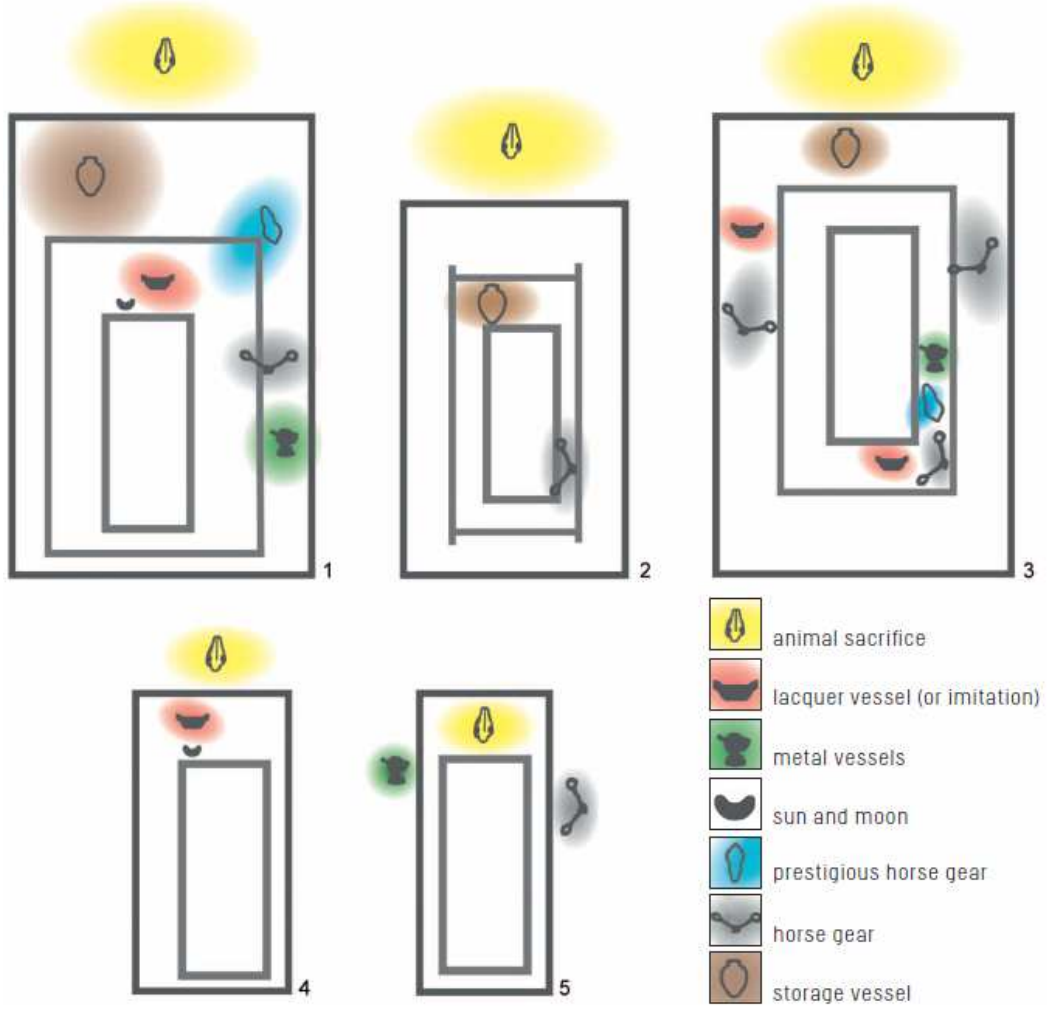


Figure 7: Deposition of artefacts in grave chambers (Brosseder 2009, 266).
(1. Gol Mod T20, 2. Il'Movaia Pad' T54, 3. Tsaaram T7, 4. Tahiltin-Hotgor T64 and 5. Tahiltin-Hotgor T82)

The artefact placement in monumental tombs (fig 7) is homogeneous and shared among all tombs that are included in Brosseders' article. This shows that there is a shared belief, value system and interconnection of the leading groups (*Ibid*., 2009). In the circular burials there is some more variation. Some objects or animal remains are placed in a different space. However, the type of objects are relatively the same. This suggest again that the people had a shared identity

In all cases animal skulls and lower bones are deposited outside the grave chambers. In burials with a chariot an additional animal deposition was made at the level where the chariot is.

Chapter 2.4: Synthesis

There are a lot of gaps in the historical timeframe of the Xiongnu, this, and the fact that they did not have their own historical record, does not allow to give a precise description of the polity. However, the descriptions of this empire are useful to create a historical background for further interpretation.

The internal organisation and struggles might be reflected in the burial patterns. It might be expected that both military and administrative elites might be represented in cemeteries. However, it can not be assumed that the chanyu is buried in the largest grave with the best quality of goods. This is not a restriction for the interpretation of reopened graves.

It remains uncertain how the territories looked like after the civil war. Differences in mortuary treatment could be a sign for newly established courts, but it is too early in general Xiongnu research to state that the monumental tombs belonged to the Northern or Southern Xiongnu. I will therefore treat them as being one archaeological culture.

In this chapter I have discussed the different types of graves that are considered as Xiongnu. The circular and monumental graves were both subjected to reopening. However, the monumental tombs show more traces of the reopening of tombs, because the tomb structure is much larger and deeper. These tombs have a different grave structure and are different inside. However, they also share a lot of characteristics. The data presented in this chapter is used as a model of expectations for what I can expect in both pristine and reopened tombs.

The next chapter will be theoretical and deals with issues of what a grave is, how it could be perceived by a society and how people attach to them. I think the attitude towards the grave is important to understand the reopening process.

Chapter 3: Graves as monuments

In this chapter I shall view the graves as a territorial marker, as a monument that can bring people together but also divide and from the ancestor worship viewpoint. These topics are important to consider for this thesis because they might give a better understanding for the reopening of graves.

"Monuments and memorials exist as a means of fixing history. They provide stability and a degree of permanence through the collective remembering of an event, person or sacrifice (Rowlands & Tilley 2006, 500)".

I think a grave is the perfect example of such a monument and memorial. It is a place where a dead person is remembered and honoured. Following Rowlands & Tilley (2006, 500) monuments can be "spaces of public display and ritual". In the landscape, monuments are spaces where people are remembered, and therefore the embodiment of power (Boyer 1994, 321). Graves both have the function of remembering a person and are a signal of the territory that is owned.

Following Lévy-Strauss the dead may symbolize legitimation of the social order and may justify land rights (Levy-Strauss 1973, 320). In the Mongolian period the body of the Khan could only be buried in his sacred homeland. The place where he was buried gave the people that inhabited the area the right to the land that is protected by their ancestor spirits. If the remains and artefacts in a grave were destroyed ,this weakened the clan (Drobyshev 2006, 68-85). These burials of high placed persons may be used to strengthen or weaken a clans' right to make use of the land. The graves legitimize the bloodline and give more power to the descendants.

In the Xiongnu period the highest placed person was called the '*chanyu'*. This was the sacred supreme ruler by the grace of heaven (Di Cosmo 1999). Weiner's use of the term 'cosmological authentication' might be relevant in this context. Her work is based on ethnographical observations in Polynesia to describe the exchange of objects in the context of religion and power relations. The term cosmological authentication is used to point out how "material resources and social practices link individuals and groups with an authority that transcends present social and political action" (Weiner 1992, 4). The chanyu used this

cosmological authentication to legitimize his position. After his death he might have had a special treatment, because he was the supreme leader. This might also be practised to other important people, for example people of the aristocracy, religious or political. This could be important for the interpretation of reopened graves, because graves had been reopened on all Xiongnu cemeteries. The persons or cultures that are responsible are unknown, as well as their motivations for reopening a tomb.

Chapter 3.1: Territoriality / sacred landscapes

"*Human activities become inscribed within a landscape such that every cliff, large tree, stream, swampy area becomes a familiar place. Daily passages through the landscape become biographic encounters for individuals, recalling traces of past activities and previous events and the reading of signs*" (Tilley 1994, 27).

Such a place could be a grave. People of the same tribe see this grave as a memory of the life of a deceased person. Other tribes might have a different attachment to this monument. The landscape could be interpreted as a medium where human activities and events took place. It is socially produced and always open for transformation and change (Tilley 1994, 11). One of such spaces is a territory. A territory can stay the same, expand, decline or be moved. However, important places are part of the territory, but do not define it (Ibid,. 39).
The landscape is a place where people and groups are implemented in systems of power (*Ibid*., 26). In the Xiongnu-period there was constant pressure from surrounding polities. To name a few, the Han empire, the Wuhuan and the Xianbei. The historical records tell that there were several expansions and contractions of the Xiongnu territory. Even within the Xiongnu empire there were several power struggles between some people who claimed to be the supreme ruler, which eventually divided the Xiongnu in a Northern and Southern polity (Barfield 1989).

During the Mongolian period the human remains and artefacts in graves of conquered tribes were destroyed to weaken the clan and the land where the conquered tribe belonged to (Drobyshev 2006, 68). Drobyshev uses historical sources to draw these conclusions on. For the interpretation of reopened Xiongnu

graves his analysis is useful for providing a background to show what measures could be taken to prevent that a grave was reopened and what actors might be active to do this. Viewing the graves from this viewpoint does not provide a full explanation, because the graves could also be reopened by the descendants of the buried to do secondary rituals.

The grave of a ruler would only be buried in its sacred homeland. Because this burial is situated in this homeland, it gives the rulers' tribe the right to the land and protection from the ancestor spirits (*Ibid*., 68-85).

Chapter 3.2: Graves bringing people together

In this section I shall describe the social function of graves. This is important because the deceased did not bury him or herself, but some organisation must have existed behind the death of an individual.

For the construction of a tomb for a highly placed person the surviving relatives are being called together. This is the social context where the death of an individual is commemorated and celebrated. They reflect their perception of death and the relationships that the living had with the deceased (Parker Pearson 1993, 203).

However, the tomb might conceal or express power relations in a society that is done by the manipulation of the dead by the living. Changing mortuary 'advertisements' may express changing social power relations (Parker Pearson 1982, 112). This advertisement can be interpreted as showing the power that an individual has through the expenditure of the mortuary ritual or the deposition of gifts. This would affect all those who took place in the ritual of the dead as a living force, because they gained power through the gifts for the deceased (*Ibid*., 112). This 'living force' might be interpreted as the backdrop for ancestral veneration. However, this veneration could also be used against a culture. In power struggles these tombs might be used to gain control over an area or people. In the Mongol empire for example, the tombs of rulers were used to gain control over the people that lived in a conquered area. These tombs could be destroyed as a strategy to subject the conquered people (Drobyshev 2006).

In the next section I shall elaborate on ancestral veneration, because this can not be ruled out that this happened in the Xiongnu period or after that.

Chapter 3.3: Ancestor worship

Worship of ancestors is practised in large parts of the world. However, some cultures from East Asia are seen as having a form of 'formal' ancestor worship (Parker Pearson 1999, 26-27). With ancestor worship I mean that ancestors, or their spirits, are revered with the result that the ancestor(s) are satisfied. This happens, according to Parker Pearson (1999), during rituals which are performed for the ancestors and could be held near tombs. The reopening of tombs could be done as an act of ancestral veneration. This is the outcome of the research of Artelius (2013) and shows that in Viking age Scandinavia people selected Bronze Age graves to perform ritual actions and bury their own death in the environment of these older tombs. The Bronze Age tombs were reused and sometimes the grave was reopened to retrieve objects. The rituals performed could be the construction of a funerary pyre, digging of a hole in the tomb or have a feast. This is a type of ancestral veneration that is directed towards an 'ancestor' that was probably not their own. However, they inhabited the same lands. In an animistic worldview, where spirits inhabit the land, the spirits of the Bronze Age people might still be active. To keep these spirits 'happy' sacrificial offerings were needed. This shows a much more friendly attitude and use of graves from other cultures than explained in the previous chapters.

For the Xiongnu period, several of the above mentioned activities were recorded around monumental tombs by Konovalov (2008). Some of these activities could have taken place during the funerary ritual. The evidence of selective deposition of animal bones in the grave chamber suggest that this could only be deposited at the time the deceased was buried, because they are outside the coffin and present in almost every grave. The pyres and reopening holes are more difficult to date and therefore to exclude as a possible act of ancestral veneration. The pyres could be made at any time: at the beginning of construction of the tomb, during the deposition of the deceased or even long after the closure of the tomb. The pyres could be the only indication that the grave was used for ceremonial purposes after the burial.

It is obvious that the tomb had to be closed before it could be reopened. There are some tombs that could be used to date the reopening, such as a tomb with a wooden cage construction. The C14 dating of wood samples shows that old wood was used for coffins, and therefore wood is an unreliable source to date. The wooden cage construction could provide an earlier date than the period where it was used for the reopening. An earlier date would only be significant if it has a later date than the burial has, because it can give an indication to whether the tombs were reopened after or during the Xiongnu period. These remains had not been dated and would provide important evidence for the study of reopened tombs. However, the dating of these cage construction lies beyond my scope.

Chapter 3.4: Synthesis

In this chapter I made a framework for the interpretation of graves as monuments. Such a monument can be seen as a power expression, or as a mark in the landscape demarcating the place were the ancestors reside. If a different culture conquers the area the burials could also be used to show their power. Especially when the power of the conquered lies in hierarchical legitimation by lineage.

To sum up what this means for the case study; there were possibly secondary rituals that took place after the burial construction. This burial could be the target of post depositional processes. However, it is impossible to tell whether the reopening process is hostile or done by people who regarded the deceased as their ancestors.

In the next chapter a framework for the interpretation of the material culture shall be explained. This is necessary because I believe the tombs might not only be reopened to perform ‘rituals’, but also to retrieve objects or bones.

Chapter 4: Interpreting material culture in mortuary contexts

> "People make things powerful," but things also "make people powerful" (Wiener 2007, 54).

With this in mind I want to concentrate on what the material culture in a grave means. I start with division of different spaces inside a tomb, because these could reflect different stages in the mortuary ritual and the placement of objects could also inform about their importance. The placement in different spaces could also say something about the identity of the deceased.

Next I shall introduce the concepts of inalienable objects and prestige goods, because these are useful tools to make a distinction between tombs that are reopened for personal gain or because their biography.

Chapter 4.1: Ritual spaces inside a tomb

If I assume that there is a distinction between different spaces inside a tomb, this would become a powerful tool to trace why a tomb would have been reopened. If one specific area is constantly the target of the people who reopened the grave, this space or the things inside it could have special significance. According to Flad, different spaces in a grave might reflect a different phase in the mortuary ritual (Flad 2002). The way I interpreted this is that these spaces can be both inside a grave and outside. If a grave contains a grave chamber and a coffin it could be explained as different stages in the burial process and the objects that are found within this chamber are connected to the stage of the ritual.

Following Shelach, who states that the objects closest to the body were probably most significant for telling something about the identity of the deceased (Shelach 2009).The objects that lie closest to the body might have had the closest ties with the person. I assume that these can all be found in the coffin, because a strong indication exist that utilitarian objects are found in the grave chamber(s) and more personal objects in the coffin. I will further explore this when I discuss the graves in the case study. Following Brück and Fontijn, the mourners placed the objects in the grave. They grouped these "objects in particular locations

relative of the body" of the deceased. The organisation of these objects do not necessarily mean that they only communicated the personal prestige of the deceased (Brück and Fontijn 2013, 360).

Hanks acknowledges that there are certain zones for the deposition of artefacts, animal and human remains (Hanks 2002, 367). I see the utilitarian category as objects that are used in daily life, but are not closely connected to only one person. These can be objects like cauldrons, horse gear, lacquer and metal vessels. I consider weapons and adornment as something more personal. ‘More personal’ as in that they were more closely connected to the deceased. However, these objects might be significant for more people than the deceased.

In the next section I will go into further detail about what these objects can tell about the identity of a person

Chapter 4.2: Identity of the dead

Identity by itself is quite a problematic word to use as demonstrated by Leve (2011). In the contemporary world it is embedded in life, in the sense of being, or of belonging to something. This can be for example age, ethnic, national, religious or sexual. The sense of belonging to a recognisable social group is this sense of belonging (*Ibid.*, 513). Identity is often used as a tool to distinguish graves from different cultures. Some examples of what is being researched are status, rank, power, gender and kinship. For the status rank and power the grave can tell something about the social organisation. Some parameters like grave size, depth, spatial organisation can be interpreted. Grave goods can also be used as a tool to interpret these topics (Parker Pearson 1999). However, this does not mean that the biggest grave with the richest grave goods is the highest placed person in society (Brosseder 2009; Brück and Fontijn 2013).

Following Brück and Fontijn (2013) the mourners placed the objects in the grave. They grouped these "objects in particular locations relative of the body" of the deceased. The spatial placement of these objects do not necessarily mean that they only communicated the personal prestige of the deceased (Brück and Fontijn 2013, 360).

Some artefact types are only found in the largest and richest graves, and may therefore be linked to socio-political status. Necessarily, Shelach makes a

distinction between ‘qualitative symbols’ and ‘quantitative symbols’. The first is linked to the quality of the interred objects, the latter is the amount of artefacts in a grave which can be a marker for social stratification (Shelach 2009, 88).

“In societies with a clear hierarchical grading, and where such grading is symbolised through mortuary sumptuary rules, one would expect to find strong correlation between the amount of labour invested in various aspects of the grave and the social status of the individual buried in it” (*Ibid*,. 88). This means that you would expect less artefacts in a smaller grave in comparison with the larger graves. In the Xiongnu society the chanyu stood at the top level of such a hierarchical grading of society (Honeychurch and Amartuvshin 2006). For this thesis I do not want to attempt to identify the tombs of this political and military leader and therefore it should be sufficient to state that there was such a grading. However, the graves that I deal with could possibly be from the chanyu, but also from people that fulfilled a lower position.

However, when the Xiongnu tombs are explored in Chapter 5 it becomes clear that, in graves that were not reopened, there are certain object categories deposited in the coffin when there is a grave chamber with multiple spaces. For example, bows, arrows, personal adornments are often found in the coffin. Horse harnesses, pots and metal vessels are often found in the inner and outer coffin. These seem to have similarities in the arrangement of objects. For this reason I follow Shelach who states that objects that are placed close to the body of the deceased tell something about his or her identity (Shelach 2009). However, the other artefacts might also communicate significant messages about the identity of the death. My interpretation is that objects that are placed in the coffin are most tightly connected to the life of the deceased and objects in the inner and outer grave chambers form part of a social deposition.

Brück and Fontijn rather see objects as networks of exchange that links artefact biographies with people. The material components of the objects are entangled with memory and identity. These artefacts create particular kinds of persons. The identity of a person is constituted by the gifts he or she offers. (Brück and Fontijn 2013, 363). Weiner (1992, 5) states that the power of the cosmological domain becomes significant through exchange. When an object is deposited in a grave it reflects the relationships that the deceased had with the surroundings and thus his or her status. Whether the objects that are deposited in

the grave are gifts that communicate the personal ties with people or states, or whether items that belonged to the deceased, they both reflect aspects of the identity of the deceased. It may well be that items become important through exchange as well as personal belongings.

In the Han empire there were prescribed rules for the burial of high placed persons and military officials. This is an indication that individual status could be reflected in the burials at the time of the Xiongnu. Polosmak (2008a) suggests that such reflection of status in burial is also visible for Xiongnu monumental tombs. However, the timeframe in which these monumental tombs were built does not cover the entire Xiongnu period (Brosseder 2009) and these tombs are not equally dispersed in the Xiongnu territory.

In the next section I shall further elaborate on the role that artefacts can play

Chapter 4.3: (In)alienable objects

Following Weiner that inalienable objects were "signs and symbols of authority and power" which were deliberately kept out of circulation in exchange networks (Weiner 1992, 6). If we acknowledge that the chanyu is the ultimate source of power in the Xiongnu empire, it might become possible to recreate how this power was distributed among the lower ranks of society. According to Weiner (1992, 5) we "must see how power is constituted through rights and accesses to these cosmological authentications that give value to certain kinds of possessions which are fundamental to the organisation of exchange". The chanyu was probably the person who had the best papers to get access to such possessions, which circulated through long distance trade networks (Brosseder 2011).

Brück and Fontijn proposed that artefacts in a grave should not be seen as alienable objects or prestige goods, but as inalienable objects. These are linked to identities, biographies and cultural values (Brück and Fontijn 2013, 368). Because certain object types, like metal vessels or weapons appear only in graves and others only in other contexts, this is called 'selective deposition'. In Bronze Age Europe for example, there was such a selective process with swords which were rarely found in graves but they were regularly found in wet places. When they are found in such a context they were deposited there because they had a certain life-

path and not solely for their form (*Ibid*., 368). In Xiongnu graves such selective deposition might also have taken place, because there is striking uniformity in the deposition of these objects.

Ethnographic research has recorded many examples of objects that are being used by the court culture. These objects are outward signs of power. For example in nineteenth century Indonesia the *kris* dagger was such an object; it was supposed to have sacred and magical powers that are operative in “all times and places” (Wiener 2007, 49). Moreover, it is suggested that some of these ‘treasures’ were put in the grave, because they represent the fundament of kingship (Steuer 2006, 21). Next to its sacred and magical power, it also played a major part in politics. It was thought by the Dutch colonial government that regalia objects were an important element in the formation and functioning of authority. If the government did not get control over these regalia it could lead to difficulties to their control of the colony (Wiener 2007, 50). For this reason state regalia could play an important role in the domination of conquered people. These objects could also embody certain historic moments, social relations, subjective states and experiences (Ibid., 51). If such an object is removed from circulation and put into a grave it could be that people want to retrieve these objects to claim power.

According to Steuer the grave goods might not be useful anymore for the deceased at a certain moment. At this moment the society might want to reuse these items and therefore retrieve them from the grave (Steuer 2006, 21). However, Mills suggests that inalienable objects can both be used to establish and defeat hierarchies. This defeat of hierarchy is used when these objects are used to "promote communal identities, rather than the identities of particular leaders". These artefacts may be destroyed and replaced (Mills 2004, 240). The chanyu is venerated both within his lifetime and after his death, and therefore also the objects that gathered a life history and gained value. If these objects remain in the grave, they could be used for the protection and legitimation of the hierarchical ordering within the empire. When there are internal struggles or when a new hierarchy is created these objects might be reused to legitimize the social order, or to create a new order. This can be done by destroying or keeping the objects.

In the Viking age objects from Bronze Age barrows might also have been reused to create or confirm a certain ideology and the right to the land. This reuse

was interpreted as a resistance against the (Christian) transformations that took place in their world (Artelius 2013). However, if an item could be reused for the legitimation of land claims it could also be used as a counter measure to avoid land claims. In this case such an object needs to be destroyed.

If the artefacts are the target of a reopening I would expect to find a difference between pristine tombs and reopened tombs, because the possibility exists that objects were retrieved from the grave. Smaller artefacts that are easily overlooked could be left behind, while the larger artefacts were easier to take away. If these remains are retrieved because of their biography two patterns can appear. The first is that of a respectful treatment where the grave is disturbed as less as possible. The second possibility could be that parts of the grave are totally emptied, in this case small remains would be expected.

The chanyu might also be venerated himself because he has the grace of Heaven. For this reason I shall discuss the possibility of human remains as inalienable objects in the next section.

Chapter 4.4: The sacred body

In churches and Buddhist temples there are relics of 'holy' people that contain human remains (bones or cremation ash) and sometimes monarchs are buried inside churches, like the Dutch royal family in Delft, The Netherlands. The rank and power of these high placed persons remains intact after they were buried (Steuer 2006, 16). Drobyshev researched the funerary rituals in the Mongol empire. Drobyshevs' hypothesis is that after the death of a Khan, his body and artefacts he possessed still had sacred qualities. These remains and artefacts maintained their sacred qualities after they were buried (Drobyshev 2006, 68).

As Steuer has stated, the death of a person can create a chaos for a community where the internal hierarchies should be reaffirmed and this event also influences surrounding communities (translated from Steuer 2006, 13). The ruler of the Mongol empire has a charisma during his (or her) life which is also reflected in the objects that surrounded the person during its life. This charisma is the sacral character of the supreme ruler (Skrynnikova in Drobyshev 2006). After the person is buried in a grave, it can still radiate the charisma it had during its life (Drobyshev 2006, 68).

The remains of an important person could be transformed into objects that could play an important role in society. For example; in the Mongolian period the body, and in particular the head of a person that belonged to the higher positions in society was important, because it embodied its charisma. The head of a leader was also used to demoralize defeated people and to subordinate them (Drobyshev 2006).

In cultures outside Mongolia the heads are also important, for example in Peru; where a debate exists about whether the Peruvian Nasca trophy heads should be considered as being used for ancestral veneration or as being used as "victims of warfare related activities". With a comparison of tooth enamel from 'trophy heads' and Nasca-period burials they conclude that the heads did not come from a distant place. Therefore they were probably not victims of war. The heads are considered as an important individual having an important ritual function (Knudson *et al*. 2008). The trophy heads from the Wari empire in Peru show traces of violence and some of the samples derive from outside the territory. Therefore they are considered as victims of war (Tung and Knudson 2008).

The body and bones of important persons from the New Zealand Maori culture also had a sacred character. The persons with a higher status lived a more ritualized way of life in comparison with people of lower status. The head had a special place with the Maori. When they went to war the head of an enemy was cooked and eaten to destroy the energy. This energy called *tapu,* which was an energy that needed to be resolved, because it was not fit for lower placed persons. By eating the brains of an enemy, this energy could be resolved and the person could live as a 'normal' person again (Fletcher 2007, 72-73). These are examples of cultures where the body and the head are treated with special care. They can be used to humiliate enemies or as token for ancestral veneration. For the Maori and the Mongols historical sources tell about the special charisma that high status persons seem to have. This charisma might give a grave a special significance.

Rowlands and Tilley suggest that "'absent' or 'missing bones' were taken out of these monuments to circulate as relics among the living or deposited in other monuments" (Rowlands & Tilley 2006, 510). Should all body parts be removed or can a part be sufficient? And what about the objects that were buried with the body?

Parts of the human body might be treated as artefacts, because they were used as heirlooms by the participant (Brück 2006). This could also be the case with the Xiongnu. A bone that was missing in a first century BC womans' grave at the Egyin Gol cemetery was deposited among the bones of animals in another grave. This had been interpreted as a human sacrifice (Murail *et al*. 2000). However, it could also be a relic. I think it is significant that a human bone is deposited in another grave. The person whom this bone was taken from also had a significant status, because she was buried.

If such attitude towards the human remains exists for Xiongnu graves I would expect to find similar patterns of body treatment in the reopened graves or different treatments for the grave types. For example, I would expect that a skull is consequently absent in reopened graves. If such a pattern is not identifiable the conclusion would be that the human body was not the target.

Since burial in flexed supine position is typical for Xiongnu graves, I would expect that all bodies would be deposited with great care. In reopened tombs I would expect to find a skeleton that either had been disturbed, but still in anatomical order and possibly some 'missing' bones, or a more destructive form where a large quantity of the human bones are out of anatomical context or missing.

In the next section a different approach will be discussed, because when there is a power-shift the new people in charge might not appreciate the biographies that are attached to objects, people and graves and therefore transform or destroy the objects.

Chapter 4.5: Prestige goods systems

A prestige goods system is based upon the assumption that a hierarchy exists between objects. These can be symbols of power and the value can be given by looking at the difficulty of the production process, rareness of the material and technological processes. These might result in control over the access to these objects and materials (Kenoyer 1991).

However, Brück and Fontijn (2013, 368) state that patterns of selective deposition of objects are not linked to wealth or prestige goods. Because the reason behind the reopening is one of the aspects that I would like to research in

this thesis, I will include the prestige goods theory anyway to test it with the available data. This motivation for a reopening from the inalienable objects viewpoint can be looting, secondary burial processes by descendants or desecration. From the prestige goods the personal gain of wealth or the acquisition of these prestigious objects can be a motivation of the reopening of a tomb. In this case prestige goods systems and wealth of objects should be considered for imaginary 'looters' might have a different attitude towards the Xiongnu tombs and might not respect the ancestral protection of the burial ground.

Chapter 4.6: Synthesis

In this chapter I have tried to create a framework for the interpretation of material culture in graves. The dead supposedly would have had an identity, or at least a role in society. Certain objects might be associated with the life of the deceased and therefore placed in the grave, others might be a deposition from the mourners to show their powers. These two might be separated in a grave by place of deposition.

If a tomb is reopened there could be two options. Either the people who reopened it wanted the objects (and possibly bones) for the monetary value, or because these things had biographies. In the first case I expect that only the valuable objects are taken out of the grave, because they can be sold for their characteristics. In the latter case I expect that objects, bones or both categories could be taken out of the grave, because the people might attach a value to these 'things' which is based on the history of the object.

In the next chapter the case study sites shall be discussed. This could give some insight in the reopening processes.

Chapter 5: Evidence for the reopening of graves

In this chapter I shall introduce and discuss the graves that I use. Unfortunately it is not possible to present the data for all of the graves, because some data is not published (yet). For this reason not all the tombs are described in the same manner. I shall first present the cemeteries where the graves are found, in this chapter I shall also include some reopened graves. Because for some graves I was not able to retrieve enough information, but do contain valuable information for this research.

Secondly, I will discuss the graves and what was found inside it. I have divided the graves in pristine and reopened graves to show how pristine burials look like and what can be expected to be found inside reopened burials. However, in some cases this categorisation is uncertain, because the data to prove this is unavailable to me. At the end of the chapter I shall synthesize the most important aspects.

Chapter 5.1: Case study cemeteries

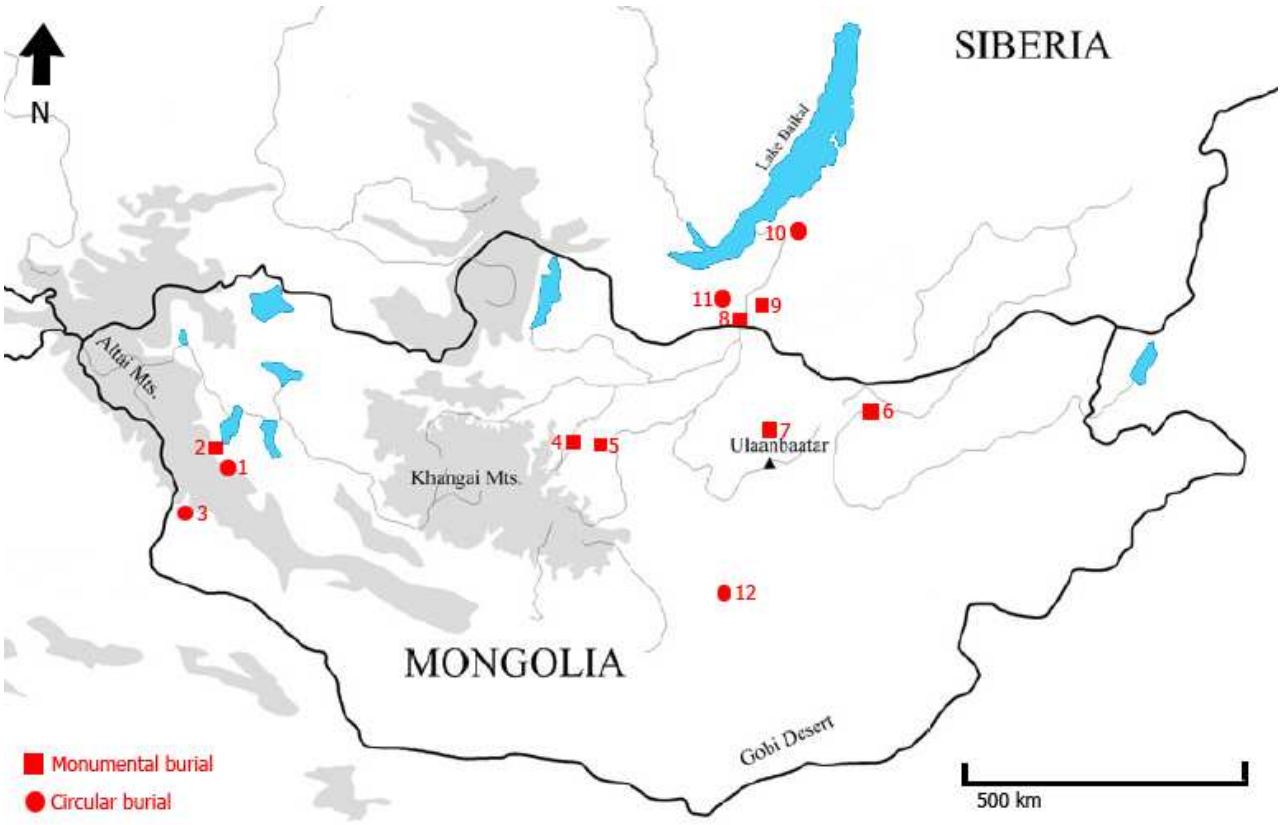


Figure 8: Casestudy sites

1. Shombuuzin Belchir
2. Tahiltin-Hotgor
3. Khökh Ürüüriin Dugui-II
4. Gol Mod II
5. Gol Mod I (not included in case study)
6. Duurlig Nars (not included in case study)
7. Noin Ula
8. Tsaaram Valley
9. Il'Movaia Pad
10. Ivolga (not included in case study)
11. Derestuy (not included in case study)
12. Baga Gazaryn Chuluu (not included in case study)

In figure 8 all the cemetery sites that are mentioned in this thesis are plotted onto the map. The numbers above show the sites that correspond to the numbers. Below follows a short introduction to each of the sites.

Shombuuzin Belchir

Shombuuzin Belchir is a circular burial ground. The data of several graves is published as articles and some in books (Miller *et a*l. 2008, Miller *et al.*, 2009b; Miller 2011). Furthermore, this cemetery lies at the western periphery of the Xiongnu empire and the mortuary ritual might be different than in the 'core'(Miller 2011). There are only three dates of graves from this cemetery. The dates assigned to these graves are from 50 BC to as late as early third century AD (Brosseder *et al*. 2011).

Tahiltin-Hotgor

This small cemetery consist of both monumental tombs and satellite burials. Both types are in balance (Miller *et al*. 2009a, 300-1).

Khökh Ürüüriin Dugui-II

The Khökh Ürüürün Dugui-II cemetery also lies in the western part of Mongolia and thus shares the same 'problem' as the Shombuuzin Belchir burial ground and Tahiltin-Hotgor. The burial ground consist out of six graves next to the floodplain of the Bulgan river. Only one is published in English and is used as a case study. This grave is significant because the relative dating shows a date at the end of the first century BC (Kovalev *et al*. 2011) and could be pristine.

Noin Ula

This cemetery is by far the largest in size of all Xiongnu cemeteries with 212 in burials in total. The burials are clustered in different groups and only 29 of them are monumental tombs (Rudenko 1969 in Brosseder 2009, 250). At a picture (fig 10) of one of the excavated tombs the traces which were left behind are visible in the profile as the dark fill. This was probably the hole that was dug during the reopening.

Figure 9: Reopening hole visible in soil cross section of tomb 31 at Noin Ula (Erezgen 2011, 41).

Gol Mod II

Gol Mod 2 consist out of 400 clustered burials and which is the largest burial ground in grave numbers. Monumental tombs as well as circular burials are present at this site. Some of these circular burials surround the monumental tombs and are interpreted as satellite burials. The site also contains a group with only circular burials, which can not be interpreted as satellite burials, because they do not flank a monumental tomb (Brosseder 2009, 250).

Gol Mod I

With 393 burials and a size that makes it also one of the larger burial ground. The cemetery has a high degree of almost half the burials that are

monumental tombs. These are often flanked by satellite burials (Desroches and André 2009, 317).

Duurlig Nars cemetery

Unfortunately, not much details about this site have been published in English, for this reason I shall only briefly present the available data.
At Duurlig Nars tomb 2, a wooden construction (fig 9) was excavated and documented inside the burial structure. This construction is probably connected to the reopening of the grave (Erezgen 2011).

Figure 10: Cage construction in the reopening hole in Duurlig Nars tomb 2 (Erezgen 2011, 47).

Tsaaram Valley

The Tsaaram cemetery complex consist out of monumental tombs which are surrounded by circular satellite burials (Miniaev 2009). Unfortunately no information is provided concerning the total number of burials. However, the author states that it contains the largest monumental burial outside the Mongolian boders.

Il'Movaia Pad

This cemetery contains a majority of circular burials in contrast with monumental burials. However, these satellite burials are clustered around the monumental tombs and one cluster consists only out of circular burials (Brosseder 2009, 251).

Ivolga and Derestuy

The Ivolga cemetery consist out of 216 circular graves and a large part was excavated where several pristine graves where found. At the circular burial cemetery of Derestuy a small scale excavation took place. Unfortunately, these are published in Russian. However, Brosseder (2007) did a comparative research to the graves from these two cemeteries which focussed on the graves of women. The graves from mature woman contained costume elements such as belt plaques and foreign pottery elements were only discovered in graves from woman.

Baga Gazaryn Chuluu

At Baga Gazaryn Chuluu (BGC) site 510 there is evidence that a grave (EX 08.04) is disturbed by a secondary burial that dates from the 3rd century AD. The primary internment dates from the first century AD. In another grave (EX 06.08) Turk ceramics were found inside the filling of the grave and the burial style of the surface demarcation resembles that from the Turk period (800 AD) (Nelson *et al*. 2011). Following Johannesson (2011, 235-6) these Xiongnu burials were disrupted soon after they had been constructed.

Chapter 5.2: Pristine graves

Only a small part of the burials which are published in a Western language lack evidence that they were disturbed by humans, these can be called pristine. The data of these burials are presented below.

Chapter 5.2.1: Shombuuzin Belchir grave 36

The stones of the surface demarcation of this circular burial were intermixed with that of grave 14 (Miller *et al*. 2009b, 14), which might be a reason why this burial was not reopened because the grave was not recognized during the survey of the cemetery. At the bottom of the pit was a stone cist with a length of one meter with the stone slabs still in place.

Figure 11: Shombuuzin Belchir grave 36 lay-out (Miller *et al*. 2009b, 14).

North of the coffin were several bones of a single sheep. Inside the coffin was a packet made of fur and stitched leather garments that contained an infant whose face had been covered with a silk fabric. The remains were from a child between a half year and a year old. Inside the packet was an amber bead.

Chapter 5.2.2: Shombuuzin Belchir grave 12

In this circular burial a cist was found at a depth of 134 cm deep and which measured 270 cm in length.

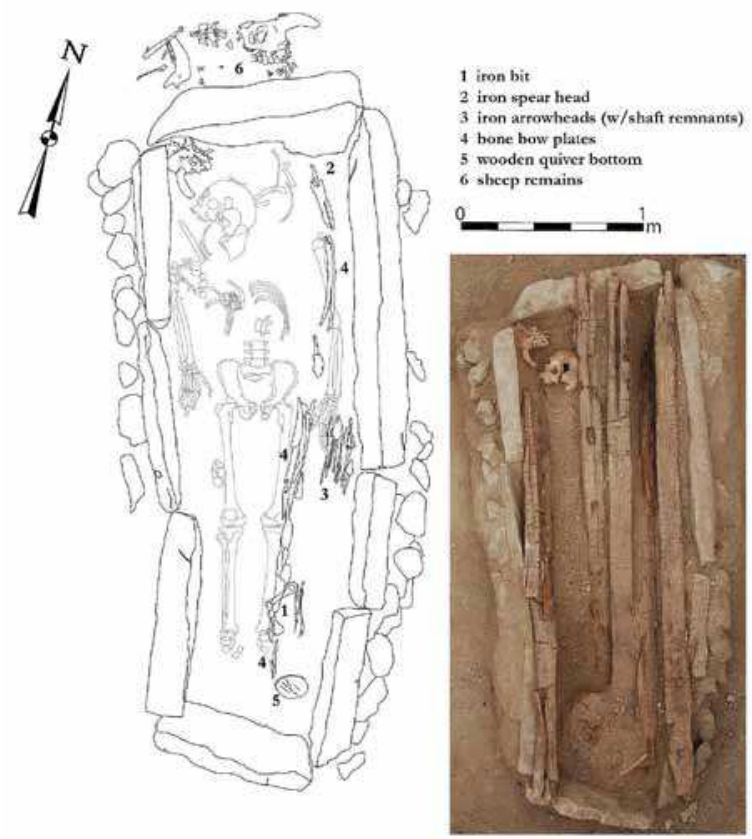


Figure 12: Shombuuzin Belchir grave 12 lay-out (Miller *et al*. 2009b).

The cist contained the remains of a young adult between 15 and 18 years old that was probably a man. The bones (fig 12) show signs of displacement which means they were probably disturbed by bioturbation, because the lid was still in place.

Bone remains of a bow that was probably placed as an intact piece were found next to the skeleton, as well as iron arrowhead, an iron bit, an iron spearhead, remains of the bottom of a wooden quiver and an amber bead (Miller 2009b, 16).

However, figure 12 shows that the lid does not completely covers the cist. The only indications that this burial was not reopened are the 'completeness' of the skeleton and artefacts is an indication that the burial was not disturbed by humans. Unfortunately the filling of the grave structure is not described, because disturbance might have been visible when the grave was excavated. However, in the field these differences are hard to recognize because the soil is sandy in this region.

Chapter 5.2.3: Shombuurzin Belchir grave 13

At the bottom (140 cm) of this circular burial is a stone cist with its lid of stone slabs still in place and the deceased within (fig 13). Some foot bones were slightly disturbed, which is interpreted as bioturbation. The cist measured 290 in length.

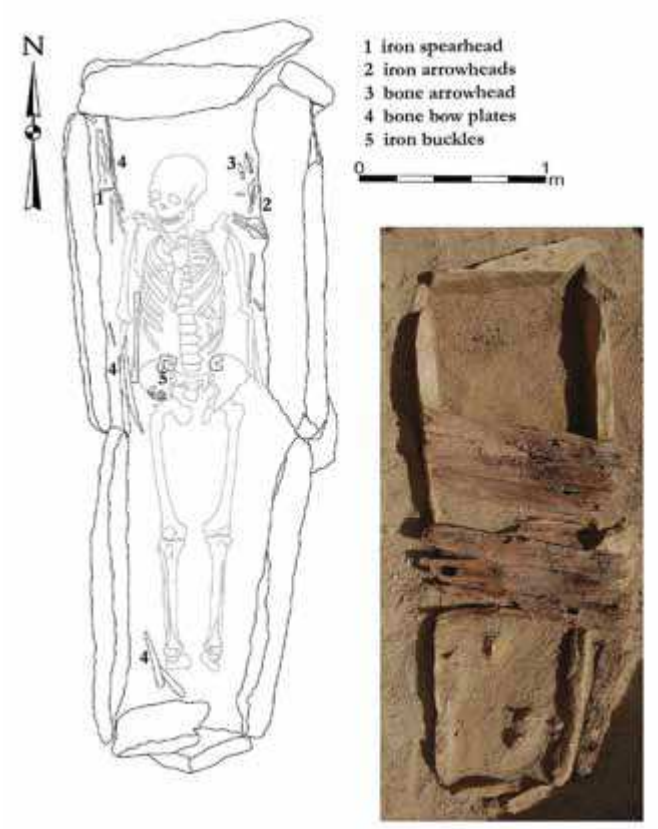


Figure 13: Shombuuzin Belchir grave 13 lay-out (Miller *et al.* 2009b, 15).

Bone remains of a bow were found next to the skeleton, as well as iron arrowhead, a bone arrowhead, an iron spearhead, iron buckles and a bone pin. In the cist of this burial a relatively undisturbed male adult between 35 and 45 in age was found (Miller *et al*. 2009b, 16). The wooden planks that covered the cist did not cover the complete skeleton. However, the articulation of the skeleton and remains of the bow are an indication that this burial is not disturbed by human activity.

Chapter 5.2.4: Shombuuzin Belchir grave 11

The surface demarcation of this circular burial was a small pile of stones. At the bottom of the pit at 75 cm below the surface lay a stone cist of 85 cm in length. The cist was undisturbed, because the stone slabs were still covering it.

The cist contained only three bone fragments from a baby (Miller *et al*. 2009b). This is an indication that the remains were not put there as a whole is indicated by the fact that the cist is undisturbed. Unfortunately the specific bones are not specified which is regrettable since knowing the kind of bones could informs.

Chapter 5.2.5: Shombuuzin Belchir grave 19

Unfortunately this circular grave is published in Mongolian language and therefore I can only rely on a small description of the burial (Miller 2011) and for further interpretation I can only use figure 14 and observations made in the field, because I helped to excavate this grave until we reached the coffin.

The skeleton in this grave is relatively undisturbed. Only bones from the arms and lower legs are displaced or absent. The smaller bones might have been moved by bioturbation processes and possibly the body was not intact when it was buried. The skeleton is an adult female and a second skeleton of an infant was found at the feet of the female skeleton.

North of the coffin was a ceramic pot shard and sheep bones. Just above the coffin at the north side was found a fragment of a Chinese bronze guiju (TLV) mirror.

Another guiju style mirror fragment was found inside the coffin, as well as a siru style Chinese mirror fragment. Near the head some ceramic beads are found. Near the waist a pair of polished stone rings were found and some lacquer fragments. Under the feet of the adult female was a silk fabric.

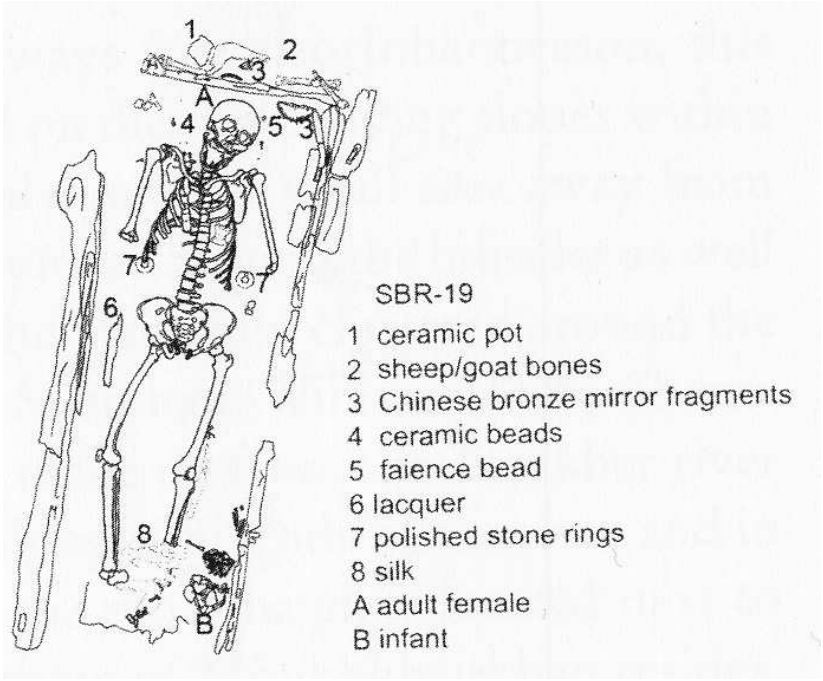


Figure 14: Shombuuzin Belchir grave 19 lay-out (Miller *et al.* 2011, 570).

Chapter 5.2.6: Shombuuzin Belchir grave 2

This circular grave is also published in Mongolian language and therefore I can only use Millers' description in a different article (2011) and figure 15.

The lower part of the skeleton is, judged from the figure, absent. Some bone pieces seem to be on the bottom of the grave which might be due to bioturbation. The upper part of the body is relatively in an anatomical position, which indicates that this was probably not disturbed by human actions.

An iron crescent 'moon' and 'sun' shaped objects were found next to the head, as well as bone chopsticks, a bone bow piece and gold foil. In the waist area parts of a horse harness, a bone tube with a needle, arrow shafts and bone bow pieces were found.

In the north side of the coffin a chopstick was found and in the west side more horse harness pieces.

The disarticulated bow pieces could be caused by bioturbation, the bow was not placed as a whole in the grave or the grave might have been reopened after all. Because of these reasons, I am not convinced whether the grave has been reopened or not.

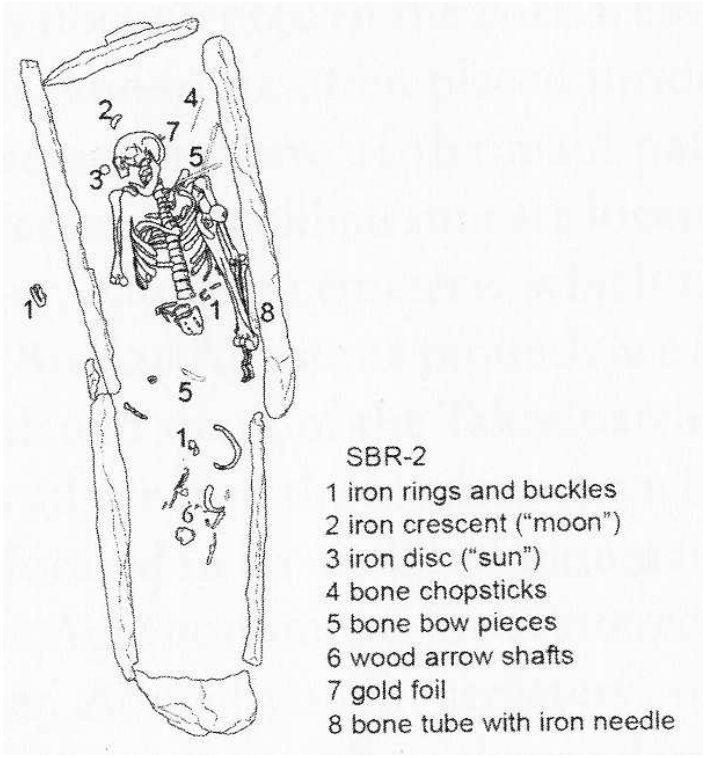


Figure 15: Shombuuzin Belchir grave 2 lay-out (Miller *et al.* 2011, 570).

Chapter 5.2.7: Khökh Ürüüriin Dugui-II grave 1

The diameter of this circular grave is 8 meter and has a cist is at a depth of 3.3 meters. Inside the filling there are two stone 'roofs' (fig 16).

Figure 16: Stone roof of KUDII-1 (Kovalev *et al*. 2011, 294).

The description of the structure inside the grave is vague, because a stone division seem to have been made. However, I shall describe where the artefacts and human remains are found. Some images are provided in the original publication (Kovalev *et al*. 2011) but do not provide a good overview of what is found in what place.

The cist is made from stone slabs and is 3 meters long by 1.5 meters long. According to Kovalev (2011, 295) a wooden chest possibly stood in the cist but decayed because of ground water. In the western part of the cist the remains of a person lying on his back were found.

The grave goods are oriented in three 'zones'. In the western zone, next to the body, an iron spear point was found. At the right hand was a thin gold foil and at the waist a whetstone and a sword sheath of jasper were excavated. In the area of the head lay two golden earrings and a golden plate. Fragments of bronze and iron arrowheads were found in the eastern zone. Next to the exterior wall an iron buckle with gold inlay, a bronze pot, a bronze bowl, an iron sword and pieces of a sheath were excavated.

At the north side sheep bones and skulls were found and a row of a bronze vessel, a ceramic pot and a spouted pot. In the north-eastern part of the cist elements of a horse harness were found (*Ibid*., 292-6).

The description of this grave does not allow to state with certainty that the grave was not reopened, which Kovalev does in the title of the article. I am uncertain about the reopening, because on figure 16 a large square hole is visible in the stone roof. I do not know how this tomb was excavated and if there are other indications that the grave could have been reopened, therefore I shall stick to the observations of Kovalev.

Chapter 5.2.8: Tahiltin Hotgor 82

This monumental tomb contains a single burial chamber with an intact coffin inside (fig 17). Miller states that the description of this tomb is not clear and that during the excavations between 1987 and 1990 only a pit to gain access to the burial chamber was dug, what makes the grave not hundred percent complete (Miller *et al*. 2008, 28-9). However, I think that this grave contains valuable information because it is the only monumental tomb that has not been reopened.

The skeleton of a woman was found in complete condition. Next to the skull were bronze sticks and a gold earring with precious stones. Next to the feet another bronze stick was found. Golden and iron belt pieces where found in the waist area.

On the west side, outside the grave chamber, was a bronze spouted pot and on the eastern side were the remains of horse bridle pieces (*Ibid*. 28-9).

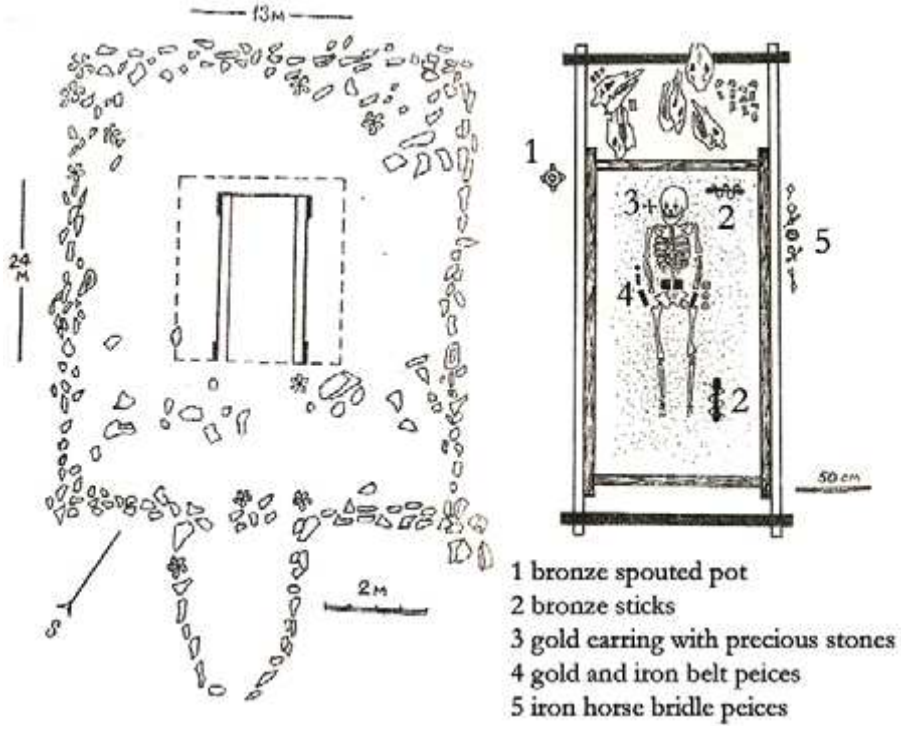


Figure 17: Tahiltin Hotgor grave 82 lay-out (Miller *et al.* 2008, 29).

Chapter 5.3: Reopened graves

In this section I shall introduce graves that show signs of reopening. It should be kept in mind how 'pristine' tombs are organised and what was found in them, because I shall discuss these differences in the Discussion chapter.

Chapter 5.3.1: Shombuuzin Belchir grave 15

The surface demarcation of this circular burial measured 8 meters and had a wooden decorated coffin placed at a depth of 230 cm, which was packed in stones and support beams.

The southern part of the wooden coffin was still articulated (Miller *et a*l. 2009b), which is an indication that the target of the reopening was the north side of the grave.

Only some teeth and fragments of ribs were found inside this grave. Based on the length of the coffin (187 cm) and the bones, this grave belonged to an adult.

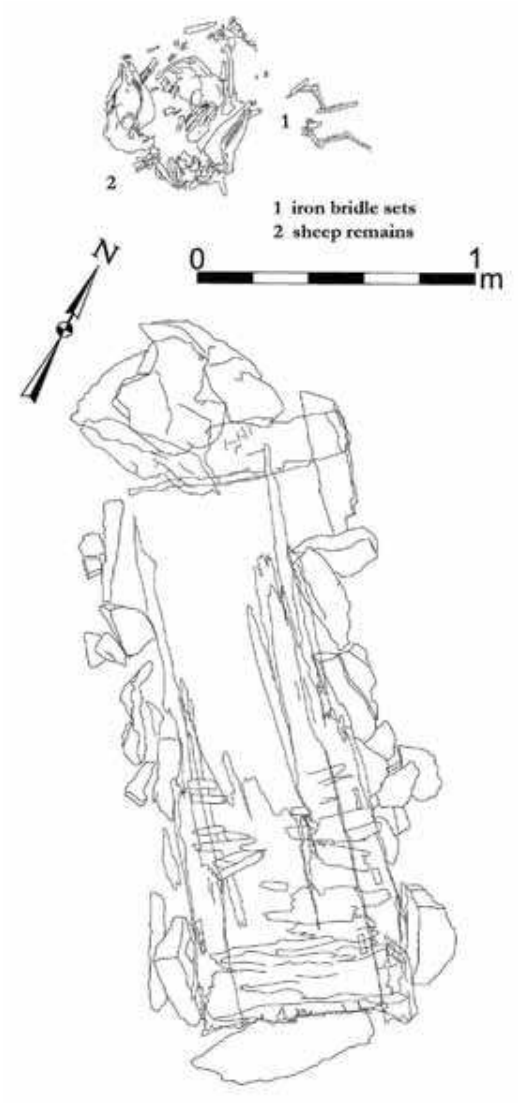


Figure 18: Shombuuzin Belchir grave 15 lay-out (Miller *et al*. 2009b, 11).

For this coffin the description, as well as the picture (fig 18) that shows where the artefacts were found is not clear, because not all the artefacts are included. In this grave a gilded iron belt buckle, thin gold foil strips and fragments of lacquer were found. Outside the coffin was an animal offering of sheep remains and at least two iron bridle sets.

Chapter 5.3.2: Shombuuzin Belchir grave 16

This circular burial is ten meters in diameter and at a depth of 270 cm a coffin was placed. The coffin was packed with stones and wooden beams were placed to support these stones (Miller *et al*. 2009b). These beams have holes in them, which are suggested to resemble holes from a wooden cart (Miller 2012).

For this coffin the description, as well as the picture (fig 19) that shows where the artefacts were found is not clear, because not all the artefacts are included. For this reason I shall only provide details about this if the location is certain.

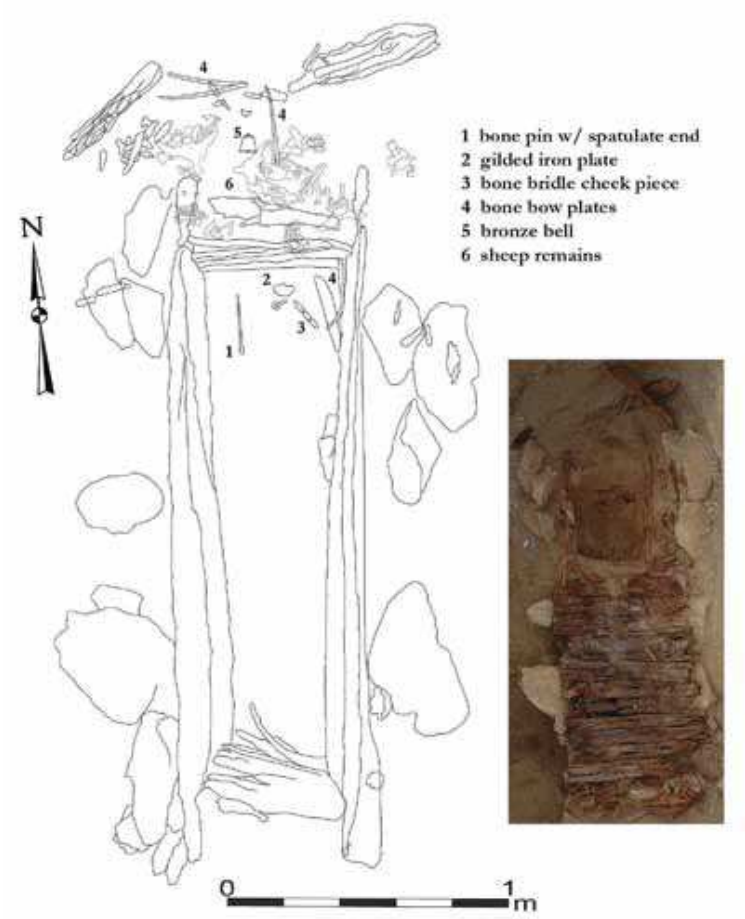


Figure 19: Shombuuzin Belchir grave 16 lay-out (Miller et al. 2009b, 10).

At the north side outside the coffin a pair of bone chopsticks was found. In the niche, north of the grave, a bronze bell, bone bow plates and remains of sheep were found.

In the north side of the coffin a bone cheek piece from a bridle pas found, as well as bone pin and a gilded iron plate.

No bones were found inside the coffin.

The artefacts that were found inside the coffin are relatively small and the placement of the gilded iron plate is different from ‘normal’ tombs. Because normally these are found in the area around the waist of the body. This piece might have been dislocated during the reopening. In figure 19 the wooden beams across the coffin are absent in the northern side. Since there were still artefacts

found inside it is unclear to what extend this tomb was reopened for artefacts. The absence of the body does not necessarily mean that it was retrieved from the grave. However, the possible dislocation of the gilded plate could be caused when a body was taken out of the coffin.

Chapter 5.3.3: Shombuuzin Belchir grave 14

At the bottom of the pit, that is at a depth of 170 cm, a decorated wooden coffin was found with a length of 146 cm. It contained the remains of a four to six year old child which were found in a flexed supine position.

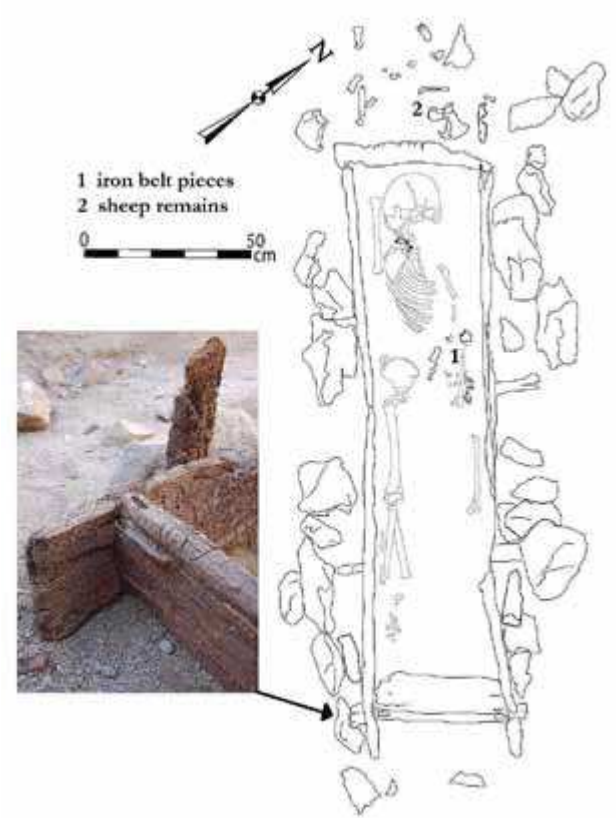


Figure 20: Shombuuzin Belchir grave 14 lay-out (Miller *et al*. 2009b, 13).

At the bottom of the coffin several beads of various materials were excavated as well as iron belt pieces (Miller *et al*. 2009b, 13). Because a textual description of the human remains is lacking I shall interpret them from figure 20. However, I do not know if all bones are drawn onto the picture, because the beads are also missing on the picture. The skull and half of the upper body is present. Half of the pelvic area seems to be missing as well as the lower leg bones from that side. The other side looks like it is relatively undisturbed. One leg or arm

bone is next to the skull, which is the only indication that this tomb was disturbed or reopened. However, according to Miller (2009b) the tomb has been reopened. But the support for this is not covered in the article.

Chapter 5.3.4: Shombuuzin Belchir grave 18

At the bottom of the grave, at a depth of 140 cm below the surface, lies a stone cist (fig 21). The stone slabs that covered the cist were thrown aside when it was opened.

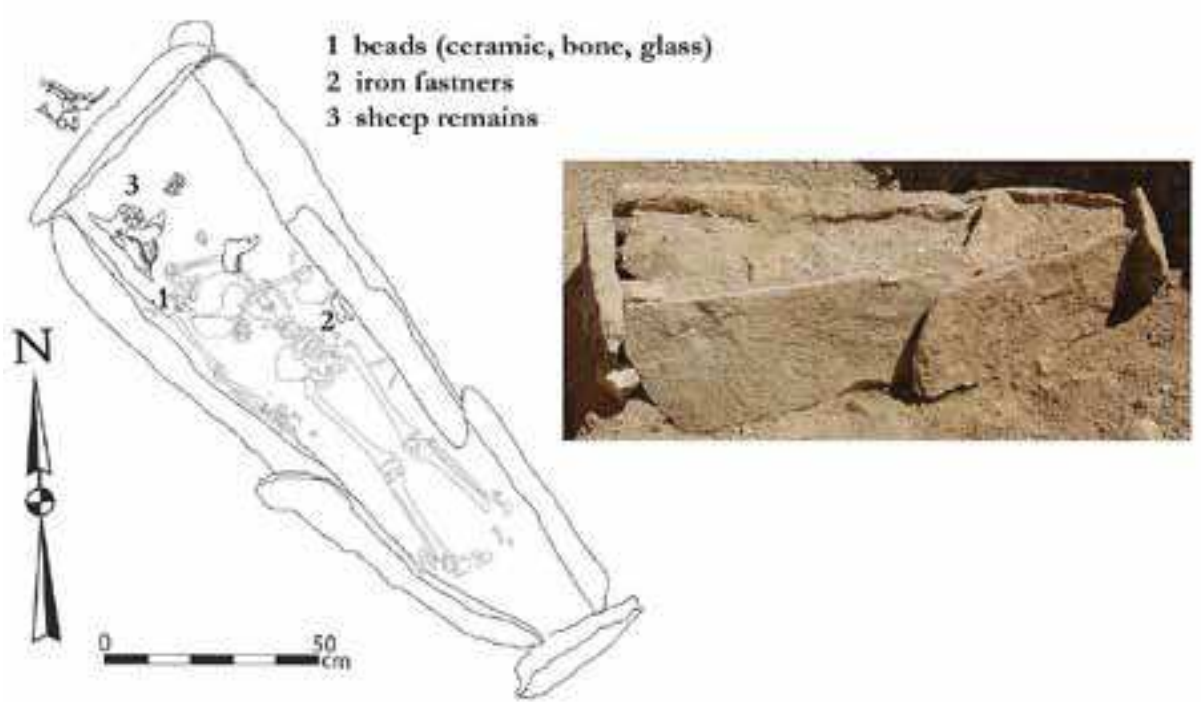


Figure 21: Shombuuzin Belchir grave 18 lay-out (Miller *et al.* 2009b, 14).

The skeleton of the grave is 90 percent complete and belonged to a child between seven and ten years old. The upper part of the body was heavily disturbed (Miller *et al*. 2009b, 14), and judging from figure 14, the head is missing.

At the northern part of the coffin animal parts were excavated. Some beads were found in the area around the neck of the skeleton and an iron belt piece with a bone fastener in the waist area (*Ibid*., 14).

The upper part of the body had been disturbed and the head is absent. Because the stone slab has been thrown aside it is certain that it had been reopened by human action.

Chapter 5.3.5: Shombuuzin Belchir grave 7

This circular burial with a wooden coffin, surrounded by stone slabs, is officially part of a Mongolian publication. However, Miller (2011; 2012) included a picture (fig 22) with a fairly short text. Both publications lack information about the presence of human remains. A skeleton is visible in the north side of the figure, which is probably human because with animals only a selected part of the skeleton is deposited and not a full chest. Miller (2012, 32) states that this grave is "heavily looted", because the wooden beams at the northern part of the coffin are absent. Indeed, the grave seems to be reopened, but without any further description it is impossible to say what exactly was damaged.[1] It seems that, assuming the chest belongs to a human skeleton, the skeleton was pulled out of the coffin.

A wooden vessel lid was found inside the coffin and there might be some more items, which are not recognizable on such a small scale.

At the northwest corner outside the coffin a birch bark container, a wooden ladle and a bronze cauldron were found. On the northeast side sheep bones and a golden circle and crescent, which are interpreted as sun and moon. North of the coffin a pair of bone chopsticks were excavated.

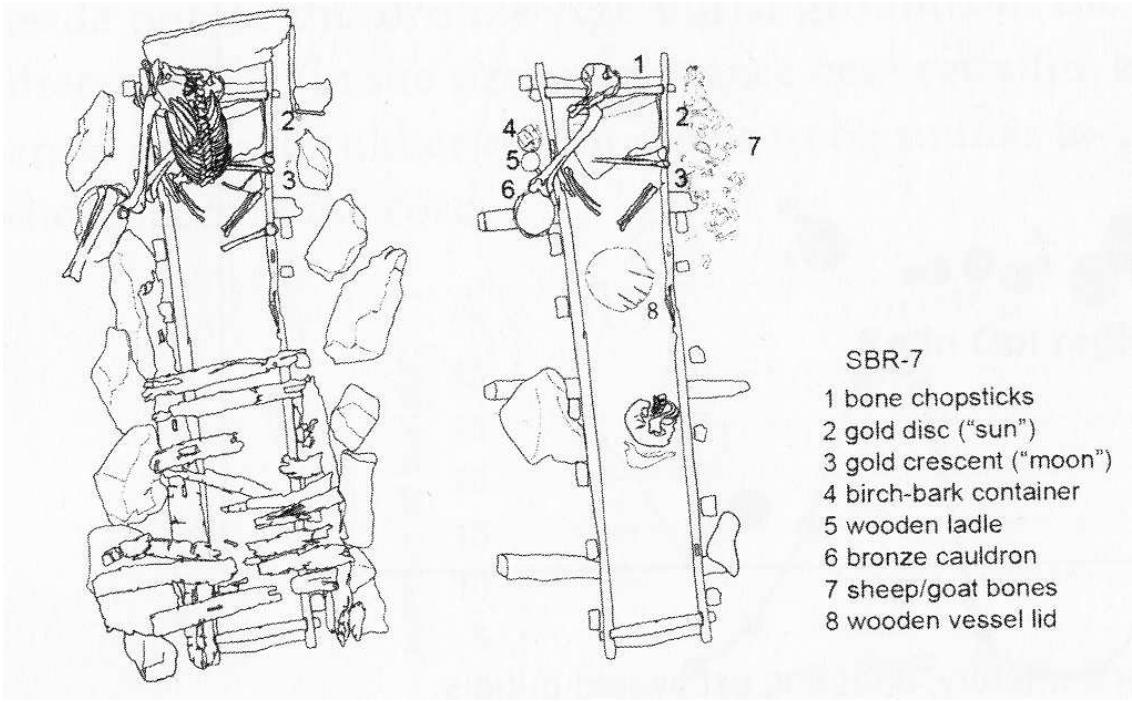


Figure 22: Shombuuzin Belchir grave 7 lay-out (Miller *et al*. 2011, 570).

[1] This might be explained in the Mongolian article by Miller (Miller *et al*. 2011 in Miller 2011).

Chapter 5.3.6: Noin Ula tomb 20

At Noin Ula tomb 20 the traces of a reopening are clearly visible (fig 23). The reopening hole is visible in the cross section as the dark colored soil with large stones in the centre of the burial. The traces of the reopening hole run down from the top, but the remains of a wider hole is visible at a depth of eight meters. Unfortunately Polosmak (2008a) does not mention this. It could mean that the grave had collapsed or that the grave was reopened while it was not completely filled and that a secondary reopening took place when the structure was filled.

At the surface level of this tomb a bowl-shaped depression is visible with a diameter of five meters and a depth of approximately three meters. The inner construction was disturbed by the reopening. The hole that was used was filled with "large stones, clay and thick charred sublayers". The layers of charcoal are interpreted as a melting process, because the ground was frozen. Above the grave chamber was a thick coal layer with a feature that was interpreted as the reopening hole. The hole that measured 50 x 50 centimetres continues through the wooden burial structure. The roof of this structure folded due to ground pressure and the disruption in the burial structure (Polosmak *et al*. 2008a).

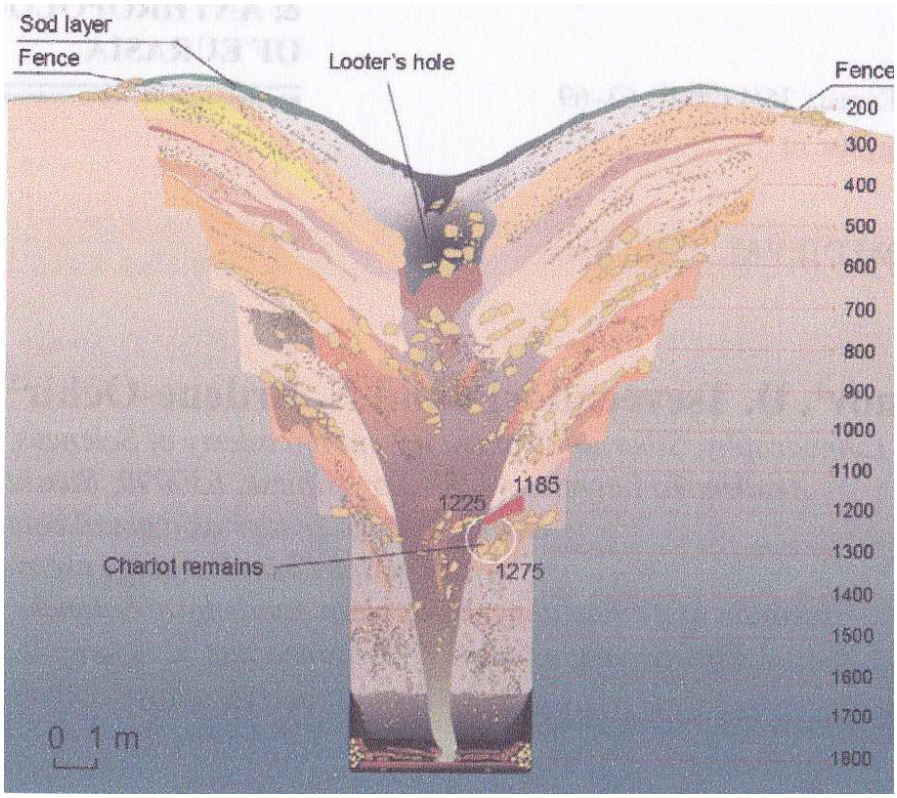


Figure 23: Reopening (or looters) hole in Noin Ula tomb 20 visualised (Polosmak *et al*. 2008b, 64).

Burial chamber

The frame of the inner and outer chamber collapsed. The coffin is shattered which is being interpreted by Polosmak as the result of the reopening (Polosmak *et al*. 2008a). However, the publication is not detailed enough to tell whether it was shattered during the reopening or due to the collapse of the tomb.

Human remains

Only some teeth were found in the burial (Chikisheva *et al*. 2009). According to Polosmak water had entered the grave chamber due to the disruption (Polosmak *et al*. 2008a., 83). The water could have dissolved the rest of the skeletal material. However, there was a felt carpet uncovered at the bottom of the coffin and the wooden beams of the frame were in quite good condition judging from the images in the publication (Ibid., 84). These materials are softer and rot away faster than bones. Therefore I think that there are two possibilities for the absence of the human remains:

- Only the dental remains were buried
- The rest of the body was taken out of the grave during the reopening process

Artefacts

The excavation of the burial chamber revealed several objects. As stated earlier a felt carpet was found at the bottom of the wooden burial chamber floor. Next to the coffin fragments, three coffin bronze handles were found. Fragments of jade artefacts, embroidered silk clothes, a mirror, hairpins made out of tortoiseshell, a censer, lacquer ware, parts of a horse harness and adornments were found on the carpet in the inner and outer chambers (*Ibid*., 85).

Under the fourth ‘roof’ remains of a Han chariot, remains of an umbrella, a deformed metal vessel and a ladle were found. The authors state that the chariot was half destroyed by the reopening hole (*Ibid*., 82). The scale of this destruction is unknown, because no further attention is provided by the authors. However, the reopening hole had been recorded inside the burial (fig 19) and the hole seems to intersect with the chariot.

It is obvious that there was found nothing at the place where the coffin was. Does this mean that no artefacts were deposited in there?

Chapter 5.3.7: Tsaaram valley burial 7

Tsaaram burial 7 was excavated and had two reopening holes (fig 24) that were visible at the level where the chariot was deposited (Miniaev and Sakharovskaia 2008). The reopening holes run down vertically, because the holes are visible again in the roof of the burial chamber. One reopening hole ended in the north side of the coffin. The other hole ended in the outer grave chamber, north of the coffin. The wooden construction had collapsed and deformed many of the artefacts (*Ibid*., 78).

This is the only excavated tomb that contains two reopening holes that are visible at the level where the chariot was discovered, where they intersect the remains of the chariot (*Ibid*., 77). The people who reopened the grave could have made a mistake when they dug one of the holes or they were after artefacts that were buried in the outer chamber. The latter interpretation could be a breakthrough for the interpretations of the other reopened graves, because this shows that not only the artefacts and human remains in the coffin were the target, but also artefacts inside the outer chamber.

Unfortunately a description about whether or not the grave contained human remains is lacking.

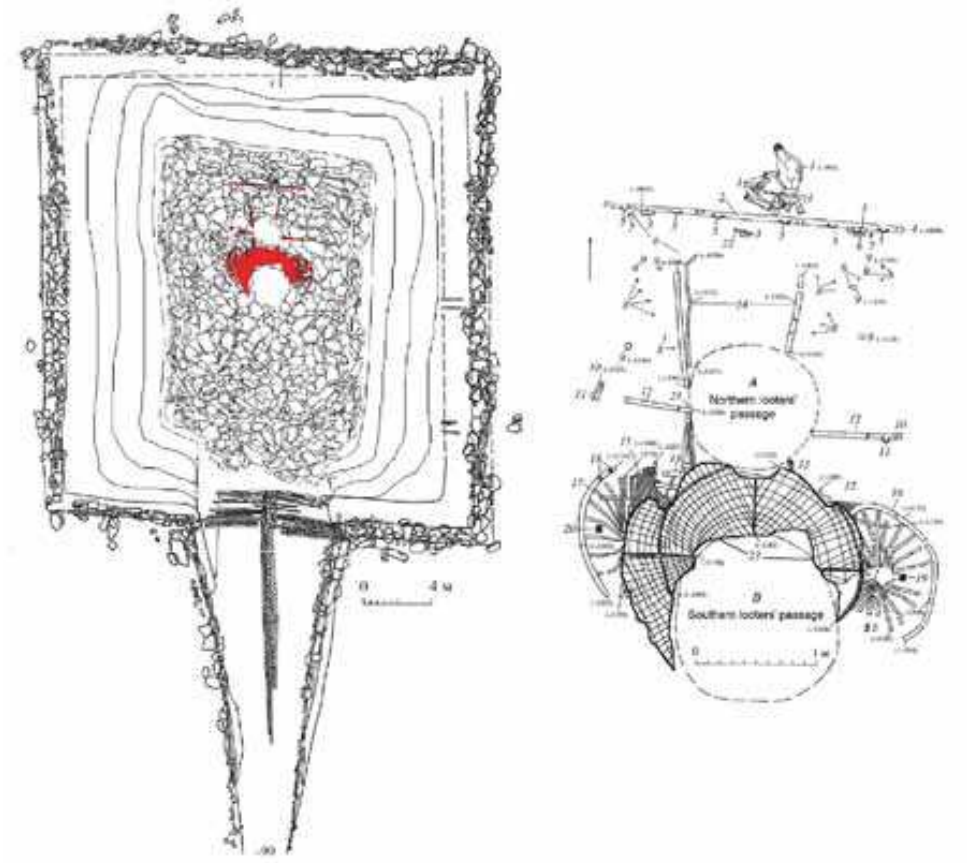


Figure 24: Tsaaram burial 7 with two reopening holes that intersect with a chariot (Miller 2012, 35).

Chapter 5.3.8: Il'Movaia Pad tomb 52

Remains of wood, which could have belonged to a wooden cage construction, had also been discovered at Il'Movaia Pad Tomb 52. Unfortunately the place where they were found was not documented. The passage had an '8' shape at different levels in the burial and started at the depth of 3 meters and continued down to 7 meters (Konavolov 2008, 28). The description of this 8 shape remains unclear. These could be two holes next to each other or referring to the way that the wooden construction was hold together.

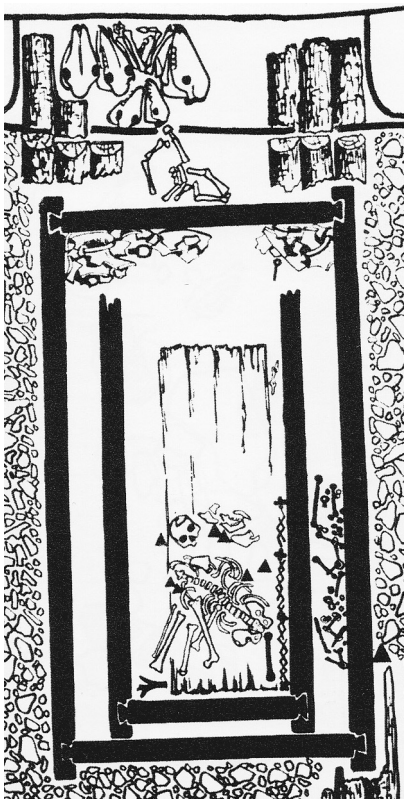


Figure 25: Deposition of the skeleton in tomb Il'Movaia Pad 54 (after Konovalev 2008, Plate 10).

The burial Il'Movaia Pad 54 contained a disturbed skeleton at the bottom of the floor. At the southern side several bones stuck out in the inner chamber. At the spine the upper and lower part of the skeleton was separated. The remains of a human skull were also found, with evidence of burning on it (Konovalev 2008, 28). Unfortunately this is the most detailed description of an internment in a monumental burial. However, the picture (fig. 25) shows how the skeleton was found during the excavation. The skeleton seems to be relative complete. The relative position where the bones are, is an indication that the body was still hold together by tissue during its deposition. Duday and Guillon (2006, 126) state that bones would not be disarticulated if the body was deposited in a grave in 'fresh' condition. It could be that the body was already in state of decay when it was buried and was disarticulated during the deposition process or the disarticulation had been caused during the reopening of the tomb. Vasaliyev (2001; in Polosmak 2008) suggest that the grave was dug after the death and the body was deposited in the grave after a relatively long period, which was ascribed by the status of the individual, which could cause the body to decay. When a body in decay is interred

this could cause disturbance to the arrangements of bones (Duday and Guillon 2006).

Some pottery shards were also found along with the bones, which could be an indication that complete pots were present during the deposition.

Chapter 5.3.9: Gol Mod 2 grave 30

Gol Mod 2 grave 30 is part of a complex of satellite graves which belong to monumental burial Gol Mod 2 grave 1. It is a circular burial that lies in between an arc of satellite burials and the monumental grave. Erdenebaatar (2011, 303) states that all burials had been reopened in antiquity. The circular grave had a diameter of 19.5 meters. Within the middle part of the grave, just below the surface ceramic shards and fragments of animal bones were found. Inside the filling several scattered artefacts, stones and charcoal fragments were discovered, which indicate that the tomb was reopened. At 1.5 meters deep, pieces of the coffin were found with iron decorations. At a depth of 3.3 meters the coffin level was reached (fig 26). A burial chamber and a coffin were found at 3.4 meters deep. The grave chamber measured 2.8 and the coffin was 2.25 meters in length. The coffin was covered in a decorative pattern. Some skull fragments and some teeth were found beneath remains of the coffin wood.

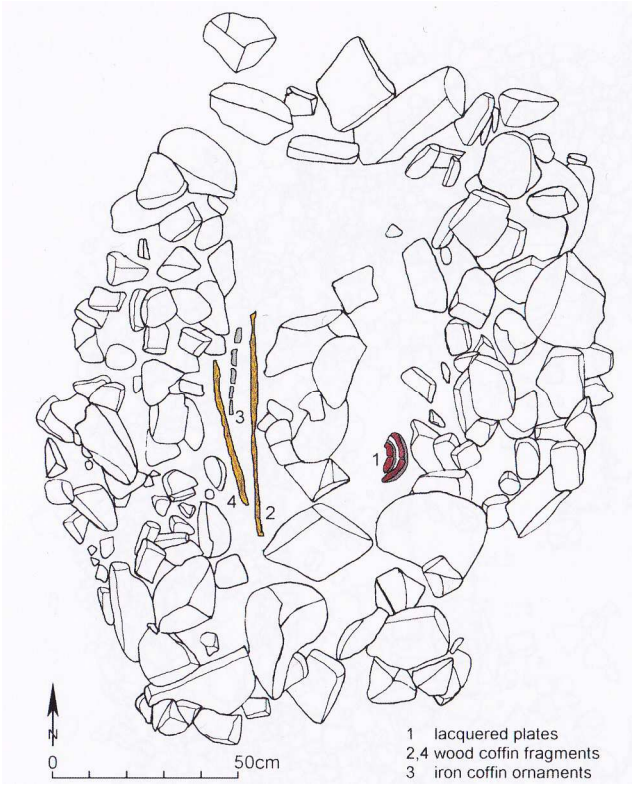


Figure 26: Top of the burial chamber of Gol Mod 2 Tomb 30 (Erdenebaatar *et al*. 2011, 306).

On top of the coffin were the remains of two lacquered plates with a sheep bone on top. Next to this was a copper container wrapped in silk, which contained 23 beads in total.

Inside the coffin (fig 27), an iron club, some silver and gold foil was found. Next to the skull fragments a semi-circular iron shape was found, which might be interpreted as a representation of a moon. In the northwest corner a fragment of a Chinese mirror was found. Outside the western part of the undisturbed grave chamber a bronze basin was found and inside the grave chamber a bronze vessel was found. At the north side a ceramic jar and a Roman bowl was found.

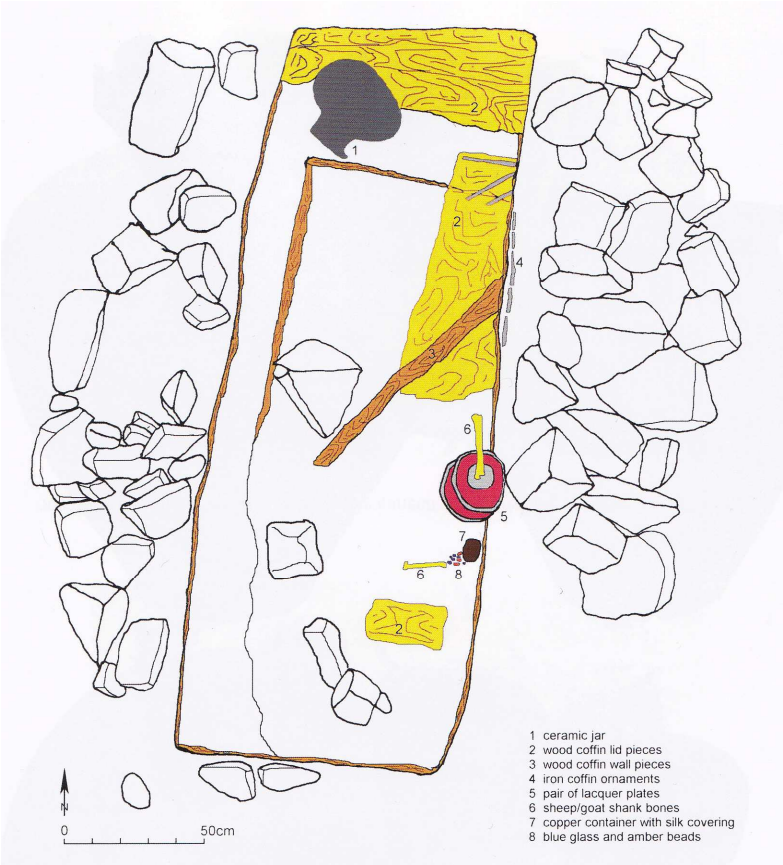


Figure 27: Burial chamber of Gol Mod 2 Tomb 30 (Erdenebaatar *et al.* 2011, 307).

Following the description of this tomb, the reopening process was quite destructive and done in a hurry. Unfortunately it is unclear to me to what extent the human remains have survived, because only the skull is mentioned in the article.

Chapter 5.4: Synthesis

In this chapter I have presented the sites from the case study, which are used in the next chapter to discuss the reopening problem. I made the distinction between pristine graves and reopened graves to provide the reader some support.

Chapter 6: Discussion

In the previous chapter the case study graves were presented to show the differences, but also the uniformity between the graves. In this chapter I shall further compare the graves to get an answer in what way reopened graves differ from pristine. The graves from Shombuuzin Belchir are used for this, because this cemetery has been published in English and has a relatively high amount of pristine graves and most graves are described in detail. The data concerning the artefacts is included as appendix 1.

After these graves are presented I shall compare them with the other case study graves and then use the theoretical framework to reflect to conclude what the possible motivations for reopening could be.

Table 2: Case study graves (SBR = Shombuuzin Belchir)

Grave	Reopened	Gravetype	Coffintype
SBR 16	Yes	circle	Wood/Stone
SBR 15	Yes	circle	Wood(dec.)/stone
SBR 14	Yes	circle	Wood/Stone
SBR 18	Yes	circle	Stone
SBR 36		circle	Stone
SBR 11		circle	Stone
SBR 12		circle	Stone
SBR 13		circle	Stone
SBR 2		circle	Stone
SBR 19		circle	Stone
SBR 7	Yes	circle	Wood(dec.)/stone

Chapter 6.1: Differences in surface size, placement and coffin type

Figure 28 contains the ground plan of the graves at the cemetery of Shombuuzin Belchir (table 2; the numbers correspond to the numbers on the map). The graves with red dots are reopened, the green dots represent the pristine graves and the grey graves were excavated, but only published in a Mongolian source. The excavated burials which have a larger surface size (grave 7, 16 and 15) were disturbed. Miller (2009b) already noticed that all three graves have a coffin type that is made of wood, or a combination of stone slabs and wood.

Grave 14, which is smaller in size shares this coffin type was also reopened. However, grave 18 consist of a stone slab cist and has a similar size as grave 14.

I shall first focus on the burials which seem to be grouped (burial 11,12,13,14,15,16,18 and 36). The radio carbon dates that have been acquired from sheep remains which were found in tomb 15, 16 and 18 are different in C14 age, and therefore possibly also in time of deposition. Grave 18 was has an age between 50 BC-3 AD, grave 16 between 51 BC-18 AD and grave 15 between 133-213 AD. This shows that this group was not buried in the same timeframe, but it could be an indication that these graves were reopened after the last radiocarbon date.

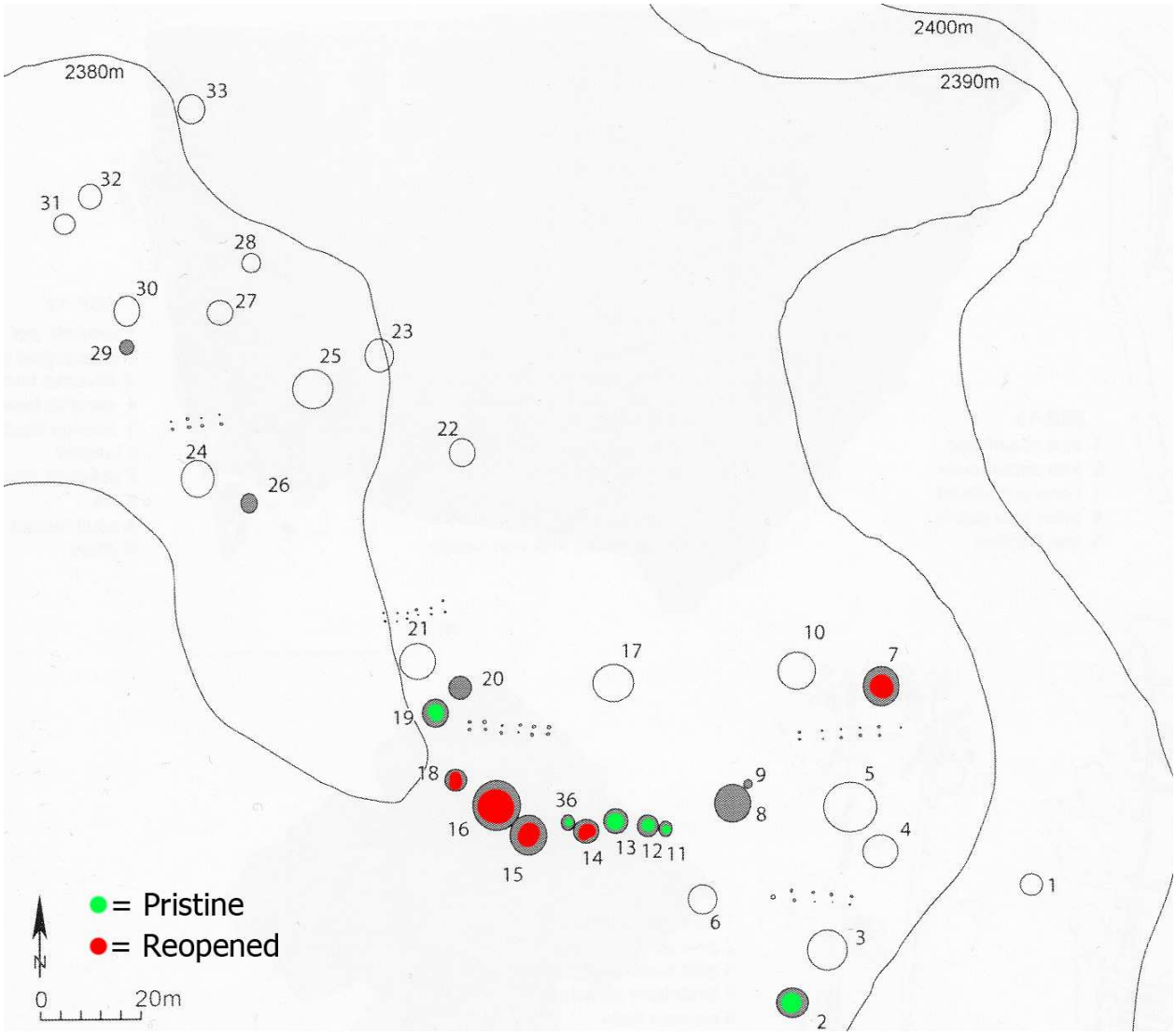


Figure 28: Shombuuzin Belchir cemetery (after Miller 2011, 569).

The pristine graves in this group are number 11, 12, 13 and 36, which all have a stone cist inside. They are all smaller in size than grave 15 and 16, which could be a factor of why these graves where not reopened. Burial 7 is larger in size than most pristine graves, but shares more or less the same surface size as burial 2 and 19, but has a different coffin type. Burial 18 is the only reopened grave that has a stone coffin inside, but only one of the burial clusters had been excavated and therefore it can not be said that more tombs of with this coffin type where the target. However, since burial 15 had a much later C14 date and was probably buried much later it could be said that the cluster was not part of a group and may have consisted out of two groups. In the next section I shall elaborate on what was found inside the coffins.

Chapter 6.2: Differences inside the coffin

In table 3, I have summarised the proportions of pristine and reopened graves, that have or have not human remains or artefacts inside the coffin. I will then elaborate about the human remains and artefacts in separate sections.

In this table 4 have counted the presence of human remains and artefacts inside the graves from Shombuuzin Belchir. The pristine graves all have human remains inside and only, but the reopened graves only 60 % of the graves have human remains inside the cist. The human remains shall be treated in the next section.

Table 3: Difference between coffin content in Shombuuzin Belchir graves (N=11)

	Number of graves	Human remains	Artefacts
Pristine	6	6	5
Reopened	5	3	4

Chapter 6.2.1: Human remains

In this chapter I shall discuss the human remains from the case study graves. Table 3 suggest that three out of five reopened graves did contain human remains. However, it should be noted that I am uncertain about one grave (SBR 7), which would make these statistical ‘facts’ slightly unreliable. However, if this grave does contain human remains, they are heavily disturbed during the reopening. In table 4 the presence or absence of different body parts is

represented. If a skeleton is present, it does not necessarily mean that it is largely complete. If a skull or some bone fragments are present it is indicated in a separate column. In this way I hoped to discover patterns that would indicate for reopened graves that consequently one part of the body was removed. I did not get strong facts, but since both burial 18 and 36 are child graves which could possibly be satellite graves. It could be that these bodies where human sacrifices and where beheaded, which was theorised by Miniaev (2009, 50). However, it is uncertain if these graves where satellite graves, but the C14 dates from grave 16 and 18 could point in such a direction, since the dates have a large overlap.

The reopened graves with the largest surface demarcation (15, 16 and 7) did not contain any human remains (grave 7 remains a question) and were probably all adult burials based on the relatively large coffin size. Almost all pristine graves of adults contained a an almost complete skeleton (12, 13 and 14) except grave 2, where only the upper body survived. This could indicate that the age (or gender) of the deceased or the surface size of the tomb were an important factor in the selection of tombs to reopen. However, then we should presume that a body was actually interred in the tomb, or else the absence of the body could be a selection criteria that the coffin was empty or has a child interred.

Table 4: Presence or absence of different human elements

Grave	Skeleton	Crania	Bone fragments	Reopened	Age
SBR 15	None	None	None	Yes	adult
SBR 16	None	None	None	Yes	adult
SBR 7	?	?	?	Yes	adult?
SBR 18	Present	None	None	Yes	child
SBR 14	None	Present	Present	Yes	child
SBR 19	Present	Present		No	adult?
SBR 13	Present	Present		No	adult
SBR 12	Present	Present		No	young adult
SBR 11	None	None	Present	No	baby
SBR 36	Present	None	None	No	child
SBR 2	None	Present	Present	No	adult?

At Il'Movaia Pad tomb 54 that probably is an adult, this is different, because it contained the full body that was probably pushed aside. At Noin Ula tomb 20 only 3 teeth had been found, which could indicate that the complete body was never there or that the teeth had fallen out of the skull while it was pulled outside the tomb during the reopening process. The latter interpretation joins in

with the graves from Shombuuzin Belchir, concerning adulthood. However, inside the pristine graves (Khökh Ürüüriin Dugui-II grave 1 and Tahiltin-hotgor grave 82) the skeletons were present, which could be an indication that this age-factor does not matter, or that not all cemeteries were the target of reopenings in the same degree.

Chapter 6.2.2: Artefacts

In this chapter I shall discuss the artefacts from the case study graves. I shall make use of the distinction between qualitative and quantitative symbols of identity. The presence or absence of artefacts in the coffin in table 3 do not show many differences, because both pristine and reopened graves have one tomb that contains no artefacts. In figure 29 I visualised the amount of artefacts that each space in the tomb contains, this is linked to quantitative symbols of identity. This might give useful insights in what the pristine graves contain in comparison with reopened.

The first thing to notice is that the reopened tombs 7 and 15 contain far less artefacts in the coffin than the other graves, while these are among the largest graves on the cemetery. This is remarkable, because in the larger burials I would expect to find more artefacts in comparison with smaller graves. For grave 7 this difference is even more visible, because this grave contains four artefacts that are located outside the coffin.

Both the large pristine (2 and 19) and reopened tombs (7, 15 and 16) contain an artefact outside the coffin, an artefact in the niche or both. The fact that they were reopened or pristine does not influence this factor. Burial 2 and 7 both have artefacts in a niche and outside the coffin. These burials are the same as the adult burials and might be seen as quantitative markers of the gender of the deceased.

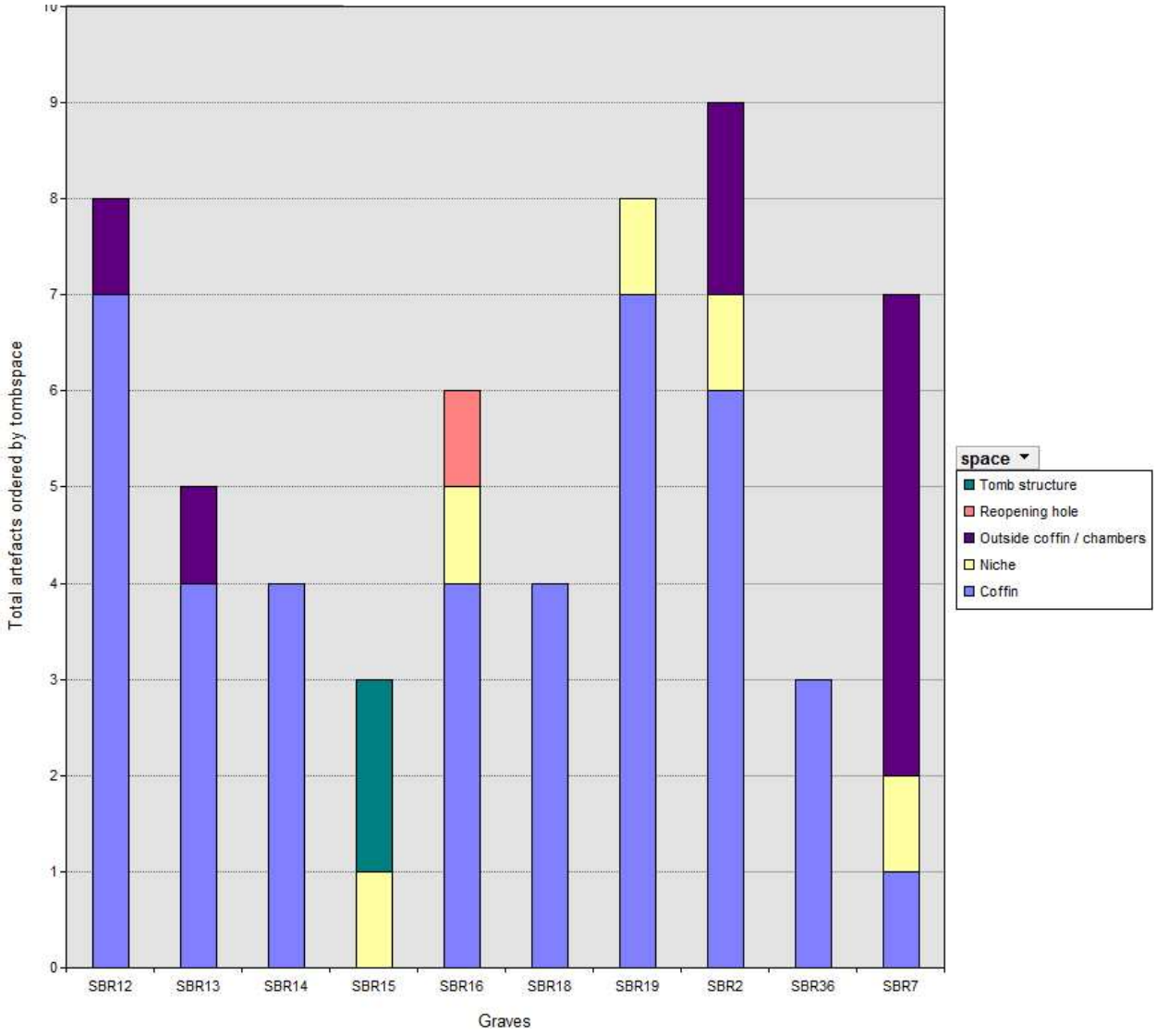


Figure 29: Grave goods from Shombuuzin Belchir graves divided by burial .

In Appendix 2 the presence of different artefact categories is shown, some of these could probably be seen as qualitative symbols of identity. These categories are imaginary, and are only used to discover trends. This table is influenced by Brosseders' model (fig. 6), but adapted to fit the circular burials. She elsewhere discusses the burial inventory of female graves in Ivolga and Derestuy (Brosseder 2007, 887). The inventory of these graves is different in respect to gender and categories, because at Shombuuzin Belchir there are probably also male burials included. Instead of the 'chariot' category I included a category for parts of wooden carts. These cart remains might be a similar deposition as the chariots (Miller 2012). However, this category might be underrepresented because the state of publication does not allow to identify these remains.

The data that I presented in Appendix 2 does not show such a clear hierarchy as the results from Brosseder. However, there are some objects that might be indicative for a hierarchical grading. For example the iron horse gear, the Chinese vessel, the cauldron, lacquer fragments and the coffin decorations. These might be made out of different materials than those objects in Brosseders' research (Brosseder 2009), but the partial overlap of the objects in the graves is an indication that such a grading is also applicable to the data I presented.

There are some tombs (7, 15 and 16) without weapons and that contain remains that could have been a part of a cart and personal adornment. These might be seen as a separate group, but most of these graves are reopened. The weapons could be the thing that was taken out during the reopening. since most weaponry is found in the coffin. Personal adornment is found consequently inside the coffin, with SBR2 and 15 as exception. In burial 15 the adornment was found in the tomb structure and these objects might be displaced during the reopening. SBR36, 14 and 11 do not contain any artefacts that belong in the categories.

SBR grave 2, 12 and 13 could be interpreted as weapon graves and do not contain vessels. Grave 1 from Khökh Ürüüriin Dugui-II shows a different picture, because there are several objects in this grave from the vessel category and also weapons.

I think that these differences might be gender-related, just as the graves from Derestuy and Ivolga (Brosseder 2007). However, the tombs that did not contain any weapons were more often the target of a reopening, but they still contain objects from the personal adornment category. This is an important observation, because this suggests that not everything was retrieved from the coffin. However, in SBR 14 only beads were found and SBR 16 contained a belt plaque, bow plates and a bone bridle. Almost all adult burials contain belt plaques, except burial 2, 7 and 19, but these have mirror fragments or what is interpreted by Miller (2011, 570) as a 'sun' and 'moon'.

Brosseder questions if weapons were removed from monumental tombs during a reopening process or if its absence is a marker for status or gender (Brosseder 2010, 265). She focuses on the artefact assemblages in the large square burials and not on the entire spectrum of 'Xiongnu' graves. However, the same pattern appears in both the pristine as well as the reopened graves from

Shombuuzin Belchir, for this reason the differences can be explained by status or gender of the deceased.

Chapter 6.3: Possible motivations behind the reopening

Drobyshev (2006, 68) states that graves from other clans could be destroyed to weaken or subordinate them. However, there could also be more reasons behind the reopenings. These will be explored in the next sections with the theories presented in chapter 3 and 4 and samples from other cultures.

Chapter 6.3.1: Destruction of burials in wars

The historical evidence about the Wuhuan that raided Xiongnu royal tombs in 78 BC, the presence of pot shards from the Turkic period in a Xiongnu period burial at the Baga Gazaryn Chuluu cemetery are the two direct indicators that the reopening of graves happened during the existence of the Xiongnu empire and after that. Indirect evidence comes from the Xianbei, who flayed the defeated Northern chanyu as described in chapter 2.2.3. They could have done this too with remains of the Xiongnu in graves.

These are examples of military demoralisation and may be carried out to fade out the history of the Xiongnu, or to demoralize them. The sacral character of the deceased ancestors was destroyed in this way and with this also the legitimation of the chanyu to make claim of belonging to his royal lineage and claim of the land.

There is textual evidence of an attack in 78 BC from a neighbouring tribe, the Wuhuan, who “raided their [the Xiongnu] royal tombs” (Barfield 1989, 59). This is one source that supports that tombs were reopened by other tribes in the Xiongnu period, but the date precedes that of most burials that were used in my case study. However, I would expect that graves where the subject of a violent reopening would contain traces of violence, because such an action is used to demoralize the society that has ties with their ancestors. Brosseder (2009, 274) suggest that competing Xiongnu tribes, rather than foreign groups were the initiator of the reopening of Monumental tombs. However, my data from Shombuuzin Belchir suggest that the reopening process was not destructive. The

initiators could have retrieved the bodies of the adults from the grave, because the two other reopened graves belonged to children and still contain human remains.

There is some indication that the reopening took place during and after the Xiongnu period, but these are not enough to state that this consequently happened.

Chapter 6.3.2: Friendly reopening

During the Tang dynasty, in what is now China, emperors used objects from earlier times to create a connection to the former rulers (Weiner 1992, 7). This is a way to justify their rule over people. These artefacts were retrieved from 'old' graves on the command of the emperor. However, would such an act be violent because the 'ancestors'' grave is dishonoured or would this be to pay direct respect to the ancestor? In Bronze Age barrows in Denmark were reused in the Iron Age and Viking Age. The people returned to these earlier barrows to bury their deceased, to dig shafts or trenches, to feast and create a bonfire. Objects from the Bronze Age barrow moved and were deposited elsewhere in such a monument in the Viking Age. (Artelius 2013). In Bronze Age Kazachstan graves were reopened shortly after the deposition. This is interpreted as 'ritual robbing' or 'necessary robbing' where secondary rituals take place (Bendezu-Sarmiento *et al*. 2007). Zdanovich interprets this as two stages where the burial has to go through. The first is the burial and decomposition of the body and the in the second stage the interred is transformed into an ancestor. The legitimate ritual 'robbing' of the grave took place at the second stage (Zdanovich 2002). These motivation behind the reopening might be a ritual component or a political act and it might be friendly or hostile.

Since there is no evidence for destructive reopening of graves, it could be a more friendly ritual instead. However, it should be stated that in reopened tombs from Shombuuzin Belchirs most skeletons in graves from adults were absent and therefore such a study could not cover the whole range of reopened graves.

There is also not much physical evidence that the reopened tombs were treated as friendly. The only Xiongnu graves which could be a sign of friendly behaviour is the one discussed in chapter 5 from Baga Gazaryn Chuluu, because the burial was reused to bury someone from the third century AD. In one of the graves Turk period ceramics were found in the filling of the grave. Burial 15 from

Shombuuzin Belchir could also be seen as reuse of a cemetery since its C14 date is beyond the Xiongnu period. However, only three dates have been acquired from Shombuuzin Belchir and for this reason the cemetery could have been in use longer after the fall of the Xiongnu empire.

Chapter 6.4: Synthesis

The reopened tombs did not contain skeletal remains, except SBR 14 and 18 which were child burials. However the coffins of these graves still contained objects that could be connected to status or gender. The larger circular tombs at Shombuuzin Belchir had a different structure inside the grave than the smaller ones and were more often the target of reopening. This also indicates that graves from deceased of different age categories had a different treatment.

It might be questioned to what degree the reopened tombs where opened for the human remains or objects. The absence of human remains in reopened adult burials could be explained by the fact that the coffins were buried without coffin or the body was retrieved by the reopeners The amount of grave goods as well as the category of objects in the coffin does not show big differences in graves that are reopened compared to pristine graves at Shombuuziin Belchir.

To give a nomination for whom was responsible for the reopening of graves is not possible, because any supportive evidence for this is not strong enough. It could thus be possible that my framework was not supportive enough, or that more than one initiator for the reopening of tombs existed, as well as for the motivations behind the reopening.

Chapter 7: Conclusion

In this thesis I aimed to answer questions about the nature of reopened graves from the Xiongnu period. The aim was to find patterns in the way reopened graves differ from pristine ones ant to what degree they differed. After this I wanted to know whom was responsible for the reopening and when this happened. This was done by creating a database of Xiongnu graves to gather information about what artefacts and human remains were inside it and the estimated age of the deceased. A framework was made to be able to identify whom was responsible for the reopening and what results I expected to find. The grave size, grave type and coffin types were compared to the difference in grave goods and human remains. The place or space in the tomb where the artefacts and human were found are also important, because this give insight in the distribution patterns inside the grave.

Review of the methodology

In this thesis some contradicting theories were opposed against each other, because to fully understand these reopening processes it is necessary to apply different theories. This was a fruitful way to research this problem and the results are significant. However, the state of English publications of Xiongnu cemeteries is far from satisfying and therefore I was not able to do a much larger survey.

Surely I have missed some details that might be important. The excavation, registration and publication methods should be adapted to fully understand this problem, because the evidence for reopenings can best be explored when direct access to the material is possible.

The graves that I investigated are probably not valid for all Xiongnu graves, but my comparative analysis of graves proved to be working. Only sites from the Western ‘periphery’ and one in the ‘core’ of the Xiongnu empire were included in this study and therefore the conclusions might not be applicable to the rest of the Xiongnu tombs. However, I am less satisfied with the results that I got from the theoretical part, which should have provided a more distinct pattern.

Evaluation of the results

The reopened tombs in Shombuuzin Belchir indicate that the human remains of the largest graves were absent. These larger tombs happened to be from an adult and the smaller from children. However, when pristine and reopened tombs were compared to the amount of and types of inventory that was found inside it, it became clear that the results showed no specific patterns in what was absent. This could be due to the size of the tombs which were reopened, because in all the burials where it can be expected that there more grave goods are inside than smaller graves the amount of objects was actually the same of lower than smaller burials. These burials also had relatively more grave goods outside the coffin and inside a niche than the larger graves. However, with the qualitative objects comparison the pristine and reopened differed significantly. Most large burials had remains of a wooden cart inside, except the two large burials that were not reopened, for this reason I think gender or status could possibly play a role why these pristine tombs were not reopened. This is supported by the fact that in almost all large burials belt plaques were found and not in these two pristine. All these observations make it hard to tell what was retrieved from the graves; possibly human remains and / or artefacts were retrieved, but the burials could have been reopened to perform secondary rituals.

The scarce evidence from excavations and historical evidence make it impossible to tell in what timeframe the Xiongnu tombs were reopened. The textual evidence give an example that this was done during the Xiongnu period as an act of humiliation. The archaeological evidence that could be dated suggested that the Turks reopened a grave. However, this occasion does not show if this was done as a hostile act or if they saw the Xiongnu as their ancestors.

Chapter 7.1: Relevance

The differences between pristine and reopened graves had not yet been studied until this moment. I compared the burial inventory and skeletal material of tombs from Shombuuzin Belchir. The results show that not all reopened tombs

got the same treatment. In most of these reopened graves the skeleton was absent and the grave goods did not deviate in numbers from graves that were not reopened. This thesis contributed to the understanding of the reopening of Xiongnu graves in particularly the west of Mongolia and might be a useful approach to research this problem in different parts of the world.

Chapter 7.2: Further research

I would like to compare several other cemeteries that were excavated and published in detail. For example Derestuy, Ivolga and Bulkhan Tolgoi. It might be that there are different reopening practices in different areas of the Xiongnu empire, because different enemies or local lineages were active.

The skeletal material from the graves is not published in detail. A study to these bones could reveal important post-mortem processes and could further contribute to the understanding of the reopening of these graves. Different treatment of skeletons, and object categories might also be gender or status related. This is what I would like to test when more publications arrive from Shombuuzin Belchir, or even better in the field. The material did not allow such study yet, but when more sites are fully published a gender based approach could be fruitful to research reopened graves.

Abstract

Tombs from various areas in the world have been reopened in antiquity. In this thesis the reopened Xiongnu period (200BC – 150 AD) graves are reinterpreted in different ways to compare them with ‘pristine’ graves.

The goal of this thesis is to get insight in the degree in which reopened graves differed from intact graves and explore the existence patterns of that show in which way these graves are different from each other. The size and type of a tomb and what coffin type was inside were compared to the difference in human remains and artefacts in the grave. These were set against the space in which they were found, which gives insight in the (distribution) patterns. For the artefacts both a quantitative and qualitative analysis was made.

The burial size and the age category of the deceased proved to be closely linked with each other. The graves that became the target of a reopening contained of both adult and child burials. The burials of adults did not contain human remains, while the child burials did contain portions of the skeleton. Which might be related to a different treatment of graves from different age categories. The quantitative analysis of artefacts showed that reopened adult burials contained a relatively lower amount of grave goods, compared to the other graves as well as the amount of artefacts inside the other tomb spaces. The qualitative approach provided an overview of the difference between reopened tombs and pristine tombs. They differ in that the pristine adult burials that did not contain cart parts and belt plaques, while the reopened adult burials did contain these objects. This difference probably explained by a different gender status.

The other goal was to show who was responsible for the reopening and when this happened, but the data for this was to thin.

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Apendix I: Artefacts in case study graves

Grave	Objectname	Objecttype	Space
SBR12	Buckles	Iron	Coffin
	Bit	Iron	Coffin
	Bead	Amber	Coffin
	Spear point	Iron	Coffin
	Arrowheads	Iron	Coffin
	Bow plates	Bone	Coffin
	Quiver	Wood	Coffin
	Beams (5)	Wood	Outside coffin / chambers
SBR13	Spear point	Iron	Coffin
	Pin	Bone	Coffin
	Arrowheads	Iron	Coffin
	Arrowhead	Bone	Coffin
	Beams (7)	Wood	Outside coffin / chambers
SBR2	Arrow shafts	Wood	Coffin
	Crescent shape ("moon")	Iron	Coffin
	Disc shape ("Sun")	Iron	Coffin
	Bow pieces	Bone	Coffin
	Gold foil	Gold	Coffin
	Tube with iron needle	Bone/Iron	Coffin
	Chopsticks	Bone	Niche
	Rings	Iron	Outside coffin / chambers
	Buckles	Iron	Outside coffin / chambers
SBR19	Mirror fragments	Bronze	Coffin
	Beads	Ceramic	Coffin
	Bead	Faiance	Coffin
	Lacquer fragments	lacquer	Coffin
	Polished stone rings	Stone	Coffin
	Infant	Human remains	Coffin
	Silk fragments	Silk	Coffin
	Pot	Ceramic	Niche
SBR7	Vessel lid	Wood	Coffin
	Chopsticks	Bone	Niche
	Ladle	Wood	Outside coffin / chambers
	Container	Birch-bark	Outside coffin / chambers
	Crescent shape ("Moon")	Gold	Outside coffin / chambers
	Disc shape ("Sun")	Gold	Outside coffin / chambers
	Cauldron	Bronze	Outside coffin / chambers
SBR16	Gilded belt plague	Iron	Coffin
	Bridle cheek piece	Bone	Coffin
	Bow plates	Bone	Coffin
	Pin	Bone	Coffin
	Bell	Bronze	Niche
	Chopsticks	Bone	Reopening hole
SBR15	Bridle sets (2)	Iron	Niche
	Gilded belt plague	Iron	Tomb structure
	Lacquer remains	Laqcuer	Tomb structure
SBR14	Beads	Stone	Coffin
	Beads	Glass	Coffin
	Beads	Alabaster	Coffin

	Beads	Amber	Coffin
SBR18	Beads	Ceramic	Coffin
	Beads	Glass	Coffin
	Bead	Bone	Coffin
	Belt plague	Iron / bone	Coffin
SBR36	Bead	Amber	Coffin
	Mortuary dress	Fur / stitched leather	Coffin
	Cloth fragment	Silk?	Coffin

Apendix II: Presence or absence of artefact categories

(green = complete; light green = fragments)

	Other				Vessels				Adornment				Weapons				
Grave	Horse gear	"Sun shape"	"Moon shape"	Mirror	Cartparts	Lacquer fragments	Cauldron	Pot	Earrings	Beads	Belt plaque	Sword	Sheath	Bow	Quiver	Arrows	Spear	Other finds
SBR 12	iron				wood					amber	iron buckles			bone	wood		iron	
SBR 13					wood						iron buckles					iron / bone	iron	
SBR 2		iron	iron											bone		wood shafts		gold foil, tube with iron needle, rings
SBR 19				bronze				ceramic		ceramic / faiance								Stone rings, infant remains, silk fragments
SBR 18										ceramic / glass / bone	iron / bone							
SBR 7		gold	gold				bronze											vessel lid, chopsticks, ladle, container
SBR 15	iron										iron							
SBR 16	bone										iron / gilded							pin, bell, chopsticks
SBR 14										stone / glass / alabaster / amber								
SBR 36										amber								mortuary dress. cloth fragments
SBR 11																		