

THE EXCAVATION AND THE CONSERVATION OF BILGE KHAN MONUMENTAL GRAVE COMPLEX IN MONGOLIA

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ABSTRACT:

Mongolia is a landlocked country in East and Central Asia and one of the important centers of Steppe Civilizations. Since 1997, the two countries, Turkey and Mongolia have been carrying out joint projects concerning the reveal of the Turkish Era Monuments in Mongolia as they have similar historical roots in this region. These projects are supported financially by the Turkish International Cooperation and Development Agency (TICA).

This project was removed to the covered area where a monument with Kok Turkish and Chinese Inscriptions were located is called as Bengü Taş (The Rock of Immortality) in Orkhun. In 2001 following the restoration activities were emerged. In addition to the Geodesy and Geophysics studies, the most important activity was the excavations at the Bilge Khan Monument Complex. The Monument Complex consists of three main parts towards east and west with 72 m. in length and 36 m. wide. The Inscriptive Monument was centered especially around the place called “Bark” (Barque) where the statues of Bilge Khan and his relatives were placed and altar on the west side. During the excavations carried out around the altar, a memorial grave was disclosed 1.5 m. away from the altar towards the north. The following 4500 items made of gold and silver that might had been the possessions of Bilge Khan found under the basement between altar and grave; Golden crown and belt which might had belonged to the Bilge Khan, two silver deer figurines, golden water beaker, hollow wares and broken pieces of a silver chest used as a storage of the mentioned items.

1. Excavations of Bilge Khan Complex in 2001-2003

The project about Bilge Khan the determination, excavation and conservation of the Turkish monuments in its surrounding, has been supported continuously by TICA (Turkish International Cooperation and Development Agency) since 1996 in different ways. The excavations at the memorial tomb/grave complex which was built in 735 A.D. to Bilge Khan; the Ruler of the Kok Turks. The complexes of Bilge Khan are situated about 400 km to Ulan Bator and are located between Orkhon River and Khosho Tsaydam Lake. These are to be found about 50 km from the old capital city of Karokurum (Mongolian Kharkhorin) which is situated about 400 km. west of Ulan Bator city again in the future. In spite of mentioning Orkhon Inscriptions, the grave complex belonging to Tonyukuk who had been a Deputy Advisor of Bilge Kaghan's father and uncle is situated 450 km east of these inscriptions in Nalayh located 90 km south of Ulan Bator.

But, Karabalasagun the capital of Uighurs is 25 km from here in Orkhon Valley. Kol Tigin Monument is situated 1 km north of Bilge Khan Monument.

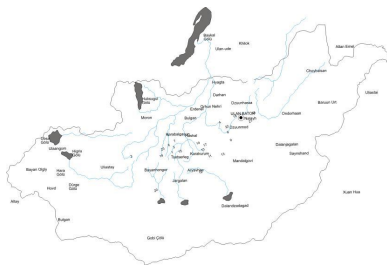
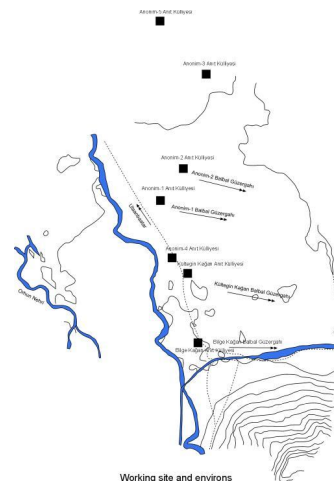


Figure 1: Turkish Monuments in Mongolia

In 734, the unexpected death of his brother Kol Tigin, had effected Bilge Khan tremendously that he

brought Chinese artisans and rose up a memorial grave for his beloved brother. A collective archaeological excavation was carried out here in 1958 under the supervision of Czechoslovakian scholar Jisl with Mongolian participants (Jisl 1963).

2000-2003 excavations at Bilge Khan Complex. Bilge Khan Complex is situated 1 km south of Kol Tigin Complex. Excavations were conducted by Radloff in 1893 and Mongolian government built a fence in 1937 and 1970s.



2. Working site in Khosho Tsaydam(Tica 2001a)

Between 2000 and 2003 Excavations of Bilge Khan were supported TICA.

2. Transportation of Bilge Khan Monument in 2000-2001.

The artifacts wrapped into felt are taken to the depot after they were loaded on a lorry. For protection,

the artifacts were wrapped in felt(Tica 2000). Except this transportation, small excavations for drilling are made around turtle pedestal and barque in 2000. Also, an excavation was carried out in the memorial grave complex which was named Anonymous IV(Tica 2001 a,b).

3. 2001 Studies in Bilge Khan Complex

Bilge Khan Monument (Turkish Bengü Taş-The Rock of Immortality) which was restored and erected.



Figure 3: Bengü Taş (The Rock of Immortality) of Bilge Khan(Tica 2001a)

Excavations were intensified in the direction of east-west, around the turtle pedestal, bark and altar.



Figure 4.Bilge Khan Excavation in 2001(Tica 2001a)

There is an adobe wall 60 m east of the complex and a drilling was made in which the gathered bricks of the complex were discovered. One of the 550 obelisks, which was under a road used till 2003, was removed in the east of the complex. The stone rams were discovered in the entrance. While the first phase of our studies between the turtle pedestal and the altar were completing we decided to continue our studies in the north of altar. During our studies we found pieces of a damaged grave.

There was a tremendous damage around the altar and the grave. Uighurs must have done this after they seized Kok Turks. All the brick coverage was taken and suspicious places were dug and artifacts were stolen. Side stones of the grave here were broken, inside and surroundings of it were dug.

4. Discovery of Bilge Khan Treasure

While excavating between the altar and the grave we discovered three silver flowers. They were under the original clay floor in a depth of 123 cm. The bricks of the ground had been taken away here.



Figure 5. On 31th July in 2001 at midnight in Bilge Khan Complex(Tica 2001a)

Our aim was to extract the findings with the soil block in a shape of a chest.

First of all we prepared a chest made of steel plates. Secondly the chest which was cut in a block form fastened with the band was later put into one of the empty tents. Carrying to the tent revealing the findings and documentation lasted seven days.

There were silver flowers belonging to one of the silver chests. Some of them (above 10 -20 cm, the surrounding of the altar) were melted from the effect of fire. There were 2556 piled silver flowers. Just under the flowers there were two deer statuettes, 9 silver dishes, the rolled flank and the upper plates belonging to the chest and two handles. In addition, sorting out the flowers, horns and the feet of the deer were broken. The golden items following the silver ones was a golden crown in the middle of them along with pieces of golden belt and a big golden dish as well as precious stones that probably belong to the crown or the belt in the mugs (Tica 2001 a).



Figure 6.Opening of Treasures of Bilge Khan (Tica 2001a)

First of all the findings were given to the National Museum of the Mongolian. Then they were transported to the Art Center of Mongolia for restoration in October, 2001.

In order to restore, conserve and exhibit those findings, a team was formed by the Turkish and Mongolian participants supported financially by TICA in 2001. This team carried out the restoration activities in the Art Gallery in Ulan Bator. Then an exhibition hall in the

National Museum of Mongolia was designed to display these findings. Crown, one of the findings of which was displayed in many countries as the “Inheritance of Ghengis Han”



Figure 7. Bilge Khan Crown after the restoration (Bahar 2002 a)

The monuments of Turkish Era belong to the first period of VIII. Century A.D. now are displayed in the National Museum of Mongolia(Tica 2001).

5. 2003 Studies in Bilge Khan Complex

We carried out our excavation activities in order to bolster the restoration of the complex in 2003. For this reason we tried to reveal the architectural dimensions and characteristics of the complex. We tried to reveal the surrounding walls, the bark (in the middle) the platform belonging to the Memorial Complex Monument. So we excavated a long (1m) trench that cuts the mound in the direction of east and west. The architectural characteristics of the bark were underlined. We discovered that the platform was 15x15 m and 70 cm height. The Platform of Bengütaş (Bengutash) was 14 x14 m.



Figure 8. The platform of Bilge Khan Monument (Tica 2003)

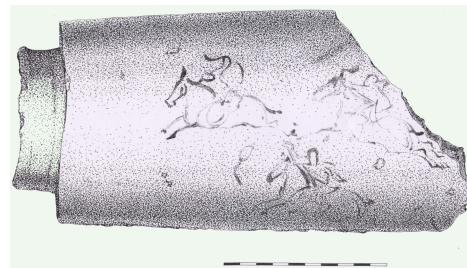
Over the brick platform we discovered a site whose base was made from sun-dried bricks. The site's flanks were open but the upper surface was covered. The inside and outside of this site and its surroundings were decorated with pictures.

There was an earthen pipe system which extends to the east waterway from the site located on the inscribed monument. In addition to the walls, there were balbals. We can observe seals over the balbals. These seals belonged to the tribes of the Bilge Khan. Outside the complex there were ditches. In addition to the archaeological information for the restoration of the Bilge Khan Complex(Tica 2003).

The most distinguished of 2003 was a cover roof tile of a wall located in the east side of the north wall and a war scene over it.

The aim with the 2003 excavation was a preparation to the restoration of the Bilge Khan complex. We wished to appear the main features of the complex and can say after the completion of work, that we have attained this goal. The length of the complex was 72 m, the wide 36 m and the bark in the middle 15x15m and the building where Eternal Stone inscription was protected, was 14 x 14 m and the ditches' wide and the depth were 6.5 m and 3.5m. The whole complex was covered with grey clay and brick plates.

The complex was surrounded by an about 225 m. high mud-brick wall. The inside and the outside of the wall, were pictured with red or black pen on a white surface. The upper parts of the walls were covered with bricks. On one of them a war scene is depicted. On the surface of the protecting wall of the Bilge Khan inscription, similar pictures were present. These pictures were voluminous, but after the wrecking they broke into pieces and dissolved, so it was difficult to complete them. Balbals were set up with certain gaps between the complex and the rain ditches. On the balbals signs of the ruling clan were present. Furthermore the starting point of the 550 balbals from the complex's east entrance to 3 km eastward has been determined. Also during the 2003 excavations, the required data were prepared for the restoration team for the architecture and measurement of the complex. 3 horsemen drawings in a competition on a tile base used for the environment wall is an interesting figure to depict the Kok Turkish art.



10. Tile brick of wall cover (Tica 2003)

TICA contributed to the 50 km. road between Karakurum-KochaTsaidam and restoration of the monuments following the 2003(Tica 2003).

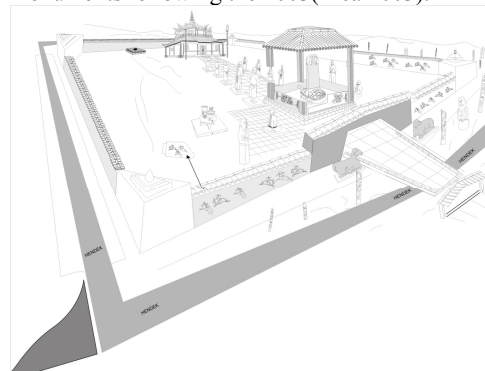


Figure 11. Reconstruction of Bilge Khan Complex by us (Bahar 2003).

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