

BURIED WITH HIS BOW AND ARROWS
THE EXCEPTIONAL CAVE BURIAL OF A 14TH CENTURY WARRIOR AT TSAGAAN KHAD
MOUNTAIN, MONGOLIA

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Introduction

Graves in caves and crevices are attested for in Mongolia and neighboring regions of Inner Asia and Southern Siberia from the 6th to the 17th centuries AD. They mirror a special burial custom that existed alongside other, more common grave types such as stone and earthen kurgans. The deceased were brought to natural caves and crevices in slopes and mountain tops that were difficult to access. There, they were put to rest in their clothes together with grave goods such as weapons and horse-riding gear and sometimes also parts of wagons and yurts. Due to the dry climate of the Inner Asian steppes and semi-deserts, organic material is often well preserved in these graves. Even natural mummification of the bodies themselves can be encountered.

In 2010, an exceptionally well preserved 14th century AD cave burial was excavated at Tsagaan Khad mountain in Southern Mongolia. The Tsagaan Khad burial stands out among the Inner Asian cave and crevice graves in several ways. Firstly, it contained a number of items which are so far without parallel in their excellent state of preservation, among them an almost undamaged, beautifully adorned composite bow and a decorated leather quiver. Secondly, it is only the second cave burial known from the period of the Mongol World Empire and one of the few cave and crevice burials that were able to be investigated and documented scientifically in a more or less undisturbed state. This opens up perspectives to achieve a comprehensive analysis and culture-historical assessment of the burial.

Cave burials in Mongolia

In Mongolia, more than 70 cave and crevice burials from ca. 60 sites are known today (Bemmann & Nomguunsüren 2012: 201, Fig. 18; Төрбат & Эрдэнэбат 2014). Most of them have been discovered by chance by local nomads, and it is likely that by far not all such finds have been reported to the authorities. The actual number of such graves is probably much higher.

The earliest information about a cave burial in Mongolia is preserved in the memoirs of the Russian businessman A.V. Burdukov who during his stay in the province of Khovd 1911-1914 noted the discovery of a burial of the Mongol period in the cave of Ulaan Üneet (Bemmann & Nomguunsüren 2012: 199). The documentation of a child's mummy found in Gurvan Zeerdijn cave in Ömnögöv' aimag, by the Soviet researcher A.D. Simukov in 1924 counts as the first scientific description (Erdenebat & Pohl, 2005: 81). It was not until the 1980s that the number of known cave and crevice burials increased substantially and that scientific follow-up investigations became possible more often. Since the turn of the millennium, research into Mongolian cave and crevice burials has advanced greatly. Among the discoveries of this period is the burial of a 10th century AD warrior at Arcat Del in Bayankhongor aimag which was investigated by a Mongolian-German team in 2001 (Erdenebat & Pohl, 2005: 82 – 85), and the 8th century AD grave of Zhargalant in Khovd aimag excavated in 2008 which contained a harp-like musical instrument with an Old Turkic

runic inscription (Törbat et al., 2012a; Ганпүрэв, 2014).

A milestone for the research of Mongolian cave and crevice burials was the exhibition “Warriors of the Steppes – Nomads on horseback in Mongolia 7-14th century AD” in 2012 in Bonn, Germany. The exposition was created on the basis of a German-Mongolian restoration project and aimed to present the exceptional organic artifacts in their culture-historical context (Bemmann et al., 2012: 18). In this exposition the Tsagaan Khad burial was presented to the public for the first time (Nomguunsüren et al., 2012). In 2014, a large exhibition dedicated to the current state of research on the phenomenon of cave and crevice burials took place in Ulaanbaatar, Mongolia; Tsagaan Khad was also among the presented complexes (Төрбат & Эрдэнэбат, 2014).

The investigation of the Tsagaan Khad cave burial

The cave burial of Tsagaan Khad is located in the Gobi Altai c. 10 km west of Bogd sum centre in Övörkhangaj aimag (Figure 1). It was discovered in January 2010 by two members of a local herder family. A man and his nephew came across a natural cave at a sunny south-facing mountain side close to the winter site of the family yurt. They took away some stones that were obstructing the entrance of the cave and started to search through the sediments in the rock cavity. In the course of this search, a large wooden object and several human bones were removed from the cave and deposited at the foot of the slope. When the two men came across a mummified human hand, they refrained from further searching the cave. Five months later, a Mongolian-German team of archaeologists from the Institute of Archaeology of the Mongolian Academy of Sciences and from the Department of Prehistory of Bonn University carried out an expedition to the site to investigate the burial scientifically and thereby save it from further undocumented destruction.

The burial was put down in a natural cave at the southern slope of Tsagaan Khad (Mongolian: “White Rock”) mountain at 1684 m asl. The cave is 3.1 m long and 2.3 m wide, its maximal height in the back part reaches 1.8 m. The narrow entrance measures 0.9 m in width by 0.7 m in height. Inside the cave, the floor was covered with a dry layer of animal excrements, twigs and roots that had accumulated over the centuries to a height of 0.7 m. A part of this layer close to the entrance had been disturbed by the finders. The sediments contained small fragments of textiles, leather and wood that had been dislocated from their original position in the burial by rodents and other animals and in many cases had been actually eaten and excreted. To retrieve all these artefacts, the entire sediment was sieved outside the cave. After the removal of the sediments, the archaeologists uncovered the burial in the back part of the cave.

The deceased had been bedded on a ledge perpendicular to the long axis of the cave in supine position (Figure 2). His body was partly mummified by desiccation. The skull was not found *in situ* but had been dislocated to the area of the left elbow. In the area where the head would have been originally, a concentration of coarsely woven material and yarn filaments was found which probably stem from the remains of a pillow. The clothing of the deceased consisted of several layers of wool, silk, leather and fur garments. Substantial parts of it were preserved in the thorax region and around the hips and upper thighs. In the knee and lower leg region, heavily decomposed felt and fur fragments might represent the remains of gaiters or boots. The fragments indicate that the deceased wore a simple everyday dress as the only decoration are simple dark stripes on the outer garment, and there are repair patches on various parts of the clothing.

Beside and above the corpse, numerous grave goods had been arranged. Unique with respect to its state of preservation is the weaponry kit. Along the right side of the deceased, a reflex bow was placed with its silk bowstring still in tension up until today. To the right of the legs and partly overlaying the bow, a leather quiver was put down. Beneath it, further leather

fragments and small iron items came to light. Possibly, these represent the remains of a bow quiver. The only part of a horseman's kit found in the grave is a small whip that lay in a niche at the south-western cave wall. Perpendicular across the legs of the corpse, several wooden battens and a curved timber had been placed. At the top lay a large wooden object with one crossbar and two battens covering the middle of the body. All these wooden objects probably stem from yurt and wagon parts. They have been broken in antiquity, indicating an intentional destruction prior to the burial. Likewise connected to the burial rites is a small group of artefacts found in the forward part of the cave, probably representing the deceased's provisions for the afterworld: Close to the entrance by the south-western wall stood a wooden bowl and beside it a sheep's or goat's tibia and foot bones stuck vertically in the sediment. The vertical positioning of a sheep's tibia in a grave is a very characteristic trait of the Medieval Mongolian burial rites which has been documented not only in Mongolia itself but also in adjacent regions of Russia, China and Central Asia.

Both the wooden bowl and the animal tibia have been AMS radiocarbon dated (bowl: Beta-287628, 700±40 bp, 1260-1390 cal AD; tibia: Beta-287627, 580±40 bp, 1300-1430 cal AD; calibration: OxCal v4.1. [http:// c14.arch.ox.ac.uk/oxcal/](http://c14.arch.ox.ac.uk/oxcal/), accessed 2011-11-27). They place the cave burial of Tsagaan Khad broadly in the fourteenth century AD when the Mongolian World Empire already began to disintegrate into smaller sub-empires.

The buried person

The body buried in the cave of Tsagaan Khad has been partly mummified by desiccation. Especially well preserved was the left hand and parts of the back while other body regions were skeletonized. The anthropological analysis of the human remains was carried out at the National Museum of Natural History, Smithsonian Institution, Washington, D.C. (Machicek et al., 2013). According to the results, the person buried in the cave was an adolescent male between 14 and 16 years of age with a body height of c. 1.69 m. No pathological developments or evidence for peri- or ante-mortem trauma was observed on the remains, leaving the cause of death unclear. Stable isotope analysis of bone collagen indicates a mixed terrestrial C₃ and C₄ based diet and a relatively high degree of animal protein consumption.

A unique weaponry kit

The most spectacular item found in the Tsagaan Khad cave burial is the highly complex, masterly executed composite bow (Figure 3) (Becker & Klee, 2012; Becker & Rutschke, 2012). It is the best-preserved archaeological bow find in Mongolia and one of only very few in the world that have survived with its fixed string still in place (Janßen-Kim, 2007; Baatar & Эрдэнэбат, 2011). Today, the 1.41 m long and up to 5 cm wide weapon has an asymmetrical form. This is the result of the tension of the string continuously straining the material for centuries, leading to a stronger bending of a weak, repaired section of one of the limbs. Originally the bow has been constructed symmetrically. The frame consists of wood, probably elm. Handle and shoulders have been enforced on the ventral side by a 0.5 cm thick lamella of slightly transparent, grey cattle horn that is visible in some damaged sections. On the dorsal side of handle and limbs, a layer of animal sinew has been glued onto the surface of the wooden body. A final layer of obliquely cut birch bark strips was wrapped around the limbs of the bow. The ends of the limbs consist of wood and contain small horn insets at the limb tips to enforce this heavily strained part. The bow string is made of a strongly twirled silk thread of 2.9 mm diameter. It is so well preserved that its surface has remained shiny up to this day. The string is fixed to the limb tips by two carefully knotted slings. The handle and the limb ends of the bow have been adorned with elaborate, multi-coloured and partly gilded geometric decoration. The ornament of the handle was made from ten separate bark pieces forming lozenge patterns of medium and dark brown stripes. The stepped ornamental bands at

both sides of the handle and at the limb ends have been applied to the surface of the bow as marquetry of coloured bark pieces and were partly highlighted by minute pieces of sheet gold.

Not just the fixed string but also the elaborate ornamentation of the Tsagaan Khad bow are unique among Medieval Mongolian bows. Examples of well-preserved bows are known from other cave and crevice burials. Closely comparable to Tsagaan Khad is a bow from the cave burial of Ikh Bayany Agui in Ömnögov' aimag. Its form and construction including the triangular profile of the limb ends which ensures the necessary tensile strength without additional bone bracings are very similar, and the suggested dating to the twelfth or thirteenth century AD place it also chronologically close (Erdenebat, 2009: vol. 1, 74). Another comparable piece is part of a thirteenth to fourteenth century AD find complex from Shilüüstei district in Zavkhan province (May, 2009: 196). Here, especially the shape and the two-part colour division of the limb ends closely mirror the Tsagaan Khad bow. Contemporary comparisons for the bow are also found on depictions of warriors or hunters with their weapons such as miniatures of the Ilkhanid dynasty that as part of the Mongolian World Empire ruled Iran and surrounding territories in AD 1236-1353 (Rauch, 2012: 105 – 108).

The leather quiver found in the Tsagaan Khad grave, too, represents a unique find as almost all archaeologically known quivers from Old Mongolian graves consist of birch bark and wood (Figure 4). In its original state with the arrows in place the entire weapon measured 83 cm in length. The leather case is 52 cm long, 30 cm wide and up to 5 cm high, it consists of several leather pieces (probably cow hide) sewn together with a sinew thread. On the frontal face, four narrow lozenge-shaped openings are visible in the upper part which have been enforced at their lower ends by v-shaped iron fittings. The central part of the frontal face is adorned by a circular ornament with a cross-shaped pattern, resembling the so-called ram's horn motive, one of the most wide-spread decorative elements of the Inner Asian nomadic world (Chabros, 1987: 253 – 254). Stylized plant-shaped applications decorate the lower part. The decorations consist of dark leather that has been sewn onto the case with a yellow silk thread. Several other finds including an iron hook can also be attributed to the quiver (Figure 5). The quiver contained seven arrows (Figure 6). Six of them have flat iron heads, among them one peculiar specimen with an integrated whistling mechanism, their polished shafts point towards the head of the burial. The seventh arrow is a wooden example probably used for the hunting of birds or fur bearing animals; it has been placed in the quiver the other way round with the head pointing out. The shafts of the arrows attest to a high level of craftsmanship, having been neatly assembled from several parts. While the actual shaft in most cases consists of bambus, birch or willow have been used for the nocks (Becker & Klee, 2012: 392). The fletching was made of three half feathers on each arrow.

With one exception, all quivers so far discovered in Old Mongolian graves in Mongolia have been made from wood and birch bark (Erdenebat, 2009, vol. 1: 72, 80; Erdenebat & Armatüvšin, 2012: 305 – 305, Kat. III.11; Törbat et al., 2012b: 271 – 273, Kat. II.3), and in the contemporary written sources, too, birch and willow quivers are mentioned, but no leather quivers (Heissig, 1981: 132). Medieval pictorial sources of Mongolian warriors, on the other hand, provide extensive evidence for the use of leather quivers for arrows. On these images the arrows are placed – like six of the seven arrows at Tsagaan Khad – with the heads down in the leather pocket while in birch bark quivers, the arrows are placed the other way round. Archaeological finds of leather quivers are rare due to the perishable character of the organic material. In Mongolia, the only fragments of such a quiver came to light in grave 2 of Mukhdagijn Am in Bulgan province (Erdenebat, 2009: vol. 1, 80; Erdenebat, 2009: vol. 2, 59). Remains of five leather quivers are reported from burials of the 12th-15th centuries AD by the River Angara west of Lake Baikal (Николаев, 2004: 87). An interesting perspective for identifications of leather quivers is offered by the v-shaped iron fittings of the Tsagaan Khad

quiver: Similar iron objects are known from cremation burials of the Mongol period in Western and Southern Siberia, and it now seems likely that these might be the only preserved parts of leather quivers in these graves.

Conclusions

Among the Inner Asian cave burials known today, the Tsagaan Khad grave is of special importance because it was scientifically documented in a relatively undisturbed state, and because it contained a number of unique items including the elaborately adorned bow with its fitted silk string and the ornamented leather quiver, enabling new detailed insights into the nomadic culture at the time of the Mongolian World Empire.

Archaeologically, important new insights are provided by the exceptional array of grave goods and the numerous preserved details. For example, the v-shaped iron fittings on the leather quiver can now be used as a reference to identify leather quivers in graves even when the organic material has long perished. The bow not only demands our admiration for its outstanding beauty but also provides us with detailed information on the elaborate craftsmanship and technologies that went into this sophisticated Medieval weapon. At the same time, the question of the social status of the adolescent buried at Tsagaan Khad is not easily decided: while the weaponry kit might seem to indicate a high position in society, the clothing with its lack of elaborate ornaments, its repairs and patches does not support any special status.

This problem still requires more research, but we can already conclude that the deceased boy in the cave of Tsagaan Khad mountain was perfectly equipped for his long rest: As Belgütei, Genghis Khan's step brother, is cited in the "Secret History of the Mongols": "What is the use of living if, while we live, our quivers are taken by the enemy? Is it not right for a man who is born to lay down his bones with his quiver and bow at the time of his death?" (Onon, 2001: 169).

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Figure 1. Tsagaan Khad cave burial

(1) in Southern Mongolia and other sites mentioned in the text (2: Ulaan Üneet; 3: Gurvan Zeerdijn; 4: Arcat Del; 5: Zhargalant; 6: Ikh Bayany Agui; 7: Mukhdagijn Am).

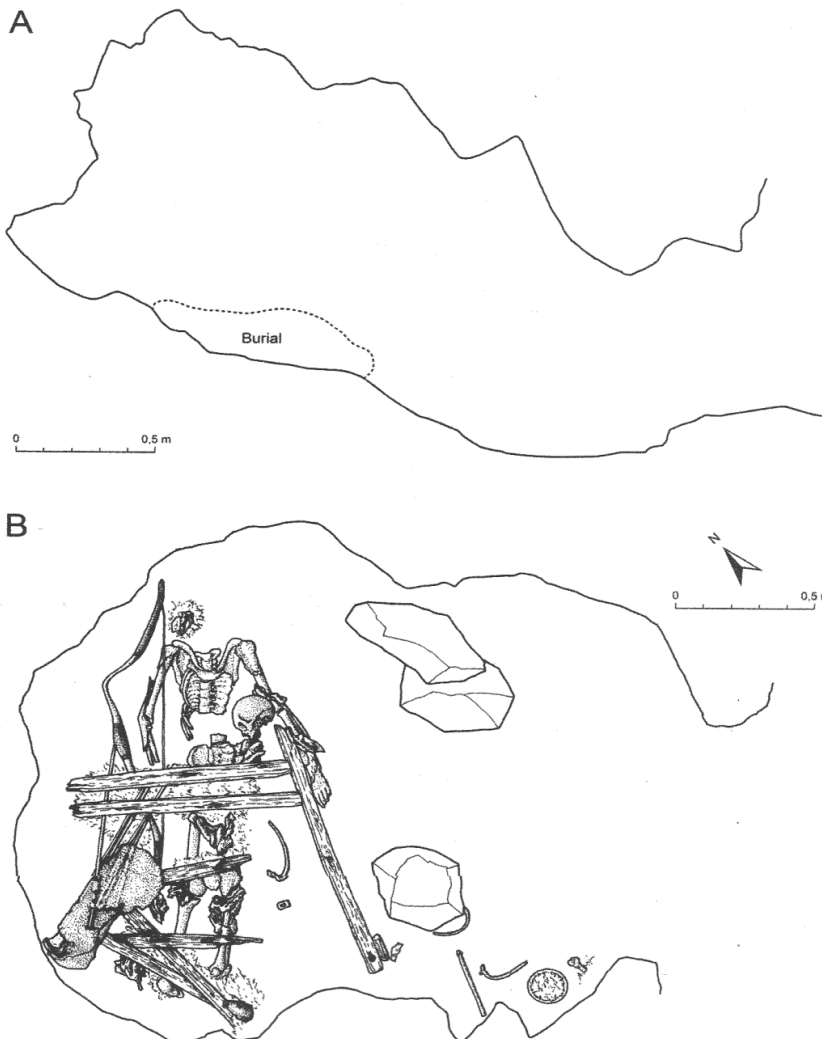
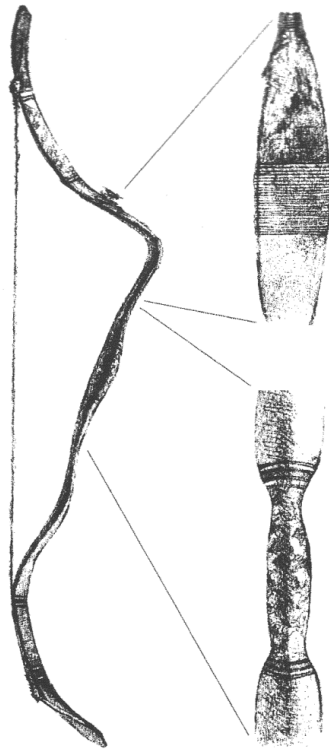
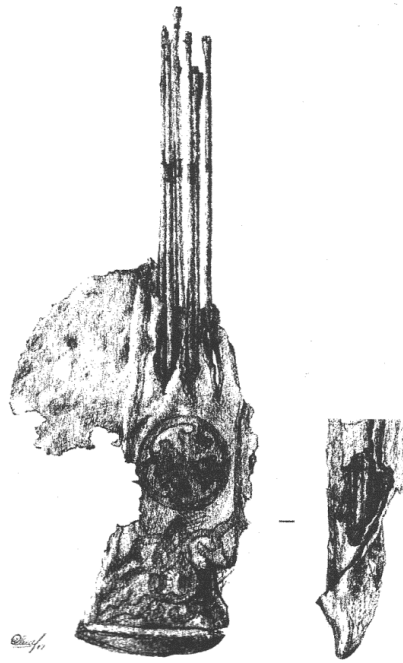


Figure 2. Tsagaan Khad, section of the cave (1) and burial plan after the removal of the covering sediment (2) (drawing: H. Piezonka).



0 20 cm

Figure 3. Tsagaan Khad, reflex bow with fitted silk string (drawing: D. Amarzaya).



0 10 cm

Figure 4. Tsagaan Khad, leather quiver case with arrows (drawing: D. Amarzaya).

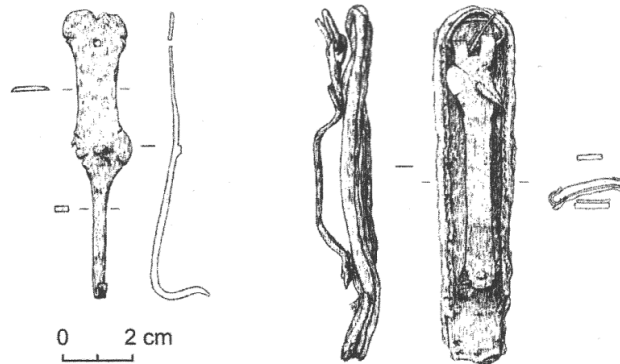


Figure 5. Tsagaan Khad, iron quiver hook (1) and iron buckle fitted on leather fragment (2) (drawing: B. Ahrens, H. Piezonka).

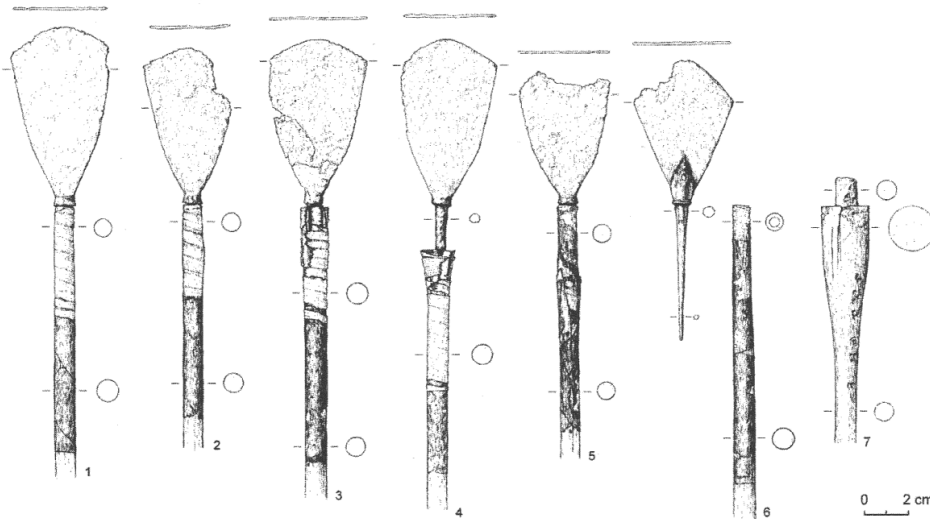


Figure 6. Tsagaan Khad, arrow points (drawing: H. Piezonka).

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蒙古国查干哈达山发现的 14 世纪武士岩洞墓

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置于洞穴及岩缝的墓葬，被证实存在于 6 至 17 世纪的蒙古国及内亚、南西伯利亚相邻地区。其反映了一种特殊的葬俗，与更常见的石质墓葬和土堆墓共存。死者被置入山坡和山顶，难进入的自然洞穴及岩缝中。此处，死者穿着衣服，附有随葬品，如武器、马具，或有马车及帐篷构件。因内亚草原及半沙漠地区的气候，有机物通常能很好地保存于这些墓葬中，甚至偶尔人体会自然木乃伊化。

2010 年，蒙古国南部查干哈达山，发掘了一座保存非常好的 14 世纪岩洞墓葬。查干哈达墓葬在内亚岩洞墓中，在某些方面非常特别。首先，包含许多器物，其良好的保存情况无可比拟，其中有一件几乎无损、华丽装饰的木弓，及一件装饰皮革的箭囊；第二，它是已知的第二座属蒙古帝国时期的此类墓葬，且是在大致未扰乱的情况下，能够勘察并科学记录的少数洞穴墓和岩墓之一。这开启了对该类墓葬进行综合分析和历史文化评估的视角。

**ПОГРЕБЕННЫЙ С ЛУКОМ И СТРЕЛАМИ
ЗАХОРОНЕНИЕ ВОИНА XIV ВЕКА В ПЕЩЕРЕ В ГОРАХ ЦАГАН ХАД НА ЮГЕ МОНГОЛИИ**

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В статье публикуются материалы раскопок средневекового захоронения из пещеры в горах Цагаан Хад на юге Монголии. Исключительная ценность данного погребения заключается в хорошей сохранности предметов, причем даже из органических материалов – шелка, кожи, дерева. Так, например лук сохранился настолько хорошо, что позволяет получить детальную информацию, касающуюся его технологии и мастерства изготовления. Он может выступить прекрасным образцом при реконструкции средневекового монгольского лука. Редкими по своей сохранности являются и другие находки, как, например, кожаный колчан. Исходя из комплекта вооружения, сопровождавшего погребенного, ставится вопрос о его высоком социальном статусе.

**МОНГОЛЫН ЦАГААН ХАД УУЛНААС ОЛДСОН 14-Р ЗУУНЫ ДАЙЧИН ЭРИЙН
ХАДНЫ ОРШУУЛГА**

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Монгол болон түүний хөрш зэргэлдээх Дотоод Ази болон Өмнөд Сибирийн нутгаас 6-17-р зууны үеийн хадны оршуулгууд олддог. Хадны оршуулга нь шороо болон чулуугаар үйлдэгдсэн бусад хэв загварын булштай зэрэгцэн үйлдэгдэж байсан нэгэн онцлог оршуулгын зан үйл юм. Нас барагчаа уулын орой эсвэл энгэрийн агуй хонгилд оршуулан өмсч байсан хувцас хунар, хэрэглэж байсан зэр зэвсэг, морины тоног хэрэгсэл, заримдаа тэрэг, гэр сууцны хэсгээс тавьсан байдаг. Дотоод Азийн тал нутаг, хагас цөлийн уур амьсгалаас болж органик материал болон булшин дахь эд зүйлс маш сайн хадгалагдан үлддэг.

2010 онд Монголын Цагаан хад уулнаа 14-р зууны үеийн нэгэн хадны булшийг олж малтжээ. Энэ булш нь Дотоод Азид олддог хадны оршуулгуудаас ялгарах хэд хэдэн онцлогтой.

1. Булшинд дагалдуулсан эд зүйлс нь маш сайн хадгалагдсан. Тэдгээрийн дотор бараг гэмтээгүй маш гоё чимэглэсэн нум, арьсан саадаг байв.

2. Уг булш нь Монголын эзэнт гүрний үед хамаарах эвдэгдээгүй, хоёрдох хадны оршуулга болно. Иймээс цаашид уг булшинд дэлгэрэнгүй шинжилгээ хийн түүх соёлын нарийн асуудлуудыг тодруулах боломжийг нээж өгч байна.