

Dromos Burials of Tasmola Culture in Central Kazakhstan

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ABSTRACT Based on the archeological materials, specialists have concluded that, in the age of Saka, a large Tasmola, historical and cultural community existed on the territory of Central, North Kazakhstan and steppe part of the southern Ural. The core of this community was the tribes living in Central Kazakhstan. The Tasmola culture was revealed by materials of 1950-1960, was localized at that region. Over the last 15 years, the authors have been obtaining new data on peculiarities of the tombs arrangement, which was unknown before. The paper considered dromos burials of Tasmola culture which were excavated by the authors on the territory of Karaganda region. Dromos tombs, in most cases, were attributable to burials of the elite. The elite burials were also distinguished by stone constructions above a tomb.

INTRODUCTION

The Tasmola archeological culture of Central Kazakhstan was discovered by M.K. Kadyrbaev (1966) in the mid-1960s and was known to many scientists by the materials of those years. After 1960s, the permanent investigations of the Tasmola culture monuments were followed by the years of occasional excavations. Thus, the main materials on the monuments of this culture were obtained during the works implemented in the end of 1950. Those years, Kadyrbaev (1968), a prominent and honored scientist in the field of archeology of the Early Iron Age in Kazakhstan and steppe Eurasia, had implemented a huge work on characterizing the culture of Saka Age population in Central Kazakhstan. His investigations related to the analysis of horse trappings, armament, mode of life fit well in the general background of the archeological studies of the steppe Eurasia. The result of this work was included in the materials of the Central Kazakhstan and the conclusions made on its basis into the common investigations of Eurasian Skythians. After the Tasmola culture discovery, the materials obtained in the north of Kazakhstan and in the steppe zone of the South Ural were generalized. The monuments of the Saka Age of these territories were very similar to that of Tasmola. The contemporary investigations will be distinguished by the studies of new object complexes. Likewise, there were no new things that were unknown on the features of funeral rites and burial construction. Thus, the topicality of investigation of Tasmola culture population connections with adjacent regions and its position in the cul-

ture system of the Early Iron Age in the steppe Eurasia has increased significantly.

Objectives of the Study

The purpose of this paper is to critically study the feature of burial constructions as dromos. Numerous dromos burials of the Tasmola culture in the territory of the east part of Kazakh Uplands were studied under the guidance of A.Z. Beisenov. During the study with new materials, it was important to consider the features of the same age monuments of the adjacent regions. In addition, most burials with dromos tombs revealed new, previously unknown, features in ceilings of the burial space.

METHODOLOGY

As for the method of the burials selection and its investigation, it is necessary to note two monuments related to the topicality of the investigation and publication of the materials of this region. The materials of Kadyrbaev (1966) that formed the base of Tasmola culture characteristics were obtained following the investigations of the monuments found at the coasts of Shyrdery river located in the north-east edge of Kazakh Uplands and had a peripheral position in relation to the main regions of the Tasmola tribes inhabitancy. The recent data shows that, the most bright and representative parameters and arrangement burial monuments of Tasmola were located at the mountainous areas inside the Kazakh Uplands. Especially noticeable were the monuments located in the east part of the province (East Saryarka) (Beisenov 1997) with the larg-

est concentration of burials and settlements. In addition to the territorial aspect, the new investigations were focused on such a feature of monuments as parameters. Kadyrbaev (1968) had investigated the burials of a small size, and the aim of the contemporary investigations was to study large constructions. Central Kazakhstan forming a part of the Kazakh Uplands represents a vast territory of rocky hills and dry steppe. Small rivers running from the high hills, dry up and lessen in the mid of summer. There are low mountains where the absolute altitude reaches 1000-1500 m and form a local oasis among the dry steppe and numerous hills. The zones of such oases were distinguished by the pine forests growing on the stones, the stripes of poplar and birch groves along the streams and springs. From the earliest times, the population of Central Kazakhstan has been concentrating at the zones of such mountainous oases with a huge amount of water and grass in the summer, and the environment suitable for living in the winter period. Such well habitable places from the ancient times were the mountainous systems: Karkaraly, Bayanaul, Chingiztau, Ulytau, Kyzylaray, Atasu and others. These zones contain numerous monuments of the Saka Age. Abundance of stone influenced on the character of the burial constructions, thus for the monuments excavations, an important technique was applied for the cairn deconstruction. The burials of the Saka in Central Kazakhstan represent a surface structure in the form of a bump with rounded semi-sphere upper part. The height of the large constructions is from 1.5-2 m to 5-6 m. The archeology applies a widely used term "*kur-gan*" (burial mound) originating from the Turkic languages. According to the investigations results, the Saka Age population in Central Kazakhstan was distinguished by disperse settlement (Kadyrbaev 1966; Beisenov 2015b), and the community of relatives consisted of a small number of families. This reflected in availability of the small burial grounds consisting of 2-5 or 5-10 burial mounds.

The burial mounds in Central Kazakhstan were robbed heavily in the ancient times, many monuments have no items or there are little of them, thus, the carbon dating of such monuments is of high importance. Recently, in 2012-2015 a group under the guidance of A.Z. Beisenov has received the results of about 30 radiocarbon analyses implemented in the Great Britain, USA, and the Russian Federation. Some of this data has

been published (Beisenov et al. 2016). At the moment, the data processing is almost finished and the complete volume of the results will be published soon. The specialists on Saka Age widely use a classical method of typology, developed long ago that provides good results while dating the items of trappings and armament. Ornaments of gold and other metals so typical for large burial mounds of the Saka Age also provide an opportunity to date the burial mounds, although not as much as the armament and trappings. Another option to date an archeological monument is the investigation of architectural features of the burial mounds as more complex arrangement is specific for the monuments of the early stage. This circumstance confirms again the necessity of a detailed investigation of the rocky and the soil layers, and different details of the construction.

OBSERVATIONS AND DISCUSSION

The archeological science of Kazakhstan admits a well-founded conclusion that, during the Saka Age there was a large Tasmola historical and cultural community that existed on the territory of Central and North of Kazakhstan, and in the south of Ural (Khabdulina 1994, 2007; Tairov 2007). This community consisted of several large tribes and kindred in their ethno-cultural relations. Beisenov (1997) who started his investigations in Central Kazakhstan by the end of 1980s had implemented some systematization of data on Tasmola by the end of 1990s, almost years under review. After that, there was a period of intensive excavations on the territory of Central Kazakhstan. A significant amount of new sources were obtained over the last 15 years following the long-term permanent investigations in the region. At present, the source studied, based on the Tasmola problematic has enlarged significantly that has resulted in both, data volume increase and appearance of new information about the categories and types of the monuments. Important were the materials on settlements, stone statues, credence near burial mounds (Beisenov 2014a, 2014b). However, after the works of Kadyrbaev (1966), the materials on paleoanthropology were generalized for the first time (Beisenov et al. 2015).

Over the last 15 years of investigations, dromos tombs were revealed in 26 burial mounds of the Tasmola culture in Central Kazakhstan (Beise-

nov 2015, 2016b). These were typologically different in their planning, section and sizes. This fact shows that, the population did not follow the common and standard principles of dromos construction. In turn, this fact showed that, the tradition of dromos burials construction was not a privilege of a distinct group of population, but represents a widely spread practice, usual and common for the culture in whole. It was also noted that dromos types are similar inside individual burial grounds. The major part of dromos burial mounds was located in the territory of Karkaraly region of Karaganda area, although this can be due to the intensive excavations at that region. Near Nurken village, the dromos tombs were found in the burial grounds Nazar-2, Nurken-2; 50 km south-west of the village and a group of dromos tombs was found in Karashoky burial ground as well. Another group of such tombs was revealed in the Taldy-2 burial ground located at 50 km north-east of Nurken village. Other dromos tombs were discovered in the burial grounds Kosoba (Beisenov 2014c), Complex “37 warriors” (Beisenov 2015c), Serekty-1, Akbeyit (Beisenov 2014a) and others.

Nazar-2 had two burial mounds. The first burial mound was 23m in diameter while the second one was - 21m. The height of the burial mounds is the same, that is, -1.7m. The burial mounds had an outer circle of stone plates located 2m away of the bank edge. The excavations showed the same arrangement of the burial mounds. The uppermost layer was a turf formed with time. This layer was filled with fine stones used by the ancient builders to cover the bank after the burial mound construction was finished. Below were the two soil layers, the thickest of them represented the ground blocks made for the construction of the burial mound. It should be noted that such laying of small ground blocks were frequently found in the soil layers of the Tasmola culture. In addition to that, the ground and turf blocks in the form of primitive bricks were widely found in the burial mounds at other

regions of Kazakhstan (Khabdulina 1994; To-leubaev 2011; Sviridov et al. 2014), and also from the regions of the north Siberia, Ural to the north of the Black Sea (Gulyaev 2009).

Beneath the soil layer, in the central part of both burial mounds, there were stone constructions that covered the burial chamber on the top. Under the stone construction, there was a chamber tomb in the ground (Table 1). The parameters of the surface stone constructions, chamber tombs and dromos of the burial mounds of Nazar-2 were almost the same (Beisenov 2015b).

The dromos were directed eastward. The excavations showed that the dromos were of two types in its section. In the burial mounds of Nazar-2, the dromos rose gently from the burial chamber to the level of ancient surface. In the burial mounds 1 (D 40 m, H 4 m) and 2 (D 60 m, H 6 m) of Nurken-2, the dromos were long with flat bottom rising gently at its end. In these burial mounds, under the thick soil layers were made of ground blocks, (Beisenov 2007) there were stone constructions covering the chamber tomb. In burial mound 1, the dromos was 15m length, and in burial mound 2 it reached 11m length. In both the cases, the dromos were of the south-east direction. The stone construction above the tomb (Beisenov 2015b) in the burial mound 1 of Nurken-2 was similar to that of the burial mound 1 of Nazar-2. There was horizontal brickwork covered with small stones from above. Dromos had the walls of vertical large slabs and it was covered by slabs and wooden beams. Similar to the central construction, the dromos was also covered by a layer of small stones from above. The burial mound 2 of Nurken-2 is a rare instance, as the stone construction at the top was made in the form of a dome using a “corbel arch” technique (Beisenov 2007). Five burial mounds of Karashoky had the dromos tombs. In addition to the two types mentioned, the tombs of Karashoky burial ground had stepped dromos (Beisenov et al. 2015). Thus, based on the materials, we can conclude about three main types of dromos. These types of dromos shown in Figure 1.

Table 1: Description of central stone constructions and burial chambers of the burial mounds 1 and 2, Nazar-2

	<i>Monument</i>	<i>Dimension of stone construction above a tomb, m</i>	<i>Dimension of chamber tomb, m</i>	<i>Dimension of dromos, m</i>
1	Nazar-2, b. mound 1	6.75 x 6.0 ÷ 0.9	2.6 x 1.8 ÷ 0.9	1.8 x 1.0
2	Nazar-2, b. mound 2	7.2 x 6.1 ÷ 0.5	2.6 x 1.6 ÷ 0.7	1.7 x 1.2-0.6

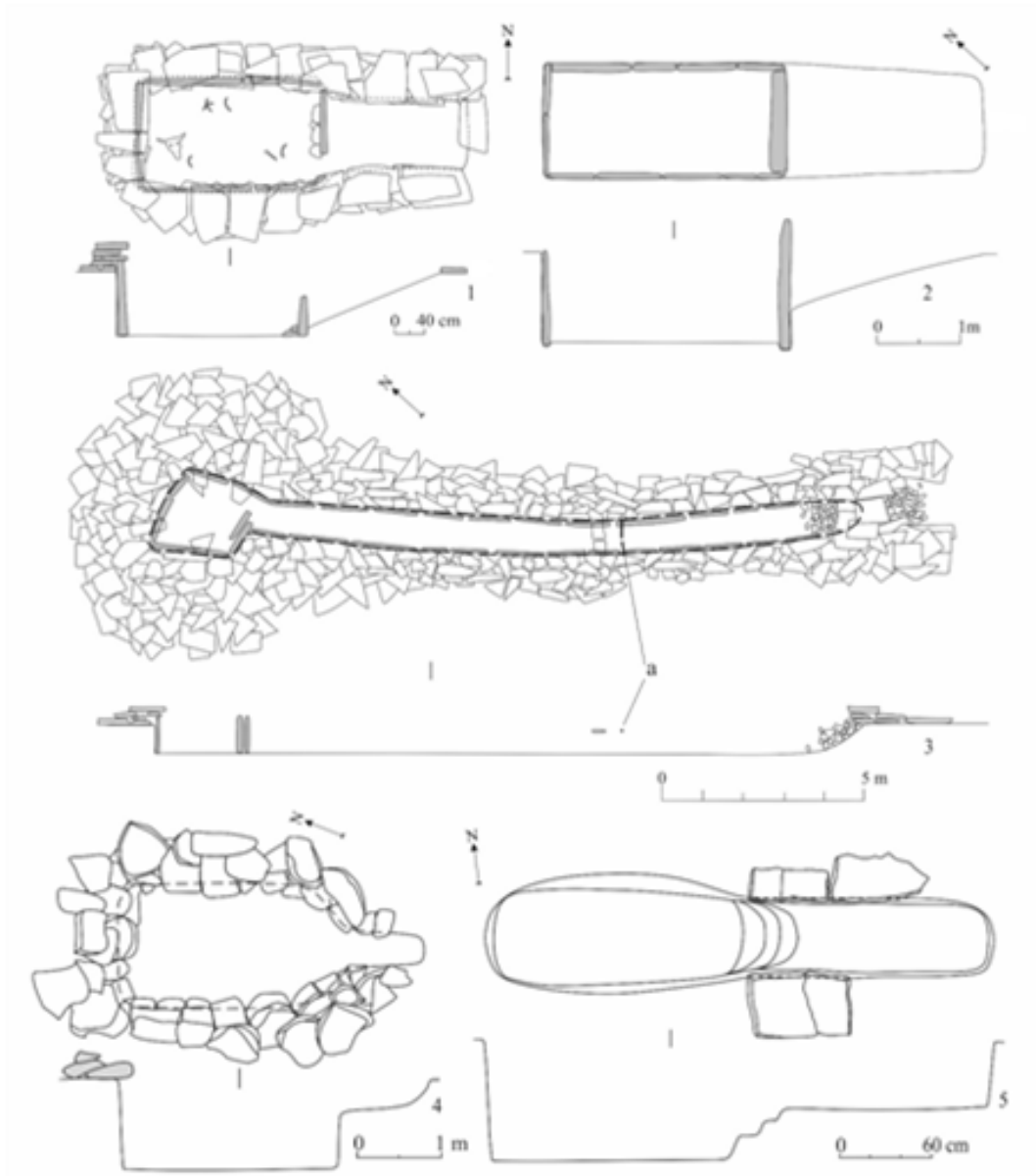


Fig. 1. Types of dromos in Saka's time burials of Central Kazakhstan.

1 – Nazar-2, burial mound 1. *2* – barrow with stone ridges Nazar. *3* – Nurken-2, burial mound 1, *a* – wood. *4* – Karashoky, burial mound 8. *5* – Sherybai, burial mound 1.

- 1) Dromos in the form of a ramp rising up gently to the level of ancient surface. This type was found in burial mounds 1 and 2 of Nazar-2 and in barrow with stone ridges Nazar (Fig. 1, *1, 2*), in burial mound 11 of Complex “37 warriors” (Beisenov 2015c).
- 2) Dromos having a flat bottom along the whole length rising gently at its end only. This type was found in burial mounds 1 and 2 of Nurken-2 (Fig. 1, *3*) and in burial mounds of Taldy-2 (Beisenov 2015b).
- 3) Dromos that have a stepped form. This type was found in burial mound 8 of Karashoky, burial mound 1 of Sheryubay (Fig. 1, *4,5*), burial mound 6 of Akbeyit, burial mound 10 of Serekty-1 (Beisenov 2015b).

The available materials confirmed that, dromos tombs existed in many regions of Kazakhstan. These were typical to the Saka in the North and East Kazakhstan, and South Ural (Khabdulina 1976, 1994; Tairov 2015; Toleubaev 2011), Zhetysyu, East Aral and for the regions of Sarmatians resettlement (Kadyrbaev 1984). However, the tombs of Early Sarmatians, those appeared starting from 6th century B.C.

It should be noted that, surface wooden tombs of burial mounds of Besshatyr burial ground (Akishev and Kushaev 1963) in Zhetysyu (Semirechye) had large Eastward corridor-tambour. The planning of these constructions was close to stone constructions of mausoleums of the Begazy-Dandybay culture. At present, the specialists have obtained new radiocarbon and tree-ring dating of Besshatyr that relates the burial mounds of the period, 8th-6th centuries B.C. (Panyushkina et al. 2015). It should be noted that many scientists allowed considering the dromos as special passages for further burials or a way for descending into the vault. Khabdulina (1986) has concluded this after investigations of the burial mounds of 4th-2nd centuries B.C. in the North of Kazakhstan. The materials showed that the dromos of Central Kazakhstan cannot be considered as special passages for entry into the tomb. The peculiarities of the monuments investigated by the authors confirmed this.

Most dromos of Central Kazakhstan were laid with stones after the burial. This example was found in burial mound 5 of Kichigino 1 in the South Ural (Tairov 2015). Also, many dromos of Central Kazakhstan had arches and vertical slabs closer to the chamber tomb. The dromos often rests against a stone slab representing the tomb wall (Figs. 1, 1, 2). On the whole, this image resembles the mausoleum corridors of Begazy necropolis, and mausoleum Buguly-3 of the late Bronze Age, added to a closed burial chamber. According to this data, the dromos excluded an opportunity of repeated entry into the tomb. However, it is necessary to note the character of the investigated culture. The mass graves used for a long period of time were typical for settled population. The burial rites of the Tasmola culture had no signs of such mass graves. Another reason why the dromos in the form of a short sloping ramp hardly can be considered as a descent to a vault is that, some vaults were 1 m depth only, or even less (Nazar-2, b. mounds 1,

2; barrow with stone ridges Nazar; Karashoky, b. mound 1; Complex "37 warriors", b. mound 11 and other). Those shallow graves hardly required a special descent. In Central Kazakhstan, the dromos were frequently found in the large burial mounds. However, small dromos also existed in the small burial mounds too. The length of the dromos in large burial mounds of Nurken-2 reaches 11 m (burial mound 2, height is 6.1 m) and 15 m (burial mound 1, height is 4.3 m). The burial mound 11 of Complex "37 warriors" was 0.5 m height and 8 m in diameter. And its dromos is 1 m only (Beisenov 2015a).

The dromos graves in Central Kazakhstan were robbed in ancient time, thus, the stone constructions were heavily destroyed. However, some large burial mounds in Central Kazakhstan were distinguished by a peculiar construction of the burial chambers cover. The following was noted:

1) Throughout the perimeter of a tomb, there was a brickwork of horizontal slabs in the form of primitive wall and closed from the top with large slabs laid stepwise from the corners to the center. Around and above the brickwork, there were additional layers of fine stones. This approach was noted in the burial mounds 1 and 2 of Nazar-2, burial mound 1 of Nurken-2 and others.

2) Around the tomb, there was a common stone construction of round shape with which the top was made by using corbel arch technique forming a dome. This kind of stone construction was found in burial mound 2 of Nurken-2, in burial mounds 1, 6-9 of Karashoky.

Both approaches showed a desire of ancient builders to leave empty space above a tomb. This pattern created an image of a house for a dead person, when a tomb in the ground represented a house basement, construction around the tomb was its walls, and stone cover while on the top was a ceiling. Mud covered above a tomb was found in burial mound 7 of Akbeyit (Beisenov 2015b). It is 0.7m height and resembled a semi-sphere dome ceiling of a house. The Genesis of the dromos graves tradition is an important issue for investigation of the Tasmola culture. The authors opined that, appearance of dromos graves in Central Kazakhstan had no relation to the mentioned regions of Kazakhstan or other distant regions of Central Asia. Dromos were typical for burial mounds of the early stage of the Tasmola culture (VIII-VI centuries B.C.). This was confirmed by archeological materials and

Table 2: AMS ¹⁴C dating of analyzed samples from dromos graves of the Tasmola culture. Queen's University Belfast, Northern Ireland, Great Britain

No. n/n	Lab ID	Provenance (monument)	¹⁴ C BP		1 sigma calibrated (1 ó, 68.3)	2 sigma calibrated (2 ó, 95.4)
1	UBA-23665	Nazar-2, b. mound 1	2507± 30	Cal BC	770-746 (0.178) 686-665 (0.157) 643-553 (0.665)	Cal BC 788-707 (0.281) 696-540 (0.719)
2	UBA-23669	Nazar-2, b. mound 2	2548± 30	Cal BC	756-728 (0.168) 716-708 (0.040) 694-679 (0.083) 671-605 (0.371) 598-542 (0.339)	Cal BC 773-482 (0.996) 440-435 (0.004)
3	UBA-23674	Karashoky, b. mound 1	2515± 27	Cal BC	774-748 (0.246) 684-667 (0.165) 641-587 (0.447) 580-559 (0.143)	Cal BC 791-728 (0.282) 713-710 (0.002) 693-658 (0.163) 653-542 (0.553)
4	UBA-23671	Karashoky, b. mound 8	2649± 31	Cal BC	826-799 (1.000)	Cal BC 894-869 (0.062) 850-790 (0.938)

radiocarbon dating (Beisenov et al. 2016) obtained by bone samples from a range of burial mounds (Table 2 and Fig. 2).

Dromos tombs demonstrated a common feature of burial rites of the early Saka for the whole East part of steppe Eurasia. This tradition was common for this territory originates in the age of the Late Bronze. For the early Saka age in Central Kazakhstan, the dromos should also be considered as a local tradition. (Beisenov 2016a,b). Tambours and “corridors” directed eastward were typical for the elite monuments of the Begazy-Dandybay culture of the Late Bronze Age in Central Kazakhstan (Beisenov et al. 2014). The same tambours were typical for planigraphy of many not excavated yet constructions of the Bronze Age in the Central Kazakhstan. It can be considered that, in terms of worshipping rising sun cult of East, the barrows with stone ridges (barrows with “moustache”) (Beisenov 1997, 2002) widely distributed on the territory of Central Kazakhstan were closed to dromos in semantic relation. According to the authors' calculation, about 400 barrows with stone ridges were found on the territory of Karaganda region only in a different time.

CONCLUSION

Thus, one of the important components of the new material on Tasmola culture of Central Kazakhstan was the discovery of the burials with dromos. East and south-eastward directed dromos in the burials of Tasmola culture were, probably, connected with the idea of the rising sun

worship, the cult of East. If a tomb construction was considered as a dwelling for the dead, then dromos represented the image of entrance directed to the East. Tradition of the dromos burials arose at the beginning of the Saka culture Eastern part of the Eurasian steppe. The appearance of this element in the funeral ceremony, Saka's early due to the formation of the new ideological norms of these tribes, who switched to the new forms of economy.

RECOMMENDATIONS

Studying the Saka burial monuments in different regions of Kazakhstan, it is necessary to consider the opinions of specialists on similarity of stone and wooden constructions built above a tomb. The dromos burials in Central Kazakhstan date from VIII-VI centuries B.C., the period of the Tasmola culture flourishing. However, it is necessary to investigate this issue for later monuments too. Further on, the topical investigation of the connection of the Eastward direction of dromos with ancient idea of East. Even, several thousand years later, the movable summer dwellings of Kazakh people (“*yurta*”) was always set with its door directed eastward that confirmed the power of the ancient tradition of the steppe nations.

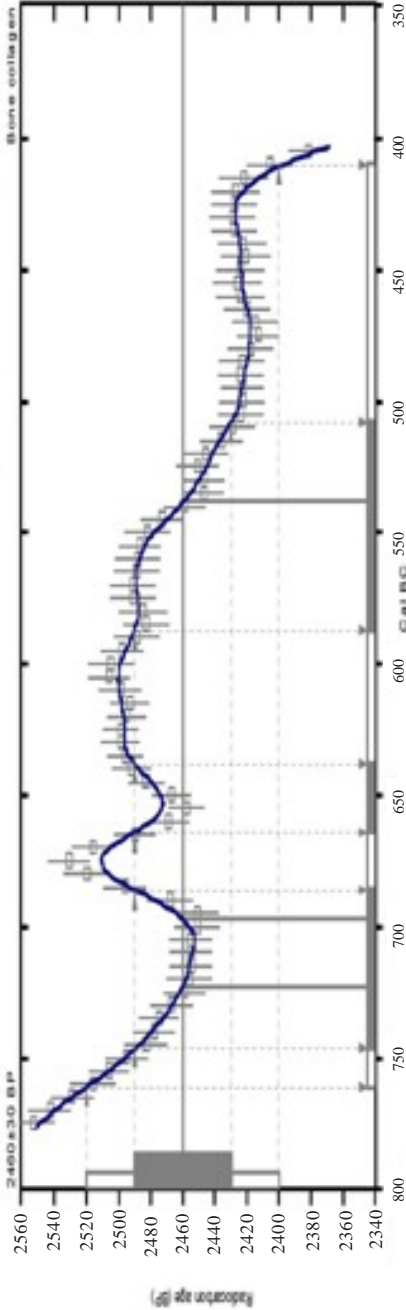
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CALIBRATION OF RADIO CARBON AGE TO CALENDAR YEARS (Variables: C 13/C12 - 19.N: Lab mult=I)

Laboratory number : Beta-290784
 Conventional radiocarbon age : 2460±30 BP
 2 Sigma calibrated result : Cal BC 760 to 410 (Cal BP 2710 to 2360)
 (95% probability)

Intercept data
 Intercepts of radiocarbon age with calibration curve :
 I Sigma calibrated results :
 (68% probability)
 Cal BC 720 (Cal BP 2670) and
 Cal BC 700 (Cal BP 2650) and
 Cal BC 540 (Cal BP 2490)
 Cal BC 750 to 690 (Cal BP 2700 to 2640) and
 Cal BC 660 to 640 (Cal BP 2610 to 2590) and
 Cal BC 590 to 510 (Cal BP 2540 TO 2460)



References:

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Beta Analytic Radiocarbon Dating Laboratory

4953 NW High Court, Florida 11/13, Tel. (303) 66 310 Fax: (303) 060904, E-mail: Beta@rediffmail.com

Fig. 2. Data of radiocarbon analysis of bone sample from burial mound 1, Nazar-2. Beta Analytic Radiocarbon dating laboratory, Miami, Florida, USA
 Source: Author

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