

Discovery of ruins of ancient Turkic monument surrounded by 14 pillars with inscriptions

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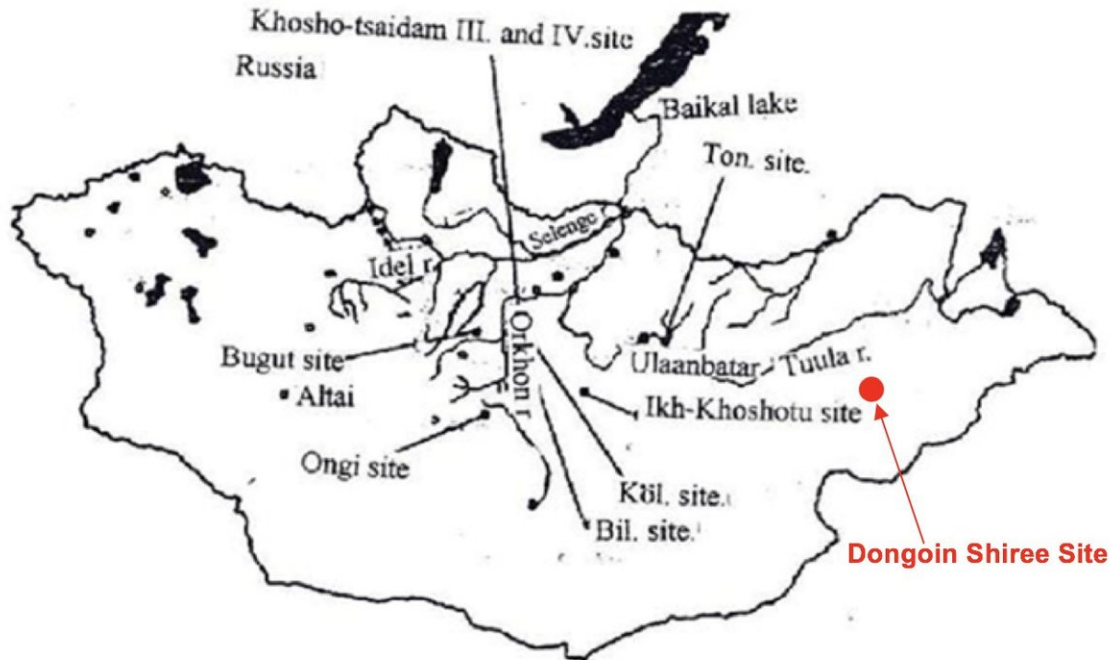


Drone aerial shot of the ancient Turkish ruins on Dongoin shiree. (North at the top.) Segments of the inscriptions and sarcophagus excavated from the hole at the center of the ruins can be seen. (September 2016) Credit: Osaka University and Institute of History and Archaeology, Mongolian Academy of Science

A joint excavation team from Osaka University and the Institute of History and Archaeology of the Mongolian Academy of Sciences discovered the ruins of a unique monument surrounded by 14 large stone pillars with Turkic Runic inscriptions arranged in a square on a steppe called Dongoin shiree in eastern Mongolia during their three-year (2015-2017) joint excavation.

Before the investigation of the ruins began in May 2015, researchers involved thought that inscriptions and ruins of Turkic royalties were only on the steppes in the western part of Ulan Bator, the capital of Mongolia. However, this [excavation team](#), led by Professor Takashi OSAWA at Osaka University, discovered 12 new inscriptions at the site, obtaining clues that clarified power relationships in eastern Mongolia in the Middle Ages from the inscriptions and the stone configuration at the monument.

The major feature of the monument is its structure—a stone sarcophagus is situated at the center of the mound, where a deceased person might be placed, surrounded by 14 stone pillars with inscriptions. Signs of the ancient Turkic tribes are carved in more than 100 inscriptions. These excavated inscriptions are some of the largest discovered in Mongolia. Using radiocarbon dating of pieces of calcined coal, sheepskin, and horse bone excavated from the sarcophagus, it was estimated that this unique monument was built in the eighth century, during the Late Second Ancient Turkic Qaghanate.



Conventional map showing places of ancient Turkic inscriptions and ruins on the Mongolian Plateau. Credit: Takashi OSAWA

Professor Takashi OSAWA deciphered these inscriptions and found that the person who is buried and commemorated in the inscriptions assumed the position of Yabgu (viceroy), the highest rank just behind Qaghan, during the reign of Bilge Qaghan (716-734 AD) of the Second Turkic Qaghanate. It was also found that the Yabgu became a Tölis-Shad (Royalty of the East), a commander-in-chief and highest administrative officer in eastern Mongolia during the reign of Tengri Qaghan (734-741 AD). Qaghan (or Khagan) is a title of imperial rank in the Turkic and Mongolian languages equal to the status of emperor, and is someone who rules a Qaghanate or Khaganate (empire).

These findings show that the Dongoin shiree steppe, where the unique

monument ruins remain, was the center of the eastern area of the ancient Turkic Qaghanate, whose location was not known from materials written in Chinese and Turkic texts. This [monument](#) reveals power relationships of rulers in the east area of the Turkic Qaghanate and their territories, as well as their political and military relationships with Mongolian tribes such as the Khitan, Tatabi and Tatar. In addition, the arrangement of these stone pillars on the plateau also provides important information for discussing the religious ideas and world outlook of the ancient nomads.

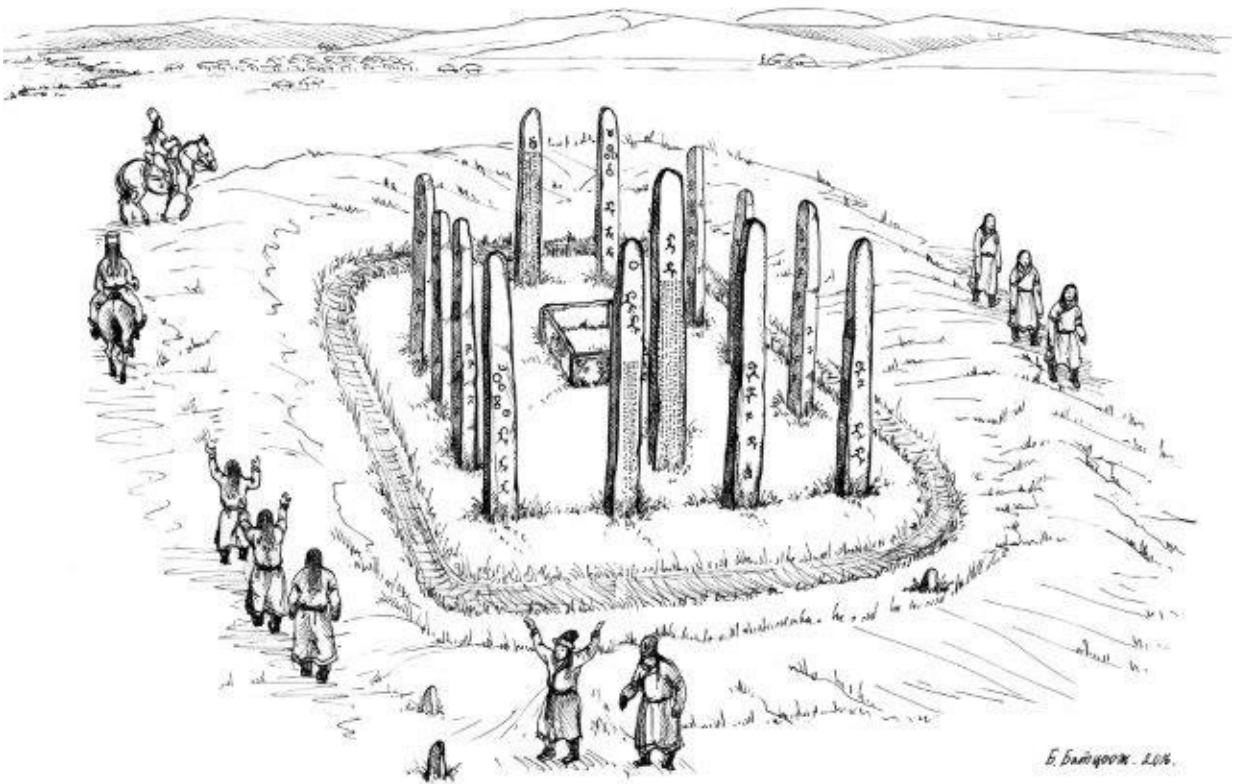


Illustration of a ritual conducted around the monument (drawn by former director of the National Museum of Mongolian History) (September 2016).
Credit: Osaka University and Institute of History and Archaeology, Mongolian Academy of Science

Provided by Osaka University

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