Excavations at Emeelt Tolgoi Site: The third Report on Joint Mongolian-Japanese Excavations in Outer Mongolia

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Preface

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This report presents the results of comprehensive excavations at Emeelt Tolgoi Site in Bayanhongor Aimag (Fig. 1). The excavations at Emeelt Tolgoi Site were carried out under a program of the Japan Society for the Promotion of Science (JSPS).

The Joint Mongolian-Japanese research groups excavated at Daram (Fig. 1) Site, Henty Aimag from 2009 to 2011 (Miyamoto & Obata ed. 2016), at Tevshi Site, Uvur Hangai Aimag (Fig. 1) in 2012 (Miyamoto & Obata ed. 2016) and at Bor Ovoo Site, Bayanhongor Aimag (Fig. 1) in 2013 (Miyamoto ed. 2017). The results of these excavations could help explain the processes by which slab graves changed over time (Miyamoto 2016).

Having finished excavations at Bor Ovoo Site, the following title was proposed for a JSPS research project running from 2015 to 2018 called, "Interdisciplinary Research on the Formation Process of Herding Societies in the Eastern Eurasian Grasslands," of which Prof. Kazuo Miyamoto (The Faculty of Humanities, Kyushu University) is representative. A research project group was established under a project entitled, "ANCIENT MONGOL KHUN PROJECT, 2015 - 2018," which was initiated under the Joint Mongolian-Japanese Research Project. This research group consisted of members of the Kyushu University Advanced Asian Archeological Center and the Institute of History and Archaeology, Mongolian Academy of Science. As part of this project, Khayr Kharaach Site, Govi Altai Aimag (Fig. 1) was excavated from July to August 2015. Two graves and two ritual stone structures belonging to the Bronze Age were excavated at this site (Miyamoto ed. 2017).

Through excavations at Bor Ovoo Site and at Khayr Kharaach Site, we gained a clearer picture of a section of the contents of Khirigsuur, which were distributed in the western Mongolian Plateau simultaneously with Stone-Slab graves in the eastern Mongolian Plateau. In order to obtain a fuller understanding of the processes of change which occurred with Khirigsuur, we decided to excavate at Emeelt Tolgoi Site (Fig. 2), which possesses a very similar burial system to that of Khayr Kharaach Site. In addition, Emeelt Tolgoi Site not only features Khirigsuur burials but also figured graves. Because of this coexistence of Khirigsuur and figured graves, we conducted surveys in the hope of finding keys to understanding the relationship between Khirigsuur and Stone-slab burial culture. This is the reason why we selected Emeelt Tolgoi Site along with excavations at Khayr Kharaach Site.

The excavations at Emeelt Tolgoi Site were also conducted under the project entitled, "ANCIENT MONGOL KHUN PROJECT, 2015 - 2018," which was initiated under the Joint Mongolian-Japanese Research Project. This research group consisted of members of the Kyushu University Advanced Asian Archeological Center and the Institute of History and Archaeology, Mongolian Academy of Science. As part
of this project, Emeelt Tolgoi Site was excavated in August 2016 and 2017, a total of two seasons (Fig. 2). One Khirigsuur, two round graves, two square graves and one figured grave belonging to the Bronze Age were excavated at this site.

These research projects were interdisciplinary in nature, covering not only archaeology but also physical anthropology and chemical archaeology. One of the goals of the research was to investigate the mobility of Bronze Age herding peoples in Mongolia. As such, Strontium analysis on human skeletal remains from Emeelt Tolgoi Site was conducted. Physical anthropological analysis and radiocarbon dating on the skeletal remains were also conducted. This interdisciplinary research was carried out with the goal of shedding light on the movement of groups of herding peoples and on the development of herding societies in Bronze Age Mongolia, as well as establishing a burial chronology for Khirigsuur culture of the Bronze Age in the western and middle Mongolian Plateau.

Fig. 2 View of Emeelt Tolgoi Site