

The Subeixi Site and Cemeteries in Shanshan County, Xinjiang

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and
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earth-pit tomb cave-cum-shaft tomb

Subeixi 苏贝希 is a village lies in a small oasis to the north of the Mt. Huoyan 火焰山 in the Turfan Basin. It means “the origin of water” in Chinese and is under the control of Tuyugou 吐峪沟 Township, Shanshan 鄯善 County. The site and cemeteries Nos. 1 and 2 at Subeixi were first excavated in May 1980. They were surveyed a couple of times in the later time. In order to construct highway, the Institute discovered No. 3 cemetery at there in 1992; then they carried out a salvage excavation.

I. The Subeixi Site

The site lies in the center of the Mt. Huoyan, 3 km south of Subeixi Village. It is on an irregular terrace, which likes an isolated island, surrounded by cliffs. The terrace’s east side is lower than the west side, with uneven surface. The site is scattered with stone artifacts, pottery shards, and woolen textile fragments and adobe wall-foundations. We selected three localities, which cover 400 sq m. Three house-foundations were recovered (Fig. 1).

1. Deposit and vestiges

The surface layer is loose and varied in thickness. It includes potshards and stone artifacts. The vestiges are directly under the surface.

F1 consists of three separate rooms and is arranged in a row as a rectangular shape. The wall foundation is built of earth with the remaining height 45 cm. Some adobe walls survived (Fig. 2). The surviving south wall is 13.6 m and the north 13.1 m in length and 8.1 m in width. Each of the three separate rooms is rectangle in plan and its door faces south. The wall near the two sides of door is thicker. Near the west wall of the west room,

there is an oblong shaped earth installation; its surface is plastered by mud-straw. This room might be used to store forage. To the east of the room there are straw bits mixed with shells of broomcorn millet. Close to the north wall of the middle room, there is an earth platform 40 cm tall. To its northwest and northeast, there is a pot shaped pit each. To its southeast corner, there is a tunnel leads to the east room. To the east of the door is a round fireplace with ash. A posthole is in the middle of the room. To the southwest corner of the east room, there is an earth square pool 120 cm each side. Its wall is plastered with mud-straw and fired. The surviving height

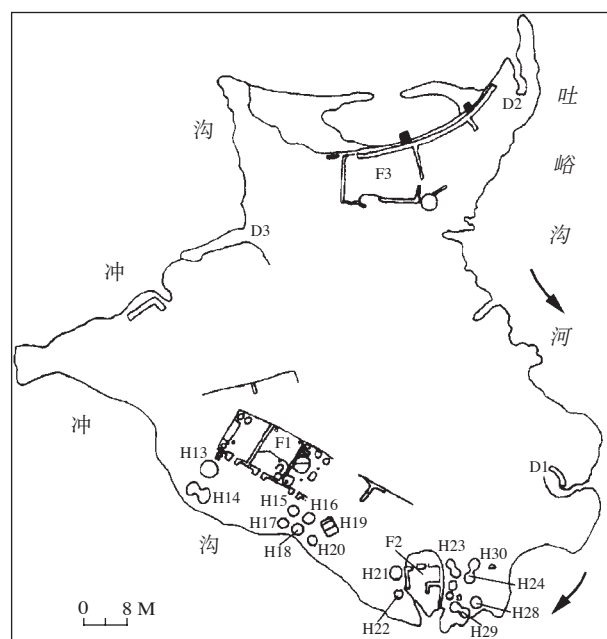


Fig. 1 Distribution of vestiges

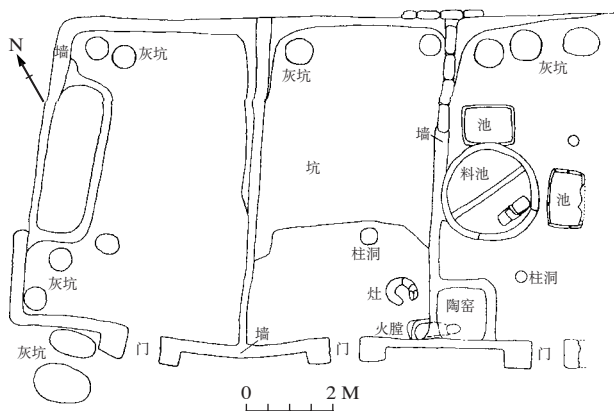


Fig. 2 Plan of F1

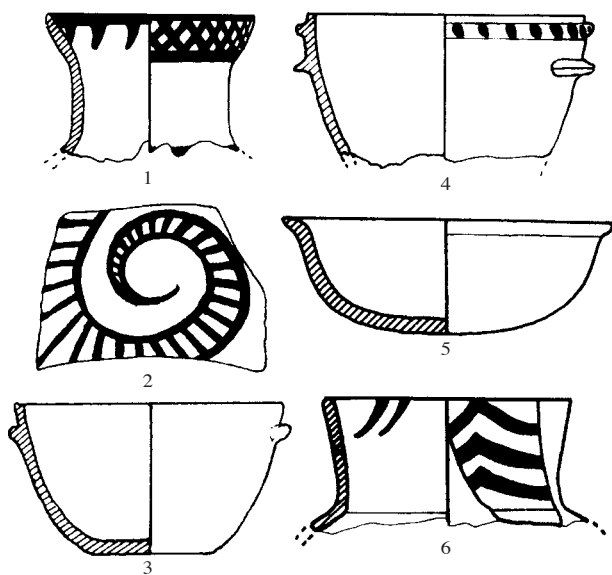


Fig. 3 Gathered and unearthed pottery artifacts
1, 2. *hu*-pots (F1:51 and 52) 3. *wan*-bowl (F3:1) 4. *fu*-cauldron (F2:13) 5. *bo*-bowl (Gather:13) 6. *guan*-jar (F1:60)(Scales: 1.1/4; 2.7/10; 6.1/7; others 1/3)

of the four walls is 40 cm. There is an irregular shaped hole in the bottom of the pool, which might be a fire tunnel. The pool might be used as a kiln. Its east section is slope and its east wall is undiscovered yet. So the pool maybe an open-air kiln. In addition, there are two postholes and one round forage pool in the center of the east room. The forage pool is separated into two semi-circle pools. To its north and east, there is a round-cornered rectangular pool each.

2. The unearthed artifacts from the house comprise millstones, stone pestles, and potshards. Some objects were gathered from on-the-spot survey.

There are 55 pieces of stone artifacts consist of 23

pieces of millstones, 15 pieces of pestles, 14 hammers, 1 spindle whorl, 1 axe and 1 pointed tool. Most of them are damaged.

A large amount of potshards were recovered and gathered, with few of them could be restored. The pottery types mainly include *fu*-cauldron, *guan*-jar, *bo*-bowl, *wan*-bowl, *hu*-pot and lamp. *Fu*-cauldrons are mainly sand tempered red pottery, with thick body, deep belly, and small flat bottom. The cauldron is appliquéed on mouth and has double handles or ears on belly. F2:13 is 26.5 cm in mouth diameter. *Guan*-jars are mostly painted with small mouth, high collar, and swelled belly. F1:60 is decorated with triangle design inside the mouth. The mouth diameter is 18.8 cm. *Bo*-bowls are of flared mouth, shallow belly, and round bottom. Gather: 13 is plain. The mouth diameter is 18.6 cm and the height is 6.6 cm. *Wan*-bowls are of flared mouth, curved belly, and flat bottom. F3:1 is 13.6 cm in mouth diameter and 7 cm in height. *Hu*-pots are of long neck. F1:51 is decorated with triangle design inside the mouth, trellis design outside, and band design on the shoulder. The mouth diameter is 12.2 cm (Fig. 3). Furthermore, a great amount of plain and decorated potshards such as cup and spindle whorl and wooden, bone, and antler artifacts were retrieved, as well as some fragments of woolen textiles.

II. No. 3 Cemetery

The cemetery lies on a terrace 80 m west of the site. There is a hill to its south and a deep gully to its north. The terrace measures 80 m long and 20 m wide in dimension. 28 squares were excavated and 700 sq m was exposed. The excavation brought to light 30 burials.

1. Cultural deposits and layout. The surface ground is covered with a layer of stone and sand washed down from the hill and no artifacts are recovered. The opening of the burial is directly under the surface. The burials are concentrately and evenly distributed in the center of the terrace and no superimposition. The burials oriented to the west of northwest.

2. Tomb structure. Altogether 1 earth-pit burial and 29 *cave-cum*-shaft burials were recovered. The most complicated *cave-cum*-shaft grave is covered with fine sands on the bottom. On the sands, wooden coffin and straw mattress are placed and then the dead is placed in. The tomb chamber is no earth-refill and the tomb opening is covered with wooden beam, reed mat, and straw; finally imposed by earth.

M27 is an earth-pit burial and 288 degrees on the

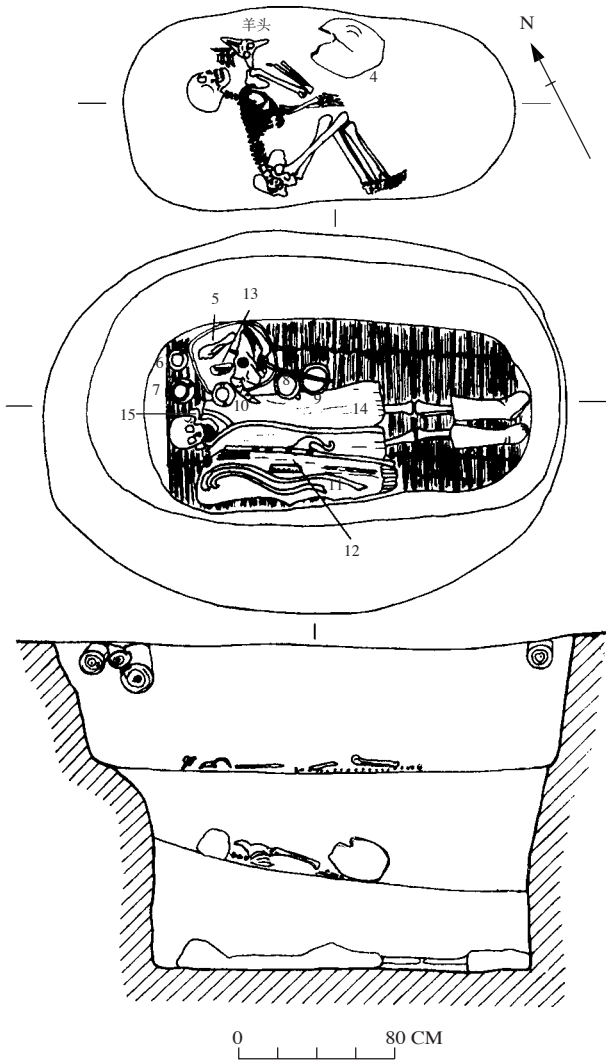


Fig. 4 Plan and elevation of burial M27

3. fragments of leather coat and woolen textile 4. pottery *fu*-cauldron 5. wooden board 6. jar shaped cup 7. pottery *hu*-pot 8. pottery *bo*-bowl 9. pottery *wan*-bowl 10. pottery *guan*-jar with double handles 11. quiver 12. wooden fire-maker 13. iron knife 14. leather coat 15. leather pillow (1. pottery sherd; 2. wooden artifact collected from earth-fill; 3. from the upper layer)

compass. The upper layer interred with the secondary skeletons of one male, one female, and one infant. The middle layer of an adult female lay sidely with contracted limbs in the center. The funerary objects consist of one pottery *fu*-cauldron and one head of goat. The lower layer interred with one aged man facing upward and with outstretched arms. He faces northwest. In his left side, funerary pottery, wooden artifacts, and iron objects as well as fried head and leg of goat, millet and meat were buried. In his right side are one set of quiver,

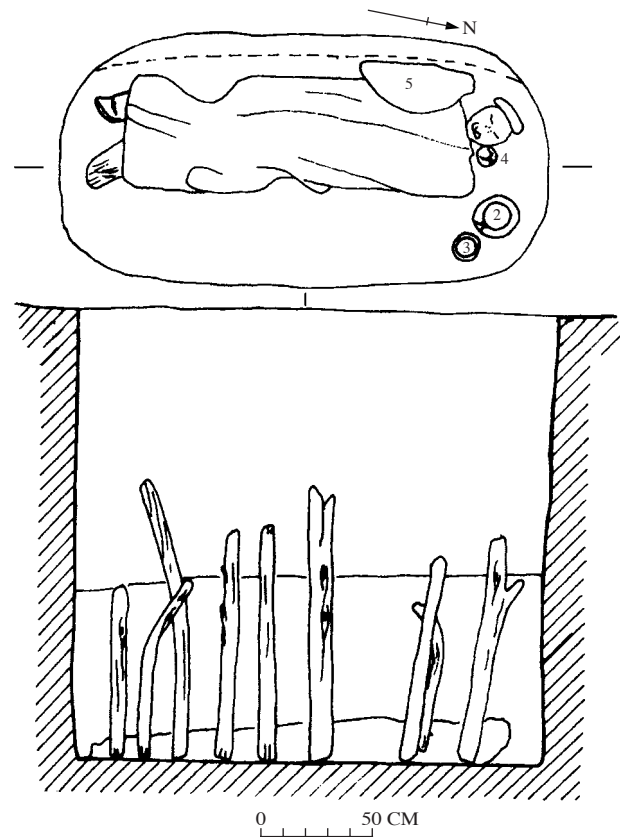


Fig. 5 Plan and elevation of burial M25

1. leather arm protector 2. pottery *guan*-jar 3, 4. pottery cups 5. woolen felt

one board for flint, and one wooden buckle. The body lay on a thick straw mat (Fig. 4).

M25 is a cave-*cum*-shaft burial and 345 degrees. The burial opening is placed 9 pieces of beams, reed, and straw. One middle-aged male is buried with outstretched limbs. His body is wrapped in woolen felt. He wears fur coat and a belt binged with 3 leather pockets in his waist. He wears a decorated chest-protector, high waist boots. Three funerary objects are buried (Fig. 5).

3. Funerary objects. Besides clothes, pottery, wood, iron, bronze, stone, bone and antler objects are found.

58 pottery wares were recovered. Most of them are sand tempered. The types include *wan*-bowl, *pen*-basin, *guan*-jar, *fu*-cauldron, *bei*-cup, *bo*-bowl, and *hu*-pot (Fig. 6).

Wan-bowl, 16 pieces, flared mouth, and flat bottom. *Pen*-basin, 6 pieces, flared mouth, shallow belly, flat bottom. *Fu*-cauldron, 4 pieces, flared mouth, shallow belly, flat bottom, a pair of ears appliquéd on the belly. Double-eared *guan*-jar has 2 pieces. Pot-shaped cup has

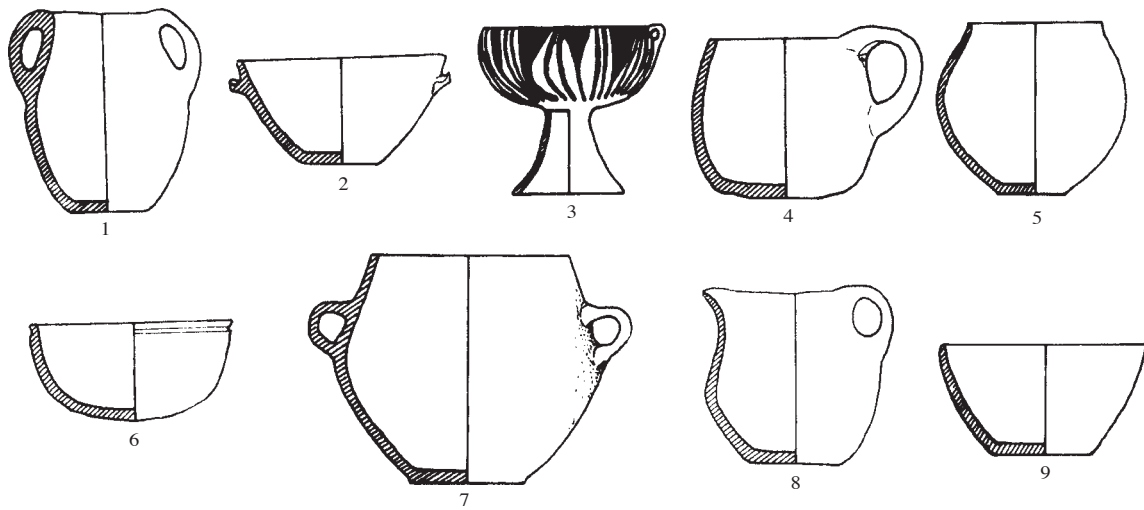


Fig. 6 Pottery artifacts

1. *guan*-jar with double handles (M27:10) 2. *pen*-basin (M12:4) 3. *dou*-pedestal stand (M6:20) 4. spoon shaped cup (M10:2) 5. small *guan*-jar (M6:2) 6. *bo*-bowl (M10:1) 7. *fu*-cauldron (M15:5) 8. spouted cup (M21:1) 9. *wan*-bowl (M15:18) (Scales: 2, 3. c. 1/7; 7. c. 1/8; others c. 1/3)



Fig. 7 Painted pottery cup (M15:16)

8 pieces with flat bottom. M15:16 decorated with triangle design inside and outside the mouth, connected whorl filled in parallel line and net design on the belly. The mouth diameter is 8.5 cm (Fig. 7).

Bucket-shaped cup has 3 pieces with single ear, upright mouth, slightly bulged belly, flat bottom. M15:10 is decorated triangle design outside the mouth, connected triangle net design. The mouth diameter is 9.4 cm (Fig. 8). One spouted cup has bulged belly and flat



Fig. 8 Painted pottery cup (M15:10)

bottom. The mouth diameter is 6.2 cm. Spoon-shaped cup has 9 pieces with single ear and small flat or round bottom. *Bo*-bowl has 5 pieces with shallow belly and round bottom. *Hu*-pot has 2 pieces with trumpet-shaped mouth, slender collar, bulged belly, and single ear. M27:7 is decorated with drip curtain design inside the mouth, net design outside the mouth, and wave and whorl designs on the belly. The mouth diameter is 7.6 cm (Fig. 9). *Dou*-pedestal stand has one piece with restrained



Fig. 9 Painted pottery *hu*-pot (M27:7)

mouth, tall ring-foot, and one small ear on the rim. The outside plate is decorated with connected triangle filled with vertical lines. *Guan*-jar has one piece.

21 pieces of wooden objects were found. *Zu*-block has 11 pieces. As flat, it holds food; as reverse, it can be used as chopping board. The bottom is thick and remains with chopping vestiges. *Wan*-bowl has 4 pieces, *bo*-shaped, and deep belly. Some have single ear and round bottom. Spoon, 1 piece, is shallow and has a long stick. The flint, 5 sets, each set consists of 2 parts: one board and one stick.

Iron object, 10 pieces, is bright and stainless. The types include knife, needle, arrowhead, hairpin, plaque, and belt hook.

In addition, only one mirror and one earring of the bronze were retrieved.

The stone, bone, and antler artifacts were rare, only 1 stone pestle, 1 stone cosmetic stick, antler comb, bow, arrow and belt were found.

Leather, fur and clothes, over 100 pieces, include chest-protector, oversleeves, and pillow. The clothes consist of jackets, overcoats, underwear, skirts, blouses, and boots.

III. No. 1 Cemetery

The cemetery lies 600 m north of the site, consists of two sections. The east section has 20 burials and the west 32 burials. It covers over 3000 sq m. 8 (M1–M8) burials were excavated in 1980 and 5 burials (M9–M13)

in this season.

1. Layout and nature. The last 5 burials, distributed in the west section, include 4 earth-pits and 1 cave-*cum*-shaft.

M11 is an earth-pit burial and 308 degrees on the compass. The upper layer is a young male in supine position with outstretched limbs. His skeleton is incomplete. The funerary objects consist of wooden *wan*-bowls, pottery *hu*-pots, wooden stick of whip, unidentified wooden artifact and head of goat. The lower layer is a three-body joint burial including one adult male, one female, and one infant. They are all in supine position with outstretched limbs and covered by one woolen rug (Fig. 10). The accessory objects consist of pottery *bei*-cup, *hu*-pot, *wan*-bowl, and *pen*-basin, wooden *pan*-plate, spoon, stick of whip, iron chisel, and leather scabbard. The clothes are kept in good condition. The female's face is covered by leather of goat and towel. She wears bucket-shaped double-pointed thick leather cap on her head, long-sleeved leather jacket, colored woolen skirt and low collared boots. Her left hand wears one glove (Fig. 11). The infant is wrapped by a piece of cloth. The male wears leather jacket and trousers joint with boots which is sewn in knee by leather of goat (Fig. 12).

M10 is a cave-*cum*-shaft burial and 298 degrees on the compass. The occupant is an adult male in supine position with outstretched limbs covered by woolen rug. He wears leather jacket, woolen trousers, leather boots, and felt cap. One woolen felt is beneath his body. The funerary objects include pottery *fu*-cauldron, *bei*-cup and *wan*-bowl, wooden *zu*-chopping block, iron belt buckle and knife, a set of bow, arrow and quiver, a set of saddle and bridle, and one woolen sweater (Fig. 13).

2. Unearthed objects consist of pottery, stone, iron, bronze, leather, and woolen artifacts.

Pottery, 26 pieces, all are sand tempered red and hand-made. There are *wan*-bowl (7), *fu*-cauldron (2), double-handled *guan*-jar (1), jar shaped *bei*-cup (3), tube-shaped *bei*-cup (2), spoon shaped cup (5), *bo*-bowl (4), and *hu*-pot (2). M13:1 is a pot appliquéd with one crescent handle. The inside rim is decorated with triangle design, the outside with cross-shaped net design, and the design on its belly is unidentified. The mouth diameter is 10.4 cm (Fig. 14).

2 stone artifacts include one millstone and one cosmetic stick.

The wooden artifacts are mostly the same with those unearthed from No. 3 cemetery; only the *dou*-

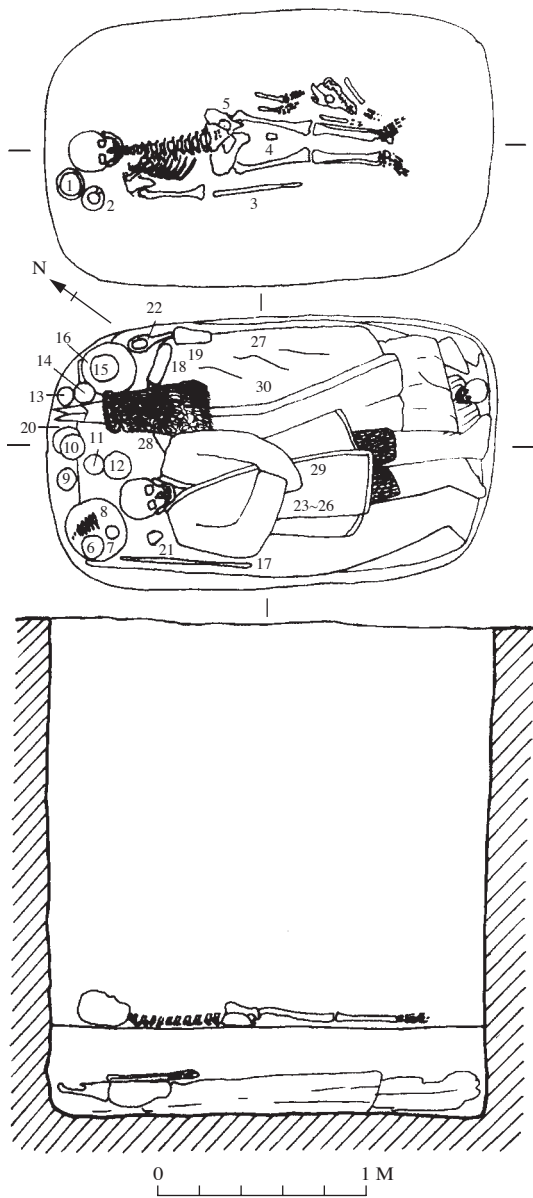


Fig. 10 Plan and elevation of burial M11

1. wooden *wan*-bowl 2. jar shaped cup 3, 17. wooden sticks of whip 4. wooden button 5. wooden artifact 6, 20. pottery *wan*-bowls 7, 9-12, 14, 15. pottery *guan*-jars 8. wooden *pen*-basin 13. pottery *hu*-pot 16. wooden chopping block 18, 19, 21. leather bags 22. wooden spoon 23. woolen knitted belt 24. felt bag 25. bone comb 26. iron awl 27, 29. leather scabbards 28. leather bag (contained cosmetic stick, wooden comb, and paint) 30. leather glove (23-30. beneath the clothes)



Fig. 11 Female mummy of M11



Fig. 12 Leather boots (IM11:C)

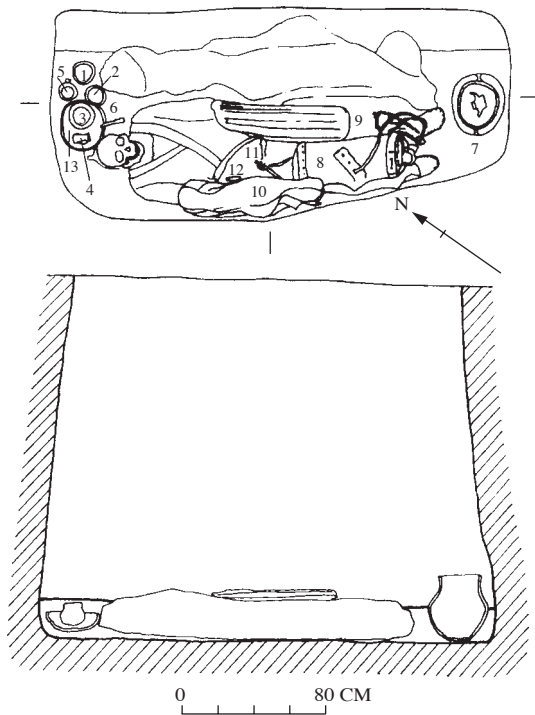


Fig. 13 Plan and elevation of burial M10

1-3. pottery *bo*-bowls 4. pottery cup 5. pottery spoon shaped cup 6. iron knife 7. pottery *guan*-jar with double handles 8. leather saddle and bridle 9. quiver 10. woolen clothes 11. leather belt and iron buckle 12. wooden plaque 13. wooden chopping block

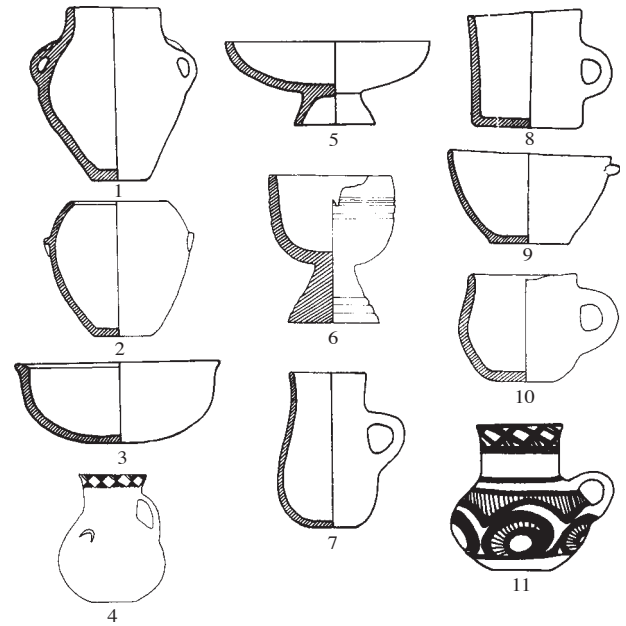


Fig. 14 Unearthed artifacts

1. pottery *guan*-jar with double handles (M10:7) 2. pottery *fu*-cauldron (M9:4) 3. pottery *bo*-bowl (M10:2) 4. pottery *hu*-pot (M13:1) 5, 6. wooden *dou*-pedestal stands (M13: 5 and 4) 7, 8. pottery jar shaped cups (M10:4, M11:2) 9. pottery tube shaped cup (Gather:1) 10. pottery *wan*-bowl (M11:6) 11. pottery spoon shaped cup (M10:5) (Scales: 1, 2. 1/10; 4, 5. 1/7; others 2/7)

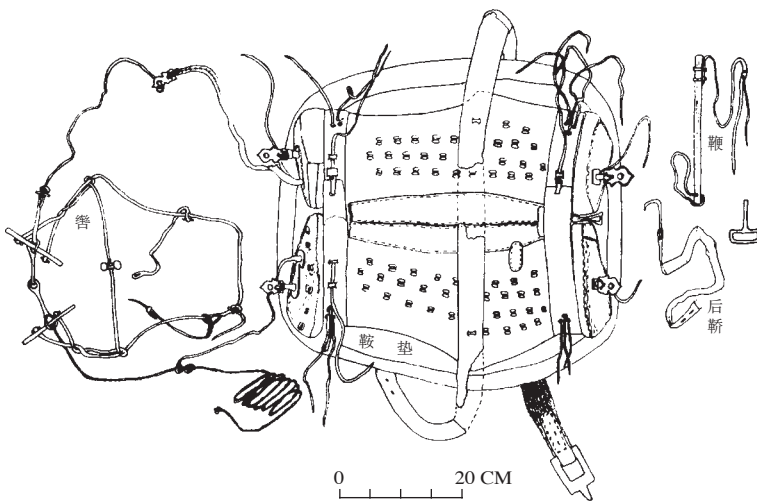


Fig. 15 Leather saddle and bridle from burial M10

pedestal stand is an exception. M13:5 has a shallow plate and short ring foot. The mouth diameter is 31.2 cm. M13:4 has upright mouth, deep plate, and forged ring foot. There are three circles of incised line outside the plate and three circles of flange on the foot. The mouth diameter is 9.4 cm.

The iron objects include a small number of knives and chisels.

The leather and clothes include one set of saddle and bridle (M10:8). The saddle is sewn by leather with the front and rear bridges are higher. The bridges are decorated with four S-shaped bone buckles, and extend connected with a peach-shaped bone buckle. The saddle is filled with deer's fur and is sewn tightly. There is a mat beneath the saddle. In addition, girth, rear axle, and whip are recovered. The bridle consists of reins, headstall, iron curb bit, wooden bit and varied leather and wooden buckles (Fig. 15).

The clothes are made of leather and wool and identified with those unearthed from No. 3 cemetery.

IV. Concluding Remarks

The Subeixi Site and cemetery is an important site in the Turfan Basin. This excavation gained richer

results than former times and the artifacts are in good state. The bodies, leather clothes, and food are un-decay.

The distance between the site and two cemeteries are very close, the burial type, type and design of the artifacts, type and artisanship of textile, and clothes are basically the same; consequently we consider all the remains belong to the same period.

A batch of artifacts with distinct time features are recovered, such as spouted pottery cup, pottery cauldron with appliquéd rim, iron knife, bow and arrow, saddle and bridle, and leather coat are identified with those from other sites. In addition, there are four ¹⁴C dates, house F1 is 2310 ± 85 BP, the cover block of the upper layer of M15 at No. 3 cemetery is 2395 ± 80 BP, the coffin bed of the lower layer of M15 is 2480 ± 85 BP, and the support of coffin bed of M13 at No. 1 cemetery is 2395 ± 80 BP. Therefore, the date of the Subeixi Site and cemeteries is between 5th–3rd century BC. The ¹⁴C dates match with the artifact features.

Regarded from the good-conditioned bodies, their

hair is light, their face is narrow with deep eyes and high nose, weak arch of zygomatic bone, inward mandible, and rare shoveling incisor. All those characteristics are close to the typical Caucasoid race. According to physical measurement and examination, the features of 19 skulls in good condition recovered from the two cemeteries are very close to the mummy, 13 belong to the branch of Caucasoid race, 3 to the branch of Mongoloid race, and 3 to mixed race. It notes worthy that among the 4 skeletons of M17 at No. 3 cemetery, A and E are the Caucasoid raced middle-age male and female, C is Mongoloid raced middle-age female, and B is mixed raced young man. This joint burial is from one family, and it is possible to bear one mixed race number like B.

The Subeixi Site is a settlement composed of site, cemeteries, houses, and pottery workshop. No. 3 cemetery is in good condition. Once discovered, it was excavated completely and obtained integrity data. No. 1 cemetery was surveyed earliest. According to the rule of archaeological nomenclature, the site is named the Subeixi Culture.

Note: The original report is published in *Kaogu* 考古 2002.6: 42–57, with 21 figures and 2 pages of plates, written by Lü Enguo 吕恩国, Zheng Boqiu 郑渤秋. The present version, an abridgment from the original, is prepared by the authors themselves and English-translated by Yi Nan 亦囡, and revised by Cao Nan 曹楠.