

Label Text for the *Gold of the Great Steppe* exhibition at The Fitzwilliam Museum 28th September 2021 - 30 January 2022.

The content listed start with the introduction text to the left as you enter the Adeane gallery and continue clockwise around the first space.

For each display cluster the objects are listed in an anti-clockwise direction in the order they appear in the galleries. Start each cluster at the section panel or the left most case.

Open skies, rolling plains,
winding rivers, creeping
marshes, soaring mountains...

In the 1st millennium BC, the Saka
people of East Kazakhstan chose
dramatic and prominent places to
bury their dead in elaborate graves.
Who were the Saka, and how did
they understand their world?

The art of repetition

The Saka made hundreds and even thousands of near-identical plaques and other ornaments by hand in the distinctive ‘animal style’. Loops on the back indicate they were sewn onto clothing to form a shimmering outfit.

Shilikti burial complex, Kurgan 16, around 800-600 BC
Gold
Excavation: A. Toleubayev 2016

Eagle with snake in its talons
КПо92 38082-3086

Two stag heads facing away
КПо92 38072–38074

Feline predator curled into a ring
КПо92 38116-38119



East Kazakhstan Landscapes



Eleke Sazy is a vast cup-shaped valley surrounded by low mountains. Over 300 kurgans are set across high ground in a mosaic landscape of river, marsh, and steppe. Some date to the earliest Saka period (around 900 BC).

The burial grounds of Berel and Shilikti, and the settlement of Akbauyr, are also located in dramatic mountain and steppe locations.

LANDSCAPES, PLACES, PEOPLE

Most of our direct evidence about the Saka comes from recent excavations of their cemeteries amidst the dramatic mountain backdrop of East Kazakhstan. Hundreds of burial mounds known as kurgans were built in lines along natural terraces and ridges, some as high as 3 storey buildings. The lavish burials are some of the earliest evidence of the Scythian culture that would dominate the Great Steppe from Siberia to the Black Sea. The Saka understood, exploited, and shaped this spectacular landscape through complex social interactions.

A noble young archer

This Saka teenager was no older than 18 when he died. He was given an elite burial at the Eleke Sazy burial ground with a bow and arrows and a dagger. He was originally buried alongside a girl, most likely his sister, who was aged 13-14. Her grave was heavily looted, while his grave was hidden under a collapsed wall of the stone burial chamber. Archaeologists rarely discover intact Saka burials.

Eleke Sazy, Group II, Kurgan 4, around 800-550 BC
Excavation: Z. Samashev, 2018

Seven deer plaques

Shown as female deer without antlers, and accompanying the stag plaque that decorated the goytos. The representations of deer on precious objects in Kurgan 4 point to a deer cult among the Saka.

Eleke Sazy, Group II, Kurgan 4, around 800-550 BC
Gold
Excavation: Z. Samashev, 2018
КПo93-38618-38624

Gorytos end piece with heraldic design of binary oppositions

The deer face each other, yet their backs are turned away. The composition is balanced, but the two parts are not identical. The granules are carefully placed, yet some appear to be deliberately missing.

Eleke Sazy, Group II, Kurgan 4, around 800-550 BC
Gold, lapis lazuli, turquoise
Excavation: Z. Samashev, 2018
КПo93-38629

Piece of leather strap with gold aiglet

Only fragments of leather tend to survive in burials, but what remains gives valuable information. The gold overlay would have made it easier to thread the strap through a fastening.

Eleke Sazy, Group II, Kurgan 4, around 800-550 BC
Leather, gold
Excavation: Z. Samashev, 2018
КПo93-38639

Gorytos side plaque

A ‘gorytos’ is a combined quiver and bow case that is a distinctive feature of Saka-Scythian cultures. This gorytos decoration was made by first carving a wooden model and then embossing a thin gold sheet over it.

Eleke Sazy, Group II, Kurgan 4, around 800-550 BC
Gold
Excavation: Z. Samashev, 2018
КПо93-38632

Stag plaque with lapis lazuli and turquoise inlays

Shown in the ‘animal style’ poised in motion with muscles straining. Turquoise is found locally in the Altai region, while lapis lazuli comes from near Lake Baikal in Siberia.

Eleke Sazy, Group II, Kurgan 4, around 800-550 BC
Gold, lapis lazuli, turquoise
Excavation: Z. Samashev, 2018
КПо93-38625

Gold torc

Weighing over 300 grammes, a show of great wealth. But was it worn as a status symbol in life as well as in death? Microscopic signs of wear might reveal whether it was worn ceremonially or made specially for burial.

Eleke Sazy, Group II, Kurgan 4, around 800-550 BC
Gold
Excavation: Z. Samashev, 2018
КПo93-38626

Two Triangular fragments

These pieces were probably fastened to leather or wood as decorative elements. The Saka were skilled in using gold to highlight the beauty of the objects they made from other materials like wood and leather.

Eleke Sazy, Group II, Kurgan 4, around 800-550 BC
Gold
Excavation: Z. Samashev, 2018
КПо93-38634-38635

Deer headdress plaques

Found near the archer's head, it is likely that the plaques decorated a headdress. The exaggerated antlers of the deer mirror those found on the scabbard, perhaps indicating they were made to be worn at the same time as a complete outfit.

Eleke Sazy, Group II, Kurgan 4, around 800-550 BC
Gold
Excavation: Z. Samashev, 2018
КПо93-38640-38641

Saka and Scythians. The same people?

'Above them dwelt the Arimaspi, men with one eye. Still further the gold-guarding Griffins' (Herodotus, Hist. iv. 13)

Around 2,500 years ago the ancient Greeks and Persians gave vivid accounts of highly mobile, horse-mounted warrior peoples occupying the Great Steppe. In ancient Persian sources 'Saka' is used interchangeably with 'Scythians', although Saka are generally attributed to the easternmost peoples of the Great Steppe. Saka remains the term used in Kazakhstan today.

In the 5th century BC, Herodotus of Halicarnassus wrote his *Histories*. He uses the term 'Scythians' to describe those groups occupying the region north of the Black Sea, while also naming many other tribes to the east who wore the same clothes and shared the same culture.

Could the 'gold-guarding Griffins' be the Saka of East Kazakhstan? This exhibition includes depictions of the mythical griffin. We don't know how the ancient peoples of East Kazakhstan referred to themselves, but we can explore the messages they give about their beliefs and society through their material culture.



Arimaspi fighting griffins. Scythian calathos headdress, from Boliznitsa, southern Russia, 6th-4th century BC.
Artist: Werner Forman/State Hermitage Museum, St. Petersburg © Heritage Image Partnership Ltd / Alamy Stock Photo

Tube located in cheek

Possibly used as part of an embalming process. The archer's long bones were also neatly drilled after his death, as were those of the girl he was buried alongside, perhaps also part of preparing the body for burial.

Eleke Sazy, Group II, Kurgan 4, around 800-550 BC
Gold
Excavation: Z. Samashev, 2018
КПо93- 38614

Tube with twist decoration

Found next to the archer's chin its purpose is unclear, but it could have been used to decorate a hair braid.

Eleke Sazy, Group II, Kurgan 4, around 800-550 BC
Gold
Excavation: Z. Samashev, 2018
КПО 93-38613

Feline predator clothing plaques

Showing clear similarity to plaques found at Shilikti burial complex. Each has two sewing loops on the back. One was found at the collarbone of the archer, another was found at his right hip where a belt might have been.

Eleke Sazy, Group II, Kurgan 4, around 800-550 BC
Gold
Excavation: Z. Samashev, 2018
КПо93-38615-38616

Belt fitting with interlocking ring joint

A functional yet beautifully crafted fitting that shows the archer wore his weapons attached to a belt. Looking like a tiny horse's bit, it fits perfectly into the hole in the scabbard.

Eleke Sazy, Group II, Kurgan 4, around 800-550 BC
Bronze
Excavation: Z. Samashev, 2018
КПo93-38644

Bronze mirror with riveted iron handle (corroded)

Bronze mirrors are found in both male and female burials across the Saka-Scythian world, and likely had symbolic meaning as well as a personal function. It would have been highly polished to give a clear reflection.

Eleke Sazy, Group II, Kurgan 4, around 800-550 BC
Bronze, iron
Excavation: Z. Samashev, 2018
КПo93-38612

‘Akinakes’ with snow leopard heads on the pommel and argali horns on the handle

The argali is a wild mountain sheep. Perhaps the dynamic of predator and prey gave power to the owner. This dagger was ritually ‘killed’ before it was buried by breaking it cleanly at the hilt.

Eleke Sazy, Group II, Kurgan 4, around 800-550 BC
Bronze
Excavation: Z. Samashev, 2018
КПo93-38627

Scabbard with scene of predator and deer

The composition seems to reflect a structured mythological space. At the hilt, deer twist their heads, alert. Below them a feline predator halts, turning its snarl towards them. Stags with exaggerated antlers line the shaft.

Eleke Sazy, Group II, Kurgan 4, around 800-550 BC
Gold, lapis lazuli, turquoise
Excavation: Z. Samashev, 2018
КПо93-38628

Triangular turquoise piece

Great care is taken during excavation to ensure that even the tiniest objects are not missed. The precise shaping of this decorative inlay demonstrates the skill of Saka artisans working with precious stones.

Eleke Sazy, Group II, Kurgan 4, around 800-550 BC
Turquoise
Excavation: Z. Samashev, 2018
КПo93-38638A

Beads



Found around the feet of the archer and most likely sewn onto his shoes, like tiny sequins. They would have been especially striking when the archer was mounted on horseback. Nearly two thousand were recovered.

Eleke Sazy, Group II, Kurgan 4, around 800-550 BC
Gold
Excavation: Z. Samashev, 2018
КПо93-38630/1-1781

Population genetics in the Great Steppe

A recent genetic study has shown that the Saka emerged from the complex mixing of Bronze Age populations in the Great Steppe. They are related to other Scythian peoples such as the Sarmatians and the Sargat, but were among the earliest group to emerge from around 100 BC in the Altai region. All groups shared a common artistic tradition, and were skilled at horse riding.



The rise and spread of Scythian peoples in the Great Steppe.
After G. A. Gnechi-Ruscone, Z. Samashev et al. 2021

The analysis of 111 ancient individuals from 39 sites across the Great Steppe has made significant advances in our understanding of how the Saka were related to other Scythian peoples. The study found that in the later Bronze Age (1400-900 BC) populations interacted across the steppe region, with three main Bronze Age gene pools identified. From these the Scythian peoples emerged. The study supports archaeologists' interpretations of the material culture that movement and interaction between populations had been taking place for thousands of years across Central Asia.

Nobility and wealth

Saka society was hierarchical, with leaders and elite families who controlled the land and resources. The presence of large and richly-furnished kurgans containing single or few individuals shows that only some members of society received a grand burial. Teenagers buried with elaborate grave goods indicate that wealthy families were able to honour their dead.

Arrowheads with gold cuffs

The gold decorative cuffs would make the arrows impractical to use, but gives them a special status for burial. These arrowheads were found in another kurgan near to the archer's burial.

Eleke Sazy, Group II, Kurgan 7, 8th–6th century BC
Bronze, gold
Excavation: E. Oralbay, 2016
КПо92-37981-37985; КПо92-37991-37995

Fragment of leather from gorytos

A remarkable survival from the archer's grave, the fine leather bears the impressions of the arrows it contained. Analysis of ancient proteins has revealed that quivers were commonly made from goat leather, however one Scythian gorytos from Ukraine was found to be made from human skin.

Eleke Sazy, Group II, Kurgan 4, around 800-550 BC
Leather
Excavation: Z. Samashev, 2018
КПo95-39623

Arrows with binding

Being an archer was an important part of Saka identity. The Eleke Sazy archer was buried with 40 identical arrows. We assume he was also buried with a composite bow made from horn, wood and sinew that was designed to be fired from horseback. This has not survived.

Eleke Sazy, Group II, Kurgan 4, around 800-550 BC
Bronze, horsehair (?), wood
Excavation: Z. Samashev, 2018
КПо93-38646/1-40

Young archer costume reconstruction

Weapons, decorative plaques and tiny beads found both in the burial and in a hoard left as gifts to honour the two teenagers buried in the mound were used to reconstruct this dazzling outfit. 40,000 beads decorate his shoes and trousers.

Woollen cloth, metal alloy, felt, suede, leather, wood
Modern reconstruction, East Kazakhstan Regional
Museum of Local History
Reconstruction by Z. Samashev
КПo94-39117

Bringing the past to life

As part of the research process archaeologists, costume designers, jewellers and other craftspeople work together to piece together evidence from excavations. Reconstructions enable the full effect of the burial costumes to be imagined, bringing the Saka to life. Reconstructing the burial costumes of both horses and people is considered an important tool for public engagement and museum displays in Kazakhstan.

Each part of a reconstructed costume is carefully considered in relation to the original archaeological context. Making a reconstruction from archaeological material is like putting together a puzzle with lots of pieces missing, particularly since fragile materials such as textiles, wooden objects, and leather are often poorly preserved or do not survive at all. Archaeologists draw on a variety of different information sources to when making reconstructions including information from other archaeological artefacts and excavations, descriptions and depictions of the Saka made in antiquity, and elements of traditional Kazakh nomadic costume.



Gold clothing and headwear decorations *in situ* during excavation. Berel Kurgan 5. © Z. Samashev

Hinged weapons belt attachment

Showing the importance of horse riding in the lives of the Saka, as well as their skill in bronze working. The hinged design acts as a shock absorber to prevent weapons from hitting against the leg of a warrior while riding. Used to attach the young archer's gorytos to his belt.

Eleke Sazy, Group II, Kurgan 4, around 800-550 BC
Bronze

Excavation: Z. Samashev 2018
КПo93-38645

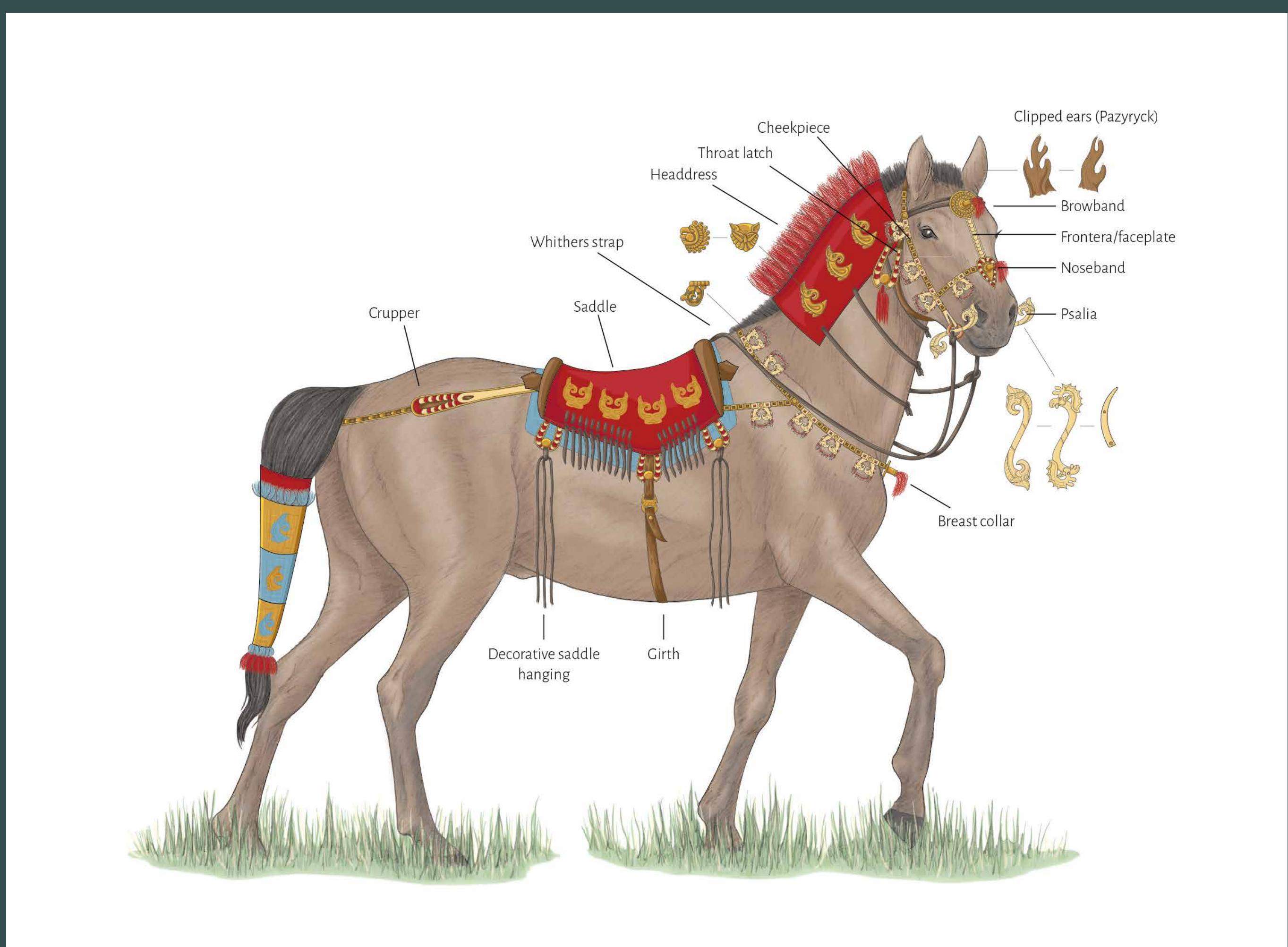
Mobility and contact

Horses and horse riding were central to the Saka way of life. Their equestrian skill is demonstrated through the specialised horse-riding equipment they made. The Saka and other Scythian groups commanded large territories, bringing them into contact and conflict with other peoples and cultures. An inscription by the Persian king Darius I (522-486 BC) records the capture in battle of a Saka king named Skunkha.

Horses in Saka society

The Saka were magnificent horse riders, known for their skill as mounted warriors. Analysis of sophisticated Saka equine gear has shown it was ideal for use in fast raids or hunting. Studies of horse remains from burials have revealed that in the Saka world humans and horses lived, worked, fought, died, and were buried together. Horses also provided milk, meat, leather and hide, and could be used as beasts of burden.

The horses of the Altai region, where the burial grounds of Berel, Eleke Sazy and Shilikti are located, were medium to large sized ponies by today's standard. In a kurgan up to seventeen horses might be placed north of the log chamber containing the human remains. Older horses are often buried with the most elaborate outfits, indicating that their long life was cherished by their human companions. Nearly all the horses from burials are male, and were either bay or chestnut in colour with no white markings.



Reconstruction of a horse in full riding tack after those found in Berel kurgan 36.
Excavated by Z. Samashev.
Vicki Herring © Fitzwilliam Museum

Horse outfit reconstruction, Berel cemetery

As well as being economically significant, horses were dressed in highly symbolic costumes for burial that turned them into shape-shifters and bearers of mythological messages. Similar to those found at Pazyryk, each horse's burial outfit is unique.

Modern reconstruction from Berel horse burials,
around 400-200 BC
Leather, wood, felt, metal alloy, cotton, horsehair
Reconstruction by Z. Samashev
КПВХ

Horse harness decorations

Adorning key functional elements of the Saka horse harness, including the bridle, bit, saddle, breast collar, and crupper. They highlight the sophistication of the horse tack, and the care that went into creating beautiful outfits for horses. The horse buried in this outfit was placed on a special 'bed' with its legs front tucked underneath its belly and its head resting on a high step.

Forehead roundel
Б-36/33

Teardrop-shaped breast collar piece
Б36-78

Horse tack ornaments in the form of two elk-griffin heads (14)
КПВХ - 482/Б36-48, КПВХ-483, КПВХ-484/Б36-26, КПВХ-490/Б3626, КПВХ-71, КПВХ-65, Б36-55, КПВХ-491/Б36-17, Б36-57, ВХ-36-48, Б36-62(2), Б36-62(1), ВХ-481, КПВХ-492

Horse tack ornaments, carved bars (4)
Б36/17, Б 36/58, Б 36/20, Б 36/2

Horse tack ornament, carved ball
ВХ - 487

Horse tack ornaments, carved square
ВХ - 487

U-shaped pieces from saddle girth (3)
Б36-46, ВХ - 479 / ВХ-481, Б36-15

Teardrop-shaped piece from bridle nose band
Б-36/41

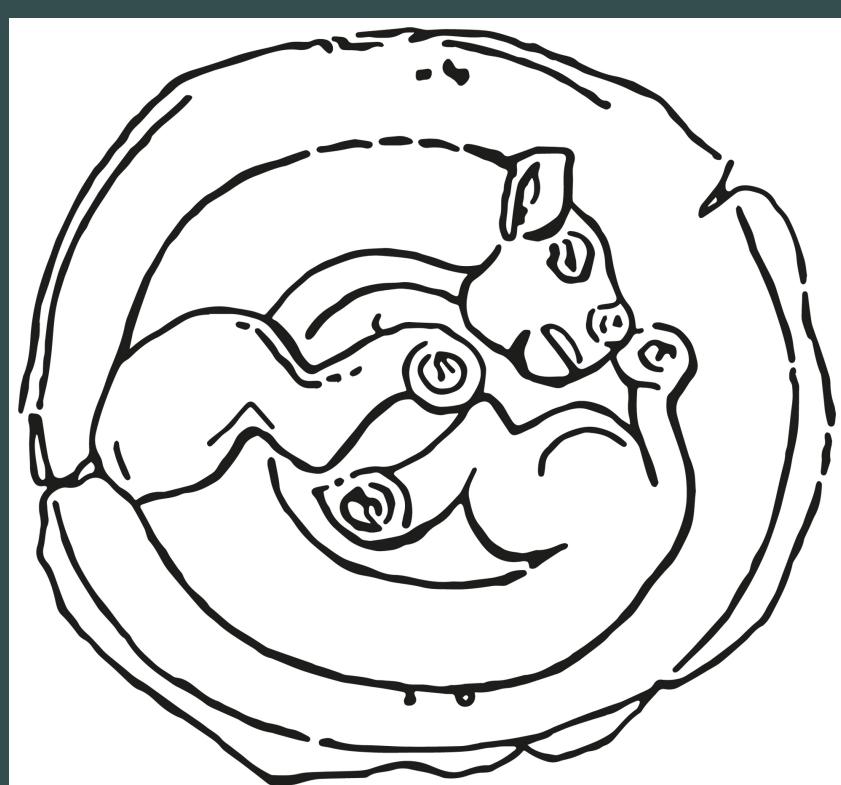
Decorative bar from bridle faceplate
Б 36/63

The ‘animal style’

The ‘animal style’ is the name given to the depiction of animals in fluid, linear, abstract forms. It was widespread across the steppe. Art historians have tried to unpick the chronology of the animal style and have identified many regional traits, but it persisted for hundreds of years. The depiction of deer and bears, wild sheep and felines reflects the world-view of the steppe communities.

The Saka art in this exhibition is decorative, applied art made for portable and precious objects, notably clothing, weaponry, and horse tack. We also find carvings on rock faces and standing stones in the landscape. Its themes are mainly wild creatures – predators and prey – rather than humans or domestic animals. The Saka imply the dynamism of the animals, or capture the movement of their limbs, muscles, and bone-structure.

Is the animal style a conventional visual language, passed on through innumerable generations and resonating with Saka mythology and religious beliefs? Or was the tradition also sustained by the constant observation of nature: ever-present and profoundly important?



(Abo e) Feline predator curled in a ring. After M. .
Gryazno . hance find Maiemir steppe azakh Altai
(right) Saka deer stones in the animal style.
Tarbagatay mountains ast azakhstan arly ron
Age . Samashe

Stag and Argali with chains and clasp

Poised on tiptoes, a stag and an argali are both elusive prey animals, representing the forests and the high mountains.

Found as part of a hoard hidden at the large kurgan ‘Patsha’ at Eleke Sazy, perhaps left in tribute to the buried leader.

Eleke Sazy, Kurgan Patsha hoard, Around 600-400 BC
Gold, garnet
Excavation: Z. Samashev, 2019
КПо94-38888-38889

Plaque with scene of predator attacking prey

Locked in a circle of conflict, perhaps representing social dynamics. Recurrent themes such as this one give us clues as to how Saka beliefs might have been organised. Coined the ‘Sayan-Altai belief system’ after the mountains which cradle the region.

Berel, Kurgan 5, Around 400-200 BC
Gold
Excavation: Z. Samashev, 2017
КПо94-39413

SYMBOLIC WORLD

Saka art depicts highly stylised and carefully executed motifs showing wild, domesticated, and mythical animals and birds in dynamic poses. These artworks hint at a rich symbolic language and mythological world that expressed their deep connection with nature and a sophisticated understanding of their spectacular environment.

We cannot fully understand the beliefs that the Saka held about the world around them. By looking at what they chose to represent in their art we can begin to understand the things that might have had particular significance for them. The natural world is captured in the ‘animal style’ – carefully posed creatures with exaggerated features, which are often combined to form beautiful patterns and shapes. We do not understand their meaning, but we can appreciate the power of the message.

Argali (mountain sheep) on clouds (5)

Appearing to float in an otherworldly space, a reflection of their high-mountain world that sits close to the heavens. Lines on the horns indicate the animal's advanced age, a clue perhaps to their status in Saka mythology.

Eleke Sazy, Kurgan Patsha hoard, Around 600-400 BC
Gold
Excavation: Z. Samashev 2019
КПо94-38859-38863

Four-petal flowers (10)

Plants in the form of leaves and petals also form a key part of the Saka visual language. The four petals bear a striking resemblance to the Greater Celandine, known for its healing powers.

Eleke Sazy, Kurgan Patsha hoard, Around 600-400 BC
Gold
Excavation: Z. Samashev 2019
КПo94-38892-38893, 38894-38902

Clothing plaques in the form of herds of horned animals

Tiny sewing holes reveal they would have been worn on clothing to give the appearance of herds running in the steppe. The Saiga antelope is recognisable with a short, curved snout and round ear, while a longer ear and snout represent the goitered gazelle.

Eleke Sazy, Kurgan Patsha hoard, Around 600-400 BC
Gold
Excavation: Z. Samashev 2019

Clothing plaques in the form of a goitered gazelle (20)
КПо94-38939-38958

Clothing plaques in the form of Saiga antelope (29)
КПо94-38907-38935

Beliefs in life

Deer are frequently depicted in heraldic designs that form symmetrical patterns. Predators curl and twist as they attack their prey. Mythical griffins with tiger stripes or horse hooves blur the realms of the real and imagined. People and horses were transformed and shape-shifted by wearing these glittering symbols. Animals, birds, fish, and plants are all found in Saka artistic expression. This hints at how they ordered the natural world, and the meanings they gave to the realms of the air, steppe, mountains, and water.

Reclining snarling feline predator (snow leopard?)

The balance and opposition of hunters and the hunted seems to have been important in the Saka belief system. From the same hoard as the argali on clouds, the energy and poise of the predators opposes the serenity of their prey.

Eleke Sazy, Kurgan Patsha hoard, Around 600-400 BC
Gold
Excavation: Z. Samashev 2019
КПо94-38867-38871,38873-38885

Hippogriff

This magnificent mythical creature has the beaked head of a griffin, antlers, horse's hooves at the front, and the lower half of a big cat. It combines the realms of the sky and the land, predator and prey, the domestic and the wild.

Eleke Sazy, Group IV, Kurgan 7, around 500-300 BC
Gold

Excavation: A. Toleaubayev 2020
КПo94-39409 - 39413

Griffin chimera clothing plaque



Imagined creatures are portrayed as frequently as real ones in the expression of Saka beliefs. With a bird of prey beak and feathers or tiger stripes on the body, perhaps the qualities of each animal depicted transferred to the wearer.

Eleke Sazy, Kurgan Patsha hoard, around 600-400 BC
Gold
КПо94-38834-38857

High mountains and open skies

Elk appear to float dreamily on clouds or petals, perhaps in a peaceful high mountain realm of the Saka belief system. Birds of prey move between realms, soaring high above steppe and mountain, but eating the flesh of ground- and water-dwelling creatures. The Saka also depict mythical griffins with hooked beaks like birds of prey.

Eleke Sazy, Group IV, Kurgan 7 hoard, around 500-300 BC

Gold

Excavation: A. Toleubayev 2020

Griffin-birds (2)

Horse harness ornaments

КПо94 39386/4, 39386/6

Elk floating on clouds (5)

Horse harness ornaments

КПо94-39395-39399

Gold

Eleke Sazy, Group IV, Kurgan 7, Around 500-300 BC
Excavation: A. Toleubayev, 2020

Beliefs around death

We can begin to understand Saka beliefs about death by studying the actions they took to bury their dead, and what they placed with them. Hoards of clothing and horse tack found under the external stones of kurgans were given as gifts to commemorate the dead long after burial. This has parallels with the Kazakh custom of sacrificing a horse laden with the clothes of the deceased one year after their death.

Horses and ceremony

Ornaments for horse tack were found in a hoard of over 800 objects hidden at the base of a kurgan at Eleke Sazy cemetery.

Unlike most delicate harness ornaments found in Saka-Scythian burials, the sturdily made objects were likely made for ceremonial use while the horse was alive.

Perhaps the long chains and leaf-life pendants on the claws of the feline predators would have created a soft tinkling sound as the horse moved.

Feline predator with pendant claws (4)
Gold

Eleke Sazy, Group II, Kurgan 7, Around 800-500 BC
Excavation: A. Toleubayev 2020
КПо94 39382-39384

Paying tribute

Elaborate horse outfits tell us horses played an important part in ritual practice around death. The intricate details from this fine gift of a ceremonial horse harness would be a worthy tribute to a Saka leader from their subjects.

Eleke Sazy, Group II, Kurgan 7, Around 800-500 BC
Excavation: A. Toleubayev 2020

Bear with bells on claws

With teeth bared and ears alert, this bear stands poised holding bells in its claws

Gold

КПо94-39380

Feline predators with large ears

Gold

КПо94 – 39462-39463

Acts of remembering

This collection of jewellery and clothing decorations represents a complete hoard hidden together under the stones of the kurgan containing the teenagers at the Eleke Sazy cemetery. Archaeologists think gifts of clothing and jewellery were left for the dead in a ceremony of remembrance to mark the anniversary of their passing. A similar custom of giving clothes in memory of the deceased forms part of Kazakh burial rites today.

Round plaques with two, three or four sewing loops on reverse

Gold

КПо93- 38577/1-103, КПо93- 38578/
1-7, КПо93-38579/1-11

Beads, carved from semi-precious stones

Turquoise, jasper, carnelian, chalcedony, pyrite, jet,
coquina

КПо93- 38597/1-371

Hollow barrel-shaped beads and leaf-shaped pendants

Gold

КПо93- 38580/1-128, КПо93-38581/1-44

Bronze mirror

A bronze mirror placed over the hoard. It would have been polished to a warm glow and may have offered protection from bad spirits or helped to guide the dead to their gifts.

Eleke Sazy, Group II, Kurgan 4 hoard, around 800-500 BC
Bronze
Excavation: Z. Samashev 2018
КПо93-38576

Gifts for the dead

The teenagers were honoured and remembered with beautifully made objects using different materials. From tiny beads to large pendants, the variety of objects in the hoard indicate that these were carefully chosen gifts.

Eleke Sazy, Group II, Kurgan 4 hoard, around 800-500 BC
Excavation: Z. Samashev 2018

Pendants

Red deer antler and stone

КПо93- 38608/1-3

Cylindrical beads, made from rolled sheets of gold

Gold

КПо93- 38584/1-11

Cluster beads made from soldered balls of gold

Gold

КПо93- 38583/1-9

Folded round clothing plaques

Gold

КПо93- 38596/1-6

Made for the dead?

Scientific analysis has revealed that the composition of the gold in the hoard is different to the gold from the burial in Kurgan 4. This supports the theory that the two groups of objects were not made at the same time.

Eleke Sazy, Group II, Kurgan 4 hoard, around 800-500 BC
Excavation: Z. Samashev 2018

Double-headed bird plaques (6)
Gold
КПо93- 38592/1-6

Rhomboid pendant made of two hollow pieces
Gold
КПо93-38595

Cylindrical gold beads



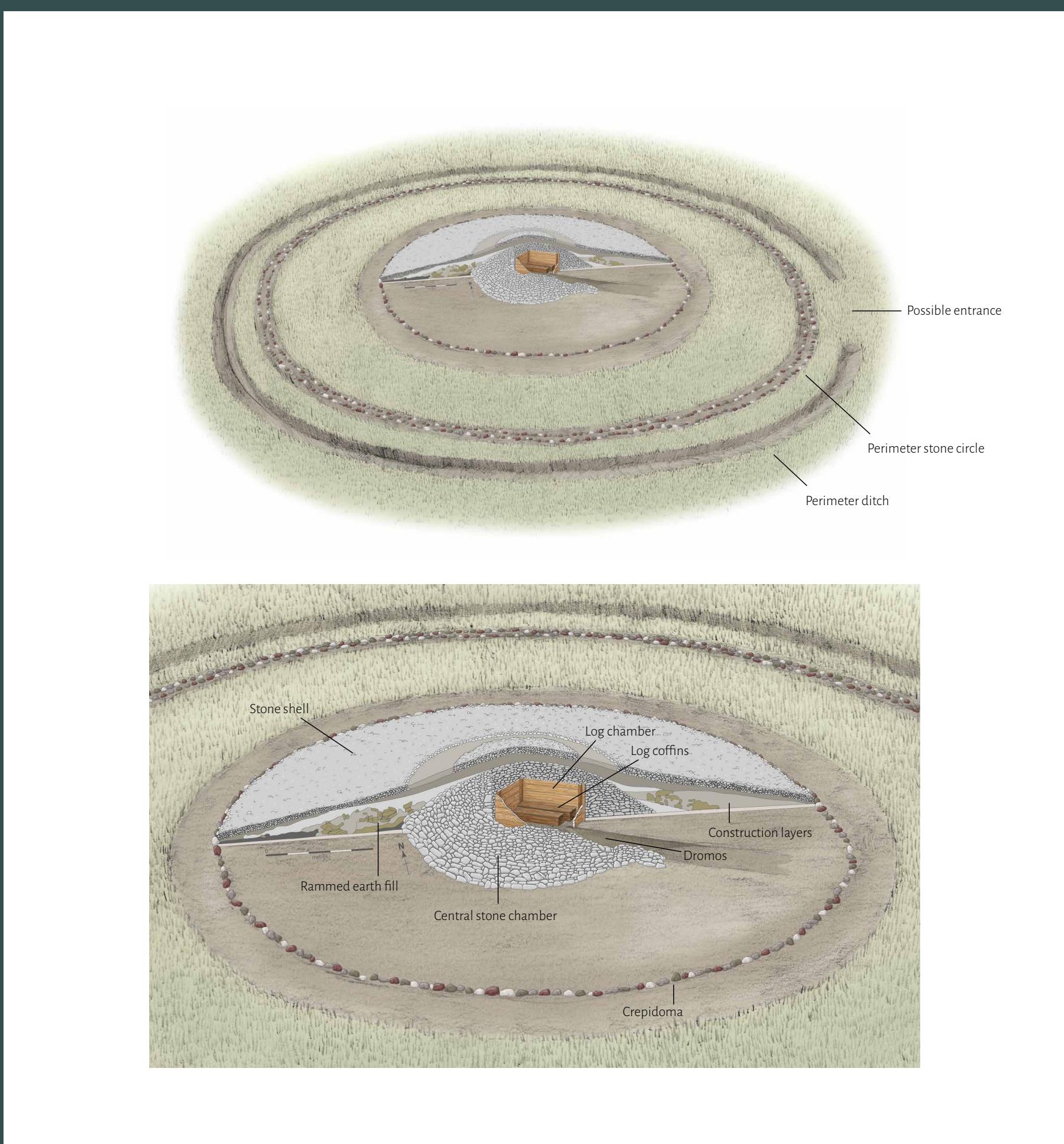
Each one of these 10,000 beads shows that the value of an object does not lie in the material alone, but also in the expertise and time invested in making it. Each bead is around one millimetre in diameter. It required specialist knowledge and time to produce, and further time and skill was needed to sew each bead onto clothing.

Eleke Sazy, Group II, Kurgan 4 hoard, around 800-500 BC
Gold
Excavation: Z. Samashev 2018 K
No93-38631/1- 10358

Kurgan architecture

Kurgans are carefully planned structures. Archaeologists study how they were built to understand Saka beliefs and rituals. Most kurgans have a central burial chamber, either built in wood above the ground or sunk into deep pits and encased in a stone structure. Layers of earth, turf and stones are used to create the mound, which is sealed with a top layer of stones. Permafrost often forms inside the stone structure, creating excellent preservation conditions for wood, skin and leather.

Kurgan 4 at Eleke Sazy, where the Saka teenagers were buried, was reinforced with packed earth on its western side, perhaps to protect against a perceived spiritual threat from the setting sun. The archer was buried with his head pointing northwest. One ring of large stones supports the layered earthen structure of turf, soil and mudbrick (crepidoma), and a double ring of beautifully coloured river stones was placed around the perimeter. The kurgan is encircled by a ditch, perhaps as the final act of ending the death ritual and ‘closing’ the monument.



Artist's impression of Kurgan 4, Eleke Sazy, Group II. Cutaway to reveal construction layers.
Vicki Herring © Fitzwilliam Museum

Felt saddle hanging in the shape of a fish

Ceremonial horse outfits included depiction of animals representing the water, land, high mountains and the sky or mythical realm. Felted sheep's wool is still made by Kazakhs today for carpets, clothing, and yurt coverings.

Berel Kurgan 11, around 400-200 BC
Felt
Excavation: Z. Samashev, 1998-2011
КПВХ-796/1

The exhibition continues in the Mellon gallery which runs parallel to the Adeane gallery you are currently in. The door between the galleries is in the middle of the room, next to the display of the horse costume.

When you enter the Mellon gallery, turn left and proceed to the end of the room. The exhibition continues from the 'Material World' theme panel.

MATERIAL WORLD

A complex world of materials and production techniques underlies the social and symbolic world of the Saka. Through careful study of the artefacts, archaeologists have begun to reveal the stories of human creativity and labour that underly each one.

We can see the work that went into producing each object – their value lies not only in their beauty, but also in the time it took to extract the raw materials and the skills needed to work with wood, metal, stone and leather. New evidence is being uncovered about the Saka's knowledge of both domesticated and wild plants and animals, the variety of different ways in which they occupied the land, and their role in the movement of objects and ideas through long-distance contacts.

Working with metals

East Kazakhstan is rich in minerals, and from at least 2000 BC its inhabitants mined rare tin deposits for bronze. The earliest gold artefacts also date to this time. The Saka were sophisticated metalworkers, drawing on the long tradition of metal working in the area. They also perfected skills in combining materials, such as bronze or wood with gold.

Highlighting in gold

Saka smiths were skilled in working with other metals besides gold, especially bronze. Gold foiling serves to highlight the importance of beautifully made bronze artefacts, and gives them symbolic significance. Using a thin layer of gold may have been a way to signal the wealth of the wearer while retaining the functional properties of stronger materials.

Bronze rings with gold foil (9)

Fragments of leather strap preserved in the attachment loops indicates the sturdy design was used in life rather than as a prop for burial.

Bronze, gold

КПо94-39408/1-9

Iron rings with gold foil

Iron, gold

КПо94 -39407/1-3

Decorated bronze plates with gold foil

Gold serves to highlight the skill of a Saka bronzeworker in creating this intricate design.

Bronze, gold

КПо94-39400/1-2, КПо94-39401/1-2, КПо94-39402

Iron torc or bracelet fragment in the shape of a snarling wolf head with gold leaf



Iron was a new material during Saka times. The gold leaf could be used to highlight the technical prowess of a Saka smith able to work with iron. Or it might represent an innovative way to use less gold while retaining a feeling of weight and wealth.

Eleke Sazy, Kurgan Patsha hoard, Around 600-400 BC
Iron core with gold leaf overlay
Excavation: Z. Samashev 2019
КПо94-38966/1-7

Hidden stories

Finding broken and damaged artefacts can be very useful to archaeologists. They may not look as beautiful but they give us the opportunity to look inside and view hidden information such as the internal structure or take tiny samples for analysis.

Eleke Sazy, Kurgan Patsha hoard, Around 600-400 BC
Excavation: Z. Samashev 2019

Complete argali plaque

Intact artefacts might hide clues as to how they were manufactured, such as joints or tool marks, but some information remains hidden to us.

Gold
КПо94-38905

Horn remnants from argali plaque (4)

The folded and shaped form on the inside of the horn is only visible because it has broken, which reveals that they are made from gold foil rather than having been cast in a mould.

Gold
КПо94-38962-65

Fragments of antelope and saiga plaques

Gold
КПо94-38959/1-22, КПо94-38960/1-10

Fragments of two argali plaques

Gold
КПо94-38904

Fragment of chain made of wire

Smaller fragments of an object can be more easily studied under a microscope, and broken ends give a view of the interior structure.

Gold
КПо94-38970/1-2

Deer plaques (6)

Analysis of the chemical composition of these plaques has revealed that they were likely made by the same goldsmiths, and from the same gold source, as those from the teenage archer's burial. They were found in a nearby kurgan.

Gold

Eleke Sazy, Group II, Kurgan 7, around 800-500 BC
Excavation: E. Oralbay, 2016
КПo92-37974-37979

Materials and material knowledge

By focusing on both how objects were made and the materials they were made from we can begin to understand the range and depth of skills and knowledge that Saka artisans possessed. We can see the hand of the smith or jeweller by looking closely at individual parts, and identifying the methods used to create them.

Eleke Sazy, Kurgan Patsha hoard, around 600-400 BC
Excavation: Z. Samashev 2019

Gold globules, wire

Their irregular shape and size indicates part of a smith's working materials. Part of a hoard found under the stones of a kurgan. A gift for a smith, or a bundle of working objects that were due to be repurposed?

Gold

КПо94-38972/1-40, КПо94-38906

Beads made of different materials

Gold beads require an exceptional knowledge of goldsmithing to produce. The Saka invested a lot of time and skill into their production. Carving stone is very different to working with gold. It is possible that each Saka craftsperson had their own material specialism.

Gold, agate, turquoise

КПо94-38971/1-126, КПо94-38972/1-40, КПо94-38973/1-6, КПо94- 38974/1-59

Earring

The Saka had access to a wide range of raw materials from the East Kazakhstan region. They knew where to find deposits of different semi-precious stones from their intimate knowledge of the landscape.

Shilikti, Group 5, Kurgan 4, Around 600–300 BC
Gold, semi-precious stones
Excavation: A. Toleubayev 2003
КПo92- 37875

Garment decoration beads

The labour behind tiny objects shows Saka elites commanded the time and skills of a large workforce. From mining and extracting the gold, to smithing, fabric production, and sewing. Each tiny bead represents a chain of human labour and skill. Formed from two parts joined together, making a tiny ‘mushroom’ shape.

Shilikty, Kurgan Baigetobe, around 730-690 BC
Gold

Excavation: A. Toleubayev 2003
КПо92- 38132/1-467, КПо92- 38133/1-470, КПо92-
38134/1-242, КПо92- 38135/1-105

Invisible stories

Analysis carried out during the preparation for this exhibition has revealed new information about the artefacts from Eleke Sazy. A non-destructive analytical technique called X-ray fluorescence has been used to determine the different elements found in the artefacts. A high-powered microscope revealed details invisible to the naked eye.



The artefacts associated with the burials from kurgans 4 and 7 were each made from a single batch of unalloyed gold containing only natural impurities. They were made using similar techniques, hammering, twisting, bending, and embossing for shaping, as well as granulation and inlays for decoration.

The artefacts from the hoard found under the stones of Kurgan 4 were fashioned from different gold. Were they deposited at a later date to commemorate the dead? Further analysis is planned, and more exciting discoveries lie ahead.



Microscope image of tiny beads, each 1mm in diameter. From Kurgan 4, Eleke Sazy Group II hoard (left) and burial (above)

Coffin nails

Coffin nails, bronze burners and cauldrons from burials show us that Saka metalworking was not reserved for decoration or weaponry. There may be many more items from daily life that were made in metal which are yet to be discovered.

Berel, Kurgan 5, around 400-200 BC
Bronze
Excavation: Z. Samashev 2017
КПВХ-522/1-2

Foil plate horse harness decoration

Thick gold foil is unlike much of the thin gold leaf found in burials, indicating a more robust item was needed for use on a living horse in a ceremonial outfit.

Eleke Sazy, Group IV, Kurgan 7, Around 500-300 BC
Gold
Excavation: A. Toleubayev 2020
КПo94-39417/1

Earring and pendant

Saka goldwork demonstrates they had a deep knowledge of the material properties of the metals they worked with. Joining metals together requires knowledge of melting points, alloys and how easily they can be shaped.

Eleke Sazy, Group II, Kurgan 9, Around 800-600 BC
Gold
Excavation: Z. Samashev 2019
КПо93-38593, КПо93-38593

Animals and natural resources

From about 1000 BC people living in the steppe developed a specialised economy for their environment. Pastoral nomadism is based on moving mixed herds including horses, sheep and goats between the best seasonal grazing places. It is still practised by Kazakh nomads today. Besides milk, meat, and cheese, the Saka made the most of the wool and leather from their herds, as well as furs, skins and antlers from the wild animals they encountered. They also used wood from the surrounding hills, and reeds from wetlands to craft textiles, clothing, ornaments, weaponry and horse tack.

Ceramic sherds with decorations and drilled holes



Excavations at the settlement site of Akbauyr have revealed that the Saka produced a range of different ceramics. They used different clay types and decorations to produce a range of cooking and dining ware. Heavy duty crucibles which were used to melt metals have also been discovered.

Akbauyr settlement, Early Iron Age Saka period
Ceramic

Excavation: Z. Samashev 2020

Акб-20/575/КПо95-39685, Акб-20-386/КПо95-39686-1,
Акб-20/566/КПо95-39687, Акб-20/299/КПо95-39688,
Акб-20/867/ КПо95-39689, Акб-20/499/КПо95-39690,
Акб-20/1292/КПо95-39691

Tools for textile production

Spindle whorls are used to spin yarn by hand which can then be made into cloth by weaving using a wooden loom with stone loom weights. The two blanks without holes show that the Saka made the spindle whorls at the settlement.

Akbauyr settlement, Early Iron Age Saka period
Excavation: Z. Samashev 2020

Spindle whorls (4)

Stone, ceramic

Ақб-20/1050 / КПо95-39692, Ақб-20/191 / КПо95-39693,
Ақб-20/214 / КПо95-39694, Ақб-20/425 / КПо95-39695

Loom weight fragment

Stone

Ақб-20/1666 / КПо95-39696

Woollen saddle cloth

The Saka made cloth from the wool of the sheep they herded. They dyed the threads and used a loom to weave fine cloth, often with complex colourful designs. Permafrost has preserved the fragile fibres, giving us a glimpse into the colourful world of Saka textiles.

Berel, Kurgan 11, around 400-200 BC
Dyed woollen fabric
Excavation: Z. Samashev, 1998-2011
КПВХ-794

Burnishing tool

Stone tools survive even if the objects they were used to make have been lost. Used to smooth and polish soft surfaces such as unfired clay and leather items, it shows the specialised tools that the Saka used to produce their crafts.

Akbauyr settlement, Early Iron Age Saka period

Stone

Z. Samashev 2020

Ақб-20/1044/КПо95-39698

Wooden deer carving with gold overlay

Preserved wooden artefacts are reminder that the Saka were also talented woodworkers as well as goldsmiths. ‘Frozen in time’ the wood was prevented from decaying by permafrost inside the kurgan.

Berel, Kurgan 5, around 400-200 BC
Wood, gold
Excavation: Z. Samashev 2017
КПо95 39606

Plants and people

Recent research has demonstrated that the Saka used both wild and cultivated plants in their diet, medicine, craft, and ritual activity. Excavations at the Saka settlement of Akbauyr in East Kazakhstan have uncovered quern-stones used for grinding grain, and stone hoes used to prepare the ground for sowing seeds. Further analyses will aim to identify the types of plants they used. Evidence from other settlements, such as Tuzusai in south-east Kazakhstan, has shown that some Saka grew millet, barley and wheat.

Pendants with granulated decoration

Appearing to be fruits or grains which might have had a special meaning for the Saka as imported delicacies. Another pendant in the shape of a bunch of grapes was found in the same hoard.

Eleke Sazy, Group IV, Kurgan 7, Around 500-300 BC
Gold
Excavation: A. Toleubayev, 2020
КПo94-39387/1-2

Cauldron pendant

Large bronze cauldrons are found in Saka and other Scythian burials and are associated with feasting. A golden miniature might be a way to indicate the wealth and status of the wearer. Analysis of food residues on vessels has the potential to reveal the types of food that were cooked together.

Eleke Sazy, Group IV, Kurgan 7, Around 500-300 BC
Gold
Excavation: A. Toleubayev, 2020
КПo94-39385

Powerful plants

Study of ancient plant remains and written sources has shown that the Saka had a sophisticated knowledge of the medicinal and stimulant properties of plants. They had access to a rich natural medicine cabinet, in addition to those plants they may have cultivated themselves.

The ‘Urzhar priestess’ was buried with a wig made of grasses, and a variety of medicinal herbs. Ferns were known to have anti-inflammatory, antiseptic, and pain-relieving properties. Cumin, thistle, and plantain were used for their bactericidal effect. Campion, used to treat poisoning and digestive issues, and cannabis for pain relief. In the wider Scythian world, finds of cannabis seeds with a burner from the Altai cemetery of Pazyryk show that it was used during funerary rituals. The Persians identified Saka ‘haoma-consumers’, an unknown plant with an intoxicating effect.



The species-rich vegetation of the Saur-Tarbagatay mountains, East Kazakhstan.
© Yevgeniy Domashev

Reconstruction of the burial costume of the Urzhar priestess

Buried with a magnificent golden headdress and a mortar for grinding the medicinal herbs that were placed in her grave. Her high status is linked with her skills as a herbalist, and indicates that Saka respect for the natural world extended to plants as well as animals.

Urzhar, modern reconstruction of Saka costume
Linen, silk, bronze, wood, woollen cloth, metal alloy
Reconstruction by K. Altynbekov
КПo94-39116

Hoes

Used to break up soil ready for planting seeds. This is indirect evidence that the Saka cultivated plants. Further archaeological work will be carried out to identify some grains found at the Akbauyr settlement, and to see if more can be recovered.

Akbauyr settlement, Early Iron Age Saka period
Stone

Excavation: Z. Samashev 2020

Ақб-20/191 /КПо95-39699, Ақб-20/987 / КПо95-39700

Saddle quern

Some Saka groups not only grew and harvested cereals or gathered wild grains, but they processed them using stones to grind grain into flour. Different Saka groups ate both wild and domesticated plants in varying ratios.

Akbauyr settlement, Early Iron Age Saka period
Stone

Excavation: Z. Samashev 2020
Ақбаур пос.3/КПо95-39697

Handstone

Grinding grain was very heavy work. Evidence from other prehistoric communities suggests it was women who ground grain, and they had stronger arms than modern rowers. Held in two hands and rubbed back and forth to produce flour.

Kanay settlement, East Kazakhstan, around 1500-900 BC
Stone
БКОМ КП.19-8324/1

Berel female costume reconstruction

A noblewoman buried with an impressive headdress depicting birds of prey, mountain goats and griffins. She wears a gold-decorated fur cloak, and was accompanied by her two horses in full harness. A gilded iron knife was placed across the spine of a sheep near a large ceramic jug in her coffin.

Modern reconstruction, Berel Kurgan 5, around 400-200 BC
Woollen cloth, metal alloy, felt, suede, leather, wood
Reconstruction: Z. Samashev 2021

Signalling status

The Saka signalled the social status of those they buried through clothing adornments, horse harnesses and weaponry. Exquisite pieces demonstrated that individuals and their families could command the time of skilled artisans and acquire precious materials and new fashions through long-distance trade networks. Both men and women were buried with high status objects.

Opium poppy-head hair pin

A split in the gold reveals something inside, perhaps once a real poppy head was encased in gold. First cultivated in the Mediterranean, the opium poppy travelled east with Alexander the Great. Its presence points to the long-distance trade networks that were available to the elite Saka woman who was buried with it.

Eleke Sazy Group VII, Kurgan 3, Around 400-200 BC
Gold, enamel
Excavation: Z. Samashev 2019
КПo94-39011

Stone mortar or altar

The small size indicates it was a personal item, and it was very finely made from a beautiful sandstone, indicating that it held high value. Traces of red pigment are visible on the surface.

Eleke Sazy Group VII, Kurgan 3, Around 400-200 BC
Stone
КПО 94-39019

Headdress with Bactrian-style figures, birds, and earrings



Either a trade of ideas or objects, the woman who wore them had access to long-distance connections across hundreds of miles. The human and bird figures have a very similar style to those found from Bactria, an ancient kingdom located on the territory of modern-day Uzbekistan, Afghanistan and Tajikistan.

Headdress plaques showing a figure in typical Bactrian dress holding two grapevines
Without border КПо94-39006А/1-17, With border
КПо94-39007/1-3

Flat headdress strip
КПо 94-39013-39017

Bird plaques
КПо94-39009-39010

Bell earrings
КПо94-39012/1-2

Eleke Sazy Group VII, Kurgan 3, Around 400-200 BC
Gold
Excavation: Z. Samashev 2019

Ceramic beads

The fashion for decorative beads continues into the later Saka period, but these are made from fine clay paste rather than semi-precious stones or gold. Found with other high-status adornments, they were perhaps also considered precious.

Eleke Sazy Group VII, Kurgan 3, Around 400-200 BC
Ceramic
Excavation: Z. Samashev 2019
КПо94-39018/1-16

X-Shaped clothing plaques

These geometric shapes are different to the curved lines found in the earlier Saka period. This change in design could be due to new contacts and the exchange of ideas and objects.

Eleke Sazy Group VII, Kurgan 3, Around 400-200 BC
Gold
Excavation: Z. Samashev 2019
КПo94-39000/1-163

Fragment of fur with glued gold appliqué

A status symbol with scenes of predation to signal the social standing of the noblewoman who was buried in it. Imagined in the reconstruction. Analysis of ancient proteins may reveal what the glue was made of.

Berel, Kurgan 5, Around 400-200 BC
Fur, gold
Excavation: Z. Samashev 2017
КПО 95-39600

WHOSE TRUTH?

We can build a picture of the past based on our understanding of artefacts, cemeteries, settlements, written text, animal and plant remains. How we interpret the past often reveals the things that are important to us and our society today. So whose truth are we telling when we speak about the past?

Archaeologists uncover new data, which may challenge or reinforce their previous interpretations. Museums present complex information in a way that can be understood by a wide audience. Governments create monuments. People may feel drawn to certain objects more than others based on their own experiences and histories.

The Saka hold a special place in the Republic of Kazakhstan today, and their kurgans remain a dominant feature in the landscape. We may find many truths in what the Saka mean to us, both within and beyond the borders of Kazakhstan.

Horse tack pieces, bear figurine and arrowhead

Showing strong stylistic links to late Bronze Age artefacts. Archaeologists believe these date to the earliest beginnings of Saka culture. Radiocarbon dating will determine their age.

Eleke Sazy Group II, Kurgan Bek, around 950 BC
Excavation: Z. Samashev 2019

Psalia, harness strap adjusters
Red deer antler/bone
КПо94-38976, КПо94-38977-38985, 38986/1-2, 38987/1-2

Arrowhead, bear figurine
Bronze
КПо94-38988, КПо94-38989

Hair braid jewellery

A shift in styles and materials signals changes in society, culture, people and fashions from contacts far and wide across the steppe. The end of the Saka period saw both change and continuity as new groups took over their territory, mixing with and displacing the Saka.

Eleke Sazy Group VII, Sardar-1, around 400-200 BC
Gold, clay, stone
Excavation: Z. Samashev 2019
КПo94-39002/1-52, 1-54

Before and after the Saka

The steppe was occupied for thousands of years before the emergence of the Saka in around 1,000 BC. Some of the earliest expressions of Saka culture and what we call the Scythian ‘animal style’ come from the Altai region. The age of the Saka began to dwindle from around 200 BC, and they were later replaced by Xianbei-Hun tribes from further east. These new inhabitants adopted and adapted Saka customs, asserting their claim to the land by burying their dead alongside Saka kurgans. The legacy of the Saka is still felt in Kazakhstan today.

Saka artefacts on modern currency



Elements of Saka culture resonate with traditional Kazakh nomadic culture, which suffered through forced collectivisation in the early Soviet period. The Saka are an important part of the past to be reclaimed as part of building a new independent identity, highlighting threads of shared experience across millennia. The only other intact Saka burial found on the territory of Kazakhstan now stands on a monumental column in Republic Square in the city of Almaty.

Kazakhstani 500, 1000, 2000 and 5000 tenge banknotes featuring Saka artefacts and symbols

Kazakhstan National Mint, 2017, 2014, 2012, 2011

Paper

Fitzwilliam Museum recent acquisition 2021

500 tenge commemorative coin, 'Gold of the nomads', featuring a Saka elk head design

Kazakhstan National Mint, 2011

Gold, silver

On loan from S. Amir

500 tenge commemorative coin, featuring an argali in the Saka 'animal style'

Kazakhstan National Mint, 2013

Gold, silver

On loan from S. Amir

500 tenge commemorative coin, featuring a Saka elk in the 'animal style'

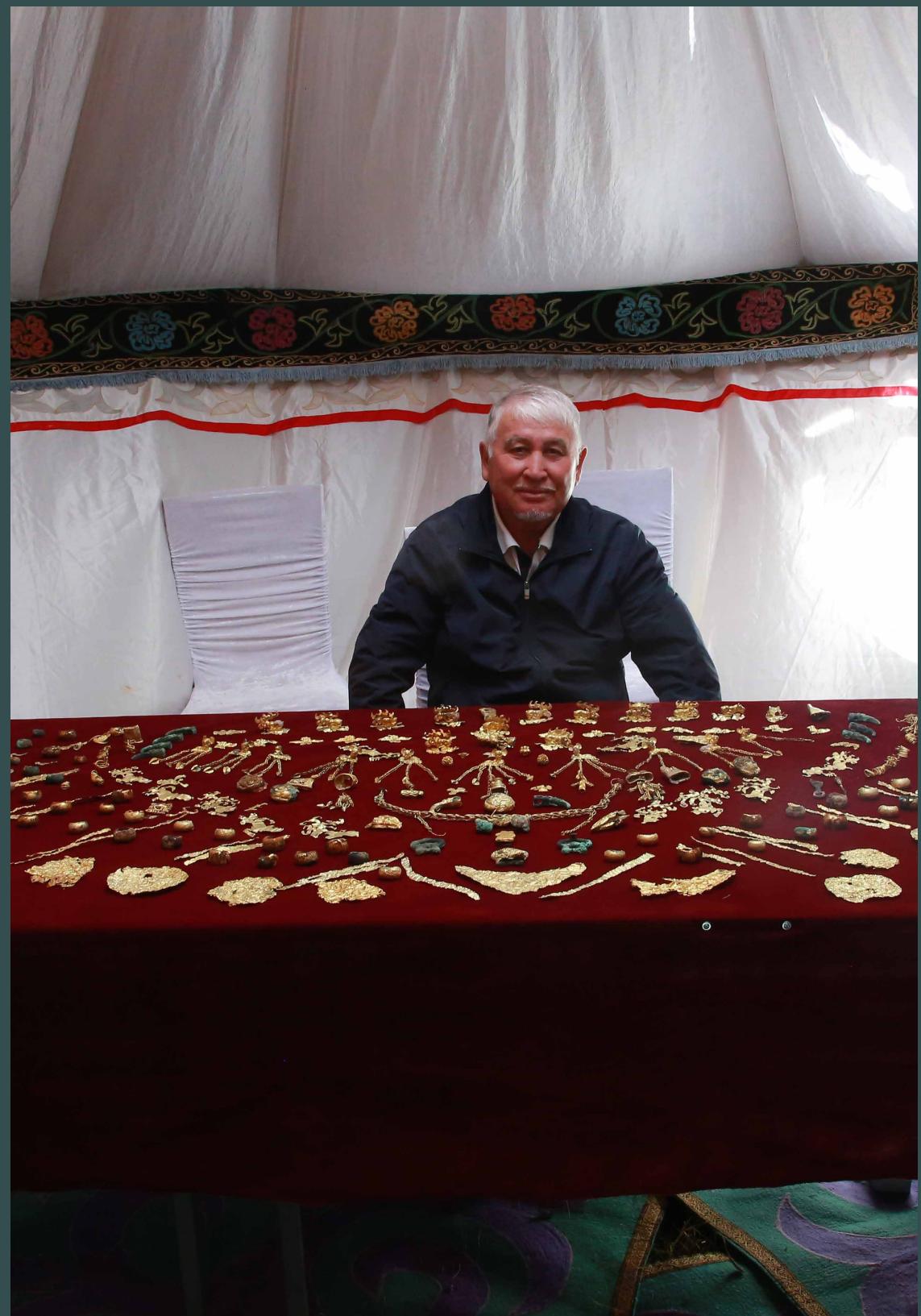
Kazakhstan National Mint, 2012

Gold, silver

On loan from S. Amir

Meet the archaeologists

All the artefacts in this exhibition were excavated by archaeologists from Kazakhstan. The year 2021 marks 30 years of independence for the Republic of Kazakhstan. Recent investment in archaeological research by the regional government of East Kazakhstan has led to outstanding discoveries. The excavation teams are led by Prof Zainolla Samashev and Prof Abdesh Toleubayev.



A new programme of Saka kurgan excavation in the post-Soviet period in East Kazakhstan began in 1998 when Prof Samashev of Nazarbayev University made extraordinary discoveries at the Berel cemetery. Prof Toleubayev of Al-Farabi Kazakh National University has led excavations at the Shilikti valley since 2003, discovering thousands of outstanding gold Saka artefacts from burials dating from the 8th to the 1st centuries BC. Since 2018 excavations have been conducted at the cemetery of Eleke Sazy, as well as the settlement of Akbauyr. Their research is ongoing.



Professor Abdesh Toleubayev with the finds from Eleke Sazy, Group IV, Kurgan 7, 2020
© A. Toleubayev

Professor Zainolla Samashev (left) shows Governor Daniyal Akhmetov (right) finds from Eleke Sazy, Group , Kurgan 4, 2018
© Z. Samashev

An unfolding story

Excavations are ongoing in East Kazakhstan, and new discoveries are being made every year. Archaeologists are also working against the threat of looters, who have severely damaged kurgans at Eleke Sazy.

The cemetery of Eleke Sazy continued to be a sacred place long after the Saka. Excavations in the summer of 2021 have opened the next chapter in East Kazakhstan's history book. At a temple complex dating from around 600-700 AD, 1500 years later than the young archer's burial in the kurgan, items of weaponry and ceremonial costumes have been found. Most impressive is a belt plaque showing a Turkic aghan, or emperor, sitting on a throne with horse-head arm rests. At his feet attendants kneel to serve him.



Aerial view of the Turkic period temple complex at Eleke Sazy, around 600-700 AD
© Z. Samashev

Gold belt plaque featuring a Turkic aghan (emperor) seated on a throne with horse-head arm rests. At his feet attendants kneel to serve him from saucers. © Z. Samashev

Bone weaving tablet

Thought to be used to weave narrow decorative strips for belts, straps and garment trims. 9 holes are drilled in a grid pattern to hold threads in place.

Eleke Sazy, Group II, Kurgan 4, around 800-550 BC
Bone
Excavation: Z. Samashev, 2018
КПо93-38606

A life cut short, a story left
untold...

A weaving tablet found alone among the scattered bones of the young teenage girl whose grave was plundered by looters. The boy archer beside her in Eleke Sazy Kurgan 4 remained hidden, untouched.

Was she skilled in weaving? A warrior in the making? What else was she buried with? Though her voice is almost silenced, it reminds us about all those whose truth we cannot speak.

ACKNOWLEDGEMENTS

The exhibition is generously supported by, and organised with, the Regional Museum of History and Local Studies of the Department of Culture of the East Kazakhstan Region.

We are extremely grateful to the archaeologists leading the excavations, Prof Zainolla Samashev (Nazarbayev University) and Prof Abdesh Toleubayev (Al-Farabi Kazakh National University), whose decades of research and whose interpretation of the material we have done our best to represent in this exhibition.

The Fitzwilliam Museum received invaluable help from the Akimat (Government) of the East Kazakhstan Region and from the Embassy of the Republic of Kazakhstan in the United Kingdom of Great Britain and Northern Ireland.

The Fitzwilliam Museum would also like to acknowledge the contribution of the following:

Exhibition Curator
Research Assistant
Exhibition Design
Exhibition Lighting
Build Contractor
Transport & Logistics
Photography

Dr Rebecca Roberts
Saltanat Amir
Nissen Richards Studio
ZNA
Sam Forster Ltd
Constantine Ltd
Yevgeniy Domashev

We would particularly like to thank the following:

Governor Danial Akhmetov, Governor of the East Kazakhstan Region

His Excellency Mr Erlan Idrissov, Ambassador Extraordinary and Plenipotentiary of the Republic of Kazakhstan to the United Kingdom of Great Britain and Northern Ireland

Raushan Nurmukhanova, Acting Head of Department of Culture of the East Kazakhstan Region

Dr Svetlana Nurgazieva, Director of the East Kazakhstan Regional Museum of History and Local Studies

Dr Galina Kuchsh, East Kazakhstan Regional Museum of History and Local Studies

Miras Zhumagulov, Project Coordinator

Aigerim Seisembayeva, Embassy of the Republic of Kazakhstan in the United Kingdom



Supported using public funding by
ARTS COUNCIL ENGLAND



Did you enjoy the exhibition. Give your feedback via our short survey here <https://uk.culturecounts.cc/s/2flwKD>

vv