

DOI: 10.17516/1997-1370-0805

УДК 39

## Khakass Underground and Semi-Underground Dwellings: Problems of Studying and Typology

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Received 11.02.2021, received in revised form 12.03.2021, accepted 10.08.2021

**Abstract.** In ethnographic time, the indigenous people of Khakassia – the Khakass – had traditional dwellings that were polytypic by design and architecture, whose emergence was caused by the natural and geographical environment, a way of lifestyle and economic activity. Underground and semi-underground dwellings were one of the understudied types of their dwellings. The research relevance is associated with an insufficient study of these objects in material culture of the ethnos. The purpose of the work is to identify features of these dwellings, typological characteristics and questions of their existing in the traditional life support system. The research objective is to describe a structure of these dwellings for classification, consideration of issues of their features and existing. The work is based on an integrated and system and historical approach to the study of the past. The description of these dwellings' structural features according to scientific ethnographic classifications on the basis of available sources and data, identification of their typology and classification should be considered to be the research results. The research showed that within the meaning of term «dugout» in the Khakass material culture, until recently, dwellings of ground log structures have been considered without their peculiar features based on the criterion of their positioning against the ground surface. The studying was also complicated by literal interpretation of nominations of the studied types of dwellings, and especially their linkage to the term «dugout» that resulted in the incorrect compliance in the system of classification of the Siberian peoples' housing constructions. These dwellings did not attract proper attention – their description was quite general because of poor information about them and an insufficient study by ethnographers. The research also showed that the Khakass existing underground and semi-underground all-season dwellings were a little-known part of their material culture and planned future prospects for studying.

**Keywords:** Khakassia, Khakass Autonomous Region, the Khakass, material culture, traditional dwelling, chir ib, «dugout», tura

Research area: history & archeology

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Citation: Prishchepa, E.V. (2022). Khakass underground and semi-underground dwellings: problems of studying and typology. J. Sib. Fed. Univ. Humanit. soc. sci., 15(5), 606–613. DOI: 10.17516/1997-1370-0805.

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## Подземные и полуподземные жилища хакасов: проблемы изучения и типологии

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**Аннотация.** В этнографическое время у коренного населения Хакасии – хакасов существовали разнотипные по конструкции и архитектуре традиционные жилища, появление которых было обусловлено природно-географической средой, характером образа жизни и экономической деятельностью. Одним из малоисследованных типов их жилищ были подземные и полуподземные жилища. Актуальность исследования обусловлена недостаточной изученностью данных объектов в материальной культуре этноса. Цель работы – выявление особенностей данных жилищ, типологических характеристик и вопросов их бытования в системе традиционного жизнеобеспечения. Задачи исследования – описание конструкции данных жилищ для целей классификации, рассмотрение вопросов их особенностей и бытования. Работа основана на комплексном и системно-историческом подходе к изучению прошлого. Результатами исследования следует считать описание конструктивных особенностей данных жилищ, в соответствии с научными этнографическими классификациями на основе доступных источников и данных, выявление их типологии и классификация. Исследование показало, что в рамках значения термина «землянка» в материальной культуре хакасов до последнего времени рассматривались жилища наземных срубных конструкций без их специфических черт, основывающихся на критерии их расположения по отношению к поверхности земли. Затрудняло задачу изучение и дословная интерпретация номинаций изучаемых типов жилищ, а особенно их привязка к термину «землянка», что привело к неверному соответствию в системе классификации жилищных построек народов Сибири. Эти жилища не привлекали к себе должного внимания, их описание было весьма общим из-за ограниченности сведений о них и недостаточной изученности этнографами. Исследование также показало, что бытовавшие подземные и полуподземные всепогодные жилища хакасов являлись малоизвестной частью их материальной культуры, и наметило будущие перспективы изучения.

**Ключевые слова:** Хакасия, Хакасская автономная область, хакасы, материальная культура, традиционное жилище, *чир иб*, «землянка», *тура*.

Научная специальность: 07.00. 00 – исторические науки и археология.

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## Introduction

The dwelling for a person of traditional culture was a model of the world and bore its lines in itself. His outlook is reflected in the dwelling of the ethnos. The dwelling is one of primary elements of a person's life support system (Prishchepa, 2018a).

Despite the available researches on the Khakass' traditional dwelling, still there are low-studied sections of its history<sup>1</sup>. One of the understudied spheres is insufficient knowledge and problems of classification of underground and semi-underground types of Khakass dwellings. Besides, there is a problem of correlation of a general nomination of the «dugout» dwelling for the dwellings that are typologically corresponding in the constructive relation to this nomination.

## Research results and discussion

The ethnographic literature noted that there are not quite clear messages about the underground and semi-underground dwellings of the Khakass (Sokolova, 1998). Such representations could be caused both by P. S. Pallas's not absolutely correct interpretation of one of the types of similar dwellings, and by an inexact use of nomination «dugout» for it. Thus, P. S. Pallas writes, «Winter yurts... are built by them from lying directly and across thin birch bars, like a big box with slightly sloping walls on each side. The front part of this box remains empty and serves as an outer entrance room, and the other half is blocked by a cross wall with small doors, and outside it is covered thickly with the earth for retaining warmth inside. Among this *dugout* (highlighted by us – *E. P.*) they do the Bashkir fireplace of branches and clay with a wooden pipe, and there is a hole in a ceiling which lets the light inside, and at night during severe cold it is stuffed up. There are wide benches on which they sleep near two walls in front of a fireplace» (Pallas, 1786). As

we see from the description, the nomination «dugout» for such a dwelling is very conditional – we will also keep this in mind below. We meet the description of this type of the dwelling also in I. G. Georgi's works: the winter dwelling was constructed from thin timber wood, had an outer entrance room, a hole in a ceiling. The walls of the dwelling were made «obliquely or aslope», and for keeping warm outside they were covered with earth (Georgi, 1799).

Later at the end of the 19<sup>th</sup> century, the ethnographer A. A. Kuznetsova recorded this type of the dwelling described by P. S. Pallas in the 18<sup>th</sup> century. She noted that dugouts and bark shelters were simple but disappearing types of dwellings of the population of the Kyzyl and Meletsk Administrations at the end of the 19<sup>th</sup> century (Kuznetsova, 1898). We will focus on the description of the first ones. The author notes that dugouts were of two types and existed only in the Kyzyl and Meletsk Administrations. At the time of latching control in all first administration only one dugout remained in the ulus Mozharsk, though half a century back (i. e. in the middle of the 19<sup>th</sup> century – *E.P.*) they were still widespread as the dwelling for the poor. A. A. Kuznetsova managed to find such an uninhabited dugout – *sherep*<sup>2</sup> (*it is written down aurally by her*) in the *Kyzylians' ulus Mozharsk*. *Sherep* had a wall construction consisting of double rows of a young birch wattle fence, and the space between them was filled up with earth. Inside the wattle fence was like a lath fence arranged with boards. The dugout had an appearance of a small hut with a door, two windows and a tiny clapboard covered an outer entrance room where there was a door to the dwelling (cf. with P. S. Pallas's description 1786). Inside there was a clay hearth-*chuval* (*sool*) with a straight-through pipe and a bench (plank bed) near a wall (Kuznetsova, 1898).

Descriptions of the second type of dugouts are provided by A. A. Kuznetsova already according to respondents from the Kyzyl and Meletsk Administrations and belong to the dwellings which had a certain existence in the 18<sup>th</sup> century. These dugouts were made of

<sup>1</sup> For example, interference problems in material culture of the peoples of the Khakass and Minusinsk Region. See: Tuguzhekova V. N., Prishchepa E. V. Influence of Russian traditions on formation of the Khakass farmstead and housing complex in the Khakass and Minusinsk Region in the 19–20<sup>th</sup> centuries [Electronic resource] // New researches of Tuva. 2019, No. 1. URL: <https://nit.tuva.asia/nit/article/view/836> (accessed 25.06.2020). DOI: 10.25178/nit.2019.1.12

<sup>2</sup> Earth yurt (Кузнецова, 1898), that is consonant with nomination *chir ib*.

boards and stakes and were covered with earth (the ulus Kumyrsk of the Meletsk Administration), and the other construction variant of boards (half of a log), which were covered with earth up to 3 ½ arshins (the ulus Meletsk of the Meletsk Administration). Dugouts had two or three small windows. Windows were covered with a peritoneum, a floor was earth. The dwelling was heated by a clay Russian stove. In the past it took two men a week to build such a dwelling (Kuznetsova, 1898).

A small section on «dugouts» is presented in the unpublished work by Yu. A. Shibaeva's «Khakass dwelling» (Shibaeva, Khakass dwelling), a small part from the same material about winter dugouts (*chir ib*) was published in the academic collection of the middle of the 20<sup>th</sup> century (Shibaeva, 1950).

The ethnographer Yu. A. Shibaeva recorded evidence from the Sagays on the use of this type of dwelling in the winter season. The dwelling is conditionally called «dugout» (*chirtura, kichig tura, chir ib*)<sup>3</sup>. According to the description of the informants interviewed by the ethnographer, the dwelling represented a small log hut with an earth floor. The frame structure represented horizontal logs strengthened in angular vertical poles. The roof deck was made of plank covered with an earthen mound. The fireplace-*sol* served as a hearth (terminology is remained – *E. P.*), which was made either of wooden half of logs covered with clay or of stones. It had a rounded shape with a towering pipe narrowing to the top. Windows were covered with a bull bladder. The existence of the dwelling was noted on the Upper Tyoya River (the Tashtyp District of the Khakass Autonomous Region (further – KhAR)) as far back as the 30-ies of the 20<sup>th</sup> century (Shibaeva, Khakass dwelling).

Yu. A. Shibaeva managed to see one of few «semi-underground dugouts» being already uninhabited in the ulus Mainogashevo of the Askiz Region of the KhAR (Fig. 1). Its description is presented in one of the author's works (Shibaeva, 1950). The dwelling had hewn walls, an earth floor and roof, and was

heated by the heart *sol* located in the northeast corner.

Yu. A. Shibaeva notes that in the 18–19<sup>th</sup> centuries the real dugouts in the earth with a flooring from poles, turf instead of a roof «were temporary dwellings and were not the rule, but an exception» (Shibaeva, Khakass dwelling). In general, this Yu. A. Shibaeva's subject of dwellings-dugouts did not find the due development in view of limitation of the available material for the full scientific analysis and conclusions. However, the given data confirm our thought that this type of the Khakass dwellings was possibly little-known and did not receive the sufficient description in view of emphasis of attention to other widespread types of dwellings. Once an obviously bigger distribution of this type of dwellings can be indirectly evidenced by Yu. A. Shibaeva's conclusion that «dugouts» existed not only in a taiga part of KhAR, but also were a part of the Kachins' (inhabitants of steppe) material culture. Thus, it was recorded the latter having two such dwellings slightly deepened to the earth with wooden hewn walls, wooden floors and a double-slope low board roof (Shibaeva, Khakass dwelling).

The other important point was that Yu. A. Shibaeva draws the conclusion that in the 18–19<sup>th</sup> centuries «dugouts» were above-ground constructions, rather houses (*turas*) with an earth floor and a primitive hearth (Shibaeva, Khakass dwelling). The ethnographer was one of the first who paid attention to this discrepancy. To our biggest regret, the presented photos of such «dugouts», which are mentioned in the work «Khakass dwelling» in the Manuscript Fund of the Khakass Research Institute of Language, Literature and History, were not saved.

Thus, we see that most of ethnographers' use of term «dugout» is not absolutely justified. Assuming its value and structural features of such a dwelling, we see the dwelling which is to be completely deepened to the earth. Respectively, the application of the term «semi-dugout» assumes deepening to the earth of the dwelling partly. At the description of the construction, given by both P. S. Pallas, and A. A. Kuznetsova, the term «dugout» is used, though the de-

<sup>3</sup> Our work is devoted to the problems of correlation of little-known nominations of residential buildings with existing constructively types of the Khakass dwellings (Prishchepa, 2020).

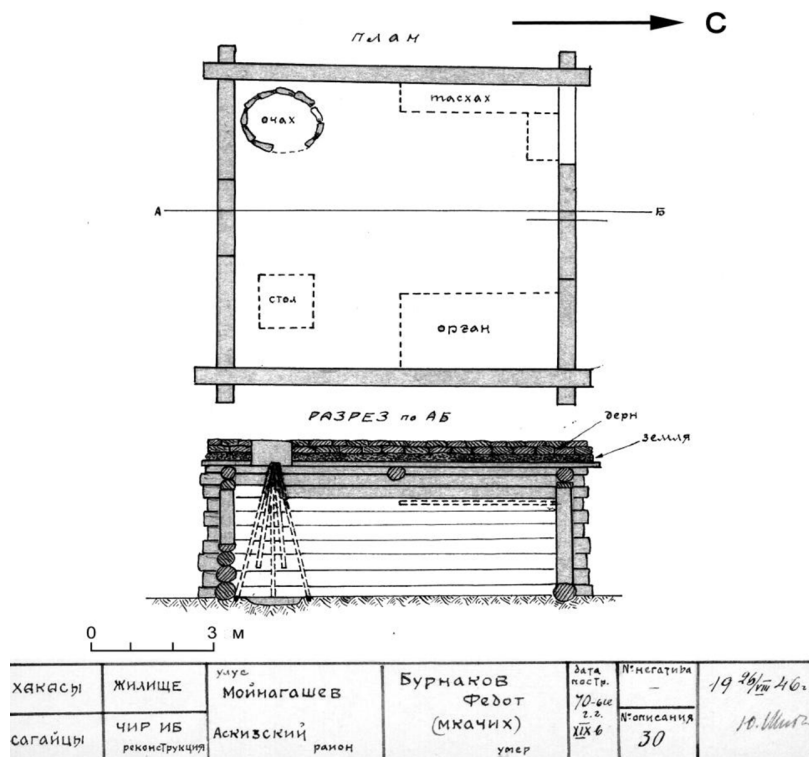


Fig. 1. Dwelling chir ib (reconstruction) [Shibaeva, Drawings of the Khakass' dwelling: fig. 30]

scribed types of dwellings are not such-like. It is more probable that the significant moment of an application feature of the nomination to the structure of the dwellings described above was not the type of dwelling-dugout in itself, but such factors as keeping walls warm by earth and turf during the winter time and use of earth for covering walls, an earth floor and an earth roof led to fixing of the term «dugout» for this type of the dwelling. Besides, the impact was made probably by a literal translation and its binding to the term «dugout»: *Chir ib* or *chir tura*, and A. A. Kuznetsova's «*sherep*» – probably *chir ip (ib)*.

Only E. K. Yakovlev's mention of this rare Khakass dwelling can be added to the number of real dugouts in the literal sense of the meaning of this term and design features. The author calls these dwellings «dugouts of other type» – «*zikh tura*»<sup>4</sup>. Their design rep-

<sup>4</sup> The constructive similarity of this dwelling to dwelling *chir tura* stated by K. M. Patachakov can hardly be considered to be correct. It is only true that the nomination itself is almost

resented simply a hole in the soil in human height sheathed on the sides with planks, sometimes without covering. Over the hall, a small crib<sup>5</sup> in 2–3 logs as a winter dwelling's<sup>6</sup> flat roof was put (fig. 2). One could meet these dwellings in Ust-Abakan village, Okunev aal (settlement), and other places (Yakovlev, 1900a). As we can see in the Description of Ethnographic Collections of the Minusinsk

identical to the term *shiiikh ib/shiiikh tura* (a stationary summer yurt in a taiga part of the Tashtyp District of Khakassia is right. (Patachakov, 1982).

<sup>5</sup> Therefore, based on the example of the Khakass dwelling, it is hardly possible to speak only about a framework structure of underground dwellings (Popov, 1961).

<sup>6</sup> E. K. Yakovlev regarded wooden cribs with a flat roof as winter dwellings-log huts, determining by that their seasonality and conditionality of their structure features (Yakovlev, 1900a), which existed in the 19<sup>th</sup> century and were the Khakass winter dwellings. At the end of the 19<sup>th</sup> century the idea of this dwelling was consisted of a thought about its Russian origin. As researches showed, this dwelling corresponds to autochthonic Khakass log dwelling *tura*, which had a certain distribution in the 18<sup>th</sup> century and taking the origin in earlier centuries (Prishchepa, 2018b).

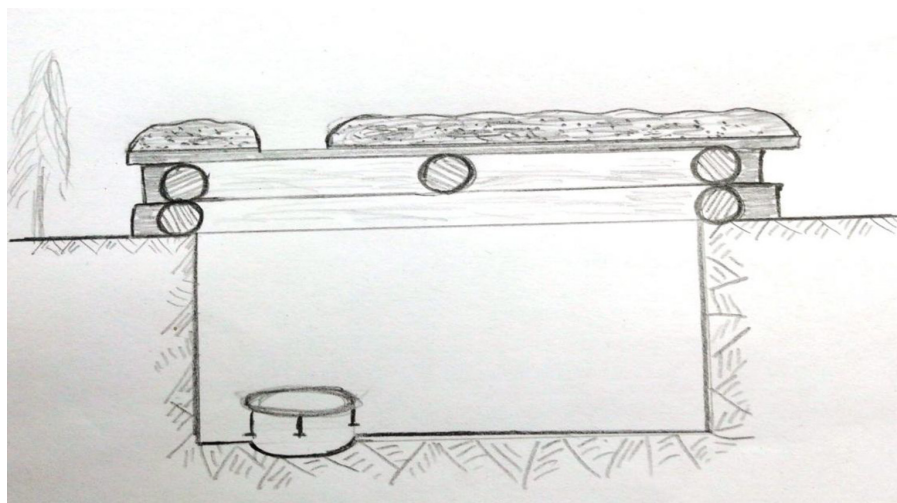


Fig. 2. Dugout with a crib. The author's drawing

Museum, this dwelling had windows which were at the ground level (Yakovlev, 1900b). Besides, we learn from the Description of Ethnographic Collections of the Minusinsk Museum that the dwelling «*zikh tura*» was also of another type and represented sometimes a quadrangular hole with two slacknesses coming to light and playing a role of windows. The ceiling was laid directly on the earth and covered with the earth, forming a small hillock at the ground level (Ust-Bidzha) (Yakovlev, 1900b). The description of the structure of this dwelling contains little information, therefore our idea of it is very limited. However, it is clear that it is a special type of dwelling which was not only little-known to ethnographers, but also it is limited by these single variants in the description. E. K. Yakovlev provides data on existing of this Khakass dwelling at a boundary of the 19–20<sup>th</sup> centuries.

In his famous work A. A. Popov provides the interesting data of P. I. Karalkin on the Kyzylia's underground dwellings, representing a rectangular cave dug on a hill slope so that its flat roof<sup>7</sup> and three walls (side and back) were earth covered by poles. Informants

testified (according to P. I. Karalkin) that the dwelling existed as early as in the 19<sup>th</sup> century (Popov, 1961). Any additional data and earlier specific references of this rectangular type of the Khakass underground dwelling are not provided in ethnographic literature.

### Conclusion

Thus, earlier described variants of dwellings-»dugouts« by P. S. Pallas, I. G. Georgi, A. A. Kuznetsova are out of this typology of underground and semi-underground dwellings in view of design features and transfer of the term «dugout» on the dwelling for which such factors as keeping walls warm by earth and turf in the winter time and use of earth for covering walls, an earth floor and an earth roof became defining. These features did not characterize the dwelling by criterion of its arrangement in relation to the ground surface. Besides, the impact was made perhaps by literal translation and its binding to the term «dugout». Once existing underground and semi-underground dwellings of the Khakass were a part of their material culture and possibly were the most ancient. Their description is very general owing to limitation of information about them, and for a long time it did not attract a proper attention of ethnographers. At a boundary of the 19<sup>th</sup>-20<sup>th</sup> centuries the ethnographer E. K. Yakovlev left the description of these dwellings, having paid

<sup>7</sup> This dwelling and one described above had one type of roofs – flat. That is a characteristic feature of the Khakass' underground dwellings. For example, A. A. Popov noted more types of roofs: dual-slope, four-slope with the form of a truncated pyramid (see Popov, 1961).

attention to them. Thanks to that we have a certain, though limited idea about them within this description.

The genesis specification of the described types of the dwellings, probably going to the

archaeological cultures of the past by their origin, description of their variations and extent of distribution in the ethnos's material culture will become further perspectives of the research.

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