



UNESCO / Flanders Funds-in-Trust

**“International Conference on Scythian Archaeology and the Archaeology of the Altai Mountains”**

Ghent, Het Pand, December 4<sup>th</sup> to 6<sup>th</sup>, 2006

[www.archaeology.ugent.be/altai](http://www.archaeology.ugent.be/altai)

Dear Colleague(s),

UNESCO has been involved in preservation and conservation activities in the Altai Mountains for several years. The Russian part of the Altai Mountains was inscribed on UNESCO's World Heritage List in 1998 as a natural site. In the Kazakh Altai, UNESCO has provided funds and expertise to the Margulan Institute in Almaty (Kazakh Institute of Archaeology) for the restoration of some of the most precious items (saddles, textiles) found in a spectacular Scythian tomb at Berel in 2000-2001.

As you know, the Scythian civilization has been known for centuries, for example through texts by the Greek writer Herodotus or Chinese records. During the last century the area of the Altai Mountains became highly reputed: especially research on the Pazyryk culture, revealed a rich heritage, showing close relations with the important civilizations of China, the Middle East and the Black Sea. By far the most important testimony of this culture is to be found in frozen tombs, in which, due to special conditions, all organic material, such as human mummies, horses, clothing, textiles, leather and wooden objects, is preserved.

Global warming is now threatening these frozen tombs. As frozen tombs are generally preserved through a combination of weather conditions (temperature, rainfall, sunlight) and other parameters, such as altitude, dimensions of the protecting kurgan, depth of the funeral chamber, it is very possible that this condition is now highly unstable. The tombs are in danger of thawing.

UNESCO is aware of the importance of this cultural heritage, and is taking continued steps to preserve these monuments in the best conditions, as testimonies of an important past culture. To this end, UNESCO has initiated a program of survey and research on these frozen tombs in the Altai Mountains with the support of the UNESCO/Flanders Funds-in-Trust. Within this project, survey is set up to pinpoint the location of the possible frozen tombs and to study the location and preservation of local permafrost. A team from Ghent University, together with the Gorno-Altai State University, Republic of Altai, Russia Federation and the Margulan Institute of Archaeology, Kazakhstan carried out two survey campaigns in 2005 and 2006 in Russia and Kazakhstan and made an inventory of the archaeological heritage and of the possible frozen tombs in the research areas.

In March 2006, a first workshop was organised in Gorno-Altai, Republic of Altai, to discuss the problems of inventory, preservation, conservation and study of these tombs among specialists and recommendations have been made to guide further steps in the preservation.

The **“International Conference on Scythian Archaeology and the Archaeology of the Altai Mountains”** in Ghent, from **December 4<sup>th</sup> to 6<sup>th</sup>, 2006**, wants to keep this multidisciplinary collaboration and discussion going. The conference also wants to place the Frozen Tombs in a broader context: the archaeological research on the Scythians and the study of the cultural landscapes of Altai are essential to understand the importance of the Frozen Tombs.

Together with the **exhibition “The Frozen Tombs of the Altai Mountains”**, from **December 6<sup>th</sup> to 28<sup>th</sup> in Ghent**, but later also in Paris (UNESCO headquarters) and in Gorno-Altai (Gorno-Altai State University), the conference closes the current on-going project 2005-2006 and hopes to introduce further initiatives on the preservation of this magnificent heritage.



## • Sessions

The conference will tackle several themes, divided into 3 sessions:

- Session 1. The archaeology of the Scythians: general introduction on the research on Scythian archaeology, from the Black Sea to Central Asia. History of research, recent discoveries etc...
- Session 2. The Cultural Landscape of the Altai Mountains: the Altai Mountains have a very rich archaeological and cultural landscape, with sites dating from Bronze Age to Ethnographic Period closely related and very visible in the landscape
- Session 3. The frozen tombs of the Altai Mountains: research and preservation of the frozen tombs, that are threatened by climatic changes

## • Workshops

As the workshop in Gorno-Altai (March 2006) recommended to set up international cooperation and research to eventually list these tombs into the World Heritage Sites, the conference will also host three workshops focusing on the specific problems of the frozen tombs in the Altai Mountains:

- Workshop 1. Mapping techniques: discussion between archaeologists and other specialists (geographers, topographers, geomorphologists etc.) on scale, set up, documentary level, transnational complementarity...
- Workshop 2. Permafrost in past, present and future (palaeo-ecological aspects): discussion between archaeologists and glaciologists on the modelling of the permafrost phenomena in diachronological perspective
- Workshop 3. Permafrost monitoring and preservation (technical aspects): discussion between technicians, engineers, landscape specialists and archaeologists to organise the monitoring of the frozen tombs and discuss the possible techniques of preservation of the permafrost

After the last workshop, we will organise a general discussion on the topics of the conference, and we will make up a list of recommendations.

## • Call for papers

We would like to invite all scientists studying one of the subjects covered by the scope of this conference to propose a lecture in one of the three themes. As the conference is nearby, deadline for contributions is **November 10th 2006**.

Please contact the organisation through the on-line form on [www.archaeology.ugent.be/altai](http://www.archaeology.ugent.be/altai)

The official languages during the conference are English and Russian.

To enable the translation of the abstracts and a smooth translation ENG-RUS during the conference, speakers are asked to ensure all full texts of the lecture at the organizers' disposal by November 15th 2006.



## • Registration

The conference can be attended by whoever is interested in the themes under view.  
Deadline: online registration till **November 15th** 2006.

Price per person / 3 days: **50 euro**

Included: coffee, sandwich lunch, the abstracts of the conference papers and invitation to the official opening of the exhibition The Frozen Tombs of the Altai Mountains on December 5<sup>th</sup>.

Optional guided tour in the historical centre of Ghent on December 4<sup>th</sup>: **free**

Optional conference dinner on December 6<sup>th</sup>: **35 euro**

Use the online form to register and to pay the registration fee on [www.archaeology.ugent.be/altai](http://www.archaeology.ugent.be/altai)

Accepted speakers do not have to pay the registration fee and closing dinner. But please be so kind to fill in the form, so we have all your contact information, and know if you will take part in the closing dinner.

## • Where?

The conference will be held in Het Pand, in the heart of one of Belgium's most beautiful historical cities, Ghent. Het Pand is an old Dominican monastery located in the heart of the city on the banks of the river Leie, near the medieval port with the guildhalls as its remnants. It is owned by Ghent University and is being used as the cultural centre of the university and as a conference centre. On top of that, it holds the rich ethnographical and archaeological collections of the University. The building was renovated and restored from 1971 to 1991.

Het Pand, Onderbergen 1, 9000 Gent, Belgium

A high resolution city map on the website shows the location of Het Pand.

### How to get there by car:

When entering Ghent, follow the parking routes to Parking 7 (P7), Sint-Michiels Parking. When coming out of the parking at the side of Sint-Michiels Church, go to the right and find Het Pand next to the church.

### How to get there by public transport:

Trams go very regularly from the Sint-Pieters train station to the centre. Take tram 1, get off at "Korenmarkt", and cross the Sint-Michiels bridge. Go left at the Sint-Michiels Church and reach Het Pand next to the church. From the Korenmarkt, this is a 2 minutes walk (500m).

## • Conference website

All practical information can be found on [www.archaeology.ugent.be/altai](http://www.archaeology.ugent.be/altai)

## • Contact

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- **Organising committee**

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We hope to see you all in Ghent!

With our best regards,

The Organising Committee