

Monuments of ancient Turks

The culture of nomadic Turkic tribes was defined by needs of their main employment – cattle breeding of various forms: from nomadic to semi-nomadic and settled.

Ancient-Turkic burial places. Only separate burial places are opened. A characteristic sign of burial of ancient-Turkic time is the custom of burying the person with a horse. Barrows of Turkic time are very close in the design and findings. External signs of burials are a low embankment from the stone or the earth, stacking under it of usually rectangular or square form. Burials were made in a soil hole of the oval form. Belongings, ornament subjects and weapon are put with the deceased. The corpse of a horse was located on a step above the hole bottom on one side with the bended feet. Sometimes instead of a horse people put his head and pieces of the hulk or skin with hoofs in a tomb. Archaeological findings from the excavated burials allow characterizing some features of material culture of Zhetysu Turks in VI-IX centuries.

The stock from burials is presented by weapon, horse harness and household purpose subjects.

The most frequent armor subjects in burials are tips of arrows. In some cases they were located in quivers from birch bark with a wooden skeleton. Quivers' internal part was smooth, external – rough, the quiver was narrowed from top to bottom and was fitted by a matter from within. Arrows are laid with their plumage downwards, their tips of various forms – trihedral, tetrahedral, three-bladed with haft is also of flat leaf - shaped form with support at the basis. Staffs of arrows have lengths of 40-80 cm; they are made of an aspen, sometimes painted in red color. Bows were compound with bone overlays, trailer and median; in one case, the wooden basis in the form of two laths connected by a wooden lace has remained under overlays.

Accessories of a horse harness are presented by an iron bit, stirrups, bridle ornaments. Bits are of two types – one-annulate with passed psalias and with eight-shaped rings in each link. There are stirrups of two types – eight-shaped with a loop formed by a bend of the handle with an aperture in the projecting plate, and rectangular with a wide lamellar footboard. Turkic masters achieved a special skill in mastering buckles and metal plates for decoration of a horse harness. Buckles were made of bronze and iron, plates and plaques – from bronze, silver and gold and were decorated by vegetative and zoomorphic ornament. Products of household and living appointment are presented by shod knives with thickened back and flat haft.

The majority of overlays of decorative belts have the heart-shaped and oval forms. There are also frame-shaped buckles and bone suspension brackets. The suspension bracket from Kyzylkainar had the cone-shaped form and ended with a lynx head. Sources and archaeological materials allow making representation about Turk clothes. It was made of woolen and silk fabrics, outer clothing –from fur. The dress looked like a caftan in which left skirt was covered from above. The caftan fitted body tightly; in a waist is has been bound by a belt. Belt had suspended sword in a sheath, a bag for flint and a grinder. Trousers were tucked in leather boots. Boots were without heels with the thin stitched soles and inflexed toes. Women put on a cape edged by fur or fabric of different color over a dress or a dressing gown.

Men wore high, probably felt caps, fur caps – malakhai, bashlyks on their heads. Headdresses in a kind of ‘three-horned’ large caps are interesting. Their images have remained on stone sculptures. Both men and women carried earrings, necklaces, bracelets and rings.

The culture of nomadic Turkic tribes was defined by needs of their main employment – cattle breeding of various forms: from nomadic to semi-nomadic and settled. Economic necessity forced Turks to improve and enhance the folding yurta. White and blue yurtas were made for rich steppe citizens and nobility. Advantages of yurta have been estimated by the neighboring people, in particular, by Chinese and Arabs. The Turks who have settled in cities continued to put yurtas in the courtyard of palaces and ordinary dwellings. For solemn receptions Turkic aristocracy used huge yurtas, which arches were supported by gilded wooden columns. Interiors of yurtas were decorated with sculptural images of horses from silver and gold vessels. Thrones on legs in the form of gold peacocks or other birds and animals amazed the imagination. During feasts, the music was performed on musical instruments.

Kyzylkainar burial ground is named by Kainar hole located in 10 km to the south-east from Aksholak station, at northern foot of Kirghiz Ala Tau ridge. In this burial ground one barrow in diameter of 7 m and height of 0.3 m with a stone embankment has been excavated, its basis is covered by large stones. Under the embankment, 2 stone stacking are found, there were 2 sepulchral holes under them. In a hole #1, the burial of a person was found. The horse skeleton laid on the right side with bended feet was located on the low step adjoining a southern wall of a hole. At a knee joint of the right foot the hollow procarved jingle with a loop for suspension has been found. Below ribs of the left side, the iron stirrup with a wide guard and a footboard was found, on vertebrae below a shovel – a fragment of a collar of a bronze vessel lay. The horse has been covered from above by a cane layer.

The skeleton of the buried lay at the bottom of a hole in the stretched position with his head to the northeast – to the side opposite to position of a horse. The right hand of the buried has been stretched along his body, the palm of the left lay on the pelvic bones. In the area of the waist, the remains of a silk fabric from clothes are found. The funeral stock consists of 4 iron dagger with traces of a wooden sheath; one knife; 3 bone median overlays for bows; bronze overlays; holders, bone zoomorphic suspension bracket from a decorative belt; iron buckles and a ring. There were bones of a hind leg of a ram and astragal remained from funeral food.

The hole #2 was to the north from the first one. Nothing except a fragment of ram rib was found in its filling.

Based on the funeral stock having analogies in monuments of VII-X centuries, in particular, Tuva, the researcher of a burial ground A.G.Maksimova relates the barrow to VII century connecting it with Karluks.

Kogaly Complex. Medieval monuments in Kogaly hole, in the upper course of Sarybulak River are found out and examined in 2007 by archaeologist A.Y.Rogozhinsky. Excavations were made on one of objects of the complex and stone sculptures are taken out and transferred to the Central State Museum of Kazakhstan in Almaty.

In a mountain part of natural boundary Kogaly, as the researcher informs, some groups of monuments are located: barrow burial grounds, ritual fencings with anthropomorphic stellas and balbals, barrow with stone ridges, sites and rock drawings.

East area of the valley has a memorial with ritual fencings, stellas and balbals.

During excavation it was possible to establish that destruction of monuments that occurred in the ancient time, probably then three stone sculptures have been tumbled down.

Under description of A.E.Rogozhinskiy, the sculpture #1 represents a fragment of sandstone of greenish color. In the top part of a stone on raw face sheet, the face of the person is knocked out: pointed chin, bow-shaped eyebrows shown over nose bridge with the inflexed ends, contour out a nose widening from top to bottom, almond-shaped eyes and a mouth with the lowered corners.

The sculpture #2 of a sandstone of greenish color is in the size 1.62x0.46 – 0.52x0.13-0.15m. On the top part of stela, there is a man's face that knocked out: high cheekbone, with the pointed chin; lips, moustaches with inflexed tips, straight nose with the wings; almond-shaped eyes contoured by eaves and thin bow-shaped eyebrows shown over nose bridge with the inflexed ends; wavy hair are combed back, along the basis are framed by the double strip stimulating a bandage. Eyes and a nose are made with a bas-relief. On the left of the lateral side, the ear contour is designated.]

The middle part of stela is occupied with the engraved images: dwelling of type of yurta with acting top; inside of it there is a trellised seat with backs, man and woman sitting on it against each other with a plait behind men's shoulders, with a sword on a belt and the woman is in a wide attire and in a three-horn headdress. The man is represented sitting, with crossed legs; heels are parted. The edge of an attire of a female figure closes a seat line and a foot of her feet project from under clothes; toes are parted. A bowl is represented in the right hand of the woman; the left hand of the man is bent in an elbow and also hands a bowl. From the right of a female figure, near to a seat back the bow and a quiver with the stretched basis are shown. Between the obverse image and a yurta four tamga-shaped signs are knocked out.

The sculpture #3 is a block of sandstone in length of 2.45 m, in average and top part of the section is roundish. On its surface, the stone top has the ledge reminding contour of person head with the stressed nose and a chin.

The sculpture #4 is sandstone of greenish-gray and brown color. From face sheet, in the top part of a stone, there is a natural ledge where the sculptural image of a man's face is executed: closed mouth with the highlighted upper lip and corners lowered downwards; the long wide moustaches lowered downwards; a relief nose merging with them; the almond-shaped eyes contoured by platen of eye-lids 'swelled up a little'; bow-shaped eyebrows, right one is hardly outlined by knockout. The lateral sides of a stone have a neck and figure shoulders marked by grinding techniques. In an average part of stela, there are two tanga-shaped signs knocked out.

Kogaly complex is extremely interesting and, first of all, because of a sculpture with engraving, representing 'a scene in the yurta'. The female figure in a three-horn headdress has wide analogies. It is a well-known 'Kudyrga boulder' and 'Maitobin face', female sculptures of

Zhetysu. First two are compared by researchers with ancient Turkic goddess – Umai; Zhetysu sculptures in three-horned headdresses with shamans.

The image on Kogly sculpture, probably can be compared with divine pair of ancient Turks Tengri – Umai or with notable Turks from a ruling dynasty. The complex and sculpture are dated by VI-VIII centuries.

Zhaisan sanctuary is in the Shu valley, in its steppe part. The works were conducted by A.M.Dosymbayeva, based on her data in 2005, 27 cult-memorial complexes have been opened in a sanctuary, each of them total tens of funeral and cult constructions. Funeral constructions are in the western part and commemoration designs (fences) in the east part, sometimes fences are among barrow groups. Petroglyphs among which patrimonial tamgas are revealed, also included into a complex, they can be seen on stone sculptures.

Basis of ritual constructions is made by quadrangular in respect of a fencing stone plates put on their edge. In the fencing one of two stellas and a stone sculpture are placed. It can be located in the east side or in the fencing center. The height of stellas is from 1 m to 2.3-3.8m.

Among sculptures are men and women, a bust with the head and face image, full figures with the image of clothes and military attributes; sculptures in a three-horn-headdress.

According to the researcher, Zhaisan complex belongs to Turkic aristocracy. From three sculptures, the first one is marked out. The sculptor has represented the notable Turk with the beard and moustache. In the right hand he holds a vessel – a mug, his left hand is on his stomach, long hair are divided into a parting in the middle, earrings are in his ears. Turk is dressed in a dressing gown with wide tops and cuffs on sleeves; his waist is bound with a belt and buckle. At the left to a belt, the dagger in a sheath is suspended on two thongs, on the right side to a belt, the handbag – ‘kaptargah’ is suspended. The footwear ‘looks out’ from his dressing – gown.

Female sculpture of a complex is twice less than male’s one; her head is knocked off, in the left hand she holds a vessel.

The iron tip of an arrow of leaf shape has been found in the center of fencing with a female sculpture.

Zhaisan sanctuary, according to A.M.Dosymbayeva is dated by VII-VIII centuries.

The sculpture of ancient Turks have a special place among antiquities as owing to the expressiveness and attractiveness drew attention of researchers at once. Sketches of stone sculptures on the Ayaguz River and near Kozy Korpesh and Bayan Sulu Mausoleum were first made S.Valikhanov in 1856. He also did the drawing of stone sculptures at the northern coast of Issyk Kul lake.

Turkic anthropomorphic sculptures occupy the territory that was included in First and Second Turkic, West Turkic, Turgesh, Karluk and Uigur Kaganate, Kimak and Kypchak states from VI to XII centuries AD. Disintegration of the First Turkic Kaganate has caused certain differences in development of monumental art in its different parts. In the east, there was a large center on the Orkhon River, where the monument was built in honor of Kyultegin.

There are also differences in iconography of the figures. Thus, in Zhetysu, there are sculptures with a bird in a hand instead of a bowl or a cup, female figures. Such stylistic signs as pretentious depiction of the fingers holding a bowl, bent line of eyebrows, big almond-shaped eyes are characteristic in a greater degree for Zhetysu sculptures – they could appear under the influence of Sogdian art.

All sculptures can be divided into two big groups, which differ very clearly by the way of decoration, form and size of stones, presence of certain attributes: group I includes stones with the image of a face of head, group II includes sculptures depicting a figure of the person.

Sculpture of I group are the most numerous. These sculptures are traditional and usual for commemorative monuments, necessary attribute of a cult place. They could have been created during the whole period of ancient-Turkic time; their exact chronology has not been developed yet. Their belonging to concrete ancient Turkic tribes is not established. Usually sculptures were established with their face to the east near to fences, made from flat stone plates, from the east side. A row of stones departs from them are ‘balbals’.

In the first group of sculptures, two types can be marked out” flat or raw stone blocks with the image of the face and processed stones with a head in the form of a voluminous sculpture. Sculptures of the first type have only eyes, mouth and nose; moustaches with ends twirled upwards or depicted by straight lines. Usually there is no beard. Ears are almost never reproduced. The whole face contour is presented seldom; usually the bottom line is highlighted (chin, cheeks) with semicircular or slightly pointed outlines. And if the head is reproduced completely, then it has either smooth roundish top contour or small sub-square ledge on the top depicting the headdress. On several sculptures from Zhetysu, there is a three-horn headdress on the head.

Sculptures of the second group sometimes have made out the upper edge of clothes in a form of sub-square or figured cut. Shoulders can be shown, the head has relief ears with earrings and moustache on the face. The head is either of roundish outlines or with a small ledge – a headdress.

Sculptures of the second group are works of art. Their necessary attribute is the vessel, except several figures with a bird in a hand instead of a vessel. They are divided into three types: with a vessel in one hand, with a bird, with a vessel in both hands.

The majority of both sculptures reproduce a waist figure of the person. But some show a sitting figure with the knees drawn ahead or with the cross-legged ‘Turkish’ position. Such sitting figures can be met in Mongolia, Altai, Tuva and Zhetysu. According to researchers almost all ancient-Turkic sculptures reproduce sitting human figures. A bit below the waist sculpture finishes and there is the raw part of a stone driven in the ground. On a surface of the earth, the sculpture was fixed in a pose of a sitting person, though the image of the bended legs is often absent. Thus, the sitting figure of the deceased with a cup or a bird in his hands created effect of participation in a funeral meal.

Many sculptures have belt shown on their waists. Under a belt ornaments and weapon were represented. Types of sculptures differ not only in depicting a vessel, but also by many stylistic

signs: based on details of belt decoration, types of weapon, forms of vessels, the dating of monuments was conducted.

Sculptures of the first type reproduced men holding a vessel in the bent right or left hand at the level of their breast. The gender of the represented person is usually defined by presence of moustache and beard. But these signs may be absent. Other hand lies on a belt and in most cases holds the weapon, which stresses the military status of the represented. All sculptures have the general height from 1.2 to 1.7 m, but they towered on 0.7-1.5 m over the ground. Flattened extended stone blocks were selected for sculptures. Sculpture had made out head and shoulders, the waist was rarely underlined.

In some sculptures, their hair dress is shown. Wavy hair in front are divided by a parting in the middle and braided in plaits behind. On sculptures from Zhetysu, five or seven plaits are shown on the back. At first. They are straight, but end with wavy lines. Cloth details on the same sculptures are very accurately worked up.

These are men with moustaches and in several cases with the beard. All of them hold a cup on the pallet in the right hand. The left hand lies on a sabre handle. Some have two sabres, one under another. Caftan details – wide triangular collars with the big tops are carefully worked. It is interesting that similar images of Turks are known on frescos of Afrasiab ancient settlement in Samarkand as a part of retinue of Samarkand tsar Varhuman. Frescos are enough convincingly date by 90s of VII century. Their hair is combed in five or seven plaits tightly intertwined and the falling tips are loosened by curls, caftans are with unbent sub-square collars, two sabres on one side and decorative belts. It is possible to assume that one these frescos, Zhetysu Turks are represented, who were among the Samarkand tsar.

Details of the face are depicted by a low relief, the straight nose widening on the end modelled by common platen with eyebrows. Often eyebrows and nose form the T-shirt shaped figure. The eyebrows are bow-shaped. However, sometimes bent eyebrows are represented.

There are earrings in ears especially frequent on Zhetysu sculptures.

Clothes are shown differently: usually the upper edge of the suit: roundish or in a kind of sub-triangle cape. Probably, various ways of wearing clothes were shown this way. In the first case – the dressing gown collar was tightly clasped at a neck and in the second case the outer loose clothes were clasped on a breast, so that skirts were turned out and lapels were formed. In some cases narrow sleeves without cuffs are underlined. In front of some dressing gowns, the fasteners and a border decorating the coat-breast were shown. In Zhetysu, the sleeves covering shoulders are straight, vertically hanging down coat-breasts cover the sculpture lateral faces. The same clothes are on Turks on frescos of Afrasiab and on Turk-kangar on a carved tree from Kuiryktobe.

The belt with pendant ornaments is reproduced on Turkic sculptures with special accuracy. The belt is an obligatory accessory for ceremonies of consecration into the category of warriors, a social status sign. From young years, soldiers acquired the right to carry it. Thus, the number of metal plates and suspension brackets on a belt define the social status of the owner.

The important role at definition of the social status of the belt owner was played by metal. Thus, gold belts were a distinctive sign of aristocracy. The weapon (sabres, broadswords, swords, daggers and knives) is located on the left side of the statue, obliquely in relation to a belt. On Zhetysu sculptures, which have analogies on Afrasiab frescos, two sabres under each other are represented, one of which is a bit shorter.

For sculptures of the second type, the image of a sitting bird in the right hand instead of a vessel is characteristic. The left hand, thus, also lies on a belt. It can be met only in Zhetysu. These are images of men, though moustaches are not shown at all sculptures. The image of a bird had some special symbolical value. The bird could represent the soul of the deceased.

The third type of all sculptures represents statuary monuments depicting men and women with a vessel in two hands. Many of them are made of granite.

Vessels with the pallet are represented on the sculptures of the third type. Images of cups with a leg prevail in Zhetysu images. Researchers consider that vessels from metal, gold or silver are reproduced on sculptures which have been spread from VIII to IX century. Metal cups on a leg origin from Sogda, where the complexes dated by VI-VII centuries were found and also can be met in wall paintings of the early Middle Age.

Belts with roundish buckles with a catch and rectangular belt holders and moon-shaped metal plates are dated by VII-VIII centuries.

Reliable chronological indicators are lyre-shaped suspension brackets which are known in archaeological monuments from VIII-IX centuries. There is a weapon on a belt of half of sculptures: sabres with direct cross-hair, maces and knives which correspond to subjects of VIII-IX centuries. Sabres and bent daggers of IX-X centuries prevail.

The group of female sculptures of Zhetysu is interesting. There is a three-horn headdress on some of them. The female figure wearing such headdress is engraved on the Kudergin boulder from Altai, which is dated by VI-VII centuries. The woman in the center sits in the cross-legged position 'like Turk' and bended-kneed men figures with horses in rein are near it. Researchers interpret the central female figure as the image of Umai goddess.

The group of monuments with the image of glass-shaped vessels barely typical to other areas of Kazakhstan and Central Asia is interesting due to date. The big group of such sculptures is found out and surveyed on summer mountain pastures in upper courses of the Merke River. The similar are dated by IX-XI centuries.

Grivnas testify to affinity of stone sculptures of Kazakhstan to Polovets sculptures. They were not typical elements of ancient-Turkic sculptures of men. Most likely grivnas can be considered as the certificate of ethnic relationship of sculpture founders and as the proof of later date of statues.

It is necessary to mention the high headdresses, sometimes shown on such sculptures. Similar headdresses are absolutely absent in Mongolia, it is the exclusive feature of Kazakhstan sculptures, most likely the female ones.

Shapes of vessels, a manner to hold a vessel in two hands, presence of the breast image, absence of the belt with the weapon – all of these allow to compare sculptures of Merke with some Polovtsian sculptures of South Russian steppes. The latter are dated by XII-XIII centuries and connected with advancement of Kypchaks from Kazakhstan to steppe of Eastern Europe.

Changing in time and space, ceremonies and cults of ancient Turks undergone serious changes, but in general, the main idea has not been lost neither in a ceremony, nor in an essence of sacrifices, in installation of idols in honor of ancestors.

For centuries, Turkic tribes kept tradition of building stone sculptures in memory of ancestors, in honor of the sun, east cult and also cult of the woman-progenitor and female Umai deity. The ceremony of remembrance on ancestors has been connected with stone fences.

In Zhetysu, in Merke, in a steppe zone of Shu, Talas, Ili valleys, in Karatau foothills and Shu-Ili Mountains, in Tien-Shan Mountains, hundreds of square and roundish fences were fixed. The stone sculpture sometimes stands from the east side of fencing and sometimes in its center. Most likely, stone idols were put only for notable and eminent ancestors, it was enough to build stone fence or a barrow for commemoration of the ordinary tribe member.

New materials show that in Kypchak altars of Kazakhstan, female sculptures prevailed and with rare exception all of them are cut with a vessel in two hands, hence, it is possible to consider that this tradition was brought from here to South Russian steppes.

On the example of Merke sanctuary, it can be asserted that fences and stone stacking similar to barrows existed in Kazakhstan up to XII century and also stone sculptures of post shape on this monument with schematically depicted faces existed nearby and obviously, with more accurately worked sculptures, at which grivnas, breast, headdresses and vessels are shown. Probably, the distinction between these two types is not only chronological, but also social.

Kypchak Merke sculptures put the monuments of all Turk-language people of Eurasia in a uniform chain testifying to original culture of Great Steppe nomads.

Used material:

K.M.Baipakov

'Treasure of ancient and medieval Taraz and Zhambyl Region'