

Function Of Turkic Stone Enclosure with Statue: Memorial Site or Cremation Burial Site?

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1. Introduction

From Mongolia to Semirech'ye (Yedi Su, Southern Kazakhstan) there are so many square stone enclosures constructed during the Turkic period. Typical enclosure (length of each side: 2–4m) consists of plate stones, accompanying one male stone statue outside of the eastern fence of the enclosure and a row of standing stones (*balbals*) lining to the east. In the center of enclosure there is a depression filled with ash, charcoal and burnt animal bones.

There is another larger type of enclosure which consists of a square low embankment and a shallow ditch. Sometimes this type has a sarcophagus in the center. This type has also one (or two) stone statue with one (or two) row of standing stones on the eastern side.

Most of Russian and Tchec archaeologists consider this enclosure as a memorial site but not a burial site, because there is no human (burnt) bone (Rudenko, Evt'yukhova, Vainshtein, Gavrilova, L. R. Kyzlasov, Grach, Jisl, Sher, V. D. Kubarev, Voitov). A few of older archaeologists accepted it as a cremation burial (Gryaznov, Potapov, Gumilev). On the other hand, every Chinese archaeologist considers it as a cremation burial (Li, Wang). I suppose that it is noteworthy to reinvestigate the theory of cremation burial.

In this paper I would like to re-examine the Chinese written sources and archaeological material about this problem.

2. Written sources of funeral ceremony of the Tuque-Turks

a) Zhoushu, ch.50, the biography of the foreign regions (p.910) (same as Beishi, ch.99, the biography of the Tuque)

死者，停屍於帳，子孫及諸親屬男女，各殺羊馬，陳於帳前，祭之。繞帳走馬七匝，一詣帳門，以刀口面，且哭，血淚俱流，如此者七

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度，乃止。擇日，取亡者所乘馬及經服用之物，并屍俱焚之，收其餘灰，待時而葬。春夏死者，候草木黃落，秋冬死者，候華葉榮茂，然始坎而瘞之。

If one of them dies, the corpse is put in the tent. All children and grandchildren, male and female relatives of the deceased slaughter every sheep and horse and lay them before the tent as an offering. They choose one day, take the horse and the clothing and utensils of the deceased and burn them with the corpse. Then they collect **the remaining ashes** to wait until a convenient time to bury them: if one dies in the spring or summer, they wait until the grass and leaves of the trees became yellow; if one dies in autumn or winter, they wait for the sprouting and blossoming of the plants; and then they bury these (ashes).

Chinese historian Liu Mau-tsai translated this part including ashes into German as follows.

Dann sammelten sie **die Asche**, um sie zu einem geeigneten Zeitpunkt zu begraben. (Liu 1958: 9)

I'd like to add one word "**restlichen**" before "die Asche" in Liu's translation.

b) Suishu, ch.84, the biography of the Tuque (p.1864)

有死者，停屍帳中，家人親屬多殺牛馬而祭之，..... 於是擇日置屍馬上而焚之，取灰而葬。

If one of them dies, the body is laid in his tent. His family and relatives slaughter cattle and horses and bring them to the dead as victim..... Now they choose one day, put the corpse on a horse and burn them (her, it). Then they bury the ashes.

The description of the Zhou-shu is more extensive than that of the Sui-shu. If we adopt the Zhou-shu, the Tuque did not bury the burnt **bones** of the dead. They buried the **ashes** of the corpse, his horse and his utensils. The ashes of the dead himself must have occupied only a few percentages.

c) Suishu ch.53, the biography of Da-xi Chang-ru (p.1350)

開皇二年，突厥沙鉢略可汗并弟葉護及潘那可汗眾十餘萬，寇掠而南，詔以長儒為行軍總管，率眾二千擊之。.....且戰且行，轉鬪三日，.....突厥本欲大掠秦、隴，既逢長儒，兵皆力戰，虜意大沮，明日，於戰處焚屍慟哭而去。

In the second year of Kaihuang (582), Shabolüe Qaghanled 100,000 soldiers,..... plundered and marched to the south. (The General of the Sui army) Daxi Changru..... fought to the death for three days. The next day they (the Tuque) burned the bodies on the battlefield; they cried and wailed and then left.

I. Ecsedy explained that this method of burial, where the interment of the ashes is not mentioned, may represent a solution evoked by the necessity of leaving the place, i.e., for escaping (Ecsedy 1984: 265). However, in this battle the Chinese army also took heavy casualty of 80 – 90 percent. The Tuque did not need to escape. They burned the bodies to take their remaining ashes and left to bury the ashes in homeland. This fierce battle was fought in December, according to the emperor's annals (Suishu, ch.1, p.18). Their ashes must have been buried next spring, around May.

d) Suishu ch.84, the biography of Tie-le-Turks (p.1879)

其俗大抵與突厥同，唯丈夫婚畢，便就妻家，待產乳男女，然後歸舍，死者埋殯之，此其異也。大業三年，遣使貢方物，自是不絕云。

Their (Tiele-Turks') customs are approximate like those of the Tuque-Turks. (However, there are two differences. One is the marriage system. And the second is the funeral custom). They bury the dead persons.

There was a difference of funeral custom among the Turks: cremation or not.

e) Xin Tangshu ch.215-a, the biography of the Tuque (p.6034)

明年.....、帝曰、「.....。俗死則焚，今葬皆起墓，背父祖命，嫚鬼神也。」

In the following year (628), The Emperor (Taizong) said, "(He pointed out the several reasons of the decline of the Tuque. One of the reasons is as follows.) According to their custom, they burned their bodies. However, now they build graves (to bury their bodies under them). This shows that they contravene the orders of their ancestors and insult their gods and spirits."

If the Emperor's saying is right, the Tuque exchanged cremation with the burial around 628, just before the collapse of the First Tuque Qaghanate in 630. After that the Xieli Qaghan surrendered to the Tang army and lived under the protection of the Emperor Taizong.

f) Xin Tangshu ch.215-a, the biography of the Tuque (p.6036)

八年，頡利死，……詔國人葬之，從其禮，火尸，……。

In the 8th year (of Zhenguan, 634) Xie-li died. …… (The Emperor) ordered the country's people (=Tuque) to burn the corpse, following their funeral custom.

g) Epitaph of Li (Ashina) Sima (Zhang 1993: 12, 113)

貞觀廿一年……卒……。仍任依蕃法燒訖、然後葬。

(Ashina Simo, the relative of Xie-li, was captured by the Tang army in 630 and then subjected to the Emperor Tai-zong, who gave his family name Li to Sima.) In the 21st year of Zhenguan (647)……(Sima) died. ……(his body) was burnt by the barbarian (Tuque) rule and then buried.

h) The History of Menander the Guardsman, Fragments 19, 1 (Blockley 1985: 176-179)

When Valentinus had spoken thus, Turxanthus said, “Since, Romans, you have come here and found me in the greatest sorrow (for my father, Silzibil=Istemi, is recently dead), you must follow the custom which prevails amongst us for the dead and slash faces with daggers.” Immediately Valentinus and his companions slashed their own cheeks with their daggers. Then, on one of the days of mourning Turxanthus brought for his departed father four Hunnic captives and, placing these wretched men in the middle with his father's horses, in his barbarian tongue he bade them go there and tell his father Silzibil how great to him. (Some words had been lost)

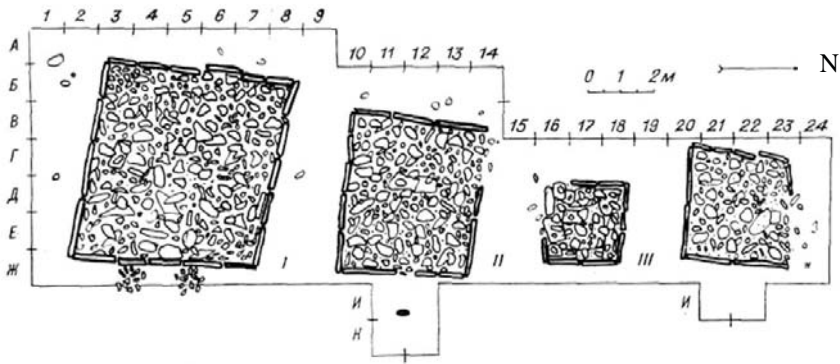
We cannot find the incineration of the Silzibil's body in Menander's Fragments. I. Ecsedy judged that Istemi's case was a unique occasion and reflects interment without cremation (Ecsedy 1984: 265-266). However, after this description there are some words lost (Blockley 1985: 178-179). Japanese Turkologist Naito M. estimated there would have been a description of cremation; the body of Silzibil and four captives on horses would have been burnt together and their ashes would have been buried after several months (Naito 1988: 394). I suppose that four captives would have been killed in substitution for balbals.

3. Archaeological material of funeral ceremony of the Altai Turks

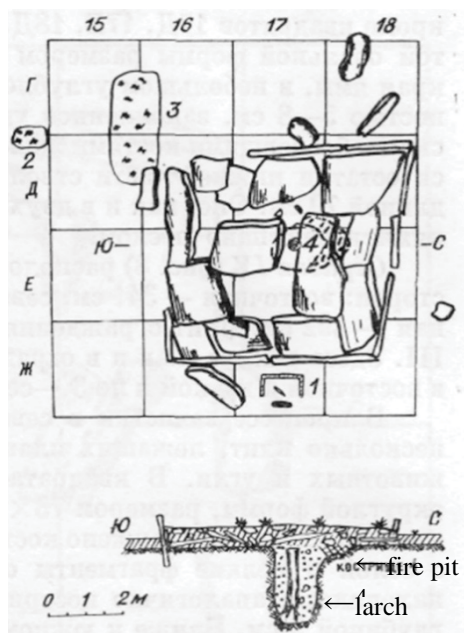
V. D. Kubarev (d. 2011) had been studying the archaeological sites in the Russian Altai for a long time. He pointed out the importance of fire in the funeral rite of the present Siberian peoples, including the Altaians (Kubarev 1984: 75).

According to the views of the Altaians, the fire served as a means of purification from pollution, protection from the attack of evil spirits, and was a kind of place “from the world of the living to the world of the dead.” The Telengits of the Kosh-Agach region (south-eastern part of the Altai Republic-----T.H.) on the seventh day after the funeral during the mourning time arranged the foods for the soul of the deceased through the bonfire. Calling the name of the deceased, they threw the rest of the deceased’s clothes and other things into the fire. His relatives brought a few various products and also threw them into the fire. All these actions were carried out near the grave. By such ways the bonfire placed in the square stone enclosure served a dialogue of the living people with the souls of the dead persons.

He paid attention to the traces of bonfire in or by the square stone enclosure. In D’er-Tebe of the Kosh-Agach region there is a memorial complex, consisting of 4 ancient Turkic square stone enclosures I-IV, built along the N-S line (Kubarev 1978: 86). On the east side of the enclosure II there is a weathered statue of white stone (H: 142 cm). On the eastern fence of enclosure III there was found a lower part of stone statue (Kubarev 1978:90).



Plan of excavated area of square stone enclosures I – IV of D’er-Tebe. (Kubarev 1978)



Plan and section of square stone enclosure III. (Kubarev 1978)
 1—"Stone box of sacrifices"; 2 and 4 – fire pits.

There were several fire pits between and inside stone enclosures. Fire pits 4 and 5 in the enclosures III and IV must have been transferred from the biggest fire pit 3 outside of the southwestern corner of enclosure III. This assumption was justified by the finding of fragment of the board which could not be burnt in fire pit 5 of enclosure IV (Kubarev 1978: 96). According to V. D. Kubarev's idea, the charcoals for the symbolic bonfire might have been brought on the board into the enclosures III and IV. Also, in the enclosures I and II the burning charcoal was, probably, brought under the larch trees. However, here was only the traces of highly burnt-out ash (Ibid.). The moving of only ashes is quite similar to the funeral rite of the Tuque-Turks written in the Chinese chronicles.

4. Conclusion

Some of older age scholars consider these enclosures as burial sites. They think that the remnants of incineration were placed inside the enclosures (Gryaznov 1940: 19-20; Potapov 1953: 86-87; Gumilev 1959: 108). According to V. D. Kubarev,

this opinion does not stand up to criticism, because “in none of the excavated enclosures there has never been found calcified human bones” (Kubarev 1984: 69-70).

Above mentioned Chinese written source says that the Tuque did not bury calcified human bones but remaining ashes of the deceased and his daily utensils after several months of his cremation. The ashes found in enclosures must be the remaining ashes of the cremation.

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