

WHEN WAS GÖK TURK STATUES SCULPTED AND ERECTED?

(A GLANCE WITH THE EXAMPLE OF KÜL TIGIN'S WIFE)

GÖK TÜRK HEYKELLERİ NE ZAMAN YONTULUYOR VE DİKİLİYORLARDI? (KÜL TİGİN'İN KARISININ HEYKEL PARÇASI ÖRNEĞİ İLE BİR BAKIŞ)

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Keywords: Gök Turk statue, Kül Tigin memorial, Balbal, Eurasian nomads.

Anahtar Sözcükler: Gök Türk heykeltçiliği, Kül Tigin külliyesi, Balbal, Avrasya göçerleri.

ABSTRACT

There are big differences in the way of sculpting technique between agrarian and nomadic cultures. Empires like Assurs, Hittites, Romans and Greeks, sculptures were mostly erected in honor of gods, goddesses, emperors and sometimes just plain people. But in nomadic cultures especially in the Gök Turk period, statues represent only the dead person (both men and women). Again Gök Turk statues were not found to be erected in temples, backyards or on the streets, but only in cultic sides where shaman performed a ritual for the soul of dead man or woman. Some of those Gök Turk statues show very strong portrait features. Since there is no name carved on them we do not know whom they belonged to, but probably in their time people were aware of that.

Contemporary Turkic nations like Kyrgyz and Kazakh who are living in Asia, avoid determining a grave for people before they die. It might call as a taboo because they even avoid talking about someone's death. They believe that, this is a bad omen for the living. So if their ancestors carved the statues for the dead, then we should ask when those statues were carved: After death or while they are still alive.

The article will try to seek an answer to the question posed above with the help of the statues part considered as a wife of Kül Tigin found in the ritual site.

ÖZET

Yerleşik ve göçer kültürlerin heykel yapımına bakışı arasında büyük farklar vardır. Örneğin Assur, Hitit, Roma ve Greklerde heykeller çoğunlukla tanrı/tanrıçaları, imparatorları ya da bazen normal halktan birilerini onurlandırmak için yapılırdı. Ancak göçer kültürlerde özellikle Gök Türklerde, heykeller kadın ya da erkek ayırt etmeksizin sadece ölülerin arkasından dikilirdi. Yine Gök Türklerde heykeller, tapınak, avlu ya da cadde başlarında değil, Şamanların önlerinde ayin gerçekleştirdikleri kült alanlarının önüne dikilirdi. Bu Gök Türk heykellerinin bazıları güçlü portre özellikleri gösterir. Üzerlerinde heykelin kime ait olduğu ile ilgili bir bilgi olmasa da, ihtimalle kendi çağı içinde kimi yansıttıkları gayet iyi biliniyordu.

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Asya'da yaşayan Kırgız ve Kazak gibi çağdaş Türk toplulukları, birisi ölmeden mezar yeri belirlemek gibi bir yaklaşımdan uzak durmaktadırlar. Hatta bu konuya tabu derecesinde yaklaşırlar ki, birisinin ölümü hakkında konuşmaktan çekinirler. Bu şekilde davranmanın yaşayanlara uğursuzluk getireceğini düşünürler. Dolayısıyla bu insanların çok uzak geçmişte olmayan ataları bahsi geçen heykelleri ölüntün ardından dikiyorlarsa, o zaman Gök Türklerin bu heykelleri ne zaman yaptıklarını sorgulamamız gerekir.

Çalışma, yukarıdaki soruna Kül Tigin'in kült alanında bulunan ve karısına ait olduğu düşünülen heykel örneği ile bir öneri getirmeye çalışacaktır.

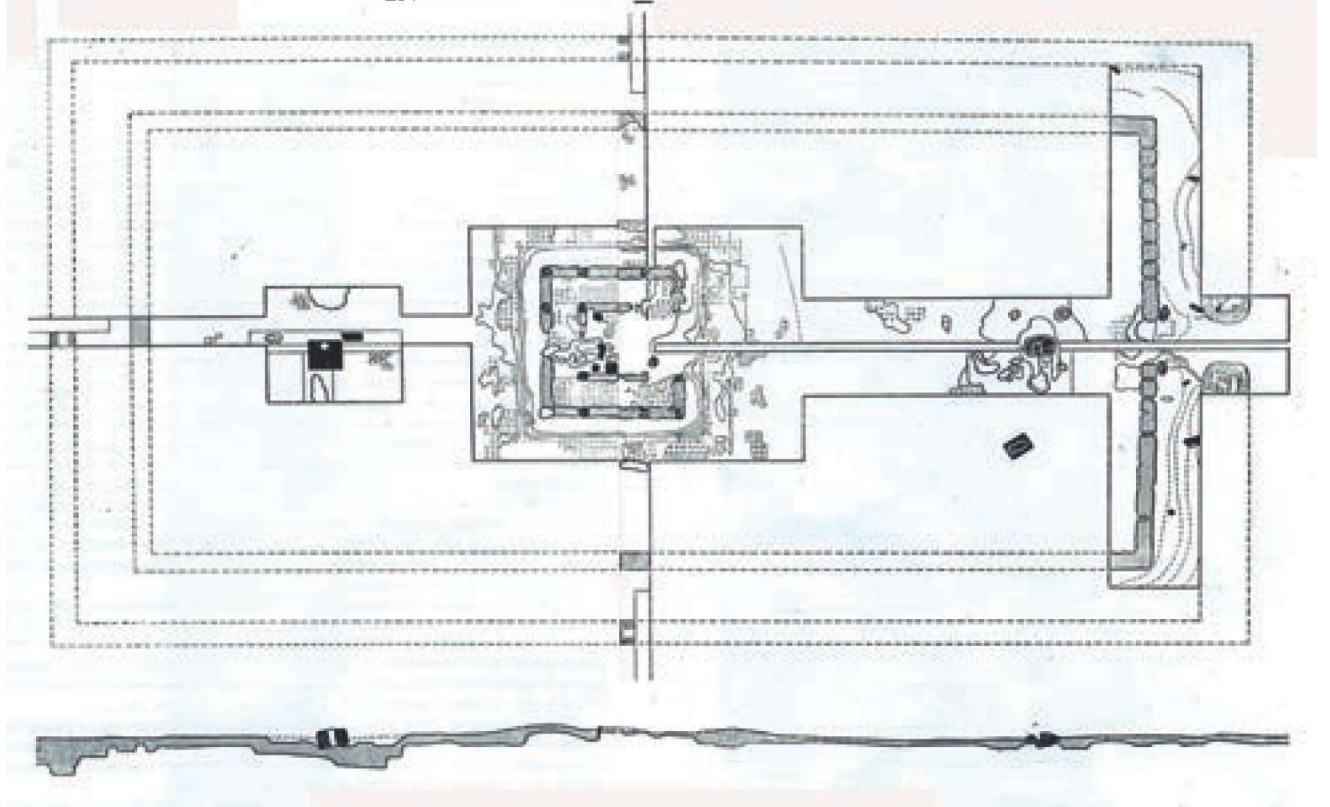
The monuments located in Kosho Tsaydam region of Mongolia which known as Orkhon memorials have been engaging scientific world for a long time. As it is known these monuments have been erected to cherish the memories of the two brothers who gave Gök Turks their golden era. Early dated cultic site was built on August 21, 732 and belongs to Kül Tigin, the supreme commander of Gök Turk army who died on February 27, 731¹. Other cultic site belongs to Bilge Kaghan who died on November 25, 734 and succeeded the throne and ruled the country under discipline with the help of his brother. His complex was built on September 20, 735 likewise his younger brother roughly one year after his death².

Alongside the first generation researchers such as Strahlenberg, Yadrinstev, Heikel, Radloff³, scientists like Jisl, Voitov, Diyarbekirli, Bayar, Hayashi, ... who use the facilities of the modern archeology, have studied these

monuments which concerns not only Turkey Turks but also the other Turkic origin nations dispersed throughout the Eurasia Belt⁴. Yet during this long period of nearly 120 years, statues belonging to complexes have been moved out to different museums or Government offices and unfortunately could not be brought together. Hopefully this unpleasant situation will be resolved in the near future and these statues return to their original locations.

The subject we want to analyze is, when those statues were sculpted? Our starting point is a piece of statue considered as a woman found in the bark building in Kül Tigin's memorial during the excavation done by Jisl in 1957.

The first archaeological excavation in the monument made by Czech scientist Jisl and almost the entire site plan was brought to uncover (Plan 1). In probing held in the Bark



Plan 1 - Structural layout after the excavation done by Jisl in Kül Tigin memorial site (After Jisl 1963)

¹ Tekin 1988:xii.
² Tekin 1988:xiii.
³ Tekin 1988:v-vi

⁴ Jisl 1960, Voitov, 1985, Diyarbekirli 1979, Bayar-Erdenebaatar 1999, Hayashi 1996, ...

WHEN WAS GÖK TURK STATUES SCULPTED AND ERECTED?

building located in the center of the memorial, a head of statue claimed to be belonged to Kül Tigin was found⁵. Consequently researches focused on this effigy (Fig. 1). However our concern is another piece of effigy found in the same probe somehow ignored by the academicians who studied early era Turkic art. Although there are no patterns revealing its gender, after the suggestion of Jisl, scientists agreed on she is Kül Tigin's wife⁶ (Fig. 2).



Fig. 1 - The effigy of Kül Tigin found during the excavation of Jisl in 1957 in the pit next to Bark. 42 x 21 x 21.5 cm. (Yüksel Dede archive).



Fig. 2 - An effigy part of a woman considered as a wife of Kül Tigin. This part also found in the same pit with Kül Tigin's head. (depts.washington.edu/silkroad/museums/ubhist/turk.html; 10.10.2014)

Unfortunately there is no archeological data on whereabouts of the lost pieces of Tigin's and his wife statues. Though Aslanapa offers beheaded sitting cross legged statue is belong to Tigin⁷, but Jisl expresses the rest of Tigin's and his wife's statues are in pieces⁸. Last work in

⁵ Jisl 1963: 395.

⁶ Jisl 1963: 394. (In fact there is no difference in Gök Turk sculpting technique between man and woman statues. Only breasts, etc. are distinguishing form of a woman characteristic.)

⁷ Aslanapa 1964: fig.3.

⁸ Jisl 1963: 394-395.

the memorial also expresses shoulder and back parts of the statue of a woman in a sitting position found in the trench next to Bark⁹ (Fig. 3). However the dimension of the Tigin's wife face piece saved by being moved to a museum is 20 x 20 x 3.5 cm. which only nose, mouth, chin and malar are noticeable.



Fig. 3 - Other parts of statues may belong to Kül Tigin and his wife because found in the same pit (after Hersek).

We know the exact date of the completion of the memorial: August 21, 732. Chinese architects and masters who were invited to set up the cultic plan have not only carved this on the Bengü stone (inscription) but also mentioned in the annals of the Tang empire which they were sent from. Still lots of questions wait to be answered related with the complex.

One of the topics not mentioned in the sculptural studies is that when they were sculpted. After the people's death or when they are still alive? Another question, if these statues were made for the prominent people of the society then can we consider these were the exact copies of the people they represent?

Before suggesting an idea, we need to consider the artists' status who sculpted the statues. Referring to the agrarian societies which kept more reliable records, unless the artists are employed by the Palace, they had been expecting an invitation or travelling from one place to another, hunting for a job¹⁰. If not busy with sculpting then fixing jobs may also welcome. Of course for these artists building a house, fixing a broken door of a temple is something but making a tombstone or building a mausoleum is another. People don't like jobs reminding them death when they are still alive. This is also a mental issue. For instance; the head of state may lose respect and authority over the country if he wants to build his own mausoleum while he is still on charge. This approach considered by people he is not thinking of serving or governing but expecting and preparing for death. As most of the King do not indicate

⁹ Hersek 2002: 167, fig. 112.

¹⁰ Sönmez 1989: 474.

his successor while he is still in charge. Therefore tombstones likewise the mausoleums were not built before the death happens. Perhaps most of the tombstones prepared in blank and filled as per the details of the deceased upon a request. We know that the existing mausoleums were reused but it is not in the tradition to build one before during lifetime¹¹.

This condition should also apply in Gök Turk society where talking about death considered to be a taboo and expressed in speaking softly¹². It should have been considered to bring unrest to society if a prominent person has his mausoleum prepared before he is dead¹³. Considering these cultic sites built in Gök Turk era were hosting the rituals after the dead person it is understandable why these cultic sites built after death occurred as in the example of Kül Tigin memorial. Actually Chinese chronicles prove this fact. In these chronicles it is told that the funerals and yog-ash ceremonies were not realized right after the death happened; if the death happened in spring then the ceremony took place in autumn and vice versa¹⁴.

Magic is another important subject in Gök Turk belief which we can be related with taboo. In order to save the mausoleums from the tomb raiders, Gök Turk nobles should have been hiding the truth about in which kurgan the deceased lied. Therefore after the burial most likely there were no ceremonies before the kurgan. Still the needs of the dead afterlife had to be met. The need of a material which helps to contact the dead might have pushed ancient Turks to build these cultic sites. Where will the ceremony take place if they do not go to the grave once more? We know that magic needs three main elements. First is a sorcerer in Turkish form kam/kaman/kamanka

(shaman). Second are the magic words which the shaman tells. And a material which belongs to deceased who you want to cast a spell on is the third. Among the living this could be his/her hair, a piece of cloth and etc. But what can help us to contact to deceased?

As far as we learned from the artifacts in the tombs, the deceased used to be buried with his personal belongings such as weapons even sometimes horses. Even the rest of his belongings were given to the shaman (probably who conducts the ceremony) to be burned¹⁵. For this reason no material left to contact with the dead. At this very moment the statues in front of the cultic sites were rose to importance being the only object to establish the connection with the dead. The more resembles the statue to his origin the more successful the connection will be¹⁶. That's why nobody wants to keep the statue at home since it reminds death and is a direct tool of magic. Because of this the statues should have been sculpted after death.

If we accept the time elapsed between the death and the building of the cultic site is correct then we should question the resemblance between the statue and its origin. At the end we could identify considerably low amount of statues with a well-known Turkish Beghs. Most probably it was known by other Turks whom these statues represented when they were run into them. In other words, a person from the same tribe passing by the cultic site was aware of to whom this statue belonged to. But excluding the cultic sites with inscriptions none of the statues have any data anywhere revealing to whom it belongs to. This leaves us with the issue of finding to whom these statues belong to. Especially knowing these tribes moving frequently between winter and summer places and sometimes totally different area then it becomes more complicated even to figure out to which tribe it belongs to.

Lack of materials to remind the past such as photographs as in today must have been limiting the artists. This obstacle might have been overcome by two options: First, these cultic sites were built for the Gök Turk aristocrats representing the prominent people of the society. Eventually these people would not have financial obstacles. Most probably while visiting these tribes, artist used to draw a picture on a parchment or make clay or wooden sketch of the persons who wanted their statues prepared for the after death ceremonies¹⁷. Since this is not somet-

¹¹ Sultan Kılıçarslan II (1155-1192) and Sultan Mehmed I (1413-1421) who have had their mausoleums built are exceptions. Although it is not Anatolian Seljuk and Ottoman tradition, these preferences should be considered as personal choices (Gündüz 2010: 242-246; 255-257).

¹² Turks prefer to describe death concept by using expressions such as "flew" (K.T.E: 16, 25) or "fade" (Ögel 1988: 75).

¹³ Indeed during the survey we held in Kyrgyzstan between 2005 and 2007 with Kubat Tabaldiev, while visiting a village, after a traffic accident the grave dug for the person who was considered to be dead. But later on, it is understood that he is not dead so the hole was filled with a sacrificed sheep with the belief of an empty grave brings bad luck to the village or the death considered visiting the village might take somebody earlier than its time (July 2006).

¹⁴ Taşağıl 1995: 98 [Tung-Tien 1068a]. (Yet we have to comment this expression carefully. Unless the people chooses the death time (committing suicide, battles, ...) they should be dying in summer and winter as well. But here the important point is that the dead were not buried immediately. This approach should be having the time required for building the memorial or cultic site of the dead person. Original text probably mean because of snow and frozen soil it is impossible to dig a kurgan or grave during the winter time so wait until spring make sense.)

¹⁵ İnan 1986: 177. (Attitude of burning the clothes need to be commented as well. Kaghans and prominent people should be protected spiritually as well as militarily. Because if black shamans capture those belongings, they may curse the owner through those materials. Therefore the belongings should be protected while Kaghan is alive but should be destroyed after his death.)

¹⁶ So we understand why the statues have portrait characteristics.

¹⁷ But there is no any archeological material about these clay, wooden or parchment sketches. We know there are wooden sta-

WHEN WAS GÖK TURK STATUES SCULPTED AND ERECTED?

hing reminding death it won't create any problem in the society or in the yurt (tent). Sculptors, (bedizciler as the Gök Turks refer KT, G: 11, BK, K: 14) come when the death occurred and complete the statue with help of these sketch which they have already prepared. Many of the statues in steppe expresses 3 dimension effect must have been sculpted this way.

As a second, if the deceased could not have enough time to complete the procedures described above during his lifetime then if the artist invited while the cultic site is prepared is skilled enough, he was shaping the statue as much as possible based on what he is told about the deceased and repeating the general anthropologic characteristics¹⁸. Expressions attributed to all Turkic civilizations such as 'moon faced', 'almond eyed'¹⁹ should have appeared during this era. Yet in steppe there are examples of casually carved stones with general anthropomorphic characteristics such as only face, eyes and ears.

Almost all of the statues sculpted after the deceased represent middle aged men and women²⁰. But most probably some of them lived until old ages. In other words, probably they have avoided posing when they were still young. Because of this we can claim that there is an idealization in the sculpting style. But in any case the statues sculpted on the stones would not be erected before death. We have no doubt on this since the memorials are dated later than the death occurrences.

In this research our preposition so far is; that the statues for the deceased were not erected before the death occurred. Yet in Kül Tigin's memorial there are statues other than Kül Tigin and his wife's (Fig. 6, 7, 8). These statues stretch in two lines on the both sides of the Road of Spirit extending from entrance to Bark building represent the Beghs who participated the yogh-ash ceremony²¹. We can suggest

that these statues do not represent dead people. It is highly probable that these Beghs having their statues on this road were representing Chieftain of dependent tribes to the Gök Turks and were lined up according to their hierarchic positions in the Kaghanate. Because these statues are not balbals. Balbals extend in front of the entrance facing east side of the complex in a single line. This leaves with only one reasonable explanation which is these statues belong to Turkish nobles who participated the ceremony.

Another approach might also be helpful. We know that the both brother's memorials have been built by Chinese masters²². These memorials except negligible differences have great similarities with the contemporary memorials in China. The statues found in the memorials in China also belong to the visitors and high ranked officials who joined the ceremony²³ (Fig. 4, 5). Possibly Gök Turks requested from Chinese masters blend the traditions of Chinese and Turkic culture. And the masters built a masterpiece which was not seen in Turkic lands before. The tradition of building memorials is common in almost all cultures. But we come across the prototypes of those memorials in Gök Turk lands as well²⁴.



Fig. 4 - The burial complex of T'ai Tsung, Tang emperor. Through the chamber, high rank Chinese officers lining both side of the "spirit road" as in Kül Tigin memorial (Diyarbakirli archive).

tues in Kypchak cultic sites (Gurkin 1987). These might have been placed to the cultic sites because of lack of time to sculpt the stone. In some cases it is believed that there is a statue (töz) in the yurt which prevents the bad sprits coming inside. (Inan 1986: 2,3,42). Are these really the images of God as claimed or the elders in the society appreciate in the ancestor cult. Although this discussion should be a subject to another article, following Gök Turks, since Buddhism in east and Islam in west were the most common religions, we should consider the fact that some of these traditions of Gök Turks might have been left and some of them might have changed during the time.

¹⁸ Surely while preparing the statue there are other criteria involved. For instance being in war or peace; proximity to countries where sculpting is a cultural or religious tradition such as Christianity or Buddhism; being close to the trade roads; richness has direct effects on the shaping the statues (Yılmaz 2007).

¹⁹ Çoruhlu 1991: 126.

²⁰ We come across with the youngsters statues as well in the steppe.

²¹ There is an also contradicting opinion about those statues as they are servants of Tigin (Hayashi 2001: 226). According to Novgorodova they are ambassadors (Novgorodova 1980: 241).

²² Tekin 1985. [We are not sure how true to suggest the Chinese masters have worked in the entire complex. Possibly Chinese were the foremen as Chinese annals expresses only 6 masters have been send (below). Already the architectural characteristics (such as squeezed earth, tile front pieces, and demons ...), obelisk and turtle foundation plate (with Bengü stone) have some similarities with Chinese culture. Statues have same aspects with Chinese samples too (Zhou 2009: fig.193). But since the idea of Chinese masters spending all their lives in Turk lands is not reasonable, to accept the idea that Turk masters created the similar style makes more sense. Therefore the statues should have come out of Turk masters' hands. Best case scenario; Chinese masters have interfered when necessary and trained the Turkish sculptures. Examining the iconographic features of Kül Tigin's sculpture, we reach to same conclusion too (Novgorodova 1980: 240, 241; Çoruhlu 1991: 128).

²³ Diyarbakirli 1999; Howard-Song-Hung-Hong, 2006: 183, 184, 188.

²⁴ Voitov 1996.



Fig. 5 - Neighboring countries send an envoy to the burial ceremony of the Tang Emperors (T'ai Tsung). In this picture headless Gök Turks showing the respect on the behalf of their Kaghans (Diyarbakirli archive).

In this we suggest that Gök Turks sculpt statues with two aspects. First, the statues sculpted after the death which we have already explained above. Second, statues of the Beghs who joined the yogh-ash ceremony took place in cultic sites attributed to only Kaghans (and Kül Tigin). According to excavation report held in 1958 there are 5 of them²⁵. The number is 12 according to Novgorodova who joined the excavation as well²⁶ (Fig. 7), Seems like Diyarbakirli misses the one²⁷ (Fig. 6). But last attempt put 13 statues²⁸ (Fig. 8).

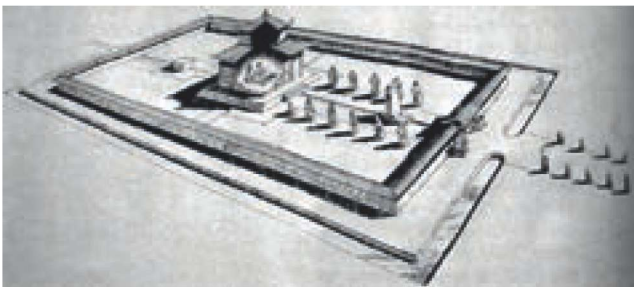


Figure 6. First reconstruction of Kül Tigin memorial done by Diyarbakirli in 1979. Diyarbakirli did this drawing with the help of his friend from Faculty of Architecture of Mimar Sinan University according to excavation reports of Jisl. Copy of some of those reports handled to him by wife of Jisl during his studies in Czechoslovakia (after Diyarbakirli 1979).



Fig. 7 - Soon after one of the member of the Jisl excavation team Novgorodova, publishes the second attempt of reconstruction of Kül Tigin memorial in 1981 (after Novgorodova 1981).

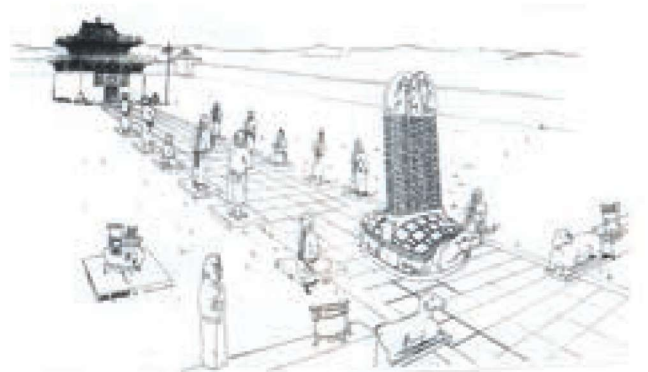


Fig. 8 - There are some more reconstruction attempts about the memorial. The last one coming from the member of TICA (Turkish International Cooperation Agency) in 2000.

Under these circumstances, when was the statue of the woman found in Kül Tigin memorials erected? Novgorodova in her reconstruction does not show what is inside the bark building. On the other hand in Diyarbakirli's reconstruction the statues of Kül Tigin and his wife are next to each other inside the bark building.

There is a clue about this in the Chinese annals:

*"Emperor has sent Chang K'u-i and Lu Hiang (to T'u-kues') with an Empire script to extend his condolence. Emperor has had his tombstone a poem written. Also he had a statue carved, a temple built and in which its walls painted with the deceased's war scenes. For this he sent his six artists who made this paintings so skillfully and naturally that the T'u-kues' said they had never seen that perfect craftsmanship. Whenever Mo-ki-lien looked at them he always felt melancholic."*²⁹

²⁵ Jisl 1963: 393.

²⁶ Novgorodova 1981: ill.3.

²⁷ Diyarbakirli 1979: ill.15.

²⁸ Hersek 2002: drawing 33.

²⁹ Tsai 2011: 252,317 [Tang-Shu].

Turkish variation can be trace in their script as follows:

*"...I brought Chinese artists and sculptors from Chinese Khan, I adorned (Kül Tigin's) mausoleum. (Chinese) did not let me down and sent the best artists of Chinese Khan. I have had them built an extraordinary mausoleum and put inside remarkable statues and paintings."*³⁰

As we can see both sources confirm each other. While Chinese mention the decoration inside the bark building, Turks tell about the entire memorial.

Considering the script in the memorial is written while the complex is being built; if Khatun had died during this process her name would be written on the Bengü stone as well. But there is no such a data on the stone. This proves that Khatun had died after the monument was completed but while Gök Turks had kept their political power. Because the statue piece confirms the quality of craftsmanship. Thus we believe the skilled masters still live close to Gök Turk capital. Considering the Chinese annals, Khatun's statue must have been placed inside the bark building; next to husband on a date after the complex was completed but of course again with a ceremony.

As a result statues never sculpted in Gök Turk culture with the approach of agrarian societies. These societies used to exhibit their emperors, gods/goddesses, nobles statues in the government offices, temples, in their villas' gardens even on the streets. Turks have developed their sculpting tradition with the death cult and applied only after the death occurred. Very few exceptions in the cultic sites do not prevent us generalizing.

Unfortunately we don't know even the name of this eminent lady who had her place in the history as a wife of Kül Tigin. What remains from the statue which we presume to reflect her physical appearance is just a piece of her face. We believe that the ambassadors invited to yogh-ash ceremony³¹ on August 21, 732 must have seen only Kül Tigin's statue inside the Bark building. And also the Beghs', whose statues sculpted because of their appreciated service to Kaghanate after the ceremony of this noble man.

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³⁰ Tekin 1988: 5 [KT, S: 11-12].

³¹ Desert people of Bökli, China, Tibetans, Avarians, Byzantine, Kyrgyz, Three Kunkan, Thirty Tartar, Kitay, Tatabi (KT,D: 4), Soghdians, Persians, Buhara people (KT,K: 11-12), Ten-Arrows and Turgish people (KT,K: 13).

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