

# Stone Statues and Balbals in Turkic World

## *Türk Dünyası'nda Taş Heykel ve Balballar*

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Avrasya Arkeoloji Projesi (Proje No: GP-27) kapsamında Kazakistan, Kırgızistan ve Ukrayna'da yaptığımız araştırmanın temel amacı, bu güne değin sağlıklı ve planlı bir şekilde incelenemeyen Türk dönemine ait arkeolojik kültür varlıklarının belgelenmesi ve envanterlerinin çıkarılmasıdır. Bu amaçla son üç yıldan beri Kazakistan, Kırgızistan ve Ukrayna'da yaptığımız araştırma sırasında 700'den fazla insan biçimli taş heykel ve balbal incelenmiştir.

Karadeniz'in kuzeyindeki bozkırlardan Moğolistan topraklarının sonuna değin uzanan geniş coğrafi bölgede, binlerce insan biçimli taş heykel ve balbal bulunmaktadır. Ancak taş heykel ve balbalların hangi amaçla yapılarak kült merkezlerine ve kurganların üzerine veya çevresine dikildiği ve anlamlarının ne olduğu, 19. yüzyılın sonuna kadar bilinmemekteydi. 1889 yılında ortaya çıkarılan ve 1893 yılında çözülen Orhun Yazıtları sayesinde, insan biçimli taş heykel ve balballar bilinmezlik gizinden kurtulmaya başlamıştır. Orhun Yazıtlarında "İlk önce Babam Kağan için Baz Kağan dikilmiştir..." cümlesi, mezar sahibi için heykelin yapılmış olduğunu

kanıtlamaktadır. Balbal için ise şu cümle geçmektedir; "Kırgız Kağanını öldürdüm, balbalını yaptırdım..". Öldürülen düşman için yaptırılan basit biçimli, şekilsiz taş heykelin üzerine, bazen düşmanın adı da yazılmaktaydı.

İnsan biçimli taş heykel ve balballar 6. ve 13. yüzyıllar arasında Türk toplulukları tarafından oldukça yaygın olarak kült merkezleri ve kurganların üzerine dikilmişlerdir. Orta Asya Türk toplulukları arasında İslamiyetin yayılması ve köklü bir şekilde bölgeye yerleşmesinden sonra, taş heykel ve balbal yapma geleneği yavaş yavaş ortadan kalkmaya başlamıştır. Ancak taş heykel ve balbalların birden bire ortadan kalktığını düşünmek, iyimserlik olur. Özellikle gelenek ve göreneklerine sıkı sıkıya bağlı olan Orta Asya Türk topluluklarında mezarlarını kurgan biçiminde yapma, ölü şölenleri (yuğ törenleri), insan ve hayvan kurbanları ve ölü armağanları nasıl Ortaçağ'dan sonra varlığını sürdürdüyse, insan biçimli taş heykel ve balbal yapımı da varlığını sürdürmüştür. Taşın yanı sıra ahşaptan yapılmaya başlanan taş heykel ve balbal geleneği, batıya göçen Türkler tarafından Anadolu'ya değin taşınmıştır.



Balbal öldürülen düşmanın taşa dönüştürülmesi, öteki dünyada kahraman savaşçıya hizmet etmesi, onu koruması ve kollaması için dikilen basit işlenmiş taş yontudur. Kurgan ve kült merkezlerine dikilen özenle işlenmiş taş heykeller ise, "Ata Kültü"nü yansıtmaktadır. Taş heykellerin ilk örneklerine Tunç Çağı'ndan beri rastlanılmaktaysa da, M.Ö. 7.-4. yüzyıllara tarihlenen İskit heykelleri, bozkır toplumlarındaki ilk taş heykelleri oluşturmaktadır. Başında üçgen biçimli üç çıkıntılı taşa benzeyen bir başlık taşıyan Umay Ana heykelleri, doğurganlık ve üretgenliğin yanı sıra, koruyucu bir ruh olarak karşımıza çıkmaktadır.

Türk topluluklarında taş balbal ve heykellerle ilgili özgün inanç geleneği günümüze değin varlığını sürdürmüştür. İnsanlar tarafından balbal ve insan biçimli taş heykellere adaklar adanmakta, isteklerinin olumlu yönde sonuçlanması için bezler bağlanmakta, kucaklanmakta ve kutsal bir varlıkmiş gibi saygı ile öpülmektedir.

Many balbals and stone statues are to be found in the wide geographic area stretching from the northern Black Sea to the end of the Mongolian lands. The function and meaning of all these stone statues and balbals, erected on or around the cult centers and kurgans, only became known towards the end of the 19<sup>th</sup> century<sup>1</sup>. After the discovery of the Orhun inscriptions in 1889 and their decipherment in 1893, these problems were gradually solved. An inscription on one statue which reads; "*First, the Baz Khan is erected to honor my Father Khan*"<sup>2</sup>, proves that it was carved for the owner of the tomb. Also, written on the same balbal

we read; "*I killed the Kirghiz Khan and had his balbals erected*"<sup>3</sup>. In addition, the name of the enemy was written on other roughly shaped or unshaped standing stones.

Human-shaped stone statues and balbals were commonly erected at cult centers and kurgans between the 6<sup>th</sup> and 13<sup>th</sup> centuries AD by the Turkish peoples. This tradition gradually disappeared with the arrival and spread of Islam among the Turkish tribes of Asia, but it would be incorrect to think that the practice disappeared suddenly. The tradition of carving human shaped statues and balbals must have survived among the Middle Eastern Turkish tribes long after the Middle Ages, alongside other funeral traditions such as burial feasts, human and animal sacrifices or leaving gifts for the dead. For instance, among the Altaic tribes, which still retain the kamlık (shamanist) belief, these traditions survived without losing anything of significant value. There was, however, a slight difference; wood was increasingly used in place of stone. This was because wood is easier to carve than stone, but since wood is not as resistant to decay, few examples remain today. The end of the tradition of making statues and balbals is, therefore, taken to be in the 13<sup>th</sup> century<sup>4</sup>. However, as discussed in more detail below, many archeological discoveries and written records indicate that the tradition of carving wooden balbals survived for a very considerable time.

As already mentioned, stone statues and balbals are to be found at kurgans and cult centers (Estelik), which are sacred for the Turks (Fig. 1). A. V. Adrianov, V. A. Kallaur and G. N. Potanin, who ma-

<sup>1</sup>The main reason of the archaeological survey carried out in Kazakhstan, Kirghizistan and Ukraine, under the name of Eurasian Archaeology Project (Project No: GP-27) is to bring Turkic cultural existence into light and to prepare the inventory which was not examined in detail up to now. We have investigated more than 700 stone statues and balbals in Kazakhstan, Kirghizistan and Ukraine for the last three years. Dr. Orhan Doğan (expert on Kazakhstan history), Dr. Kemal Özcan (expert on Crimean history), Erkan Konyar (M.A.; expert on Iron Age), Can Avcı (M.A.; expert on Iron Age), Anıl Yılmaz (M.A.; expert on pre-Islamic Turkic art), Mehmet Zeren (M.A.; expert on western Göktürk history) and İbrahim Çeşmeli (M.A.; expert on Turkic art) have joined the research team under my scientific counseling. I would like to thank to my colleagues for their work and individual contributions to the group.

<sup>2</sup> Barthold 1947, 515.

<sup>3</sup> Orkun 1936-41, I, 36.

<sup>4</sup> Orkun 1936-41, I, 40.

<sup>5</sup> Belli 2002a, 912-914.



de research in the Altay and in Kirghizistan in the early 19<sup>th</sup> century, reported that the stone statues in human form were located close to the kurgan areas<sup>5</sup>. It is unfortunate that most of the Kurgans, stone statues and balbals, which decorate the natural setting like pearls, have been destroyed over many centuries (Fig. 2). Doubtless this destruction was not at the hands of the Turks, who hold them sacred, but by European travelers or, more particularly, by the Russians who used many of these monuments as construction materials or re-erected them as decorative features in parks, gardens or pensions (Fig. 3-4). In this way very many of the balbals that were formless or carved in rounded or square shapes were destroyed. Whereas stones sculpted in human form were less frequently used, the big, shapeless or square balbals were often employed as columns in building constructions. As a result, today we have fewer balbals than statues. Further, hundreds of examples lie buried beneath the soil. In order to prevent them being used in new buildings, most have been transferred to museums<sup>6</sup> but, because written records were been properly kept, we do not know exactly where most of the balbals in museums, parks, gardens and pensions were brought from, nor what features were originally associated with them (Fig. 5-6). Due to such irresponsible behavior, we do not have any knowledge about associations between kurgans, cult centers, stone statues and balbals which were made in antiquity and in the Middle Ages by Turkic tribes living in the wide lands lying between the steppes stretching from the northern Black Sea to Mongolia. Further, we do not know exactly where they were made and, hence, their disse-

mination and full extent. Both the data and the written records mentioned above are, however, very important documents that compliment the very few written records of early Turkic culture.

### 1- Stone Balbals

We encounter the word for balbal in the Orhun<sup>7</sup> and Uybat IV<sup>8</sup> inscriptions, which means that this word was used by both the Kirghizs and the Gök-Turks. Different suggestions have been put forward concerning the original meaning of the word "balbal"<sup>9</sup>. Almost all researchers and linguists agree, however, that the Russians borrowed it<sup>10</sup>. Radlov defines it as "a stone monument representing a dead person"<sup>11</sup>. Another suggested meaning of interest is; "it is the stone representative of the number of enemies killed by the dead one, erected by his enemies"<sup>12</sup>. W. Barthold, a scholar of the Middle Eastern Turkish History, explains the reason for their existence in connection with the belief that in the next world those killed will work in the service of either their murderers or of the leader they fought for<sup>13</sup>.

It has been seen that the Turks decorated a grave chamber in the same way as a house. Even the Moroccan traveler Ibn Batuta drew a comparison with a house that was everywhere covered with carpets<sup>14</sup>. The fact that the grave was decked out to resemble a residence leads researchers to derive different meanings from the balbals erected over these tombs. One such interpretation is that the souls of slain enemies were turned into balbals erected around the tomb and were thereby captured. Also, it was believed that the balbals would protect the owner of the tomb<sup>15</sup>.

<sup>5</sup> Barthold 1947, 517-521.

<sup>6</sup> Belli 2001a, 433.

<sup>7</sup> Orkun 1936-41, I, 36.

<sup>8</sup> Orkun 1936-41, III, 147.

<sup>9</sup> Roux 1999, 164.

<sup>10</sup> Clausen 1972, 333.

<sup>11</sup> Radlov 1893-1911, IV, 1507.

<sup>12</sup> Kotwicz 1928, 2.

<sup>13</sup> Barthold 1945, 14.

<sup>14</sup> Defremery-Sanguinetti 1853-58, IV, 301.

<sup>15</sup> Kotwicz 1937, 192-193.



Transformation of a slain enemy into a stone that was carved and then erected by the tomb is indicative of the heroism of the deceased. If the slaughtered enemy killed was a significant personage, his name was written on the balbal. One balbal, erected on a kurgan which belonged to a heroic warrior and located next to the Ongon inscriptions, the *"Ishbara Tarkan's balbal"*<sup>16</sup> has such a text inscribed on it. In conclusion, we may say that a balbal is a carved stone that was put up so as turn the slain killed enemy into a stone, to make him serve the heroic warrior and to protect him in the next world<sup>17</sup> (Fig. 7).

We do not know exactly when such balbals were erected or whether any ceremonies were organized while they were put up. The example given below could provide an explanation for our lack of such knowledge. In 711 Bilge Khan had the following statements written for his uncle Kapagan Khan; *"... First, I have turned the Kirghiz Khan into a balbal..."*<sup>18</sup>. If we consider the fact that the Kirghiz Khan died in 716<sup>19</sup>, we easily see that the balbal mentioned is indicative of a request. We thus know that the balbals could be one or more of the following: representations of persons killed while the deceased was alive, those he would kill in his next life, or those who were slaughtered and offered to him as gifts after his death.

As mentioned above, the number of balbals around any one tomb varied according to the number of the people whom the heroic warrior had himself killed while he was alive (Fig. 8-9). For instance, the length of the line of balbals erected towards the east of the stone statue in the Estelik at Tuva, is over 350 m. Just outside the eastern wall of Kül Tegin's monument tomb are no less than

170 balbals that constitute 3 km long sequence and, at a distance of 850 m from the northern part of the monument, the length of the balbal sequence is 1,250 meters. Yet another sequence, this time of 750 balbals, lies 450 m to the north. We also know that the monument of Bilge Khan, elder brother of Kül Tegin, is even bigger and that the length of the balbal sequence erected for him extends for more than 3 km. It was believed that the tomb was protected by the souls of the enemy that had been transformed into balbals and, also, that this army of balbals would also protect the dead hero in his after life<sup>20</sup> (Fig.10-11).

Balbals are of various height; the shortest being 40-50 cm high and the tallest about 1.70-2.00 m (Fig.12). Balbals are hewn from stones brought from local quarries. The basic distinction between a balbal and a statue is that balbals are simple and shapelessly representations<sup>21</sup>. The European travelers also tended to describe balbals as carved roughly in round or square shapes<sup>22</sup>.

The Orhun inscriptions, as well as the Chinese chronicles, provide us with valuable information about the way in which balbals and statues were erected. For instance, Bianyi dian, writing around 552-556, says; *"... After the corpse is buried, they carry stones to near the tomb... The number of these stones is directly proportional to the number of people he killed... If he killed one man, only one stone is erected... There are those for whom hundreds or thousands of stones were erected..."*<sup>23</sup>.

Actually the numbers given above might seem exaggerated. However the balbals found in the Uybat Region of the

<sup>16</sup> İnan 1972, 231.

<sup>17</sup> Belli 2002a, 911-913.; Belli 2003,37.

<sup>18</sup> Orkun 1936-41, I, 40.

<sup>19</sup> Divitçioğlu 2000, 95.

<sup>20</sup> Belli 2002a, 911-913.

<sup>21</sup> Belli 2002a, 911-912.

<sup>22</sup> Rochill 1900, 82.

<sup>23</sup> Julien 1877, 10, 28.



Autonomous Republic of Hakas, where they are called Caa taş (stones of war), show that these numbers are not as exaggerated as might be thought (Fig.13). Although most of them are weathered, the hundreds of balbals, spread over a wide geographic area, present a spectacular view. This scene reminds us that the forest which inspired Nizami of Gence, in the 13<sup>th</sup> century, consisted of stones.

The Chinese chronicle Zhou-shu, in 630, says the following about Turkic burial tradition and balbals; "... When someone dies, his body is kept in a tent... All his children, grandchildren, male and female relatives sacrifice a sheep and a horse and spread them in front of the tent as offerings. They make seven tours around the tent on horse and hurt their faces with a sword and mourn when they come in front of the tent. Blood and tears drop from their eyes. They later decide on the day when they would burn the dead person's personal belongings and his horse. They gather around the ashes and wait for the best time to bury him. If he died in spring or summer they wait till the green grass and trees turn into yellow and drop their leaves. If he is dead in autumn or winter they wait till flowers and trees bloom. Later they dig a hole and bury the ashes. On the very day of burial the relatives do offerings again, organize horse races and hurt their faces as they did on the first day of death. After the burial ceremony they erect stones on the grave. Number of the stones is equal to the number of the people he killed while he was alive. They hang the heads of the strangled sheep and horses on gravestones..."<sup>24</sup>.

From the information collected in 636 from Sui-shu of the Sui dynasty, we gain

an impression of a noble Turkic tomb; "... The relatives erect posts in circles around the tomb and draw the portrait of that person and views from the wars he fought, on the walls of the circle..."<sup>25</sup>.

The knowledge provided about balbals in the Orhun inscriptions is much more reliable and detailed; "...I killed their heroic warriors and made balbals of them...I turned the Kirghiz Khan into a balbal for my uncle...many Turks had been killed and...they had made balbals of them...I erected Kuy Sangun as a balbal..."<sup>26</sup>.

The knowledge provided to us by travelers and priests, based on their first-hand observations, verifies the historical sources. The earliest information on this subject is provided by Ibn Fadlan, who was the clerk of the delegation which visited the Bulgarian king Iltebir Almush, who converted to Islam in 920-21. But Ibn Fadlan, mistakenly, describes the balbals as statues. Some researchers think such a description exaggerated<sup>27</sup>. Actually, what Fadlan describes is not a statue but a balbal, which is, therefore, how we should consider it. Ibn Fadlan writes about how the Oghuzs buried their dead and how they erected balbals; "...When an Oghuz kills someone and becomes a hero, a wooden balbal of the murdered one is carved and erected on his tomb...Number of the balbals erected on his tomb is directly proportional to the number of people he killed...who are his servants from then on. It is believed that they would serve him in heavens..."<sup>28</sup>.

Ibn Fadlan's description of the balbal as being made of wood which, unlike stone, is subject to decay, explains why they have not survived down to the present day<sup>29</sup>.

<sup>24</sup> Liu 1958, 9-10.

<sup>25</sup> Liu 1958, 42.

<sup>26</sup> Orkun 1936-41, I, 36, 40, 68, 70.

<sup>27</sup> Roux 1999, 309.

<sup>28</sup> Togan 1939, 27.

<sup>29</sup> Belli 2002a, 911-913.; Belli 2003, 41.



Nizami of Gence, a wandering minstrel who wrote at the beginning of the 13<sup>th</sup> century, provides interesting information about the stone statues and balbals of the Kipchak steppes. It is supposed that he gained his knowledge from the Kipchaks living in Azerbaijan. With regard to the wooden balbals, Nizami says; *"...The wooden arrows stuck into the soil in the Kipchak steppes are as many in number as the grass at the seashore..."*<sup>30</sup>.

Concerning stone balbals, Guillaume de Rubrouck, who was a member of the delegation sent to the Mongolian army by the French King in 1253, writes; *"...Graves enclosing a certain area are circled with uncarved, rounded or square stones. In addition, on the four sides of the tomb four stones, symbolic of the four sides of the world, are erected perpendicularly..."*<sup>31</sup>. In actual fact, balbals are very simply carved when compared to statues. As already pointed out, the most significant distinction between a balbal and a statue is that a balbal is either completely shapeless or is just simply shaped.

The famous traveler Marco Polo tells us how people were turned into balbals in the 13<sup>th</sup> century; *"...I will tell you about another big event, when corpses of the great khans are brought up to this mountains to be buried, although it is a way of 40 or more days, all the people encountered on the way were slaughtered by those bringing the corpse. While slaughtering, they were telling them to go and serve their lord in the next world. Because they believed that whoever they slaughtered in his honor had to serve the great lord in his next life...Keep in mind that more than 20,000 people who encountered the carriage were slaughtered while Khan*

*Mangu's corpse was being taken to be buried..."*<sup>32</sup>.

As I have already mentioned, balbals, as well as stone statues began to be carved out of wood from the 13<sup>th</sup> century onwards and, simultaneously, the burial traditions of the Turks started to gradually disappear.

## 2. Stone statues in human form

Stone statues in human form which were erected beside the kurgans and graves are encountered in the Near East from the Bronze Age<sup>33</sup>. The earliest instances of these statues, which were carved by the people of the steppe culture are found in the steppes of the Northern Black Sea region. They were made between the 7<sup>th</sup> century BC and the 4<sup>th</sup> century AD and they belonged to the Scythians<sup>34</sup>. The father of history, Herodotos, who is an authority on all the Scythian traditions and techniques of war, does not, unfortunately, provide us with any knowledge about such stone statues<sup>35</sup>. What differentiates the older Scythian statues from those of Central Asian are their headgear, their horseshoe shaped moustaches and their armor<sup>36</sup> (Fig.14-15). The main feature of the male statues in Central Asia is that they all have heavy moustaches<sup>37</sup>.

As mentioned before, stone statues in human form, just like balbals, were erected in cult centers and kurgans from the 6<sup>th</sup> century onwards. Compared to balbals, these stone statues were carved much more painstakingly and realistically. The main reason for this was to continue the existence of the dead person in a more concrete way. Thus stone statues represent the Ancestor Cult of the Turkish past<sup>38</sup>. For

<sup>30</sup> Kotwicz 1928, 5-6.

<sup>31</sup> Rockhill 1900, 82.

<sup>32</sup> Hambis 1955, 81.

<sup>33</sup> Schachner 2001, 137.; Sevin 2001, 81.

<sup>34</sup> Belozor 1996, 41-50.; Kovalev 1998, 248.; Çurilova 1999, 8-9

<sup>35</sup> Belli 2002a, 910-912.

<sup>36</sup> Belozor 1996, 41-50.; Kovalev 1998, 260, fig. 7.; Çurilova 1999, 8-9

<sup>37</sup> Belli 2002a, 911-912.

<sup>38</sup> Belli 2002a, 913-914.; Belli 2002 b, 927.; Belli 2003, 42.



instance, the Kitans had made golden statues of their king and his eight sons and put them in a temple built for the dead<sup>39</sup>.

In addition to the Chinese chronicles, the Orhun inscriptions also provide us with very important information. The Chinese historian Tang shu gives us an important kind of information about the Turkish burial traditions and the statues they made; "...After building the tomb, they erect a statue of the dead which is symbolic of his heroic deeds while he was alive..."<sup>40</sup>.

Inscriptions concerning the importance of the sculpture and the necessity of painstakingly carving the statue of the dead warrior—that represents the Ancestor Cult—gives us a clue about the importance of that tradition. For example, on Kül Tegin's tomb we read; "...For the sake of the adornment of the infinite stone, I brought sculptors from the Chinese Khan and had the statue made..."<sup>41</sup>. Pieces of statues which were found during archeological excavations in Kül Tegin's and Bilge Khan's grave sites are most probably the remnants of the statues mentioned above. Today however almost all scientists agree that the head of the statue kept in the History Institute of Ulan Bator, the capital city of Mongolia, is Kül Tegin's<sup>42</sup>.

The burial traditions of the Gök Turks were also continued by the Shamanist Oguzs and the Kipchaks between the 9<sup>th</sup> and 13<sup>th</sup> centuries. Another tradition of the Gök Turks was the carving balbals and stone statues in human form (Fig.16).

The most classical and realistic information about the stone statues in human form comes from Guillaume de Rubrouck,

a priest who was a part of the delegation sent to the Mongolian army in Karakorum, in Central Asia, by the French king; "...The Kumans built a huge Protuberance on graves and erect a statue looking towards the east and holding a cup in his hand..."<sup>43</sup>. From the information given by Rubrouck we learn that the tradition of erecting statues on graves was carried on at least until the middle of the 13<sup>th</sup> century. Rubrouck also describes how the statue's face is turned to the east. As it is known, while determining the four sides of the world the Orhun Turks were looking towards the east; so their right side was south, and their left side was the north<sup>44</sup>.

As I have already mentioned, these stone statues in human form were erected either on or around the kurgans, or in Esteliks which are cult centers surrounded by stones. Usually two statues, one representing the husband and the other the wife, were erected on graves (Fig. 17). Until today, many statues representing the male and the female have been found. On the other hand, the number of the stone statues in human form found in square cult centers surrounded by stones is much higher than those found in kurgans. But none of the written records give any proper knowledge about female and male statues erected either in cult centers or on kurgans.

A. Kh. Margulan, who excavated at cult centers in Kazakhstan, encountered animal rather than human skeletons. That is, the bones found belonged to the animals eaten and offered to the dead person during feasts<sup>45</sup>. V. V. Kubarev, who works on statues in the Altay Region that belong to the Turkish dynasty, informs us that there are many cult centers in the re-

<sup>39</sup> Şeşen 1975, 210.

<sup>40</sup> Baibosynov 1996, 50.

<sup>41</sup> Thomsen 1896, 119.

<sup>42</sup> Diyarbekirli 1979, 337, fig. 20.; Çoruhlu 1998, 98.; Sertkaya-Alyılmaz-Battulga 2001, 45.

<sup>43</sup> Rochill 1900, 81-82.

<sup>44</sup> Barthold 1947, 534.

<sup>45</sup> Baibosynov 1996, 44.



gion which were built for feasts. Kubarev also relates that one of these cult centers contained human statues and that the center was surrounded by kind of a wall or ditches. He adds that these walls and ditches were built to prevent the progress of enemies<sup>46</sup>.

According to the results of research that we have undertaken over three years, the distribution of stone statues of the Turkic Republics and their neighbors is; Ukraine 267<sup>47</sup>, Azerbaijan 13, Turkmenistan 61, Tacikistan 26, Uzbekistan 78, Chinese Turkistan 192<sup>48</sup>, Mongolia 562<sup>49</sup> (Fig. 18), Tuva 210<sup>50</sup> (Fig. 19), Hakasia 265<sup>51</sup>, Altay 379<sup>52</sup>, Kazakhstan 690<sup>53</sup> (Fig. 20), Kirghizistan 366 (Fig. 21). But these numbers are relative and, as the scale of research increases, the number of known stone statues is expected to grow. As a great number of these statues exist in kurgans and cult centers that are located on high plateaus mountainous areas, it is certain that the numbers given above will double when sites on the high plateaus are excavated.

The sizes of the human statues vary; while the shortest are about 40-50 cm (Fig. 22), the tallest are around 250 cm high. According to latest research, the highest statue is that in the garden of the Bishkek Museum, which is 275 cm high (Fig. 23). This particular monumental statue represents a very important ruler named "Karahan". A statue in the Tüp town of Kirghizistan, on the other hand, with a width of 75 cm, is the widest human statue ever found (Fig. 24). It is understood that statues of the rich, the rulers or the commanders were of larger size. Statues are of many different kinds, partly because the types of local stones that were used for making statues differ from region to region. In some places there are no stone quarries, indica-

ting that some statues were carved and brought from distant sites. Many of the statues carved by stone-workers of the day show similarities, so that it might be possible to identify the hand of individual sculptors. It is also understood that the statues represent rulers, commanders, warriors, wandering minstrels, orators, shamans and shepherds.

89 % of the statues that we have studied up to now represent males, and the remaining 11% of depict females or figures of indeterminate sex and Mother Umay. The most important characteristic of all of these statues is simple and realistic that their facial expressions are. It is clear that the artists expended great effort in realistically depicting the owner of the statue. With one exception, the statues provide clear evidence that they were designed and built by local artists. In other words, the facial expressions of the female and male statues are found in Altay, Tuva, Kazakhstan, Kirghizistan, the Chinese Turkistan and Mongolia show great similarities with the people of these regions. Most of the male statues are represented as being beardless but carrying a moustache, although some do have a very sparse beard on the chin. Ibn Fadlan, in a teasing tone, says that the Turks do not have beards; "...All Turks pull their beards out and grow a moustache. Sometimes among them you can find an old one who pulled all his beard out but left some on his chin and who has a fur on his shoulder..."<sup>54</sup>. Thus we know that carrying a moustache has been very common amongst the Turks since the ancient times.

While most of the human statues are carved with their legs crossed, the legs of some are not at all clearly depicted. Since such kinds of statues were inserted in so-

<sup>46</sup> Baibosynov 1996, 44-45.; Kubarev 2001, 906.

<sup>47</sup> Pletneva 1974, 17 pp.; Krasilnikov 1999, 14 pp.; Çurilova 1999, 8-9.

<sup>48</sup> Wang 1996, 19 pp.

<sup>49</sup> Bayar 1998, 64.; Hayashi 2001, 221.

<sup>50</sup> Graç 1961, 14 pp.

<sup>51</sup> Sher 1966, 28 pp.

<sup>52</sup> Kubarev 1984, 46 pp.

<sup>53</sup> Sher 1996, 22 vdd.; Charikov 1986, 131-140.; Charikov 1989, 87-102.

<sup>54</sup> Togan 1939, 28.



il, the ends of the lower parts of their bodies, which were about 30-50 cm long, were tapered. According to the knowledge we gained from recent research, we can classify the statues into the following groups;

- 1- Statues standing or sitting (Fig.25).
- 2- Armed men holding a cup in their right hands (Fig.26).
- 3- Unarmed men or sexless statues holding a cup in their right hands (Fig.27).
- 4- Men holding cups or pots in both hands (Fig.28).
- 5- Statues with only faces depicted (Fig.29).
- 6- Female statues holding cups each hand (Fig.30).
- 7- Few statues with birds (Fig.31).
- 8- Statues representing the Mother "Umay" (Fig.32).
- 9- Few female statues holding flowers in their hands (Fig.33).
- 10- Man holding a music instrument in his hand (Fig. 34).

Generally, it can be seen that human figures were carved in considerable detail, but today most statues are worn and eroded due to long exposure to the elements. In particular, belts, quivers and armor were carefully carved. Their armor indicates whether they were warriors or rulers. Their clothing, the cup or pot that they hold, and any birds or arms, help us also to classify and date them. The heads of the statues are large in comparison to their bodies, and bald. This is in accordance with the knowledge provided about Turks by many Muslim geographers.

A general evaluation of the statues leads us to the following conclusions; in almost all the male, female and Mother Umay statues' the front parts of the bodies are stressed, while little attention is paid

to the sides or the backs. It is understood that the artists spent much effort in catching the details of the facial expressions and other parts of the heads of the persons they depicted. For instance, in *Hudud al-A'lam*, an anonymous work written in 982, it is mentioned that the Turks have scanty hair<sup>55</sup>. Unlike the other male and female statues, the Mother Umay statues were engraved. The male statues are usually short, plump and beardless with big noses. The cups held by statues of either sex, either in both hands or only in the right, supposedly held sacred water, Bengi- Su.

From the 13<sup>th</sup> century onwards human statues began to be made from wood, as were the stone balbals. As mentioned before, the number of the wooden statues increased quickly since it is easier to carve. However many wooden statues have been found in archeological excavations conducted at the cult centers of the Kuman, located in the steppes towards the northern part of the Sea of Azov and western part of the River Don<sup>56</sup>. It is significant that the wooden statues look toward the east, just like the stone ones. The stone and the wooden statues both vanished simultaneously with the burial traditions of the Turkic communities. In the future, thanks to the new archeological and ethnographic records that await discovery, we hope to learn the exact date of their disappearance.

It seems that the tradition of carving statues in human form started to disappear after the Turks converted to Islam, because Islam strictly prohibits the construction of human images. However, the Turks, spreading to Anatolia and the Balkans, continued to practice their unique traditions by successfully drawing birds, monsters, swords or human figures on the

<sup>55</sup> Minovsky 1937, 96.

<sup>56</sup> Gurkin 1987, 100-109.



high stones which they erected on graves<sup>57</sup>. What is more important is the continuation of balbal and stone statue traditions in most parts of Anatolia, notably in Alevi cemeteries where ancient Turkish traditions are still observed (Fig. 35). Plaited grave stones at the Teslim Abdal village cemetery in Baskil district of Elazığ, for instance, bear close affinities with the examples in Tuva<sup>58</sup> (Fig. 36).

### 3. Statues of Mother Umay

Among the male statues found, those having round faces and crown-like headgear with three salients in triangular form, are supposed to be representations of Mother Umay (Fig. 37). The most important characteristic of these statues is that they all have three-sided crowns in the form of a pyramid. Also, these mother goddess statues are smaller than the male statues. Moreover, the Mother Umay reflects the women's fashion of their time and place with her crown, earrings and rich clothing<sup>59</sup>. Except for the lines of the pyramid-like crown with salients, the face is carved in very detailed, soft lines. This indicates that the artist paid much attention to reflecting her compassionate, protective, tender and beautiful moon-like face. Therefore, it would not be wrong to think that such artists came from Turkish communities which believe in the holiness of Mother Umay. However, we do not know where the Mother Umay statues were erected, what their specific positioning was, which sacrifices were offered to them and which specific cult rituals were performed. But in 1997, during the archaeological excavations around one of the cult centers in the Çon-Döbö district of Song Köl, in Kirghizistan, a Mother Umay statue was brought to light<sup>60</sup>. We believe

that after further evaluation of the Umay statues which were discovered at this cult site, more solid and reliable information will be accessible.

While some researchers interpret Mother Umay as the symbol of prolificacy and fertility, others see her as a goddess<sup>61</sup> or an angel-like, protective soul<sup>62</sup>. Actually, Umay Ana should not be confused with the 8000 year-old Mother Goddess cult that survived in Anatolia and Central Asia into Antiquity and Medieval times<sup>63</sup>. Those who interpret Mother Umay as a goddess are especially affected by the following sentence from the Tonyukuk inscriptions; "...*The God, Umay, the sacred earth and water smashed them for us...*"<sup>64</sup>. As it is clearly seen in the sentence, Mother Umay is counted among the souls helping the Turks.

Mother Umay was so much loved and respected that, not only were her statues erected, but also her picture was drawn on the Kudurga Sapkın Rock in the Altay region<sup>65</sup>. During archeological studies of a kurgan in the Süttü Bulak grave area, a plate was found on which the mother image was depicted<sup>66</sup>. The unchanging characteristic of all is that Mother Umay is always represented with her pyramid-like crown.

Although we do not have any exact kind of knowledge about the origin of the Mother Umay cult in our literary history, we first came across her name in the Orhun inscriptions. For instance in Kül Tegin's monument it says that the elder brother, Bilge Khan, compared her mother to Umay who protects the children; "...*When my father died, my brother Kül Tegin took the name of the brave hero...*"<sup>67</sup>.

<sup>57</sup> Karamağaralı 1992, 1-34.; Haseki 1977, 5-56.; Mujezinović 1974, 12 pp.; Mujezinović 1977, 7 pp.; Mujezinović 1982, 22 pp.; Özkan 2002, 614 pp.

<sup>58</sup> Parman 1987, 300, fig. 189/1-3.; Karamağaralı 1992, 25, fig. 104-107.

<sup>59</sup> Bozer 1999, 134, fig. 4.; Çoruhlu 2001, fig. 23.; Takashi 2001, fig. 258.

<sup>60</sup> Bozer 1999, 134, fig.

<sup>61</sup> Bernštam 1946, 99, 105, 163.; Clausen 1972, 164-165, 371.; İnan 1972, 36.; Ögel 1982, 191.; Abramzon 1990, 192-194.; Roux 1999, 138.; Kafesoglu 2000, 302.; Çoruhlu 2001, 100-101.

<sup>62</sup> Tanyu 1980, 196.; Orkun 1936, I, 44, 113.; Gömeç 1989, 634.; Sinor 1995, 207.; Sertkaya-Alyılmaz-Battulga 2001, 127.; Mülazımoğlu 2002, 58.

<sup>63</sup> Belli 2001b, 4 pp.

<sup>64</sup> Tonyukuk, the northern part.; Orkun 1936, I, 113.; Sertkaya-Alyılmaz-Battulga 2001, 227.

<sup>65</sup> Çoruhlu 2001, fig. 19.

<sup>66</sup> Anke et al. 1977, 535, fig. 19/8.; 20.; Tabaldiev 2002, 30-31, fig. A-B.

<sup>67</sup> Kül Tegin, I, eastern part 31.; İnan 1972, 35.



As a part of the series of the collected works of the famous Turcologists, N. Katanov and W. Radlov about the Sagaian Turks, in their work titled "Proben", we can not fail to note a passage with the following interesting statement; "...By the time we descended from the Ancestor Ulgen, these two trees of beech descended to the earth with Mother Umay..."<sup>68</sup>. In another text about the burial ceremony it says, "Meat is cooked for those who attended the burial. While those coming from the graveyard drink raki, three girls sprinkle the ground with raki for Mother Umay"<sup>69</sup>.

The Mother Goddess represents fertility among the Turkic tribes of Central Asia, as it does also in other cultures. Umay, who is the mother of the Altaic gods, is at the same time accepted as the protector of children and young animals. A statement made by Mahmud of Kasghar, "she, who gives birth to a baby, worships Umay when she prays"<sup>70</sup>, reflects the main characteristic of the Mother Umay. For example, the second meaning of the word "Umay" in the language of Uighurs is "the soul which protects the children"<sup>71</sup>.

Among the Tunghuzs living in South Siberia, Altays and the North-eastern Siberia, there is a common belief about Mother Umay protecting children; "...they believe that the child meets Mother Umay in his dream when he smiles in his sleep and that Mother Umay left him when he cries...". "When the child gets sick, they believe that Mother Umay has been away for too long and call a shaman to summon her back"<sup>72</sup>.

Among the Kirghizs, a strong belief about the protective power of Mother Umay still exists. For instance, when tre-

ating a child or during a birth, the nurse says; "It is not my hand but Mother Umay's". And when a child is sent to somewhere, the old women say "I entrust him to Mother Umay". And during the fertile period of the animals "they say that milk was pouring from Mother Umay's chest"<sup>73</sup>.

#### 4- Holiness of the Statues in Human Form

The Turks erected statues which they carved for their dead ancestors either on the top or at the base of kurgans or, mostly, in the cult centers. Statues or the cult centers were later surrounded by a square or a rectangle of stones. In the cult center, where the statue of the ancestor was erected, feasts were organized in the name of the dead, and some of the food and drink was offered to the dead. As some researchers explain, the cult of the stone statues emerged as a result of such a distinctive religious tradition<sup>74</sup>.

The stone statues in human form are held sacred and are highly respected by the Turkic tribes. And such holiness was not restricted only to any one period of time but continued even after their conversion to Islam. Even today some Turkic tribes still hold them sacred and call them "taşnine" (stone grandmother), "taşbaba" (stone father), or "saymaltaş" (the respected stone) or "kesertaş" (the cutting stone). The Arab historian Abu Zeyd al-Belhi, who wrote his work in the mid 10<sup>th</sup> century, stresses that the Turks worship effigies and goes on; "...Some of them worship the sky and some the Sun..."<sup>75</sup>. The effigies mentioned here are supposed to be the stone statues that are held sacred and are respected by the Turks.

<sup>68</sup> Katanov 1907, 552.; İnan 1972, 35.

<sup>69</sup> Katanov 1907, 462.; İnan 1972, 35.

<sup>70</sup> Brockelmann 1928 I, 23

<sup>71</sup> Caferoğlu 1968, 265.

<sup>72</sup> Sinor 1995, 207.

<sup>73</sup> Abramzon 1990, 293.

<sup>74</sup> Balbosynov 1996, 44.

<sup>75</sup> Huart 1907 IV, 21-22.



We get the first kind of information about the holiness of these stone-made statues from a wandering minstrel from Gence, Nizami. It is supposed that Nizami got the information that he passed on to us from the Kipchaks, living in Azerbaijan; "...Stone statues were erected on the steppes of the Kipchaks as talismans. All of these talismans are still standing there. Whenever a Kipchak comes closer to one of them, he worships him and puts an arrow in his quiver. If it is a shepherd who comes close to him, he sacrifices a sheep for him..."<sup>76</sup>.

Ssanang Ssetsen also mentions the instance of putting an arrow in the quiver of the statue in the story about Togan Tayshi. According to this story, Togan Tayshi had insulted Ghengis Khan's tomb and had been killed by an arrow in his quiver. From the story, we conclude that the statue of Ghengis Khan had a quiver<sup>77</sup>.

We also find out from another source that the statues of Ghengis Khan and other Khans were erected and revered. As it is known, since the Dynasty Grave of Ghengis Khan was accepted as sacred, it was always protected and preserved. Apart from Ghengis Khan, other Khans such as Tuluy, Mönke and Arık Boğa were buried in this graveyard as well. As it was stated, the guards saving this graveyard served the souls of the dead as well as the living<sup>78</sup>. The Persian historian Rashideddin, at the beginning of the fourteenth century informs the reader about this mysterious subject as follows; "...Having made their image (statues), they always burnt odorous things before them..."<sup>79</sup>.

The information given by Nizami is verified by the ethnographical researches held in the Turkic tribes of the Central Asia. The studies reveal that the statues

are paid high religious respect by the shamanist people. G. N. Potanin, who conducted research in the Altay and Southern Siberia in the last quarter of the 19<sup>th</sup> century, explains to us how the people around respected a stone statue of a human located in Dain-Gul Valley; "...The Kazaks named this statue Dain-Batir and the Uranhaians Oldze-Dain. The statue, which is 150 cms tall and 38 cms wide, is very well protected. His forehead and the crooked eyes prove a Mongolian origin. Moreover, he has a moustache. It can be guessed that, in comparison to the others, this statue is made in a more recent time. Even today, the people around pay much respect to it. They had built a shelter of wood in order to protect it from the snow, rain and sunlight and stretched a rope inside for tying pieces of clothes as offerings..."<sup>80</sup>.

According to the researches he made in the Ak-Yüs Valley of the Altay on August 18<sup>th</sup> 1722, Messerschmidt asserts that the people of the region paid much respect to the statues, offered sacrifices to them and rubbed suet on their mouth; "...The female statue named as "Kurtuyak Tash" (hag stone) is made of gray sandstone and erected crookedly. The pinch of hair dropping from its backhead is hardly seen since it is eroded. Today women of the Kamliks and the Kumans wear the same dresses. It is not clear if there is any writing on it. The by-passing Tatars living in the Is Beltir area pay much respect to it. Everybody turns three tours around it and offer some of their food. When I asked them why they had such a simple belief, if that lifeless stone deserved such respect and if they did not see that the food they offered him was eaten by birds, foxes or other animals, they replied; she had been a noble woman and been turned into stone by the omnipotent Kayra-Khan as far as they heard from their ancestors and that

<sup>76</sup> İnan 1972, 179.

<sup>77</sup> Barthold 1947, 533-534.

<sup>78</sup> Barthold 1947, 531.

<sup>79</sup> Barthold 1947, 531-532.

<sup>80</sup> Radlov 1956, II, 96.



*they actually knew the food which they offered was eaten by animals, but that they had been paying respect to her saintly memory...*<sup>81</sup>.

On July 20<sup>th</sup> 1722, Messerschmidt, in the studies he did around Kara and Ak-Yüs, writes; *"...on the left side of the road, in a spectacular valley ornamented with beech trees, there is statue named "Kozan-Kush-Tash" (Kozan- Bird-Stone). It is carved out of a red stone. He has a tea bowl-like pot of ash in his right hand, holds the skirt of his robe in his left. He has a cloth belt and two small bags hanging on it. His head is covered by a conical hat leaving the ears out. His head was as if cut and later inserted haphazardly again. His moustache reminds the moustache of a Polish warrior. He has a sparse beard around his chin and mouth. As it is understood from the description, the statue is not of a woman but of a man. The Tatars passing by never neglect to pay their deep respect to it by offering some of their food..."*<sup>82</sup>.

## 5. Conclusion

Apparently the peculiar belief in the holiness of stone statues continues in this

or that way among the shamanist Turkic communities. For example, the areas where balbals and statues are erected still keep their holiness in the Republic of Hakasia. The shamanist people of the Turkic communities of the area still go on praying to the stone-made statues in human form and to the balbals, doing offerings to them, embracing them and tying pieces of clothes to them for their wishes to come true<sup>83</sup> (Fig. 38).

During the archeological studies in Kazakhstan and Kirghizistan, we observed that the people highly respect the statues which they carried into their gardens from cult centers and regarded them as indispensable members of their family. Furthermore, they do not let any governmental officers to transport the statues to any museum. In Kirghizistan, we also observed that the statues which were exhibited in the garden of the Manas Museum, were highly respected and held sacred by the people of the region. Women who wanted their dreams to come true touch them and rub their hands to their faces, kissing them as sacred beings (Fig.39). Actually, if the Turkic tribes had not held them sacred and protected them carefully, the statues would not have survived until today<sup>84</sup>.

<sup>81</sup> Radlov 1956, II, 92-93.

<sup>82</sup> Radlov 1956, II, 93-94.

<sup>83</sup> Mülazımoğlu 2002, 59.

<sup>84</sup> Belli 2003, 50. 2002, 59.



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Fig. 1: A stone statue in cult center (Estelik), Kazakhstan.



Fig. 2: A seriously damaged kurgan and stone statue, Song Köl-Kirghizistan.





Fig. 3: Stone statues gathered in the parks, Karakol-Kirghizistan.



Fig. 4: Stone statues gathered in the parks, The Faculty of Fine Arts, Bishkek- Kirghizistan.





Fig. 5: Stone statues in the garden of museum, Balasagun- Kirghizistan.



Fig. 6: Stone statues in the garden of museum, Zhambyl-Kazakhstan.





Fig. 7: Balbals around the kurgan, Hakasia (Photo S. Anadol-Atlas).



Fig. 8: The Line of balbals in Tonyukuk complex, Mongolia (Photo S.Başaran).





Fig. 9: The line of balbals around the kurgan, Kazakhstan.

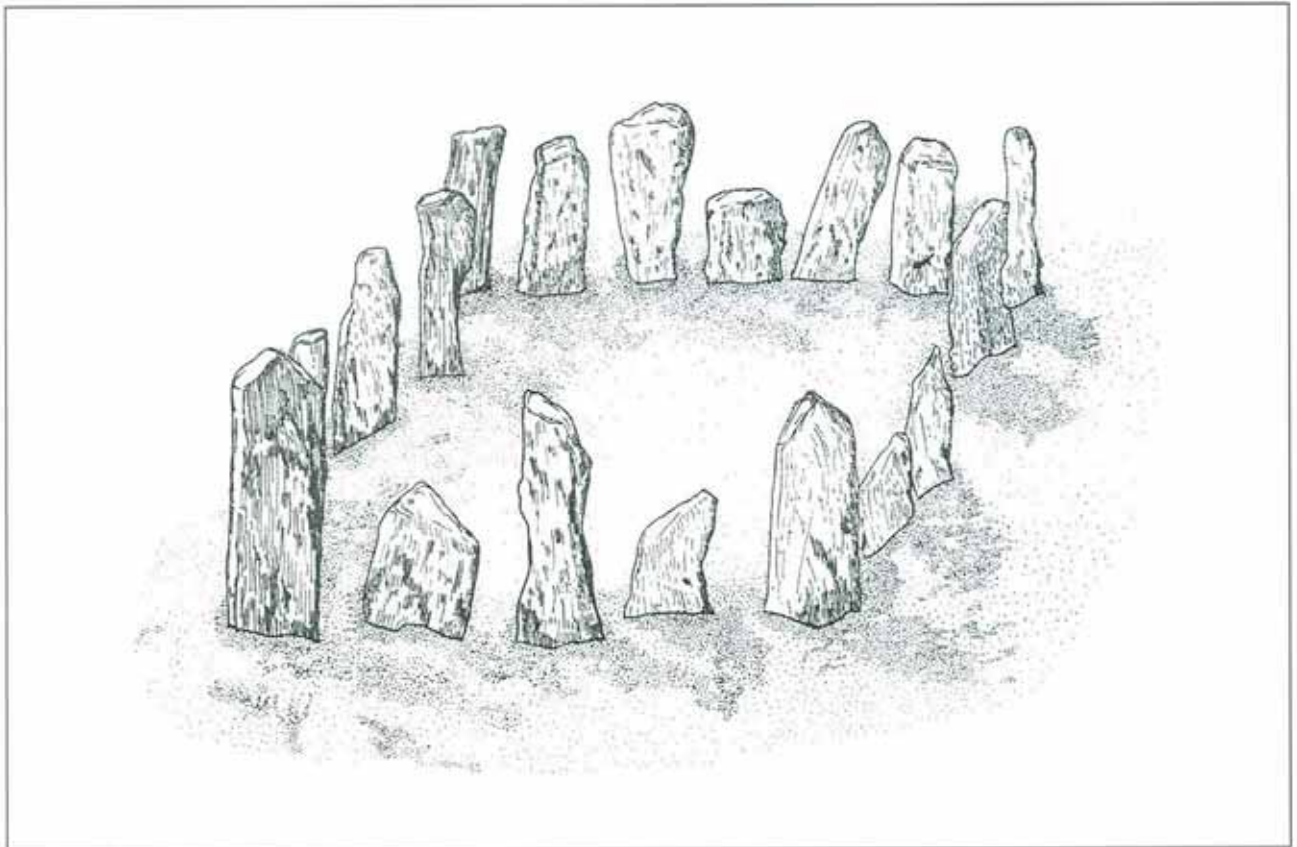


Fig. 10: Balbals around the kurgan, South Siberia, Radlov.



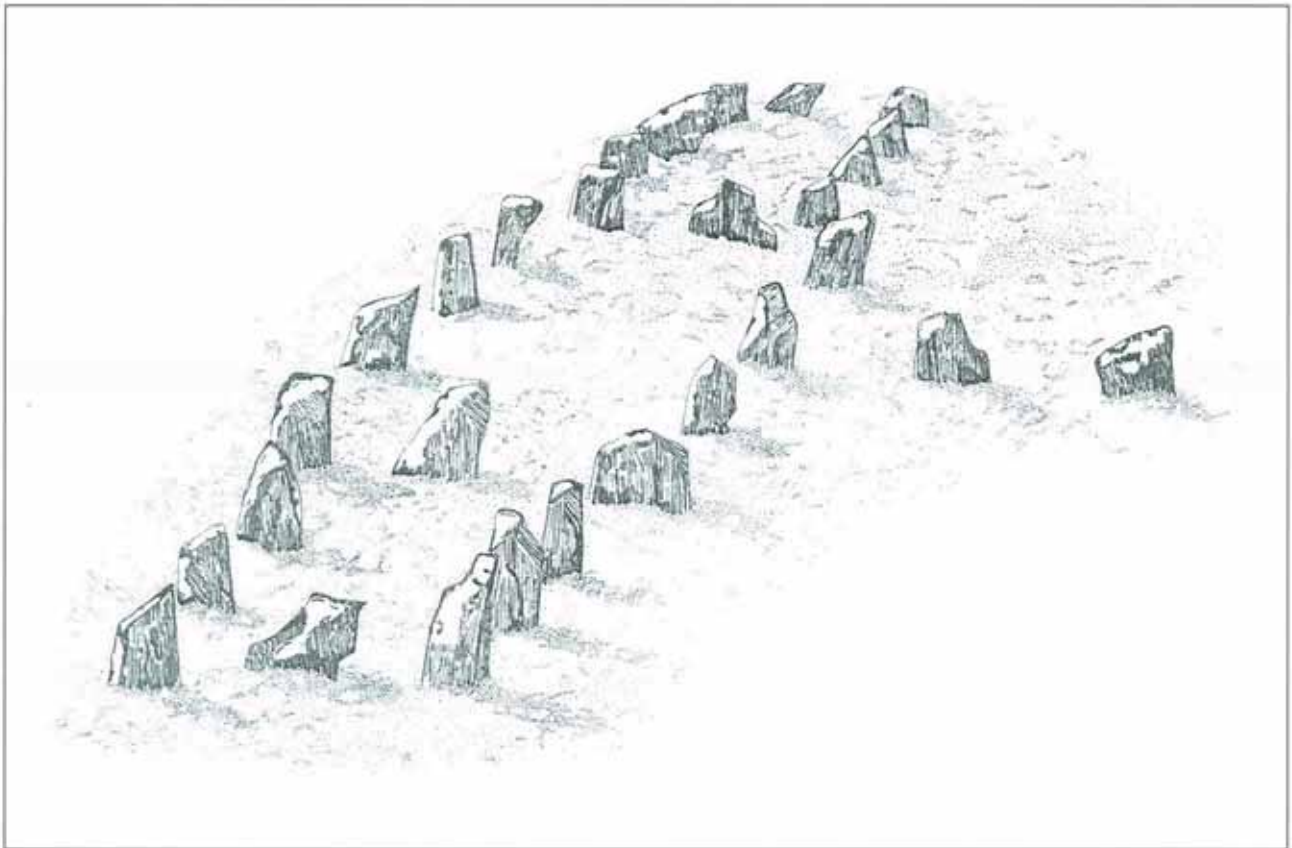


Fig. 11: Balbals around the kurgan, South Siberia, Radlov.



Fig. 12: Balbal, Kiev-Ukraine.





Fig. 13: Caa taş, Uybat Region, Hakasia (Photo S. Anadol-Atlas).



Fig. 14: Scythian stone statue,  
Kiev-Ukraine.





Fig. 15: Scythian stone statue, Kiew-Ukraine.



Fig. 16: Kipchak stone statue, Kiew-Ukraine.

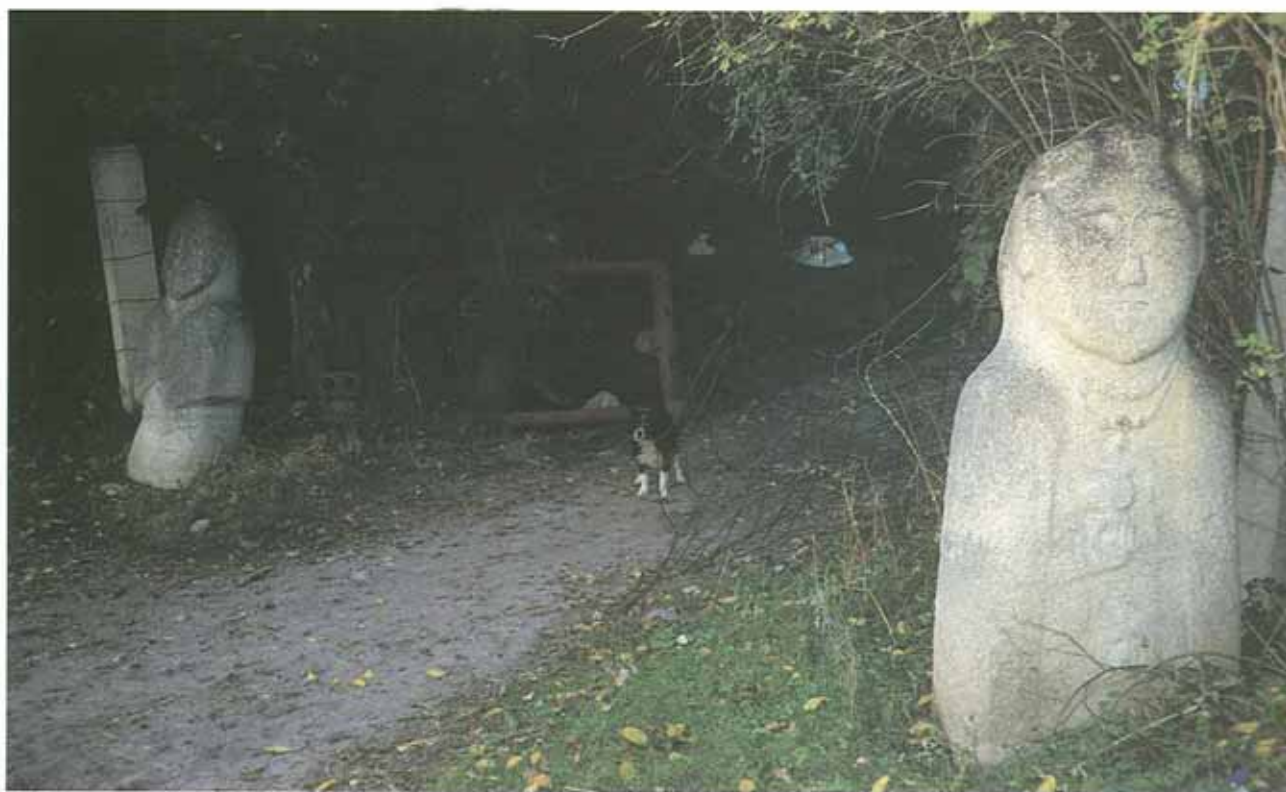


Fig. 17: Male and female statues taken out of the kurgan, Tüp Region- Kirghizistan.





Fig. 18: Stone statue, Mongolia  
(Photo Y. Dede).



Fig. 19: Stone statue, Tuva  
(Photo S. Anadol-Atlas).



Fig. 20: Stone statue, Kazakhstan.





Fig. 21: Stone statue, Kirghizistan.



Fig. 22: The shortest statue, Kirghizistan.





Fig. 23: The highest statue, (Karahan)  
Bishkek-Kirghizistan.



Fig. 24: The widest statue, Tüp Region-  
Kirghizistan.



Fig. 25: Standing and sitting statues , Mongolia (Photo S. Başaran).





Fig. 26: Armed man holding a cup in his right hand, Kirghizistan.



Fig. 27: Unarmed man statue holding a cup in his right hand, Kirghizistan.



Fig. 28: Man holding cup or pots in both hands, Tuva (Photo S. Anadol-Atlas).





Fig. 29: Statue with only faces depicted, Kazakhstan.



Fig. 30: Female statues holding cups each hand, Zhambyl-Kazakhstan.





Fig. 31: Man holding bird in hand, Zhambyl-Kazakhstan.



Fig. 32: Mother Umay.





Fig. 33: Female statue holding flower in their hands.

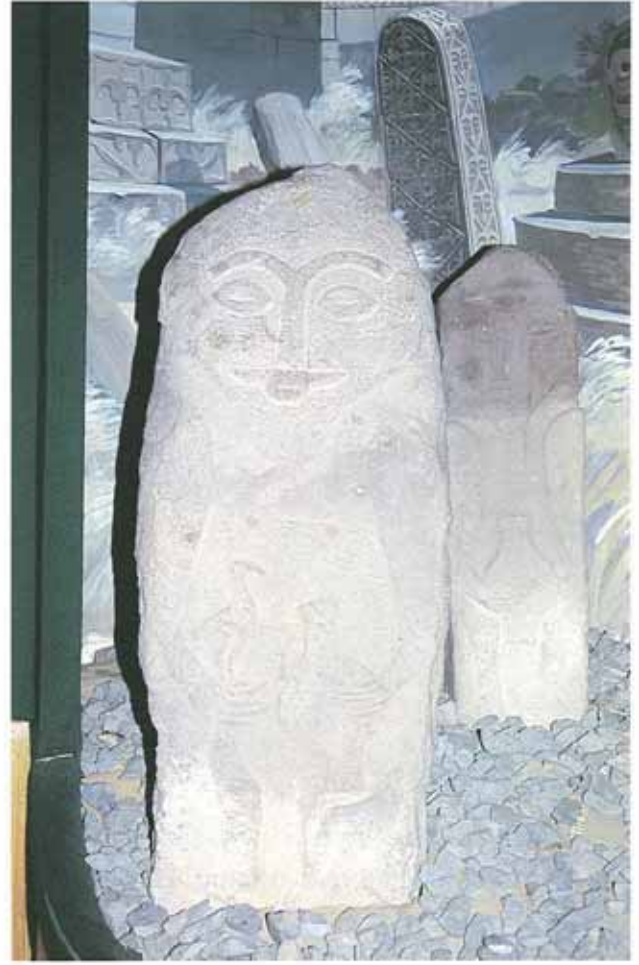


Fig. 34: Man holding a music instrument in his hands, Almatı-Kazakhstan (Photo Y. Çoruhlu).



Fig. 35: A Grave stones in the form of balbal (Tizgi cemetery-Hasankale Turkey).





Fig. 36: A Grave stones with braiding, Teslim Abdal cemetery, Baskil-Elazığ Turkey (Photo E. Parman).



Fig. 37: Mother Umay, Zhambyl -Kazakhstan.





Fig. 38: Clothes tied up to stone statues and balbals, Uybat Region-Hakasia (Photo S.Anadol-Atlas).



Fig. 39: Ladies Kissing the stone statues in deep respect, Talas-Kirghizistan.