

# SEVERAL PROBLEMS ABOUT THE TURKIC STONE STATUES

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## Introduction

Turkic stone statues are found widely in the Eurasian steppes. They have attracted many scholars' attentions from the 18th century, because they are unique figures of various cultural elements: religion, funeral rite, hair style, costume, weaponry, daily commodities of the Turks.

There are several controversial problems about the Turkic stone statues: their origin, chronology, typology, meaning, relation with a square stone enclosure, etc. They are correlated with each other. We must study them synthetically. In this paper I would like to make clear how much these problems have been solved or not. In other words, I will summarize the scientific results and present situations about them.

## 1. What is a Turkic stone statue?

Turkic stone statues are distributed from Mongolia in the east to the Syr Darya basin in the west. There have been confirmed over 100 statues in Tuva (Evtyukhova 1952; Grach 1961), 5 in Khakassiya (Evtyukhova 1952), 256 in Russian Altay (Kubarev 1984), nearly 400 in Kazakhstan (Sher 1966; Charikov 1986; Charikov 1989), about 100 in Kirgizstan (Sher 1966 and others), about 20 in Uzbekistan, 1 in Tadjikistan, 2 in Turkmenistan, 182 in Chinese Turkestan (Wang, Qi 1996), and 11 in Inner Mongolia. I counted over 330 statues in Mongolia on the basis of not only preceding publications but also my field surveys in 1993, 1995 and 1996 (Hayashi 1996).

There are many variants of them. On the basis of the materials from Kazakhstan and Kirgizstan, Ya.A.Sher divided them into 6 groups: 1) male statue with a vessel in right hand and with a weapon (fig.1); 2) male or unidentified statue with a vessel in right hand but without a weapon (fig.2); 3) statue with a representation of a face only (fig.3); 4) statue with a bird (the number is very small) (fig.4); 5) male statue with a vessel in both hands (fig.5); 6) female statue with a vessel in both hands (fig.6) (Sher 1966: 25-26). He arranged groups 1-4 as type I dated to the 6th-8th century and groups 5-6 as type II dated to the 6th-12th century (Sher 1966: 44-46).

There are male and female seated statues mainly in Mongolia and Tuva. Male ones sit cross-legged (fig.7), while female ones sit straight (fig.8). Male ones may be possible to be included in group 1 of Sher's classification.

A. A. Charikov from Kazakhstan divided statues into 3 types: 1) "Old Turkic" type - statue with a vessel in right hand in front of the breast dated to the 7th-9th century; 2) "Polovtsian" type - statue with a vessel in both hands in front of the belly dated to the 9th-11th century; 3) Pillar type - statue with a representation of a face only dated to the 11th-13th century (Charikov 1980). Type 1 of Charikov's classification corresponds to the groups 1, 2 and 4 of Sher, and type 2 - groups 5 and 6. Charikov's datings will be examined later.

The size is diversified: the smallest one is 40-50cm high and the tallest one is over 200cm. Generally speaking, Sher's group 3 is smaller, groups 4 and 6 are comparatively small. Sher's groups 1, 2 and 3 are distributed widely, group 4 is found only in Southern Kazakhstan, group 5 is distributed westward from Western Mongolia, and group 6 is found mainly in Kazakhstan and Kirgizstan.

The datings of the stone statues can be judged by their details: vessels, swords, belt ornaments, hair styles, costume, finger shapes holding vessels. These details are dated to the 6th -8th centuries by Ya.A.Sher (Sher 1966: 40-44). His datings are quite reasonable but I would like to point out his mistake of the interpretation of finger shapes of groups 1 and 2.

There are some variants of finger shapes. When a vessel has a round bottom, the figure holds it, opening the thumb and other four fingers of the right hand (fig.9). When a vessel has a little stand, the figure holds the stand by the thumb and the forefinger (fig.1). Sher interpreted such unique representations of fingers as the Buddhism iconography "in which each gesture has a definite meaning" (Sher 1966: 68). V.D. Kubarev followed Sher and explained "gesture" as "mudra" (Kubarev 1984: 100-101). But these finger representations can be related to the art of Sogdiana (fig.10) and Tokharistan (fig.11), and furthermore can be traced to the ancient Iranian art (fig.12) (Hayashi 1993).

## **2. Stone statues, stone enclosures and balbal-stones**

A Turkic stone statue (Sher's groups 1, 2, 3 and 4) stands on the eastern (or southeastern) side of a square stone enclosure, one side of which is composed of 2 or 3 slabstones (fig.3). The inside of an enclosure is filled with stones. The average size of an enclosure is 3Å~3m. In Russian Altay there were found a tree trunk, ashes, charcoal, burnt sheep bones, horse bones and teeth in an enclosure, and a silver cup in front of a statue (fig.13) (Kubarev 1984). Eastward from a statue there stand stones in a row. In Tuva these stones are 10-70cm in height, the number of stones is 3-157 and a row stretches 350m in length (Kyzlasov 1969: 26). These stones in a row might have been called "balbal" in old Turkic. Stone enclosures often form in line from north to south (fig.14).

A stone enclosure, a statue and a row of stones compose a minimum unit. A stone enclosure develops into a large square earthwork with a sarcophagus. A male statue becomes bigger and is accompanied by a female statue, stone lions, stone

sheep, many statues (maybe of servants), a stone tortoise with a stela. Balbal-stones become bigger and a row of them stretches 1-3km in length. There can be confirmed several grades of units from lower to upper (Voitov 1986; Voitov 1996).

A maximum unit must be a mausoleum of a khaghan and his family of Turkic Khanates. Few of them has been excavated. One of them is the mausoleum of Kyol-Tegin, the brother of the third khaghan of the Second Turkic Khanate, which was partly excavated by the Czech expedition in 1958 and now is again investigated by the Turkish Expedition. Japanese expedition also worked there but without excavation.

According to the Czech archaeologist L. Jisl and our observations, this mausoleum was surrounded by a trench in which there was constructed a rectangular mud wall roofed with tiles (67.25m~28.25m) (Jisl 1963). A gate was opened on the east wall. Inside of the wall was paved by mud bricks. In the center of the court there stood a shrine. Between the gate and the shrine there stood a stone tortoise with a stela (now they are separated) and stone statues (fig.15). In the shrine there were found fragments of two seated bigger statues which belonged surely to Kyol-Tegin and his wife (fig.16, 17). Out of the east wall there stand approximately 170 balbal-stones in a row, which stretches a little less than 3km.

About 900m southward from the Kyol-Tegin mausoleum there is another one of his elder brother Bilge Khaghan (fig.7), which is a little bigger than the former and a row of balbals is longer (over 3km). About 850m northward from the Kyol-Tegin mausoleum there are a big sarcophagus, a statue and a row of balbals (1250m), furthermore 450m northward there are a sarcophagus and a row of balbals (700m). The latter two are not identified but probably belong to the family members of the brothers.

### **3. Whom did a stone statue represent?**

Chinese chronicles left important informations about funeral customs of the Turks. The Zhou-shu which is devoted to the events of Northern Zhou (556-581) and was compiled in 630s describes them as the followings:

"When a man has died, the corpse is laid in his tent. Each of his children, grandchildren, male and female relatives kills a sheep and a horse and spreads them as offerings in front of the tent. Then they ride on horseback and go around the tent seven times. Whenever they come to the entrance of the tent, they hurt their own faces with a sword and cried. Blood and tears pours together. They do so seven times and then stop. They choose a day, when they burn a horse and daily commodities of the dead with the corpse. They gather the remained ashes and wait a time to bury them. When a man died in spring or summer, they wait till grass and trees become yellow and drop. When a man died in autumn or winter, they wait till flowers bloom and trees are in leaf. And then they dig a hole and bury (ashes). On the burial day the relatives give offerings, ride on horseback and hurt their own faces just like the first time. When the burial rites are over, they stand stones and make a post on the grave.

The number of stones correspond to the number of (enemies) whom the dead man had killed during his lifetime. And they hang all the heads of sheep and horses on the post" (Liu 1958: 9-10).

The description of the Sui-shu of the Sui dynasty (581-619) (compiled in 636) is quite similar but with a little difference concerning a grave. "(The relatives) stand timbers as grave-posts for the grave, in which they make a chamber. (On the walls of a chamber) the portrait and the battle scenes during his lifetime are painted" (Liu 1958: 42). Noting this difference, L.R.Kyzlasov considers a simple grave of the Zhou-shu for an ordinary nomad and a painted chamber of the Sui-shu for a nobleman (Kyzlasov 1969: 39). Anyhow we can read "stones of enemies" but cannot find out "stone statues" in the two Chinese chronicles. We can notice only a painted portrait of the dead in the Sui-shu.

There is a controversy about the interpretation of stone statues as an archaeological material, relating with the aforementioned literary sources. Some scholars think that both of a stone statue and balbal-stones symbolize the enemies who were killed by a buried person during his lifetime (V.V.Barthold, N.I.Veselovskii, A.D.Grach). Others think that a stone statue represents a buried person and balbal-stones symbolize the enemies who were killed (S.V.Kiselev, L.A.Evtyukhova, L.R.Kyzlasov).

The former view was influential before, but in recent times most of scholars agree to the latter view. One of the grounds for the latter view is that a statue has a vessel. Ashes, charcoal, burnt animal bones remaining in an enclosure mean that a funerary banquet was opened there. On some of statues, especially bigger ones, are seated statues. Consequently the dead person himself took part in the banquet in the form of a statue with a vessel in his right hand (Sher 1966: 58).

Generally speaking, we cannot find any human details on balbal-stones, however in some cases an anthropomorphic stela is erected among balbal-stones (Sher 1966: 58; Voitov 1996: 86-87). I found a roughly made stone statue (fig.18) near the mausoleum of Kyol-Tegin where other statues are made elaborately. This "statue" may have been a balbal of a killed enemy.

On the other hand, there are many statues (fig.19) except the statues of the dead man and his wife in the biggest sites of khaghan class like Kyol-Tegin's mausoleum. These statues clearly represent servants of the dead man. We can find some servant stone statues near the tumuli of Chinese emperors. The servant statues were probably brought from China.

In conclusion I would like to point out that stone statues mostly represent the buried man, but at the same time in the biggest sites also his wife and servants, and furthermore, roughly made anthropomorphic stelae represent enemies.

#### **4. Was a stone enclosure a tomb or a memorial site?**

Chinese chronicles said that the Turks burnt the corpse. Was a square stone enclosure a cremation tomb? Some scholars think so (M.P.Gryaznov, L.P.Potapov, L.N.Gumilev), but many other archaeologists of Russia deny this view and consider it as a memorial site, because there are found ashes, charcoal and burnt animal bones but no burnt human bones (S.I.Rudenko, L.A.Evtyukhova, S.I.Vainshtein, A.A.Gavrilova, L.R.Kyzlasov, A.D.Grach, Ya.A.Sher).

But the latter view has a big problem. There is a question what is a cremation tomb of the Turks, if an enclosure is not a cremation tomb. A.D.Grach discovered a small stone circle with burnt human bones and square enclosures side by side in Tuva, and dated them the 6th - the first half of the 7th century (Grach 1968: 207-211). But his datings are very much problematical. So one Russian archaeologist confessed that the trustworthy cremation tombs of the Turks have not yet been discovered (Mogil'nikov 1981: 32).

I suppose the former view is worth reexamining. According to the Chinese chronicles, the Turks did not bury burnt human bones just after the cremation but buried "remained ashes" of the corpse, a horse and commodities burnt before nearly half a year. Therefore burnt human bones of one body cannot be unearthed. The ashes and charcoal must be the "remained ashes."

But even this view has a weak point. According to the Xin-Tang-shu, around 628 just before the downfall of the First Khanate the Turks discontinued a cremation and began an inhumation (Liu 1958: 193). If this information is right, the Turks changed the funerary custom at the beginning of the 7th century. If we accept this change and the former view, a square stone enclosure and accompanied stone statues and balbal-stones, all of them might have been dated before the beginning of the 7th century. But the maximum unit of them, Kyol-Tegin's mausoleum was constructed in 732. Did a cremation revive in the Second Khanate?

On the other hand, according to the Sui-shu, the Tiele tribes of the same Turkic origin held the customs almost same as the Tuque-Turks but they had different customs in inhumation and unique marriage. In fact there have been found not only stone enclosures but also inhumation tombs with a horse skeleton in Tuva, Altay, the Tien-Shan mountains. There is another question whether the inhumation tombs belonged to the Tie-le and the cremation tombs belonged to the Tuque-Turks. We cannot answer this question under the present scientific level.

#### **5. When did a stone statue appear?**

Hitherto most scholars have thought that the Turkic stone statues had been made during the period of the Turkic Khanates: the 6th-8th century. But in recent years some scholars have a doubt about this established theory. Were there stone statues in the First Turkic Khanate? As I cited before, in the Zhou-shu and the Sui-shu there is no description of stone statues but only stones of enemies and mural

portraits. Chinese historical sources did not prove the presence of stone statues in the First Turkic Khanate.

We should pay attention to the Bugut mausoleum site in Arkhangai aimag of Mongolia which was devoted to the fourth khagan Tabo=Tatpar (r.572-581) of the First Turkic Khanate. This site was excavated by Ts.Dorjsren in 1956, by V.E.Voitov and S.G.Klyashtorny in 1982. We Japanese expedition observed this site and took a rubbed copy of a stela in 1997. There were found a stone tortoise, a stela with Sogdian and Brahmi inscriptions which is kept in the museum of Tsetserleg (fig.20), the remains of a shrine with roof tiles, a row of balbal-stones outside the rectangular earthwork (258 counted by Voitov, 276 by us) (fig.21). There stand stones in line also inside the earthwork. They are comparable with servant stone statues inside the wall of Kyol-Tegin's mausoleum. It is very important that there is no stone statues.

The same situation can be seen in the Ider or Deed-Tsetsuukh site where are a rectangular earthwork, roof tiles, a long row of balbal-stones and a stone tortoise (a stela was lost) but no stone statues (fig.22). On the basis of these investigations, S.G.Klyashtorny and V.E.Voitov concluded that there were no stone statues in the First Turkic Khanate (Klyashtorny 1984: 512; Voitov 1986: 126; Voitov 1996: 107).

Furthermore V.E.Voitov considers that the stone statues and stone animals from Unget (or Unegt) on the northern bank of the river Tuul (tola) were the earliest examples (fig.23). Formerly D.Bayar thought that the statues from Unget were made by the Rouran people, the predecessors of the First Turkic Khanate, because of their "primitiveness" (Bayar 1978: 15-16). But this basis was very weak, so Bayar told me orally that he withdrew his own view. On the other hand, V.E.Voitov asserted that the statues from Unget were devoted to the khaghan of the Xueyantuo, Yinan, after his death in 645. Voitov's main arguments are the followings: 1) two layers are recognized at the site and the second one seems to belong to the Second Turkic Khanate; 2) Yinan kept the north of the river Tuul after the decline of the First Turkic Khanate, according to the Chinese sources, Xintangshu (Voitov 1987: 104-107).

If we accept this view, the problem of the origin of the Turkic stone statues will be solved: stone lions and sheep are clearly of Chinese origin, and therefore stone statues also were brought from China during the reign of Yinan, who was appointed to be khaghan by the Tang Emperor, Taizong.

But I must propose two negative arguments to his view. The first is that the Xueyantuo belonged to the Tiele tribes whose funerary custom was different from the Tuque-Turks, as I mentioned in the preceding section. The second is that the lotus ornament of the roof tiles from this site is quite similar to the ornament of the tiles from the later buildings, the Kyol-Tegin mausoleum, Khara-Balgasun, Por-Bazhin of the Uighur Khanate (744-840) (Hayashi 1991: 167).

Furthermore, there is an evidence that a Turkic stone statue was made during the First Turkic Khanate. The statue standing near the Zhaosu (Ili district, Xinjiang) has a Sogdian inscription dated to the second half of the 6th century (fig.24), according to the Japanese Iranist, Y.Yoshida (Yoshida 1990: 76). And as I mentioned in the section 1, the finger representations came from the Sogdian-Tokharistan iconography. The Tuque-Turks had communications with the Sogdians from the beginning of the foundation of the First Turkic Khanate. So a Turkic stone statue could have appeared in the second half of the 6th century.

Recently Yu.S.Khudyakov and Yu.A.Plotnikov proposed that firstly only rectangular stone enclosures appeared in the 4th - 5th centuries, secondly stone statues with engraved faces were erected by enclosures during the First Turkic Khanate, and then stone sculptures not only with faces but also representations of dress and weapons continued from the Second Turkic Khanate till the end of the 10th century (Khudyakov, Plotnikov 1990: 124). But this theory cannot explain that there are no statues in the Bugut site of the First Turkic Khanate and the statue of Zhaosu has the inscription of the second half of the 6th century.

One more unique theory complicates this problem. Many of Chinese archaeologists of Xinjiang think that stone statues had been made continuously from the Bronze Age (1200-700 B.C.) to the 11th century (Wang, Qi 1996: 207). In fact there are found unique statues with round faces in Northern Xinjiang (fig.25). They are dated to "the Bronze Age and the Early Iron Age" by the Chinese archaeologists. Following them, A.Kovalev considers that those statues might have been the prototype of the Scythian stone statues in Northern Caucasus and on the Northern Black Sea coast by A.Kovalev (Kovalev 1998: 267). But I observed that those statues stand outside square stone enclosures, facing the east (fig.30). This is the same situation as the Turkic stone statues. So I suppose that those unique statues also might have belonged to the Turkic period. Anyway the problem of the origin of the Turkic stone statues has not yet been solved.

## **6. When did a stone statue disappeared?**

I would like to pay attention to the early Uighur funerary or monumental sites: the Sine-Usu and the Tariat sites devoted to the second khaghan Moyun-chor (r.747-759), and the Khosshootyn-Tal. In the Sine-Usu there are a square earthwork, stone heap and a stone tortoise with a stela, but neither stone statues nor balbal-stones (fig.26). In the Tariat site there were found a stone tortoise with a stela on a small mound but there is nothing else. Consequently, the Tariat was not a funerary site, while the Sine-Usu was a memorial funerary site. The Khosshootyn-Tal which is regarded as the memorial site for the first khaghan Qutlugh-Boyla by V.E.Voitov (Voitov 1996: 30) is similar to the Sine-Usu but now there is a stone-tortoise without a stela.

There has not been found such a memorial site devoted to the subsequent khaghans. Taking this change into consideration, V.E.Voitov concluded that the third khaghan Bugu adopted Manichaeism to discard the traditional customs and the subsequent khaghans did not construct the memorial sites (Voitov 1986: 124-125).

But I have two questions about his view. Firstly, the substantial changes, the extinction of stone statues and balbal-stones, had already occurred in the time of the first and second khaghans before the adoption of Manichaeism. Secondly, Moyunchor erected several stelae at the sites which did not have connections with funerary customs like the Tariat stela. In other words, the combination of an inscribed stela and funerary customs collapsed during the reign of the second khaghan. So I would like to say that the change of the funerary customs occurred at the beginning of the foundation of the Uighur Khanate regardless of the adoption of Manichaeism. This was probably one of the changes of whole social systems in the Uighur Khanate.

Did the Uighurs abandon the custom of erecting stone statues, too? This assumption may be right, but other Turkic tribes continued to erect stone statues in the western part of the Turkic world. L. R. Kyzlasov considers that a stone statue with a vessel in both hands (Sher's type II) belonged to the period after the Uighur Khanate, the 8th-10th centuries (Kyzlasov 1969: 80-82). On the contrary, T.Osawa thinks that some of this type might have been erected earlier (Osawa 1992: 12). Generally speaking, however, the statues of Sher's type II might have been later than type I, because the similar statues holding a vessel in both hands were erected by the Kipchaks (Polovtsians) in Kazakhstan and on the Northern Black Sea coast in the 10th-13th centuries.

But the function of type II is surely different from type I. L.R.Kyzlasov says that in Tuva such statues stand alone without rectangular enclosures and balbal-stones, though they face the east like type I (Kyzlasov 1969: 82). I myself observed two such cases in Northwestern Mongolia (fig.27) (Ercilasun 1991; Hayashi 1996: 183, 185). And in Kazakhstan and Kirgizstan there are found female statues holding a vessel in both hand which clearly show the naked breasts (fig.6). Ya.A.Sher related type II with the matrilineal ancestor worship (Sher 1966: 64), but the evidence is weak. Anyway, we must think that the statues of Sher's type II had no relations with the funerary customs of warriors and the function of stone statues changed about the middle of the 8th century.

### **Closing**

In this paper I have summed up the present situation of several problems about the Turkic stone statues. To my regret, most of the problems have not yet been solved. The future investigations and excavations in the field will elucidate these problems.



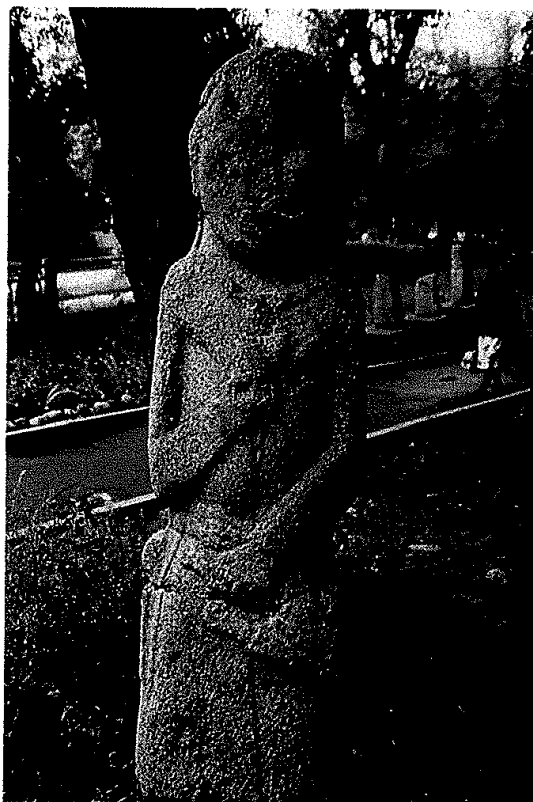


Fig. 1. Statue in Ust'-Kamenogorsk Museum, Kazakhstan



Fig. 2. Statue in Dadgyn Khoshoot, Arkhangai, Mongolie

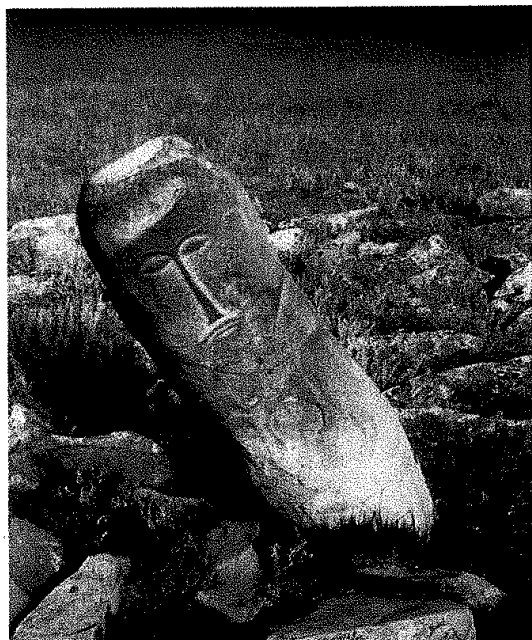


Fig. 3. Statue in Khyargas sum, Uvs,  
Mongolia

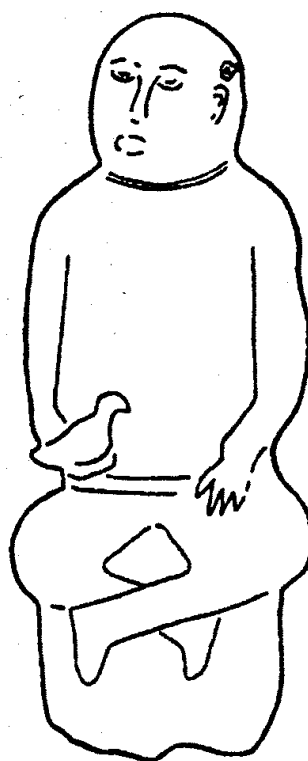


Fig. 4. Statue in Altyn-Emel, Semirech'e,  
Kazakhstan (Sher 1966)

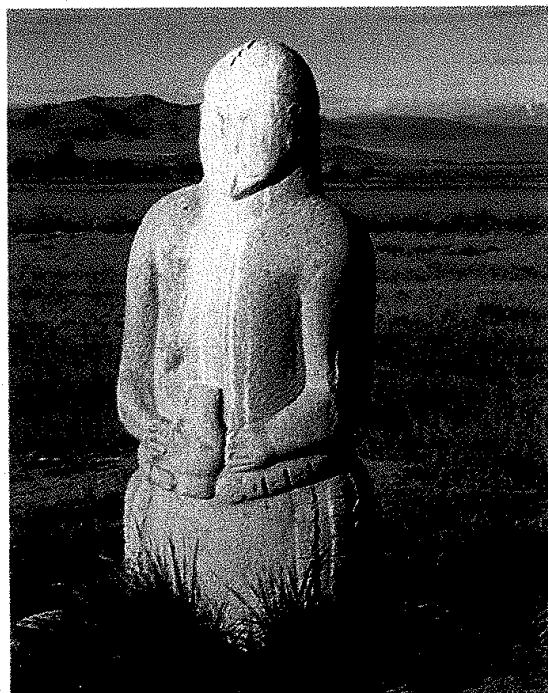


Fig. 5. Statue in Kyzyl-Mazhalyk, Tuva



Fig. 6. Statue in Almaty Museum,  
Kazakhstan



Fig. 7. Statues of Bilge khagan (r.) and a servant (l.), Khoso-Tsaidam, Mongolia

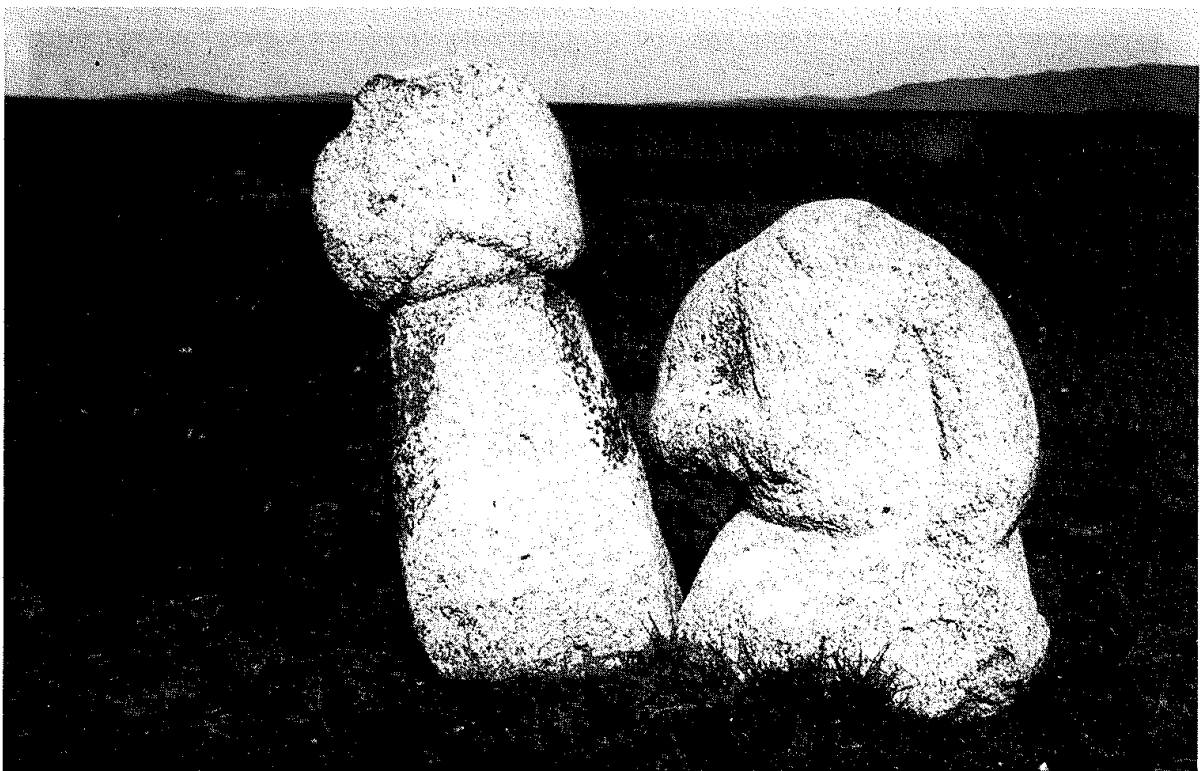


Fig. 8. Statues of the Khatun of Tonyuquq (?), an servant, Nalaykh, Mongolia

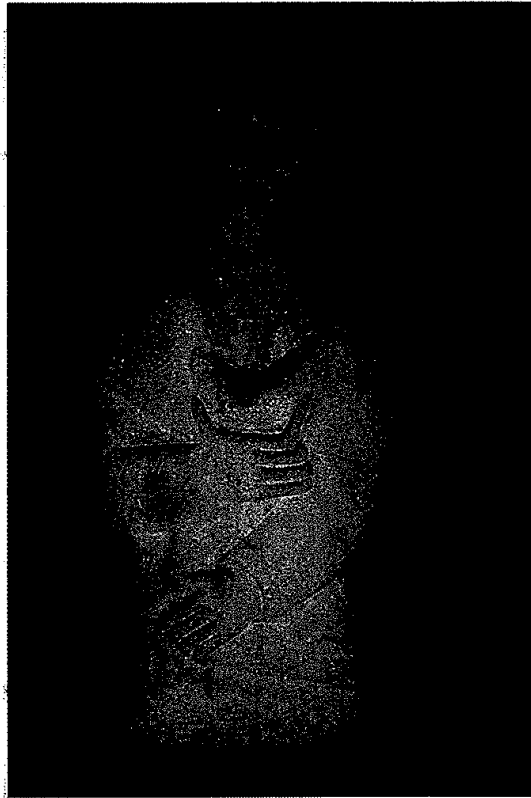


Fig. 9. Statue in Bishkek Museum, Kirgizstan



Fig. 10. Mural Painting in Varakhsha, Uzbekistan



Fig. 11. Mural Painting in Balalyk-Tepe, Uzbekistan



Fig. 12. Sassanian silver vessel

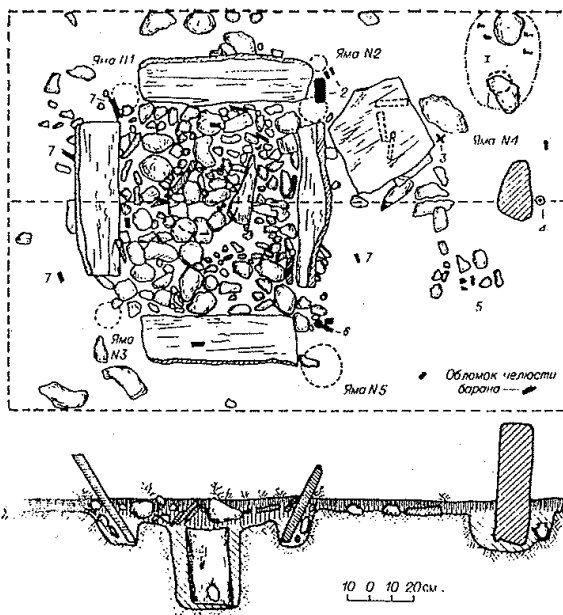
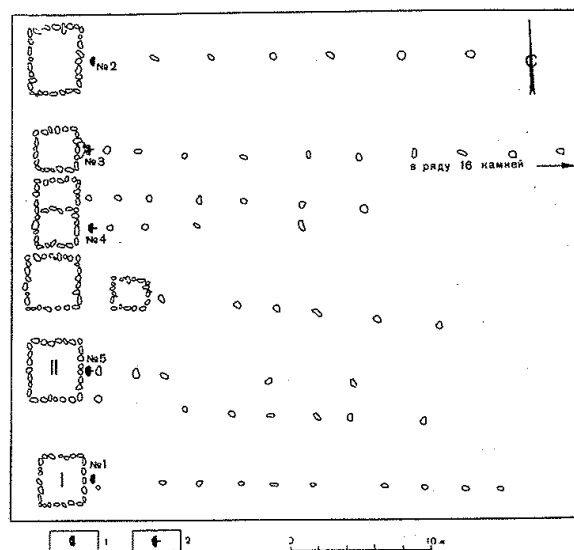


Fig. 13. Stone enclosure with a statue, Yustyd, Russian Altay (Kubarev 1984)



F. 14. Kyzyl-tei, Tuva (Kyzlasov 1969),  
1 - statues, 2 - broken stutues

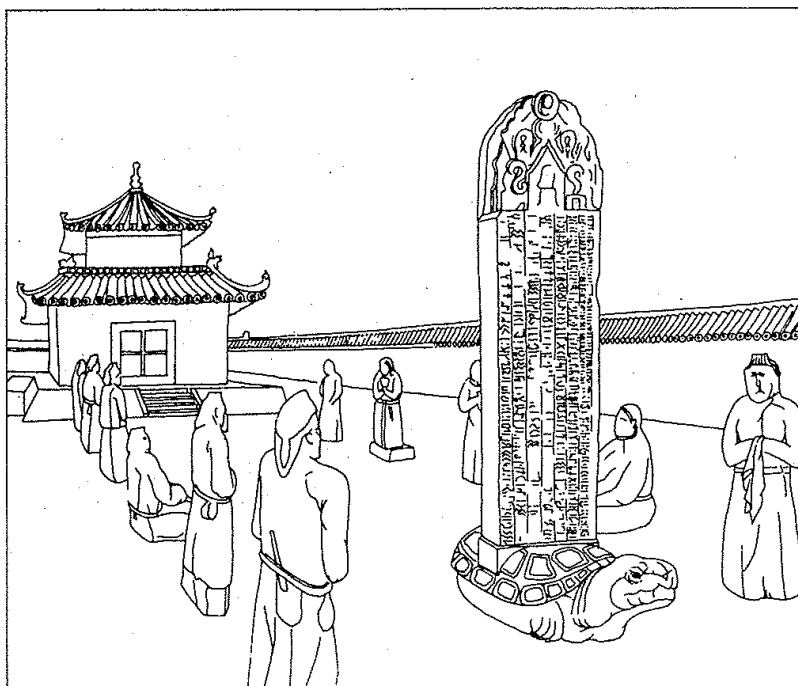
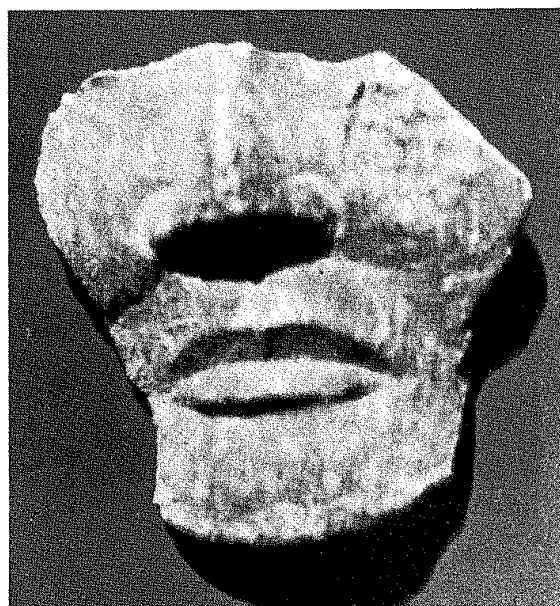


Fig. 15. Imaginary picture of the Kyul-tegin mausoleum (Nowgorodowa, 1980)



Fig. 16. Head of the statue of Kyul-Tegin



F. 17. Fragment of the statue of the Khatun of Kyul-Tegin (?) (Jisl 1963)



Fig. 18. Roughly made statue, Khosho-Tsaidam, Mongolia



Fig. 19. Statue of a servant of Kyul-Tegin, Khosho-Tsaidam, Mongolia

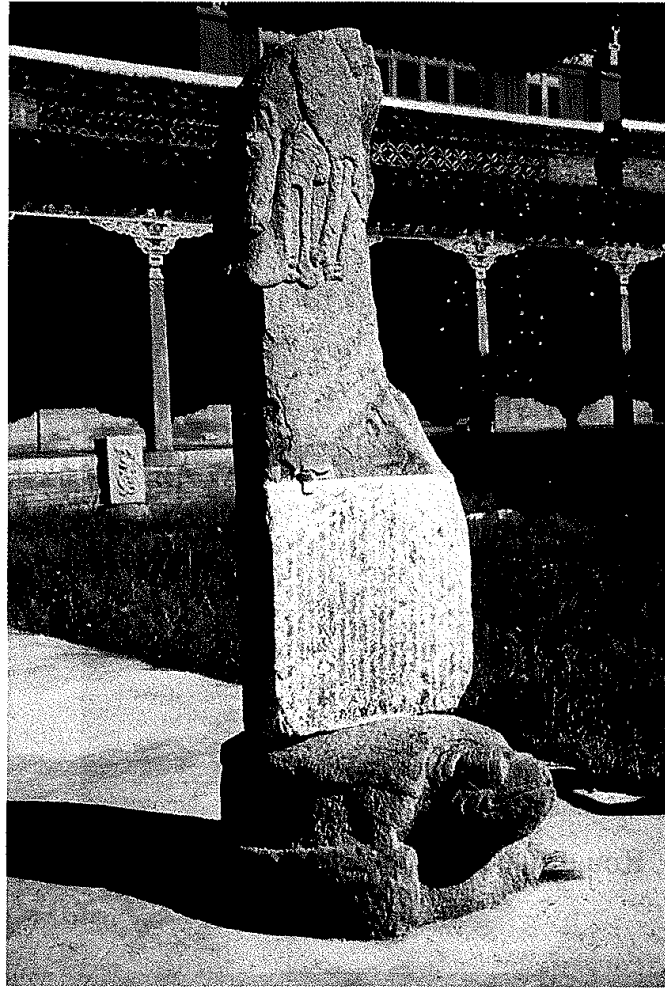


Fig. 20. Bugut Inscription, Tsetserleg Museum, Mongolia

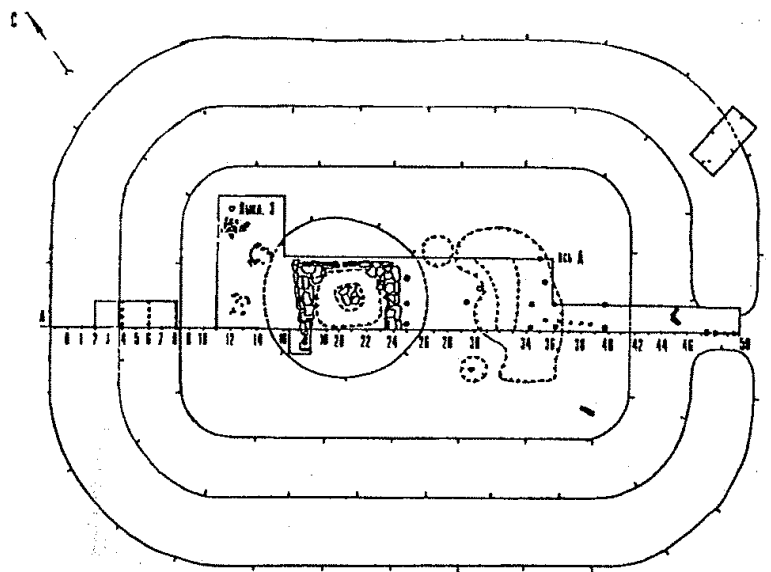


Fig. 21. Bugut site, Arkhangai, Mongolia (Voitov 1996)





Fig. 22. Stone tortoise in Deed-Tsetuukh, Arkhangai, Mongolia



Fig. 23. Statue in Unget, Central Mongolia .

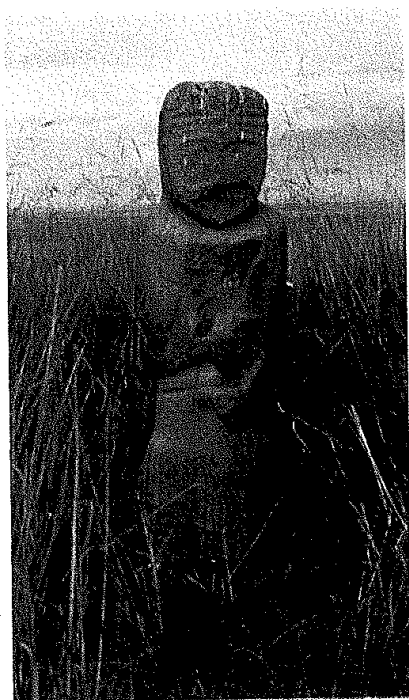


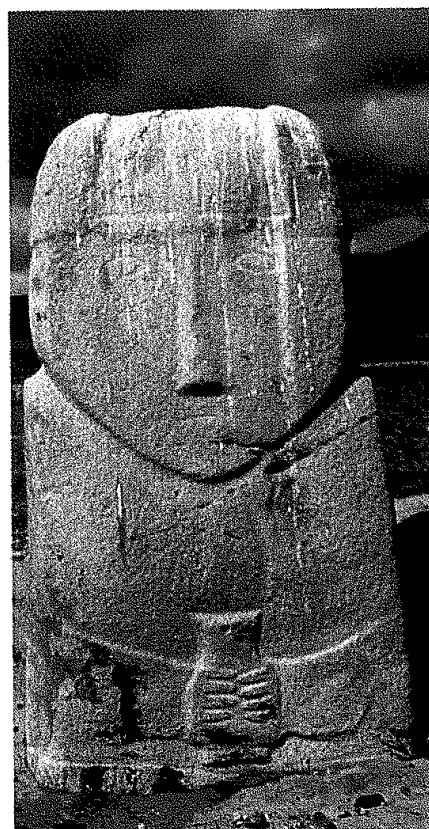
Fig. 24. Statue in Zhaosu,  
Ili, Xinjiang



Fig. 25. Statue in Qurumqi,  
Altay, Xinjiang



Fig. 26. Sine-Usu, Bulgan, Mongolia



F. 27. Tsagaan-dovon,  
Bayan-Ölgii, Mongolia

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