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Stone Statues of Central Qazaqstan¹

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Тірек сөздер: Сарыарқа; меңгір; мұнара; тас мүсін; балбал тас; «мұртты қорғандар»; қоршау; сақ; түркі; қыпшақ

Ключевые слова: Сарыарқа; менгир; стела; олений камень; каменное изваяние; курган с «усами»; ограда; курган; сакские; тюркские; кыпчакские

The article examines the stone sculptures of present-day Central Qazaqstan, which are an important source for the history of the ancient and medieval peoples of Eurasia. They not only embody the external appearance of people from past eras, but also reflect valuable information about the social structure and lives of those who left these monuments. The work presents the results of a recent study of ancient and medieval stone sculptures decorating the wide steppes of Central Kazakhstan, and further research and careful analysis of them seem very necessary. The first scientific information about stone sculptures was collected by Shoqan Walikhanov while studying the mausoleum of the Qozy Korpesh and Bayan Sulu during his travels around the outskirts of Issyk-Kul. Alkey Kh. Margulan, in his works, presented serious research on the monuments of Sary Arqa. In the last decade, the chronological framework for studying the stone sculptures of Sary Arqa has been expanding. Currently, the scientist Arman Z. Beysenov in his works, touches on current issues relating to stone sculptures and steles from the Saka period of Sary Arqa and is engaged in a comprehensive study of the complexes in which they are located.

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Орталық Қазақстанның балбал тастары

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Мақалада Орталық Қазақстанның балбал тастары мен оның ежелгі және ортағасырдағы Еуразия халықтарының тарихында қаншалықты маңызды рөл атқаратыны жөнінде айтылған. Балбал тастар – байырғы адамдардың сыртқы мүсіні ғана емес, сол кездің әлеуметтік құрылымы мен тұрмысынан хабар беретін құнды ақпарат көзі. Бұл еңбекте Орталық Қазақстан – Сарыарқаның кең даласына сән беріп тұрғани ежелгі және ортағасырлық балбал тастарды зерттеу нәтижелері ұсынылған. Мақала Сарыарқаның балбал тастарын толық зерттеп, талдау мәселесіне арналған. Бұл тастар туралы мәліметтерді алғаш рет Шоқан Уәлиханов Ыстықкөл төңірегіне саяхат кезінде Қозы Көрпеш – Баян сұлу кесенесін зерделеген кезде жинақтаған. Әлкей Марғұлан өз еңбектерінде Сарыарқаның монументальді ескерткештері жөніне тоқталып, зерттеушілік пікірлерін жазған. Кейінгі онжылдықта Сарыарқа балбал тастарын зерттеудің хронологиялық ауқымы кеңейе түсті. Қазір ғалым Арман Бейсенов сақ кезеңіндегі Сарыарқаның балбал тастары мен мұнаралары жөнінде өзекті мәселе қозғап, жан-жақты зерттеумен шұғылданып жүр.

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Каменные изваяния Центрального Казахстана

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В статье рассматриваются каменные изваяния Центрального Казахстана. Как они являются важным источником по истории древних и средневековых народов Евразии. В них не только воплощен внешний облик людей прошлых эпох, но и отражена ценная информация о социальной структуре и быте оставивших эти памятники. В работе представлены результаты исследования древних и средневековых каменных изваяний, которые украшают широкие степи Центрального Казахстана. Статья посвящена проблеме необходимости исследования и полного анализа каменных изваяний Сарыарки. Первые научные сведения о каменных изваяниях были собраны Ч. Валихановым при изучении мавзолея Козы Корпеш – Баян Сулу в период его путешествия по окрестностям Иссык-Куля. Алкей Х. Маргулан в своих трудах представил серьезные научные исследования монументальных памятников Сарыарки. В последнее десятилетие расширяются хронологические рамки изучения каменных изваяний Сарыарки. В настоящее время ученый Арман З. Бейсенов в своих работах затрагивает актуальные вопросы, касающиеся каменных изваяний и стелл сакского периода Сарыарки, занимается всесторонним изучением комплексов, в которых они расположены.

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Introduction

The territory of present-day Central Qazaqstan, characterized by extensive cultural interactions, is a significant site for the formation and advancement of ancient tribes, whose highly developed culture exerted a significant influence on the culture of the subsequent tribes in the northern, western, and eastern regions of Qazaqstan. Over the course of a long period, Central Qazaqstan was inhabited by tribes of a vibrant original culture. They left behind numerous monuments located along the river valleys, in intermountain depressions, in gorges, in general, where there are meadow grass, convenient irrigated lands and, of course, rich deposits of minerals.

It would be incorrect to say that today we have comprehensive information about the region; many archaeological monuments still need to be explored. Studying the monuments of the region can provide valuable information about the ancient situation not only of the region in question, but also of the entire territory of the Eurasian steppes. It is imperative to note that the absence of information regarding the monuments of Central Qazaqstan renders it impracticable to fully explore many controversial issues in Eurasia.

Central Qazaqstan is one of the regions occupying the vastest space of our country; it is known not only for its natural resources, but also for its unique ancient monuments. Long ago, the Qazaqs called this land Sary Arqa (the Qazaq Uplands). This term refers to a vast plateau bordered in the south by the Aral-Balkhash Lowland, in the west by the Caspian Plain and the Turgay Plateau, in the northeast by the Siberian Lowland and in the east by the Irtys Valley. Geologists believe that the name Sary Arqa successfully conveys the geomorphological structure and relief of Central Qazaqstan (present Qaraghandy (Karaganda) Region).

Since the primitive era, humans have tried to find an explanation for natural phenomena and disasters that they did not understand. During this period of the appropriating economy, individuals heavily relied on nature and their sustenance was contingent upon luck in obtaining food through hunting, gathering, or fishing. They therefore worshiped the forces of nature. During the transition to a productive economy, when humans began to fulfil their essential dietary requirements through the cultivation of cattle and agriculture, they ceased to solely rely

on nature and began to venerate deities, ancestors, and heroes alongside with the forces of nature.

The stone sculptures of Central Qazaqstan comprise a vibrant and numerous collection of monuments belonging to ancient and medieval nomads. For their production, the Qazaq Uplands had suitable raw materials, such as granite and sandstone.

Within the works of Qanysh I. Satbaev, Alkey Kh. Margulan, Mir K. Kadyrbaev, Zholdasbek K. Kurmankulov, Lyubov' N. Ermolenko, Arman Z. Beisenov and others, it has been established that the majority of Sary Arqa sculptures belong to the Middle Ages, namely to the Turkic and Qypchaq times [Kasanova 2019; Kasanova 2020]. Their cultural and chronological diagnostic traits have been distinguished. In addition to the medieval sculptures, there exist sculptures in Sary Arqa from other eras that necessitate precise identification, documentation, creation of cultural, chronological attribution and classification. Until this point, only the classifications

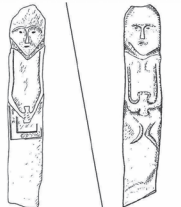


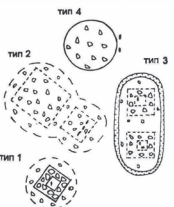
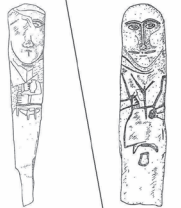


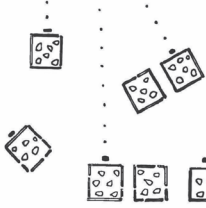
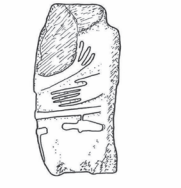







№ п/п	Полнота изображения человеческой фигуры	Поясные/Полные	Погрудные	Антропоморфные стелы	Сооружения
4	Кыпчаки				
3	Тюрки				
2	РЖВ				
1	Поздняя Бронза				



Fig.1. The tradition of stone monumental sculpture on the territory of Central Qazaqstan is represented by monuments of four chronological groups

1-сур. Орталық Қазақстандағы монументальді тас мүсін дәстүрі хронологиялық төрт топ ескерткіштері арқылы көрсетілген

Рис.1. Традиция каменной монументальной скульптуры на территории Центрального Казахстана представлена памятниками четырех хронологических групп

of medieval sculptures of the present-day Qazaq steppes have been developed and no special geological identification or mapping of the monuments has been conducted.

One of the oldest traditions of honoring the dead was the perpetuation of their memory through the construction of special structures and installation of statues. In the steppes and valleys of the Qazaq Uplands, the Sary Arqa, which are abundant in pastures and water sources, and therefore conducive for nomads, stone sculptures from different epochs are still preserved (Fig.1).

There are sculptures of different sizes, from 1 m to giant ones, over 4 m high; they can stand alone or in groups. They are usually installed near stone structures that look like quadrangular fences or mounds. In rare cases, such stone structures are missing.

Stone sculptures, which draw attention and impart an ancient flavor to the unending Qazaq Steppe, have consistently piqued the curiosity of both travelers and scientists. Shoqan Walikhanov, a talented Qazaq scholar from the 19th century, wrote one of the first scholarly articles on the sculptures of Sary Arqa and described and sketched the original sculptures near the Qozy Korpesh and Bayan Sulu *mazar* [Walikhanov 1984: 309]. Since the sculptures themselves have long been lost, Walikhanov's drawings are of great value.

Some sculptures from Central Qazaqstan were included in the first summary work on the sculptures of the entire Qazaq Steppe, published at the beginning of the 20th century. The author is the French researcher Joseph Antoine Castanier [Castanier 1910].

Alkey Khaqanovich Margulan, an outstanding Qazaq archaeologist, made a great contribution to the study of monuments of Central Qazaqstan (statues and *menhirs*) in the 1940s – 1960s. The study of stone sculptures became a key area of research for the Central Qazaqstan Archaeological Expedition (CQAE), which was founded in 1946. The initial results of this research were published by Alkey Kh. Margulan and the famous Russian archaeologist Leonid R. Kyzlasov in 1951 [Margulan 1951: 3–52]. Alkey Kh. Margulan introduced dozens of Sary Arqa sculptures to scientific circulation. They are presented in a solid general article and in a posthumous monograph [Margulan 1979; Margulan 2003: 36].

Materials and methods

Information regarding several sculptures of Central Qazakhstan is given in the classic work of Yakov A. Sher about the Semirechye sculptures [Sher 1966].

Since the conclusion of the 1970s, the CQAE team comprising of Mir K. Kadyrbaev, Zholdasbek K. Kurmankulov, Serzhan M. Akhinzhanov, and Lyubov' N. Ermolenko has consistently pursued the identification and investigation of sculptures from Central Qazaqstan. Consequently, Zholdasbek K. Kurmankulov and Lyubov' N. Ermolenko introduced over a hundred previously unknown ancient and medieval Sary Arqa sculptures [Ermolenko 2004; Kurmankulov, Ermolenko 2014]. Arman Z. Beisenov has been studying the sculptures of Central Kazakhstan for the past decade [Beisenov, Ermolenko 2014].

Researchers have established that the tradition of making stone sculptures in Sary Arqa dates to the Late Bronze Age, when the settled population of the steppes mastered nomadic pastoralism. Alkey Kh. Margulan believed that the first stone sculptures on the territory of present-day Central Qazaqstan depicted animals [Margulan 1979]. For example, he highlighted rough sculptures, whose outlines resembled the upturned face of a ram (*qoytas*), a horse (*tulpartas*), or a bear (*ayutas*). During this period, sculptures also appeared on which a human face was indicated. One of them was discovered in the valley of the Aksay River. It is challenging to determine who was depicted: a deity, an ancestor, or a revered deceased individual.

Several sculptures from the Bronze Age have been preserved, as well as many standing large, elongated stones called *menhirs*. Many *menhirs* possess a beveled top, which lends them the

appearance of sculptures depicting animals schematically. Most of the *menhirs* were found in the Qarqaraly and Bayanaul Mountains, north of Lake Balkhash, along the Sarysu and Atasu rivers, in the Aqqoytas, Qyzyltau, Ortau, and Aqtau Mountains, which were favorable for cattle breeding. Monuments of this kind received in Qazaq folk toponymy the names *symtas*, *serektas*, *saghantas*, *qanattas*, *qorghantas*, *samalatas*, etc.

The emergence of nomadic pastoralism was accompanied by the complexity of social relationships, the increasing significance of war in nomadic society, and the rise of the social status of a warrior. In the sculptures of the early nomads, the depiction of a warrior prevails.

Stone sculptures from the Saka period, dating from the 7th to 5th centuries B.C., were recently discovered on the territory of Sary Arqa. Currently, approximately three dozen such monuments have been found. Many of these sculptures are associated with burial mounds, and certain were discovered near the so-called ‘mounds with mustache’, specifically the mounds with two arched stone ridges directed towards the east [Ermolenko, Kurmankulov, Kasenova 2016: 129–135] Among the Saka sculptures, several exhibit similarities to Scythian sculptures from the Northern Black Sea Region and the Northern Caucasus. They sometimes depict an *akinak* (dagger), a *chekan* (battle axe), and the details of a naked body (shoulder blades, spine, buttocks, signs of the male gender) Another form of sculpture prevalent during the Saka era pertains to miniature sculptures

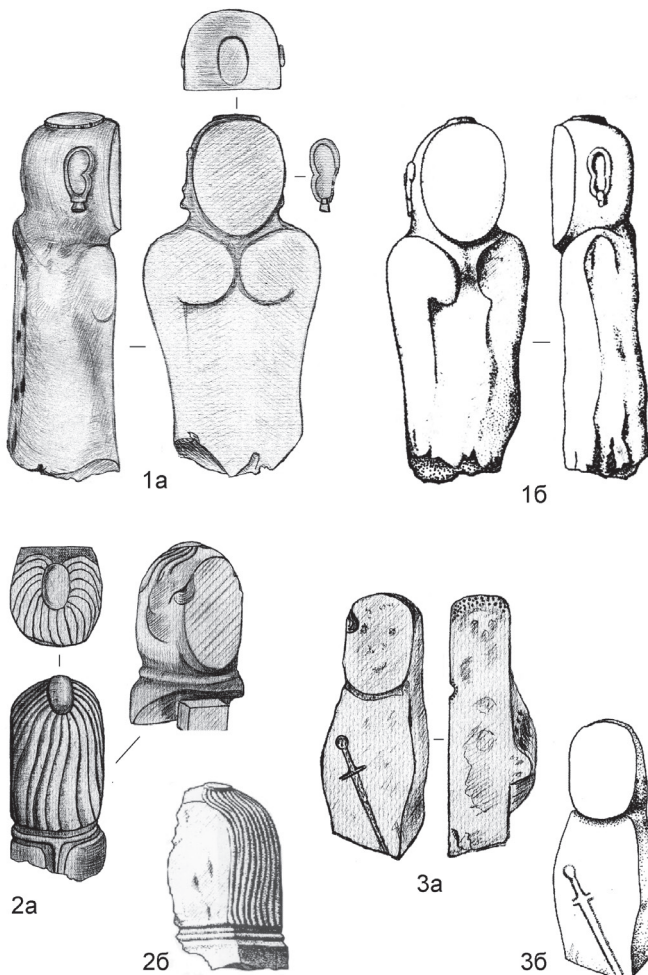


Fig.2. Early Iron Age sculptures
2-сур. Ерте темір ғасырынан
қалған балбал
Рис.2. Изваяния раннего желез-
ного века

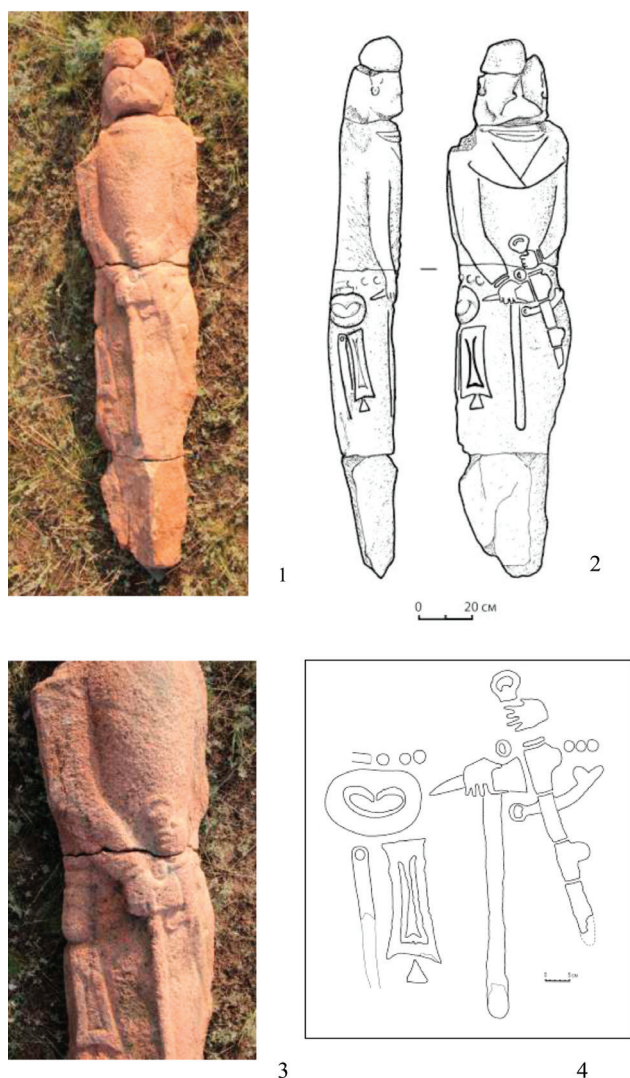


Fig 3. Turkic sculptures. Borili tract. (Ulytau district)
 3-сур. Түркі балбал тасы. Бөрілі ша-
 тқалы. (Ұлытау ауданы)
 Рис 3. Изваяния тюркское. Урочище
 Борили. (Улытауский р-н)

depicting human heads. On the top of the head, there exists a rounded cone-shaped protrusion, or more commonly, a strand of hair (Qaz. *aidar*) Therefore, the *aidar*, which has survived to this day as a child's hairstyle, has ancient origins. As per the Qazaq heroic epic 'Qoblandy Batyr', *aidar* was once the hairstyle of young men (Fig. 2) The cone-shaped protrusion may have represented a case in which the *aidar* was placed. One of the sculptures displaying a protrusion on the top of the head was discovered in the vicinity of the village of Qosaghaly (Zhanarqa District, Karaganda Region) [Kurmankulov, Kasenova 2014: 177–178].

Subsequently, the custom of erecting stone sculptures was practiced during the period of the Turkic Khaganates (VI to VIII centuries). Turkic stone sculptures were usually placed on the eastern side of quadrangular structures, which are usually called 'enclosures' (Fig. 3) The walls of the fences were constructed using slabs that were positioned on their edges. A certain quantity of slabs has consistently been employed in the construction of walls. Several stones were thrown inside the fence. Fences can be built in a single or several fences (from 2 to 8) can be built in a row along the north-south line. The statue was facing east. Before the sculpture, a series of stone pillars were often dug in to the east. These columns are known as *balbals*. From ancient Turkic inscriptions written in runic script, we know that the Turks called *balbal* a stone, which signified

an enemy killed by a warrior. Rows of *balbals* use to extend for numerous meters. Currently, it appears that the *balbals* have fallen and not all have been preserved.

Numerous sculptures from the era of the Turkic Khaganates depict a warrior holding a vessel in his right hand. The warrior's left hand lies on the hilt of his sword. The sword is shown suspended from a belt on which small bags can also hang down. Some sculptures show clothing, such as a robe with triangular openings on the chest, jewelry (earrings, neck decoration, bracelets), and a hairstyle with several braids going down to the waist. Rarely on Turkic sculptures were the legs depicted in a crossed position, meaning that the warrior was feasting while sitting on the floor. Among the Turkic sculptures depicting warriors, there are unique ones. One of them was discovered in the Borili tract (Ulytau) [Kurmankulov, Ermolenko 2014: 25]. In the right hand of this realistic sculpture, instead of a vessel, an axe is shown, which served as a symbol of power in that era.

Besides the statues of warriors, there were also sculptures that depicted only a human head.

The tradition of stone sculptures did not interrupt with the fall of the state of the Western Turks and continued during the Qypchaq period. The main feature of the Qypchaq-type sculptures was that they no longer depicted warriors. Some sculptures depicted a human head, others showed a figure of a man with a vessel in two hands, lowered to his stomach. There are sculptures that show signs of gender, usually female. The prevalence of female sculptures may indicate the high social status of women among the Qypchaqs.

The sculptures of the Qypchaq era are associated with structures that externally resemble mounds. One or more (up to five) sculptures were installed on the eastern side or in the middle of such a 'mound'.

Excavations showed that under the embankment of some 'mounds', in the center of which the statues were erected, there was a powerful stone fence. The statues were dug inside this fence. Such monuments, called 'Qypchaq sanctuaries', have been studied in Qarqaraly (Ablay wintering), Aqtoghay (Zhinishke River) and Shet (Myrzhik Tract) districts of Karaganda Region [Ermolenko 2004]. In the sanctuary on the Zhinishke River an extraordinary female statue with a painted apron have been found.

Near Unirek village (Shet District) an unusual Qypchaq sanctuary with male statues have been discovered [Ermolenko 2004: 52]. Currently, excavations of this monument are underway, which will make it possible to find out its structure and, possibly, obtain dating material.

Conclusion

In the Qazaq Steppe, the practice of erecting statues ceased during the 12th – 13th centuries owing to the strengthening of Islam with its prohibition against depicting individuals. Since the installation of stone sculptures in Europe (Polovtsian sculptures) and Mongolia also ceased around the same time, it can also be associated with the emergence of new cultures and changing worldviews in the High Middle Ages, because these territories had less connections with Islam. However, it is not excluded that an echo of this tradition is the construction of steles (*qayraqtas*, *qulpytas*, etc.) vaguely reminiscent of a human figure, on Qazaq graves.

On the territory of present-day Central Qazaqstan, more than 300 monuments of different times are known: more than 100 of them are *menhirs*, 30 sculptures are from the Saka era and more than 100 stone sculptures belong to the Turkic and Qypchaq periods. Unfortunately, due to the negative impact of both natural and anthropogenic factors, their numbers are decreasing every year.

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