

Pebbles in Ritual and Cult Practice: An Archaeological Context

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This article describes how sharp stones were not only used for production, but also actively used in religious ceremonies and worship rites (altars, funerals). The researchers believe that various symbols or graphic inscriptions carved in the style of graffiti are associated with religious ritual practices of the ancient population of the Bronze Age, and have different meanings. Moreover, that the stones themselves were a symbolic sign of the particular ceremonies. In the mythological view, the idea of the connection between stone and earth (the stone being the son of the earth) can be associated with a common meaning. If light is a source of energy (heat), so stone is also a source of energy. Medieval pebbles with inscriptions are the most studied and numerous categories of material cultural monuments both for Kyrgyzstan and for the whole of Central Asia. The origin of pebbles has long been a subject of controversy among scientists. In this article, the author has tried to describe the problem that has become the controversial subject about the origin of pebbles.

Key words: *Pebble, Monument, Cult, Thematic, Engraved, Thracological, Soul, Birth, Death, Rite, Initiation, Reincarnation, Rebirth, Torgazhak, Swaddled, Epitaph, Epigraphy, Muslim, Burial, Karshi, Karakhanids.*

Introduction

In geology, the term pebbles refers to rounded fragments of rocks of a certain dimension - from one to ten centimetres. They are always found in the form of open beds (gravels) in river beds, on the shores of lakes and seas. In an aqueous medium – in a water flow – the crushing of fragments of pebble material leads to an increase in the quality and determines its advantage over non-rolled fragments of the same rocks, the internal heterogeneity and hidden fracturing of which is much higher (Kulik, Postnov, 2009, p. 12). The main feature of pebbles, their true strength, depends on hardness, and the structure, or coagulation (Kulik, Postnov, 2009. pp. 48-50). Due to its availability, pebbles were the first material that the ancient ancestors of humanity began to use (Serikov, p. 42).

Pebbles were used not only for the manufacture of tools, but were also actively used in ritual and cult practices (Morozova, 2015, p. 64). Whole and chipped pebbles are often found on monuments of a cult nature: sanctuaries, sacrificial sites and burials (Serikov, p. 57). Researchers of engraved pebbles believe that they were associated with the cult-ritual practice of the ancient populations of the Bronze Age and had a variety of semantic meanings (Leontyev, 2001, pp. 111-115). At the same time, engraved pebbles were used in the corresponding rituals and were a symbolic designation of the desired result (Savinov, 2003, p. 51).

The data from ecological analysis confirm the hypothesis about the use of pebbles as twins or other irrational objects associated with magical actions (Savinov, 1996, p. 34). According to the ideas of the Nenets, many spirits appear during childbirth, various actions are taken to protect against them: special plaques are placed, amulets are made, sacrifices are made. A fawn of the same sex as a newborn is sacrificed. Its soul distracts spirits to itself, thereby protecting the baby (Savinov, 2003. No. 2 (14). P.67). In this case, the traces of blows with a metal knife, fixed on the surface of the artifacts, are the result of the ritual of killing the "double", designed to distract the spirits from the real child, [in its] attempt to damage, harm a real person" (Volkov, Kiryushin, Semibratov, 2008. P.334). It was found that the process of trace formation on the studied artifact had three stages: 1) "birth", the process of applying an ornament; 2) "life", during which the product was in the hands of a person for a relatively long time; 3) "death" (resulting in serious damage to the product) under the blows of a metal knife. Traces of this kind of impact overlap the linear traces of ornamentation and the surface of smoothing, which indicates this process as the last one that left traces on the artifact (Batargina, 2013, pp. 129-130).

In this ritual, the ritual of the life cycle – birth/life/death – is performed (Lbova, Volkov, Batargina, Mitko, 2013, pp. 50-58). Various researchers have expressed assumptions regarding the purpose of pebbles and stone tiles (Korneva, 2017, p. 65). The main assumptions being: 1) pebbles were ritual objects associated with the cult of the dead (Couraud, 1986. P.49); 2) pebbles with signs refer to the rites of passage, in particular to the initiation rites, symbolising the death of the initiates and the ritual rebirth to a new life. All these symbols, for thousands of years, have been associated with the ideas of the other world, death and rebirth, reincarnation (Kabo, 2002, p. 36). Engraved pebbles are common on all continents of the earth, but are relatively rare in Africa and Australia. Sometimes they are compared with Australian churingas – they were also made from pebbles – which are human equivalents (Semenov, 2007, p. 71). In America, they are found in the Clovis cultural monuments and are common from Alaska to Patagonia. Paleo-Indian groups brought the custom of “dressed pebbles” to America and keep it to this day (Semenov, 2007, p. 72). In the Eneolithic settlement of Yurtik (Kirov region), oval pebbles were found near the central foci, all of them were of different colours, one was painted with ochre (Morozova, 2015: 64). Such pebbles were also found on Lake Shaitan, at Bronze Age sites in the Komi Republic, the

Ilmurzino Mesolithic site (Bashkiria) (Serikov, p. 57), in Mountain Altai, in Tuva, and at the Minusinsk Basin, Primorye (Kuzina, 1987, pp. 8-9). According to P.P. Efimenko, “painted pebbles had the meaning of totemic symbols, had artistically engraved images on fragments of bone or tiles of soft flint” (Efimenko, 1953, p. 624).

Engraved female images on pebbles are unique (Sinitsyna, Grigorieva, Mednikov, 2018, p. 195). In the cultures of the final Paleolithic of Northern Europe, two engraved female images are found as schematic. This is an abstract drawing of a female body without feet and head (Sinitsyna, Grigorieva, Mednikov, 2018, p. 199). A pebble with an engraving of a female image, where intentional damage to the drawing is revealed, and the presence of specially prepared paint, Sinitsyna considers a figurative-symbolic object, evidence of ritual activity in the Resselin culture (Sinitsyna, Grigorieva, Mednikov, 2018, p. 200). Women ”from Geldrop III-I (North Brabant, Netherlands) was engraved on a rounded lydite pebble (Rozoy, 1978. 123 p. fig. 24), and a schematically static woman from Lanino I / 8 (Valdai Upland, Russia) is shown without clothes (Sinitsyna, 2006, pp. 55-57), in contrast to the “dancing woman” of the Arensburg culture, in which a loincloth is drawn, and clothes and shoes are marked with horizontal lines on the arms and legs (Sinitsyna, Grigorieva, Mednikov, 2018. 205). Researchers believe that the earliest depictions of women in the Sayan-Altai region date back to the Eneolithic era – these are depictions of the so-called "lattice figures" from Kalbak-Tash (Altai) (Kubarev, 2002, p. 17). There are similar images among the petroglyphs of Chuluut (Northern Mongolia) (Novgorodova 1984, p. 48).

The largest series of ornamented pebbles (Fig. 1) is known thanks to the research by Savinov of the Torgazhak settlement in the south of Khakassia (Karasuk time). The settlement, according to some characteristic features of artifacts, was attributed to the late stage of the Karasuk culture and dated to the 10th-9th centuries BC e. (Savinov, 1996, p. 46). According to Leontyev, the Torgazhak engravings are a variation of the image of a sacred deity - a goddess or a deified woman. He sees in the Torgazhak pebbles the image of the main female character of the pantheon of the late Karasuk tribes. In his opinion, the three-foldness of the image indicates the connection of the deity with the three spheres of the universe, and the decor of the “clothes” reproduces the structure of the cosmos in vertical and horizontal aspects (Leontiev, 2001, pp. 111-114). “Dressed” stones, as Karl Schuster believed, originally represented the spirits of ancestors, then their meanings are focused on the social structure and can be the emblem of society (Shuster, 1996, 317 p). The female appearance of the Torgazhak engravings is ornamented with plant symbols: tree-like signs (“Christmas trees”) play the role of a braid or loose hair, decorate a headdress, and also decorate the so-called “apron” (Ladygina, 2013, p. 38).

Savinov considers the Torgazhak pebbles to be works of ritual and applied art aimed at regulating the life cycle of women, the successful birth of children and the preservation of the "soul" of a child who has not yet been born (or died) and ensuring the process of transition

and reincarnation (Savinov, 2003. P. 48). He also noted that the drawings on both sides of the pebbles represent an anthropomorphic, as if "swaddled" figure (Table XXVI), like images of swaddled children. The pebble itself is a votive reproduction of a cradle with a swaddled baby placed in it. Some pebbles (group I) convey the bodies of pregnant women, which in semantics is quite associated with the image of the cradle (Savinov, 1996, pp. 43-44).

In the Chalcolithic materials of the Tytkesken-2 settlement, there is a sample similar to the Torgazhak pebbles. According to Yu.F. Kiryushin, this may indicate the similarity of cultural traditions and ideological (religious) ideas of the population of the Sayan-Altai Upland in the Eneolithic and Late Bronze Age (Kiryushin, 2006, p. 87). E. A. Novgorodova believes that the anthropomorphic figures from Chuluut and Kalbak-Tash are images of mothers/progenitors (Novgorodova, 1984, p. 89).

In mythological material, stone is often an active element. The concept of the connection between stone and earth (stone being the son of the earth) (Gracheva, 1989, p. 115) can be referred to as universals. The stone represents the original nature (essence, origin), the original appearance. If Light is a generative principle, then the Stone also represents a generative principle. If Light is a source of energy (heat), then Stone is also a source of energy (Kondybai, 2008, p. 158).

According to pagan ideas, the soul after the death of a person finds refuge in a grave monument (Tolstoy, 1995, p. 207), the "second body" of the soul (Ermolin, 2009, pp. 33-39). The famous Khanty hero Tonya is born because his mother swallowed a pebble (Materials on Khanty folklore, 1978, p. 41). People turn into stones (Myths, legends, fairy tales of the Khanty and Mansi, 1990, pp. 352,391,463). According to the Sakha-Yakuts, upon initiation into shamans, the soul of the chosen one should be born (anew) from a stone (Kondybai, 2008, p. 159). Urahais-Lamaites say that the soul of a deceased shaman lives in stones (Katanov, 1894, p. 20). The Tajiks have preserved the idea of the reincarnation of the spirit. It is believed that the spirit of the deceased is embodied in a stone (Babaeva, 1993, p. 29, 78). In the Khakass epos, pebbles together with sand perform a creative function (Comparative-Historical Grammar of Turkic Languages, 2006, p. 689). The researcher of the epic Altyn-Aryg V.E.Mainogasheva refers to the early mythological tradition of "the moment of the miraculous appearance of Altyn-Aryg into the world, when it emerges from a stone inside the White Rock in military armor, and after death it turns, together with its horse, into sand and pebbles "(Comparative-historical grammar of the Turkic languages, 2006. p. 688). Painted pebbles are perceived as containers for souls (Sinitsyna, Grigorieva, Mednikov, 2018, p. 205). The pebbles painted red between the legs of the buried woman (Sopka 2 burial ground) allow us to consider the pebbles as a symbol of new life (Serikov, 2013: pp. 131-132). N. Yu. Kungurova considers pieces of hematite and other objects of red rock placed in graves to be "a symbol of rebirth and warmth, a sign for the return of the soul to the world of the living" (Kungurova, 2005, p. 33). Painting objects with blood, ochre and other red paints could give

them supernatural strength, could symbolise the "revival" of objects or their "feeding" (Essays on the cultural genesis of the peoples of Western Siberia, 1994, p. 160).

According to the views of the Karachai-Balkarians, the expression "tuugan tash" means "homeland", when literally translated, sounding like "the stone where you were born", "son of tash" - a tombstone or "tash gula" - a stone coffin, sarcophagus (Maremshaova, 2002.<http://www.balkaria.info/library/m/maremshaova/es.htm>). The important cult value of pebbles is demonstrated by one of the exhibits of the National Museum of the Republic of Tuva, named after V.I. Aldan Maadyr, which is a family talisman (eeren), a pesto-like stone placed in a model of a cradle, which serves as a symbol of a baby (Dyrtyk-ool, Opey-ool, 2006, Fig. 6). According to the beliefs of the Yakuts, a child's kut (oh kut) can fly away at the slightest fear, which is why there was a custom to put flat river pebbles in the cradle under the baby's pillow (Bravina, 2005, p. 41).

In a number of burials at the Koshibeevsky burial ground, there are elements of the Sarmatian burial rite, in particular, the position of the bones and teeth of a horse in the grave, pebbles at the head of the grave, specially broken objects, characteristic of the Sarmatians (Trubnikova, 1965, p. 55). In the burial ground of Munchaktepe II (V-VIII centuries. Pap district, Namangan region) in crypt 5, where burials in reed coffins were carried out, a "pillow" was specially placed under the head of the dead. Plants, earth, fabrics and pebbles were used for the "pillows" (Matbabaev, Khoshimov, 2010. p.229). For some of the deceased at the Gurmiron burial ground, a special burial bed was made of small pebbles. In one case, the head of the deceased was on a pebble pillow (Gorbunova, 1975: 33). When opening the burial of Shah Rokh, one interesting and mysterious detail attracted general attention - next to the skeleton of the deceased, wrapped in a shroud, there was a small wooden box, such as a school pencil case, but of a larger size, which contained 144 pieces of small river pebbles (pebbles) of grey and white flowers (Semenov, 1949, p. 46). Folk Nenets ethnography explains the need to build strong grave structures, precisely because they will not be broken from the outside by real beings or disturbed by some supernatural forces (Gulevsky, 1993: 124). The Türks put stones and a stone stele with inscriptions on the grave of the dead (Sadri, 2002, p. 213).

Despite the fact that over time the rite became Islamised, the stones continued to retain magical power in prayers (Maremshaova, 2002. <http://www.balkaria.info/library/m/maremshaova/es.htm>). In the funeral rituals of the Karakhanid Turks, and then representatives of the Mongol tribes, small pebbles - kairaks with epitaphs - were placed on the graves of their deceased ancestors (Goryacheva, 2021. <http://www.ctaj.elca...tyi/c/c021.html>). Kairak (قارياق - kairak) was one of the earliest grave monuments, laid on the earthen hillocks of Muslim burials in Central Asia (Masson, 1953, p. 33).

Such are the stones-kairaki – smoothly rounded large river pebbles of irregular or round shape, elongated up to 90 centimetres in length. This term is used in the territory of Central Asia in a narrow sense to denote gravestones (شاترىفة) in the form of pebbles – pebbles from more or less hard mountain rocks, in the southern regions most often from quartzous micaceous sandstones of a dark grey colour or with a faint brown tint. The local population of Tajikistan called kairaki "sangi rui kabr" (gravestone stone), "kairosangi mazor" (stone-kairak mazara), "hatti rui kabr" (grave inscription), "kairosangi kabriston" (cemetery stone-kairak, 1979) (Mukhtarov . P.23) or simply "sangi obi" (Babaeva, 1993. P. 29,78).

Kairaks were consumed in their natural form without additional surface treatment and without any changes in their natural form (Masson, 1956, pp. 3-8). The time of their distribution covers the period from the 11th to the 19th centuries (Dodkhudaeva, 1981, pp. 116). Tombstone kairaks with epitaphs are the most studied and most numerous categories of monuments of material culture of medieval Kyrgyzstan, but also of the whole of Central Asia (Goryacheva, 2021. <http://www.ctaj.elca...tyi/c/c021.html>).

We recorded kairaks in the course of epigraphic studies in the summer of 2015 in the village of Gubdin to the west of the city of Karshi. A gravestone – an elongated kairak, found on the territory of the Gubdin cemetery “Kuk tunli ota”, dedicated to ash-shayku al-yāūk al-imam Mahmud ibn Ahmad (died 576/1181) (Fig. 2) – and some fragments of details architectural structures – carved terracotta located in the Kusam at a complex in the Pudín village of the Kasan region, 15 kilometres west of Karshi – testify to the existence of memorial inscriptions of the Karakhanid era here (Shonazarov, 2015: 90).

The largest centre for the manufacture of grave kairaks was Samarkand (Masson, 1956, p. 4). In the scientific literature, the most ancient Central Asian tombstone kairak is considered, dated to the middle of the 9th century, with reference to the work of the German scientist M. Hartman. Samarkand pebbles with the name of Sheikh Abu Zakariya, the son of Yahya from Varagser, whose death, according to the epitaph and according to al-Samani, followed in the month of Rabbi 844 (Masson, 1956, p. 8).

Scientists have long been interested in the question of the origin of the kairaks. V.L. Vyatkin, considering the issue of the origin of this type of burial monuments, points to two possible ways of borrowing the custom: “Arabian” and “Turkic” (“Karakhanid”). He notes the appearance of the Kairaks during the establishment of the Karakhanid power in Maverannahr. The famous researcher of the Central Asian kairaks, M.E. Masson, sees the origins of the custom of installing kairaks in the Turkic traditions of installing statues and notes that typologically the kairaks can be associated with a group of monuments known as "stone women". However, comparison of stylistic and ornamental features of kairaks with Middle Eastern material indicates the influence of Muslim classical traditions (Dodkhudoeva, 1983: 13-14). V.L. Ogudin expresses the conviction that “it was a stone in the X-XI centuries. was a



well-known cult object, therefore, the Karakhanid ruler Sayf ad-Daula Malik was buried next to it” (Ogudin, 2006, pp. 180-18).

The kairak found on the territory of the Gubdin cemetery serves as strong evidence that such monuments have been placed here since the time of the Karakhanids and there may have been more of them here. Well-ironed kairaks with inscriptions in large numbers have been preserved on the territory of neighbouring Samarkand, dedicated to many famous fuqaha, theologians who lived in the XI-XIV centuries, in Maverannahr. Research by L. Dodkhudoeva showed that names with nisba an-Nasafi al-Guvidini (imam, d. 586 AH), al-Khalidi an-Nasafi (imam d. 585 AH), Nasafi (518 AH), al-Nasafi (imam, VI century), speak of immigrants from the Karshi oasis. It is known that many theologians of the al-Maturidiyya school came from Neseef, Bazda (Fazli) and other areas of Nakhshab.

It is assumed that in the territory of Karshi and its environs, especially at the cult sites of Pudina, Kasbi, Kavchin and Karshi, there could have been kairaks dedicated to famous theologians. These river boulders with epitaphs give us invaluable facts of the transition period in Maverannahr - from the adoption of Islam to the emergence of centralised states here, as well as these monuments witness events from the Karakhanid era to the conquest of the Mongols.



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Appendix



1. Savinov D.G. Ancient settlements of Khakassia: Torgazhak. SPb .: Center "Petersburg Oriental Studies". 1996. Table. XXVI.



2. Gravestone - kairak found on the territory of the Gubdin cemetery “Kuk tunli ota”.