

UOT 73

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ORIGINS AND SYMBOLISM OF HORSE SHAPED TOMBSTONES IN AZERBAIJAN

Abstract. The appearance of tombstones in the form of a horse in Azerbaijan in the Middle Ages is not an accidental, local or short-term phenomenon. These tombstones appeared when the religion of Islam have been preached for a while and had an uncompromising struggle against idolatry. The fact of their appearance in this era testifies to the vitality of the ancient pagan symbolism of the horse in the worldview of the Azerbaijanis.

The long-term formation of the symbolism of the horse was facilitated by the fact that the horse always gave its owner food, clothing, strength, wealth, an advantage in speed and overcoming long distances. The horse saved lives, personified the valor of a warrior, the courage and luck of a hunter, was an attribute of power and being chosen.

The cultivation of the symbol of the horse among the Azerbaijanis continued after the adoption of the religion of Islam. This ancient cult led to the widespread use of tombstones in the form of a horse.

The simultaneous appearance of such tombstones among many Turkic people suggests that the cult of the horse and its symbolism were universal for all nomadic and semi-nomadic Turkic tribes of the Eurasian continent.

Key words: tombstone, stone horse, kurgan, Azerbaijani folklore, mystical carrier of the soul.

Introduction. The earliest images of wild and later domesticated horses in Azerbaijan were found among the petroglyphs of Gobustan and dated to the Eneolithic and Early Bronze Ages (5th–3rd millennium BC). In these

petroglyphs, a special cultivation and mystification of the image of a horse cannot be observed yet. In the petroglyphs of Gobustan, the horse is just an important attribute of hunters [1, pp. 99, 105, 125].

Early evidence of the cultivation of the horse symbol appears in the Iron Age (1st millennium BC) and is associated with the fact that at that time the horse turns into an important attribute of a warrior – protecting, bringing victory, power, wealth and freedom. Early ritual burials (kurgan) of the horse together with the deceased owner in barrows date back to this time. According to Herodotus, who reported this, the meaning of the burial of the horse was that the horse served the buried hero in the afterlife, and to safely reach its distant destination” [2, p. 189].

Military-political contacts and the permanent settlement of the Scythian tribes in the South Caucasus led to an even greater spread of the cult of the horse in this region. The horse becomes an indispensable attribute of a warrior, and his images are constantly present on the golden objects of the grave inventory.

The interpretation of the main material. Further cultivation of the horse and its transformation into an important symbol of religious and ideological beliefs is also observed in the ancient era. The deification of natural principles and elements, the mythologization of the most important processes and phenomena of the life of nature and society were expressed through various zoomorphic symbols. One of them was the symbol of a horse, personifying the element of rain. In the Avesta, the deity of rain – Tishtriya is described as a white horse, bringing necessary hydration and rain to the earth. Sculptural images of a horse appear on cult sacrificial vessels. The presence of numerous aquamaniles in the form of a horse in the grave inventory of this time also testifies to the significance and role of the horse symbol in the religion and ideology of this era. Aquamaniles from a protome horse were used in rituals for making rain and sacrifices [3]. During the burial, these aquamaniles were placed in the grave, next to the buried.

The cult of the horse, widespread among the Scythians, Huns, and later among the Khazars and Oghuz Turks, continued to spread in the early Middle Ages. The important role of the horse in life was not limited only to the needs for military mobility, which was provided by the horses of mounted warriors. Animal husbandry was the main type of economy that provided food for the local tribes. The natural, climatic and geographical features of the South Caucasus region led to the emergence of distant pastures here, in

which, with the onset of summer and the drying of grasses in the lowlands, herds of animals were driven away to high mountain pastures. With the onset of autumn, the herds wandered back to their winter camps. All this difficult work of grazing large herds of animals, the shepherds could not do without the help of fast horses. Thus, along with the military function, the horse was an important element in the economic life of the nomads.

The role of the horse in military and economic life was further enhanced in the Middle Ages. At that time, the horse turns into a male symbol of freedom, heroism and high social and property status. It was these factors that predetermined the appearance of numerous tombstones in the form of stone statues of horses in the territories inhabited by Azerbaijani Turks. The stone horse, forever standing on the grave, symbolized heroism, prowess, social and property status of its owner, who had gone to another world. The “petrified” horse was always waiting for its owner and symbolized his presence nearby and his return.

Symbolism of the horse covered many ethno-cultural and religious-ideological narratives, among which the symbolic images glorified in myths and folk epics were of great importance. One of the important folk narratives that postulate the special role and significance of the horse in the acquisition of heroic qualities by its owner is the ancient Azerbaijani epic “Koroglu” (“Son of the Blind”). In the epic, the protagonist’s favorite fast horse (qyr-at/black horse) helps to show military prowess and courage, saves him from enemies, instantly reunites him with his beloved, warns of danger, etc. The mystical genealogy of the horse “Gyr-at” in the epic – “explains” the magical ability of the horse to deliver its owner to the desired and hard-to-reach goal in the blink of an eye: “In search of his stray mare, the father of the protagonist of the poem, named Aly, finds her grazing alone on a moonlit forest lawn late at night. Suddenly, a bright ray of light falls from the sky onto the lawn, along with which a heavenly winged horse descends onto the lawn, which immediately copulates with a grazing mare. Bewitched by what he saw, Aly remembers this mare and by taking her to the herd, begins to follow her. After the allotted time, the mare gives birth to two stallions, black and white. Dying, Aly punishes his son Rovshan (in the epic, Rovshan acquires the name “Koroglu” – “Son of the Blind”), before teaching the stallions to ride, keep them for 40 days in a dark closed stall so that sunlight does not fall on them. If he does what he says, then the stallions will grow invisible magic wings that will make them the fastest horses. Rovshan waited 39 days, could not stand it,

and opening the gate went into the stall to see the horses. At this time, a ray of sunshine fell on a white stallion, who immediately lost his magic wings. The black stallion (qyr-at), having stood for another day in a dark stall, retained its magical invisible wings and became the fastest horse, about which it was said that he did not run, but “fled” [5, p. 49-58].

Thus, in the medieval folk epic, the horse is designated as a mystical vehicle that quickly delivers a person to his destination/dream. The ability of a horse to carry a person through space and time is also extrapolated to a mystical transition after death to another/afterlife.

Perhaps the formation of such an image of a mystical carrier horse was also facilitated by the Qur’anic story about the Magical night transfer of the Prophet Muhammad through the heavenly spheres (Miraj) to the abode of Allah. Along the way, the prophet visits both heavenly Paradise and Hell. The image of a magical horse (Burak), which transferred the Prophet Muhammad to the heavenly and afterlife, was extrapolated to the image of an ordinary earthly horse, which symbolically transfers the soul of its deceased owner to Paradise [5, p. 232-241].

In medieval cemeteries, along with tombstones in the form of a horse, with identical semantics, a large number of tombstones in the form of a ram were found. The formation of the symbolism of the “mystical carrier” in the form of a ram was facilitated by common Turkic folklore plots, among which the Azerbaijani “Tale of Malik-Mamed” stands out. The hero of the tale, the young prince Malik-Mamed, in search of a div who stole the apples of youth from his father’s garden, descended into the underworld. The older brothers who remained at the top cut the rope and left the younger brother in the underworld. In order to ascend to this / bright world, Malik-Mamed had to contrive there and jump on a white ram. But the white ram contrived and threw him onto the back of a black ram, which took Malik-Mamed even deeper into the other world.

Thus, the fairy tale postulates the transfer of a person by a mystical ram from the world of the living to the world of the dead and vice versa. This folk tale clarifies the semantics of gravestone rams on graves. The ram, on which the life of a nomad depended, was also perceived as a symbol of life, including life after resurrection in the afterlife.

The formation of the cult of the horse, and the spread of its monuments on the graves, was facilitated not only by the factor of the high speed of movement of the horse. At the same time, the horse was an attribute of the

property status of its owner. The horse was a very expensive animal, and the presence of its monument on the grave was unambiguously perceived as a sign of the material security of the buried person's social exclusivity. In Azerbaijani folklore, the expression has still been preserved: if they want to say about someone that he is low-born, a commoner, they say that he is not on horseback, but on foot (piyada).

All these factors influenced the formation of the tradition of installing horse stone monuments on medieval graves. Such monuments were found in large numbers in such regions of Azerbaijan as Karabakh (Kelbajar, Lachin, Goranboy, Barda), in Shirvan, Nakhchivan, Mughan, Shamkir, Tovuz, as well as in the regions of compact residence of Azerbaijanis on the territory of modern Georgia (Dmanisi, Marneuli, Bolnisi, Qardabani) and Armenia (Sisian).

Each of these regions has its own stylistic features of grave monuments in the form of a horse. With all the stylistic diversity, two main types of horse images can be distinguished: The first and earliest type depicts a horse with separately doubled front and hind legs. Such a stylistic decision led to the fact that over time, the legs of most of these monuments were broken off. The second type depicts a horse whose legs are only slightly traced on a solid block of stone. The fore and hind legs of such monuments are not distinguished from the general silhouette of the horse's figure. Monuments in which the legs are not separated from the general stone mass of the tombstone are better preserved.

The vast majority of gravestone monuments of a horse depict saddled horses waiting for their owner. In such tombstones, a luxurious horse saddle, rich harness and horse decorations testify to the high social status of the buried.

On grave monuments in the form of a horse, the names of the buried, the date of his death, Koranic texts, excerpts from the classics of Eastern poetry and various epitaphs were written in Arabic script. An example is the inscriptions from the grave monument in the form of a horse from the collection of the Azerbaijan National Museum of Art: "The owner of the grave is Babur, the son of Orkhan. Treasure of the heart of Sadi Agha..." [6, p. 71].

On some grave monuments in the form of a horse there are images of a tribal tamgha, indicating the ethnic origin of the buried. Such a monument was found in the territory of compact residence of Azerbaijanis in Georgia and is kept in the Mtskheta branch of the Lapidary of the State Museum of Georgia.

On one side of the stone figure of the grave horse, a warrior is depicted, on the other, a saber hanging from the saddle is depicted. On the horse's croup there is a tamgha of the Turkic clan Alayundlu, who participated in the ethnogenesis of the modern Azerbaijani nation [8]. There is an inscription on the neck of the horse: "The owner of the grave is Karam Khan. 741/1341" [9, p. 16].

Conclusion

1. The symbolism of the stone horse on the grave monuments goes back to primitive and ancient religious and ideological beliefs, according to which the white horse brought rain, moisture and increased vitality. The appearance of burials of the horse together with the owner in the burial mounds of the Iron Age speaks of the important role of the horse in this and the afterlife of the hero.
2. In the ancient period, the iconic symbol of the horse was still associated with vital energy. Cult vessels (aquamanile) in the form of a horse were used for sacrificial libations on the ground in the rite of causing rain.
3. In the medieval era, to the previous attributes of the horse symbol, a narrative is added about an indicator of the social and material status of the person buried in the grave.
4. The new semantics of the mystical horse also appears in the new religion – Islam. The magical horse of the Prophet Muhammad in the "Night Ascension" (Miraj) takes him from the physical world to heavenly paradise and hell, and also delivers him to the abode of Allah.
5. In myths, fairy tales and legends, the horse symbol acquires the mystical discourse of a magical carrier that "delivers" the deceased to the other world and continues to serve him in the afterlife. A symbolic image of the winged soul of the buried (man-headed bird) riding a horse to the afterlife (paradise) is on a tombstone of the 16th century from the Zangezour village of Urud (the territory of modern Armenia) [9, p. 21].

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AZƏRBAYCANDA AT ŞƏKİLLİ MƏZAR DAŞLARININ MƏNŞƏYİ VƏ SİMVOLİZMİ

Məqalə Orta əsrlərdə Azərbaycan ərazisində geniş yayılmış at şəkilli məzar daşlarının mənşəyi və simvolizminə həsr olunmuşdur. Ən erkən belə məzar daşları XV ə. aiddirlər, lakin onların simvolizminin mənşəyi daha erkən dövrlərə təsadüf edir. Bu qədim simvolizmin ən erkən nümunələri dəmir dövrünün kurqan dəfnlərində meydana gəlmişdir. Bəzi o dövrün kurqanlarında at skeletləri aşkar olunmuşlar. Qədim inama əsasən, həmin kurqanlarda at sahibi ilə birgə dəfn olunmaqla, ona axirətdədə qulluq etməli idi. Orta əsrlərdə atın sahibi ilə bərabər dəfn edilməsindən imtina edildi. Dəfn olunan qəhrəmanın məzarı üstündə onun atının daş heykəlinin ucaldılması ənənəsi yayıldı. Buna şərti olaraq, dəmir dövründən başlayan qədim ənənənin davamı demək olar. Bununla belə, məzar üzərindəki at simvolik mənada – dəfn olunmuş qəhrəmanı axirət dünyasına çatdıran əbədi nəqliyyat vasitəsi kimi dərk olunurdu.

Açar sözlər: məzar daşı, daş atı, kurqan, Azərbaycan folkloru, Axirət dünyasına aparən mistik nəqliyyat vasitəsi.

Тельман Ибрагимов (Азербайджан)

ПРОИСХОЖДЕНИЕ И СИМВОЛИЗМ НАДГРОБНЫХ ПАМЯТНИКОВ В ВИДЕ КОНЯ В АЗЕРБАЙДЖАНЕ

В статье исследуется происхождение и символизм средневековых надгробных памятников Азербайджана в виде каменных коней. Самые ранние надгробные памятники в виде коня в Азербайджане датируются XV веком, но символизм этих памятников имеет более древние корни. Самыми ранними проявлениями этого символизма считаются курганные погребения знатных воинов эпохи железа. В некоторых курганах обнаружены скелеты коня, захороненного вместе с его хозяином. По вере древних предков азербайджанцев, конь должен был служить своему хозяину и в загробной жизни. В средние века захоронение коня было заменено установкой их каменных фигур над могилой усопшего героя. Каменный конь символически должен был перенести своего усопшего хозяина в мир иной и вечно служить ему там. Таким образом, можно сказать, что традиция захоронения героя вместе со своим конем продолжалась и в эпоху средневековья. Вместе с тем, каменный могильный конь символизировал мистический перенос души своего хозяина в загробный мир.

Ключевые слова: надгробный памятник, каменный конь, курган, азербайджанский фольклор, мистический переносчик души.