Chapter 2

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Outline of the Genesis of Anthropomorphic Stelae. Cult Places

1. Introduction

The Turkic people, whose vanguards appeared at the Volga Region probably at the turn of the 10th and 11th centuries and then quickly migrated to the west, crossing the Don and Seversky Donets rivers, are known under various names. They were specified in geographical descriptions, chronicles, historical accounts and reports from journeys related to the 10th – 14th centuries. Oriental sources (Arabic, Iranian, Armenian and Georgian) identified the new wave of nomads as "Kipchaks". In the Ruthenian annals they are called "Kumans" and "Polovtsians", while in Byzantine chronicles they are described as "Kumans" or "Komans". In Hungarian reports they are named the "Kuns" (Gurkin, 2000, 6).

The oriental sources include information concerning both the early history of the Kipchaks and the "European" episode of the Polovtsians. Reports by travellers and scholars are extremely valuable research tools in regards to the customs, daily living conditions and spiritual spheres of these nomads. Authors of these significant works were: Tamim Ibn Bahr (8th/9th century), Ibn Chordadbek (9th century), Ibn Fadlan, Al Masudi, Al-Istahri (10th century), Mahmud of Kashgar (Turk who written in Arabic language), Al Gardizi, Al Bekri (11th century), Al Idrisi (12th century), Ibn Said (13th century), Rashid ad Din, Abul Fida (13th/14th century), and Ibn Batutta (14th century). The most reliable European studies include the Byzantine sources. Due to contacts with nations living in the periphery of the Black Sea, Byzantium always possessed detailed information acquired through diplomatic, military, trade and cultural means. Topics related to the Turkic people have been addressed by former leaders, servicemen, clergy and also members of aristocratic families, including those belonging to the inner tsarist circle. Reliable reports concerning the Pechenegs and Polovtsians are contained in the Alexiad, written by Anna Komnena (1083-1155). The princess acquired her information from the officials and servicemen of her father, tsar Alexius I. Her comments are related to the European history of the Polovtsians. Sources from the Slavic circle include the "Primary Chronicle" covering the years 852-1113 and, starting from 1054, reporting the stormy relationship between Ruthenian princes and Polovtsians khans. It lists the names and nicknames of the Polovtsian khans, and

briefly informs about the tactics of the Polovtsians in relation to the Ruthenian princes and people living in the area. It contains reports about alliances which were strengthened through arrangements and marriages between the heads of the Polovtsian families and Ruthenian noblemen. Sometimes the annals provide specified data concerning the abundance of the nomads' troops. Unfortunately, the chronicle does not include any details related to Polovtsian everyday life or special ceremonies, nor descriptions of the appearance, attire or weaponry of the Polovtsians. Another Old Russian source is the epic "The Tale of Igor's Campaign" written ca. 1187-1188 and referring to events of 1185. The work describes a Ruthenian military expedition against the nomads; its authenticity is still debated by historians and linguists. Records detailing relations with the nomads were also included in later codes: the Laurentian Codex of the second half of the 14th century, the Hypatian Codex of the beginning of the 15th century and in the Radziwiłł Chronicle (Königsberg Chronicle) of the 12th century preserved in a 15th century copy. The last includes splendid, colourful images showing Polovtsian fighting tactics. These miniatures provide information about the nomads' attire, ornaments, weaponry and means of transport.

The Ustugski Chronicle, describing the history of the Rus from 852, dates from the first quarter of the 16th century. The narration maintains the form of laconic sentences describing the most important events of the following years. It contains information about battles between the Ruthenian princes and the Polovtsians, called here the "Totars". Sources concerning the Polovtsians coming from Central Europe include the "Chronicle of Gallus Anonymus". It contains short notes concerning several attacks of Polovtsian reconnaissance troops on the Sandomierz region that took place in first decades of the 12th century. Their subsequent presence in Polish lands was related to military interventions during the dynastic competitions. As mercenaries alongside the Ruthenian troops, they attended battles of Vladyslav II the Exile against his half-brothers in 1146 (Zientara, 1978, 96). There are also known records from Armenian and Georgian sources. The substantial information was included by Matthew of Edessa (Mettew of Urha) in his chronicle describing causes of the appearance of Kipchaks and Kimaks at the Transvolga. He additionally listed names of the tribes.

Based on reports of Arabic travellers (Al Masudi, Abu Dulaf, Hudud Al Alem book) along with ethnic, toponymic and linguistic research, a hypothesis was put forward that at the turn of the 9th and 10th centuries the Kipchaks, being the eastern flank of the Kimaks, acquired independence. They created their own administration of sorts, extending over territories from the western basin of Irtysh River to the North Aral and the southern and eastern foothills of the Ural Mountains. The westernmost federate were Kumans who occupied steppes from the Aral Lake to the southern Ural. They were neighbours of Pechenegs from the west, of Oghuz from the east and Bulgarians from the north. Supposedly, they were related to the Kipchaks as the first crossed the Volga and occupied the area

of the Black Sea Steppes (Kumiekov, 1987, 15-23). According to the information of Ibn Said and Abul Fida in the 11th century, the Volga River became the border dividing the Kipchaks into two distinct factions: western (the Polovtsians) and eastern Kipchaks.

The turn of the first millennium was characterised by an unstable political situation in the area of south and east Europe. During the following four centuries the steppes have been crossed by several waves of people, which contributed to the reduction of settlement focused primarily at rivers and in a range at the Black Sea coast. The Polovtsians crossing the Volga were an efficient group consisting of Turkic and Mongol tribes already federated in the area of western Asia. The alliance was consolidated to such a degree that subduing people living in the area of south and east Europe, and taking over the political and economic control on these lands, was a smooth process not accompanied by the destruction and economic collapse seen during earlier waves of invasions by Iranian and Turkic nomads.

The West Kipchaks (the Polovtsians), the descendants of Asian Turks, brought with them to Europe a rich material and spiritual culture. One of the most important elements of their beliefs was the cult of ancestors. The Manism was a significant part of the religion of the early Turks. It was cultivated by the Kimaks, Khakaz, Uighurs, Yenisei Kirghiz and Kipchaks. Archaeological material includes sites associated with the cult of ancestors, where periodically ceremonies for departed souls were carried out (the so called sacrifice-stone enclosures¹) and, closely related to them, stone symbols in the form of rough stones including runic inscriptions² (the so called balbals) and the anthropomorphic stelae.

The Polovtsians did not erect balbals (e.g. Fedorov-Davidov, 1966, 192). However, they constructed cult-sacrifice sites within which they erected anthropomorphic statues and made sacrifices during periodical ceremonies

1 Literatim in the literature: поминальные оградки, жертвенно-культовые оградки etc. The word **ограда** (Russian) means: fence, hedge, hurdle. In the overall context of these establishments and, specifically, given the role of the „fenced”, inner space within the spiritual sphere of the Turkic people, it seems that using the Polish word „ogród” or „ogródek” („garden”, in Polish etymologically connected with the word „fence”) comes closest to evoking the sense of such close construction than, for example, „cult-sacrifice hedge” which could be understood quite differently in spatial terms. The Turkologist E. Tryjarski also applies term „stone enclosures” to the Turkic cult constructions (Daszkiewicz, Tryjarski, 1982, 183). Russians translate this term into the English language as „cult enclosures”.

2 The stones had an inscription „blbl”. Turkologists are not certain how to pronounce this word. It is assumed that the most probable is the version „balbal”. In Russian literature the vocalisation is rendered **балбал** (von Gabain, 1953, 549). The word balbal was translated as: 1. stone, 2. enemy, 3. brought as a sacrifice (after W. Kotwicz, J-P Roux: Daszkiewicz, Tryjarski, 1982, 25). It symbolised a slain enemy (L.R. Kyzlasov, 1964a, 352).

for departed souls. It is known that erecting balbals together with making sacrifices for the dead was practiced among the Oghuz. However, there is no source information, nor has it been confirmed through archaeological research, that anthropomorphic stelae were erected within cult-sacrifice establishments among other Turkic tribes inhabiting the European steppes in the Middle Ages³. Relics of the cult of ancestors survived in the environment of Turkic people to the present day. Wooden and stone statues have been made by Turkmens, Kazakhs, Bashkirs, Chuvash, Yakuts, etc. despite the fact that they were within the influence of the major monotheistic religions (ethnographic data of 1940s-1960s). In the 18th century the Kazakhs built stone constructions on a square plan, erected anthropomorphic stelae at the eastern wall and sacrificed cattle as seasonal sacrifices. The Tuvans honoured those dead who, when living, had been generally respected by society through erecting wooden or stone stelae even in the 19th century (L.R. Kyzlasov, 1964b, 39).

2. Notes on the Religion and Mythology of the Turks on a Background of Reception of Foreign Cultural Influences

Places that assumed an aura of stability and clan unity were points of reference in the perception of both life and the afterlife among the nomads, whose particular lifestyle influenced their awareness and forms of beliefs. Houses could not play that role because, due to the mobility coerced by natural conditions and their model of economy, the nomads did not have fixed dwellings. The role of such centres had been assigned to burial grounds („resting places of the dead ancestors“), initially located in outstanding natural forms of terrain such as caverns, ravines, and many other kinds of mysterious and wondrous places. With the passing of time flat burial grounds were replaced with mounds that, in steppe environments, took the shape of monumental foundations. The visual effect was additionally strengthened by erecting these mounds on elevated terrain. Burial structures of all nomads were related to inhabitable structures or means of transport (often a carriage of animals), becoming the magical link between the world of the living and the afterlife. Burial grounds were always situated nearby rivers. Apart from the possibility of having a longer, safe rest

³ Pletneva in her doctoral thesis described the burial of a Tork-Oghuz in which two small, wooden anthropomorphic statues with schematic shapes were found. The finding comes from studies of V. A. Gorodcov of 1901. However, these statues are related to burial and funeral ceremonies, not to ceremonies for departed souls (Pletneva, 1958, 161-162).

in favourable conditions during seasonal migrations, the choice of an area that favoured creating fixed objects which centres of clan unity and identification (in that case – clan burial grounds) was determined by their system of beliefs and the perception of the world. Natural conditions and the role that these places had to play in the awareness of the community contributed to the process of attributing sacred value to them, as they were the links of time and space, of the cycle of life and generations, of human and divine worlds, and of clan unity. Customs associated with ancestor worship evolved; they were expanded and enriched with forms of funeral architecture, such as kurgans and stone structures (mausoleums, sacrifice-cult enclosures and temple complexes). An effect of that evolution was the development of the art of anthropomorphic stelae. These places were visited on a regular basis and hosted burial or remembrance ceremonies attended also by the representations of the dead, which strengthened the bonds in a clan. The syncretic religion of the Turkic peoples was not only integrative but also ceremonial-aesthetic and political-ideological.

During their stormy history, ancestors of the Polovtsians succumbed to stronger nations, within which they entered into not always peaceful contacts. Cultural impulses came from the Chinese, Iranian, Arabic and Manchuria-Tunguska societies. Today it is hard to determine clearly what part of the nomads' beliefs constituted their "primeval" religion and what, in actually, that religion had been. Most information on the original Turkic religion comes from Chinese sources and relates chiefly to the events of the 6th century. These chronicles contain descriptions of rituals, customs and rites governing people linked through dialectal similarity to the same language group. The chronicles mention, among others, rituals in honour of the ancestors, rituals related to the worship of heaven, astronomical bodies and forms of the landscape, etc. (L.R. Kyzlasov, 1964b, 29-31, 38; Sher, 1966, 14; Gumilov, 1972, 73; Gurkin, 2000, 11).

An important role within the mythology of the Turkic people, as well as in many others, was played by an idea of the construction of the world. The holy mountain of the Turks, Ötüken, located in the mountain chain of Khangai, was believed to be the centre of the earthly world, and to arrange it vertically. On the micro-level, the same function was attributed to terrain elevations (drainage divides, fluvial terraces, steep river banks, crags), holy trees, hitching posts and boulders.

The horizontal order was determined by the daily passage of the Sun. The east was the most important direction for the Turkic people. Their observations of the surrounding world and natural phenomena resulted in an association and connection of the sunrise (dawn) with the beginning of animal and human life cycles (birth) and the beginning of floral vegetation (spring). The west, by analogy, was associated to dusk, death and autumn. It was believed that the world of the ancestors was located somewhere to the west or north-west. This orientation was applied to graves in the burial ritual of most Turkic peoples. The

east and the west determined also the horizontal sphere of the world of the living. Spring and autumn were when offerings were given to the spirits of nature. The Chinese chronicles noted that people who died in spring or summer were buried by the Turks in autumn and those who died in autumn or winter were buried in spring; a custom that had its roots deep in the past. Archaeological findings have confirmed that it was practiced also by the people of the Tashtyk culture (von Gabain, 1953, 541; Lvova et al., 1988, 46-49). The seasons of spring and autumn were connected with transition between wintertime encampments and summer pastures. Autumn and spring were also the time of military marches.

The four-sided image of the horizontal world and three-part division of the vertical world were known in the Indo-Iranian culture (the scheme of the horizontal image of the world in the form of squares was known by Scythians), as well as the Ugric and Turkic. The square depiction of the human world surrounded by the circle of the natural world was present also in China. In the culture of the Turkic people who came to Europe, the horizontal order of the world has been described as squares, of which the most important one depicted the sacral middle of the world and was associated with squares, inscribed one into another, located along two crossing axes of symmetry (the so called: „*вавилон*“ – Babylon or „*мельница*“ – mill). These signs were present in the environment of the Proto-Bulgarians in the Old Great Bulgaria and the Kama Bulgaria (e.g. the iconographic of walls of Biliar) and, relatively numerous, in the Khazars Khaganate, mainly as graffiti on the white stone walls of castles of the Verkhniy Saltov, Sarkel, Mayak, on small objects and in the form of amulets (Pletneva, 1989, 96-97; Nakhapetian, 1994, 110-113). The vertical image of the world was presented in the graphic form as the more or less stylised tree with a crown and roots, strongly schematical ladder, or pole with a solar symbol upwards. Similar to symbols of the horizontal world, the vertical signs are present on relics related to the states of the Proto-Bulgarians and Khazars. There are graffiti on bricks and stones of strongholds (Biliar, Sarkel, Verkhniy Saltov, Mayak, Tsimlyansk gorodishche), symbols on small objects and ornaments (arrowheads, stone linings of pottery from the area of the basin of the Seversky Donetsk River, rings from the Dmitrievskoye cemetery) (Pletneva, 1989, 116; Nakhapetian, 1994, 108-109, 114). Within the Alano-Bulgarian section of the Saltov-Mayak culture there are other, intriguing approaches to the vertical image of the world. Among burial inventories of the Alan women three samovar-shaped box-pendants were found (Pletneva, 1989, 106). I.L.Kyzlasov noted that the early Turkic inscriptions in the Köl-Tegin mausoleum describe two levels of the world: heaven and earth.⁴

⁴ The information has been provided to me by prof. I. L. Kyzlasov in May 2012, during my stay in Moscow. For these valuable comments I sincerely thank him.

In the mythology of the central Asian people (Turks, Mongols, Iranians) there are descriptions of heaven and earth adjoining at their ends. Two bowls banded together at their bottoms could have been symbolising this image of the world. This opposition is also associated with the image of a tree, with roots and crown shown antithetically to represent heaven and earth. The image of the third sphere of the world, the underworld, was generated much later and probably under the influence of contact with the major monotheistic religions.

The early origins of shamanism is attested by rock carvings, widely distributed in the basin of the Minusinsk Hollow associated with the Tashtyk culture of the early Turkic tribes of the Sayan-Altay Foothills. They depicted narrative scenes describing the fight against evil powers of nature and diseases, fights against bad spirits, fertility rituals, honouring all powers of nature, spells related to war and hunting trophies (L.R. Kyzlasov, 1990, 261). The earliest testimonies proving the presence of shamanism in the environment of Turks come from the middle of the 6th century (Gumilow, 1972, 82). The Sin-Tanshu Chronicle provides the Chinese transcription of the name of a Turkic shaman – kam (Chinese – gian'), who made sacrifices in open areas. A shaman was placed highly in the hierarchy of Altaic societies. A shaman's pantheon of ancestors included, in addition to people, deities and spirits of nature. During the rite of passage, a shaman became a family's representative in the world of nature, caring for their well-being (Sagalaev, Oktiabrskaya, 1990, 96-97). The shamanic gift was also revealed under the influence of expectations from the community, who needed their own representative in the world of spirits and deities in order to live safely in the natural world. During the trance, a shaman acquired messages that dictated the treatment of or contact with ancestors' spirits. The most important function played by the shaman was to take care of multiplying the number of animal souls ensuring a successful hunting.

Important equipment of a shaman included: a mask, drum, three-horn tiara, armour, bow and arrows. During burial ceremonies a shaman in a mask played the role of "deputy dead" (Motov, 2001a, 69). The attire of a shaman, decorations and a mask emphasised his equity with ancestors, deities, animals, birds and people of both sex.

In the case of Turks, where the social structure was based on a tribe, the natural consequence of the understanding of laws associated with changes of the cycle of life and death was the vertical scheme: ancestors, descendants, and relations between them. It structured the position of a tribe's members in time and space. According to primeval beliefs ancestors did not disappear but guarded and took care of their living relatives, becoming their representatives in the world of souls, spirits and deities. Their death did not mean breaking ties with the family. Therefore, the living tried to maintain the benevolence of their ancestors and keep the harmony of the world, by remaining in close proximity with the dead through establishing contact, passing their names and

legends on to their descendants and fulfilling obligations related to extended ceremonies for departed souls. This cultural model, including the image of the world, shamanism and Manism, as well as mixed burial traditions dated back to the Bronze Age, contributed within the environment of the Turkic people to the creation of the specific form of ceremonies for departed souls that over time was transformed into the cult of ancestors.

The art of stelae originated from the above-mentioned ancestor worship and from the perception of the mythical image of the world. Initially people would set vertical boulders to symbolise the centre of the earthly world, the *axis mundi*, and thus arrange the ceremonial space. Wooden stelae had a similar function. Anthropomorphic statues were an artistic and aesthetic fusion of the old beliefs: they symbolised the tree of life, they were shelter for a specific deceased soul, as well as centres around which rituals of passage to the divine dimension of the world were held and where one could contact one's ancestors. A vessel or a horn held in the dead's hand would very soon become part of the canon of early-Turkic stelae representations. During sacrificial rituals, relatives included their ancestor, personified by the statue, in feasts and remembrance ceremonies. They provided him with food and drink by casting it into the fires burning in pits dug under the stelae. He was talked to and addressed with requests for help. Representations of such feasts and the participants are very rare in the Asian stelae record (L.R. Kyzlasov, 1964b, 34).

3. Anthropomorphic Stelae

„The Kumans build a mound over the corpse and erect a stela for it with its face turned to the east and holding a vessel in a hand in front of a navel” (Travels into the East Countries of Willem de Ruysbroec of the Annum Domini 1253, chapter 10) (4)⁵.

A “stone baba” is a term used to describe an anthropomorphic statue that was adopted both in everyday language and in professional publications. It covers Asian and European stelae coming from various cultural circles with a wide chronology. The concept “baba” had appeared for the first time before the year 1398 in the Novogorod Annals (Fedorov-Davidov, 1966, 166, reference 1). The term “stone baba” appears in journals by servicemen and travellers around the 18th century. Already in the 19th century there were attempts to connect the

5 „Команы насыпают большой холм над усопшим и воздвигают ему статую, обращенную лицом к востоку, и держащую у себя в руке пред пупком чашу”. Translated from Russian by A. Gołębiowska-Tobiasz, translated from Polish by L. Adamus.

etymology of the word with its closest phonetic parallel: "baba" (Turkic "baba"), "balbal", "balvan" (Russian "болван", Old Russian "блѣвань"). The word "baba" appears in many Turkic languages, and was also used in the Old Turkic language. It means "ancestor, grandfather" (Siemienieć-Gotaś, 2000, 21). Pletneva also indicates other possible sources of the term. Namely, she associates the name "baba" with the Turkic "balbal". Another parallel may be the Persian word "pāhlavan" or Uzbek "palvan". Both mean the hero-athlete, however researchers note that these two last terms never refer to a statue (Pletneva, 1974a, 6). The word "balvan" appears frequently in medieval historical sources in relation to the Polovtsian statues. It is probable that the Ruthenian people acquired this word from the Turkic word that was relatively easy to remember and articulate in the Slavic environment. According to Turkologists the word "balbal" was not known in the Kipchak language (Daszkiewicz, Tryjarski, 1982, 26). The language of the Kipchaks had a distinct expression for a statue, „sin-tash” (tur. sîn-taş), meaning „a stone image of the dead” or „a stone image” (Arslanova, Charikov 1974, 232; Siemienieć-Gotaś, 2000, 86, 123).

The tradition of constructing monumental stone sculptures originated in the environment of the Bronze Age cultures of Central and Middle Asia around the 4th millennium B.C. It spread relatively quickly to the region of the Black Sea Steppe. It appeared there among the peoples of the following cultures: Sredny Stog, Low-Mikhailovsk, Kemi Oba, Pit Grave and Catacomb cultures (Gedl, 1985, 190; Krasilnikov, 1999, 6, 12-13; Chochorowski, 1999, 266-269, 273-274, 286-287 et al.). The genesis of this phenomenon is not the topic of this book, although one needs to realise that the art of creating stelae was known earlier in many cultural circles before it emerged in the environment of the Turkic peoples. Due to obvious reasons, the canon of human characters depicted also varied. The Neolithic and Early Bronze Age stelae show schematic human figures carved on the surface of the stone. They have highlighted facial details, whiskers and hands with splayed palms. The stone was processed and polished in such a way that the silhouette carved into it presented an individual with broad shoulders, unseen neck and waist, and without lower limbs. Figures are men – warriors and shepherds – dressed in decorated coats, belted and armed with clubs, axes and pickaxes. Often their sexual attributes are indicated. Sometimes in the lower part of a sculpture images of animals were placed. Similar schematic details and angular shapes on stelae are characteristic of the art of the Kimmerians. On their sculptures there are no facial details depicted. Heads have been highlighted schematically, separated from a body by a drawing of a necklace. Statues had no sculptured limbs. Where legs should have been, the body is symbolically separated from the lower part by a belt. Warriors are armed with bows, knives and short swords. In the early Iron Age anthropomorphic stelae had appeared in the Scythian environment. They present a generalised image of a masculine ancestor-warrior, however without attempt to present individual traits.

An outline of a silhouette, with face, limbs, body and weaponry, was carved in the stone. The Scythians at first started to process blocks of stone to create a spatial sculpture. Incisions highlighted details on the surface of a statue: moustached face, massive necklace, horn held in both hands, belt with acinaces, caftan. Often primary sexual characteristics were marked (Sher, 1966, 32-33; Olkhovsky, 2005, 53-56, 109-117). The art of stelae in the abovementioned cultural circles was associated with burial ceremonies (Olkhovsky, 2005, 78, 117).

Most of the information on the original Turkic religion comes from Chinese sources and relates chiefly to the events of the 6th century, when an alliance of tribes and clans created the First Khaganate of the Turks. The chronicles mention, among others, rituals in honour of ancestors (Gumilov, 1972, 73; L.R. Kyzlasov, 1964b, 29-31, 38; Sher, 1966, 14; Gurkin, 2000, 11). A testimony of these ancient traditions includes, for example, a report of the ceremony that the Khagans of the Western and Eastern Turks attended annually with their notables and emissaries of vassal nations. They would come from remote places to sacrifice sheep and horses in the holy caverns of their ancestors. Another form of this worship involved constructing a wooden structure containing a stela-shaped figure of a dead, with scenes of battles he fought painted on the walls. Prior to entombing the balbals had been erected symbolising a killed enemy (L.R. Kyzlasov, 1966, 206-208). It was not infrequent to have dozens of such stones arranged in rows at the east side of the cult place. Great Turkic warlords and khagans were honoured with cult-sacrifice mausoleums made of bricks or stones. These structures were raised to emphasise the significance of the deceased allies by builders sent by the Chinese emperor. The eastern part of the structure's interior contained stone stelae of the deceased individual and his wife. Sacrifice pits were constructed before the statues. Apart from battle scenes, the walls were covered with inscriptions that glorified honoured heroic exploits and, in some cases, the names of the officers of the Chinese Empire in charge of the mausoleum's construction (L.R. Kyzlasov, 1964b, 23-32). Warriors of the lower ranks were commemorated with wooden yurts or small stone enclosures with an anthropomorphic sculpture, post or rock set by the east wall. Rows of small stones, stretching towards the east, were placed in front of them. One should bear in mind that Turkic sacrifice-cult complexes were not raised above their burial grounds but in a different, specially selected place. This contrasts with Chinese customs, in which zoo- or anthropomorphic stelae were placed nearby graves. The custom of erecting sacrifice-cult complexes was present also in the environment of Uighur and Mongol tribes.

In the 1950s, L. R. Kyzlasov demonstrated that within the Tashtyk culture the cult of the dead developed specific ceremonies. Post-mortem plaster masks were made and then deposited on an effigy made of fabric and wood. Fairly soon they started to make stone stelae depicting the dead (L.R. Kyzlasov, 1964a, 352). Russian researchers formulated a hypothesis that under the First Khaganate of

the Turks the archaic funeral customs were still followed, and consisted of the ceremony being attended by a deceased person or a dummy. The dummy would be clothed and sat in an especially constructed chamber. Some forms of this custom were preserved among the Khazars, and elements were practiced by the Kazakhs (Arslanova, Charikov, 1974, 234) until the 1880s. The rituals were accompanied by a prolonged period of mourning and the custom of leaving the corpses unburied for some time. With time the deceased was replaced by a wooden or stone statue (Motov, 2001a, 81).

The statues of the Turkic people from the Asian lands are characterised by uniqueness of individual representations within the assumed canon of sculpture. Both masculine and – very rarely – feminine statues represent people that contemporary relatives and donors knew and recognised, rendered familiar by means of portrait features, everyday objects, clothes and other details, sometimes overemphasised for the sake of individuality, reflected in stone and presumably also in wood (Charikov, 1976, 160).

An object common to all types of Turkic statues is a vessel held in one or both hands; its symbolism is difficult to interpret it clearly. According to Turkologists and archaeologists specialising in Altaic research, this attribute could represent a sacrifice vessel containing a liquor of immortality. The vessel could also perhaps be filled with pabulum or liquor during periodical ceremonies for departed souls (extensive literature listed in: Daszkiewicz, Tryjarski, 1982, 30-31). The hypothesis explaining the vessel's function as an urn containing symbolic dust of an ancestor seems to be unlikely, due to the shape of vessels (cups, flat bowls) which were not used as urns. According to the ethnographic data within the environment of Turkic tribes a vessel (*saba*) filled with a milky beverage was a talisman that provided wellbeing and fertility in the family. They believed that the full vessel symbolised the source of life. In magic rites it could be used to summon the soul of a child. It is possible that the vessels depicted on the Turkic stelae symbolised the continuous cycle of life and death; the ancestor held in both hands a vessel, filled with souls of his descendants (Lvova et al., 1988, 128-134).

In 1960 Sher analysed the Turkic statues occurring in west Kazakhstan, Semirechye, southern Siberia, Tian-Shan Mountains and Mongolia. Most of the distinguished groups of statues represented silhouettes holding a vessel in one or both hands. Feminine statues occurred only at the Semirechye area, and their amount increased when moving to the west. The Volga River forms a border, behind which they occurred massively. Masculine statues with weaponry and vessels were linked to the representatives of the military aristocratic families of the Turks. Sculptures without weaponry were intended to represent aristocrats who did not practice the art of war (Sher, 1966, 25-26, 57-58). They were characteristic of the Uighur people and of areas under the influence of the Uighur Khaganate. A similar division of the aristocracy has been drawn from

the analysis of later, but genetically linked to Turkic stelae, Polovtsian statues (e.g. Krasilnikov, 1999, 44 c.f. Pletneva, 1974a, 74-75). The blooming period of Asian stone sculpture has been linked to the influences of Sogdian art at the time of the Western Turkic Khaganate stability (603-657). The precise consideration of body part proportions in masculine stelae with weaponry, the softness of the relief lines, the manner of styling facial expressions and above all the realistic representation of hands and fingers have their counterparts in the territories of Sogdiana, and reflect the influences of Buddhist schools.

The statues on which a figure holds a vessel in both hands came from the period of the Uighur Khaganate or were associated with the Uighurs (Sher, 1966, 64). The Uighur statues holding a vessel in both hands were mentioned by another notable researcher of the early Turks, L. R. Kyzlasov. He has drawn attention to the lack of weaponry presentations on stelae, abundance of belt mount sets, head dress details and hats, based on which it was possible to date precisely and establish the cultural affiliation of the figures (e.g. L.R. Kyzlasov, 1964a, 351-352). The Uighur statues were not associated with burial places. They were erected in separate places and, in similarity to other Turkic tribes, they constituted an important element of ceremonies for departed souls.

Statues representing schematic figures holding a vessel in both hands are characteristic of Kipchaks. However, such statues lack portrait features. They do not depict the abundance of details of head dress, ornaments and parts of attire (Charikov, 1979, 181-189; Charikov, 1986, 95-99). Researchers studying Asian stelae have hypothesised that this phenomenon might have been related to a custom of dressing stone statues in fabric robes and headgear that had been specially dedicated for this purpose. This could perhaps explain why, for example, the tip of a statue's head had been modelled so that headgear with attached braids did not slip down. Pole-like or stelae-shaped bodies devoid of decorations and, sometimes, even limbs would be perfect as mannequins upon which to put ceremonial clothing. Some details of a sculpture could have also been decorated with other materials (for example covered with silver or gold foil). It is obvious that such fragile materials as fabrics or metal foils would not have survived to modern times (Ermolenko, 2007, 126-128). The ending of the time period linked to the art of making stelae in Asia is dated to the late 10th or early 11th century (Sher, 1966, 39-40, 65-69).

Fedorov-Davidov supported an opinion that statues found in the Transvolga region are stylistically associated with stelae from the Semirechye and Tian-Shan, from where the idea of cult sculpture were taken by the eastern Kipchaks-Kimaks. According to Fedorov-Davidov's work, they were disseminated in the 10th – 11th centuries in the territory of modern-day Kazakhstan and, together with the Western Kipchaks, appeared in the European steppe region. Although the author pointed out that the Asian statues represent a different canon of poses of figures, he did not attempt to explain changes of the presentation of a

silhouette or the abundance of depicted details (Fedorov-Davidov, 1966, 189). Comparing the context of findings of anthropomorphic stelae in areas occupied by the Polovtsians with complexes known from Asian regions, the author noticed that the Polovtsians did not erect balbals. He believed that stelae were not associated with stone structures similar to the Turkic complexes. However, he indicated that at several sites, already published at the end of the 19th century, there was stone paving upon which stelae were erected. In formulating his conclusion, the stone complexes were not linked with Polovtsian kurgans containing cult-sacrifice places. Fedorov-Davidov demonstrated great scientific instinct and in analysing the context of a finding he stated that these constructions are related rather with statues than with burials and suggested that some ceremonies were probably celebrated around them (Fedorov-Davidov, 1966, 192). Another difference, the research mentioned, was the greater proportion of feminine stelae among findings of stone statues in the Black Sea Steppes in comparison to the Asian regions. The author believed that changes in ceremonies took place in the Semirechye region (Fedorov-Davidov, 1966, 191). He favoured the theory that the Polovtsian babas represented dead leaders and their wives, who were honoured not only by members of a tribe but also by travellers and proved the existence in that region of a cult of ancestors. Similar conclusions were drawn by Pletneva (Pletneva, 1974a, 75-76).

Customs linked to ancestor worship, including the art of stelae, were brought to the steppes of Eastern Europe by the Kipchaks (as far as to Transvolga) and the Polovtsians. The skill of creating anthropomorphic stelae was characterised by proficiency in processing different kinds of stone and wood, artistic value of representations and the timeless aesthetics of the canon. The oldest sculptures attributed to the Polovtsians emerged in the lower basin of Seversky Donets and Priazov in the first half of the 11th century, almost coinciding with the period during which these territories were claimed by groups of nomads arriving from Transvolga. This is evidenced by the manufacturing techniques, iconographic canon including figures presented with a vessel held in both hands, analogous to the Kipchak stelae of the 10th – 11th centuries, and the fact that occupied areas were used as wintering sites from which the Polovtsians would depart to spring and summer pastures or on military marches (Pletneva, 1974a, 61; Krasilnikov, 1999, 24). Initially, there were flat statues in stela-like or pole-like shapes, with faces, hands and vessels that could be associated with similar representations known from Semirechye. The blossoming of the Polovtsian sculptures took place in the 12th and the early 13th centuries. The stelae from that period feature whole silhouettes of standing, half-sitting or sitting characters that are always holding with both hands a vessel on the lap. These are spacial sculptures. They have portrait features. Due to attributes and poses depicted on masculine statues, Russian researchers divide them into two groups: stelae representing the ancestral aristocracy who exercised authority and conducted military

operations (standing statues), and a class of prosperous people whose wealth had been acquired through trade, culture and fiscal policy (sitting statues). The first group are depicted possessing weaponry and riding clothes. The second group include presentations of men who are wealthily attired, yet poorly armed. Similar features can be distinguished on feminine stelae. Standing feminine figures are characterised by rich attire, ornaments and objects suspended at their belts. The stelae representing people as standing are much more carefully processed. These people belonged to the highest social class – free warriors (Turkic “er”) (Siemienieć-Gotaś, 2000, 22, I.L. Kyzlasov, 2004, 111). The existence of a division into two groups with different, complementary functions among the Polovtsian aristocracy dated back to the distant past of their Asian ancestors, which is supported, *inter alia*, by similar a division of the early Turkic stelae (Sher, 1966; Pletneva, 1974a, 75-76; 57-58, Krasilnikov, 1999, 44). As has already been mentioned, the stone stelae were erected only by wealthy members of society. They were located in prominent places, at the tops of older mounds. Each member of the family and wider community passing near the cult place was obliged to honour these ancestors. In addition to the religious aspect, stelae at kurgans played the role of points of orientation, which in these vast areas allowed for efficient communication, finding a wintering place or locating sources of drinking water. The analysis of concentration of stelae sites (found *in situ*) indicates that temples were erected in areas particularly attractive to the nomads, rich in water and pastures. In lower social classes images of ancestors were made from saddle-cloth or wood and were held in yurts⁶. The purpose of regular meetings dedicated to funeral meals was the transfer of past knowledge to future generations and the consolidation of moral standards. The cult of

6 „Тем не менее у них есть какие-то идолы из войлока, сделанные по образу человеческого, и они ставят их с обеих сторон двери ставки и вкладывают в них нечто из войлока, сделанное на подобие сосцов, и признают их за охранителей стад, дарующих им обилие молока и приплода, скота. Других же идолов они делают из шелковых тканей и очень чтут их. Некоторые ставят их на прекрасной закрытой повозке пред водом в стаку и всякого, кто украдет что-нибудь с этой повозки они убивают без всякого сожаления (...). Вышеупомянутым идолам они приносят прежде всего молоко всякого скота и обыкновенного и вьючного. И всякий раз, как они приступают к еде или питью они прежде всего приносят им часть от кушаний и питья” „However, they have some idols made of saddle-cloth, of a human form, and they erect them at both sides of yurts and put inside them something made of saddle-cloth, similar to cones/nodules, and believe it to protect herds, having sacrificed to them plenty of milk, crops and cattle. Other idols are made of silk and they honoured them a lot. Some are erected on beautiful covered carriages in front of yurts and anyone who would have stolen something from such carriage, they kill without regret (...). They bring to the abovementioned idols mainly milk from various farms and pack animals. And each time, when they prepare themselves to eat or drink, they bring them some food and drink.” (Giovanni da Pian del Carpine, History of Mongols, 1244, chapter 3, § I) (2). Translated from Russian by A. Gołębiewska-Tobiasz, translated from Polish by L. Adamus.

ancestors – family guardians together with the sacralisation of the authority manifested, *inter alia*, in the cult of dead khans - turned into the deification of leaders. The need to immortalise prominent and wealthy people who were important for particular families and those subordinated to them turned during the heyday of the Polovtsians into a form of official and ritual art. Its purpose was to represent the monumental image of a mythic ancestor – a hero – as a cult object for the entire community. The image of the dead leader had been transferred into the image of a demi-god: an ancestor of families, their confidant and hero, a masculine guardian of the horde, who belonged to the other world (Fedorov-Davidov, 1976, 102). Qatun became a symbol of the mother-getter, giving immortality to future generations of the tribe (Pletneva, 1974a, 74-76; Pletneva, 1974b, 259-260, Fedorov-Davidov, 1976, 96). This procedure allowed for maintaining strong relations between particular Polovtsian associations and, at the same time, consolidated the social and political position of the aristocracy.

Following the Mongol invasion, the custom of raising stelae was continued until the end of the 13th or first decades of the 14th century. The statue became a pole on which one may see a face, details of clothes and, less frequently, a vessel. The limbs of these characters were not marked.

Stelae- and pole-shaped statues, classified as the oldest and the latest, are androgenic: on one stela both feminine and masculine features were presented. Pletneva explains this with regards to a declining matriarchy and the high position of women in Polovtsian society (Pletneva, 1974a, 74). In the recent century several discoveries of exemplars of metal figural art were found in the steppe areas. These were usually findings devoid of archaeological context; some were discovered in banks of kurgans. These statues were cast in bronze. They usually represent a man-woman hybrid figure with highlighted sexual characteristics (e.g. Spicyn, 1909, 144-147; Khalikov, 1971, 106-112). These objects were connected with the Oghuz-Pechenegs culture and dated back to the 8th – 10th centuries. There are many hypotheses concerning function and significance of these statues. Based on ethnographic studies it has been established that within the environment of the Turkic people the married couple was determined with an expression: *eki baštu* (Turkic "two-head", Siemienieć-Gołaś, 2000, 32) understood as "husband and wife" (Lvova et al., 1989, 203). Figures probably represented a couple of gods, "first parents" (Umay and Tengri), symbolising the protection of the family and ensuring fertility. Statues were perhaps used by shamans, but it is also possible that they were located in sacred places in yurts. The statues have been associated with the cult of ancestors of the Turkic nations. There is a strong probability that this interpretation is the most accurate explanation of these androgenic features in Polovtsian anthropomorphic stelae as well. This is not only because of the close relations between Torks and Pechenegs. We know who the people sculptured on stelae were, thanks to information acquired through studies and analyses of runic inscriptions

and complexes from Central and Western Asia.⁷ On the Black Sea Steppes at older kurgans, there were stone constructions erected within which a couple of sculptures symbolising a married couple from the highest social class had been placed. The masculine statue represented an ancestor of the warrior class (Turkic “er”). On his left hand there was an image of his wife (Turkic “qatun”). Statues had east-oriented faces. They symbolised a pair of rulers: ancestors but also coupled cosmogonic deities (Umay and Tengri). Unusual personality and leadership features in life, frequently paired with early death, contributed to the heroisation and deification of the deceased. The dead became the guardians of the tribe, for which the archetype of the horse-mounted archer symbolised the survival, strength and military efficiency of subsequent generations. Anthropomorphic statues placed in cult-sacrifice complexes are representations of the er and qatun, a husband and wife, who are “petrified” looking to the east towards the land of ancestors, waiting for souls to be released. It is likely that the Polovtsians set two statues within the temple establishment, which is supported by the *in situ* findings. Another detail is preserved in reports from the 16th – 18th centuries (e.g. E. Lassota von Steblau, *Kniga Bolshomu Chertezhu*⁸, Ph. J. von Strahlenberg, etc.) mentioning groups of few or several stelae placed on a mound. These observations shall be treated as historic documentary reports, because we cannot be certain whether the stelae observed then were actually *in situ*. At that time, the process of removing stelae from kurgans and relocating them to other places had already been ongoing for several centuries.

The art of stelae disappeared with the fall of the Polovtsians and spread of Islam in the place.

4. Cult-sacrifice Places

Turkic tribes led a nomadic or semi-nomadic life, depending on the territory that they inhabited: steppe, forest-steppe, forest or foothills. A significant role in their culture was attributed to places that defined stable centres of clan groups on the claimed territory with respect to neighbouring lands, and as points of reference to remote, unknown realms. In such carefully chosen places they would establish clan burial grounds and erect cult buildings, as well as winter encampments and seasonal settlements. The place chosen as a centre of the clan’s fatherland determined their notions of the visible and mythical worlds.

⁷ The information acquired from prof. Igor L. Kyzlasov in May 2012, for which I sincerely thank him.

⁸ Книга Большому чертежу.

Stone buildings encompassing anthropomorphic stelae, which have been connected with sacrifice-stone enclosures, were already being established in central Asia in the 2nd century B.C., and were linked to the Shurmak and Tashtyk cultures⁹. These were the sites for a ritual that consisted in placing sacrifices in pits, in front of which stone poles were built into the ground. The buildings were placed within clan burial grounds or on their verges.

Ceremonies linked to ancestor worship among the Turkic peoples are described in Chinese chronicles. A testimony of these ancient traditions includes a report of the ceremony that the Turks would come in the holy caverns to sacrifice sheep and horses for their ancestors. Another form of this worship involved constructing a wooden structure containing a stela-shaped figure of a dead. Rows of balbals were set in the front. Souls of slain enemies were conjured in them. It was not infrequent to have dozens of such stones arranged into rows in the East side of the cult place. Great Turkic khagans were honoured with cult-sacrifice mausoleums made of stones. The Eastern part of these interior contained two stone stelae: the khagan and his wife with before them constructed sacrifice pits. The walls of the mausoleum were covered with inscriptions (L.R. Kyzlasov, 1964b, 23-32).

The Turkic people at some stage of their settlement in areas of Central and Western Asia were forced to involve themselves in diplomatic contacts with "ethnically" foreign neighbours both near and far. Knowing existing writing systems, the Turks created their own alphabet described as runic-shaped letters. Signs were carved in wood, leather, birch bark and stone. Preserved relics of writing include primarily rock carvings, burial stelae and rock paintings containing poetic texts, funeral poetry and descriptions of political events. Studies of inscriptions carved on funeral stones or rocks reveal that an important element of burial ceremonies was the writing of funeral poetry (Turkic "ir"). The oldest relics of funeral poetry carved as burial inscriptions are both Orkhon inscriptions. An object containing a text was identified with a personification of a dead person, who talked through the carved words (von Gabain, 1953, 543, 553). Sometimes, the social status of the dead was so high that despite adverse political changes arising, for example, from coups, no one dared to disturb burial ceremonies and ceremonies for departed souls nor mausoleums of funeral stones with inscriptions (e.g. for Bilge-Khan). According to the Turks' beliefs, a man loses his immortality in the afterlife if his name, life and deeds have been silenced by the family, tribe or nation and if no burial stone with inscription is erected for him. The manifestation of this magical thinking was a sense of responsibility for surviving colleagues and relatives, as well as strong social relationships within the community (von Gabain, 1953, 555).

⁹ Shurmak and Tashtyk cultures are dated from 2nd century B.C. to the 5th century C.E.

The location of enclosures was also significant. They were established in places that stood out from the landscape: in ravines, in mysterious and wondrous places, or on hills, always near to watercourses. The Turkish-speaking nations that inhabited Central-Western Asia worshipped forms of natural landscape such as caverns, alluvial ravines, mountains and rock formations (Gumilov, 1972, 75; Tryjarski 1991, 32-33). The holy mountain of the Turks, Ötüken, was believed to be the centre of the earthly world. On the micro-level the same function was attributed to terrain elevations, holy trees, hitching posts and boulders. Usually the hill nearby a river would become an object of worship within the territory seized by a clan. In mythological terms, these types of natural places, together with rivers for spirits, were travel routes between heaven and earth. Such places were also where both worlds transcended, and that enabled the shamans to contact deities, natural spirits and ancestors. The rivers constituted a road for guardian spirits or the souls of the dead heading towards the afterlife to follow. Such sacred places were where clan cemeteries and temples that „sealed“ the burial grounds from the east and from the west were located (Motov, 2001a, 71; Motov, 2001b, 142-143). Sacrifice-cult constructions among the Turkic peoples reflected their cosmological myths. They were not only schematic representations of the world's structure, but they also arranged time and space, and symbolised the cyclical nature of life and the order of its metamorphoses. The stone structures were built on a square or rectangular plan, arranged according to the four directions of the world. That was achieved by erecting low walls of flat, unconnected stones or by placing loose, separate, specially prepared stone plates. The inner space was filled by a layer of stone pavement. The statue or statues, made in wood or stone, were placed with their faces turned towards the east outside or, rarely, inside the enclosure, near its east wall. There are known stations without anthropomorphic stelae or boulders. The central part of the enclosure featured a sacrifice place, a kind of small altar or pit, in which is often found pieces of pottery, ash and burnt animal bones (Sher, 1966, 20; Kostiukov, 1998, 312; Motov, 2001b, 145-146). The enclosure was sometimes surrounded by an additional low wall, or encircled with a pit. Stone balbals were placed at the east side of the temple's foundation. Cult-sacrifice structures were raised at kurgan burial grounds, sometimes three or four next to each other, arranged on an east-west axis. As has been mentioned above, the temples „arranged“ space, when built at the centre, or „sealed“ it, when erected on the verges of a clan burial ground (Kostiukov, 1998, 311; Motov, 2001b, 142-148). The stone or anthropomorphic stelae constituted the vertical axis, *axis mundi*, that connected spheres: Heaven (Turkic Kök Tengri) and Earth (Turkic Yer-Su). In some cases a boulder symbolising the clan's tree was placed vertically in the central part.

Sacrifice-cult enclosures in Central-Western Asia are dated from the 6th to the 8th century. In the south-east of the Ural Mountains stone temples were

constructed until the 10th century. The custom of erecting cult foundations in that area, though, lasted until the 13th/14th century. Confirmation of such late dates is provided by the results of the burial inventory analysis carried out in burial grounds where enclosures have been discovered. The material used to construct them was wood, not stone. They were placed near to sepulchral pits, in the depression of the soil. The boards were placed in a manner in which their longer sides created a rectangular frame (and thus the name „frame enclosures” originated). Stakes on which horse hides were hanged were placed outside these walls. It is probable that after the ceremonies for departed souls, of which the remnants include cracked pottery and pieces of weaponry, these places were set on fire and then a mound was erected over the burial grounds and the ashes of the site. These ceremonies are attributed to the descendants of T’ie-le tribes, who were the forefathers of, for example, the Kipchaks (Kostiukov, 1998, 316-318; Gurkin, 2000, 7).

Among the Kipchaks, quadrilateral temple foundations had walls made of stone plates or flat stones built without mortar. The interior was covered with many layers of pavement. Some enclosures were accompanied by a low mound to the west. It was covered with stones and contained no burials. Similarly to the early Turkic peoples, the Kipchaks erected temples in groups: 2 or 3 on the east-west axis. Statues with their faces turned towards the east were placed inside the foundations. The stelae were made from stone, but there is evidence that wooden statues were present as well (Beysenov, Kozhakov, 2001, 162-163). Animal bones have been discovered within the enclosures. Offering pits that contained pieces of pottery and remains of bones were located towards the east. Hitching posts with horse hides were probably placed on the eastern side. A hitching post had an important role in the Nomadic culture. It was used to tie horses. It marked the spot where guests were greeted and took their leave. A hitching post enriched that space with sacral value, as it was a connection (axis mundi) between the spheres of the worlds. It was used as a path by the spirits of nature and the soul of the shaman in his trance. It determined the luck of a household as well. It was a sign of the beginning or end of a journey, including the final one. The hitching post was never taken away. Once it had been placed, it remained unmoved until it decayed naturally. Possibly, it was a channel connecting the netherworld and heaven during the ceremonies of ancestor worship (Lvova et al., 1988, 33, 75-79). Turkic and Kipchak ceremonial complexes associated with ancestors were always located on elevated terrain, near to rivers, often in nearby burial grounds. Elevated terrain was connected to the image of the holy mountain, a symbol of the world’s vertical structures, while the rivers were paths allowing the souls of the ancestors to venture into the afterlife. Kipchak temples are dated from the 9th to the 13th centuries.

Construction of cult-sacrifice complexes and the erection of statues for the dead served various purposes. The dead clan members were both honoured and

simultaneously prevented from returning to the world of the living, which kept the living from the terror of death and the mystery of the afterlife. It is probable that temples were constructed immediately after someone died or during the remembrance ceremonies during which his relatives gathered to offer sacrifices, feast together with the stone representation, and talk to it through the shaman (L.R. Kyzlasov, 1964b, 36-38; Tryjarski, 1991, 236-237).

Features of early-Turkic customs associated with ancestor worship were preserved in burial rituals and ceremonies for departed souls by the Polovtsians. The *in situ* findings have allowed the reconstruction of cult places. Due to a landscape that differed from that in Asia, and earlier burial constructions providing pre-existing sanctified spaces, temples were erected at the bases of older kurgans. Only those mounds raised near to rivers were selected. In prehistoric times, kurgans were usually constructed on drainage divides or elevated terrain, above steep banks of steppe rivers or their smaller, sometimes even seasonal, tributaries. These places fulfilled the Turkic requirements of attributing sacral value to space and determined the boundaries of the three worlds: heaven, earth and netherworld (Pletneva, 1974a, 5; Shvetsov, 1979, 199; Lvova et al., 1988, 75-79). The enclosures of the Black Sea Steppe are dated from the 10th to the 13th /early 14th centuries. The sacrifice-cult places dated from the 10th to the first half of the 11th century are similar in their foundations to the early-Turkic enclosures. The top of the selected elevation was cut and then its surface was levelled. The temples were set on a quadrilateral plan built with flat stones without mortar. Stelae-shaped sculptures with their faces turned towards the east were placed inside the western wall (Privalova, Minenkova, 1998, 63). The enclosures dated from the 11th to the 13th centuries are characterised by other construction features. The top of the selected mound was levelled and the stelae were placed in the central part of the kurgan, always facing the east. These stelae were stone representations of a man and a woman. The space around the statues was „closed“ by dry walls of stones placed on a circular, square or trapezoid plan. Their protective significance was similar to how they were perceived by the early-Turkic tribes. Such walls were believed to prevent the dead or evil spirits from „stalking“ their living relatives. The bases of the statues dug into the soil were often surrounded by a small, oval wall, usually single-layered, and constructed without mortar. Within the walls, either in the corners or in front of the statues, were constructed oval pavements, offering pits or hearths surrounded with stones (Gurkin, 1987, 107; Krasilnikov, 1999, 42).

Traces of the of primaeval beliefs and remembrance customs of the Turkic people have been preserved in Russian legends. One of them tells about a Turkic hero turned into stone; a bloody human sacrifice was needed to enable him to return to the world of the living. Remains of children and adults have been found during archaeological investigation of the pits constructed in front of the anthropomorphic stelae (Shvetsov, 1979, 208; Pletneva, 1988, 264). Bones of

horses, rams, cattle, canines, game animals and large quantities of hand-made Nomad pottery, Byzantine amphorae and clay cauldrons have been found there as well, which gives evidence of burial and remembrance feasts, during which the statues were ritually brought to life by sprinkling them with human or animal blood (Pletneva, 1974a, 73; Shvetsov 1979, 207; Gurkin, 1987, 103-107; Minenkova, 2004, 156-164). Animal sacrifices are evidence that very old customs tracing the origins of particular clans back to their animal totems were still alive among the Polovtsians (Gurkin, 2000, 18). Remembrance ceremonies were rooted very deeply in the awareness of the Turkic peoples. Such ceremonies were organised on the 3rd, 7th, 9th, 12th, 20th, 40th, 49th and 52nd days after the death of a relative, and then after half a year, year, 3 years, 5 years and 7 years. In some cases meetings with the deceased, „talking, feeding and giving to drink“, lasted for three years (Tryjarski, 1991, 231, 235-237, 249).

An exceptional Polovtsian sacrifice-cult site was a building found on a kurgan burial ground located on the right bank of the Seversky Donets River. A unique, interestingly constructed temple has been found on one of the mounds, with a rectangular, fallen object preserved in the eastern part of the elliptical late Bronze Age mound. The exploration revealed it to be a quadrilateral whose walls were oriented according to the directions of the world. A massive wall was constructed with flat stone plates that were carefully arranged in one row after another. The entrance was located towards the east. A sacrifice pit filled with remains of horse bones has been found in front of the entrance. A female anthropomorphic stela placed in a specially made pit was found *in situ*, in the centre of the temple's interior. The statue was facing the east. The interior was covered with stone pavement, and the temple was originally protected with a roof. The author of the excavation, considering the report of a 13th century traveller called Willem de Ruysbroec¹⁰, assumes that there could have been a hip roof (Guguyev, 2001, 72-82).

Cult places were constructed in a slightly different manner on the left bank of the Don River. The top of the chosen mound was levelled and a ditch was dug

10 „Они строят также для богачей пирамиды, то есть остроконечные домики. (...) Я видел одного недавно умершего, около которого они повесили на высоких жердях 16 шкур лошадей, по 4 с каждой стороны мира. (...) Я видел другие погребения в направлении к востоку, именно большие площади, вымощенные камнями, одни круглые, другие четырехугольные, и затем четыре длинных камня воздвигнутых с четырех сторон мира (...)”.

„They build pyramids or cone houses for the rich people (...). I have seen (a place) of one recently deceased, around which they have hanged on high poles 16 horse leathers, four on each side of the world (...). I have seen another grave directed to the east, actually large surfaces padded with stones, one oval, other square and four long stones erected on four sides of the world (...).” (“Travels into the Eastern Countries of Willema de Ruysbroeca Anno Domini 1253”, chapter 10) (8). Translated from Russian by A. Gołębiowska-Tobiasz, translated from Polish by L. Adamus.

in the centre of the kurgan. One or two wooden or, less frequently, stone stelae were placed in the central ditch facing the east. The whole was surrounded with an oval, circular or square ditch. Opposite to the enclosures, they are referred to as "pit temples" and dated from the 12th to the 13th or first half of the 14th century (Gurkin, 1987, 100-108; Guguyev, 1998, 40-41; Minenkova, 2001, 105).

V. A. Gorodcov believed that the constructions, nowadays known as "pit temples" were associated with kurgan burials. At one of the sites, located close to the Srednyaya Ayula (Salsky Raion, Rostov District) at the turn of the 19th and 20th centuries, a pit with four wooden statues was discovered. However, at that time, the statues were not linked with the Polovtsian temples, but based, *inter alia*, on the remains of a child, they were considered as burial stelae (Fedorov-Davidov, 1966, 190, reference 32).

Some of the Polovtsian sacrifice-cult foundations carried traces of damage. The stone statues were overthrown and cracked, and wooden stelae were buried in the pits. The interpretation of this phenomenon is not unambiguous. Cracking a statue could have been intended to free one of the ancestor's souls to help it in its final journey into the afterlife, which was linked to the final stage of the remembrance ceremony. Destruction of statues could also have been an expression of Islam's struggle with anthropomorphic representations. The decline of ancestor worship is dated as late as the first decades of the 14th century. In that time sacrifice-cult structures were no longer erected, although funeral traditions cultivated into the 15th century prove that Polovtsian customs were conserved (Pletneva, 1962, 136-137; Pletneva, 1974a, 53-71; Gurkin, 1987, 108; Gurkin, 1998, 32-36).

Initially, the tradition of creating anthropomorphic stelae and sacrifice-cult enclosures was probably followed by most or all of the Turkic tribes. With time only certain peoples retained it, while others abandoned it under foreign influences. As late as the 17th century an Arab historian, Abul Gazi reported: „If someone's loved one, that is his son, daughter or brother, died, they made him a statue similar to that person and placed it in his house, saying: that it was one of our loved ones. They expressed love towards it, put the first part of their food before it and laid down before it, (...) they would also bow to it.”¹¹ (L.R. Kyzlasov, 1964b, 33).

11 „Когда у кого умирал любимый кто-либо, то сын, или дочь, или брат делали похожую на него статую и, поставив ее в своем доме говорили: это такой-то из наших ближних; оказывая к нему любовь, первую часть от кушанья клали перед ней, (...) и кланялись ей.” Translated from Russian by A. Gołębiowska-Tobiasz, translated from Polish by B. Zima. Quotation after: The Genealogical Tree of the Turks. The Writings of Abul Gazi, the Khan of Kiva (Kyzlasov, 1964b, 33, footnote 47).