# FUNERARY TRADITION OF THE ANCIENT EAST IN EXAMPLES FROM ANATOLIA AND BACTRIA-MARGIANA: ORIGINS OR PARALLELS?

# ESKİ DOĞU'NUN ANADOLU VE BACTRIA-MARGIANA'DAKİ ÖRNEKLERDE CENAZE GELENEĞİ: KÖKEN Mİ PARALELLİK Mİ?

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## ABSTRACT

*The article is devoted to an ancient tradition in the burial practices of the peoples of Asia Minor and Central Asia, dating back to the Neolithic Period, namely exposing the dead to be eaten by birds or animals. Exposing the dead was performed at designated areas of natural character (mountains, hills), and special constructions, described in ancient Persian sources (Avesta) with a special term, "dakhma". After the "purification" of bones from the flesh, the remains were buried in rooms (the sanctuary of Çatal Hüyük) or in graves (Bactria). The practice of exposing the dead to the mercy of birds of prey - vultures - is recorded on monuments with figurative representations of the Neolithic Period in ancient Anatolia (reliefs of Göbeklitepe and murals of Çatal Hüyük). Çatal Hüyük's paintings clearly illustrate the custom and at the same time are the earliest examples of narrative art. This burial tradition is observed also in the archaeological material and in works of small forms of Central Asia (Bactria, Margiana) of Late Bronze Age. Of great interest in this respect are two seals originating from Bactria. However, the custom of exposing the dead for purification continued in Central Asian and Iran regions for many centuries until the arrival of Islam in these lands. This is evidenced by the data of ancient authors and medieval written sources. One variety of this rite in Central Asia can be observed in the ossuary rite of burial. Remnants of this ancient custom of purification bones are fixed also in the ethnographic material of Central Asia until the late of Middle Ages.*

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## ÖZET

*Bu makale Küçük Asya ve Orta Asya toplumlarında görülen, Neolitik Dönem'e tarihlenen, ölülerin kuşlar ve hayvanlar tarafından tüketilmesi ile şekillenen eski ölü gömme geleneğine adanmıştır. Eski Pers kaynaklarında "dakhma" olarak adlandırılan bu uygulamada ölüler bu iş için belirlenmiş olan açık alanlara (dağlar, tepeler) bırakılırlardı. Kemiklerin etlerden "arındırılmasının" ardından kalıntılar odalara (Çatal Höyük tapınağı) ya da mezarlara (Bactria) gömülürdü. Ölülerin alıcı kuşların insafına terk edilmesi temsili olarak Neolitik Döneme tarihlenen eski Anadolu'da görülen anıtlarda (Göbeklitepe kabartmaları ve Çatal Höyük duvar resimleri) karşımıza çıkmaktadır. Çatal Höyük resimleri açıkça bu geleneği resmederken aynı zamanda sanatsal anlatımın en eski örneklerini teşkil eder. Bu ölü gömme geleneği aynı zamanda Geç Tunç Çağı'nda Orta Asya'da (Bactria, Margiana) bulunmuş olan arkeolojik materyal ve küçük eserlerde de karşımıza çıkar. Bu açıdan bakıldığında Bactria menşeli iki mühür ilgi çekicidir. Bununla birlikte ölülerin arındırılma amacıyla dış mekânlarda bırakılması geleneği İslamiyet'in bölgede yayılmasına kadar Orta Asya ve İran'da yüzyıllarca devam etmiştir. Bu aynı zamanda antik yazarlar ve ortaçağ kaynakları ile de kanıtlanmaktadır. Orta Asya'da bu geleneğin bir türevi de ölü kemiklerinin gömülmesi geleneğidir. Bu eski kemik arındırılması geleneğinin örneklerine ortaçağa kadar Orta Asya'nın etnografik materyali içinde rastlanmaktadır.*

## INTRODUCTION

Archaeological research of the Bronze Age monuments in the territory of historical and cultural regions of Bactria and Margiana, which includes modern Afghanistan and Turkmenistan and the south parts of Uzbekistan and Tajikistan, show common culture of ancient population that lived in the region. In the archaeological literature this community was named BMAC (Bactrian-Margian Archaeological Complex) (Fig. 1). The study of known settlements such as Gonur, Togolok, Ulugtepe in Turkmenistan and Sapallitepa, Djarkutan in Uzbekistan clearly showed the formation of early urban centers of Central Asia with a highly developed agriculture, a high level of crafts, construction technology and art. Research of the funerary monuments of the period allow to get acquainted with existing cults and religious notions of the ancient population of Central Asia and to follow the evolution in the development of religion and - more broadly - in the development of spiritual culture of society. In this sense items of material culture and art associated with funerary rites, along with the design features of the graves provide important information.

One of the most difficult and at the same time interesting aspects in the interpretation of archaeological sites is the search for the origins of culture as a base on which was formed the ancient civilization of Central Asia. We are familiar with these monuments, thanks to the works of archeologists and specialists of different profiles: anthropologists, linguists, palaeobotanists, palaeozoologists. It is difficult not to acknowledge the contributions of such prominent archeologists such as a V.M. Masson, V.I. Sarianidi, A.A. Askarov, N.A. Avanesova, Y. A. Zadneprovsky et al., whose works reflect the results of many years of field work. The collected results of their work give a more or less complete picture of the ancient society.

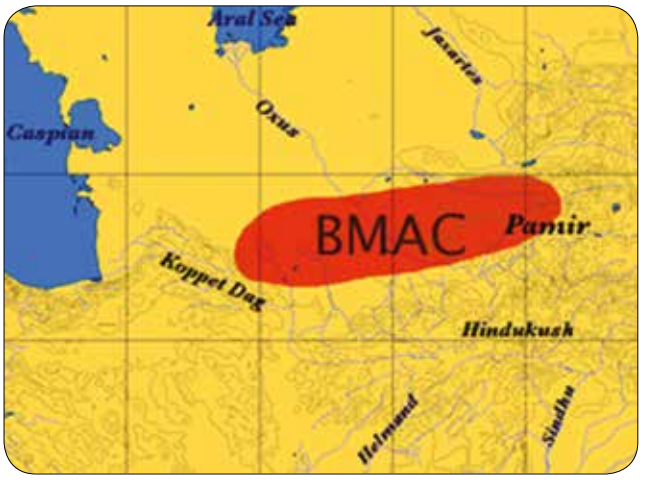



Figure 1: Schematic Map of Bactrian-Margian Archaeological Complex (BMAC). Internet resource / *Baktriyana-Margiana Arkeoloji Kompleksi (BMAC) Şematik Haritası*

This paper is an attempt, based on the analysis of artifacts of funerary culture and archaeological data, written sources, supplemented by ethnographic materials, to emphasize similarities of rituals that are reflected on monuments of ancient culture of Anatolia and Bactria-Margiana – regions that were distant both in space and in time.

Funeral rites and rituals associated with them can be attributed to the most conservative elements of the culture of ancient civilizations. Each of the signs of this ritual dates back to earlier, we can say prehistoric times. This fully applies to the funeral rites of the world's religions to their foundations, and the canonical regulations. In each of them can be found echoes of more ancient pagan religions, or even elements of earlier concepts, dating back to the primeval period. Burial rites of the ancient culture are the key to solving one of the most difficult problems of origin and evolution of religious beliefs that form the basis of the ideology of ancient societies and future state religions.

Attitudes of ancient people were connected primarily with the observation of natural phenomena (thunder, lightning, rain, cold, fire, etc.), and the development and knowledge of the surrounding environment: the landscape, flora and fauna, etc. Homo sapiens being himself a part of that environment tried to build his own world order and to establish links between the elements of the world through the prism of experience. In the minds of primitive humans, the incomprehensible and inexplicable properties of things acquired the character of supernatural phenomena, and the most vital, threatening, fatal phenomenon, inspiring in them defenseless human fear and awe, became an object of worship and deification. Later, these evolved into totemic cults, which became the basis for the emergence of religious beliefs. Objects of artistic culture presented before investigators are a reflection of the creative world of primitive people.

The burials of the ancient people excavated in situ, are indisputable factual evidence of the distant past. Unearthed funerary complex is documentary evidence, depicting a set of actions, the result of a formal offering to archaeologist after its discovery. All the previous cycle of ritual actions remains a mystery. The goal of researcher is to fill this form by a substance and to some extent revitalize and recreate previously executed actions; understanding their meaning makes it easier. On the other hand, the opposite is also true: the scrupulous study of actions helps to penetrate into their essence. It is here, balancing between fact and conjecture, the researcher

faces the main difficulty: there is a risk of going in the wrong direction in the search and accordingly coming to misinterpretations.

In the study of funerary complexes, an archaeologist is able to only partly reveal some aspects of the material and spiritual culture of the ancient society. In this paper, we consider only a limited number of objects, by a happy coincidence extant to the present day. It is a rare case when a funerary complex is added by graphic material, as illustrating certain actions prior to the final "Entombment». This unique example of narrative art in archeology embodied in the brilliant discovery of Çatal Hüyük (Fig. 2) an archaeological site of Neolithic culture in South of Anatolia (Turkey)[1].




Figure 2: Localization of Çatal Hüyük. Internet Resource / *Çatal Hüyük'ün Lokalizasyonu. İnternet kaynağı*

## ASIA MINOR (ÇATAL HÜYÜK)

Çatal Hüyük has become a kind of benchmark monument of the Neolithic period, which half opened the mysterious veil of ancient civilizations for the modern world[2]. The merit of this remarkable monument belongs to its explorer James Mellaart and in his early works, and especially in his general work, (Mellaart 1967) he pays great attention to the description and study of the actual material. Numerous subsequent studies reveal in more detail various aspects of the material and the spiritual life of ancient society.

Unfortunately, invading this mass of completely unexpected information on antiquity, it was sometimes difficult for the human to resist to the flood of ideas, with one another tempting on the interpretation of the material - from the ideas of "Saturnalia" to "Vulture shamanism." Scientists, journalists and enthusiasts and amateurs of ancient history offered sometimes unimaginable interpretations – it is the good that about the nearly 10-thousand-year history of human civilization has accumulated plenty of guesses and assumptions. For the author of this article, as well as everything else, it is difficult to avoid the temptation to step over the line of the real world and fantastic hypotheses. However, given that the archeology is largely the science of material culture - of the material world, we will try to build our hypothesis on the basis of the available facts.

Always, when it concerns the monuments of the ancient period and the works of the ancient artists who create them on the basis of abstract thinking, the researcher intrudes into the mysterious world of contemplation and comprehension of the surroundings by an ancient people. There is every reason to believe that: than art is more ancient, it is more concrete. However, the pictorial language, to be more precise, the way of transmission is expressed by symbols, namely by the method of primitive symbolism. Paintings of Çatal Hüyük provide a wonderful example of the birth of the figurative-narrative nature of art, which includes elements of older symbolism. Building a hypothesis falls on the basis of a comparison of real and recognizable elements of the image with symbols conditionally transmitting natural elements or abstract mode of action. We can say that the art of the Neolithic - is the era of the birth of a pictogram, an expression which is built as the result of knowledge and understanding of ancient world by people. In practice, it is difficult to cover the entire range of problems associated with the level of thinking and creativity of ancient human, with his attitude and worldview. Our task is more simple - to identify certain features of the ritual in the works of the ancient artist, that is, one of the signs of the birth of a sustainable burial practice, which eventually turns into one of the elements of subsequent religion of ancient society.

In particular, we will focus on the ceremony of exposing the dead for its consistent cleansing of the flesh involving wild or trained animals or birds. Let's try to see how this custom developed in the religions of ancient societies.

As the object of study, as mentioned above, we have taken wall paintings of a Neolithic settlement, located in the south of Turkey and dated by archaeologists to the 8th - 7 th millennium BC. The paintings on the walls of houses

[1] Edens 1995: 68-69.

[2] To the study of Çatal Hüyük is devoted such a vast literature that it is not possible to reflect it in full. The main results, we can say archaeological source material can be regarded as the work of James Mellaart (Mellaart 1967) and subsequent researchers who carried out excavations at the monument (Hodder 2007; Hodder 2010).

and sanctuaries are present in almost all the construction periods. According to J. Mellaart "painting at Çatal Hüyük may have been practiced even before Level X, which we tentatively date around 6500 BC[3]".

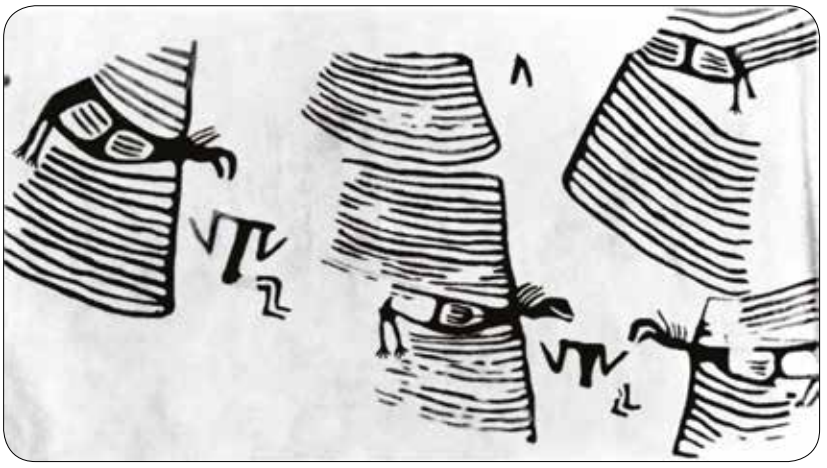


Figure 4: Fragment of Wall Painting from "Sanctuary of Vultures. / *Akbabalar Koruma Alanı" ndan Duvar Resmi. (*Mellaart *1964: Pl. VII)*

Location of wall paintings of burials and their semantic background point to a direct link with entombed human remains. Images applied to the surface of the whitewashed walls, as a rule, are located over the low platforms, representing the structure of the burial pit (Fig. 3). As the first explorer of Çatal Hüyük James Mellaart notes, burials belonged to the priestesses and were arranged, as a rule, in the sanctuaries. In addition to the wall paintings the cultic character of the rooms is confirmed by the nature of the burials and their equipment, and design of these sanctuaries of various objects and reliefs. On a set of objects in the burials and the nature of the decoration of the sanctuary differ significantly in their wealth from ordinary dwellings of Çatal Hüyük's population. "The only correlation that can be made is that burials in shrines are more richly equipped than burials in houses[4]".



Figure 3: Wall Painting with a Tomb in Platform. Reconstruction. Internet resource. Modified in Photoshop by Author / *Platformda Bir Mezarla Duvar Resmi. Yeniden Yapılanma. İnternet Kaynağı. Photoshop'ta Yazar Tarafından Değiştirildi.*

Rich burials in the so-called sanctuaries, according to the excavations of the author, as already noted, belonged to the priestesses. The responsibilities of the priestesses remain unclear , i.e. whether they performed a specific function of cult-ceremonial activities outside sanctuaries? Engaged whether the "priestess" conduct ceremonies after death and the preparation for the final burial or their functions are more limited? Actions prior to burial, as already noted, were clearly depicted in the paintings on the flat surface of the white-washed walls. Plots with vultures and headless anthropomorphic figures are one of the most important episodes in the funerary practice of Çatal Hüyük residents.

## PAINTINGS WITH VULTURES

The most expressive images of the murals are a sanctuary VII.8 - the so-called "Sanctuary of vultures." Attachments are depicted in a certain perspective, and this pattern is characteristic for almost all the paintings. The body of the bird is given in profile, while the wide-open wings are shown in a frontal position (Fig. 4). Noteworthy is the way of the image of huge wings, likely to capture the imagination of the ancient artist[5]. The outer edge of the wings is depicted by a thick line, extending from the base of the neck at a right angle in both directions (up and down). From this line are long parallel lines depicting the bird's plumage. And only the most extreme lines are rounded, and the whole bird feathers are nearly the same length, and the general outline of the wide-open wings is close to a rectangle. The body of vultures, as mentioned above, are shown in profile, although the poultry breast with two bright spots, sometimes filled with a pattern (three parallel lines or a more complicated pattern in the middle figure) is shown in a frontal perspective. Head with open beak on an elongated neck is turned towards the corpse. A characteristic feature of the necks are several lines (3 or 4) extending transversely from the neck, the lines facing forward. The legs of the birds are

[3] Mellaart 1967: 70.

[4] Mellaart 1967: 82.

[5] By Mellaart's definition Gyps fulvus (Mellaart 1964: 64).

shown in an unusual manner. Firstly, they are depicted to the back from the corps closer to the tail. For example, in the painting of Sanctuary, VII.21 the feet are shifted back closer to the tail (Fig. 5). Secondly, their position is not entirely consistent with the position of flight, that is horizontally, and most characteristic of the position during the approach to the ground (or booty?)[6], i.e. put forward to overcome inertia.

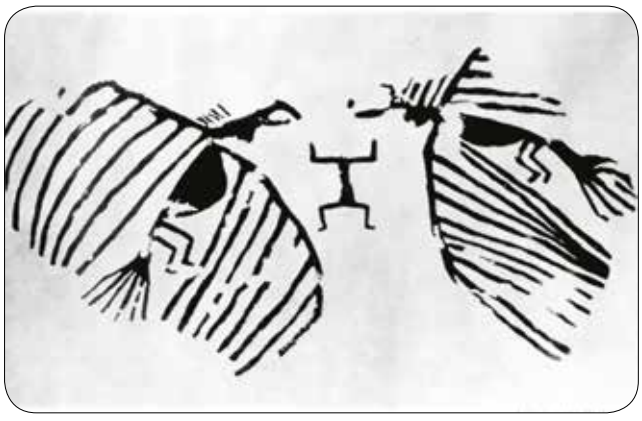


Figure 5: Wall painting from Shrine VII.21 / *Tapınak VII.21'den Duvar Resmi. (Mellaart 1964: Pl. XII)*

Images of human figures on the paintings of Çatal Hüyük are shown in two ways. It should be noted that the figures without heads, meaning according to Mellaart the body of the dead, was shown in a reduced size. This technique, in all probability, was to emphasize the huge size of the vultures themselves. The upper part of the bodies of the dead people was shown in a frontal perspective with arms bent at the elbows, while his feet were in profile. It looks like a sitting posture, but in fact such a position meant a figure lying with bent legs.

In the paintings of the Northern wall of the Sanctuary VII,21 a headless figure of the dead is shown in a different perspective, namely frontally. The figure is placed between the birds of prey and it seems to be flattened: legs and arms spread out and bent at right angles[7].

## COMPOSITION IN SHRINE VIII, 8 WITH DEPICTION OF TWO VULTURES AND HUMAN FIGURE BETWEEN THEM

The representation was discovered as noted Mellaart under the Shrine VII,8, the "Vulture Shrine" in "a very similar building", painting was preserved fragmentary and in better condition it was opened only on the east wall[8]. Taking into consideration that it was unearthed in VIII Building Horizon it would be expected to find some distinguished nuances in the way of representation.

The composition is significantly different from all other images of vultures. For all images of vultures of Çatal Hüyük there is one characteristic feature, that is, the striking scale of huge wings. However, in the composition of the Sanctuary VIII.8 the wings were treated somewhat differently (Fig. 6). Theoretically, changing of the way of depicting could be explained by the evolution of the pictorial tradition, although this explanation is weakly reasoned. The wings themselves are not as large and only shown with 4 parallel lines. Birds and feathers of the neck are treated differently, there is no back forelock. This element is shown clearly and necessarily from the Sanctuary vultures VII.7. Between the birds was placed a figure of a man with arms aside, and most importantly, the figure was represented with a head that may mean that the person was alive. In his right hand he holds a long object as if he had swung his stick at the bird on his right[9]. In his left hand an object difficult to define, but it is logical to assume that the subject had a similar function (i.e., it served to repel birds). Notable is the fact that the headless figure (dead) is located under the hand of a live personage, armed with a stick. To put it briefly, in the scene a living personage is involved, who drives away the birds from the dead body. This was pointed out by author of the exploration of Çatal Hüyük[10].

This action compared to other depictions is somewhat unusual, where no one interferes with the vultures as they peck dead flesh off the corpse, although it should stipulate that the vultures would be depicted as flying up to the headless body. Here, on the contrary, a personage drives away birds. In this case, how does one explain this scene? There is the idea that the VIII.8 Sanctuary composition showed no vultures but another breed of birds (crows?) - This breed, also related to scavengers, was not permitted to eat corpses ("purification").

[6] It is interesting in this respect the way of depicting of legs of vulture on the relief from Gobeklitepe which dated back to earlier millennium. The legs of the bird extended forward (Mann, figure on the page 48).

[7] Mellaart 1964: Pl. XII (a), (b). Shrine VIII.8, "the predecessor of the Vulture Shrine VII.8, similarity contained a painting of black vultures, unfortunately badly damaged,. Here the scene is different for though a headless body lies between the two birds of prey. A man armed with a sling is actually warding off their attacks. Yet a third building, the Second Vulture Shrine, VII.21. contained scene of this sort on its north wall. Between two of these creature, provided with human legs, and perhaps priestesses or priests in disguise, lies another headless corpse (below), but in a position different from the others." (Mellaart 1967: 46, 47).

[8] Mellaart 1964: 70.

[9] Mellaart in his book (1967: 70) has determined this object as a sling, although this is not certain.

[10] Mellaart 1964:70.



Figure 6: Composition in Shrine VIII.8 with Depiction of Two Vultures and Human Figure between Them / *Tapınak VIII.8'te İki Akbaba ve Aralarında İnsan Figürü Bulunan Kompozisyon, (Mellaart 1964: Pl. XIV)*

Some of the differences in details do not affect the overall image of vultures in the whole scheme, and the ensemble of images give a fairly stable iconography. Funeral wall paintings of Çatal Hüyük reveal the special status and exclusivity of the vulture as the birds unusual in their appearance and size (as we noted above, and as stressed by ancient artist); apparently, only this kind of bird was entrusted the task of cleansing the bones from the flesh in the funeral rites.



Figure 7: Wall Painting with Depiction of Construction Including a Ladder in the Room VI.B. 65 / *Odada Bir Merdiven Bulunan Bir Yapıyı Tasvir Eden Duvar Resmi VI.B. 65. (Mellaart 1967)*

The images of vultures and human figures on the surface of walls, unfortunately, give no idea exactly where the action takes place. Whether the body of dead is exposed on a specially fenced off space constructed or special designs, on which could fly the birds? This question is still open, although some elements of the compositions indicate features of the landscape and provide a basis for clues.

## CONSTRUCTIONS ON ÇATAL HÜYÜK PAINTINGS

The most expressive in this regard is an ornamental band of red paint on a white background and the next in a horizontal direction in the room VI.B. 65. According to Mellaart 'the subject of which, though uncertain, may include the representation of ladders.[11]'

The painting represents repeated patterns of structures located horizontally on surface of wall. There are two rows with distinctive features of the upper and lower row. The top row shows the interconnecting line (Fig. 7), reminiscent as it is said by Mellaart, of a ladder. It should be noted that the ladder was a necessary tool to play an important role in the lives of the dwellers, and not by chance is reflected in the figurative complex of Çatal Hüyük.

In the composition, it occupies a central position. Ladder with steps is shown obliquely standing. At the bottom line it is connected with the subject of a rectangular shape, filled with a combination of horizontal and vertical lines, resembling the masonry, and the subject - obviously construction has artificial nature, such as a platform from which it is related with the stairs. At the upper part the "ladder" is a rhomboidal detail, which rests in the recess of another part of the construction. This entirely painted part of construction has triangular shape; an acute angle facing down. A characteristic feature of this part is a flat horizontally contoured surface. In the picture published by J. Mellaart this part of the composition is repeated 6 times.

The bottom row is something similar to the above arrangement with some distinctive features. In particular ladder is depicted somewhat differently in the form of adjacent upper sides of rectangles, recalling some kind of twist. At the bottom the ladder is connected by line with the subject, which we have designated above as the "platform". Platform has a more simplified design

[11] Mellaart 1967: Fig. 5.

in shape of horizontally and evenly stacked rectangles. Further the ladder is connected to completely black colored triangular in a similar manner as described above.

It should be emphasized that the structural parts of the construction painted by the lines evidently represent man-made details, while the triangles show another nature of the design. Triangles with acute apex facing downwards represent, in my opinion, a steep rock. Platform of upper row resembles bricks or stone masonry and the ladder itself was likely to have been made of wood. The recess in the rock and upper end of the ladder and then part of the groove in the rock were made for a solid fixation. For what could be used such a structure having a ladder connected with the sheer cliff which has in turn a flat surface on the top? The platform, which is attached to the ladder and then a rock, with sharp angle downward, testify in favor of the fact that the place is meant for some special function. Apparently, it was in an isolated place and was not available to animals. All of the above suggests that this could be a prototype of an ancient dakhma of Old Iranian literary sources – a construction for exposing corpses. The lower row of patterns of the same composition obviously represents a more simplified version of the same design. If our guess is correct, that the closed triangles represent an element of the natural terrain, it can be assumed that the residents of Çatal Hüyük used landscape features, complementing it with the necessary constructed adaptations.

The objection against this interpretation may be the absence of additional elements, such as birds, vultures, or the remains of the deceased, which to some extent would ease the interpretation of the entire composition. However, given the facts that in other depictions of the same figurative complex are present only vultures with dead bodies "without indicating a place" it could be a representation when a construction for exposing of corpses is shown separately. With regard to the "place", intriguing in this respect seems a polychrome painting on the northern wall of the sanctuary VI.B.I lying in the subsequent building horizon[12].

## CONSTRUCTIONS (CONTINUED)

## POLYCHROME PAINTED COMPOSITION ON THE NORTH WALL OF THE SANCTUARY VI.B.I

According to Mellaart, the composition is a mortuary structure, lightly built of bundles or reeds and matting, in which the dead were removed for the first stage in the Neolithic burial rites, the process of excarnation, as it is suggested, shown below by the human skulls and bones (Fig. 8). The author suggests that it was here in a special morgue or mortuary (charnel-house) took place a process of purification of the flesh. Wall paintings of the two sanctuaries Level VII and VIII suggest that this function was performed by vultures cleansing bones. According to the author, it is unlikely that their beaks left marks on the bones, and such signs were found[13].



Figure 8: Polychrome Painted composition on the North Wall of the Sanctuary VI.B.I. After J.Mellaart / *Kutsal Alanın Kuzey Duvarında Polikrom Boyalı Kompozisyon VI.B.I. J.Mellaart (Mellaart 1967)*

Vertical structures, equipped with a staircase of light construction (wood), are likely to have on top of a flat surface - the site where the body of the deceased was placed. The second part of the composition, discovered later, adds to our understanding of the fact that the bones were collected later. Among them particularly well and clearly presented is the skull. Skull by its mass and volume is one of the largest and perhaps the most expressive of bones of the human skeleton. And consequently it is given special attention in the practice of burial and religious rites[14].

The vertical design of the composition is high and is located between the peaks of zigzags, which surely represent the tops of mountains. Interesting small painted details on the background of the voids with a forked

[12] In his early work, the author indicates that the painting was cleaned in the dwelling E VI.B.I (Mellaart 1963: Pl. XXVI (a)), but later in his generalizing work this room was determined as a sanctuary VI.B.I. (Mellaart 1967: 36, Fig. 8).

[13] Mellaart 1964: 92; Mellaart 1963: 95-98.

[14] The interpretation of these structures as a place of eating the corpses of vultures and then drag the soul to other similar structures appear to be at least far-fetched and not having a base (Graham Hancock's, Magicians of the Gods: its proposed astronomical considerations at Gobekli Tepe - a critique by Andrew Collins, London 2015, Fig. 13.

limb tongue? and weaving body resembling creatures like reptiles. Structures built by human, it was clearly intended that wild animals and reptiles could not reached its height. Also of interest is a long strip on the right side of the composition, representing two parallel lines enclosing wavy band. That band resembles waves ending in banks. The whole plot represents, in all likelihood, one of the earliest in the landscapes of the region - landscape with mountain peaks and river. Unclear figures of creatures are represented in the reserved spaces of triangular shape. Although the meaning of the general picture is more or less interpretable, however, due to the very schematic way of representation there may be other options for interpretation..

## TREATMENT OF REMAINS OF THE DEAD AFTER PURIFICATION

In the study of tombs of Çatal Hüyük there are two important points. The correct anatomical order was maintained thanks to the remaining tendons. On the remaining bones there are traces of ocher paint, and the separated skull was wrapped in cloth. All this shows that in the grave were placed dissected bones after removing of soft tissue. Vultures, eating bones, left undisturbed part of the brain because of its inaccessibility; they have been found in many graves level VI. From the skull found in the room E VI.I brains were extracted and wrapped in a piece of cloth[15].

Dried, but preserving the correct anatomical order the bones were wrapped in cloth and tied with strips of cloth. Mellaart states that the bones were collected and prepared for burial in the course of the year, were buried in the same specified calendar time, perhaps in the spring festival. On the occasion of the burial the house and the sanctuary temporarily were released, the couches of the inhabitants shifted and on the released platforms grave was dug. After performing all the rituals the room was re-plastered and, if it was necessary, re-covered with paintings[16].

## PLACE FOR EXPOSING OF CORPSES

In the paragraph devoted to the pre-burial constructions we were concerned partially the question of the place. In scenes with vultures, impinging on the dead headless body, it remains not completely clear the question of where all this was going on. It is clear that this action is the order of the funeral, or rather, more precisely; it is the action that precedes the final burial. As we have noted, the preliminary burial exhibiting corpses to vultures for the cleansing (purification), does not fit the definition of a secondary burial. The explorer of Çatal Hüyük excavation permits a process which is in pre-burial - inhumation, then the exhumation and re-burial. If such a practice did exist, then there is every reason to call it a "secondary burial", but full of confidence, that the burial took place in this way, does not arise.

In this case, one should recognize the existence of several methods of purification of the flesh of corpses. In any case, the assumption that the purified bone buried in the ground , which then once again was re-buried is devoid of logic. In the ancient agricultural societies, where land was considered a sacred element, such a custom would not allow (Zoroastrianism). Theoretically, in more ancient period the remains of the dead could be subjected to the purification of the flesh in various ways, including a pre-burial. However, for the specific case is unlikely reconstruction of the burial rite, when the custom of not allowing eating other animals for human flesh and placing it into the ground, where it will be subjected to rodents, insects and other creatures that do not belong to the circle of ritually acceptable "purificators" . The custom of leaving the corpses to the mercy of predatory vultures points to two important points in the burial customs of the inhabitants of Çatal Hüyük. On the one hand, the dead body is given to vultures; other animals are not allowed access to the body. And if our guess is right that the painting of Sanctuary VIII.8 did not depict vultures but other carrion birds, trying to pick the corpse, but were warded off by the stick , and then it turns out that not all the birds of carrion were allowed to peck the flesh of the dead. This, in all probability, is directly connected with the choice of the place where the dead bodies were exposed. These places were to be secluded and had to defend the corpses being eaten by other animals.

Mellaart based on the analysis of several paintings of level VII, namely scenes with vultures and the bodies of the dead, as well as compositions with structures where the remains were kept and identified them as mortuary. He tried to combine the image and make the reconstruction of this building (Fig. 9). Reconstruction of Mellaart, in my opinion, is fully justified and is not devoid of logic, although many researchers were perceived ambiguously[17].

Returning to the vertical structures, it should be said that the construction in the paintings of Çatal Hüyük leads to an association with the facilities of a later period, that

[15] Mellaart 1964: 93.
[16] Mellaart 1964: 92.
[17] See, for example the article of Marla Mallet, The Goddess from Anatolia. An Updated View of the Catal Huyuk Controversy; Collon 1990: 119-123.

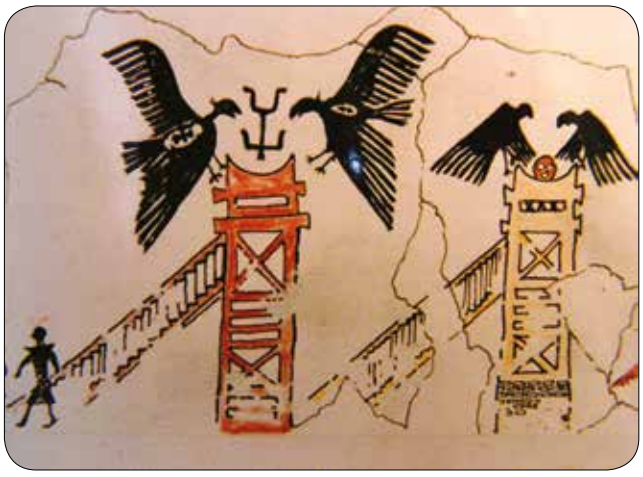


Figure 9: Reconstruction of the Structures for "Purification" of Dead Proposed by J.Mellaart. Internet Resource / *J.Mellaart Tarafından Önerilen Ölülerin "Saflaştırılması" İçin Yapıların Yeniden Yapılandırılması. İnternet kaynağı*



Figure 10: Kaaba of Zoroaster. Cultic Construction of Naksh-i Rustam Ensemble. Iran. Internet Resource / *Kabe-i Zerdüşt Naksh-i Rustam Topluluğunun Kült Yapısı. İran. İnternet kaynağı*

in ancient Persian sources (Avesta) are referred to as dakhma[18]. Religious buildings of Achaemenid period, for example, cult-funerary ensemble at Naqsh-i Rustam in Iran of cubic form, known as the Kaaba of Zoroaster with high stone staircase is by design vaguely reminiscent of reconstruction proposed by Mellaart burial structures of Çatal Hüyük's murals. This is one of the best preserved monuments of religious architecture of ancient Iran and is likely only one of the links in the evolution of the burial complexes of the ancient East (Fig. 10). To some extent, this type of construction, where the dead bodies were kept is in common with the famous "tower of silence" of Iranian and Indian Zoroastrians (Parsis). Running ahead, we note that such facilities are available on the high hills and in archaeological material of Central Asia of antiquity and the early Middle Ages.

It is interesting to note that the term "dakhma" lives up to the present time and does not lose any of the basic values - elevated platform for exhibiting of corpses, although has significance of crypt or grave, also catacomb and caves. In the modern Uzbek dakhma can mean a mausoleum, a tomb, a family tomb or headstone[19]. A striking example of dakhma of the medieval time with a elevated podium and tombstones and stelae can serve as dakhma of Sheibanids in Samarkand (Fig. 11).



Figure 11: Sheibanid's Dakhma in Samarkand / *Semerkand'da Sheibaniler Dakhması*

## CENTRAL ASIA (BACTRIA, MARGIANA)

Archaeological sites which we have to address, are located in the south of modern Uzbekistan, i.e. region called Bactria in scientific literature. Chronologically, we considered the settlement dates from the first half of the 2nd millennium BC (Sapallitepa)[20] as well as the end of the 2 - beginning of the 1st millennium BC (Dzharkutan)[21]. Of great interest is small in size (3 hectares) Sapallitepa mound excavated by Uzbek archeologists in the late 60s and early 70s of the last century. Within the excavated part of the settlement under the floors of residential buildings, in ruins of abandoned buildings courtyards and streets within the walls of the individual rooms and corridors bypass were discovered burials with rich grave goods, materials similar to those settlements. The graves by their construction are divided into the catacomb, podboy[22] and simple tomb in shape of pit. The last is most commonly associated with children's graves.

[18] The term dakhma in the texts of the Avesta, in particular, Videvdat can transmit different values, chief among which is the Zoroastrian platform for exposing a corpse, but the word can also mean simply non-Zoroastrian grave. In Middle Persian sources dakhma could mean funeral, burial niche, ossuary or a platform for exposing of corpses.

[19] Uzbek-Russian Dictionary 1941: 118.

[20] Askarov 1973.

[21] Askarov 1977.

[22] Tomb with an underground chamber and a side niche (alcove).

Burials with fractioned bones were also found in the burial sites of Margiana (Turkmenistan): Gonur-depe, Togolok-1, and Togolok-21[23]. In particular, during excavations of Gonur-depe three burials with fractional remains stacked in a pile in the burial pit were found. In Togolok-1 one of the premises was used as cemetery; here on the floor of the room in a small-sized hole the phalanx of the fingers and toes were discovered. In the same non-plundered burial near the fragments of the skeleton an amulet made in lapis lazuli was found, with the image of a bird-man and a winged animal[24]. In the altar area of Togolok-21, after the altar ceased to function, under a large pithos long bones were cleared, which were placed under two skulls[25]. Separated bones with skulls have been found in Northern Gonur (Fig. 12)[26], as well as in the ruins of the temple of Togolok-21[27]. According to the excavator, V. I. Sarianidi, these bones were cleaned from meat, although this type of burial of fractioned bone is rare and limited and is located apart from the main burials[28]. I would re-emphasize two facts which are important for the study here, namely, those burials with fractioned bones are few in relation to other types. The second important point is the burial location, as V. I. Sarianidi stated they were apart, and one of these burials (Togolok-21), was located in an altar (sacred) area, although at the end of its functioning.



Figure 12: Burial with Decected Bones. Gonur North. Turkmenistan. After V.I. Sarianidi / *Parçalanmış Kemiklerle Defin. Kuzey Gonur. Türkmenistan. V.I Sarianidi (Sarianidi 2007)*

Archaeological investigations of the funerary complexes of Dzharkutan have revealed characteristic features in the burial and the evolution of the funeral rite[29]. For the Dzharkutan stage we can see quite a strong tradition expressed in the flexed (knees) position of the buried lying on his sides and with the head oriented to the north. For the Molali stage a variability of funerary methods, including inhumation in a flexed position on the side in podboj grave, and sometimes in pit graves is characteristic; inhumation on the back with his legs apart; burial with fractioned bones stacked in a pile; cenotaph burial[30].

The next two burials are of paramount importance for the topic of our research. For this reason we give a quote of the description of V. Ionesov, author of the excavation. "Burial number 100 is a pit grave and dated to the Molali-Buston phase. The grave has an oval shape, with size of 160 x 130 cm, in north-south orientation. The preserved depth of the grave is 35cm. In the burial a dismembered skeleton of a woman has been found, in the northern part of grave there was a skull. The neck was oriented to the east. The skull was lying on two tibias, located in front of the pelvic bone. Next, lay the dense cluster of femoral and radial bones, ribs, scapula, vertebrae, clavicle and mandible. The southern part of the grave was empty. Burial inventory was represented only by a tiny bronze plate of 6 cm length, 0.5 cm width, and was located just west of the pile of bones. It should be noted also the finding of several charcoals. This rite of burial was observed in a number of graves at Dzharkutan-4B and Bustan-4 (no. 41, 60, 83, 88 - Dzharkutan-4B; no. 8, 30 - Bustan-4 (4)"[31].

The second burial no 8 (Fig. 13) of Dzharkutan 4b from the Kuzali phase: "It is significant that the tomb was located apart from the majority of graves in the northeastern corner of the excavated space at a relatively great depth. The burial was of podboj type and had not been robbed. The entrance hole of 70x50 cm (EW) was located in the northern part of the grave. The burial chamber was round with a size of 140 x 120 cm along the axis E-W. The bottom of the grave was reached at a depth of 215 cm from the current surface. In the northern part of the chamber fractioned bones of a man of 20-35 years were unearthed. The bones were neatly and symmetrically stacked. The skull was on the left front side of the parietal to the west. Next, lay the dense cluster of limbs[32]. We should remember that the "isolation" of this burial from the others is reminiscent of the situation of the Margiana necropolis (Gonur North, Togolok-21), as discussed above.

Of course, the above examples do not provide a complete picture of burial ceremonies in any quantitative or qualitative terms, and require more detailed investigation. To a certain extent the material of the Dzharkutan

[23] Sarianidi 2007: 5.
[24] Sarianidi 1998: no 1620.
[25] Sarianidi 1990: 128.
[26] Sarianidi 1990: 156, no 2.
[27] Sarianidi 1990: 160, no 21.
[28] Sarianidi 2007: 50
[29] Ionesov 1988.
[30] Avanesova 2006: 23.
[31] Ionesov 1990: 143.
[32] Ionesov 1996: 23.




Figure 13: Burial no 8 with Fractioned Bones. Dzharkutan. Uzbekistan / *Bölünerek Kemikler ile Defin No 8. Djharkutan. Özbekistan*

complex is complemented by the Buston necropolis located in the proximity of Dzharkutan. For example, the Buston phase shows various examples of the buried ritual posture and orientation. There are several groups of ritual characteristics and their variants (inhumation, cremation, symbolic graves), many aspects of ritual practices change and evolve[33]. This, in turn, may reflect the highly complex processes of sacralizing and mythologizing in the religious thought of ancient society.

Considering here only the graves with the fractioned bones, we have repeatedly pointed out that their number compared with the total number of excavated graves, is not high. Nevertheless, even these few graves show some differences between them, which, however, can be attributed to variations of one (single) burial custom. N. A. Avanesova considers this practice to be "a particular form of ritual inhumation" designating it as "secondary burial of the remains of fractioned bones." In Buston VI there are several versions: "imitation of integrity of remains", non-articulated finds of individual bones "and "partially articulated joints"[34].

The arrangement of purified bones in the burial pits is still the most important fact. All burials with dissected bones belong to the Molali and Buston phases.

The basic construction of the burial is a catacomb with rectangular dromos (entrance) (in the work of N. A.Avanesova - "podboj-catacomb construction with sub rectangular entrance.") There are burials with the same type of construction and sub rectangular dromos but without inventory (similar to the Tulkhar burials in Tajikistan)[35]. The burial chamber usually has a rounded shape. The entrance (dromos) of the catacomb was laid in rows of unfired bricks, sometimes large stones (boulders) were used additionally.

It should be noted that in the necropolis of Tulkhar the dromos (Mandelshtam called this part of the structure "descent") was over lapped by flagstones. This detail in funerary structures, as can be seen from the context, was dependent on the terrain and raw materials (stone was replaced by brick)[36].

So, in a very short examination we traced the common elements in burial practice between Asia Minor (Çatal Hüyük) and Central Asia. Taking into consideration a long chronological gap and specificities of the complexes we can emphasize certain similarities indicating the origins going back to prehistoric period of mankind. In fact, not only the funerary rite of burials of fractioned bones unites these two regions. There is another very similar tradition namely to expose the corpses to birds of prey to be decarnated ("purified") that proceeded of burials. Remarkable analogies to the pectoral scenes with vultures of Çatal Hüyük were found on two seals from Bactria.

## SEALS WITH SCENE OF DEVOURING OF DEAD FROM BACTRIA

I suggest that certain Bactrian seals had a direct relation with the funerary rites discussed above. The compositions on these seals demonstrate scenes which later were

[33] Avanesova 2006: 25.

[34] Avanesova 2013: 62.

[35] Tulkhar otherwise Early Tulkhar Necropolis located in Bishkent Valley in southern Tajikistan. Necropolis was investigated in 1960-es by A. Mandelshtam and dated to Late Bronze Age (Mandelshtam 1968).

[36] Mandelshtam 1968.

accepted and included in the funerary complex of the Zoroastrian religion.

The first seal comes from the private collection of P. Gardner. It was published repeatedly by V. I. Sarianidi[37] and represents a scene of torment of dead bodies by predatory birds and animals (Figs. 14 - 15). The figures of animals and the dead are placed around a circle in the center of which there is a big figure of a bird (vulture?) with an emphasized long and sharp beak. The legs of the bird with sharp talons are stretched to the breast of the lying figure while its beak approaches the face of the person on the level of the eyes. Laying on its back the figure is shown with flexed legs. The second figure is shown in the upper part of the composition in a similar pose. There is a bird which also sits on the belly of the figure. Another (third) bird is represented in swooping position. On the right, but in the lower part between two figures, there is a running quadruped animal, in all probability, a dog. A little above there is an S shape design, meaning most likely a reptile (snake?).

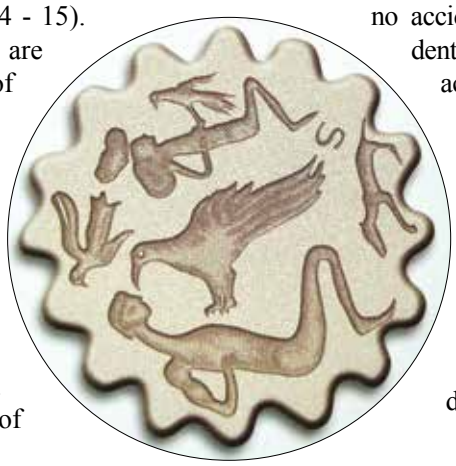


Figure 14: Seal with Scene of Devouring from Garner's Collection. / *Garner'ın Kolleksiyonu'ndan Kuşların Parçalama Sahneli Mühür (Sarianidi 2010)*

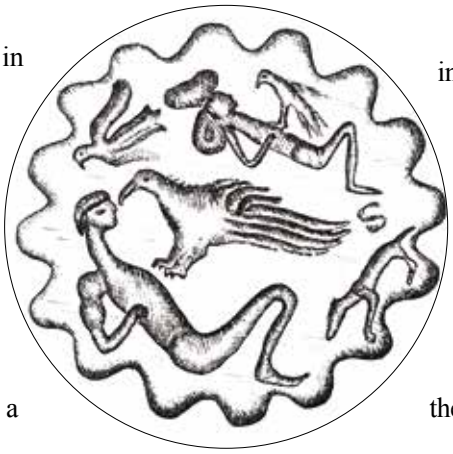


Figure 15: The same. Drawing by Author / *Aynısı. Yazarın Çizimi*

The second figure is represented in a distinguished way; the head differs from the first figure. A large drop shaped object is attached to the neck. It could be explained as an element of hairstyle, for example, like a mop of hair, however it would be more tempting to recognize in it a funerary object. In any case, we can interpret more definitely the second detail represented above the head of the person. It has a prolonged form with rounded ends.

The exactness and accuracy of the ancient master-engraver treating the details of figures lying on their backs with legs flexed at the knees and arms placed on the belly may be noted. In this respect it is interesting to remember the primitive clay figure found in one of the burials of Dzharkutan that repeats position of the personage on the seal[38]. However, we have not sufficient evidence to suggest that the poses of the exposed dead could be repeated in clay representations. We can only suppose that the poses of dead left on the open space were regulated in certain ways in accordance with the rules of funerary practice (infr.).

The seal described has 16 angles and the composition inscribed in space is limited by these angles. It seems no accident that the shape of the seals with dented edges gives an impression that the action is on a mountain landscape.

On a second seal, made in dark-brown stone of triangular form with dented sides, from the Kabul Museum[39] we have the same scene with a big bird over a figure lying with bent legs (Figs. 16 - 17). The author of the publication V. I. Sarianidi describes this subject as "a man attacked by a bird". In my opinion, here is the same scene of torment of the dead. The stretched arm of the lying figure is joined with an object of massive form the configuration of which is not clear. It may be noted that the figure lies on the jags, symbolizing, in all evidence, the mountains. And the coincidence in this case seems not accidental. The representation of the mountains in the most unambiguous manner indicates that the bodies of dead were exposed on open space in mountainous areas. These two seals specifically testify that the place for the rite of exposing the dead were mountains. It is appropriate to refer to the words of Ahura Mazda to the question of Zarathustra from Zend-Avesta: «Whither shall we bring, where shall we lay the bodies of the dead, O, Ahura Mazda?» Ahura Mazda answered: "On the highest summits, where they know there are always corpse-eating dogs and corpse-eating birds, O holy Zarathustra!"[40]

It should be emphasized that on both seals the heads of figures lying on their backs are turned up to the sky (similar position of the clay figurine unearthed from the Dzharkutan tomb). Such a pose for the rite of exposing the dead is also recommended in the Zend-Avesta. «The worshippers of Mazda shall lay down the dead (on the Dakhma) his eyes towards the sun (Vendidad, Fargard V, III, 13 (44)[41].

[37] Sarianidi 2001; Sarianidi 2010.

[38] Abdullaev / Rtveladze / Shishkina 1991: no 22.

[39] Sarianidi 1998: 914.

[40] Vendidad, Fargard VI, V, 45 (93).

[41] Zend-Avesta 1880: 52.

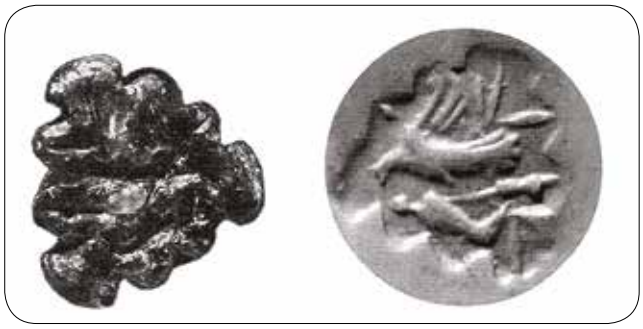


Figure 16: Seal from Kabul Museum / *Kabil Müzesi'nden Mühür. (Sarianidi 1998)*

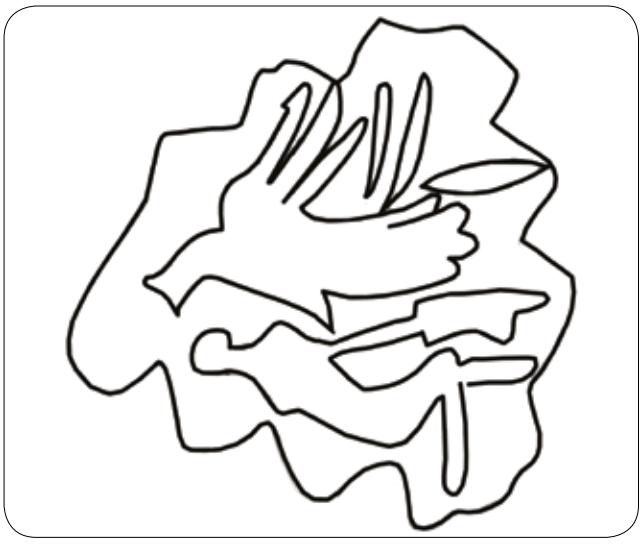


Figure 17: The Same. (Drawing) / *Aynısı. (Çizim).*

Numerous legends are associated with mountains in Central Asia as well as in other lands and regions, when in certain historical periods the old and feeble people were brought to mountains (in forests) and left there supplied with the minimum of meals and water[42]. In all probability, the rite of exposing on a certain space, in this case in mountains, was preceded by the emergence of special artificial constructions, like the dakhma, although in certain periods two ways of exposing could have co-existed. In any case, for the mountainous area the tops were more convenient while for plain landscapes people used natural hills like at Chylpyktepa in Khorasmia (3rd – 4th century AD) (Fig. 18)[43]. On the northern part of Kalaly site also in Khorasmia (2-3 centuries AD) S.P. Tolstov observed two constructions which could be used as "towers of silence" – place for preparation of bodies for the subsequent burials in ossuaries[44]. Otherwise special elevated platforms were erected as we can observe in the Erkurgan area (Kashkadarya, Uzbekistan, 2nd century BC)[45].

The dakhma of Erkurgan is represented by an eroded hill of oval form (length 70 m and height 7 m) located in the north-western part of the ancient city between its exterior and interior ramparts. The excavations revealed that the upper part of the dakhma has a towering monolithic structure (34 to 23 m) that was built of mud brick and clay. The tower was built on a vast platform (lower level of construction). To the east façade of the tower adjoined an adobe platform with a height to just below the platform of the tower, its surface having been carefully plastered with adobe clay. The dakhma functioned in the 2ndcentury BC, for a relatively short time and soon after that was very carefully entombed[46]. The top of the tower was almost completely destroyed, and only in the south-west corner, under the rubble, at a depth of 70-80 cm from the top the remains of an area were found, paved with large and small pieces of white limestone. Here, among stones disturbed and displaced by treasure hunters, finger bones, teeth and other small human bones and few fragments of pottery were found. When stripping the western slope of the dakhma's surface, immediately under a thin layer of sods at a depth of several centimeters in the soil conglomerate, a skull of a teenager was found who, apparently, was lying on the surface of the south-western area of the dakhma's tower[47]. According to the author and the head of the excavation, R. Suleymanov, it is on the top floor, in the south-western part, laid out with raw pieces of limestone, where the corpses of the dead were exposed. The dakhma of Erkurgan is dated by a few but expressive complexes of ceramics to the 2nd century BC[48].

From this description it is important to emphasize that the area for exposing the bodies of the dead was paved with limestone which evidently served as material isolating the dead from the earth. In this case we can suggest that the bodies of the dead were isolated from the earth not only in the tombs of burials but also on the area of exposure. It was specifically when it was a construction of clay or mud brick (kind of earth!), unlike the mountains of rock which itself could serve as isolating material.

Excavations at Gonur-depe (Turkmenistan) have shown that the role of dakhma here was played by one of the rooms of the palace complex[49]. The author of the excavation, V. I. Sarianidi, suggests the existence of a special entrance, where specially trained dogs could penetrate. In the Avesta places where there were special dogs and birds are prescribed. The indication that "there shall the worshippers of Mazda fasten the corpse, by the feet and by the hair, with brass, stones, or lead, lest the corpse-eating dogs and the corpse-eating birds shall go and carry the bones to the

[42] Andreev 1953: 211.
[43] Tolstov 1948: 71-72.
[44] Tolstov 1962: 114-115.
[45] Suleymanov 2000: 115-120.
[46] Suleymanov 2000: 115.
[47] Suleymanov 2000: 119.
[48] Suleymanov 2000: 120.
[49] Sarianidi 2010: 50.



Figure 18: Dakhma Chylpyktepa in Khorazmia. Uzbekistan. 2-4 c. A.D / *Khorazmia'daki Dakhma Chylpyktepa. Özbekistan. MS 2-4 Yüzyıllar*

water and to the trees"[50], is indicative of the fact that the bodies were exposed, likely in the open space (outdoors). It is interesting that in this passage there are listed devices for fixing the bodies against their being moved by animals. It is appropriate in this context to recall the epitaph to the slave-Persian by the poet Dioscorides, who emphasizes that the fire and the river do not come into contact with corpses[51]. That is, the devices must be secured against moving parts of a corpse to rivers or other sacred elements. Are not these items shown in the above seals from the collection of R. Gardner and the Kabul Museum?

It would be categorical to believe that the building, where the corpses were exposed, had a well-defined shape and a well-defined function, an assumption for which B. A. Litvinski, and a number of authors (see above), stated, that the dakhma could serve as a place for exposing and as storage place (naos), seems quite convincing[52].

## WRITTEN SOURCES

Quite a variety of information about the burial customs of the Persians is given by one of the early classical authors, Herodotus (Bk. I,CXL). "So much I can say of them of my own certain knowledge. But there are other matters concerning the dead which are secretly and obscurely told – how the dead bodies of Persians are not buried before they have been mangled by bird or dog. That this is the way of the Magians I know for a certainty; for they do not conceal the practice. But this is certain, that before the Persians bury the body in earth they embalm it in wax."[53]

Information on this custom can be found also in his followers[54]. The same Herodotus and Xenophon mention burials under a mound (kurgan)[55] or ordinary burial[56]. In a military context burial rites were, in all probability, simplified. For example, by the order of Xerxes I 19,000 Persians, who perished at Thermopylae, were just buried[57]. In a similar manner noble Persians were buried after the battle of Issus[58].

Strabo also notes that the Persians had to bury the dead after they are coated with wax[59]. Perhaps what is meant by embalming applied mainly to royal persons. This custom was due to the existence of the cult of the king and his deification during his lifetime (the cult of the pharaohs, Alexander, etc.).

[50] Zend-Avesta, Vendidad, FargardVI, V, 46 (95), 73.
[51] Chistyakova 1993: 169.
[52] Litvinski / Sedov 1983: 113.
[53] Herod. Hist., 181,140.
[54] Cicero. Tusc.45, 108; Strab. XV, 3, 20.
[55] Herod. Hist. VII 117; Xen. Cyr. VII 3, 16.
[56] Herod. Hist. IX 84; DeLuc. 21, 932.
[57] Herod. Hist. VIII 24-25.
[58] Cur. Ruf. Hist. Alex. Mag. III 12, 13-14.
[59] Strabo XV, III, 13.

According to Strabo "Anciently the Sogdians and Bactrians did not differ much from the nomads in their mode of life and manners, yet the manners of the Bactrians were a little more civilized. Onesicritus, however, does not give the most favorable account of this people. Those who are disabled by disease or old age are thrown alive to be devoured by dogs kept expressly for this purpose, and whom in the language of the country they call entombers (ένταφιασταί). The places on the exterior of the walls of the capital of the Bactrians are clean, but the interior is for the most part full of human bones. Alexander abolished this custom"[60]. However, the accuracy of these reports has been questioned[61].

"Something of the same kind is related of the Caspians also, who, when their parents have attained the age of 70 years, confine them, and let them die of hunger. This custom, although Scythian in character, is more tolerable than that of the Bactrians, and is similar to the domestic law of the Ceians; the custom, however, of the Bactrians is much more according to Scythian manners"[62]. In another fragment we find that "the Caspians starve to death those who are above seventy years old, by exposing them in a desert place. The exposed are observed at a distance[63]; if they are dragged from their resting-place (κλίνη) by birds, they are then pronounced happy; but if by wild beasts, or dogs, less fortunate; but if by none of these, ill-fated"[64].

Justin wrote about the Parthians," Their general mode of sepulture is dilaniation by birds or dogs; the barebones they at last burying the ground (sepulture vulgo autaviumaut canum laniatusest; nudad emumossa terra obruunt)"[65]. Agathius also wrote on the custom of leaving a seriously ill person outside the camp[66]. Porphyry reports about the Hyrkanians and Scythians who abandon the elderly and sick[67]. However, describing the rites of magicians, Strabo notes that according to their custom, they did not bury the deceased in the ground, but gave them to be eaten by birds of prey.

The earliest report on the specific Zoroastrian custom of exposing corpses, as already noted, belongs to Herodotus: Persian corpses were exhibited to the mercy of predatory birds and dogs[68]. Herodotus saw on the battlefield of Papremise heaps of bones of the Persians and Egyptians[69]. Hyrkanians grew for this a particular breed of dog[70].

The custom of exposure for devouring by dogs and birds is typical for all Persians, Agathias describes for his time, and burial in the ground or in the coffin was forbidden, but very common in the past[71]. Procopius mentions the prohibition in legislative form of betraying the dead body to the earth[72]. According to Cicero and Strabo, precisely the magicians expose the corpses to be eaten by birds[73]. This is a very interesting report, to which we will return below for a detailed analysis.

Agathias tells the story about a group of Platonic philosophers, led by Damascus, visiting Persia. On the way they saw an unburied corpse and decided to bury him, but to no avail, and the deceased came to the philosopher in his sleep, after which he interpreted the ban to bury the corpses in the earth-mother as a punishment to the Persians for their custom of cohabitation with their mothers[74].

The above examples may indicate that in the pre-Achaemenid period and later the funeral rites of western Iranians largely differed, not only from the eastern provinces, but also among themselves.

As V. V.Barthold noted, funeral rites in the eastern Iranian world, in contrast to the rites of the Persians, experienced an independent evolution[75]. In fact, in the historical and cultural regions of Central Asia, such as, Khorezm, Sogd, Chach, Margiana, as well as monuments of Semirechye quite common finds of ossuaries - ceramic boxes with the remains of buried stacked inside[76]. Meanwhile, it should be noted their complete lack in the territory of Bactria and historical regions of Iran[77].

Interesting information about funeral rites of the people of Samarkand can be found in the encyclopedia of Tung-tien[78] in the story of the envoy Wei Jie at the beginning of the 7th century AD. In particular, they say that in Samarkand at that time there still remained an old Bactrian custom of educating dogs specifically for

[60] StraboXI, XI, 3.
[61] Koshelenko 1985: 266.
[62] StraboXI, XI, 3.
[63] Strabo XI, 11, 8.
[64] Strabo XI, XI, 7.
[65] Just.,XLI, 3.
[66] Agath. Reign. Just.II 23.
[67] Porph. Reign. Just.Abst. IV 21.
[68] Herod. Hist. I 140.
[69] Herod. Hist. III 12.
[70] Cicero. Tusc. I 45, 108.
[71] Agath. Reign. Just.II 22-23.
[72] Procop. I 11, 35.
[73] Cicero. Tusc.I 45, 108; Strab. XV 3, 20.
[74] Agath.Reign. Just.II 31.
[75] However, as archaeological studies of the Bactrian Region testify until present days there are no finds of ossuaries in this territory.
[76] Rapoport 1967; Rapoport 1971; Grenet 1984.
[77] Bartold1966 : 119-120.
[78] Chavannes 1903: 133.

devouring meat of human corpses; the bones of the dead were buried in the ground, but not put in coffins[79].

Chavannes writes: "…texte fort curieux qui est tiré du Mémoire de Wei Tsie sur les Barbares d'occident … , je n'ai pu trouver aucune renseignement sur ce Wei Tsie ; le passage traduit ci-dessous (voyez Pien i tien, chap. XLVII, notice sur le K'ang-kiu, p. 4 r) est une citation qui est faite dans le T'ong tien de TouYeou (TouYeou entreprit son encyclopédie á l'âge de 32 ans, la première année ta-li = 766 ; il a terminéà l'âge de 67 ans, la dix-septième année tcheng-yuen = 801) : "Le Mémoire de Wei Tsie sur les Barbares occidentaux dit : Les gens du royaume K'ang … . En dehors de la capitale il y a, logées á l'écart, plus de deux cents familles qui ont la spécialité de s'occuper des funérailles ; ces gens ont construit dans un endroit isolé une enceinte dans laquelle tous les ossements qu'on enterre en leur faisant un convoi funèbre ; on ne les met dans aucun cercueil"[80].

One of the first translators of the Chinese Chronicle, the Russian monk Iakinf (Bichurin), describing the Bosy (Persians) after Bey Shi, notes that they leave the dead in mountains and for one month they are in mourning. Out of residence there is an estate of people who live separately and their business is related with funerary duty; they are considered as unpurified. If they go to market they let people know their identity by ringing bells[81].

An interesting and at the same time some mysterious information is contained in the story of al-Baladhuri in his Futuh al-Buldan (404) dating back to the conquest of Khorasan by Arabs. Let bring this passage in its entirety.

"Death of al-Aswad. Ibn-Amir[82] sent al-Aswad ibn-Kulthum al-Adawi (Adi ar-Ribab), a pious man, to Baihak, a district of Nišabur. He entered one of the gardens belonging to its population by means of a breach in its wall, and a part of the Moslems entered with him. But the enemy seized the breach against them, and al-Aswad fought until he and those with him were killed. He was succeeded in command of the force by Adham ibn-Kulthum , who accomplished the capture of Baihak. Al-Aswad had prayed his Lord to gather him at the resurrection from the bellies of the beasts and birds, and so his brother did not bury him, although his martyred companions were buried.[83]"

From this passage it follows that al-Aswad ibn-Kulthum prayed to his Lord (it is not specified exactly what Lord) that Lord recreated him from the stomachs of wild beasts and birds. It is logical to assume that for this his corpse should have been eaten by these birds and beasts. From the following text it is clear that this is not a free expression of author, and indeed al-Aswad's body was left by his brother without burial in contrast to his fallen comrades whose bodies were interred.

Involuntarily the question arises: was whether al-Aswad an adherent of Zoroastrian religion? There is no direct indication of this, and the question remains open, although against the background of the buried Muslims the desire to rise from the dead "from the stomachs of animals and birds" looks strange and definitely not Muslim.

This story has distant resembles to the death of Bukhar Hudat Tughshāda, which will be discussed below. The only difference is that Tughshāda orders his subordinates, being mortally wounded, but in consciousness. As for Al-Aswad and his Muslim fellows, his brother finds them already dead and buries them in accordance with their confessional affiliation. Consequently, Al Aswad's wish was known for his brother even earlier. It can be assumed that al-Aswad belonged to a Zoroastrian community, and then we have at our disposal an interesting fact of tolerance and joint actions of Muslims and Zoroastrians in the territory of Khorasan.

According to medieval sources (Narshakhi, at-Tabari, al-Garnati) beside exposing the corpse on an open space for separating the flesh from the bones there was another way, that is, the mechanical one. We have information on this in the story of Bukhār Khudāh Tughshāda reflected in two sources: History of Prophets and Kings of at-Tabari (839-923) (II, 1694) and History of Bukhara of Muhammad Narshahi (899-959)[84] concerning the murdering of Tughshāda in 121 (739 AD). Narshahi writes, when Tughshāda was wounded mortally he exhorted and died after one hour. Servants entered and removed his flesh(کشت از وی جدا کردند) and brought his bones to Bukhara[85].

However, can we consider this case with Tughshāda as a funerary practice or tradition? Or could it be a forced measure because of the situation. Baron V. R. Rosen studied this episode and proposed that "it is necessary to distinguish in this case religious custom and action

[79] Bartold 1968 : 346.
[80] Chavannes 1903 : 133.
[81] Bichurin 1951, 169
[82] Abdallah ibn Amir- governor of Basra (29-35 = 649-655), The year 30 (= 650) made a compaign to Khorasan.
[83] Baladhuri 1924: 160.
[84] Narshahi 1954. The work of Narshahi edited and changed in 1128 was translated to Persian by Abu-Nasr Akhmad ibn Muhammad al-Kubavi.
[85] Narshahi 1954: 62.

used for commodity of transportation of the remains"[86]. Removing flesh from the bones could theoretically be one of the wishes of the dying Tughshāda.

In this respect the information of N. I. Veselovski referring to the Astrakhan merchant Abrosimov (1842) is interesting. Having been in Khiva Abrosimov observed the Kirgiz taking out a dead from the tomb, scraping away the flesh from the bones for transporting them to his natal village trying to give a possibility for the parents to mourn and re-bury their son. So, two similar examples discussed above testify that fractioned bones of dead with subsequent burying, excluding the practice of exposing the corpse, were in fact, only incidental instances.A little differently we can interpret a fragment from an Arab source of the 12th century, Abu Khamid al-Andalusi or al-Garnati cited by V. V. Bartold, who narrates about the Zirihgerans[87] and their funerary rites. According to Bartold, many Arab writers, beginning from Baladhuri and Masudi, write about this tribe, "but all these information concerning their funerary rites go back to the author of 12th century, Abu Khamid al-Andalusi or al-Garnati, who unfortunately is quite doubtful"[88]. Zirihgerans inhabited two settlements located on a high hill near Derbent; in every settlement there were two underground rooms similar to cellars; one for the male corpses the other one for females. In each room there were men with knives and when the corpses were brought they removed the flesh from the bones and took out the brain. After that the bones were cleaned and dried and put in a sack, namely, the bones of rich men in brocade sacks and the bones of poor people in unbleached material (brown Holland). On the sack they wrote the name of the dead and his parents, date of his birth and death and hung it up in the same room. The flesh of the male corpse was brought away to a hill located outside the settlement and given to black ravens; other birds were kept off by arrows. The female flesh was given to black kites and other birds were also kept away[89].

This information inadvertently brings to mind a wall painting from Çatal Hüyük (Sanctuary VIII.8) which depicts an live personage with stick in hand driving away a bird from the corpse.

In this case, if the information of Arab author is accurate, we have a certain rite associated with certain religious traditions and ideology of the Zirihgeran tribe. Although mechanically (manually) cleaned bones collected in a sack excluded the custom of exposing of the corpse, nevertheless the flesh was given to certain birds which resembled those described in the stories of classical authors (Herodotus, Strabo and specifically information about the Caspians, see above ).

If we can consider the case of Bukhār Khudāh Tughshāda as a forced measure for the facilitating of transportation, the actions of Zirihgerans are comparable with a tradition. However, in both cases the corpse undergoes operative actions and bone separation has an artificial character. In the first case it was a close and instructed servant, in the second one the question is of a group of special (professional?) men who were regularly occupied with that rite.

The main idea in both cases is the burial of fractioned bones although their purification was effected in different ways. In this respect information about the Zirihgerans delivered by al Garnati is more concrete, where special people executed this ritual. From an archaeological point of view the sites of the funeral culture of Azerbaijan are of great interest. In particular in kurgan no. 34 in the Hanlar district of Azerbaijan Ya .I. Gummel discovered fractioned bones and they had been cut at the joints, clearly indicating artificial dismembering of the corpse before burial[90].

In this relation a principal question arises. Can we associate all the burials with fractioned bones to Zoroastrian funeral practice? In this respect the tradition of one of the Kafir tribe of the Hindukush is notable. V. V. Grigorjev, in his time translating Erkunde of Carle Ritter, specifically noted the parts devoted to Kabulistan and Kafiristan[91]. From the observations of the outstanding German scholar we know about funeral customs of the Siah Posh tribe which was documented by M. Mohun Lal accompanying Lieutenant Bornes on his journey. The information was based on the oral report of a Muslim mufti who visited the tribe[92].

'Having passed through the valleys called Darah Nur, Damunj, and Vakul, he arrived the third day at the village named Katar, occupied by the Siah Posh… Their dress is of goat skin, and their hair hangs down to their shoulders. They drink wine as well as water, and never sit upon the ground, but only in chairs. This shows perhaps that they are the descendants of Alexander the Great. …As to their religion, they worship idols, either made of stone or wood, which they call Buruk, or Maha Dev. They wear iron rings in their ears, and a string ornamented with shells, round their necks. They sacrifice cows on their holidays,

[86] Veselovski 1907: IV.
[87] Zirihgerans means makers of chain-mail armor.
[88] Bartold 1966: 120.
[89] Bartold 1966: 121.
[90] Gummel 1940: 60-61.
[91] Ritter 1867.
[92] Mohun Lal 1834: 76-79.

as the Muhammadeans do in the day of Eeduzuha. If a stranger happens to ask them where is god, they point with their fingers towards the west or Mecca. They read the Muhammedean kalimeh to please the Musulmans, and at the same time confess themselves to be Kafirs; in short, their religion is not known…. The funeral of the Siah Posh people is triumphantly solemnized. The corpse is generally attended by young men, who sing, skip, dance, and play upon drums. The deceased, unwashed, is carried away upon the shoulders of men, in a large box, as among the Muhammedeans. It is taken upon the top of a high mountain, and put open to the sun. They sacrifice a cow, and give a feast to the attendants of the funeral. Then they return home, and do not weep at all.'

After sixty days, when the body is putrefied, and eaten by birds, the women of the family go in an assembly upon the mountain. They pick up the bones, and after washing them in a stream, they bring them home, sit round them, and then mourn for a short time; after this, the men come and convey the bones, they say, "This is the heaven for you"[93].

Archaeological material from Margiana is demonstrative for the interpretation of burials with fractioned bones. In the funeral complexes and necropoles this type of burials is presented in a minority compared to the ordinary inhumation tombs. It could mean that the buried bones belonged to a certain isolated group of people. Though these burials have no similarity with royal burials, however, isolation from the other tombs and their closeness to sacral areas may testify to a certain measure the high status of this group. Clergy had such a status in ancient society, and we can suppose that the burials with fractioned bones belonged to priests (magi). Let me remind that in classical sources (Herodotus, Strabo etc.) it is known that only the magi could publicly and freely expose the corpse of the dead to be eaten by birds and animals.

However, there is no common opinion amongst classical authors about the social status of the magi. They are presented as a tribe or as a professional society. The similar situation in classical sources about Indian Brahmans can be noted, where their determination is different (tribe or society) but they possessed special knowledge and had a high position in the social hierarchy[94]. According to Herodotus, the magi were one of six Median tribes[95]. They are mentioned without relation to Zoroaster or his follower[96]. Aeschylus characterizes magi in an ethnic sense[97].

The historical episode related to Smerdis who usurped the throne after the death of Cambyses also indicates the high status of the magi in the state structure[98]. Originally, magi were interpreters of dreams, for example, interpretations of King Astiag's dreams concerning Cyrus[99]. Herodotus also mentions the participation of the magi in sacrifices[100].

Clearchus from Sol names gymnosophists as disciples of the magi[101]. However, there is the contradictory information of Ammianus[102], that Histaspes, father of Darius, who followed the teaching of Zoroaster, received the knowledge from Brahmans and then transferred it to the magi. Information of the same Ammianus is important. It concludes that initially there was a minority but then they increased. They live in separate settlements without fortification walls, according to their laws[103].

After Lucian the magi were followers of Zoroaster merged with Chaldeans from Babylon who open the gate to Aid by invocations[104]. Apuleius considers the magi's science as pious[105]. Agathias of Merineus unites the magi in a clan that was elevated in the time of Artaxar's rule who conquered the Parthians and participated in magi's mysteries. In the time of Agaphias all social affairs amongst Persians were accomplished by the advice and predictions of the magi, and with their confirmations were considered as lawful and just[106]. After Strabo in Cappadocia there was a big clan of magi who were called pirephes (kindlers of fire in Greek) and there were a lot of shrines devoted to Persian divinities[107].

If we admit that burials with fractioned bones are related with the priest's society, it is difficult to explain the existence of female bones in such burials taking account that only male persons could be magi. It could be possible in this case that the tradition of this custom was applicable for every member of their family. If the priests were castes or tribes it is evident that the rules of funerary tradition were equal for every member of the society.

[93] Mohun Lal 1834: 77.
[94] Abdullaev 2014.
[95] Herod. Hist. I 101. However this information is questionable: Frye 2000, 111; Eliade 2001: 294.
[96] Plu. Quaestconv IV 5, 2, 670d.
[97] Aesch. Pers. 317.
[98] Herod. Hist. III 61-65, 74-79.
[99] Herod. Hist. I, 128.
[100] Herod. Hist. I 132.
[101] Diog. Lart. I, 9.
[102] Amm. Marc. XXIII 6, 33.
[103] Amm. Marc. XXIII 6, 35-36
[104] Luc. Men.6-7.
[105] Apul.Apol. 26, compare 90.
[106] Agath. II 26; compare. Boys 2003: 156.
[107] Strab. XV 3, 15.

The special kind of burial of fractioned bones in ceramic boxes – ossuaries – may be noted, which was widely distributed in Central Asia (Sogdia, Chach, Khorasmia, Margiana). Some richly decorated specimens (Biyanaiman, Ishtykhan, Kashkadarya) represent compositions related with the Zoroastrian mythology and religious pantheon[108].

The appearance of these ossuaries belongs to the Early Medieval period while absolute chronology remains disputed. Their emergence in Sogdia is questionable; it is quite possible we have some influence of adjacent Khorasmia in the tradition which is dated to an earlier period[109]. Some subjects and iconographical elements on the relief composition of ossuaries of Sogdia go back to late Roman and early Christian (Byzantine) sarcophagi and ceramic boxes[110]. However this aspect is weakly studied.

## CONCLUSION

The suggestion of scholars that such burials have no relation with Mazdean or Zoroastrian funerary tradition is reasonable because despite the exterior similarity we have no arguments to relate every burial with fractioned bones to Zoroastrian rites; because such burials could be reminiscent of very ancient traditions going back, according to archaeological evidence, to the prehistoric period and Çatal Hüyük Complex gives in this relation a brilliant specimen. Nevertheless, this rite became one of the necessary elements of the Zoroastrian funerary practice and evidently not only Zoroastrian.

Our hypothesis that burials of fractioned bones belong to the priests-magi (at least in certain periods) are supported by classical sources. Partially it could explain isolation, vicinity to the sacred areas and the relative rarity of these burials in comparison to the ordinary (inhumation) burials. The origins of the tradition of burying of purified bones with an obligatory isolating layer excluding any contacts of the remains with earth, evidently goes back to very ancient cults, for example the cult of the earth. In later periods this practice, as well as exposing the corpse of the dead, was adopted by the magi and introduced into Mazdean and Zoroastrian religious traditions as one of the elements of funerary rites.

The question mark in the title of this article, "the origins or parallel" inclines us to "the origins". It is much more difficult to answer to the question where the start of these sources is. In any case, the monuments of the Neolithic period of ancient Anatolia still remain champions in this regard.

[108] Pugachenkova 1985; Grenee 1987.
[109] Rappoport 1971.
[110] Abdullaev1989: 5-7.

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Arr. An = Arrianus Anabasis

Cicero. Tusc. = Tusculanae disputations

Cur. Ruf. Hist. Alex. Mag. = Quintus Curtius Rufus. Historiae Alexandri Magni Macedonis

Diog. Lart. = Diogenus Laertius. Lives and Opinions of Eminent Philosophers.

Just. Hist. Phil. = Marcus Junianius Justinus Historiarum Philippicarum libri XLIV

Herod. Hist. = Herodotus Historiae

Plu. Alex. Virt. = Plutarchus De Alexandri Magni fortuna aut virtute

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