

Reflection of Horse and Ram Beliefs on the Tombstones in the East Region of Turkey

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Abstract: We can see many types of the gravestones in the historical cemeteries in the worldwide and it can be said that each type of tombstone has emerged under the influence of different beliefs and thoughts. Ram and horse-shaped tombstones on which their images (of ram and horse) are depicted are among the ones which attract great attention, especially in the Asian continent. By considering ram and horse-shaped tombstones and other related artworks, it can be said that human and these two extraordinary animals have had such relationship that even death can't take away their close bonds (ties) from each other.

Ram and horse related art works and tombstones with their shape can be seen widely in countries such as Mongolia, Azerbaijan, Turkmenistan, Kazakhstan, Uzbekistan, Armenia, Georgia and in the east part of Turkey. Although ram and horse-shaped related artworks in each country differ from other, they bear a resemblance in many ways. So, it is thought that many of the artworks in Asia continent, related to horse and ram, are based on similar sources. In this study; we will search the general beliefs and thoughts about ram and horse in ancient nomadic period and try to make an evaluation about their reflections on the tombstones in the east part of Turkey.

Keywords: Beliefs, Ancient, Nomads, Horse, Ram, Shaped, Reflection, Turkey, Tombstones.

Introduction

People are interested in everything around them directly or indirectly and this affects them in some way. When considering the impact of the horse and ram, we can see that their related artworks are not limited to tombstones and sculptures in their shapes. They can be seen on ornaments, war tools, kitchen utensils, knitting, weaving, architectural structures, gravestones and etc. In fact, these widely artefacts reflect the degree of their influence and extent not only in a narrow boundary, but also worldwide very clearly.

Each creature has a purpose of being created but their creation objectives are different. When considering horse and ram in terms of their specialities, we see that the services of the horse offered to people and their contribution to their development is quite high. Beyond the battle areas, they have made a significant contribution to transport, agriculture, science and industry. Its superb appearance also attracts people in many ways and it is linked with qualifications such as nobility, royalty, power, strength, and etc. and that why it is regarded as the aristocrat of the animals. The leadership quality and some other features of the ram also influenced nomads in many ways. We think that this study will be interesting for the ones who are curious about in what ways the nomads were affected by these two extraordinary animals and their reflections to later periods.

1. The Effects of Horse and Ram on Ancient Nomads

We can say that ancient nomads were affected by various things which shaped their beliefs, cultures and social life and horse and ram are two of the things that had great effect on them and this can be examined under the following subheadings:

a. Horse and Ram as Symbols

The horse and ram were considered as symbols of many things. The symbols attributed to the horse mainly comprise speed and power, courage and loyalty, beauty and nobility. Here is what Garson expresses about horse in this issue: 'The horse is a universal symbol of freedom without restraint, because riding a horse made people feel they could free themselves from their own bindings. Also linked with riding horses, they are symbol of travel, movement and desire' (Garcon: 2013:15-8).

Except for its impact related to strength, it seems that the ram has had an influence on different imaginations, as well: 'The motif of ram horn is the symbol of power, strength, health and happiness, sustenance and protection of male fertility. The weavings that are decorated with only by ram horns are symbolizing the world of man...' (Olmez: 2009: 13).

b. Horse and Ram as Sacrificial Animals

Animal sacrifice is explained as the act of offering an animal to appease or maintain favour with a deity. We can see the practice of this religious sacred duty in almost all cultures since ancient times. As the sacrificial animals are offered to a supreme power (god), the selection of animals is carried out accordingly. Depending on the desired features, such worthy animals could be a goat, a cow, an ox, a bull, a camel, a sheep (ram), horse and etc.: 'The content of sacrifice depended on the rank of god or spirit for whom the sacrifice was. Eastern Turks (kok) sacrificed 'many sheep and horses' to the Sky [12]. Western Turks, besides sheep and horses, sacrificed bulls to the Sky [13]' (Nurzhanov 2014, 377).

It seems that the horse and ram were also among the transcendent and worthy animals sacrificed to gods: 'The horse sacrifice was of the highest status among the Altaic peoples who believed that the horse, and

especially the white horse, should be sacrificed merely to the most important gods (Galdanova 1981, p.53) (Fedotoff 1997).

Sacrificing sheep/ram to the gods is explained as follow: ‘The scope of the sacrifice was based on the degree of the god and for whose soul they were sacrificed. Turks in the East sacrificed many sheep and rams to the sky god. Turks in the West, beside the animals such as sheep and ram, they also sacrificed bull to the sky god’ (Nurzhanov 2014, 377):

c. Horse and Ram as Sacred Animals

Considering such animals as sacred might be based on either seeing them in the position of divinities or due to the extraordinary features given by gods. Animals that have supernatural features seem to have been considered as sacred in two different ways: one of them is the belief of regarding them as the gods and the other one is looking on them as representatives of the characteristics of the gods. Of these two viewpoints, it seems that the second view, the animals with extraordinary power to represent one of the features of deities, is gaining intensity. In this respect, it can be said that certain animals were accepted as sacred not because of the belief regarding them as godlike, but because of the characteristics given by god:

‘In Shamanism, the first religion of Turkish tribes (people) in Siberia and Altai, “horse” is believed to have come from the sun country in the level of sky. Judging the unicorn head and masks unearthed from the Pazarık kurgans, perhaps the sacrificial horse, increasingly, believed that it could have taken the place of deer which carry the soul to the other world ... Eventually, both animals are fast and the horse is heavenly, because ancient Turks believed that god also had a sacred horse’ (Tekçe: 1993: 124).

The ram/sheep is also seen among the animals to be treated as a sacred animal: ‘Taking place in the animal calendar, sheep is considered

as a sacred animal. It is said to have been the result of the presence of Turkish tribes which accepted sheep as totem (Armutak, 2002: 418)' (Mandaloglu: 387).

d. Regarding Horse and Ram as Protectors

In ancient times, people believed that some animals had the capability to protect them against various dangers. The animals with the ability of strength, speed and other supernatural features were among the ones for such expectations. They were thought capable of and entrusted to do many things for people, both in this world and in the other world. They were expected to protect them from ghosts, demons, and snakes or accompanying them to the other world:

'In Altaic epics, the heavenly horse is regarded as a protector of the people ... The local population of the Altaic mountains believed the white horse had not only heavenly origin, but it also possessed certain sacred power. They believed that a horseshoe hanged up on a wall over a door, or a threshold should protect from ghosts and demons. In order to protect themselves from poisonous snakes they encircled their stands with a rope which was woven from horse mane and tail (Fedotoff:1997).

Here are some suggestions about the protective features of the ram: 'There were ram sculptures on both sides of the eastern entrance of the complex' (Çoruhlu: 2007:164). 'Two ram sculptures, guarding, can be seen' (Aslanapa: 2003:8). Haldun Özkan says that: 'It is possible to see the animal sculptures representing protective spirits around the graves' (Özkan: 2000:33). On this matter Çoruhlu says that: 'However, the most obvious symbolic meaning of the ram was its protective characteristic' (Çoruhlu:1988:34).

e. Association of Horse and Ram with Social Rank / Leadership

Comparing the features of people with some of the animals is very common in the world. For example, a hardworking one is associated with an ant or a bee. We can say that correlating some admired distinctions of people with certain animals also dates back to ancient times. The deceased, represented with the images of ram and horse, is linked with the ones who were very brave, powerful and had a high stature in the community: 'Images of kingship were closely linked with certain animals. The royal hunt, in which the king could appear alone, mounted, or in a horse- or donkey-drawn chariot while shooting swiftly running animals with arrows, defined the ruler's attributes of strength, skill, and mastery of the natural world' (Benzel, Graff, Rakic, Watts: 2010:.32).

Aiman also mentions that: 'The horse equipment corresponded to a social rank of the owner. According to excavations, the saddled and bridled horse was put in burials of Turk warriors. Saddles, stirrups, various items of bridle equipment (cheek-piece, bone and metal clasps, buckles), have allowed us to reconstruct battle horse equipment of ancient Turk, which accompanied with the owner in other world' (Aiman: 134).

The depiction of a ram's head either on the harness or garment is considered to mark the deceased in a high statue / rank: 'The leadership associated with the ram constantly fits to the image of the ruler. The heads of rams found are applications, sewn on the garment of the elder/priest in order to emphasize his functions as guarantor' (Kamenova:2011:5).

f. Association of Horse and Ram with Gods

Mankind has ever been curious of the Creator. Supernatural creatures were treated in two ways; one of them is as a "god", the other one is that the creatures which were in the service of gods:

'From the Rig Veda, the ten sacred books of Sanskrit hymns, we learn that the horse-chariot was believed to control the sun. Martial symbol of world rule, the horse was carrier of the gods, the white horse drawing

the chariot as the primeval force that moves as fast as light' (Kelekna: 2009: 150, 166-9).

Here is some other viewpoints about the relations of the horse with the gods: 'Horses Dadkhikra and Tarkshya were worshiped by ancient Indians who made sacrifices to them. Horse was one of solar gods and was semantically connected with cosmogony. There are numerous monuments portraying winged horses and so called sun chariots with horses in Central Asia and Kazakhstan' Nurzhanov: 2014: 376.). 'The Turks and Mongols, who appeared in Central Asia in later historical epoch, regarded a white horse as a Heavenly being residing Heaven. That was the reason quite often such a horse to be described as a winged horse. The image of the white winged horse one can find in Mongolian, Turkic, and Korean myths and legends. Among the Mongols and Turks, the horse is a totem' (Fedotoff: 1997). As for ram, it is said that: "Ram is a symbol of power and strength. At the same time, like a wolf, it can be regarded as a kind of the epitome of god' (Çoruhlu: 1988: 34).

g. Association of Horse and Ram with Gods **Horse and Ram as Mediator between the Worlds**

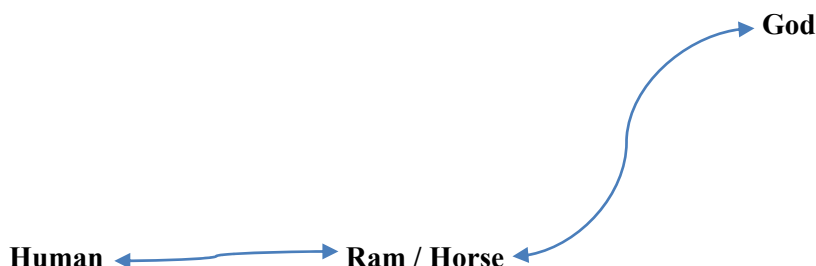
Ancient people believed that they could make their other world journey and could go to heaven by means of these animals. The service of the horse and ram was considered not only connected with this world, but also with the other world. They were accepted as sacred animals because of their contact with gods. That is why it was thought that they could be a means of contact between the gods and them, both in this world and the other world: 'The horse has been important in Shinto thought from early times, serving not only as a vehicle for various gods, but also as a messenger between the temporal and celestial worlds' (Riddle: 2011:4).

Fedotoff explains the issue related to Mongols and Turks as follows: 'Among the Mongols and Turks, the horse is a totem. Moreover,

similarly to ancient Koreans, they believed that the white winged horse had a divine origin. According to their views, such a horse often came down to earth a Heavenly messenger or Heavenly representative' (Fedotoff: 1997).

The ancient stock-breeders valued the ram for his leadership qualities, perseverance, desire for dominance and fertility. These characteristics define his place in the cosmogony of the ancient societies- he occupies the middle area of the space, i.e. he acts as a mediator between worlds, between humans and gods, between this world and "afterlife" (Kamenova:2011: 4-13). In a way, ram and horse are central deities in the spiritual lives like a deer. They assist the deceased in their final journeys.

Ram and Horse as Mediators between the Worlds



h. Association of Horse and Ram with Burial Rituals / Death

Burial practices take an important place in traditions and cultures of all the communities. However, the way of dealing with the deceased varies from society to society and shows diversity from period to period. It is known that in the old burial customs the deceased was buried with his valuables and it is observed that 'horse' and 'ram' were among the things encountered from the excavated kurgans in Asia: 'The special attitude to an image of hero and his horse, acting together as the equal in rights

partners, is underlined in all monuments of material and spiritual culture of Turkic. Both of them are described in poems. The hero and his horse are inseparable even after death: the horse accompanies with the owner in the other world in the epos. Burial rite confirms the validity of the described tradition. It was the feature of medieval Turk culture' (Aiman:134).

The reason for burying the horse with the deceased (owner of the horse) is explained as follows: 'As for their indispensable services in hunting, immigration and war, horse carries a disproportionate value in the index of all the Central Asian communities (tribes). And in order to maintain these services in the next world, it was buried with its owner' (Tekçe: 1993:124-5). The burial of horses is also attributed as follows: 'When burying noble people, they dug an alive-saddled horse with a saddler whose duty was to serve his master in the other world. The Yakut believed that after death, a soul of the dead went to the other world riding his horse' (Romanova, Danialova).

As for the reflection of ram to the burial rituals: "The spiral view of ram horn from profile symbolizes the route that soul draws while going to eternity... Ram, sheep and horse are the symbols of death' (Ölmez: 2009:13). 'Stone sculptures in Gokturk period were made to perpetuate the memory of deceased persons and the imagery on them portrays the deceased itself' (İskenderzade: 2010: 259).

i. Prey Animal

Before domestication of animals and producing agricultural products people had to hunt to live. The horse was also among the animals hunted about 6000 years ago. We see that ancient people also respected the animals with extraordinary features and they didn't hunt them in a haphazard way. The way they hunted is a good example for the hunters in our age: 'The Stone Age hunters could not have trapped and killed horses,

animals stronger and swifter than themselves, without understanding their behaviour, and such understanding must have bred respect. We cannot know the precise function served by drawings such as these, but may assume that they were part of the ritual surrounding hunting' (Johns: 2006:31).

2. Images

Before the invention of writing, people used to record their thoughts on rocks, caves with depicting some images that stand for different meanings especially related to their social life, culture, traditions, beliefs, and etc. What the images could stand for is explained as follows: 'The Power of the Image: What can images do? Images of gods, rulers, spirits, demons, and assorted other creatures, beings, and symbols constantly surrounded the people of the ancient Near East. Imagine the visual impact of seeing these images everywhere, on a daily basis... While not all representations in the ancient Near East were considered to embody such power, those that were enlivened could represent a deity, a protective creature, a ruler, or even a non-royal person' (Benzel: 2010: 128-9).

2.1 Horse-Shaped Images

We can see horse-shaped images on various objects made from stone, metal, ceramics, pottery, glass, wood, bone, ivory, and etc. The images might have been depicted in the frame of what they meant to the society they belonged to. As for the decoration on the horse-shaped sculptures / tombstones, although it varies from region to region, we mainly see war tools, such as a sword, a dagger, an axe or the tools used in daily life.

2.1.1 Emerging of Horse-shaped Tombstones

Erecting horse-shaped tombstones and making their sculptures is explained as follows: ‘Horse-shaped tombstones are cult for nobles and wealthy people to praise their bravery after their departure. They were made, exclusively for men’ (Açıkyıldız:2010:194-5). It is also suggested that; “According to them (Turkish and Azeri scholars), Turks had a tradition of burying people with their horses. The tradition changed with time and the real horses were replaced with a horse sculpture on the graves’ (Açıkyıldız:2010.191).

2.1.2 Horse-shaped Tombstones in the East part of Turkey

Horse-shaped tombstones in the east part of Turkey are not as widespread as ram-shaped tombstones. Horse related images are linked to a social rank, especially a high rank. That might be one of the reasons that horse-shaped sculptures / tombstones are not as common as ram-shaped tombstones. While having a look at the horse-shaped sculptures, they look as if they are going to take their owner to distance lands. They are generally saddled and decorated with guns and various ornaments (Fig.1-2).

2.2 Ram Shaped Images

As for ram images, we see them on pottery, terracotta, and ceramics and as a figurine depicted on various objects, including ornaments and war tools and we can see that most of them are with ram head. Making tools in this way is one of the characteristics of nomadic art (animal style): ‘Sometimes objects or a portion of the objects are in the form of an animal or in the form of an animal’s head’ (Çoruhlu:1988:40).

Here is what Çoruhlu says about ram images: ‘Animal sculptures, made of stones and encountered during the reign of Gokturk, mostly stand out as objects of religious-mythological. We can also accept some of them

as essence. As a result, many of them are connected to animal ancestors conceive/concept in ancient times. Although depicted in various forms, they can be included in the animal-style or in the group in the influence of animal style' (Çoruhlu:2007:209).

2.2.1 Emerging of Ram-Shaped Sculptures / Tombstones

Today we can see a lot of sculptures / ram-shaped tombstones spread across various Asian countries such as Azerbaijan, Turkmenistan, Georgia, Armenia, and Nakhichevan and in the eastern part of Turkey, with various sizes-shapes and decorative elements. Erecting ram-shaped tombstones on the graves is explained as follows: 'In Central Asia in the period Before Common Era (BCE), Turkish art works including sheep, ram and horse-shaped sculptures, formed by the Turks known as "Eurasian Style" assessed in their own, were transferred to Anatolia as a continuation of animal style'(Diyarbakirli:2007:65).

The ram-shaped tombstones are said to be set for respected, wealthy ones or for warriors. The motifs such as weapons, swords, axes, quiver and bow and badges of military rank are also the indicators for that. Besides these, the form and the size of ram-shaped sculptures can signify additional aspects. In this context Beyhan Karamağarlı says that: 'There is no doubt that these statues are made for the ones at a certain level. But it is never for religious chiefs. No matter for whom ever had it made; he is wealthy in that region' (Karamağaralı: 1992: 35).

2.2.2 Ram-shaped Tombstones in the East part of Turkey

We can see hundreds of ram-shaped tombstones in Turkey, mainly in the cities in the East Region of Turkey. They can vary in size and type and also in terms of decoration. You can see even see some in lamb forms which might have been erected for a child. The ones in the form of sheep

are thought to have been erected for a woman. Ram-shaped tombstones were mainly depicted with war-tools such as sword, dagger or arrow (Fig.3) Besides those, some of them were depicted with figures and hunting scenes (Fig.4) and motifs related to ancient beliefs, such as amulets (Fig.5).

In the course of time, it seems that the influence of the ancient beliefs was minimised. Instead of erecting ram or horse-shaped tombstones, stylized forms were preferred, mainly stylized ram horns or ram head (Fig.7).

3. Effects of Ram and Horse Beliefs on the Tombstones in the Eastern Region of Turkey

When we have a look at the bonds of horse and ram with people, we can see a great influence of them on cultures, rituals, beliefs and art in the worldwide. Considering their influence on ancient nomads, the following reflection can be seen:

- a. Considered as deities; associated with gods, sacred / heavenly and also treating them as protectors are some of the perceptions.
- b. Symbol; the symbol of strength, power, courage, loyalty, nobility, honour, proud and reverence,
- c. Sacrificial animal; they were regarded as the most precious animals and sacrificed to the most important gods for the most important occasions.
- d. Sacred animal / Heavenly animal; due to their links with gods and their service and the journeys between the worlds they were accepted as holy/sacred animals.
- e. Regarded as protector; have protective qualities; ancient nomadic believed that horse and ram could protect them against demons

and dangers. Wearing horse/ram-depicted ornaments in ancient times might be linked with that belief.

- f. Associated with god / goddess; have special characteristics of gods /supernatural creatures. (Power, courage, strength and guardianship are some of the characteristics that they can be linked with).
- g. Messenger / mediator between worlds: human ↔ god, this world ↔ after life; earth ↔ heaven: Worthy of God; something that was worthy of god, was also worthy of the people. (Messenger / mediator between worlds, loyalty, nobility, honour, proud, reverences are some of the themes that can be associated with).
- h. Have association with burial rituals / death; on the occasions of death and burial rituals, they were sacrificed and their meat was dealt out. (Sacrificing horse or ram to the deceased and burying their skeleton with the deceased in the graves/kurgans and also erecting horse-shaped and ram-shaped tombstones on the graves that show the deceased's social rank/leadership are some of the themes that could be mentioned).
- i. Represent social rank / leadership; some of their features such as nobility, honour, proud, braveness match with social ranks.
When having a look at the images of ram and horse in ancient nomadic period, they can be seen in every field of living. The great influence of animals on nomads caused emerging a type of art called "animal style". The art works made from stone, metal, ceramics, pottery, glass, wood, bone, ivory, and etc can be seen on the ornaments, kitchen utensils, war tools, daily used tools, and etc.

Considering the reflection of ancient beliefs, including ram and horse related, on later periods, we can see a reaction of divine religions. The response of divine religions to the ancient beliefs and art mainly

depends on to what extent they match up with each other. This response can be categorised as follows:

A. Ancient Artworks are not Preferred by the Divine Religions, but were Continued

There are wide viewpoints which indicate that Islam is strongly disapproved of erecting sculptures on the graves and depicting figures on the religious structures, including the tombstones. However, we can see many ram and horse-shaped tombstones in the eastern part of Turkey. Considering where such tombstones are common, it can be seen that they are mainly seen in certain areas, mainly where Alevi and Shia people live. Tunceli and Iğdır are two of the cities ram and horse-shaped tombstones are common and where Alevi and Shia people live (Fig.6).

B. Ancient Artworks Continued in Different Forms / Ways

As it has been mentioned, although some of the artworks were not preferred to be continued in later periods, it wasn't possible to eliminate them completely. Instead of putting them away, they came up with that problem. Instead of sculptures and figures, stylized forms were preferred. Such decorations evoke/resemble plants and flowers which are leaned to by Islam, as well. Depicting ram horns and ram head on the tombstones can be samples which reflect this suggestion. Such tombstones can be seen widely in Güroymak, Bitlis (Fig.7).

C. Ancient Artworks Continued with the Combination of the New Ones

One of the cities where ram-shaped sculptures are widespread is Iğdır. Besides the ones made in medieval era, you can come across many

ram-shaped tombstones date to 20th. century. Such ram-shaped tombstones can be seen in a cemetery in Yağcılar Village. These tombstones reflect the combination of old and new tradition and beliefs. Depicting an amulet on a ram's neck is one of the examples for this. Even, today, we can see that ornaments such as amulets/blue beads used against evil or demons. This tradition might be linked with the ancient nomadic beliefs because using such ornaments are not preferred by Islam (Fig. 5).

D. Replacing Objects with Sculptures That Have Similar Meanings

It is known that horse and ram represent nobility, power, strength, braveness and many more features related to heroes, rulers, warriors, and etc. In the periods when ram and horse-shaped sculptures were not preferred, war tools such as sword, dagger, arrow, pistol, and etc. were depicted to reflect that the tombstone belong to someone in a high statue when he was alive (Fig. 8).

E. Conclusion

The continuation of horse and ram art from ancient times to the current time indicates how close ties have been formed. Horse and ram-related artwork seems to be focused on all the themes related to our lives. As we have had ties with the horse and ram concerning all areas of life, we can come across artwork comprising the whole. From kitchenware to war tools and from adornments to the tools used in producing garments, and etc.

In Turkey, especially, in the East Region, we can see hundreds of sculptures of rams along with some sculptures of lambs, sheep, and horses. When considering the geographical area where one comes across ram and horse sculptures, it can be seen that the breadth extends from Central Asia

to westward. Besides Turkey, we can see ram and horse-shaped sculptures in Mongolia, Azerbaijan, Turkmenistan, Georgia, Armenia, and Nakhichevan with various size, shape and decorative elements.

While considering the bonds of ram and horse with ancient nomads, it can be seen that they were highly effected. They were regarded as extraordinary animals, even gods or creatures had close relations with gods. So, nomads thought that they could protect them when they were in danger and thought that they could provide contact between them and the gods. As they were regarded as extraordinary animals, the artworks made in their shape represent a high value. That's why, people who possessed an artwork in their shape are regarded as people in high statue.

Considering the reflection of horse and ram beliefs on the tombstones in the east of Turkey, in addition to many ram and horse shaped tombstones, we can see many tombstones with the decorations related to ram and horse beliefs linked to ancient nomads. Erecting tombstones in the shape of ram and horse is linked to animal style, tradition of burying ram and horse with the deceased, and etc. We think that their function as mediators between this world and the other world might have had an influential effect, as well. Finally, it can be said that despite some attempts in replacement, limitation and objections in transferring artworks of ancient nomads related to ram and horse, nothing stopped continuation of them in the east part of Turkey as in the other parts of the world. Depending on periods and denominational differences, the effects and influence may vary.

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Figures

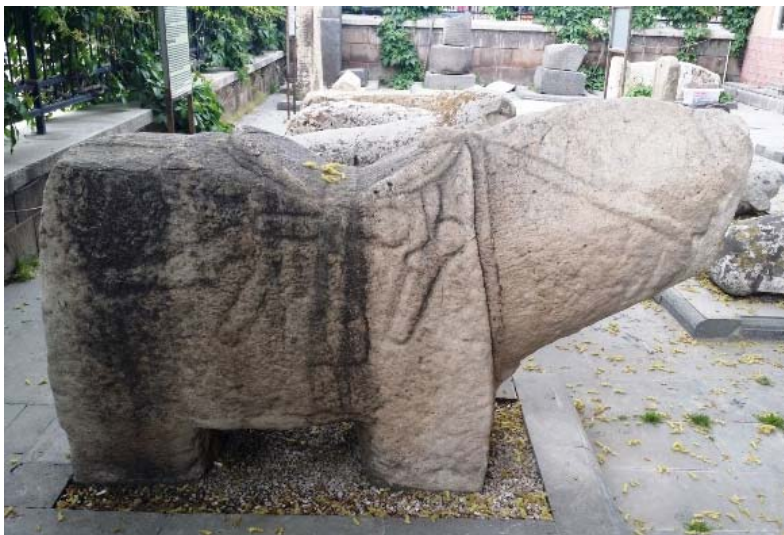


Fig.1: Saddled horse-shaped tombstone in Van Museum- Turkey.



Fig.2: Saddled horse-shaped tombstone. Kars Museum- Turkey



Fig.3: Ram-shaped tombstones in Van museum garden, Turkey



Fig.4: A ram-shaped tombstone with a mounted warrior, nested circles and hunting scenes on the other side.



Fig.5: A ram-shaped tombstone with an amulet. Yaycı –İğdır / Turkey.



Fig.6: A ram-shaped tombstone with inscription. Yaycı – İğdır / Turkey.



Fig. 7: Ram head/horns depicted on tombstones. Güroymak, Turkey

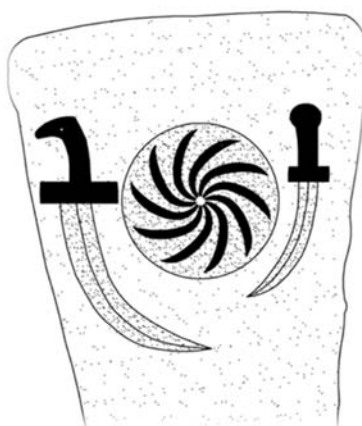


Fig.8:Tombstone depicted with pinwheel&swords. Güroymak-Bitlis

