

## ZOROASTRIAN BURIAL RITES OF THE SOUTHERN ARAL SEA REGION

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### ABSTRACT:

**The article is devoted to material culture The territory of the Southern Aral Sea region, in cultural and historical terms, in various historical periods was either a part or a territory under the cultural, political or economic influence of the ancient and medieval Khorezm, which, according to well-known written and archaeological sources, is firmly included in the circle of the Avestan geography, and, according to some scientists, is the most ancient center of the Zoroastrian religion.**

**KEYWORDS: the Zoroastrian, Sea region, the Khorezm, South Aral Sea region, the Amu Darya, Ossuary, Sultanuizdag, Shaikh-Jalil, Kuyuk-kala, Tok-kala, Krantau, Porlytau, Yu.A. Rapoport.**

### INTRODUCTION:

The territory of the South Aral Sea region, in cultural and historical terms, in different historical periods was either a part or a territory under the cultural, political or economic influence of the ancient and medieval Khorezm, which, according to well-known written and archaeological sources, is firmly included in the circle of Avestan geography, and, according to some scholars, it is the most ancient center of the Zoroastrian religion. Many years of research in the South Aral Sea region of the Khorezm archaeological and ethnographic expedition, as well as of the Karakalpak and

Turkmen archaeologists, allowed me to accumulate a large amount of material on funeral rites that took place in antiquity and the early middle Ages in this cultural and historical area. Therefore, it would be natural to begin the analysis of the burial rites of the Southern Aral Sea region with the Zoroastrian burial rite, namely, with the ossuary rite of burials.

To date, in the right-bank part of the lower reaches of the Amu Darya, more than 40 locations of burials in ossuaries have been recorded, including a number of ossuary burial grounds.

Ossuary burial grounds were located in niches on the slopes of Sultanuizdag (Burly 3, Mount Shaikh-Jalil, etc.) [1]; on the heights: the Kuyuk-kala necropolis [2.]; necropolis of Tokkala [3.]; necropolis Krantau [4.], Porlytau [5.]. All burials are secondary (i.e., burials of bones previously cleaned of soft tissue), but several variants can be noted. Burial of bones according to the rite of hydropathic (Kuyuk-kala, Krantau, Porlytau, etc)

The Kubatau necropolis was one of the first ossure burials discovered in the Left-Bank of Khorezm. The burial ground is located 4.5 km northwest of the Mangit regional center of the Republic of Karakalpakstan. As a result of these works, a burial building was discovered here. The found fragments of statuary ossuaries and the antique standard of brick in the walls of the building indicate, obviously, that it was erected in the first centuries of our era. During the

research, burials of bones in vessels of the jumchi type, alabaster ossuaries and ossuaries made of unbaked clay, which date back to the 7th-8th centuries AD, were also found. [6. 98.99,].

#### **MAIN PART:**

The Kuyuk-kala necropolis is located 2 km west of the fortress on the Kushkana-tau hill. The necropolis stretches for a distance of over a kilometer. The surface of the burial ground is covered with fragments of many ossuaries. Locals call ossuaries *tas sandyk* - a stone box. All ossuaries are of the Afrihid type. Ossuaries were installed in pits carved into the stone ground. Sometimes they appeared immediately after removing a 5-10-centimeter layer of soil. Yu.A. Rapoport suggested that the lids of the ossuaries, before destruction, somewhat protruded above the surface [6. one hundred]. Ossuaries were set up close to each other, sometimes in groups, but they also met one at a time, with their butt to the cliff.

They did not adhere to a single orientation. Only a few bones were placed in the ossuary. The skulls were destroyed by the time of excavation by plant roots. No finds were found in ossuaries. Only a few pottery fragments were found throughout the area. The necropolis dates back to the 7th-8th centuries. AD. The ossuary burial ground at Burly-kala is located in the Sultanuzdag Mountains. It is located 4 km north-west of the Burly-kala fortress. Burials were made on the crest of a rock. Remains of traces of niches carved in it. The wreckage of the ossuaries was scattered over the slopes. Fragments of statuary ossuaries, barrel-shaped ossuaries and ceramic boxes of the late Afrigid period (VII-VIII centuries AD) were found. Fragments of household vessels were also found [6. 68-69].

The ossuary burial ground of the medieval Mizdahkan is located in the western outskirts of the city of Khojeyli, Republic of

Karakalpakstan. Here burials were made, in addition to burial structures, in ossuaries without any ground structures. The ossuary was sub rectangular in shape. They were buried in the ground in pits that repeated the shape of the ossuaries. In ossuaries, there are not only single burials, but also group ones. Ossuaries were located in such cases in an earthen pit or in an underground vaulted structure. The orientation of the ossuaries is varied. Ossuaries were installed in several tiers. When new ossuaries were installed, the old ones came down and collapsed. The ossuaries were sprinkled with sand and earth mixed with coals.

The ossuaries in most cases contained the skull and the lower jaw. Only occasionally were the remaining bones encountered. There have been cases where the bones of two subjects were separated by a septum. No regularity of placement of bones of several subjects is observed [7.78]

There are also known burials of ossuaries and cleaned bones in the ruins of structures. For example, many ossuaries were found in Central Asia on ancient settlements, in the ruins of palace buildings and other buildings. In particular, at the Aybugir-kala settlement in the left-bank Khorezm and the ruins of a structure in the center of the settlement were found in 1950 and 1954. Many fragments of statuary ossuaries, ceramic vessels and human bones. It is not possible to install the structure of a rectangular building. The material was found in a secondary occurrence, apparently, it was originally installed on the surface of the array. The use of the structure for ossuary burial dates back to the Kushan time [6. 68]. During the study of the Kunya-Uaz settlement in Khorezm in 1952, E.E. Nerazik, the building of the castle of the ruler of the III-IV centuries was discovered. AD [8.275-276]. A burnt-out, square-shaped room with an area of 64 sq.m. In the center of it was a rectangular brick pavement. She was badly calcined.

Fragments of alabaster ossuaries were found opposite it at the south-east and south-west walls. Several bones lay inside, on one of the ossuaries fragments of painting were preserved: against a red background - yellowish palmettes and stripes decorated with a herringbone ornament. In the southern corner, next to one of the skulls, a sculptural detail of a statuary ossuary was found, depicting the right hand and forearm [6. 77]. In this room, 5 skulls and several fragments were found. Under three skulls, which were located nearby in the southern part, spongy bones lay on a half-burnt reed bed. Two Khorezm coins were also found. They depict a swastika and a horseman. The ossuary burial ground at the Kalaly-gyr I settlement in the Tashauz region of Turkmenistan dates back to the turn of the 5th and 4th centuries. BC. - The beginning of the IV century. AD In the third period of its functioning, the ruins of the premises and the walls of the settlement were used for ossuary burials.

During excavations at the site, up to 150 skulls and 40 ossuaries were found. Several types of burial have been identified:

- 1) Burial of bones in a rectangular fossa dug in the rubble. The bones were compact, which gave Yu.A. Rapoport to assume that they were wrapped in a cloth [6.92].
- 2) Burials in small niches cut through the walls of the building.
- 3) Burial of bones in household vessels such as khumchi.

Burials in ossuaries. The ossuary was usually installed in niches, but sometimes they were simply placed near the wall. For burial at the fortress wall, a slab was cut down in the groin base. Some ossuary contained the skulls of people who died at different times. In separate ossuaries, male, female, and children's skulls have been found together.

Archaeological materials from excavations of burial monuments of Central Asia and Iran confirm the data of written sources

about the wide area of burial structures of the Zoroastrians and testify to the local Central Asian version of Zoroastrianism associated with the wide spread of the ossuary rite. The elements of this version are statuary ossuaries, which tell us about the existence of a strong influence of the ancestor cult in the Zoroastrian ideology of the population of the southern Aral Sea region

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