

## From Kurgans to Pyramids

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The cult of sacrificing horses after a dead leader is of Asiatic origin practiced by the early Uighur tribes, as discussed in several previous chapters. In order to differentiate a regular live-horse from a sacrificed one, the Asiatic cultures depicted the hind part of the sacrificed animal being contorted upside down. This symbolism meant that the horse –or any sacrificed animal- lost its physical normal shape and became a spirit, ready to run in the underworld. Actually the sacrificed animals were killed with a single blow on the forehead, which resulted in sudden painless death. Figures of contorted horses and elks have been found in several Altaic kurgans. The elk tattoo shown in Chapter 4 exhibits this symbolism of contorting hind legs. The golden plaque (Picture 1 below) shows a contorted horse that adorned the knob of the dagger of the “Golden man” discussed in Chapter 26, **The Issik kurgan**. It is clear that such zoomorphic contorted figures were not intended for simple decorative effect, but were to symbolize the soul of sacrificed animals, sent to the underworld for allowing a safe passage to the soul of the dead person.

Picture 2 below is a drawing of the Ukok kurgan mentioned in Ref. 3 of Chapter 4. Horse remains were found on the top as well as on the external sides of the wooden burial room.



Protecting the soul from being devoured by griffins was such a strong belief in Central Asia that the first emperor who united China, **Qin Shi Huang Di** (259 – 210 BC) ordered a special mausoleum to be built and horses to be sacrificed after his death. The title “Huang” is a transformed form of the Turkic “**Khang**” as mentioned in Chapter 5, **Climatic changes**, a clear indication of the Asiatic influence on Chinese culture. Qin troops overran the **Han**

(Khan) state in 236 BC and then proceeded to defeat the Çao (**Çay**), Wei (**Uy**), Çu (**Uç**), Yan (**Yan**) and Qi (**Kıyı**) states, all of them belonging to the early Uighur confederation of loose independent tribes. The names of these neighboring states are all of Turkic origin, as transcribed in brackets.

Construction of the mausoleum of Qin Shi Huang Di started in 247 BC and lasted until his death. As many as 720,000 workers from across the country helped construct the tomb. A sacrificial stable was unearthed some 20 ms from the Qin Mausoleum. This stable contained 99 sacrificed horses (1). Picture 3 above shows a row of terracotta horses from the Qin Mausoleum. Three trenches, which cover over 20,000 square ms, hold about 7,000 life-size terracotta horses and armored warriors.

The original burial site was 115 ms high and was covered with earth, forming a medium size pyramidal mound. There are still many untouched pyramids in China. These pyramidal structures are man-made hills replacing –or mimicking- the kurgans located at the high regions of the Altai Mountains. They are all built on the flat plains of China and are burial sites of previous local Uighur Kings or early Chinese Emperors, another indication of the Central Asiatic influence on China. Below we see some examples of Uighur and / or Chinese pyramids.



The tradition of knotting the tail of horses is another typical Central Asiatic influence on the Chinese culture. This tradition of knotting the tail of horses, kept in the Chinese army, can be seen in the picture below, showing terracotta soldiers and horses (2).



**Terracotta horses and warriors**

The tradition of burying kings and important leaders of the society in man-made pyramidal structures, together with sacrificed horses, went wherever the Asiatic Uighur tribes migrated.

When ancient Egyptians pressed south, some 2500 years BC, they found a culture devoted to the sun-cult which was called **Kush** ("bird" in Turkish). The main cities of this culture were Jebel Barkal, Napata and Meröe, all of them located between present Egypt and Sudan on the banks of the upper-Nile river. In Jebel Barkal and Meröe the tombs of five Kushite kings and their 70 successors were discovered.

In an article on Kush, Timothy Kendall says (3):

**Nearby the burial site, the excavators discovered an amazing horse cemetery. Twenty-five steeds, draped with nets decorated with cowrie shells and faience and bronze beads had been interred standing. Horses were introduced to Egypt from the east and the Kushites raised fine animals coveted even by the distant Assyrians.**

These words give us some hints on the extent of the south-east expansion of the Uighur tribes discussed in Chapter 18, **Towards Sümer and Elam** (see the map in Chapter 18).

## References

- (1) **Terra Cotta Warriors**, PRC Publishing, page 11, Beijing, China.
- (2) *Idem*, page 42.
- (3) **National Geographic**, Vol. 178, No. 5, November 1990, page 114.