

# Sacred Stones and Stone Structures in the Ritual Practice of the Turkic Population in the Southern Urals: Archaeological Evidence and Modernity

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Članek povzema, analizira in strukturira verovanja turškega prebivalstva južnega Urala, ki so povezana s kamni, gorami, menhirji, karaski, kamnitimi gomilami, nagrobniki itd. Na podlagi del ruskih in tujih avtorjev ter terenskega gradiva, zbranega med terenskim delom v letih 2011–2023, sta izpostavljeni dve skupini verovanj: kulti, povezani s kamni naravnega (božjega) izvora, in verovanja, povezana s kamnom, konstrukcije umetnega izvora. Opisane so različne oblike uporabe kamna in kamnitih konstrukcij pri Turkih v sodobni obredni praksi. Obravnavani so procesi sakralizacije in desakralizacije na kulturnih območjih Južnega Urala, ki se dogajajo na današnji stopnji razvoja. Posebej so analizirana verovanja, povezana z dragimi kamni, ki so jim ljudje dajali poseben simbolni pomen ter jim pripisovali zaščitne, magične in zdravilne lastnosti.

KLJUČNE BESEDE: kult kamna, *karaski*, *aulia kabere*, sveti prostori, sakralizacija, desakralizacija, etnografija, arheologija, Južni Ural

The article summarises, analyses and structures the beliefs of the Turkic population of the Southern Urals that are associated with stones, mountains, menhirs, *karaski*, stone mounds, tombstones, etc.

Based on the works of Russian and foreign authors, as well as on field materials gathered during the expedition trips in 2011–2023, two groups of beliefs are singled out: cults associated with stones of natural (divine) origin, and beliefs associated with stone constructions of man-made origin. Various forms of the use of stone and stone constructions by the Turkic people in modern ritual practice are described. The processes of sacralisation and desacralisation at the cult sites of the Southern Urals occurring at the present stage of development are considered. Beliefs related to gemstones, to which people gave special symbolic meaning, and attributed protective, magic and healing properties, are analysed separately.

KEYWORDS: stone cult, *karaski*, *aulia kabere*, sacred area, sacralisation, desacralisation, ethnography, archaeology, Southern Urals

Since ancient times, rituals have been a significant element of any community's development and have accompanied people from the moment of their birth until their death. Originating in ancient times and later undergoing transformations to adapt to the changing

reality, many rituals have survived to the present day and continue to play an important role in the lives of modern people.<sup>1</sup>

Researchers single out different types of rituals – calendar, crisis, imitation, and others. The magical and religious ones are considered particularly special (Chernykh 2012: 12-14).

One of the functions of the latter is to regulate relations between the socio-cultural and natural environment by including certain elements of nature (mountains, lakes, local areas, etc.) in the ritual practices of people when holding prayers and rituals on them.

The beliefs associated with stones and stone constructions common among the Turkic peoples of the Southern Urals may serve as such an example. Although scientists do not share a unified opinion on the time of their formation, some researchers believe they appeared among ancient peoples while they were living on the African continent (from where they moved out to settle elsewhere around 60,000 years ago). Others believe that the cult of stone began to form later – in the Early Metal Age (Ilimbetova 2020: 163–164).

According to Eliade, the worship of stones originated in the time of prehistoric peoples, as instruments of spiritual action or places of energy were intended to protect the people or their dead (Eliade 1999: 209). Later, it gradually developed to integrate both archaic elements and elements of monotheistic religions, and transformed into a rather complex system of religious beliefs. Nowadays, the beliefs associated with the veneration of mountains, rocks, cobblestones, stone mounds, etc., include not only the objects themselves, but also the surrounding territories.

The objective of this work is to analyse and systemise the beliefs connected with stones and stone constructions that are present among the Turkic population of the Southern Urals, represented by the Bashkir, Tatar, and Chuvash peoples.

The article is based on scientific works written by Russian and foreign authors, and on field materials found during expeditions in the years 2011–2023 to the territory of the Republic of Bashkortostan, Chelyabinsk and Orenburg Oblasts within the administrative territory of the Southern Urals, as well as on materials found during expeditions to the western part of Kurgan Oblast.

The study of beliefs related to stones and stone constructions, including those practised by the Turkic population of the Southern Urals, attracts the attention of specialists from various scientific areas who pay much attention to certain aspects of the problem.

Archaeologists investigate the role of these beliefs in the worldview of people in ancient times, and their place in the modern socio-cultural space of the Southern Urals. Potemkina (Potemkina 2011: 11–35) and Serikov (Serikov 2018: 80–97) have summarised and systematised material from the study of megalithic objects in the Urals in the cult practice of the region's ancient population; Kotov (Kotov 2012: 95–100), Garustovich and Ovsyannikov (Garustovich 2011: 401–408; Garustovich, Ovsyannikov 2012: 179–187) have analysed the data of Bashkir folklore, ethnography and archaeology related to various

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manifestations of the veneration of mountains among the Bashkirs; Grigoriev and Mineeva (Mineeva et al. 2013: 192–195) have observed the state of study and preservation of menhirs in the Southern Urals; Aminev, Ovsyannikov and Savelyev (Aminev et al. 2012: 6–20) have described and classified small cult objects of the Irendyk ridge; Tuzbekov has analysed present-day processes of sacralising archaeological objects such as stone mounds, menhirs, graves of “saints”, etc. (Tuzbekov 2018a: 39–49; Tuzbekov 2018b: 78–85). Serikov considered the role and place of precious and semi-precious stones in the cult practice of ancient people in the Southern Urals from the Upper Palaeolithic to Medieval times (Serikov 2019).

Ethnologists, folklorists and religious scholars who pay more attention to certain types of stones and stone constructions, or their mythological and ritual component, have made a great contribution to the study and description of beliefs related to stones. Thus, the works of Inan (Inan 1998), Velidi (Velidi 1981) and Absalyamova (Absalyamova 2014: 155–158) investigate the rituals of weather control using magic stones; the works of Nagaeva (Nagaeva 1984), Suleymanova (Suleymanova 2005) and Altynbaev (Altynbaev 2013) study the veneration of mountains and their place in the mythological tradition of the Turkic population of the Southern Urals.

The studies focusing on beliefs and rituals related to tombstones, stone constructions, and so on, are even more numerous. They have been carried out by Yunusova (Yunusova 2015: 106–115), Syzranov (Syzranov 2006: 127–143), Absalyamova (Absalyamova 2008: 207–210), Medvedev (Medvedev 2011: 375–384), Petrov (Petrov 2018: 109–122), Idiatullov (Idiatullov 2018: 89–94), etc.

The monograph by Ilimbetova is particularly worth mentioning, as it presents a consistent study of the cult of stone in the traditional culture of the Bashkir population of the Southern Urals on the basis of folklore, and mythological and ethnographic materials (Ilimbetova 2020).

The most noteworthy foreign studies have been written by Kazakh, Azerbaijani and Turkish scientists. They consider the problem of the coexistence of Islam and archaic religious beliefs associated with stones and stone constructions. The work by Azhigali (Azhigali 2002) stands out for its thoroughness: stone constructions and their use in the cult practice of the Turks of Kazakhstan are described and classified in much detail. The work by Kuliyeva (Kuliyeva 2007) takes into consideration the problems associated with the cult of stones among the Turkic peoples of Azerbaijan.

Another work by the Turkish religious scholar Tanyu (Tanyu 1968) should also be noted as it has not only studied the role of stone in ancient and modern religions, but also described and systematised the most widely used cult objects made of stone, and the related rituals among the Turkic peoples of Turkey and Central Asia.

An analysis of the available literature on the spiritual life and religious beliefs of the population of the Southern Urals, and accompanying field materials, indicates a large number of stone objects and complexes (holy stones, rocks, mountains, menhirs, single mounds, stone arrangements, etc.) used in the ritual practice of the Turkic-speaking population of the region in the relatively recent past and the present time. A comparison of the sacred representations of the modern Turkic peoples of the

Southern Urals with various types of hierotopias, the centres of which are stones, has made it possible to divide the beliefs associated with stones and stone constructions into two large groups:

1. beliefs related to stones of natural (divine) origin,
2. beliefs related to man-made stone constructions.

### BELIEFS RELATED TO STONES OF NATURAL (DIVINE) ORIGIN

The first group includes the following:

1. *Beliefs related to single stones.* These consist mainly of stone sculptures with an anthropomorphic or zoomorphic appearance, or stand out due to the presence of small indentations resembling footprints or human hands (*sledovick* stones). The origin of the latter is associated with mythological saints or legendary historical figures. In the modern ritual practice of the Turkic population, they are used to summon rain, improve health, and wish a safe trip. Two examples include *Peygamber Tash* (Trail of the Prophet Muhammad in Bashkir) in the village of Kadyrsha in Zilairsky District of the Republic of Bashkortostan (Fig. 1), and *Mahadi-Tash* (Mahdi stone in Bashkir) near the village of Ust-Bagaryak, Kunashaksky District, Chelyabinsk Oblast.

2. *Beliefs associated with the accumulation of stones.* The stones are located at a distance of no more than 50 metres from each other and have no analogues in the morphology of the surrounding landscape. These stones (called rain stones by the locals) often differ in size from each other, so worshippers arrange them in a hierarchy, calling the larger ones *Babai Tash* (grandfather stone in Bashkir), and *Atay* (father). Smaller ones are called *Abiy tash* (grandmother stone), and *Inei* (mother), etc. The religious practice of the Turkic population of the Southern Urals still includes the rain calling ceremony known as “Stones of Summer”, which is held in the villages of Zirikovo in Gafuriysky District (Fig. 2) and Kuseevo in Baymak District, both in the Republic of Bashkortostan, and the “Thunder Stones” ceremony at Assy in Beloretsky District of the Republic of Bashkortostan. Local residents perform these rituals in times of drought or when there are floods. They wash the boulders, wipe them with oil and pray for good weather.

According to some researchers, the use of these stones is an ancient animistic relic of the cult of nature, and also indicates the common ancestral homeland of the Turkic peoples (Dorzhieva 2015: 12–16).

3. *Beliefs associated with rocks* are divided into beliefs related to:

1) rocks with anthropomorphic outlines. This subgroup includes religious beliefs associated with the rocks called *Tchertov Palets* (Devil’s Finger) on the Yamankaya ridge, the *Tchertov Palets* and *Ebey Tash* rocks in Abzelilovsky District of the Republic of Bashkortostan, the *Tchertov Palets* on the Belaya River in Burzyansky District of the Republic of Bashkortostan;

2) rocks with a cave, such as the *Uklykaya* rock (Rock with arrows) at Tashasti village in Gafuriysky District of the Republic of Bashkortostan (Fig. 3).



Figure 1: A single stone “Peygamber tash”. Zilairsky district, Republic of Bashkortostan (photo by A. Tuzbekov, June 2016).



Figure 2: “Stones of Summer” – “Babai Tash” (left) and “Abiy Tash” (right). Gafuriysky district, Republic of Bashkortostan (photo by A. Akhatov, July 2014).

The allocation of this subgroup is explained by the existence of a cult of shooting at rocks with arrows with warheads dating from the 10<sup>th</sup> to the beginning of the 13<sup>th</sup> centuries. According to researchers, the presence of a large number of combat arrows on the eastern slope of the mountain may indicate that it was a military sanctuary, while the mountain itself was an object of veneration (Garustovich, Ovsyannikov 2012: 179–187). According to another version, the shelling of the rock represented the process of fertilization (Ozheredov 1999), and was associated with the cult of the goddess Humai.

Evidence of the existence of this cult is also recorded on *Kamen Dyrovatyi* (Stone with Holes) on the Chusovaya River (Serikov, Skochina 2011), and the *Tri Sestri* sanctuary (Three Sisters) in the Middle Trans-Urals. This cult has not been preserved in the modern-day religious practice of the population of the Southern Urals.

4. *Beliefs related to mountains.* Such beliefs are mostly associated with the veneration of the host spirit of a lonely mountain: Tura-Tau (Kotov 2012: 95), Yuraktau (Garustovich 2011: 404) of Ishimbai District of the Republic of Bashkortostan (Fig. 4), Kurmantau of Gafuriysky District of the Republic of Bashkortostan, Iremel, Yamantau of Beloretsk District of the Republic of Bashkortostan, Masim-tau of Burzyansky District of the Republic of Bashkortostan; or a mountain with extraordinary phenomena (Yangan-Tau mountain of Salavatsky District of the Republic of Bashkortostan).

Considering the settlement of the Bashkirs, Shirgazin draws attention to the fact that each tribal unit had a sacred mountain on its territory (Shirgazin 2010: 169–184).

In the sacred beliefs of the modern Turkic population of the Southern Urals, cults associated with natural (divine) stones are losing their former significance. The sites mentioned above are being actively desacralized due to economic development, which means they are frequently transformed into tourist destinations and turned into places for recreation and entertainment. Despite this process, some of the objects from the first subgroup (single stones) continue to hold a significant place in the beliefs of the modern population (Garustovich 2011: 406). This leads to the realisation that objects of sacralisation with a specific centre, which occupy a small space, are more resistant to the processes of desacralisation.

## BELIEFS RELATED TO MAN-MADE STONE CONSTRUCTIONS

In connection with this, the second group of beliefs associated with stones and man-made stone constructions with clear boundaries and centres is of undoubted interest for further study.

Concerning the typology proposed by Savelyev (Savelyev 2012), these beliefs can be divided into four subgroups:

1. *Beliefs related to menhirs.* These date back to the cults of the Bronze Age population and depend directly on their types (single, alley) and location. As a rule, separate menhirs are located at the bluff line of above-floodplain terraces, or near the terrace on a small hill near the river bank. Most menhir alleys are located topographically much higher, on the slopes of hills (Petrov 2007: 74). According to Eliade, such monuments



Figure 3: Uklykaya (arrowhead) Rock. Gafuriysky district Republic of Bashkortostan (photo by A. Akhatov, July 2014).



Figure 4: Mount «Tura-Tau». Ishimbaysky district, Republic of Bashkortostan (photo by A. Akhatov, July 2014).

were associated with the cult of the dead and were erected in order to pacify the soul of the deceased (Eliade 1999: 209–210).

Archaeological research conducted in the Southern Urals found no evidence of burial constructions or traces of memorial actions near most of the menhirs, indicating that these monuments were generally not related to funeral rites. A connection may be assumed due to the widespread cult of worship of steppe spirits in nomadic cultures, which also existed among the Bashkirs (Petrov 2007: 75).

Single menhirs were allegedly used as a border between developed and undeveloped areas, as a kind of guardian of homes. The existing tradition of relocating or building a new menhir as a guardian, or *kut* of a dwelling, and as a landmark for the construction of a settlement or a new street, recorded by the Bashkirs, may be evidence for the existence of this type of cult. As a rule, the menhir alleys stretch to the south of the most prominent peak of the district, which may be associated with the veneration of mountain spirits, widespread among the Turkic population of the Southern Urals.

In addition to the above-mentioned menhirs on the territory of the Bashkir Trans-Urals (Baymak and Abzelilovsky Districts of the Republic of Bashkortostan), other locations of menhirs have also been identified that are not linked to settlements and Bronze Age burial grounds. Menhirs were placed on the summits and slopes of mountains, as well as on river terraces. Indirect and direct data on these objects under study allows us to date them to the ethnographic time period (100–200 years) (Saveliev 2012: 128, 144). Researchers divide the menhirs into three groups: ritual-memorial complexes (Kyngyrtau-18, Ulkan-Seyalyk, Abzakovo), spatial markers (Kynyrtyash-7, Cook-teke-1), and separate cult objects (Sygyltau-5, Yanzigitovo-2, Talkas-8), which can have a memorial function and possibly also mark a burial site (Saveliev 2012: 145).

2. *Beliefs associated with stone pyramids (karaski, obo)* These are structures constructed mainly by the people of the southern part of the Bashkir Trans-Urals on the summits of mountains, on mountain passes, and near permanent settlements (Fig. 5). They were presumably erected in honour of the spirits of mountains and territories, and were constantly enlarged. Whoever climbed the mountain to perform a ritual for the spirits of the ancestral area had to take a stone and, having reached the summit, put it into the *karaski* (Bashkir word for guardians) and conducted a sacrificial ceremony in the hope of obtaining reliable protection for their ancestral territory (Aminev 2011).

Some *karaski* were in the shape of large columns or pyramids. Sometimes stone mounds from the early Iron Age served as the fundament, which was then completed with new stone arrangements and pyramids. Often there were heaps of brushwood or birch branches near the *karaski*. Some of the piles of stones had poles stuck in them with skulls of sheep impaled on the poles (Kotov 2012: 98). The modern Turkic population of the Southern Trans-Urals preserves the tradition of building *karaski*, but in most cases does not attach a spiritual meaning to this process, simply constructing them to scare away wolves or to pass the time while grazing cattle.

3. *Beliefs related to tombstone constructions.* Originally, people believed stones were the abode of God, or other higher powers, as well as the habitation of human souls (Fraser 1989: 339–340). That is why, after a person's death, burial stones or stone constructions



Figure 5: Stone pyramid »karasky«. Baymaksy district, Republic of Bashkortostan (photo by A.Tuzbekov, June 2016).

were built over the grave, or the place where the person died, to “fix” the soul of the deceased and provide it with a temporary home near the living people, so it could ensure the fertility of their fields by the force of its spiritual nature, and prevent the soul from wandering or becoming dangerous (Eliade 1999: 209–210).

The most common tombstone construction among the Turkic population of the Southern Urals is a stone stele that evolved from the small stone at the head of the grave known as the *bash tash* (headstone) to the big stele and most common form of Muslim tombstone, the *syin tash* (gravestone). The size and material from which the tombstones are made depend on the buried person’s importance. Tombstones on the graves of saints, Muslim clergy or dervishes are believed to possess a special supernatural power. For example, the residents of Abdrashitovo, a village in Duvansky District of the Republic of Bashkortostan, perform rain-calling cults by washing tombstones on the graves of saints during a drought. Meanwhile, in the village of Abultaevo, in Safakulevsky District of the Kurgan region, there are widespread beliefs associated with tombstones that are miraculously growing up from the ground (Fig. 6).

Sometimes they acquire anthropomorphic features. The residents of the village of Meseli in the Aurgazinsky District of the Republic of Bashkortostan believe one of the gravestones is the “owner” of the cemetery (Medvedev 2015: 76).

4. *Beliefs associated with stone mounds, fences and stone arrangements.* These are more closely related to the ritual of venerating ancestors’ graves, preserved in the Southern

Urals, owing to the presence of Sunnism of the Hanafi madhhab, which is sufficiently liberal to incorporate pre-Islamic beliefs and nomad rituals (Syizranov 2006:129).

Archaeologists and ethnographers have so far identified more than 100 objects of this kind. Most of them are located on the territory of the eastern part of the Uraltau ridge. Common cases of inclusion of stone mounds, walls and arrangements in the rituals of the local population include (Aminev, Kotov, Ovsyannikov, Savelyev 2012): 1) the construction of *karaski* on the tops of mounds or near them (Olo-tau-2, Baymak District of the Republic of Bashkortostan); 2) the construction of stone walls on mounds (Bai-shevo-12, Baymak district of the Republic of Bashkortostan); 3) chaotic piles of stones and stone arrangements on the tops of mounds; 4) putting menhirs, stone arrangements and rings on the mounds, and the use of ancient mounds as awliya (Islamic saints); 5) the construction of stone walls around the mounds.

It is worth mentioning that the modern-day Turkic population of the Southern Urals admits the importance of funeral monuments located on the tops of mountains or hills in perpetuating the memory of their ancestors. Visiting the hills where mounds are located has become an integral part of most Muslim holidays. Evidence of the transformation of beliefs about such objects is of particular interest for researchers. While the idea of the sacredness of mounds is clearly fixed among the older generation, representatives of the younger generation also sacralise the areas adjacent to the mounds or the entire visible territory. The stone mound near the village of Suramanovo, Uchalinsky District of the Republic of Bashkortostan, which presumably dates back to the Middle Ages, may exemplify that. In the 19<sup>th</sup> and 20<sup>th</sup> centuries, the mound was used by local residents as a place where diseases of the genitourinary system of domestic animals were healed. Recently, the population has begun to call the mountain *auliale tau* (the mountain with the grave of a saint), connecting it with a saint allegedly buried here in ancient times (Tuzbekov, Bakhshiev 2022: 190).

##### 5. Beliefs related to precious, semi-precious and ornamental stones

A special place in the ritual practice of the Turkic-speaking population of the Southern Urals is reserved for beliefs related to precious, semi-precious and ornamental stones. Differing from ordinary stones in their physical properties, rarity, bright colours, etc., stones worn in jewellery have acquired a special magic-religious character largely due to intermediate hierophany (manifestation of the sacred) or cratophany (manifestation of supernatural power), i.e., symbolism that gives them magical or religious significance (Eliade 1999: 397). At different times in different parts of the world, various peoples told legends about the origin of precious and semi-precious stones (including pearls and corals). Numerous superstitions and beliefs were associated with them, and they were widely used in magic, medicine, etc. (Eliade 1999: 397–402; Tanyu 1968: 8–9, 28, 51–52, 100–101, 137). In the past, they had numerous functions – aesthetic, practical, protective, ritual, symbolic, etc., some of which have survived to the present day.

Archaeological finds of precious and ornamental stones and minerals dating back around 800 thousand years have been discovered at monuments in Eurasia and Africa. In the Southern Urals, from the Upper Palaeolithic era to the Middle Ages, rock crystal, carnelian, malachite, agate, serpentinite, amber, jasper, etc. were widely used for making



Figure 6: A “growing” tombstone. Safakulevsky district, Kurgan region (photo by A. Tuzbekov, June 2006).

various objects. The majority of such finds are discovered in treasure troves, burial sites and sanctuaries, which suggests that they were endowed with symbolic meaning and mainly used by the ancient population in cult practices (Serikov 2019).

Folklore and mythological and ethnographic material shows that in the past different peoples, including those living in the Southern Urals, widely wore stones in jewellery to protect themselves against “evil forces” and mishaps, to attract longevity, enhance the reproductive qualities of people, as well as in folk medicine. The Bashkirs used carnelian in this way to treat heart and eye diseases, amber was used against hepatitis and to prevent Basedow’s disease. They also believed that diamonds worn in jewellery heal human diseases. In order to ensure good health and longevity, new-born babies were often given names of noble and precious stones.

In addition, the Bashkirs considered stones in jewellery to be a strong aphrodisiac, and believed that wearing jewellery – bracelets, rings, earrings, necklaces, etc. made of carnelian and amber (or encrusted with them) protects against the evil eye (Ilimbetova 2020: 20, 25–26, 33, 67, 105–106, 116, 119–120). Currently, representatives of different ethnic groups living in the Southern Urals (including Bashkirs, Tatars and Chuvash) are actively interested in the protective and healing properties of stones worn in jewellery, including the ones recommended on the basis of their date of birth according to the Eastern calendar (Galieva 2016: 125).

## CONCLUSIONS

The literature and field materials studied testify that stones and stone constructions are an element of the modern-day religious and mythological beliefs (and corresponding cult actions) of the Turkic-speaking population of the Southern Urals. They can be nominally divided into two large groups. The first includes beliefs associated with stones of natural (divine) origin – individual stones and groups of stones, rocks, mountains, which are all losing their significance in the sacred beliefs of the modern Turkic population of the Southern Urals due to developments in agriculture and recreation. However, the situation is different for some *sledovick* stones (literally footprint stones) and rain stones, on which rituals are still carried out to summon rain, healing, etc. The second group includes beliefs associated with man-made stone constructions – menhirs, stone pyramids (*karaski*, obo), tombstone constructions, stone mounds, walls and stone arrangements, which are actively observed in the modern ritual practice of the Turkic population of the Southern Urals. These processes are most widely recorded today in the south-eastern Bashkir Trans-Urals. One of the features of such a process in this region is the inculcation of esoterism into the public consciousness, the basic conductors of which are marginal religious associations. In the ritual practice of the Turkic-speaking population of the Southern Urals, a special place is reserved for beliefs related to stones worn in jewellery. Unlike ordinary stones, they were believed to have special magical and healing properties designed to defend and protect their owner.

Overall, most of the surveyed archaeological sites are characterised by the spontaneity of the formation of the sacred area, and the formation of absolutely artificial beliefs, supported at the same time by some Muslim clergy, and sometimes by government bodies. The phenomena under consideration definitely require additional research. The similarity of these processes at various sites around the world testifies to the global character of the crisis of traditional (established) spiritual values – people looking for spiritual support instead turn to new or reviving religious systems, often giving simple and understandable solutions to the challenges of the modern world.

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САКРАЛЬНЫЕ КАМНИ И КАМЕННЫЕ СООРУЖЕНИЯ В  
РИТУАЛЬНОЙ ПРАКТИКЕ ТЮРКОВ ЮЖНОГО УРАЛА:  
АРХЕОЛОГИЧЕСКИЕ СВИДЕТЕЛЬСТВА И СОВРЕМЕННОСТЬ

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В статье обобщаются, анализируются и структурируются верования тюркского населения Южного Урала, связанные с камнями и каменными культовыми комплексами, используемыми людьми в ритуальной практике в относительно недавнем прошлом и в настоящее время.

Имеющаяся литература и полевые материалы, полученные в ходе экспедиционных выездов, совершенных в 2011–2023 гг. авторами свидетельствуют, что камень является одним из значимых элементов современных религиозно-мифологических представлений (и соответствующих культовых действий) людей, благодаря его наделению магическими, чудодейственными, сакральными и др. свойствами.

Сопоставление сакральных представлений современных тюркских народов Южного Урала с различными типами иеротопий, центрами которых являются камни, позволило разделить верования, связанные с камнями и каменными сооружениями, на две большие группы.

Первая включает в себя верования, связанные с камнями природного (божественного) происхождения – одиночные камни и группы камней, скалы, горы, которые ввиду их хозяйственного и рекреационного освоения теряют свое былое значение в сакральных представлениях современного тюркского населения Южного Урала. Исключения составляют отдельные камни-«следовики» и камни-дожда, на которых до настоящего времени проводятся ритуалы для вызова дождя, оздоровления и т.д.

Вторая группа – это верования, связанные с камнями рукотворного происхождения – менгирами, каменными пирамидами (караски, обо), надгробными каменными сооружениями, каменными курганами, оградками и выкладками, большая часть которых является объектами археологического наследия. Они достаточно активно используются в ритуальной практике тюркского населения Южного Урала в наши дни, особенно на юго-востоке – в Башкирском Зауралье.

Одной из особенностей данного процесса в этом регионе является внедрение в общественное сознание эзотерических (иррационально-мистических) составляющих, базовым проводником которых выступают маргинальные религиозные объединения. В целом, для большинства обследованных археологических объектов характерна стихийность формирования сакрального ареала, конструирование абсолютно искусственных представлений, поддерживаемых при этом частью мусульманского духовенства, а иногда и властными структурами.

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