

Notation and Symbols Carved on Tombstones City in Koohdasht city

Mehrdad Hatami

Shoushtar Branch, Islamic Azad University, Shoushtar, Iran. Department of Archaeology

ABSTRACT

Engravings on the tombstones seem like a natural museum, since the last time any of the discerning travelers and dedicated to him and think he thought.

As well as a place where the dead have been buried, analysis of this burial site can provide valuable information about the culture and lifestyle of distant civilizations.

Observation and analysis of the features etched on relics serves to reveal religious practice and customs of peoples in the past. Social, economic and cultural rights of any ethnic group can be seen in their burial practices and rituals.

Unfortunately, the stone graves in the Koohdasht city have suffered due to lack of attention. These graves have not benefitted from the favor of any associated authority or benefitted from any other form of protection. The gravestones have therefore suffered decay from human neglect and environmental factors. But still, many years after their construction, these works of art in the form of stone inscriptions can provide a powerful insight in to the dark corners of the country's past people.

This research aims to expose the details of the design on the graves of Koohdasht for consideration in the fields of Archeology and Anthropology.

KEY WORDS: Koohdasht - tombstone - engraved - symbol

INTRODUCTION

Koohdasht is a large and culturally rich city located in the central Zagros Mountain region. Its geographical location in southwestern Iran and with altitude of 1195 m above sea level. Situated between the north west province Kermanshah and the northwestern city of Shirvan and Chrdavl, Puldokhtar city to the south, southwest of the city Dareh shahr and the East valley city limit is Khorramabad. (Bakhtiari. S. 2004, Page 175)

The science of archeology stems from an innate human interest in past times. And objects such as stone tablets, slabs of clay, stone relief work and cylindrical seals are all artifacts that provide us with access to information about how people lived their lives in the past. (Sarraf. M. R. 1993, page 1)

This region has important historical and archaeological rock art. The designs of the inscriptions on the tombstones are representations of a past historical period. The subject matter mostly depicts animals and hunting scenes, but there are also Jockey images, weapons and ritual ceremonies. These images from the past etched on to various historical monuments provide researchers with an intriguing insight in to the religious beliefs of past people.

Records research:

Extensive and detailed research on the tombstones of the city of Koohdasht has been done and there are some accounts of these in travel journals but they include only general descriptions of the artifacts in the different areas located in the western provinces of the country.

For example, Baron Dubud describes of the carvings with subject womens, on tombstones in castle Rازه in the northwest of the province Khozistan and part subsidiary Andimeshk city and they are comparable to accounts from Herodotus in ancient Greek texts. (Dubud. Baron 2009, Pages 81-380)

In the village of Greer, according to Alashtar and Stark, there are carved gravestones with carved lines and beautiful flowers (Stark. Ferya 1985, Page 22). In past years, publications on this subject in the Lorestan area have had little content (Farzin. Alireza 2005).

Majid Zadeh holder of the morning ceremony in Noorabad, Delfan has given the gravestones some attention and briefly described them. Delfan and the close ties of its local people are discussed in terms of their culture. The people can be characterized as migrants. They spent the annual cold seasons in Koohdasht and lived in Noorabad during the warmer months.

Thus there is a cultural connection between these two regions from the annual migration patterns of their communities (Majydzadeh. Joseph, and all 1964, page 13-8)

By the graves, and their designs:

It seems that these beautiful decorations on the tombstones were inscribed to represent developed concepts and principles for the sake of posterity rather than for reasons of aesthetics or for the accumulation of wealth. The inscriptions relate to the gender of the deceased person. They can be divided into three main categories as indicated below:

A: There are motifs associated with hunting scenes on the gravestones and almost all the stones on the graves of men can be seen placed vertically on top of the graves. These scenes often depict a mountain goat or a ram in hunting scenes as representations of what the person is hunting.

B: Religious motifs are engraved on the tombstones that include with pictures of seals, prayer, prayer beads, and a sprinkler.

C: Some of the graves are those of women and they are mostly vertical and include depictions of instruments, references to carpets, bilateral shoulders and there is also a mirror. (Picture 1)

It should be stated that the customs of people inhabiting the region, involved mourning rituals that are rooted in ancient history and that reflect the isolated landscape of Lorestan. Grief and mourning ceremonies on the right foot have been associated with certain traditions in the city of Koohdasht.

At the death of an elder, tribal leaders and local figures of authority gathered to the sound of drummers beating a melodic rhythm to evoke a sense of grief and sorrow at the announcement of the tragedy that had occurred. Of Serena and drum musicians with local authorities and with the melody of grief and sorrow over the people were aware of the tragedy occurred. The dead persons kin, as a sign of their grief threw black mourning veils over their shoulders.

Serena upset is the melody and the drum¹, Some of the men that make up the group are dancing in a row. This type of dance runs contrary to customary celebrations of joy in which the celebrants circulate in a clockwise motion is in the clockwise and vice versa, indicating dissatisfaction with the owners of the rotation time of mourning. The dance, as well as being a dignified homage to the dead person, also represents a belief in the force of nature. The circular movement or rotation in the dance symbolizes man's struggle against natural elements.

This exciting dance scene, and other symbolic motifs associated with death and the rituals associated with death ceremonies, frequently appear as engravings on the gravestones of Koohdasht city. (Pictures No. 3 and 4)

Hunting and horseback riding are also subjects depicted in national and ethnic heritage as a source of pride for indigenous people during different periods of history. This proud tradition has been kept alive from generation to generation and is linked to national historical mythology and folk culture. Many of the designs depicted on the tombstones are devoted to hunting and riding scenes.

Being a mountainous region the area has difficult conditions for agriculture, but abundant water and pasture, provide a suitable environment to support a variety of livestock. As well as supporting livestock the area supports an abundance of wild animals such as goats and deer.

Migration routes, and the act of migration between seasonal pastures have a specific effect on how people live and hunt, and the culture of migrants encourages hunting. And references to hunting have been widely used on the tombstones as a mark of honor. Hunting has also been glorified through poetry. The interesting thing is that these poems have mainly been written in celebration of death. They are written by men and women in mourning for the one who died. They make reference to a rise in numbers of animals in nature, while maintaining that they would not hunt them.

These references to hunting can also be seen on iconic carvings. An image of a large number of animals is depicted on a faceted stone mast. Who is to hunt without them? (Picture No.2)

However, due to the indiscriminate and illegal hunting with modern automatic weapons, unfortunately much of this wildlife has probably been wiped out.

Most residents of the area lived before the mandatory settlement program of the Pahlavi period.

Their customs and services are almost always based on the culture of migration dictated by natural environmental conditions and it should be noted that, this lifestyle has been led for a long time. At least up until the establishment of paved roads and modern methods of transport and these developments can be used to reconstruct patterns of biodiversity in the region.

The position and role of the horse in the lives of the residents in the area should not be overlooked. This animal seems to have been an important part of the lives of the people in past centuries and therefore had an important place in depicting the life of a deceased person. Among other people and their friends, horsemen are depicted larger than the other characters.

¹ The musical authorities to be wailing grief in Lorestan (Ševany) would name the songs and sounds with a sharp "ژ" (ve) "ژ" (ve) women will be played somehow. (Farzin, Alireza 2005, Page 74)

The inhabitants of the Zagros region developed specific skills, and it is believed that throughout the Mesopotamian region, people were familiar with the animals there.

This is among the reasons for the importance and status of animals in the past millennium.

Tools and horse riding are depicted on the graves of the inhabitants of the area as far back as the first and second millennia BC.

The depictions on the tombstones mainly show people holding a horses' halter in one hand whilst shooting. In addition, engravings of animals in hunting scenes portray the horse as a noble animal, and a loyal partner for its owner. A sign of mourning often accompanies an image of the hunt. One of these symbols of mourning is a black cloth thrown over the shoulders. Another is when the personal belongings of the deceased are put on the backs of nails as a sign of mourning. (Picture No. 4)

Natural conditions and the difficulty of access in the area make entry to the area for foreigners rather difficult, therefore cultural influences from outside the area have been restricted and this has maintained what can be described as a pure culture in the region. Unlike the tribes of the plains where new culture was absorbed quickly, cultural integration in the Koohdasht area has always been slow. (Shishehgar. Arman 2005, Page 38)

These factors led to a belief that groups of residents settled in the foothills and valleys. Many of the isolated cultural characteristics and actions can be found in ancient Persian and Shia Islam. Among them are Muslims who believed in the combination of paying homage to worship God, as well as claimed the right to call themselves advocates of a cult.

Although the regulations of Yaresan were a defensive movement against foreign domination, signs of the Mehr religion in the Yarsany migrants' calendar is easily recognizable in the region.

Evidence of a pre-Islamic belief system evident on a number of the graves where there are depictions that refer to the existence of good and evil forces in nature

Symbols derived from nature have been mixed with those of legend and celestial objects, including that of Polaris, they have been used to symbolize forces of good and evil.

Among the natives of Lorestan, for important things, like weddings, travel, flight, plowing, spraying and seed harvesting, and any action associated with moving and handling, custom dictates that the action should be done in the "star-crossed" position, that is located in the leg or behind them.

Blessed is the time when the star is in the basement. If you happen to be out of the position when they began, a person could be left out of the activity or deterred from work. (Ayzadpanah. Hameed 1997, pages 142-43)

On the tombstones in this region, the star is evident in both positions. A star at the top of the head and is a sign of grave adversity used to symbolize an untimely loss of a dear one. A star located behind or beneath (a horse for example) is a symbol that relates to good circumstances surrounding a the death. Moreover, not far from the mind as the star or the sun is considered a symbol of Mehri is a symbol of dawn and the start of a working day. (Gyman. Dushenne 2006, Page 58) A star motif can also be used to mark the start of a new life in another world. (Picture No.6)

In addition to the vertical tombstones, there are also carvings on horizontal tombstones and these are carved with religious symbols that are associated with Islam.

Most of these designs are of prayer mats and beads. They appear to symbolize piety, or conversion to Islamic worship. (Picture No. 5)

The gravestones are also adorned with other representations of the dignity of the deceased person. There are images of domestic objects such as cups, samovars and images of domestic rituals such as hand washing. Images of hand washing were used to represent a variety of possibilities such as guests washing hands before or after eating, as a sign that alludes to the generous hospitality of the deceased. And washing could also represent honor as an act of ablution or preparation for washing the body of the deceased.



Picture No. 1 Cemetery Diyali (Farzin. Alireza 2005, Page 68)

Picture No. 2 Cemetery Koreh dasht , Hunter's death, To rise is the number of mountain goats.



Picture No. 3 Cemetery Koreh dasht , The symbolic use of music for the funeral



Picture No. 4 Cemetery Aoladqhabad (Diyali) Dark horse in the middle of the engraved cover, and in the bottom three with a black veil down over her shoulders while they dance.



Picture No. 5 Davoud Rashid cemetery carved religious symbols.



Picture No. 6 The star on the left horseman

Conclusion

As stated these tombstone engravings have a lot more to offer an observer than merely beautifully decorated artifacts. Each of these monuments provides us with clues to the hidden secrets of past peoples.

The recognition of different national and cultural leaps and bounds during the period is evident in these inscriptions and their analysis can be an important step toward preserving cultural identity and local tradition in the region.

The symbolic motifs on these tombstones demonstrate the importance of mourning ceremonies and rituals in the region. Patterns ascertained from these carved images can serve to inform us of a variety of cultural and religious practices, validated over several centuries. However, there is very little in the way of oral and folk culture remaining among the natives of the region today. These tombstones mark the beginning of a journey that is eternal and without return, in memory of a deceased person, the only evidence of his life that remains

Acknowledgement

This work was financially supported by Islamic Azad University of Shoushtar for promotion of science.

REFERENCES

- Ayzadpanah. Hameed 1997, Lorestan historical ancient monuments, cultural figures and works Publications, Volume II
- Bakhtiari. S. 2004, Atlantic provinces of Iran Gita, Gita Institute of Science, Tehran
- Dubud. Baron 2009, Lorestan and Khuzestan travel, translation: Aria. Mohammad Hossein, Publication of scientific and cultural enterprises, Tehran, Third edition
- Farzin. Alireza 2005, tomb is painting Loristan, Anthropology Research Institute, Tehran
- Gyman. Dushenne 2006, Religion of ancient Persia, translated: Roia. Monajem, published by Science Press, second edition
- Majydzadeh. Joseph, et al 1964, Delfan mourning rituals in Lorestan, Art and the people Journal, No. 25
- Sarraf. M. R. 1993, The relief of Elam, Jahan Publishing
- Shishehgar. Arman 2005, Sorkhdom e Laki excavations report, published by Cultural Heritage
- Stark. Ferya 1985, Travel Alamut. Lorestan and Ilam, Translation: Saki.A.M, Scientific Publications, Tehran