

THE CUMANS – ART - SCULPTURE

OVERVIEW

The available written sources provide little information on the Cuman's cultural life. They were pagans and worshiped the stone idols placed on burial mounds. The erection of these stone statues in honor of their ancestors was explained as a ritual of ancestral remembrance.

The Cumans built cult-sacrifice sites with anthropomorphic statues and offered sacrifices during their ceremonies, and according to the Persian/Azerbaijani poet Nizami Ganjavi, the Cumans, during their religious rituals, knelt down before these stone statues and offered animals to show their respect to their deceased ancestors.



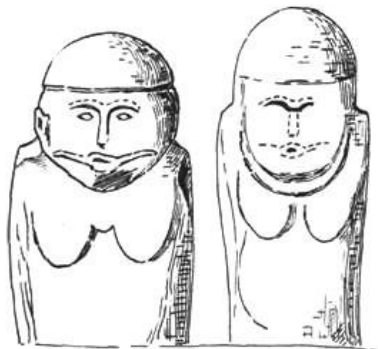
SCULPTURE

The Cumans created a large kurgan over the deceased and placed a sacral stone stelae called *balbal* (in Russian *kamennye baby*) for him with its face directed to the east and holding a bowl to its belly.

Cuman balbal, Dnieper

Similar statues were first erected in the 6th century between the Altay and Sayan Mountains.

The oldest statues positively identified as Cuman were discovered in the lower basin of Seversky Donets and Priazov and date from the first half of the 11th century. These sculptures roughly coincide with the period in which these territories were conquered by groups of nomads arriving from the Transvolga.



Cuman balbal, 12th century, Luhansk

On women's statues bare breasts generally symbolize the benefactor and patron of the family and clan. Breasts are a symbol of life and power, and may indicate that Cuman society retained many matriarchal aspects.

Statue of a male warrior with women's breasts – Saratov museum



Discussion/Questions

1- Why would statues of female figures be erected at the burial site of male warriors?

Readings

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