

Stone monument of horse. Baglypeye village. Middle Ages. Kalbajar



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TRADITIONAL STONE MASONRY IN KARABAKH



Karabakh, the land of picturesque mountains and vast arid plains, has given humanity the most ancient Guruchay archaeological culture. Judging by the materials of archaeological excavations, this peculiar culture began to form almost half a million years ago. **The world famous Azikh cave, which is a kind of treasury of materials about the time when primitive man began his labour activity,** significantly clarified this process. As a result of excavations carried out in this cave, tools made of pebble were found in its Paleolithic layers. All this gives reason to count the history of stone masonry in Karabakh from the Pleistocene era.

In the lower layers of the Paleolithic cultural layer of the Azikh cave, individual pebbles and their fragments, which served as tools, were discovered. But these are not yet specially made tools, as there are no traces of stone masonry on them. But on the other hand, in the Acheulian cultural layers of the cave, the first rough chopper-type tools made by crushing and used for cutting, chopping, breaking, scraping, crushing, and chiseling were found. (1) Thus, **the history of practical stone masonry originates from the Acheulian era, when the crushing technique emerged.**

It should be noted that the mountainous terrain of Karabakh with its dense river network has long been an inexhaustible source of raw materials for stone masonry. The tools and weapons found in the Paleolithic monuments of Karabakh — the Azikh, Taglar and Zar caves — are mainly made from pebble, flint, volcanic glass (obsidian), and to a lesser extent, from fragments of basalt and felsite. At first, a block of stone was crushed with blows, after which the resulting fragments were turned into cutting, scraping, piercing and drilling tools by means of notching and cutting. Then their various typological types appeared - knives, flat axes, awls and chisels. (2) Stone tools of the Middle Paleolithic (Mousterian) are obviously made from fragments of disk-shaped nuclei, and tools of the Late Paleolithic from prismatic ones. It is noteworthy that some of the Late Paleolithic stone tools are made from oblong fragments of flint and equipped with wooden and bone handles. The tradition of manufacturing stone tools and weapons with handles continued in the Mesolithic too. **The result of improving the technique of manufacturing stone tools and weapons was, in particular, the invention of the bow and arrows.** The microlithic arrowheads found during archaeological excavations appeared as a result of the improvement of the pointed stone tips of such stabbing weapons as darts and spears. Such

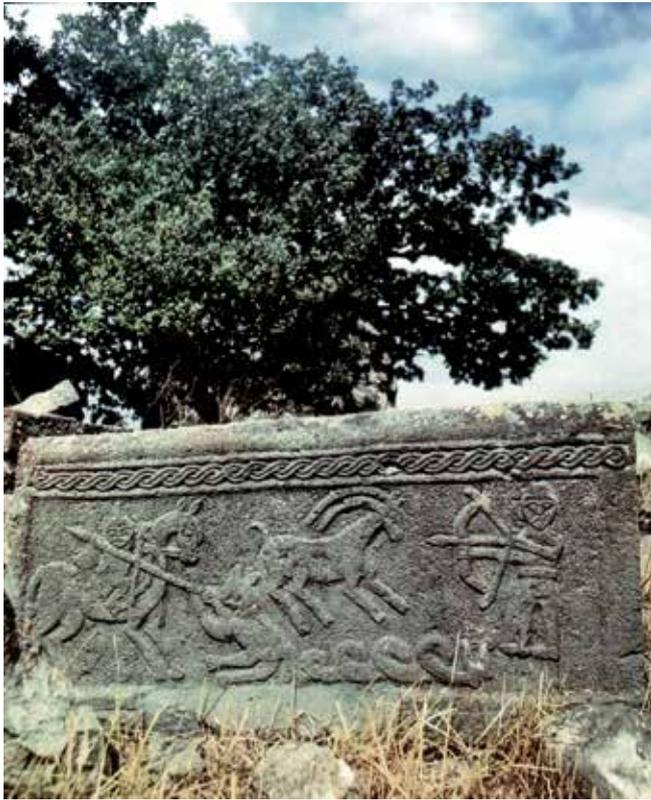


arrowheads, made already with a rather complicated technique, make it possible to judge the ability of the Mesolithic inhabitants of Karabakh to use throwing weapons, and at the same time, the high level of the art of stone masonry, which has already taken the path of specialization. Therefore, at the next stage of technological progress, due to the complexity of stone masonry, **there appeared manufacturers of bows, who turned into a special layer of craftsmen among the members of the tribe. This event happened much earlier than the first major division of labour in primitive society - the separation of cattle breeding from agriculture, which took place in the Neolithic period.**

One of the greatest historical achievements of the Neolithic (new Stone Age) was the transition from the appropriating economy (gathering, hunting and fishing) to the producing one. The emergence of

Tombstone. Boyahmadli village, Agdam district of Karabakh





Sarcophagus. Zeyve village. 16th century. Lachin

agriculture brought to life a number of stone tools used in ploughing the land and harvesting and threshing grain - hoes, inserts, graters, mortars and pestles, sharpeners, gristmills. One of the remarkable features of the Neolithic stone tools of Karabakh is that some of them were processed by grinding and drilling. These are polished stone axes, maces and staff handles.

The emergence of the producing economy led to the replacement of the nomadic lifestyle by a sedentary one. This, in turn, contributed to the emergence of construction, which laid the foundation for the construction of stone residential and utility structures. Thus, **there appeared a new practical function of stone in addition to the manufacture of tools and weapons - now it was a convenient building material.**

In the polymetallic era, the production of stone tools was reduced, but in general, stone retained its economic value to a large extent, turning into the main building material. As a rule, various kinds of fortifications around large settlements in the form of walls and barriers with loopholes, and defence structures were built from stone. Thus, the defensive wall around the mid-Bronze Age settlement in Garagoytepe reaches a thickness of 3 metres. (3) The impressive defensive walls of masonry

are also known around the settlement of Uzerliktepe near the city of Agdam. (4)

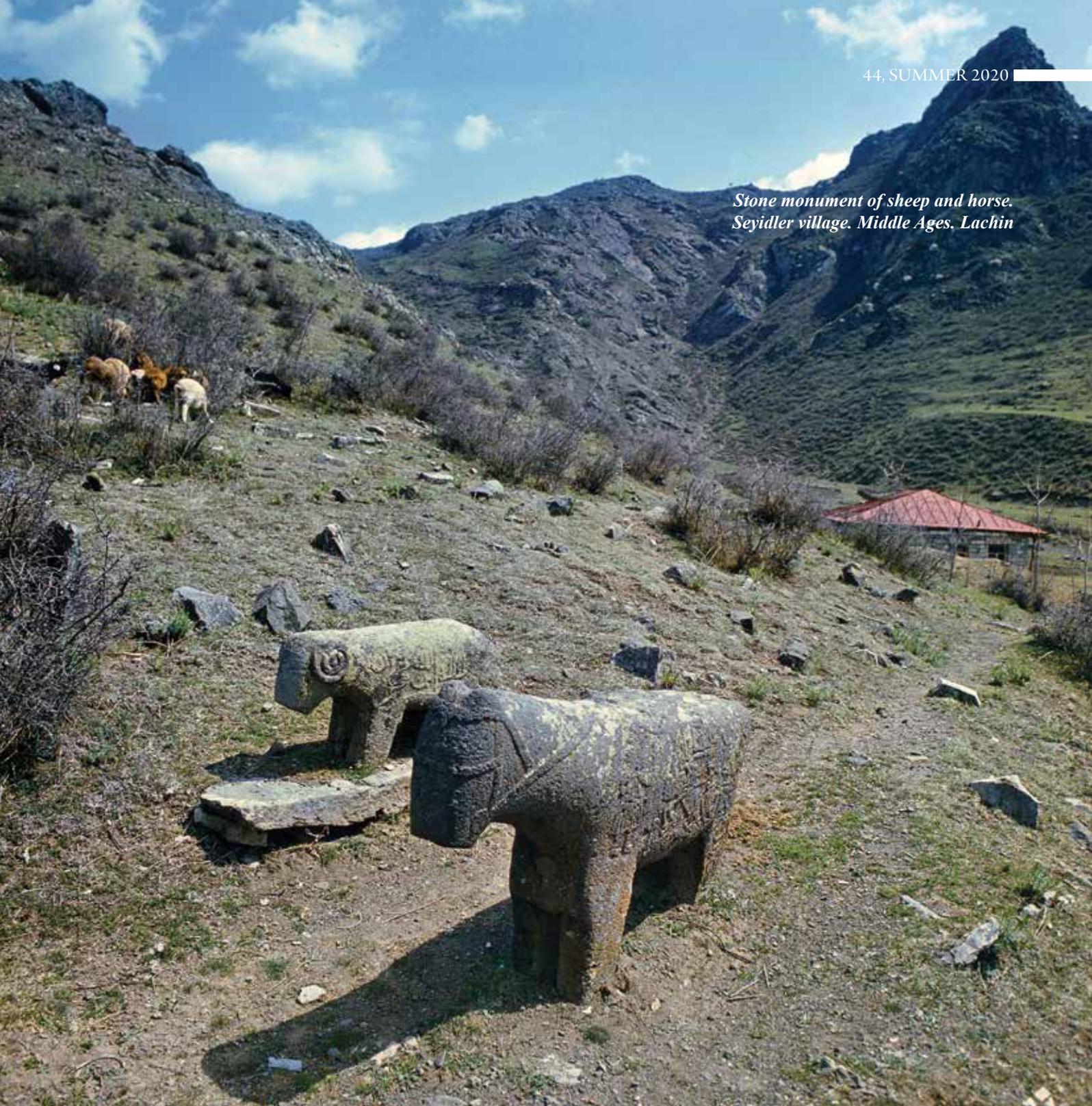
The majestic burial mounds north of the city of Khankendi brought to us samples of material culture from an almost 6-thousand-year-old historical period. Among them are stone products, in particular flint arrowheads, polished clubs, as well as stone molds for casting cold steel, which began to be manufactured with the development of bronze metallurgy, including for the production of bronze products by casting. Therefore, **from the indicated time, the Karabakh moulders began to mass-produce molds for casting various tools and weapons from soft types of stone.** Along with this, the production of a number of stone household products continued in the new era, including hand mills, graters, mortars, cribs, troughs, jugs, and buckets. Some of the masons began to specialize in the manufacture of millstones, hand mills and threshing boards. At the same time, the stone mined near the famous Albanian Gandzasar monastery was considered the most suitable for the manufacture of millstones and hand mills. (5)

On the Mil-Karabakh plain, where people have long had to use water from small silted rivers and artificial streams, special stone filters made from finely porous rocks have been used for filtering silt from time immemorial. Initially, the outer surface of the stone was trimmed, giving it the shape of a bud, then the internal part was hollowed out. In a similar way, such important household items as mortars, buckets, and jugs were made. Residents of settlements located near the stone quarries ordered stonemasons such household items as mangers, drains, water tanks and threshing boards.

A special place in the traditional stone masonry of Karabakh was occupied by **the funeral business, the masters of which were divided into manufacturers of tombstones and memorial fountains.** The manufacture of tombstones was more common and has a longer history. A number of their varieties are known in Karabakh - stone crates, statues of humans and animals, sarcophagi, vertical and horizontal tombstones, and gravestones.

The tradition of constructing tombstones to immortalize the memory of the deceased in Karabakh has a rich history. For example, in a number of Bronze Age barrows (Khojali, Dovshanli on the right bank of the Khachinchay River) burial grounds such as stone boxes were discovered. As for burial grounds such as sarcophagi and human statues associated with religious rites, they are most

*Stone monument of sheep and horse.
Seyidler village. Middle Ages. Lachin*



often found in early medieval cemeteries. Animal statues (a saddled horse - a symbol of abandonment, a ram - a symbol of pride and adherence), which are considered characteristic of Turkic tribes, are widespread at the burial grounds of the developed and late Middle Ages.

In decorative art, the most developed branch of traditional stone processing in Karabakh is carving or engraving, in which engraved pointed instruments of various shapes were used. Engravers were mainly en-

gaged in applying patterns and epitaphs on tombstones and on their various elements - on columns, their pedestals, cornices, arches. In this case, various types of Arabic writing were used - kufic, naskh, thuluth, taliq, nastalig and tawhid. An epitaph-free surface was decorated with geometric and floral patterns. In addition, images of household items, weapons and horse harnesses were made on tombstones. In the modern era, it has become customary to depict the deceased on a tombstone.



Sarcophagus. Summer pasture in Baglypeye village. Middle Ages. Kalbajar

Thus, when considering the ethnographic aspects of traditional stone masonry in Karabakh, it turns out that the manufacture of stone products in this historical region of Azerbaijan has come a long evolutionary path from the Paleolithic to our time. This ancient branch of local traditional craftsmanship is represented by tools, weapons, household items, building materials and tombstones, which were decorated using various techniques, including engraving, notching, chiseling and grinding. 🌿

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