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INTEGRATION OF NOMADIC TRIBES AND SEDENTARY PEOPLE IN THE HISTORY OF INNER ASIA

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FOREWORD

It is with scholarly intent that I present this volume, which compiles the proceedings of the international symposium entitled "Integration of Nomadic Tribes and Settled Populations in Inner Asian History." The symposium constitutes a significant contribution to ongoing academic discourse by providing a rigorous platform for the examination of the long-term, multidimensional interactions between mobile pastoralist communities and sedentary agricultural societies across Inner Asia. Through historical, archaeological, linguistic, and socio-cultural perspectives, the studies herein illuminate the complex dynamics of coexistence, adaptation, conflict, and integration that have shaped the region's civilizational trajectory.

Held in the historic city of Karakorum, Mongolia, on 30 June – 1 July 2025, this significant academic gathering was jointly organized by Istanbul University, the National University of Mongolia, the International Institute for Nomadic Civilizations (UNESCO), the Turkish Language Association, the Turkish Cooperation and Coordination Agency (TİKA), Istanbul Aydın University, the International Organization of Turkic Culture (TÜRKSOY), the Karakorum City Council, and the İlteriş Foundation. A total of 33 distinguished scholars from nine countries—Türkiye, Azerbaijan, Turkmenistan, Kazakhstan, Kyrgyzstan, Uzbekistan, the Russian Federation, the People's Republic of China, and Mongolia—participated in the meeting.

The studies presented here explore how nomadic and sedentary cultures have influenced one another throughout history, and how these interactions shaped economic, social, cultural, and political structures across the region. These scholarly contributions hold great value not only for the field of Inner Asian history but also for understanding the broader civilizational landscape whose impact continues to resonate today.

At Istanbul Aydın University, we attach great importance to international academic collaboration, the scientific investigation of cultural heritage, and the global dissemination of knowledge. Contributing to this symposium aligns fully with our university's academic vision and offers meaningful support to ongoing research on the shared history of the Turkic world.

I extend my sincere gratitude to all institutions, researchers, and members of the organizing committee who contributed to this comprehensive work. I hope that this volume will provide a valuable contribution to the study of Inner Asian history and to Turkic world research.

PROF. DR. MUSTAFA AYDIN
Chairman of the Board of Trustees, Istanbul Aydin University

FOREWORD

The interactions between nomadic and sedentary communities have long constituted a central theme in the study of Inner Asian history, intersecting the research agendas of multiple disciplines. In this context, the present volume, which brings together the proceedings of the international symposium entitled "Integration of Nomadic Tribes and Settled Populations in Inner Asian History," offers an opportunity to reassess these interactions through both theoretical and empirical perspectives. The contributions contained herein introduce new approaches to political organization, cultural transmission, economic networks, and processes of social transformation, thereby enriching the scholarly literature with original insights.

Held on 30 June – 1 July 2025 in Karakorum, one of Mongolia's historic centers, the symposium represents the outcome of a strong collaborative effort among Istanbul University, the National University of Mongolia, the International Institute for Nomadic Civilizations (UNESCO), the Turkish Language Association, the Turkish Cooperation and Coordination Agency (TİKA), Istanbul Aydın University, the International Organization of Turkic Culture (TÜRKSOY), the Karakorum City Council, and the İlteriş Foundation. With the participation of 33 scholars from Türkiye, Azerbaijan, Turkmenistan, Kazakhstan, Kyrgyzstan, Uzbekistan, the Russian Federation, the People's Republic of China, and Mongolia, the meeting provided a robust academic platform that opened new avenues for discussion within the field of Inner Asian studies.

As Istanbul Aydın University, we remain committed to advancing universal scientific knowledge, strengthening academic exchange, and promoting the interdisciplinary study of cultural heritage. Our contribution to this symposium not only reinforces our institution's position within international academic networks but also offers meaningful support to collective efforts aimed at furthering research on the shared history of the Turkic world. I extend my sincere appreciation to all scholars, supporting institutions, and members of the organizing committee whose efforts made this volume possible. I trust that this work will offer lasting contributions to the study of Inner Asian history and related fields.

PROF. DR. İBRAHIM HAKKI AYDIN
Rector, Istanbul Aydın University

FOREWORD

The present volume comprises the proceedings of the international symposium titled "Integration of Nomadic Tribes and Sedentary People in the History of Inner Asia", jointly organized in Kharkhorum, Mongolia, on 30 June- 1 July 2025 by Istanbul University, the National University of Mongolia, the International Institute for the Study of Nomadic Civilizations (UNESCO), the Turkish Language Association, the Turkish Cooperation and Coordination Agency (TİKA), Istanbul Aydin University, the International Organization of Turkic Culture (TURKSOY), the Kharkhorum City Council, and the İlteriş Foundation.

A total of 33 scholars from nine countries- Türkiye, Azerbaijan, Turkmenistan, Kazakhstan, Kyrgyzstan, Uzbekistan, the Russian Federation, the People's Republic of China, and Mongolia- participated in the meeting. We extend our sincere gratitude to L. Khaltar, Governor of Kharkhorum; L khagvajav Tur-Od, Kharkhorum City Councillor; and H. E. Enkhbayar NAMBAR, the third President of Mongolia and Chairman of the Kharkhorum City Council, for their support of our event.

We hope that this volume, which brings together the most recent academic findings of leading experts on the historical interactions and integration between sedentary and nomadic communities in Inner Asia, will make a valuable contribution to the field.

Editors

ELVİN YILDIRIM
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MISCONCEPTIONS IN ANCIENT CHINA ON NOMADIC PEOPLE

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Abstract

This study examines how ancient Chinese sources depicted nomadic peoples of the steppe and explores the cultural, ideological, and historiographical biases underlying these representations. Chinese historiography often portrayed nomads as inferior, greedy, immoral, and unclean, emphasizing their supposed admiration for China and framing their Sinicization as a virtue. By analyzing records from texts such as the *Wei Shu*, *Liang Shu*, and *Bei Shi*, the study demonstrates that these portrayals reflect a Sino-centric worldview rather than historical reality. Contrary to Chinese claims, the steppe peoples possessed a highly organized socio-political structure, an independent moral code, and a coherent cultural system centered on mobility, animal husbandry, and ironworking. Archaeological evidence also indicates that they engaged in limited agriculture, challenging the dichotomy between "barbarian nomads" and "sedentary farmers." Modern scholarship has at times perpetuated Chinese biases, constructing the image of the nomads as parasitic and predatory. This paper argues that such interpretations stem from a misreading of ideologically charged Chinese narratives and calls for a reassessment of steppe civilization as an autonomous and internally consistent cultural type

Key Words: Ancient China; Steppe Nomads, Chinese Historiography, Cultural Bias; Sinicization, Steppe Civilization, Sino-Centrism, Nomadic-Sedentary Relations.

The ancient Chinese regarded nomadic people with considerable prejudice. They not only misinterpreted their culture and way of life but also positioned China at the center of their worldview, believing that nomads admired Chinese civilization and considered their own Sinicization a mark of virtue.

The following observations concerning the nomadic lifestyle are recorded in Chinese sources:

a- Living in felt tents, migrating according to water and grass resources: "They had no walls surrounding their cities, but they followed water and grass to raise their livestock and live in tents" (*Liang Shu*, 1997, 817); "The weather in their lands grew cold early. They lived in tents made of felt cloth" (*Nan Qi Shu*, 1997, 1023); "The cities where the Rouran lived had no walls around them, but they followed water and grass to raise their livestock and carry their felt tents, which were their homes, wherever they migrated" (*Song Shu*, 1997, 2357). These records are classic accounts of all ancient steppe people. A record in the Liang Shu regarding the Rourans states: "During the Tianjian reign (502-519), they (the Rourans) began to defeat the Dinglings and returned to their former lands. They began to build a fortified city, which they named "Mumo 木末 city (城)" (*Liang Shu*, 1997, 817). The location of this city is unknown, and there are no ruins attributable to it. However, I believe it was primarily a garrison of some kind, established for military purposes, as in other examples from the Gokturk and Uyghur periods."

b- Admiration for China: Chinese sources consistently claim that the steppe people always admired China. Since the time of the Huns, statesmen in the steppe have been portrayed in this way. Chanyu Modu's son, despite the might of his state, admired China. A similar situation is observed among the Rouran. For example, in 477, an envoy named Biba sent to the Tuoba (Tabgaç) court gazed at the gold, jade, and inlaid objects, and remarked: " This great state is prosperous and magnificent—such things have never been seen in my life" (*Wei Shu*, 1997, 2296). The last khan, Anagui, detained the envoy Qun Yutan and kept him close to him. Because Anagui "admired China," he introduced Chinese-style official titles into his administration (*Bei Shi*, 1997, 3265). Chinese chroniclers often emphasized that the steppe people learned everything from China. The statements regarding Shelun, who founded the Khaganate, are similar: "Taizu said to Cui Xuanbo, the chief scribe (or imperial secretary), 'The Rouran people used to be called fools, plundering and looting whenever they came. Today, Shelun has learned about China and established warfare and battlefield regulations…" (*Wei Shu*, 1997, 2291). Accordingly, the steppe people, who admired China, even learned how to establish a state from the Chinese. This claim, however, does not reflect historical reality. The Chinese believed they were admired by the entire world because they saw themselves as central. In this worldview, to return to "hua" that is, to China, was regarded as a moral and cultural virtue.

c- Greed, immorality, uncleanliness: Chinese sources often portrayed steppe people as avaricious or self-interested, avaricious, self-interested, and morally deficient, and

accused them of immorality, untruthfulness, etc. because they did not conform to Chinese values. The reason why the steppe people, were called "greedy" was that They were portrayed as continually demanding greater returns from their raiding campaigns or the gifts (or taxes) they received from China. For example, in the 35th volume of the Wei Shu, it is recorded that the Rourans: "In autumn, they gather together with their flocks and migrate to the temperate lands in the south to avoid the cold, to raid" (*Wei Shu*, 1997, 818). It is mainly modern scholars who have created the image of the nomads as marauding, parasitic steppe people. The idea that the lifestyle of the nomads impoverished them, that they could not meet their needs, and that for this reason they plundered the settled farmers and wealthy people and to obtain what they lacked is related to the "predatory", "greedy barbarian" model of the nomads ascribed to them by certain modern researchers (Beckwith, 2011, xxiv).

d- The charge of immorality (as perceived by the Chinese) against the nomads is related to the Chinese philosophical concept "yi" (義). Yi can be translated as "ethical", "proper", "good", "principle" (*Ci Yuan*, 2002, 2496). For the Chinese, their own practices qualify for these attributes, while those of the steppe people do not. For example, the Chinese envoy who arrived in 174 B.C. during the reign of Jiyu, the Chanyu of Huns, said in his speeches that the Huns had father and son living in the same tent, that when the father died, the sons married their mothers, that the Huns did not wear headdresses and sashes, that they did not know court rituals, and so on (*Han Shu*, 1997, 3760). According to the Chinese, those who did not behave in this way were not obeying the "yi".

e- Chinese sources focus on "uncleanliness" in the culture of the nomads. Due to the limited water resources, there are some records in the main sources on the cleanliness of the nomads. It is noteworthy that Chinese sources explicitly emphasize the Rouran's unclean habits (as perceived by the Chinese). Accordingly, the Yueban observed that in the Ruanruan country, people did not clean their clothes, did not tie their hair, did not wash their hands, and women licked pots and pans (*Wei Shu*, p. 2268-2269). According to the *Wei Shu* records about the Yueban, their customs and language are the same as those of the Gaoche, except that their people are the cleanest among the Hu. Their custom is to cut their hair to eyebrow level, tidy it with cream, and make it shiny. They wash three times a day, after which they eat and drink (*Wei Shu*, p. 2268). On the other hand, the *Bei Shi* emphasizes the Gaoche's uncleanliness (*Bei Shi* 3271). As can be seen, although Chinese sources frequently

assert that the nomads were unclean, their accounts are inconsistent and occasionally self-contradictory.

The Question of Dependence on Settlers

It is widely accepted that steppe tribes were economically dependent on sedentary states and that nomads needed certain goods to endure the harsh winter months. Moreover, when the sedentary state, which had established a state monopoly in foreign trade, manipulated the prices of goods or suspended commerce altogether, the steppe states, which were in a difficult situation, had no other option but to fulfill their needs by looting. In this respect, the goods that the steppe state would receive from the sedentary state through trade or tribute were very important. Zhonghang Yue, who was with Jiyu, the Chanyu of Huns, reprimanded the Chinese envoy for this: "Chinese envoy, don't talk anymore. Look, the silk weaving, rice, fermented liquor that the Chinese brought to the Huns must be of good quality. What more can you say? If what you give is excellent and of good quality, fine. If it is not excellent and of good quality, if it is bad, wait for the fall, our galloping horses will trample the crops in your fields". Commodities such as silk and cloth, which were subject to taxation, also played a significant role in the Turks' trade relations with other countries.

While nomadic culture was founded upon the horse, it was not defined by it alone; iron was also an essential component. Horses and iron are two fundamental elements of steppe civilization. Naturally, they possessed a distinct legal consciousness. As a distinct cultural type, they were also complemented by religious, intellectual, and moral aspects, creating a unity of spiritual values. Unable to cultivate but possessing vast pastures, nomadic people were necessarily relied on animal husbandry. A gradation of civilizations such as "barbarian nomadic" and "sedentary farmers" is incompatible with scientific facts. Each culture and lifestyle constitutes an internally coherent whole; there is no difference between them in terms of "cultural value." Furthermore, it is known that nomads engaged in agriculture, albeit to a limited extent. Archaeological excavations have unearthed various irrigation canals, plowshares, sickles, granaries, and so on, in the steppe during the Hun and Turk periods. Mongolian archaeologist N. Ser-Ojav has likewise documented agricultural activities among the Rouran.

The steppe people, who made raids to open trade and obtain needed products, were seen by the Chinese as greedy. Moreover, the Chinese accused the steppe people of being immoral and dishonest because they did not conform to Chinese

values. The Tabgach Emperor Xianwen (reigned 466-471) said of the Rourans: "Rourans are like animals, they are greedy and immoral". Steppe people were called greedy because they always wanted more from their plundering expeditions or the gifts (or taxes) they received from China. The image of the nomads as marauding, parasitic steppe dwellers is, in fact, largely a construction of modern scholarship. This stereotypical portrayal rests on misinterpretations of deeply biased Chinese sources. Such views overlook both the prejudices and the internal contradictions within these records, as well as the more reliable evidence within the same sources that contradicts them. The notion that the nomadic lifestyle impoverished its practitioners—forcing them to plunder sedentary farmers and wealthy societies to meet their needs—is ultimately a prejudiced and anachronistic perception of nomadic culture.

Strengths and Weaknesses of Nomads

It was often relatively easy for nomadic steppe states to dominate sedentary states and societies. Turks and Mongols even dominated huge nations such as China and established their own dynasties there from time to time. Dynamic warriors from the nomadic world could easily prevail over the static people of the settled world. In Chinese history, this was achieved by people other than the Turks, such as the Mongols, Tungus (and later their successors, the Manchus) and Tibetans.

The population of these outsiders was very small compared to the society they ruled. In a populous territory like China, these outsiders quickly melted away, leaving only their names behind. Apart from the population factor, China's potential to dissolve foreign cultures within itself, the attractive nature of a Chinese-style life to nomads, and the fact that the steppe people liked the Chinese life because of its stability, peace, and tranquility also played a role. Indeed, Turkic communities such as the Tabgachs became Sinicized shortly after they ruled China and established their own state inside China. Turkic nobles and large Turkic families who went and settled in China were completely absorbed into Chinese culture within a few short generations. Initially, Chinese culture exerted a moderating influence on the steppe people, were soon able to make a counterattack. Nomads, who were in a minority position, had become increasingly passive and even Sinicized, were living off the tribute they received from the society, became the target of the civil bureaucracy that controlled the society. Eventually, the military power of the nomads came to an end with the Chinese revolts against the foreign power. Thereafter, only the remaining Sinicized descendants—who had lost their distinct power and identity—persisted.

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ON THE QUESTION OF URBANIZATION IN THE STATES OF STEPPE EURASIA

(BASED ON ARCHAEOLOGICAL EVIDENCE FROM EASTERN EUROPE)

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Abstract

In the Middle Ages, the urban centers of steppe Eurasia were an exceptional archaeological phenomenon, a unique evidence of a special civilization combining various economic patterns. The formation of urban centers in steppe Eurasia is associated with the emergence of the first large states at the end of the first millennium B.C. General patterns of urban processes, closely interlinked by trade and economic ties, emerged in the Xiongnu Empire era. Their traces are found in the subsequent formation of large urban regions in the culture of the medieval Turks, and their development continued in the Mongol Empire. The established traditions of culture and spiritual life determined the development of the vast territories populated by Eurasian peoples for many years to come.

Keywords: steppe, Eurasia, nomads, towns, archaeology, the Middle Ages, the Turks.

Reflecting on the issues of the formation of world civilizations provides new opportunities for understanding the development of cultural and historical communities in Steppe Eurasia. One topic that attracts the attention of scholars in the humanities is the specifics of the formation and development of the peoples of the North Eurasian steppes and their interaction with the populations of neighbouring areas [Khazanov 2002; Kradin 2007; Masyanova, Zhanaev 2008].

Comprehensive historical and archaeological research in the Volga and the Northern Black Sea regions has shown that the emergence of urban culture in this area is linked to the rise and dynamics of international trade along trans-Eurasian trade routes. The formation of cities is closely intertwined with the development of trade routes and is directly tied to them, while the prosperity, growth, and decline of settlements can be explained not only by the weakening of state power or natural causes but also by shifts in trade activity along various directions. Historical evidence indicates that the empires of the Great Steppe conquered nations and established stable socio-political structures with a high degree of urbanization.

The Volga region and the northern Black Sea region, an area where several natural zones converge — from semi-deserts and steppes to forest-steppes and taiga — serve as an excellent example of the interaction between various cultures and civilizations. In this regard, it is important to trace how the processes of urbanization and the co-existence of different types of economies interacted in this region.

From the 8th to the 10th centuries, the rapidly developing Khazar Khaganate achieved a high level of agriculture and built cities. From the Don River basin all the way to the forest zone, and from the North Caucasus and the Volga Delta to the Danube, these territories became settling zones. At the same time, a symbiosis of pastoralism and agriculture emerged here. The example of the Khazar Khaganate demonstrates how a Turkic dynasty united a multitude of peoples in Eastern Europe. Under these conditions, sedentary settlements and cities appeared in various regions of the khaganate. They were united by a shared cultural tradition, represented by the Saltovo-Mayaki culture. The common origins are also reflected in urban planning practices, which are well-documented in archaeological materials from numerous 8th–10th century sites stretching from the Volga to the Danube [Vasiliev 2006; Sitdikov 2006].

Military defeats of Khazaria at the hands of invading nomadic tribes from the east — the Pechenegs and Oghuz — coupled with the transgression of the Caspian Sea, which flooded significant fertile areas, led to a sharp reduction and decline of the settled agricultural zone of the Saltovo-Mayaki culture. In the 10th century, significant population groups relocated to new zones. New states with a developed urban craft culture and a large agricultural population emerged in Eastern Europe. In the Middle Volga region, the first Turkic state — Volga Bolgaria — was established.

Prior to the formation of the Bolgar state, the Middle Volga region had no agricultural or urban culture. This state's flourishing and the rapid growth of its cities were due to the rise of the Volga trade route and the massive influx of settled agricultural populations from the Pecheneg-ravaged Don region and other parts of the Khazar Khaganate. Furthermore, as the military and political power of Khazaria weakened, the influence of Volga Bolgaria grew, and by the end of the 10th century, it had become the sole state in the Volga-Ural region. Medieval Volga Bolgaria was a state led by a nomadic Turkic elite, but its settlement structure was similar to that of the countries of Eastern and Northern Europe. The Bolgars actively participated in global trade along the Volga River, which became the foundation of its economic development and was reflected in its material culture. By this time, the country was undergoing an accelerated process of urbanization. In the 10th century, some of the largest cities in Eastern Europe emerged here: Bolgar, Suvar, Bilyar, Kazan and others [Khuzin 1995; Khuzin 2001; Sitdikov 2006]. Archaeologically, the remains of 170 fortified settlements are known. The remains of over 800 unfortified settlements have also been identified. Together, they form a structure of various settlement types, where the fortified settlements functioned as urban centers and the unfortified ones served as their agricultural districts [Fakhrutdinov 1975].

Several urban agglomerations also emerged in the Lower Volga region during the pre-Mongol period, which, based on the foundations of their material culture, have their origins in the Saltovo-Mayaki culture. Archaeological remains of these cities are recorded in the Volga Delta (the fortified settlements of Samosdelka, Moshaik, among others), which are linked to the historical region of Saksin.

A new stage in the formation of statehood and the development of accelerated urbanization processes in the region began in the mid-13th century, when Eastern Europe became part of the Ulus of Jochi (Golden Horde) of the Mongol Empire. Unified laws and the absence of numerous internal restrictions ensured the dynamic development of sedentary settlements and the growth of trade [Fedorov-Davydov 2001].

Amid instability in the Middle and Near East, goods from China were routed to Europe via the Volga region. This is archaeologically evidenced by numerous settlement sites featuring a wide range of craft products, among which the cities covering vast areas are particularly notable. Furthermore, despite numerous innovations in the development of craft technology, a certain continuity in material culture — which

had been forming in the steppe zone of Eastern Europe since the Saltovo-Mayaki period — is also evident.

One of the economic centers of the Ulus of Jochi (Golden Horde) was the Volga region. This area was also home to the ulus's major urban agglomerations along the Akhtuba River: the Selitrennoye settlement and the Tsarev settlement. Other major cities of the Lower Volga and the Northern Caspian region included Hajji Tarkhan, Beljamen, and Ukek, as well as the urban centers along the Ural River such as Sarayçıq and Jajyk, among others. Together with dozens of towns and settlements, these cities formed a network where urbanization processes were observed along the major rivers and principal overland trade routes stretching from Khwarezm to the Danube. Many of these large cities have survived to the present day. A particularly distinct sedentary agricultural region with a developed urban structure was the Ulus of Bolgar, centered around the city of Bolgar. This city also became the first capital of the Ulus of Jochi during the reign of Batu Khan [Fedorov-Davydov 2001].

Medieval Kazan became the inheritor of the Golden Horde Turkic-Tatar urbaniza-tion of the Volga region. Having first emerged as a trading and border outpost even in the pre-Mongol period, Kazan was transformed into a military, political, and com-mercial-economic center for the region, and later, in the 15th–16th centuries, for the entire Volga-Ural region under the rule of the Tatar Kazan Khans [Sitdikov 2006]. Crafts that had moved from the cities of the Lower Volga developed here, and the foundation for its sustained development was the region's considerable sedentary agricultural potential. The preservation of prior urban cultural traditions is also clearly evident in the other Tatar khanates that emerged after the dissolution of the Ulus of Jochi (Golden Horde) in Eastern Europe and Siberia.

The formation of states in the Eastern Europe is the result of their incorporation into the process of medieval urbanization, which was connected to the Turkic world of Eurasia and the widespread influence of Muslim urban traditions. The integration of this part of the world into the system of Muslim civilization and, subsequently, into the structure of the Mongol Empire, became a defining factor in the process of ur-banization and its scale. The traditions of urban culture that developed in the medi-eval states of the Volga and Ural regions are also reflected in the contemporary cul-ture of the region's Turkic-Tatar population.

The development of urban culture in the Volga-Urals during the medieval period is closely linked to the emergence and flourishing of international trade along trans-Eurasian routes that connected the region to the Silk Road. The rise of states led to the consolidation of political power, the growth of cities and trade networks, and the development of the social structure. These changes facilitated the formation of stable ethnopolitical and ethnosocial communities, which succeeded one another historically within the medieval Turkic state formations of Eastern Europe.

Великий шёлковый путь в VII — XIII вв.
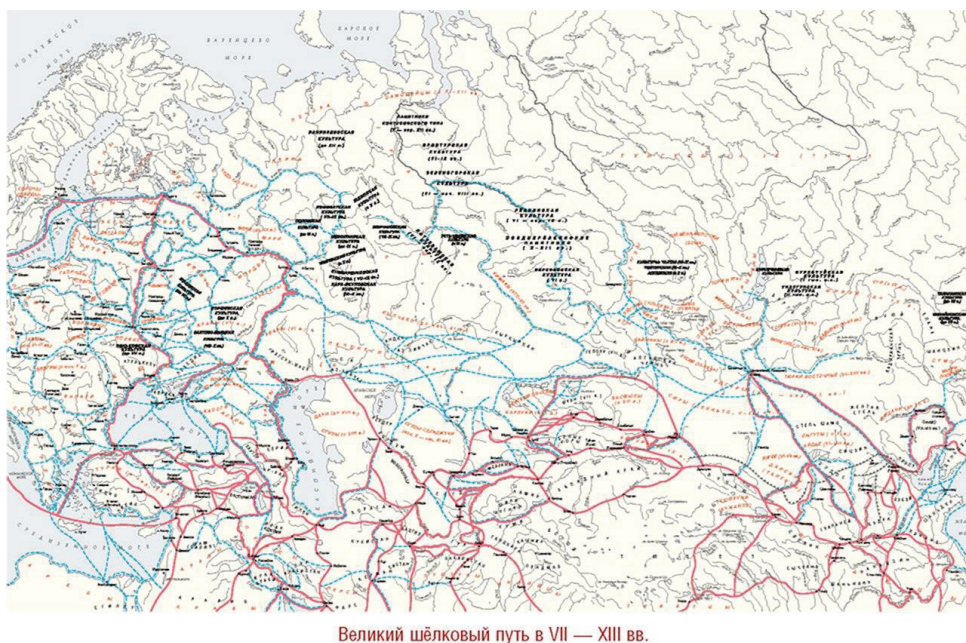
Fig. 1: The Silk Road in the 7th-13th centuries
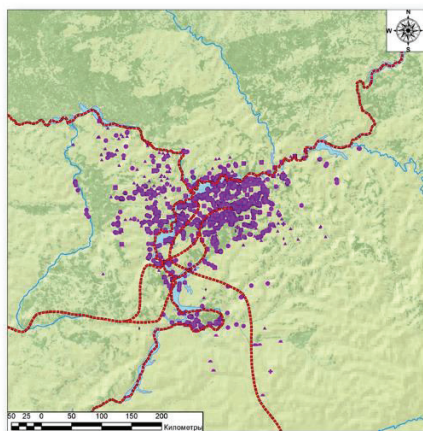
Fig. 2: Layout of archaeological monuments of Volga Bolgaria in the 10th-13th centuries. 1704 archaeological monuments, 107 of which are the remains of fortified settlements and towns.
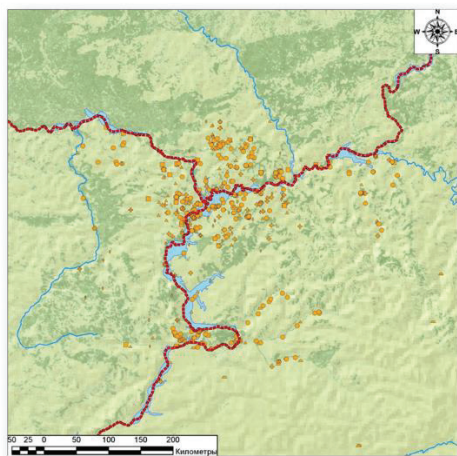
Fig. 3. Layout of archaeological monuments of Volga Bolgaria in the 13th-15th centuries. 514 archaeological monuments, 37 of which are the remains of fortified settlements and towns.

Fig. 4. Reconstruction of the Cathedral Mosque (1240s) of Bolgar

Fig. 5. a. Reconstruction of a public (East Chamber) bathhouse (1260s) of Bolga: layout of the excavated foundation of a public (East Chamber) bathhouse.
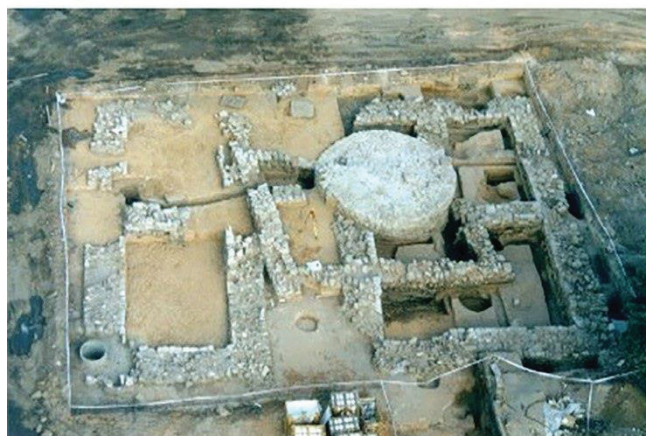
Рис. 130. Общий вид раскопа XLVIII.

| Фундамент башни XV в. | Ханский дворец XV - первая половина XVI вв. | Фундамент жилой постройки XVIII - XX вв. |

Рис. 131. Реконструкция сооружения раскопа XLVIII.

Fig. 6. a, b. Excavation and foundation layout of a palace of Kazan Khans (16th century); **c.** Reconstruction of a palace of Kazan Khans

Fig. 7. Reconstruction of the Kul Sharif Mosque (16th century) of the Kazan Khanat based on excavation materials

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ARCHAEOLOGICAL STUDIES OF URBAN SETTLEMENTS IN MONGOLIA

D. ERDENEBAT

MONGOLIAN ACADEMY OF SCIENCES

Abstract

This study examines ancient Chinese perceptions of nomadic societies as reflected in classical historical sources. Chinese writers often interpreted the pastoral, mobile lifestyle of steppe communities through a Sinocentric lens, portraying nomads as culturally inferior and assuming their admiration for Chinese civilization. Such representations reveal not only a fundamental misunderstanding of nomadic social organization, mobility patterns, and material culture but also China's broader ideological effort to position itself as the center of civilization. By analyzing key descriptions—such as the use of felt tents, seasonal migrations, and distinct social customs—this summary highlights the interpretive biases embedded in Chinese historiography and underscores the need for critical evaluation when reconstructing the cultural dynamics between China and the nomadic world.

Keywords: nomadic societies, ancient China, Sinocentrism, historiography, pastoralism, cultural perception, steppe civilizations, mobility patterns

Urban settlements in Central Asia first emerged as early as the Bronze Age. Within the territory of present-day Mongolia, the earliest known urban centers are associated with the Xiongnu Empire. The first archaeological evidence of a Xiongnu settlement was discovered and excavated near the Ivolga River (also known as Ivleg River), close to the city of Ulan-Ude in the Republic of Buryatia (Xiongnu Dictionary, 2011, 132).

The scientific study of archaeological monuments in Mongolia began in the late 19th century. Recent studies have identified approximately 300 ancient urban and settlement sites across Mongolia, dating from the 2nd century BCE to the late Middle Ages, around the 17th century. These findings serve as concrete archaeological evidence that refute the long-held notion that our ancestors were purely nomadic, constantly migrating from place to place. Instead, they reveal that early Mongolians not only practiced nomadism but also established permanent urban centers and engaged in sedentary life. Geographically, these more than 300 ancient urban and fortress sites are distributed across the extensive territory where the Mongol ethnos first rose and subsequently flourished. This vast region stretches from Lake Baikal in the north to the Great Wall of China in the south, from the Khingan Mountains in the east to the Altai Mountains and the Dzungarian Gobi in the west. Characterized by its extreme and diverse natural conditions, this area corresponds to what is known as the Mongolian Plateau, the ancestral homeland of the Mongols (Mongolian Science, 2007, 139).

The nomadic tribes inhabiting this territory traditionally relied on pastoralism as their main source of living, shaped by the natural environment and surrounding landscapes. At the same time, they also established numerous cities and fortresses to varying degrees of permanence, many of which have left a lasting mark in history. The distinguished scholar and academician D. Perlee, a specialist in the research of Mongolian cities and settlements, summarized the unique characteristics of ancient Mongolian urban development: *A fascinating feature of the ancient and medieval cities and settlements in Mongolia is that a newly dominant state seldom continued and developed the urban centers of the previously flourishing polity. Rather, they appear to have viewed them with hostility and destruction... Consequently, the ancient and medieval settlements in Mongolia were geographically scattered, chronologically disparate, and lacked direct lineal continuity, arising at different times and places according to the varying historical conditions of the country*.

Starting in the 1950s, Mongolian archaeological research saw a significant intensification of efforts by native Mongolians to independently study the material culture of their ancient history, with D. Perlee being the foremost representative of this era. He conducted extensive exploratory research across much of Mongolia, examining a wide range of monuments from different historical periods. Nonetheless, the study of cities and settlements remained a central focus of his work. D. Perlee is credited

not only with founding Mongolian urban archaeology but also with establishing settlement studies as a distinct sub-discipline within the country's archaeological scholarship.

In 1925, well before the intensive period of the 1950s, the Russian outstanding researcher B. Ya. Vladimirtsov and the Buryat scientist Bazaar Baradine performed exploratory work near the headwaters of the Kherlen and Tuul Rivers. A small amount of remains of an ancient city have been excavated and analyzed at a site known as Tereljiin Dorvolzhin, located on the eastern bank of the Terelj River, a right tributary of the Kherlen River. Between 1952 and 1957, D. Perlee, one of Mongolia's pioneering archaeologists, discovered and excavated numerous urban and settlement sites. These included Gua Dov in Bayanjargalan soum of Tuv province, Undur Dov in Mungunmorit soum, Shuvuutain Gol fortress in Jargaltkhaan and Delgerkhaan soums of Khentii province, Baruun-Doroogyn fortress in Tsagaan-Ovoo soum of Dornod province, and Bayanbulag ruins in Nomgon soum of Umnugovi province. His work established the concept that urban settlements had been established in Mongolia since ancient times (Xiongnu Dictionary, 2011, 133).

Investigating and analyzing urban settlements across different eras of Mongolian history is essential to illuminate various subjects, such as the changing methods of city building, architectural styles and techniques, shifts in construction materials and decoration, the state of industrial development, and foreign relations of the time.

Mongolian national researchers classify the urban settlements that existed in the country as follows:

Firstly, Cities and settlements from the Xiongnu era:

    1). Tereljiin Dorvolzhin. Mungunmorit Soum, Tuv Aimag - Excavated in 1925 by Vladimartsov, Baradin, in 1949 by S.V. Kiselev, in 1952 by D. Perlee.

    2) Gua Dov. Bayanjargalan soum of Tuv province. First discovered in the 1920s by S. Jamyan (clan name is: Onkhod), the site was excavated and studied by archaeologist D. Perlee in 1952, who dated it to the Xiongnu period, specifically between the 2nd century BCE and the 1st century CE.

    3) The Bayanbulag Ruin, Nomgon soum, Umnugovi province.

Archaeological research commenced with Kh. Perlee (1957), followed by L. Navaan (1976), and D. Tsevendorj and Z. Batsaikhan (1990). Subsequent analysis by D. Tsevendorj, Z. Batsaikhan, and Ts. Torbat attributed the monument to the Xiongnu (Hunnu) period. Based on textual sources, they concluded that the site may represent Zhaoxin Cheng, a city purportedly built in 123 AD for General Zhao Xin, who defected from the Xiongnu to the Han Dynasty. Furthermore, the evidence confirms that the ruin constituted a considerably large settlement for its era.

4) The Boroo Settlement in Bornuur Agricultural Area, Tov province. Ts. Dorjsuren conducted the initial excavation and study in 1966, followed by research from D. Tsevendorj and I. Erdelyi in 1990. More recently, the site has been continuously studied by a joint Mongolian-Swiss team, including Ts. Torbat, Batbayar, and Pusa, since 2002.

5) Burkhiin Dorvolzhin, Mungunmorit soum, Tuv province, when Kh. Perlee first examined the remains of the walled structure, he found fragments of roof tiles and square bricks with irregular patterns. These artifacts were similar to those discovered at Gua Dov and Tereljiin Dorvolzhin, leading him to conclude that they belonged to the same period, the Xiongnu era.

6) *Luut City, Ulziit soum, Arkhangai province.* Archaeologist *T. Iderkhangai* initiated research on the political centers of the *Xiongnu Empire* in the *Orkhon and Tamir River basins*. The ancient city of *Luut* was first identified in 2017, and its discovery was publicly announced following the commencement of systematic excavations in 2020.

Secondly, Turkic and Uyghur Towns:

1). The Uighur's Capital Karabalgasun. (Khotont soum, Arkhangai province).

The archaeological investigation of Karabalgasun began in the late 19th century. Russian researchers played a key role: I. Paderin first explored the site towards the close of the century, and N. M. Yadrintsev conducted fieldwork there in 1889. Following this, D. A. Klements and V. V. Radloff undertook detailed research in 1891, the results of which were subsequently published in scholarly journals. The site was initially excavated and studied by the Russian scholar *D. D. Bukinich* during 1933-

1934. This was followed in 1949 by a minor excavation conducted by the joint *Mongolian-Soviet research expedition*, led by *S. V. Kiselev* and *D. Perlee*, which successfully recovered valuable artifacts and scholarly materials. Subsequently, in the early 1980s, a Mongolian-Soviet research team focusing on history and culture, comprising *D. Tseveendorj* and *Yu. S. Khudyakov*, carried out reconnaissance work, specializing in the study and publication of the site's ceramic and pottery findings.

2). The Biibulag Ruins, Khutag-Ondor soum, Bulgan province.

The history of this ancient city was first addressed from a historical perspective by the Finnish scholar G. I. Ramstedt. Furthermore, S. V. Kiselev, a prominent Soviet historian specializing in the ancient history of Mongolia, conducted significant research on Mongolian urban settlements and specifically mentioned Baibalyk in his influential article, "Ancient Cities of Mongolia". Furthermore, Kh. Perlee, one of Mongolia's pioneering archaeologists, expressed that Baibalyk "*was not studied properly according to the principles of ancient studies, ... noting that "its walls were constructed of rammed earth, similar to the fortifications of Khar Balgas*." Additionally, in 1975, Turkic scholar S. G. Klyashtorny personally examined the site and emphasized that its layout bore a distinct resemblance to Khar Balgas as well.

Thirdly, Khitan Urban settlements: Although burial sites, tombs, and sacrificial altars dating to the Khitan period are not frequently found in the territory of Mongolia, urban settlements and city ruins from this era have been discovered in relatively large numbers and are currently under active investigation. Archaeologist D. Perlee conducted reconnaissance studies of Khitan-period settlements, making a significant contribution to clarifying issues related to the urban development of this era, including the preliminary dating of sites. Notably, his research identified and incorporated major settlements such as Emgentyn Balgas, Talyn Ulaan Balgas, Khadasangyn Balgas, Chin Tolgoi, Dersentolgoi, Oglogchyn Kherem, Baruun Kherem, Zuun Kherem, and Bars City.

1). Oglogchiin Kherem, Batshireet soum, Khentii province.

In 1926, Soviet scholar S. Kondratyev visited the site, measured the wall's height, and observed no traces of buildings within the fortress. Based on the presence of leveled earth platforms built against the inner wall, he hypothesized that the structure

was an archers' fortification dating to the 12th-14th centuries. However, Kh. Perlee later refuted this hypothesis, tentatively dating the site to the Khitan period based on pottery shards recovered from the area.

2). Kherlen Bars City 1: Tsagaan-Ovoo soum, Dornod province.

During 1953-1955, archaeologist Kh. Perlee conducted excavations and research at the site. He investigated four structures within the city walls of Bars-1 and the foundations of smaller buildings located around the adjacent minor wall. Based on these findings, he successfully determined that these buildings had served as a site for religious worship or cult activity.

3) Zuun and Baruun Kherem (Eastern and Western Walls), Moron soum, Khentii province

Archaeologist D. Perlee excavated and studied these two parallel fortifications, located within Moron Soum, between 1952 and 1953. Researchers subsequently cross-referenced the physical evidence from these walls with historical records detailing that in 1012 and 1015, the Kidan state suppressed an uprising by tribes inhabiting the upper Kherlen River area. The sources further state that the Kidan military subsequently subdued the rebels and settled the survivors in a newly built city near the source of the Kherlen River. By carefully comparing the evidence, the researchers confirmed that the Zuun and Baruun Kherem were indeed the sites mentioned in these historical accounts.

4) Guulin Uls City – Sumtiin Toirom, Dariganga soum, Sukhbaatar province

From 1944 to 1995, archaeological investigations were conducted at the site known as Sumtiin Toirom in Dariganga soum, Sukhbaatar province, focusing on the largest building ruin. These excavations yielded finds from two distinct historical periods. First, the discovery of decorative bricks featuring raised lotus flower patterns directly above the building ruin-similar to those found at the Khitan state's Bars City 1-allowed for the dating of the site to that specific era. Analysis of the wooden structural elements recovered from the excavation, employing radiocarbon dating, established a timeframe spanning the 15th–16th centuries, thereby suggesting that the

settlement was continuously inhabited or reoccupied during two distinct historical periods.

5) Khar Bukh Balgas (ruin). This site is located on the left bank of the Khar Bukh River in Dashinchilen soum, Bulgan province. It was first identified in the late 19th to early 20th century by scholars, including I. Paderin, N. M. Yadrintsev, and J. G. Grano, who also carried out the crucial initial work of mapping the site. Furthermore, the site was documented by D. D. Bukinich, who produced a background map in 1933–1934, and S. V. Kiselev subsequently conducted the first formal excavations. In the 1970s, D. Perlee and E. V. Shavkunov excavated a stupa and discovered a valuable monument of medieval Mongolian written culture - a cork book. Most recently, the 2005 research under the "Black Bukh" project included extensive exploration along the Orkhon and Tuul basins, which revealed nine new and one previously known but unexplored urban sites. The background maps for these sites were then completed by researchers A. Ochir, A. Enkhtur, and S. Erdenebold[8].

Fourthly, Urban Settlements and Cities of the Mongols

The effort to locate and confirm the site of Kharkhorum, the capital of the Mongol Empire, began in the 1820s of the 19th century. The exact location of the city was definitively established in 1889 through the involvement of scholars from various countries, marking the official start of its archaeological investigation (Erdenebat, 2018, 33). The first archaeological excavations at the city's ruin were conducted by the Soviet researcher D. D. Bukinich. During 1933–1934, he dug a significant number of small exploratory trenches across the site's surface area. The initial excavation of the Kharkhorum city ruins, the capital of the Mongol Empire located on the Orkhon river, began in the 1930s. Subsequently, extensive excavations were organized in 1948–1949 by the joint Mongolian-Soviet historical and ethnographic research group, led by Professor S. V. Kiselev. This later fieldwork was crucial, as it was the first to archaeologically confirm the site's identity as the inaugural capital of the Great Mongol Empire. The excavations in Kharkhorum led by S. V. Kiselev were attended by a full contingent of young Mongolian archaeologists, including the eventual pioneer D. Perlee, along with Ts. Dorjsuren, D. Navaan, and N. Ser-Odjav, all of whom had pursued archaeological studies in the USSR. This collaborative effort became a major training and research school that defined the initial generation of Mongolian archaeologists.

The finds recovered during the 1948–1949 excavations are currently preserved in the archives of the Institute of Archeology of the Academy of Sciences. The detailed report on this fieldwork was later published in 1965 as part of the collaborative volume, 'Cities of Ancient Mongolia'. The findings from the excavations were promptly published by the participating scholars in a series of articles in the Soviet Archaeological Research Journal, notably including works by Evtukhova (1957, 1959), Kiselev (1957), and Perlee (1957). Furthermore, detailed analysis of artifacts recovered from Kharkhorum and preserved in Ulaanbaatar was undertaken: U. Gongorjav published specifically on the bronze and copper objects utilized as measuring instruments, while Kh. Perlee authored a study focusing on the bronze yoke fittings associated with carts.

The study of Kharkhorum, the capital of the Mongol Empire, demonstrates a clear methodological progression over time. Initially, research focused on historical-geographical and field reconnaissance to successfully identify and confirm the precise location of the city's ruins. This phase was followed by a pivotal shift in the mid-study period, characterized by the execution of the first formal archaeological excavations on the city's foundation. Subsequently, the investigation deepened, aligning with the requirements of modern scientific archaeology. This sustained, continuous approach allowed historical information regarding the city's appearance, districts, demographic structure, and the residents' lifestyle to be rigorously verified through archaeological artifacts and material evidence (Batbayar, 2022, 25).

One of the most comprehensive works detailing the study of Mongolian settlements is 'A Synopsis of Early and Medieval Settlements of the Mongolian People's Republic', authored by Mongolia's pioneering archaeologist, D. Perlee. In a related work, 'Khitans and their connections with the Mongols' (1959), Perlee specifically highlighted the urban activity of the Khitan state. In Section 5, "On specially established settlements," he emphasized that among all the ancient states that held sway over both Mongolia and China, the Khitan state established the greatest number of towns and settlements (Perlee, 2012, 53).

Conclusion: As a result of many years of continuous research on ancient cities in Mongolia, the nation possesses hundreds of monuments that vividly demonstrate the structure, organization, and craftsmanship of urban centers and architectural complexes. These sites span vast historical periods, including the eras of the Xiongnu,

Uyghurs, Khitans, the Great Mongol Empire, the period of fragmentation, and the Manchu rule. Collectively, these remains-ranging from royal palaces and walled cities to handicraft factories, agricultural settlements, sacrificial altars, and religious temples-offer profound insight into the diverse architectural heritage that flourished alongside Mongolia's nomadic civilization.

Firstly, the oldest urban monuments discovered within the territory of Mongolia date back to the Xiongnu period, an era spanning from the 2nd century BC to the 1st century AD. Cities of this period were characterized by being encircled with thick, square earthen walls, which enclosed numerous internal buildings. Furthermore, a deep moat typically bordered the exterior of these walls, enhancing the fortification. Xiongnu buildings featured rammed earth walls, which were typically finished with a plaster composed of clay and lime. The roofs were constructed using baked red brick tiles. Here, let us pause to mention that archaeologist Z. Batsaikhan classified Xiongnu settlements into three categories based on their function and purpose:

1. Settlements for Handicraft Production and Agriculture: Located along the Selenge River.

2. Sacrificial and Ritual Sites: Located along the Kherlen River.

3. Military fortifications exist within the territory of *Inner Mongolia*. However, archaeologist *Ts. Torbat* has refined this classification, dividing them into four categories as follows:

1. Temporary fortifications (for military or administrative purposes)

2. Religious settlements

3. Border fortifications and castles

4. Settlements of artisans and agricultural communities (Xiongnu Dictionary, 2011, 134).

Secondly, Urban settlements of the Uyghur state during the 8th–9th centuries were characterized by being encircled with high, thick fortification walls constructed from

rammed earth compacted mud and earth. Internally, these cities housed complexes including residences, palaces, and temples. Furthermore, sophisticated irrigation systems, comprising water and agricultural canals, were established to surround the settlements.

Thirdly, several large cities were constructed in Mongolia during the *10th and early 11th centuries*. Research indicates that the cities established by the *Khitans*, who held dominance over the region at this time-such as *Zuun and Baruun Kherem (Eastern and Western Walls)* and *Bars City*-served primarily as *military settlements* aimed at controlling local nomadic populations and supporting administrative functions. Archaeological evidence also shows that buildings within these cities were equipped with *central wall-heating systems*.

Fourthly, numerous urban sites dating to the 13th-century Mongol Empire, its predecessors, and subsequent periods have been identified. These include the ancient capital Kharkhorum, the ruins of Avarga, where Chinggis Khan was enthroned as ruler of the Mongol Empire, as well as other monumental cities associated with later periods.

Fifthly, during the *16th–17th centuries*, the construction of urban settlements continued uninterrupted, with *Tibetan-style stone buildings* erected under the influence of *Buddhism*, which had entered Mongolia. Major architectural monuments of this period include the *Tsogtyn Tsagaan Baishin (Tsogt's White House)*, the *Khar Bukh* (Black Bull) *Ruins*, the *Sarda Monastery* at the headwaters of the *Tuul River*, and the *'Kheseg baishin' (Some houses),* and '*Olon baishin' (Many Houses)* in *Dornogovi province* (Mongolian Science, 2007, 176).

Based on these findings, *archaeological research demonstrates* that a large number of cities were constructed during the *great historical days*, which experienced periods of rise and decline during *ancient and medieval Mongolia*. These sites will undoubtedly be further investigated through *future excavations*.

This is supported by historical research, and it is evident that the study of Mongolian cities continues to expand annually.

Therefore, there is a clear need to take proactive measures to further deepen and expand research on Mongolian urban settlements, including the incorporation of the latest scientific advancements to advance the field.

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THE HISTORICAL INTEGRATION OF NOMADS AND SEDENTARY SOCIETIES IN SIBERIA: AN EXAMINATION FROM TSARIST RUSSIA TO THE SOVIET PERIOD

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Abstract

This study examines the historical interaction and integration processes between nomadic Turkic communities and sedentary populations in Siberia, spanning a broad timeline from Tsarist Russia to the Soviet era. Archaeological and ethnological evidence point to the presence of a Europoid population in Siberia dating back to the Neolithic Age, revealing the cultural continuity and anthropological amalgamation that persisted until the Gökturk period. In the subsequent states established after the Gökturks, Turkic peoples maintained their presence in Siberia, and from the 12th century onwards, they recognized Mongol suzerainty. The expansionist policies initiated by the Russians from the 16th century onward transformed the demographic, economic, and administrative structure of Siberia through the construction of military forts (ostrogs) and the implementation of taxation systems. The indigenous population was subordinated to the state through the yasak (fur tribute) tax; simultaneously, their agricultural, pastoral, and hunting activities were incorporated into the Russian administrative system. While Russian influence intensified in the homelands of Turkic communities throughout the 19th and 20th centuries, the Siberian Turks increasingly came to be characterized by autonomous structures. Russian settlement policies, while while provoking local resistance, also facilitated voluntary assimilation, ultimately leading to the enduring Turkic presence in Siberia to the present day. The study analyzes the impact of Russification policies on the social transformation of nomadic populations.

Key Words: Siberia, Nomadic Peoples, Sedentary Societies, Integration Process, Russians.

The Emergence and Cultural Development of Turkic Peoples in Siberia

Siberia is a geographical region that witnessed continuous interaction, cultural integration, and anthropological transformation between nomadic and sedentary societies throughout the period spanning from the Neolithic Age to the Middle Ages. Archaeological excavations carried out in the region provide valuable insights into the habitation, habitation patterns, production activities, and religious practices of small communities, as well as primitive artifacts crafted by human hands since the Neolithic period. The Afanasyevo Culture, which emerged particularly in the Yenisei basin, produced some of the earliest known examples of metallurgy in the region (Kızlasov, 1971, 66).

Throughout this period of cultural development, a clear continuity can be observed among the Andronovo, Karasuk, and Tagar/Tashtyk cultures, ultimately linking them to the ancestors of the Turks who later appeared in written sources. The interaction between the Europoid Andronovo and Mongoloid Okunev communities in the Altai-Sayan region led to significant cultural transitions and occasional conflicts. The presence of both Europoid and Mongoloid types in burials from this period indicates the intensive anthropological amalgamation that occurred during the Karasuk and Tagar phases (Savinov, 2004, 115; Jettmar, 1950, 113-115; Vadetskaya, 2014, 43). The findings related to this period are supported by the research of scholars such as Chlenova, Molodin, Savinov, and Jettmar. Concurrent with these cultural phases, the presence of proto-Hunnic tribes—such as the Rong, Di, and Yi— in the region is documented in Chinese sources, and These groups are understood to have occupied a position along the historical trajectory that ultimately led to the formation of the Great Hunnic State (Kırilen, 2015, 96-117; Yıldırım, 2024, 47). According to Kürşat Yıldırım, this period extends as far back as 2350 BCE, and the aforementioned ancestors of the Huns were referred to by the names *Shan Rong*, *Quan*, *Quan Rong*, *Xianyun,* and *Hunyu* (Yıldırım, 2024, 47). In the Chinese source Han Shu, these tribes are described as "dwelling along the northern borders before [the time of] Tang and Yu, following pastures to raise livestock and relocate" (Ercilasun, 2021, 131). The Huns, achieving political unity under Modu Chanyu, became a dominant and enduring power on the steppe and consolidating various ethnic groups under their rule. In the periods following the Huns, political entities such as the Xianbei, Wuhuan, Tabgach, and Juan-Juan assumed control of the steppe; ultimately, the Rouran Khaganate was overthrown by the Köktürks in 552 CE. This chronological and cultural trajectory forms the archaeological and ethnological foundation for the

emergence of the Köktürks on the historical stage. The mastery of the steppe belonged to the Köktürks from 552 CE until 744 CE, when their authority was brought to an end by the tripartite alliance of the Uyghurs, Basmils, and Karluks. Subsequently, the Uyghurs maintained their dominance over a vast geographical area, including the Ötüken region, until 840 CE, after which they too were compelled to withdraw from the political scene. The Uyghurs were ultimately overthrown by the Kyrgyz, another Turkic tribe, whose name had appeared in Chinese sources in various forms such as *Gekun* and *Jiankun* since the period of the Asian Hunnic State. It was in that year that the *Kyrgyz* established their own Khaganate in *Qingshan* (Sayan) (Yıldırım, 2024, 586). Their dominance was later challenged by the emergence of the Khitans, who, by 915 CE, had captured the the area corresponding to present-day Beijing and established it as their capital (Togan, 1981, 61). Unable to withstand further Khitan aggressions further, the *Kyrgyz* dispatched an envoy and submitted to the Khitans in 931 CE. (Gömeç, 2011, 63) Subsequently, as a result of Jochi's incursion into the Kyrgyz Steppe in 1218, they submitted to Genghis Khan's Great Mongol Ulus (Barthold, 1990, 395).

The early Turkic communities were not sedentary farmers tied to the land, but instead adopted a nomadic or semi-nomadic lifestyle. This social and organizational structure enabled them to safeguard their autonomy and, by migrating under adverse conditions, discover new habitats. Their livestock-based economy required greater expertise, labor, and experience compared to agriculture. The Turkic peoples established an economically self-sufficient system; they only became externally dependent during exceptional circumstances, such as famine or epidemic outbreaks. This structure played a crucial role in enabling them to sustain their independence (Gömeç, 2018, 41). Furthermore, the economic foundations of early Turkic life can be categorized under seven main headings: 1) Nomadic and semi-nomadic pastoralism, 2) Agriculture, 3) Commerce, 4) Hunting, 5) Taxation of the populace, 6) Plunder raids, and 7) Tribute revenues (Gömeç, 2018, 40). The appeal of the settled lifestyle was undeniable; the prosperity of societies engaged in commerce and craftsmanship, who faced fewer challenges from nature, captured the attention of the nomads and occasionally drew them in (Gömeç, 2018, 41). However, the most significant economic pursuits of the Turkic peoples of Siberia, however, were hunting, followed by the fur trade, fishing, animal husbandry, reindeer herding (depending on the region), forestry, and agriculture (Yıldırım, 2020, 271-273).

Ultimately, although the states may have disappeared from the stage of history, the existence of the Turkic peoples as a nation in this geography was not erased; rather, their cultural structures, especially their economic life, persisted. During the era of the Uluses (successor states) established after the Mongol expansions toward the western territories, and subsequently in the age of the Timurid State- emerging after the collapse of these Uluses-and the subsequent Khanates, Turkic peoples founded states, subjugated sedentary societies, and adopted an urban culture. However, the geographical location of the Siberian region in a more challenging environment enabled its Turkic inhabitants to preserve their cultural characteristics due to the limited nature of their contact with the outside world. In the end, the Turkic states — which disintegrated due to numerous internal and external factors —were gradually subjected to Russian domination after 1552, and the Siberian populace was governed first under Tsarist rule and later under the administration of the Soviet Union.

In the post-1991 period, the Kazakh, Kyrgyz, Uzbek, Turkmen, and Azerbaijani Turkic peoples separated from the Soviet Union and declared their independence, while other Turkic tribes and communities remained within the Russian Federation. These Turkic groups and communities are today concentrated primarily within the Volga Federal District, the North Caucasus Federal District, and Siberia. In contemporary Siberia, various Turkic tribes and communities, referred to —such as Tuvans, Khakas, Altaians, Bashkirs, Chuvash, and Tatars— continue to inhabit the region alongside Mongol-origin communities and other indigenous populations. Within this concise historical framework, the primary sources of livelihood across the vast territories inhabited by the Turkic and Mongol peoples have sequentially included hunting and gathering, fishing, pastoralism, and agriculture/animal husbandry in suitable regions since the early historical period. The incorporation of the region under Russian authority and the subsequent settlement of Russian populations are understood to have brought about cultural transformations among the nomadic groups, primarily affecting their economic life.

The Russian Expansion into Siberia

Although Vernadsky asserts that Russian expansion did not constitute imperialism, expansionist activities began during the reign of Ivan IV with the capture of Kazan in 1552. This paved the way for Russia's advance into a territory of more than one million square kilometers, stretching from the Ural Mountains to the Pacific Ocean (Ferro, 2002, 92-93). Within the region Russians term 'Eurasia,' the boundaries of

this expansion are defined as stretching along the northern line from Kiev-Kazan-Tyumen to the Altai Mountains, encompassing the steppes of Mongolia, the tundra and desert belt, and Western Turkestan (Vernadsky, 2009, 21-22). Following the request of the Stroganov Brothers (Ferro, 2002, 93) to establish a new city on the Kama River in Perm, cultivate the lands, engage in agriculture, and employ people through corvée labor in the saltworks, Ivan IV granted the requested lands to the Brothers. This act, in turn, initiated expansionist activities in Siberia. The expansion continued through the construction of fortresses and monasteries in Siberia, which ensured the permanent settlement of the Russians in the region (Ferro, 2002, 93). The Russian advance in Siberia was accomplished by means of fortresses constructed sequentially from one river to the next. Accordingly, Russian expansion reached the Ob and Irtysh Rivers in 1585, the Yenisei River in 1628, and the Amur and Kolyma Rivers by 1640. This process was completed following the neutralization of the final impediment, Khan Kuchum, in 1598. Subsequently, the territories of the Sibir Khanate were seized in 1604, the city of Tomsk was established on the right bank of the Tom River, and all routes were opened for the Russians (Kurat, 1987, 168; Topsakal, 2017, 101). Subsequently, the Russians established the city of Yakutsk in 1632, after which they reached Kamchatka in 1649 (Topsakal, 2017, 101). Thus, the Russians successfully reached the coasts of the Sea of Okhotsk and the Bering Sea 150 years after the occupation of Kazan (1552).

The Russian entry into Siberia was not effortless; rather, it was marked by considerable bloodshed. The Tatars, Cheremis, Chuvash, and Mordvins engaged in successive, ultimately unsuccessful uprisings that lasted until the periods of Stenka Razin and Pugachev. During this process, many Tatar nobles were stripped of their possessions, and several were beheaded (Ferro, 2002, 258). In the mid-17th century, the Kazakhs, Samoyeds, and Ostiaks, who had come under Russian dominion, were subjected to taxation through Siberian sable furs (Ferro, 2002, 93). On the other hand, it is understood that the Kalmyks and the Telengits—a community belonging to the Altai peoples—were compelled to recognize Russian sovereignty and pay tribute in 1608 and 1609 (Küçük, 2024, 33-34. As they advanced toward the Central Yenisei, the Russians undertook campaigns against the Tungus, Buryats, Oirats, and Kyrgyz, founding the cities of Yeniseysk in 1618 and Krasnoyarsk in 1627 (Barthold, 2010, 233). During this period, Altan Khan, who is understood to have exercised authority over the Yenisei Kyrgyz and the Tuvans of Western Mongolia, was active (Barthold, 2010, 232). In the 1640s, the Russians defeated Oylan, the Buryat Khan who had

exercised authority over the region, after which they began to depict themselves as the liberators of the indigenous peoples (Topsakal, 2017, 104). The Buryat territories were brought entirely under Russian dominion between 1620 and 1650. Bartold notes that the unity and power lost by the Oirats beginning in the 1660s shifted in favor of the Russians, and that the Yenisei Kyrgyz came to acknowledged Oirat suzerainty in the 1680s (Barthold, 2010, 235). Concurrently, the Russians advancing along the Lena and Yana rivers, under the leadership of Pyotr Beketov founded the Yakutsk *ostrog* (Acaloğlu,2007, 301)[1] in 1632, followed by the establishment of the Albazin ostrog in 1651, Nechinsk in 1654, and Irkutsk in 1661 (Naumov, 2006, 60). Throughout this process, all those who resisted Russian expansion were eliminated. The capture of Albazin brought the Russians into direct confrontation with the Manchus. As the Manchus suffered increasing economic losses over time, they attacked the Albazin ostrog in 1685, forcing the Russians—unable to withstand the assault— to retreat to Nerchinsk. Although the Manchus subsequently burned the Albazin Fortress, the Russians rebuilt the *ostrog* shortly thereafter (Yılmaz, 2024, 6). When the Manchus laid siege to the fortress once again, the Treaty of Nerchinsk, signed in 1689, temporarily halted Russian expansion in Siberia (Yılmaz, 2024, 11). Conversely, the Russians and the Manchus delineated the borders between the two states with the Treaty of Bura (Burinsky Treaty) in 1727, which consequently placed the territory of present-day Tuva under Manchu suzerainty (Teziç, 2018, 506). Up to this stage, sources indicate that the Tuba peoples lived in a comparatively less developed cultural state and were subordinate to the Yenisei Kyrgyz (Barthold, 2010, 233). While the Russians classified the sedentary population as a taxable state stratum, they did not subject the nomadic population to any such classification. Instead, the nomads were utilized to fill occasional labor gaps or were employed to meet military requirements (Topsakal, 2017, 117).

The Kyrgyz carried out intermittent assaults on Krasnoyarsk in 1642 and 1660. Kyrgyz Khan Erineak besieged Krasnoyarsk twice, in 1667 and 1679, but was unsuccessful. A notable development during this period was the collaboration of some local chieftains with the Russians. Notably, Eushta, the leader of the Tatars, cooperated with the Russians in return for an exemption from the ban. The Teleuts similarly collaborated with the Russians against the Yenisei Kyrgyz (Topsakal, 2011, 50).

1 Ostrog: A Russian term used for a Russian military fortified outpost

Reports began circulating among the Russians in the 1700s claiming that the Kyrgyz were either expelled due to the arrival of the Kalmyks or had completely withdrawn. However, these reports did not reflect the reality, and the Yenisei Kyrgyz continued to reside in the region under the name Khakas (a name they adopted after the revolution) (Barthold, 2010, 236).

Administrative decisions were made regarding the future of the indigenous population remaining in Siberia. Starting from the reign of Peter the Great (Peter I), the Russification of the local population in the peripheral regions of the Russian Empire—particularly in areas lacking a Russian populace—was implemented through administrative, economic, legal, and cultural policies. The governance of this process was entrusted to the Vicegerencies and Governorates-General (Kerimov-Topsakal, 2019, 365-382). The Russians established the Abakan ostrog in 1707 and the Sayanskiy ostrog in 1709, leading to a decline in agriculture and animal husbandry among the region's populace and resulting in famine (Topsakal, 2011, 104-105). While ostrogs (fortresses) were being established, administrative structures were simultaneously instituted for the governance of the occupied territories. Concurrently, fur traders were dispatched for the fur trade, and Russian officials were appointed to collect taxes—known as yasak—from the local population. Under these circumstances, the local populace was compelled to accept Russian sovereignty. Following the expansion of sedentary Russians into Siberia, administrative units named the Sibirskiy Prikaz were established to ensure the integration of, and implement specific policies concerning, the nomadic pastoralist communities—the original inhabitants of the region (Küçük, 2024, 33).[2] Following the suppression of the Arin, Sagay, and Mator peoples around the Yenisei in the 17th century, Russian authority became firmly established in the region and was formally institutionalized from a diplomatic perspective by the Treaty of Kyakhta/Bura in 1727 (Somuncuoğlu, 2002, 195). By the 1760s, the Russians had brought a large part of Southern Siberia under their dominion and, in order to protect these fertile lands from their former owners, established the Siberian Fortified Line consisting of 124 fortifications stretching from Chelyabinsk to Kuznetsk (Topsakal, 2011, 128). Following 1822, administrative units were established in locations such as Kyzyl, Sachin, and Sagay, and the

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2 The regions captured by the administrative unit called the Sibirskiy Prikaz began to be administered through military and administrative regulations

region was attached to the Yenisei Governorate-General (*Rusya'daki Türkler,* 2015, 385). Similarly, the Russian advance continued in the Altai region, and the management of the area's mineral resources passed under Russian control. Although the regional administration frequently changed, it was generally governed by the mining enterprise administration before being included in the Tomsk Guberniya in 1804 (Evrim Küçük, 2024, 4-13).[3]

Developments in the Saha homeland at the beginning of the 17th century indicate that following the establishment of the first fortress by Pyotr Beketov, the Yakutsk Uyezd was founded in 1638. Subsequently, it was attached to the Irkutsk Regional Administration in 1775 and transformed into the Saha Province in 1784. The Saha Homeland acquired the status of a sovereign's demesne in terms of property rights. Through the appointed voyevodas (governors), it subsequently became an integral part of the Russian state—administratively, militarily, and commercially—and its populace was transformed into taxpayers obligated to pay the yasak tax (Acaloğlu, 2007, 302). In this context, sable and fox furs were collected from the populace. The Russians exercised caution to avoid jeopardizing the regular collection of the yasak tax; consequently, a portion of the voyevodas (governors) authority was transferred to the local tribal leaders upon instruction from Moscow (Acaloğlu, 2007, 303). The Russian population, which gradually increased around the fortresses and winter settlements established in the interior of the Saha territory, initiated agricultural activities and taught farming to both the Saha and other local communities (Acaloğlu, 2007, 303). Cultivation of crops such as rye, wheat, barley, beans, chickpeas, buckwheat, oats, cabbage, carrots, and potatoes was initiated in the region. New settlers attempted to produce these crops in the Tura, Tobol, Irtysh, Ob, Ket, Yenisei, Angara, Ilim, Lena, Shilka, Argun, and Amur valleys; however, they understood that sufficient yields could not be obtained due to the region's harsh climatic conditions (Topsakal, 2017, 119). In addition to this, the Russians introduced new hunting techniques to the region, utilizing hunting dogs and traps, and consequently left no sable remaining to be hunted in Western Siberia by the 17th century (Topsakal, 2017, 120). By the 18th century, all of Siberia, except for the territories governed by the Manchus and the Dzungars in the south, had come under Russian dominion. Having secured the region militarily, migrants began to move toward Siberia. During this

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3 Guberniya: Administrative unit

process, the settlements of Omsk, Chernolutsk, Slabada Bolshaya, Kulachinsk, Krasnoyarsk, and Miletin were rapidly established (Topsakal, 2017, 122). With the elimination of the Dzungars towards the middle of the 18th century, the Russians annexed the Southern Altai region and established fortified settlements there. During this time, the Altai peoples engaged in hunting and fishing along the banks of the Bukhtarma River. Following the discovery of copper ore, they gained citizenship rights in 1784 in exchange for working in the region's mining enterprises (Topsakal, 2017, 124). Due to the persistent difficulty in finding volunteers to settle in the region, those who had fled slavery and arrived there were not prosecuted. Consequently, by the 1800s, numerous villages, towns, and factories were established. The local populace and the new settlers were governed by the administrative centers established in Southern Siberia, including Ishim, Kurgan, Yalutorovsk, Omsk, Kansk, and Achinsk (Topsakal, 2017, 125).

Radloff, one of the leading experts who conducted research in Siberia in the 19th century, stated that in the second half of the 19th century, the Teleuts lived permanently in villages and were mostly engaged in agriculture. He further observed that they were strictly bound to Shamanism in terms of religious belief, and that even the first Teleuts who converted to Christianity were forced to emigrate from their villages because they were ostracized (Küçükballı, 2019, 25). The Tubas, who led a settled life in the Altai region even before the arrival of the Russians, also sustained themselves in the 19th century through hunting, the gathering of resin seeds (or pitch seeds), and root collection (Küçükballı, 2019, 28). Radloff stated that, in the second half of the 19th century, the Kumandins led a settled life in small villages consisting of five to ten houses on the northern slopes of the mountains along the Biya River, and that they were mostly engaged in agriculture. He also noted that the Kumandins living in these villages had become half-Russified (or partially Russified) (Küçükballı, 2019, 29). Financial aid was provided to the Altai people, who were burdened by heavy taxes, on the condition that they accepted Christianity. Furthermore, fertile lands were allocated to them, and the taxes they paid were reduced. However, changing the religion of the Altai Turks was not considered sufficient; to fully Russify them, their nomadic life was forcibly ended, and they were settled in villages. They were required to dress like Russians, and they were forbidden from coming to church in Altai national costumes (Küçükballı, 2019, 31).

From the second half of the 19th century onwards, agricultural activities became the second most important occupation in the economic life of the native population in

the Sakha homeland. The developing relations between the settlers and the Sakha people, intermarriages, and cultural exchange contributed to the native population rapidly Christianizing while simultaneously preserving their old beliefs (Acaloğlu, 2007, 303) In the Uranhay region, the Russians began to infiltrate the area following the discovery of minerals around 1839, with subsequent agreements leading to their firm settlement in the region. They also attempted to resolve the issues that had started with the Chinese through negotiation, which resulted in the Peking Convention of 1860. This situation led to an increase in their political influence in the 1870s. (Ewing, 1981, 192-193; Somuncuoğlu, 2002, 276; *Rusyadaki Türkler*, 2015, 373) Concurrently, following the war with Japan and the ensuing revolution in 1905, numerous rebellious movements took place across the country, including in Siberia. Seeking to turn this environment into an opportunity, the Altai, Khakas, and Yakuts initiated labor uprisings that were only suppressed by the Russians in 1906 (Kurat, 1987, 379-391; Forsyth, 1992, 167-168). The regional power vacuums resulting from the Xinhai Revolution in 1911 caused the collapse of the Manchu administration. Consequently, Uranhay, along with Outer Mongolia which declared its independence, was de facto separated from Chinese rule (Teziç, 2018, 505). In 1912, different political groups in Uranhay sought external support; due to geographical proximity, some elements in the north advocated for Russian protection, while other groups preferred unification with Mongolia or maintaining integrity with China. In meetings held that same year, Uranhay's independence was declared, and an application for Russian protection was submitted. Although Russia initially took a reserved stance on this request, in April 1914, it officially took the region under its protection and annexed it to Russia under the name "Uranhay Krai" (Teziç, 2018, 505). In 1921, a nominally independent structure called the Tannu Tuva People's Republic was established in the region under Soviet influence; it subsequently gained the status of the Tuva People's Republic in 1926. Ultimately, in 1944, Tuva was officially incorporated into the Soviet Union and defined as the Tuva Autonomous Oblast (Teziç, 2018, 505). Separate regions were established for the Altai and Khakas people in 1923. The administrative structure, initially designated as the Khakas National Region, was converted into the "Khakas Okrug" in 1925 (Sarali, 2022, 58). In 1930, facing the threat of union collapse, the Khakas people informed the Russians that they might join the Tuva Republic. Consequently, the Khakas Autonomous Oblast was established on October 20, 1930 (Sarali, 2022, 58). A unit commanded by Rydzinski, sent from Irkutsk to the Sakha territories, established the So-

viet order on July 1, 1918. Although some Sakha dignitaries were appointed as representative leaders, Kolchak, one of the Tsarist generals, launched a rebellion across Siberia. Nevertheless, the Soviet administration ended the civil war in the 1920s and consolidated control (Acaloğlu, 2007, 305).

Ultimately, following the establishment of Russian dominance over Siberia, they implemented a settlement policy to ensure their permanence in the region. It is observed that those sent to Siberia, either voluntarily or as exiles, were mostly concentrated in the West Siberia region, increasing the demographic balance in favor of the Russians. The Russians divided the peoples in the region into three groups: settled people liable to tax, nomads, and state servants (Topsakal, 2017, 117). Concurrently, Russification policies towards Turkic and Mongolian-rooted communities continued rapidly, primarily implemented through educational and religious institutions, with schools and churches being opened one after another. Within this scope, the Altai Spiritual Mission was established to spread Christianity, and the mission was granted certain privileges. Christianity spread significantly, particularly among the Telengits and the Yakuts. Concurrently, the wearing of traditional clothing was prohibited, and the local populace was compelled to adopt the Russian naming and surname system Somuncuoğlu, 2002a, 2002b, 2002c; Forsyth, 1992, 62).

Anthropological studies conducted on the Turkic peoples living in the steppes of Turkestan, which have been under Russian occupation since the Tsarist era, indicate that these people were granted freedom in the steppe provided they did not oppose or disrupt Russian imperialism, which was established to build industry and cities. It is even noted that various subsidies were channeled by the state to the pastoralists in the steppe, who were the source of meat and dairy production needed by the cities (Yıldırım, 2020, 255-280).

CONCLUSION

Turkic peoples still exist today in West Turkestan, East Turkestan, Siberia, and Mongolia. One of the most important reasons for Russia's continued existence among powerful states throughout history is their domination over Siberia and its riches. The most significant result of the Russian entry and settlement into Siberia throughout the 16th and 17th centuries was the change in the demographic structure of the population due to continuous Russian migrations to the region. It is observed that

those who went upon the request of the Russian governments, those who were forcibly sent to the region as exiles, or those who saw the region as a source of gain settled permanently in Siberia. In this process, the historical integration of the nomadic Turkic communities and other local peoples with the settled populations in Siberia was not limited solely to cultural contact and exchange processes; it was also shaped by major political transformations, military expansions, and colonial administrative practices. The systematic settlement and Russification policies implemented by Russia towards the region since the Tsarist era have both transformed the demographic structure and fundamentally affected the traditional way of life of the nomadic peoples. Local resistances, collaborator elements, and forced adaptation processes demonstrate that the integration has a multilayered structure. The autonomous structures established in the 19th and 20th centuries, on the other hand, should be evaluated as a result of the Turkic communities' efforts to sustain their existence. This study contributes to understanding the socio-cultural transformation of the nomadic peoples in Siberia by addressing the historical process in an archaeological, ethnological, and political context. Consequently, the transformation experienced by the region's peoples involves not only a process of assimilation but also dynamics concerning the reconstruction of local identity and resistance.

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SOME REASONS WHY THE ORKHON VALLEY WAS CHOSEN AS THE CENTER DURING THE ESTABLISHMENT OF THE GOKTURK STATE

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Abstract

The Orkhon Valley, located in central Mongolia, occupies a prominent place not only in the history of the Mongols but also in the statehood and culture of the nomadic peoples of Central Asia. Since the establishment of the first Xiongnu state, many ancient peoples, including the Xianbei, Rouran, Turks, and Uighurs, established their political centers in this region. In the 13th century, the rise of the Great Mongol Empire from this region and its emergence as the center of the world further affirmed this significance. In 552, Bumin Khan of the Turks defeated the Rouran and established his own state in the Orkhon Valley, leaving behind historical monuments that attest to the region's role as the center of the state system and cultural traditions of the Turkic Khaganate. In 2004, by decision of the UNESCO World Heritage Committee, Mongolia inscribed the "Orkhon Valley Cultural Landscape" on the World Cultural and Natural Heritage List. For the Turkic Khaganate, the choice of the Orkhon Valley as its center was directly linked to five factors: geographical location, natural and ecological advantages, historical tradition, cultural-symbolic significance, and military-political strategic conditions.

Keywords: Orkhon, Gokturk, Center, Government, Culture

In 552, Bumin Khan of the Turks defeated the Rouran and established his own state in the Orkhon Valley, leaving behind renowned monuments that bear witness to history. Thus, the Orkhon Valley became the center of the state system and cultural traditions of the Turkic Khaganate. At its 27th session in 2004, Mongolia inscribed the "Orkhon Valley Cultural Landscape" on the UNESCO World Cultural and Natural Heritage List, thereby confirming the global significance of the region's archae-

ological monuments. This cultural landscape preserves an integrated complex of historical heritage, including the capitals of the Turkic, Uighur, and later Mongol empires (UNESCO, 2004). Covering a total area of 121,967 hectares with a 61,044-hectare buffer zone, the site is located in the Orkhon River Valley within Övörkhangai and Arkhangai provinces of Mongolia. For the Turkic Khaganate, the choice of the Orkhon Valley as its center can be explained in connection with the following five factors.

1. Geographical location. The Orkhon Valley lies in central Mongolia, approximately 360 km southwest of Ulaanbaatar. It is located in the Orkhon River basin, which originates in the Khangai Mountains and flows northward. Naturally, the area comprises vast steppe, forest, and water resources, providing a favorable environment for livestock herding and settlement. Consequently, the region has been inhabited since very early times. This is evidenced by the famous archaeological remains at Moiltiin Am near Kharkhorin. Moiltiin Am is situated on the north bank of the Orkhon River, northwest of the center of Kharkhorin soum in Övörkhangai Province. The site was first discovered in 1949 by a joint Mongolian-Soviet archaeological expedition led by A. P. Okladnikov, with subsequent excavations conducted in 1960, 1961, 1963, and 1965 (Okladnikov, 1950). Moiltiin Am has revealed multiple cultural layers from the Upper Paleolithic, Mesolithic, and Early Neolithic periods, including stone tools, hunting traces, bone remains, and thousands of small stone implements, all demonstrating that the region was continuously inhabited for thousands of years.

The geographical location of the Orkhon Valley holds historical and strategic significance and played a decisive role in the establishment of the political and cultural center of nomadic peoples, as confirmed by scholarly research.

2. Nature and ecology. The Orkhon Valley lies in central Mongolia, on the southeastern slopes of the Khangai Mountains, and is notable for its unique natural and ecological formation. The region is characterized by a complex system that combines vast steppes, forests, high mountains, and rivers (UNESCO, 2004). The Khangai Mountains serve as a barrier against northern winds and play a crucial role in preserving water resources. Major rivers such as the Orkhon, Tuul, and Tamir not only supplied water for irrigation, food, livestock, and military needs but also created natural zones of protection through their basins.

This ecosystem, with steppes stretching for hundreds of kilometers and vast pastures, was highly suitable for livestock herding and for concentrating populations and military forces, making it a key factor in the location of the capitals and military bases of nomadic states and empires. Moreover, the abundance of forests, mountains, and waters provided essential resources such as firewood, game, and building materials, which contributed to the region's stability and improved quality of life.

3. Economy. The natural and ecological features of the Orkhon Valley not only facilitated the concentration of population and livestock but also established the fundamental conditions for the development of a military-strategic base and a center of trade and cultural exchange.

The vast steppes, forests, and well-watered pastures made the region suitable for concentrating thousands of soldiers and large herds of livestock. The Khangai Mountains and rivers such as the Orkhon, Tuul, and Tamir offered protection and abundant water resources, rendering the area particularly favorable for agriculture. As noted earlier, the region has been inhabited since the Old Stone Age.

Since the advent of agriculture, people in this region cultivated crops such as barley, wheat, red wheat, and peas alongside livestock, as evidenced by archaeological finds of stone mills and grain remains. Historical sources, including the accounts of Wilhelm Rubruck, the *Yuan Shi* (元史), and Juvayni's *History of the World Conqueror*, record the presence of cultivated fields and irrigation channels. Agricultural activities continued into the 18th-19th centuries, with small-scale farming and gardening near Buddhist monasteries and settlements. In the 20th century, significant vegetable and grain cultivation developed in the Orkhon Valley. This practice continues today; however, agriculture has never been dominant in the Orkhon River Valley, where the economy has remained primarily centered on livestock herding.

Renowned archaeologist D. Navaan observed: *"Next to Khara Balgas, the valley was wide and well-watered, making it suitable for agriculture. The city was extensively organized, with a large central fortress containing major buildings, administrative and economic facilities, and places for assemblies and religious activities. Outside the main fortress were ordinary households and residential neighborhoods."* (Navaan, 2018)

This observation underscores that one of the key reasons for establishing a city-fortress and designating it as a political center in the Orkhon Valley was the availability of arable land, along with sufficient space outside the city walls to accommodate ordinary residents.

In addition to livestock herding and agriculture, the Orkhon Valley occupied a strategic position as a center of trade and commerce. The valley lies near the northern branches of the Silk Road, which are believed to have originated in Xi'an, China, passed through the Hexi Corridor in Gansu Province, advanced along the northern slopes of the Tian Shan Mountains, and reached the Orkhon Valley. These routes functioned as major channels for merchants, envoys, and cultural exchange, and the valley's proximity to them enhanced opportunities for trade, commerce, and intercultural interaction. Thus, the Orkhon Valley's geographical position and closeness to the northern Silk Road branches made it strategically significant for trade, commerce, and cultural exchange, as confirmed by historical and archaeological research.

4. Military and defense. The Orkhon River Valley is situated in central Mongolia, in a highland area surrounded by the branch mountains of the Khangai range. This natural setting has long been regarded as strategically advantageous, providing favorable conditions for establishing watchpoints and monitoring enemy movements. Since the Xiongnu period, the valley has served as the heartland of nomadic states, carrying both political and symbolic significance. The occupation of areas used as central "palaces" reflected the continuity of authority and prestige. Remains of watchtowers from the Turkic, Uighur, and Mongol empires on the surrounding hilltops further demonstrate the defensive importance of this region.

The valley was not only naturally protected but also situated at the intersection of central Mongolian routes and pasturelands, making it a central gathering place for clans and nobles' assemblies. Historical sources record that Genghis Khan's first Great Kurultai, as well as the state ceremonies of the Turkic and Uighur Khaganates, were held in this region. The availability of water, fertile soil, and rich pastures provided the essential conditions to sustain armies, large assemblies, and major settlements.

Scholar B. Batsüren notes:*"In general, most domestic and foreign researchers have regarded the Orkhon Valley-particularly the areas around Kharkhorin and Khar*

Balgas-as the political core of the nomadic states. They have referred to the region as la province impériale du Haut-Orkhon ('Orkhon's origin, cradle of rulers'), or as the heartland of the pastoral empire ('the heartland of the nomadic peoples'), and also as отюкенская чернь. It has been described as the center of strategy, religion, national consciousness, and intellectual life, with flat pastures, abundant water, good grazing land, and favorable conditions for agriculture and settlement." (Batsüren, 2009)

Indeed, the Orkhon Valley, as the "heartland" of the nomads, offered remarkable advantages for military and defensive purposes. With its natural protection, strategic communication routes, capacity to host assemblies uniting multiple clans, and ability to concentrate major settlements, the Orkhon River Valley developed into the political and administrative core of the nomadic states.

5. Historical tradition. The Orkhon Valley is located in central Mongolia and holds historical significance not only for the Mongols but also for the nomadic peoples of Central Asia. This region served as the center of the first nomadic state, the Xiongnu Empire, which established settlements and made it their political hub. The renowned historian G. Sükhbaatar notes in his work that the Anhou River, considered by some to be the historical Xiongnu homeland, was identified in the 1960 Japanese publication *Atlas of Asian History*, and Man Cha-shou regarded it as corresponding to the present-day Orkhon. (Sukhbaatar, 2023)

In the western part of the Orkhon Valley, within the territory of present-day Ölziit soum, Arkhangai Province, lies Lute City, regarded as the capital of the Xiongnu and one of the most important centers of the Xiongnu Empire. Archaeological research at Lute City began in 2017 and has since been carried out in several stages. In 2017, a team led by Dr. Tse. Iderkhangai, Associate Professor in the Department of Archaeology at the National University of Mongolia, identified the ancient city ruins through an aerial survey.

Subsequently, in 2018, 2019, and 2020, archaeological surveys were conducted, uncovering artifacts such as decorated pottery from the city walls inscribed with "Shanyu, Son of Heaven," which confirmed the site as Lute City. In 2020, the first field excavation was launched, revealing sections of the central palace, city walls, and water reservoirs.

After the Xiongnu, the Xianbei also established their states in the Orkhon Valley. Recent archaeological research has revealed that traces of Xianbei nomadic and burial culture are distributed across the Orkhon basin. Burial and heritage sites from the Xianbei period have been identified both in the Orkhon Valley and in the Selenge River basin.

For instance, between 2014 and 2018, the National Museum of Mongolia and the Orkhon Provincial Museum jointly documented more than 100 graves at a site called Gozoor in Airag, Jargalant soum, Orkhon Province, and conducted detailed studies on 16 of them. The structure of the graves and associated artifacts indicated that they belonged to the Xianbei and the transitional period following the Xiongnu. Artifacts such as horse and cattle harnesses, wooden objects, and pottery closely resemble the burial styles of the Xianbei in China.

In addition, Xianbei-period graves and heritage sites discovered in Orkhon soum of Selenge Province and other locations indicate that the Xianbei occupied the Orkhon-Selenge basin for a certain period. The Rouran played a central role in the history of Central Asian nomads during the 3rd, 4th, and 5th centuries. Rising to power after the Xiongnu and Xianbei, they inherited and further developed their territories and state traditions. The Orkhon Valley also came under their control and administrative influence. Archaeological excavations and research have uncovered Rouran-period artifacts in areas near the Orkhon Valley. Moreover, the river name *Egen*, recorded in Chinese sources within Rouran territories and water systems, has been identified by scholars such as G. Uchida as likely referring to the Orkhon, according to historian G. Sükhbaatar. (Sukhbaatar, 2023)

The Rouran began constructing the double-walled Möömöt City (502-519). According to A. V. Tivanenko, by occupying Ötüken-the sacred land of multiple Turkic and Mongol tribes in Central Asia-the Rouran further expanded their regional influence. Möömöt City is believed to have been located in present-day Arkhangai Province, as the Xiongnu capital Luntecheng retained its sacred significance during the Rouran period. Therefore, the selection of this location was not a random choice. (Ölziibayar, Enkhbat, 2017) The Turkic Khaganate chose the Orkhon River Valley, long the political center of earlier nomadic states, as the seat of their own state. This is confirmed by both historical sources and archaeological evidence. The steles of

early 8th-century Turkic rulers, including Kül Tegin, Bilge Khan, and their advisor Tonyukuk, provide unparalleled firsthand accounts of the political and military-administrative system of the era. Known collectively as the Orkhon inscriptions, these monuments constitute the earliest known records in the Turkic language and script, serving as invaluable historical sources for the Turkic Khaganate.

Regarding the Turkic city in the Orkhon Valley, H. Perlee notes that the palace of Bilge Khan, called Mogilyan, who died in 734, was located about 70 *li* (approximately 35 km) northwest of Kharkhorin. Bilge Khan had planned to build city walls and temples for Buddhist and Taoist practices around his palace, but his wise minister Tonyukuk (c. 646-721) advised against it, leading to the abandonment of the construction of walls and temples. (Perlee, 1961) Following the Turks, the Uighurs established their capital, Khar Balgas, in the same region, and later, in the 13th century, the Great Mongol Empire founded its world capital, Kharkhorin, also in the Orkhon Valley.

Conclusion. The Orkhon Valley emerged as the political and cultural center of Central Asian nomads due to a combination of factors, including geographical location, natural ecology, economy, military-political strategy, and historical tradition. When the Turkic Khaganate defeated the Rouran in 552 and established its state, its decision to concentrate in this valley was not coincidental; it embodied the inheritance of the traditions and symbols of earlier nomadic states and the deliberate selection of the most geographically and strategically suitable region. The highland setting, surrounded by the branch mountains of the Khangai range, together with abundant water and pasture resources and proximity to the northern branches of the Silk Road, created favorable conditions for military deployment, trade, population concentration, and the development of a watch system. Moreover, the valley's suitability for both agriculture and livestock herding provided a solid foundation for the establishment of settlements, administrative centers, and cultural hubs. Thus, the Orkhon Valley served as the political center not only of the Turkic Khaganate but also during the Xiongnu, Xianbei, Rouran, Uighur, and Great Mongol Empire periods, fulfilling the definition of the "heartland" of Central Asian nomadic states. The unique characteristics of this region, supported by historical and archaeological evidence, attest to its enduring role as the core of political authority, cultural tradition, and strategic governance among nomadic empires.

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SOME CONSIDERATIONS ON THE INFLUENCE OF KHOREZM-MONGOL RELATIONS ON ETHNIC PROCESSES

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Abstract: The article highlights the ethnic composition of the Khorezmian population, the settlement of Turkic-Mongol tribes, ethnic processes, and their influence on political, social, and cultural life.

Introduction: Khorezm and the Mongol territories — one based on a sedentary culture, the other on a nomadic one—are known from historical sources as two powerful states. Before examining the Khorezm-Mongol conflict, we turn our attention to the political landscape of Khorezm. In oriental studies, this state is referred to as the Khorezmshakhs empire, governed by the Anushteginid dynasty. From 1097 to 1221, this state reached its peak of development. During the reign of Tekish (1172–1200), the Khorezmshakhs initially acted as vassals of the Seljuks, then the Qara-Khitai, while ruling over all of Movaraunnakhr and Khorasan. Later, they began to function as an independent state.

By the early 13th century, the political situation had become increasingly complicated not only in Khorezm, but across all of Movaraunnakhr. The 200-year reign of the Qarakhanids was ended by Khorezmshakh Muhammad. Not content with this, Muhammad Khorezmshakh turned his attention to the lower reaches of the Syr Darya. Although, he was unable to subjugate them, he launched military campaigns against the nomadic Kipchaks.

Around the same time, the Naiman tribes living along the Ili river grew in strength, and under Kuchlug Khan, they established a new Naiman state on the ruins of the Qara-Khitai state. The Naimans launched military campaigns against the Turkic-speaking tribes such as the Qara-Khitai, Kipchak, Karluk, Qangli, and others in the regions of Semirechye (Yettisuv) and Eastern Turkestan. They plundered the local Muslim population, destroyed villages, and looted property. Oppressed by the Naimans' cruelty, the Kipchak and Qangli leaders appealed to Genghis Khan for help. During this time, the borders of two great powers of the Eurasian continent began to meet. The emergence of these rival states inevitably led to future military confrontations. The complex situation of the early 13th century ultimately culminated in the tragedy of Otrar.

Course of events: According to historical sources that around 2 million people lived in Gurganj, the capital city of Khorezmshakhs during the Mongol invasion. Historical records show that the population of Khorezm included not only the local "Sart" population, but also a variety of ethnic groups, tribes, and people. Among them, Turkic tribes formed the majority, mentioned in the sources under names such as Qangli, Kipchak, Naiman, Tukhli, Argun, Durman, and Qiyat.

According to A. Asqarov, groups such as the Huns, Usuns, Karluks and Chigils, Arguns and Tukhsis, Kaltatays and Qanglis, Kyrgyz and Uighurs, Altai Turks and their ancestors—the Hu, Di, and Rung, as well as Saka-Scythian tribes—never settled permanently in one place. They moved not only across the vast Great Turkic steppe but also through the river valleys and deserts of Central Asia that had not been fully settled by ancient farming communities, grazing their livestock on seasonal pastures. A portion of the poorer nomads remained in these lands during each migration cycle and gradually adopted a sedentary lifestyle. This recurring process, taking place over centuries and becoming a historical constant, led to the regions of Central Asia up to the Amu Darya being known since the Bronze Age as Turan, and the Turkic-speaking tribes eventually being recognized as the indigenous people of the Turan land.

The Sakas of Central Asia (referred to in the Avesta as "Tura," with the nobility being called "Aryans") eventually penetrated as far as central and eastern Kazakhstan, the Altai Mountains, the Ural region, and the Yenisei and Orkhon river basins. There, under the influence of dominant Turkic linguistic environment, they became

Turkified. Thus, the bilingualism characteristic of the ancient Saka-Scythian tribes was the product of broad economic, political, and cultural processes within a vast Turko-Sogdian ethnolinguistic sphere.

By the time of the Mongol invasion, Turkic tribes had gradually settled in Khorezm. During the Khorezmshakh period, the migration of Naiman and Kipchak tribes into the region increased due to various political and economic reasons. Notably, since Turkan Khatun, had kipchak origins, historical sources mention that between 10,000 and 60,000 of her relatives were — Naimans, Uighurs, and Kipchaks who settled in Khorezm.

In general, the process of Turkification was already underway during the Khorezmshakhs' period. This was reflected not so much in the physical traits of the population as in their language. Linguist A. A. Freiman concludes that by the 12th century, certain Arabic religious terms had been partially integrated into the Khorezmian language, which used the Arabic script. Words such as nikoh (marriage), halol (permissible), and harom (forbidden) had entered the vocabulary. However, in some cases, these Arabic terms were replaced with local Khorezmian synonyms—for example, the term kabin was used instead of the Arabic mahr (dowry). Valuable materials related to the religious vocabulary of the Turkic population in Khorezm have been preserved in the word lists of Abu'l-Qasim Mahmud al-Zamakhshari's Muqaddimat al-Adab. According to Zamakhshari, Khorezmshakh Otsiz regarded the Arabic language as superior to others. For this reason, he ordered the preparation of an Arabic version of Muqaddimat al-Adab for the royal library. In subsequent versions of the book, Khorezmian words are less frequently found. Turkic elements appeared in the dictionary only later, during the Golden Horde period. According to Bertels, by the time of the Mongol invasion, Persian had already lost its status as the state language, and the foundations for the rise of the Turkic language were being laid. Scholars believe that, compared to other regions of Central Asia, the Turkic language became dominant in Khorezm as a literary language earlier than elsewhere. The processes of Islamization and Turkification were largely carried out through literature. Scientific and religious works were translated from Arabic and Persian into Turkic, evidencing this transformation.

Among the earliest literary works written in Turkic are the "Qissa-i Yusuf" (1232), composed by the Bulgar poet Qul Ali, and the "Qissa-i Anbiya" by the Khorezmian

poet Rabghuzi, which recounts the stories of the prophets. In 1363, a Turkic translation of the Qur'an in the Khorezmian dialect appeared. A copy of it was found in Mashhad, and it shows that many Arabic terms were replaced with Turkic equivalents—for example, the word Allah was replaced by Tangri (God).

Before the Mongol invasion, Khorezm had a well-established book culture in Persian, Arabic, and Khorezmian. The emergence of literary creativity in Turkic only began in earnest during the Golden Horde period.

In the more peripheral regions of Central Asia—especially those under Turkic rulers (referred to as Aroddi at-Turk)—Islamization took place more freely and gradually. As a result, local customs, national values, and cultural traditions, as well as the practices of other religious communities, entered into a prolonged process of mutual interaction with Islamic beliefs. This environment of tolerance gave rise to a new social synthesis and boosted the influence of charismatic Sufi sheikhs, whose role in 13th-century political life grew significantly. These spiritual leaders attracted not only nomadic populations but also urban dwellers. Artisans, craftsmen, and merchants began to see their group interests reflected in the work of these sheikhs.

Sufi orders played a major role in the Turkification process of Khwarazm. Indeed, the successors of the Kubrawiyya school managed to unite both the population and political elite across a vast area stretching from northern Khorezm to the Dasht-i Qipchaq and the Golden Horde. According to Vambery, during the Mongol invasion, "the Mongols regarded the Qangly and other Turkic soldiers as their kin, promised to accept their surrender, and to pacify them, shaved their heads in the Mongol fashion. However, once the sun set, they executed all of them." Juwayni, in his Tarikh-i Jahan-gusha, also writes that the Mongols differentiated between the Tajik and Turkic people.

Historical sources report that in Gurganj, Jalal al-Din Manguberdi clashed with a 7,000-strong army organized by tribal leaders of the Turkan Khatun's lineage. This army mainly consisted of Kipchaks and Naimans. It was during Turkan Khatun's time that Turkic slave soldiers in the Khorezmian army were replaced by Kipchak cavalry. From the above, it becomes clear that by the time Genghis Khan's mongols reached Khorezm, their ethnic kin had already settled and become sedentary in the

region. According to Rashid al-Din and Juwayni, as many as 100,000 Mongol soldiers participated in the siege of Gurganj alone.

Abulghazi Bahadur Khan, in his work Shajara-i Turk, emphasizes that the names of several tribes living in the Khwarazm region were of Mongolian origin and provides their meanings. For instance, Dörmen is a Mongolian word meaning "four" in Turkic; Naiman means "eight" in Mongolian. Similarly, in his works, Abulghazi claims that the names of tribes such as Qiyat, Qongirat, Qangly, and Qongirat (repeated) are also Mongolian in origin.

When discussing the relations between sedentary and nomadic tribes, it is essential to consider the "Sart" population, who were the settled inhabitants of Khwarazm. This term has been a subject of scholarly debate for over a century. Scholars such as V. Bartold, T. Khojayev, A. Asqarov, and Sh. Kamoliddin argue that the term "Sart" is best used to refer to the non-tribal, historically agrarian, artisan, and merchant populations of Khorezm, Tashkent, and the Fergana Valley. Many Soviet scholars associated the term with the hydronym Yaksart (the ancient name for the Syr Darya River), and suggest a Sanskrit origin, interpreting it as "caravan leader," "interpreter," or "merchant." In Mahmud al-Kashgari's Dīwān Lughāt al-Turk, the term is defined as "merchant." Chinese sources also referred to Central Asian merchants as Sarts.

Overall, some scholars suggest that the term Sart was used by foreigners to refer to the people of Turan. In the Secret History of the Mongols, the word "Sartul" appears 18 times. A comparison of multiple sources shows that "Sart" or the "Land of the Sartuls" likely referred to the state and population of the Anushtegin Khorezmshakhs.

Conclusion: The Mongol invasion of Central Asia devastated the region's cities and rural areas, disrupting the highly developed agricultural and artisan culture that had evolved over centuries. Due to brutal massacres, the region was left desolate. In cities like Samarkand, Urgench, and Khojand, only about a quarter of the population survived.

According to the Chinese chronicle Changchun Siyu Ji, an ethnic group called "Sartul" emerged among the Mongols after the conquest. In the Altan Tobchi, it is stated

that after conquering the land of the Sartuls, Genghis Khan returned to Mongolia and distributed Sartul princes and livestock among his sons, with Kublai receiving the largest share.

On the other hand, a significant portion of Khorezm's population joined Jalal al-Din Manguberdi's army and migrated to what is now Turkey. The remaining local population (mainly Uzbeks and Tajiks) endured harsh economic conditions. Even the crops painstakingly grown through agriculture were confiscated by the Mongols. The number of nomadic herders in the oasis regions also sharply declined.

After the Mongol invasion, the regions of Khorezm, Movoraunnakhr, and the surrounding provinces could not recover for nearly half a century. The small surviving population largely consisted of sedentary people, whose composition remained mostly unchanged. The number of nomadic herders around the oases greatly decreased. Many of those who lost their livestock and homes migrated to cities and villages in search of work, gradually settling and assimilating into the local population. Sources indicate that many of them even forgot their ethnic names
—a common fate for ethnic groups separated from their original communities.
Moreover, for a long period after the Mongol invasion, the influx of new ethnic groups into Movaraunnakhr ceased entirely.

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ON THE INTERRELATIONS OF THE CAPITAL CITIES OF THE GREAT YUAN DYNASTY

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Abstract

This study examines the historical development, political significance, and interrelationship of the capital cities of the Great Mongol Empire during the Great Yuan period—Karakorum, Shandu, and Khanbaliq. Drawing upon historical sources and archaeological evidence, the research traces the evolution of Mongolian statehood and highlights how the concept of a capital city emerged early in Mongolian history, becoming central to state formation, consolidation, and governance. The paper divides the history of Mongolian capitals into three major periods and focuses particularly on the transition from the Great Mongol Empire (1206–1270) to the Great Yuan period (1271–1368), when the political center shifted sequentially from Karakorum to Shandu, and ultimately to Khanbaliq.

Karakorum, formally established in 1235 by Ögedei Khan, served as the first major political and administrative center, embodying long-standing traditions of locating the capital in the Orkhon Valley. Shandu functioned as the upper capital and seasonal imperial residence, symbolizing Mongolian imperial prestige and cultural refinement. Khanbaliq, designated as the main capital in 1272 under Kublai Khan, became a major urban and administrative center of East Asia, reflecting the empire's shift toward governing the Central Plains.

The study demonstrates that these three capitals were not isolated political centers but were integrated through administrative, economic, postal, and military networks that ensured effective governance across the vast Mongol Empire. The findings shed light on the strategic and ideological considerations behind capital relocation and underscore the enduring relevance of historical capital traditions for understanding the development of modern Ulaanbaatar and Mongolia's contemporary statehood.

Keywords: Great Mongol Empire; Great Yuan Dynasty; Karakorum; Shandu (Xanadu); Khanbaliq (Dadu); Mongolian capital cities; political center; state formation; urban development; historical geography.

Introduction

According to historical sources, the concept of a "capital city" emerged quite early in human history. In ancient states, the city or palace complex where the king resided and governed the country was distinguished from other cities and could be referred to as "the king's city" or "the state's city." In other words, in early states, the city that housed the royal court and served as the main political center was called the capital.

From the perspective of Mongolian history, more than 2,230 years ago, when the Mongols first established their earliest state, they already possessed a capital city. Thus, the existence of a capital—the political center of a given state—played a crucial role during periods of state formation, expansion and flourishing, as well as decline and weakening. Therefore, in ancient states, determining where to establish the political center, where to relocate it during times of prosperity, and where to concentrate authority during periods of decline constituted important political decisions of the ruling power.

The capital cities that served as the political centers of the states that existed throughout Mongolian history can be classified into three historical periods as follows:

1. Capital cities of early Mongolian states. The capitals of this period include the Xiongnu capital Luut City; the Rouran capital Mumu (Mööm) City; the Five Capitals of the Khitan State—Upper Capital Linhuang-fu, Eastern Capital Liaoyang-fu, Central Capital Dading-fu, Southern Capital Shijin-fu, and Western Capital Datong-fu; as well as the Uyghur capital Ordu-Baliq, also known as Khar Balgas.

2. Capital cities of medieval Mongolian states. The capitals of this period include Karakorum, the capital of the Great Mongol Empire; Khanbalgas (Dadu), the main capital of the Yuan Dynasty; and Shandu (Shangdu), the Upper Capital.

3. Capital cities of modern Mongolia. The capitals of this period include Örgöö City during the Manchu period; Da Khüree or Ikh Khüree; Niislel Khüree during the Bogd Khanate; and the capital city of the Mongolian People's Republic and the present-day Mongolian state, Ulaanbaatar.

Capital Cities during the Great Yuan Period of the Great Mongol Empire

In this presentation, I aim to discuss the historical traditions and interrelations of the capital cities during the Great Yuan period of the Great Mongol Empire, namely Karakorum, Khanbalgas, and Shandu. This study closely examines the policies, historical traditions, and characteristics behind the establishment of these capitals during the period of Mongolian power and prosperity. It also highlights their significance for guiding the development of Mongolia's present-day capital, Ulaanbaatar, and for reviving certain historical traditions.

During the Great Mongol Empire, there were three relevant capital cities: Karakorum, Shandu, and Khanbalgas. It is insufficient to limit the Great Mongol Empire period only to 1206–1259, the era of Chinggis Khan, Ögedei Khan, Güyük Khan, and Möngke Khan. In 1260, Kublai Khan succeeded to the throne of the Great Mongol Empire, and in 1271, although he changed the name of the state, he did not abandon the legacy of the Great Mongol Empire. Instead, he conferred the title "Great Yuan" on the state, so it became known as the Great Yuan, the Great Mongol Empire [Ider **et al. 2019**: 52-58]. Therefore, the period of the Great Mongol Empire can be divided into two phases: 1. The Great Mongol Empire period, 1206–1270. 2. The Great Yuan period of the Great Mongol Empire, 1271–1368. Accordingly, the capital of the Great Mongol Empire was centered at Karakorum, while during the Great Yuan period of the Great Mongol Empire, the main capital was Khanbalgas and the upper capital was Shandu. A brief overview of these cities follows.

Karakorum City

During the era of the Great Mongol Empire, the political center and capital city was Karakorum. This city is located in the modern-day Kharkhorin district of Övörkhangai Province in Mongolia. From the time of ancient Mongolian states up to the Great Mongol Empire, it was customary to establish the political center, or capital, in the

Orkhon Valley. After founding the Great Mongol Empire in 1206, Genghis Khan sought to establish the political center in the Orkhon Valley. Historian U. Erdenebat writes: "The founder of the Great Mongol Empire, Genghis Khan, in his clear and astute judgment, designated the Orkhon Valley as the site for his future capital. This was a rightful act that followed the ancient traditions of the nomadic peoples of his lineage, demonstrating courage, capability, and the pursuit of great victories by establishing the grand capital in the prosperous Ötüken (Khangai Mountains) region."[Erdenebat. 2020: 48].

Although Karakorum existed as early as the 7th century, it expanded significantly in the 13th century. Chinese sources from the Qing Dynasty, such as the *Treatise on Unified Understanding*, note that in 1220, Genghis Khan established Karakorum as the capital. In Europe, the name appeared in 1246 as "Kara Koron." [Perlee. 1961: 83]. Although Genghis Khan ordered the establishment of Karakorum in 1220, he did not complete the construction. The policy to build and develop the city was implemented by Ögedei Khan.

By 1235, Ögedei Khan had established Karakorum. Rashid al-Din's *Jami' al-Tawarikh* records:

"When asked which city on earth was the most beautiful, they replied, 'Baghdad.' He then ordered a magnificent city to be built in the Orkhon Valley, naming it Karakorum." [Rashid al-Din Fazlullah. 2015: 492].

Similarly, the *Yuan Shi* notes:

"In the spring of the year of the Blue Sheep [1235], the city of Kharlin (Karakorum) was completed, and the Tumen Amgalant Palace was established." [Yuan Shi. 1976: 34].

Comparing these sources, it is clear that Ögedei Khan officially founded Karakorum in 1235 and designated it as the capital of the Great Mongol Empire.

Marco Polo described Karakorum's size and features, stating:

"Karakorum is a city three 'ber' in circumference. In ancient times, it was the first central settlement of the Tatars. The city is surrounded by a strong earthen wall as there are few stones. Near the outskirts of the city is a large castle where the ruler has a beautiful palace." [**Bat-Uchral** et al. 2019: 69].

Here, "three ber" corresponds to approximately 4.92 kilometers in circumference, and the "beautiful palace" likely refers to the Tumen Amgalant Palace.

During the reign of Möngke Khan, a remarkable structure called the Silver Tree was built at the center of Karakorum to impress both domestic and foreign visitors. Möngke Khan commissioned the French craftsman Guillaume de Rubruk, paying 300 *yastok* (3,000 marks) and providing 50 workers, to construct the tree [William of Rubruck. 2020: 120]. The Silver Tree was a four-sided structure, with each spout dispensing wine, fermented mare's milk (airag), honey mead, and *terrasin* (fermented beverage). At the top stood a figure holding a banner, symbolizing the grandeur and prestige of Karakorum at the time.

In 1260, when Kublai Khan ascended to the throne of the Great Mongol Empire and settled in the city of Kaiping, the capital was transferred from Karakorum to Kaiping. Despite this shift, Karakorum's political influence, administrative functions, and significance remained strong. Kublai Khan established a dual-capital system, linking Karakorum and Kaiping, to govern the empire effectively.

Shandu City

Shandu was the upper capital during the Yuan Dynasty. The emperors of the Yuan Dynasty resided in Shandu annually from June to August. During these three months, the climate of Shandu was cool and very pleasant, which made it an ideal retreat for the Mongol rulers. The city was located in the modern-day Shuluun Khukh County of Xilin Gol League, Inner Mongolia, China.

In 1256, by the order of Möngke Khan, Prince Kublai began the construction of Kaiping City. He chose the site called Lunggan, located east of Huanzhou in the Jin Dynasty, behind the Luan Shui River [Yuan Shi. 1976:1350]. In 1264, Kublai Khan renamed Kaiping to Shandu, a name derived from the nearby Shandu River.

Shandu City measured approximately 9 km in circumference, 2,050 meters from east to west, and 2,115 meters from north to south. The city contained many grand structures, including the Great Amgalan Palace, the Borlor Palace, Bayasgalan Palace, Bugat Palace, Khulsan Palace, Bor Palace, and the Yellow Palace [Ider **et al. 2019**: 59]. Shandu was divided into three main sections: the palace city, the imperial city, and the outer city.

According to the *Yuan Shi*, regarding Shandu's administration and population:

"There were 48,042 households and a population of 118,191. One administrative office, one xian, one citadel, and four zhou. Three xian were under administration. The citadel administered three xian, and two zhou administered six xian." [Yuan Shi. 1976:1350].

This shows that Shandu was a large and significant city for its time.

Shandu was renowned as a remarkable and visually striking city. Marco Polo wrote:

"Kublai Khan commanded the construction of a magnificent palace from marble and other stones. The great hall of the palace and the residential chambers were gilded, producing a truly magnificent spectacle. Surrounding the palace was a 16-ber long wall, inside which were many fountains, rivers, and grazing lands. The Great Khan kept deer, elk, and other wild animals there." [**Bat-Uchral** et al. 2019: 79].

Marco Polo's accounts introduced Europeans to the marvels of Shandu, later making it famous as the legendary city of Xanadu. In 1272, Kublai Khan moved the capital of the Great Mongol Empire from Shandu to Khanbaliq (modern-day Beijing). After this, the Yuan emperors primarily resided in Khanbaliq, but they continued to stay in Shandu every year from June to August to govern and oversee state affairs.

Khanbaliq (Dadu) City

Khanbaliq was the imperial capital of the Yuan Dynasty. It was located on the territory of modern-day Beijing, China.

In 1264, Kublai Khan divided the former Jin Dynasty capital, Yanjing, into districts and administrative units and renamed the city Zhongdu, meaning "Central Capital." He also ordered the construction of a new city nearby. The building of this new city began in 1267, supervised by Chancellor Liu Bingzhong and the Sartul official Ikhtiar [Ider **et al. 2019**: 62]. The construction continued until 1272. In February 1272, by the order of Kublai Khan, the newly constructed city was named Khanbaliq and officially designated as the imperial capital of the Yuan Dynasty.

According to census records from 1270, Khanbaliq had 147,590 households and a population of 401,350. The city's administration included 2 ministries, 6 xian, and 10 zhou, with the zhou overseeing 16 xian [Yuan Shi. 1976: 1347]. Geographically, the city extended west to Mount Taihan, bordered the great sea to the east, relied on the Zhuyun port, and was built in the north, covering an area of approximately 60

square li (around 30 km in circumference), making it a large and densely populated city [Yuan Shi.1976: 1347].

Marco Polo described the appearance and structure of Khanbaliq:

"The city's layout is perfectly square, each side measuring twenty-four ber, surrounded by earthen walls. The walls are twenty paces high and ten paces thick at the base, tapering upward to three paces thick at the top. The walls are white, with a ridge at the top, and the city has twelve gates. Each gate is accompanied by a large palace, with three gates per palace, and each corner of the walls also has a palace, so there are five palaces per wall." [**Bat-Uchral** et al. 2019: 95]

Thus, according to Marco Polo, Khanbaliq had twelve gates, while the *Yuan Shi* records indicate eleven gates, with each gate named specifically. Although Khanbaliq was built in 1272, its expansion and renovation continued until 1286. The city remained the Yuan Dynasty's imperial capital until 1368, when the Yuan administration in China fell.

Conclusion

During the Mongol Empire, three imperial capitals were established, with the center of political power shifting in 1235, 1260, and 1272. These three capitals—Karakorum, Kaiping/Shandu, and Khanbaliq—were closely interconnected political centers. While the Khitan state had a five-capital system, the Yuan Dynasty was notable for its three-capital system.

Karakorum was first established in 1235 as the Mongol Empire's political center. In 1260, after Kublai ascended the throne, the imperial seat moved from Karakorum to Kaiping. This shift was part of Kublai Khan's broader strategy to consolidate the Central Plains and ultimately govern a vast empire extending over much of East Asia. The relocation of the capital was a strategic decision aligned with state development, power, and expansion. Importantly, the former capitals were not abandoned; they were connected to the new capital through coordinated administrative, military, and logistical systems, reinforcing the strength and prosperity of the Yuan Dynasty.

The three imperial capitals of the Mongol Empire were integrated into a network of infrastructure, postal routes, food supply systems, and military defense. Each capital had its specific administrative role and unique policy functions, ensuring the empire's effective governance and cohesion.

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THE CONFLICT BETWEEN KHOREZM AND THE MONGOLS: POLITICAL DYNAMICS UNDER CLIMATIC CHANGES AND ECOLOGICAL PRESSURE

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Abstract

This article explores the movements of the Mamunids, Altintashids and Anushteginid Khorezmshahs for independence who ruled in Khorezm. It examines how ecological and climatic factors played a crucial role in the transformation of the Anushteginids – from minor provincial governors along the Lower Amu Darya – to a major political entity in Central Asia and the Middle East. The article theoretically outlines the natural and geographical conditions that fostered Khorezm's political rise and advances conceptual insights into this process. Furthermore, the study investigates how climate change contributed to the collapse of the Khorezmshah state, while supporting perspectives on the influence of climate in the formation of the Mongol Empire founded by Genghis Khan.

Key words: Khorezmshahs, Mongols, climate change, Medieval Warm Period (MWP), Anushteginids, ecological factor, natural environment, political crisis, migration.

Methodology and source analysis

The article employs an interdisciplinary approach, integrating insights from paleo-climatology, historical geography, archaeology, demography, historical sources, as well as the views of both contemporary Western and local scholars. It compares the results of archaeological excavations conducted in the Khorezm oasis with information recorded in written sources. The perspectives of classical authors such as Beruni, Ibn Fadlan, Utbi, Ibn al-Asir, Juvayni and Bayhaqi are analyzed alongside the interpretations of Western researchers including Lamb, Thomas Allsen, and Niccolò di Cosmo.

INTRODUCTION

From antiquity to the medieval period, sedentary and nomadic peoples of Central and East Asia gradually entered into mutual integration and assimilation through migratory movements. These populations complemented one another and played a significant role not only in the sociopolitical and cultural processes of these two regions but also in shaping broader developments across Eurasia. While much scholarly attention has been given to political and cultural factors in analyzing these processes, the influence of natural forces – such as ecology and climate change – on historical dynamics remains relatively underexplored. In particular, the role of climatic and ecological conditions in the rise and decline of the Anushteginid Khorezmshahs – who emerged as a regional power in the Lower Amu Darya basin – has not been sufficiently examined in academic discourse. It is worth emphasizing that the Khorezmshah state, located at the crossroads of the Silk Road and centered in a river oasis, represents a classic example of river-based civilization. Although prominent archaeologists and historians such as S.P. Tolstov[45] and Y. Ghulamov[38] have highlighted this in their research, they did not address the significance of climate in the integration between the steppe and the oasis. In the 21st century, advancements in science have brought the study of historical processes into a new phase, emphasizing their connection with natural-geographical and climatic factors. One of the earliest theoretical approaches to climate's impact on global history was introduced by British meteorologist Hubert Horace Lamb in 1965, when he coined the term "Medieval Warm Period" (MWP)[17]. Since then, numerous comprehensive studies have been undertaken to explore the influence of climate on human history and geopolitical movements. Analysis concerning the role of climate in driving the southward and westward migrations of Turkic and Mongol tribes in Inner Asia

also began to take shape in the 21st century. These scholarly efforts have increasingly led to the recognition of Inner Asia's geoclimatic conditions as a crucial factor in shaping historical movement. From this perspective, the present article analyzes the role of climate in both the emergence of the Anushteginid Khorezmshah state in Turkestan and its subsequent conquest by the Mongols.

MAIN PART

The Concept of the Medieval Warm Period (MWP)

According to climatologists, the Medieval Warm Period spans approximately the 10th to the 13th centuries. This theory posits that the climate during this period was significantly warmer and drier than in both the preceding and subsequent centuries. The climatic conditions in the region of Turkestan have historically been shaped primarily by air masses originating from the Atlantic Ocean and the Mediterranean region[3]. As the clouds and air systems formed over the Atlantic and Mediterranean move inland, they gradually lose most of their moisture content before reaching Central Asia, thus becoming more continental in nature. In contrast, the southern and eastern parts of Central Asia – including the Hindu Kush, the Pamirs and the Tangritagh (Tien Shan) mountains – are geographically separated from the monsoon climate systems formed over the Indian Ocean. Consequently, the region's climatic conditions, particularly the amount and intensity of precipitation, have historically been linked to changes in the Atlantic Ocean's climate[40]. The warming and increased continentality of the Atlantic climate contributed to higher temperatures and increased aridity in Turkestan during the 10th to 13th centuries. It is assumed that this period was warmer than the climate of the 20th century[6]. For instance, the Medieval Warm Period (950–1250) was highly favorable for the peoples of Northern Europe. During this time, agriculture was established in Greenland, and viticulture developed in Scotland. Overall, the populations of Northern Europe advanced northward, establishing new settlements and cities[12]. In the western part of Central Asia, particularly in the Aral Sea basin, climatologists have attempted to prove the rise in temperature and increasing dryness during the 10th to 13th centuries using various laboratory methods[11]. It is believed that the peak of this global warming period, which lasted for around four centuries, occurred around 950–1100 CE in the Northern Hemisphere. However, there are also scholarly views that question the universal significance and human impact of this warm period. Some argue that humans have always taken pride in their ability to adapt to any climate, from the equator to the

poles, and thus the influence of climate change on human history remains debatable. Yet, when examining the historical developments in Turkestan during this specific period, one can clearly observe parallels between migration patterns and climate change. Below, we will analyze the political developments that occurred in Turkestan during the Medieval Warm Period.

The Impact of the MWP on Khorezm.

The Turkestan region is a unique area where nomadic and sedentary peoples have long coexisted, engaging in mutual integration and cultural exchange. The vast deserts and steppes that make up much of Turkestan, such as the Karakum, Kyzylkum, Ustyurt Plateau and Dashti Kipchak have traditionally been home to nomadic tribes. In contrast, the mountainous areas were inhabited by people engaged in dry farming, while the valleys of major regional rivers like the Amu Darya and Syr Darya and smaller rivers such as the Zarafshan, Murghab, Tajan, Kashkadarya, Surkhandarya, Karadarya, Narin and Chirchiq, were populated by settled communities practicing irrigated agriculture.

Did the MWP factor affect the Khorezm oasis? Yes, it did. Interestingly, unlike other regions, the heat factor during the initial phase was not terribly disastrous for Khorezm oasis. In fact, the MWP factor created conditions for Khorezm to become stronger compared to other regional powers. The reason is that the economy of Khorezm oasis was not dependent on annual rainfall or humidity, but rather on the waters of the Amu Darya river, which flows northwestward from the melting of the Vrevsky Glacier, located at an altitude of 4,950 meters[34] on the northern slopes of the Hindu Kush. At this point, the words of Abu Ishaq al-Istakhri come to mind: *"Khorezm is the country that benefits entirely from the Jayhun (Amu Darya)".* Global warming, in our opinion, led to the increased melting of eternal glaciers, which in turn increased the volume of water in the river. It is worth noting that many small rivers in Turkestan depended on snow in the winter and spring rains for their water supply and these seasonal rivers usually dried up by summer. If, as climatologists suggest, the warming effect truly had a serious impact on the region, we believe it would have severely damaged the agricultural centers in the valleys of these rivers. However, the Amu Darya and Syr Darya oases, which were fed by eternal glaciers, were exceptions during the initial phase of the warming period. According to Maqdisi[24,38] and other travelers and historians, by the end of the 10th century, the capital city of Khorezm, Kath, was slowly being flooded and eventually washed

away. Around the same time, another capital of Khorezm, Gurganj (Jurjaniya), was also being flooded. The people of Urgench built dams using wood and branches to prevent the river from washing away their city, successfully diverting the river eastward[38]. The flooding of Kath, which held capital status for seven centuries, and of Gurganj, which later became the capital of a great empire, in our view, reflects nothing other than the annual increase in water volume of the river. Based on the reports of Ibn Hawqal, Maqdisi, and Istakhri, it is written that until the 10th century, part of the Amu Darya flowed westward toward the Caspian Sea through the Uzbay. One of Maqdisi's stories is especially notable: "The main branch of the Jayhun used to flow toward a place called Balkhan, beyond the city of Nisa. The Emir of Balkhan formed kinship ties with the ruler of Khorezm and gambled with him. The ruler of Khorezm won, and according to the bet, if the Emir of Balkhan lost, he would divert the river toward the Khorezmian side for one day. He kept his word and allowed the river to flow toward their side for a day. The river changed course and began flowing toward them, but afterward, it was impossible to return it to its original course. Since then, the river has continued to flow in that direction. While the river flowed toward Kath, the people of Khorezm dug canals and built cities around them. Balkhan, deprived of water, fell into ruin"[24]. Even if this is a legend, it still shows that significant changes occurred in the lower part of the Amu Darya in the 10th century. Istakhri listed 13 cities in Khorezm during his visit between 930-933, while Maqdisi, who visited Khorezm in 985, listed 32 cities[42]. These numbers demonstrate the sharp increase in towns and villages in the lower Amu Darya basin. As the MWP factor caused more glacier melt and increased the volume of the Amu Darya, the Khorezm oasis expanded further. New agricultural centers emerged, and in previously uncultivated areas of the oasis, wetlands and reedbeds essential for livestock herders appeared. Overall, this process caused a demographic explosion in the oasis. Its expansion, in turn, attracted nomadic tribes suffering from drought in the surrounding steppe and desert regions. This is evident in the migration of the Oghuz and later the Kipchaks into the oasis areas.

The Impact of the MWP on the Migration of the Oghuz Turks

Starting from around the 950s, a noticeable migration of the Oghuz people, who lived a nomadic lifestyle under the Oghuz Yabghu Confederation in the Dashti Kipchak towards the Lower Syr Darya, Lower Amu Darya and Bukhara oasis regions is observed. This migration occurred against the backdrop of the Oghuz entering the

service of the Samanids and later strengthening their alliance with the Khorezm governed by the Altintash dynasty, which sought independence from the influence of the Ghaznavids. The relocation of the Oghuz to areas near Bukhara such as the town of Nur, and around Khorezm, has typically been interpreted by researchers as driven solely by political, cultural, or ideological reasons. However, in our opinion, the MWP factor also played a significant role in this process. The British historian Andrew Peacock also supports this view, suggesting that the migration of the Oghuz who relied on a pastoral nomadic lifestyle, was caused by a decline in available pastures as a result of drought brought on by climatic changes[22,9].

During this period, due to the hot and dry climate in the Dashti Kipchak and Ustyurt steppes, the lack of sufficient biomass for livestock forced the Oghuz, who owned large herds to migrate. Led by the Seljuq dynasty, they first moved to the area around the city of Jand on the lower course of the Syr Darya. Then, due to political conflicts and while entering into the service of the Samanids[29], they migrated to the town of Nur. After the fall of the Samanid dynasty, they moved from there to the Khorezm oasis at the invitation of Khorezmshah Harun.

While the MWP had a positive impact on human life in Europe, especially in Northern Europe, the same cannot be said for the Turkestan region, which mainly consists of steppes and deserts with a sharply continental, hot and dry climate. If we look closely, the migration of the Oghuz from the north into Mavaraunnahr, Khorezm and Khorasan coincides precisely with the mid-10th century, that is, with the beginning of the MWP. In our opinion, the departure of the Oghuz, who had been living in the northern part of the Aral Sea and its surroundings since the 8th century from these lands starting from the mid-10th century was not solely due to military-political processes. Another important factor was drought and the warming of the climate, which led to a shortage of grass and fodder in the steppes, making it difficult to sustain their livestock-based nomadic lifestyle. This idea is also supported by the report of Zahiriddin Nishapuri. He wrote that the Oghuz migrated to Mavaraunnahr because the number of their households had increased and there was not enough pasture left for their animals[9]. Moreover, the uprisings within the Oghuz Yabghu Confederation from the mid-10th to the early 11th centuries can also be interpreted as a result of conflicts over scarce resources in the steppe. The lack of sufficient rainfall and the hot weather made life increasingly difficult for the nomadic populations living in the region. The inability to find enough feed for their livestock in the steppe likely compelled the Oghuz to seek new opportunities. In such conditions, only the major rivers

of the region and their surrounding oases could provide enough feed for their herds. Perhaps that is why the city of Yangikent, located on the lower course of the Syr Darya, became their capital. And perhaps, that is also why the last representatives of the Yabghus remained in that city.

Which Route Did the Oghuz Use to Migrate to Khwarazm?

If we turn our attention to the information left by Beruni, one of the most reliable sources on the region in the 10th century, we can see that the Oghuz began migrating toward the lower reaches of the Amu Darya. For the people of Khorezm, fighting against the Oghuz arriving from the steppe became part of their daily life in the 10th century. Beruni describes the "Faghbura" celebration – meaning "the king's appearance" – as follows: *"On this holiday (when heat ends and cold begins), the Khorezmian kings would leave their residence and chase away the Oghuz Turks, defending the borders of their land against them"[31]*. Beruni also notes that the fortress of Korategin, located in the north of Khorezm, was built specifically to defend against the nomadic Oghuz[20]. According to medieval travelers, cities such as Madminiya[38][*], Git[38][*] and Jurjaniya (Gurganj) – located closest to the Aral Sea – are mentioned as places where the Oghuz would come for trade during times of peace. We believe that the most convenient routes for the Oghuz to enter these northern cities of the Khorezm oasis were either from the east of the Aral Sea, or from the west, through the Ustyurt Plateau. One route from the east of the Aral Sea followed the ancient channel of the Syr Darya (Janadarya), flowed toward the Akchadarya delta (Baroktom oasis), then reached Takhtakupir in present-day Karakalpakstan and from there led into the Khorezm oasis and its towns. As for those migrating from the west (e.g., Mangyshlak), their only possible path was through the harsh and barren Ustyurt Desert. However, this route was extremely risky for large herds, as it lacked pasture and forage. It was likely used only for trade, not mass migration. Therefore, in the case of the Saljuqs – the largest group of migrating Oghuz – their southward migration from the banks of the Syr Darya most likely followed the Syr Darya →

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[*] The city of Madminiya is believed to be the city of Bugrokhan, located in today's Kungrad district, in Karakalpakstan.
[*] It is assumed that the city of Git (Git) was located on the site of a city (mound) called Puljoy by the locals on the border of the Ustyurt desert and oasis in the Kungrad district.

Janadarya → Akchadarya (Baroktom oasis) → Takhtakupir route. It is difficult to imagine any other viable migration corridor for such a large nomadic population.

Before reaching the Aral Sea, the Amu Darya river would flow from the right side of Sultan Uvays mountain through its tributary, the Akchadarya, into the Kyzylkum Desert, forming the Baroktom oasis. During the time of Beruni, this riverbed was called the "Fakhmi" (Still Waters) channel. Similarly, the old course of the Syr Darya, specifically the Janadarya tributary and its offshoots like Inkardarya also flowed southwest before reaching the Aral Sea, eventually merging with the Baroktom oasis. In other words, the waters of the Amu Darya and Syr Darya converged in the Kyzylkum Desert before ever reaching the Aral Sea. Academician S.P. Tolstov, who thoroughly studied the ancient oases of these two rivers, discovered signs of the Neolithic-era Kaltaminor culture in 17 locations along the Akchadarya channel. He also found traces of the Bronze Age Tozabagyab culture (dating back to the 2nd millennium BC) in 42 locations, and the Bronze Age Suvorgan culture, Kaunty stage (2nd-1st millennium BC) in 29 locations. Additionally, he identified 16 sites associated with the Kamishly stage of the Suvorgan culture, which practiced irrigated agriculture, and nearly 100 sites from the Iron Age associated with nomadic settlements[45]. He also confirmed that a similar number of ancient settlements existed in the Janadarya and Inkardarya channels of the Syr Darya, as well as in the Baroktom (Kamishly) oasis[45]. During the time of the Xionites and the Hephthalites, the Baroktom dead oasis was home to nomadic and semi-sedentary populations[36]. In this regard, the account provided by Beruni is of great value to us. Beruni wrote: *"Later, the Jayhun (Amu Darya) turned towards Farab*, along the channel now known as Al-Fahmi*. More than 300 towns and villages were established along both banks of the river by people. The ruins of these settlements remain visible even today"[30]*. According to the research of Tolstov and Barthold[37], ancient settlements and medieval cities have also been discovered along the Janadarya branch of the Syr Darya. In 12th-century documents, this place is referred to as "Sagdere" or "Right tributary"[45]. Along the Janadarya, which directly connects to the Akchadarya, there exists a mausoleum 18 km southwest of Sagdere that locals today call "Sırlıtom". Its construction style resembles the architecture of the Karakhanids and Khorezm[45]. Additionally, within a 3 km radius of Sırlıtom lie several historical

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* The Syr Darya is meant here.

* According to Tolstov, Al-Fahmi is the old Aqchadarya valley of Amudarya.

monuments such as Zangarqala (9th-10th century), Khoja Kazghan I, Akmambet, Uygaraq and Kum Qala situated near the Akchadarya channel[45]. Even today, Kazakhstani archaeologists have confirmed the existence of irrigation structures from the medieval period in areas where the Janadarya joins the Akchadarya[33]. In our view, the Janadarya and Akchadarya rivers were the main routes during the Middle Ages through which the Oghuz Yabghu Confederation connected with and migrated toward Transoxiana and Khorezm. Furthermore, since the Janadarya flowed directly north of Akchadarya[36], it facilitated easy access for nomads into the Khorezm oasis. According to Maqdisi, one of the northernmost villages of Khorezm was Barategin, where the Oghuz used to come and trade during peaceful times. The distance from this village to the point where the Syr Darya flows into the Aral Sea was 4 days (10 days according to Ibn Hawqal) [38].

In order for nomads to move their livestock from one place to another without loss, there had to be enough fodder. In our opinion, the banks of the Janadarya and Akchadarya rivers which flowed toward each other before reaching the Aral Sea from the Syr Darya and Amu Darya had sufficient biomass to support migrating herds. Historical sources confirm that the nomads had large numbers of livestock. For example, according to a report by Ibn Fadlan (922), after passing from Khorezm into Oghuz territory, he encountered individuals among the Oghuz who owned 10,000 or even UrDPIGulomjon

100,000 head of livestock (camels, horses, sheep, cattle, etc.) [25]. It was not feasible to migrate southward with such large herds through the arid and resource-poor Ustyurt region from the Dashti Kipchak. Furthermore, the middle and upper courses of the Syr Darya were under the strong control of the Samanids and later the Karakhanids during that time. The Karakhanids, whose main support came from Karluks and other Turkic nomadic tribes, would not have allowed the Oghuz nomadic tribes to pass through the middle Syr Darya region, which was under their control. Taking these factors into account, we have sufficient reason to assert that the only viable migration route for the Oghuz toward the south was through the old channel of the Syr Darya – Janadarya – via the Baroktom oasis of the Amu Darya. If we look at Khorezm's irrigation system during this period (10th-11th centuries), we can see that large main canals operated mainly on the left bank of the Amu Darya, while the right bank was limited to culturally cultivated areas where agriculture is still practiced today[36]. The absence of medieval towns or fortresses in the Baroktom oasis does not prove that life didn't exist there. We believe this micro-oasis may have dried up

during the early Middle Ages, but due to the MWP factor, a large influx of water from the Amu Darya likely revived water flow into the Baroktom oasis through the Akchadarya channel. The arrival of water in this micro-oasis could have played a decisive role in enabling nomads to enter Khorezm.

It is also known that the rulers of Khorezm, in alliance with nomadic tribes, sought to free themselves from the influence of the Ghaznavids. From the 10th century onwards, internal conflicts and rebellions began within the Oghuz confederation. As a result of this disorder, the central government in Yangikent rebelled against Ali Khan, and Saljuk ibn Dukak, along with his Kinik tribe, seized control of Jand, which was located on the Janadarya branch of the Syr Darya[2]. According to research, Ali Khan was unable to respond effectively to Saljuk's rebellion. However, tensions between his successor Malikshah and Saljuk's family continued to escalate. Once Saljuk, the founder of the Seljuq state, settled with his tribesmen in Jand in the lower Syr Darya, they decided to convert to Islam and sent an envoy to the city of Zandak in Khorezm. This area was located on the steppe border where both Khorezm and the Oghuz grazed their livestock. Abu al-Faraj quotes Saljuk's words in this regard:

"*If we do not accept the religion and customs of the land we wish to live in, no one here will treat us with respect*". Following this, Saljuk's representative requested that the governor of Zandak send someone who could explain the rules and principles of Islam, as well as preach and offer advice. The governor sent his imam with numerous gifts for the new converts[5]. From this account, we can conclude that the Seljuq dynasty had already begun serious efforts to establish close relations with the Muslim states of Transoxiana, Khwarazm, and Khorasan in their future political plans.

In 1025, Saljuq ibn Dukak sent a letter to Mahmud of Ghaznavi requesting permission to cross south of the Amu Darya. In response, they were granted settlement rights in the regions of Abivard and Nisa. However, this agreement did not come easily. In the meantime, the Khorezmshah Harun contacted Saljuq's sons and proposed cooperation. That is, in 1017, Mahmud of Ghaznavi had ended the Mamunid dynasty in Khorezm and appointed one of his commanders, Altintash, as the governor of Khorezm. After Mahmud's death, Altintash's son Harun refused to submit to Sultan Masud, who had taken the throne, and instead formed an alliance with the

Saljuqid Turkmens[2]* sons and grandsons of Saljuq including Tughril, Chaghri, and Ibrahim Inal, who were stationed around Bukhara[41]. There is no information about the conditions of their agreement. However, in our opinion, there is an important point to consider here. The representatives of the Samanid dynasty had once granted control over Nisa in Khorasan to the Mamunids of Northern Khorezm, and control over Abivard to the Afrighids of Southern Khorezm[29]. Perhaps Khorezmshah Harun, seeking to strengthen his independence, aimed to reclaim these regions of Khorasan for Khorezm. It is our belief that this desire led him to enter into an alliance with the sons of Saljuq. Harun declared Khorezm's independence. During the uprising by the Turkmens in Khorasan, Khorezm's ruler Harun, who planned to conquer Khorasan, sought help from the Saljuqids. Turkish scholar Mahmud Altay Kuyman provides information stating that Khorezm played a significant role in the formation of the Great Saljuqid Empire[46]. Abul-Fazl Bayhaqi reports the following: *"The Saljuqids, with many soldiers, tents, camels, horses and countless sheep and goats, came to the Khorezm region with the help of Harun. They were granted good lands and pastures in places like Masha Rabat and Shurakhan and were sent many gifts and offerings. Later, he said, 'Rest for now, because I am preparing to set out for Khorasan. When I move, establish your settlements here and go before me"[16].*

The Seljuqs settled here safely. There had long been animosity and blood feud between the Seljuqs and Shahmalik, the ruler of Jand. Upon hearing through his spies that the Seljuqs had arrived in Khorezm, Shahmalik attacked them with a strong army. As a result of the attack, seven to eight thousand Oghuz people were killed and many were taken captive. With the support of Khorezmshah Harun, the Seljuqs recovered from their losses. As a result, other tribesmen of the Seljuqs who had remained in the town of Nur also moved to this area[16]. After reaching a temporary agreement with Shahmalik, the ruler of Jand, Harun began serious preparations for a campaign toward Khorasan and together with the Seljuqs, they set off toward Khorasan. However, all these plans were thwarted due to an assassination attempt organized by supporters of Sultan Masud against Harun in May 1135. The Khorezm army, which had set out for Khorasan, fell into disarray and retreated. However, the Seljuqs continued on their path and engaged in the struggle in Khorasan. According

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* The Oghuz who adopted Islam were called Turkmens.

to Bayhaqi, in 1040, under the conditions of political instability in Khorezm, the ruler of Jand, Shahmalik, seized control of Khorezm[16]. The Seljuqs, meanwhile, fought the Ghaznavids for Khorasan and achieved victories[4]. Inspired by this triumph, the Seljuqs took control of both Khorezm, which was under Shahmalik's rule, and the cities of the Oghuz Yabghus along the Syr Darya. A large portion of the Oghuz joined the Seljuqs and moved toward Transoxiana and Khorezm, then onward to Khorasan. Another portion went to Eastern Europe, following the Pechenegs. The remaining Oghuz who stayed in their homeland eventually assimilated into the Kipchaks, the new masters of the region[32,2]. The alliance of Khorezmshah Harun with the surrounding Oghuz tribes for the sake of independence did not yield results. On the contrary, Khorezm itself fell under the influence of the Seljuqs.

The alliance of Khorezm with the Kipchaks

A large part of the Kipchaks during the 10th to 13th centuries were nomadizing in the steppes stretching from the Irtysh River to the middle and lower reaches of the Syr Darya and westward to the Dnieper[47]. The Kangli people, who had long lived in this area, joined the Kipchak confederation starting from the 12th century[47], but they did not fully assimilate with them[43]. Later on, by establishing kinship ties with a new emerging Turkic state in Central Asia – the Khorezmshahs – they began to enter the lands of Khorezm and Transoxiana.

Even during the period when Khorezm was directly governed by the Seljuqs (1043-1097), there is information indicating that Kipchaks were part of the Khorezm military forces. At the time when the Seljuqs, originating from among the Oghuz, began to establish a state in Khorasan, the Oghuz who had remained in their former lands were in a state of conflict with the Kipchaks, who were migrating into the region. This is evident from the war that took place in 1065 between the Oghuz and the Kipchaks in Mangyshlak[27].

Sharaf al-Zaman al-Marwazi also provides information regarding the arrival of the Kipchaks in the Khorezm region. In particular, he notes: "Among the Turks, there is a group of tribes called Kun, who came from the land of Qitay out of fear of Qitakhan. They were Nestorian Christians... Among them was also Khorezmshah Ekinchi ibn Kochkar"[15]. The following account by Ibn al-Asir complements Marwazi's statement: "Among the Sultan's amirs was one named Ekinchi. The Sultan appointed him as the amir of Khorezm and granted him the title of

'Khorezmshah'. Ekinchi gathered 10,000 cavalrymen and returned to the Sultan"[14]. Juwayni, for his part, reports: "The Seljuq sultan Barkyaruq's governor in Khorasan, Dadbek Habashi, took the administration of Khwarazm from Ekinchi, the son of Quchqor, one of Sultan Sanjar's mamluks, and gave it to Qutbiddin Muhammad, granting him the title of 'Khorezmshah' in the year 1097"[35]. As we can see, the Kipchaks held a certain position in Khorezm and its surroundings, which were under the influence of the Seljuq state established by the Oghuz. In fact, before the rule of the Anushteginids – who were representatives of the Bekdeli tribe – Kipchak-origin Ekinchi ibn Kochkar had ruled Khorezm. Overall, Khorezm, under Seljuq rule, began moving toward independence, and in order to escape Seljuq influence, entered into alliance relations with the Kangli-Kipchaks, who had settled in the former lands of the Oghuz. In this process, the rulers of Khorezm established familial ties with the Kipchaks. During the reign of Sultan Tekish, the establishment of connections with Turkic tribes in the Dashti Kipchak marked a new stage in Khorezm-Kangli-Kipchak relations[21].

In the 12th century, the Anushtegin Khorezmshahs' subjugation of the Kipchaks living along the Syr Darya and the incorporation of their military forces into the Khorezmian army paved the way for large-scale migration of Kangli-Kipchak tribes into Transoxiana, Khorasan, and Khorezm[39]. At the beginning of the 12th century, the Kangli tribes residing in the Yettisuv region moved into Transoxiana, and after 1181[39], the Kangli groups living in the northern regions of the Syr Darya and Aral began to enter the territory of the Khorezmshah state and settle within its borders. The Khorezmshahs made effective use of the Kangli-Kipchak mercenary forces and, as a result, turned into one of the dominant powers in Central Asia and the Middle East. In our opinion, the warm climatic factor mentioned earlier also played an important role in the migration and settlement of the Kangli-Kipchak tribes in the vicinity of Khorezm. Even as the Anushtegin Khorezmshahs became a major regional power, their political center remained the Khorezm oasis. We can assume that by the early 13th century, the MWP may have led to severe socio-economic consequences in regions outside the Lower Amu Darya and Lower Syr Darya and that a decline in natural resources occurred during this drought period in Turkestan. Amid such circumstances, a new rising power in the East – the Mongol Empire under the leadership of Chinggis Khan – was beginning to flourish.

Ecological Problems and Climate in Turkestan on the Eve of the Mongol Invasion

According to climatologists, during the MWP, the water level of the Aral Sea began to decline starting from around the 1150s[7,9]. This indicates a reduction in the volume of water flowing into the Aral Sea from the Amu Darya and Syr Darya rivers. Another group of climate researchers also confirmed that in the second half of the MWP — i.e., during the 12th-13th centuries — the water level of the Aral Sea decreased significantly[1]. They concluded that this was due to a relatively cooler and more humid climate. Some climatologists also suggest that the drop in the Aral Sea's water level intensified shortly before the Mongol invasion[9,8,10]. In addition, studies conducted along the middle course of the Syr Darya have shown that starting from the mid-12th century, the volume of water in the Syr Darya and its tributaries such as the Arys River, which irrigated the Otrar oasis, began to decline. This suggests that even before the Mongol conquest, the area of irrigated farmland in the region had already started to shrink[28].

Likewise, there were several smaller rivers in the region such as the Zarafshan, Kashkadarya, Surkhandarya, Talas, Murghab and Tejen, whose water stability depended on annual precipitation and spring floods. Due to the effects of the MWP, these rivers did not receive sufficient water, which led to a relatively difficult situation for agriculture in the oases along these riverbanks[18]. However, since the region connected the trade routes between the Eastern and Western worlds before the era of the Great Geographical Discoveries, no severe economic crisis occurred, despite these climatic challenges.

The Role of the MWP Factor in Genghis Khan's Conquest of Turkestan

Many scholars, including Nicola Di Cosmo[19], Pederson[23] and others, have emphasized the importance of climate as a factor in Genghis Khan's establishment of his great empire. According to their research, a 15-year period of increased average rainfall was identified between 1210 and 1225. The regions of Southern Siberia and Mongolia are directly influenced by humid airflows coming from the Pacific Ocean. This period is considered "pluvial", that is, rich in water and moderate in temperature and it represents the wettest and most prolonged phase in Mongolia's climatic history[19]. Such climate conditions created a favorable environment for Genghis Khan to unite the Mongol and Turkic tribes.

It is well known that a warm and moist climate creates ideal conditions for livestock farming, and during this time, biomass resources on the steppe significantly increased[26]. As a result, the Mongols gained a substantial advantage in warfare by possessing a large number of horses. The crucial role of horses in the Mongol army is also noted by Thomas Allsen. According to him, each Mongol warrior had up to five horses. For example, during the military campaign to Turkestan, if 150,000 cavalrymen were mobilized, then the army possessed at least 750,000 horses[19]. Furthermore, considering that livestock was the main food source on the Mongolian steppe and that favorable climate conditions led to its growth, we can conclude that the Mongols had sufficient food resources to conduct long-lasting and continuous military campaigns. Under such conditions, neither the Kara Khitai, nor the Khorezmshahs in Turkestan, nor the states in China could withstand them, a fact proven by historical events.

Additionally, the humid climate in this region led to increased biomass in the Tarim Basin, which enabled the mobility of the Mongol army through this territory and facilitated the nomads' southward movement and expansion into new pastures[19]. This situation provided new economic resources to the rising political power in East Asia, while in contrast, it reduced the economic resources of the existing political power – the Khorezmshahs – in Central Asia. This, in turn, may have been one of the factors that contributed to the Mongols' victories in the battles between the two forces that took place somewhat later.

The initial result of the Mongol invasion of Turkestan was that during the course of the wars, a portion of the population was killed, another portion migrated to other regions, some were taken to other places as captives, and yet others died due to epidemics[44]. This situation led to demographic fluctuations in the region. The destruction of large cities that had developed under the rule of Turkic Muslim dynasties before the invasion, the death of many city dwellers during battles, their flight to other places, or their capture and removal after the war is cited in numerous historical sources. According to certain paleoclimatic and geoarchaeological studies, the demographic crisis that occurred in Turkestan during the 13th century was influenced not only by the Mongol invasion but also significantly by climate change[13]. According to these studies, the anomalously hot climate in Eurasia during the 10th-13th centuries caused serious damage to agriculture and urbanization in the Turkestan region. Additionally, paleoclimatic researchers have concluded that the hot and arid

climate further delayed the recovery of agricultural oases destroyed by the Mongols[28].

CONCLUSION

The MWP factor caused the migration of the nomadic population of Central Asia and this migration intensified the integration of the sedentary and nomadic populations of the region. This integration is most evident in Khorezm oasis in the lower course of the Amu Darya, which is fed by perpetual glaciers. While drought continued throughout Central Asia, the increase in the water supply of the Amu Darya, nourished by perpetual glaciers, led to the development of agriculture in Khorezm oasis, the proliferation and enrichment of cities, and the expansion of new pastures for pastoralists in areas of the oasis not cultivated for farming. The policy of the Khorezm rulers to resettle nomadic pastoralists into these pastures increased the human resources in Khorezm oasis. As a result, Khorezm, as a model of river civilization, now became the leading political power in the region. This gave Khorezm the opportunity to exert political influence not only over Turkestan but also over the Middle East, the South Caucasus and South Asia. In its 3,000-year history of statehood, it was precisely during the MWP that Khorezm oasis became the largest regional power. Precisely because of the MWP, the Anushteginid dynasty achieved the greatest result ever reached in Khorezm oasis, something that the preceding Afrighids, Mamunids, Altintashids or even subsequent dynasties could not attain despite their efforts. They conquered vast territories previously unimaginable to earlier dynasties and, from Khorezm, established rule over Turkestan and the Middle East.

Likewise, the emergence of favorable climatic conditions in the Altai region at the beginning of the 13th century created the prerequisites for the formation of the Mongol state, the increase of horse and livestock resources and the military campaigns of Genghis Khan. In contrast, in Turkestan, the shortage of resources caused by climatic stress reduced the region's defensive capabilities against the Mongol invasion. Thus, climate and ecological factors played a decisive role not only in the rise of one state but also in the decline of another.

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INTEGRATION BETWEEN NOMADIC AND SEDENTARY SOCIETIES IN AFGHANISTAN: A HISTORICAL ANALYSIS BASED ON THE CASE OF BALKH

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Abstract

Throughout history, Inner Asia—and especially Afghanistan—has been a key arena of interaction between sedentary civilizations and nomadic communities. While often described through conflict, in regions like Balkh this encounter fostered long-term adaptation and coexistence. With its strategic location and deep historical roots, Balkh embodied nomadic-sedentary relations, comparable to Herat, Ghazni, and Kunduz. Urbanized since the 6th century BCE, it hosted diverse religious traditions—from Zoroastrianism to Islam—and served as a temporary or permanent center for nomadic groups. Practices such as nomadic chieftains founding waqfs, enrolling children in madrasas, and integrating into markets and ribats illustrate the social, cultural, and institutional dimensions of this process. This study conceptualizes these dynamics through the "Balkh Model" and compares it with the steppe tradition centered on Ötüken and the Orkhon Valley, framing Balkh as a space of transition and Ötüken as continuity. A historical geography approach, based on geographical treatises, travelogues, chronicles, and secondary literature, underpins the analysis.

Keywords: Afghanistan, Balkh, Orkhon Valley, Inner Asia, nomadic communities and sedentary societies, historical geography.

Introduction

The historical relationship between nomadic societies and sedentary populations constitutes a foundational conceptual axis in understanding the social, political, and economic fabric of Inner Asia. These two ways of life have often been treated as opposing categories in historical narratives: sedentary peoples portrayed as representatives of "civilization," while nomads are framed as "marginal and destructive

forces." However, recent scholarship has increasingly challenged this dichotomy, shifting the focus toward interaction, exchange, and coexistence. Transitional regions such as the Balkh Basin, which historically accommodated both nomadic and sedentary communities, offer a suitable historical geography for examining these dynamics.

Afghanistan's position at the crossroads of Inner Asia, South Asia, and the Iranian plateau made it a strategic zone of passage both geopolitically and culturally. This location enabled coexistence among diverse groups and laid the groundwork for multilayered relationships between nomadic and sedentary populations. The northern corridor of Afghanistan—particularly south of the Amu Darya—served as a passage and settlement zone for nomads, who integrated into the economic system, emerged as political forces, or adapted to sedentary life. The Balkh region, at the intersection of migration and trade routes, demonstrates that nomadic-sedentary relations were rooted in deeper processes rather than surface conflicts.

Balkh's significance stems from its geographic position and its cultural and political roles across periods. During the transition from the Buddhist to the Islamic era, it became a major center, especially under the Abbasids. Later, under dynasties such as the Ghaznavids and Timurids, Balkh functioned as a hub where nomadic-sedentary relations were reconfigured; for example, under Mahmud of Ghazni it incorporated Turkic tribes into its military system. Military collaboration remained a salient form of interaction: Turkic groups such as the Oghuz and Karluks served in armies, and over time these ties facilitated cultural integration. Marriages, patronage networks, and urban settlement show that the boundary between nomadic and sedentary life was often fluid.

Early Islamic texts, including Hudūd al-ʿĀlam, mention Balkh's fertile lands, trade routes, and multiethnic populations, portraying nomads not only as threats but also as contributors to urban life. Trade, security, taxation, and seasonal settlement patterns regulated these relationships. The Mongol invasions profoundly reshaped the region, at times suppressing sedentary populations but also incorporating nomadic groups into new settlement strategies. Migrations to Balkh during the Chinggisid era accelerated assimilation, as nomadic-origin students entered madrasas and formed political alliances.

The aim of this study is to outline processes of integration between nomadic groups and sedentary populations in the Balkh region, from antiquity to the Timurid era. Rather than viewing nomads solely as destructive forces, they are treated as constitutive components of society. The study focuses on key questions: (1) How did nomads interact with urban life in Balkh? (2) How did these contacts lead to integration in military, economic, and cultural spheres? (3) How did sedentary populations adapt to nomadic elements?

These questions highlight the contemporary relevance of nomadic-sedentary relations in Afghanistan. The case of Balkh demonstrates that these relations could evolve into stable symbiosis, producing multidimensional interactions. This article seeks to develop a new perspective on such processes within the framework of the "Balkh Model," drawing on historical records, geographical evaluations, and sociocultural interactions.

1. The Geographical and Historical Position of Balkh

Located in northern Afghanistan, the Balkh region has historically been one of the significant settlement centers of Inner Asia. This prominence can be explained not only by its accumulated historical heritage but also by the strategic advantages provided by its geographical features. Within the current administrative boundaries, Balkh province is bordered by Jowzjan to the west, Sar-e Pol and Samangan to the south, Kunduz to the east, and to the north it shares frontiers with Uzbekistan and Tajikistan along the Amu Darya (Oxus) River. The region covers a wide area, with its northern part consisting of flat, fertile plains and its southern section characterized by mountainous and rugged terrain. The southern part, locally known as Kuh-i Elburz, is considered an extension of the Hazarajat mountain range. This physical geography has historically shaped the life cycles of both nomadic communities and sedentary populations. The central plain of Balkh, often regarded as the heartland of the region, is commonly referred to among locals as the "Eighteen Rivers Plain" (Hijdah Nehr). This name derives from the numerous branches that diverge northwards from the Balkh River (Balkh Ab), which flows from the Hindu Kush mountains. Nevertheless, the region is not entirely fertile; some of the wetlands remain unsuitable for agriculture due to salinization and swampy conditions [Barthold 1984: 11-12; Adamec 1985: 98-99, 118-121; Nahiz 2015: 147 ff.; Yazıcı 1992: 410-411]. Throughout history, this plain has functioned as a central hub that brought together

diverse ways of life, owing to its access to water resources, ease of transportation, and its location at the intersection of important trade routes.

Climatic conditions have directly influenced the lifestyle of the region's inhabitants. Winters in Balkh are harsh, with snow remaining on the ground for extended periods, particularly in the mountainous areas. In contrast, due to the abundance of wetlands in the plains, snow tends to melt quickly. During the summer months, hot and dusty northwesterly winds make life difficult and restrict agricultural activities. This climatic variability historically encouraged nomadic communities to adopt a transhumance system in the Balkh region, moving between summer and winter pastures. During the winter months, groups would descend to the relatively milder lowlands around Balkh, engaging not only in animal husbandry but also in trade and cultural interaction with the settled population. Over time, this seasonal movement turned Balkh into one of the key intersection points between nomadic and sedentary communities. Some nomadic families built permanent structures around Balkh during the winters and gradually integrated into sedentary life, while others maintained a semi-nomadic way of living [Çiftçi 2025: 113 ff.; Nahiz 2015: 149-150, 152]. This multilayered structure reveals that Balkh functioned not merely as a settlement center, but as a dynamic zone of interaction where diverse lifestyles intersected and gradually integrated over time.
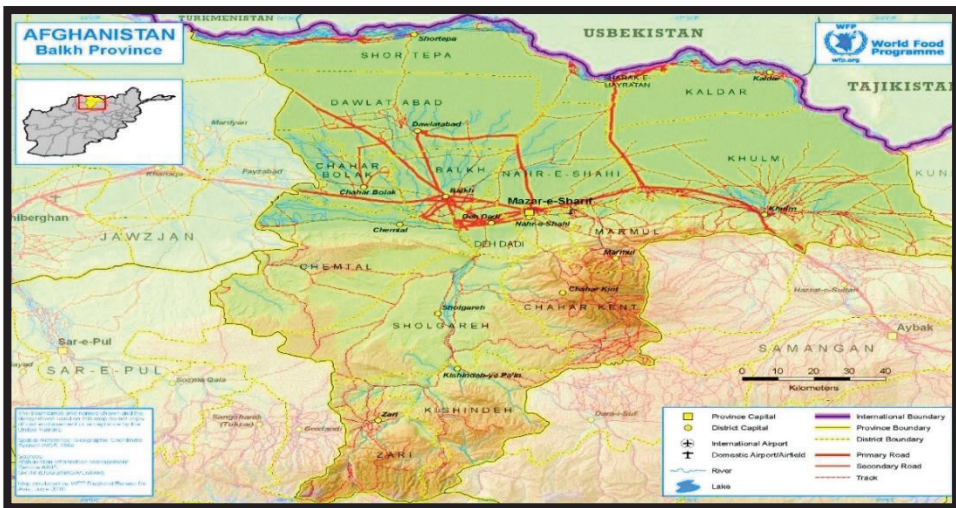
Map 1: Balkh Map [Balkh Provincial Profile, 2024]

2. Historical Development of Balkh: From Antiquity to the Timurids

One of the oldest settlements in Inner Asia, Balkh is known to have emerged on the historical stage as the center of the Bactriana region from at least the 6th century BCE. During the Achaemenid period, it served as a satrapal center and, as far as early records indicate, came into contact with the steppe world through Saka incursions. With Alexander's campaign, the city came under Macedonian rule and became a significant center of trade and urbanization during the Hellenistic period, further consolidating its position under the Seleucids and the Greco-Bactrian Kingdom. During the Kushan era—another period that benefited from the wealth of the Silk Road—Balkh emerged as one of the major centers of Buddhism. The Nawbahar Monastery, which gained prominence as a religious hub during this time, was later transformed into a madrasa in the Islamic period. Under the Sassanids, Balkh became one of the key administrative centers of Khorasan. In the era of the Hephthalites (Akhuns) and the Turk Shahis—who represented the legacy of the Göktürks—the region gained considerable economic prosperity due to its location on the Silk Road. This period marked one of the peaks in the integration of steppe-origin communities into trade networks, exemplifying a high point of steppe-economy interaction [Yazıcı 1992: 410–411; Nahiz 2015 I: 147-148; Ahmetbeyoğlu 2017: 126-128; Yıldırım 2013: 406-407; Çiftçi 2025: 114 ff.; Strange 1930: 421; Taşağıl 2019: 117].

With the Islamic conquests, Balkh was initially subjected to tribute; later, during the Umayyad and Abbasid periods, it gained the status of a regional center. Especially during the reigns of the Tahirids, Saffarids, and Samanids, the city witnessed significant cultural and scientific development. In 999, it came under the rule of Mahmud of Ghazni. Following prolonged conflicts involving the Seljuks, Ghurids, and Khwarazmshahs, Balkh was devastated by Genghis Khan in 1221. Subsequently, it came under the control of the Chagatai Khanate and later the Timurids, playing a crucial role during the dynastic struggles of Timur's successors. In the 16th century, Balkh changed hands multiple times between the Uzbeks, Safavids, and Mughals. However, with the rise of Mazar-i Sharif, Balkh largely lost its status as a major center of attraction [Yazıcı 1995: 410-411; Çiftçi & Yıldırım 2023: 78-89; Adamec 1970: 98-99; Juvayni 1958: 291-292; Babur 2000: 64; Jurjani 1881: 50; Rumlu 2020: 531 ff.; Grousset 2019: 273; Abu'l-Fazl 2000: 188 ff.; Bayur 1987: 59, 97; Gardizi 2022: 63; Baladhuri 2013: 470; Ibn al-Athir 1991: 206–208].

3. The Question of Nomadism

Among Turkic and Mongol steppe communities, nomadism represented not only an economic formation but also a mode of identity construction, a worldview, and a strategy of sovereignty. For these groups, a rigid opposition between sedentary life and nomadism was not drawn; rather, nomadism was regarded as the foundation of universal domination due to its attributes of flexibility, agility, and military superiority. In the epics of the Huns, Göktürks, and Oghuz; in the Mongol *Yasa*; and in the oral traditions preceding the Ottoman era, nomadism was idealized as a model of political legitimacy. The expression "may they always migrate, never settle" reflects not only a recommendation but also an *ethos* that sustained the continuity of steppe aristocracy.

This mentality did not exclude the attachment of nomadic tribes to land and homeland; on the contrary, the concept of *yurt*—even within a nomadic system—held a central place as a symbol of belonging and defense. Chinese and Arab sources frequently emphasize the Turks' attachment to their homelands, while Persian authors such as Ferdowsi and Thaʿālibī idealize Turkic heroes through acts of extraordinary sacrifice in defense of their native lands. In this context, nomadism assumed a defining role in history not only through physical mobility but also through its function as a carrier of culture.

One of the scholars who focused on the issue of nomadism, Zeki Velidi Togan, approached it as a dynamic structure within the historical process. He did not view it as an absolute sign of superiority or backwardness. According to Togan [Togan 2020: 146-148], nomadic and sedentary elements coexisted without mutual exclusion within political entities, and this coexistence continued uninterruptedly from pre-Islamic Turkic states to the Khwarazmshahs. İbrahim Kafesoğlu [Kafesoğlu 2019: 32 ff.], on the other hand, criticized the Western historiographical tendency to portray nomadism as a "pre-civilizational" stage. He emphasized that nomadism, for the Turks, was a socio-cultural way of life shaped by geographical conditions. Rejecting the direct application of Ibn Khaldun's typology of desert nomads to the steppe context, Kafesoğlu argued that Turkic nomadism possessed a unique structure marked by its organizational capacity, legal consciousness, and cultural continuity.

4. The Geopolitical Position and Regional Dynamics of Balkh in the Context of Nomadic Influence

Understanding the historical geography of Balkh through the lens of its interaction with nomadic cultures requires consideration of the surrounding political and ethnic structures. Situated at a crossroads, Balkh—referred to as the "Mother of Cities"—was connected westward to the Iranian plateau via Herat and Nishapur, eastward to the Pamirs and China via Kunduz and Badakhshan, and northward to Khwarazm and Western Turkestan via the Oxus (Amu Darya) River. These routes served not only as trade corridors but also as channels of migration and cultural exchange. Hence, Balkh's geopolitical significance stemmed not merely from its strategic location but also from its position at the heart of multifaceted networks of interaction. This positioning rendered its relationship with nomadic populations not only spatial but also structural and enduring. Through these networks, nomadic communities positioned themselves not as peripheral actors but as integral components of the broader system. The adaptation of nomadic groups to the external world entailed both economic and socio-political dimensions. Although these domains may be analytically distinguished on a theoretical level, in practice they were deeply intertwined [Khazanov 1984: 198].

Throughout history, due to its location and function, the city of Balkh has remained within the sphere of interaction between nomadic and sedentary communities, undergoing constant processes of change, transformation, and reconstruction as a result of these interactions [Khazanov 1984: 18, 198 ff.]. The influence of nomadic elements on Balkh is reflected in the patterns of population movement and demographic transformation documented in the work of Xuanzang. His accounts indicate that despite the city's considerable physical size, the settled population was relatively small, whereas the level of employment was notably high [Ekrem 2003: 148]. This situation suggests the presence of semi-nomadic groups living on the outskirts of the city or maintaining periodic connections with it. Similarly, as noted by Ibn Ḥawqal, the existence of vineyards, agricultural lands, and milling systems [Yörükhan 2013: 392-393] in the vicinity of the city implies that these agricultural activities may have been utilized not only by the settled population but also by rural communities of nomadic origin.

According to the details provided by Yakubi, the surroundings of Balkh were enclosed by walls, with villages and fields located within these fortifications, while the

area outside was characterized by completely uncultivated sandy terrain [Yaʿqūbī 2002: 90 ff.; Strange 1905: 420]. This description reveals a physical boundary between the urban center and the rural and nomadic worlds, while simultaneously providing significant evidence that nomadic communities lived outside these boundaries yet maintained intermittent interactions with the city. Notably, Yakubi's classification of the settlements north of Bamyan as being affiliated with Balkh indicates that nomadic or semi-nomadic groups inhabiting this extensive region were considered part of Balkh's economic and administrative hinterland.

The accounts of travelers such as Juvayni and Marco Polo reveal that the Mongol invasions had a direct impact on Balkh, demonstrating the military mobility and destructive effects of nomadic groups on the region [Juvayni 2013: 153–154; Polo 2021: 81]. The destruction carried out by the armies of Genghis Khan [Çiftçi 2025: 411; Cüzcani 2016: 153-154] reflects not only physical devastation but also the influence of the nomadic Mongol political and military organization on the city. For instance, Juvayni emphasizes Balkh's agricultural production capacity prior to the Mongol invasion [Cüveyni 2013: 153-154]. The observations of travelers such as Marco Polo and Ibn Battuta [Polo 2021: 81; Ibn Battuta 2004: 555] indicate that the city was left in ruins due to nomadic incursions, yet it still retained remnants reflecting its former grandeur. These accounts suggest that nomadic raids were not solely acts of destruction but also left lasting imprints on the urban memory of the city.

Particularly in the period following the Mongol invasions, the population around the city appears to have retreated to the mountains and fortresses, indicating a departure from the classical settled order and suggesting that the rural areas were likely reutilized by nomadic groups. Observations by Clavijo from the Timurid era exhibit similar patterns. Clavijo notes that the lands within the city walls were used as agricultural fields, which may have been accessible to groups of nomadic origin [Clavijo 1993: 126]. Clavijo, noting that the dense population was concentrated beyond the inner-city walls [Clavijo 1993: 126], implicitly suggests that while the settled population was protected within the fortifications, nomadic groups or external elements tended to inhabit areas less integrated with the urban core.

Certain turning points in Balkh's political history clearly illustrate the influence of nomadic communities. For instance, the dominance of semi-nomadic dynasties such as the Saffarids, Ghaznavids, and Karakhanids over Balkh demonstrates the decisive authority of nomadic powers in the city. The concern that the loss of Balkh would

lead to the forfeiture of the entire region of Khorasan [Beyhaki 2019: 411; Cüzcani 2016: 68-69; Bosworth 1992: 57 ff.]. underscores the critical importance of nomadic political structures' control over this city for regional hegemony. Particularly, the rise of the Shaybanids in the 16th century and their interest in Balkh highlight the relationship between nomadic Turkmen-Uzbek elements and the city. Nomadic dynasties that besieged, governed, or conquered Balkh regarded the city both as a military stronghold and a political center [Babür 2000: 186, 293; Duğlat 2019: 334]. In this context, nomadic groups did not only bring destruction to the city but also participated as forces establishing political centers, control points, and administrative structures.

Based on all these observations and considerations, Balkh can be regarded as a city characterized by multifaceted interactions with nomadic communities. The nomads sometimes appeared as external invading forces, at other times as economic agents moving between the urban and rural spheres, and occasionally as dynasties exercising political authority. These dynamics have left profound impacts on both the physical and social fabric of Balkh. This situation illustrates that Balkh is a multilayered city bearing traces not only of settled cultures but also of steppe-originated cultures.

5. Balkh and the Orkhon Valley/Ötüken: The Geographical Memory of Sedentary and Nomadic Cultures

Central Asia has historically been a geography where nomadic and sedentary lifestyles have intertwined, with this cultural interaction constituting a fundamental factor in the formation of Turkish history. In this context, the Balkh Plain and the Orkhon Valley emerge as representatives of two distinct ways of life. While Balkh, due to its fertile lands and water resources, became a center for the development of sedentary civilizations and the nurturing of religious and cultural diversity, the Orkhon Valley is recognized as a sacred site where steppe politics and the nomadic state tradition originated.

Located in northern present-day Afghanistan, the Balkh Plain has hosted diverse religious systems such as Zoroastrianism, Buddhism, and Islam; following the Islamic conquests, it became an important center of scholarship, culture, and mysticism. The fact that the ancestors of Mevlânâ Celâleddîn Rûmî lived in this region has endowed it with a distinctive place in Turkish-Islamic cultural history. In this regard, Balkh

represents a threshold and transition zone where nomadic societies shifted toward settled life.
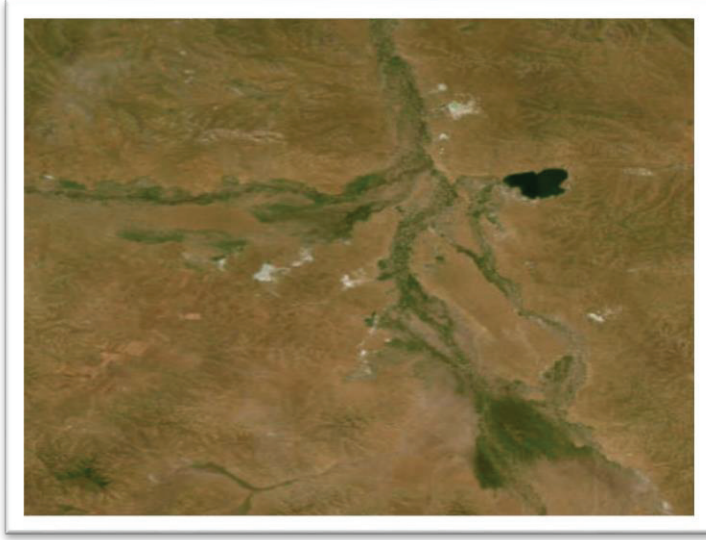
Map 2: Orkhon Valley [Orkhon Valley 2024]

On the other hand, the Orkhon Valley, situated in present-day Mongolia, is the cradle of the first great Turkic states, primarily the Göktürks and the Uyghurs. The region is also renowned for the Orkhon Inscriptions, the oldest written documents of Turkic history [Yıldırım 2018: 104-105]. These inscriptions provide unique insights into the early Turkic political and cultural order, indicating the geographic origin of the Steppe-Turkic identity, statecraft, and written memory. The Orkhon Valley is defined in historical geography literature as a shared space of both Turkic and Mongol heritage. The establishment of Karakorum, the capital built near this region after Genghis Khan's era, further demonstrates that the Orkhon Valley held a central position not only in early Turkic history but also in the institutional development of the Mongol Empire. Thus, this ancient steppe stands out as a historical stage where nomadic political traditions and sedentary administrative forms intersected over centuries.

The historical and cultural significance of the Orkhon Valley is further reinforced by the concept of Ötüken, which lies at its core. Frequently emphasized in the inscriptions, Ötüken is not merely a physical place but is defined as a sacred center

that embodies the *kut* (divine mandate) of the state, the survival of the nation, and the source of political legitimacy. The following statements from the inscriptions of Bilge Khagan and Tonyukuk clearly illustrate this conception:

"The Turkic Khagan who resides in the Ötüken forest will have no troubles in his realm."

"There is nothing better than the Ötüken forest. Ötüken forest is the place that sustains the state."

"If you settle in the land of Ötüken and send caravans and caravansaries, you will encounter no difficulties [Yıldırım 2018: 104-105]."

These sayings demonstrate that Ötüken is directly linked to the stability of the state. The idea that Ötüken is not merely a mountain or forest, but a sacred political center and a source of spiritual authority, holds a strong place within the belief systems of the steppe societies. Many nomadic groups, from the Huns to the Uighurs, integrated this sanctity into their political traditions by establishing the khagan's court in Ötüken, thereby constructing their political legitimacy through this "sacred place" [Yıldırım 2018: 109].

Although there are varying opinions regarding the geographical location of Ötüken, the general consensus places it between the Orkhon and Tuul Rivers, on the eastern foothills of the Hangay Mountains. This area has historically been considered sacred by the Göktürks and Uighurs, and is referred to by names such as Dujin and Yudujin in Chinese sources [Yıldırım 2018: 105 ff.]. Besides being a central place, Ötüken is regarded as the heart of the steppe, closely connected with the spirits of ancestors and the divine concept of *küt* (spiritual mandate). Therefore, it was deemed essential for the khagan to reside in Ötüken to establish charismatic authority; the tribes from the four directions pledged their allegiance at the yurt (otağ) established in this sacred center [Yıldırım 2018: 109].

In this context, while Balkh serves as a transitional zone between the steppe and sedentary cultures—representing a hybrid lifestyle, cultural diversity, and the post-Islamic scientific tradition—the Orkhon Valley and its core, Ötüken, embody the nomadic political tradition, the consciousness of written history, and the belief in a sacred center. Both regions represent complementary aspects of steppe history: Balkh generally as a space of transition and transformation, and Ötüken as a center

of continuity and sanctity. Indeed, the historical transformation encapsulated in the saying, "If a place begins as a tent, it ends as a city," is most concretely reflected in these two areas.

Conclusion

The example of Balkh demonstrates that the historical relationships between nomadic groups and sedentary peoples were not mere temporary encounters; rather, they indicate a profound interaction process that produced spatial and social transformations. In this respect, Balkh exhibits a complexity and intertwinement that cannot be reduced to the frequently cited nomad-settled dichotomy in classical historiography. This dichotomy proves analytically insufficient in regions such as Inner Asia, where mobility and cultural exchange are intense; consequently, Balkh emerges with the potential to offer a novel interpretive framework.

The "Balkh Model" proposed within this study presents a historical ground in which diverse lifestyles coexist more through negotiation than conflict, allowing for reciprocal political, economic, and cultural interaction. It highlights nomadic communities not only as military forces or threats but also as productive, transformative, and carrier agents on the historical stage. The imprints left in Balkh by nomadic-origin or nomad-interactive political entities such as the Ghaznavids, Karakhanids, and Timurids clearly illustrate the multidimensionality of this transformation.

The symbiotic structure observed in Balkh enabled the redefinition of urban identity through education, marriage, economic cooperation, and semi-sedentary lifestyles. The relations that nomads with seasonal pasture cycles gradually established with the urban periphery permit us to characterize Balkh not merely as a city but as an "integration laboratory." From a historical geography perspective, this necessitates reconsidering Balkh and similarly characterized sites not simply as places, but as multi-centered, multi-functional, and multicultural civilization platforms.

Within this framework, the cultural memory of Inner Asia highlights the distinct but complementary roles of two key geographies: the Balkh Plain and the Ötüken-centered Orkhon Valley. Balkh, with its fertile lands and water resources, developed as a center where sedentary civilizations flourished and religious and cultural diversity thrived. In contrast, the Orkhon Valley was the sacred cradle of steppe polity and nomadic state traditions. Balkh hosted belief systems ranging from Zoroastrianism to Buddhism and Islam, and particularly with the Islamic period, became a center of

science, culture, and mysticism. The fact that the ancestors of Mawlānā Jalāl ad-Dīn Rūmī lived here grants the region a privileged place in Turkish-Islamic cultural history.

Meanwhile, the Orkhon Valley was the cradle of early steppe states such as the Göktürks and Uyghurs, and with the Orkhon Inscriptions, it became a focal point for steppe political thought and the emergence of written historical consciousness. At its heart lies Ötüken, which is not only a geographical entity but also a sacred and political center. Expressions found in the inscriptions—such as "If the Turkic Khagan sits in the Ötüken forest, there will be no trouble in the realm"—unequivocally associate Ötüken with the state's continuity and the nation's order as a sacred place.

Accordingly, Balkh stands as a transitional area between the steppe and sedentary culture, representing a hybrid lifestyle, cultural diversity, and the post-Islamic scientific tradition; whereas the Orkhon Valley and Ötüken at its core carry the legacy of nomadic political tradition, written historical consciousness, and sacred central belief. These two regions symbolize two complementary facets of steppe history: Balkh as the locus of transition and transformation, and Ötüken as the center of continuity and sanctity. The concrete traces of this historical transformation are most clearly seen in these two areas, echoing the proverb, "If a place begins as a tent, it ends as a city."

This historical case exemplifies that nomadism and sedentarism need not be mutually exclusive but rather complementary socio-economic models. Through their interactions, more flexible and inclusive social structures can be constructed. In this sense, the Balkh Model produces a historical experience that transcends binaries such as center-periphery, state-society, and sedentary-mobile.

The ongoing interaction between nomadic communities and sedentary ways of life in Afghanistan today transforms Balkh's historical legacy into a reference framework that extends beyond the past. Thus, beyond being a historical site, Balkh functions as a dynamic laboratory enabling the construction of new paradigms on historical continuity, social transformation, and spatial interaction in contemporary research.

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THE KHAGANIC MEMORIAL COMPLEX OF ELEKE SAZY IN THE TARBAGATAI REGION

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Introduction. The memorial complex discussed below is situated within the Tarbagatai district of East Kazakhstan oblast, 95 km south–southwest of the Aksuat village, on the third floodplain terrace of the right bank of the Kargyba river, in the eastern sector of the Eleke Sazy burial field. Its geographical coordinates are N 47° 19' 48.21'' E 082° 08' 10.37''.

Before the start of excavation, the stone construction of the temple, the rectangular ramparts, ditches, and platforms on which the components of the complex had been built were clearly visible on the surface. Faint traces of architectural structures were visible inside the annex attached to the eastern side of the temple.

The monument occupies an elevated insular area in the northern foothills of the Tarbagatai range, between two small streams that merge below to form the mountain river Kargyba. The complex is elongated along the east–west axis with a slight deviation—an orientation consistent with the cosmological and spatial principles characteristic of ancient Turkic monumental architecture.

The Eleke Sazy complex corresponds in its main features to what V. E. Voitov termed "khaganate elite" monuments, referred to in Old Turkic written sources as *barq* (DTS 1969, p. 84). Such monuments marked the sacralized space of the ancient Turkic *el* (*qorug*—"to protect, a consecrated place", Voitov 1996, p. 76–79)—and were primarily associated with the deification of a deceased khagan.

The emergence of a memorial complex in the Tarbagatai area reflects certain ethno-sociocultural processes in Central Asia connected with the rise of the ancient Turks to the historical arena (conventionally defined as the stages from "legendary ancestors to archaic empires", Klyashtorny 2005, p. 74, 87). These developments embodied new spiritual-ideological and religious-philosophical orientations as well as multifaceted interactions within the Central Asian space.

The Eleke Sazy *koryk* may have begun to form as early as the Xiongnu–Xianbei period, or even earlier, in the Early Saka period. The *barq* itself, however, belongs to the northern margins of the *On Ok El*, with the political center in Suyab in the Chuy Valley, dating to the 7th–8th centuries CE and later.

In its structure, planigraphy, and several other parameters, the complex is closely comparable to the "khaganate elite" memorial monuments of the Orkhon Valley, the best-known of which—those of Kultegin (731 CE) and Bilge Khagan (734 CE)—were erected during the Second Turkic Khaganate. At that time, the empire maintained close military-political and ethno-cultural contacts with Tang China, a circumstance that might have fostered reciprocal (though not unilateral) cultural influences (Schafer 1981; Khaslavskaya 2000). The Eleke Sazy monument displays especially close affinities with the complex at Mount Shiveet Ulaan in Central Mongolia, presumably built in 693 CE in honor of Elteris Khagan, the founder of the Second Turkic Empire (Samashev, Tsevendorzh, Ongaruly, Chotbaev 2016). Some scholars, however, attribute it to the Ongin complex (Malov 1959, p. 7; Sadri Maksudi Arsal 2002).

At the same time, several elements of the Eleke Sazy complex differ from the "standard" *barqs*, which generally lack labyrinth-corridors but feature numerous sculptural representations of members of various social strata, as well as zoomorphic and polymorphic statues with apotropaic and other symbolic functions. Such monuments are thought to reflect the hierarchical structure of the Khaganate.

In 2019, an excavation area measuring 104×64 m (divided into 8×8 m sectors, total 6,656 m²) was established at the site.

The overall length of the complex, oriented east–west, is 90 m, and its maximum width is 50.90 m. By its dimensions, it is comparable to the Shiveet Ulaan and Khosho-Tsaidam complexes, which are similar in structural and functional design. For comparison, the Bilge Khagan complex measures 90×60 m, that of Kultegin – 82.4×48 m, and Shiveet Ulaan – 107×45 m.

In 2021, during the step-by-step removal of layers in the central part of the temple, an oval-shaped stone enclosure was discovered at the base of the structure. It showed traces of intense burning and was filled with ash and stones. Within the enclosure and along the perimeter of the temple floor, a large number of artifacts were recorded, which will be discussed below.

Traces of fire, in the form of ash spots and burned areas, are recorded on nearly all exposed parts of the temple floor.

The Structure of the Memorial Complex. The monument is of considerable interest for the study of both religious-ideological phenomena and the technical and technological aspects of construction in ancient Turkic architectural art. A comparative-historical analysis of the Eleke Sazy complex will allow situating it within the broader system of monuments whose emergence is closely connected to the ethnocultural and ethnopolitical developments of Central Asia during the early medieval period.

The principle of constructing multicomponent ritual complexes can be traced back to the Early Saka period, when the monumental burial mounds of the elite featured a central above-ground structure containing a burial chamber, with a corridor adjoining its eastern side. The essential difference lies in the form: the (early) Saka burial monuments externally formed a single monolithic construction of pyramidal or spherical shape.

The Eleke Sazy complex consists of a dual stone-and-earth structure: a square central element—the temple—and, attached to its eastern side, a composite "corridor" with an adjoining labyrinth.

Ramparts. Both components of the complex are surrounded by separate earthen ramparts composed of loess mixed with gravel and soil. Joined together, these ramparts create a single ensemble, ensuring the structural unity (and sacral integrity) of the entire composition.

The rampart surrounding the temple is not closed, and is considered to be subrectangular in shape with rounded corners; in cross-section, the walls are trapezoidal with a broad base. Its dimensions, accounting for collapse, are 50.90×48.85 m; its height is 0.8 m, and the width at the base varies between 4.80 and 6.40 m.

The rampart surrounding the "corridor-labyrinth," the second component of the complex, has a U-shaped plan extending in the east–west direction. Its divided ends adjoin the eastern wall of the temple rampart. The length is 48.90 m, the total width is 30.20 m, and the height is 0.6 m; the width of each of the three walls at the base, taking the collapse into account, varies from 6.30 to 7.30 m. In the middle of its eastern wall, a wide opening (approximately 6 m) marks the location of the main outer gates through which pilgrims once entered the sacral space—thus constituting one of the key nodes of the sanctuary.

The extended eastern wall of the rampart has a break of 8 m in its center for the installation of the gates (or an arch) through which pilgrims, proceeding along the labyrinth and corridor, entered the sacred temple.

The ramparts of both structures were equipped with specific gates that provided an axial passage (from east to west), allowing worshippers to move through the labyrinth-corridor toward the altar section of the main temple.

Platforms. Both structural components of the ritual complex were erected upon tightly packed loess surfaces mixed with small stones, forming subrectangular platforms that rose visibly above the surrounding terrain.

These platforms, while primarily technical in function, apparently also held ritual significance.

The platform of the corridor-labyrinth is slightly elongated and rectangular in plan with rounded corners (Fig. 8). It served as the foundation for the corridor-like pathway with its labyrinth, along which pilgrims made their way toward the temple. Its length is 37 m, width – 16.50 m, and height is about 0.30 m. The light gray loess and gravel composition contrasts sharply with the dark chestnut-colored local soil.

It should be noted that the shell-like surface that covers the main temple was made exclusively of brown, light brown, and reddish river stones. Such a deliberate color arrangement may have carried a symbolic meaning associated with the ritual practices performed at the sanctuary.

The platform of the temple is square in plan, measuring 38 × 38 m and 0.40 m high. Its construction material is identical to the previous one.

Ditch. A noticeable structural element of the complex is the ditch surrounding the platforms. About 0.45 m deep, it was created by removing soil, giving the entire monument additional expressiveness. Like the platforms, the ditch may have served multiple functions, including participation in ritual performances.

Together with the outer rampart, the ditch might have symbolically delineated the boundary between the sacred and the profane realms. "Transitions to other worlds"—associated with ritual ceremonies and pilgrimages—occurred at the areas of rampart and ditch where gates were installed, possibly in accordance with calendar cycles.

Gates. Remnants of both outer and inner gates were identified in the rampart zones. In the "standard" large khaganate elite memorial complexes of the Orkhon Valley

and Central Mongolia, figures of guardian spirits—polymorphic mythological creatures resembling wolf-dragons and others—were commonly placed near the entrance gates under Buddhist influence. Their absence at Eleke Sazy may indirectly indicate a more archaic architectural and ritual tradition. The gates, and the act of passing through them, undoubtedly carried deep ritual and semantic significance. The remains of both outer and inner gates of the complex, as well as the construction stones, were recorded during the course of the site's investigation.

Next, we shall examine the main components of the memorial complex.

The Labyrinth-Corridor and Main Temple. The remains of a three-part structure were found beneath the turf layer, among the collapsed stone debris. These remains consisted of a subrectangular central building with two adjoining extensions on either side, identified as a labyrinth and a narrowing passage-corridor leading toward the western end.

The Labyrinth. One of the most original and distinctive features of the Eleke Sazy complex, setting it apart from all other known monuments of this type, is the labyrinth, located at the easternmost section of the platform, directly opposite the outer gate. The labyrinth, as the most intriguing element of the complex, was fully exposed after the removal of the stone debris.

It was constructed—like the entire three-part complex—entirely of slate slabs, laid in several horizontal layers without using any binding material. In some places, up to six or seven layers of slate remained intact, with a single slab measuring 5–7 cm in thickness. The exclusive use of slate as a building material appears to have been intentional rather than incidental.

Judging by the width of the walls and the number of preserved horizontal courses, the height of the labyrinth walls might have reached about the waist level of an adult.

The passage itself was narrow, designed for the movement of a single person at a time, and there was apparently no roof or ceiling above it.

The uniquely shaped narrow labyrinth, through which only a single pilgrim could pass into the main sanctuary at a time, was likely an innovation in the ritual of passage or reflects ritual practices among the ancient Turkic people that remain unknown to us.

The Polygonal Chamber. Between the labyrinth described above and the corridor with its narrowing end was a polygonal chamber with an axial passage. In the central

part of the chamber, the remains of a rectangular platform were identified, which had been covered with flat slate slabs. Some of the slabs of this construction were found in an upright position. It is presumed that a stone statue of the khagan was once placed upon this platform. Small fragments of calcined bones, charcoal and ash were also recorded in this area.

A wheel-made clay vessel, with a handle and horizontal relief ornamental bands, was found in situ at the southeastern corner of this platform. The vessel most likely originated from some southern periphery of the *On Ok El* confederation. Close analogies are found among the ceramic assemblages of Panjikent dating to the 6th–8th centuries (Belenitsky, Bentovich, and Bol'shakov 1973, p. 51–57).

This chamber likely played a key role in performing certain ritual and ceremonial actions associated with veneration of the khagan's statue and purification by fire. After performing the prescribed ritual procedures within the chamber, pilgrims proceeded further toward the main temple through the narrowing stone corridor.

The Stone Statue of the Khagan. As previously noted, a stone statue identified as "khaganic" in character originates from this complex (Samashev 2012, p. 400–419). It is executed in the canonical style characteristic of khagan statues that are found primarily in northern Mongolia and other regions inhabited by the medieval Turkic peoples.

The khagan is represented in a seated position with crossed legs; his right hand rests upon his right thigh, while with his left hand, held at chest level, he grasps a ritual vessel.

As we believe, the statue was originally installed at the center of the chamber on a rectangular pedestal, of which only the base elements have survived. The sculpture was found fragmented and displaced from its original setting. It is currently on display at the National Museum of the Republic of Kazakhstan.

The Stone Corridor. From the polygonal chamber, a sharply narrowing stone "corridor" led westward toward the temple.

The corridor, constructed of slate slabs, represents the final element of the three-part structure, which forms an integral component of the "khaganate elite" complex of the ancient Turkic period at Eleke Sazy. The western end of the corridor appears to cut through the rampart that surrounds the temple and extends directly to its base.

The corridor is paved with stone slabs, just like the labyrinth. The deliberate narrowing of the corridor near the temple's entrance, at the base, was apparently intended to ensure that pilgrims could enter the sanctuary one by one.

In its planigraphic configuration—the combination of the narrowing stone corridor and the chamber containing the statue—the structure broadly recalls the external layout of the Xiongnu royal burial complexes.

The Temple. The principal element of the memorial complex is a grand stone temple built upon a rectangular platform and enclosed by a square earthen rampart. In its current state, the temple's form resembles a truncated pyramid with four (or more) sides, though due to the collapse of its upper portions, it now appears as a rounded structure.

A funnel-shaped depression and faint outlines of a rectangular structure were discernible on the surface of the construction.

The main construction material of the temple consists of broken and river stones. In the shell layer, multicolored, rounded river stones predominate, giving the structure a distinctive appearance.

During the removal of the "shell covering" by layers and the collapse of stones on the temple's surface, traces of single-row masonry made of slate slabs were recorded along the upper edges of its eastern and southern walls. On the lateral sections of the structure, remnants of horizontal systematic masonry were also visible. These elements serve as key indicators for identifying the overall construction and architectural features of the temple. The investigation of the temple has not yet been completed, which is why significant revisions to its architectural and structural interpretation may be expected in the future.

At the central section of the temple floor, an oval-shaped enclosure built of large stone blocks was uncovered. Inside this stone enclosure were layers of light-gray ash and burnt soil, mixed with stones and metal artifacts.

Traces of fire—dark patches and light-brown scorched lines—were recorded across nearly all of the exposed areas of the temple floor excavated in 2021.

Thus, the presence of a special structure in the form of a stone enclosure built at the very bottom of the temple, together with evidence of burning, thick layers of ash mixed with river stones, and the discovery of prestigious items (of gold, silver, and iron) within it, as well as other indirect data, clearly indicate that a sacred cremation

ritual was performed here—the burning of the body of a "departed" chieftain, a local khagan of the Ashina lineage.

At the site of the cremation, a stone temple—with the aforementioned adjoining structures—was subsequently constructed, apparently in several stages.

Certain architectural elements of the Eleke Sazy complex differ from the "classical" *barq* structures of northern Mongolia, where labyrinth-corridors and, most importantly, traces of cremation are absent. However, a large number of sculptural representations have been documented there, depicting members of various social groups, as well as numerous zoomorphic and polymorphic statues serving protective and other symbolic functions (Samashev et al. 2016).

It is believed that such complexes symbolize the structure of the political organization of the khaganate.

Further study of the inner temple structures—as well as of the external components—of the Eleke Sazy complex and the expansion of the excavation area are expected to bring significant revisions to our understanding of the ritual and ceremonial practices that took place here. It remains unclear whether these practices were performed as single events or followed a cyclical pattern.

The Characteristics of the Finds. In addition to the stone disc discovered among the stones of the temple structure and the ceramic jug with a handle buried in the southeastern corner of the rectangular construction within the polygonal chamber of the corridor-labyrinth.

The jug features a distinctly defined wide cylindrical neck, an expanding ovoid body, and gently sloping shoulders. The rim, triangular in cross-section and profiled inward, forms a small inner recess or "pocket"; on the exterior, it is encircled by a shallow groove and a raised band. The elongated body is decorated with low-relief horizontal bands, produced, according to E. Dubyagina of the Margulan Institute of Archaeology, "as a result of work on the potter's wheel." The lower part of the body was finished by trimming on a rotating wheel. The vessel was manufactured in several stages; on the inner surface of the neck, clear traces of wheel-turning are visible. On the exterior, across the shoulder, there are horizontal incised lines forming a wide belt. A joint line between the neck and rim is also evident. The handle is attached at its upper end to the rim and at its lower end to the body. Its surface is ornamented with vertical incised impressions, creating an additional groove-like feature.

Dimensions of the jug: height – 40.5 cm; base diameter – 14.5 cm; maximum body diameter – 26 cm; rim diameter – 11.5 cm, and 14 cm across the raised band; neck height – 6.2 cm; handle thickness – 1.6 cm; handle height – 11 cm.

The vessel is thin-walled (thickness of the upper part of the walls is 0.6 cm). Both the interior and exterior surfaces are brick-red in color, as well as the core. The firing is good and even, carried out in an oxidizing environment. The outer surface of the vessel is coated with a light slip. The clay body is homogeneous; in cross-section, the fabric appears uniform and well mixed. The vessel was made from ferruginous clay; the raw material contains quartz, feldspar, oolite, a small amount of mica and amphibole, with grain sizes ranging from 0.034 to 0.077 mm (very fine sand). The temper consists of sand and organic matter (manure of ruminant animals).

The majority of the objects were discovered within the stone enclosure at the bottom of the temple, mixed with ash, small calcined bone fragments, and stones. These include both fragmented and intact items made of gold, silver, iron, and bone. Among them are distinguished prestigious and ordinary elite objects, as well as various other categories and types of artifacts. We believe that some of these items belonged to the deceased khagan himself, while others were deposited by participants in the cremation ritual as evidence of their involvement in the sacred act of sending the ruler's immortal soul into the afterlife and as declaration of their devotion to serve him there—as warriors, companions, etc.

These beliefs are apparently associated with the deliberately deposited or buried assemblages of objects—offerings (*priklad*)—found in various parts of the temple floor, which had been exposed to fire.

Among the finds within the enclosure, two gold and one silver buckle were identified, as well as ornamented fittings decorated with geometricized patterns. The latter are of the same type but can be divided into two groups by size. The ornamental composition of both groups is identical: a four-petaled rosette with a prominently enlarged and deeply incised central circle. Four-petaled rosettes have been a favored decorative motif adorning the surfaces of various objects from antiquity to the present across many cultures (Stewart 2020).

The gold accessories discovered within the enclosure, at the site of the khagan's cremation, belong to sets of composite belts. Considering the exceptional imagery depicted on two of the belt plaques—presumably representing the "Great Khagan" (or khagans) of the Ashina lineage—these composite belts should be regarded as supreme insignia and symbols of authority (Dobzhansky 1990, p. 45–80).

Small heart-shaped belt plaques are also of interest; the design of their front surfaces is associated with the head of a ram. Elements of zoomorphism are present, for instance, in the belt set from Burial Yustyd XXIV in the Altai (Kubarev 2005, p. 50).

We shall now examine in greater detail the images on the pendant belt plaques.

Pendant Belt Plaque—1. The condition of the first gold plaque from the composite belt, which was found in the fire beneath a large rounded stone, is generally satisfactory. It consists of a front ornamental fitting serving as a frame for the pendant strap, bearing relief images, a clamping plate on the reverse side that precisely follows its contours, and several small nails used to attach the piece to the leather belt.

Compositionally, the object is gold (95.7%) with silver, zinc, magnesium, lead, and very little copper. Interestingly, the nails, in addition to containing gold (85.7%), also have a high proportion of silver (nearly 9%) and zinc (about 4%). It is noted that zinc facilitates the smelting of metal (Kubarev 2005, p. 53).

The overall contours of the object are fairly well preserved. However, on the front surface—between the depiction of the throne and the figure of the servant on the left—a damaged area has formed. In the form of a melted depression with a small perforation, it was apparently caused as a result of exposure to intense directed heat.

The plaque has an overall segment-shaped (portal-like) outline; its edges are adorned with nine petal-shaped projections—festons—with thin rims slightly bent toward the front. Its dimensions: length – 3 cm, width – 3.7 cm, thickness – 0.3 cm.

The upper five petal-shaped projections (lobes) form a kind of "cloud-like" background resembling a throne back with curved contour. They are also decorated with vegetal motifs in the form of hanging leaves and round fruits.

The two lower lateral lobes are deliberately made noticeably wider in order to accommodate depictions of two additional kneeling figures, evidently court attendants or servants.

In the lower part of the object, there is an elongated oval slot with rounded corners, intended for a strap. It features a slight rim and a small triangular projection in the center. The slot, like some comparable examples, has in its upper middle section a so-called "beak" (*mysok*) (Raspopova 1980, p. 89). This final element appears to complete the vertical axis of symmetry running downward from the "cloud-shaped lobe" above the khagan's crown, ending at the point below where the heels of the enthroned figure meet.

On the other side of the artifact, a partially melted (from the fire) clamping plate for securing the leather strap has been preserved, along with small gold nails or pins used to fasten the plaque to the belt.

The artifact's architectonics are executed with great care and are strictly subordinated to a single aim: to depict, within a limited surface, a proclamatory narrative that manifests the sacral nature of authority in ancient Turkic society—through a concise yet realistic image of a crowned sovereign, majestically enthroned in a canonical pose and surrounded by servants or officials (possibly embodying—in terms of codified symbolism—"my people," the *kara budun*).

From an art-historical standpoint the piece may be regarded as a work of small-form toreutics with original anthropomorphic decor (Korol 2008, p. 476–485).

We shall now turn to the genre composition depicted on the front surface of the object—first, however, considering individually the attributes and elements of the figure's costume.

The Crown. There is a complex crown depicted on the khagan's head—an attribute serving as a sacred symbol of the legitimacy and divine origin of absolute power.

In the sacralization of power and authority among the ancient Turks—as among many other cultures—the crown played a special role as a symbol organized along the spatial axes. It visually embodies the idea of the heaven-sent mandate to rule over the "servants" living on the "brown" earth.

On the frontal part of the crown is positioned the main vertical shield, arched and rounded at the top. This element bears the principal semantic narrative of the composition and was possibly adorned with stepped—or petal-shaped—outer projections.

Owing to severe fire damage, many details melted; it is possible that the front shield originally had an emblem in the form of a three-dimensional bird—phoenix, as crowns of the Great Khagans of the Ashina dynasty were sometimes adorned (cf. the treasure of Bilge Khagan and certain sculptural depictions, e.g., Niri Khagan).

On either side are two prongs (lobes), rounded at the top and noticeably inclined outward. Such elements are typically attached to the broad horizontal, plate base of the crown, which in many cases is richly inlaid and further supplemented with triangular prongs or border frames.

A distinctive feature here is a fourth, posterior, petaloid shield that exceeds the others in size, imparting structural originality and special semantic emphasis to this sacred attribute of power.

Ribbons from the Crown. On either side of the crown are depicted two descending ribbons that form a symmetrical circular outline around the khagan's head, extending to the level of his chest. Their bifurcated, pointed ends pass beneath the shoulders and are directed upward.

The inclusion of the ribbon element as an important component of ceremonial attire in the creation of the iconic image of the ancient Turkic khagan emphasizes a distinctive character of the composition. At the same time, it is evident that this is not a mere decorative motif enhancing the ornamental field, but rather a crucial bearer of sacred meaning—one associated with the divine right to supreme power bestowed by Heaven.

In this regard, the myth recorded in written sources about the strangling of the throat with a silk cloth during the enthronement of a claimant appears particularly noteworthy (Bichurin 1950, p. 229). Therefore, the inclusion of such an element in the official emblem of the ruler is not of a purely decorative nature but carries profound meaning, rooted in the idea of the divine origin of royal power and the ways it was sacralized in ancient Turkic society. If the ritual of symbolic strangulation (with a ribbon!) of the future sovereign and the subsequent deification of his image indeed took place in the ancient Turkic society, it could have been derived from a typologically related ritual of divine election in shamanic practice. The depiction of the ribbon encircling the head in the form of a halo lends the composition on the plaque from Eleke Sazy in the Tarbagatai a particular solemnity, while simultaneously emphasizing the celestial origin of the Turkic emperor—"heaven-like" or "heaven-born."

However, the ribbon, artistically shaped and passed beneath the khagan's arms, most likely codifies certain phenomena within the religious and mythological system of the ancient Turks (Stebleva 1972, p. 213–220). At this stage of their cultural development, they were strongly influenced by Manichaean religious and philosophical teachings, which in several regions of the Turkic world rose to the level of a state religion (Kyzlasov 1999).

The tradition of passing a special colored ribbon across the shoulders is known from East Turkestan wall paintings depicting Manichaean deities.

The depiction of the ancient Turkic khagan with such symbolism and in a specific iconographic manner reminiscent of ecclesiastical painting likens him to the Manichaean Supreme Deity.

It is noteworthy that the general outline of the ribbon element depicted on the plaque evokes associations with the Turgesh (?) tamgas from the foothill regions of the Tien Shan (Tabaldiyev 2003) and from Zhetysu.

The Cup. Next, among the other depicted objects, there is a traditional goblet for a sacred drink held in the right hand. A vessel of similar form occurs in the treasures of Bilge Khagan.

The Throne. This is the most intriguing element of the entire genre composition. The ancient Turkic emperor is shown seated on a throne—one of the principal attributes and symbols of his absolute and sacred authority.

Particular care is devoted to the foreparts of horses—heads, necks, chests, and forelegs. The animal heads have pointed ears and elegant necks; they face opposite directions, unlike typical armrests facing forward. That is why these sculptural images should likely not be regarded as mere armrests.

It is possible that the basis of this type of throne was formed by horizontally joined sculptures of the foreparts of animals—horses, deer, rams, and others. In this arrangement, the seat itself would have been covered with the hide of a beast, possibly that of a leopard or tiger.

The Eleke Sazy plaque shows a backless variant of the Turkic imperial throne—usable in military campaign conditions and during major state ceremonies in the royal camp.

It is important to mention the depiction of a similar throne type (with deer foreparts and forelegs with hooves), covered by a carpet, on the Möngöt-Khösöö stele in western Mongolia, first documented by G. N. Potanin in 1876–1877 and redrawn by D. Bayar in 1996 (Bayar 2007).

The Mongolian example may represent a special (campaign) variant of the backless zoomorphic throne.

It may be assumed that the jeweler, working within the limited surface of the object and seeking compositional optimization, chose to merge the depiction of the throne's backrest with the overall contour of the pendant plaque and, due to the difficulty of rendering the three-dimensional armrests in perspective, turned the sculpted horse

heads in profile, facing opposite directions. However, it appears more likely that such thrones originally lacked backrests—features typically associated with palace receptions.

It should be noted that the regalia of power—in which the throne and crown of the Turkic emperor occupy a central place—has received little attention in scholarly literature. This is largely because researchers have relied primarily on written sources, owing to the scarcity or absence of material remains and visual representations. One such text states:

> "…By the will of the Turkic Heaven and the Turkic sacred Homeland, I became the khan; when I became khan, the Turkic beys and the people, who had been sorrowful in the face of death, now looked upward (toward the throne) with calm eyes, rejoicing. When I myself ascended the throne, I established such firm power over the people dwelling in the four corners (that is, in all directions of the world)" (Malov 1959, p. 20).

Among the other motifs on this plaque are dishes in the hands of the kneeling servants in the lower part of the composition. Similar dishes are present among the items from the memorial complex of Bilge Khagan.

We shall now return to the image of the khagan himself, depicted on the front of the pendant plaque from the ceremonial belt.

There is tightly braided hair beneath the crown, falling to the shoulders.

It can be seen that the khagan's face was originally rendered with great care, emphasizing his individual features; however, as a result of the intense heat to which the object was exposed, the image has become significantly blurred.

At the top of the image, there are faint traces of the triangular lapel of a robe, while on the waist there are also indistinct remnants of a belt and garment folds. Closer to the knees, the front panels of the robe that are split appear to be faintly visible. No clear indications of weapon depictions are present.

The plaque preserves the canonical pose of the ruler intended for immediate visual recognition during official receptions and ceremonies. The bent left arm resting on the thigh and the widely splayed knees impart particular dignity and severity. The folds of trousers falling over the boot tops further enhance the noble image of the "heavenly" khagan.

An example of luxurious ceremonial trousers, richly ornamented and worn outside the boots, appears in the sculptural depiction of a figure from the memorial complex on Mount Shivet Uul in the Orkhon Valley, and even more vividly—with deep folds—on the statue from Ogomor in Mongolia. The prototypes of such trousers were likely lightweight, wide silk *shalvar*-type garments.

Pendant Belt Plaque—2. The second plaque with a similar composition is heavily damaged: one third of its left side was melted by fire, resulting in the complete loss of the sculpted horse's head from the throne, the kneeling figure holding a dish, and the bifurcated end of the ribbon.

On this plaque, the three-horned crown on the khagan's head is better preserved and shows somewhat different constructional solutions than on the first plaque. The contours of the face, eyebrows, and eyes are more visible, while the base of the nose and the chin are somewhat blurred; locks of hair over the shoulders, with occasional twisted braid segments, are clearly visible.

The feet are shown pointing in opposite directions; the depiction clearly reveals high heels and slightly pointed toes of the footwear. The slightly raised tips of the boots seem to press on the hanging ends of animal hides that cover the surface of the zoomorphic throne's seat.

The figures of the two servants, placed in the lower part of the composition on either side of the belt slot, clearly depict a scene from a court ceremony in which they, kneeling on one knee, present to the ruler on a dish something of importance—but not food. Seated on the throne and holding in his right hand a ritual vessel containing a sacred drink, the khagan would scarcely be receiving food from the hands of his court attendants.

The iconography of the crowned khagan on the throne accompanied by kneeling figures (perhaps personifying the "sons of men" living between the blue sky and the brown earth) appears to be an imperial symbol.

Apparently, this emblem was required to be carried by the highest-ranking titled officials of the state, in one form or another—such as a medallion worn around the neck or on the chest, a ring, a composite belt, etc.

A composite belt bearing images of "Great Khagans" may have served as an investiture item presented to junior khagans upon their accession to office by the sovereign of the *On Ok El*, whose court was located in Suyab and Mynbulak (Qianquan),

in the region of Taraz or Merke, following its transfer by Khagan Tun Shekhu (Ton-Yabghu), who reigned from 618 to 630 CE (Bichurin 1950, p. 283–284).

When the empire was divided into ten domains, Shabolio Khilashi Khagan granted each *shad*—a regional ruler—a single (possibly golden) arrow as a symbol of authority. From this derives the Chinese designation "Ten She" (Bichurin 1950, p. 286), meaning "the land of ten arrows" (Kychanov 2010, p. 128). Consequently, it may be assumed that, in addition to the golden arrow, the subordinate rulers (*yabghu*, *shad*, and others; for an analysis of the titulature, see Kyuner 1961, p. 327–328; Kubatin 2016) could have received from the emperor of the *On Ok El* a golden belt as well—adorned with images of the Great Khagans of the Ashina house (or perhaps even bearing their own portraits).

It remains unclear which historical figures are depicted on the gold plaques of the "investiture" belt from Eleke Sazy. It may be assumed that the images represent the founder of the Great Turkic Khaganate, Bumin (Tu-men *Yili Kehan*; Tishin 2019, p. 133), and Mukan Khagan (552–572), under whose rule "the Turks reached the peak of their power, with a territory extending from the Caspian Sea in the west to the Liaodong Bay in the east" (Ganiev 2017, p. 189)—figures whose heroic merits and divine image were undoubtedly acknowledged and respected throughout the ancient Turkic world.

In the KTb.1 text, alongside Bumin Khagan, Istemi (Dizabul) Yabghu Khagan (d. 575) is named as a founder of the state, considered the "Khagan of the Ten Tribes" (Malov 1951, p. 36; Klyashtorny 2005, p. 93); his iconographic image might likewise have been represented on an investiture emblem of this kind.

Notably, the coinage of certain rulers of the *On Ok El* (mainly in the Transoxiana oases) bears their own names and images, suggesting that products of this kind could indeed be produced given the political will. On the coin of Tun Yabghu, one of the most prominent rulers of the *On Ok El*—during whose reign the khaganate maintained close military-political contacts with Byzantium, Sasanian Iran, and the Caucasus, and who fought on the Byzantine side (for which Emperor Heraclius placed his own crown upon the Turkic ruler's head)—there appears an inscription interpreted by G. Babayarov as "Divine Tun Jabghu-Khagan". Crucially for our analysis, on the obverse of this coin he is depicted seated on a zoomorphic throne (Babayarov 2005, p. 9–10; Babayarov 2011; Babayarov & Kubatin 2014, p. 62–69; see also: Tishin 2021, p. 140–144).

The Khagan's pose is canonical, as before—confident and authoritative, seated on a throne with horse heads. The horse head is carefully modeled with ears and eye; short incisions indicate the hanging mane. Animal hides seem to be cast over the seat, their limbs hanging at the ruler's feet. A foreleg of the sculpted horse shown in profile symbolizes the supporting leg of the emperor's throne.

At the lower right stands a kneeling figure in profile (servant or symbol of the *qara budun*?) presenting something on a dish. The ruler wears an elaborate hairstyle and a long robe with folds. Though placed in the foreground, the kneeling figure is half the size of the khagan.

This raises a question whether these are different historical figures, or variations in representing the same khagan, given the differing crown constructions? At this stage, both possibilities must be regarded as plausible. In this context, it is appropriate to recall once again the episode in which the Byzantine emperor presented his own crown to Tong Yabghu, the ruler of the *On Ok El.* During his long reign, Tun Yabghu naturally possessed his own crown as well; thus, a historical figure could have been represented in such sacral-symbolic artifacts in more than one manner.

Direct iconographic matches are yet unknown to us. Among the closest analogies is what B. I. Marshak terms a "royal banquet scene" on a Sogdian silver dish (Marshak 1971, fig. 29). The Sogdian toreutist may have been poorly acquainted with steppe artistic canons and committed eclectic inaccuracies in rendering the crown, throne, robe, and especially the leg position of the seated Khagan—or, by the patron's design, sought to depict the Turkic Khagan, sovereign over Sogd, in locally familiar aristocratic attributes. A clumsy forgery cannot be excluded (Marshak 1971, p. 82). Marshak's classification as a banquet scene perhaps requires revision: a king seated with scepter in the right hand would scarcely be feasting in the throne hall. Rather, the scene symbolically conveys the image of a sovereign ruler, as well as the wealth, abundance, and sociocultural order within the empire.

To conclude the description of the gold artifacts, we also note a round gold plate bearing stamped images.

Other Objects. Among the noteworthy finds from the stone enclosure at the temple floor is a zoomorphic amulet made of rock crystal.

Among the other objects discovered there are burnt fragments of bone (or antler) plaques from a quiver, engraved with geometric patterns. The width of the bone plaques is approximately 0.5–0.6 cm.

There were discovered numerous fragments of chainmail made of iron and copper rings within the ash layers inside the stone enclosure, along with bronze buckles and a belt fitting closely resembling, in their typological characteristics, the gold specimens described above.

The deposited bundles (*priklads*) on the temple floor vary in composition.

The main bundle comprised iron and bronze stirrups, girth buckles, arrowheads, bits with psalia, an iron war pick (*klevez*), knives of various types, an adze, strap distributors, lamellar plates, rings, and other items, buried together in a small pit at the bottom of the temple floor. Among them is also an iron plate buckle with a hook at the end, presumably from a belt.

Of the iron stirrups, about eleven are well preserved; three are bronze. All are of the same type: massive, elongated plate forms with rims on short narrowed necks and oval-elongated bows. The treads are uniformly very wide with central stiffening ribs. The iron stirrups are inlaid with silver plates in various patterns; some wide treads have shaped cutouts.

In the same bundle with the stirrups were ten complete massive girth buckles of the type commonly referred to as "with a tongue on a swivel".

Particularly original are bronze bits, whose mouthpieces are wrapped with four spiked plates. In their principal elements they do not differ from known types: the S-shaped cheekpieces (psalia) are rectangular and flat in cross-section, and the mouthpieces are short.

It is also important to mention iron arrowheads of various types, a battle axe-pick, knives, and other finds.

Another bundle (*priklad*) consisting of a bronze lamp with handle, a bronze bowl, and an iron tripod was found in the southern part of the temple floor.

The lamp evidently played an important role in funerary-memorial rites within the temple, as suggested by its mention in the Bilge Khagan text. Inside the lamp were traces of charred twigs of some plant and a dark ash-like substance.

A third bundle comprised a bronze dish with movable side handles and a base plate (now lost), along with a bronze cup.

Questions of Dating. The Eleke Sazy monument is the only memorial structure of "khaganate elite" character so far known in Kazakhstan and, to date, the westernmost monument of this type within the distribution area of ancient Turkic cultures.

Memorials closely related to Eleke Sazy in their architectural and planning structure, religious and mythological content, socio-political orientation, and functional purpose are known from northern Mongolia. Among them is the Shiveet Ulaan complex, erected, presumably in 693 CE, in honor of Elteris Khagan (Samashev 2016, p. 55–56). Other comparable monuments include those at Tarni, Shiveet Uul, Mogoyn Shine Us, Khushuun Tal, and others, which appeared in the 7th–8th centuries (Voitov 1996, p. 23, 25, 28).

The variety of artifact categories recovered from Eleke Sazy suggests that the complex may have been constructed during the active phase of the *On Ok El*'s development—socially, economically, militarily, and ideologically—within the mid-7th to (mid-)8th century.

Some of the artifact types—such as elongated-plate stirrups with broad treads inlaid with silver designs, massive arrowheads with perforated blades, and others—continued to be used in subsequent periods of time, even within different ethno-cultural contexts. The results of radiocarbon analysis are not yet available; they may, however, provide important adjustments to the dating of the complex.

The most emblematic finds from Eleke Sazy—those discovered at the cremation site, namely the elements of composite belts made of precious metals—have numerous parallels among known Sogdian and Turkic examples. Issues of their classification, typology, and chronological attribution have been thoroughly developed in scholarly research (Kovalevskaya 1979; Raspopova 1980, pp. 86–99; Dobzhansky 1990, p. 30–44; Ovchinnikova 1990, p. 23–44; Kubarev 2005, p. 48–59, and others).

The assemblage of artifacts discovered at the site corresponds to the period of the *On Ok El* and may be dated broadly to the 7th–8th centuries.

The primary dating materials are the iron and bronze stirrups from the main bundle *(priklad)* assemblage.

The origin, classification, and typology, as well as the cultural and chronological attribution of medieval stirrups, have already been extensively addressed in the works of several generations of scholars (Gavrilova 1965; Ambroz 1973; Kyzlasov 1973; Vainshtein & Kryukov 1984; Savinov 1984; Ovchinnikova 1990, fig. 47; Neverov 1998; Kubarev 2005, p. 131–133; Azbelov 2014, and others). Therefore,

there is no need to elaborate on these issues in detail within the scope of the present study.

The iron and bronze stirrups from our complex belong to a single type—"elongated-plate with rims (flanges)" (Neverov 1998). They feature very broad treads with stiffening ribs; some specimens display decorative cutouts and silver-plate inlays forming various ornamental compositions.

The literature notes that such massive wide-tread stirrups were used by heavily armed cavalry, and that the decorative cutouts and ornamental silver inlays indicate their association with the elite of ancient Turkic society.

In A. K. Ambroz's typological chart, such stirrups—with elongated plate strap ears and rims for the stirrup leathers—are dated to the period between the 7th and early 8th centuries (Ambroz 1973, p. 84, fig. 2).

Thus, the stirrups from the Eleke Sazy complex can be dated to within the 7th–8th centuries; however, it is clear that this type of horse equipment continued to develop throughout the subsequent periods of ancient Turkic history.

The stirrup from Kurgan 11 of the Balyk-Sook I burial ground in the Altai region is dated by G. V. Kubarev to the 8th–first half of the 9th century (Kubarev 2002, p. 92, fig. 2.14). The persistence this stirrup type (as well as other categories of horse gear and weaponry) after the 8th century likely reflects ethno-sociocultural processes in the region associated with the presence of the medieval Kyrgyz (see Dashkovsky 2015, p. 98–120, and others).

Stirrups typologically and chronologically close to those from Eleke Sazy are known from numerous Altai sites and neighboring regions (Khudyakov 2005; Teterin 2000; Suleimenov & Ilyushin 2005, p. 165, fig. 1; Kyzlasov 1979, p. 134, fig. 93.3, and others).

As to the massive iron girth buckles "with a tongue on a swivel"—B. B. Ovchinnikova believes that they appeared in the 8th century (Ovchinnikova 1990, p. 121–122). Structurally similar buckles occur together with massive stirrups with plate loops on the Yenisey, which L. A. Evtyukhova once dated to the 7th–8th centuries (Evtyukhova 1948, p. 16–17, fig. 15). Comparable examples are also known from Tuva (Kyzlasov 1979, p. 133, fig. 92.9). G. V. Kubarev dates them to the 8th–9th centuries (Kubarev 2005, p. 135), while D. G. Savinov suggests that on the basis of their design, two new buckle types developed in the 9th–10th centuries, one of which is closely related to the Kyrgyz type (Savinov 1984, p. 137).

In the Tarbagatai, early examples of this buckle may already have been in use in the 7th century. Given their imperfect practical design, they appear to fall out of use by the late 8th century, although modernized versions occur in Yenisey Kyrgyz culture in the 9th–10th centuries (Savinov 1984, p. 137–138; Grach, Savinov & Dluzhnevskaya 1998, p. 29–31).

Among the arrowheads we note a rare large three-bladed tanged type. It features a generally elongated triangular outline and perforations in the blades, but differs from known types in its sharp, downward-directed barbs. The barbed, broad perforated blades lend the piece a certain originality.

According to the classification proposed by V. V. Gorbunov, similar (though not identical) whistling arrowhead types were distributed in the 6th–8th centuries (Gorbunov 2006, p. 27–46, figs. 23–38).

The remaining arrowhead types from Eleke Sazy also fall within the same chronological range (Khudyakov 1986, and others).

The Eleke Sazy complex was constructed during the active phase of the *On Ok El*'s development—socially, economically, militarily, and ideologically—within the mid-7th to (mid-)8th century, a chronology confirmed by radiocarbon analysis.

Discussion. Within the worldview and ideological system of ancient Turkic society, the sacralization and justification of the Khagan's divine origin, along with the legitimation of his right to rule (Torlanbaeva 2003; Klyashtorny 2004, p. 100–103; Kychanov 2010, and others), occupied an exceptional place—repeatedly documented in the monuments of written tradition.

The ancient Turkic socio-political and military titulature and the system of court ceremonies—inheriting many elements from the Xiongnu–Xianbei predecessor societies and refined amid continuous rivalry and confrontation with the Tang Empire—were extraordinarily complex and multistaged. They directly reflected ideas of the power and immutability of imperial order, as well as the sacredness of the Khagan's authority and of his own personality, described in the texts as "godlike" and "appointed by Heaven."

The cult of the divine ruler, proclamation of his heroic deeds, and the formation of corresponding institutions—including temples and other structures—are characteristic of many forms of state organization in the ancient world (Koshelenko & Gaibov 2010, p. 141–146; Trepavlov 2004).

In a number of studies, Sogdian, Sasanian Iranian, and Chinese influences are considered decisive in the formation of Turkic institutions of power (Drobyshev 2018). At the same time, a one-sided approach risks underestimating the agency of the steppe empire-builders themselves, reducing their efforts to the mere adaptation of external institutions. This is a highly complex scholarly problem—primarily sociocultural and political—in which the emergence of administrative hierarchy and bureaucracy, court ceremonial practices, religious-ideological settings, and other mechanisms ensuring social functioning must be considered. In addressing these and related questions, recent archaeological discoveries, alongside written sources, may prove particularly valuable.

The Eleke Sazy complex was erected at the site of the cremation of a deceased "subordinate" Khagan, apparently of the junior branch of the "golden" Ashina dynasty. His court (perhaps the summer headquarters) as ruler of one of the "ten arrows" may have been located in the northern Tarbagatai foothills, not far from the complex. Judging by the monument's *barq*, parameters—which in no way fall short of the northern Mongolian khaganate elite complexes—the deceased "minor" Khagan, in addition to his undeniable lifetime merits, likely maintained very close relations with the ruling Orkhon Ashina house, as did, for instance, Bars-bey, who, according to the text, was granted not only the khagan title but also the sister of Kultegin in marriage (Malov 1951, p. 38; KTb, 20).

Here we observe features of a "rite of passage" not previously recorded in known "khaganic" complexes: the "consecration" (or burial) of the cremation ashes at the pyre locus (together with personal belongings and offerings), followed by the (staged?) construction of a temple above it.

The lack of archaeological evidence to date for cremated remains of the ancient Turkic elite within such complexes led to the scholarly view that the cremated ashes were buried elsewhere (Tishin 2021, p. 42, 49, and others), meaning outside the *barq* territory. Part of this debate stems from the fact that no northern Mongolian "khaganate elite" complex has yet been fully excavated on a large scale. Meanwhile, some memorial complexes in that region include tile-paved enclosures (in some cases decorated with ornamental patterns and images of mythic phoenixes, etc.) where, hypothetically, cremation rituals might have been performed, followed by the burial of the ashes (or cremated bone remains) in a specially prepared pit.

As for ordinary enclosures, especially those with stone statues, there are occasional reports of cremated remains.

It is worth noting that among the ancient Turks of the Middle Yenisei region, a fire was lit in the burial pit above the earth-covered remains of a person and his accompanying horse (Mitko & Teterin 1998, p. 396–404).

The inhumation and ashes burial after cremation, although both belong to the unified cycle of the "rite of passage," nevertheless imply the performance of distinct sequences of ritual and ceremonial acts. It is precisely in this distinction that the epistemological specificity of such a type of monument is manifested (Mikhailov 2009, p. 95–97).

The preparation and execution of the cremation procedure itself presupposed a series of specific actions: the selection of the cremation site, the construction of an enclosure, and the preparation of fuel and implements—for example, as noted in the inscription dedicated to Mogilyan, "candles," "sandalwood," and other ritual materials.

Archaeological evidence for burial of cremated remains of khagans or top elites in large mounds or enclosures within the early Turkic sphere is still lacking; we therefore cite a Tangshu notice (*Old Book of Tang*) describing cremation "according to nomadic custom" of the body of Khieli (Sieli), once the powerful khagan of the eastern Turks, who died in captivity in 634 CE (Malyavkin 1989, p. 112). Of him it was written: "Standing on a level above all other nomadic peoples, he looked upon the Middle Kingdom with contempt, speaking and writing with arrogance and making excessive demands." A funerary monument was erected for him on the left bank of the Ba River (Bichurin 1950, p. 247, 256).

Elsewhere Tangshu (*Old Book of Tang*) provides a more detailed description of a funerary rite involving cremation (of a khagan?), which has elicited differing interpretations among scholars (Bichurin 1950, p. 230; Bubenok 2014, p. 77–79). Variations of this account are found in the works of Liu Maocai, along with new translations (Liu Maocai 2002, p. 21; Ovchinnikova & Ganiev 2004; Tishin 2021).

Given its importance for interpreting Eleke Sazy materials, the full text is cited below:

> "They place the body of the deceased in a tent. Sons, grandsons, and relatives of both sexes slaughter horses and ride seven times around the tent on horseback, then before the entrance to the tent cut their faces with a knife and lament; blood and tears flow together. This is done seven times and then ends. Then, on an appointed day, they take the

horse the deceased had ridden and the objects he used and burn them together with the deceased; they collect the ashes and bury them at a certain season. The dead are buried in spring and summer, when the leaves on trees and plants begin to unfold. On the day of burial, as on the day of death, the relatives offer sacrifice, gallop on horses, and cut their faces. In a building erected at the grave they place a painted portrait of the deceased and an account of the battles in which he took part during his life. Usually, if he killed one man, they set up one stone; for some the number of stones reaches a hundred or even a thousand. After sacrificing all the sheep and horses, they hang their heads upon poles. On this day, men and women in festive dress gather at the cemetery; if a man takes a liking to a girl, upon returning home he sends to ask for her hand, and the parents rarely refuse. After the death of a father, elder brothers, or paternal uncles, they marry stepmothers, widowed brides, and aunts." (Bichurin 1950, p. 230).

Variations of this passage appear in the works of Liu Maocai, as well as in newer translations (Liu Maocai 2002, p. 21; Tishin 2021).

Despite the compilative nature of this source—as noted by some researchers (Savinov 2005, p. 198)—it contains crucial data for interpreting Eleke Sazy complex: (1) the existence of cremation among the ancient Turks; (2) cremation with the belongings of the deceased; (3) burial of ashes; (4) construction of a building "at the grave" (or at the cremation site?); (5) information about installing a "painted portrait" of the deceased, i.e., a stone statue; (6) sacrifice, etc.—besides verbally characterized, non-materialized elements (lamentation, self-laceration, etc.).

A short passage from the Bilge Khagan inscription (trans. S. E. Malov) reports that for him (d. 734, the Year of the Dog), in the next year, 735 (Year of the Pig), his son (who became khagan under the name Ijan) "arranged the funeral":

"Li Sun Tai-sengun headed the five hundred men who came to me. They brought an immeasurable quantity of fragrant incense, gold, and silver. They brought funerary incense candles and set them up. They brought sandalwood… So many people cut their hair, ears, and cheeks. They brought countless fine riding horses, black sables, blue squirrels, and offered them to the deceased." (Malov 1959, p. 23).

As noted above, among the Eleke Sazy temple finds is a large bronze lamp with spout and long handle, intentionally damaged per ritual prescriptions—perhaps relating to the "incense candles" mentioned.

Though this text does not explicitly mention cremation, note that the "immeasurable gold and silver" offered by participants—or perhaps a separate set of objects deposited at cremation a year earlier—were recorded archaeologically at Bilge Khagan's complex in heavily burnt soil, some in melted condition, as in our case (Bayar 2004, p. 78–81). It also indicates two stages of funerary-memorial rites extending over several months or more: for Kultegin, commemorations were held nine months after death; for Mogilian, after seven months (Voitov 1996, p. 109). V. V. Bartold, citing Prof. Hirth, notes 11 and 12 months, respectively (Bartold 1968, p. 320).

Thus, within the religious system of the ancient Turks, associated with funerary and commemorative rites, there existed several stages in the enactment of the "rite of passage."

The phrase "arranged the funeral" in different texts should be read not literally as a single burial act, but as the organization of multistage rites at set points in the calendrical cycle. Some scholars further posit temporary preservation of the body up to mummification (Savinov 1984, p. 59; Voitov 1996, p. 109)—a line of thought based not on cremation among the top elite, but on inhumation (Voitov 1996, p. 109).

It is generally believed that the departure from the custom of cremating the dead among the ancient Turks is recorded in the Tangshu (*Old Book of Tang*) in the 630s CE, when Emperor Taizong of Tang accused Khieli of violating the ancestral prescriptions, noting that "the Tujue now bury their dead and build tombs for them" (Liu Maocai 2002, p. 68). However, this report may refer only to the population of border regions under Khieli's rule, or, more likely, to the defeated Turks resettled within the Chinese Empire, who were forced to adapt to new living conditions. Therefore, a more convincing interpretation is offered by A. D. Grach, who argued that "the rite of cremation apparently continued to be practiced in the Orkhon region even later — during the burials of Turkic khagans, princes, and the most distinguished figures of the Second Turkic Khaganate" (Grach 1968, p. 211).

The culmination of the first stage of the funerary cycle is the cremation of the body and burning of the personal belongings (or their parts), followed by construction (temporary or as components of the main complex) directly over the cremation site.

It is clear that from the announcement of death to the cremation, various rites were performed—lamentation, self-laceration, horse races, offerings, etc. (Ryndina 2002; Samashev 2017). Professional mourning women, as seen on the wall paintings of the Turfan cave temples, likely held a special place; notably, at Kultegin's complex, a sculpted mourner appears among other honored figures.

We have noted that the labyrinth-corridor of the Eleke Sazy complex distinguishes it from other such monuments and points to the unique nature of the ritual and ceremonial performances that took place there.

The labyrinth, consisting of eight interconnected zigzagging passages, likely encodes numerical symbolism associated with the deceased Khagan (and possibly with the politico-administrative structure—e.g., the *Segiz Oghuz*, the clan-tribal composition of a particular domain, or natural/life cycles). The right and left outer sides of the labyrinth walls and their corridors may have had independent meanings or additional semantic loads.

The wall height, judging by collapsed masonry, did not exceed an adult's waist; its narrow corridors were designed so that movement forward (toward the main temple) could only be performed individually, one after another (at least up to the polygonal chamber with the statue of the khagan). Most importantly, this passage had to be made in a kneeling or crouched position.

Bowing the head and kneeling were established socio-political traditions formed over the long historical development of ancient Turkic states (Zhumaganbetov 2007, p. 152), institutionalized in court ceremonies and reflected in various written sources. These sources let us reconstruct key moments of ritual action associated with veneration and deification of the khagan in specialized sanctuaries and other sacralized loci.

The entrance to the labyrinth was constructed on the northern side, rather than directly from the outer eastern gate. This arrangement was possibly related to the specific orientation system of the ancient Turks within the horizontal linear space (Podosinov 1999, p. 416–445), which was governed by the principles of binary oppositions such as left (north) – right (south), upper – lower, and others.

The pilgrims were required to follow a prescribed ritual sequence. After entering the sacred territory through the eastern outer gate, they would ascend the platform and, in accordance with the linear–solar orientation system of the ancient Turks, turn their faces toward the rising sun—symbolically moving backward (in practice, forward)

toward the west, the direction associated with the departed ancestors. They would then turn left, that is, to the north, "facing the midnight side—the place where night reaches its zenith," and subsequently turn sharply southward, "facing the midday side—the place where the sun stands at its zenith" (Kononov 1978, p. 73), finally approaching the entrance to the labyrinth, which was blocked by a large stone slab.

At the entrance to the labyrinth, there may have been gatekeepers who admitted pilgrims one by one, first removing the stone barrier. The rhythm of movement inside was dictated by the labyrinth's design, and it is highly probable that the pilgrims advanced only on their knees. According to ancient Turkic inscriptions, the act of kneeling held particular importance in court ceremonies. Therefore, it is quite plausible that a specific portion of the path—for instance, the section leading to the statue of the deceased khagan within the polygonal chamber—was meant to be traversed in a kneeling position.

From the labyrinth, pilgrims entered directly into the hall with the khagan statue, where they performed the prescribed ritual and underwent purification by the sacred fire that burned there. Afterward, they proceeded toward the main temple, moving through the narrowing stone corridor.

This narrow, uniquely shaped labyrinth, allowing entry to the sanctuary one pilgrim at a time, constitutes either an innovation in the "rite of passage" or reflects previously undocumented yet known features of ancient Turkic ritual practice.

Proceeding on knees to the enclosed polygonal chamber that housed the stone statue of the khagan, required, as noted, negotiating eight sharp but short turns within the labyrinth.

After preliminary fire purification in the chamber, accompanied by bows and other ritual gestures, the pilgrim passed through the sharply narrowing corridor and inner gates into the main temple. There, at the central point of the sacred space—the site of the khagan's cremation—he performed the cultic and mystery rites prescribed by tradition. Which actions occurred within the temple during pilgrimage visits and what additional internal structures it may have contained, remain subjects for future investigation.
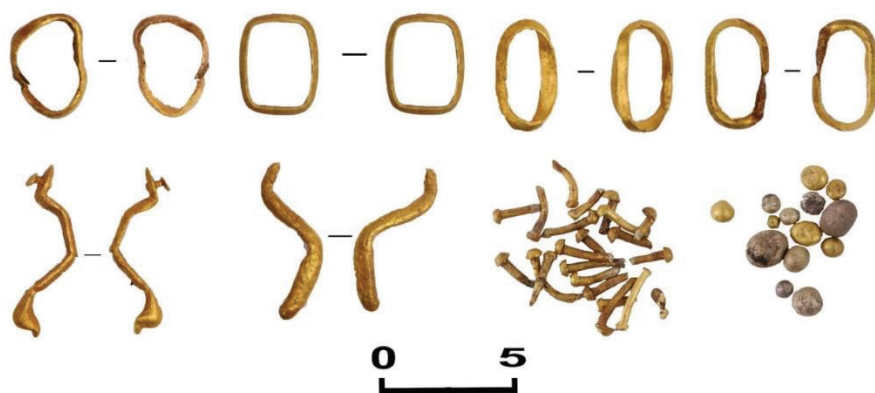
Conclusion. The Eleke Sazy memorial complex was established on the site of the cremation of one of the "local" (subordinate) khagans of the *On Ok El* (Western Turkic Khaganate)—a point of fundamental importance.
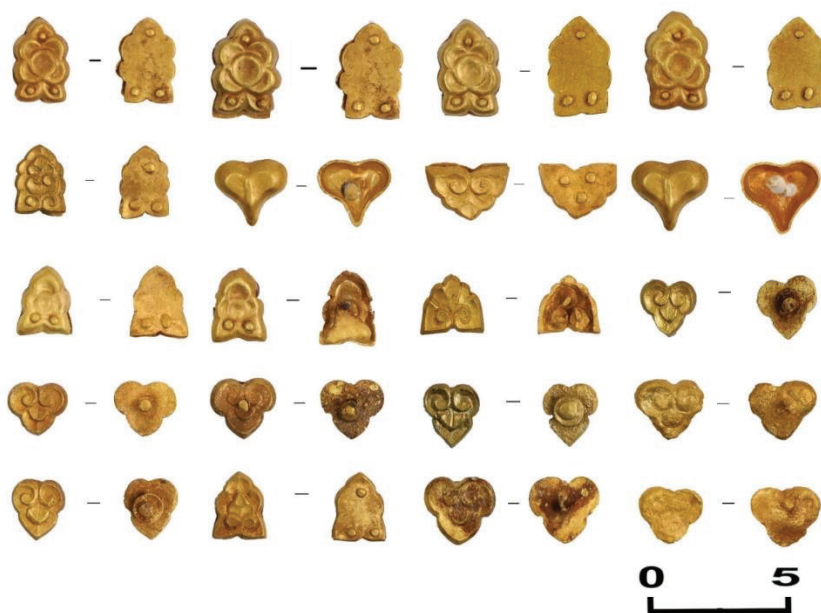
In terms of its structural and architectural-planning features, the complex belongs to the category of "khaganate elite" *barqs* (in V. E. Voitov's terminology) of the Early Turkic period (6th–8th centuries). Such monuments were intended to secure the posthumous sacralization of the image of the celestial khagan and to reinforce the legitimate authority and power of his successor, thereby affirming the strength and continuity of the state.
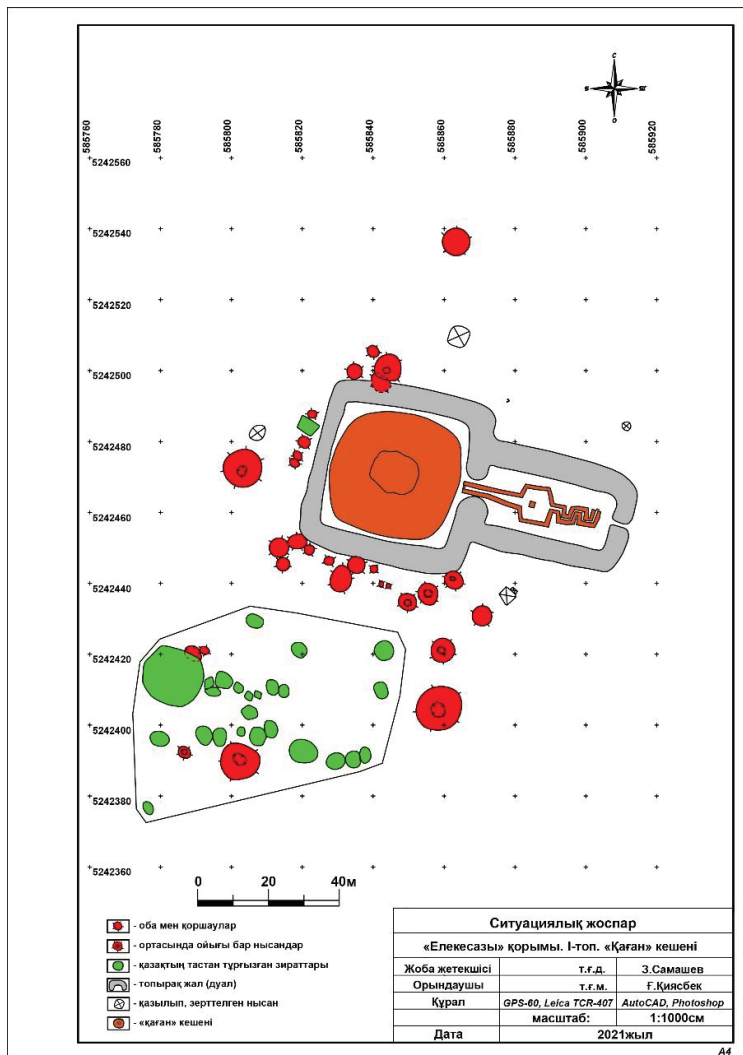
Among the objects discovered within the temple are masterpieces created by Early Turkic metalworkers, remarkable for their exceptional artistic quality. Of particular note are the genre compositions depicting crowned figures seated on zoomorphic thrones, rendered in canonical poses and accompanied by kneeling servants and other symbolic motifs. These finely executed scenes vividly convey the iconography of royal power, showcasing the ruler's refined attire and the regalia of state, all emphasizing the sacred and divine nature of his image.

Taken together with other works of art—as well as the weapons and everyday objects discovered within the temple of the Eleke Sazy memorial complex—these finds constitute a new historical source crucial for addressing current problems in the study of state organization, religious beliefs, court ceremony, and the multifaceted connections of medieval steppe empires across space.

Field investigations of this complex are still ongoing, and therefore many questions related to its analysis and interpretation—including issues of chronological and ethnic attribution (see: Kubarev 2021)—are left for future study.

Ситуациялық жоспар

«Елекесазы» қорымы. I-топ. «Қаған» кешені

Жоба жетекшісі	т.ғ.д.	З.Самашев
Орындаушы	т.ғ.м.	Ғ.Қиясбек
Құрал	GPS-60, Leica TCR-407	AutoCAD, Photoshop
	масштаб:	1:1000см
Дата		2021жыл

Легенда:
- оба мен қоршаулар
- ортасында ойығы бар нысандар
- қазақтың тастан тұрғызған зираттары
- топырақ жал (дуал)
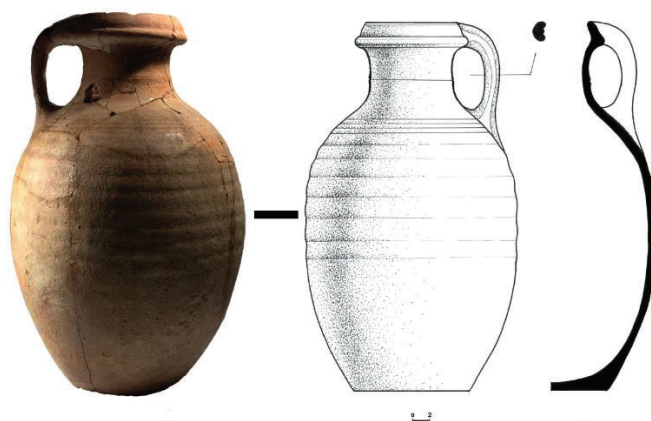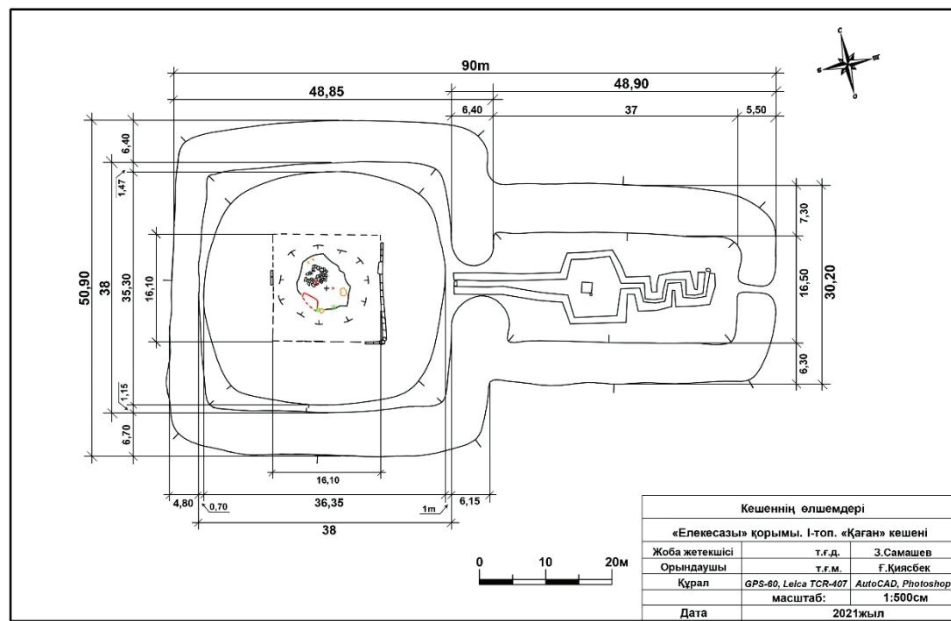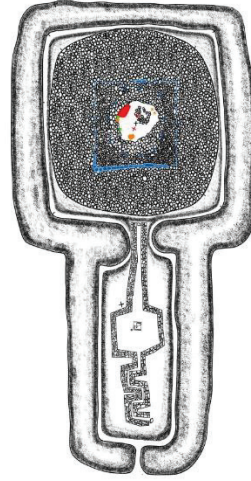- қазылып, зерттелген нысан
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NOMADIC CULTURE IN AZERBAIJAN: THE CASE OF NATIONAL YAYLAK FESTIVALS

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Abstract

This study explores the historical development and contemporary manifestations of nomadic culture in Azerbaijan. Drawing on archaeological evidence, it demonstrates that the nomadic lifestyle—organized around the yaylak-kishlak (summer-winter pasture) system—has played a pivotal role in shaping both the economic and socio-cultural fabric of the region. Practices such as horse breeding, sheep herding, and metalworking have constituted the material foundations of Turkic identity. This way of life promoted communal solidarity, facilitated political organization, and ensured cultural continuity among nomadic groups.

The article emphasizes the multifaceted role of nomadic communities—not only in modes of subsistence but also in the formation of early state structures, the development of oral traditions, and the evolution of the Azerbaijani Turkic language. Despite systemic repression during the Tsarist and Soviet eras, nomadic culture endured and has, since independence, become a powerful reference in the reconstruction of national identity.

Furthermore, the study examines the National Yaylak Festival as a contemporary cultural platform that revives and reinterprets nomadic heritage. The festival plays a vital role in preserving traditional crafts, promoting national sports, and encouraging ecotourism, thereby rendering historical legacy visible within modern contexts. The nomadic philosophy of living in harmony with nature resonates with contemporary discourses on sustainability and environmental consciousness, while also reaffirming collective identity, a sense of belonging, and social cohesion.

Keywords: Nomadism, Azerbaijan, National Yaylak Festival, Cultural Heritage, Identity, Sustainability

İntroduction

The ethnic and cultural composition of Azerbaijan has been profoundly influenced by successive waves of migration and settlement throughout history. In antiquity, the Volga (*İdil*) and Ural (*Yayık*) rivers, extending from north to south, demarcated the frontier between the eastern and western regions of the Turkic world. Both river basins contained fertile and productive lands, particularly suitable for livestock breeding. Turkic tribes migrating westward from the East would pause in these regions to graze their herds, reorganize their social structures, and prepare for further movement into the Caucasus and Europe. Due to its strategic location at the heart of the Turkic world and its geography characterized by east-west and north-south corridors, the Caspian basin and the territory of Azerbaijan have historically served as highly dynamic zones of migration.

Archaeological remains of the Kura-Araxes culture from the Early Bronze Age, uncovered in Azerbaijan, along with material findings from the Gedebey and Khojaly kurgans, indicate the presence of a semi-nomadic civilization in the region.

In historical sources, the ancient Turks are primarily characterized by three essential elements: the horse, iron, and sheep. Each of these symbols holds a distinct significance: the horse represents speed and mobility; iron signifies weaponry and defense; and sheep symbolize sustenance and clothing. Without these three elements, it is difficult to meaningfully analyze the material and cultural foundations of Turkic identity.

Among the earliest Turkic groups to systematically institutionalize large-scale sheep husbandry were the Huns, whose expansive pastoral networks facilitated their extensive mobility across the Eurasian steppe, from east to west and from north to south. This pastoral tradition was later sustained by the Göktürks, Uighurs, Oghuz, Pechenegs, Kipchaks, and Turkmens. While several scholars have emphasized the centrality of the horse to the socio-political structures of the steppe, it is more accurate to conceive the horse as a strategic instrument within a broader nomadic paradigm. In contrast, sheep herding—and by extension, the practice of pastoralism—formed the socio-cultural foundation of nomadic life and played a central role in the sociological structures of Turkic societies.

A substantial segment of the Oghuz-Turkmen populations inhabiting Azerbaijan have historically embraced a semi-nomadic pastoralist lifestyle. The cultural framework of this existence is intrinsically tied to the management of ovine herds and the recurrent, cyclical process of seasonal migration. Livestock husbandry—constituting the foundational economic activity within Turkic societies—encompasses the breeding of a diverse array of species, including horses, oxen, bulls, camels, sheep, goats, rams, lambs, and bucks. Among these, sheep occupy a position of paramount importance, functioning not only as a primary source of nourishment but also as critical providers of textile materials, commodities for commercial exchange, and objects of ritual significance.

The practice of transhumance, involving at least biannual relocations, necessitated that Turkic pastoralists develop adaptive strategies responsive to fluctuating climatic conditions, while simultaneously fostering martial prowess and a culture of resilience and collective endurance. Moreover, the pastoralist ethos embedded within shepherd communities contributed significantly to the evolution of governance structures, authority dynamics, and leadership capacities within Turkic sociopolitical organization. This mode of subsistence also engendered strong communal solidarity, serving as a catalyst for the consolidation of shared cultural norms and collective identities among nomadic groups.

Historically, nomadism has constituted not only a distinct mode of subsistence but also an essential economic complement to sedentary agrarian societies. Settled farming communities adjacent to nomadic groups typically refrained from extensive livestock husbandry—excluding draft animals such as horses, oxen, and donkeys—and depended significantly on nomadic pastoralists for the provision of vital animal products including meat, dairy, and wool, often at comparatively reduced costs. These agrarian populations demonstrated a marked propensity to engage in reciprocal exchange, trading grain and bakery goods for nomadic dairy produce. The resultant commercial activity, particularly the influx of livestock and leather merchants into villages contiguous to nomadic encampments, catalyzed the economic development of these peripheral regions by facilitating access to urban markets and fostering regional trade networks.

Beyond their economic role, semi-nomadic communities exerted substantial influence on the political landscape of the region. The establishment and consolidation

of significant polities such as the Seljuk, Akkoyunlu, Karakoyunlu, and Safavid states were critically underpinned by the military and socio-political support of Oghuz-Turkmen tribal groups. These communities, organized through complex clan and tribal structures, played a crucial role in both centralizing political authority and legitimizing emerging state power.

Culturally and linguistically, the semi-nomadic way of life has been instrumental in shaping the development of Azerbaijani identity. The predominance of oral traditions within nomadic societies significantly enriched the corpus of folk literature, thereby playing a formative role in the evolution of the Azerbaijani Turkish language. Despite concerted efforts to suppress national consciousness through Russification policies during the Tsarist and Soviet eras, nomadic cultural practices and linguistic features persisted resiliently among the populace.

In the post-Soviet era, this cultural heritage has been reevaluated and valorized as a foundational referent in the rearticulation and reconstruction of Azerbaijani national identity. In summation, nomadic culture has functioned as a determinant factor across multiple dimensions—military, economic, social, political, and cultural—in the formation of the Azerbaijani nation. It has also fostered a sociological cohesion that harmonizes the interplay between nomadic and sedentary communities. Consequently, this cultural framework should be understood not merely as a historical relic but as a living and dynamic component of contemporary Azerbaijani Turkish identity.

The National Yaylak Festival: Continuity from Past to Present

Azerbaijan's historical and cultural heritage is intricately woven from a rich tapestry of traditions refined over centuries. Among these, the *yaylak-kishlak* culture, the nomadic lifestyle, and *elat* (tribal) customs hold a particularly significant place. The *yaylak* system—seasonal transhumance to highland pastures—has endured for millennia across both mountainous and lowland regions, serving not only as a critical economic pillar but also as a significant determinant of social organization and cultural identity. Contemporary efforts aimed at the preservation, intergenerational transmission, and international promotion of this cultural complex are gaining momentum, particularly considering its potential for sustainable tourism development.

Among these initiatives, the **National Yaylak Festival**, organized by the **Javad Khan Historical and Cultural Foundation** in the Ganja-Dashkasan region.

The National Yaylak Festival principally aims to reinvigorate elements of the traditional nomadic way of life by situating them within a contemporary representational framework. This festival transcends mere exhibition of archaic customs, foregrounding the continued relevance and adaptability of these traditions within the present socio-cultural milieu. Central to its ideological foundation are the revival and sustained promotion of indigenous handicrafts, the dissemination and celebration of national musical and performative arts, and the endorsement of ecotourism practices that exemplify the symbiotic relationship between humanity and the natural environment. Collectively, these facets function not only as mechanisms of cultural preservation but also as instruments for fostering sustainable cultural tourism and reinforcing national identity.

A particularly prominent component of the festival is the exhibition of applied arts that have been cultivated and transmitted within Azerbaijani society over the course of millennia. The festival prominently showcases traditional artisanal disciplines, including carpet weaving, coppersmithing, woodcarving, ceramics, and various other indigenous handicrafts. These exhibitions serve purposes beyond aesthetic appreciation; they function as vital conduits for the intergenerational transmission of artisanal knowledge and craftsmanship, thereby contributing to the preservation of the collective cultural and artistic memory. Furthermore, the festival provides a comprehensive reenactment of nomadic life, encompassing traditional attire, everyday artifacts, and ritual practices. The ceremonial erection of yurts, the communal presentation of elat feasts, performances of folk music, and the enactment of ashik bardic traditions constitute salient features of this segment. Through these performative and immersive modalities, participants are afforded an experiential reconnection with the historical lifeways of the yaylak, facilitating a renewed engagement with the foundational narratives.

The National Yaylak Festival transcends its national context and functions as a cultural nexus that reflects the shared nomadic heritage of the broader Turkic World. In this regard, the organization of the fourth iteration of the festival under the auspices of the Turkish Cooperation and Coordination Agency (TİKA) is particularly note-

worthy. Traditional sports, which constitute an integral component of nomadic culture, occupy a distinctive place within the festival's program. Equestrian games, archery, wrestling, and various other competitive events not only captivate audiences but also foster interest in ancestral sport traditions among younger generations. These activities function not merely as displays of physical prowess but as symbolic manifestations of discipline, courage, and collective spirit.

Equally significant is the festival's ecological dimension, which foregrounds the environmental richness of Azerbaijan's highland pasturelands (*yaylaks*). By facilitating experiential engagements—such as the establishment of tented camps in natural landscapes, guided mountain treks, and curated ecotourism routes—the festival contributes to a deeper public appreciation of the region's ecological assets. Such initiatives promote awareness of environmental stewardship while simultaneously fostering a model of sustainable cultural tourism.

The National Yaylak Festival is not merely an entertainment event, but rather a profound expression of national identity. Beyond transmitting the historical culture of the Azerbaijani people into the modern era, the festival also serves as a catalyst for the development of regional tourism. It injects vitality into the socio-economic life of local communities while simultaneously contributing to the international visibility of Azerbaijan on the global cultural stage.

Ultimately, the National Yaylak Festival functions as a bridge between the past and the present. It does not merely showcase the rich legacy of the nomadic lifestyle; rather, it transforms this heritage into a vibrant and dynamic component of contemporary culture. This dynamic underscores that the yaylak tradition has not been relegated to the forgotten pages of history; on the contrary, it remains a living element of national identity and constitutes a valuable cultural legacy to be transmitted to future generations.

Ethnographic and Cultural Sections of the National Yaylak Festival

The annually held National Yaylak Festival in Azerbaijan is not merely a cultural event; it embodies the collective commitment to preserving the deep-rooted lifestyle and both the tangible and intangible heritage of the Azerbaijani people. According to information provided by the website myf.az, the festival's ethnographic-cultural

section showcases some of the most vivid and enduring expressions of the yaylak tradition—an ancient highland pastoral culture that has persisted for centuries in the mountainous regions.

This segment of the festival offers a comprehensive presentation of the traditions, handicrafts, folk dances, music, and *ashiq* (bardic) performances that have emerged from Azerbaijan's nomadic and semi-nomadic modes of life. Thus, it simultaneously foregrounds both the aesthetic dimensions of rural existence and the deep cultural roots of national identity. Performative elements such as *ashiq* duels, national dances (e.g., *yalli*, *jangi*), folk songs, and traditional games are not merely modes of entertainment but are emblematic representations of collective memory and cultural identity.

Moreover, the ethnographic section of the Yaylak Festival also reflects Azerbaijan's longstanding traditions of tolerance and multiculturalism. Throughout the festival, representatives of various ethnic communities residing in the country—such as the Avars, Lezgins, Talysh, Molokans, Tsakhurs, among others—actively participate and present their own cultural programs. This inclusivity provides a tangible demonstration of Azerbaijan's cultural plurality and its enduring spirit of peaceful coexistence among diverse peoples.

The festival is organized around the following thematic components:

The Poetic Contests of Ashiqs:

The verbal duels (deyişme) of ashiqs represent one of the most vivid and original expressions of Azerbaijani folk poetry. In this performative tradition, the power of the word merges with the resonant sound of the saz (a traditional stringed instrument), giving voice to the emotions, thoughts, and spiritual essence of the people. During a deyişme, ashiqs engage in spontaneous poetic exchanges, responding to one another with improvisational mastery and lyrical wit. This practice is not merely a musical or poetic performance—it is the audible embodiment of a collective memory that spans millennia.

The poetic contests performed during the festival provide younger generations with an opportunity to witness the ashiq tradition in its authentic form and to engage with

its underlying philosophical and national foundations. In this way, tradition functions as both a living art form and a conduit for the transmission of cultural identity.

National Dances (Yallı and Cengi):

Azerbaijan's national dances embody a repertoire of aesthetic movements that vividly express the people's joy, heroism, and sense of unity. Traditional dances such as *Yallı* and *Cengi* are performed collectively and are widely regarded as symbols of solidarity and communal cohesion. The circular formation of the *Yallı* dance holds particular significance within Turkic cultural heritage, serving as an ancient emblem of unity.

Within the context of the festival, these dances are performed with region-specific costumes and melodies, effectively revitalizing the rich cultural mosaic of the Azerbaijani people. The presentation offers audiences both an aesthetic experience and a profound spiritual engagement, reinforcing cultural identity through embodied performance.

Folk Songs:

Folk songs constitute the emotional core of Azerbaijani musical tradition, encapsulating a spectrum of sentiments ranging from joy to sorrow, with a predominant emphasis on patriotic devotion. Iconic melodies such as *Sarı Gəlin*, *Ayrılıq*, and *Sən gəlməz oldun* hold significance not only for their melodic and musical qualities but also as powerful articulations of national sentiment and collective identity.

At the National Yaylak Festival, these songs are performed either in the traditional *ashiq* style or through professional renditions, thereby sustaining the emotional memory of the people through music. This performative continuity serves as an aesthetic embodiment of national identity, reinforcing cultural cohesion, and offering audiences a profound connection to their historical and emotional roots.

Stages and Performances:

Stage performances and theatrical representations serve as vivid mediums reflecting the quotidian life of the people, the yaylak (summer pasture) culture, and traditional

nomadic existence. Scenes portraying shepherd life, hospitality rituals, weddings, and festive celebrations immerse the audience into the inner world of folklore. These performances serve not only as an entertainment function but also fulfill an educational purpose; traditional customs are conveyed not merely as dramatic elements but as integral components of value systems.

Consequently, folklore through these staged enactments becomes both a pedagogical and aesthetic resource for contemporary generations.

Traditional Folk Games:

Traditional folk games such as Dirədöymə, Çilingağac, Əzəldəyməz, Müçük, Aşıq-Aşıq, and Molla-Mindi have long been integral components of rural Azerbaijani life. These games symbolize physical agility, camaraderie, and collective solidarity. Moreover, they serve as living continuations of the socialization practices characteristic of ancient Turkic communities.

The revival of these games at the festival not only revitalizes folk entertainments that risk fading into obscurity but also serves as a crucial mechanism for the intergenerational transmission of national traditions. The participation of children and youth in these traditional activities fosters both recreational enjoyment and the transmission and internalization of cultural knowledge and values.

Yayla Cuisine as an Ethno-Culinary Phenomenon:

The Azerbaijani yayla (highland) cuisine represents a cultural domain where nature and tradition converge. Dishes such as *Dovğa*, *Çoban Buğlaması*, *Sac Üstü Kətə*, and *Kebap* are traditionally prepared over open flames using natural, locally sourced ingredients. The presentation of these culinary products not only appeals to the palate but also symbolizes the harmonious relationship between the community and their natural environment.

The gastronomic segment of the festival functions as an ethno-gastronomic exhibition, showcasing the distinctive flavors and culinary practices characteristic of each region.

Exhibition and Commercialization of Applied Folk Arts:

Handcrafted items such as baskets, wickerwork, decorative objects, saddles, and scales exemplify the creative ingenuity and artisanal craftsmanship inherent within the community. These art forms carry both functional and aesthetic significance. The folk arts exhibitions organized during the festival provide a platform for artisans to demonstrate their skills, simultaneously contributing to the preservation and revitalization of local craftsmanship. The presentation of traditional patterns and motifs in contemporary forms serves as a vibrant manifestation of cultural continuity.

Exhibition of Rams, Shepherd Dogs, and Indigenous Yürük Horses:

Animal husbandry constitutes a foundational element of highland life in Azerbaijan. The exhibition of rams, shepherd dogs (known locally as *qurbasar*), and indigenous Yürük horses underscores both the traditional significance and the aesthetic values associated with pastoral practices. These events serve not only as showcases of regional livestock breeds but also as platforms for the evaluation of critical criteria such as lineage, health status, and husbandry practices. Ultimately, such exhibitions highlight the role of agriculture and animal husbandry not merely as economic activities, but as integral components of the region's intangible cultural heritage.

Highland and Agricultural Products Fair:

The fair features a wide array of highland and agricultural products, including mountain herbs marketed under the name *"herbal aptek,"* as well as wool, felt, honey, meat, and dairy products—most notably *motal* cheese. This section of the event highlights both the productive capacity of the local economy and the ecological purity of its natural resources.

Each product embodies specific climatic conditions, cultural practices, and modes of rural life characteristic of the region it originates from. As such, the fair functions not only as a space for trade, but also as a platform for cultural representation. By promoting traditional forms of production, the event contributes to the preservation of rural identity and the transmission of intangible cultural heritage.

Exhibition of Tolerance and Multiculturalism

One of the most significant segments of the festival is the program that reflects Azerbaijan's multicultural composition. Various ethnic groups residing in the country—such as Avars, Molokans, Talysh, Jews, Lezgins, Sahurs, and other communities—present their distinct cultural programs on stage. This segment serves as a living demonstration of Azerbaijan's historical tradition of coexistence. The event, where diverse languages, costumes, and melodies resonate together, exemplifies how national unity can be achieved through cultural pluralism and richness.

The Contemporary Relevance of Nomadic Culture

The Yaylak Festival demonstrates that nomadic lifeways are not merely relics of a distant past, but instead continue to hold significant value in the modern world across social, cultural, and ecological dimensions. Nomadic culture constitutes a vital mechanism for historical continuity, sustaining collective memory, a sense of rootedness, and intergenerational identity formation. Through the preservation and reenactment of this cultural heritage, individuals are positioned not only within the temporality of the present, but also as active links in a larger historical continuum.

At the core of the nomadic worldview lies a deep ecological sensibility—one that is inherently aligned with the rhythms of nature and predicated on sustainable interaction with the environment. The cyclical movement between summer and winter pastures (yaylak–kışlak system), animal-based economic practices, and mobility patterns have historically necessitated a balanced relationship with natural ecosystems. This model, far from being obsolete, offers valuable insights into contemporary debates on sustainability, climate resilience, and environmental ethics. It exemplifies a mode of subsistence that avoids the depletion of natural resources while promoting adaptive strategies in response to seasonal and ecological change.

Furthermore, nomadic culture embodies a set of social values—such as communal sharing, cooperative labor (imece), mutual aid, and solidarity—that challenge the atomizing tendencies of modern urban life. These values foster social cohesion, a sense of belonging, and collective responsibility—qualities increasingly vital in the context of rising individualism and social fragmentation. Thus, nomadic heritage should not be relegated to the status of folkloric nostalgia; rather, it represents a viable socio-cultural paradigm through which contemporary societies might reimagine and reconstruct social bonds.

As such, the contemporary significance of nomadic culture lies not only in its role as an irreplaceable component of historical identity, but also in its potential to inform alternative models for addressing the ecological, social, and cultural crises of modernity. Events such as the Yaylak Festival serve not merely as performative acts of cultural remembrance, but as dynamic and adaptive platforms for transmitting this heritage to future generations. In doing so, they position nomadic culture as a living tradition—one that bridges past and present, tradition and modernity, human society and the natural world.

Reflections of Nomadic Culture in Azerbaijani Folk Literature and Arts

Nomadic culture has profoundly influenced not only the economic life and social organization of communities but also their literature, music, and arts. The yaylak-kishlak system, seasonal migrations, and pastoral lifestyle have left significant imprints on Azerbaijani oral traditions and folk literature. Epics, legends, proverbs, and folk songs carry traces of nomadic life. Within these narratives, elements of nature, animal symbolism, migration routes, and tent life emerge as salient motifs. Particularly, the Ashik literary tradition stands out as one of the most powerful vehicles preserving the collective memory of nomadic societies. The poetry performed by Ashiks, accompanied by the saz, articulates both individual emotions and social concerns, while simultaneously reflecting the rhythm of nomadic existence. Activities such as tent pitching, herding, and weddings and festivities held in the yaylaks serve as essential sources of inspiration for this literary tradition.

From an artistic perspective, handicrafts such as carpet weaving, kilim production, felt making, and leatherworking are integral products of the nomadic lifestyle. Carpets woven by women in the yaylaks function not merely as utilitarian objects but also as carriers of cultural memory. Their motifs and patterns reflect the identity and belief systems of these communities. In the realm of music, both stringed and wind instruments have facilitated the creation of compositions that embody the symbiotic relationship between nomadic life and nature's rhythms. Instruments such as the kaval, balaban, and zurna harmonize with the sounds of herds, the rustling wind, and the melodies of the natural environment, accompanying the daily life of nomadic groups.

Viewed through this lens, the reflection of nomadic culture in Azerbaijani folk literature and arts represents not only an aesthetic richness but also a mode of historical memory transmission. The values conveyed through artistic expression have ensured the continuity of the nomadic lifestyle's legacy into the modern era, thereby contributing to the strengthening of collective identity through literature and the arts.

Conclusion

In Azerbaijan, the nomadic culture has historically functioned not merely as an economic mode of subsistence but as a fundamental dynamic underpinning social order, political organization, and cultural continuity. This pastoral lifestyle has instilled in communities a spirit of solidarity, resilience, and an ethos of environmental harmony, thereby playing a decisive role in shaping Azerbaijani national identity and contributing significantly to state-building processes across different historical periods. In the modern era, nomadic culture transcends its characterization as a romantic relic of the past and retains its significance as a sustainable model capable of addressing contemporary ecological, social, and cultural needs.

Cultural events such as the Yaylak Festival enhance the visibility of this deep-rooted heritage and facilitate cultural revitalization and reproduction across diverse domains—from handicrafts and folk literature to national sports and ecotourism. Within the Azerbaijani context, nomadic culture should be understood as a functional and symbiotic bridge connecting past and present, tradition and modernity, and humanity and nature. The preservation and transmission of this cultural legacy to future generations constitute not only a historical responsibility but also a critical component in strengthening national identity and advancing sustainable development strategies.

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BORROWING LEXEMES FROM THE OGUZ DIALECT INTO THE LANGUAGES OF THE NOMADIC KIPCHAKS IN THE GOLDEN HORDE PERIOD: ON THE EXAMPLE OF THE CUMO-KIPCHAK LANGUAGES

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Abstract

During the Golden Horde, many nomadic tribes switched to a sedentary lifestyle. It was during this period that borrowing from the Oguz dialect began in the language of the sedentary Kipchaks. As a result of borrowing words from the Oguz dialect, the Cuman-Kipchak languages were formed as a separate group of Kipchak languages.

The article studies the influence of the Oguz dialect on the Cuman-Kipchak languages, analyzes the complex linguistic and cultural contacts that took place in the northwestern Turkic world. The analysis is based on historical data, including written sources, and the comparative historical method. Using research methods, it is shown which words and language constructions were borrowed, how they were adapted and what were the reasons for their inclusion in the Kipchak dictionary. The results obtained allow us to understand the mechanisms of interaction of languages and the dynamics of language processes in the Golden Horde period.

Keywords: Nomads, Kipchaks, Oghuz, Balkar, Karachay, Kumyk, Crimean Tatar, Karaim, Kyrymchak

The history of the Golden Horde begins in 1224, the year Genghis Khan allocated the conquered lands in Desht-i-Kipchak and Khorezm to Jochi. Initially, the state of the Golden Horde was known as "Ulus Jochi", "Ulu Ulus" and "Ulu Orda"(Fig. 1).

According to their way of life, the inhabitants of the Golden Horde are divided into three categories:

1. Nomadic population

2. Urban dwellers

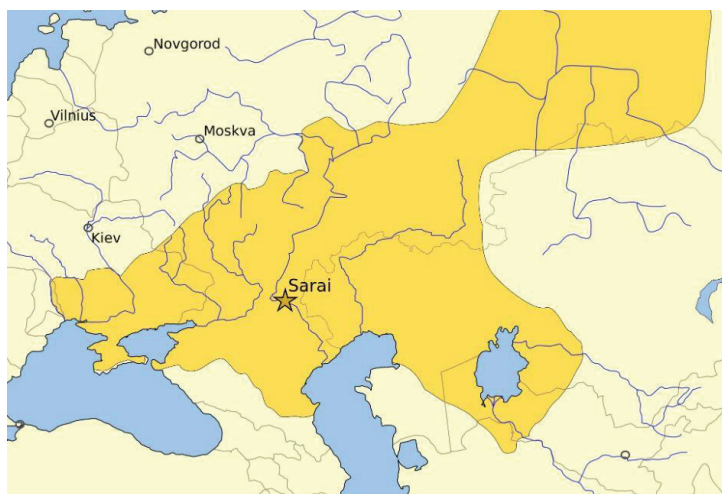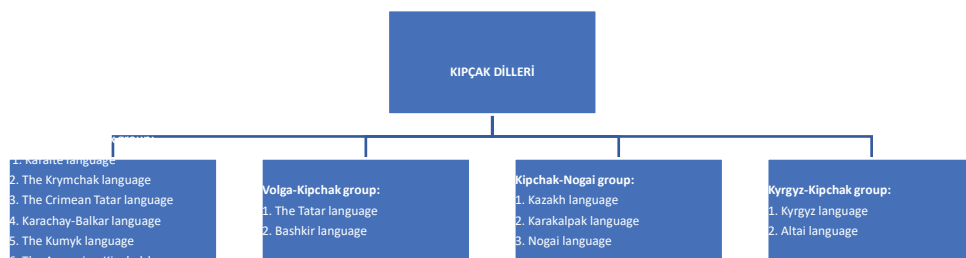3. Settled population living in mountain, seaside and coastal villages.

Fig. 1.

Nomads made up the majority of the country's population. They were engaged in cattle breeding in desert and forest-steppe areas [Султанов 2017: 74—90]. The city population was mainly engaged in crafts. The settled population was engaged in cattle breeding and agriculture [Воротынцев 2023: 317].

From the 13th century, a new culture began to form in the Golden Horde under the influence of the religions of the Mongols, Turks and Finno-Ugric peoples, including Christianity and Islam. The cultural heyday of the Golden Horde began during the reign of Khan Uzbek. During this period, Islam became the ideology of the Horde; mosques, madrassas, schools, sanctuaries and mausoleums were built in large cities and villages [Сайфетдинова 2016: 457, 463,968]. Architects and artisans, scientists, and Sufis began to arrive from Bukhara, Urgench, Egypt, and Turkey to study religion. Thus, lexemes from Arabic and Persian began to penetrate into the language

of the city dwellers. Students who came from villages to study in the cities took these borrowed words back to their villages.

From the 15th century, as the Golden Horde declined, independent Uzbek, Kazakh, Kazan, Siberian, Nogai, and Crimean khanates began to form. Gradually, a special culture and language of these khanates formed. The Kipchak language became a dead language, and in its place appeared the *Polovtsian-Kipchak, Volga-Kipchak, Nogai-Kipchak*, and *Kyrgyz-Kipchak* language groups (Table 1).

KIPÇAK DİLLERİ

1. Karaite language 2. The Krymchak language 3. The Crimean Tatar language 4. Karachay-Balkar language 5. The Kumyk language 6. The Armenian-Kipchak language	**Volga-Kipchak group:** 1. The Tatar language 2. Bashkir language	**Kipchak-Nogai group:** 1. Kazakh language 2. Karakalpak language 3. Nogai language	**Kyrgyz-Kipchak group:** 1. Kyrgyz language 2. Altai language

Tabl. 1.

The group of Cuman-Kipchak languages includes Karaite, Kyrymchak, Crimean Tatar, Karachay-Balkar, Kumyk, Urum (two dialects) languages. And dead languages, such as Armenian-Kipchak, Mamluk-Kipchak [Тенишев и др. 2002: 7].

The Cuman-Kipchak languages have a huge written heritage. Among them are the "Codex Cumanicus", "Kitab al-Idrak", "At-Tukhfat uz-Zakiyya", "Ash-Shuzur az-Zahabiya", "Kitab Majmua Tarjuman Turkiy va Ajamiy va Mughaliy (and Persian)", as well as 112 written sources written in the Armenian-Kipchak language in the 16th-17th centuries.

During the Khazar period, the Cuman-Kipchak languages borrowed many words from Hebrew. From the 2nd century, lexemes were borrowed from Aramaic, and

during the Golden Horde period, from Mongolian. Today, the language consists of six layers:

1. Altai layer.

2. Properly Turkish layer:

a) Kipchak

b) Oghuz.

3. Hebraisms.

4. Words borrowed from Arabic-Persian languages.

5. Words borrowed from Mongolian.

6. Words borrowed from Slavic languages.

The Karaite and Kyrymchak languages borrowed Hebraisms, the Crimean Tatar and Karachay-Balkar languages borrowed many lexemes from Arabic-Persian languages. The common feature of these borrowing lexemes is that they are mainly religious, scientific and ceremonial terms.

Mainly ethnonyms, toponyms, military and everyday vocabulary were borrowed from the Mongolian language. Among them are words such as *ulus, orda, naiman, otarch, yasaul, karaul, bikaul, dubulga, daruga, nauker, egch*. However, many of them can be a lexeme of the Altai layer.

In the 17th century, the confederation of the Crimean Khanate and the Ottoman Empire began to form [Duval 1676: 310]. A significant part of the population began to move from a nomadic to a semi-nomadic or sedentary lifestyle. The influence of Ottoman culture increased. Islam became the dominant ideology. The Turkish alphabet with Arabic script is used in schools. All residents of Crimea learned the Turkish language. Thus, gradually the Oghuz dialect began to function as a koine.

Dialects are formed depending on the degree of influence of the Oghuz language. For example, three dialects were formed in the Crimean Tatar language: the South Coast dialect (Yaliboili); the steppe Nogai dialect; the Middle dialect (Orta-Yolak, Tat).

The South Coast dialect is closer to the Oghuz dialect and has many Greek and Italian elements.

The steppe Nogai dialect was mainly spoken by the Kipchaks and the area of its speakers extended from the Kipchak steppes to Central Europe.

The middle dialect is widespread mainly in mountainous and foothill areas. This dialect is considered neutral, since it borrowed many Oghuz words [Гаркавец 1987: 18.].

The Crimean Tatar language had a strong influence on the formation of other languages that formed in Crimea, in particular, the Kyrymchak, Karaite and Urum languages [Меметов 2015: 35-42].

Parallels of Kipchak and Oghuz words in the Polovtsian-Kipchak languages are clearly visible in the table below:

Language	lexems										
Kipchak	*bolmaq*	*miñ*	*temir*	*tav*	*avuz*	*cıla*	*qara*	*al*	*uy*	*o'ot*	*it*
Oghuz	*olmaq*	*biñ*	*demir*	*dağ*	*ağız*	*ağla*	*baq*	*qol*	*ev*	*ateş*	*köpek*

Mongolisms have been preserved mainly in the dialects of rural, semi-sedentary and nomadic populations. Mongolisms are more common in the steppe dialect of the Crimean Tatar language, the Karachay-Balkar and Kumyk languages.

Kh. I. Suyunchev identified about 800 words that are used in parallel in the Karachay-Balkar and Mongolian languages [Суюнчев 1977: 128].

Language	lexems							
Karachay-Bal-kar	*ayran*	*apsin*	*baur*	*badja*	*bayram*	*balta*	*këk*	*qatın*
Mongolian	*ayrag*	*avsan*	*boor*	*baza*	*bayar*	*balt*	*xëx*	*xatan*
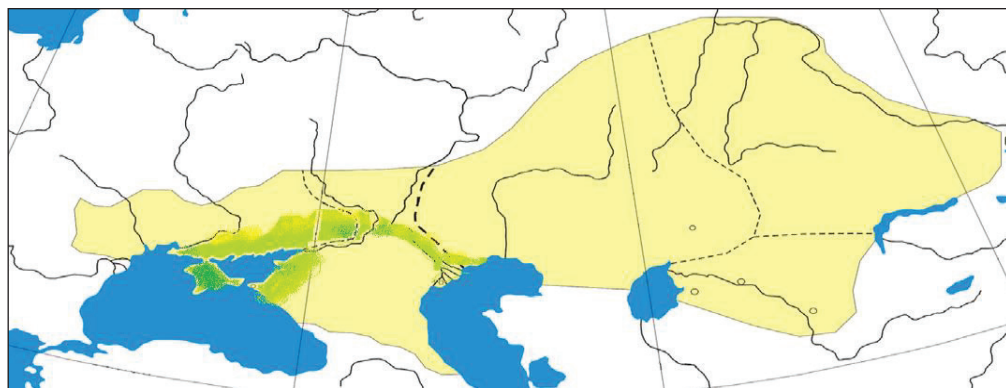
Conclusion. Modern Polovtsian-Kipchak languages differ from the Volga-Kipchak, Nogai-Kipchak and Kyrgyz-Kipchak groups by the abundance of Oghuz elements in their vocabulary. This brings it closer to the Anotolian Turkish language. Borrowed vocabulary of the Cuman-Kipchak languages from the Turkish language is noticeable in Crimea, and Kumyk and Karachay-Balkar languages less than in Crimea (Fig. 1, 2, 3).

Picture 1. ▇ **Kipchak language area** ▇ **Polovtsian-Kipchak language area**

The Oghuzization of the Cuman-Kipchak languages, in turn, led to its allocation as a separate subgroup within the Kipchak languages. The formation of the Cuman-Kipchak languages plays an important role in the settlement of the Turkic peoples and the formation of urban culture. The vocabulary of the Cuman-Kipchak languages is an important source on the history, evolution and geolinguistic distribution of the Turkic languages. Today, comparative historical studies of these languages allow us to reconstruct the grammatical and phonetic features of the ancient Turkic language. Comparative historical analysis allows us to deeply study not only the past of the Turkic languages, but also cultural and ethnic ties.

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THE HISTORY OF THE STUDY OF BRONZE AGE AND EARLY IRON AGE SETTLEMENTS IN KYRGYZSTAN

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Abstract

This article presents the results of field studies conducted at the Bronze Age and Early Iron Age settlement of Chap, located in the Kochkor Valley of Kyrgyzstan. Archaeological investigations carried out between 2003–2004 and 2018–2020 revealed a number of unique finds. To date, systematic and sustained research on settlements of this period has not yet been established in Kyrgyzstan. A review of archaeological research since the second half of the 20th century shows that most attention has traditionally been devoted to the study of burial mounds and cemeteries of the Early Iron Age. As field and laboratory analyses of such sites have demonstrated, research in this area is extremely promising, requiring interdisciplinary collaboration and the application of modern scientific methods and technologies.

At the Chap settlement, a wide range of analytical approaches was employed, including archaeobotanical, zooarchaeological, isotopic, palynological, genetic, chemical, and climatological methods, as well as radiocarbon dating. The resulting evidence indicates that the ancient inhabitants of the region gradually developed a mixed subsistence economy, combining seasonal nomadic pastoralism with agriculture.

Keywords: Kyrgyzstan, ancient settlements, agriculture, seasonal animal husbandry, paleobotany, paleozoology

From a physical and geographical perspective, the mountainous and foothill zones of Kyrgyzstan possess all the necessary environmental conditions favorable for the development of both animal husbandry and agriculture. An analysis of the history of archaeological research shows that, until recently, the primary focus of investigations in Kyrgyzstan remained on funerary monuments—particularly the burial

mounds of nomadic communities. This was largely due to prevailing scientific interests, state-directed research priorities, and the technical capabilities of the time. The investigation of dwellings and settlements, by contrast, requires long-term fieldwork and extended study. Consequently, systematic and sustained research on habitation complexes and other aspects of material culture—especially those relating to the Bronze Age and Early Iron Age—has remained limited. As a result, information regarding the sedentary lifestyle, economic activities, and social organization of the populations of these periods remains fragmentary and calls for further in-depth study.

Nonetheless, it cannot be claimed that the study of ancient settlements and dwellings of the Bronze and Early Iron Ages was entirely absent. Archaeologist Yu. A. Zadneprovsky (MIA, issue 118) obtained important data on the development of early agricultural culture in the southern regions of Kyrgyzstan [Zadneprovsky, 1960]. At present, the western part of the Ferghana Valley and the foothills of the surrounding mountain ranges remain promising areas for archaeological research. Small-scale excavations in these regions have been initiated by Osh State University in cooperation with the University of West Bohemia [https://www.oshsu.kg/ru/news/1790]. A significant stage in the development of Kyrgyz archaeology was the excavation of a Bronze Age dwelling at the Zhazy-Kechuu site in the 1970s. The monument, located in the Ketmen-Tyube Valley linking the northern and southern regions of the country, offered valuable insights into early settlement patterns. However, research was discontinued with the onset of construction of the Toktogul Reservoir, and this important site now lies underwater. According to preliminary data published in the scientific literature, Zhazy-Kechuu was not the only Bronze Age site in the region. Its materials are of great importance for reconstructing the cultural history of the transitional phase from the Late Bronze Age to the Early Iron Age—a topic that remains among the least explored in Kyrgyz archaeology.

A comparable site from the Early Iron Age was discovered between 1985 and 1988 in the eastern part of the Ketmen-Tam Valley, near the construction site of the Kambar-Ata HPP-2. The excavations were conducted not by archaeologists but by geophysical specialists during exploratory trenching. Organic samples from ancient dwellings, dated by radiocarbon analysis (C^{14}), span a wide chronological range—from the Middle Bronze Age to the Middle Ages ($4200 \pm 100 - 1110 \pm 60$ BC). Situated at an altitude of 1,500 m above sea level, this archaeological site provided

evidence suggesting that the Andronovo culture of the Bronze Age utilized high-altitude pastures as early as the Middle Bronze Age [Galochkina, 1991:16–21].

Traces of Bronze Age dwellings in northern Kyrgyzstan were first recorded during the construction of the Great Chui Canal in 1938–1940, in the western part of the Chui Valley between the villages of Zhaima and Kayyndy. No systematic excavations were undertaken [Bernstam, 1950:104–106]. Eight types of ornamentation were identified on the recovered pottery fragments. Engravings were applied to the upper portions of the vessels using various tools, including a distinctive technique known as "pearl decoration," in which hemispherical protrusions were formed by pressing from the interior with a pointed implement. Similar pottery ornamentation is known from Western Siberia. Today, it is difficult to precisely locate the findspots of these ceramics. It is assumed that after the Bronze Age, the economy of settled agricultural communities continued to develop in the mountainous and foothill regions. However, the archaeological record of the transitional phase from the Bronze Age remains only partially studied.

A settlement of the Usun period in the Chui Valley was discovered and investigated by archaeologist A. K. Abetekov near the town of Kara-Balta. Fragments of clay vessels and grain grinders were found in a dwelling [Abetekov, 1975:137–138]. According to archaeologist Isman Kozhomberdiev, settlements in the Ketmen Valley have been known since the Bronze Age. Although settlements of this period have not yet been excavated, finds of clay vessels in mounds of the Saka and Hunnic periods clearly indicate habitation activity. Additional information on Bronze Age and Early Iron Age settlements is found in the works of archaeologist V. P. Mokrynin and historian V. M. Ploskikh [Mokrynin & Ploskikh, 1989:72–82].

All the above-mentioned scholars emphasized the importance of studying settlements and dwellings dating to the Bronze and Early Iron Ages. In their view, the traditions of settled agricultural culture that emerged during the Bronze Age persisted in subsequent centuries. However, systematic research on such sites has not been maintained. Under present conditions, new scientific investigations are required—employing advanced analytical methods, modern technologies, and interdisciplinary collaboration. Even small-scale excavations can now yield significant data, and the remains of ancient settlements discovered in recent decades provide valuable information for addressing these long-standing research questions.

One such site was accidentally discovered in the Kochkor Valley during excavations of ancient and medieval burials. The settlement was first identified in 1992 during the excavation of a stone mound resembling an ancient burial structure. The area, located in the foothills, revealed traces of sedentary populations who also practiced animal husbandry. They constructed residential buildings, and some elevated areas were later reused as burial sites. In 1992, excavation of one mound revealed a circular stone structure under which cultural layers of an ancient settlement were found. In 2004, a 36 m² excavation area was opened at the site. Analysis of ceramic fragments indicated the presence of cultural layers dating to the Bronze and Early Iron Ages [Tabaldiev, 2004:70–71]. Some vessel fragments display morphological similarities with Andronovo-type ceramics, while the majority correspond to the Saka-Usun cultural complex. The vessels were handmade and molded; most finds consist of body sherds, while rims, handles, and bases are less common.

No medieval ceramic fragments were identified. Among the finds were sherds bearing textile impressions on their inner surfaces, indicating the use of fabric templates during vessel formation and suggesting the presence of textile production. These traces offer insights into ancient weaving and fabric-making techniques. The rarity of such finds attracted the attention of researchers from Japan and Russia, who studied the textile imprints in detail.

Subsequent expert examination of the ceramic assemblage revealed a particularly rare fragment of a painted bowl. Its carefully polished and colored surface is atypical for the Inner Tien Shan traditions and closely parallels ceramics from the Ferghana region. In addition to ceramics, the cultural layer yielded stone pestles, grinding stones, fragments of grain mills and stone sickles, as well as bones of domestic animals.

The faunal remains are dominated by jaws and long bones of horses, sheep, and goats. Textile imprints recorded on the interior of certain ceramic fragments suggest the use of organic linings during vessel manufacture. Based on the 2004 excavation materials, the settlement is dated to the Late Bronze and Early Iron Ages (end of the 2nd millennium BC – beginning of the 1st millennium BC). The ceramic assemblage reflects a sedentary agro-pastoral culture [Tabaldiev, 2005:305–310].

These conclusions were confirmed by radiocarbon dating conducted by Giedrė Motuzaite Matuzeviciute, Associate Professor at Vilnius University and head of the Bioarchaeology Research Center. Her research in Kyrgyzstan focuses on the emergence and spread of agriculture and pastoralism in the mountain regions of Central Asia. The upper layers of the Chap site (to a depth of 1.40 m) date to 1065–825 BC [Motuzaite, Tabaldiev, Ananyevskaya et al., 2019:29–39]. This period corresponds to the transitional phase from the Late Bronze to the Early Iron Age, a poorly understood stage in regional prehistory. Joint interdisciplinary research was carried out between 2018 and 2020.

Excavations covered an area of 6 × 6 m, yielding materials that significantly expanded earlier results, particularly with respect to site chronology. Radiocarbon analyses of the upper layers, conducted at the Vilnius laboratory under the supervision of Motuzaite, determined that the lower layer of the site dates to approximately 2000–2200 BC.

The stratigraphy of the Chap settlement comprises several cultural layers separated by sterile deposits. Two major occupational phases are distinguished, divided by a thick (50–70 cm) loess-like horizon. Paleoclimatic analysis indicates that about 4200–3000 years ago, the settlement was abandoned and later reoccupied [Spate, Motuzaite, Tabaldiev, 2025: https://www.researchgate.net/publication/391048705**].**

During excavations in 2002, 2003, 2018, and 2020, an important assemblage of ceramic tableware fragments was collected. The ornamentation exhibits stylistic traits foreign to this region. For example, several sherds display hemispherical protrusions under the rim—produced by pressure from the exterior with a stick—a decorative technique conventionally termed "pearl ornamentation." Similar decorations are known from Bronze and Iron Age sites in Western Siberia and Kazakhstan. On some ceramic fragments, textile impressions have been preserved on the inner surface — traces left during the vessel's manufacturing process.

The principal result of the excavations at the multilayered Chap settlement concerns the discovery and analysis of botanical remains [Motuzaite Matuzeviciute, Mir-Makhamad, & Tabaldiev, 2021:743–758]. Charred barley grains were identified, confirming that cereal cultivation was practiced more than 4,000 years ago. The inter-

mountain valleys were inhabited by populations engaged in both herding and agriculture—a complex subsistence system that developed over millennia. Climatic fluctuations and changing political conditions influenced settlement patterns and living conditions. The materials from the Chap site thus demonstrate the parallel development of agriculture and nomadic pastoralism in this region. The degree of their development can only be fully understood through the continued identification and investigation of other sedentary settlements of the 1st millennium BC. Work in this direction is gradually resuming across various regions of Kyrgyzstan.
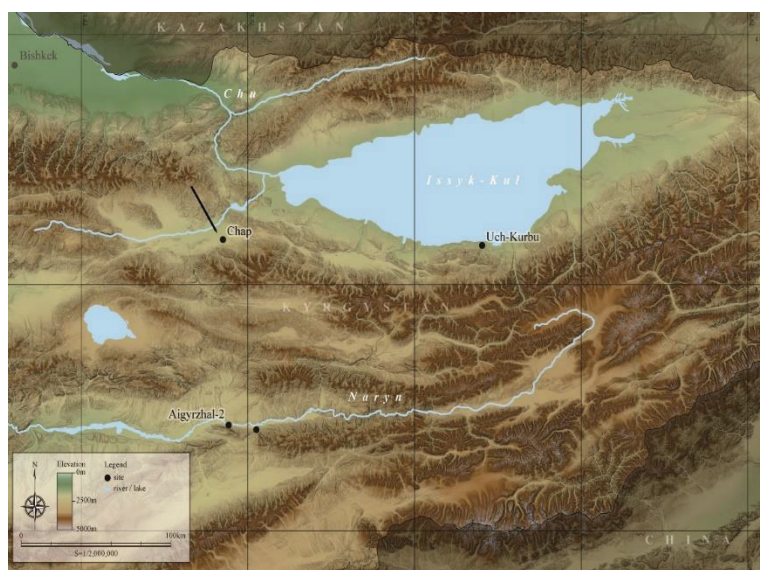
1. Map. Issyk-Kul, Inner Tien Shan

2. Kochkor Valley. The arrow indicates the location of Chap

3. Chap. Excavation process at the Chap settlement
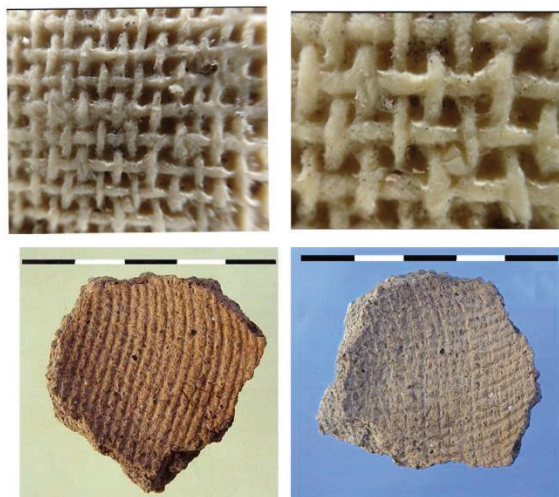
4. Chap. Excavation process at the Chap settlement

5. Fragment of a vessel with hemispherical knobs ("pearls")

6. Grinding stones from the Chap site

7. Chap. Ceramic fragments with textile impressions — traces left during the vessel-making process

8. Textile impressions on the inner surface of ceramic fragments from Chap

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THE BOUNDARIES OF TERRITORIAL SETTLEMENTS OF ANCIENT NOMADIC CATTLE BREEDERS ON THE COAST OF THE ARAL SEA REGION AND QUESTIONS OF THE GEOGRAPHY OF MONUMENTS OF THE FIRST SAKS TRIBES

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Abstract

Today, there is a growing global interest in the lifestyle, history, and legacy of nomadic cattle-breeding tribes. The process by which these nomadic pastoralist communities have transitioned to a sedentary way of life—under the influence of environmental factors—continues to this day. The shift to a settled lifestyle and the unification of these groups led to the formation of many empires throughout history. At times, they were also instrumental in the downfall of advanced states and cultures. Leading scientific research institutions across the world are conducting applied studies on various aspects such as the formation processes of nomadic pastoralism, their settlement areas, migration routes, winter pastures, their influence on societal development, interactions with neighboring regions, the history of nomadic empires, and their roles in trade and economic life.

In the Aral Sea region, shepherd communities and societies based on mixed farming and herding emerged as early as the Bronze Age, before the rise of true nomadic pastoralism. During this period, the tribes of the Aral region developed within the historical context of economic and cultural relations with other agrarian regions and ancient centers of civilization in Central Asia. The lifestyle and economic systems of the Eastern Aral tribes were influenced by the geographical environment and the activity of the lower Syr Darya tributaries, while in the southern Aral area, the livelihoods of ancient populations were shaped by the activity of the lower Amu Darya's branches, such as the Akchadarya and Sarykamysh, as well as the ancient channels of the Aral region.

This article investigates the territorial boundaries of ancient nomadic cattle-breeding communities in the Aral Sea region and the geography of the earliest Saka tribe monuments. Relying on newly uncovered scientific data, it aims to highlight unresolved issues, assess the degree to which nomadic tribes assimilated into the Aral region, and identify the unique features and limits of their territorial settlement.

Keywords: "Turan," "Scythians," "Dahae," "Sarmatians," "Saka-Massagetae," "Khorezmians"

INTRODUCTION

The history of the early Saka-Massagetae nomadic tribes in the territory of Uzbekistan has been studied through comparative analysis based on written sources and archaeological materials. As a result of archaeological research, including the examination and analysis of burial mounds, significant progress has been made in understanding the unique lifestyle characteristics of nomadic tribes, their distinctions from one another, traditions, issues of migration, and their impact on societal development.

During the years of Uzbekistan's independence, greater attention has been paid to history. Along with thoroughly analyzing historical processes, identifying new dimensions and expanding the scope of research have been set as priority tasks. The number of studies focused on pastoral farming has increased, and as a result, the history of nomadic herders has been enriched with new research findings.

Research is being conducted on foreign relations among peoples, the mutual economic interactions between various ethnic groups, the historical and cultural significance of sedentary agricultural populations of Central Asia and the early nomadic Saka tribes, as well as the influence of nomadic culture on ancient civilizations. Moreover, efforts are being made to identify the continuity in socio-economic relations of ancient peoples, to restore ancient trade routes, to preserve and further develop the material and spiritual culture of the Saka tribes, and to highlight their contributions to the development of regional culture.

Due to the favorable natural and geographical conditions, the southwestern Aral Sea region (including the Ustyurt depression and the slopes of Mount Sultan Uvays) was settled by humans very early—during the Paleolithic and Mesolithic periods. In the Neolithic era, which marked a new historical stage, the Aral Sea regions, like other parts of Central Asia, were inhabited by hunters, fishermen, and gatherers. The expansion of these communities across wide territories was connected to their economic needs, such as securing sources of fresh water, occupying areas rich in flora

and fauna, and utilizing stone quarries to produce tools. Seasonal migration was characteristic of these hunting and fishing communities. Throughout human history, migration—i.e., the movement of populations from one location to another across regions and interregional scales—has played a significant role from ancient times to the present day. The causes and patterns of migration are studied based on various factors. Typically, migrations are classified as internal or external, and as occurring over long or relatively short distances, depending on social (demographic), economic, political, and environmental factors. There are also temporary migrations associated with production and labor processes, as well as seasonal migrations of nomadic and semi-nomadic pastoral populations.

The findings concerning the territorial settlement boundaries of ancient nomadic cattle breeders and the geography of the earliest Saka tribe monuments in the Aral Sea region have not been thoroughly analyzed. Therefore, it is important to draw upon new scientific data to uncover existing problems, assess the extent to which pastoral tribes assimilated the Aral Sea territories, and determine the specific characteristics and boundaries of their territorial distribution.

DISCUSSION AND RESULTS

Given the limited availability of written sources, archaeological data plays an invaluable role in identifying the interactions between geographic areas and ethnic groups, the development of anthropogenic landscapes, the degree of territorial assimilation, population density, and settlement boundaries. The Khorezm archaeological expedition has made a significant contribution to the study of the geography of Bronze Age and early Iron Age monuments in the Aral Sea region, particularly in solving cartographic issues related to these sites. It is therefore appropriate to explore this topic based on available archaeological data. First, it is necessary to briefly review the extent to which the area has been studied.

As a result of the Khorezm expedition's research, maps of monuments from different periods have been created. In S.P. Tolstov's work, the first map published in chronological order is titled *"Distribution of Monuments of Primitive Culture in the Akchadarya Delta"*, which, alongside the Kaltaminor and Tozabagyab cultural areas, also features Iron Age nomadic cultural monuments. The second map is dedicated to the Amirobod culture's sites from the late Bronze Age, and the third map is titled *"Map of Settlement and Distribution of Archaeological Cultures in the Jonidarya and Kuvondarya Basins of the Lower Syr Darya."* [Tolstov 1962: 7, 29, 72]

A. S. Kes compiled a map highlighting the old Akchadarya channel of the lower Amu Darya, the Aral channel, the Sarykamysh delta (Daryolik and Dovdon channels), and the Upper Uzboy riverbed. This map also includes features such as depressions, saline soils, sand dunes, ravines, ridges, and dried riverbeds. These resources have been effectively used by researchers to illuminate the important topic of anthropogenic influences on the formation of the Amu Darya's alluvial-delta plains [Kes 1981: 72–80].

In B.I. Vaynberg's monograph, cartographic data on monuments is supplemented with materials such as the *"Cartoscheme of the Research Areas of the Khorezm Archaeological-Ethnographic Expedition"* and the *"Map of Left-Bank Khorezm Monuments with Historical-Archaeological Descriptions from Ancient Times."* These works also analyze topics such as ecological and ethnic history, economic uses of natural resources, and problems in historical ethno-geography. Based on the ideas of V. V. Bartold, the Aral Sea region is referred to as "Turan." [Vaynberg 1999: 335–336]

S. B. Bolelov's article includes a map of early Iron Age monuments in the southern Aral Sea region, enriched with sites such as Sakarchaga, Qoratosh, Toshsaka, Mishekli, and Ucho'choq [Bolelov 2017: 69]. In H. Matyaqubov's monograph, the territorial distribution and boundaries of the population in the Khorezm oasis during the Bronze and early Iron Ages are examined along with problems in historical geography. According to the researcher, Vaynberg's monograph contains several inconsistencies and shortcomings in describing the territorial distribution of tribes in the Aral Sea region (Turan). For instance, the omission of burial mound materials related to the early Saka at Sakarchaga on the right banks of the middle Dovdon channel in the Sarykamysh area appears questionable, as they point to the presence of the Saka in the Khorezm oasis during the 7th–6th centuries BCE [Matyaqubov: 80–85].

A key aspect of studying the geography of monuments and historical ethno-geography is the need for quantitative comparisons between different cartographic indicators. Therefore, it is crucial to thoroughly examine cartographic data, widely use diverse sources, and select mapping methods that yield historically accurate results. The use of chronologically verified, stable scientific materials is also essential. However, in some cases, meeting this requirement proves challenging. As an example, in one of the maps from Tolstov's aforementioned work, more than 70 monuments of "nomadic barbarian tribes" are marked in the Akchadarya delta of the southern Aral Sea. However, there is no information provided about the types of these sites (seasonal settlements, permanent dwellings, burial mounds) or their chronological classification, nor are their names included. Only quantitative data is presented.

The legend on the map of Eastern Aral Sea archaeological sites includes ruins of cities and fortresses, ancient settlements and dwellings, burial structures (mausoleums), and burial mounds. Among them, the most important sites are named, and more than 60 Saka tribe settlements from the 7th–5th centuries BCE are recorded along the southern old channels of the lower Syr Darya [Levina 1998: 42–45].

The nomadic pastoralist tribes that inhabited the Eurasian regions during the early Iron Age are referred to in written sources as Scythians, Dahae, Sarmatians, and Saka-Massagetae. The early history of these peoples is generally dated to the 7th–6th centuries BCE [Markov et. al. 1973]. During the 10th–8th centuries BCE, pastoralist tribes who left behind the North Tagisken burial mounds were spread across the Eastern Aral Sea region. They raised livestock along the banks of the Inkardarya and Jonidarya rivers and lived in seasonal dwellings and settlements. Most of their sites (over 30) are concentrated near the confluence of the Jonidarya and Akchadarya rivers, forming a large oasis. In general, the monuments span a 250-kilometer stretch along ancient, now-dry riverbeds, indicating these lands were used for grazing. The origins of these pastoral tribes are typically linked to Central Kazakhstan, [Tolstov 1962: 201–204] and this stage is viewed as the transitional period to early Saka history [Itina et. al. 2001:102–107].

In the desert-bordering areas along the Amu Darya, there was no permanent settlement during the late Bronze Age, as the Dovdon channel's flow into the Sarykamysh Lake had ceased. Meanwhile, the right-bank Akchadarya channel had more reliable water supply. Economic revitalization along the Sarykamysh corresponds to the development of the Sakarchaga Saka culture and the Quyisoy culture. In the 7th century BCE, the restoration of water flow in the Dovdon channel enabled livestock grazing across vast steppe pastures. Ten sites from this period have been identified and studied. Archaeological remains are spread across roughly 350 square kilometers. The distances between nearby settlements range from 5 to 15 km, while the largest pastoral settlements—Quyisoy 2 and Qang'akala—are about 70 km apart [Vaynberg 1999: fig. 1/3]. These figures indicate that the degree of territorial assimilation and population density in the Sarykamysh basin was relatively low. Notably, the settlement area was bounded by the O'ngizorti Karakum hills to the south and the Ustyurt ridges to the north.

Due to migration, newly arriving tribes introduced their cultural traditions into newly settled regions (for example, the migration of the early Saka from the lower Syr Darya to the Sarykamysh area). Moreover, according to written sources, the emergence of the ancient "Khorezmians" as an ethnic group may have resulted from the blending of various ethnic layers—including the Saka, the inhabitants of Quyisoy,

and peoples from Bactria and Margiana—with the local pastoralist and farming populations.

In the 7th–6th centuries BCE, the Saka of Eastern Aral were settled in the central parts of the Inkardarya and Jonidarya basins, previously assimilated by earlier pastoralists. Their dwellings were grouped in settlements stretching 300–800 meters along the riverbanks. These settlements were not enclosed by defensive walls. Water availability in the river branches varied, and in some cases the branches dried up—affecting the topography and location of the settlements [Levina et. al. 1991: 155–156].

In the 5th–4th centuries BCE, the Chirikrabat culture developed on the basis of the local early Saka culture. Archaeological sites linked to this culture are located in the central part of the Jonidarya basin, and over 200 related monuments have been discovered. During the late Bronze Age and early Iron Age, the northern part of the Syr Darya delta—including the Eskidaryolik (Kuvondarya) basin—was also settled.
In the middle of the first millennium BCE, the Jetisoy culture emerged in this region. About 50 archaeological monuments belonging to this culture have been discovered. Unlike the settlements of the Chirikrabat culture, all Jetisoy culture habitations were fortified, consisting of fortresses and fortified dwellings. These sites formed distinct groups of 5–6 fortresses located 2–8 kilometers apart [Levina 1996].

In the works of S.P. Tolstov, the Eastern Aral Sea region is referred to as "Scythia." This is reflected in his general conclusion: "Now we have the opportunity to become acquainted with the heart of Central Asian Scythia (or perhaps Scythia itself)… The population here was relatively dense. The traditional label of 'nomads' given to the people of this region, which no longer seems fitting, has long become outdated, though it has not yet entirely disappeared from scholarly use. These people were not merely herders—they were also irrigators, craftsmen, and builders of cities. They led a firmly sedentary way of life" [Tolstov 1948: 424].

The terms "land of the Scythians" and "Scythia" were first used in Herodotus's *Histories*, referring to the tribes inhabiting the northern coasts of the Black Sea and the lower reaches of the Dnieper River. In the works of later Greco-Roman historians and geographers, the term "Scythian" became a broad designation for various nomadic tribes such as the Dahae, Saka, and Massagetae. These groups were rarely referred to as a "people" or "ethnos" in the sources; more often, they were called "tribes" and named by their specific ethnonyms [Herrman 1914: 13–20]; [Tarn 1938: 478–488].

S. P. Tolstov made a significant contribution to the study of the ethno-geography of the Saka. The ethno-geographical issues concerning the Saka-Massagetae were first addressed by Western Orientalists such as I. Markwart, A. Herrmann, J. Junge, and V. Tarn. In the early 20th century, ethnonyms like "Saka-Tigrakhauda" from ancient Persian inscriptions and "Massagetae" from Herodotus were interpreted as different names for the same group. The Massagetae were described as including tribes such as the Derbices, Augasians, Attasians, Apasiacs, and Khorezmians [Tolstov 1948: 112].

S.P. Tolstov attempted to clarify this list by mapping the distribution of Saka-Massagetae tribes as follows:
- The Khorezmians and Apasiacs along the northern borders of Khorezm from the Uzboy to the Jonidarya (corresponding to Strabo's "swamp-dwelling Massagetae");
- The Sakaravaks from the southeastern border of the Khorezm oasis to the Nuratau mountains;
- The Haumavarga-Saka and Amyrgian-Saka as "mountain and plain Massagetae";
- The Derbices between the middle Amu Darya and the Bukhara oasis;
- The Dahae around the Kuvondarya;
- The Asii (or Asians) from present-day Turkistan to the Tashkent oasis [Tolstov 1962: 136–137].

Although the Khorezmians are considered ethnically related to the Saka-Massagetae by Strabo, the ancient Greek historian Hecataeus placed them in the region between Parthia and Bactria. According to Herodotus, the Khorezmians lived in a mountain-enclosed valley near the lands of the Hyrcanians, Parthians, Sarangians, and Tamaneians. In his later works, Tolstov placed the Apasiacs in the Jonidarya oasis, the Augasians near the Kuvondarya, and the Sakaravaks in the Inkardarya basin—mostly relying on Strabo's accounts [Tolstov 1962: 136]. According to Tolstov, along the tributaries of the lower Syr Darya in Eastern Aral, a unique "semi-nomadic agricultural" economy developed, rooted in the cultural traditions of the late Bronze Age. The rich landscape of this vast territory—with numerous river branches, lakes, and swamps—resembled the environment described by Strabo as the land of the Massagetae, "the swamps formed by rivers" or "islands in the marshes." Thus, it was precisely in this area that the land of the Massagetae, as described by Strabo, was located [Herodotus: IV.12].

In Herodotus's *Histories*, the "swamps and islands" of the Massagetae are linked to the Araxes (Amu Darya) River. He wrote: "The Araxes flows like a serpent, branching into forty streams, all of which vanish into swamps, save one. It is said that people who feed on fish live in these swamps. Only one channel of the Araxes continues to flow and empties into the Caspian Sea" [Vaynberg 1999: 350].

Strabo also provides corresponding information about the Araxes, its branches, its swamps, and the people living in them Following Tolstov, B.I. Vaynberg also contributed to the ethno-geographical study of Turan. Taking similar features from written sources into account, he placed the "Saka beyond Sogdiana" in the areas between the Inkardarya and Jonidarya rivers in Eastern Aral. In his maps, the Massagetae tribes—Apasiacs and Derbices—are located near the lower and middle reaches of the Uzboy River. However, this idea was not new. Long before Vaynberg, I.V. Pyankov had proposed that the Massagetae lived in the desert region between the Caspian and Aral Seas, attempting to explain their seasonal migration patterns. According to Pyankov, their winter centers were in Mangyshlak, the lower Ural and Syr Darya regions, and where the Irgiz and Turgai rivers meet, as well as on the Ustyurt Plateau [Mandelshtam 1976: 21–27]. In summer, they grazed livestock in the Emba River basin. These seasonal migrations were driven by economic needs.
A. M. Mandelshtam linked burial mounds found in the eastern Caspian steppe to the Massagetae culture. [Yagodin 2011: 235–240]. V.N. Yagodin proposed unifying the ancient pastoralist monuments of the Ustyurt–Caspian region under a single cultural umbrella known as the Aral–Caspian culture [Smirnov 1979: 74–77]. K.F. Smirnov placed the homeland of the early Dahae and Massagetae between the Emba and Ural (Yaik) rivers, in the southern Urals [Khodzhaeva 2015: 3–16].

The ethnonym "Daha" (also written as Dahi or Day) appears in the *Yasht* section of the *Avesta*, along with other pastoral tribes such as the "Tura" and "Sairima" [Marquart 1901: 155–157]. Based on these references, I. Markwart identified the "Tura" tribes with the Massagetae, placing them east of the Caspian Sea, and equated the "Sairima" with the Sauromatians (Sarmatians), locating them in the steppes of the lower Volga [Smirnov 1979: 76].

In Herodotus's account, the "Day" (Dahae) and "Massagetae" tribes were likely present in the southern Urals by the 7th century BCE. The ancient hydronym of the Ural River—Yaik or Daik (Daicus)—is believed to derive from their name [Pyankov 1998: 241–246]. According to the *Avesta*, the "Tura" tribes lived in the land of "Kanha." In scholarly literature, this region is associated with the Eastern Aral area [Vaynberg 1999: 205–206] or, alternatively, with the lands east of the middle course of the Syr Darya near Qoratog [Obelchenko 1987: 107–109].

B. A. Litvinsky located the "Saka beyond Sogdiana" on the right bank of the middle Syr Darya, the Saka Tigrakhauda (Massagetae) on the eastern shores of the Caspian Sea, and the Haumavarga-Saka in the borderlands of Bactria and Sogdiana [Litvinsky 1960: 169]. In our view, placing the "Saka beyond the river" in the steppe regions along the right bank of the middle Syr Darya is the most accurate.

In the works of late antique authors, the Kyzylkum desert is described as the "Scythian steppe," "the famous deserts of Scythia," [Litvinsky 1972: 158–178] "lands of the Scythians and Massagetae," [Curtius Rufus VII.3.19–21] and "the desert and steppe country" [Arrian VI.16.4] where the river Politimet (Zarafshan) disappears among the sand dunes.

CONCLUSION

Because the natural geographical conditions of the Aral Sea region were favorable for the life of nomadic herders, nomadic pastoralist communities inhabited large expanses of its territory. The Aral sea region consists primarily of deserts and lowlands: to the south lies the Karakum desert, to the east and north the Kyzylkum sesert, and to the west the Aral–Caspian lowlands and the Ustyurt Plateau. Its northern area borders the vast desert steppes of Kazakhstan, which created excellent opportunities for the movement and migration of nomadic herders.

The banks of the Amu Darya River and its channels, as well as the border regions of the Khorezm oasis, served as wintering grounds for nomadic pastoralists. The riverside thickets and reed beds provided fodder for livestock during the harsh winters. Burial mounds of nomads were also constructed in these winter camps. Nomadic herders migrated within defined territories. Based on their movement patterns, different types of nomadism can be distinguished. They would leave their homelands due to livestock growth, drought, or pressure from other nomadic tribes and enter new regions. Conflicts over territory and pastureland frequently occurred. Nomads also conducted raids into agricultural oases. In response, ancient states reinforced their borders for protection.

As a result of comparative analysis of written and archaeological sources, new foundations have been laid for understanding the historical ethno-geography of the Saka-Massagetae. According to this, it is appropriate to locate the "Saka beyond Sogdiana" between the Eastern Aral sea region and Northern Kyzylkum; the "Saka-Khorezmians" or "Khorezmians" in the former riverbed oases of the Amu Darya such as Dovdon and Daryolik in the Sarykamysh region; the "Saka Tigrakhauda" in the territory between the Sarykamysh Lake and the Caspian sea; and the Apasiacs and Derbices—tribes that were part of the Massagetae—in the right and left bank steppes of the Uzboy river.

This conclusion is based on the degree of territorial assimilation seen in the geographical and cartographic records of Saka monuments, on studies of territorial settlement characteristics and boundaries, and on historiographical sources that illuminate the historical geography of nomadic populations.

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THE WOLF CULT AND BŐRTE CHINO

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Abstract

This article aims to clarify whether the figures Börte Chino and Qo'ai Maral—mentioned at the beginning of The Secret History of the Mongols—were based on real historical individuals, and whether the worship of the wolf and the doe actually existed among the ancient Mongols. It also attempts to demonstrate that the stone structure known today as the "Wall of Chinggis" located in the basin of Mount Burkhan Khaldun may have been the dwelling place of Börte Chino and Qo'ai Maral after their migration. This conclusion is based on archaeological research conducted at the site. Over the centuries, this sacred place continued to be revered by later generations of Mongols as Yekes-e Qajaru ("Land of the Ancestors").

Keywords: Börte Chino, Qo'ai Maral, wolf, doe, Yekes-e Qajaru ("Land of the Ancestors"), Wall of Chinggis

The Origins of Chinggis Qa'an. *At the beginning, there was a blue-grey wolf (*Börte Cinō*), born with his destiny ordained by Heaven Above. His wife was a fallow doe (*Qo'ai Maral*). They crossed the Tenggis, and after settling at the source of the Onan River on Mount Burqan Qaldun, a son named Batačiqan was born to them* (Rachewiltz, 2004:27). Thus, The Secret History of the Mongols records the coming of the forebears of the great Chinggis Khaan—the ruler with the Nine Banners and founder of the Mongol Empire—to Mount Burkhan Khaldun. The most reliable source that provides additional details about the divine ancestor of Chinggis Khaan, Börte Cinō, and his origins is the Compendium of Chronicles (Jāmiʿ al-Tawārīkh). It states: "*Trustworthy historians of the Turks report that all the Mongol tribes are descended from the two persons who went into Ärgänä-qun. One of those who emerged from there was an important commander, a leader and chief of tribes, Börte China [Blue Wolf] by name, from whom Dobun Bayan, the husband of Alan Qo'a,*

and several other clans were descended. He had many wives and sons. By his chief wife, Qo'ai Maral [White Doe], he had a son—the most important among his sons—who attained rulership. His name was Batachi-qiyan." (Fazlullah, 1998:114)

The two credible historical sources clearly refer to the same figure—Börte Cinō of The Secret History of the Mongols and Börte China of the Compendium of Chronicles—as evidenced by their identical wife (Qo'ai Maral) and son (Batachiqan). According to the Compendium of Chronicles, Dobun Mergen, the distant ancestor of Chinggis Khaan, was a descendant of Börte China; while The Secret History of the Mongols states that Chinggis Khaan's lineage began with Börte Cinō. Therefore, it is beyond doubt that Börte China, who emerged from Ergene Qun and became the distant ancestor of Chinggis Khaan, is indeed the same person as Börte Cinō, who came to Mount Burkhan Khaldun at the source of the Onan River to continue his lineage.

While the Compendium of Chronicles portrays Börte China as a historical figure—a man with many wives, among whom was Qo'ai Maral, who bore rulers—the Secret History describes Börte Cinō as "a blue-grey wolf born with his destiny ordained by Heaven." Likewise, Qo'ai Maral is depicted as "a fallow doe." Many scholars have interpreted these representations through the lens of totemic theory, viewing them as animal ancestors or tutelary spirits symbolizing the mythical origins of the Mongols. However, such interpretations are not well supported. They rely on vague definitions and have often been repeated without thorough critical analysis or solid evidence (Menes, 2008:24).

Some Mongolian historians are attempting to step away from the totemistic view associated with the origin story of the Mongols and adjust it to fit historical realities. For example, Sh. Bira explained that Bőrte-cinō and Qo'ai-maral were an expression of the ancient totemistic belief that attributed the lineage of Chinggis Qa'an to animals. He suggested that this tradition was broken when Alan-Gua's husband, Dobun Bayan, died. In reality, it was the son born to Alan-Gua from her illicit union, Bodonchar Munkhag, who became the founder of the "Golden Lineage" of Mongol Khans. This represented a fundamentally new view—a turning point in the political thought of the ancient Mongols—and could even be termed the "light theory" (or *gēriin üzel*). ... The "light theory" is more sophisticated than the ancient totemistic view and represents a finer concept rooted in abstract thought (Bira, 2011:109).

G. Menes's explanation regarding this is more intriguing. He suggests that the gap of 22 generations between Bőrte-cinō and the lineage of Bodonchar might not indicate a break in the lineage but rather the possibility that in ancient times, Mongols counted the lineage of khans in cycles, naming a span of 20–22 generations as "huja'ur" (origins) and marking it as one cycle (Menes, 2008:24).

Later historical works, such as Khondemir's (1475–1535) *"The Friend of Biographies"* and Abu'l-Ghazi Bahadur Khan's (1603–1663) *"Genealogy of the Turkmens"*, contain versions of the Ergenekun legend where Bőrte-cinō is mentioned as having ruled the Mongols who emerged from Ergenekun. The subject matter and narrative in these accounts are similar to the *"Compendium of Chronicles"* (Bichurin, 1950:225).

Mongolian historians of the 17th–18th centuries were unanimous in recording Bőrte-cinō and Qo'ai Maral as historical figures. For instance, the learned monk of the Urat lineage, Luvsandambijaltsan, records in his Altan Tobchi that: "*When Börte Cinō was twenty-nine years old, his son Batachihan was born in the second year of the Zhenyuan reign of Emperor Dezong of the Tang dynasty, the Year of the Red Tiger.*" (Luvsandambijaltsan, 2006:53). This evidence unequivocally states that Bőrte-cinō was a physical person.

It is impossible for the culture of nomadic Mongols to revere and worship the wolf, which they have always regarded as an enemy of their livestock. In this regard, the Inner Mongolian scholar Ch. Khishigtogtokh, who specifically studied this subject, concluded that the wolf cult and totem did not exist among the Mongols (Khishigtogtokh, 2014:417-419). Therefore, it is certain that the Bőrte-cinō and Qo'ai Maral from the beginning of *The Secret History of the Mongols* were physical persons and not totem animals.

Archaeological evidence from ancient and medieval nomadic cultures in Mongolia provides no indication that the wolf or the doe were ever worshipped as totemic animals. In fact, depictions of these two creatures in early nomadic art do not represent them in a reproductive or harmonious context, but rather in scenes of confrontation or struggle. Such imagery appears, for example, in the art of the Xiongnu (Hunnu), reflecting an earlier artistic tradition in which animals were portrayed in

dynamic opposition rather than symbolic unity. As Russian archaeologist S. S. Minyaev observes: "This circumstance at first glance links the formation of the most important components of both the spiritual and material culture of the Xiongnu—their artistic motifs and the most characteristic types of objects—with the circle of Scythian tribes of the Sayan–Altai and southern Siberian regions, where the objects under consideration, bearing zoomorphic images, were most widespread." (Minyaev, 1995:123-136). Among the archaeological artifacts discovered in Mongolia, one of the most remarkable examples is the felt carpet from Noyon Uul, whose decorative motifs are among the finest achievements of early nomadic art. The depiction that most closely parallels the symbolic pairing of the wolf and the deer discussed here can be found in one of its scenes—specifically, an image showing a beast of prey attacking a deer. As S. I. Rudenko describes: "Another scene—an attack of an eared griffin upon a deer (plates XLIV and XLV)—is compositionally and stylistically extremely close to similar scenes in the art of the tribes of the Altai and especially of southern Siberia. This similarity is emphasized not only by the poses of the animals but also by the details in the depiction of the griffin's wings and tail, particularly the presence of small cells at the base of the wings and tail imitating turquoise inlays on golden images of similar griffins from Scythian-period clasps of Siberia." (Rudenko, 1962:54).

Russian researchers interpret the animal combat on the embroidered rugs as a symbol of the struggle for existence, the struggle between life and death, the battle between good and evil for life, and the struggle between light and shadow. They explain that: "The mythological beast—a carnivorous creature of the horned feline type and the griffin bird—represents the Otherworld or death, while the yak and deer, which exist in reality, represent the real world or life, respectively. The yak and deer are revered animals associated with the sun cult" (Yelikhina, 2017:68) (Figure No. 1. Rudenko. Tabl. XLV).

Although researchers have consistently interpreted the animal attacking the deer on the No'on Uul rug as a griffin, this winged creature is entirely different from the griffin depicted on the felt embroidery featuring mounted nomads from No'on Uul. Therefore, J. Bayarsaikhan suggests that this creature cannot be equated with any real bird; instead, it is an expression of the widespread belief and cult representing the powerful, mythological bird that dominates the sky and firmament among the Xiongnu and their rulers (Bayarsaikhan, 2020:59-69).

Similar compositions to the one on the No'on Uul rug also exist in Xiongnu sculpture. For instance, there is a bronze belt plaque housed in the National Museum of Tuva Republic depicting a griffin or phoenix biting a hoofed animal—such as a horse or yak (the upper part is missing) (Leus, 2019:50-65). The proportions of the hoofed animal's body, as well as the position and appearance of the winged creature biting it, are strikingly similar to the depiction on the No'on Uul rug (Figure No. 2. Leus. Fig. 2).

In reality, there is no predatory bird that bites the back of a hoofed animal. However, in the Eurasian steppe belt, the only predator capable of biting and fighting the back of a deer or elk is the wolf. Therefore, the winged, fantastical beast depicted in the artifacts we mention is likely not a griffin, but rather the wolf. Its cellular ears, body size, and physique resemble those of a wolf. The creative process of making the wolf into an abstract (fantastic) image had already penetrated Xiongnu figurative art. Clear evidence of this is the cylindrical object made of bone found in a Xiongnu burial at No'on Uul, featuring the image of a wolf with horns and wings (Rudenko 1962:54). The wings spread from either side of the wolf's back appear, at first glance, to resemble camel humps (Figure No. 3. Rudenko. Tabl. XXXVI, 1, 2). From this, it is plausible that the mythological creature that researchers mistakenly identified as a griffin is, in fact, the wolf.

A realistic depiction of the struggle between a *wolf* and a *stag* (a horned male deer, not a doe) is found on a belt plaque made of black boghead stone discovered in a Xiongnu burial at *Ikh Sansar Mountain*, Sumber soum, Govisümber Province, Mongolia (Mijiddorj et al, 2023:42-45). The engraved scene vividly portrays an open-mouthed wolf chasing a large stag with branching antlers, while another wolf—its mouth closed—is depicted above them, all carved with sharp, fine-pointed tools (Fig. 4, Mijiddorj et al., Fig. 3).

A nearly identical artifact—a pair of belt plaques made of black boghead stone inlaid with gemstones—was unearthed from a Xiongnu burial site near *Terezin settlement*, located on the southern bank of the Sayano-Shushenskoye reservoir in the Chaa-Khol district of Tuva. Researchers have dated this find to the turn of the 2nd–1st centuries BCE (Leus, 2019:5-65). Thus, even in the early period of the Xiongnu state, compositions featuring the combat between the deer and the wolf had already entered Xiongnu figurative art.

It is clear that this composition of combat between the deer (not a doe without antlers) and the wolf among the Xiongnu has no connection to the reproduction/mating of the wolf and doe which was later misunderstood as a totem among later Mongols. Instead, the meaning and symbolism of this combat composition between the two animals would be more convincing when compared with earlier periods. Mongolian territory is the homeland of the deer stones, monuments created between the 6th and 13th centuries BCE. Researchers have interpreted the deer depicted on these stones in various ways, such as symbols of power, a vehicle carrying the spirit of a warrior hero, and so on.

However, we have previously published a research work interpreting that the meaning and significance of the carvings on deer stones are connected not with the soaring deer itself, but with its antlers. The power and authority of ancient warriors were represented by majestic antlers (the more branches and larger the rack, the greater the authority), and this was depicted along with the creature that possessed them (deer, bull, yak, elk). The deer is the mammal with the most branched and majestic antlers. Therefore, the deer stone with carved antlers served as the symbol of a clan or lineage possessing supreme authority. The deer stone, as an expression of authority (the emblem/totem), was erected in the territory where the authority of that lineage (or alliance of tribes) was recognized (Ölziibayar, Khaskharu 2018:196-199). The dominance of the antlered lineage began to wane in the middle of the 1st millennium BCE. This process seems to be reflected in Xiongnu art through depictions of a predator chasing an antlered animal or the image of a single-antlered animal. Perhaps the winged wolf chasing the deer/elk on the No'on Uul rug, and the wolf chasing the deer carved on the belt plaque from Ikh Sansar mountain, are connected to heroic epics commemorating the heroic deeds that overthrew the dominance of the antlered lineage in ancient times.

The figures *Bőrte-cinō* and *Qo'ai-maral*, who appear at the beginning of The Secret History of the Mongols, are, according to many scholars, not totemic animals such as a blue-grey wolf or a fallow doe. Instead, they were real historical people who led Mongol tribes from Ergüne Qun to Burkhan Khaldun. Regarding the birth year of their son *Batačiqan*, it is specifically mentioned in Urad monk Luvsandambijaltsan's Altan Tobchi. Buryat scholar *P.B. Baldanzhapov* calculated that the Red Tiger year, corresponding to the 2nd year of the Zhēnyuán era under Tang Emperor Dezong (780–804), is *786* (Baldanzhapov, 1970: ком 219, 392-394). Therefore, the arrival

of Bőrte-cinō and his group of Mongol tribes at Burkhan Khaldun can be dated to the *780s*, making them the direct ancestors of Chinggis Khan.

In Mongolian sources composed during the 17th–18th centuries, the place where Bőrte-cinō settled is recorded as "Yed-un qajaru" (Land of the Yed)∗. This "Yed-un qajaru" is orthographically and semantically close to the phrase "Yekes-e qajaru" ("Land of the Ancestors") mentioned in the sentence from §70 of The Secret History of the Mongols: "tere qabur ambaqai-qahan-nu qatut orbei soqatai jirin yekes-e qajaru inerü qaruqsan-tur hő'elün-üjin otcu qojit gürcü qojida<'u>'uldaju hő'elün-üjin orbei soqatai jirin-e ügülerün yisügei-ba'atur-i ükübe-'ü kő'üju ko'ud-i minu yeke ülü bol<u>qui yaca yekes-ün kesig-ece bile'ür-ece sarqud-aca yekin qojida'ulumui ta üje'et ideküi ülü sergü'ülün newükün bol<u>ba ta ke'ejü'ü" (Rachewiltz, 1972:27).Therefore, it is probable that the place where Bőrte-cino and a section of the Mongol tribes first arrived and settled on Mount Burkhan Khaldun was termed "Yekes-e qajaru" (Land of the Ancestors) in The Secret History of the Mongols, but was later recorded as "Yed-un qajaru" in Mongolian sources composed later. According to §70 of The Secret History, Mongol queens visited Yekes-e qajaru in spring to perform major rituals. These ceremonies were probably dedicated to the ancestors, particularly the early forebears of Bőrte-cinō, at the site where they had first established their settlement. Over time, the original name "Yekes-e qajaru" seems to have been shortened or simplified to "Yed-un qajaru."

We have attempted to clarify the location where the Mongol tribes led by Bőrte-cinō arrived at Mount Burkhan Khaldun and first established their hearth. The "Chinggis Kherem" (Wall of Chinggis)∗ located in the basin of the Öglögchi River, an eastern tributary of the Khurkh River, in Batshireet sum, Khentii aimag, in the eastern region of Mongolia—is of particular interest both in terms of its location and structure. This structure encircles the slope and ridge of a mountain, with a total circumference of 3.08 km. In its current preserved state, some sections are built by carefully stacking

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∗ Because of the similar spelling, this word has sometimes been reconstructed as **"Jad"** and "translated" from Turkic with the meaning **"foreign land"**, an interpretation that has been adopted without close scrutiny

∗ Marxist historians artificially began to refer to this fortress as the "Öglögchi" Kherem after the name of the locality, starting in the 1960s.

unworked natural stones, reaching a height of 350–380 cm (Figure No. 5. General view of Wall of Chinggis).

In 2002 and 2003, the Mongolian-American joint "Chinggis Khaan" expedition excavated several semi-subterranean dwellings with heating systems (*kang*), which were widely distributed in the Far East and the Amur River basin. The majority of these dwellings were dated to the 7th–9th centuries CE (Ulziibayar, 2010:290-296). Furthermore, the "Onon-2013" expedition of the Institute of History and Archaeology of the Mongolian Academy of Sciences determined through radiocarbon analysis that this fortress was built around 780–800 CE (Figure No. 6. Graph showing analysis results).

CONCLUSION

Evidence that the wolf was revered and worshipped as a totem is absent in the monuments of ancient Mongolian art. The Xiongnu depiction of a wolf chasing an antlered animal appears to be related to the heroic epic content concerning the overthrow of the dominance of the preceding era's antlered lineage. Bőrte-cinō and Qo'ai-maral from *The Secret History of the Mongols* were physical persons and not totem animals. The name "Chinggis's" given by local residents to the stone fortress located in the basin of Mount Burkhan Khaldun, and the date established by archaeological research, align with the written historical accounts regarding the arrival of the Mongol tribes led by Bőrte-cinō at Mount Burkhan Khaldun. Therefore, we believe that the Mongol tribes led by Bőrte-cinō built the Chinggis Kherem and resided within it. We conclude that this site was later revered and worshipped by their descendants as the sacred place known as "Yekes-e qajaru" (Land of the Ancestors).
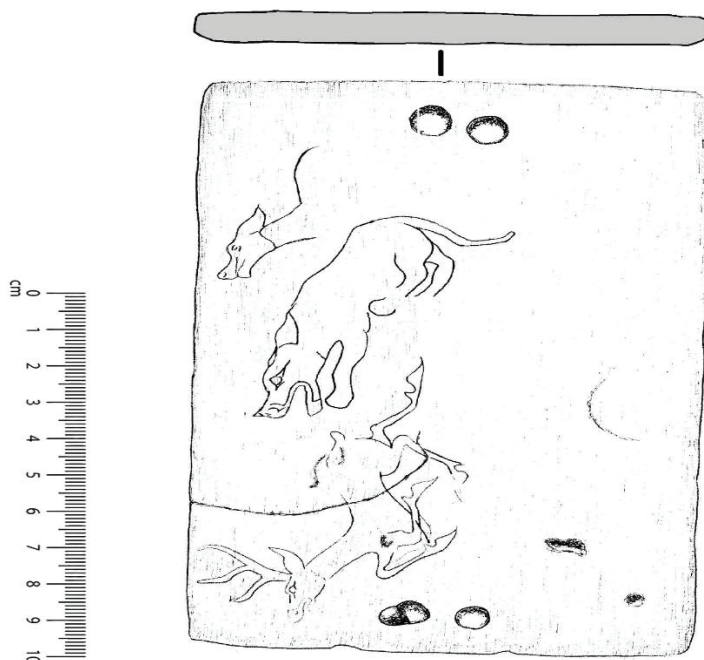
Fig. 1. Wolf and Maral Figurine

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GRAVE LOOTING IN STEPPE SOCIETIES: THE EXAMPLE OF XIONGNU TOMBS

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Abstract

Nomadic societies, as an expression of their respect for ancestors, built large and small graves and furnished them with valuable objects and numerous elements of material culture. This, as in sedentary societies, resulted in the reopening and looting of graves. Studies on post-burial interventions have shown that such actions cannot be explained solely as economically motivated robberies, but may also have been carried out for ritualistic or status-related purposes. For this reason, grave interventions among the Xiongnu represent a multi-layered phenomenon. Archaeologist Paul Bahn, while examining tomb robberies in ancient Egypt, described tomb robbery as the world's second oldest profession and noted that no royal tomb escaped. Fortunately, the case of the Xiongnu is somewhat different. Recent research has revealed, albeit in small numbers, unplundered rectangular ramped large tombs and simple graves. Archaeological excavations have shown that almost all Xiongnu graves were looted. These actions constitute a multi-layered phenomenon with social, ideological, and cultural significance.

Keywords: Xiongnu, Elite Tombs, Nomadism, Rituals

Introduction

Studies on the nature and context of post-burial interventions happened in the graves of various societies around the world have shown that such actions cannot be explained solely as economically motivated looting. Instead, they may also have been carried out for ritualistic or status-related purposes. In the case of the Xiongnu grave interventions are far from being a phenomenon that can be evaluated only from an economic perspective; they represent a multi-layered issue.

The Xiongnu, within their semi-nomadic way of life, were constantly in interaction with different tribes and communities of the steppe, sometimes united them under their federative structures. When the economic balance was disrupted under harsh natural conditions as a result of disasters or famines, tribes whose economy largely depended on animal husbandry were compelled to seek other means of livelihood [Khazanov 2015: 166]. Chinese sources mention numerous raids, sometimes coun-tedin the hundreds, carried out by these tribes during such times. For communities living in similar geographies and under similar conditions, raids were regarded as a means of subsistence and economic gain. Another possible reflection of this pheno-menon can be observed in grave interventions.

Archaeological excavation reports from Central Asia contain extensive information on grave reopening. The richly inventoried Scythian graves in the Altai Mountains were plundered [Güngör 2020: 10]. In Mongolia too, looted graves dating back to the Early Bronze Age have been recorded. In addition to the disturbance of the Khi-rigsuurs to obtain materials for slab-stone graves, there were also cases of looting defined as the removal and destruction of the corpse. Like the Khirigsuurs, slab-stone graves were also looted [Johanesson 2011: 113].

Almost all graves belonging to the Xiongnu bear traces of such interventions. First, in a manner similar to the Khirigsuurs, Xiongnu graves were reopened to be reused for subsequent burials. The reuse of graves often occurred long after the initial in-terment, usually several centuries later [For Example see. Torbat 2004: 74; Nelson et al. 2011: 225-226] and typically involved new burials being placed in the upper layers without fully opening the grave. Moreover, this reuse did not take place as a customary practice for later cultures but was rather a rarely observed phenomenon.

In Xiongnu graves, traces of post-burial interventions manifest themselves through several features:

- Deformation of the surface stone covering, with the central area becoming devoid of stones and slightly sunken, or with soil accumulations appearing around the sur-face stone cover. (Whether the superstructure was directly damaged by the interven-tors remains a matter of debate.)

- The presence of a pit trace with characteristics different from those of the grave fill,

- Disturbances in the stone layers within the grave fill, including traces of burning,

- Damage to finds located in the upper layers of elite graves,

- Finds or fragments that should have been in the burial chamber or coffin being discovered at different levels of the grave fill,

- The coffin being damaged or its fragments found in places other than where they should have been,

- Anatomically disarranged skeletons and the absence of certain bones belonging to the deceased (in some cases also affected by animals such as rodents).

- Items that should have been in the inventory but are absent while leaving traces (for example, imprints left by metal objects).

When grave robbery is concerned, certain question patterns are common for researchers. Were particular types of graves targeted? If no other motive is apparent, on what visible features were thieves likely to have selected those graves? Were the individuals who opened the graves members of the same community as the grave owners? How much information did the grave-openers have about the graves' contents? Were graves of individuals of certain ages or sexes preferentially opened? When were the graves opened? Was any time constraint a factor in the process? What methods were employed? Was the disturbance a simple opportunistic opening or a series of planned and organized events? Were the aims destructive or were there instances of actions that could be interpreted as gestures of respect? In the case of the Xiongnus it is impossible to answer all these questions definitively. Nevertheless the characteristics of the graves permit certain interpretative statements.

Chronological and Typological Evaluation of Interventions

Determining the precise dates of grave interventions appears to be nearly impossible in most cases. Therefore, the times of intrusion can be divided into three general periods. In some graves, bones were found heaped in one area or scattered throughout different parts of the grave, indicating that entry took place after the body had decomposed and the skeletal connections had loosened. For instance, in Burkhan Tolgoi in the Egyn Gol Valley, bones in most graves were discovered in a dispersed state. In grave no. 11 at Naima Tolgoi in Erdenemandal Soum, Arkhangai Province (Fig. 1), situated at a depth of 5 meters, the bones of two individuals and the arrangement of the grave were found in a highly disturbed condition [Tseveendorj 2013b: 269].

In the graves at Khirgist Khooloi, Tsogt Soum, Gov Province, it was clear that entry occurred before the bodies had fully decomposed. In grave no. 1, the skeleton remained intact except for its displaced head. In grave no. 2, the chest and pelvis of the

body were found separated at a distance from each other [Tseveendorj 2013a: 205; Tsevendorj 2016: 82]. Such cases show that although the body had decayed to an advanced degree, soft tissues still held parts of the body together. This could generally be recognized from the clustering of certain bones in specific areas of the grave. In the final scenario, the body had not yet begun to decompose, and the bones were still bound by muscles and soft tissues. In grave no. 4 at Khirgist Khooloi, looters pulled the corpse out by the armpits and stripped it, leaving not a single bone broken inside the grave [Tseveendorj 2013a: 207]. This demonstrates that entry occurred not long after the burial ceremony.

Interventions could also be identified by the displacement of objects in the chamber or coffin before the burial chamber collapsed. Since most objects in wooden burial chambers were removed, it is highly probable that looters entered the tomb before the wood had completely decayed [e.g. Duurlig Narsnii Hünnü Bulş II 2015: 35]. For looters, entering not long after the burial also had the advantage of looser soil conditions.

In some graves, evidence exists regarding the possible periods of plundering. For example, at the Tamirin Ulaan Khoshuu cemetery, a Sasanian silver coin dated to the 5th century AD and later was recovered from a depth of one meter above grave no. 24 of the Xiongnu [Torbat 2021:131]. In the Gol Mod-2 cemetery, traces in the elite grave no. 189 indicate that it was looted after AD 66 [Erdenebaatar et al. 2022: 201]. Some graves were even entered twice, such as grave no. 7 at Noyon Uul, Zuramtyn Am [Erdene-ochir et al. 2021: 21].

Were particular types of graves targeted? If no other motive is evident, on what visible features were looters likely to have based their selection of these graves? To answer such questions, investigations must of course be carried out on a cemetery-by-cemetery basis. However, in general it can be stated that among the Xiongnu, monumental, simple, and even satellite graves were all opened, including those unlikely to have contained anything of significant value.

Research conducted on the round-planned graves at Shombuuzyn Belchir in Monkhkairkhan Soum, Khovd Province, revealed that some excavated graves had not been plundered. Graves no. 2, 7, 8, 14, 16, 18, 20, and 26 have been looted;

graves no. 11, 12, 13, 29, and 36 are reported as unlooted. There is no information about grave no. 19, but it is likely unlooted [Bayarsaikhan et al. 2011: 142-169; Miller et al. 2009: 8-20]. The average size of the superstructure of looted graves in this area is 6.0 m, while that of unlooted graves is 2.6 m. This may suggest that the size of the superstructure was a determining factor in grave robbery. In addition, it was observed that looted graves mostly contained adult individuals. This may be related to the general tendency for grave size to vary according to whether the deceased was an adult or a child. By contrast, nearly all of the unlooted graves belonged to children (Table 1). This suggests that children's graves may have been left untouched because they contained fewer or less valuable objects. Unlooted graves generally contained smaller or simpler items, such as beads and fragments of clothing. This may indicate that the looters consciously selected graves according to their inventories. The fact that only one child's grave was looted is noteworthy. Coffins, however, appear to have had no influence on whether a grave was plundered.

Table 1 – Summary of the Excavated Graves in Shombuuzyn Belchir

[(The table was compiled and prepared based on the studies by Bayarsaikhan et al. 2011 and Miller et al. 2009]

Loo-ted	Grave No	Stone Cove-ring Dia-meter (m)	Skele-tal Re-mains	Coffin Type	Other Finds	Sex & Age	Depth (m)
Yes	2	4.8	Upper body parts present	Stone coffin (with stone lid)	Bit, iron sun-moon, bone stick, bow and arrow frag-ments, gold-plated orna-ment, bone ne-edle case, glass bead	M (50–60)	1.4

Yes	7	7.8	Ribs present	Wooden coffin	Bronze cauldron, wooden spoon, birch-bark container, golden sun-moon, double bone sticks, amber bead, lacquer remains, textile	F (50–70)	1.8
Yes	8	7.5	Scattered bones	Wooden coffin	Numerous beads, hairpin, birch-bark container, ceramic sherds, bronze mirror with silk case (fragments), 46 coffin ornaments (iron), cauldron	F (50–60)	2.6
No	11	0.7	None	Stone coffin	Animal bone	Child	0.75
No	12	1.9	Present	Stone coffin with stone and wooden lid	Quiver, 8 arrows, bow, spearhead	?	1.4

No	13	4.8	In situ, all preserved	Stone coffin with lid	Bow, arrowheads, iron spear, stone bead, belt plaques	M (45)	1.4
Yes	14	3.5	Ribs, legs, skull, etc.	Wooden coffin	Glass pendant fragment, many beads	C (5–6)	1.7
Yes	15	7.3	Teeth, ribs present	Wooden lid, stone frame	Bit cheek-pieces, inlaid ornament, gold-plated iron belt plaque, iron sun-moon	25–45	1.5
Yes	16	9.5	None	Wooden coffin with stone frame	Iron coffin ornaments, bow fragments, bone stick, cheek-piece, bone hairpin, iron bit with cheek-piece, bell	–	2.7
Yes	18	3.6	Upper torso scattered	Stone coffin	12 beads, knife, textile	C (7–10)	1.4
Not clear	19	6.3	Infant skeleton	Wooden coffin	Bronze mirror, beads, silk, lacquer fragments	F (18–22), C (0–2 months)	1

Yes	20	5.3	All bones except skull in place	Wooden coffin	Cauldron, double bone sticks, birch belt plaque	F (18–22)	2.2
Yes	26	4.2	Scattered bones	Stone coffin with lid	Bow fragments, stone bead	C (11–12)	1.2
No	29	2.5	?	Stone coffin	Child in garment, iron-plated belt, beads	C (4–6)	1.3
No	36	2	All preserved	Stone coffin with lid	Child in garment, amber pendant fragment	C (0.5–1)	1.3

At the Salkhityn Am cemetery in Rashaant Soum, Khovsgol Province, among the excavated circular-plan graves, only Grave 7 remained undisturbed in later periods. All other graves in the immediate vicinity were reopened. This single unlooted grave belonged to a male aged 30–35, and its surface covering measured 48 m². Considering the average surface covering of the graves in this area, it is relatively large, indicating that visibility and size on the surface were not the sole determinants for looting in this cemetery. The reason this grave was protected from disturbance appears to be that the main burial chamber, created by slightly deviating the pit from the surface depression and digging toward the south, was covered with stones to conceal it [See. Olziibayar et al. 2019: 25-26].

Post-burial disturbances in elite tombs
Elite tombs, being large and monumental structures and containing rich assemblages, would certainly have attracted the attention. These assemblages included gold,

silver, and bronze objects, imported items, and beads and pendants made from various stones. Such wealth likely made them open targets after the completion of the burial ceremonies. Monumentally large surface coverings indicated the presence of large and wealthy tombs beneath. However, it should not be forgotten that these graves also held political and cultural significance for these societies. This suggests that interventions may have been driven by motives other than mere plunder.

Among the Xiongnu elite tombs excavated so far, only no. 82 at Takhiltyn Khotgor in Mankhan Soum, Khovd Province and no. 10 at Gol Mod-2 in Öndör-Ulaan Soum, Arkhangai Province, escaped becoming the target of looters. These tombs are not large due to their size. According to the analysis, the average surface structure of elite tombs is approximately 20.38 m². It is observed that the unlooted tombs remain below this average (about 13 m²) [Tombs Noyon Uul No1, 6, 11, 20, 22, 23, 24, 25, 31, as well as Ballod, Andreev, and Kondratyev tombs; Duurlig Nars No1, 2, 5; Gol Mod No1, 20, 79; Gol Mod-2 No1, 5, 10, 106, 189; and Takhiltiin Khotgor No1, 64, 82, 83 were examined. For all data, see: Erdene-ochir et al 2021; Yerool-erdene, 2015: 51; Duurlig Narsnii Khünnü Bulsh I 2011; Duurlig Narsnii Khünnü Bulsh II 2015; Erdenebaatar et al. 2021; Erdenebaatar et al. 2021; Mon-sol Tösliin 2002-2004 onii Sudalgaanii Ur Dun 2004: s.187-188; Miller 2008: 27-35]. This indicates that the generally looted tombs were visible and therefore easier targets. The probable reason why Gol Mod-2 Tomb no. 10 was not looted despite its wealth.

In the examined tombs, those that were looted show disruption of the burial's integrity, with in most cases only a few bones or skulls remaining, often found in different areas of the grave. For example, while no human bone was found at Gol Mod 1, only very few bones were found in the Noyon Uul tombs. In many graves, skeletons were completely scattered, fragmented or entirely absent. This indicates that looters had no concern for the integrity of the burial or respect for the deceased. It is also evident that looters often aimed to reach directly the burial chamber, and the objects in the upper layers of the pit did not atract interest and were often damaged or destroyed if present. Nevertheless, reopened and untouched graves show some common features. For instance, in tombs containing decoration pieces of horse harness made of precious metals, these were located on the eastern side, while sun- and moon-shaped coffin decorations were positioned at the north, near the head of the deceased [Brosseder 2009: 265]. In tomb no. 10 at Gol Mod-2 as well, silver horse bridle and breastplate

decorations were located next to the eastern wall of the burial chamber and sun and moon-shaped decorations were on the inner wall of the coffin, in the North [Erdene-baatar et al. 2021: 140].

Destruction or Respect?

When examining grave robberies, one important question is whether and to what extent the deceased were treated with "respect" during the interventions. Archaeo-logical reports generally avoid sentences that would allow such interpretations when discussing grave lootings. However, from the statements in the reports and the grave plans, it is still understood that little respect was shown to the deceased. In most cases, the bones in the tombs were scattered throughout different areas, sometimes thrown in at random. Although cases were observed where bones were missing, there were also instances in which only the bones in the entered part of the grave were disturbed while the rest were left in situ.

In some tombs, clear traces of destruction can be seen. For example, in tomb T20 at Gol Mod, destruction was evident everywhere. Coffin decorations were mostly torn off, leaving only their traces on the surface of the coffin. All metal vessels were smashed and their fragments were scattered [Brosseder 2009: 268]. Even in small satellite graves, traces of damage to the skeletons were present. In the satellite graves of tomb no. 189 at Gol Mod-2, the deceased were targeted more than the grave goods [Erdenebaatar et al. 2022: 202].

Methods of Looters and Measures Taken to Prevent Looting

Looters generally removed surface stones of the area which they intented to enter, dug a pit, and broke through encountered stone layers to reach the burial chamber directly. In these pits, burnt soil and pieces of wood were sometimes found. It's in-dicating that they tried to heat the frozen ground or provide a light source. Then, they would enter the grave by breaking the coffin lid or moving wooden parts of it aside. This mostly shows that the graves had not yet collapsed. However, interven-tions in some elite tombs show evidence of more planned and systematic actions.

In Tomb no. 22 at Noyon Uul and tomb no. 5 at Duurlig Nars, black burnt soil and charred wood remains were found in the looter's pit [Erdene-ochir et al. 2021: 133; Duurlig Narsnii Khünnü Bulsh I 2011: 39]. Stones and burnt soil were also found in the looting pit of the tomb no. 189 at Gol Mod-2. This suggesting that looters may have lit fires to thaw the frozen ground during winter. In the same tomb a wooden

structure supporting the intervention pit was also uncovered [Erdenebaatar et al. 2021: 81; Erdenebaatar 2022: 199]. A similar structure had previously been found in Elite tomb no. 2 at the Duurlig Nars cemetery and it was seen to be a very carefully prepared construction (Fig. 2). Here, approximately 1-meter-long vertical wooden posts were placed around the pit at 25-30 cm intervals, 3.5 meters below the surface. The same construction was repeated at the lower levels. To keep these closely set timbers in place, rectangular horizontal frames made of somewhat larger timbers were installed at the top and bottom. Finally, to prevent the frame from collapsing inward, two wooden beams about 10 cm-wide were placed in a cross shape [Duurlig Narsnii Khünnü Bulsh I: 39]. This indicates that the intervention was carried out without any time pressure and organized by more than one person working in a co-ordinated manner.

Several measures were taken to prevent such interventions in Xiongnu graves. These included digging graves deeper, placing layers of stones within the fills, and const-ructing horizontal and vertical stone arrangements resembling walls in the pit and on the surface. According to Glegdorj Eregzen, after the attacks on their tombs by the Wuhuan, the Xiongnu began to build their tombs further inland from the southern borders, to dig the burial pits deeper, and to create multi-layered stone fillings [Eregzen 2024: 122-123]. Indeed, the rectangular-planned, ramped Xiongnu graves with deep pits have been dated to the 1st century CE. Ch. Yerööl-Erdene also states that elite tombs were built in sandy soils and dug deeply to prevent looting.

In small circular-planned graves few measures were taken against looters. In these burials, the pits were generally not very deep and simple wooden coffins or stone coffins were used, while in some cases the body was placed directly into the pit. Even in graves where precautions were taken, these measures often proved ineffec-tive against the looters. In Grave no. 1 at Dund Shandyn Am, Baga Gazryn Chuluu, the coffin was overlaid with eight stone slabs. Nevertheless, looters still broke thro-ugh these stones to enter the coffin. In the small graves at Baruun Mukhdag in Bul-gan Province, in an attempt to prevent looting, the pits were filled with oily and hard black clay, which may have served as a kind of protective method. However, despite these measures, they were looted as well [Tseveendorj 2000: 37; Baterdene 2015: 24].

No taboo or cursed protective objects have been found in Xiongnu graves against looting. However, the presence of dog bones in some burials, and their symbolism as protectors, suggests that they may have been interred to reflect this protective role against looters. Dog bones have been found in various graves. Almost complete dog skeletons were excavated from Mörin Tolgoi cemetery, Grave no. 2 at Baruun Khairkhan in Tov Province, no. 60 at Burkhan Tolgoi and no. 3 at Khüren Khund [Amartuvshin 2020: 222]. Similarly, in China, dogs placed in graves since the Shang period and later replaced by small figurines during the Han Dynasty. In both period they served as protectors of the deceased and their possessions against thieves [see. Grenger 2023: 685-701].

Conclusion: Motivations of Destruction

Although sources on tombs generally imply they were plundered mainly for economic purposes, this appears to be a phenomenon too multi-layered to be reduced solely to economic reasons. Records of grave disturbances, even in sedentary societies, frequently appear especially in Chinese sources. Since the Warring States period, Chinese sources emphasize that graves should be simple and avoid richness to protect them from looters [Riegel 1995: 301]. Nevertheless, by constructing large mounds and richly furnishing tombs, Chinese society could not escape lootings.

Apart from economic motivations, grave looting may also have been carried out as acts of humiliation against enemies, demonstrations of power, erasure of former authority, or destruction of memory. For these reasons, their cultural, ideological, and social dimensions should not be ignored. Especially they are significant in terms of the suppression of collective memory. According to sociologist Maurice Halbwachs' theory of Collective Memory, every collective memory emerges within a spatial framework [Halbwachs 1980: 139-140]. Among the communities adopted a nomadic lifestyle, this memory was likely preserved not through permanent architecture but via graves or sites in the natural landscape. Tim Ingold also argues that nomads never fully transition into a phase of permanent construction [Ingold 2002: 181]. For the Xiongnu as semi-nomads, graves represented a form of permanent architecture. Because of this any destruction would affect graves, linking not only to the individual buried but also to the community's past as a whole. In this context, Ann Marie Kroll states: "If the construction of a large monument mobilizes labor collectively and the monument is built to withstand natural processes, it can be interpreted as a reflection of both the power dynamics among the living and their relationships with the dead."

Such practices nourished collective memory [Kroll 2000: 215]. Indeed, the Xiongnu in accordance with their ancestor cult, held annual gatherings in accordance with ancestral cults [Sima Qian 1996: 137], valued their graves and considered the looting attempts of their tombs a cause for war.

Considering that graves were entered early and the destruction incurred, it is likely that looting in the mobile lifestyle with competitive environment of the steppe was perceived and planned as a demonstration of power. In an environment of rapid living and constant pursuit, looting may also have been carried out by slipping past control mechanisms. It is likely that in nomadic societies the seasonal, compulsory migrations between specific areas and the obligation to stay in those areas for set periods reduced the ability to maintain surveillance over cemeteries. For this reason, the fact that graves were entered and looted relatively soon after burial was probably carried out by various tribes during the Xiongnu period.

During the Xiongnu period and later, interactions among different clans in the same region often likely led to hostilities. Research on the nomadic Sargat people indicates that cemetery locations were not random; like in agricultural societies, graves may have been used as boundary markers. Grave disturbances could thus have been concretely expressed as attacks on the territories acquired by tribes [Kroll 2000: 216]. The mobile environment surrounding the Xiongnu likely facilitated grave looting. Indeed, certain distinctive features of some graves can link them to specific groups. For example, some features observed in the Tamiryn Ulaan Khoskhuu graves that differ from the Xiongnu burial culture can be explained by their belonging to specific groups of the Xiongnu population [Torbat 2021: 95]. Similarly, Xiongnu graves at Salkhityn Am, with horse burials, indicate a distinct cultural group [Olziibayar 2019: 7]. In such a context, during conflict, it is plausible that communities looted the graves of ancestors from rival tribes.

For later period lootings, Chinese records provide insight: "…Moreover, the longer a person has been buried, the more distant their living relatives become, and those responsible for protecting the grave act more indifferently. Guardians may slacken, but the buried goods remain in place. Under these conditions, the dead cannot rest in peace [Riegel 1995: 309]." In other words, as time goes the bond with the past loosens and this brings indifference toward grave destructions to the fore.

We have not evidence for the subsequent use of items taken from or left behind in Xiongnu graves. Such items may have been used economically, but they could also have served other purposes. Mary W. Helms notes that objects obtained from distant lands were believed to hold supernatural power, conferring ideological influence and political prestige to their new owners [Helms 1988: 262-263]. Portable and symbolically significant items taken from Xiongnu graves likely acquired similar meanings and may have become prestige objects among different tribes.

Finally, according to Chinese texts, the looting of graves indicated that the state was not at peace and secure. In China, tomb lootigs "displayed the downfall of formerly powerful states and the disappearance of former territories." Large tombs of these fallen states were looted [Riegel 1995: 310-313]. But after attacks of the graves by the Wuhuans, the Xiongnu regrouped and maintained control over the steppe for many years.
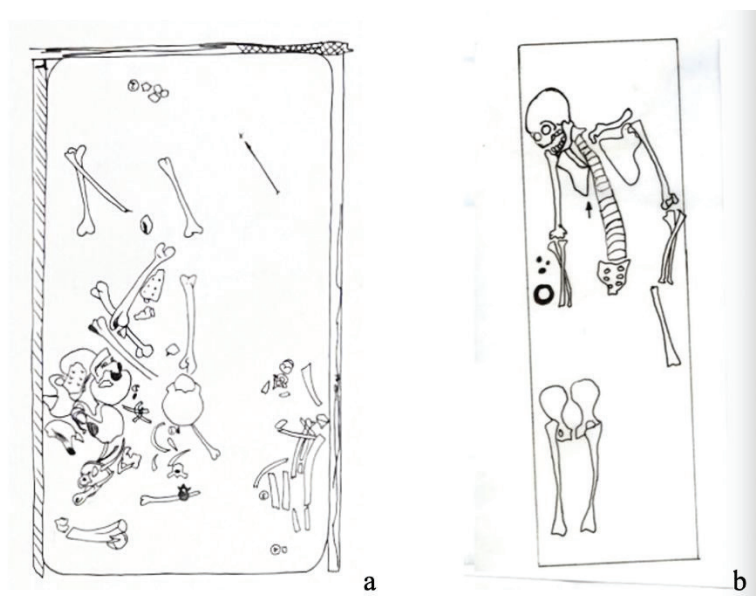
Fig. 1: a) Naima Tolgoi Grave No. 11, b) Khirgist Khooloi Grave No. 2[Tseveendorj 1986]

Fig. 2: Traces of looting in Grave 2 at Duurlig Nars [Duurlig Narsnii Khünnü Bulsh I]

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INVENTORY AND CATALOGUE STUDIES OF OLD TURKIC INSCRIPTIONS AND MONUMENTS IN MONGOLIA: WITH REFERENCE TO MONUMENTS BEARING SOGDIAN, BRAHMI, AND CHINESE TEXTS

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TURKIC ACADEMY

Abstract

The Old Turkic bitig inscriptions and monuments found across vast territories also demonstrate the historical and cultural relations with distant and neighboring states, such as the Tabgaç-China, Sogd, Kidan, Rum, Tibet, and Tangut states. Especially, there are monuments from the Turkic period written in Old Chinese, Sogdian, Brahmi, Kidan, and other languages.

In the Old Turkic inscriptions from the 6th-9th centuries, in addition to the Turkic tribes and communities, there are also mentions of the "thirty Tatar", "nine Tatar", "kidan", "tatabi", "tuygın" and other nomadic Mongol-Manchu-Tungusic tribes. Additionally, "Tabgaç" (China), "Böküli Čölüg" (Korea), "Apar" (Avar), "Tüpüt" (Tibet), "Söngüz" (Sönüz), "Purum" (Rome), "Tangut", "Tajik" (Arab) countries and tribes are also mentioned. Therefore, it is clear that there were various relationships, political-economic connections, and religious contacts between the Old Turks and these countries and tribes. This is confirmed by the written monuments and works from the Turkic Khaganate period. Tatbar Khagan (571-582) bitig stone, two bitig stones from the era of Niri Khagan (587-599), a bitig stone from Kutlug İlteriş Khagan (682-693), the bitig stones of Kültegin (685-731) and Bilge Khagan (683-733), "Dongoyn Şiree" bitig stone, "Boroo" bitig stone, Karabalgas I Bitig stone (800-832), Sevrey Bitig stone (8th century), Derst Hötöl Inscription, Biireg Inscription, Baga Oygır II Inscription, Şiveet Hayrhan II Inscription, "Shoroon Dov" inscription, all include Old Turkic bitig inscriptions, as well as Sogdian, Brahmi, Kidan, and Chinese written texts.

Keywords: The Old Turkic bitig inscriptions, Old Chinese, Sogdian, Brahmi, Kidan, and other languages, inscriptions, monuments.

The systematic study of Old Turkic inscriptions (*bitigtaşh* and related monuments) has a longstanding tradition in Turkology. Nevertheless, a comprehensive scientific

catalogue encompassing all known inscriptions has not yet been produced. Previous efforts remained fragmentary and regionally confined. In order to address this lacuna, the International Turkic Academy launched a large-scale research initiative aimed at preparing a full inventory and catalogue of Old Turkic inscriptions discovered up to 2023.

The principal objective of this project is to document, classify, and analyze the entirety of Old Turkic epigraphic material, while also contextualizing multilingual inscriptions that attest to cross-cultural interaction. The catalogue is being prepared in four volumes: Volume I: Inscriptions from Mongolia and China. Volume II: Inscriptions from Central Asia (Kazakhstan, Kyrgyzstan, Uzbekistan, Tajikistan), the Caucasus, Eastern Europe, and Turkey (Middle East). Volume III: Inscriptions from the Altai, Tuva, Khakassia, and Southern Siberia. Volume IV: Studies on the origins of the Old Turkic script, phonological features of tamga-signs and letters, as well as the grammar and lexicon of Old Turkic.

Thus, the Old Turkic inscriptions and monuments found across vast territories demonstrate historical and cultural connections with all Turkic tribes of the time, as well as with neighboring states near and far, such as Tabgach-Chin, Sogdu, Kidan, Rum, Tibet, and Tangut. In particular, there are Turkic-era monuments inscribed in scripts and languages such as Old Chinese, Sogdian, Brahmin, and Kidan.

Old Turkic inscriptions attest to a wide range of Turkic tribal groups such as *Oğuz, İç Oğuz, Dokuz Oğuz, Sekiz Oğuz, On Ok, Bayırku, Dokuz Bayırku, Türgeş, Karluk, Üç Karluk, Kurıkan, Üç Kurıkan, Basmıl, Kırgız, Çik, Yağma, Uygur, On Uygur*. Alongside these, references to nomadic Mongolic–Manchu–Tungusic groups (*Otuz Tatar, Dokuz Tatar, Kidan, Tatabı, Tuygın*) are also preserved (Fig.1).

Fig. 1. Political boundaries of the Turkic Khaganate (551–750 CE)
(Drawing by Napil Bazylkhan, 2013)

The inscriptions further mention foreign states and peoples, including *Tabghach/China, Korea (Böküli Steppe), Avars, Tibetans, Byzantines (Rum), Tanguts, Arabs (under the ethnonym "Tajik"), Sogdians, and Tocharians*. These references reflect the diverse political, economic, and religious interactions of the Turkic Khaganates with neighboring polities.

Key monuments illustrating these multilingual and intercultural features include:

• The stele of **Tatbar Khagan (**571–582**)**
• Two stelae from the reign of **Niri Khagan** (587–599)
• The stele of **Kutlug İlteriş Khagan** (682–693**)**
• The memorials of **Kültegin** (685–731) and **Bilge Khagan** (683–733)
• The inscriptions of **Dongoyn Shiree, Boroo, Karabalgasun I (800–832), Sevrey, Derst Hötöl, Biireg, Baga Oygur II, Shiveet Khairkhan II,** and **Shoroon Dov**.

Many of these monuments contain not only Old Turkic inscriptions but also texts in Sogdian, Brahmi, Khitan, and Chinese, thus constituting valuable sources for reconstructing the multilingual landscape of Inner Asia.
The corpus of Old Turkic inscriptions, when studied comprehensively, reveals that the Turkic Khaganates were situated within a broad web of intercultural relations. The epigraphic evidence demonstrates both internal tribal structures and external connections with neighboring civilizations. Multilingual inscriptions in particular

highlight the significance of diplomatic, religious, and economic exchanges across Eurasia.

The ongoing catalogue project of the International Turkic Academy seeks to provide an authoritative reference for the study of Old Turkic epigraphy, thereby contributing not only to Turkology but also to the broader fields of Central Asian and Inner Asian historical studies.

Sogdian, Brahmi, Chinese, and Khitan Inscriptions of the Turkic Khaganate Period

The **stele and monumental complex of Tatbar Khagan** (reigned 571–582) was discovered in Mongolia, Arkhangai Aimag, 10 km west of Bugat Sum [Bazılxan 2005: 21-23]. The main inscription on the front face of the stele (B-2, 19 lines), as well as on its right and left sides (B-1, 5 lines; B-3, 5 lines), is written in Old Sogdian (Fig.2, 3).. On the reverse side (B-4, 20 lines), the text is composed in Old Mongolic language inscribed in Old Brahmi (Sanskrit) script [Vovin 2019: 162-167]
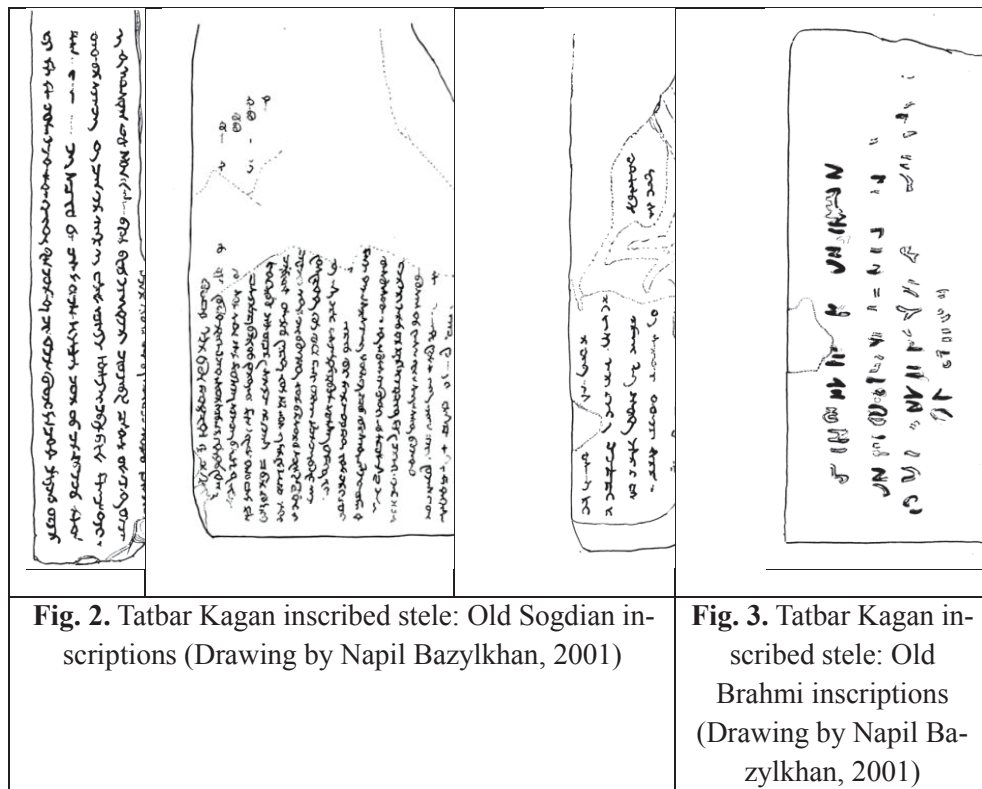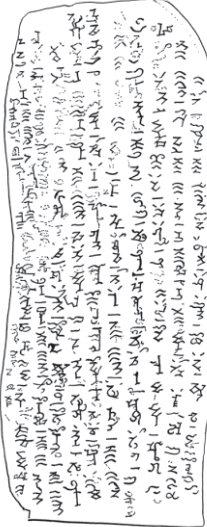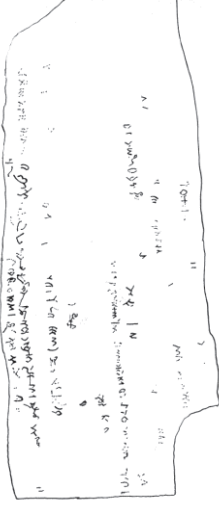

Fig. 2. Tatbar Kagan inscribed stele: Old Sogdian inscriptions (Drawing by Napil Bazylkhan, 2001)	**Fig. 3.** Tatbar Kagan inscribed stele: Old Brahmi inscriptions (Drawing by Napil Bazylkhan, 2001)

Two stelae dating to the reign of **Niri Khagan** (587–599) were discovered in Mongolia, Bulgan Aimag, on the Hüis Tolgoy hill of Mogoed Sum. These inscriptions are particularly remarkable as they are written in Old Mongolic language [Vovin 2018: 303-313]   using the Old Brahmi (Sanskrit) [Qurčabaγatur 2019: 56] script (Fig. 4,5).

Fig. 4. Huis-tolgoy-I inscribed stele: Brahmi inscriptions (Drawing by Napil Bazylkhan, 2003)	**Fig. 5.** Huis-tolgoy-II inscribed stele: Brahmi inscriptions (Drawing by Napil Bazylkhan, 2003)

The **stele and monumental complex of Kutlug İlteriş Khagan** (reigned 682–693) was discovered in Mongolia, Arkhangai Aimag, in the Nomgon Valley of Haşaat Sum [Enkhtör et al 2022: 69–86]. The monument contains 19 lines in Old Turkic script, 5 lines in Old Sogdian characters, and 15 lines in Chinese characters [*Proceedings of the International Forum…, 2023*] (Fig. 6,7,8,9).
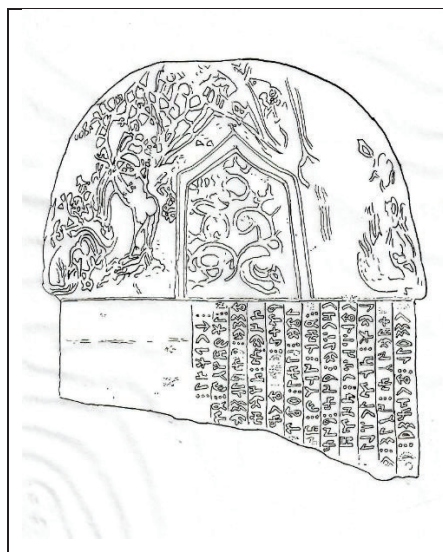
Fig. 6. Kutlug Ilteris Kagan Old Turkic inscribed stele

(Drawings by Napil Bazylkhan, Altangerel Enhtor, Gonchig Batbold, 2022)

Fig. 7. Upper and lower sections and turtle base of the Kutlug Ilteris Kagan inscribed stele (Napil Bazylkhan, Altangerel Enhtor, Gonchig Batbold, 2022)
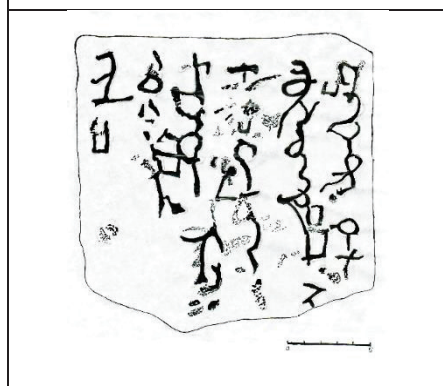
Fig. 8. Kutlug Ilteris Kagan inscribed stele: Sogdian inscriptions

(Drawings by Napil Bazylkhan, Altangerel Enhtor, Gonchig Batbold, 2022)
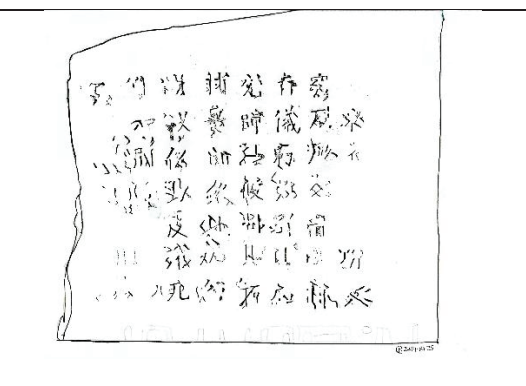
Fig. 9. Kutlug Ilteris Kagan inscribed stele: Chinese character inscriptions

(Drawings by Napil Bazylkhan, 2023)

The **stelae and monumental complex of Kültegin** (685–731) and **Bilge Khagan** (683–733) are located in Mongolia, Arkhangai Aimag, Bugat Sum, in the Höshöö Tsaydam Valley. The Kültegin stele contains 70 lines in Old Turkic script and 14 lines in Old Chinese [*Inscriptions de l'Orkhon…,* 1892: 1-66], whereas the Bilge Khagan stele comprises 80 lines in Old Turkic script and 14 lines in Old Chinese [Wassiljew 1895: 166-174] (Fig.10,11, 12,13)
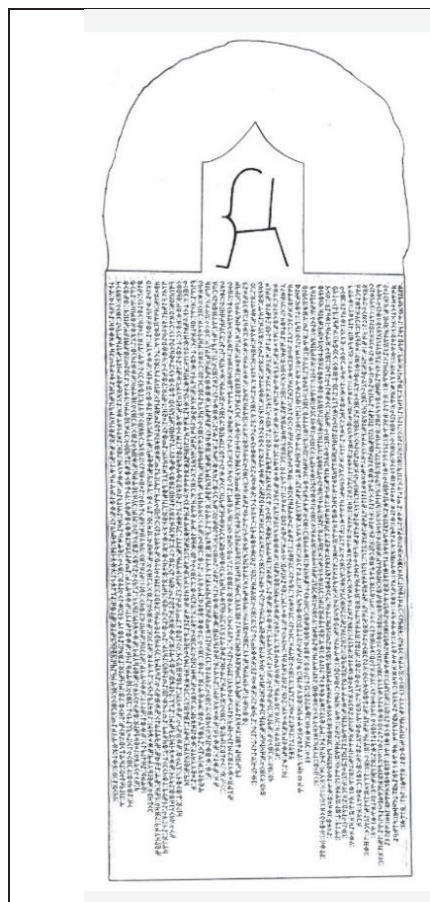

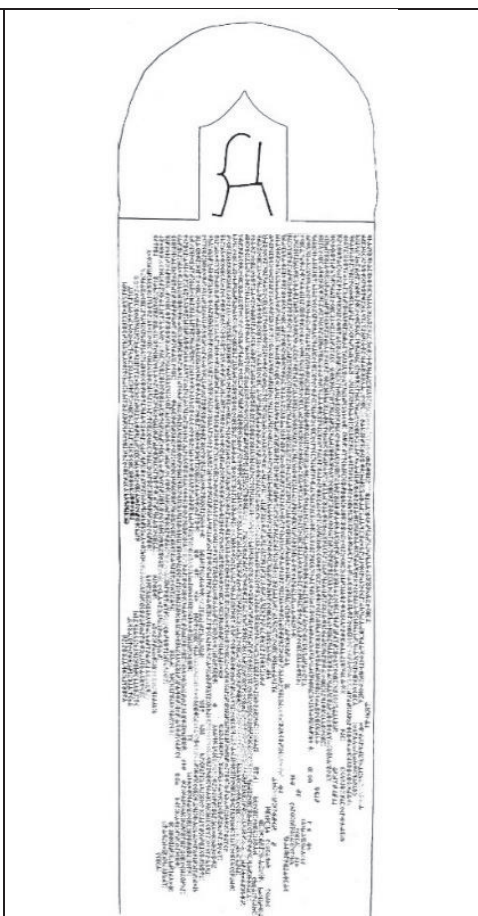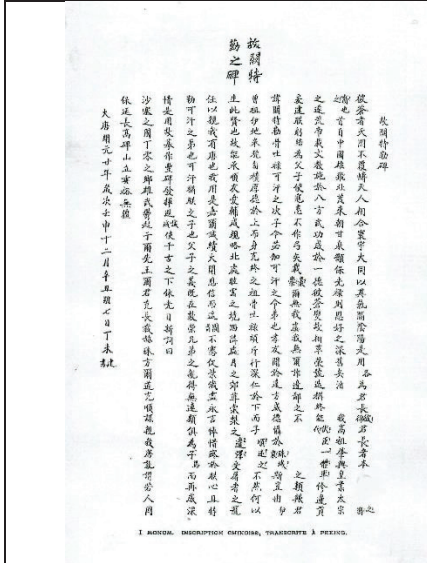| **Fig. 10.** Kultegin Old Turkic inscribed stele (Drawing by Napil Bazylkhan, 2001)	**Fig. 11.** Bilge Kagan Old Turkic in-scribed stele (Drawing by Napil Bazylkhan, 2001)

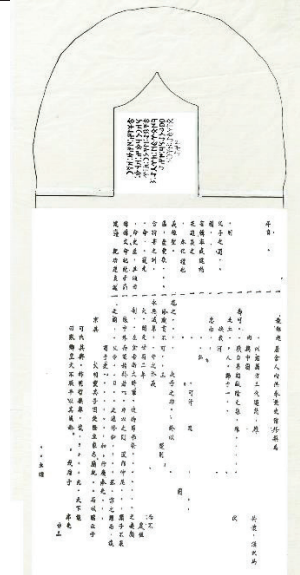| **Fig. 12.** Kultegin inscribed stele: Chinese inscriptions (Research by A. Heykel, 1889)	**Fig. 13.** Bilge Kagan inscribed stele: Chinese inscriptions (Research by A. Heykel, 1889)

The **"Dongoyn Shiree" stelae and monumental complex** are located in Mongolia, Sühbaatar Aimag, Tüvshinshiree Sum, on Delger Khaan Mountain in the Dongoyn Shiree area. The complex consists of 14 granite columnar monuments. The inscriptions include 72 lines in Old Turkic script, comprising 3,857 characters and 1,193 words [Mönkhtulga 2014:108-109], as well as 4 lines in Khitan script [Mönkhtulga, Oosava] (Fig.14, 15).

Fig. 14. "Dongoyn Siree" inscribed steles: Old Turkic text (Research by R. Monhtulga)	**Fig. 15.** "Dongoyn Siree" inscribed steles: Old Kidan text (Research by R. Monhtulga)

The **"Boroo" stele** was discovered in Mongolia, Selenge Aimag, Mandal Sum, in the Bayan Suudal area. It contains 16 lines in Old Chinese [Suzuki 2007: 49-58]. Due to severe erosion, the Chinese text on the stele is largely illegible and no complete transcription is available (Fig.16,17,18).

Fig. 16. "Boroo" inscribed stele: Upper section of the inscription (Drawings by Napil Ba-zylkhan, Altangerel Enhtor, Gonchig Batbold, 2023)	**Fig. 17.** "Boroo" in-scribed stele: Front face (Drawings by Napil Bazylkhan, Altangerel Enhtor, Gonchig Batbold, 2023)	**Fig. 18.** "Boroo" inscribed stele: Chinese inscriptions (Research by Suzuki Koosetsu, 2007)
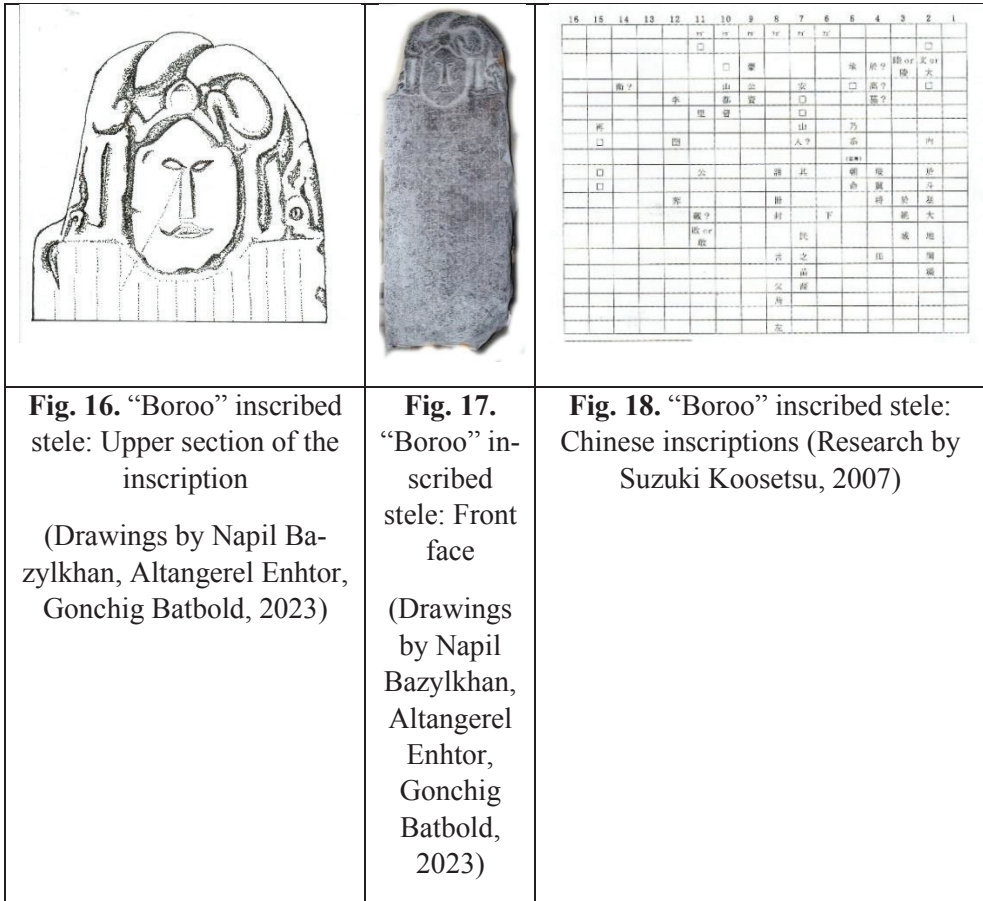
The **Karabalgasun I stele** was discovered in Mongolia, Arkhangai Aimag, Hoton Sum, south of the city of Karabalgasun. The monument dates to the period of the Uyghur Khaganate, specifically 808–832 CE, during the reign of "Alp Bilge Tanrı Uyghur Khagan, blessed by Heaven" (*Teŋiriken Ay Teŋiride Qut Bolmış Alıp Bilge Teŋiri Uyğur Qaγan*). The stele contains inscriptions in Old Turkic script [Radloff 1895: 283-298], Old Sogdian [Hansen 1930: 14–39], and Chinese [Yoshida 1999: 117–123] (Fig.19,20,21).

Fig. 19. Karabalgas I inscribed stele: Old Turkic inscriptions (Research by W. Raldoff, 1891)	**Fig. 20.** Karabalgas I inscribed stele: Old Sogdian inscriptions (Research by W. Raldoff, 1891)	**Fig. 21.** Karabalgas I inscribed stele: Old Chinese inscriptions (Research by W. Raldoff, 1891)
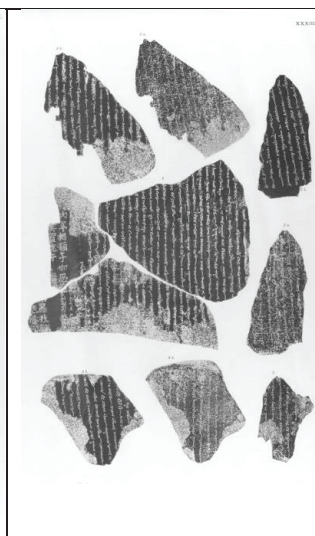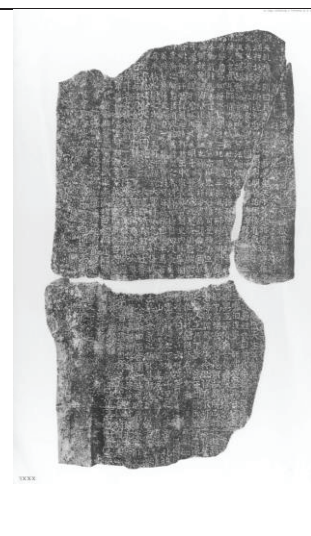
The **Sevrey stele** is located in Mongolia, Ömnögovi Aimag, Sevrey Sum. The large stone monument contains 7–10 lines in Old Turkic script and 7 lines in Sogdian [Yutaka Yoshida et el, 1999:225–227.] (Fig.22).

Fig. 22. Sevrey inscribed stele: Old Turkic and Sogdian inscriptions
(Drawing by Napil Bazylkhan, 2003)

The **Derst Hötöl inscription** is located in Mongolia, Dundgovi Aimag, Ölziit Sum, on Del Uul, Baruun Bilüün, Derst Hötöl Mounta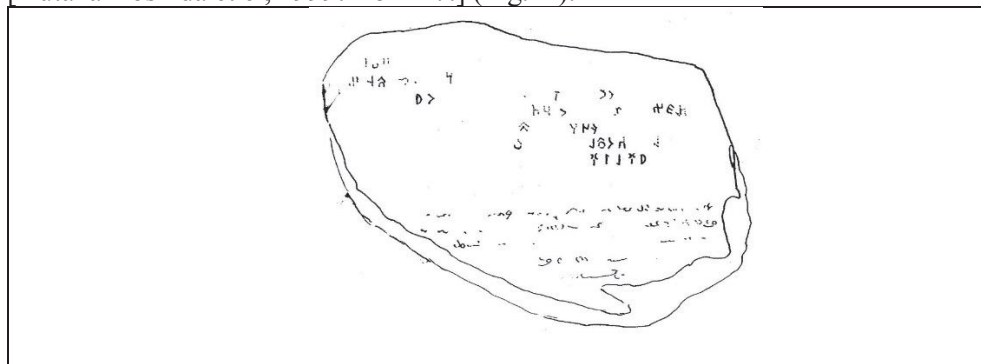in. The inscription consists of 4 lines carved on rock. This inscription is particularly noteworthy: based on published photographs, it contains unique characters found in the Talas inscriptions, Mongolian inscriptions, and Southern Siberian inscriptions [Boldbaatar 2018:466-468]. However, at present, it is not possible to fully read or interpret the text (Fig.23).

Fig. 23. Derst Hotol inscription (Research by Yu. Boldbaatar)

The **Biireg inscription** is located in Mongolia, Khovd Aimag, Erdene Büren Sum, in the Biireg Valley, on a side stone of the monumental complex made of barkin slate [Battulga 2022:170-173]. This inscription contains characters whose phonetic values have not yet been determined, making it currently impossible to produce a meaningful reading (Fig.24).
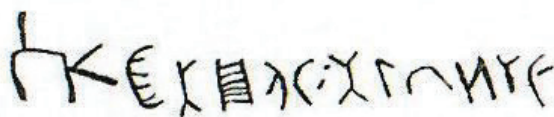
Fig. 24. Biireg inscription: Drawing of the stele (Research by Ts. Battulga)

The **Baga Oygur II inscription** is located in Mongolia, Bayan-Ölgii Aimag, Ulaanhus Sum, on a stone in Baga Oygur Mountain [Jacobson et el, 2001:124,

pl.350]. The inscription is written in an as-yet undeciphered script, so it is currently impossible to make definitive statements regarding its classification (Fig.25).
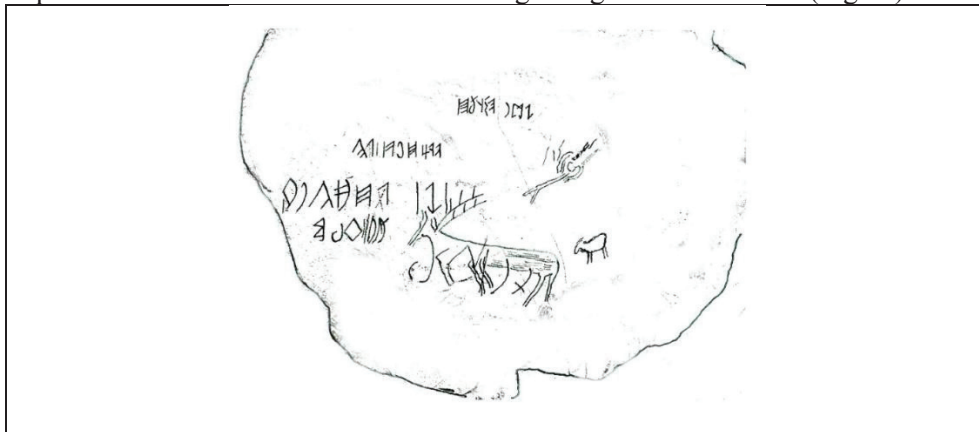
Fig. 25. Baga Oygir II inscription: Drawing (Drawing by Napil Bazylkhan, 2008)

The **Shiveet Khairkhan II inscription** is located in Mongolia, Bayan-Ölgii Aimag, Tsengel Sum, on Shiveet Khairkhan Mountain. The inscription consists of 4 lines carved on rock. It is written in an as-yet undeciphered script [Kubarev 2009:163], making it currently impossible to provide a definitive classification (Fig.26).

Fig. 26. Siveet Hayrhan II inscription: Drawing

(Research by D. Tseveendorj, E. Jacobson, V. D. Kuvarev, 2009)

The **"Shoroon Dov" inscription** is located in Mongolia, Töv Aimag, Zaamar Sum, on the cover stone and sarcophagus of an underground Turkic-period burial mound (tumulus). 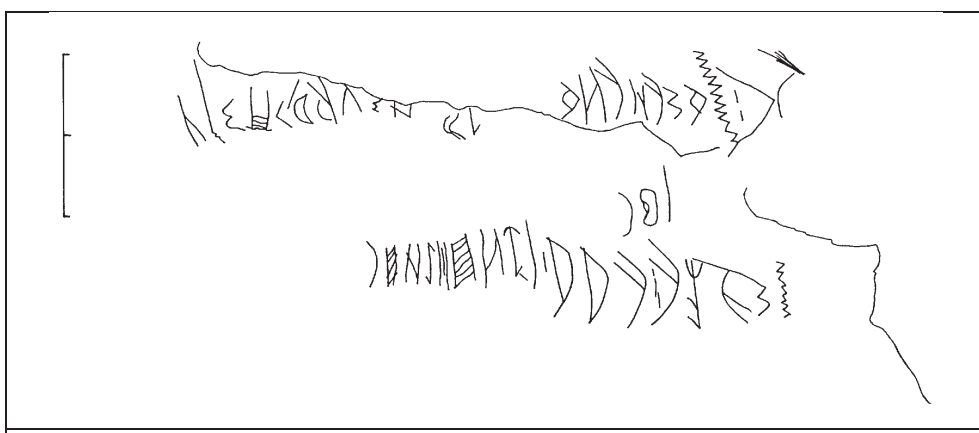The cover stone contains 4 lines in Chinese [Danilov et el, 2010:254-257; Batbold 2017: 244], while the sarcophagus stone contains 28 lines in Chinese (Fig. 27,28).

Fig. 27. Inscription on the lid stone of the Bugu tribe (Itu) (Research by Gonchig Batbold)	**Fig. 28.** Inscription on the coffin stone of the Bugu tribe (Itu) (Research by Gonchig Batbold)

The various written texts found in Mongolia, as referenced in the inscriptions of Kültegin and Bilge Khagan, state: "… öŋre: kün: toγusïqta: Böküli: Čölüg el:Tabγač: Töpüt: Apar: Purum: Qïrqïz: Üč Qurïqan: Otuz Tatar: Qïtaň: Tatabï:bunča:budun: kelipen: sïγtamïs: yoγlamïs…" — indicating that from the east arose the Bökli and Chölük states, the Tabgach (Chinese), Tibetans, Avars, Rum (Byzantines), Kyrgyz, Üç Kurikan, Otuz Tatar, Khitan, and Tatabi peoples, who came together, mourned, and participated in the rituals of the yoke (yoğa).

Another passage states: "…berje: Tabγač: budun: yaγï: ermis: jïrïya: Baz qaγan: ToquzOγuz: budunï: yaγï: ermis: Qïrγïz: Qurïqan: Otuz Tatar: Qïtaň: Tatabï: qop: yaγï: ermis…" — "On the right / south, the Tabgach (Chinese) Khagan was hostile; on the left / north, Baz Khagan and the Dokuz Oghuz people were hostile; the Kyrgyz, Kurikan, Otuz Tatar, Khitan, and Tatabi were all hostile."

These passages provide information concerning the neighboring and more distant states relative to the borders of the Turkic Khaganate. This implies that the Turkic peoples had military, political, diplomatic, and cultural-economic interactions with these states and peoples. Therefore, texts in Sogdian, Brahmi, Khitan, and Chinese found on Old Turkic inscriptions and steles can be understood as natural manifestations of the Turkic peoples' engagement with the written cultures of neighboring and distant states.

The inscriptions from "Shiveet Khairkhan" (No. 2), "Baga Uygur" (No. 2), the Biireg inscription, and the Derst Hötöl inscription in the Mongol-Altai Mountains have not yet been fully deciphered. The script forms, particularly the stamped characters, closely resemble those of inscriptions found in regions such as Kazakhstan [Smagulov, 2009:204-209], Kyrgyzstan [Kyzlasov 1994:279-282. Ris. A1], Uzbekistan [Babayarov 2023:196-215], the North Caucasus [Baichorov 1989: 200-290], and Hungary [Németh 1971:1-52].

Consequently, these four inscriptions, along with similar others, are directly or indirectly connected to the ancient writing systems used by peoples of the western wing of the Old Turkic Empire, including the Türgesh, Basmyl, Karluk, Yagma, Kayı, Oghuz, Khazar, and Bulgar peoples. It is plausible that these inscriptions were left by envoys or representatives of clans and confederations situated in the western wing of the Old Turkic period.

Archaeological and written sources clearly demonstrate that the ancient Turks maintained regular international trade relations with settled peoples of Chinese, Indian, Iranian, and Roman origin between the 6th and 9th centuries. Historical records provide detailed accounts of nomadic Turks engaging in horse trade with the Tabgach-Chinese in exchange for various silk fabrics and other goods, as well as collecting substantial tribute from them.

Coins issued by the rulers of the western wing of the Turkic Khaganate, on behalf of the Khagans and subordinate lords, have been found extensively in settlements located in modern Kazakhstan, Kyrgyzstan, and especially Uzbekistan, including Kanka, Kulaktepe, Aktepe, Hanabad, Kavardan, and Kındıktepe.

A significant number of monuments and documents in Sogdian have survived from the Old Turkic period. This is primarily because the Sogdians constituted a settled merchant community that connected trade routes between the Turkic Khaganate and the Tabgach-Chinese, Sasanian, and Byzantine empires. Additionally, their use of the Semitic alphabet, adoption of religions such as Manichaeism and Buddhism, and active propagation of these beliefs contributed to their cultural influence.

In this context, some Khagans of the early Old Turkic Khaganate established regular political and economic relations with the Sogdians, particularly utilizing them in trade. As a result, the interactions between Turks and Sogdians were not limited to commerce and economics but also facilitated the widespread use of the Sogdian script within the Turkic territories.

Texts composed in honor of Old Turkic Khagans Tatbar (571–582) and Niri Khagan (587–599) were written in Old Sogdian and Brahmi scripts. Furthermore, the names of rulers appear in Old Sogdian on coins found within the numismatic complexes of regions under Tardu Khagan (576–603), including Shash, Fergana, and Bukhara. During the Türgesh State period (699–766 CE), these Sogdian-inscribed coins circulated extensively through trade. In the Uygur Khaganate period (808–832 CE), inscriptions composed in Old Turkic, Sogdian, and Chinese were dedicated to Alip Bilge, the protector deity of the Moon God.

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A NEW INTERPRETATION OF THE DATA CONCERNING BARS BEG IN THE ORHUN INSCRIPTIONS

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Abstract

This paper reexamines a passage from the common text of the Kül Tigin and Bilge Kağan inscriptions (KT E 20; BK E 16–17) and offers a new interpretation of its historical context. The passage describes the Göktürks' conferral of the title *qaγan* upon Bars Beg, his political integration through marriage to the princess—the sister of Bilge Kağan and Kül Tigin—and his eventual execution, followed by the enslavement of his people. Previous scholarship has generally assumed that the act of betrayal mentioned in the text was committed by Bars Beg himself. Through syntactic analysis and reinterpretation, this study argues instead that the betrayal was carried out by Bars Beg's wife, the princess. It is proposed that the betrayal occurred in 716, during the council assembled after Kapgan's death, when Kapgan's son Inel was chosen as *qaγan* in place of his elder brother Bilge. As a result, Bars Qaγan was executed, while the fate of the princess remains uncertain; she was most likely pardoned, as the newly enthroned *qaγan* was her brother Bilge.

Keywords: Göktürk empire, Orkhon inscriptions (Kül Tigin and Bilge Kağan), Bars Beg, dynastic succession, political betrayal in early Turkic history

Introduction

It has been more than 130 years since the script of the Orkhon inscriptions was deciphered. During this period, the inscriptions have been published many times by different editors. In these publications, particular attention has been paid to phonetic and morphological issues. Semantic and syntactic studies followed somewhat later. The background of the texts and their connection with historical events, however,

have not yet been sufficiently explored. Even so, in their current state the publications on the inscriptions have been among the most successful works of Turkic linguistics.

For individuals of the Göktürk era who were in some contact with their surroundings and whom we might call the intellectuals of that period, understanding the inscriptions and linking the text with the events lingering in the background was undoubtedly not difficult. Today, while we grapple with linguistic problems of the inscriptions, we may be overlooking information between the lines. There may be fragments of information concealed in the background of the subject and noticeable only through grammatical analysis of the sentences. These fragments would of course become meaningful if supported by historical data. But if historical data are insufficient, then reconstructions may also gain importance.

Problem

In this paper, I propose a new interpretation regarding the meaning of a passage in the common text of the Kül Tigin and Bilge Kagan inscriptions and its connection to Göktürk history. I believe that there is a morphological and semantic problem in the passage in question that has hitherto gone unnoticed.
The relevant passage is as follows:[1]

KT E 20: *bars beg erti kagan at bunta biz birtimiz siŋilim kunçuyug birtimiz özi yaŋıltı kaganı ölti bodunı küŋ kul boltı*

BK E 16-17: *[bars beg] erti kagan atıg bunta biz birtimiz siŋilim ku[nçu]yug birtimiz özi yazıntı kaganı ölti bodunı küŋ kul boltı*

The transcriptions and translations of this passage in the principal editions of the inscriptions are as follows:
Literature

Radloff 1895

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1 For the transcription, I relied on the text found in the following work: [Alyılmaz 2005: 44, 128].

KT E 20: *Bars beg erti, kagan at bunda biz bertimiz, altı elim Kunçayug bertimiz, özi yaŋıltı kaganı ölti budunı küŋ kul boltı* (p. 13) "Da war auch Bars-Bäg. Dem hatten wir hier den Namen eines Chans gegeben, dem hatten wir unsere sechs Stämme der Kuntschajug verliehen. Er selbst handelte schlecht (irrte), da starb ihr Chan, und sein Volk wurde Knechte und Mägde." (p. 13).

BK E 16-17: *[bars beg] erti, kagan atın bunda biz bertimiz, altı elim Kunçayug bertimiz, özi yazındı kaganı ölti, budunı küŋ kul boltı* (p. 53) "Da war auch Bars-Bäg. Dem hatten wir hier den Namen eines Chans gegeben, dem hatten wir meine sechs Stämme der Kuntschajug verliehen. Er selbst verging sich (gegen uns), da starb ihr Chan, und sein Volk wurde Knechte und Mägde." (pp. 52-53).

Thomsen 1896

KT E 20: *bars beg erti, kagan at bunda biz birtimiz, siŋilim konçuyug birtimiz. özi yaŋıldı, kaganı ölti, budunı küŋ kul boldı* (p. 104) "il y avait Bars-beg. Nous lui donnâmes ici le titre de kagan, et nous lui donnâmes ma sœur cadette pour épouse. Mais lui-même tomba en faute. Leur kagan fut tué, et son peuple devint serves et esclaves." (p. 104).

BK E 16-17: *[…] erti, kagan atıg bunda biz birtimiz, siŋilim ko[nçu]yıg birtimiz. özi yazındı, kaganı ölti, budunı küŋ kul boldı* (p. 104).

Radloff 1897

KT E 20: *Bars-beg erti kagan at<ıg> bunda biz bertimiz, siŋlim kunçuyug bertimiz, özi yaŋıltı, kagani ölti, buduni küŋ kul boltı* (p. 135) "… war Bars-Beg, ihm hatten wir hier [zu dieser Zeit] den Chanstitel verliechen, hatten ihm meine jüngere Schwester, die Prinzessin, (zur Frau) gegeben. Er selbst verging sich (gegen uns), (daher) kam der Chan um und sein Volk wurde zu Mägden und Knechten." (p. 135).

Thomsen 1924

KT E 20: […] war Bars bäg; wir gaben ihm den Titel Kagan und gaben ihm die Prinzessin meine jüngere Schwester zur Ehe. Aber er selber war verräterisch, der Kagan wurde getötet und das Volk wurde zu Sklaven und Sklavinnen." (p. 148).

Yazıksız 1924

KT E 20: *Baras beg erti. Kagan at bunda biz birtimiz, altı elim <siŋilim> konçayug birtimiz. Özi yaŋıltı, kaganı ölti, bodunı küŋ kul boltı* (p. 111) "Baras [nam zat] bey idi. Kendisine han adını burada biz verdik, ? küçük hemşiremi zevce verdik. Kendisi hata etti hanı öldü. Kavmi cariye, kul oldu." (p. 111) // "Baras [so named] was a beg. We gave him the name of khan here; ? we gave my younger sister as wife. He erred; his khan died. His tribe became maidservants and slaves."

Orkun 1936

KT E 20: *bars beg erti, kagan at bunda biz birtimiz, siŋilim konçuyug birtimiz. özi yaŋıldı, kaganı ölti, budunı küŋ kul boldı* (p. 38) "Bars bey idi. Hakan adını burada biz verdik. Küçük kız kardeşimi prenses olarak verdik. [Fakat] kendisi yanıldı. <Kabahat etti> Hakanı öldü. Kavmi cariye ve kul oldu." (p. 39) // "He was Bars Beg. We gave him the title khagan here. We gave my younger sister, the princess. [But] he erred. The khan died. His tribe became maidservants and slaves."

BK E 16-17: […] erti, *kagan atıg bunda biz birtimiz, siŋilim ko[nçu]yıg birtimiz. özi yazındı, kaganı ölti, budunı küŋ kul boldı* (p. 38).

Malov 1951

KT E 20: *Bars beg erti, kagan at bunta biz birtimiz, siŋlim kunçuyug birtimiz; özi yaŋıltı, kaganı ölti, budunı küŋ kul boltı* (p. 30) "был Барс-бег; мы в то время (*или*: при тех обстоятельствах) даровали (ему) титул кагана и дали (ему в супружество) мою младшую сестру-княжну. (Но) сам он провинился, (а потому) каган умер (*т. е.* он сам был убыт), а народ его стал рабынями и рабами." (pp. 38-39).

Tekin 1968

KT E 20: *bars beg erti. kagan at bunta biz birtimiz. siŋlim kunçuyug birtimiz. özī yaŋıltı, kaganī ölti, bodunī küŋ kul boltı* (p. 234) "was Bars Beg. It was we who had given him the title of kagan. We had also given him my younger sister, the princess, in marriage. But, he betrayed (us). (As a result) the kagan was killed and the people became slaves and servants." (p. 266).

Ergin 1970

KT E 20: *Bars beg erti. Kagan at bunda biz birtimiz. Siŋilim kunçuyug birtimiz. Özi yaŋıldı, kaganı ölti, budunı küŋ kul boldı* (p. 54) "Bars bey idi. Kağan adını burda biz verdik. Küçük kız kardeşim prensesi verdik. Kendisi yanıldı, kağanı öldü, milleti cariye, kul oldu." (p. 8) // "He was Bars Beg. We gave the title of kagan here. We gave my younger sister, the princess. He erred, their khan died, his people became maidservants and slaves."

Tekin 1988

KT E 20: *b(a)rs b(e)g (e)rti k(a)g(a)n (a)t bunta biz birt(i)m(i)z siŋ(i)l(i)m kuunç(u)yug birt(i)m(i)z özi y(a)ŋ(ı)ltı k(a)g(a)nı ölti bod(u)nı küŋ kul boltı* (p. 28) "Bars (bir) bey idi. Hakan unvanını burada (ona) biz verdik. (Eş olarak da) kız kardeşim prensesi verdik. (Buna rağmen) kendisi hata işledi. (Sonuç olarak) Az'ların hakanı öldü, halkı (da) kul köle oldu" (p. 29) // "Bars was a beg. We gave him the title of khagan here. (As spouse) we also gave him my sister, the princess. (Nevertheless) he committed a fault. (As a result) the khan of the Az was killed, and his people became slaves."

Berta 2010
KT E 20: *bars beg erdi kagan at bwnda biz bẻrdimiz siŋilim kunçuyug bẻrdimiz özi yaŋıldı kaganı öldi bodwnı küŋ kul boldı* (p. 153) "Bars bey oldu. Kağan ünvanını [ona] o zaman verdik. Prenses kızkardeşimi [ona eş olarak] verdik. [Fakat] o kendisi yanıldı, böylece [bodununun] kağanı öldü, bodunu cariye ve köle oldu." (p. 194) // "He was Bars Beg. We gave him the title of khagan [then]. We gave my sister, the princess [as spouse]. [But] he himself erred, thus [his people's] khan died, his people became maidservants and slaves."

Ercilasun 2016

KT E 20: *Bars Beg erti. Kagan āt bunta biz birtimiz. Siŋilim kunçuyug birtimiz. Özi yaŋıltı, kaganı ölti, bodunı küŋ, kul boltı* (p. 516) "Bars bey idi. Kağan unvanını o zaman biz verdik. {Ona} küçük kız kardeşim prensesi verdik. [Fakat] o yanıldı, kağanı öldü, halkı cariye ve kul oldu." (p. 517) // "He was Bars Beg. We gave him the

title of khagan then. {To him} we gave my younger sister, the princess. [However] he erred, their khan died, his people became maidservants and slaves."

BK E 16-17: *[Bars Beg] erti. Kagan atıg bunta biz birtimiz. Siŋilim ku[nçu]yug bir-timiz. Özi yazıntı, kaganı ölti, bodunı küŋ, kul boltı* (p. 564) "Bars bey idi. Kağan unvanını o zaman biz verdik. {Ona} küçük kız kardeşim prensesi verdik. {Fakat} o yanıldı, kağanı öldü, halkı cariye ve kul oldu." (p. 565) // "He was Bars Beg. We gave the title of khagan then. {To him} we gave my younger sister, the princess. {However} he erred, their khan died, his people became maidservants and slaves."

Aydın 2017

KT E 20: *bars beg erti kagan at bunta biz bėrtimiz siŋilim kunçuyug bėrtimiz özi yaŋıltı kaganı ölti bodunı küŋ kul boltı* (p. 57) "Bars beydi. Kağan unvanını burada biz verdik. Kız kardeşim prensesi (eş olarak) verdik. Kendisi yanıldı, kağanları öldü. Halkı cariye (ve) köle oldu." (p. 57) // "He was Bars Beg. We gave him the title of khagan here. We gave my sister, the princess (as spouse). He erred; their khan died. His people became maidservants (and) slaves."

BK E 16-17: *[bars beg] erti kagan atıg bunta biz bėrtimiz siŋilim kunçuyug bėrtimiz özi yazıntı kaganı ölti bodunı küŋ kul boltı* (pp. 85-86) "(liderleri) Bars bey idi. Kağan unvanını burada biz verdik. Kız kardeşim prensesi (eş olarak) verdik. Kendisi yanıldı, kağanları öldü. Halkı cariye (ve) köle oldu." (pp. 85-86) // "(their leader) was Bars Beg. We gave him the title of khagan here. We gave my sister, the princess (as spouse). He erred; their khan died. His people became maidservants (and) slaves."

Ölmez 2021

KT E 20: *bars beg erti kagan at bonta biz bėrtimiz siŋilim kunçuyug bėrtimiz özi yaŋıltı kaganı ölti bodunı küŋ kul boltı* (pp. 94-95)) "Bars beydi. Hakan unvanını (ona) burada biz verdik. Küçük kız kardeşim prensesi (de ona eş olarak) verdik. Kendisi hata etti, (bunun için de) öldü. Halkı cariye, köle oldu." (p. 107) // "He was Bars Beg. We gave (him) the title of khagan here. We also gave my younger sister, the princess (to him in marriage). He committed a fault, (and hence) he died. His people became maidservants and slaves."

BK E 16-17: *[bars beg] erti kagan atıg bonta biz bėrtimiz siŋilim ku[nç]uyug bėrtimiz özi yazıntı kaganı ölti bodunı küŋ kul boltı* (p. 130) "(Başlarındaki) Bars beydi. Hakan unvanını (ona) burada biz verdik. Küçük kız kardeşim prensesi (de ona eş olarak) verdik. Kendisi hata etti, (bunun için de) öldü. Halkı cariye, köle oldu." (p. 144) // "He was Bars Beg. We gave (him) the title of khagan here. We also gave my younger sister, the princess (to him in marriage). He committed a fault, (and hence) he died. His people became maidservants and slaves."

Erdem-Demirci 2023

KT E 20: *b(a)rs b(e)g (ė)rti k(a)g(a)n (a)t bonta biz bėrt(i)m(i)z siŋ(i)l(i)m kunç(u)yug bėrt(i)m(i)z özi y(a)ŋ(ı)ltı k(a)g(a)nı ölti bod(u)nı küŋ kul boltı* (p. 860) "Bars bey idi, kağan unvanını burada biz verdik. Kız kardeşim prensesi (eş olarak ona) verdik. Özü yanıldı, kağanı öldü, milleti (hep) cariye (ve) kul oldu." (p. 861) // "He was Bars Beg, we gave the title of khagan here. We gave my sister, the princess (to him as spouse). He himself erred; his khan died; his people (all) became maidservants (and) slaves."

BK E 16-17: *[b(a)rs b(e)g] (ė)rti k(a)g(a)n (a)t(ı)g bonta biz bėrt(i)m(i)z siŋ(i)l(i)m kunç(u)yug bėrt(i)m(i)z özi y(a)z(ı)ntı k(a)g(a)nı ölti bod(u)nı küŋ kul boltı* (p. 924) "Bars Bey idi, kağan unvanını burada biz verdik. Kız kardeşim prensesi (eş olarak ona) verdik. Özü yanıldı, kağanı öldü, milleti (hep) cariye (ve) kul oldu." (p. 925) // "He was Bars Beg, we gave the title of khagan here. We gave my sister, the princess (to him as spouse). He himself erred; his khan died; his people (all) became maidservants (and) slaves."

Discussion and Evaluation

As can be seen from the transcriptions and translations, there does not appear to be any substantial difference among the editors' interpretations. This is because there are no newly discovered difficult or problematic words or grammatical features in the text. On the contrary, there are simple sentences constructed with known words. To better understand what led me to a different interpretation, we can now analyze the relevant passage sentence by sentence. The common text of the two inscriptions is almost the same. There is only a difference in one word and one suffix. Therefore, I have combined the two texts below:

1. […] bars beg erti "... Bars was a beg."

The beginning of the sentence is missing, because the end of the previous line (KT E 19) has been lost. This is a nominal sentence. The issue here is this: does the word *bars* belong to the predicate or to the subject? If it belongs to the predicate, filling in the missing parts, the phrase may be understood as "Such-and-such a person was Bars Beg." If it belongs to the subject, it may be interpreted as "Such-and-such Bars was a beg."

From the translations, it appears that, except for Yazıksız (1924) and Tekin (1988), the editors considered bars together with beg as the predicate. Since the title kagan is emphasized in the second sentence and *beg–kagan* are implicitly contrasted, like Yazıksız and Tekin I think the word bars is part of the subject.

It is understood that the person named Bars, bearing the title *beg*, was the head of a tribe, because *beg* is a title given to those at the head of tribes [Donuk 1988: 6]. Later, he was given the title *kagan*. I will return to this issue when commenting on the historical background.

2. kagan at/atıg bunta biz birtimiz "We gave the title of kagan at this time."

In the Bilge Kagan inscription *atıg* is used instead of *at*. There is no difference in meaning. The only difference is the use of the definite object in the Bilge Kagan inscription.

Editors have generally translated this sentence in the same way. The difference lies only in the translation of bunta. Unless the context is very clear, this word can be translated as "here" or "at this time."

Since *kagan* was given to Bars, who was *beg*, it follows that more than one tribe must have been subordinated to him.

3. siŋilim kunçuyug birtimiz "We gave my sister, the princess."

This sentence has been correctly understood by all editors except Radloff (1895). The differences involve additions like "little younger sister" or "as wife/spouse" to clarify the meaning. Marriage is already understood from the context; there is no need to add "wife/spouse." Since a princess is female, the word "girl" is unnecessary.

Siŋil by itself means "younger sister."[2] If an elder sister were meant, the translation would already use the word "abla." For this reason, the translation "We gave [him] my sister, the princess" suffices.

4. *özi yaŋıltı/yazıntı* "He/She betrayed."

In the Bilge Kagan inscription, *yaŋıltı* is replaced by *yazıntı*. Since both words can be used as a reduplicative pair,[3] they have the same or similar meanings.[4]
Editors have generally translated this sentence similarly. The differences lie in the meanings given to *yaŋıltı*. It has usually been translated as "he erred, made a mistake." However, characterizing an action that resulted in the killing of the qaghan and the enslavement of the people as "to err, to make a mistake" would be an understatement. I think translating the word *yaŋıl-* as "to betray" is more appropriate. There is also a problem regarding the interpretation of the subject in this sentence. The subject is the word *özi*, which alone means "himself/herself." As a word class it is a pronoun; it stands in for a noun. Who is meant by "himself/herself," i.e., the third-person singular "s/he"? For this, we must look at the noun that appears before it and closest to it. In the previous sentence "princess" is mentioned; she may be intended. Also, even if not explicitly named, Bars might be implied. Editors either left the subject indefinite as in the inscriptions, or they thought Bars was meant and translated accordingly.[5] The betrayal is certainly that of one of the two: the princess or Bars. The answer lies in the next sentence.

5. *kaganı ölti* "Her qaghan died."

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2 The princess is definitely younger than Bilge Khan. This is because the word *siŋil* is used for her. Unless she had a different mother, she is also younger than Kül Tigin. This is because there is only one year between Bilge Khan and Kül Tigin.
3 *yaŋıltukın yazıntukın* (BK E 16); [Wilkens 2021: 880b; Karaman 2022: 385].
4 *yaŋıl-*: "совершать проступок, грешить" [Nadelyaev et al. 1969: 234a]; "to err, misbehave" [Clauson 1972: 951a]; "sich irren, fehlgehen, sich täuschen, sich vergehen, verfehlen" [Wilkens 2021: 863b]. *yazın-*: "совершать проступок, грешить" [Nadelyaev et al. 1969: 251a]; "to misbehave" (Clauson 1972: 988a]; "sündigen, fehlen" [Wilkens 2021: 880b].
5 In Turkish publications, the word *özi* is translated as "kendisi", leaving ambiguous whether the person referred to is female or male. In foreign language publications, however, the gender of this person had to be specified due to grammatical necessity: *er* "he" [Radloff 1895: 13; 1897: 135; Thomsen 1924: 148]; *lui-même* "himself" [Thomsen 1896: 104]; *сам он* "himself" [Malov 1951: 39]; *he* [Tekin 1968: 266].

In translating this sentence, the editors agree on who died: the qaghan. As for whom the possessive suffix in *kaganı* represents, opinions differ. In his translation Radloff uses ihr ("her"), indicating that it was the princess's qaghan (1895). Radloff (1897), Thomsen (1924), Malov, Tekin (1968), and Ölmez translated the word without a possessive. Thomsen (1896), Tekin (1988), and Aydın interpreted the possessive suffix as third-person plural and translated accordingly. Yazıksız, Orkun, Ergin, Ercilasun, and Erdem–Demirci left ambiguous which noun the possessive suffix refers to. Berta says that the *bodun*'s qaghan died.

The person who died is Bars, who bore the title of qaghan. There is no doubt about this. The *+ı* in *kaganı* ("[his/her] qaghan") is the third-person singular possessive suffix. In that case, if the one who betrayed in the previous sentence is Bars, then the one who died in this sentence is "his qaghan," i.e., Bars's qaghan—an oddity. Thomsen (1896), Tekin (1988), and Aydın must have noticed the strangeness and attempted to resolve it by interpreting the possessive suffix in *kaganı* as third-person plural. In my view, the person meant by *özi* in sentence 4 is the princess. In other words, the princess betrayed, and as a result her qaghan—her husband Bars—was killed. I will discuss this in the historical background section below.

6. *bodunı küŋ kul boltı* "Her people became maidservants and slaves."

Leaving aside the choice among "people, nation, tribe," this sentence has been understood and translated in the same way by all editors.

Thus, the information remaining between the lines in the passage I focus on can be understood as follows:

Bars, who previously held the title *beg* as the head of a tribe, was given the title *kagan*. With his new title, Bars Kagan was married to the princess, the sister of Bilge Kagan and Kül Tigin. However, the princess betrayed. As a result, her husband Bars Kagan was killed, and his people were made maidservants and slaves.

This information must be fitted into the historical background.

Historical Background

Information about Bars Beg is limited to the Kül Tigin and Bilge Kagan inscriptions. Chinese histories do not mention him.

The events in the passage under discussion begin in 711. In that year the Türgiš, who were subject to the Göktürks, rebelled. A campaign was undertaken against them. In

the ensuing battle the Türgiš were defeated. Their qaghan, commanders, and begs were killed. The people of the On Ok tribal confederation suffered greatly. So that the homeland would not remain leaderless, the Az people were reorganized. Bars, the beg of the Az tribe, was given the title of qaghan. He was married to the princess, the sister of Bilge Kagan and Kül Tigin. When betrayal occurred, Bars Kagan was killed. His people were made maidservants and slaves.

Two questions must be examined in light of this information:

Was Bars the qaghan of the Türgiš or of the Az? The end of the line where the passage occurs in the inscriptions (KT E 19; BK E 16) is missing. The context is as follows:

eçümüz apamız tutmuş yir sub idisiz bolmazun tiyin az bodunug itip yara[tıp …] bars beg erti "So that the land and water held by our forefathers would not be left without a master, we organized the Az people […] Bars was a beg." (KT E 19–20).

At the very end of the passage we read:

kögmen yir sub idisiz kalmazun tiyin az kırkız bodunug yara[tıp …] "So that the Kögmen land would not be left without a master, we organized the Az and the Qırğız people (…)" (KT E 20).

At the end of KT E 19, approximately 20 characters are missing.[6] This corresponds to roughly 4–5 words. In this missing section there was probably the end of a verbal sentence and the beginning of a nominal sentence. The gap could be repaired as follows:[7]

eçümüz apamız tutmuş yir sub idisiz bolmazun tiyin az bodunug itip yara[tıp yana keltimiz süŋüşdümüz anta] bars beg erti "So that the land and water held by our

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6 There are 40 lines on the eastern face of the Kül Tigin Inscription. The first 11 lines are completely preserved. The ends of the remaining 29 lines are missing. When I counted the characters in the first 11 lines, it turned out that there was an average of 148.6 characters per line. In the 19th line, 128 signs have been preserved. Accordingly, 20.6 letters have been lost in the 19th line. I performed this counting and verification according to the following publication: [Alyılmaz 2005: 43-44].

7 The section proposed for restoration can be written with 16 characters. Thomsen suggests that a sentence such as *ilin yana birtimiz* "we *gave* them back their independence" could be found in the space at the beginning of the passage [Thomsen 1896: 150, note 26].

forefathers would not be left without a master, we organized the Az people (we returned again, we fought. Then) Bars was a beg."

From the context, I think that Bars was originally the beg of the Az,[8] and later, when he was given the title *kagan*, the Qırğız were also subordinated to him.[9]
What might the princess's betrayal have been? As a result of this betrayal, Bars Kagan was killed, and the people under his leadership were made maidservants and slaves. The fate of the betraying princess is not mentioned. When and how could this event have occurred?

Although the five events—conferral of the title *kagan* on Bars Beg, his marriage to the princess, the princess's betrayal, the killing of Bars Kagan, and the enslavement of his people—are presented consecutively in the text, indicating the order in which they occurred, the interval between each is not clear. It may be said that the conferral of the title and the marriage followed each other immediately, and likewise that little time passed between the betrayal, the killing of the qaghan, and the enslavement of the people. However, the interval between the marriage and the betrayal was probably not short. For this, the conditions had to arise; a very significant event had to occur that would lead to betrayal.

It is known that in the last years of Kapgan Kagan, due to his oppressive rule, the tribes rebelled and some migrated to China for refuge. The incident in which the princess betrayed and Bars Kagan was killed could have occurred at any time between 711 and 716, when Kapgan's reign ended.[10] Since, along with the title *kagan*, a princess was given to Bars to strengthen his ties with the central authority, the betrayal likely did not occur shortly after. Moreover, if the betrayal was not by the

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8 Ahmet Taşağıl also included the Az people in his book examining ancient Turkic tribes [Taşağıl 2004: 50-51]. He thus indirectly acknowledged their Turkicness. Sadettin Yağmur Gömeç shares the same opinion [Gömeç 2017: 53-57].
9 Salman, Ercilasun and Şirin describe Bars as the khan of the Türgiş [Salman 1998: 35; Ercilasun 2016: 330; Şirin 2020: 205]. Taşağıl, Bars is mentioned in one place as the khan of the Türgiş [Taşağıl 2004: 33], elsewhere as the khan of the Az and Türgiş tribes [Taşağıl 2004: 50]. Gömeç and Aydın, however, state that Bars Beg was the khan of the Kyrgyz [Gömeç 2021: 199; Aydın 2018: 291, 306].
10 Salman states that Bars Khan's death in 712 or 715 was due to his desire to submit to China [Salman 1998: 37].

qaghan himself but by his wife, a princess of the Göktürk royal family, then it must have been precipitated by a very special event.

I believe that the betrayal expressed by the word *yaŋıl-/yazın-* occurred during the selection of the new qaghan at the kurultay convened after Kapgan Kagan was assassinated in 716. As is known, after Kapgan Kagan, his son took the throne under the name İnel Kagan. It appears that while Kapgan was still alive, by appointing his son to act as commander of the army, he considered him heir apparent and prepared him for the qaghanate.[11] During Kapgan's lifetime, it is to be expected that, in light of possible developments, leading figures of the state—above all members of the royal family and tribal begs—had already positioned themselves.

At the kurultay convened after Kapgan Kagan's death to choose the new qaghan, İnel's selection was very likely considered a foregone conclusion. Bilge may not have been very insistent or eager to be a candidate. We may assume that the women of the royal family also had voting rights at the kurultay. The princess and her husband, Bars Kagan, probably cast their votes in favor of İnel rather than Bilge. Even Tonyukuk's preference for İnel over his son-in-law Bilge may give us a sense of the atmosphere at the kurultay.

Ultimately, İnel was chosen as qaghan; however, Kül Tigin objected to the result and killed his cousin İnel and all members of Kapgan Kagan's family. He probably also eliminated the kurultay members who had supported İnel. Bars Kagan must have been killed at that time. As for his wife, the princess, I think, like Tonyukuk, she was pardoned at the request of her elder brother Bilge Kagan. The events involving Bars Kagan and his wife, the princess, likely unfolded in this way.[12]

Returning to the beginning, these events would not have been unknown to the intellectuals of the Göktürk era. Today, we try to imagine and reconstruct the truths compressed into the lines of a partially damaged text. I do not think there is an error or orthographic issue of missing/excess writing in the text. Had there been such a

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11 The word *İnel* also means "deputy, heir apparent" (< *ına-l* > *inel*).

12 The inscriptions contain no information about İnel being elected khan and ascending the throne, Kül Tigin's opposition to this, his killing of İnel, or the destruction of his lineage and supporters. We owe all our knowledge on this subject to Chinese sources.

problem, it would have been corrected in the Bilge Kagan inscription. The relevant passage in both inscriptions is almost identical. Nevertheless, historians in particular may explain and interpret this problem of Göktürk history differently. As a linguist, when I look at the issue, I am of the opinion that the text should be interpreted as I have explained above.

After this discussion, evaluation, and interpretation, we can reconstruct and translate the relevant text as follows:

KT E 19-20: *eçümüz apamız tutmış yir sub idisiz bolmazun tiyin az bodunug itip yara[tıp yana keltimiz süŋüşdümüz anta] bars beg erti kagan at bunta biz birtimiz siŋilim kunçuyug birtimiz özi yaŋıltı kaganı ölti bodunı küŋ kul boltı kögmen yir sub idisiz kalmazun tiyin az kırkız bodunug yara[tıp …]* "So that the land and water held by our forefathers would not be left without a master, we organized the Az people (we returned again; we fought. At that time) Bars was a beg. We gave (him) the title of qaghan at this time. We gave [him] my sister, the princess. The princess betrayed. Her qaghan died. His people became maidservants and slaves. So that the Kögmen land would not be left without a master, we organized the Az and the Qırğız people (…)."

Conclusion

1. While Bars was the beg of the Az tribe, in 711 he was given the title *kagan* by the Göktürks and placed at the head of an Az–Qırğız union, and he was married to the princess, the sister of Bilge Kagan and Kül Tigin.

2. The princess betrayed. This betrayal occurred during the selection of the new qaghan at the kurultay convened after Kapgan's death in 716 and took the form of preferring Kapgan's son İnel over her brother Bilge. As a result of this betrayal, her husband Bars Kagan was killed, and the qaghan's people were made maidservants and slaves.

3. The fate of the princess is unknown. Thanks to being Bilge's sister, she was probably pardoned, like Tonyukuk.

4. For the correct understanding of the Orkhon inscriptions, our knowledge of Göktürk history is our greatest assistant. On the other hand, possible truths that do not appear in the histories but are reflected in the text of the inscriptions or hidden between the lines can be revealed with the help of philology; at the very least, reconstructions of their plausibility can be made. These may offer clues for historians.

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TRACES OF THE DISTRUST OF CENTRAL ASIAN NOMADS TOWARDS SEDENTARIES IN OLD TURKISH INSCRIPTIONS

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Abstract

This study examines the traces of the mistrust that Inner Asian nomadic societies had towards settled civilizations in the Old Turkish inscriptions. The Taryat inscription, erected in the steppe Uyghur Khaganate in 753 AD, contains the phrase *ılagım tarıglagım.* This statement proves the existence of a settled population among the Turks during the Göktürk period, contrary to the widespread belief that the steppe-era Turkic communities only embraced a nomadic lifestyle. It also demonstrates the advanced linguistic capabilities of the Turkish language in expressing agricultural activities associated with settled life. Many place names mentioned in the inscriptions also point to settled life. However, according to the Turks, China is the main representative of settled civilization and the "other". The distrust of China manifested itself in the inscriptions in the context of learning lessons from historical events and the need to leave advice for future generations, thus transforming the inscriptions into a manifesto.

Keywords: Inner Asia, nomadic, sedentary, Turkish, China.

Introduction

Today, it is generally accepted that the peoples of Inner Asia are not directly nomadic societies, but rather that they settle and migrate within a certain system. In this regard, the Taryat inscription (AD 753) from the Ötüken Uyghur Khaganate period provides us with valuable first-hand information about the nature of Turkish nomadism. In the inscription, the Turkish ruler did not limit his mobility between the regions he specified by name and borders solely to nomadism: **"[ötüken ėli tegres ėl]i ėkin ara ılagım tarıglagım sekiz seleŋe orkon tugla sewin teledü karaga burgu**

ol yėrimin suwumun konur köçür ben" (*Ötüken yurdu ile Tegres yurdu,(bu) iki-sinin arasındaki vadilerim ve tarlalarım, sekiz (kollu) Selenge, Orhon, Tula, Sevin, Teledü, Karaga (ve) Burgu. Bu topraklarım (üzerinde) (ve) ırmaklarım (boyunca) konup göçerim.)* (Tar B4, UY) [Aydın 2018: 45]. (*The land of Ötüken and the land of Tegres, my valleys and fields between them, the eight-branched Selenge, Orhon, Tula, Sevin, Teledü, Karaga (and) Burgu. I settle and migrate on these lands of mine (and along) my rivers.*) There are two events here, settling and migrating, and the mentioned regions are described with the phrase ılagım tarıglagım. It is known that during the period when the Taryat inscription was erected, the suffix +lAg was used to form place names [Erdal 1991: 108]. Considering that the root *ı* also meant "tree, bush, greenery" during this period, the word *ılag* means "a place where trees or bushes are found," that is, "forest, bush, pasture, meadow." Similarly, *tarıglag*, meaning "place where grains are found," i.e., "field," is derived from *tarıg*, meaning "grain." Therefore, the phrase *ılagım tarıglagım* in the inscription refers to a whole consisting of forests and fields [Şen 2008: 105]. Another noteworthy point from a linguistic perspective is also relevant here. Doğan Aksan, while listing data showing the development and improvement of the language as one of the rich narrative methods in the Old Turkic Inscriptions regarding the determination of the age of Turkish, mentioned the reduplication found in the monuments [Aksan 2003: 99]. For multiple words to emerge to represent the same concept or object within the same conceptual field, centuries are required. It also takes time for words from a common conceptual field to become fixed and unified under the umbrella of reduplication. In addition, it takes centuries for one of the elements of the reduplication to fall out of use in the standard language and survive only under the umbrella of reduplication. The word *ılag* is found in Old Turkish only in the *ılag tarıglag* reduplication [Şen 2021: 363]. Therefore, the words we encounter in the reduplications, one of whose elements is fossil, in the period of inscriptions have a much older history in Turkish. In this context, the fact that the word *tarıglag*, meaning "field", appears for the first time in a reduplication, and that one of the elements of the reduplication, *ılag*, is a fossil word, leads to the conclusion that the concept of "field" was adopted by the Turks earlier than previously thought. This situation is a linguistic indicator that requires us to take the agricultural activities of the Turks back to the age of inscriptions. Considering that agriculture developed within a settled lifestyle, it is understood that alongside the main groups of nomads who made a living from animal husbandry, there were also communities engaged in agriculture among the Turks. This is why Kapgan Kagan asked the Tang Dynasty for one hundred thousand measures of millet

and three thousand sets of agricultural tools to be used in the fields in return for their help in suppressing the Kitay rebellion that broke out in China [Taşağıl 2013: 162]. It should also be noted that during the First Göktürk Khaganate, when the Turks lived a predominantly nomadic lifestyle, one of their defining characteristics was ironworking. Chinese sources state that the Göktürks initially lived in the Altai Mountains and were engaged in ironworking [Gömeç 2018:7]. Indeed, when Bumın Khan (542-552), founder of the First Göktürk State, asked for the daughter of the Juan-juan chieftain, he received the reply, "How dare you, who work in my ironworks, make such a request?" [Taşağıl 2018: 21]. Blacksmithing requires established workshops. If the entire population is nomadic, such workshops cannot be established. Because it is impossible for nomads to carry their iron workshops with them. This situation leads us to the conclusion that there was a settled mass among the Turks during the First Göktürk Khaganate. Additionally, the inscriptions contain many city names [Sümer 1984: 11]. This is another indication that nomadic and settled elements coexisted within the same socio-political structure.

Development

While the majority of the population in Central Asia was nomadic, there were also those who adopted a settled lifestyle. During this period, there were also Turkic Khagans who sought to transform the settled lifestyle into their primary form. Bilge Khagan is the most striking example of this. According to information we obtain from Chinese sources, Bilge Khagan proposed that the Turks adopt a settled life, living in walled cities. However, Vizier Tonyukuk opposed this idea for the following reasons: The Turks have a small population and households. They don't live in the same place permanently; they move along waterways and pastures. Because they live by hunting, they have practiced warfare. They attack when they are superior and flee when they are weak, hiding in forests and mountains. Although the Chinese have numerous soldiers, they are useless. Because they are untrained and unpracticed, they cannot demonstrate superiority on the battlefield. The Göktürks' military strength, however, depends largely on their way of life. If they build and inhabit walled cities, their old traditions will change. This change in lifestyle could lead to their defeat in battle and their conquest by the Tang Dynasty [Taşağıl 2013: 168]. This strategic thought is reflected in the inscriptions as an ideological worldview: Nomadism is identified with independence and power.

Taking Tonyukuk's concerns into account, Turkic states were established in Ötüken. China was the representative of the settled societies that these Turkic states viewed as a threat. In the eyes of the Turks, China is the "other". According to the expression in the Ongi Inscription, which is thought to have been erected simultaneously with the Köl Tigin Inscription (732?), south means China in the subconscious of the Turks. **"Türk bodun öŋre kün tugsıkıŋa kèsre kün batsıkıŋa tegi bèrye tawgaçka yıraya yışka [tegi...]"** (*Türk halkı doğuda gün doğusuna, batıda gün batısına kadar, güneyde Çin'e, kuzeyde bozkıra kadar...*) (O D2, OY) [Aydın 2018: 123]. (*The Turkish people extend to the east as far as the sunrise, to the west as far as the sunset, to China in the south, and to the steppe in the north...*) The equivalence of the south and China in the minds of the Turks is related to the settled and therefore fixed position of the Chinese. In this context, warnings about China may help us understand the obstacles to the integration of nomadic tribes and settled peoples in the history of Inner Asia.

There's no doubt that at the heart of Turks' attitudes toward established nations lies a trust issue due to their relationship with China. This issue certainly has a historical basis. Chinese diplomatic efforts to deceive the Turks have left a deep mark on the Turks' memories. Interestingly, the Chinese openly embrace this tactic. They don't deny it. In fact, the Chinese ruler who sent scribes for the Köl Tigin inscription says the following on the western side of the inscription in Chinese: "*Siz bizi üzmediğiniz takdirde biz sözümüzden dönmeyeceğiz (kandırmayacağız)*" (OY) [Aydın 2018: 123] (As long as you do not upset us, we will not go back on our word (we will not deceive you)). These words clearly show the deception method used throughout history towards the addressee. In fact, the western side of the inscription, written from a Chinese perspective, contradicts the narrative in other parts of the inscription. The Chinese side of the inscription shows the Chinese ruler belittling the Turks: "*Kuzey memleketlerinde hâkim güç sürekli değişti. Şimdi ise Türkler hâkim oldu. Nesil ...ebildi, ... İmparatora saygıda kusur etmedi*" [Yalınkılıç 2013: 33]. (*The ruling power in the northern lands changed constantly. Now the Turks were dominant. Generations of ...were able to .... (The Turkish Emperor) did not disrespect the (Chinese) Emperor.*) Bilge Khagan's account is entirely different. He said that he forced the Chinese ruler to make a deal: "**Bu yirde olurup Tabgaç bodun birle tüzültüm. Altun, kümüş, işgiti, kutay buŋsuz ança birür.**" (*Burada oturup Çin milleti ile anlaşma yaptım. Altını, gümüşü, ipeği, ipekliyi sorun çıkarmadan ona {anlaşmaya} göre veriyor*) (KT G4-5) [Ercilasun 2016: 500-501]. (*I sat here and made a deal*

with the Chinese people. They are giving them gold, silver, silk, and silk without any problems, according to the agreement.) The difference in content between the above statements is evidence that the interlocutors position each other in different ways and is noteworthy in this respect. The words on the Chinese side of the inscription may refer to the approximately fifty-year period during which the Göktürks were subject to the Chinese after the First Khaganate. However, on the Turkish side of the inscription, Bilge Khagan chose to express his criticisms of China and the superiorities the Turks achieved over them, without specifying a specific time period. To keep historical memory alive, the Göktürk ruler Bilge emphasized his experiences with China and his warnings against the Chinese at every opportunity. Bilge Khagan commemorated the Tang Dynasty (618-907) in China, which had subjected his nation to a period of slavery, with the following insulting words: **"Tabgaç bodun tebligin kürlüg üçün, armakçısın üçün, inili eçili kikşürtükin üçün, begli bodunlıg yoŋaşurtukın üçün Türk bodun, illedük ilin ıçgınu ıdmış.** (*Çin milleti sahtekâr ve hilekâr olduğu için, aldatıcı olduğu için, kardeşlerle ağabeyleri birbirlerine karşı kışkırttığı için, beylerle halkı birbirine gammazladığı için Türk milleti, oluşturduğu devleti elden çıkarmış*) (KT D6) [Ercilasun 2016: 508-509]. (*Because the Chinese nation is dishonest and deceitful, because it is deceptive, because it incites brothers and sisters against each other, because it tells lies between the lords and the people, the Turkish nation has lost the state it created*.) The point to be noted here is that the Chinese emperor who offered his condolences to Bilge Khagan was also a member of the same dynasty, that is, the Tang dynasty. Furthermore, the sincerity of the Chinese ruler's words expressed on the western side of the Köl Tigin Inscription should also be questioned. "*Ölümünden ötürü çok büyük bir acı duymaktayım. Bununla birlikte kağanın kardeşi Köl Tigin kağan da benim oğlum gibidir. Mademki baba-oğul arasındaki bağ bu denli sağlam; ağabey ve kardeş arasındaki bağ da aynı olamaz mı? Hepsi de babanın oğluna beslediği sevgidir, daha da içtendir*" [Yalınkılıç 2013: 35]. (*I feel great sorrow over his death. Moreover, the khan's brother, Köl Tigin khan, is like a son to me. Since the bond between father and son is so strong, shouldn't the bond between brother and brother be the same? It's all a father's love for his son, and it's even more sincere*.) If the Orkhon inscriptions had contained only Turkish or Chinese text, we would have viewed history in a one-sided way. If the inscriptions had been written only in Chinese, we would have seen a submissive and righteous Turkic world, yet we would have ignored the years of warfare. If the inscriptions had been written only in Turkish, we would have seen an invincible Tang

enemy in Asia [Yalınkılıç 2013: 40]. A comparative reading shows that the relationship of respect expressed by Bilge Kagan for the Chinese ruler with the expression *sabımın sımadı* "he did not break my promise" is not based on very solid foundations. Interestingly, Bilge Kagan's observations about keeping the historical memory of Turkish-Chinese relations alive begin with a warning against settling in regions under Chinese influence. In fact, the very basis of China's settlement policy is the goal of controlling the uncontrolled nomads by inducing them to settle. Turkic khans also harbored similar concerns from time to time. Indeed, the Chinese side of the Karabalgasun Inscription describes the Uyghur khan's invitation to settle the steppe travelers with sweet words and compliments as follows: "...*Topraklarında rahat duran ve temiz hava teneffüs eden ahaliden iyi olanları iltifata boğdu; karşı gelenleri ise kızıl kana boyadı. Bunun üzerine çoraklarda gezenleri tatlı diller dökerek yerleşmeğe davet etti ve halka iltifatlarda bulundu*" [Ölmez 2015: 261]. (*He showered praise on the people living peacefully in their lands, breathing clean air, but he shed blood on those who resisted. He then invited those wandering the barren lands to settle down with sweet words and complimented the people.*) However, Turks have negative memories of those they consider foreigners, those who embraced a settled lifestyle. Traces of these memories can be seen in the oldest Turkish proverbs. Proverbs contain the wise knowledge that nations pass on to future generations, shaped by their experiences and worldviews. It takes centuries for proverbs to become accepted and established within a community. Dîvânu Lugâti't-Türk contains the oldest Turkish proverbs. The proverbs in the work are records of the early experiences of the Turkish nation. In this context, the following proverbs criticize the self-interested relationship established with the "other." **"öküz ađakı bolgınça buzagu başı bolsa yig"** (*Buzağının başı olmak, öküzün ayağı olmaktan daha iyidir.*) [Ercilasun, Akkoyunlu 2018: 28]. (It is better to be the head of the calf than the foot of the ox.) **"yātnıng yāglıg tiküsinden ŏznüng kānlıg yuđruk yig"** (*Yakın birisinden yumrukla dürtülmek ve yumruklanmak, yabancı birisinden yağlı bir lokma yemekten daha iyidir.*) [Ercilasun, Akkoyunlu 2018: 367].

Although Turkish experience includes warnings about not falling under the influence of foreigners (others) in relationships, there have been Turkish masses throughout history who have ignored these warnings for various reasons. From the inscriptions, we understand that people settled in regions close to China, drawn by propaganda and economic promises. However, this decision to settle ended in tragedy: **"Tabgaç**

bodun sabı süçig, agısı yımşak ermiş. Süçig sabın, yımşak agın arıp ırak bodunug ança yagutır ermiş. Yaguru kontukda kisre anıg bilig anta öyür ermiş. Edgü bilge kişig, edgü alp kişig yorıtmaz ermiş. Bir kişi yanılsar oguşı, bodunı, ebi eşükiŋe tegi kıdmaz ermiş. Süçig sabıŋa, yımşak agısıŋa arturup üküş Türk bodun öltüg. Türk bodun ölsikiŋ. Biriye Çogay yış, Tögültün yazı konayın tiser, Türk bodun, ölsikig. Anta anıg kişi ança boşgurur ermiş. Irak erser yablak agı birür, yaguk erser edgü agı birür tip ança boşgurur ermiş. Bilig bilmez kişi ol sabıg alıp, yaguru barıp üküş kişi öltüg. Ol yirgerü barsar Türk bodun, ölteçi sen.” (*Çin milletinin sözü tatlı, ipeklisi yumuşak imiş. Tatlı sözle, yumuşak ipekliyle aldatıp, böylece uzaktaki halkları yaklaştırırmış. Yaklaşıp yerleştikten sonra kötü bilgi {fitne ve fesat} düşünürmüş. İyi ve bilge kişileri, iyi ve yiğit kişileri yürütmezmiş. Bir kişi yanılsa soyuna, halkına, yakınlarına dek sınır tanımazmış {sınır tanımadan yok edermiş}. Tatlı sözlerine, yumuşak ipeklilerine kanıp Türk milleti, çok öldün. Türk milleti öleceksin. Orada kötü kişiler şöyle öğretirlermiş: Uzakta olanlara kötü mal veriyorlar, yakında olanlara iyi mal veriyorlar diye öğütlerlermiş. Cahil kişiler o sözlere inanıp yakına gidince çoğunuz öldünüz. O yerlere gidersen Türk milleti, öleceksin.*) (KT G5-8) [Ercilasun 2016: 500-501] (*The Chinese people's words are sweet, and their silks are soft. They deceive distant peoples with sweet words and soft silk, thus drawing them closer. Once they have settled down, they contemplate evil knowledge (discord and corruption. They wouldn't allow good, wise, or brave individuals to rise. If a person made a mistake, they would punish everyone, including their lineage, their people, and their relatives. The Turkish people, fooled by their sweet words and soft silks, died. You, Turkish people, will die. There, the wicked people would say, "They give bad goods to those far away, and good goods to those nearby." When the ignorant believed these words and went to nearby places, they died. If you go to those places, Turkish people, you will die.*); **“... igidmiş kaganıŋın sabın almatın yir sayu bardıg. Kop anta aşkıntıg, arıltıg. Anta kalmışı yir sayu kop toru, ölü yorıyur ertig.”** (*... {seni} beslemiş olan kağanının sözlerini dinlemeden her yere gittin. Oralarda hep yok oldun, perişan oldun. Kalanlarınız hep bitkin vaziyette, ölerek {oraya buraya} yürüyüp duruyordunuz.*) (KT G9) [Ercilasun 2016: 504-505] (*... You went everywhere without listening to the words of your kagan who had fed you. You were always destroyed and ruined there. The rest of you were walking here and there, exhausted and dying.*); **“Iduk Ötüken y[ir bodun, bardıg. İlgerü barıgma] bardıg; kurıgaru barıgma bardıg. Barduk yirde edgüg ol erinç: Kanıŋ subça yügürti, süŋüküg tagça yatdı. Beglik urı ogluŋ kul boltı; işilik kız ogluŋ küŋ boltı.”** (*Kutsal Ötüken toprağının halkı, gittiniz.*

Doğuya (gidenleriniz) gitti; batıya gidenleriniz gitti. Gittiğiniz yerlerde kazancı-nız(!) şu oldu: Kanınız su gibi aktı, kemiğiniz dağ gibi yattı. Beyliğe layık erkek ev-latlarınız kul oldu; hanımlığa layık kız evlatlarınız cariye oldu.) (KT D23-24) [Erci-lasun 2016: 520-521] (*People of the sacred land of Ötüken, you have departed. Those of you who went east have departed; those of you who went west have depar-ted. In the places you went, your gain(!) was this: Your blood flowed like water, your bones lay like mountains. Your sons worthy of being lords became slaves; your da-ughters worthy of being ladies became concubines.*); **"Men (özüm kagan olurtu-kuma), [yir sayu] barmış bodun ölü yitü, yadagın yalaŋın yana kelti."** (*Ben (ka-ğan olduğumda), oraya buraya gitmiş olan millet ölerek, biterek, yayan yapıldak dönüp geldi.*) (KT D27-28) [Ercilasun 2016: 520-521] (*When I became the khan, the people who had gone here and there returned naked, diminishing and dying on the roads.*).

From the above statements, it is understood that the scenarios that the Turkish nation has experienced and is likely to experience are formed within the framework of the following methods:

Espionage activities: In accordance with its settlement policies, China probably en-couraged the Turks to settle in the regions around its sphere of influence through its spies. The expression *anyıg kişi* "bad person" in the inscriptions refers to people who carry out such espionage activities or become instruments of these activities. Altho-ugh the Turkish experiment had an "**kişi alası içtin yılkı alası taştın"** (*İnsanın ala-cası içindedir; yani muhalif olduğunu gizler; hayvanın alacası ise vücudunun dışın-dadır, görünür.*) [Ercilasun, Akkoyunlu 2018: 44] (*A human being does not show his color to the outside, that is, he hides his opposition; whereas an animal's color is obvious, that is, there is nothing to hide.*)" shaped warning, its competitors created distractors that could make it forget this warning. In this direction, the Chinese cle-ared the way for evil people who served them by eliminating the *edgü bilge* "good and wise" and *edgü alp* "good and brave" people who could guide the Turks.

Propaganda: Throughout history, humanity has been curious about concepts it was unfamiliar with and has longed to grasp them. However, in doing so, it has someti-mes failed to properly value what it already possesses. This is expressed in the oldest Turkish proverbs as follows: **"bār bakır yōk altun"** (*Elde bulunan şey bakır gibidir, ona değer verilmez; bulunmayan şey ise değer bakımından altın gibidir.*) [Ercilasun, Akkoyunlu 2018: 155] (*What is available is like copper, it is not valued; what is not*

available is like gold in value.) Therefore, increasing the masses' sense of access to what is not available by polishing it is one of the basic techniques of directing society. The proverb "**kuş tōrka meŋ üçün ılınur**" (*Kuş, içindeki yem için tuzağa takılır.*) [Ercilasun, Akkoyunlu 2018: 493] (*The bird gets caught in the trap because of the bait inside.*) in DLT describes exactly this situation. When the masses get caught up in the hope that the promises offered to them will relieve their troubles and make their lives easier, they run after it, as in the proverb **"usukmışka sākıg kamug suw körünür"** (*Susayan, bütün serapları su gibi görür.*) [Ercilasun, Akkoyunlu 2018: 95] (*All mirages of the thirsty person are water*.) quoted by Kashgari. In the Turkish of the inscriptions, such suggestions by the Chinese supporters who acted under the guise of righteousness were expressed with the verb *boşgur-* "to give advice, to teach". Bilge Kagan calls advice that would endanger the identity and existence of the Turks *anyıg bilig* "bad, harmful knowledge" and those who follow this bad information disguised as advice by getting closer to China *bilig bilmez kişi* "ignorant person". So, how did the indoctrination of ignorant people with harmful information come about? Of course, there must have been some distracting factors in this process. Although the proverb **"sakak bıçar sakal okşar"** (*Habersizce çeneyi keserken sakalı okşar.*) [Ercilasun, Akkoyunlu 2018: 125] "the beard is caressed while the jaw is cut without being noticed" in DLT, which describes those who hypocritically bring evil to life, is a warning against similar situations, the communities that have been captivated by the propaganda directed at them have not been able to escape falling into the trap throughout history. In the Turkish of the Inscriptions, the main ingredient of propaganda conducted through promises is designated as *süçig sab*, "sweet talk." The proverb in Turkish, "Sweet talk draws the snake out of its hole," which states that sweet talk is one of the most effective means of persuasion, is a sign of continuity in Turkish linguistic logic. However, words alone can only manipulate the masses to a certain extent. It is essential that what is said be supported by interests. During the Göktürk period, one of the most important sources of interest offered by the Chinese was *yımşak agı* (soft silk fabrics), which were valued because they could not be produced in the Turkish homelands. So much so that, in the Göktürk era, *agı*, which meant silk fabric, underwent a broadening of meaning in Old Turkish and acquired the meaning of "treasure" [Clauson 1972: 78]. In ancient Turkish society, silk was both a luxury good needed by the lords and a kind of currency used in Asia [Divitçioğlu 2000: 276]. Starting from Gokturkish, the word agi, which means both silk fabric and treasure in Uyghur, Karakhanid and Khwarezm Turkish, means only silk fabric in Kipchak and Ottoman Turkish. According to Clauson, the

expression *ağı kurdu* "web worm" in Türkiye Turkish dialects is also related to the Old Turkish *agı* [Clauson 1972: 78]. The fact that the word *agı* means "treasury" in Old Turkish has led to the word *agıçı,* derived from *agı,* gaining the meaning of "the manager who manages the state's treasury" in Uyghur and Karakhanid texts [Şen 2007: 136-137].

In the inscriptions, Bilge Khagan used three distinct adjectives -*teblig*, *kürlüg*, and *armakçı*- to describe China's deceitful propaganda, which used rhetoric and promises of gain to deceive the Turks. Using three different words for such a characterization demonstrates the strength of the ingrained prejudice against the addressee. From this point of view, it can be understood that the Göktürk nomads' distrust of settled communities was quite deep. The word *tevlig~tevlüg*, which we encounter in Old Turkish reduplications such as *teblig kürlüg ~ tevlig kürlüg* "cheat", is derived from the Old Turkish base *teb~tev* "trick, deception". The word *kürlüg*, meaning "deceptive", is based on *kür*, meaning "trick, deception". The word *kür*, meaning "trick", underwent a semantic improvement after the Gokturkish language, and the word also gained the meaning of "brave, courageous" in the Old Uyghur and Karakhanid areas. The acceptance of the meaning of deception as a good one is associated with achieving victory by deceiving the enemy in war. The third adjective used for China, *armakçı*, "deceptive, liar", derives from the Old Turkic verb *ar-*, "to deceive, to deceive".

The following proverbs strikingly describe the situation of the Turkish masses who were exploited by the methods described above and fell into China's sphere of influence: **"yakadakı yalgagalı eligdeki ıçgınur"** (*Yakasındaki yemek döküntülerini yalayanın elindeki kap vb. kaçar veya kaçırılır.*) [Ercilasun, Akkoyunlu 2018: 115] (*The plate in the hand of the person who tries to lick the food crumbs off his clothes will run away or be stolen.*); **"yazıdakı süwlin eđergeli ewdeki takagu ıçgınma"** (*Sülün avlamaya çıkıp da evdeki tavuğu elden kaçırma.*) [Ercilasun, Akkoyunlu 2018: 194] (*Don't go hunting for pheasants and lose your chicken at home.*)

The process by which the deceived Turkic tribes adopted a settled life, as we learn from inscriptions, ended in disaster. The Köl Tigin inscription describes the deplorable situation of the masses caught in the Chinese trap as follows: **"Kanıŋ subça yügürti, süŋüküg tagça yatdı. Beglik urı ogluŋ kul boltı; işilik kız ogluŋ küŋ boltı."** (*Kanınız su gibi aktı, kemiğiniz dağ gibi yattı. Beyliğe layık erkek evlatlarınız kul oldu; hanımlığa layık kız evlatlarınız cariye oldu.*) (KT D24) [Ercilasun 2016: 520-521] (*Your blood flowed like water, your bones lay like mountains. Your sons*

worthy of being lords became slaves; your daughters worthy of being ladies became concubines.)

Conclusion

The distrust felt by the Turks, a nomadic community of Inner Asia, towards the settled Chinese culture has economic, ideological, and psychological aspects. This perspective offers a significant contribution to understanding the historical antagonism between nomads and settlers in Central Asia.

Bilge Kagan expressed the situation experienced by the Turks who left their homeland and became closer to China with the verbs *öl-* "to die", *alkın-* "to perish", *yit-* "to lose, to disappear". He wanted to increase the impact of his warning by describing this destruction in the following lines with the expressions *kanıng subça yügürti* "your blood flowed like water" and *süngüküng tagça yatdı* "your bones lay like a mountain". The inscriptions describe the plight of those who survived, using verbs such as *arıl-* "to become exhausted, unable to recover" and *toru-* "to weaken, lose strength", all of which refer to the loss of health. Those who somehow managed to survive and return to their tribes are depicted with the terms *yadag* "without a mount, on foot" and *yalıng* "naked, not properly clothed; unarmed".

Therefore, it is stated in the inscriptions that those who did not heed the warnings of their khans and settled in the regions under China's influence by being deceived by its propaganda could lose their lives, property, health, reputation and honor. Because of the distrust felt toward the Chinese, warnings about them are often presented as examples of the greatest suffering a person can experience in this world. It was not easy for the Göktürks to forget the traumas they endured. According to the following proverb in Dîvânu Lugâti't-Türk, the Göktürks and their followers in Ötüken kept their distance from the settled culture represented by China for many years. **"Saçıratgudın korkmış kuş kırk yıl adrı yıgaç üze konmas."** (-*İki dal arasına kurulmuş tuzaktan kurtularak- vartayı bir kere atlatan kuş, iki dalı olan ağaca kırk yıl boyunca konmaz.*) [Ercilasun, Akkoyunlu 2018: 336] (*The bird that escapes from the trap set between two branches does not land on the tree with two branches for forty years.*)

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THE CONCEPTUAL DOMAIN IN LANGUAGE OF NOMADIC AND SETTLED LIFE IN INNER ASIA: DEFINITENESS AND SPECIFICITY[16]

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Abstract

This study investigates Determiner Phrase (DP) structures in historical Turkic texts from the Orkhon, Uyghur, Yenisey, Khorezm, and Chaghatay periods, focusing on the encoding of Definiteness and Specificity. The data show that DPs are organized through functional projections of Specifier, Complement, and Head, with proper names systematically projecting into Definite-Specific readings due to inherent referentiality. Constructions denoting sovereigns, nations, and cities exhibit [+definite, +specific] features, while other DPs—such as those encoding settlement types, religious institutions, and worshiping classes—achieve referentiality contextually. Many appear as Noun-Noun Compounds (NNC), where the absence of overt articles is compensated by morphosyntactic and discourse cues. The findings indicate that Turkic DPs integrate structural economy with cultural domains: both nomadic and settled contexts display Definite and Specific readings, with settled life fostering lexicalization and frequent NNC formation encoding contextually anchored Definiteness and Specificity. This distribution suggests that historical Turkic syntax reflects universal grammatical principles alongside sociocultural variation.

Keywords: Definiteness, Specifity, Inner Asia, Nomadic, Settled, Turkish

1. Introduction

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[16] This study is derived from the doctoral dissertation entitled "*Genitive Structure in Old Turkic*", which is being prepared at the Institute of Social Sciences, Niğde Ömer Halisdemir University.

Sentences are structures expanded by verbs. Verb Phrases (VPs), in terms of their formation, contain elements such as the Inflectional Phrase (IP) and the Complementizer Phrase (CP), and they occur within the Tense Phrase (TP). In addition, VPs can be modified by adverbs and Prepositional Phrases (PPs) [Carnie 2013: 80-86; Alqarni 2020: 60; Tortora 2018: 53]. Noun Phrases (NPs), on the other hand, arise through Functional Projection (FP). Determiner Phrase (DP) constitutes the FP [Alexiadou et al. 2007: 3; Alqarni 2020: 9; Abney 1987: 44].

In many languages, NPs are used together with a DP. NPs constructed without a DP generally function as predicates. Like other grammatical categories, the DP is a lexical category. It represents the Head of the phrase and can take a Complement. Since the DP, when serving as the Head, assigns Definiteness to the noun it takes as a complement, it is regarded as a nominal functional element and is evaluated as a Functional Head. The DP is interpreted as equivalent to the IP. However, the DP may also appear at different structural levels [Lyons 1999: 282; Abney 1987: 169].

NPs exhibit features that allow them to be classified as either Definite or Indefinite across languages. The elements that assign Definiteness to NPs are called articles. In English, "*the*" and "*a*" function as articles before nouns, whereas in Arabic, the prefix "*al-*" is used as a Definiteness marker. In the sentence "*I bought a car this morning*", the article "*a*" does not point to a particular car, while in "*the car I bought*", the article "*the*" attributes Definiteness to the "*car*". From the NP "*the car*", one can derive meanings of Definiteness, Specificity, uniqueness, and individuality, whereas the phrase "*a car*" conveys a referent that the speaker is interested in or has rendered specific in discourse. In Arabic, Indefiniteness is marked morphologically by the suffix "*-n*" [Lyons 1999: 1-2].

Definiteness on lexical items varies according to how speakers perceive the elements in the sentence, their world knowledge, and their familiarity with the events:

(1) a. "*The cat* ran quickly after the mouse."   [Alexiadou et al. 2007: 56]

   b. "Someone left *the cat* on my doorstep this morning."

   c. "*The cat* was chosen by his wife."

In the sentences in (1), the article "*the*" attributes Definiteness to the word "*cat*". However, this Definiteness in the sentences in (2) arises after the expression "*a cat*" has been introduced into the discourse, allowing any cat—albeit Indefinite—to take

shape in the minds of the speaker and the listener. After its first mention, the expression "*a cat*" becomes semantically established in the minds of the participants and acquires Definiteness. This process is accompanied by the speakers' and listeners' intuition of identifiability and familiarity toward events and objects:

(2) a. "*A cat* immediately chased the mouse." 　　　[Alexiadou et al. 2007: 56-57]

　　b. "Someone left *a cat* on my doorstep this morning."

　　c. "*A Persian cat* was chosen."

Nouns can also acquire Definiteness in relation to specific situations or events. In the example shown in (3), even if the listener does not know the "*bride*" or if the speaker has not previously provided information about the bride and the wedding, the word "*bride*" takes the article "*the*" because the presence of a bride and groom at a wedding is a world-knowledge-based presupposition known to everyone:

(3) "I've just come back from a wedding. *The bride* was wearing red." [Alexiadou et al. 2007: 59; Lyons 1999: 262]

2. Definiteness and Specificity in the Language of Historical Texts from Inner Asia
2.1 Predicative Constructions

The nomadic and settled peoples living in Inner Asia reflected conceptual domains such as Definiteness and Specificity onto the NPs they employed. These NPs may surface at the sentential level within a variety of syntactic structures. Definite and Specific NPs typically appear with Gen marking. However, in historical texts, it is not possible to observe Gen consistently on NPs. Pronouns, on the other hand, are inherently Definite and therefore are mostly marked with Gen.

Although Definiteness is often regarded as equivalent to Specificity, the two are in fact distinct. Concepts such as "*familiarity*" "*uniqueness*" and "*referentiality*" come to the fore in both. However, Definiteness is associated with a wide range of syntactic properties, whereas Specificity does not exhibit as many syntactic features. In a communicative setting, if the speaker knows that the listener is already informed about the topic, the NP under discussion is Definite. The key notion of Definiteness is that the NP is known to both the speaker and the listener [Erk Emeksiz 2003; Tura 1986; Enç 1991; Dede 1986].

In (4), the example taken from the Yenisei Inscriptions illustrates that a pronoun marked with the Gen forms a predicative NP. In addition to Definiteness and Specificity, it is also known that elements such as the Topic Phrase (TopP) and the Focus Phrase (FocP) are included among the FP [Chomsky 1988: 94; Abney 1987; Lyons 1999: 227; Alexiadou 2001: 27; Alexiadou et al. 2007: 127-128; Roberts 2023: 37-61-62; Eppler and Ozón 2019: 34-36; Tortora 2018: 27; Alqarni 2020: 87; Arslan Kechriotis 2009].

In Türkiye Turkish, no NP can be predicated in the clause-initial position without a TopP (5). However, in the example from the Yenisei Inscriptions, it is observed that the NP formed by a pronoun constitutes both the TopP and the predicate (4):

(4) "…çabış oġuş **ben-iŋ bitig-im**…"   [Kormuşin et al. 2016: 186]

    Çabış Oguş I-GEN inscription-1SG.POSS

    '…I am Çabış Oguş. This is my inscription…'

(5) a. ***çocu(ğ)-un defter-i(dir)**.

    child-GEN   notebook-3SG.POSS(COP)

  b. [$_{TopP}$[$_{NP}$[$_{DP}$ **(bu)**] [$_{N'}$[$_{N}^{0}$ **defter**]]] [$_{Top'}$] [$_{Top}^{0}$]]], çocu(ğ)-un defter-i(dir).

        (this)   notebook   child-GEN notebook-3SG.POSS(COP)

    'this notebook is child's notebook.'

By the Islamic period, it is observed that in Chagatai Turkish, the copula "*turur*" predicativizes NPs marked with the Gen:

(6) "…**bu bāġ   siz-ler-niŋ   bāġ-ıŋız tur-ur-Ø**…"

    this vineyard you-PL-GEN vineyard-2PL.POSS stands/be.COP-PRS-3SG

    '…this vineyard is your vineyard…'   [Argunşah 2013: 284]

Beyond the inherent Definiteness carried by personal pronouns, their ability to function predicatively also supports their analysis as Definite. These NPs, prior to predication, actually occupied the clause-initial position, as seen in (4). In other words, by conveying the proposition mentioned in the sentence, they both establish the topic and, through predication, assert a proposition about it. The ability of a Gen-

Poss NP to become predicative depends on the TopP that provides prior information about the proposition. In the example given in (4) from the Yenisei Inscriptions, the clause-initial position of the TopP is illustrated in (7). In (6), representing the Chagatai period, it is observed in "*Muhakamat al-Lughatayn*" that the TopP occurs in the clause-initial position (8).

(7) çabış oġuş [$_{TopP}$[$_{NP}$ **Ø**] [$_{Top'}$[$_{DP}$ [$_{NP}$ **ben-iŋ**] [$_{D'}$[$_{nP}$[$_{NP}$] [$_{n'}$[$_{NP}$ bitig-] [$_{n}^{0}$]]] [$_{D}^{0}$ **-im**]]] [$_{Top}^{0}$]]]

(8) [$_{TopP}$[$_{NP}$[$_{DP}$ **bu**] [$_{N'}$[$_{N}^{0}$ **bağ** t$_{a}$]]] [$_{Top'}$[$_{DP}$[$_{NP}$ **sizler-niŋ**] [$_{D'}$[$_{VP}$[$_{NP}$ t$_{a}$] [$_{V'}$[$_{nP}$[$_{NP}$] [$_{n'}$[$_{NP}$ **bāġ-**] [$_{n}^{0}$]]] [$_{V}^{0}$ turur]]] [$_{D}^{0}$ **-ıŋız**]]]

2.2 Noun Phrases Formed with Names of Nations, Cities, and Rulers

In Historical Turkish, all nouns forming Head NPs with overt or null Poss marking, although not consistently inflected with the Gen, are sometimes found with Gen. These nouns may include names of celestial bodies as well as nouns modified by numerals, since quantifiers and proper nouns such as the names of celestial bodies carry functions of Definiteness and Specificity. Nouns modified by numerals are also Definite (9b):

(9) a. "…**ay-uŋ**   yat-ġu   eb-i

   moon-GEN sleep-PTCP house-3SG.POSS

   '…the sleeping house of the moon…' [Kormuşin et al. 2016: 347]

   b. "...**beş yüz   ärän-niŋ** aş-ı   suv-ı

   five hundred man-GEN food-3SG.POSS water-3SG.POSS

   kölük-i

   pack animal-3SG.POSS   [Hamilton 2020: 44]

   '...food, water and pack animals enough for five hundred men...'

Similarities are observed between sentence and NP structures in Orkhon Turkish, that is, between DP and IP. In IP, the inherent Definiteness of a pronoun is reflected

in the person agreement on the verb (10a), whereas in NP structures, person agreement occurs under the DP (10b). In NNC[17] and Gen-Poss constructions, Head nouns are governed by a little noun phrase ('nP'). The Poss marker allows the nP to take a argument. Therefore, Poss on Head nouns surfaces as n^0 [Öztürk and Erguvanlı Taylan 2016: 101-102]. The relevant structures are illustrated in tree diagrams in (10c–d).

(10) a. "...**men** tokuz yeğirmi yıl   şad   **olur-tu-m**..."   (BK-S 9)

       I   nine   twenty year shad reign-PST-1SG

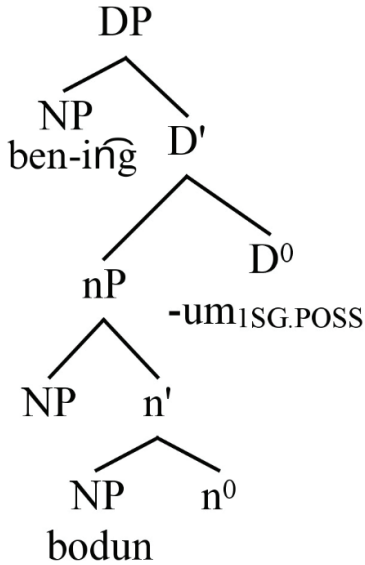   '...I reigned as shad for nineteen years...'   [Tekin 2017: 70-71]

  b. "...**ben-ing bodun-um**   anta erür-Ø..."   (T-E 5)

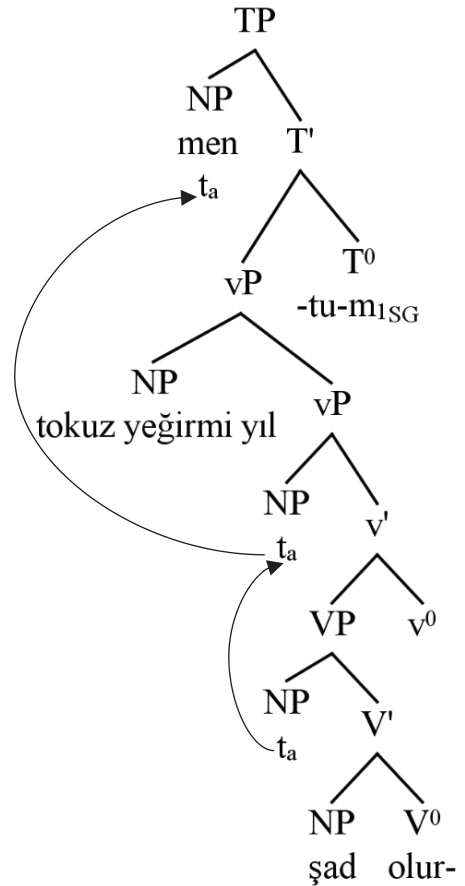   I-GEN   nation-1SG.POSS there be.PRS-3SG

       '...my nation will be there...'   [Tekin 2017: 78 -79]

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[17] The relevant term is quoted from Kunduracı (2013): *Kunduracı, A.* Turkish Noun-Noun Compounds: A Process-Based Paradigmatic Account. Canada: University of Calgary Unpublished Ph.D. Thesis, 2013.

c.

```
              DP
            /    \
         NP       D'
       ben-iñg   /  \
               nP    D⁰
              /  \   -um₁SG.POSS
           NP    n'
          /     /  \
        NP    NP    n⁰
       bodun
```

d.

```
                    TP
                  /    \
               NP       T'
              men      /  \
              t_a    vP    T⁰
                    /  \  -tu-m₁SG
                  NP    vP
          tokuz yeğirmi yıl  /  \
                          NP    v'
                          t_a  /  \
                             VP    v⁰
                            /  \
                          NP    V'
                          t_a  /  \
                             NP    V⁰
                            şad   olur-
```

Apart from pronouns and names of celestial bodies, NPs are also formed with various other nouns. These NPs may include proper names such as those of cities, nations, rivers, lakes, and mountains. Wherever proper names occur, Definiteness and Specificity are present. Such NPs may refer to the name of a city, as well as to the names of nations and rulers:

(11) a. "…**Bukarak uluş-Ø   bodun**-Ø-ta…"   (KT-N 12)

       Bukhara   city-3SG.POSS people-3SG.POSS-LOC

       '...from the nation of Bukhara city...'   [Tekin 2017: 50-51]

 b. "…**Türük Bilge Kağan(-Ø)   il-i-ñge**   bititdim…"   (T-E 8)

Türk Bilge Khan(-GEN) state-3SG.POSS-DAT write-make-PST.1SG

'...I had it written during the reign of the Turkish Bilge Kagan...'

[Tekin 2017: 84-85]

The NP "*Bukarak uluş*" in (11a) refers to a city. This NP is formed by the juxta-position of two nouns, whose primary function is to create a NP. The Poss marker is not always phonologically realized in historical texts. However, it is present syntac-tically within the NP structure. The NP follows a Complement–Head pattern, the Poss marker appears as a null element during the developmental stage of the NP structure (12a-b). In the NP "*Bukarak uluş bodun*", the noun "*Bukarak*" is Definite because it is a proper noun. However, in the NNC construction, it is not moved to the DP. In the Gen-Poss construction, on the other hand, it can be said that "*Bukarak uluş*" is moved to the DP:
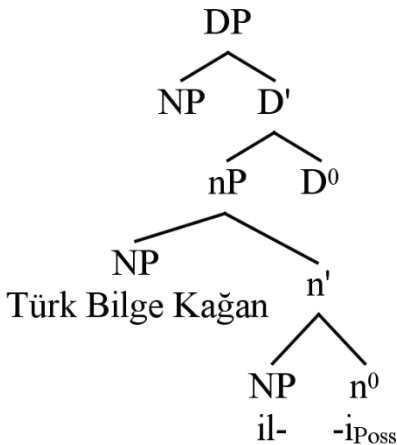
(12) a. Definite-Specific   b. Definite-Specific


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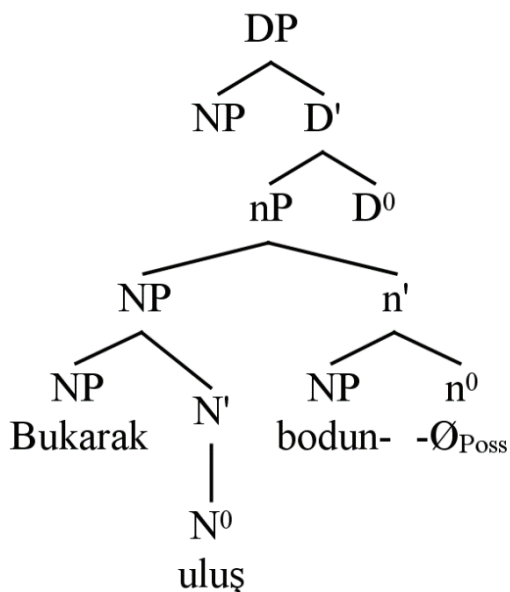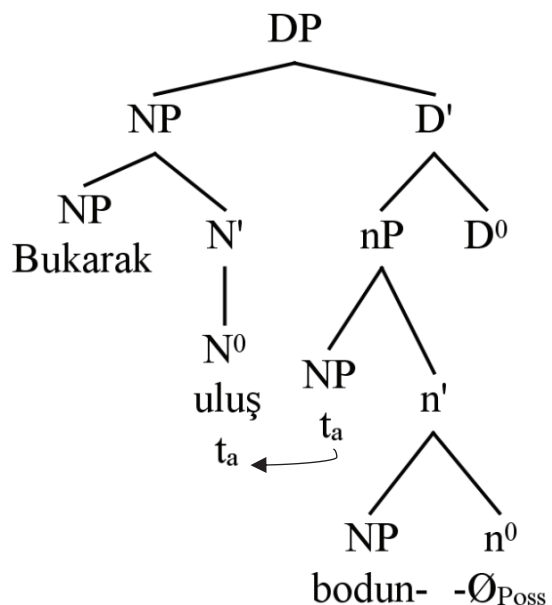
The example in (11b) is similar to that in (11a). However, in (11b), the Poss marker is overtly realized on the word. The ruler's name "*Türk Bilge Kağan*" can occupy a Complement or Specifier position, as in (11a). The formation of a NP with the proper name and the word "*il*" indicates that the domain of Definiteness and Specificity is also reflected in the traditions of settled life and urbanization. The relevant NP is illustrated in the tree diagram below:

(13) a. Definite-Specific   b. Definite-Specific
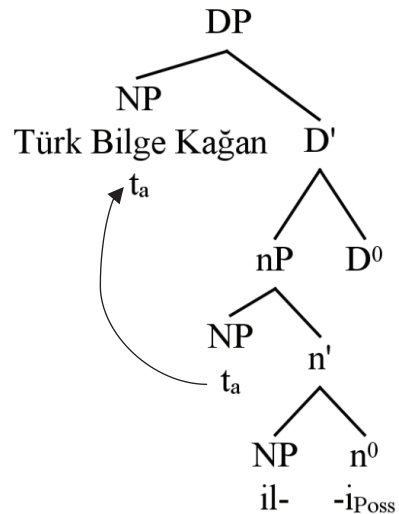
2.3 Noun Phrases Other Than Proper Names

In the examples presented in section 2.2, it was noted that proper names contribute Definiteness and Specificity to NPs. However, Definiteness and Specificity are not limited to proper names. In the NPs in (14), Definiteness and Specificity are also observed in constructions related to the social conditions of a community and its defensive capabilities:

(14) a. "...**er**   **erdem**-i..."

      man merit-3SG.POSS

'...merit of the warrior man...'   [Kormuşin et al. 2016: 65]

b. "…**bodun boğuz-ı**   tok erti-Ø…"   (T-S 1)

nation   throat-3SG.POSS full be.PST-3SG

'...the nation's throat were full...'   [Tekin 2017: 74-75]

The heads in the NPs "*er erdemi*" and "*bodun boğuzı*" can be analyzed in two ways, as being governed by a Complement or a Specifier, e.g., "*er yiğitliği (the valor of a warrior)/erin yiğitliği the valor of the warrior*" or "*halk boğazı (the throat of a people)/halkın boğazı (the throat of the people)*". In fact, in these NPs, reference to a universally known individual (er) or to the people (bodun) is possible. In the NP "*er erdemi*", since it refers to the profile of a warrior, it is more plausible to interpret it as a generic reference. The NP is Indefinite-Specific, yet formed as an NNC construction:
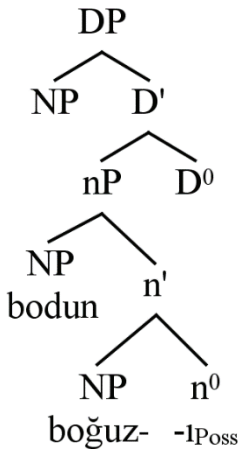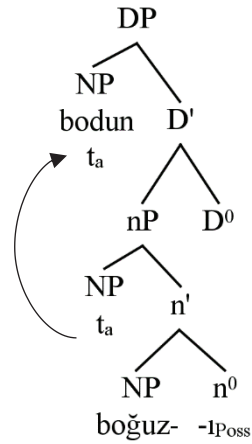
(15) Indefinite-Specific
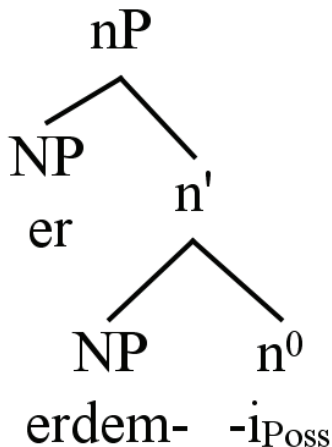
For the NP "*Bodun boğuzı*", considering the expression in the text as a whole, it is clear that it refers to a Specific "*bodun*". Therefore, this NP is Definite-Specific, and the noun "*bodun*" can occupy the Specifier position. It can also be said that "*bodun*" is processed under the DP even when it occupies the Complement position, since some compounds exhibit Definiteness in certain usages. On the other hand,

when the NP is considered independently from the text, an Indefinite-Specific interpretation under a nP is also possible. These three different NPs are illustrated in the tree diagrams in (16). In (16a), although formed as an NNC construction, the NP is Definite-Specific; however, the Complement (*bodun*) is not moved to the DP. The NP in (16b) is also Definite-Specific, but here "*bodun*" is moved to the Specifier position. In (16c), being only Specific, it forms a compound under the nP:
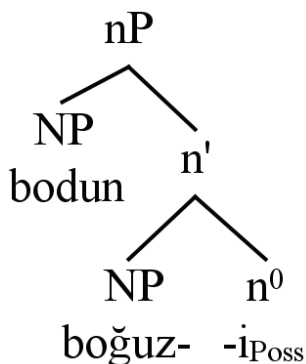
(16) a. Definite-Specific (NNC) b. Definite-Specific (Gen-Poss)

c. Indefinite-Specific (NNC)

$$nP$$

NP
bodun

n'

NP
boǧuz-

n^0
$-i_{Poss}$

Traces of settled life appear not only in references to people, rulers, and cities, but also in terms denoting places of dwelling, habitation, and worship. With the transition to a settled lifestyle, the construction of religious buildings and their regular use provided the ground for the formation of certain concepts. In language, one of the most common ways of forming such concepts is through NNC constructions. Accordingly, in the NP shown in (17a), settled practices triggered the derivation of an NNC composed of the nouns "*tersā*" and "*zāhid*", which were frequently used in religious contexts. Since the NP "*tersā zāhidleri*" denotes a concept, it expresses Specificity. However, in the NP "*tersā zāhidleridin biri*", the Head consists of a partitive. Partitives inherently carry Definiteness and Specificity, since the noun they select as their Complement designates a Definite or Specific set [von Heusinger and Kornfilt 2017: 5]. Therefore, the Head of the NP is marked under the DP. In addition, in the NP "*Ol ṣavmaʿa*", since it designates a place of worship, Definiteness and Specificity are also present.

(17)

"[15] (6)...Ol **ṣavmaʿa** **içinde** **tersā** **zāhid-(7)-ler-i-din**

that place of worship in.LOC Christian devotee-PL-3SG.POSS-ABL

bir-i ʿibādat birle meşġūl erdi-Ø..."

one-3SG.POSS praying with busy be.PST-3SG

'...In that place of worship, one of the Christian devotees was busy praying...'

[Eckmann 1995: 11]

In addition to religious expressions, compounds are also formed with words such as "*kerekü (tent)*". Such words likewise indicate the presence of a settled lifestyle. With the transition to settled life, word like "*kerekü*" entered the language, creating their own conceptual domains. This conceptual domain is formed through NNC constructions and, within the context in which they occur, reflects both Definiteness and Specificity, since the tent in question refers to a single, identifiable tent. However, if we consider an NNC such as "*kerekü tügünüki (tent chimney)*", which refers to a general category, then only Specificity, but not Definiteness, can be said to be present:

(18) "...**kerekü-Ø** : içi :   ne : teg : ol :   **tügünük-i** (IB 18)

     tent-GEN   inside.3SG.POSS   how like   3SG.COP   flue-3SG.POSS

   ne : teg : ol..."

     how like   3SG.COP   [Kormuşin et al. 2016: 418]

    '...What is the inside of the tent like? What is its flue like?...'

3. Conclusion

Definiteness and Specificity in the historical stages of Turkish are encoded both lexically and syntactically within NPs. While pronouns inherently carry Definiteness, their ability to function as predicates depends on the presence of a TopP. In the Yenisei Inscriptions, however, pronouns simultaneously fulfill both topical and predicative functions, a pattern that reflects the conceptual background of a nomadic lifestyle. With the transition to settled life, as in Chaghatay Turkish, agricultural terms such as "*bāġ (garden)*" appear in topical position, illustrating the emergence of new conceptual categories tied to settled communities.

Proper names, including those of rulers, cities, and nations, consistently mark Definiteness and Specificity, whereas non-proper-noun NPs may refer to a type or class, often through NNC structures. Depending on context, such compounds can be interpreted as Definite or Specific. The interplay among Specifiers, Complements,

and Heads in NP structure further highlights the syntactic mechanisms behind these distinctions.

Overall, the linguistic reflections of nomadic and settled lifestyles are evident in NP structures: nomadism is associated with multifunctional pronouns and less grammaticalized topical categories, while settled life is linked to the development of religious and agricultural terminology as well as the expansion of NP compounds through part–whole relations.

Abbreviations

ABL	ablative
ACC	accusative
ART	article
BK-S	Bilge Kağan-South
COP	copula
DAT	dative
Gen	genitive
IB	Irk Bitig
KT-N	Kül Tigin-North
LOC	locative
MASC	masculine
NEG	negative, negation
NNC	noun-noun compound
NOM	nominative
PL	plural
POSS	possessive
PRS	present
PST	past
PTCP	participle
Q	question marker
RC	relative clause
SG	singular
t	trace
T-E	Tonyukuk-East
TP	tense phrase
TopP	topic phrase

T-S   Tonyukuk-South

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THE SPREAD OF ISLAM AMONG SEDENTARY AND NOMADIC TURKIC PEOPLE

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Abstract

The spread of Islam among the Turkic peoples represents a gradual and multifaceted historical process shaped by political interaction, cultural exchange, and shared religious concepts. Initial contacts between the Turks and Islam occurred in the mid-seventh century during Arab military campaigns in Khorasan and Central Asia. Although these encounters did not immediately lead to mass conversion, they introduced Islam as a cultural and ideological alternative to the existing belief systems. A decisive turning point came after the Battle of Talas in 751, when the Karluks allied with the Muslims against the Chinese, strengthening religious and political ties.

The sedentary Muslim population of Mavarennakhr played a pivotal role in the Islamization of the nomadic Turks. The Samanid rulers, particularly Nuh ibn Asad and Ismail Samani, combined military expansion with missionary patronage, promoting the construction of mosques and religious schools in frontier regions. Turkic warriors captured during these campaigns later served in the Samanid military apparatus, eventually rising to positions of significant political authority. Among them was Alptegin, whose career laid the foundation for the Ghaznavid state, which in turn contributed to the further spread of Islam, especially in the Indian subcontinent.

The adoption of Islam by the Karakhanids in the 10th century marked a major milestone, transforming Islam from an external influence into a state-supported religious and cultural system. The pre-Islamic monotheistic worldview of the Turks – rooted in the Kok Tengri belief – facilitated their spiritual assimilation of Islam, allowing for continuity rather than rupture in religious perception. The subsequent spread of Sufism, particularly through the influence of figures such as Ahmad Yassawi, further integrated Islamic ethics with Turkic cultural values.

Thus, the Islamization of the Turks was not merely a religious conversion but a broader civilizational synthesis that reshaped political organization, cultural identity, and spiritual life across Central Eurasia.

Keywords. Islamization of Turks, Kok Tengri, Ghazawat, Mavarennakhr, Samanids, Karakhanids

Introduction

The adoption of Islam by the Turkic peoples is a unique and unrepeatable phenomenon in human history. This process is fundamentally different from the adoption of religion by other peoples. For centuries, nomadic Turkic tribes, faithful to the Kok Tengri faith, embraced Islam without any coercion, of their own free will. Forcing the nomadic Turks, freedom-loving and rebellious by nature, to adopt any religion was impossible. Historical sources indicate that after the adoption of Islam by Turkic rulers, in particular by Satuq Bughra Khan, and several other military leaders, their subordinates also converted. This event laid the foundation for the natural spread of Islam throughout the Turkic world.

After the Turkic peoples, originally nomadic, established their states, a certain portion of the population gradually migrated to urban areas and adopted a sedentary lifestyle. As a result, they began to engage in agriculture, horticulture, and trade. This process is particularly evident in the case of the Karluks, who lived in the Fergana Valley and Jetisu. The adoption of Islam by the sedentary Turkic population was among the first to subsequently lead to the widespread spread of this religion among the nomadic Turkic peoples. Thus, Islam became a factor not only in the religious but also in the cultural and political revival of the Turkic peoples.

Results and Discussion

According to historical sources, the name Turk dates back to the sixth century CE. During this period, the Eastern and Western Turkic Khaganates emerged across a vast territory stretching from the northern borders of Mongolia and China to the Black Sea. The founder of the Eastern Empire was Bumyn Khagan, and the Western Empire was founded by his brother, Istemi Khagan. Although the name Turk as a political term emerged in the sixth century, the roots of the Turkic people go much deeper. Researchers believe the Turks are descendants of the ancient Huns. After the

Huns disappeared from the political scene, the name Turk firmly established itself as a historical name in their place [Mert 2021: 658].

Before the adoption of Islam, the Turkic peoples held a variety of religious beliefs. Among them were followers of Christianity, Zoroastrianism, Buddhism, and Manichaeism. According to Ibrahim Kafesoglu, the religious system of the ancient Turks was based on three main principles: faith in the forces of nature, ancestor worship, and the worship of Kok Tengri. These beliefs formed a unique synthesis of the religious and moral worldview of nomadic society. The inhabitants of the steppes usually believed in one God. Later, researchers called this belief "shamanism". Some consider it a religion, others – a part of everyday life [Yildirim at al. 2024: 164]. However, the most widespread belief among the Turkic peoples was the belief in Kok Tengri, which formed the basis of the national mentality and worldview of the Turks [Kafesoglu 2002: 297; Tanyu 1980: 6].

According to the belief in Kok Tengri, there is only one God, who determines the fate of the universe and is considered the creator of all beings. The Turkic peoples worshiped a single God of Heaven and Earth, calling him Tengri. Tengri was recognized as the Creator of the entire universe and the arbiter of the fate of humanity. Based on this belief, they sacrificed camels, cattle, and sheep to Tengri [Mert 2021: 660]. Byzantine historians also left valuable information about the beliefs of the Turks. Menander, a sixth-century author, wrote of the Turks: "Besides worshiping earth, water, and fire, they believe in one God, the creator of the universe". Theophylaktos states: "The Turks believe in one God, the true ruler of earth and heaven, worship him, and offer sacrifices to him" [Tanyu 1980: 14]. Thus, the Turkic worldview initially gravitated toward monotheism, which likely contributed to the relatively easy acceptance of Islam in subsequent centuries. It was this early belief in one God that created fertile ground for the future adoption of Islam. Islam, unlike Buddhism or Zoroastrianism, was closer to the worldview of the steppe peoples – a single, all-powerful, and just Creator.

The Orkhun inscriptions are the primary source for understanding the essence of the Kok Tengri religious system. These inscriptions describe God as a force "helping people and the khan". The inscriptions contain the following lines:

"When the blue sky above and the black earth below were created, man was created between them."

"My word is Turk Bilgi Hakan, created by God, like God."

"God said: I gave you a khan, you surrendered, abandoning your khan. Because you surrendered, God killed you."

"By the power of God, the warrior of my father the Khagan is like a wolf, and the enemy is like a sheep" [Tanyu 1980: 29–32].

These lines demonstrate that the heavens and the earth were created by one God. The Orkhun inscriptions contain no evidence of polytheism or the worship of other celestial bodies, such as stars. Consequently, the fundamental principle of belief in these inscriptions is faith in Kok Tengri, that is, monotheism [Mert 2021: 663]. The Arab traveler Ibn Fadlan, who visited Volga Bulgaria in 922, also notes in his work the Turks' belief in one God: "When any of them is oppressed or faces some misfortune, he raises his head to heaven and says: God is one" [Puteshestvie Ibn-Fadlana 1939: 61]. In this belief, the word "Kok" denotes the greatness and power of God. Later, the Turks who adopted Islam began to use the word "Kok" to mean the sky, and "Tangri" instead of "Allah".

The first contacts between the Turks and Islam date back to the mid – 7th century, during the reign of Caliph Umar ibn Khattab (634–644). At this time, Arab troops reached Khorasan, Tokharistan, and Mavarennakhr, where they encountered Turkic tribes [Tabari 1987: 18–21; Dadan 2017: 116]. In Arab sources, the Turkic tribes of Central Asia at that time are referred to under the names Haftal, Eftal and Turk [Tabari 1987: 32, 106]. Although these contacts were initially military in nature, they gradually developed into cultural and religious interactions.

From the 8th century onward, Islam began to gradually spread in Mavarennakhr. During this period, the region represented a complex religious landscape, where Manichaeism, Zoroastrianism, and Christianity coexisted. However, it was Islam that proved capable of uniting the region's diverse ethnic and cultural groups under a single spiritual banner. The Battle of Talas in 751 became a key event, strengthening ties between Muslims and Turks and opening the way for the Islamic mission to the east [Mert 2021: 666-668]. After the Battle of Talas, the religious expansion of

Islam took on a cultural and educational nature rather than a violent one. Merchants, scholars, and Sufis played no less a role here than warriors.

During the Abbasid period, particularly under Caliph Mu'tasim (833–842), the Turks began to play an important role in the Islamic world. Mu'tasim's mother was Turkish, who gathered many Turkic warriors around her and founded the city of Samarra for them. Turkish warriors quickly became the leading force in the Caliphate's army [Sarioglu 2023: 101]. This period also saw the emergence of prominent Turkic scholars: the renowned Muslim theologian and hadith scholar Abdullah ibn Mubarak al-Marwazi (d. 797), whose mother was Turkish; the mathematician Abdulhamid ibn Turk ad-Jili, who worked at Bayt al-Hikma in Baghdad; and others.

The widespread popularity of Islam among the Turkic peoples dates back to the Karakhanid era, when the ruler Satuk Bughra Khan – later known as Abdulkarim – embraced Islam and, together with him, many members of the Karluk, Chigil, and Yagma tribal confederation also converted. His acceptance of Islam, which sources such as Jamal Karshi and Ibn al-Athir associate with the spiritual influence of the Samanid court, led to the proclamation of Islam as the state religion [Karaev 1983: 96]. This event strengthened both the political structure of the emerging Karakhanid state and the integration of the Turkic peoples into the broader Islamic cultural and economic world. From this point on, Islam steadily gained ground in the Central Tien Shan region, where cities such as Osh served as important frontier strongholds of Muslim authority as early as the 9th century. According to Arab geographers, the towns of Biskent and Salat, located between the Naryn and Karadarya rivers, already marked the borderlands of Islam at that time [Karaev 1983: 94].

The Samanid emirs had the greatest influence on the conversion of the Turks to Islam. In 840, the Samanid emir Nuh ibn Asad conquered Isfijab. During this period, Nuh ibn Asad ruled Sogdiana, Fergana, and several Turkish cities [Ibn Khordadbekh 1986: 68]. The Samanid policy combined military force with missionary activity. Their emirs actively supported the construction of mosques and madrassas in the borderlands. Ismail Samani, having captured Taraz in 893, converted a Christian church into a mosque and laid the foundations for the Islamization of this region [Narshakhi 2022: 138]. Ismail launched a second campaign against the Turks in 906 and captured many cities in Turkestan [Pilipchuk 2019: 216]. Thus, the Samanids conquered the lands of the Karluks and expanded the borders of their state at the

expense of their territories. Uzgand, located around Fergana, was also captured from the Turks in the 10th century. According to Ibn Hawqal, the city of Haftdeh (near Uzgand) initially belonged to the Turks and then passed into Muslim hands.

In the 9th-10th centuries, Islam spread widely among the inhabitants of the Talas Valley and the surrounding towns. The Arab geographer al-Muqaddasi (1000) writes of the existence of mosques in the towns of Jiqil, Barskhan, Behlu, Atlakh, Jamukat, Kulan, and Merke. Al-Muqaddasi also mentions that the Samanid commander Faiq built a rabat (caravanserai) outside the town of Merke. According to the author of "Hudud ul-Alam" (10th century), many Muslims also lived in the cities of Shelji, Taraz, Tekabket, Farunkaz, Merke and Navkat [Karaev 1983: 95]. Thus, by the second half of the 10th century, the majority of the population of the Jetisu Valley was Muslim.

The medieval Arab geographer Ibn Hawqal praises the Muslims of Mavarennakhr as the most active defenders of Islam. According to him, in no other region of the Islamic world "is there a region more successful in holy war", because they are located on the frontier with pagan and Turkic tribes [Ibn Hawqal 2021: 17]. According to him, these borders extended from Khorezm to the region of Isbijab; from Isbijab to Fergana, where the Karluks lived; further to Khuttal and the borders with the Indian lands [Ibn Hawqal 2021: 17]. Thus, according to Ibn Hawqal, the entire Mavarennakhr was a border zone of Islam, constantly in a state of military readiness. The author pays special attention to the military strength and discipline of the region's population: the troops participating in the campaign of Nasr ibn Ahmad, the Samanid emir (864–892), numbered 300,000, emphasizing a sophisticated mobilization system. Small detachments could wander, separated from the main army, but still retained organization. Ibn Hawqal notes that most of the fighters were local residents, not foreigners, and each of them "knew his status", that is, he received a salary and had a clear role in the army [Ibn Hawqal 2021: 17].

This fragment represents an important source for the analysis of the role of Mavarennakhr as a strategic military outpost of Islam on the north-eastern borders of the Caliphate, reflects the nature of close contacts between the Muslim states of Central Asia and the Turkic nomadic tribes (Ghuzz, Karluks and others), and also testifies to the formation in the 10th century of a stable border identity of the Muslims of Mavarennakhr, based on the synthesis of religious devotion and military tradition.

The Karakhanid rulers played a decisive role in the Islamization of the nomadic Turkic tribes living in the Central Tien Shan and Yetisuv regions. It was under their political and religious influence that a significant portion of these tribes converted to Islam, further strengthening the position of Muslim culture among the Turkic peoples. Hilal al-Salbi left us valuable information on the religious rites of the Khagans. According to him, when the Karakhanid Ilek-khan Nasr captured Bukhara without resistance in October 999, representatives of the Samanid dynasty attempted to resist the Turks with the help of the people. At their call, the preachers of the mosque urged the townspeople to fight the enemy. The Bukharans then turned to religious scholars for advice. The scholars, addressing the people, responded: "If the Khanids (Karakhanids) had quarreled (with the Samanids) over religion, then fighting them would have been obligatory". "And when the struggle is for the good of this world, Muslims are not allowed to destroy themselves and expose themselves to murder. The way of life of these people (i.e., the Khanids) is wonderful, and their faith is impeccable, and therefore it is better to refrain from any interference" [Karaev 1983: 121-122]. As a result of such advice, the local population greeted the arrival of the Turks in Bukhara with indifference.

The Islamic religion initially spread among the sedentary Turkic peoples living in cities and oases. They embraced the new faith not only as a religious doctrine but also as a factor in socio-political unification. Subsequently, sedentary Muslim Turks began to spread Islam among their related nomadic tribes. This process continued for several generations and contributed to the formation of a common religious and spiritual unity among the Turkic peoples.

The adoption of Islam by the Karluks, Chigils, and Yaghmas, which resulted in the emergence of the Karakhanid state, is a striking example of this phenomenon. A similar process is observed among the Ghaznavids: Turkic gulams serving the Samanids eventually emerged as major military and political figures. Among them was Alptegin, the founder of the Ghaznavid state, who served the Samanids for many years and defended their borders. His words, quoted in the Siyasatname, reflect the spiritual and moral ideals of Turkic Muslim military leaders: "At the end of my life, I will be occupied with the affairs of ghazawat (holy war). If I die, I will be a martyr, and if I win, then thanks to me, many infidels will become Muslims" [Nizomulmulk

2022: 134]. These words demonstrate that holy war was understood as a lofty spiritual endeavor. The Ghaznavid state occupied an important place in history by widely spreading Islamic culture in the southern regions.

By the beginning of the 10th century, the Volga Bulgars had also voluntarily adopted Islam, and the Samanid state had a significant influence on this process. This is evidenced, in particular, by the fact that the name of Ismail Samanid was engraved on coins minted by the Bulgar Khagan Almush [Yanina 1962: 185]. During this same period, Islam began to spread in the Urals and southern Siberia. Turkic peoples, who had previously professed religions such as Manichaeism, Zoroastrianism, Christianity, and Buddhism, finally adopted Islam by the 12th century [Tanyu 1980: 105]. The Khorezmians, who bordered the Oghuz to the north and west and Mavarennakhr to the south and east [Ibn Hawqal 2021: 27], also played an important role in the Islamization of the Oghuz tribes. Some of the Oghuz who did not convert to Islam separated from Khorezm and migrated to the lands of the Pechenegs [Tanyu 1980: 91]. Thus, the sedentary population of Mavarennakhr made a significant contribution to the conversion of nomadic Turkic peoples to Islam, which determined the further development of the cultural and religious space of Central Asia.

Beginning in the 11th century, the Holy Qur'an began to be translated into various Turkic languages. In these translations, native Turkic equivalents were often used for key Islamic terms: Tangri for "Allah," Yek for "Shaitan," Yalvac for "Prophet," Uchmag for "Paradise," and Tamu for "Hell." This phenomenon illustrates that the Turks embraced Islam while preserving their linguistic and cultural identity [Tanyu 1980: 105]. In the 12th century, the Syrian monk Mikael wrote: "The Turks believe in the oneness of God. The Allah of the Arabs is also one deity; therefore, the Turks easily accepted the religion of the Arabs" [Tanyu 1980: 117]. This observation confirms that the Turks approached Islam through the prism of their pre-existing religious worldview.

Later, during the Seljuk period (10th–11th centuries), Islam spread among the Turks, even to the lower classes. This process accelerated after Seljuk Bey's acceptance of Islam in the city of Jand in 985. The Seljuks quickly established the Great Turkic-Islamic Empire and became the political and military leaders of the Islamic world. In his Siyosatname, Nizam al-Mulk, written in 1091, provides a compelling argu-

ment for the Turks' eventual acceptance of Islam: The Great Sultan Alp Arslan emphasizes that the Turks accepted Islam with a pure heart, saying: "The reason why our Lord today cherishes the Turks and grants them the kingdom is because of the purity of their Islam and because they know no bid'ah or betrayal" [Nizomulmulk 2022: 186].

The rapid spread of Islam among the Turks was greatly influenced not only by military campaigns, but also by the movement of da'wah and Sufism. Starting from the Companions and Tabi'in, scholars, Sufis, and merchants who propagated Islam traveled to different lands and invited people to Islam. As a result of this process, many Turkic peoples became Muslims based on internal conviction.

Conclusion

The process of Islamization among the Turkic peoples represents one of the most distinctive and profound transformations in the religious history of Eurasia. Situated at the crossroads of civilizations and faiths, the Turkic world absorbed Islam not through coercion or conquest, but through gradual spiritual and cultural integration.

Several interrelated factors explain the Turks' voluntary and enduring acceptance of Islam. First, their monotheistic worldview—rooted in the ancient Kok Tengri belief—resonated deeply with the Islamic doctrine of tawhid (divine unity), creating an ideological and spiritual continuity rather than rupture. Second, the Turkic ideal of bravery and loyalty, embodied in their warrior ethos, found a natural parallel in the Islamic concept of ghaza and jihad, where courage served the defense of faith and justice.

Equally significant was the compatibility of Turkic social ethics with Islamic moral principles. This congruence prepared fertile ground for the subsequent rise and spread of Sufism, which provided the emotional and mystical dimension that bridged nomadic and urban ways of life. Sufi teachers and missionaries—most notably the followers of Ahmad Yassawi – played an instrumental role in integrating Islamic spirituality with the traditional Turkic worldview. Through their teachings, Islam became not merely a religion of dogma but a living moral and cultural force that shaped the collective identity of Turkic societies.

Thus, the Islamization of the Turks was not a simple religious conversion but a complex process of civilizational synthesis. It marked the emergence of a unique Turkic-Islamic culture, one that harmonized faith with freedom, spirituality with statehood, and tradition with renewal – leaving a lasting legacy on the cultural and political landscape of the Muslim world.

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THE KAZAKH EPIC AND THE CONCEPT OF "CITY" IN THE GOLDEN HORDE ERA

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Abstract

If we regard the epic as the encyclopedia of a nation's culture, it is impossible for the epic heritage of the Kazakh people, a major representative of nomadic culture, not to contain information related to city culture. The foundation of the epic is historical reality. Specifically, it is directly related to the environment that gave rise to the epic and the geographical place names. A historical epic must contain historical names, otherwise, the listener will not believe its historicity. Therefore, the creators of the historical dastan (epic poem), starting with specific toponyms, make the terrain where the events take place as close as possible to a realistic concept.

The prevailing concept in the Kazakh epic tradition, which was formed during the eras of the Golden Horde, Ak Orda, Nogai Horde, Uzbek Khanate, and Kazakh Khanate and reached its peak in the 18th-19th centuries, is that of viewing ancient settlements common to the old Turkic peoples as their own homeland and even considering former relatives who established separate states as part of one nation's territory—a concept of unification. For this reason, even the later historical epics frequently mention the names of ancient historical places. In Kazakh epics, Crimea, Ürim (Byzantium/Rome), Urgench, Khiva, Astrakhan, Kazan, Istanbul, Andijan, Kokand, and others are regarded as the Turks' own lands. Syria (Sham), Egypt (Mysyr), Baghdad, and others are described as friendly nations to rely on in times of distress.

The heroic epics, considered the pearl and treasure of the rich oral literature of the Kazakh people are a source of wisdom, history, culture, and worldview accumulated over centuries. These epics depict not only the heroic deeds of the warriors, the aspirations and sorrows of the people, and customs and traditions, but also the social structure of society, economic relations, and the geographical environment. One of these central elements is the concept of the city. In Kazakh epics, the city is not

merely a simple dwelling place; it appears as a space that is a center of power and defense, a focus of civilization and culture, the arena of heroic events, and also possesses symbolic meaning.

In this article, we comprehensively examine the concept of the city based on major Kazakh epics related to the Golden Horde era, such as "Yer Yedige," "Yer Targin," "Yer Kosai," "Yer Sayin," "Karasai Kazi," and "Orak Mamai". The objective of the research is to reveal the peculiarities of the city image, its functions, its role in the lives of the heroes, and its symbolic meaning in these epics. This research allows for a deeper understanding of the Kazakh people's perspective on the city in the past era and its place in their social and spiritual life.

The main function of the city in Kazakh epics is to be a center of power and a fortress of defense. These two aspects are closely connected, because only a strong power can effectively defend the city, and a defended city ensures the stability of the power.

Keywords: folklore studies, Kazakh epic, concept of "city," Golden Horde, historical epic.

The epic heritage of the Kazakh people is the main channel for preserving the nation's spiritual culture and historical memory. Epic poems are the fruit of a genealogical consciousness and epic tradition deeply ingrained in the nation's memory. These poems convey in artistic language the stages of the nation's historical development, and the images of historical figures, nations, and cities that lived during that time.

Heroic epics artistically compile the history and traditions the nation endured over centuries, establish their own perspective and evaluation of various events, and express the nation's hopes and aspirations for the future. While not an exact chronicle or copy of specific historical events and deeds, the epic suggests the deep, fundamental meaning and conclusion of such phenomena. From this perspective, it is clear that although heroic poems may not present historical periods, events, and figures precisely, the epic does not deviate far from historical reality. One facet of the unique, marvelous nature of epic compilations lies here. What makes heroic poems especially close to the heart of the nation is their infusion with the idea of patriotism. Throughout all stages of human societal development, the issue of protecting the

peace and integrity of the clan, tribe, or state unions, defeating the hostile enemy, and establishing a happy life has always been the most complex problem. This very aspiration is the distinct characteristic of heroic poems.

Various battles and hardships that occurred throughout history are described subject to the internal logic of the epic. Remaining solely within the scope of a particular war or conflict is not characteristic of the epic. The epic does not pursue the number or chronology of events that occurred in real life. Only aspects of phenomena that align with the nation's aspirations are selected for the heroic poem.

The history of the Kazakh people contains a long chain of events fought for independence. Foreign enemies, coveting the wealth of our land and exploiting various contradictions and unfavorable situations within the populace, intermittently waged devastating wars over the centuries, inflicting heavy disasters upon the nation. While historical works list the exact causes, circumstances, participants, and outcomes of those events, the epic interprets such phenomena in its own way. While the causes and triggers of major struggles in real life are always concrete, the epic thoroughly sifts and compresses them, selecting only the essence. In a historical work, the name of the oppressive conqueror must be clearly stated, and their place of residence, occupation, and customs must be covered as fully as possible. For the epic, however, it is the "substance" of the enemy, not the name, that is necessary. Similarly, in a heroic poem, it is not considered mandatory to know exactly "which hero showed bravery in which war". This is why the heroes in the epic often represent the image of individuals who ought to exist according to the people's understanding, rather than people who actually existed in real life [History of Kazakh Literature 2007: 317].

In the Kazakh epic, many historical figures, historical events, and historical place names are encountered. This is especially true for the period we are discussing.

The Golden Horde, established in the mid-13th century, was one of the major state formations in the Eurasian space. Its composition included a large part of modern Kazakhstan, the southwestern part of Russia, the Crimea, the Volga region, the Caucasus, and territories in Central Asia. The Golden Horde was a major focus of medieval civilization where different ethnic groups and cultures converged. This historical foundation found expression in an artistic-epic form in the poems.

A substantial portion of the Kazakh people's epic heritage was formed during the Golden Horde era, or ancient epics underwent a stage of re-development exactly during this period. Dozens of epics can be included in such poems, such as "Alpamys Batyr," "Kobylandy Batyr," "Yer Sayin," "Yer Targin," "Yer Yedige," "Yer Kosai," "Orak Mamai," "Karasai Kazi," and others. It is also appropriate to recognize the 40 poems belonging to the "Forty Heroes of Crimea" cycle, which epic scholars closely relate to historical poems rather than heroic epics, as the legacy of this period. Not many Golden Horde rulers became central heroes or were named in the Kazakh epic. These include Batu Khan (Sayin Khan), Janibek Khan, Mamai Khan, and Tokhtamysh Khan. However, the number of rulers of various uluses (districts), heroes, beys, and historical figures from the period of the collapse of the vast empire who remained in the epic memory of the Kazakh nation exceeds one hundred. Among them are historical figures from the Crimean Khanate, Kazan Khanate, Ulug Ulus, and Nogai Horde established on the territory of the disintegrated Golden Horde. In works written by folklore scholars over the past nearly one hundred years about the historicity of the Kazakh epic, comprehensive research has been conducted on the historical figures included in the epic, and descriptions have been provided of the portrayal of the historical events they participated in within the poem. Researchers from Russia, Kazakhstan, Tatarstan, and others devoted great effort to such fundamental investigations both during the Tsarist Russian and Soviet Union periods.

However, it is appropriate to specially mention the work "Turkic Heroic Epic" by V. M. Zhirmunsky, published in 1974. In the chapter "Poem of Edige" and the chapter "Review of Historical Data on the Poems of the Nogai Heroes" in his research, he used the Kazakh variants as the main versions of the poems he examined. The scholar did not limit himself to the Kazakh variants but also provided a scientific analysis of the versions of these poems among the Nogais of the Caucasus. In this work, V. M. Zhirmunsky fully revealed the historical nature of the images of these names that entered the epic, extensively citing historical documents such as the diplomatic papers of the Russian Tsarist government related to historical figures, various chronicles, reports from Russian spies in the Nogai Horde, data from the travel notes of Russian and Western travelers, and data from Eastern historians [Zhirmunsky 1974: 280-378].

Kazakh scholars such as A. Margulan, B. Kenzhebayev, M. Auezov, A. Konyratbayev, R. Berdibayev, S. Kaskabasov, and Sh. Ybyrayev conducted systematic research on the place of historical events and historical figures of the Golden Horde period in the Kazakh epic [Historicity of the Kazakh folklore 1993].

Among the Kazakh epics that emerged in this era, the most extensive, the most variant-rich, and the most widespread are the folk poems about Yedige (1340-1419), the well-known emir, talented military commander, and prominent statesman who lived during the final period of the Golden Horde state. Scholars who have studied it, both past and present, have acknowledged that the events in the poem are very close to history and sometimes even recount historical events precisely.

The well-known scholar B. Kenzhebayev highlights two distinct features of the "Edige" poem. According to his observation, first, the "Yedige poem contains historical truths," and second, "it contains a number of myths-fairytales, legends-stories that are rarely found in other heroic poems of the Kazakhs". One wonderful aspect of the "Yedige Batyr" poem is that history, historical events, and the names of historical figures are frequently encountered and, to a greater or lesser extent, correctly preserved. It can be said that in none of the other heroic poems of the Kazakh people are history, historical events, and the names of historical figures presented as extensively and correctly as in the "Yedige Batyr" poem. This is because the scholar concludes that "the people in the 'Yedige Batyr' poem, whether it is Yedige, Tokhtamysh, Satemir, Nuralyn, Kadyrberdi, or others, as well as the relationships, conversations, wars, and wrestling among them, were all real, historical people and historical events" [Kenzhebayev 1940: 93-95]. This is likely due to the poem's stage of formation, its genre type, and the fact that it is a late epic that emerged soon after the historical events took place. Specifically, in the version by Sh. Valikhanov, which is considered classical in scholarship, the political tensions that unfolded in the Golden Horde state, and the painful end of the struggle for the throne in the Horde, are depicted with a tragic resolution. Honestly, no other Kazakh poem discusses the struggle in the Horde, the confrontation between the Khan and the Bey, i.e., the irreconcilable conflict of the aristocratic magnates for power, to such an extent. This was, of course, a novel characteristic rarely found in epic tradition. The main space of the poem unfolds on the arena of the geopolitical game between Tokhtamysh, Yedige, and Satemir (Shah Temir). Since the theme is the political struggle in the court, the symbols used in the nomadic state tradition also hold crucial significance

in the poem. The poem completely lacks an external enemy coveting the homeland, which is typical of epic tradition. Conversely, because the poem "narrates the rivalry between two strong figures within one nation", the events cannot intensify and unfold with the usual dynamic pace. [Berdibayev 1993: 32] Therefore, symbols, allusions, and psychological contrasts play a major role here. Naturally, in a heroic poem, the hero chases the external enemy, achieves victory, and as a result, brings happiness to his nation. However, in the version we are analyzing, the opposite occurs: Yedige deserts his own nation, takes refuge with the ruler of a foreign nation, Satemir, returns, and conquers his own sovereign. This is likely one point where the poem closely aligns with concrete historical reality.

For instance, the initial friendship and subsequent enmity between Tokhtamysh and Yedige mentioned in the poem, Yedige's seeking refuge with Satemir, his receiving aid and conquering the Horde, his son Nuralyn's campaign against Tokhtamysh, and the avenging of the younger son of Tokhtamysh, Kadyrberdi, by killing Yedige are all events that occurred in history [Margulan 1945: 281].

If we regard the epic as the encyclopedia of a nation's culture, it is impossible for the epic heritage of the Kazakh people, a major representative of nomadic culture, not to contain information related to city culture. The foundation of the epic is historical reality. Specifically, it is directly related to the environment that gave rise to the epic and the geographical place names. A historical epic must contain historical names, otherwise, the listener will not believe its historicity. Therefore, the creators of the historical dastan, starting with specific toponyms, make the terrain where the events take place as close as possible to a realistic concept.

When considering the historical names in the Kazakh epic, we cannot deviate far from the issues of epic space and epic time in the national heritage. The Kazakh scholar Sh. Ybyrayev, who thoroughly studied these concepts, says: "It is impossible to precisely map the epic toponymy onto a geographical map. The main characteristic of the epic genre is the extreme scope of the object it depicts. Just as the epic embraces major events of great significance in the fate of the people, it also encompasses the lands, settlements, and dwellings where the nomadic people have moved and lived since ancient times. ...Here, there is a conscious expansion of the concept of space, not based on concrete events, but in accordance with the general geographical concept of the nomadic people. Furthermore, the expansion extends broadly

across the entire Eurasian Steppe, the territory of Central Asia. ...In essence, the nature of the epic, which gathers and summarizes both historical events and geographical names, is evident," he states [Ybyrayev 1993: 159].

For example, the "Forty Heroes of Crimea" cycle epic narrated by Muryn Zhyrau includes the Volga (Edil), Ural (Zhayyq), Zhem, Oyyl, Yessil, Irtysh, Syr Darya, Amu Darya, Karatau, Alatau, and Balkantau.

In the Kazakh epic, the names of several cities from the Golden Horde period are mentioned, or toponyms representing the political-geographical space of that period are used. Namely:

Sarayshyq — As the capital of the Golden Horde, it is depicted in the poems with the symbols of "Khan's Horde" and "Golden Throne".

The cities of Kazan, Bulgar, Derbent, and Azov also found their place in the epic space of the vast empire's people.

Cities along the Volga and Ural rivers — the phrases "the banks of the Volga are the nation's feast" and "the shores of the Ural are the place where the enemy is repelled" reflect the convergence of peaceful life and wartime events.

Otrar, Syganak, Zhent — as cities along the Syr Darya, they are mentioned in historical poems as spaces that determine the nation's fate. These cities, through the poems, clarify the people's historical geography and their view of culture and civilization.

The prevailing concept in the Kazakh epic tradition, which was formed during the eras of the Golden Horde, Ak Orda, Nogai Horde, Uzbek Khanate, and Kazakh Khanate and reached its peak in the 18th-19th centuries, is that of viewing ancient settlements common to the old Turkic peoples as their own homeland and even considering former relatives who established separate states as part of one nation's territory—a concept of unification. For this reason, even the later historical epics frequently mention the names of ancient historical places.

In Kazakh epics, Crimea, Ürim (Byzantium/Rome), Urgench, Khiva, Astrakhan, Kazan, Istanbul, Andijan, Kokand, and others are regarded as the Turks' own lands. Syria (Sham), Egypt (Mysyr), Baghdad, and others are described as friendly nations to rely on in times of distress. The following lines are a clear example of this idea:

If you ask about my origin,
From the Nogais with ninety branches,
 From the Crimea with forty seals ("Anshybay Batyr" poem)
 Did you say a small settlement?
 If I get angry,
I will send news to the Crimea with forty seals
To Urym (Rome/Byzantium) with twelve branches
If I attack,
I will send news to the city of Sham and to Egypt (Mysyr)
I will also send news, To Balykty and Badakhshan
If I get angry,
I will send news To Khiva and Old Urgench ("Orak Mamai" poem)
This is Kazan standing here
It was a city built by the Nogais. ("Tana Batyr" poem)
Istanbul and Kazan
Were the support for my nation. ("Shora Batyr" poem)

The Kazakh scholar A. Margulan states: "The Golden Horde Khans would leave their magnificent cities along the Volga and go to settle the banks of the Don (Tana Su), Dnieper (Oza Su), Kuban in the North Caucasus, or the Volga banks during the summer" [Margulan 1940: 92-97]. It is evident that the geographical names in the Kazakh epic do not stray far from this historical space.

The main foundation of the nomadic way of life is the vast steppe, the flatland. The concept of space that stands opposite the vast steppe in the epic turns out to be the mountain. The mountain is an extremely dangerous place in the nomadic epic. The contrast between the steppe and the mountain transforms into a method of contrasting two different cultures—the nomadic and the sedentary economy. What is referred to as a mountain actually turns out to be a city surrounded by a high wall.

The description of the enemy's nation in the heroic epic is, on the whole, a medieval sedentary state. The point here is not the concepts of Kalmyk, Kyzylbas, etc., which are mentioned among the historical enemies, but the understanding of the enemy has acquired a general epic comprehensive meaning. The epic enemy is differentiated not only by religion, language, and custom but also by their livelihood and economy.

The heroic epics, considered the pearl and treasure of the rich oral literature of the Kazakh people, are a source of wisdom, history, culture, and worldview accumulated over centuries. These epics depict not only the heroic deeds of the warriors, the aspirations and sorrows of the people, and customs and traditions, but also the social structure of society, economic relations, and the geographical environment. One of these central elements is the concept of the city. In Kazakh epics, the city is not merely a simple dwelling place; it appears as a space that is a center of power and defense, a focus of civilization and culture, the arena of heroic events, and also possesses symbolic meaning.

Based on major Kazakh epics related to the Golden Horde era, such as "Yer Yedige," "Yer Targin," "Yer Kosai," "Yer Sayin," "Orak Mamai," and "Shora Batyr," it is possible to reveal the peculiarities of the city image, its functions, its role in the lives of the heroes, and its symbolic meaning. Such research allows for a deeper understanding of the Kazakh people's perspective on the city in the past era and its place in their social and spiritual life.

The main function of the city in Kazakh epics is to be a center of power and a fortress of defense. These two aspects are closely connected, because only a strong power can effectively defend the city, and a defended city ensures the stability of the power.

1. The City as a fortress and fortification

Cities in the epics are usually described as strong fortresses intended for defense against enemy invasion. For example, most of the cities encountered during the campaigns of Targin Batyr in the "Yer Targin" epic are substantial fortifications. Their high walls, deep moats, and complex gates are frequently described. These cities appear not only as places of residence but also as a refuge for the people, the last line of defense for protecting their nation and land. In the "Yer Targin" poem, the hero skillfully uses war tactics to defend against the enemy or to capture an enemy

city. This demonstrates the strategic importance of these cities. For instance, the Khan's city of Crimea or other fortifications clearly show their defensive capabilities and military importance in the epic.

The city of Sarayshyq in the "Yer Edige" epic is a prime example of power and defense. Sarayshyq is a historical city that was one of the major centers of the Golden Horde. Yedige's actions concerning Sarayshyq in the epic, his attempts to defend it, or his rule over it demonstrate the city's state importance. Sarayshyq appears as the Khan's Horde, a junction of trade routes, and a political center. Its destruction or fall into enemy hands is narrated as a major event that affects the fate of the entire nation.

In the epics "Yer Kosai," "Yer Sayin," "Karasai Kazi," and "Orak Mamai," cities (or settlements) are also often the epicenter of conflict and defense. In these epics, the heroes frequently liberate cities captured by the enemy or defend their own cities. The capture or destruction of cities is a symbol of the people's suffering, while their liberation is a symbol of victory and revival.

2. Khan's horde and political center

The city in the epics is not only a fortress but also the Khan's Horde and a political center. This is where the Khan sits, rules, gathers the army, and governs the nation. The Khan's palace, the Khan's Horde within the city, is the place where power is concentrated. Heroes often set out on campaigns from these cities, either by the Khan's order or on their own initiative, or defend these cities from the enemy. For example, Yedige's rule over Sarayshyq or his involvement in its fate in the "Yer Yedige" poem demonstrates his role as a statesman. The city is the material manifestation of power, a testament to its strength and might.

3. The City as a focus of civilization and culture

Cities in the Kazakh epics demonstrate signs of cultural and economic civilization in addition to their military and political functions. However, as the main focus of heroic epics is war and heroic deeds, these aspects are sometimes relegated to the background.

4. Trade and economic center

Many cities, especially those like Sarayshyq from the Golden Horde era, were major trade and economic centers because they were located along the Great Silk Road. Indirect descriptions of the wealth of such cities and the development of trade there can be found in the epics. The presence of merchants coming to the city, the goods being brought, and craftsmen indicates the economic development of the city.

5. Cultural and spiritual Life

Cities are typically densely populated places inhabited by representatives of various social groups. Data on the life, human relations, customs, and traditions within the cities can also be found in the epics. This is where heroic feasts are held, gatherings take place, and important decisions are made. However, in accordance with the characteristics of oral literature, the epics do not provide full descriptions of the city's cultural life, mostly prioritizing its military and political importance.

Although mosques and madrasahs within the city are not directly mentioned in the epic, it is known from historical sources that cities developed as spiritual centers alongside the spread of Islam. This aspect is indirectly reflected in some versions of the epics through the heroes' actions related to religion or their spiritual beliefs.

6. The City as an arena for heroic events

The city in Kazakh epics is not merely a background; it is the direct arena for important events in the heroes' lives. All significant moments, from the heroes' birth and coming of age to their setting out on campaigns, achieving victory or suffering defeat are closely connected with the city.

7. The City's influence on the hero's fate

The city's fate is often closely linked to the hero's destiny. The destruction of the city or its fall into enemy hands is a great sorrow for the hero, while its liberation is a great joy. For example, the fate of the city of Sarayshyq in the "Yer Yedige" epic is directly related to Yedige's life and his role in the history of the Golden Horde. The city is a reflection of the hero's spirit, heroism, and patriotic feeling. The names of

the cities and their locations in epics like "Yer Kosai," "Yer Sayin," "Karasai Kazi," and "Orak Mamai" often correspond to historical reality, strengthening the epic's historical foundation. The actions of these heroes revolve around those cities, thereby making the cities play an important role in developing the epic's plot line.

Evolution of the city image and symbolic meaning

The evolution of the city concept and its symbolic meaning in Kazakh epics is closely linked to the people's historical development, their worldview, and changes in their lifestyle. For the nomadic people, the city held a special meaning:

1. The City as a "fortress" or an "object of conquest"

In the majority of epics, the city appears in two main meanings: as a defense of their own nation, a fortress ensuring the people's safety, and as the enemy's target, a land to be conquered. This perspective was formed under the influence of the nomadic lifestyle and the times of war. Although the city was a sign of sedentary civilization for the nomads, its importance as a living space was twofold: sometimes a refuge, sometimes a danger. The description of cities in the "Yer Yedige" and "Yer Targin" epics clearly shows this duality. On one hand, cities like Sarayshyq are the pillar of the Khanate, and on the other hand, they become the target of enemy attacks, bringing sorrow.

2. Association with the concepts of "capital" and "national horde"

The cities that hold a special place among the cities in the epic are those considered the "capital" or "national horde". These cities are the spiritual and political center of the entire nation and state. They are not only the Khan's Horde but also a symbol of the people's unity and independence. The destruction of such cities or their fall into enemy hands is narrated as a great tragedy that affects the fate of the entire nation.

3. Mythological and sacral meaning of the city (in some cases)

In some epics or individual versions of them, cities may be given a mythological or sacral meaning. For example, concepts like "seven cities" and "seven nations" found in the "Batyrlar Zhyry" (Epic of Heroes) are not just geographical names; specific

mythological and cosmogonic concepts may underlie them. However, in the Yer Yedige" and other epics we are considering, the historical, military, and political importance of the city prevails over its sacral meaning. Cities are a testament to the historical events, military campaigns, victories, and defeats preserved in the people's memory. They are preserved in the epic as witnesses of the past and passed down from generation to generation.

The concept of the city in Kazakh epics is a complex and multifaceted notion that provides a wealth of information about the Kazakh people's history, culture, and worldview. Through the analysis of the city image in epics such as "Yer Yedige," "Yer Targin," "Yer Kosai," "Yer Sayin," "Karasai Kazi," and "Orak Mamai," we have identified the main functions and symbolic meaning of the city.

Firstly, the city is a center of power and defense. It appears as the Khan's Horde, a military fortress, and a refuge ensuring the people's safety. The life path and heroic deeds of the epic heroes are closely linked with these cities. Secondly, the city is a focus of civilization and culture. However, in heroic epics, this aspect is mostly reflected indirectly through the city's economic importance and internal life. Thirdly, the city is an arena for heroic events. From the heroes' birth, their heroic deeds, campaigns, victories, and defeats are directly linked to the cities. The city's fate is often intertwined with the hero's destiny. Fourthly, the symbolic meaning in the city's image is its appearance as a symbol of the people's independence, unity, and historical memory. The destruction of the city is the nation's sorrow, and its liberation is a testament to victory and revival.

The nations and ethnic structures in the epic poems of the period we are discussing also do not deviate far from historical data.

The main populace of the Golden Horde is the Kipchak ethnic association. The Kipchaks appear in the poems as the main military force, a symbol of heroism ("Kobylandy Batyr," "Alpamys Batyr"). Nogais — the Nogai era holds a special place in the Kazakh epic ("Er Targin," "Shora Batyr"). The common spiritual heritage of the Nogais and Kazakhs is clearly visible in these poems. Kangly, Kerei, Naiman, Argyn — clans and tribes are indirectly described in the poems as part of the social structure, not as a historical foundation. Mongol elements — In some

poems, Genghis Khan and his descendants are described as the "Great Khan," clarifying the historical context of the poem.

The ethnonyms, toponyms, and geographical names in the Kazakh poems align with historical sources such as Rashid ad-Din's "Jami' al-Tawarikh," Abulgazi Bahadur Khan's "Genealogy of the Turks," Mahmud al-Kashgari's "Dīwān Lughāt al-Turk," Ibn Battuta's travelogue, and the works of Plano Carpini, Rubruck, and Sharaf ad-Din Ali Yazdi. The cities and peoples of the Golden Horde era in the Kazakh epic poems are a reflection of the ethno-historical space preserved in the Kazakh people's historical memory. They are considered a mirror of the people's geopolitical, cultural, and ethnic worldview. By comparing the data in the poems with written sources, the historical value of the Kazakh epic can be clearly observed.

Overall, the concept of the city in Kazakh epics provides a great opportunity to understand the history of the Kazakh people, their interaction with sedentary and nomadic cultures, and their way of life during periods of war and peace. Historical figures, historical cities, and peoples who lived during the Golden Horde era occupy a prominent place in the Kazakh heroic epics and historical poems. Historical poems, as an important expression of the Kazakh people's historical memory and worldview, depict the political, ethnic, and cultural space of a certain period. In the course of the research, the names of the cities and peoples in the historical poems were analyzed by comparing them with medieval written sources.
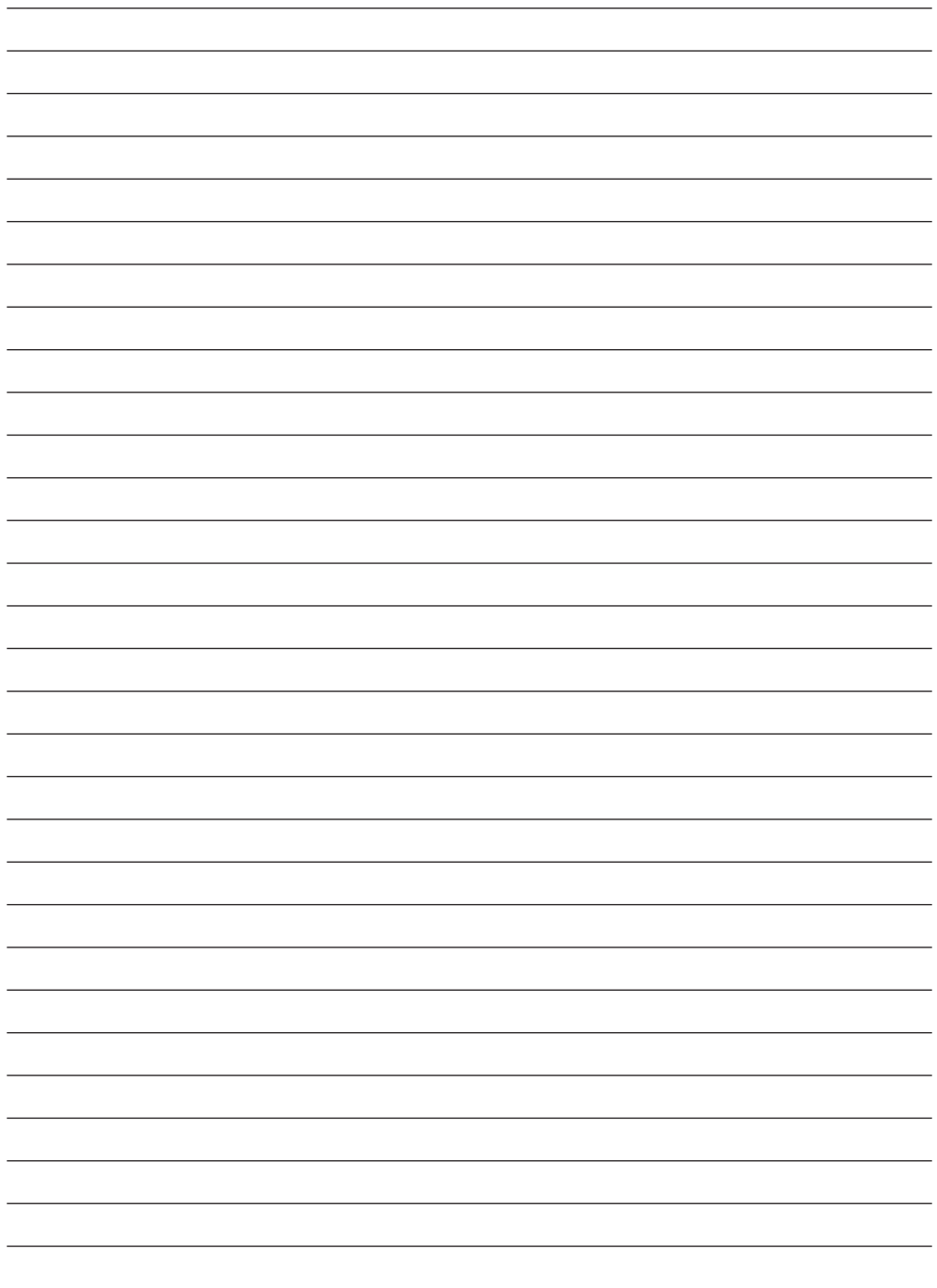
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NOTES

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INTEGRATION OF NOMADIC TRIBES AND SEDENTARY PEOPLE IN THE HISTORY OF INNER ASIA

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