

# Altaic Religious Beliefs and Practices

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This volume contains the papers read at the 33rd Meeting of the Permanent International Altaistic Conference (PIAC), held at Budapest June 24-29, 1990. They mainly deal with the problems of Altaic religious belief and practices, but also with linguistic and other special features within the fields of Turkic, Mongolian and Manchu-Tungus studies and related Central Asian aspects.

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## ANCIENT TURKIC ETHNICAL AND POLITICAL UNIONS AND THEIR ROLE IN THE TURKIC ETHNOGENESIS

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The most ancient regions of Turkic ethnogenesis and glottogenesis are all connected with the Eastern part of Eurasia: Central Asia and South Siberia, from the Altai mountains in the west to the Hinggan mountains in the east. This vast area was not isolated from the neighbouring civilizations nor from the tribes which were of a different ethnic type residing in the forests, mountains and steppes. The migration routes, which varied in scale throughout the period of migration covered the whole of the Great Steppe. However, the stable correlation of the "Altaic" ethnogenesis with Eurasia's Eastern Steppeland makes it possible to link the appearance of the first Turkic-speaking ethnical group (being the Western ones in the Altaic language family) with this period. This situation remained the same until the first centuries A. D.

Due to the high mobility of the tribes inhabiting the Great Steppe, their ethnogenesis had no reference to a certain territory. The common features of all the Turkic tribal unions of ancient times and the medieval period were their instability, mobility, and high capacity for adaptation within the emerging new tribal unions. Within the framework of ethnical and political unions created by a certain tribal group (dynasty), the chaotic outward appearance of the migrations formed definite directions. Only when the vast time periods are considered does it become obvious that these migrations had one tendency: from the East towards the West.

As only few written sources are available and it is difficult to explain from the ethnological point of view the archaeological materials, one can only hypothetically reconstruct those processes and draw conclusions from these. That is why here I shall deal with the most obvious periods of the ancient Turkic epoch, which are connected with the separate stages of formation of the Turkic ethnical unions.

The beginning of Turkic ethnogenesis is commonly linked with the dissolution of the Hunnu State and the setting apart in Central Asia of hitherto unknown tribal groups. These could hardly be regarded as having ethnical relations with the Huns despite some references found in the Chinese sources. Today it is obvious that there was a difference between the (linguistically) non-Altaic early Huns, who created their own empire, and the later Hun conglomerate unions in which the Altaic ethnical groups dominated. It was on the outskirts of the Hun empire that proto-Turkic ethnical and political unions emerged at the beginning of our millenium. The oldest Turkic folklore evidence, which was written down in the 6th c., is the legend of the Ashina tribe's origin and its growing dominance in the emerging tribal union of the Turks. In the Turkic genealogical legends, besides the genealogies proper, one can find the sources of three other tribal traditions concerning the initial stage of the Kyrghyz, Kypchak and Tiehle (Oghuz) ethnogenesis. There are two well-known legends about the origin of the Turks: one found in the Chou-shu, another in Bei-shi. Both legends seem to be different forms of a single legend which reflects the successive settling of the Ashina Turks in Central Asia. After the migration of the Ashinas to the Altai mountains, the Turkic ethnical groups of Northern Central Asia and South Siberia 'who had created their own neighbouring tribal unions' joined

the Ashina genealogical tradition. According to the Chinese sources these formed the Tsigu group, i.e. the Yenisey Kyrghyz, or "White Swan" group. This group was identified by me with the Kypchak and Tiehle group, and together these can be identified with the Ashina relatives, who had settled on the banks of the Dju-dje river.

Two important aspects from the two variants of the legends should be mentioned. First, the four main ancient Turkic tribal groups, whose historical successors survived up to later periods, had been formed at an early stage of the Turkic ethnogenesis, when their genealogical relationship was fixed in the narrative tradition. Secondly, by counting the number of generations, one can date back the events recorded in the 6th to the 5th or, probably, 4th-5th centuries. These events took place on the territory of Eastern Tien-Shan and Sayan-Altai (the Mongolian Altai included), and this encourages us to consult the remaining historical records and archaeological materials of those times.

In the Sayan Altai area of the 3rd-5th centuries several archaeological cultures have been discovered. On the basis of specific ethnical elements they can be regarded as early Kyrghyz, early Tiehle and early Kypchak cultures. As examples of these elements in the Tashtyk culture on the middle Yenisey Lowland during the 3rd-5th centuries, one can mention cremation rites, features of sepulchre construction, and various types of adornments and ceramics. These were later developed among the Yenisey Kyrghyz. The remains of the Berel type found in the Mountaineous Altai (3rd-5th centuries) are noteworthy for the burials with horses, and can be regarded as being of early Tiehle origin. In the conglomerate Upper Ob culture, especially its Odintsov stage on the Northern Altai, the monuments of the same period possess some features characteristic of the early medieval Kypchaks. The peoples who created all the archaeological complexes seem to be connected with ethnical and cultural substratum of the Hun-Sarmath time, and by 3rd-5th centuries stood apart as a separate ethnical community. On the basis of written tradition and archaeological evidence it is possible to point out the initial stage of the Turks' ethnogenesis, which can be named as "the stage of legendary ancestors".

In the middle of the 6th century the four main groups of ancient Turkic tribes joined the political union newly established by the Ashina Turks, thus giving birth to a new stage of ethnical and political history of Central and Middle Asia – "the stage of archaic empire".

The new stage of the Turks' ethnogenesis emerged against the background of changing social conditions (a process of intense class-formation) in other geographical areas (i.e. the spread of the Turkic Khagan's power to the Middle Asia part of the Great Steppe and the spread of their political influence to the area of the Middle Asian civilization). These things caused a new level of ethnic contacts and economical symbiosis with the Eastern Iranian world. The formation of the Turkic and Uighur Khaganats – along with the formation of the Karluk, Türgesh, Kyrghyz and Kimak states, which had similar social and political structures – moved the Turkic ethnogenesis westwards and weakened the ethnic processes connected with the Turks in Central Asia.

In the archaic empires the clan ideology was the counter-balance of imperial ideology. Within the borders of a united empire existed a common literary language and writing (which survived even after the empire's collapse), a common style in the

form of material objects, and a common social and political nomenclature; the latter reflected a new ethnical world-outlook and it stood as a symbol opposed to another cultural world. At the same time, in Djety-su, Eastern Turkestan and to some extent in Maverannahr the process of narrow localization of stable ethnic groups continued. In this process the centripetal forces grew stronger and, despite unstable intertribal links, became firmer. Thus they shaped the future Turkic peoples.

The centripetal and centrifugal processes, which replaced each other and co-existed in the course of the archaic empires history, resulted in the inconsistency of the simultaneously developing archaeological cultures. On the other hand, the completion of the common Turkic cultural complex included the spread of material objects over the whole of the steppeland belt. This took place during the 1st millennium A. D. and is reflected in the ideological notions of the funeral rites, and objects of imitative art. Also, such archaeological complexes have concrete ethnical features. Thus three independent archaeological cultures can be identified and each has specific decorated material objects associated with funeral rites. For example, the cultures of the Yenissey Kyrghyz, Altai Turks and Kimak-Kypchak cultures of Eastern Kazakhstan and Northern Altai. Observing various innovations, one can trace the direction of the early medieval "cultural spread" from South to North and from East to West.

Thus, during the 1st millennium A.D., in Central Asia and the Steppelands of South-Western Siberia, (in Djety-su and Tien-Shan) an ethnic process was going on which involved the formation of cultural traditions that were linked with the ethnogenesis of the Turks proper, i.e. Oghuz, Kyrghyz and Kypchaks. This took place within a framework that was common for all Turks.

Within the borders of the archaic empires four groups of Turkic tribes consolidated their positions and became the core of the formation of new ethnoses. The Kimak-Kypchak group, comprising the Sirs and some Oghuz tribes as its bulk, left Central Asia and moved to the Irtysh basin. They then rapidly spread westwards pressing from the South other Turkic tribes. Judging from the archaeological objects it becomes obvious that the Kyrghyz, after enlarging their Yenissey state, opened up the economically important foot-hill and forest areas for the nomads - from Baikal to Eastern Kazakhstan.

The Toguz-Oghuz tribal groups were pressed by the Tibetan expansion to the Western part of Kansu and Eastern Turkestan, making the Tarim basin part of the Western outskirts of their state. After the political disaster of 744 the Turks lost their Central Asian homeland and grouped in Kashgar and Djety-su. After adopting Islam and intermixing with the Karluk tribes, in the 10th century they created the Karakhanide state. Their Djety-su branch, being the descendants of the Turk-Oghuz tribes of the Western Khaganate, were pressed by the Karluks. This branch formed the state of the Aral Oghuz and assimilated the population of the Syr-Darya oasis and Aral Steppes. The ethnic developments, which started in the mid-period of the archaic empires, are reflected in states whose formation marked the beginning of a new stage of the political, social and ethnic history of the Great Steppe – the stage of barbarous states. In these states the ethnic nucleus of the early medieval Turkic peoples was formed.

At the same time there was a change in the correlation between the endogenous and exogenous factors forming the direction of ethnical processes. On

**the other stage of ethnogenesis the main thing was not the development of the Turkic components but the influence of the contacts with other ethnical environments - those of the Iranian and Caucasian of Asia Minor and the Finno-Ugrians. The two different lines of ethnic development - that introduced from Central Asia, and that of local substratum displayed themselves in a different way in the racial genesis, cultural genesis and the ethnic history of the Turkic peoples.**