

FUNERAL CEREMONY OF ANCIENT TURKS AS A REFLECTION OF CONTACTS WITH IRANOPHONE NOMADS IN THE SPHERE OF IDEOLOGY

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ABSTRACT

Long ago modern scholars found out the fact that the funeral pagan traditions of the early medieval Turkophone ethnic groups of Eurasia, funeral customs of the ancient Iranophone nomads (Scythians, Sarmatians and Alans) as well as of the modern Ossetians are similar to each other. This fact is confirmed by the evidences of Iordannis about the funeral of Hunnic captain – Attila, of some Chinese authors about the funeral traditions of the early Turks, of Movses Kalankatuatsi about the funereal customs of the Daghestani Hunns in the 7th century AD, of an Arab traveler of the 10th centuries AD-Ibn Fadlan about the Volga Bulgarians funeral traditions, etc. Thus, some common features in the funeral pagan traditions of the early medieval Turkophone ethnic groups of Eurasia and ancient Iranophone nomads can be indicated: the deploring of a dead with cutting face, whipping body by knouts and fists; bringing the dead to the cemetery on a carriage or a sledge; rich burial and funeral repast; offering animals and human-beings as a sacrifice for the dead; horse-race in honour of the dead; etc. So, the funeral ceremony is very conservative and therefore we can believe that originally the proto-Turks could adopt some funeral customs from the bearers of Scythian culture in Altai at ancient times and later on, at early medieval times, the Turks had adopted other funeral customs from the descendants of Sarmato-Alans in Eurasian steppes. Archeological excavations of tumuli of the Scythian times in Tuva (Arjan) and Altai (Pazyryk) confirm this hypothesis.

Key Words: Funeral, ceremony, burial, Iranophone Nomads, early medieval Turks.

РЕЗЮМЕ

Погребальный обряд древних тюрков как отображение контактов с ираноязычными номадами в области идеологии

Исследователи уже давно обратили внимание на то, что погребальные языческие традиции раннесредневековых тюркоязычных этнических групп Евразии имеют много общего с погребальной обрядностью ираноязычных народов времен античности (скифов, сарматов, аланов) и современных осетин. В первую очередь, следует отметить сообщения Иордана о

похоронах гуннского вождя Аттилы, китайских авторов о погребальных традициях тюркютов, Мовсеса Калакантуаци о похоронах у дагестанских гуннов, Ибн Фадлана о погребении умерших у волжских булгар и т. п. В результате, мы можем отметить общие черты в погребальной обрядности как раннесредневековых тюркоязычных, так и древних ираноязычных кочевников: самоистязание членов погребальной процессии; доставка тела умершего до места погребения на повозке или на специальных носилках; пышные похороны и поминки; посвящение животных и людей покойному; конные состязания в честь умершего и т. п. Исходя из факта консервативности погребальных традиций у кочевых народов, данные соответствия можно объяснить не только тем, что раннесредневековые тюрки включили в состав своих племен потомков ираноязычных кочевников, но и тем, что в Центральной Азии уже в скифский период прототюрки могли иметь настолько длительные контакты с ираноязычными кочевниками, что это нашло отражение в их представлениях о загробной жизни. Раскопки курганов скифского времени в Туве (Аржан) и на Алтае (Пазырык) дают основания для таких выводов.

Ключевые Слова: погребальный обряд, похороны, ираноязычные кочевники, раннесредневековые тюрки.

Long ago modern scholars have found out the fact that the funeral pagan traditions of the early medieval Turkophone ethnic groups of Eurasia and also the funeral customs of the ancient Iranophone Nomads (Scythians, Sarmatians and Alans) are similar to each other. However until now this fact has not been explained. The solution of this problem may help to determine where and when the first contacts between proto-Turks and Iranophone peoples took place. Some scholars suppose that it happened on the edge of Hunnic and Old-Turkic epochs during the 5th century AD (Еремеев, 1970: 136). However the funeral ceremony is very conservative and must have been forming for a long period of time. The information of ethnographical character from the early medieval written sources indicates the presence of the formed funeral customs among early Turks, similar to the funeral traditions of the ancient Iranophone nomads.

For example, Iordannis writes that in the end of the 5th century AD after the Hunns have had known about the death of their captain – Attila, according to their tradition they started cutting ears and faces. Then Attila’s body was transported to steppe and put into special tent. The best Hunnic horsemen rode around the tent where the dead had been left. Finally, after the crying Attila was buried into the barrow where later on Hunns organized a great funeral feast called “strava”. Attila’s body was put into three coffins in turn – golden, silver and iron ones. Attila’s trophies as well as his treasures were put down into his grave. The place

of burial was secret, therefore all grave-diggers were killed¹ (Иордан, 1960: 117, 172).

In Central Asia the funeral traditions of the early Turks are analogous to pagan funereal customs of the Iranophone peoples as well. The Chinese authors – Matuanlin and others-write that in the 6th-7th centuries AD the Turks put down the dead into the tent at the beginning of the funeral ceremony. Then their kinsmen and kinswomen made sacrifice of the horses and ewes and rode the horseback around the tent seven times. They got together near the entrance into the tent and cut their faces seven times. Then at a special day they buried the horse and belongings of dead together with the dead. The kinsmen and kinswomen of dead put the ashes into the grave in the special season of year. They made sacrifice, galloped on the horseback and cut their faces on the day of death and the day of burial. Some time later, near the grave special building was erected with the portrait of a dead and a number of stones similar to the number of killed enemies. Heads of animals slaughtered during the funeral ceremonies were placed on special poles (Менандр, 1860: 421-422, прим. 71; Бичурин, 1950: 230).

Byzantine author Menandr indicates that in the end of the 6th century AD the Byzantine ambassador Valentine visited stopping-place of the Great Kagan of the Western Turkuts – Dilzivul-just after his death. According to the data of Menandr

¹sequenti vero luce cum magna pars diei fuisset exempta, ministri regii triste aliquid suspicantes post clamores maximos fores effringunt inveniuntque Attilae sine ullo vulnere necem sanguinis effusione peractam puellamque demisso vultu sub velamine lacrimantem. tunc, ut gentis illius mos est, crinium parte truncate informes facies cavis turpavere vulneribus, ut proelior eximius non femineis lamentationibus et lacrimis, sed sanguine lugeretur virile. De quo id accessit mirabile, ut Marciano principi Orientis de tam feroci hoste sollicito in somnis divinitas adsistens arcum Attilae in eadem nocte fractum ostenderet, quasi quod gens ipsa eo telo multum praesumat. hoc Priscus istoricus vero se dicit adtestatione probare. nam in tantum magnis imperils Attila terribillis habitus est, ut eius mortem in locum muneris superna regnantibus indicarent. cuius manes quibus a sua gente honoratae sunt, pauca de multis dicere non omitamus. in mediis si quidem campis et intra tenturia sirica cadavere conlocato spectaculum admirandum et sollempniter exhibetur. nam de tota gente Hunnorum lectissimi equites in eo loco, quo erat positus, in modum circensium cursibus ambientes, facta eius cantu funereo tali ordine referebant. “praecipuus Hunnorum rex Attila, parte genitus Mundzuc, fortissimarum gentium dominus, qui inaudita ante se potential solus Scythica et Germanica regna possedit nec non utraque Romani urbis imperia captis civitatibus terruit et, ne praedae reliqua subderentur, placates praecipuis annum vectigal accepit: cunque haec omnia proventu felicitates egerit, non vulnere hostium, non fraude suorum, sed gente incolume inter gaudia laetus sine sensu doloris occubuit. quis ergo hunc exitum putet, quem nullus aestimat vindicandum?” postquam talibus lamentis est defletus, stravam super tumulum eius quam appellant ipsi ingenti commensatione concelebrant, et contraria invicem sibi copulantes luctu funereo mixto gaudio explicabant, noctuque secreto cadaver terra reconditum copercula primum auro, secundum argento, tertium ferri rigore communiunt, significantes tali argumento potentissimo regi omnia convenisse: ferrum, quod gentes edomuit, aurum et argentums, quod ornatum rei publicae utriusque acceperit. addunt arma hostium caedibus adquisita, faleras vario gemmarum fulgore praetiosas et diversi generic insignia, quibus colitur aulicum decus. et, ut tantis divitiis humans curiositas arceretur, operi deputatos detestabili mercede trucidarunt, emersitque momentanea mors sepelientibus cum sepulto.

the Western Turkuts cut their faces during the days of burial and mourning. Dilzivil's son – Turksanf-ordered to make sacrifice from horses. Menandr writes that afterwards Turks offered four captive “Hunns” as a sacrifice in honor of the dead because they had to pass the information to the dead from the living people in the other world (Менандр, 1860: 421-422).

Albanian author Movses Kalankatuatsi mentions the similar traditions in the funeral customs of the Daghestani Hunns in the 7th century AD. He writes that during the burial the kinsmen and kinswomen cried loudly, cut their faces and bodies. They injured by the knives and swords the dead. The funeral ceremony was accompanied also by noise and the beating of drum, ritual dancing and singing of songs. Near the cemetery the Hunns fought by swords and galloped on the horseback (Мовсэс Калакантуаци, 1984: 124). A. P. Novoseltsev, who believed that Daghestani Hunns were the Khazars, supposed that these Hunn's customs were similar to those of Scythians and proved the succession between the old Iranophone nomads and Khazars (Новосельцев, 1990: 145).

An Arab traveler of the 10th centuries AD-Ibn Fadlan-reports that the Volga Bulgarians had the similar funeral traditions. He writes that the Volga Bulgarians brought also the dead body to a cemetery on a carriage and buried it in a catacomb. Other parts of funeral ceremony of the Bulgars were also of a strong resemblance to Ancient Scythian and Modern Ossetian. For example, the Bulgarian men cried loudly near the tent of dead and the slaves of Bulgarians whipped their bodies very strong by a knout. They laid the arms of dead near the grave and did not cease crying during two years. After two years the kinsmen and kinswomen of dead made the banquet in honour of the finish of mourning (Ковалевский, 1956: 140). A. P. Kovalevsky states that the tradition to bury the dead in a catacomb is similar to the customs of the Sarmato-Alans in late ancient times as well (Ковалевский, 1956: 140, 230).

The similar funeral traditions were spread among the Iranophone population who were the predecessors of Turkophone tribes in the Eurasian steppes. As early as the 5th century BC Herodotos described the similar funeral customs of the Scythians. This ancient author reports that after the death of their king the Scythians embalmed his body and brought the dead body on the carriage to the tribes which were ruled by the Royal Scythians during forty days. The Scythians cut their ears, hands, faces, noses, ears and pricked their hands by the arrows in the honour of the dead. After this riding round the Scythians buried their dead King in the special grave with a rich furniture and sacrifices of the animals and slaves. One year later the Scythians made a rich funeral repast with the sacrifices of the slaves. Herodotos writes that other Scythians buried their dead kinsmen simpler (Herodot, IV: 71).

The Modern Iranophone Ossetians, who are the descendants of the Alans, preserve the old Iranian pagan traditions. Anthropologists mark out the following

elements of the funeral traditions of Ossetians: mournful herald; deploring of dead with the cutting the face, whipping on the body by the knouts and fists; bringing the dead to the cemetery on a carriage or a sledge; rich burial and funereal repast; devoting a horse to the dead; horse-race in honour of the dead; etc. The devoting of a horse to the dead is of special interest. Anthropologists report that before the funeral ceremony a horse was decorated, loaded by the things of dead and brought to the dead. An old man made a speech about that this horse will serve to his owner in the other world and broke up the jug with the wine on the horseshoe. Then a horse was lead around the dead three times and cut a part of ear and mane and put down its into a grave. The kinsmen and kinswomen cut a plait of widow and put down also it into the grave. B. Kaloyev believes that this customs are the survivals of old Iranian traditions when were buried together the dead, his horse and his wife. The Ossetians make the funeral repast very often during the first year (Калоев, 1964: 1-7; Калоев, 1984: 72-78).

The Modern Tajiks of Karategin and Darvaz continue to preserve also the similar Old Iranian pagan traditions described above. The cause of it is their geographical isolation. During the funeral ceremony they cry loudly, cut their faces and ears, beat their heads, etc. The kinsmen and kinswomen of the dead make a special dancing. They bury a dead body in a catacomb. A funeral repast is obligatory as well (Таджики..., 1976: 118-164).

The data of the archeological researches and some written sources indicate other funeral customs of the early Turks, analogous not only to the customs of the later Turkophone peoples but also to funeral traditions of Iranophone peoples. According to the data of L. R. Kyzlasov, in Tuva the portraits of the dead on stones were founded. Simultaneously, one should keep in mind information of the Chinese authors that near the grave special building was usually erected with the portrait of a dead on it. L. R. Kyzlasov mentioned analogous tradition among the Comans, Mongols and other medieval nomads of Eurasia. They made portraits of the dead not only from stones but also from thick felt and during holydays they took the portraits down and fed them (Кызласов, 1969: 38-40). Iranophone peoples knew this tradition as well. According to the data of Yu. A. Rapoport, during the archeological excavations of ancient Kwarizm the terracotta portraits of the dead were found. However, Yu. A. Rapoport stresses that this tradition was common for Eurasian steppes long BC (Рапопорт, 1971: 86-89). On the eve of a New year night – “The Night of the dead” – modern Ossetians make mannequins of their dead and feed them. The ritual lasts whole day long at the funeral table laid for the mourning of a dead (Дюмезиль, 1990: 189; Калоев, 1984: 94).

This old funeral custom is still regular among the modern Turkophone Chuvashs. According to the data of ethnographical researches, before the day of a funeral repast the Chuvashs make a wooden portrait of a dead – “upa”. On the day of a funeral repast they take it into the house and put clothes of a dead

on it. Whole day long some food is left for the dead on a funeral table. Next day the “upa” should be taken to a cemetery where it is placed near the grave (Каховский, 1965: 190). Besides, some other ancient funeral customs are still common among the modern Turkophone peoples of Central Asia. Thus, not so long ago Kazakhs, Kirghizs, Turkmen and other peoples like Ossetians and some Iranophone peoples used to gallop on horseback in honour of a dead during the burials; the kinsmen and kinswomen cried loudly; they organized a funeral repast where the head of a sacrificed animal was put before the elders, etc. According to the data of B. A. Kaloyev, these funeral traditions were spread in Central Asia irregularly (Калоев, 1999: 65-66).

As a result, we can mention the common features in the funeral traditions of the early Turkophone nomads and Iranophone peoples and explain them.

1. Deploring of a dead with cutting face, whipping the body by knouts and fists – as substitution for people sacrifices from among kinsmen and kinswomen.

2. Bringing a dead to a cemetery on a carriage or a sledge – symbol of a farewell to This World.

3. Rich burial and funeral repast – spirit of a dead needs to be fed.

4. Sacrifices from among animals and human-beings for the dead – spirits of slaughtered animals and people will serve to the dead in Other World and have to pass information to the dead from the living people.

5. Horse-race in honour of the dead – spirits of the best horses will serve to the dead in Other World.

6. A making of the mannequin of a dead – during the funeral repast the spirit of a dead comes into the mannequin.

We can not believe in the fortuity of these coincidences because the common features in the funeral traditions were spread among the early Turkophone nomads and also Iranophone peoples complexly. Therefore the existence of these common funeral customs among the Turkophone and Iranophone nomads can be the result of a mutual influence. We do not know: where and when it took place?

A. P. Novoseltsev, B. A. Kaloyev and other scholars believed that the described analogies are the result of assimilation of the Iranophone tribes by the Turkophone nomads in the early Middle Ages. They supposed that after Hunnic expansion the Iranophone and Turkophone population coexisted in the steppes of Turan. The political domination of the early Turks could promote assimilation of the Iranophone tribes by the Turks. According to their opinion this process was gradual. As a result the latest Iranophone nomads of Eurasian steppes have exerted influence on the ideology of the Turkophone newcomers (Новосельцев, 1990; 145; Калоев, 1999: 65-66). D. Yermeev believes that assimilation of the Iranophone

tribes by the Turks happened on the edge of Hunnic and Old Turkic epochs during the 5th century AD. He believes that components of early medieval ethnic names of Turks—*bulgar*, *khazar*, *kangar*, *kuman*, *turkman* meaning “man”-*ar (er)* and even *men(man)*-have an Iranian (Indo-European) origin and were adopted from the Iranophone peoples in this period of time (Еремеев, 1970: 136). In spite of this, we can believe that the first ideological contacts between the Iranophone and Turkophone tribes took place in Central Asia earlier—in the Scythian period. The results of archeological excavations confirm this supposition.

Thus, in Tuva the Arjan tumulus was excavated by M. P. Griaznov. It was the grave of a King with the elements of funeral ceremony similar to the Scythian one described by Herodotos: burials of the king and the “queen” are located in center; around the burials of the king and the “queen” burials of seven old men and one young man with six horses have been found; on the border of the grave about 160 horses were placed, etc. Objects from the burials were similar to the furniture from the Scythian tumuli in the Black Sea region. However M. P. Griaznov dates the Arjan tumulus by the 8th-7th centuries BC. As a result, this researcher supposed that since the 7th century BC common Scythian-Siberian culture started crystallizing on the territory from Central Asia to the steppes of Black Sea region (Грязнов, 1980; 45-59). However L. R. Kyzlasov dates the Arjan tumulus by 7th-6th centuries BC. He connects this funeral monument with the Iranophone newcomers from the West – the Saks. Finally, this researcher believes that the population of Tuva was mixed in the early Scythian period (Кызласов, 1979: 35-41).

The Pazyryk tumuli of Altai are more interesting. Fifty years ago C. I. Rudenko excavated the tumuli near Pazyryk in Altai. There was permafrost and therefore the burials have been preserved very well. Owing to it, the funeral ceremony can be reconstructed in details. The funeral traditions of the Pazyryk tumuli and the Scythians graves were similar to each other. Besides, the Pazyryk tumuli funeral ceremony coincides with Herodotos’ description of the Scythian funeral customs and also some funeral traditions of the Altai Turks: in tumuli only the kings and the adults were buried like in the case of Herodotos’ Scythians; the burials took place within a specified period of time (spring and autumn) like in the case of the early Turks;² the head of a dead was turned to the East with face turned to the West because the Other Word was located in the West; embalming of the bodies of kings and the adults like in the case of Herodotos’ Scythians;³ extraction of all muscles from the body of a dead for the purpose of ritual eating like in the case of Herodotos’ Massagets and Issedons⁴; the arms, other objects, concubine and horse were placed into the grave like in the case of Herodotos’ Scythians

² We can explain it as a result of influence of climate in Altai.

³ At the ancient times the embalming was spread not only in Egypt but also among the Iranophone peoples. Maybe, Iranophone nomads believed that after burial the spirit of dead must return into its body.

⁴ This cannibalism reflected the idea about possibility to receive the force of dead.

and the Early Turks;⁵ the building of tumulus is erected over the grave like in the case of Herodotos' Scythians and the Early Turks⁶; articles for the ceremony of ritual cleaning after burial like in the case of Herodotos' Scythians⁷; rich burial and funeral repast on the place of funeral like in the case of Herodotos' Scythians and the Early Turks, etc. Unfortunately, the archeological excavations reflect only final stage of funeral ceremony. Therefore we can expect that other Scythian funeral customs were familiar to the customs of the ancient inhabitants of Altai. C. I. Rudenko dates the Pazyryk tumuli of Altai by the 5th-4th centuries BC and underlines the mixed anthropological type of the ancient inhabitants of Altai⁸. According to these data the researcher came to conclusion that from Altai to the steppe of Eastern Europe pastoral tribes formed common culture in the Scythian period because they were nomads and therefore they spread their cultural traditions faraway quickly. As a result, the unique culture did not disappear in Altai and then it took part in the forming of culture of the Turkophone peoples not only in Altai but also in the whole Central Asia (Руденко, 1953: 62-69; 326-361;).

At present many scholars support the opinion that the proto-Turks lived in Altai at ancient times. Therefore the proto-Turks could adopt the funeral customs from the bearers of Scythian culture in Altai at the ancient times. Besides, proto-Turks' funeral traditions could exert influence on funeral ceremony of the Iranophone nomads in Central Asia as well. Thus, in the first centuries AD proto-Turks' funeral ceremony was similar to Iranophone peoples' one. Description of funeral traditions of the Hunns of the 5th century AD and early Turks of the 6th century AD confirms this fact. Some time later political domination of the early Turks could promote assimilation of Iranophone tribes by the Turks in the steppes of Eurasia. As a result, the latest Iranophone nomads of Eurasian steppes affected the ideology of the Turkophone newcomers and therefore the Turks adopted new funeral customs from the descendants of Sarmato-Alans.

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⁵ Ancient nomads believed that the spirits of slaughtered animals and people will serve to the dead in Other World.

⁶ The tumulus must immortalize the memory of the dead.

⁷ In Pazyryk tumuli special coppers with stones and hemp were found similar to those, described by Herodotos. Ancient nomads believed that the bodies of kinsmen and kinswomen of the dead became ritually unclean during the funeral and therefore ritual purifying of their bodies was necessary.

⁸ In Pazyryk tumuli the bearers of Mongoloid and European anthropological types were buried together.

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