

AN ASSESSMENT OF "SECRET HISTORY OF
THE MONGOLS" AND "ALTAN TOPÇI" FROM
THE VIEWPOINT OF THE TURKISH LINGUAL
AND CULTURAL HISTORY

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A five-line inscription in Mongolian, engraved around 1219–1220 on a stone found in the vicinity of Lake Baykal, is considered as the first written document of the Mongolian language. The original stone is in Leningrad's Asia Museum. The inscription is translated by I. J. Schmidt, D. Banzarov and I. Klyukin.

Another document which, perhaps, ranks second in importance to the inscription cited is the piece of work titled "Secret History of the Mongols" (Monghol-un Niguça Tobça'an". This work, translated into German, Russian, English, French, Japanese and Turkish¹, reveals information about the most ancient phase of the Mongolian history, namely the 13th Century, starting with legendary pedigree to Ögedei. Apart from this great work, another piece well-known to the Altayists is "Altan Topçi". Beleived by some to be written in 1604 and by others earlier, 83 percent of the text of "Altan Topçi" covers same subjects which are told in "Secret History of the Mongols." "Altan Topçi" too, has been translated into several languages; its Turkish translation having been done by this author².

¹ Manghol-un Niuça Tobça'an (Yüan Ch'ao Pi-Shi). MOĞOLLARIN GİZLİ TARİHİ (SECRET HISTORY OF THE MONGOLS) (Written in 1240), First Translation. Translated into Turkish by Dr. Ahmet Temir comparing the previous translations into German by Prof. E. Haenisch and into Russian by S. Kozin with the original text in Mongolian. Printed at the Printing works of Turkish Historical Society, LII+300 pp. Contains 2 maps and I photocopy in addition to the text.

² "ALTAN TOPÇI" (Translated into Turkish by Dr. Tuncer Gülensoy), TTK-BELLETEN, Cilt XXXVIII, Sayı 152 (Turkish Historical Society-BULLETIN, Volume XXXVIII, Number 152) (Ankara, October 1974). pp : 597-634. / I. Entrance : II. Text in the Mongolian language (first 8 pages) : III. Transcription (first 5 paragraphs) : IV. Translation (1-21 paragraphs : from the Beginning to the enthronement of Çinggis) and notes.

"ALTAN TOPÇI-II-" (Translated by Assoc. Prof. Dr. Tuncer Gülensoy). TTK-BELLETEN, Cilt : L, Sayı : 196 (Turkish Historical Society-BULLETIN, Volume : L, Number : 196) (Ankara, April 1986) pp : 9-71 / paragraphs 22-96./

"ALTAN TOPÇI-III-" (Translated by Assoc. Prof. Dr. Tuncer Gülensoy). TTK-BELLETEN, Cilt LI, Sayı : 199 (Nisan 1987). Turkish Historical Society-BULLETIN, Volume LI, Number 196, pp. 10-66 / paragraphs 97-126 and Index).

It is well-known that the Mongols, the creators of these two great pieces of work, are people who have, in Central Asia, been in close relationship with Turks. The two peoples, though seen racially apart are considered related to one another in the family of Altaic languages by many linguists.

Mongols were living in the Middle Ages in the region between Lake Baykal and the Great Wall of China. To the East of the Mongol land, the land of the Turkish peoples extended. The Mongolian peoples, whose land is divided today into Inner and Outer Mongolia, lead then a certain co-habitational life with the Turks, one practically living within the territory of the other, sharing the richness of the same steppe culture. Any in-depth study of the language, history, literature and folklore of the Mongols would reveal a parallelism with those of the Turks.

The World empire founded by the great Mongol Khan Çinggis in times got to be called "The Turkish-Mongol Empire." "Invaluable material on Turkish language and history are contained in the documents pertaining to the political entities established by the sons and grandsons of Çinggis in Iran, Iraq, Deşt-i Kıpçak, Crimea and India such as the Ilkhanites, the state of Iraqi Mongols, Khanate of the Golden Horde, Crimean Khanate, the Empire of Timur the Lame, the Baber Empire.

Apart from this, Turks constituted the fundamental element of the armies of Çinggis and of his followers. Turkish emirs serving in the most important posts played great roles in the conquest of Anatolie, Azarbaijan, Iraq, Iran, and Deşt-i Kıpçak. The Mongolian armies, dominated by the Turkish element, were in time Turkified under the influence of the Turkish tribes in the lands they invaded. This influence can be clearly traced in studies on the Mongolian language and its onomastics.

The Mongols were neighbours to the Turks even in the pre-Çinggis times and the steppe culture of Central Asia was dominant over the both peoples. Turks and Mongols were exchanging words as early as those times in which the Turkish language was more active in influencing the other. As a result, many Turkish words have directly entered Mongolian³. The influence of the Mongolian language on Turkish, on the other hands, has been much more than minimal⁴. It is established that the following words, which are considered to be in the Turkish Vocabulary as they appear in the work of "Divānu

³ Tuncer Gülensoy, "Moğolların Gizli Tarihindeki Türkçe Kelimeler Üzerine Bir Deneme" ("An Essay on the Turkish Words in Secret History of the Mongols), *TÜRKOLOJİ Dergisi*, Cilt : V/1 (The Journal of *TURKOLOGY*, Volume V/1) (Ankara 1973), pp : 93-105.

⁴ Tuncer Gülensoy "Eski ve Orta Türkçede Moğolca Kelimeler ve Moğolca-Türkçe Müşterek Kelimeler Üzerine Notlar" ("Notes on Mongolian-Origin Words in Ancient and Middle Turkish and Words common in Turkish and Mongolian"), *TÜRKOLOJİ Dergisi*, Cilt : VI/I (The Journal of *TURKOLOGY*, Volume : VI/I) (Ankara 1974).

Lugati'-t-Türk" by Mahmud of Kashgar are of Mongolian origin : *tewsi* (tebsi (tray)), *kög* (the measure of poetry and song), *kalkan* (= shield) < derived from the name of the Kalka tribe), *kami* (= özleme (yearning) < derived from gom), *laçin* (= şahin (falcon) < derived from naçin/laçin....)⁵ Added to this are the many words common to both the Turkish and the Mongolian languages which are hard to determine what language originally borrowed it from the other.

Following the short entrance above, this author now wishes to take up the cultural treasure which is common to both the "Secret History of the Mongols" and "Altan Topçi",

"Secret History of the Mongols" (SHM), as can be understood from the notation it carries (§ 282), "was written and completed in the seventh month of the Year of the Mouse (1240) while palace was set between localities of Dola'an-boldak and Şilginçek on the Island of Kode'e of the river of Keluren".

The work, SHM, is like a wide-angle mirror reflecting the events of the Mongol history and a treasury protecting the folkloric and the ethnographic material of the same people. The adjective of "Secret" added to the title generates from the *taboo* which forbids it from being taken outside the small circle of the dynastic family.

Let us now open the door of this treasury with the key of science and start studying invaluable jewels of material there in comparison with "Altan Topçi".

According to the Mongolian Mythology, "The ancestors of Çinggis Kaghan were a *Bozkurt* (Graywolf) (Mongolian : Börte-Çino) created by the will of the great God, and his wife, a female deer (Mangolian : Go'a-Maral). They came here crossing the sea (Lake Baykal)". Alan-go'a (Mongolian : Alan-Kowa), a grand mother among Çinggis-Kagan's maternal ancestors, was said to be impragnated while she lying in her tent by a beam of light which came throug the window (or the hole at the top) and caressed her belly. In SHM (§ 20-21) it is recorded that a blond man swooped into the tent with the light. The same man, while going out, creeped on the lights of the sun or the moon like a yellow dog.

The same incident is accounted for in the following manner in "Altan Topçi".

⁵ Tuncer Gülensoy, "Divânu Lugâti't-Türk ve Kutadgu Bilig'deki Moğolca kelimeler üzerine" ("On Mongolian-Origin Words in Divânu Lugâti't-Türk and Kutadgu Bilig), *Türk Kültürü Araştırmaları*, Cilt : XXII/1-2 (*Researches on the Turkish Culture*, Volume : XXII/1-2) (Ankara 1984, pp : 90-103).

“A boy emitting yellow light came into being in the dark of the night. This (boy) came in to my tent in the form of a brilliant light. This (boy), when he started rubbing my belly, became a yellow “*Kalçin*” dog (Mongolian : sira Kalçin nokai). He was licking his lips with his tongue while he was creeping out...”

The yellow dog in this event is a lion and a wolf according to the text called “Han-name” (The Book of the King).

The same motive appears in the Uzbek region as a *Lion* and *Wolf*; in proto-Mongols as *Nokai*. The importance placed to dogs and “dog-fathers” by the Mongols can be verified by the sources and by the names of individuals. The dog-cult, the existence of which can also be detected with the Turks, is studied by Ahmet Caferoğlu⁶.

The descent of light from the heavens is claimed to be a motive of Manicheism, a religion adopted by the Uighurs in A. C. 763 at the reign of Bögü-Kagan. The events of “descent of light from the heavens” also exist in shamanism. What does not exist in that cult is, unlike Manicheism, a full line of literature on those events.

As revealed by the text, the force impregnating Alan-go'a is the God itself, or its envoy, coming down in the light of the moon, embodied in a symbolic animal. The fact that the text contains both the “sun” and the “moon” without making any reference to the time of the day in which the event takes place, i.e. whether it is the day or the night, indicates that the two heavenly bodies are held at the same level of importance.

There appears another legend about birth in SHM (§ 59) :

“Ho'elün-ucin was pregnant when Yesugai-bagatur was bringing the Tartarians Temucin-uge (Altan Topçi : Temücin), Kori-buka and the others at his captivity. During a stop at Deli'un-boldak on the banks of River Onan, Çinggis-kaghan was born, while he was coming upon this world he was holding in his right palm a clot of blood as big as a saka bone”.

The “blood” motive in this legend may have been meant to profess his noble and heroic leadership.

Same traditions applied in both the Turkic and Mongolian tribes in the naming of the newly born babies. If the new-born baby was male, he was given a provisional name. As stated above, at the time Çinggis was born Temücin the Tartarian was brought to the tribe in captivity. It was another tradition to name the child after a stranger who was with the

⁶ Ahmet Caferoğlu, “Türk Onomastiğinde Köpek Kültü” (“The Cult of Dog in the Turkish Onomastics”), *Türk Dili Araştırmaları Yıllığı-BELLETEN (The Annual of Researches on the Turkish Language-BULLETIN)*, 1961 (Ankara), pp : 1-11.

tribe at the time for the sake of the remembrance of the event. Thus Çinggis was provisionally named Temücin. We see the same traditions on name giving in Turkish tribes as cited in the cases recorded by Hungarian scientist L. Rásonyi with whom we are acquainted closely.

In Mongolian tribes, a boy was born, grew up and a girl was asked for him to marry. In conformity with the traditions of the steppe, first, an *engagement council* convened then was eaten the *engagement meal*. The fathers of the girls consented to give their kids away only after much insistence against which they carried a pretense of reluctance for a long time. In SHM and AT there is an account of the same event told in connection with Çinggis's engagement (§ 66): "Yesugei-bagatur asks Dei-seçen's daughter Börte for his son Temücin to marry. Thus thinks Dei-seçen : Upon the more asking I consent to giving my daughter away the more she will be esteemed; whereas I give her a way after little asking, she will be esteemed less. A girl's destiny must be not getting old in the house she was born to. Leave your son as *damat* (groom) (Mongolian : Güreget) with me when you go back".

As can be seen in the quotation above, in the Mongolian tradition the bay who to be married was left as a guest at the house of the girl after word was set, which was comparable to similar traditions of the Turks.

Again in the Mongolian tradition, a man, following his first marriage, could take many more women. Historical records indicate that Batu Khan had 26 wives. Only one of these would be regarded as Ulu Khatun i.e. *baş kadın* (the head woman), who assisted the affairs of the state, even issued "Yarlıks" (firmans (decrees)) in the name of the hakan. This subject was studied in depth in a paper by this author, titled "Eski Moğol içtimaî hayatında kadın ve onun devlet idaresindeki rolü" ("Woman and her role in the administration of the state in ancient Mongols") and read XVI. PIAC meeting which convened in Ankara in 1973.

In Turks, spilling the blood of a member of the dynasty was forbidden. That is the reason why the hakans and princes who were decided to be killed were strangled to death than any other means to secure the end. This in SHM and AT : "while Otçigin and Teb-Tengeri were wrestling, Otçigin and his men killed Teb-Tengeri by breaking his back...."

Witchcraft was very highly esteemed by the Mongols. Rain making with magic is told in the following manner in SHM (§ 143): "... Buyiruh-han and Kuduka held in their possession the power of making it rain by means of witchcraft. Rain started upon their spells cast to make it rain. But gales changed the situation and rain continued to their disfavor".

This author is of the opinion that this motive has to be studied in a parallelism between itself and the tradition of Turkish clans in Anatolia and elsewhere of going out for prayers to make it rain.

The motive of *Ötüken* in the Turkish shamanism is also present in SHM. Çiggins-kagan, while thanking Togrıl-han and Camuka, says the following :

tenggiri kacar-a gücü nemekdecü erketü tenggiri-de
nereyitçu eke etügen-e gürgücü

i.e.: "My strength increased with the help of the heavens and the earth. I took name from the all-powerful God. We came here with help of our mother Etügen".

As would be known, *etügen/itügen* and *ötügen/ötügen* are the name given by the kams to the *god of the earth* and the meaning of *eke etügen* or *etügen eke* is the world.

Salutation of the sun is another motive of the Turkish mythology.

"When Er-sogotah reached the age of 19, his heart started beating in a different manner and his blood started boiling from deep inside.... He looked around and felt pity for himself. All creatures were going around in couples in this cosmos. Seeing his case irregular, he decided to search and find his mate. Before hitting the road with that in mind, he went home to sleep. When he woke up in the morning, the first thing he did was going to the Hakan-Ağaç (the King-Tree). And before going to the tree, he faced the sun and saluted it three times..."⁷

The same motive also exists in SHM and is taken up in the following manner (§ 102) : "..... Temücin, with these words, hung his belt on his neck and his that on his arm, turned to the sun, beating his chest with his hand, and expressed remorse by kneeling nine times before the sun".

Sun is regarded as a sacred object in some parts of Anatolia. The sun motive which appears on a lot of doors and honeycomb figures signifies abundance and fruitfulness. Aged people in the region of Tunceli, who still keep alive the shamanist traditions, say they still pray facing the sun.

This yields us the conclusion that *Heavens* and *sun* were held of first grade importance in the cult of ancient Turks and Mongols.

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Some numbers are sacred in SHM and AT in a parallelizm with the Turkish tradition. In the Mongolian mythology, sacret numbers are 6 and 60. Nertheless, numerals of 3, 6, and 9 also seem possess fairly important roles in SHM and AT. In those texts, in the narrative of the events, clauses which bear importance in the Turkish folklore like.

3 days, 3 nights, 3 times, a road of three days, 7 hills, Seven-Tabluks (name of the individual), 9 days, 9 times, 9 offenses, a pennant of 9 pieces

⁷ Bahaeddin Ögel, *Türk Mitolojisi (The Turkish Mythology)*, Ankara 1971, p. 105.

are frequently utilized. On these numerals this author has published an article and he submitted a paper to the I. Uluslararası Türk Folklor Kongresi (I. International Congress on Turkish Folklore), Istanbul 1975.

The *Tepegöz* (Topeye) of the Book of Dede Korkut re-emerges as Duva-Sokor in SHM and AT. Duva-Sokor, the son of Torokolçin, has only one eye which is situated at the center of his forehead and he can see a distance of 3 days with it.

What all these indicate is that the two sources of SHM and AT of the Mongolian language are not only valuable for Mongolistics but for Turkology as well. Reference to these sources by the specialists of the two disciplines and the Altayists in their studies of linguistics, folklore, ethnography and cultural history is apt to yield significant results in the analysis of Altaic peoples' historical and cultural relations with one another.