

**Крым**

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<https://doi.org/10.24852/2587-6112.2024.2.193.201>**STATE FORMATIONS IN ANCIENT TURKIC STEPPE SOCIETIES<sup>1</sup>**

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The Turks are one of the oldest nations of the world, and there is evidence that they had established states very early in their history. The masses of the Turks living a nomadic life in the steppes had formed political structures different from the state systems of settled societies, and we can call these "steppe states". The most important feature of the steppe states was that they did not have fixed centers and ruled over expansive territories using their well-trained armies. Nomadic steppe states were unions of tribes. They were established not by settled states or cities, but by the gathering of nomads who had the power of war. A family with authority to rule ("kut" in ancient Turkic), which was received from God and could be held by legitimacy, established the state. The strength of the centralized structure depended on the ability to intervene in the remote corners of the state; otherwise, the dynamics of the steppe would bring about the rebellion of the connected tribes. The Turkic state existed in tribes formed by families connected to each other by blood kinship, and the state emerged from the tight, disciplined cooperation among these tribes. This gave the state a military character. Since the soldiers, horses and weapons were always ready for war, the expansion of the state was inevitable. Starting from the Huns until the 9th century, the center of these great states, which had a nomadic structure before Islam came onto the scene, was Ötüken, which was originally thought to be in the Orkhun Valley. After the 9th-10th centuries, Turkic states were established by Muslim horse warriors who combined urban and nomadic steppe traditions, making rich trade networks their political centers.

**Keywords:** Turkic peoples, Turkic steppe societies, Turkic name, state-building, war tradition, nomadism, social stratification, töre, world state thought, centralized state mentality.

**ГОСУДАРСТВЕННЫЕ ОБРАЗОВАНИЯ В ДРЕВНЕТЮРКСКИХ  
СТЕПНЫХ ОБЩЕСТВАХ<sup>2</sup>****Йылдырым К., Йылдырым Э.**

Тюрки – один из самых древних народов в мировой истории, и имеются доказательства, что они основали государства на очень раннем этапе своей истории. Тюркские общности, ведущие кочевой образ жизни в степях, создали отличающиеся от государственных формирований оседлых обществ политические структуры, т.н. "степные государства". Наиболее важной особенностью степных государств было то, что они не имели постоянных центров и в управлении обширными территориями опирались, прежде всего, на военную силу. Степные государства кочевников представляли собой союзы племен. Они были созданы не на основе оседлых государств или городов, а объединением кочевников, обладавших военной властью. Государство было создано родом, наделенным Богом исключительной властью ("кут" по-древнетюркски) и имевшим легитимное право на верховенство в представлении кочевников. Незыблемость центральной власти зависела от способности контролировать самые отдаленные территории государства, в противном же случае вспыхивали восстания племен. Тюркское государство создавалось племенным объединением древних тюрков, связанным между собой родами, на основе сплоченности и установленного порядка. Всё это придавало государству военный характер. Поскольку войны, лошади и оружие всегда были готовы к военным действиям, покорение новых земель было неизбежным. Начиная с гуннов и до IX века центром этих великих государств, которые до принятия ислама имели кочевую структуру, являлся Отукен, который первоначально считался расположенным в долине Орхун. После IX–X веков тюркские государства создавались мусульманами,

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которые объединили городские и кочевые степные традиции, сделав богатые торговые регионы своими политическими центрами.

**Ключевые слова:** тюрки, тюркские степные общества, тюркское имя, государственное строительство, военная традиция, кочевничество, социальная стратификация, обычай, мировая государственная мысль, централизованный государственный менталитет

### **Turkic State and Turkic Name**

Those under Turkic rule would be named after the state or founder, meaning that everyone under the state had the same name. This deep-rooted state tradition epitomized a developed political culture. In Turkestan during the Selcuk and Ottoman eras, whenever a Turkic group took over the administration, they would call all the Turks under their rule by the same name (Ögel, 2001, p. 8). There are examples of this from the early periods. The Hun ruler Modu sent a letter to the Chinese Emperor in 176 BC in which he said: "With God's help, our officials and soldiers are in good condition, our horses are strong and powerful, we have destroyed the Yuezhi, all of them have either been beheaded, killed, or subjugated and dealt with. Loulan, Wusun, Hujie and all 26 countries on their side became Huns" (Han Shu, 1997, p. 3756-3757). As it is understood from these statements, regardless of their origin and name, everyone under the state was now called a "Hun". This phenomenon is present throughout Turkic history. Those under the umbrella of the Gok-Turk Kaganate were also called Turks. The Chinese, who knew this very well, often called all people north of the Chinese borders Turks (Xin Tang Shu, 1997, p. 5173). When statements of Turk Khaganate, Bilge Tonyukuk talked about the population of the Turk Kaganate, he called all the people under the state "Turks" (Xin Tang Shu, 1997, p. 5174). There are also statements in the Orkhon Inscriptions where the tribes within the Turk Khaganate are referred to as Turks: "The Turgish Khan was our Turk, our nation" (Köl Tigin, East/18); "The Nine Oghuz nation was our nation" (Köl Tigin, North/4); "Turk Sir Nation" (Tonyukuk, West/3) (Ergin, 2009, p. 15, 25, 65). When Bilge Kagan addressed the people under him, he always said "Turkic nation" (Türk budun).

In the Gok-Turkic era, the name Turk was not just the name of the individual Turkic tribe, but rather a broad term for the Turkic state. "Fifty years have passed since the Turkic state was founded by God," Isbara Khan told the Emperor of China. Historical inscriptions show that the word Turk was mostly in the form of "Turk budun", which

meant the Turkic nation. The words "Turkic tradition", "Turkic Khan", "Turkic İl", etc., were not just for a small group of Turks who founded the state. They must have been meant for a big state, the Turkic Khaganate (Ögel, 2001, p. 9-11). The Turkic term "il" was a word that corresponded to today's understanding of the state. According to the ancient Turks, *bodun* (i.e. nation) and land were the two important elements that constituted the state. A state without land was unthinkable. The Gok-Turk word *budun* corresponded to the concept of the nation. And the nation came before both the state and the kagan. The province, i.e. the state, was completed by the khaganate. There was no such thing as a province without a kagan or a kagan without a province. According to Ögel, the word *il*, the state, came before kagan in all inscriptions, implying that ancient Turks attached more importance to it than to the kagan (Ögel, 2016, p. 315-317).

### **State-building and Independence**

State-building brought an independent life, and the Turkic identity was shaped accordingly. In fact, it should not be forgotten that national identities need both a state and independence in order to fully develop. According to Ayhan Bıçak, in their thousands of years of history, Turks have been able to maintain their existence by fighting life and death with every civilization they encountered (Bıçak, 2019, p. 29). This struggle has always kept the idea of independence alive. Bıçak explains the link between state-building and independence as follows: "The basic category of statehood is independence. Therefore, independence constitutes the essence of statehood" (Bıçak, 2019, p. 86-87). "Oksizlik" expresses independence in the Old Turkic Inscriptions, and has constituted the common desire of the Turkic nation (Kafesoğlu, 2004, p. 233), which established states in early periods of history. It is thanks to these states that the Turkic identity has developed and progressed to the way we understand it today. Turks have always tried to protect their national identity. After Modu's death in 174 BC, his son Jiyu became enamored with Chinese-style life, clothing, and food. Zhonghang Yue, who was in the position of advisor or prime minis-

ter, warned him, saying, "The total population of the Huns is not equal to the population of one province of China. What makes the Huns strong is the difference in their clothes and food, and not being dependent on China. Today, Chanyu has changed its traditions and likes Chinese products. At this rate, not even two tenths of Chinese products will be consumed and the entire Huns will be subject to China" (Han Shu, 1997, p. 3759). Zhonghang Yue said that independence could be achieved by preserving the Hun way of life. This is national culture, which is the direct expression of national identity. This event reinforces the notion that national identity was linked to independence for the Huns. When some Huns advocated for a stronger connection to China in 54 BC, the following objection was made in the assembly: "Oh no. In the tradition of the Huns, being strong is honored, being of service is despised. The Huns built their state by fighting on horseback, that is why they are respected by all mankind. To die in battle is the work of strong men. Today, brothers and sisters are fighting each other for the state, if not the brother, then the sister. Despite the dead, dignity will exist, sons and grandsons will always be the heads of states" (Han Shu, 1997, p. 3797). This speech shows that the Turks considered independence to be a guarantee of national existence. Another important event showing that the Turkic identity could be preserved was Tonyukuk's warnings. In response to the construction of Buddha temples by Bilge Kagan, Tonyukuk opposed such a move, saying that such a move would destroy the spirit of struggle and warriorism (Jiu Tang Shu, 1997, 5174). The Orkhon Inscriptions recall the Chinese captivity between 630-680, recording how the Turks had lost their independence, the nation abandoned their traditions, their children became servants, and finally the Turk gentlemen ("beg") abandoned the Turkic name (Köl Tegin Inscription, East/7-9; Ergin, 2009, p. 11). In the inscription, giving up the name "Turk" was taking on the role of a servant-slave and losing independence.

### **War Tradition**

Turkic steppe states developed deep-rooted traditions of warfare. Throughout their millennia of history, Turks were able to survive by fighting other civilizations through both military and culture wars. War tradition includes many issues such as why war is important, the value of the warrior in society, the production and use

of war tools, war tactics, who the enemies are, under which conditions war should be fought, definitions of strong or weak armies, the qualities of the ruler, and the honor of dying in war. The study of these tradition of war reveals the Turks' perspective on life, their understanding of the state and the individual, and how they viewed other societies. The Turks' constant need to fight is directly related to the continuity of their social existence, and the tradition of war constitutes an important element of Turkic thought (Bıçak, 2019, p. 29-30).

### **Conscious Nomadism**

In the states established by the ancient nomadic Turks, the mobile lifestyle lent itself to the development of an advanced military. The warrior masses were strong men with high energy who had grown up with all kinds of difficulties from childhood, who knew how to ride horses and shoot, who practiced war with hunting games even in peacetime, and who were fed with meat and kımız in the vast region of the steppes. The state had to avoid destroying the source of its soldiers. As a matter of fact, in a Chinese record of the Asiatic Huns, Zhonghang Yue warned, "If you buy China's silk weavings and ride horses, your clothes and trousers will be torn and shredded in the grass and thorns. Then you will see that they are not as strong and beautiful as felt and leather; when you throw away Chinese food and products, you will see that they are not as useful and beautiful as koumiss" (Han Shu, 1997, p. 3759). Tonyukuk stated that what made the Turks strong was that they were always on the move, always armed, and always hunting (Jiu Tang Shu, 1997, p. 5174). The Turks' meat-heavy diet surprised some ancient writers. Al-Jahiz said that there was no one on earth who ate as much meat as the Turks, and that anyone other than a Turk would get sick if he ate so much meat (El-Cahiz, 1967, p. 68). It is known that ancient Turkic states deliberately kept some masses nomadic. For example, it is known that the Qarakhanid rulers ensured that certain Turks maintained their nomadic lifestyle so that they would not lose their warrior skills (Cezar, 1977, p. 14). The Turks made a clear distinction between those who lived in the city and those who did not. In ancient Uighur writings, the words "durucu, oturucu in the city and ulush" were frequently encountered. The city was also an administrative organization. According to Ögel, the state organization of the ancient Turks had two main tenets: i) administra-

tion based on tribes, and ii) administration based on cities. The organization based on tribes was more important than cities for the Turks. Both the city and the province belonged to the state. The word "il-ulush" in the Old Uighur inscriptions could be explained as "iller-ulushlar", i.e. "countries and cities", although it is not certain (Ögel, 2000, p. 209–213).

The states established by ancient nomadic Turks did not have cities or fixed administrative centers. The reason for this was that the society was based upon animal husbandry/herding, and the herds had to move based on the season. In fact, the masses had to move several times a year depending on water and grass resources, temperature, and precipitation. In these migrations, families carried all their possessions, belongings, and household equipment with them, as they did not have houses with locked doors where they could keep their assets. This was also how state officials lived. Wherever they went, they would travel with their entire entourage and all their possessions. There was also a fundamental concern regarding sedentary life. According to this, if one lived in a fixed place, in a city, the entire population, statesmen and their possessions could be destroyed by a sudden raid of the crowded enemy armies. Several times in Turkic history, statesmen wanted to establish cities, but were dissuaded from doing so due to these fears. The Huns decided to build cities against the Chinese armies in 83 BC. Hundreds of pits were dug and thousands of timbers were cut. It soon became clear that the Huns would not be able to protect the cities and that everything would fall into the hands of the Chinese, so the city-building activities were stopped (Han Shu, 1997, p. 3782). Bilge Tonyukuk expressed the danger of being destroyed by Chinese raids if cities were built and inhabited, and opposed Bilge Kagan's idea of building cities (Jiu Tang Shu, 1997, p. 5174). Perhaps the most important move Tonyukuk made to preserve the conscious nomadism of the Turks was to prevent Bilge Kagan from building cities and temples. The settlement of the warrior and dynamic steppe Turks, on which the Turkic states were based, into cities would render the Turkic nation unable to establish great states again, and unable to go to distant lands to establish a home. Thus, modern day Turkish people would not have made it to the land where they live today and establish great states like they did. Of course, it is a fallacy to make interpretations

based on assumptions in history, but it is historical fact that a significant portion of the Turks who settled in cities developed small feudal structures and lost their warrior skills and their desire to establish global states. Tonyukuk asserted that the population of the Turks was not even one percent of that of the Chinese, and that if they settled in cities and villages, the nation could be destroyed by sudden and crowded raids. Because of this, he suggested they go on campaigns in times of strength and live in the mountains and forests in times of weakness. In this way, even if the numbers were small, the Chinese could be defeated with the strength and warriorism of nomadism. Moreover, the Turks who devoted themselves to worship in temples would weaken and forget how to fight (Jiu Tang Shu, 1997, p. 5174). The Turks had wanted to establish cities before. When the Hun ruler Jiyu emulated the Chinese, his statesman Zhonghang Yue warned him with the same words nearly nine centuries before Tonyukuk: "The total population of the Huns is not equal to the population of one province of China" (Han Shu, 1997, p. 3759).

It is very easy for nomadic steppe states to dominate settled states and societies. Turks even dominated huge nations such as China and established states 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 peoples 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. There were warnings from statesmen on this issue. Bilge Kagan says the following about not going to China: "... It gives gold, silver, silk and silks without any trouble. The Chinese nation's word is sweet and silk fabric is soft. With sweet words and soft silk cloth, he would deceive and bring the distant nation closer. After they are brought near, they think of bad things at that time. He would not make a good, knowledgeable person and a good, brave person walk. You have died, Turk nation,

you have died. Turk nation, you will die!" (Köl Tegin Inscription, South/5-6; Ergin, 2009, p. 5). Indeed, Turkic communities such as the Tabgachs became Chines-ized 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<sup>1</sup>. While the Turks who established a state in China held the military bureaucracy in their hands, the civil bureaucracy naturally remained in the hands of local administrators. The Turks had nothing else to do with a small number of people in a crowded and completely alien culture. The civilian bureaucracy, on the other hand, quickly brought the Turkic nomads under control because Turkic soldiers had lost their mobility in peace and became complacent with the blessings of the settled culture. The Chinese, who initially had a softening effect on the steppe people, were soon able to make a counterattack. Turks, who were in a minority position, had become increasingly passive and even Chines-ized, 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 Turks came to an end with the Chinese revolts against the foreign power. After that, the masses of remaining Chines-ized Turks who had completely lost their power were all that remained. With the exception of the Mongolian Yuan dynastic family, these masses did not seek to recover everything and return to the steppe. Bilge Tonyukuk did not find it right to conquer China or settle in China. The main reason for this was the different lifestyles shaped by geography. The fact of the matter was that the geography of China was not suitable for Turks. According to Tonyukuk, the Chinese could be challenged since the Turks were in a state of constant readiness for war (Jiu Tang Shu, 1997, p. 5174). Bilge Kagan even went so far as to lament the death of the Turkic nation for thinking of a move to China: "If you go to those places, the Turkic nation will die" (Bilge Kagan Inscription, North/6).

### **Social Stratification**

It is generally believed that there were no distinct social classes in the steppe Turkic society, and thus, a state structure that does not conform to the classical theories of state based on stratification is mentioned. However, the steppe gave rise to stratification in various aspects. Livestock production created social

differences among steppe people. Undoubtedly, this was mainly caused by livestock ownership. The number of livestock was the criterion for the accumulation of wealth, and this led to stratification. Those who accumulated herds and other goods had the upper hand in the use of pastures, water sources, and hunting grounds (Danilov, 2004, p. 31). Even though the pastures were the common property of all, in the distribution of the pastures, of course, the one with more animals was given more and better space. Nevertheless, there was no privileged class based on economic wealth in the steppes of the ancient Turks. The Chinese used expressions such as "their life is very simple," "everyone is a soldier," "everyone is equal" for the Turks in the steppes. Everyone individual could find himself in the literary works of the ancient Turks, from the topmost sultan to the lowest soldier (Soysal, 2002, p. 48). On the other hand, it was also true that there was a differentiation. As a matter of fact, all the heroes and main personalities of the epics were members of the noble class, i.e. beys, and the common people were not given much attention (Sümer, 1960, p. 418). It was essential to merge the concept of alliance with that of beylik to emphasize the charismatic personality and to see beylik as possible only through bravery. According to those who try to fit this into their social theory, the ancient Turks had a simple stratification with a khan or tribal head at the top, an aristocratic stratum (beys) below him, and finally the lower classes, or common people (Mardin, 2004, p. 82). In fact, in ancient Turkic societies, there was no strictly defined categorization and a class consciousness based on it, although there was a kind of social stratification and ranking (Türkdoğan, 1981, p. 12). Since the steppe Turks did not have a class structure, the state did not act in line with the interests of any one class, and each of the elements of social order was valid for the whole of society (Bıçak, 2019, p. 78-79).

As can be seen in the Dede Korkut Epics, the determination of where everyone would sit in the assembly was a matter of "orun", which was obtained through courage, bravery and giving (İnan, 1998, p. 241-254). Ultimately, the Turks' stratification was based on blood. When giving and receiving daughters, the steppe Turks attached importance to the lineage of the family they were dealing with, and so a blood-based nobility took shape. In the steppe Turkic states, there were large families that had a say

in power (Yıldırım, 2017). For example, there were four big families in the Huns. At the center of the steppe Turkic state, certain noble families were influential. For example, in the Uighur Khaganate, nine families named Yaglakar (kagan family), Huduoge, Duoluowu, Mogexiqi, Awudi, Gesa, Huwasu, Yaowuge and Xiyewu ruled the state (Jiu Tang Shu, 1997, p. 5198; Xin Tang Shu, 1997, p. 6114).

In ancient Turkic society, the tribes that came together to form a state were considered equal to one other. However, the tribes that joined the state later were relatively inferior. Those who had been defeated in war and incorporated into the union found themselves at the bottom of the hierarchical structure. For example, the Uighur Khaganate was founded by tribes such as Pugu, Hun, Bayırku, Tongra, Sijie, Qibi, Ediz, who were part of the Nine Oghuz unity. The Uighurs later defeated the Basmil and Karluks and annexed them, so the nine tribes became eleven tribes with the addition of the Basmil and Karluks. Afterward, these two tribes were on the front lines whenever the union went to war (Jiu Tang Shu, 1997, p. 5198).

### **Töre**

The most important record of the place of ceremony is found in the Orkhon Inscriptions: "Turk, Oghuz beys, nation, hear: if the sky above did not press down and the earth below did not pierce, Turkic nation, who would be able to disrupt the province and töre?" (Köl Tegin, East/22). The word Töre appears as *törü* in Kâşgarlı Mahmud's *Dîvânu Lugâti't-Türk* and means "order" (Kâşgarlı Mahmud, 2006, I, p. 106) or "peace" (Kâşgarlı Mahmud, 2018, p. 52). Kâşgarlı Mahmud also cites the proverb "il kaldı törü kalmas," meaning "the country was abandoned, but töre was not abandoned" (Kâşgarlı Mahmud, 2006, I, p. 240). In this respect, "il" and "töre" were always used together. According to Ziya Gökalp, Turks were migrating from provinces captured by enemies to places where their national traditions prevailed. In addition to written laws, unwritten customs were also part of töre, and there were even religious and moral töres alongside legal töres. Töres were so important that, according to Gökalp, even the word "Turk" could mean "törelî" ("the people who has töre") (Gökalp, 1975, p. 8–9). According to Bıçak, the state and the people being in order is one of the main conditions for their overall survival. The basis of the social order provided through the state was the töre, and the töre also

represented order and tradition. Regardless of the status of the person, be it a ruler or an ordinary citizen, the töre was applied in the same way without bias (Bıçak, 2019, p. 72–80). Even if the province was gone, the töre remained. In essence, the preservation of the töre took precedence over the continued existence of the province. If necessary, the province, i.e. the state, would be destroyed and a new state would be established with the preserved töre. Tradition was defined as the order, foundation, and therefore, the power of the state. When a new state was established, a big congress would be held to determine and establish the töre. In fact, the töre of that state was named after the founder of the state, like töre of Oghuz Khan (Ögel, 2016, p. 104–105). A töre is a set of values that emerges from traditions and must be followed. The decisions made by the ruler and the decisions of the assembly are also included in the töre. Töre binds everyone equally and is applied regardless of one's position. Actions that do not comply with the töre are punished, and thus the sanctioning power of the töre is revealed. The importance of the töre in the state order is emphasized by the constant use of the expression "the töre was organized" when inscriptions refer to the establishment of the state. Since social order is the foundation of both töre and the state, order is considered the most fundamental principle of human existence (Bıçak, 2016, p. 79–80).

### **World State Thought**

The ancient Turkic steppe states had the desire and ambition to become world states. In a letter sent to the Chinese Emperor in 176 BC, Modu Chanyu, the ruler of the Great Hun State, introduced himself as "the Great Chanyu of the Huns, enthroned by God," and continued, "All 26 countries have now become Huns" (Han Shu, 1997, p. 3756–3757). In this way, the state was being handed over to a ruler authorized by God to rule the world. Furthermore, this state was not only the state of the Huns, but many other countries had joined the state and all of them were made "Huns". Bilge Kagan said, "When the blue sky was created above and the greasy earth below, the son of man was created between the two. My ancestors Bumın Khan and Istemi Khan sat on the human being" (Köl Tegin, East/1). This was a world state ruling over all mankind. According to Ayhan Bıçak, the conception of the universe plays an important role in Turkic thought. For the ancient Turks, God was responsible for the orderly functioning of the universe and controlled it

with his power. Although sometimes referred to as the "Turkic God", the notion that this God was the God of all people was valid. This idea necessitated the establishment of a state order that encompassed all people. Bıçak argues that the Legend of Oghuz Kagan presents a state model closely related to the conception of the universe. The archetype of the Turkic state and its ruler is created within the framework of this model (Bıçak, 2019, p. 62–63, 66). Again, according to Bıçak, the Ottoman idea of Nizam-ı alem (order of the world) constituted the theoretical basis of the world state. It was assumed that this order was based on a divine origin, and at the same time it was supposed to abolish oppression and evil on earth (Bıçak, 2000, p. 124). According to the ancient Turks, the people of the whole world were the people of the Turkic state and the Turkic ruler was the ruler of the world. Modern researchers call this the universal state. A striking similarity existed between the world order and the state organization. The Turkic conception of the state was a system that was molded by life experience free from mysticism, and was the highest example for all central Asian states. Nevertheless, the state understanding and principles of the Turks were also rooted in the unchanging systems of time and space (Ögel, 1989, I, p. 274).

#### **The Question of Dependence on Settlers**

It is generally accepted that steppe Turkic states were economically dependent on sedentary states and that nomads needed certain goods to survive the winter. Moreover, when the sedentary state, which had established a state monopoly in foreign trade, played with the prices of goods or stopped trade, the steppe states, which were in a difficult situation, had no other option but to fulfill their needs by looting (Eberhard, 2008, p. 5). 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, scolded 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 and 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" (Han Shu, 1997, p. 3760). Goods such as silk and cloth, which were taxed,

played a role in the Turks' trade with other countries.

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" (Wei Shu, 1997, p. 2296). Like other steppe peoples, the Rourans were called greedy because they always wanted more from their plundering expeditions or the gifts (or taxes) they received from China. For example, volume 35 of the Wei Shu records the following about the Rourans: "In autumn they gather together with their herds, migrate to the temperate lands in the south to avoid the cold, to plunder" (Wei Shu, 1997, p. 818). The image of the nomads as marauding, parasitic steppe dwellers is essentially the creation of modern scholars. According to Beckwith, this stereotypical understanding is based on distortions of extremely biased Chinese sources. It does not consider the biases and internal contradictions of these sources or the more reliable information appearing in the same sources that contradicts this point of view (Beckwith, 2009, p. 329–330). The idea that the lifestyle of the nomads impoverished them, that they were unable to meet their needs, and that they therefore plundered the settled farmers and wealthy peoples and obtained everything they needed and wanted, is a prejudiced view of the nomads in today.

#### **Centralized State Mentality**

The ancient Turkic steppe state, established across vast territories, was firmly centered. At the beginning of the Great Hun State, although the privileges and principalities of the local populations and the tribe lords had not yet completely disappeared, they all seemed to have merged into a strict military discipline. For the Huns, the highest priest was the Hun ruler, as there was no separate high priest or clergy. The sovereign participated in the major sacrificial ceremonies, while minor ceremonies were held in the sovereign's ottoman. Taxation was the most important job after military service, as was also true in later Turkic states. In addition to the accumulation of taxes, interest and even delay penalties of the accumulated taxes were calculated and collected from the trade cities that were attached to the Hun state (Ögel, 2001, p. 64–68). According to

Bahaeddin Ögel, all tribes, cities and regions were administered by officials sent from the capital city. Despite centralization, there were two main characteristics of the ancient Turkic states: i) they showed great tolerance to the local population, and ii) they did not interfere with their daily economic life (Ögel, 2001, p. 134–138). In addition to this, Turkic tribes were sent to

each conquered region in masses so those territories could be kept under control. The centralist state understanding was also reflected in the inscriptions. For the Gok-Turks, the center of the world was the Ötüken region. The mountain in the center of Ötüken was believed to be both the pillar of the sky and the axis of the world. It was also the sacred center.

#### Note:

<sup>1</sup>There is a book written by me on this subject: Yıldırım, 2017.

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