

## MYTHOLOGISATION OF THE HISTORY OF THE TURKIC PEOPLES AT THE BEGINNING OF THE THIRD MILLENNIUM

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**Abstract:** For a long while practically all the Turkic people lived in one state, first the Russian Empire and later the USSR. Historiography as a discipline followed the Marxist-Leninist ideology. Anything else was declared heresy. The Soviet state replaced history with a myth of its own creation intended to lay the foundations for the task of building communism. The beginning of the perestroika became the starting point of general changes in all spheres of social sciences, including social consciousness. Such objective and subjective phenomena as language, religion, the legacy of ancestors, elements of material and spiritual culture, the mythologised conception of uniform genetic origin, notions of a “golden age” and original homeland, etc. became indicators, symbols or markers of the awakening of ethnicity, the banners of ethnic mobilisation and the foundation of ethnic identity. The myth is used for particular political purposes. These processes were analysed by the author in Kazakhstan, Turkmenistan, Uzbekistan, Azerbaijan, in Northern Caucasus, the Ural-Volga region, among the Uighurs.

**Keywords:** Turkic people and languages, mythologisation, history, culture, ethnicity

For a long while practically all the Turkic peoples lived in one state, first the Russian Empire and later the USSR. As a result the development of history as a discipline followed the same scheme in the Turkic republics of the USSR (whether federal or autonomous), namely Marxist-Leninist ideology, the “only true teaching”. Naturally, because of the *a priori* conclusions, the approach to a whole series of problems reflected this unavoidable subordination. Anything that did not fit into the Procrustes’ bed of Leninism was declared heresy, many topics were taboo and their researchers were persecuted (see, e.g. the “Bekmahanov affair”, the “affair of the Kazakhstan historians” in the Stalin era, the “O. Suleimenov affair”<sup>\*</sup> under Brezhnev and that of Ismagulov in the Gorbachev–Kolbin period).

In this way the Soviet state replaced history with a myth of its own creation intended to lay the foundations for the task of building communism. Despite the persecution, attempts were made to view the history of the Turkic peoples not only from the position of the Kremlin. “The late 1960s were characterised by a wave of de-Russification in such areas as language, cadres and history. Native historians and artists re-emphasised the ancient roots of their communities and their cultural debt

<sup>\*</sup> Extracts from Suleimenov’s book (*Az i Ya*) appeared in *Forrás*, a journal published in Kecskemét, 1977. The author is a geologist, a proponent of the link between the Sumerian and Early Turkic languages. (Remark by I. Erdélyi.)

to traditional Islamic, especially Arabic and Persian, influence, while downgrading the Russian contribution. In much literature the individual Soviet republic replaces the Soviet Union as the object of patriotic loyalty.<sup>1</sup>

The beginning of perestroika became the starting point of general changes in all spheres of the social sciences, including in social consciousness (which was quite unexpected for those who had been “building and strengthening” it). One of the most important problems became solution of the nationality question which in Soviet times had in reality only been solved within the frame of the ideals of internationalism, the uniform Soviet people, and the priority of class interests.

The national elite took advantage of the unsolved state of the nationality question in the struggle waged for power. M. N. GUBOGLO introduced the terms “de-infantilisation of ethnicity” and “ethnic mobilisation” to characterise this.

Such objective and subjective phenomena as language, religion, the legacy of ancestors, elements of material and spiritual culture, the mythologised conception of uniform genetic origin, notions of a “golden age” and original homeland, etc., became indicators, symbols or markers of the awakening of ethnicity, and accordingly the banners of ethnic mobilisation and the foundations of ethnic identity.

The mobilisation and deinfantilisation of ethnicity also needed an ideology, human resources, mechanisms, mobilisers and leaders. An important role is played by ethnic leaders and ethnic mobilisers (or ethnic entrepreneurs, the representatives of “rebirth” to use another expression), who made a dynamic start on introducing the ethnic ideology and its symbols, “deepening” history, stressing the significance of the mother tongue, the true reality of the ancient and present homeland, the search for heroes and ethnos in the distant past, and on the struggle against *mankurtism* (i.e. the state of being a zombie) and marginalisation.<sup>2</sup>

It was often members of the human sphere who undertook the role of such leaders: poets, writers, philosophers and historians who made use of history – or more precisely episodes in history strengthening ethnicity – to awaken and mobilise ethnicity. They began to use history to shape an ethno-political myth which, in the opinion of V. A. SHNIRELMAN, will become an inseparable feature of the national movements in the period of national rebirth.<sup>3</sup>

At the time of the disintegration of the USSR and the subsequent formation of the CIS the role of historical researchers and research in the political processes grew even more and this is probably why in most of the CIS states it is professional historians who became leaders and presidents of the national movements. (The best example of this is V. Ardzinba.)

<sup>1</sup> Islam Outside the Arab World. Eds David WESTERLUNG and Ingvar SVANBERG. Richmond: Curzon Press, 1999. p. 156.

<sup>2</sup> ГУБОГЛО, М. Н.: Деинфантилизация этничности // Второй международный конгресс этнографов и антропологов. Резюме докладов и сообщений. Part. 1. Уфа. 1–5 июня 1997. “Восточный университет”. pp. 18–22.

<sup>3</sup> ШНИРЕЛЬМАН В. А.: Борьба за аланское наследие (этнополитическая подоплека современных этногенетических мифов) // Восток. 1996 No. 5. p. 100.

The growing interest in history and the historical legacy, in the forgotten and forbidden traditions which resulted in the publication of a vast amount of historical literature can be attributed not only to the interest of the aims of ethnic mobilisation but also to the internal logic of the development of the discipline. With the disappearance of the “closed”, taboo topics and central censorship, it became possible for historians to conduct research in a great variety of themes. However, the appearance of the new materials and ideas was used as a weapon for ethnic mobilisation. In the period of independence, history began to play the role of ideology. In the opinion of S. A. ROMANENKO, after the collapse of the social and state consciousness, ethno-historical consciousness had to take over the role of world-view and ideology and to perform a function for which, by nature, it is not suited. This in turn prevents it from discarding the distortions it brought from the totalitarian past, and consequently leads to new distortions of content and function. In this state it stimulates ethnic conflicts and prevents their solution and legal regulation.<sup>4</sup> In the past decade history has played a big role in the processes, taking over the role of ideology and mobilising ethnicity. It achieves the latter through the active use of history made by ethno-politicians to create myths.

In the opinion of V. A. SHNIRELMAN, we are witnessing the emergence of a new trend in our discipline with the aim of studying the ethno-political myth, its structure, creators and representatives\*, their aims and the way they are attained; the role of ethno-genetic patterns in the shaping of ethno-political myths; ethno-genetic formations as important elements in ethnic ideological confrontations; the place of ethno-centric and ethno-political patterns in today’s historical development; the shaping of new national symbols in the process of independence (flag, arms, hymn, national rites and celebrations, list of national heroes and enemies); the establishment of new museums or the replacement of old exhibitions and the ideology behind them with new ones in the existing museums.<sup>5</sup> All of the above applies to the Turkic republics of the CIS. However, the creation of ethno-political myths has not yet been analysed.

The aim of this article is to trace the functioning of the emerging myths in the various regions of the Turkic-speaking world and to throw light on the role they play. It is important to note that it is not possible to illuminate all aspects of the problem since this work is only of a conjectural nature. It is simply an attempt to examine the problem of the mythologisation of Turkic history in the post-Soviet period.

The Turkic-speaking peoples found themselves in different circumstances in the different countries of the ex-Soviet Union. Some of them (which had previously had

<sup>4</sup> РОМАНЕНКО, С. А.: Историческое сознание в межетнических конфликтах // Второй международный конгресс этнографов и антропологов. Резюме докладов и сообщений. Part. 1. Уфа. 1–5 июня 1997. pp. 95–96.

\* It is not right to dismiss this question by declaring that the proponents or followers of Turanism in Hungary belong to the “rabble”. See the article by Pál Engel, *Népszabadság*, 12 May 2001. (Remark by I. Erdélyi.)

<sup>5</sup> ШНИРЕЛЬМАН, В. А.: Национальные символы, этноисторические мифы и этнополитика // *ibid.* p. 103.

the status of federal republic) created independent national states, while the situation of others (which had not had this status) hardly changed at all or in many cases even deteriorated.

History or, more precisely, the ethno-political myth which is replacing it, will probably play many different roles in the different parts of the Turkic world, depending on the tasks of ethnic mobilisation that arise. Above all, it should be noted that not all historical periods are being mythologised or included in the ethno-historical myth. Let us examine how the myth is shaped and how it functions.

## KAZAKHSTAN

After winning independence, new documents entered the scholarly mainstream and a number of previously forbidden themes were explored. Those who had been persecuted by the Soviet historical myth-makers won the recognition they deserved. The discipline of history is at present rising in Kazakhstan, new historical journals are being published as well as other publications which had been forbidden by the Soviet censorship. On the whole the professional historians of Kazakhstan, who often suffered under the totalitarian regime, preserved their scholarly traditions and did not take part in shaping the mythologised history. But it should be noted that besides the scholarly version, its mythologised variant also came into being. The latter is generally created by representatives of technical disciplines, people who consider that the history of Kazakhstan came into being by command and must be rewritten. (The title of one book is typical: "Alternative History of Kazakhstan".) We could ignore this parallel history, but it is not only more popular, it is also being taught in the schools<sup>6</sup> and is playing an active part in shaping historical consciousness.

All this exists together with the clan-tribal structure. Recent years, particularly the first years of independence, have seen the publication of a great number of books, brochures and articles dealing with the different tribes and their origin. Apart from the works of professional historians, which draw on mediaeval written sources and throw light on previously little known aspects of Turkic history,<sup>7</sup> the writings of dilettantes have also appeared.<sup>8</sup> The main aim of these "researchers" is to push back knowledge of the past of different tribes, clans and hordes (*zhuz*).

Foreign researchers have also noted this phenomenon: "The aspect of the reappraisal of Kazakh history that had the greatest popular appeal was that relating to

<sup>6</sup> ТУРЛУГУЛОВ, Т.: Рассказы по истории Казахской ССР. Пособие для IV класса. Алма-Ата, 1988.; 3rd to 1st century BC tribes in Kazakhstan are raised as an example and are called Kazakhs. This textbook is still in use in the schools.

<sup>7</sup> КАДЫРБАЕВ, А.: Очерки истории средневековых уйгуров, джалаири, найманов, кирентов. Алматы. Рауан. 1993.

<sup>8</sup> Е. г.: Абдіраманұлы А. Халық данасы – Сафры би және Қонырат руларының шежіре. Алматы. Рауан. 1992; Суан шежіре. Алматы. Ақжазық. 1993; Шежіре – кіші жүздің кейбір аталары. Алматы. 1995 etc.

clan-tribal issues. For over sixty years the official attitude towards the clan-tribal system was that it was primitive, repressive and a bar to progress, and must therefore be destroyed. Underlying this was the fear that these traditional structures could be used as subversive power bases which might threaten the security of the new regime. Consequently, in public Kazakhs were careful to distance themselves from any possible association with clan-tribal factions and vehemently to condemn signs of group solidarity formed on this basis.”<sup>9</sup>

The physicist Y. S. OMAROV made a number of “discoveries” in his research into the “glorious” ancestors of the different Kazakh tribes, declaring the Kipchaks to be descended from the Scythians and the Saka. In the case of the Arguns he found equally “prestigious” ancestors in the Huns or, more precisely, the Hephthalites. This idea can be found in the work of S. T. KUANGANOV, mechanical engineer.<sup>10</sup>

In line with this view, they proclaim the Scythians and Huns to be Kazakhs,<sup>11</sup> Attila is identified as Edil, hero of the Turkic epic after whom the Volga was named.<sup>12</sup> This latter view is becoming an axiom of alternative history.<sup>13</sup>

There have also been attempts to prove that Genghis Khan was a Kazakh and at the same time the political significance of this view was stressed: “In this connection, which people Genghis Khan belonged to, and in particular whether he was Chinese, is of enormous geopolitical significance and could become a factor in international politics. The aim of this book, through the scientific research carried out, is to prove the truth about the Kazakh State and Genghis Khan,” writes K. DANIYAROV, a candidate in technical sciences, in his foreword. “Genghis Khan’s father was Yesugei of the Kazakh Kiyat clan, his mother was Ojan of the Kazakh Merkit clan and finally, Genghis’s wife was Bortei of the Kazakh Konurat clan. If we add to this that in 1223 Genghis divided his empire up among his four sons born to him from Bortei ... then what kind of Mongol origin can we speak of in the case of Genghis?”<sup>14</sup>

They see the history of the Kipchak through the prism of the conquests of Genghis Khan: “the Kazakh historians dissociated themselves from Genghis Khan and his conquests. In contrast, they discovered the Kipchak origin of the Kazakh people

<sup>9</sup> SHIRIN, Akiner: *The Formation of Kazakh Identity*. Royal Institute of International Affairs. 1995. p. 58.

<sup>10</sup> ОМАРОВ, Е.: Скиф + сак = кыпчак = кыпшак (о происхождении кыпчаков). Вестник университета “Кайнар”. 1997. No 2; idem. Эфталиты белые гунны (или о великом государстве Аргу). *ibid.* 1998. No 1; КУАНГАНОВ, Ш. Т.: Гун немесе аргун тарих гурапы. Алматы. Бінімію 1997.

<sup>11</sup> ОМАРОВ, Е.: Аттила и империя европейских гуннов. Вестник университета “Кайнар”. 1997. No 2.

<sup>12</sup> ОМАРОВ, Е.: С. Казахстан – наследник империи гуннов. Вестник университета “Кайнар”. 1997. No 3.

<sup>13</sup> ӘЛШПБай, Т.: Еділ батыр: Әлқисса //Жерұйық. – 1995. –21, 34, 28 ақпан; 3 наурыз; БАЗАРБАЕВ, М.: Аттила кім? // Ежелгі гун тайпасының көсемі (445–453) туралы // Түркістан – 1995 27 қыркүйек, 4 қазан, 11 қазан; ОТЕНИЯЗОВ, С.: Еділ батыр (Аттила): Ежелгі гун тайпасының көсемі (445–453) туралы тарихи зерттеу // Жалын. 1994, No 1–2, pp. 196–244; САДУАКАСОВ, К.: Батырлық – елдің байрағы: (казак батырлары Еділ, Ер Едіге, Жәнібек т. б. туралы) //Сарыарқа. 1996. – 11, 12, 13 маусым; in Europe he is known as Attila, Atil or Etil, the Turkic-speaking peoples preserve the memory of Attila as a legendary military commander, in the name-form Edil. Казактар / Казахи. Институт развития. Vol. 2. Истори. личности. 1998. p. 262.

<sup>14</sup> ДАНИЯРОВ, К.: Альтернативная история Казахстана. А., Жубек жолы. 1998, pp. 4., 62.

(*Kipšak*) ... there can be no doubt that the Kipchak played an enormous role in the history of the Kazakh people ... But to prove that the Kipchak constituted the Kazakh people is, to say the least, an attempt to dissociate themselves from Genghis Khan and his conquests.”<sup>15</sup>

Taking Kazakh history back to the period of the Saka does not serve dissociation from the Mongols either (although there is no need for this): “From earliest times the Chinese, like the Mongols today, used the name “*hasag*” for the Kazakhs, meaning “true Sak”. *Ha* = true, genuine, *sag* = Sak.”<sup>16</sup>

It is likely that “deepening” the history of one or other tribe must strengthen the position of its representatives within the power structure. This is why anniversary celebrations of historical figures, dates and events became very popular in Kazakhstan. Each such celebration is intended to show what a particular tribe contributed to the history and culture of the people and in this light it expects recognition in the form of power or that persons originating from a particular tribe should acquire leading roles in various spheres of power. The way Turkmenistan is preparing to celebrate its 2000th anniversary can be described as almost a curiosity. In the case of a city it remains to be decided whether the 2000th or 1500th anniversary should be celebrated.

Another problem also attracted the attention of the myth-creating historians: when did Kazakhstan join Russia? This has been examined in detail in an article by V. MOISEYEV.<sup>17</sup> It should be noted that in connection with the revision of history the author does not give adequate attention to the role of dilettantes and former party historians who have transformed themselves into mediaevalists. It is a typical example of the latter, not only in Kazakhstan but in the discipline of history in all the Asian post-Soviet republics, that former communist ideologues who once persecuted dissident scholars, now not only write the opposite but head scholarly institutions and are the organisers of official interpretations of history.

## UIGHURS

The disintegration of the USSR, the crisis of the socialist world system, the establishment of Turkic-speaking states, the transition to the CIS system have also affected the situation of the Uighurs. The Uighurs found themselves within the frames of different new states. Their appearance is reflected in growing national consciousness and in numerous attempts to gain independence. In China this took the form of mass disturbances with the loss of many lives. Naturally, the struggle for independence requires ideological foundations and historians play an important role in shaping them. They have made repeated attempts at reappraisal of the history of the people and defining their ethnic territory.<sup>18</sup>

<sup>15</sup> Ibid. pp. 7–8.

<sup>16</sup> Ibid. p. 3.

<sup>17</sup> МОИСЕЕВ, В.: Казахстанские идеологи переписывают историю. “Алтай”. Барнаул. 2000. No 1.

<sup>18</sup> See e. g. ТУРГУН, Алмас: Уйгуры. [Алмаеы, самиздат (illegal publication).]

Some Uighur historians also claim parts of today's Kazakhstan. The period of perestroika was marked by relative activity in this respect in the field of research. It was then that the Uighur Institute of the Kazakh SSR Academy of Sciences announced that: "As regards the Region Between the Seven Rivers and Central Asia, there are no historical or other written documents to support the claim made by certain researchers that this was once the autochthonous territory of the Uighurs."<sup>19</sup>

## KYRGYZSTAN

In their case, the "Az" among the ancient ethnic groups have been suggested as the glorious ancestors of the Kyrgyz people – the Arimaspeus, Yuechi, Aors, Turgesh, Saka, Massagete, Apasia, Oguz, Wusun, Issedon, Tochar, Surakauk and the ancient Kirgiz who belong in this group. All these peoples have been recognised as belonging to one of the two early Turkic branches (to the second, namely the Cumanians).<sup>20</sup> Some myth-makers identify the Kirgiz with the Huns. The writer, O. AJTYMBETOV, for example, interprets the events described in the Manas epic as applying to the Hun period and considers that the name "On" applies to the Huns. He presents the right flank of the Kirgiz in this early period.<sup>21</sup> T. OTORBAYEV, former lawyer of the town of Talas, published a book titled "*Manas Ata tarihi*" in which he identifies the heroes of the epic with historical Hun figures.

Historical research is also used to recreate national symbols. On 3 July 1991 in the town of Asylbagas a day of commemoration for the victims of the 1916 uprising was held at the initiative of the Kyrgyzstan democratic movement. On 4 July the demonstration march arrived in the town of Bishkek and a large gathering, addressed by the president of the Kyrgyz Federation was held in the main square. The march continued towards the Issyk-kul. The participants were dressed in blue cloaks and carried the *Kök azsaba* (=blue banner) in memory of those who fell in the uprising, in this way reviving the old national symbol. (The Kirgiz believed in the Blue Heaven = *Koko Tengir*).<sup>22</sup>

## TURKMENISTAN

The Turkmen scholar O. A. GUNDOGDYEV considers that: "Over the past decades Scythian studies became a bastion of anti-Turkism. Because the Scythian language has not been studied sufficiently many mistaken views spread, holding that all the "Scythians" are Iranian-language peoples. In the wake of the erroneous views of

<sup>19</sup> Краткая история уйгуров. Алма-Ата. 1991. p. 234.

<sup>20</sup> Эсен уулу Кылыч: Азия или кочевники Азы. Бишкек. Илим. 1993.

<sup>21</sup> АЙТЫМБЕТОВ, О.: Уллу баатыр баяны "Манас" эпосуна жаыыча коз караш // Ала.Тоо 1990 No 3–6. (Повествование о великом батыре // Новый взгляд на эпос "Манас"); ОТОРБАЕВ, Т.: Манас ата тарыхы. Талас. 1992.

<sup>22</sup> АСАНКАНОВ, А.: Кыргыз: рост национального самосознания. Бишкек, Мурас. 1997. p. 94.

European authors on the historical situation of all the “Scythian” peoples, we reached the point where even our national scholarly circles held that the Iranian peoples were the major element in the formation of the Turkic nations.” From his analysis of a number of data he reached the conclusion that the “Royal Scythians” were also Turkic speaking, and that “... the names Massagete, Skolot, Sak, Saj, Tureget, Derbik, Turkut and Turgesh are all synonyms or derivatives of the same word: royal, honoured, chief, inner, right-flank (*buzuk*), which eventually developed into the ethnonym of the Turkmen people.”<sup>23</sup> Similar “research”, besides proving that the president of Turkmenistan is a descendant of Alexander the Great, make it possible to “deepen” the history of the Turkmen people.

## UZBEKISTAN

It is known that Iranian- and Turkic-speaking peoples contributed to the formation of today’s Uzbek people. If we regard the former as autochthonous, the latter – at least those which can be localised already in the early period to the territory of Uzbekistan – cannot be considered as autochthonous. Moreover, the Uzbek ethnonym is a relatively late phenomenon in the cities of Central Asia; it came from Kazakhstan and meant Turkic-speaking tribes. The territorial origin of the Republic of Uzbekistan is also complicated. All this objectively shows that Uzbek historians are obliged to push back the historical time limit of the Uzbek people in this region to seek glorious, heroic ancestors. Nor is it surprising that they have proclaimed Timur Lenk (Tamerlane) the founder of the State.

## AZERBAIJAN

The present ethnic situation in Azerbaijan is complicated by the conflict over Nagornyy Karabakh. It is therefore natural that Azeri scholars are seeking Turkic roots in Transcaucasia in the earliest times because to be autochthonous means to have ancestral right to the land. The theory that the Turkic Azeri are the original inhabitants is not new: it appeared in the form of a hypothesis already in the Soviet period.<sup>24</sup>

## NORTHERN CAUCASUS

Because of the complicated ethno-political situation there the Northern Caucasus is the most typical region regarding mythologisation through history. Drawing the borders has led to bloody conflicts between ethnic groups in more than one case.

<sup>23</sup> Гундогдыев, О. А.: О языке “царских скифов”. Вестник университета “Кайнар”. 1997. No 3. pp. 14–22; Idem. Богиня – мать земли Туркменской. Ашгабад. Ылхам. 1998. p. 42.

<sup>24</sup> See e. g. Ямпольский, З.: Дрнейшие сведения о тюрках в зоне Азербайджана // Ученые записки Азербайджанского Государственного Университета. Сер. языка и литературы. 1966. No 2.

The appeal to history has always been a weighty argument in proving the right to land. Of course, the further back the ancestors go, the more weight the argument carries. The Ossetians who are Iranian-speaking and the Turkic-speaking Karachai and Balkar are in a complicated situation even though they are all descended from the Alans who appeared relatively late in the Caucasus. Following the same scenario, the same factors and the same past have influenced the idea of ethnomythologisation. They all agree in demonstrating that the Alans were present very early, moreover the Karachai and the Balkar declare both the Scythians and the Alans to be Turkic-speaking peoples, the ancestors of the Northern Caucasian peoples. I. M. MIZIYEV regards the Turks as the founders of the oldest civilisation in the ancient world. He considers the Hun invasion to be a factor for progress as it crushed “the reactionary social system” and “brought progressive cultural relations” to Europe.<sup>25</sup>

## THE URAL-VOLGA REGION

The ethno-linguistic situation here is rather complicated. Capitalism began to emerge early in *Tatarstan* and there was quite a large stratum of intellectuals. During the years of Soviet rule the republic became one of the biggest industrial regions. All this contributed to the development of an active national movement and at the same time gave strong impetus to historical studies in the area of aspirations for independence. Naturally, the first appeal was to the occupation of the Kazan Khanate. This period was declared to be a golden age and the occupation of Kazan was looked on as a great Turk-Muslim tragedy. According to Tatar intellectuals (journalists, historians, writers) the peoples of the Volga region – Tatars, Chuvash, Mari, Udmurt and Bashkir – were defeated in 1552 and later began to struggle together against the Russian oppression for the restoration of the Kazan Khanate.<sup>26</sup>

This argument is the justification used by the leaders of the Tatar national movement not simply for conducting negotiations on the restoration of autonomy but also for the restoration of Tatarstan on the former territory of the Kazan Khanate within the Kazan Province.

*Bashkir* scholarly circles do not agree with this view, pointing out that the situation of the Bashkir, Chuvash and Mari was worse under the Kazan Khanate because those peoples did not support Kazan in the struggle against Russia. After its downfall they did not struggle for its restoration. At present there is no dispute over the fact that Bashkiria joined Russia voluntarily.<sup>27</sup>

It should be noted that the opinion of the Tatar scholars is accepted in Kazakhstan: “The Kazan fortress was surrounded by an “iron ring” when the bloodi-

<sup>25</sup> МИЗИЕВ, И.: Древнейшие этнокультурные пласты истории тюркских народов // Алм. Issue 1. Алма. Ата. 1990. pp. 134–154.

<sup>26</sup> ИМАМОВ, В. В.: Запрятанная история татар. Набережные Челны. 1994.

<sup>27</sup> АКМАНОВ, И. Г.: За правдивое освещение истории народов (Замечания к книге В. В. ИМАМОВА “Запрятанная история татар”. Набережные Челны. 1994.) pp. 8, 9.

est and most tragic struggle for all the Turkic peoples began, one which was also glorious because it stands as an example for all future generations ... while it should be noted that at that time there were no sharp national borderlines between the Tatars, Bashkir, Nogay and Kazakhs and we are therefore not mistaken in saying that almost all the Turkic-speaking peoples of Eurasia took part in the defence of Kazan.”<sup>28</sup>

In our opinion, the purpose of the popularisation of the “Tatar view” in Kazakhstan is probably not only to achieve autonomy and research opportunities independently of the Centre, but also to strengthen pan-Turk bonds.

Regarding the further history of Tatarstan, V. V. IMAMOV refers to the heroic struggle waged by the Tatars under the Russian yoke, although his critics say that he sometimes exaggerates their scale. The Bashkir scholars consider that all the uprisings in Tatarstan during the existence of the Russian Empire tend to be regarded as Tatar–Bashkir uprisings and the leading role in them is attributed to the Tatars.

The general aim was to win independence for Tatarstan within the boundaries of the Kazan Khanate and as far as possible to annexe to it all the territories inhabited by Tatars. (The majority of Tatars hold the mythologised opinion that the Crimean and Siberian Tatars are part of the Tatar ethnos.<sup>29</sup>)

It can be presumed that the thesis of the closeness of the Tatars and the Bashkir serves to question the existence of the Bashkir as an independent ethnic group and to stress, in contrast, that they belong to the single Turkic-Tatar people.<sup>30</sup>

Naturally, this conclusion was not received with enthusiasm by the Bashkir scholars who claim that the Bashkir are just as close to the other Turkic-speaking peoples because they have common roots.<sup>31</sup> The idea that the Siberian and Crimean Tatars are the same people is opposed by the leaders of the Siberian Tatars who head the national movement. At present the question of the mysterious old Sibir people has arisen. In addition, trends have also appeared within the Tatar people which regard the Mishar as a separate ethnic group and historical data have been put forward in support of this view.

At the same time in the struggle for independence Tatar scholars have also begun to combat the likewise mythologised Tatar history which exists among the Russian people and which holds that the Mongol-Tatars conquered lands occupied by the Slavs. In contrast, they attempt to place the appearance in the Kama-Volga region of the Turkic ancestors of the Tatars to more than 4000 years before the appearance of the Great Russians in this region. The archaeologist R. ISMAGILOV is conducting explorations intended to prove that the Scythians spoke a Turkic language\*.<sup>32</sup>

<sup>28</sup> МАГАУИН, М.: Азбука казахской истории А., Казахстан. 1977. р. 143.

<sup>29</sup> See e. g. – ХАЙРУЛЛИН, Г. Т.: История татар. Алматы. 1997. р. 167.

<sup>30</sup> Гаяз Исхаки. Идель-Урал. Набережные Челны. 1993. pp. 9–10.

<sup>31</sup> АКМАНОВ, И. Г.: За правдивое освещение истории народов. р. 11.

\* Currently this position is represented in Hungary by the archaeologist Kornél Bakay. At the end of the 19th century Géza Nagy, an archaeologist, corresponding member of the Academy, expressed a similar conviction in his inaugural address. (Remark by I. Erdélyi.)

<sup>32</sup> ХАЙРУЛЛИН, Г. Т.: История татар. р. 15.

The Mongol Tatar period also serves to justify their claim to be the sole rightful heirs to the Golden Horde. As A. S. KADYRBAYEV noted: “There is another topic among Tatar historians, the debate on the Eurasian legacy of the Golden Horde, which has not waned but which currently has the impetus of a new wave.”<sup>33</sup> Evidence of this can be seen in the efforts made by certain Tatarstan scholars to identify the historical legacy of the Golden Horde solely with the Kazan Khanate and its history, which is myth-making. It is a proven fact that the Kazan Tatars descended from the Volga-Bulgars, a Turkic-speaking ethnic group whose statehood was destroyed by the Mongols. The “historical version” directed against the legacy of the Golden Horde appeared only recently, as a product of the current political situation. It is a phenomenon belonging in the category of “invention of traditions”. Mention must also be made of another actively propagated aspect of Tatar history which claims that the Tatars carried out a civilising mission in different regions. In the case of Kazakhstan excessive importance is often attached to the role of the Tatar population in general education and culture, figures of Bashkir origin are said to be Tatars and it is even claimed that Cyril and Method were of Azov Bulgar origin, “originating from the state of the ancestors of today’s Tatars”.<sup>34</sup>

All these examples show that ethnic myth-making is growing in the newly formed Turkic-speaking states (including within the Russian Federation). This process is characteristic not only of these countries but of all the Soviet successor states and it did not begin today. It can be traced back to the disintegration of the Soviet Union, when the old identity was lost and a new one had to be sought. Periods of transition and sudden breaks are accompanied by the formation of statehood and the nation and the growth of national self-awareness which brings new myths in place of the old. The new myth does not arise in a vacuum: the myth-makers draw on the results of scholarly research and introduce new ideological elements. It must be noted for the sake of truth that myth-making is often a reaction to old myths created by other ethnic groups.<sup>35</sup>

The myth-makers are most commonly journalists or writers, and less often (e.g. in Kazakhstan) members of the technical intelligentsia with no training as historians.

<sup>33</sup> КАДЫРБАЕВ, А. Ш.: Золотая Орда и ее евразийские наследники // Казахстан-спектр. 1998. No 3. p. 91.

<sup>34</sup> ХАЙРУЛЛИН, Г. Т.: История татар. pp. 24, 150–156. АКМАНОВ, И. Г.: За правдивое освещение истории народов. p. 5.

<sup>35</sup> The best example of this is the book of M. Adzi who very correctly referred in his work to deceptions that arose in Russian and Soviet historiography in the field of Turkology, in the analysis of relations between the Slavs and the Turkic peoples. What is said also applies to a certain extent to the book of R. S. Ishdinova. Both authors, like O. Suleimenov, refer to the falsifications written on the subject of Kipchak-Russian relations. It should be noted here that the present author does not regard Suleimenov’s book as myth-making, but rather tends towards the opinion of V. I. Abayev, the outstanding Ossetian Orientalist who, in his review of the work of Suleimenov, wrote that he considers the chapters titled “Lay of Igor’s Host” and “Word of Honour” to be the most objective ever written on the epic, “Lay of Igor’s Host”. Even if there is a Turkophile tendency in the book, even this is good because it counterbalances the one-sided tendencies of Ilovayski. Unfortunately, elsewhere in Suleimenov’s book there are many doubtful and erroneous things. The followers of Ilovayski take advantage of these in their attempts to declare the whole book unacceptable. АБАЕВ, В. И.: Избранные труды. Vol. 1. Владикавказ. Ир. 1990. p. 536.

These things could be ignored because, as V. A. SHNIRELMAN pointed out, scholarly debate with the creators of ethno-genetic myths draws them into the circle of scholarly hypotheses and gives them scholarly status they do not deserve.<sup>36</sup> However, it must also be noted that the myths they create are used by ethnic leaders for their own purposes and the latter also involve professional historians in myth-making.

In this way history becomes propaganda and the manipulation of historical awareness is continued for political aims. Different stages of historical development or state forms from the period of national self-determination, certain earlier principles, forms of consciousness and circumstances are transferred to the present, and the answers to questions of present and future development are sought in the past. Part of the ethnic group grasps one period of historical development of a people by force, with the aim of holding it up as an example or idol, of attributing absolute value to its period of former greatness, peak of development and successes, detaching it in a metaphysical way from the historical, geographical and cultural context. In the awareness of the masses historical past and present blend into some kind of inseparable unity and any distinction between past, present and future disappears. Under new historical conditions the present possibility and future illusion arises of things that are impossible to decide or attain, because they are based on elements of the past that are dying or already dead.<sup>37</sup>

The myth is used for particular political purposes. The best example of this is the mythologisation of genealogy. A knowledge of their past roots was always important for the Turkic-speaking peoples. In the distant past genealogy (*sežire*) served not only to structure social relations but also as the basis for certain decisions and actions. The cultural and historical proximity of the Turkic and Iranian peoples was explained by the existence of common ancestors. After the Mongolian conquest, legends tracing the origin of local “tribes” and “clans” right back to Genghis Khan and his sons spread through the territories occupied by the nomads. “Ethnic” myth-making is still taking place.\* Sometimes attempts are made with the help of archaeologists and linguists to prove links between contemporary Turkic-speaking peoples and peoples of the ancient world (e.g. between the Kazakhs and the Saka and Wusun, between the Turkmen and the Massagetes). There have also been attempts to declare people of the ancient world to be Turkic-speaking in order to justify occupation of the given territory and the right to that territory. In recent years the theory of a direct link with the Aryans has become popular, especially in “literature in the vicinity of scholarship”.<sup>38</sup>

<sup>36</sup> ШНИРЕЛЬМАН, В. А.: Борьба за аланское наследие. p. 101.

<sup>37</sup> РОМАНЕНКО, С. А.: op. cit. pp. 95–96.

\* At the World Congress of Yasiens held in Hungary in 2001 the erroneous view was put forward that their ancestors entered the Carpathian Basin together with the Hungarians at the time of the Magyar Conquest. In reality this ethnic group migrated to Hungary in the 13th century. (Remark by I. Erdélyi.)

<sup>38</sup> ВАЙНБЕРГ, Б. И.: “Этническая” мифология народов – среднеазиатско-казахстанского региона в прошлом // Второй международный конгресс этнографов и антропологов. Резюме докладов и сообщений. Part. 1. Уфа. 1–5 июня 1997. “Восточный университет”. pp. 18–22.

The mythologisation of genealogy, as already noted above, is of political significance. In Turkmenistan it was officially announced that Turkmenbashi Saparmurat Niyazov is directly descended from Alexander the Great. Uzbek statehood is traced back to Timur. The most prominent historical figures are adopted as ancestors providing the basis for the exercise of power according to the myth-makers since it is sanctified by traditions and time. Both “ancestors” are the greatest conquerors of the past so the myths also have a territorial aspect. Compared to these republics, the myth-makers of Kazakhstan are simple beginners: the president is merely descended from a certain Karasaybay who lived in the time of the Jungar-Kazakh wars,<sup>39</sup> but at the same time they also take the beginning of the Sapyrasti tribe’s history further back in time. The president, N. Nazarbayev is descended from this tribe. This is why the mythologised history of this tribe is among the most important ideologies.<sup>40</sup>

Enhancing the past of different tribes is one of the favourite subjects of the myth-makers in the Turkic-speaking states. In our opinion, these and similar “historical researches” can only be described as vanity. Behind these efforts are various clans striving for power, who attempt to prove the rightfulness of their aims by demonstrating their ancient roots. It can be said that the most dangerous thing in today’s myth-making is its ability to stir up conflict when the myth is used for the purposes of territorial claims and to seize power.<sup>41</sup> It seems to the present author that various factors cause the mythologisation of history: the desire to counterbalance the mythology created by another (generally dominant) ethnic group, to solve some kind of political task. Whatever the case, mythologisation always has a particular aim and as human experience confirms, history of this kind has often served as the basis for bloody conflicts (e.g. the Aryan myth). It is one of the tasks of historical studies to combat anti-history, however attractive it may be.

<sup>39</sup> Карасай батыр. Алматы, Санат. 1998; Казактын Карасай батыры. Алматы. Жалын. 1993.

<sup>40</sup> Шапырашты Казыбек бек Тауасарулы. Туп-тукианнан озіме шейін. Алматы. Жалын. 1993. This book drew strong criticism from the professional historians who declared it to be a falsification from beginning to end.

<sup>41</sup> Кол, Ф.: Национальная идентичность и использование далекого прошлого на Кавказе // Второй международный конгресс этнографов и антропологов. Резюме докладов и сообщений. Part. 1. Уфа. 1–5. июня 1997. p. 31.