

THE FEATURES OF THE COUNTRY OF MARGUSH AND THE TRADITIONAL CULTURE OF THE PEOPLES OF CENTRAL ASIA

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For millennia, traditional culture served as an inexhaustible foundation which nourished the spiritual life of Indo-European peoples. The features which are reflected in such monuments as the Rigveda and the Avesta can also be seen today in ethnographically attested rituals and beliefs. The ancient ideas of the Indo-Iranian world became the core for the traditional cultures of Central Asia, receiving and losing various elements in the course of historical development, but keeping the main models. Influenced by the major religions — Buddhism, Zoroastrianism, Christianity and Islam — in the depths of traditional culture special phenomena were born and new forms of expression appeared. In time, they disappeared or became obscure, and were adapted for the needs of the current religious system. One would hope that the discovery of one of the most ancient layers of culture on the territory of Central Asia will make it possible to clarify both the mechanism of formation of the religion of Iranian empires, Zoroastrianism, which existed in these lands after the extinction of the civilisation of the country of Margush, and the development of traditional cultures of Central Asian peoples.

As concerns Zoroastrianism, several comments should be made. The formation of this religion took place over several historical eras and was only completed, it is believed, in the period of the Muslim conquest of Iran. Until then, it is most likely that Zoroastrianism was not a single formed system of belief — evidence of this is the significant differences in both ideology and ritual, found in research of monuments which are classified as Zoroastrian. The relationship between west and east Iranian elements in the ritual system of Zoroastrianism has not been fully unravelled. Perhaps it is in the country of Margush that the sources of rituals should be looked for which do not lead directly to the Indo-Iranian tradition of the Rigveda and early Avestan Yashts, but may be linked with the western tradition and are usually associated with priest cults described in the Avestan Videvdat. Among their number can be included variants of the funeral ritual testified by this monument, complex system of subsequent ablutions of the defiled in pits and similar mode of purification of the fire, and also the dog cult. Although the latter phenomenon is supported well by the Vedic tradition and the general Indo-European background, the "Zoroastrian", especially partial attitude to this animal in the Avestan collection is only found in the Videvdat. The dog, unlike other "good" animals, is not mentioned in any other book of the Avesta, and Herodotus calls it an animal concerned with West Iranian mages. In this connection, the Gonur burial places of dogs, especially separate ones, are interesting. Of course, Zoroastrians of the late time of the composition of the Videvdat did not sacrifice dogs, and unlike the residents of Gonur they (at least

judging by priestly orders) displayed the corpses of dogs as they did the corpses of people, but cults like the Gonur cult could have supported the tradition of a special attitude to dogs.

Also, the most significant features of the civilisation of the country of Margush, such as temple complexes equipped with water, traces of the fire cult, remains of stimulating and hallucinogenic plants, because of their nature which is general for the Indo-European world, may not serve as proof that residents of Gonur were "Zoroastrians", but as a sign that the Margush ancient eastern civilisation could have been fertile soil, one of the factors for the formation of the Zoroastrian religion.

Several factors which demonstrate the link between the Margush civilisation and the traditional cultures of the peoples of Central Asia are more specific. They include, for example, the architectural feature of wall niches, which V. I. Sarianidi calls "blind windows". These niches, a usual feature of valley and sub-mountainous dwellings of Central Asian settled population, are used both for household and religious needs. For example, one of the niches may serve as a mikhrab, i.e. to show the direction for Muslims to pray to Mecca. There seems to be no doubt that the Muslim use of the religious niche is secondary, and it is no coincidence that it is sometimes used simultaneously as a place for bedding, which in itself has sacred significance. It is interesting that there are niches in the "imperial necropolis" which imitates a house, on the east shore of the main body of water of north Gonur (chapter 8).

In the description of Gonur buildings, it is noteworthy that almost every one of them, including burial chambers, which imitate homes, has a two-part oven. V. I. Sarianidi suggested that these stoves, the construction of which does not allow the flame of the fire to enter the large compartment, served to isolate sacrificial meat from the sacred fire, to avoid defiling the latter. Indeed, according to Vedic and later Indian ritual texts, sacrificial meat should not burn in the fire, but should only be roasted, and covered with a crust (see Malamud 2005. P. 77, which discusses the smoking of the bride in completing the marriage ritual and the cremation of the corpse — in both cases during the ritual "cooking" the sacrifice is exposed to fire). This feature was dictated by the idea that otherwise the entire sacrifice would only be gained by the "scorching" sort of fire ("devourer of the living"), and the gods, deprived of the aid of different fire which carries the gift, would not receive anything (see Malamud 2005. p. 83). At the same time, it seems probable to me that such numerous ovens (even built in the towers of citadel walls) could have served not exclusively as ritual hearths, but as ordinary fireplaces to heat rooms. Indirect proof may be the practice which is preserved in Central Asia to this day of building special equipment for heating, which is called "sandali". As a fireplace, a two-level depression was dug under a wooden stool or table ("sandali"), on the risen part of which the "heat" lay — coals, and on the lower part the ash, in which water was heated in vessels. Around the perimeter, the depression has a wooden frame or brick chips, similar to the ceramic fragments which were used for the floor of Gonur ovens. The table itself was covered with a blanket. The sandali was installed both in the middle of the room, and close to one of the walls (Pisarchik 1982. pp. 94-95). The construction of this equipment is different from the two-chamber ovens of Gonur, but the heating effect, when one can warm oneself right next to a large and not scorching oven seems to be similar.

According to A. K. Pisarchik, especially in mountainous regions, a large clay bowl was fixed in the ground under the sandali as a fireplace (Pisarchik 1982. p. 94). This interesting method has also been recorded in Gonur. In the eastern complex (see chapter 6) vessels were found in the earth with bowls fixed to the bottom. In one of the photographs, one can see a row of five such vessels put in a line on a narrow rectangular platform. A similar composition of five deep chambers placed in an even chain, lined with bricks with traces of strong burning, is described by V. I. Sarianidi at the beginning of chapter 2. The number "5" is noteworthy, which is profoundly symbolic in the Indo-Iranian tradition, and in the traditional culture of Central Asian peoples (the four corners of the earth and the centre, the symbolic depiction of the person etc.) The system of pits or depressions, which form a single row in straight line, reminds one of the Zoroastrian rituals of purification prescribed by the Avestan Videvdat for ablution of people and purification of the desecrated fire.

The hole found in the "complex of burial rituals", through which according to V. I. Sarianidi a corpse could be taken out, is perhaps not only evidence that the ritual was followed of taking dead bodies not through the usual door, but through a special hole (recorded in the Avestan Videvdat), but also confirms the ancient origin of an architectural feature of modern Central Asian dwellings. Of the two existing doors which lead from the aivan into the house, only one is used. The second door, through which it would be possible to enter the living area directly, should never be used for this purpose. It is significant that sometimes this door is not of normal size, but much smaller, more like a hole. Dr. R. Rakhimov who told me this information, also said that corpses are also not taken through this door, and that the ordinary door is used instead.

As for the "sand rooms", I would like to give a pragmatic reason. Could they have been used for fire safety? In a complex with this number of fireplaces and ovens, fires must have been a serious threat, especially that the "area of joint meals", which had traces of fire, was evidently covered in sand. This idea is supported by the brick "column" resembling a fire-tower in the centre of one of the rooms, to which a staircase led, and also the fact, that the sand rooms, if I have understood V. I. Sarianidi's description correctly, were higher than the level of the floor of other rooms and did not have roofs. Additionally, they are located on different sides of the palace, which would ensure the swift supply of sand. Of course, there were reservoirs on the territory of Gonur, but on the one hand, the "sand rooms" could have come from a time when the water was gradually decreasing, and on the other, it is quite possible that there was a ritual prohibition on extinguishing fire with water.

On the whole, it should be noted that the life of a human being — this is particularly evident from the example of ancient and traditional societies — is completely in the power of the sacred, and each action of the believer is strictly regulated by the religious law. Not only the temple, but also the dwelling is a resemblance of the upper world, and not only the festive sacrifice, but any food is an offering. Perhaps for this reason, Gonur is seen as a complex of sanctuaries, where it seems everything was subordinate to the idea of making an endless number of sacrificing (depiction of a ram's head with tears in its eyes on the ritual vessel is also in keeping with the Indo-Iranian attitude to the sacrificed animal — it is asked for forgiveness with all

sympathy before being killed). These sacrifices, together with the raised alters; reservoirs and fires, were essential elements of the world view. It seems that in the formation of Zoroastrianism and the traditional cultures of Central Asia, the ancient Gonur cultural and historical base, though it was not the only source of ritual systems, could at least have served as one of the foundations.

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THE CULTURE OF MARGIANA AND BACTRIA IN THE FINAL BRONZE AGE (EIA) AND IT'S ETHNICAL IDENTIFICATION

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The aim of the work is the reconstruction of the dynamic of cultures and ethno-cultural processes in the region. Many scholars suppose that the pastoral tribes of Eurasian steppes and Central Asia were the ancestors of the Indo-Aryans — the branch of Indo-Europeans which includes three linguistic groups: Dards-Nuristani, Indo-Aryans (West — Persians and East — Saka-Scythians, Khorazmians, Sogdians, Bactrians and oth.). The verification of this hypothesis is very relevant now because the Indo-European speaking population took now the first place in the world: 1.200 millions (Chinese — 1.075 millions only) (Time World Almanach 2000).

The severe criteria of classification let to distinguish in Central Asia the two coexisting cultures: Timber-Grave (Srubna) and dominant Andronovo. They formed on the common base of East European cultures between the Volga and the Urals — Sintashta (Proto-Andronovo) and Potapovka (Proro-Srubna) — in the end of the 3rd — beginning of the 2nd millennium BC.

The population were occupied with metallurgy, stockbreeding (cow, sheep, especially horse). They were the first to use the light chariot — it was very important innovation in the military tactics.

During the 2nd mill. BC the Andronovans step by step occupied Kazakhstan and South Siberia.

Three stage of Andronovans' migration to Central Asia were distinguished. The 1st stage — 19-18th centuries BC: the horse and chariot appeared in Zardcha-Halifa, Dzharokutan and Gonur from the Urals.

The 2nd stage — 16-13 centuries BC: the settling of Andronovan shepherds from the steppes up to Afghanistan (Shortugai). The Srubna wave of migration went