

## **Features of Development of Social System of Early Medieval Turks of Central Asia During the Period of the First Khaganate (On Archaeological Materials)**

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**Abstract:** The article is devoted to consideration of features of development of social system of an early medieval Turks in Central Asia during the period of the First khaganate. Possibilities of obtaining new data from written sources are limited. Therefore results of the analysis of archaeological materials (ritual and funeral complexes) became a basis for research. Despite short time of existence of the First khaganate, Turkic peoples created the complex social system which has become an example for imitation for nomads of Central Asia in the subsequent historical periods.

**Key words:** Turks • Early Middle Ages • Social system • Archaeological site • Central Asia • First khaganate

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### **INTRODUCTION**

One of the most important events of an early medieval history of Central Asia is the creation in 551–552 AD of the First Turkic khaganate which has united a large number of nomadic tribes. Turk's political history (formation of the nomadic empire, active military expansion and internal civil strifes) is presented in written sources and considered by researchers rather in detail [1; 2; 3]. The hegemony period proceeded not for a long time. Crash of eastern (Central Asian) part of Turk's political association happened in 630. In 650 as a result of a campaign of the Chinese forwarding group the last Turkic possession in Altai mountains was liquidated. Despite the short period of political independence nomads created complex organized society. Experience of research of evolution of social system of an early medieval Turks in the period of the First khaganate on the basis of the analysis of archaeological materials is presented in the article.

### **MATERIALS AND METHODS**

Earlier research of social history of an early medieval Turks was based only on studying of data of written sources – runic texts and Chinese dynasty chronicles. However these materials have a number of shortcomings.

Besides, opportunities of obtaining new information in their analysis are already exhausted. Therefore in this work other approach based on social interpretation of results of excavation of archaeological sites of an early medieval Turks is realized. Archaeological complexes are divided into two groups – ritual and funeral. The methodological basis of research is the concept according to which the status of the died person finds reflection in materials of a site which is built in his honor. Theoretical and practical provisions of such work are proved in publications of many researchers in details [4; 5; 6] and also were already applied by the author of the article in the analysis of sites of an early medieval Turks of Central Asia [7; 8].

### **RESULTS AND DISCUSSION**

The analysis of data of written sources and also consideration of the general logic of development of the nomadic empire allow to conclude that the complication due to inclusion of numerous tribes and groups of the population as a result of active military expansion of nomads was the main direction of evolution of social system of an early medieval Turks in the second half of the VI century AD. Judging by available information, in some cases Turkic peoples didn't change bases of the organization of the subordinated societies, including kept

local elite, however left deputies in the subdued territories. Besides, other important processes were strengthening of consolidation of Turkic society in the conditions of need of control of the subordinated tribes and thus inevitability of disperse moving of the few nomads compelled to keep extensive territories.

Archaeological materials illustrate these and other processes only partially [9]. The most part of funeral complexes of an early medieval Turks of the First khaganate (the 2nd half of VI – the 1st half of the VII centuries AD) are dug out in the territory of Altai. Obviously, it reflects the status of this territory not only as places of formation of culture, but also as base for the first military campaigns of nomads. Outside Altai burials of an early medieval Turks are quite not numerous. Only three such objects are investigated in the territory of Tuva. Judging by available materials while there are no dug-out burials of this stage in Mongolia. At the same time, in that territory there are a series of casual finds and also materials of the 2nd half of VI – the 1st half of the VII centuries AD from ritual sites [10]. On such background a series of burials of this stage, dug out in various regions of Central Asia and Kazakhstan looks quite representative. Besides, the special group of burials of the First khaganate's period showing addition of local variant of archaeological culture of an early medieval Turks is investigated in the territory of Minusinsk Basin.

It is difficult to explain small number of burials of an early medieval Turks of the 2nd half of VI – the 1st half of the VII centuries AD, considering that this period is time of the highest development of the nomadic empire. Probably, sites are not investigated yet for various reasons. One of explanations is low degree of study of Mongolia where was a center of the khaganate. Other probable explanation of limited quantity of sites is connected with the high degree of mobility of nomads caused by active military expansion. Anyway, the designated characteristics of funeral complexes of an early medieval Turks of the First khaganate significantly reduce possibilities of their social interpretation. The additional factor complicating supervision in this direction is unification of nomad's ceremonial practice. Probably, standardization of ritual reflects processes of consolidation of nomadic society.

Materials of excavation of funeral complexes dated by the period of the First khaganate show the general strengthening of social differentiation of society. Both burials with very poor stock and the objects, which subject complex are reflected rather high lifetime position of the died person are founded. Among prestigious

categories of items from some burials we can note belt sets and also decoration of horse equipment. Distribution of burials of professional warriors in which the representative set of arms is recorded is an indicator of dynamics of structure of nomad's society.

Despite the presented development of Turkic society it is necessary to recognize that the most part of burials of the 2nd half of VI – the 1st half of the VII centuries AD belongs to common peoples. Some information about nomad's elite of this period is provided by materials of researches of memorial complexes in the territory of Mongolia. These objects relating dated by the period of the First khaganate are very not numerous and studied far not fully. However, obviously that they are an important source for reconstruction of features of development of social system of an early medieval Turks.

Judging by available materials [11] memorial complexes of Mongolia of the 2nd half of VI- the 1st half of the VII centuries AD are quite difficult and large-scale constructions including such constructive elements as a shaft, a ditch, a stone embankment, a row of balbals and also the remains of some kind of temples from which numerous fragments of a tile and the basis of wooden columns remained. Today one of the few surely dated by the period of the First khaganate of memorial sites of Mongolia is the Bugut complex. Its important part – a known stele with inscriptions in Sogdian and Sanskrit. A significant amount of publications is devoted to various aspects of interpretation of this object [3; 12; 13; 14; 15]. Therefore in this article we consider only the most important characteristics of this site which are indicative for research of social history of an early medieval Turks.

The Bugut stele is dated by the last quarter of the VI century AD. Some information about specifics of a nomad's society organization in this period is given in it. The author of an inscription presented such system of socio-political hierarchy of nomads: khagan, his relatives, numerous officials of various level, horse warriors, common peoples [12].

Specifics of the Bugut stele consist in the Sogdian and Sanskrit inscriptions which have appeared in lack of Turkic runic writing in the VI century AD [13]. The important role of sogdians and their high positions in socio-political system of the First khaganate was reflected by Chinese chroniclers. Inclusion of group of foreigners in nomad's hierarchy shows once again its complexity. Separate term which an inscription in the Bugutsky stele reflects is the penetration of the Buddhism to Turkic society in VI century AD. Information about religious elite of an early medieval Turks during the period of the First

khaganate is very fragmentary. However there are bases for the assumption of formation a special group of attendants of the cult who were privileged persons in nomad's social system in this time.

Special consideration is demanded by a problem of definition of extent of influence of China on formation and initial development of socio-political system of an early medieval Turks. This question is a separate subject for research and the decision is complicated by limitation of available materials. At the same time, there are no doubts that influence of the Chinese culture on nomadic society, especially on elite, was very strong. Some data on it provide materials of researches of archaeological objects. Memorial sites of elite of the 2nd half of VI- the 1st half of VII centuries AD show high extent of imitation to traditional Chinese complexes. According to V.A. Korenyako's conclusion [13], the Bugut stele, as well as later ritual objects of Mongolia similar to it, are the reduced and a little simplified reproduction of the Chinese steles which have gained distribution in Heavenly Empire since the beginning of the VI century AD.

### CONCLUSION

Thus, the social organization of an early medieval Turks during the period of the First khaganate appears as the complex system including various components. Inclusion in it of different groups of nomads as a result of military expansion was the main tendency of development of nomad's society. Archaeological materials reflect these processes extremely fragmentary. Not numerous funeral sites show strengthening of social differentiation of nomadic society. Some aspects of development of elite reflect the materials of excavation of memorial complexes in the territory of Mongolia. Judging by them, the elite of China had strong impact on the upper class of nomads. Despite short time of existence of the First khaganate, Turkic peoples created the complex social system which has become an example for imitation for nomads of Central Asia of the subsequent historical periods.

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