

**THE GREAT STEPPE ON THE CROSSROADS OF THE GREAT
SILK WAY**

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Abstract

The article concerns issues of international relations that existed between different countries (states or nations) over a long-lasting historic period on the various parts and branches of the Great Silk road. Authors refer to the historical data and sources that notify and prove the existence of diplomatic relationships between rulers and khans of the Great steppe of Desht-i-Qipchaq and different countries (states or nations) both in the East and West. Thus, the Great Silk Road implies an ethos of diplomatic relations that ensured intercultural communicative dialogue between those different countries (states or nations).

Keywords: the Great Silk Road, the Great Steppe, ethos, diplomacy, xiongnu (Huns), Turks.

The Great Silk Road has a special place in the history and course of international relations. It represented not only the “global trading artery”, but also the ethos (channel) of diplomatic relations, providing intercultural communicative dialogue between different countries. The Great Silk Road arose as a trade and diplomatic path at the end of II c. BC and was well-known, having a great importance as a pathway of cultural ties. Along with the distribution of the goods, cultural samples and standards in the applied arts, architecture, wall paintings, the art of music, dance and spectacular performances had spread in the countries of East and West.

A special role in the formation and development of the Great Silk Road has been played by over the centuries of diplomatic relations between the Great Steppe Desht-i-Qipchaq and its neighbors from the East and the West. These are relations with China (Han Empire), India (Mughal Empire), Iran (Persia) and other states and countries. Already in ancient times, in the second millennium BC, the Iranian-Turkish cultural symbiosis in Central Asia started to develop.

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According to historical documents, the whole western area of the Eurasian steppe belt till the Yenisei, Rudny Altai and East Turkestan was mastered by Indo-Iranian cattle breeding tribes, which recall to the monuments of Andronovo cultural community. In the late Bronze Age at the turn of II and I millennia BC the nomadic tribes of Caucasoid anthropological type, moved far to the east, extending the range of their habitat and cultural boundaries to Transbaikalia, Eastern Mongolia and the Ordos. Differentiation of cultural communities in the Late Bronze Age culture of Scythian-Sarmatian-Saka range from the Black Sea to the steppes of Eastern Turkestan and Southern Siberia, which forms ethnocultural image of the Iranian-speaking nomads of the Eurasian steppes with a subject complexes including "Scythian triad" of weapon items, horse harness and animal style; Kurgan architecture, "petrography and monumental memorial complexes. Mongoloid nomads of the eastern regions of Central Asia, the Huns and dunhu tribes, who are supposedly the ancestors of the Turkic and Mongolian nomadic ethnic groups, in the Scythian time were in the point of view of military-political and cultural influence of the Iranian-speaking nomads¹.

Ethno-political situation in Central Asia has changed at the end of the III c. BC, as a result of the victory of the Huns in the war against the Yuezhi dynasty, there has been formed Hunnish military power, led by Hun presumably Turkic nomadic ethnic group. Since then, it has begun the process of migration activity of Turkish and a little later Mongolian tribes, settling in Central Asia of Mongoloid nomads and Turkization of Central Asian nomads in language perspective, including ethnic and cultural assimilation of Iranian-speaking nomads. This process in Central Asia had been stretched for seven centuries².

But in the 1st century BC internal processes had split the power of the Huns. Some splited parts of them obeyed China, while others retreated with fightings to the west, where, mingling with the utras and Sarmatians and turned to the Huns.

Thus, throughout history such Tengrian nations as the Turks (Huns) and Mongolia were constantly facing with strong and powerful nations, namely Persia, China, Byzantium, etc.

Aggressive power and strength of China on the one hand, an enormous pushing force from the West, the Arab-Persian conquest from the part of Central Asia and the Caucasus have affected the ancient military tactics and diplomacy.

1 Khazanov A.M. 'Nomads of the Eurasian steppes in historical retrospective. Nomadic alternative of social evolution' // Moscow: Institute of African studies RAS, 2002, p. 51

2 Gumilyov L.N. Huns. Saint Petersburg, 1993, pp. 48-49

A great Turkic scientist L.N. Gumilyov stated that "the heart of the Eurasia is Great Steppe, the land of ancient Turks, which stretched from the Great Wall of China till the Carpathians, in the south from Afghanistan to Iran, and in the north bordered by Siberian taiga. In ancient times, this steppe in the West was called as Scythia, Persians called it Turan, and the Chinese called it the steppe of "northern barbarians - Bayhu"³.

The founder of the Great Turkic khanate, Bumyn, had initiated trade cooperation and the establishment of diplomatic relations with the neighboring estates.

In the middle of the VI c. BC nomadic peoples of the Eurasian steppe were united under the rule of the First Turkic khanate rulers. Under the control of the ancient Turks there was a significant portion of the Great Silk Road from China to Iran's borders, and also trade routes leading to the South and West Siberia. Because of inconsistencies about the volumes of silk trade, Turks come into conflict with Iran, and tried to build a new trade route to Byzantium, detouring Iran through the Volga and the Black Sea steppes. Thus, after the conquest of Central Asia, the Turks became masters of a large part of the trade route from China to the Mediterranean and the Great Silk Road countries. The main intermediaries in the trade of silk were Sogdians (on the Central Asian and Middle Asian parts of the pathway) and the Persians, who controlled a pathway from the area near Bukhara to Syria. The main buyer of silk was Byzantium. Silk trade brought huge profits for the Sogdian merchants and Turkic khans. The Turks had the opportunity to sell through the Sogdians the military booty and tribute, which was paid to them by the Chinese kingdoms. Sogdians had concentrated an unprecedented number of precious silk fabrics in their hands. However, as noted by Klyashtorny and Sultanov⁴, already since the end of the IV century there were silk-weaving production on local raw materials in Sughd. Sogdian silk was highly valued not only in the West, it was imported even to East Turkestan and China.

The trade pathways of the Great Silk Road from Iran, Sogd and East Turkestan to the nomads were used not only for the delivery finished products made by urban craftsmen, but also for their production technology. The significant influence was observed especially by Iran and Sogd in the production of artistic metal of Sayano-Altai nomads. In the middle of the 1st millennium

³ Gumilyov L.N. Rythms of Eurasia: eras and civilizations. Moscow: Ekopros, 1993, p.53

⁴ Klyashtorny S.G., Sultanov T.I. Kazakhstan: chronicles of three thousand years of history. Almaty: Rauan, 1992, 375 pages

BC, during the reign of the Sassanid dynasty, the production of toreutic items ("toreutics" - the art of hand-embossed processing of metal products, including embossing, stamping, finishing castings) in Iran had been experiencing a real flowering.

Decorative motives and figurative subjects, which was usual characteristic of the Iranian and Sogdian art, were widespread in the Turkic nomadic world in Tang China. Products of Sasanian and Sogdian toreutics were in great demand among the Ugric peoples of the taiga zone of Western Siberia. There have been laid branches of the "Great Silk Road" from Iran, Central Asia and Eastern Turkestan to Siberia, which were used for the import of products to the Sayano-Altai, made in the urban centers of craft, and also for the export of furs, tusks, deer musks and wood.

According to the composition of import findings in medieval graves of nomads, the Sayano-Altai lay on the main road of the "Great Silk Road", being part of several caravan routes. One of them ran out of Zhetysu and the Irtysh river, and further down along the Irtysh to the Altai and Salair, and reaching upper parts of the Ob' River. Alongside, this road was wallingl into the bulk of the Central Asian, Iranian import with items from Badakhshan, the Indian subcontinent, the eastern Mediterranean and Byzantium. Another pathway led from East Turkestan to the north, in the basin of the Great Lakes region of Mongolia, to the Sayan Mountains and the Minusinsk. In this way, not only Sogdian, Iran and the Eastern goods had been continuously brought in the Altai-Sayan, but also the bulk of Chinese silk, bronze mirrors and coins, and other Chinese-made products.

However, it should be noted that in addition to trade and economic activity, Sogdians played an important role in the political and ideological spheres of Turkic khanates existence. Sogdians performed important diplomatic missions of Turkic Khagans, headed the embassies to Iran and to the courts of the Iranian shakhs, and also defending not only Turks, but also their own interests, concerning the silk trade. During the period of the Second Eastern Turk Empire, on the basis of Sogdian script, there was created an ancient Turkic runic writing, which became widespread among the Turkic nomadic peoples in the early Middle Ages. After the collapse of the Turkish Kaganates, Sughdians continued to play a leading role in trade with the nomadic peoples of Central Asia. Sogdians had trading posts in the area of the resettlement of Kurykan tribes in the Baikal region. Sogdian Manichaeen preachers have become an important political force in the Uyghur Khaganate, when the Uighurs adopted Manichaeism as the state religion. The impact of Sogdian culture on Uighur had reflected in the defense architecture at the construction of Uighur fortresses, and in the

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production of pottery and metal art products. Under the influence of Sogdians, the Uighur toreutics gained popularity for canonical ornamentation, which included the Manichean and Buddhist symbolism.

Kyrgyz ties with the Iranians and the Sogdians, who lived in the early Middle Ages in the Minusinsk basin and in the lands to the north of the Sayan Mountains, at that time limited. Kyrgyz rulers in the VII-VIII centuries were focused on the establishment of diplomatic and trade relations with the Tang Empire. However, during the wars with the Eastern Turks, and then with the Uighurs, the Kyrgyzs became able to establish friendly relations with the Turkic tribes of Zhetysu, Turgeshes, and then Qarluqs and Tibetans, whose lands were on the "Silk Road pathway", or very close to it. These contacts reflect the entry of imported products of Chinese and Sogdian production to the Yenisei, delivered from Zhetysu on the "Kyrgyz pathway", which connected the Sayano-Altai with the "Great Silk Road". In the Kyrgyz mounds of VI-VIII centuries there were found toreutic products of Iranian and Sogdian circle, the expensive golden, silver and richly ornamented banquet dishes, bronze reliefs with images of hunting. Typical images of Sassanid-Iranian heroic hunting, apparently, gained popularity in the Tang China, and from there, it could be delivered along the "Silk Road" through East Turkestan to the Yenisei. The Kyrgyz victory in the long war against the Uighurs in the 9th century opened the way for them to trade and craft centres of Zhetysu and East Turkestan. The Kyrgyz monuments of the 9th and 10th X centuries included an increased number of imported items significantly. In addition to the things from China, an increasing number of products were imported from Central Asia and Eastern Turkestan. Centuries later, the Mongol conquest and subordination of large parts of Central, Middle and Western Asia to the authorities of the Mongol khans had changed the ethno-political situation in the whole Eurasia. Many Turkic nomadic ethnic groups and Iranian sedentary-agricultural peoples were composed of the same post-Genghis States.

Historically, over the thousands of years, Kazakhstan had become the area of the oldest and largest territorial scope of nomadism in Eurasia reflected by the nomadic lifestyle of the local population. About 3.5 thousand years, the nomadism was the leading mode of production and the dominant way of lifestyle of Kazakhstan population. Nomadism was the basis of life-support and environmental management systems, material and spiritual culture, mentality and psychology of the local population, the relations with the neighboring nations, social organizations, socio-economic relations and political system. Over these thousands of years, all the history and culture of

Kazakhstan was directly linked exclusively with nomadism. The nomadic peoples had a tremendous impact on the development of civilization processes throughout Eurasia. By its movements and migrations, nomads had glued fragmented and segmented space, continents, worlds and civilizations, making them part of a single global civilization space. They relay material and spiritual values, institutional relations, and contributed to the pre-Columbian world globalization. They have made a huge contribution to the diffusion of culture and technology innovation, and also have contributed to the development and dissemination of cultural stereotypes, early institutional relations, and most important, the development of trade. Trade routes through the territory of nomads, as a live stream of water, had affected the development of world civilization. Due to the nomads, the world finally became a single, interconnected and civilizational system. At the boundaries of nomadic and settled worlds, the new cities emerged as centers of their interaction and mutually-beneficial exchange. Especially significant was the contribution of the nomads to the development of state institutions. According to the member of the British Academy of Sciences, American professor Khazanov⁵, most state formations on the territory of Eurasia in the Middle Ages were created by conquests of nomads. The nomads were first to create after their invasions a new type of state, a centralized state-empire. They drastically affected the formation of the institutions of power in sedentary-agricultural societies. They carried pets and domestic animals as a high importance and prestige to the life of settled-agricultural peoples. Nomads radically affected the qualitative improvement of the diet and nutrition of peoples who had contacts with them, and increased the role of the protein. This has contributed to the demographic growth of the populations in Eurasia and North Africa. Thus, the issue of nomadism is one of the most significant, relevant and most important scientific topics of the history and culture of Kazakhstan, Central Asia and also internal areas of Eurasia.

Nomads had a huge influence on the development of world civilization, however it is still very poor studied. Through the prism of nomadism we should consider all aspects of the past history of both socio-economic and public-political development of the vast region of Central Asia and the neighbouring territories.

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