



RECONSTRUCTION OF ANCIENT TURKISH CULTURE BASED ON EPIGRAPHIC SOURCES

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Abstract. *This article analyzes the cultural life, religious beliefs, customs, and worldview of ancient Turkic peoples based on the Orkhon-Yenisey inscriptions. Particular attention is given to such aspects as the tradition of erecting balbals, burial rituals, elements of shamanism, the cult of Tengri and Umay, and the ancient Turkic calendar system. Additionally, the study examines the literary and folkloric traditions of early Turkic society through the example of the Irq Bitig, highlighting their continuity with modern Turkic cultures. The research demonstrates that the Orkhon-Yenisey inscriptions are not only valuable historical sources but also significant written monuments reflecting the cultural heritage and national identity of Turkic peoples.*

Keywords: *Orkhon-Yenisey inscriptions, Turkic Khaganate, ancient Turks, cultural life, Tengri, balbal, shamanism, Irq Bitig, Turkic literature, ethnography.*

Annotatsiya. *Mazkur maqolada O'rxun-Enasoy bitiklari asosida qadimgi turkiy xalqlarning madaniy hayoti, diniy e'tiqodlari, urf-odatlar va dunyoqarashi tahlil qilinadi. Bitiklarda aks etgan balbal qo'yish marosimi, dafn odatlari, shamanlik unsurlari, Ko'k Tangri va Umayga sig'inish kabi diniy tasavvurlar hamda qadimgi turkiy taqvim tizimi ilmiy jihatdan yoritilgan. Shuningdek, Irq bitigi misolida qadimgi*

turkiy adabiyot va folklor an'analari tahlil qilinib, ularning zamonaviy turkiy xalqlar madaniyati bilan uzviy bog'liqligi ochib berilgan. Tadqiqot natijasida O'rxun-Enasoy bitiklari nafaqat tarixiy manba, balki turkiy xalqlarning madaniy merosi va milliy o'zligini aks ettiruvchi muhim yozma yodgorlik ekanligi asoslab beriladi.

Kalit so'zlar: *O'rxun-Enasoy bitiklari, Turk xoqonligi, qadimgi turkiylar, madaniy hayot, Ko'k Tangri, balbal, shamanlik, Irq bitigi, turkiy adabiyot, etnografiya.*

Аннотация. *В данной статье на основе орхон-енисейских надписей анализируется культурная жизнь древних тюркских народов, их религиозные верования, обычаи и мировоззрение. Особое внимание уделяется таким аспектам, как обряд установки балбалов, погребальные традиции, элементы шаманизма, культ Тенгри и Умай, а также древнетюркская календарная система. Кроме того, на примере «Ирк битиги» рассматриваются литературные и фольклорные традиции древних тюрков и их связь с современной культурой тюркских народов. В результате исследования обосновывается, что орхон-енисейские надписи являются не только историческим источником, но и важным письменным памятником, отражающим культурное наследие и национальную идентичность тюркских народов.*

Ключевые слова: *Орхон-енисейские надписи, Тюркский каганат, древние тюрки, культурная жизнь, Тенгри, балбалы, шаманизм, Ирк битиги, тюркская литература, этнография.*

Introduction. The Orhun-Enasoy inscriptions are one of the unique written sources of special scientific importance in the study of the history, culture and statehood traditions of the ancient Turkic peoples. These

inscriptions reflect important aspects of political, social and cultural life during the period of the Turkic Khaganate, which was formed in the territory of Central Asia in the 6th–8th centuries. They are recognized not only as the first example of the ancient Turkic writing system, but also as an important source illuminating the worldview, religious beliefs, customs and cultural values of the Turkic peoples.

Through the information reflected in the Orhun-Enasoy inscriptions, it is possible to form important ideas about the social structure, rituals and traditions, religious views, as well as the daily life of the ancient Turkic society. In particular, the custom of putting balbal, funeral rites, elements of shamanism, religious views such as the worship of the Blue God and Umay are reflected in these inscriptions. This allows for a deep study of not only the political, but also the cultural and spiritual life of the ancient Turkic peoples.

The relevance of this topic is that through the Orhun-Enasoy inscriptions, it is possible to draw comprehensive scientific conclusions about the ancient cultural heritage of the Turkic peoples, the process of national identity awareness, and historical thinking. In particular, the importance of these inscriptions in determining the cultural roots of modern Turkic peoples and studying their historical continuity is incomparable.

The purpose of this article is to analyze the cultural life of the ancient Turkic peoples reflected in the Orhun-Enasoy inscriptions, to shed light on their religious views, customs, and worldview on a scientific basis. At the same time, the article reveals the role and significance of these inscriptions in the study of the cultural heritage of the Turkic peoples.

Literature Review. The study of the Orkhon-Yenisey inscriptions and the cultural life of ancient Turkic peoples reflected in them has developed into a distinct scholarly field within historiography and Turkology. The earliest academic investigations in this area date back to the 18th century. In particular, the Swedish officer F.I. Strahlenberg and the German scholar D.G. Messerschmidt were among the first to introduce information about previously unknown inscriptions discovered in Siberia to the European scientific community. At this stage, various hypotheses were proposed regarding the origin and ethnic affiliation of these inscriptions, with some attributing them to Slavic, Germanic, or other peoples.

By the late 19th century, the study of the Orkhon-Yenisey inscriptions reached a new scientific level. A significant contribution was made by the Russian scholar N.M. Yadrintsev, who introduced the monuments discovered in the Orkhon Valley into academic circulation and advanced the hypothesis of their Turkic origin. A major breakthrough occurred when the Danish scholar V. Thomsen deciphered the script in 1893, followed by the reading and translation of the texts by V.V. Radlov. These achievements marked a turning point in Turkology and firmly established the Orkhon-Yenisey inscriptions as authentic written monuments of the ancient Turkic language.

Throughout the 20th century, extensive research was conducted on this topic. Scholars focused on the linguistic features, phonetics, lexicon, and historical content of the inscriptions. The works of S.E. Malov, A.N. Kononov, G. Clauson, L.N. Gumilev, and S.T. Klyashtorny played a crucial role in forming the theoretical foundations for the study of ancient Turkic language, culture, and history. Their research demonstrated that

the Orkhon-Yenisey inscriptions should be regarded not only as linguistic material but also as an important historical source reflecting the socio-political and cultural life of Turkic peoples.

In Uzbek historiography, this issue has also been widely studied. For instance, in N. Rahmonov's work *The Turkic Khaganate*, the main stages of the history of the Turkic Khaganate are analyzed based on the Orkhon-Yenisey inscriptions. Similarly, G.B. Boboyorov's research provides an in-depth analysis of the political and ethnic processes in Central Asia during the 6th–8th centuries. In addition, the studies of S.P. Tolstov on ancient Khorezmian culture and B.T. Gafurov on the history of the Tajik people contribute to a broader understanding of the historical context of the region.

In recent years, new methodological approaches to the study of the Orkhon-Yenisey inscriptions have emerged. They are increasingly analyzed not only as historical or linguistic sources but also as cultural, anthropological, and ideological phenomena. Contemporary research focuses on reconstructing the worldview, religious beliefs, ritual practices, and cultural identity of ancient Turkic peoples. In particular, aspects such as the tradition of erecting balbals, elements of shamanism, and the cults of Tengri and Umay are examined through a comprehensive interdisciplinary approach.

At the same time, certain issues remain subject to scholarly debate, including the origin of the script, its early stages of development, the complete interpretation of some inscriptions, and their cultural semantics. This indicates the need for further in-depth research and the application of new scientific approaches in this field.

Research Methodology. This study employs a comprehensive scientific approach to examine the cultural life of ancient Turkic peoples based on the Orkhon-Yenisey inscriptions. The methodological foundation of the research is built upon the principles of historicity, objectivity, and systematicity. Guided by these principles, the data reflected in the inscriptions are analyzed comprehensively, their content is interpreted scientifically, and their meanings are contextualized within a broader historical framework.

The research utilizes a combination of general scientific and specialized historical methods. In particular, the historical-comparative method is applied to compare the information contained in the Orkhon-Yenisey inscriptions with other written sources, including Chinese chronicles, Arabic-Persian historical works, and modern scholarly studies. The historical-typological method is used to generalize the social structure, religious beliefs, rituals, and traditions of ancient Turkic society and to identify their distinctive features.

In addition, source criticism and epigraphic analysis constitute an essential part of the study. Through these methods, the textual content of the inscriptions, their writing system, structural features, and semantic meanings are examined in depth. Linguistic analysis is employed to identify the phonetic, morphological, and lexical characteristics of the ancient Turkic language and to substantiate their cultural and historical significance. Furthermore, a cultural-anthropological approach is used to interpret the customs, belief systems, and mythological representations reflected in the inscriptions.

A systematic approach is also applied, allowing the Orkhon-Yenisey inscriptions to be analyzed in close connection with the socio-political and

cultural processes of the Turkic Khaganate period. At the same time, the method of historical reconstruction is utilized to restore the sequence of events, rituals, and cultural phenomena reflected in the inscriptions and to trace their developmental dynamics.

Through these methodological approaches, the study provides a comprehensive substantiation of the role of the Orkhon-Yenisey inscriptions in illuminating the cultural life of ancient Turkic peoples, as well as their scientific value and reliability as historical sources.

Analysis and Results. The content analysis of the Orkhon-Yenisey inscriptions demonstrates that they represent significant written sources reflecting the cultural life, religious beliefs, and social views of ancient Turkic peoples. The information contained in these inscriptions allows for the formulation of important scholarly conclusions regarding the customs, rituals, and worldview of Turkic society.

The analysis reveals that the tradition of erecting balbals was widespread among ancient Turkic peoples and was closely associated with the life and activities of the deceased. Balbals functioned not only as memorial monuments but were also deeply connected with religious beliefs, particularly the concept of the immortality of the soul and the veneration of ancestors. This indicates that religious and ritual practices occupied an important place in Turkic society.

The funerary rituals and mourning traditions described in the inscriptions further illuminate the belief system of ancient Turkic peoples. Practices such as making sacrifices for the deceased, conducting burial ceremonies according to specific rituals, and observing mourning customs were integral components of the social and cultural structure. In particular, acts such as ritual mourning involving self-inflicted cuts,

sacrificial offerings, and ceremonial processions were directly linked to religious conceptions.

The findings also show that the cult of Tengri (Heaven) occupied a central position in the Orkhon-Yenisey inscriptions. Tengri was perceived as the supreme power, creator, and the determinant of human destiny in ancient Turkic belief systems. In addition, the worship of the goddess Umay constituted an important religious element, symbolizing motherhood and the protection of children. This suggests that the religious worldview of ancient Turkic society was well-developed and systematized.

Based on the data presented in the inscriptions, it is also possible to identify the time-reckoning system of ancient Turkic peoples. In particular, a twelve-year calendar cycle named after animals was in use, reflecting its close connection with steppe culture. This indicates that Turkic peoples possessed not only religious but also practical and scientific knowledge.

Furthermore, the analysis of the *Irq Bitig* demonstrates the existence of literary and folkloric traditions in ancient Turkic culture. This work reflects mythological concepts, the struggle between good and evil, symbolic imagery, and motifs characteristic of oral tradition. Such evidence confirms the richness of the spiritual and cultural heritage of ancient Turkic peoples.

In general, the results of the study substantiate that the Orkhon-Yenisey inscriptions constitute a reliable and essential source for studying the cultural life, religious beliefs, and social structure of ancient Turkic peoples. They provide valuable insights into the historical consciousness, cultural values, and worldview of Turkic societies.

Conclusion and Recommendations. The study confirms that the Orkhon-Yenisey inscriptions constitute an invaluable historical source for understanding the cultural life, belief systems, and social structure of ancient Turkic peoples. These inscriptions not only document historical events but also provide deep insights into the worldview, traditions, and ideological foundations of early Turkic society. The analysis demonstrates that elements such as balbal traditions, funerary rituals, shamanistic practices, and the cults of Tengri and Umay reflect a well-developed and systematized spiritual culture.

Furthermore, the inscriptions reveal that ancient Turkic society possessed a complex and integrated system of social and cultural values, in which religious beliefs, political authority, and communal traditions were closely interconnected. The presence of a structured calendar system, as well as literary works such as the *Irq Bitig*, indicates a high level of intellectual and cultural development among Turkic peoples. These findings highlight that the Orkhon-Yenisey inscriptions should be considered not only as historical documents but also as significant monuments of cultural heritage and collective memory.

The study also establishes that the inscriptions play a crucial role in tracing the origins and continuity of Turkic cultural identity. The values reflected in them—such as unity, loyalty, independence, and respect for ancestors—remain relevant and continue to influence modern Turkic societies. Therefore, the inscriptions serve as an important source for understanding both the historical past and the cultural foundations of contemporary Turkic nations.

Based on the research findings, several recommendations can be proposed. First, it is necessary to strengthen interdisciplinary

approaches by integrating history, linguistics, anthropology, and cultural studies in the analysis of the Orkhon-Yenisey inscriptions. Second, further research should focus on the comprehensive re-examination of these inscriptions using modern scientific methods, including digital technologies and epigraphic analysis tools. Third, the systematic study of newly discovered epigraphic materials in Central Asia should be expanded and interpreted in a comparative framework.

Additionally, it is advisable to enhance the incorporation of the Orkhon-Yenisey inscriptions into higher education curricula as a key source for studying Turkic history, culture, and statehood traditions. Finally, promoting the preservation, digitization, and international dissemination of these inscriptions will contribute to a deeper global understanding of Turkic civilization and its historical legacy.

In conclusion, the Orkhon-Yenisey inscriptions represent not only a reliable source for reconstructing the history of the Turkic Khaganate but also a unique cultural and intellectual heritage that continues to hold significant scholarly and practical value.

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