

## Religion of Old Turks

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**ABSTRACT** Nature is a source and the origin of the Turk worldview. Without changing natural events and their rhythm, it has become their cornerstone of philosophical thought and worldview. The creator of nature is believed to be "*Tengri*" (God) and respect to it was shown by taking care of nature. This process still exists in the traditions followed by many nations. Only "*Tengri*" (God) is believed to be alone, and for many other creations are believed to exist in pairs, so they created a coupled worldview. The present Turkish people call it "*iki yıldız*" (two stars), Mongolians call it "*arga bilig*", and Kazakhs "*amal-bilik*". Nomadic tribes created a dual worldview based on approaches and the system of abilities. The dual worldview of nomads differs from the European dual worldview in terms of its quality. In European comprehension, existence involved struggling with each other, and originally Turks believed that existence develops through support and intense connection of approach and abilities to each other.

### INTRODUCTION

The worldview is a set of information gathered as a result of usage among people or people's view to the world and life, approach in reaching goals or upholding the view.

What is worldview? Many writers have their definitions. For example, James Sire said, "*Worldview is hypothesis (or ideas) corresponding to the main structure of the world*". Philips and Brown said, "*Worldview is the definition of world and ideas about world at first, then it's the usage of view (ideas)*" (James 2004). In other words, a worldview is the scenery of world and the people's view to it.

According to the definitions above, one understands the importance of worldview. It is not difficult to understand that every action that a human being performs on their own worldview is a will based on the willing person's worldview. Thus, it is obvious that old Turks influenced and changed nations religion, language and traditions by their worldview through several conquests of a great nation such as China, and that was the reason for constructing the Great Wall, which is still know as the Chinese Wonder or the Chinese Great Wall.

What were their religion and their written manuscripts, and was there any information about that? Did the worldviews reflect in their cultures and traditions, beliefs, language and literature of their descendant nation? These issues will be considered in the works of foreign historic researches.

Nature is a source and the origin of the Turk worldview. Without changing the natural events and their rhythm, it became the cornerstone of their philosophic thought and worldview. It is indissolubly related to nature that controls changing events in nomadic family feelings and the result of ability of transferring felt sense into spiritual wealth. Many beliefs and prohibitions of traditions appeared as a result of close connections with nature, which are the groups of notions not in use for many years.

*"Zhaz zhailau, kys kystau, kuz kuzey"*

(In summer, cattle pastured in summer grassland, in winter, in closed and covered places, and in autumn, in pastures).

It is obvious that this worldview appeared due to the job of cattle raising. Cattle rearing was the source of food, a job and was the main occupation of nomads. The creator of nature is believed to be God (*tengri*) and taking care of nature showed respect to God. This process still exists in traditions of many nations. For example:

- ♦ The existence of the notion of, "*Zhaz zhailau, kys kystau, kuz kuzey*" (in summer cattle pasture in summer grasslands, in winter, in closed and covered places, and in autumn, in pastures) in present Mongol, Kazakh, Kyrgyz;
- ♦ Not doing laundry in the river as a part of respecting and appreciating water;
- ♦ Such notions as, "*Kok shop zhulma*" (Not to cut green grass), "*Bastau bassyna aktyk bailau*" (to wear kerchief);
- ♦ Existence of spirits of animals and cattle (*Kok bori*, camels' ancestor is *Oissyl kara*, the horses' ancestor is *Kambar ata*, *Shopan ata*).

This way they respected and appreciated every creature of “*Tengri*” (God). Only “*Tengri*” (God) is believed to be alone, and many other creations are believed to have their own pair, so they created a coupled worldview. Present Turkish people call it “*iki yıldız*” (two stars), Mongolians call it “*arga bilig*”, and Kazakhs call it “*amal-bilik*”.

### METHODOLOGY

Nomadic tribes created a dual worldview based on approaches and the system of abilities. The dual worldview of nomads differs from the European dual worldview in terms of its quality. In European comprehension, existence appeared by struggling with each other, and original Turks believed that existence develops through support and intense connection of approach and abilities to each other.

The Native Turk dual worldview’s approaches and abilities resemble the Chinese’s “*yin yang*” (陰陽).

Ancient and native Turk religion is still on the stage of research. There is no exact answer until present day, what was called religion and belief for *ish-oguz* (*skif*), *sak*, *hunnu* (*xiongnu*) and *göktürk* (Turkish Khaganate). The Turk religion and beliefs can be counted on fingers. French researcher Roux (1956; 1958; 1962; 1986), Russian researcher Stebleva (1972) and Kljash-tornyj (1981) researched this issue. Maillard worked on the connection of native Turk religion and *manihey* religion. Potopov (1973), Anohin (1924), Majnagashev (1961), Valihanov (1984), Dyrenkova (1928), Sanzhaev (1930), Alekseev (1975), Purjev (2002), Toleubaev (1991), Abramzon (1971), Pelliot (1929), and Snesarev (1969) worked on the issue of connections between the Turk *ongyn* (cult) with shamanisms of Central and Central Asia nations of XX-XXI centuries. Both these researchers prove a worldview of native Turk, *mongol*, *manchu-tungus* as spiritual culture and belief. In the present, science belief is nonscientific fully believed on natural powers to the existence some kind of event.

French researcher Roux said, “*It is not obvious that turk kagan ongyn (cult) was the real national religion (tribal and relatively)*” (1962) and also that belief wasn’t on the same stage as religion. But Stebleva searched the religion of native Turk on the frame of *Turk* beliefs and considered them having many gods. The supreme

was “*Tengri*”, then “*Umai*” and after that “*Jersuv*” (earth-water), the fourth cult being “*Atababa*” (ancestors’ spirit) (1972).

Klyash-tornyi considered the religion of old Turks to be “shamanism” and divided the world into three parts—the upper, middle and lower. The god of the upper world is “*Tengri*” and it influences animate and inanimate nature (1981). “*Umai*” is the view of maternal family, maternal care of babies and the belly. The earth-water is the god of the middle world (Kljash-tornyj 1981). The God of underworld is “*Arklig*”. Thus, he divides the world into three gods. Therefore, he considered that native *Turk* religion had many gods. Moreover, he transferred the native *Turk* worldview into myth (legend).

Famous Kazakh Turkologist Sartkozhauly (2003) describes mistakes in research of ancient *Turk* worldview this way. Above-mentioned scientists described native *Turk* religious beliefs according to Siberian shamanism. This research cannot be accepted because,

1. There are great differences between Siberian shamanism and *hunnu* (*xiongnu*) *turk mongol* empires’ ancient religion, that was the cornerstone of imperial phenomenon. Siberian shamanism is a relic that stayed because of destruction of ancient religion.
2. Above-mentioned scientists did not take into consideration that religion kept in ancient *Hunnu* (*xiongnu*), native *turk* and Mongol Empire of middle ages were specially formed systems.

Due to these two factors, ancient Eurasian nomadic nations’ religion considered them to be beliefs.

Famous German scientist Doerfer and Kazakh Sartkozhauly’s opinions correspond with each other. Doerfer, emphasized that old Turks’ religion increased to the stage of religion, and considered that religion was close to monotheism (belief to one god), also came to the conclusion that native *Turk* religion was “*tanirlik*” (ten-grism), “...it was quite possible that this religion passed through three stages of formation such as: totemic, shamanism and sit *venia verbo tanirshildik*” (1965). The researchers support the idea of the famous scientist and considered to develop his idea. What is the essence or origin of philosophical transcendence of religion? There are:

1. God is not on Heaven or on Earth
2. God isn’t created or born

3. Must be this world and the other half
4. Heaven and hell exist
5. Judgment Day must exist
6. Religion must be interconnected with all ethnoses, people's consciousness and living ethics.
7. The existence, development and changing of life (humanity) should be measured by religious worldview (philosophy).
8. It must be the place where people could pray.

Due to these eight criteria, beliefs can be developed to the stage of religion. Present criteria of classical religions, like Buddhism, Judaism, Christianity (and Catholic), Islam had been mentioned above.

In such situation let's study in detail the *Turk* religion.

1. According to native *Turk* consciousness *Tengri* (God) is not on Earth but in Heaven, which one cannot see. For example, in old Turkic *Kultegin* inscription "*Üze kök teKri*" (*Tengri* is on Heaven) (KT I.1).
2. "*Tengri*" is only the creator. He is not created or born (KT IV.1).
3. This world is life and existence. Man's spirit (soul) goes to other worlds. The soul cannot be lost. For example, *Kül-tegin qoj jylqa [toquzynëy aj] jiti jigirmike uëdy* (*Kultegin* flew away (died) on the seventeenth of the ninth month (September) of sheep's year (KT.II.14) (Sartqozhauly 2012). This sentence shows that *Kultegin's* soul left its body and the bones stayed on the ground.
4. Flown away spirit cannot be lost. It finds good or difficulties in the other world (it goes to Heaven/Paradise or Hell).
5. The Judgment Day is when "*Tengri*" and "*Earth*" are being cursed. Human beings, brothers and relatives struggle with each other. For example, *TeKri jer bulâaqyn ûcûn* (*Tengri* and *Earth* God are being cursed) (KT.II.4) (Moldabay 2011).
6. In native *Turk*, texts show that the creator is only (one) "*Tengri*" (God) for animate and inanimate forms of life. They were called two essences three ages (*eki jyltyz ûc öd*). That is the main philosophy of native *Turks* (Moldabay 2011).
7. The Native *Turk's* dual worldview corresponds to all essences of couples.
8. In the state system, "*Tardush*" and "*toles*" constitute right and left.

9. In the ruling system, "*yabgu*" and "*shad*" are titles of the ancient *Turkic* state.
10. In social hierarchy, the paternal and maternal family are "*handas*" and "*suyektes*".
11. In music, *dichord*.
12. In art, paternal and maternal symbols.
13. In language and graphics, the harmony of vowels and harmony of consonants.
14. In philosophical worldview, approach and abilities, event and essence, and life and death, all of them are based on the "dual worldview" (Sartqozhauly 2012).
15. As Doerfer considered in the period totemic, shamanism people used to pray in caves or to the sacred mountain. After the appearance of *Göktürk*, they used to pray in specially built constructions (church) with some saint person. In that church they did not put bones. There are hundreds of *baryks* (temples) in Mongolian steppes. For example, *Kultegin*, *Bilge kagan Tui-ukuk* were the places where people used to pray and these places were considered sacred (Zholdasbekov et al. 2006). In Chinese data written shows that in *Hunnu (xiongnu) baryk* (temple) people used to pray.

Thus, transcendental principles prove that the native *turk* religion was on the stage of religion even at that age.

Religion was spiritual wealth, consciousness, and customs and traditions that saturated in people's mind because of which, ancient and native nomads kept this ideology and could act in groups as one fist.

The core of ideology is "*Tengri*". *Tengri's* curse can cause the Judgment Day. *Tengri's* *rasul* on land is *kagan*. *Kagan* is the "*creature of Tengri*" (KT.III.1). The great *Kagan* founded "*mangilik yel*" (eternal nation) with *Tengri's* blessings. "*Mangilik yel*" was the center of land (power). *Kagan* shows the best way to people and gives all right things with *Tengri's* blessings, and he reigns his people. Beings against *Kagan* were equal to being against *Tengri's* will (God). Due to this the researchers can say that old *Turks* were governed by one *Kagan* (reigned by one king) and one religion. Religion was the main and central ideology of power (ruling/governing). This case corresponds to Confucianism.

Regarding the *Turk* religion of "*Tengri*", Suleimenov said in his famous book "ASiA", "*Tengri* was one of the oldest and ancient religions that appeared before the appearance of

*Christianity, Semit, Indian and Iran religion and influenced Egyptians about four thousand years ago, finally found its way to scientists and researchers. Theologists and atheists can work on this subject as well* (1975). That was the beginning of accepting the ancientness of “*Tengri*” religion.

There are many collections of work that prove the ancientness of “*Tengri*”.

## RESULTS

The Eurasian continent, from east Xyanđan field to the west ridge of the Caucasus region, for ten thousand years was inhabited by nomads who consumed a divine religion, age, sedentary neighbors, Chinese, Indian, Persian, Slavic, consuming thousands of divine religion. Each town and village, each of which individually believed in their own god, and didn't accepted others except their own, was reason for many battles and struggles.

Consequently, one God religion began to appear in neighboring sedentary tribes, as if they were in agreement. They are, Buddhism VI-V century BC, Judah VII-VI centuries BC, Confucian in 551-479 BC Daoism VI-V centuries BC and the Christian in the first century BC, Islam appeared in the VI century AD. All of these religions appeared in the neighboring nomads of the eastern and southern sides of the border. The appearance of all Mass at the same level for such a change, one God, wasn't it the influence of nomadic “*Tengri*” religion? The so-called effects of classical religions above believers worshipping “*Tengri*” ritual slightly changed. “*Tengri*” believers used to pray by stretching their hand forward and showing their empty open hands, Buddhists make a wish by bowing down to their open hand and touching their forehead, and Islam believers pray by opening their hand but without stretching it forward, after praying by touching the forehead for making a wish after which they palm their faces. Isn't it the influence of “*Tengri*” believers of appearance and notions as this world and the other world, Heaven and Hell, and the existence of Judgment Day?

In the texts of Orkhon ancient monument, *Bogu Kagan (bögü qaān)* (Tuy. 34). *Tuy ukik* and the head religion were in the war together. Native Turk Mongolians used to ask the religious person (psychic) to make predictions only after that they went to war. Scientists thought

that *Bogu kagan* was *Kapagan kagan*'s son. The researchers found the names of psychics as above-mentioned information about *Bogu kagan*. *Bogu Kagan*. (Tuy.34 - 50), *Bogu khan* (TT.II. Å 33), *Boge-budrach* (MK II 27) and *Boge-Yavgach* (Q Å N. 396 6).

In ancient Turk manuscripts:

- ♦ “*bes sūnūs sūnūsdūkde Kūūli-cor anèa bilge cab esi erti, alpy, bökesi erti*” (after five wars, Kuuli-chor became the ruler and the owner of words, and his protector was Boke) (Ė4. 17. 4) (Sartqozhauly 2012);
- ♦ “*buny jaratyyma böke tutam*” (this I present to Boke, the creator);

In ancient monuments of IX-XI centuries:

- ♦ “*Anta jeme Linxuanyn özentinen ök bögün kelgin tuymaqy*”

From Linhua flower Bogin will appear (born) (Uig. II. 44 33);

- ♦ “*Öntün synarqy burxanlar ulusynta bögüler quvrayynta jaymur jaymys tegxua cecek jaymysyn saqynmys kergek*”

In the other world, in *boguler* place, tulips will grow as its rain in our world (TT. V. Å 107);

- ♦ “*Yduq bögü biliglig burxan*”
- Sacred Bogu – skilled Burkhan (Suv. 89 9);
- ♦ “*On küclüg bögü biliglig uyan arzylar*”
- Bogu skilled smartest wishes better ten times (SA26);

- ♦ “*bögü elig küclüg jaruq teKri*”
- Bogu nation – sacred Tengri (Màn. III. 28 8);

- ♦ “*Bajat bergü edgü saKa aj Bögü*”

Hey Bogu, let give wealth (QBK. 189 7);

- ♦ “*Qajadf joryyly bu ymya teke, Qutulmas seninden aj ersik Böge*”

It can't escape from you hey Boge my goat (QBN. 385 15);

Here are examples of using the words *boge*, *boke*, *bigu* in the context of the head of religion. But, let's take Chinese written works of describing religious person, which word they used in their history. “*Worshiping spirits, worship to Wolves (Chinese letter Vu also means Wolves)*” (Bichurin 1950), as it is fixed. Even in Chinese works it was saved as the word “*Bogu*”. The XIII-XIV century heritage of the Codex Cumanicus is saved in the form of “*Bogu*” (Quryshzhano et al. 1978). It is saved in Mongolian secret chronicles as “*Bogu*”, and in Mongolian language as “*Böö*”.

Thus, the ancient name of Turk religion should be called not *Tengriism* (Russian. *Tengrianstvo*), but “*Bogu*”.

As you can see, “*Bogu*” (*Tengriism*), which appeared thousand years ago, reached the 21<sup>st</sup> century, the Turkish nation that consumed for thousand years of their own heritage of spiritual treasure, with big changes. Ancient “*bogu*” (*Tengriism*) is one of the respectful and prestigious works that was the fundament of dual worldview and religion for all ancient Turks. “*Bogu religion*” always stays unsearched, mysterious and full of secrets in the field of religion.

### CONCLUSION

- ♦ The ancient name of Turk religion should be called not *Tengriism* (Russian *Тенгрианство*) but “*Bogu*”;
- ♦ Nature is a source and origin of the Turk worldview. The creator of nature is believed to be “*Tengri*” (God) for which respect was shown by taking care of nature. This process still exists as a part of the traditions of many nations. Only “*Tengri*” (God) is believed to be alone, and for many other creations are believed to have each own pair, so they created coupled worldview. Present Turkish people call it “*iki yıldız*” (two stars), Mongolians “*arga bilig*” and Kazakhs “*amal-bilik*”.

Nomadic tribes created the dual worldview based on approaches and the system of abilities. The dual worldview of nomads differs from the European dual worldview in terms of its quality. In European comprehension, existence appeared by struggling with each other and original Turks believed that existence develops through support and intense connection of approach and abilities with each other.

### ABBREVIATIONS

KT – Inscription Kultegin  
 BK – Inscription Bilge Kagan  
 KCh – Inscription Kulli-Chur  
 Tuy – Inscription Tuy-uquq  
 Man III – fragments of Manichaeian inscription (Chotscho III)  
 MK – Mahmud al-Kashgari, *Dîwânu l-Lu'lat al-Turk*  
 QBH – Kutadgu Bilig (Herat (Vienna) variant)  
 QBK – Kutadgu Bilig (Cairo variant)  
 QBN – Kutadgu Bilig (Namangan variant)  
 Sud – Suvarnaprabhâsa  
 TT.II – Türkische Turfan – Texte II.  
 TT.V – Türkische Turfan – Texte V.  
 Uig II – Uigurica II

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