

*Bark: A Study on the Spiritual World of the Early Türks**

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The German Turkologist, Wolfgang-Ekkehard Scharlipp, is the pioneering scholar in exploring the spiritual world of the Early Türks. His conclusion is that the religion of the Early Türks was polytheism, totemism and naturism.¹ It is noteworthy that Scharlipp exerted lots of efforts to argue that the Early Türks were not monotheists. In the eyes of the Early Türks, the soil and water could also be sacred, just like *tenri*, and this type of belief can be summarized as Shamanism. In this short article, we are not going to review the bulk of articles and books by historians in Turkey who tried to demonstrate that the Early Türks, by the time of the Old Turkic inscriptions had already become Monotheists.

From *Suishu* 隋書 we know that during the First Türk Empire the Türk Tabo Kağan believed in Buddhism and even built a Buddhist temple. He sent envoys to North China asking for the Buddhist canon.² But the belief in Buddhism seemed very limited among the Early Türks. In the Second Türk Empire, the belief of Buddhism had already fallen into decay. When Bilge Kağan intended to build a Buddhist temple, he was immediately dissuaded by his consultant, Tonyukuk. The argument of Tonyukuk was that Buddhism and Daoism require their adherents to be compassionate and sympathetic, which are fatal characteristics for fighting soldiers.³

We can find some evidence from the Chinese sources to prove that the Early Türks also believed in Zoroastrianism, as Wang Xiaofu and Chen Ling have demonstrated it.⁴ Professor Wang and his colleagues from Beijing have found a piece of granite in the exhibition room of the artifacts unearthed from the Kül

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1 W.-E. Scharlipp, Die alttürkische Religion und ihre Darstellung bei einigen türkischen Historiker, *Die Welt des Islams* 31(2): 168–192.

2 *Suishu*, chapter 84, “Biography of the Turks”, Zhonghua Publishing House, 1973: 1865. A. von Gabain: Buddhistische Türkenmission, *Asiatica. Festschrift Friedrich Weller, zum 65. Geburtstag gewidmet von seinen Freunden, Kollegen und Schülern*, Leipzig: Otto Harrassowitz, 1954: 161–173.

3 *Xin Tangshu*, chapter 215, “Biography of the Türks”: 6052; *Jiu Tangshu*, chapter 194a, “Biography of the Türks”: 5174.

4 *Youyang zazu* says: “The Türks practised Zoroastrianism. There were no temples.” Cf. *Youyang zazu*, chapter 4, Zhonghua Publishing House, 1981: 45.

Tegin tomb, in which they managed to recognize a bird-shaped image. According to Wang's research, the bird-shaped image is supposed to be Verethraghna (Warahrān/Bahrām), the god of war in Zoroastrianism. In his earlier article, through textual evidence, he has already pointed out that the practice of worshipping fire in the Zoroastrianist way must have existed among the Early Türks.⁵ The other Chinese scholar Chen Ling has demonstrated that the bird-shaped motif on Bilge Kağan's crown and on Kül Tegin's marble head had been directly and indirectly influenced by the Sassanid-Persian culture. The two wings belong to the Varaghna bird, or the shape of the god of war/Verethraghna.⁶

According to the Chinese sources, the Early Türks also had the custom of "revering ghosts and spirits, believing in wizards and sorcerers" (敬鬼神、信巫覡). Scholars usually take the record of "believing wizards and sorcerers" as evidence for Early Türk Shamanism. However, almost nothing has been discussed about the record of "revering ghosts and spirits". This article is going to demonstrate that Early Türks not only worshiped Buddha, fire, *teñri* and nature, but also worshiped human beings whom they revered.

In Chinese sources there are two examples supporting this view. At the beginning phase of the second Türk Empire's rising, the Türk troops met a big trouble set by the Tang general Cheng Wuting 程務挺, who was a very skillful general and could always defeat the Türks, and the Türks were very scared of him. When he passed away, the Türks were relieved and delighted. They built a shrine for him and whenever the Türk army was about to be deployed in a campaign, they would pray in the shrine and wish for good luck.⁷

The other example comes from the biography of another Tang general, Zhang Renyuan 張仁愿. According to the record, at the beginning the border between the Türks and the Tang was the Yellow River; and on the river bank on the Türk side there was a shrine called Biyun 拂云祠. Whenever the Türk army was going to plunder Tang territories, they would first go to the shrine praying and wishing for good luck.⁸ We don't know exactly who was worshiped in the Biyun shrine. The possibility that it was a Buddhist temple is low, because Buddhism had already fallen into decay in the Second Türk Empire. It could not be a Zoroastrianist temple either, because the Turkic Zoroastrianists never built temples, according to the Chinese sources.⁹ It could be a similar shrine to that of Cheng Wuting, but as

5 Wang Xiaofu 王小甫: On the Etymology of Gongyue 弓月名義考, in *Festschrift for Professor Ji Xianlin's 80th Birthday*, Nanchang: Jiangxi People's Publishing House, 1991: 351-363; The Cult of Fire and the Rise and Decline of the Türks: A Case Study of the Ancient Turkic God of War 拜火教與突厥興衰——以古代突厥斗戰神研究為中心, in *Historical Research 歷史研究* 2007 (1): 24-40.

6 Chen Ling 陳凌: A Study of Turkic Royal Crowns: With A Discussion of Turkic Xian-Zoroastrian Beliefs, in *Eurasian Studies* V, 2017: 139-198.

7 *Jiu Tangshu*, chapter 83, Biography of Cheng Wuting: 2785.

8 *Jiu Tangshu* 93: Biography of Zhang Renyuan: 2982.

9 Cf. *Youyang zazu*.

of now, there is no way for us to identify the person whom was revered in this shrine.

Actually, not only in Chinese sources, but also in Old Turkic inscriptions there is evidence for Early Türks building shrines for the people whom they revered.

In the Old Turkic inscriptions, the word *bark* appears several times. In almost half of the cases, it is used together with *ev*, while in the other half it is used alone. Later, the usage of *bark* seemed to have become narrower. In the age of Mahmūd al-Kāshgharī, for example, *bark* was never used alone, but only paired as *äv barq*. The phrase *ev bark* exists in many different Turkic dialects, and scholars don't have a disagreement about the meaning of *ev bark* as “‘house, home, household, property’, etc.” But, as far as the meaning of *bark* itself is concerned, especially as to its usage before al-Kāshgharī, i.e. in the Old Turkic inscriptions, it seems that scholars have not exerted much efforts to discuss it.

Firstly, we discuss the cases where *bark* is used alone in the Old Turkic inscriptions.¹⁰

K. N. 12–13: *tabğaç kağanta işiyi liken kelti. bir tümen ağı altun kümüş kergeksiz kelürti ... bark étgüçi, bediz yaratıgma, bitig taş étgüçi, tabğaç kağan çikani çañ señün kelti.*

“From the Chinese emperor came the secretary Likeñ (呂向 in Chinese). He brought countless (lit. ten thousand) silk, gold, silver and superfluous things. ... The **bark**-builders, the fresco-painters, the memorial-builders and the maternal cousin of Chinese emperor, General Zhang, came.”

The Chinese delegation dispatched to the Türk and their assignment is also recorded in the Chinese sources. According to the *Jiu Tangshu* 194a: “When Kül Tegin passed away, the emperor sent Imperial Insignia General Zhang Quyi 張去逸 and Criminal Administration Bureau Director Lü Xiang 呂向 to visit the Türk expressing condolence, and establish a memorial. The emperor composed the text of the inscription by himself. In addition, a shrine was also built. The stone was sculptured into figures. The four sides of the shrine were painted with pictures of his fighting.”¹¹

If we make a comparison between the Chinese record and the Old Turkic inscription, it is not difficult for us to figure out that the Old Turkic *bark* must have been an equivalent to the 祠廟 “shrine” in the Chinese context.

A similar paragraph is K. S. 11–12/B. N. 14:

¹⁰ The arabic numbers are used to mark the lines. The transcribing system of the Old Turkic runiform alphabet follows Sir G. Clauson, in *An Etymological Dictionary of Pre-Thirteenth-Century Turkish*, Oxford University Press, 1972. The text of the Old Turkic Inscriptions are translated into English by myself.

¹¹ *Jiu Tangshu* 194a, “Biography of the Türk”: 5177.

men beᅡgü taş tokitduk üçün tabğaç kağanta bedizçi kelürtüm, bedizet[d]im. meniñ sabımın sımadı. tabğaç kağanın içreki bedizçiğ it[d]ı. añar adınçığ bark yaraturtum. için taşın adınçığ bediz urturtum.

“For establishing a memorial, I sent for painters from the Chinese emperor. I let them decorate [the stone]. [The emperor] did not refuse my request. The Chinese emperor dispatched his imperial painters. I let them build a gorgeous **bark**. I let them paint gorgeous frescos both interior and exterior of the **bark**.”

There are some other similar examples of *bark* that we will not discuss in details, i.e. K. NE *taş bark étgüçig, bunça bedizçiğ toyğut élitber kelürti*. “It was Toyğut Élitber who brought those memorial- and shrine-builders and fresco-painters.” B. N. 15 *taş barkın* ... “memorial and shrine.” B. SW *bunça barkığ bedizig uzuğ* “such a shrine, frescos and skilled work.”

Let’s take an overview of the interpretations of the word *bark* by previous scholars.

(a) Mahmüd al-Kāshgharī: **āw barq** “house and home (*bayt wa-dār*)”; one never uses *barq* alone, but only paired.¹²

(b) G. Clauson: **bark**: perhaps Den. N. fr. **ba:r**; ‘movable property, household goods’; hardly ever used by itself, nearly always in the phr. **ev bark** ‘dwelling and household goods’. This phr. survives in SW Osm. And Jarring records it in SE Türki as **öybarka/öyvaka** ‘household’, and also in the phr. **balabarka/balavaka** ‘family’, but otherwise **bark** seems to be extinct. **Türkü VIII** in the accounts of the erection of Kül Tégin’s and Bilge Xağan’s tombs **bark** ‘grave goods’ is mentioned several times in association with **bediz** ‘(painted) ornamentation’ (of the walls, etc.), e.g. **añar adınçığ bark yaraturtım** ‘I had various kinds of grave goods made for it’ *I S 12*; o.o. *I N 13 (é:t-); I NE; II N 14; II NE sıña:r süsi: evig barkığ yulğalı: bardı*: ‘one wing of his army went to pillage (our) tents and household goods’ *II E 32*; o.o. *do. 34 and 37: VIII ff. Man.* (if we have found the light of the five gods) **evke barkka** ‘to our dwellings and household goods’ *Chuas. 235*; o.o. *do. 249; TT II 8, 41–2; Uyğ. VIII evin barkın Şu. E 2, 12 (?)*: VIII ff. Man.-A **katlı yañı yemişlik ev bark yaratırça** ‘as one makes a new orchard or house and household goods’ *M I 14, 8–10*: Man. (mediating on the transitoriness of the body) **evtin barktın üntiler** ‘they left house and home’ *TT III 137–138*; o.o. **Wind. 32, 34; TT IX 62: Bud. **evde barkta ada kılguçı** (devils) ‘who cause danger in the house and home’ *TT V 10, 84*; o.o. *VI 61, 63 etc.*: Civ. (various kinds of property) **evümdeki barkımdakı**, *USp. 98, 14*: **Xak. XI** one says **ev bark bayt wa dār** ‘house and home’; **bark** cannot be used separately (*yufrad*), but only in (this) combination**

¹² Mahmüd al-Kāshgharī: *Diwan lugat At-Turk*, Dankoff R. & Kelly J. eds. & translators, 1982: *Compedium of the Turkic Dialects*, by Mahmüd al-Kāshgharī, vol. I. Duxburz, Mass.: Harvard University: 273.

(*muzdawica(n)*) *Kaş. I* 348; (the enemy wished to sell) **evin barkın dūrahu wa ‘aqārahu** ‘his houses and property’ *III* 333, 9; *KB ev bark* 4536, 4545, 4727: XIII (?) *Tef. ev bark* ‘home’ 91; *Çağ. xv ff. bark* is used coupled (*ba-ṭarīq-i muzāwaca*) with *öy* in the phr. **öy bark xānumān wa xāna wa atāt albayt** ‘house and furniture’ *Sam.* 121r. 21.¹³

(c) W. Radloff: Барк: 1) das Bauerwerk, das Werk; 2) (Krm. Osm.) das Haus und aller Zubehör (die Geräthe und Leute).¹⁴

(d) Talat Tekin: “house, building, residence; tomb, mausoleum”.¹⁵

(e) A. von Gabain, “Habe, bauliche Anlage”.¹⁶

The explanation of *bark* by Clauson as “grave goods” is not supported by any evidence. The explanations by Radloff (i.e. “Bauerwerk”), von Gabain (i.e. “bauliche Anlage”) and Tekin (i.e. “mausoleum”) are closer, but not accurate. Through a comparison with the relevant Chinese sources, we have come to the conclusion that *bark* should denote “shrine”. The Russian historian S. G. Kljaštornyj has also pointed out that the terminus *bark* should be translated as “temple”, but he did not provide any supporting evidence.¹⁷ Strictly speaking, “temple” refers to a religious building where a God or gods are worshiped, while *bark* is a place where human beings are worshiped. Therefore, “shrine” is the more accurate translation. If our explanation of *bark* as “shrine” has not gone astray from the right path, we suggest the phrase *ev bark* to be understood as “house/home”, both in a material and spiritual sense.

Unlike the later usage, in the earliest context, *ev bark* could still be translated literally as “house and shrine”. The following are examples where *bark* and *ev* are being used together as a phrase in the Old Turkic inscriptions. B. E. 32: *siṅar süsi evig barkıḡ yul[i]ḡalı bardı* “Part of their troops went pillaging houses and shrines.” B. E. 34: *evin barkın buzdum* “I destroyed their houses and shrines.” B. E. 37 *evin barkın anta buzdum* “I destroyed their houses and shrines there.”

When the Turkic people were at war, it was a common practice to destroy the religious or spiritual constructions of the enemy. Here I give an example of the Kirgiz in the year of 840. When the Kirgiz army defeated the Uyghurs, they

13 G. Clauson: *An Etymological Dictionary of Pre-Thirteenth-Century Turkish*, Oxford University Press, 1972: 359–360.

14 W. Radloff: *Versuch eines Wörterbuches der Türk-Dialecte*, vierte Band, S. Petersburg, 1918: 1483.

15 Talat Tekin: *A Grammar of Orkhon Turkic*, Indiana University Press, 1968: 308.

16 A. von Gabain: *Altürkische Grammatik*. Wiesbaden, 1974/1941: 327.

17 С. Г. Кляшторный Храм, изваяния и стела в древнетюркских текстах (к интерпретации Ихе Ханын-норской надписи), *Туркологический сборник С 1974*: 238–255. S. G. Kljaštornyj, „Tempel, Standbild und Stele in altturkischen Texten (zur Interpretation der Iche-Chanyn-Nor-Inschrift)“, *Die Geschichte Zentralasiens und die Denkmäler in Runenschrift*, Schletzer, Berlin, 2007: 245–326.

destroyed many memorial constructions on the steppe, i.e. *balbals* “stone figures”. According to the Czech archaeologist, Lumír Jisl, *balbals* are erected by the Early Türks as a depiction of the defeated enemy.¹⁸ We can find evidence in the Chinese sources to support his view. “When someone passed away, people would erect stones for him. The number of the erected stones depends on how many enemies he had killed in his lifetime.”¹⁹ Similar to *balbal*, *bark*, which should be interpreted as “shrine”, is also connected with the spiritual world of the Old Turkic people. To conclude, the case study of *bark* helps us to realize the richness of the manifold spiritual world of the Old Turkic people.

Abbreviations:

K.: Kül Tegin Inscription
 B.: Bilge Kağan Inscription
 N.: North side
 S.: South side

Primary sources

Kül Tegin Inscription.

Bilge Kağan Inscription.

Liu Xu et al., *Jiu Tangshu*, Zhonghua Publishing House, 1975.

Ouyang Xiu and Song Qi, *Xin Tangshu*, Zhonghua Publishing House, 1975.

¹⁸ Lumír Jisl, *The Orkhon Türk and Problems of the Archaeology of the Second Eastern Türk Kaghanate*, Praha, 1997: 66.

¹⁹ *Zhoushu*, chapter 50, “Biography of the Türks”: 910.