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## **Al-Birūnī's version of an old Turkic genealogical legend. On the semantics of Turkic "baraq"**

**Sergej G. Kljaštornyj**

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In "India" and "Mineralogy", two works by al-Birūnī, Choresmian scholar (11th century), there are fragments of an Old Turkic genealogical legend. Both fragments have been adopted into the history of the Kabul-Shahs' dynasty and show their Turkic origin. More importantly, correlations between al-Birūnī's fragments and the Chinese fixation of an Old Turkic genealogical legend (7th century) may be identified. In al-Birūnī's text, the relation between the "origin of the cave", the "wolf" genealogy and the king's right to power in Turkic mythology is expressed.

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Old Turkic genealogical legends are related to those few folklore-ethnological relics that can be traced back to the time when a Proto-Turkic ethnic community was being formed. Two such legends recounting the derivation of Ashina—the ruling clan of the Turkic empire (6th-8th centuries)—were written down earlier than others. In the middle of the 6th century, both legends were briefly fixed by Chinese historiographers from the sayings of the Turks themselves. As our analysis has proved, they are two variants of the same narration (see Kljaštornyj 1965, cf. Sinor 1982: 223-257). According to the main story, the ancestors of Ashina were exterminated by their enemies. Only a ten-year-old boy with severed arms and legs remained alive. He was saved from death by a she-wolf which later became his wife. The young man was finally killed by his enemies while the she-wolf hid from their pursuers in a mountain cave situated to the north of the Turfan oasis (Eastern Tien-

Shan). There she gave birth to ten sons who on growing up married Turfan girls and created kins of their own. The most dexterous one of the she-wolf's sons named Ashina became the chief of the new tribe.<sup>1</sup> His descendants led the tribe out of the cave and resettled in the Altay region.

The cult of the ancestors' cave existed in the ancient Turkic state along with the cult of the qaghan kin (see Pelliot 1929). Special honour was paid to the wolf, expressed in various (mostly military) symbols (see Esin 1972). Remnants of the wolf cult have been repeatedly fixed among Turkic peoples, though zoolatric motives prevailing in them do not allow connecting them with the genetic myth (see Potapov 1958: 135-142).

The first iconographical proof that links the legendary genealogy of the Turkic qaghans with the parent mother-she-wolf and parent father-man is a recently discovered ancient Turkic historical monument. It is the Soghdian-language Bugut stele (dated A.D. 582), at the top of which a boy with stumped arms and legs is depicted at the moment a she-wolf is saving him (see Kljaštornyj & Livšic 1972). No verbal reflections of the legend have remained in this written monument.

Another possibility for cross-checking the Chinese version of this ancient Turkic legend is found in al-Birūnī's report on the Turkic origin of the Kabul royal dynasty. The ethnicity of the early medieval dynasties from Tokharistan, Kâpisa, Zabulistan and adjacent regions still remains a topic of debate. The supreme suzerainty of the Western Turkic qaghans was established here during the reign of Ton-yabghuqaghan (A.D. 612?-630) who passed the power over the newly conquered land to his son Tardu-shad whose headquarters were in Qunduz (see Chavannes 1903: 52, 130, 196). Nonetheless, according to Josef Marquart's opinion presently supported by Robert Göbl, the local Yueh-chi (Kushans) and Hephtalite (in Robert Göbl's terminology "Hunno-Iranian") dynasties managed to preserve power in their former possessions (Marquart 1901: 291 and Göbl 1967: 7-8, 256-258). However, alongside this, the titles of these rulers and their favorites had undergone noteworthy changes: By the 8th century one finds among them *tegins*, *eltebers*, *tarhans*, *shads* and *tuduns*. Göbl, arguing against Roman Ghirshman, who had supposed the emergence of Turkic dynasties in

<sup>1</sup> On the etymologies of Ashina see Kljaštornyj (1994: 445-447)

Tokharistan and Kâpisa, suggests that the usage of Turkic titles itself gives evidence not of the change of dynasties, but of a certain tribute to the fashion that appeared under the influence of the supreme Turkic suzerains (see Göbl 1967: 256-258). However, the question is not all that easy. First of all, the ethnic structure of the local population obviously changed—the Turks had become its visible part not only in Tokharistan, where mostly Qarluqs had settled, but in Zabulistan as well (see Chavannes 1903: 160-161). The dynasty of the Tokharistan yabghu from the Ashina family succeeded that of Tardu-shad (see Chavannes 1904: 20). It had been preserving Turkic names and titles for at least two centuries, combining them with the titles of the former rulers. Thus, the yabghu of Tokharistan Qutlugh (A.D. 728) was at the same time named “king of the Hephtalites” (Chavannes 1904: 49). In this very period the king of Kâpisa was named “tegin-shad” (Chavannes 1904: 59), which seems to reflect his family relations with the Turkic dynasty (only people from the royal family could have borne the title “tegin”). Kâpisa was the region located to the extreme south of the Western Turkic empire, and Hsüan Tsang, who had visited it in A.D. 630 and 644 calls it “boundary” and mentions together with this that ten smaller principalities were subordinate to it (Chavannes 1903: 197). Kabul obviously was also included in that number, as it was Kabul and Zabulistan which Ibn Khurdadbih called the border regions of “great” Tokharistan (see Barthold 1934: 874 and Stein 1973: 13-20).

Let us now look at what al-Birūnī says:

“The Indians had in Kabul kings from the Turks who were said to derive from Tibet. The first of them was Barahtakin. He entered a cave in Kabul which no one could enter other than by moving sideways or crawling. There was some water in there and he left some food there for several days. This cave is still known, it is called Var. Those people who consider it a good omen, visit it and take water from it, which is very difficult to do. Crowds of peasants were working by the entrance to the cave... Several days after Barahtakin had entered it, someone suddenly came out of it, and the people all together could see that he emerged as though being born from his mother's belly. He was wearing Turkic garments consisting of a qaba', high headgear, boots and weapons. People paid honours to him as to a miraculous creature designated for kingdom. He ascended the throne there and his title was Shah of Kabul. The kingdom remained with his sons for generations, the number of which is about sixty.” (Sachau 1887: 257)

A shorter variant of the same legend is found in al-Birūnī's "Mineralogy":

"The inhabitants of Kabul in the days when they were illiterate [i.e. before their conversion to Islam, S. K.] believed that Barahtakin, the first of the Turkic kings, had been created in a local cave which is nowadays called Bughra and had come out of it wearing a [king's] headgear (kalansuva)." (Belenitskij 1963:27)

Correlations between the ancient Turkic genealogical story and the legend mentioned by al-Birūnī are sufficiently evident. However, only al-Birūnī's version clearly shows the connection of the "cave" birth with the right to royal power, which is not so obviously reflected in the Chinese fixation of the legend. Jean-Paul Roux (1966: 284-287) relates this motif to the ancient cult of the cave-mother who bears the ancestor-beast (the heavenly beast). However, the beast motif seems to be missing in al-Birūnī's text. In this regard the name of the hero of this legend attracts our attention. It is "(...) Barahtakin" and obviously corresponds to the Turkic Barah-tegin.

Eduard Sachau in his edition of al-Birūnī's "India" reads *barahtakîn* as he seems not to have known that this name is also mentioned in al-Birūnī's "Mineralogy". Nevertheless, his explanation of the second part of this name as the Turkic title "takîn" (Sachau 1887: 360-361) is correct. Belenitskij, the translator and commentator of "Mineralogy", identifies both these forms of the word and suggests the correct reading of the form fixed in "India". However, he also says that "the exact meaning of this word has not been established" (Belenickij 1963: 421). The word *barah / baraq* has an unequivocal meaning in Turkic languages: 'shaggy dog', 'shaggy', 'dishevelled' (Dankoff & Kelly 1982: 190, Clauson 1972: 360 and Doerfer 1965: 728). The alternation "wolf / dog" is frequently recorded in genealogical stories of Turkic and Mongolian peoples (see Roux 1966: 329-335), but in this case the synonymic denomination of the wolf as 'shaggy' can not be excluded, since taboo names of ancestors are usual in Turkic onomastics (see Potapov 1958: 142). The connection between beast-ancestor and "cave" birth, which by al-Birūnī's time had already been comprehended and anthropomorphized, is still rather clearly apparent in this story. Thus, in early medieval Kabulistan there still remained some reminiscences of the ancient Turkic qaghan cult of the ancestor's cave inseparable from the genealogical

dynastic (and respectively kin) cult of beast-foreparent. On the other hand, a later fixation of the archaic Central Asian story by al-Birūnī bears witness (more evidently than the ancient Chinese narrations) to the social reorientation of the kin-family mythology, which had absorbed the idea of sacral legitimization of royal power (i.e. the power of military leaders of a family) at the time when a state was beginning to form.

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