

Symbolical image of Kut in the ancient Turkic's worldview

Nurbolat Bogenbayev, Azhar Shaldarbekova, Aidyn Zhalmyrza

Gumilyov Eurasian National University, Department of Turkic Sciences, Astana, 010000, Kazakhstan
E-mail: nurik198080@mail.ru

Abstract. This article is devoted to the analysis of the concept of “kut” (abundance, happiness) from the philosophical, mythological, archaeological and ethnographic aspects. The word “kut”, which is contained in the traditional worldview of ancient Turkic peoples, has played an important role in the worldview of Turks, in their manner of the life, and in the development of the family. The kut is not only a sign of wealth, abundance and unity, but is also considered as a gift from God. This article is aimed at exploring in detail the above-mentioned issues with the help of new resources. The research work covers the mythologies of the Paleoasia peoples, the North American Indians, Turks and also the ancient Indian and Chinese peoples.

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Introduction

“Kut” is a sacred concept in the worldview of the ancient Turkic people, giving lifelong energy, abundance, wealth, reputation and fame to human life. Moreover, the “kut” has been comprehended not only as the “**kiye**” – “**sacred**” of the human being, but is also related to animals, domestic animals, plants. Among the ancient Turkic people, the impact and view of “kut” can be understood in the different ways. For example, the breeding of domestic animals, the enhancing of the reputation and fame was associated with the “kut” on someone’s head; i.e. the “kut” is considered as “**the bird of happiness**”, which comes to the head of the man. Kazakh people currently have stable phrases related to the “kut”: “bakyt kusi” – “the bird of happiness”, “bak konu” – “to be happy or successful”, “kut kondy” – “happiness takes ground”, “kuty ushtu” – “happiness falls”, “zhany ushty” – “departed soul” or “bakyt kusi kondi” - “the bird of happiness falls”. If we consider that the words “ushu – to fly” and “konu – to take ground” as being used only for the flying creatures, we see that the Turkic people related happiness to birds. Indeed, ancient peoples thought that some birds have especial features, and made them totems. In the list of totemic birds we can include swans, geese, falcons, griffins, crows and rooks¹. And, which bird can give us the symbolic image of “kut” that we are looking for?

First of all, to make our investigation more systematic we will give a full description of the meaning “kut”.

In order to determine the connection of the “kut” with any bird, we give two meanings to “kut” according to the ancient Turkic people’s worldview:

Methodology

The usage of “kut” in the meaning of “wealth”, “abundance”, “prosperity” and the other positive meanings;

The usage of “kut” in the meaning of “spirit”, “soul”.

1. In *The Old Turkic Dictionary* it is said that the word “kut” has the meaning “wealth”, “abundance” and “prosperity” [1]. The Turkish researcher of the Turkic people, Talat Tekin, in his book *Orkhun Yazitlari* gives the definition to the word “kut” as *the luckiness, the presence of the God* [2]. According to the belief of the Kazakhs, the person who caught a “kut” will reach happiness, there is also the opinion that only a good, honest person can catch it: and in the hands of bad people “kut” will turn to “excretion”. In fact, the concept “kut” has the same meaning in all Turkic languages. For example, the lexeme “kut” is used with the meaning of the “*kiye*” which gives the happiness, abundance to the person, to the family” in the Karakalpak, Kumyk, Bashkir, Kirgiz, Turkish languages [3]. We are going to present some examples with the meaning “richness, abundance” of the word “kut” from the Kazakh language’s lexical vocabulary. For example, we congratulate somebody using following words: “kutty meken” – blessed place, land (a land of milk and honey), “kutty konys” – home and hearth, “kutty el” – a country of prosperity and happiness, “kutty konak” – a guest who brings wealth and happiness (Turkic people have the proverb: “when the welcome guest comes – the sheep brings twin lambs”), “kutty kelin” – a daughter-in-law who brings happiness to a family, “kutty kadam” - a lucky step, which means lucky beginning of something, a wish when a child begins his first steps and a wish to a bride when she

first comes to the house of her husband, “kuttykhtaimyn” – congratulations, “kutty bolsyn” – may it brings happiness and luck. In addition to this, there is a lexeme “*kudyk-draw-well*” in *The Old Turkic Dictionary* [1]. Perhaps the root of this word is “kut”. Because, as we know that the water drawn from a draw-well is the life source of everything in the world. The scientist M. Eskeeva, who made the linguistic analysis of the “kut” and “kudyk (draw-well)” states that it can be seen in the relation of “kud/kut” and “k-udyk/kut-ydyk” in the lexeme “kudyk” with the “Yduk yiri-subu” on the Orkhon monuments. Sometimes, in the Turkic languages the letters *u* and *i* are used with one meaning, for example, the word “umay” occasionally can be spelled as “umay” [4].

The Turkic nations show respect by adding the lexeme “kut” to the first root of the personal names. For example, Yelteris Kutlyg Kagan is a historical figure, who found The Second East Turkic Khaganate. He is the Great Kagan, who liberated his nation (Turkic budun) from the oppression of China, which lasted for fifty years, and who bestowed the richness, abundance and “kut” to his nation [5]. Furthermore, in Chinese sources Kutlyg Kagan was known by the name of “Gudulu” [6].

According to N. A. Baskakov, the etymology “kut” has very broad distribution, it isn’t limited to the ancient Turkic peoples, but also it keeps its meaning in the Mongolian and Manchu-Tungus languages [7]. For example, in the Tungusic languages, in its group called Tungus, the vocabulary of the language Evenki there is a word “kutuchi” with the meaning successful, happy [8]. Therefore, we should look for the root of “kut” far and wide.

In the stone monument in honor of Kultegin we also can perceive the word “kut” several times. For instance, “Kultegin was given a man’s name, to the happiness of my mother the Katun, who is like Umay” and in the Bilge Kagan inscription it is written as follows: “By the will of Heaven and to my happiness, it was so brought it about that I brought the dying people back to life” [5]. And on the east side of Kultegin monument it is written on the stone: “Tengri yarlıkadukın üçün, [ö]züm kutum bar üçün, kağan olurtum” which means “Under the will of Heaven, and to my happiness, I became Kagan” [9]. In these inscriptions the word “kut” was expressed as a gift of Tengri (Heaven) and had the meaning “as long as I am alive”, “to my luck and happiness”, and “I made the scanty people numerous and unified under a country” Before connecting “kut” and “kus (a bird)” as single concept, it is better to dwell on another meaning of “kut”.

2) The another meaning of “kut” is “soul”, “spirit” [1]. In the world view of the Sakha (Yakut)

people, one of the Turkic people, there is a belief that a person has three “kut” (souls). They are described as followings: “buor-kut” (land-kut), “salgyn-kut (air-kut)” and “izhe-kut (spirit-kut or mother-kut)” [10]. Among the Sakha people a person in his extreme moment shows agony by expressing “kutum”, “surum (oh my soul)” [11]. Old Turks had a belief that “kut” and “soul” are gifts of Tengri (Heaven) and when a person dies Tengri takes the “kut” back. Therefore, when a person dies, they say “The soul has flown away”. For instance, on the Kultegin inscription it is written “You fly away leaving your grieving people” and on Bilge Kagan Monument it is written “Bilge Kagan has flown away, may he take his place in Tengri (Heaven)” [5]. Also in the mythology of ancient people inhabiting the territory from Egypt to Siberia and from North Europe to North America, there is a belief that the soul of a person turns into a bird and flies away [12].

Now, analyzing the above-mentioned data, we will try to define communicative value of “kut” and “kus (bird)” which is a basis of our studying.

The main Part. The relation of kut and bird (kus)

As has been explained above, the flying and landing possibilities of the “kut” are found in its meanings of “spirit, wealth, abundance”. For example, on the Kultegin monument, a picture of a bird waving wings to fly is drawn. This picture of a bird was a totemic symbol of the dynasty of Turkic Kagans, and it was the symbolic image of describing the “soul” or “kut” flying away from the body of a dead man. The picture of a bird is met not only on the Kultegin monument, but also on other monuments belonging to the Old Turkic period. For example, among the valuable monuments with the picture of a bird are – Eltiris Kutlyg Kagan Monument, Khöl Asgat and the crown of Bilge Kagan [13]. Scholars have suggested different views on the picture of a bird painted on these stones. For example, Ilhami Durmush supposes that the picture of a bird on the forehead of Kultegin is a picture of a falcon [14]. but another scholar Peter Ziene considers it to be a picture of an “accipiter or hawk” [15]. We suppose that this picture is of a crow. Since, the crow is one of the birds that have totemic meaning in the worldview of the Turkic people.

In order to substantiate the connection of the rook-crow and “kut” it is not enough to be limited to the worldview of Turkic people. For this purpose we have to add the folklore of the Tungus, Chinese, and Koreans, who parted for a long time from Turkic peoples. For example, the ancient Turkic word “kut” is phonetically close to the Itelmen word “Kutha³” in Kamchadala. The totem of the Itelmens was the crow (karha-kutha) and they consider it as their ancestor

[16]. In the worldview of the Itelmens “Kutkhu” was considered to be a mythological crow, owner of the “almighty” power. The translation of the word “Kutkhu” is “dark black”.

The totemic meaning of the crow in the ancient Turkic people can be seen in the legend about how Wu-sun’s governor Kunbi⁴ survived. It is written in the famous “Records of Grand Historian” of the Chinese historian Sima Shian. According to the legend Wu-suns were conquered by another tribe, nobody survived except one baby, who were brought up by a wolf and a crow, the wolf breast-fed the baby and the crow brought it meat [17]. And there are other interesting stories in Mongolia: the famous person of the Mongolian Buddhism Lama Jiambel Jongdui during his childhood stayed in the cave with his mother and a crow brought them some meat [18]. The well-known scholar P. Daffina, who investigated legends about Wu-sun Kunbi in their Chinese sources, claims that the etymology of “Wu-sun” means “crow descendants” [19]. The first root of the word Wu-sun is “us”. If we take into consideration the phonetic and semantic similarity of the word “wu-sun” (us-us+a) – uzak [rook]), then his interpretation is correct. The rook is the type of the crow. In the work of Mahmud Kashgari *The Comprehensive Dictionary of Turkic Languages* there are following lines: “*kaldi mana tat, ajdim amdi jat. kushka bolub at, sani tiler us buri*” [20].

The meaning: “I’ve met one “tat” (unreliable uyghur), I’ve killed him, then I’ve cut his body, in order to make meal for the vulture and wolf.” In this work of Mahmud Kashgari the meaning of the word, “us” is “vulture”, “rook-crow”. If this hieroglyphic sign “wu-sun” in the Chinese language means “the descendants of crow”, “descendants of the vulture”(country, tribe), then we see that in the famous work of M. Kashgari the ancient Turkic translation of “vulture” – “us” phonetically and semantically corresponds to the Chinese word “u”. Excepting these facts, the Turkic people have many legends and myths about their origin. For example, Kazakhs say “uzakpiz-guzakpiz (we are rook-crows)”, “karga tamirly Kazakhpiz (the Kazakh with a blood vessel of a crow)”. Yakuts in their tribes Kangalas and Shor also have the family “karga (crow)”. They think that they are the descendants of a crow, a crow was their totem, and they prohibit the killing of crows [21]. Namu Jila, who investigated the totems of crow and wolf comparatively, gives valuable facts regarding the features of a crow. She states that among the ancient Wu-Suns a crow was considered to be the sacred bird that saved Wu-Sun Kun-Bi (Kun-mo) and the descendants of Wu-suns. The Kereys also thought that the crow was their ancestor [18]. In the works of Rashid ad-Din and G.

N. Potanin there are a number of legends about the relation of the words “kara (black)”, “karga (crow)” and the name of the tribe Kerey [22]. Also, in L. N. Gumiliyev’s book *Ancient Turks*, which lists West Turkic kaganate’s tribes, we meet the tribe named “Garga-pur”. In his book he writes that this ethnonym is composed of two words: “gar-ga” – in old Turkic a crow, and “pur” – from the Persian means son [23]. We should pay special attention here to the crow totem.

Calling of Wu-sun’s governor Kunbi

Now, let us make an analysis of the calling of the Wu-sun governors, who were saved by crow and wolf, “gunmo (kunbi)”. It is only occasionally that the Wu-sun governors were believed to be saved by a crow and a wolf and given the name Kunbi (Kun-mo). It’s clear that the Wu-suns’ governor name “Kunbi (Kun-mo)” is related also to the Sun. If we consider the fact that this legend remains in Chinese sources, then we need to add to this case the Chinese mythology. In this mythology the Sun and crow are represented together. Archeological material also confirms the fact that in ancient times and totemic legends regarding the Sun bird – crow or crow under the Sun (1st picture) were widely spread among the ethnic groups, which constituted the Hansurars. In one of the mythological legends, which itemizes the relation of the Sun and crow, we can find the Chinese legend “The overthrowing of nine Sun-crows by the hunter Hou I”. The main plot of the legend is following:

The great Eastern Governor Di-Jun and his wife Xi-he had ten sun-children. They lived in the tree “fusan”. Each of them every day rose to the sky and made a journey from east to west. So passed many years. Once, the sun-children rose to the sky all together and broke a regime. Because of a heat of ten Suns, the waters were dried up and the earth turned into a desert. The people, whose existence became hard, asked a famous hunter Hou Yi to save them from this suffering. The hunter I, with carefully selected arrows, felled nine Suns from ten, and so nine crows fell from the sky. It is interesting that the fallen crows had three legs. People were surprised having seen that the ten Suns heating the Earth was three legged crows [17].

According to a Korean myth the three-legged crow are related to the Sun [24].

Also, the color of the bird, which is described in the archeological material, is yellow (the color of the Sun). For example, in 647 a West Turkic kagan presented their symbol “the golden crow” to Tan emperor [19]. And in 2006, in the Karakistak-1 Korgan, which belongs to the West Turkic Kaganate

(Zhambyl, Kazakhstan) it was found a golden foil with the picture of the bird [25].

In addition to these facts, the crow is described in relation to the sun, the light, the fire in the worldview of the Paleo-Asiatic peoples of the Amur, the North American Indians, the Chukchi peoples, the Yakuts, etc. And, in the myth of the Volga Bolghars, “The Great Crow” is shown as the sacred force against evil. According to this myth, the evil Albasty⁷ aims to wipe out humanity and build a high wall, which covers the Sun. The Earth becomes dark and cold. And then the Great Crow with its two sons Sak and Sok work for the redemption of the Sun, and again gave to the world the light of the Sun [26].

Really, the reason of the naming of Wusun’s king a Kunbi relates the crow to the Sun in the ancient eastern nations. And the crow is the only sacred bird that saved the Wusun’s governor from hunger and bestowed the “kut”. The myth and facts about the doer, savior, “kut” the bestower, features of the crow and goes beyond this. According to the belief of the Asian nations who inhabit Siberia, the crow is still considered as sacred bird. For example, the tribes of Shaka Kangalas and Shor have the family karga (crow). According the Tlingit and Atapask tribes in the North America, *the equivalent of the word “country” is “karga (crow)”*. The indigenous peoples of the Americas, as the Paleo-Asiatic peoples, consider the crow as the bringer of the light, water, land, fire and other boons, as well as the sacred sign of charity [22]. In ancient times according to Turkic peoples the rook-crow was considered to be the first messenger of spring. The Bashkirs, one of the Turkic peoples, still today have the holiday named “karga toy – a crow holiday” which is celebrated in spring [26]. In the Saka period, the crow appears in the visual arts (sculpture). In the lamp, which was discovered near Almaty, it is shown as the subject, which will confirm our theory. The sacrificial capra lies in the center of the lamp, at the two sides there are sitting two wolves with wide open mouth and on the other two sides there are two crows waiting for a sacrifice. This lamp is presented in Imangali Tasmagambetov’s book *The civilization at the mane of the horse*. In this book is given a following definition of the crow at the sacrificial dish: “The crow is the sign of the eternity and sobriety, mediator between life and death” [27].

Conclusion

In conclusion, the concepts “karga-crow” and “kut” are close, sacred figures in the worldview of the Turkic people. Not only Turkic nations, also ancient Chinese, Indians, Native Americans, the Nations of Siberia, even ancient European nations in

different areas considered the crow close to their worldview. Conclusion from this – “crow-karga” was deemed to be a totem that has a great significance according to its positive view (with the negative views held by certain cultures set aside in this paper). For example, we have observed that some ancient nations have equated the crow to the Sun, some comparing the crow to the “kut”. But, for the Turkic people “kut” is an invisible, untouchable, sacred concept that has a meaning – blessing, abundance. From the above mentioned information we can see two meanings of “kut”: the first – spirit, soul, esprit; the second – richness, abundance, and prosperity. It is obvious that these two meanings of “kut” are a way of equating the phenomena like “the soul flew a way” and “the landing of the happiness, affluence”. And one of the ancient totemic birds, the crow, was considered as savior, the maker of the Sun image, even the nation’s ancestor. The above-mentioned notions are the values which exist in the worldview of ancient Turkic people since olden times. For example the word “kut” can be seen several times in the Orkhon manuscripts. And there are many myths about crows.

Notes

Rook – a type of a bird that belongs to the crow family.

Draw-well – hydro technical facility known from the ancient times.

Kutha – Alternative name of the crow from the Itelmens worldview.

Kunbi – Supreme power in the ancient Wusun’s state.

Nest – habitation which is related only to birds.

Albasty – a mythological character in the folklore of Turkic people, the possessor of negative powers like those of the Devil, Satan.

Corresponding Author:

Dr. Bogenbayev Nurbolat
Gumilyov Eurasian National University, department of Turkic Sciences
Astana, 010000, Kazakhstan
E-mail: nurik198080@mail.ru

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