



OVERVIEW OF COSMOLOGICAL ASPECT OF TURKISH TENT

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ABSTRACT

The tent, which provides the necessities of the nomadic lifestyle, is the most important argument of culture and reflected from culture to place. The Turks who commutes between summer pasture - winter quarters, have used tents which can be built easily and quickly for a long time. The tent has been adapted to the active lifestyle of the nomads. Moving the tent from one place to another could be done on the back of the animal or by putting high wheels under it. Living conditions, weather conditions and some vital necessities have caused the tent to appear in different types and sizes.

The human mind is trying to perceive the secrets of life and the environment in which it lives with the material conditions and resources of its surroundings. Tents, which have an important place in Turkish culture, are a good example of this perception study. As a matter of fact, the Turks used their tents suitable for their lifestyle in both real life and spiritual life. The tent was used as an effective symbol on the religious area.

In this article, the relationship between the pre-Islamic Turkish tent and the heavenly world will be determined, and then the tent's value and function will be tried to be discussed through the cosmological meaning.

Key words: Turk, tent, heavenly world, universe, Oghuz Khan Epic.

1. INTRODUCTION

In prehistoric times, the tent emerged as a solution of housing problem in the process of migration from the caves to the hot regions. Since then tent has provided the necessities of people's protection and housing (Ardatürk, 2015: 1). Over time, other than housing and protection, the tent has embodied cultural values such as belief, tradition, custom, economy and art (Erden, 1979: 73-78).

It is inevitable that tools and materials which people use in their social life, takes part in their thoughts and religious understanding. The Turks have a nomadic lifestyle which means they are mobile. They travel between summer pasture - winter quarters together with their herd and flock between (Koca, 2002: 17-20). Turks are constantly in motion due to their lives. Due to their life style, there is no permanent house structure in their social lives. As a matter of fact, the shelter and housing requirement had to be met in a short time in places where animals were grazed. That is why their houses are the tents they carry with them even in motion.

We understand the importance of the tent in social life through a number of applied principles. According to this, principles such as where to set up and how to set up and which direction the tent exit will open are determined. These principles have gained cosmic meanings over time.

In terms of their use in social life, the tent is a protective shelter for the steppe people from the freezing weather, savage nature and at the same time the enemies (Gumilëv, 2005: 112). Under the shadow of God, this shelter can also be easily established wherever they wanted (Diyarbakirli, 1972: 43-44). In

some way, by staying in his tent, even the ruler was protected against the threats of foreign world¹ (Grousset, 2006: 124).

2. THE RELATIONSHIP BETWEEN TENT AND HEAVENLY WORLD

The Turks likened the sky to the tents they used in social life. The tent's stitch were imagined as a milky way. Under the belief that God intervenes in social life on earth, the ceiling of the tent is made of transparent material that sees the sky. Because of the belief that the sky did not completely cover the earth and winds formed from the openings, open spaces inside the tent were not closed and the cosmic understanding was applied inside the tent by allowing the winds to get inside (Eliade, 2003: 15).

Concept of universe in the Turks shaped according to design of tents. The sky is envisioned as a semi-circular dome, and the earth envisioned as having four corners and eight directions (Bayat, 2007, C.1: 34). Domed tents were generally used by Chou people. This community, which presents the concept of universal cosmology, has also designed in their tents a model of the universe in a micro cosmos way² (Günay-Güngör, 2003: 86). Tent is the best example in applying the concept of cosmology to daily life. The tent pole in the middle is the gate that opens directly to the heavenly realm. It was believed that this way, they can communicate with God³. The tent is the symbol of the world tree with its feature of connecting the parts of the universe (Bayat, 2007, C. 1: 43).

In the Chou period and later period, some Chinese beliefs were also found in different forms, in the Eastern Turks of the Kök Turk (550-745) and Uighur (745-1212) khanates, and the sky dome resembled a cylindrical and domed ruler tent.

It was believed that the sky dome was made of green-blue jade stones, and stars made of white-green jade stones. The earth was considered as a flat surface which four corners are floating in the sea⁴. This was almost the same as the belief in China (Esin, 2001: 40, Günay-Güngör, 2003: 87, Coruhlu, 2002: 89, Ögel, 2014, C. II: 316, Ögel, 1982: 4). In an Uighur text, the universe is again depicted as a tent. And also in the text it was said that an eight-cornered pole resembling a wooden column in the middle of the tent, supporting the earth above the waters. The eight-cornered universe axis is an ancient thought of Indian cosmology (Esin, 2001: 40-41).

In the Turkish universe perspective, the sky was conceived as a tent dome. It was thought that Polar Star held the dome up and fixed like a pile. According to Kashgar's work, the Turks mentioned Polar Star as "*Temur Kazuk*" (Kaşgarlı Mahmud, 2006: 40). The Turks likened the stars in the sky to herd of horses. The point that this herd was merged was the Polar Star (Eliade, 1999: 293). Likening stake (used for tying horse herds in social life) and Polar Star shows that social elements bear cosmic qualities. The Turks also likened this star to stake which they tie their tent from four sides. These metaphors are inevitable traces of equestrian culture.

Because Polar Star holds the sky as a stake, it is believed to be in the middle of the sky dome. And to make a communicative relationship somewhere in the earth will be qualified as the center of the universe. The tent, the first micro cosmos of the person living in the steppe, was taken as the central location⁵. By likening tent to sky man can reach this center. The subconscious form of this is based on the possibility that man can communicate directly with the celestial realm. In the macro cosmic approach the communication with the heavenly world is made up of pole, mountain, tree, etc. but in the micro cosmic approach it is made up of middle pole of the tent or opening on top of tent (Eliade, 2003: 16).

¹ Hsüan-tsang, who visited the Western Kök Turk State in 630, states that khan was in a large tent made of gold mine and the tent was decorated with flowers.

² Nomadic origin Chou Tribe, likened the universe to a cylindrical tent or a two-wheeled car with a tent or umbrella. 28 slices in the umbrella represents 28 signs in Chinese astrology, and two wheels on the car represents the Sun and the Moon.

³ Shamans used tents in some religious rituals (Günay-Harun, 2003: 128; Ögel, 1971: 147; Radloff, 1986: 244-245).

⁴ The image of a quadrangular world has been transformed into a circular form with Islamic influences (Günay-Güngör, 2003: 88).

⁵ In Turkish understanding, the universe and the earth are divided into four main directions. The best example of this aspect approach is Turkish tents. The tent was located in the center of four directions. The order of seating inside the tent was arranged according to fire place which is in the middle of the tent dome or the door opening to the east (Esin, 1978: 36).

2.1. The Usage of Tents in Reaching the Heavenly World

The cosmic link between the dome of the tent and dome of the sky has been reflected in the tomb architecture. In fact, the tombs designed according to tents because of the belief that deceased's soul will rise to the sky. The social cause behind this could be keeping diseased and sick body away from the community. For this reason, the body was kept in a tent for a certain time⁶. During this time it was believed that the spirit lefts the body. When the body was in the tent, a grave complex called "*kurgan*" was built and the body was buried here after the soul was believed to fly. Kurgans were not prepared for all members of society; only the graves of people with a certain hierarchical importance.

Funerals of Kağnılı (ox-driven carts) tribes were like "atalar" (ancestor) worship. In these ceremonies, a light was created by burning sharp weapons such as arrows and lance and also bones of hunted animals such as deer and wild horses⁷ (these animals were hunted by those weapons). The men would turn around the grave on horseback. As in other rituals, men and women were, singing⁷ and dancing by playing music instruments. The deceased was placed in the grave pit by placing a lance in his hand as well as a belt and a sword (Esin, 2001: 165).

The rituals performed at the funerals of the Kök Turks were almost the same as those of the Kağnılı tribes. History of the Tang dynasty of China when talking about the events of the 4th century, describes funeral ceremonies of Kök Turks (İnan, 2013: 177). According to this source, when one of the Kök Turks died, his corpse was put inside a domed and cylinder Turkish tent, then sheep and horses were sacrificed by the relatives of the deceased and their meats were brought before the tent. Besides the meat brought, gold and silver items and also scents that can be poured to body to make it smell good and additionally incense branches (*yog yıpar*) were within gifts that are brought (Esin, 2001: 165-166). On horseback they wander seven times around the tent where corpse was kept⁸ (İnan, 2013: 177; Koca, 2000: 178; Kafesoğlu, 2013: 291). After each round, people in the ceremony would shatter their faces with a knife as if they were mixing their blood and tears (Jen Tang, 1968: 116; Tsai, 2006: 22; İzgi, 2014: 339). In another Turkish text, it is said that some people in the ceremony cut their hair and ears. Then, on one determined day, the horse, clothes and all the objects of the deceased were burned together with the dead body. The corpse which was turned into ashes was buried (Esin, 2001: 166; İnan, 2013: 177). Gerdizi, who was one of the 11th century historians, mentioned that the Kyrgyz burned their dead. The Kyrgyz believed in the cleansing power of fire. According to them, the fire was the cleanest thing, and anything that fell into the fire was cleared of all sins (İnan, 2013: 8).

The belief in body burning is related to the "*yarug*" principle. The body was believed to have reached the sky using fire. If the person dies in autumn or winter, until the earth becomes green; if they died in spring and summer, the corpses were kept waiting until the leaves turns to yellow (Esin, 2001: 166; Tsai, 2006: 22; Turan, 2006: 74). On the day of the burial, relatives of the deceased ride their horses and cry by shattering their faces with a knife as they had done on the day of death (İnan, 2013: 178). After the burial, the mound was built and the heads of the sacrificed animals were hung on a pole. Sometimes these sacrificed animals were painted on top of the standing tombstone. As a reminder of the heroism that the deceased showed during his lifetime, the number of tombstones erected according to men he

⁶ There are cosmic and religious elements among reasons for this waiting period. It is clear that the burial process has to do with the biological periods of the plants (Roux, 2001: 137). It is noteworthy that the ceremonies organized were held in the summer solstice, especially when the resurrection of nature began.

⁷ The songs of the Turks were unmeasured folk song "uzun hava". For this reason, these songs may have been perceived by the Chinese as a wolf howl. In addition, Chinese people 's mention of these songs shows that they attracted their attention (Ögel, 2014, C. I: 21).

⁸ Chinese sources indicate that Huns ride horses around the tomb and Kök Turks ride horses as circular orbit both around tents and tombs (Eberhard, 1996: 86, 94). It is indicated in the sources that Kök Turks ride their horses 7 time around tents and graves (Tsai, 2006: 22). The corpse of Attila who is the ruler of the European Huns was kept in fur-covered bed in a tent made of silk and by making tent their center, all-day circular rides were made on horseback (Brion, 2005: 122; Ahmetbeyoğlu, 2001: 106).

It is clear that the turn round number here has a cosmic purpose. In these actions, it is considered that the corpse is not the center. The center is an imaginary column rising to the sky and this center was carried by the tent. We can say that, this circular rides around the funeral tent aimed to support diseased person's soul during cosmic voyage.

had killed. It is believed that spirits of the people he killed and sacrificed animals will serve to the deceased in the other world⁹ (Esin, 2001: 166-167).

In Kyrgyz, Oghuz and the Caspian (Hazars) there are rituals such as hanging the corpse (in a coffin) on a tree branch; burying him in a dome-shaped tent grave together with his horse, belt, sword and a grail in his hands or by singing hymns and playing musical instruments throwing body to the rives¹⁰ (Esin, 2001: 167). It is understood from the information given by İbn Fazlan that between 9th-13th century, Oghuz apply the same rituals as of Kök Turk burial ceremonies (İbn Fazlan, 1995: 40).

It can be seen that the Turks used the tent form as the first tomb. The tent that forms the universe model forms the shape of both the house and the tomb in the Turks.

3. COSMIC VALUE OF THE RULER TENT

In the Turks, the ruler's tent, like his quarters, city, mansions and temples takes place in the center and plan of the universe. In other words, the ruler city has taken its place as a "small universe" in the form of earth (Esin, 2003: 36). These dwellings were nine-celled structures, one in the center, four in the axis and four in the corners (Esin, 2001: 48; Esin, 2003: 36; Roux, 2001: 108). Which means, universal cosmology has taken its place in these dwellings and found its expression in architecture. Turks, had a tripod stove (fire pit) under smoke hole (*tügünük*) which was in the center of the dome and in the middle of the tent, which was the symbol of the universe. In the old nomadic tradition of Inner Asia, the stove was the place where both the cooking and the fire ceremony were held (Esin, 2001: 49; Gömeç, 2011: 54).

The ruler tent which was beleived to be God's shadow on the earth, represented both the universe and the Turkish state. The ruler is important in the understanding of the universe. He had to execute two main functions from one hand. First, in order to become the ruler on earth, he must have reached a certain level by serving the sky. Secondly, he had to serve on earth to organize things when he was ruling and again reach to the sky (Roux, 2005: 69).

According to Chinese sources, there were some rules in the Hun laws for Chinese ambassadors' entry to tents. The most important of these is that ambassadors' wand which represents Chinese emperor, is not allowed to get into the tent. In addition, before entering the tent, they had to get some kind of tattoo done. In 110 BC when the Chinese ambassador did not leave his wand in, the Hun ruler met with the envoys outside the tent (Pan Ku, 2004: 31).

There are lots of events showing how important the tent in the political history of the Turks. It is noteworthy that, in 587, Şapolyo, the Kök Turk ruler, saw his tent collapsed during the return of a hunt and felt so sad that he passed away after a year. Again in 618, it is observed that Kök Turk ruler Şipi's Tent, collapsed on its own and one year later he died (Kurat, 1952: 21, 23). In 634, Hsie-li, who was captured by the Chinese, did not accept to stay in the palace and set up his tent (Esin, 1997: 9). It is seen that, collapse of the tent by itself or by someone else evokes the evil in Turkish understanding.

God's directing of natural phenomena led to subconscious theories. Human beings have always wanted God's help since they are weak against such phenomenon. Natural phenomena in nature have come as a sign of God to the humans who are in expectancy. As a matter of fact, in 563 when the king of Tunghu wanted to marry the daughter of the Kök Turk monarch, he sent an envoy. However, the ruler did not immediately decide and kept this ambassador waiting for three years. In a natural event that occurred one day, a thunder fell in his tent. For sake of this thunder, the ruler declared that he gave his daughter to the king of Tunghu (Schmidt, 1966: 71).

In the period of Kök Turks Sun, Moon, and *kün-ay* (star-crescent) was considered as symbol of reign (Esin, 2001: 148). The gate of the tents of the Kök Turk khans on the Ötüken Mountain was looking to the east (Ögel, 1988: 166; Ögel, 2014, C. II: 237; Roux, 2001: 110; Esin, 2003: 127). Because the khan

⁹ When burying the body, men and women gathered around the tomb, wearing their most beautiful clothes and jewelry. They depicted deceased person's portrait(s) scenes from the wars that he had participated before his death (Göksu, 2013: 95).

¹⁰ As it is known, the body of Dede Korkut was left to the Sir-Derya waters on a carpet with qopuz(kopuz) in his hand.

would respect the direction of the birth of the Sun¹¹ (Esin, 2001: 152; Ögel, 1988: 704; Ögel, 2014, C. II: 237). There were accession ceremonies for the ruler who took power from the sky, earth, and kün-ay (star-crescent). When we look at the details of these ceremonies in the sources, they were at the edge of a river. During the ceremony, under the leadership of those who had the highest rank within the state, the new ruler was assigned a wolf-headed flag, a mehter team and a two-wheeled ruler ox-cart made of gold. Khan who was on a felt carpet lifted to the air by lords (Esin, 2001: 149), turned to the west nine times around the khan tent which is considered as center of the universe (Öley, 1988: 163; Ögel, 2014, C. II: 206; Esin, 2003:120). After each turn completed, those at the ceremony leaned in front of the Khan. The wives likened to the moon were crowned with a similar ceremony. But the wives were carried on the sofa, not on the felt carpet (Esin, 2001: 150). After the ninth turn, the last stage of the ceremony started. With a silk wrap, the throat of the Khan was squeezed (Ögel, 1988: 164), and the khan fainted then it was asked to him that how many years he would reign (Esin, 2001: 150).

The coronation ceremony of the khan is a belief like the ascension ceremony. According to the Turks, the sky was nine layers¹² (Roux, 2001: 108; Gömeç, 2011: 28; Ögel, 2014, C. II: 205). Thus, the khan, turning around the tent nine times, approached God, and obtained God's kind and support. He also sworn to serve to God (Ögel, 1988: 163).

3.1. Cosmic Value of Tent in Oghuz Khan Epic

In addition to finding expressions and relationships related to the celestial realm in the Epic of Oghuz Khan, symbolic elements are also seen in a concrete state. On one side his face was in the color of the sky when he was born reflects his characteristics, and on the other side it shows that he is under protection of beings in the heavenly world (Ögel, 2014, C. I: 133). This is a reflection of the "*tengri tek tengride bolmuş-Tanrı gibi, Tanrıdan olmuş Türk Bilge Kağan*" concept which can be seen on monument of the Bilge Khan. The sanctification of carrying a trace from the sky has reached the present day as evil eye talisman with the effect of changing social-cultural conditions. The celestial elements that complement Oghuz's superior qualities appear during his first marriage and expeditions. "One day when Oghuz Khan is begging to God, suddenly darkness fell and a light came down from heaven. It was brighter than the sun and the moon ... There was a very beautiful girl in the light. Fiery and bright spot on her head like pole star. That girl was so beautiful that if she laughs God would laugh and if she cries God would cry. Oghuz Khan loved her and chose her as his wife. When the day was lit up, a ball of light such as the Sun entered in his tent. A big male wolf whose hair like color of the sky came out of that light... and said "Oghuz, you want to walk on Urum, I want to walk in front of you". It is understood that the sky is behaving in a guiding and protective manner to the hero (Arslan, 2005: 67-68).

There were heavenly light elements that float into the tent of the Oghuz Khan in the campaigns he has attempted to provide the ideal order on earth. In one of his campaign, when he was camping alongside the Muz Mountain side near the dawn, a wolf which has sky colored male entered his tent. Wolf told Oghuz to follow him during the expedition. Show up of the wolf at sunrise shows Sun's meanings of sovereignty and conquest. As a matter of fact, the wolf here should be considered as the sun's lights that float into the tent. We can say that matter form of these lights is the wolf. In fact, the Turks expressed the meaning of sovereignty and conquest with the red color of the Sun. The light entering into the tent has a kind of compromise mission between God and Oghuz.

Spiritual people communicate with the celestial realm by using tools such as light, dream, *bozkurt* (a mythological sacred animal) and wise old man. The integration of Oghuz with the sky was completed with his three children named *Gün, Ay* and *Yıldız* who were from his wife who descended from the sky in the light. This is due to the idea that human has the power of the earth and the heaven in itself, which is present in the existence idea of the Oguzes. In this thought, the highest layer and the most abstract is the sacred heaven. This is the piece that completes the earth. They pray only to Holy Sky and also to Tengri in order to maintain the materialistic life of the world, the desire to live in the ideal order and to

¹¹ The Turks turned their doors and corpse's heads to the east. When they were directing, they would turn their faces to the east again. The Turks, who turns to the east, called east as "forward". They sometimes used the term sunrise instead of forward. There was a suffix as "-re" in Old Turkish. For example, this suffix is seen in Modern Turkish words such as *ile-ri* (forward), *ge-ri* (back), *üze-re* (on), *son-ra* (then). All these suffixes are the ones that remained to us from the old Turkish grammar (Ögel, 2014, C. II: 187).

¹² The Western Kök Turks believed that sky consist of 7 layers. Number seven stands out in Iranian and Persian cultures.

be successful. Because the sky is the ideal example of universal law and order. There is no irregularity in this place, which is the position of the god of heaven.

In Oghuz Khan Epic the sky was perceived as an objective part of the universe. The phrase which he told his folk and in his great aim "The sun become plume, the sky become tent" and name of his children from his second wife are sky, mountain and sea which is believed to be sacred, confirms the thought mentioned above sentence (Arslan, 2005: 68). The sky or sky dome considered as matter is considered as a tent that covers the earth. Stitches which are fusion points of the tent are Milky Way, and stars are holes for light penetrates through openings. It was believed that the winds blowing from inside the tent open and people with superior qualities reached the holy sky through it (Eliade, 1999: 292).

4. CONCLUSION

The nomadic lifestyle of the Turks caused tent tradition for housing requirement. In addition to meeting vital needs, the tent covered much more. According to the concept of Turkish cosmology, the tent, which forms the central location on earth, has gained its internal and external characteristics according to the cosmic understanding. Within the framework of this understanding, the sky dome is likened to a tent dome. The features of the tent and seating arrangement in it show the social status in the society as well as the cosmological understanding. Funeral ceremonies and doing coronation ceremonies around the tent certainly shows that approach.

When someone dies in the community, the funeral starts from the tent in which the deceased lives. The Turks generally believed that life on the other side would be in the tent just like in this world. Making the first ceremony in front of the tent and making rides around the funeral tent show cosmic aspect of the tent. With these ceremonies, the soul was drawn into a cosmic movement. Conducting coronation rituals around the tents is due to the desire to create this cosmic movement. In this way, the tent was used as a sort of mediate; it was believed that the ruler had reached the celestial realm and won God's approval and bestowal.

It is seen in the Oghuz Khan Epic that cosmological events occurred in or around the tent. In fact, light comes from heavens as a result of Oghuz Khan's being together with his wife in the tent, and it penetrates tent and then wolf which is considered as sacred came out of there can be regarded as a cosmological event. The dome of the sky is likened to dome of tent is also emphasized in the myth.

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