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Leon Dominian

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THE TURK, CASUAL OF GEOGRAPHY

By LEON DOMINIAN

From the mountain border of China to the valley of the Danube the stretch is long but always open: mile upon mile, four thousand and more, of clear footing, over which the nomad may pursue his course without interruption. A large part of this even surface is the Turan of Asiatic writers, a land beset by wind, drought and sandstorms—withal the cradle of Turkish power. Upon that spacious stretch of our world imagination is free to run riot with the host of tumultuous recollections bequeathed by centuries. There was a time when the silk of China reached the markets of Imperial Rome or the kingdoms of Franks and Gauls by way of this land avenue. The westerly advance of the Turks proceeded along the same belt in a migratory movement which, at the lowest computation, is five thousand years old. And when the crest of this mighty human wave swept over eastern Europe, in the fifteenth century, it meant that the western marches of China had been moved to blue water in the island-cluttered Aegean. How these Turks came, hacking and hewing their way to empire with the curved blades of their scimitars, whence and why, I shall strive to tell.

Turan, the Home of the Turk

STEPPE AND DESERT

The more southerly portion of the great uninterrupted plain extending across Europe and Asia consists of alternate patches of grassland and desert sand. In either the eye scans the widest of prospects. Grass, grass everywhere, or else sand, nothing but sand, to an ever-receding horizon, underneath a lonely sky. To look for novelty in the expanse of those continuous plains is useless. Sometimes in the sandy stretches a few green spots relieve the monotony and keep the nomad footbound for a brief spell of days; but, apart from this solace, the great plain always flees before one's vision. The stolid and fatalistic soul of the Turk was bred in the midst of that everlasting sameness.

The pasture lands in spring wear a mantle of luxuriant grass. In the more southerly sections the pleasant green is gradually withered under summer heat to the dull grayish yellow of the fall. Farther north a more considerable summer rain preserves the pastures green till winter. In winter drifting snow contributes another change in the seasonal color cycle; for this wild steppe lies open to the northern winds that sweep with never an obstacle along their gusty path. Here climate, as well as soil, has imparted a ceaseless mobility to man. It is nothing for him to wander a thousand miles between summer and winter pasture and a thousand miles back, and some times he wanders permanently farther afield.

From the grassland to the desert the transition is marked by wilted herbage and the fading leaves of stunted shrubs. Then follow acres of life-choking sands. To one acquainted with Turkish the names on the map of Asia betray reality in vivid language: "Kizil Kum," red sands; "Ak Kum," white sands; "Kara Kum," black sands, but always sand, the crumbling wreckage of nature denying a foothold to man or beast. Turning from western Asia towards the east there is Gobi, a form corrupted from the old Turkish "Kobi", which means emptiness. Upon these wastes, be it east or west, the wayfarer travels over the changing surface of sand mounds spread in surges of gritty, mobile particles responding ceaselessly to the call of the winds. The impression of abandonment, of impending mishap, is always present.

THE CLIMATE OF CENTRAL ASIA

North of the deserts and the grasslands lie Siberia's gloomy forests; and beyond, more wastes—the frozen tundra belt—lands inclement and repellent. To the south the majestic sweep of Asia's giant mountains is an equally forbidding barrier. Cut off from north and south, the Turk was fated to move perpetually in the direction of longitude.

In the zone of his movement the climate is one of uncomfortable extremes. Excessive heat of day changes to pinching cold at night. Icy cold winters alternate with hot summers. Ever open to northern winds the region is subject to marked changes of temperature at all seasons as they blow or subside. Restlessness and

nervous agitation in the Turkish disposition betray the ugly impress of this climate. Furthermore the cold season is abnormally long in Turan and Mongolia. Dreary months of howling winds

FIG. 1—Back to Asia. Anticipating the results of the Balkan War of 1912 many Turkish families fled from the European soil held by their forefathers through many centuries. (Photograph by Frederick Moore, reproduced by permission from *Asia*, Journal of the American Asiatic Association.)

laden with rain and snow have cast their spell over the Turkish race in the long period of its development. From the Arctic come gusts that sweep unchecked over the plains to the mountain

walls on the south. At times a streak of this windy violence will filter through the gaps in the ranges and desolate the plateau homes or carry the shiver of its glacial touch to the broad valleys of southern Asia.

At the edge of the plateau in Ferghana the natives, imaginative as are all their congeners of Iran, know this reminder of the Arctic by the name of "Ho Dervish" wind. Whenever it blows the tale is told of how four of these traveling monks were once caught in the fury of a straying gust and how, losing sight of one another, they kept on calling "Ho, Dervish!", "Ho, Dervish!" until they perished, overmastered by the icy blast. Since then, so the fanciful Sart will inform the traveler, the chase has been maintained by the ghosts of the unfortunate pilgrims, and the weird call tingles today in native ears as they listen to the northern gales.

TURAN VERSUS IRAN: AGAINST AGRICULTURIST

Such is Turan, the ancient home of the Turks. A land of solitary grandeur and of scant companionship. To the Persians it was the lean earth of barbarous darkness in contrast with their own Iran, the land of light. The conflict between the two regions is an ever-present theme of Persian poetry. Firdausi has immortalized it, representing in legendary form the struggle between the Turks, Tatars, and Mongols of the open steppe lands and the sedentary populations of the valleys and plateaus of Persia. No records afford a better insight into the history of Turkish southwesterly migrations than Persian literature. The steppe men of Turan were pastoral nomads to whom comfort had been measured in scanty dole. In contrast the settlers of Iran were engaged in farming, industry, arts, and sciences. They counted poets and philosophers in their midst.

THE NOMAD LIFE

How can the native of a steppe land be weaned from his roving propensity? How can the concept of frontier enter into his mind when infinity in all the majesty of its endlessness stares him in the face on all sides? The Turk became a conquering wanderer because his life, material and spiritual, was conditioned by the wild tract of his surroundings. Nature's work in breeding the nomad was thorough, for she also gave him the horse. By this crowning

gift the Turk came fully into his own. On the bare back of his mount he could feel that he had annihilated space.

The whole social order of the nomad body was permeated by the spirit of its steppe environment. Personal wealth was computed in terms of hoofs. Horses, by right, reverted to the eldest born male, sheep to the youngest. So tradition prescribed. The guardian of the hearth, that is to say of the tent, was always the last born son or a weakling, for elder brothers were warriors who often went forth never to return. The steppe, in which each free lance carved out its own domain of pasture, was theirs: a sword was the heritage most ardently prized. Armed with this symbolic weapon the Turk became his khan's trusted follower. To rush undaunted on the foe, to delight in the slaughter of enemies, and to meet death in the clash of arms was henceforth his martial and only creed. All his duties have been summed up in a single line of his only national poem, the Kudatku Bilik:

Sekirtur, ya eulturur, ya oorooshi eulur
He thrusts, he kills, or, fighting, dies

When the steppe was not a battlefield there was some charm in the primitive simplicity of the life of its occupants. The tented towns of nomad communities spotted the landscape in continually shifting blots. The winding streams, sickly though they might be, were favored spots where patriarchal tents were pitched; but these shelters were mere bubbles of homes alternately created and released by the nomadizing force of the waste surface. Beneath the smoke-tainted roofs culture never transcended the rug and curdled milk stage. Symbolizing that culture would come from the outside the neighing of horses grazing at ease intermingled with the bleating of sheep. To the aged and the women was entrusted the task of maintaining the flimsy fabric of desert society: the men were away battling.

The History of the Turks

For faithful accounts of the early Turks we must turn to the scant translations of the historical hoard accumulated by the patient labor of Chinese annalists. These records range back to 1400 B. C., some six centuries before Homer's immortal epic. The early Greeks and Romans knew little of the Turks; but in the Far

East Turkish tribes proved themselves so troublesome to the Chinese that the latter could not avoid bestowing considerable attention on their doings.

Shorn of the racial traits acquired by marriage with women of conquered populations, the Turk is none other than the old-time barbarian dweller of China's western frontier. There his reputation as a trouble-breeder fully equaled the obnoxious name he made

FIG. 2—A Kirghiz with his flocks. Their number determines his wealth and rank. (Photograph by E. Nelson Fell. Reproduced by permission from *Asia*, May, 1918.)

for himself at a later date in Europe. China's Great Wall was raised in the path of his depredations three hundred years before Christ. The Turk was then called by another name, but his identity is the same.

ETHNIC RELATIONS ON THE ASIATIC STEPPE

The Asiatic steppe country is inhabited by a single people. It is the connecting land between the slit-eyed population of the Orient and the men of our western races. It is also the home of the ideal snub nose. This peculiarity impressed early Western travelers, who came back from the East with tales of having seen a race of noseless men whose faces had two holes instead of nostrils. Toward the east the native tribes pass into pure Mongols and are known as such. In the middle parts, the tribes answer collectively to the appellation of Tatar. As they reach the west these same Tatars become Turks. The three names represent

changes of longitude; the difference they express is primarily one of place geography. A well-marked distinction is found only between inhabitants of the extreme ends of this great open land, that is only between the Chinese and the European, between the oblique eye and the round. In the Hiungnu of the Chinese, in the Turanian of the Persians, and the Scythian of the Greeks and Romans we recognize early names which correspond to the three-

FIG. 3.—In the mountain border of the Turkestan steppe. Kirghiz on their various mounts: the horse is the favorite mount: the ox and camel are more particularly used as baggage animals. (Photograph by Ellsworth Huntington, reproduced by permission from *Asia*, May, 1918.)

fold regional divisions of the land inhabited by Turkish peoples: Hiungnus or Mongols, Turanians or Tatars (with a predominance of Mongolian traits), Scythians or Turks (with European features predominating). A change of name occurs after the fifth century, when Byzantine writers drop the name of Scythian and replace it with that of Hun. The change is significant for it intimates the arrival of the name Hiungnu on the eastern confines of the Byzantine Empire after centuries of westward travel.

EASTWARD MIGRATIONS

The continuity and sameness of the history of the Turks from the earliest times are its most striking points. It is the tale of a warrior race which, rather than remain prisoner in a stern and wild region, elected to wander beyond its confines. At first these warriors directed their blows eastward against China, but their

success in this direction was only partial, and with the stiffening of Chinese resistance they were compelled to seek the sandy roads that were to lead them westward against Europe. The turning point occurs somewhere between the second and third centuries of our era. After that time their eastern wars became desultory border struggles. Occasionally they managed to push annoying wedges into northern China. They even succeeded in placing dynasties of their race on the Chinese throne; but from the western battlefields calls for warriors became pressing and continuous. For China the Turks were no longer a danger; and yet, even to this day, strange as it may seem, they remain a vexation. The raiding brigands of northern Manchuria, who are now locally known as Hunghutzes and whose lawlessness affords many a paragraph to Chinese contemporary news sheets, are descendants of the Turks and are merely maintaining ancestral traditions whenever they clash with Chinese authorities.

MIGRATIONS WESTWARD

With the early centuries of the Christian era Turkish peoples began a great series of westward migrations, pouring out from Inner Asia through the Dzungarian Gate onto the western steppes and deserts.

To the civilization of the West the Turk of this period is the barbarian, despised but not feared. The casual notices of Byzantine chroniclers are couched in tones of unfeigned contempt. Until the eighth century the turbulent tribes of Turan acknowledged no common leader. They lived and moved fighting incessantly among themselves. Then out of feuds and strife came unity. Hek Khan, a chieftain of the most bellicose clan, finally succeeded in uniting eastern and western Turks in a single nation with its capital at Kashgar. Furthermore about this time the Turkish human tool of destruction created by a semi-arid country was perfected by Mohammedanism.

From the ninth to the twelfth century the inflow of the Turks from the east never slackened. A fondness for grabbing land as well as Christian women appears to be the chief characteristic of the Turks of this period. It soon became one of the duties of far-seeing Byzantine statesmen to keep on hand a well-plenished stock

of beauties, often drawn from the best families of the empire, for the purpose of conciliating Turkish chieftains. Notable alliances of Greek princesses and Tatar sultans and emirs, recorded by the Byzantine chroniclers, increase in number with the decline of the Eastern Empire.

To the Khalifs, ever anxious to increase their domain at the expense of the Byzantine Empire, the intrepid nomads of the steppes proved valuable auxiliaries while at the same time they must needs be diverted from the lands of Arabic civilization. Turkish chieftains received assurance that all the land they could conquer by fighting beyond the western frontier of the Khalifate would be theirs. Thus were the Turkish emirates and fiefs founded in Anatolia. As long as the incentive existed the Tatars made good, and the scimitar eventually landed them athwart the Bosphorus and in possession of the castles of the imperial city that guarded the famous strait.

THE TURK IN OTHER ENVIRONMENTS

So far the Turk had moved and acted within the field of his primitive and harsh environment. From now on, however, he forsook the old haunts of his race to force himself upon the tablelands of western Asia, where Persian pomp and Byzantine splendor filled his mind with visions of loot. Trained as he was to conquer the adverse forces of nature, the project offered little difficulty. He learned to recognize the slender ribbon of defiles carelessly hanging down slopes and setting their abruptness at naught. The mountain pass favored him, and the scattered bands that lacked cohesion on the broad grasslands or the sandy deserts became the close battalions that poured confusion among Persians and Byzantines. Two distinct regions, both elevated plateaus, both seats of empire, lay in his path. Persia, the political unit founded on the table-land which goes by the name of Iran, first gave way before the onslaught of the Turanians. The Greeks controlling the table-land of Anatolia were afterwards to fall.

In Persia, the desert-bred Turk found gardens, groves, and vineyards. Having tasted the delights of Oriental Capuas he forgot the frugal life he had led in his native land and gave himself over to self-indulgence. Beyond Persia lay the Byzantine domin-

ions, replete with pleasant gifts of land and sea. The Turk cast a longing eye towards this western territory. Visions of its conquest henceforth colored the dreams of his leaders. Already the softening influence of settled life at Teheran, Shiraz, or Isfahan had been felt among them: with the conquest of Byzantine lands Turkish life found itself finally transferred from the camp to the walled enclosure.

Before changing completely from nomadic to sedentary life, the Turk had a final spell of wandering. In Asia Minor he beheld familiar environment. The interior table-land is drearily devoid of vegetation. Its climate, sorely deficient in moisture, would be naturally shunned by any other race; but the Asiatic sons of semi-arid regions felt at home amid this bareness and used the peninsula effectively as a final stepping-stone out of Asia. Here they gathered strength for the invasion of Europe and the conquest of the Balkan Peninsula as far west as the hill-sheltered bays of Dalmatia.

THE ZENITH OF TURKISH POWER

In the thirteenth century, an eventful one for their race, the Turks, for the first time in their history, became conscious of the might of their name: the old tribal appellation had finally acquired political value; it stood for power and religious leadership. These Turks, but recently tributary to the Khalifate, became its masters.

In the fourteenth century the desert scourge spread to the Balkans. Crossing the maritime boundaries of Asia Minor, the Turks brought into southeastern Europe the fierceness and barbarity which have always characterized Asiatic warfare. Mongols were in their ranks as well as Turks and Tatars—names which in the annals of history stand for destruction. On a sudden Turkish sultans saw in themselves the successors of Caesars in the Near East. The name of Rome fascinated the minds of these medieval Turks in the same way that the name of China had exercised a spell over the imagination of their ancestors.

A short last act—for Constantinople was not captured till 1453—and one of the world's greatest migrations was over. Fully a century elapsed between the first Turkish occupation of Balkan territory and the capture of the great city. Protected by a triple line of massive walls, and partly surrounded by a natural moat

formed by the waters of the Marmara and the Golden Horn, the ancient capital strove to maintain the crumbling edifice of the Byzantine Empire to the very last. The deathblow was to be given by Sultan Mohammed II, young, ambitious, and shrewd enough to enlist on his side every recreant Christian who showed ability as a soldier or mechanic. The walls which had withstood the battering rams of ten centuries crumbled before the stone bullets of the rude Turkish cannon. On the very spot where mighty Persian cohorts bent on subduing the West had failed, the spirit of desert Turan—of the barbarous East personified by the Turk—proved stronger than the civilized West represented by the Byzantines.

TURKISH INFLUENCE ON THE RELIGION OF CENTRAL ASIA

Of the many ways in which these Turks turned out to be molders of destiny volumes might be written. One of the far-reaching though little-known results of their coming was the complete cessation of the Christianizing of Asia—a task that had been undertaken and energetically carried on by the Nestorian Church. This church was the easternmost Christian community of importance. Founded in eastern Syria in the fifth century, it spread rapidly to northern Mesopotamia and southeastern Armenia, where thousands of its followers are still to be met today. The honor of having first introduced Christianity in China belongs to Nestorian missionaries. A large part of western China became Christian through their zeal. At Hsi-an-fu a famous monument testifies to the importance of the movement. The work of converting the heathen was steadily maintained up to the twelfth century. Many Turkish and Mongol tribes, notably in the vicinity of Kashgar, had adopted Christianity. That most observant of travelers, Marco Polo, notes that he met Nestorian Christians on his way to China. Turkestan then contained Christian settlements which have not survived. The extinction of Christianity in central and eastern Asia was the work of Timur and his hordes in the fourteenth century. But for the Turk central Asia might have been Christian today.

The history of this great race of conquerors is drawing to a dishonored close before the gaze of the whole civilized world. The casual of Asiatic geography has become the outcast of Europe.