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The Kyrgyz in written sources from the reign of Emir Timur

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Abstract. This study analyses information about the Kyrgyz in sources dating from the reign of Emir Timur, that is, from the last third of the fourteenth to the early fifteenth century. The study is particularly relevant because a source-critical analysis of two medieval works – Maṭlaʿ al-saʿdayn wa majmaʿ al-baḥrayn (The Rise of the Two Auspicious Constellations and the Confluence of the Two Seas) by ʿAbd al-Razzāq Samarqandī and ʿAjāʾib al-maqdūr fī tārīkh-i Taymūr (The Wonders of Predestination in the History of Timur) by Aḥmad ibn ʿArabshāh – makes it possible to determine the chronological and geographical framework within which the main body of Kyrgyz tribes appeared in the mountains of the Western Tian Shan. These works were examined using the traditional chronological method of historical source criticism. Additional sources were also consulted to assess the reliability of the information about the Kyrgyz found in the work of ʿAbd al-Razzāq Samarqandī. The Kyrgyz are mentioned in Maṭlaʿ al-saʿdayn wa majmaʿ al-baḥrayn in connection with the campaign into Moghulistan undertaken by the Timurid prince Iskandar. This evidence makes it possible to localise the Kyrgyz tribes in the late fourteenth and early fifteenth centuries in the northern regions of Moghulistan, in the southern part of the Altai Mountains near the city of Beshbaliq. It is suggested that at that time the Kyrgyz tribes occupied the mountain valleys of the southern spurs of the Mongolian Altai, while partly extending into the Eastern Tian Shan, including the areas of the Bogdo-ula and Barköl Tagh mountain systems. In addition, the Russian translation of Aḥmad ibn ʿArabshāh's ʿAjāʾib al-maqdūr fī tārīkh-i Temür was examined. In its description of the military contingent stationed in the fortress of Ashpara, on the eastern borders of Emir Timur's empire, a tümen of "Chagatai Kyrgyz" is mentioned. This translation was made by Kh. Bababekov from the Uzbek translation by U. Uvatov. Its analysis, together with recourse to the Arabic text and the English translation of ʿAjāʾib al-maqdūr fī tārīkh-i Taymūr, showed that the term qirghī had been erroneously rendered as "Kyrgyz." The analysis therefore indicates that the sources examined contain no reliable reference to the Kyrgyz in the Western Tian Shan during the reign of Emir Timur. Consequently, the absence of evidence for the Kyrgyz in the Western Tian Shan during Emir Timur's reign suggests that the Kyrgyz, as a consolidated ethnic group, did not establish themselves in these lands until after the fourteenth century.

Keywords: Kyrgyz; Samarqandī; Ibn ʿArabshāh; Chagatais; Emir Timur; Iskandar; Ashpara; Moghulistan

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Алтын Орда тарихындағы қырғыз халқы

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Аңдатпа. Бұл зерттеудің мақсаты – XIV ғасырдың соңғы үштен бір бөлігі – XV ғасырдың басындағы Әмір Темірдің билік еткен уақытына қатысты дереккөздердегі қырғыздар туралы мәліметтерді талдау. Жұмыст өзектілігі ортағасырлық шығармалардың деректанулық талдауы негізінде "Матла ас-садайн ва маджма әл-Бахрейн (екі тақуалық шоқжұлдыздың көтерілуі және екі мұхиттың бірігуі)" Абд ар-Раззак Самарқанди және "Аджайиб әл-макдур фи тарихи Таймур (Темур тарихындағы тағдырдың кереметі) Ахмед ибн Арабшах, Батыс Тянь-Шань тауларында қырғыз тайпаларының негізгі массивінің пайда болуының уақыт пен географиялық шеңберін анықтауға мүмкіндік туды. Бұл қолжазбалар тарихи дереккөздерді зерттеудің дәстүрлі хронологиялық әдісін қолдана отырып талданды. Сондай-ақ, Әбд әл-Раззақ Самарқандидің еңбегіндегі қырғыздар туралы мәліметтердің дұрыстығын растайтын қосымша дереккөздер тартылды. Олар "Матла ас-садайн ва маджма әл-Бахрейн" шығармасында Тимурид Ханшайымы Искандердің Моғолстанға жасаған жорығы аясында айтылған. Бұл мәліметтер Қырғыз тайпаларын XIV ғасырдың аяғы мен XV ғасырдың басында Моғолстанның солтүстік аймақтарында Алтай тауларының оңтүстік бөлігінде Бешбалық қаласының маңында оқшаулауға мүмкіндік береді. Бұл кезде қырғыз тайпалары моңғол Алтайының Оңтүстік сілемдерінің таулы аңғарларын алып, ішінара Шығыс Тянь-Шаньға – Богдо-ула және Баркелтаг таулы жүйелерінің аймағына қоныс аударды деп болжануда. Сонымен қатар Ахмед ибн Арабшахтың "Аджайб әл-макдур фи тарих-и Темур (Темір тарихындағы тағдырдың ғажайыптары)" шығармасының орыс тіліндегі аудармасы зерттелді, онда Әміре Темір империясының шығыс шекараларындағы Ашпара бекінісінде орналасқан әскери контингенттің сипаттамасында "шағатай қырғыздары" деп аталады. Бұл аударманы Өзбек аудармасынан Х. Бабабеков орындады. "Қырғый" термині қате түрде "Қырғыз" деген атпен берілгенін көрсетті. Осылайша, Әмір Тимурдың билігі кезінде Батыс Тянь-Шань аумағында қырғыздар туралы айтылмағандығы тіркелді. Демек, Әмір Тимурдың тұсында батыс Тянь-Шаньда қырғыздар туралы ақпараттың болмауы қырғыздардың біртұтас этникалық ұжым ретінде бұл жерлерді XIV ғасырдан ерте игермегені туралы айтуға мүмкіндік береді.

Түйін сөздер: Қырғыздар; Самарқанди; ибн Арабшах; шағатайлар; Әмір Тимур; Ескендір; Ашбара; Моғолстан

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Кыргызы в письменных источниках периода правления эмира Тимура

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Аннотация. Целью настоящего исследования является анализ сведений о кыргызах в источ-

никах, относящихся ко времени правления эмира Тимура в последней трети XIV – начале XV века. Актуальность работы заключается в том, что на основе источниковедческого анализа средневековых сочинений «Матла ас-садайн ва маджма ал-бахрайн (Восход двух благоприятных созвездий и слияние двух океанов)» Абд ар-Раззака Самарканди и «Аджайиб ал-макдур фи тарихи Таймур (Чудеса предопределения в истории Темура)» Ахмеда ибн Арабшаха стало возможным определение временных и географических рамок появления в горах Западного Тянь-Шаня основного массива кыргызских племен. Данные рукописи были проанализированы с использованием традиционного хронологического метода исследования исторических источников. Также были привлечены дополнительные источники, которые подтвердили достоверность сведений о кыргызах в труде Абд ар-Раззака Самарканди. Они упоминаются в сочинении «Матла ас-садайн ва маджма ал-бахрайн» в контексте похода в Моголистан тимуридского царевича Искандера. Эти сведения позволяют локализовать кыргызские племена в период конца XIV – начала XV века в северных районах Моголистана в южной части Алтайских гор вблизи города Бешбалыка. Предполагается, что в это время кыргызские племена занимали горные долины южных отрогов Монгольского Алтая, частично откочевывая в пределы Восточного Тянь-Шаня – в район горных систем Богдо-ула и Баркёльтага. Кроме того, был изучен русский перевод сочинения Ахмеда ибн Арабшаха «Аджаъиб ал-макдур фи тарих-и Темур (Чудеса предопределения в истории Темура)», где в описании воинского контингента, размещённого в крепости Ашпара на восточных границах империи эмира Тимура, упоминается тумен «чагатайских кыргызов». Данный перевод был выполнен Х. Бабабековым с узбекского перевода У. Уватова, анализ которого, вместе с привлечением арабского текста и английского перевода сочинения «Аджайиб ал-макдур фи тарихи Таймур», показал, что термин «қирғий» был ошибочно передан как «қырғыз». Тем самым фиксируется отсутствие упоминаний кыргызов на территориях Западного Тянь-Шаня в период правления эмира Тимура. Следовательно, отсутст-вие сведений о кыргызах на западном Тянь-Шане в эпоху правления эмира Тимура позволяет говорить о том, что кыргызы как единый этнический коллектив освоили эти земли в период не ранее XIV века.

Ключевые слова: кыргызы, Самарканди; ибн Арабшах; чагатаи; эмир Тимур; Искандер; Ашбара; Моголистан

Introduction

The study of the origins of the modern Kyrgyz people is characterized by considerable scholarly debate, the most significant issue being the routes and chronology of the migration of their core population to the Western Tian Shan. It must be stated at the outset that the view held by scholars who entirely deny a historical connection between the modern Kyrgyz and the ancient Siberian Kyrgyz (Kyzlasov 1959: 104-113; Kyzlasov 1984: 65-67; Kyzlasov 2017) is thoroughly refuted by population genetics data, which confirm a direct genetic link between them. Contemporary scholarly discourse favors the "migration theory," which posits the relocation of the main body of Kyrgyz tribes from the Sayan-Altai region to the Tian Shan; however, scholars differ regarding the chronology of this process. In this context, a critical analysis of sources on Kyrgyz history is important.

Materials and Methods

To achieve the primary objective of the study, two sources dating from the reign of Emir Timur that contain information on the history of the Kyrgyz people were analyzed: Maṭlaʿ al-Saʿdayn wa Majmaʿ al-Baḥrayn (The Rising of the Two Auspicious Constellations and the Confluence of the Two Oceans) by ʿAbd al-Razzāq Samarqandī, and ʿAjāʾib al-Maqdūr fī Tārīkh-i Tīmūr (The Wonders of Predestination in the History of Timur) by Aḥmad ibn ʿArabshāh. To verify information concerning the Kyrgyz during this period, materials from the following sources were also consulted: Yuan Chao Bi Shi (The Secret History of the Mongols); Zafar-nama (Book of Victories) by Sharaf al-Dīn ʿAlī Yazdī; Zubdat al-Tawārīkh-i Bāysangūrī (The Cream of Baysangur's Chronicles) by Ḥāfiẓ-i Abrū; Tārīkh-i Rashīdī (History of Rashid) by Muḥammad Ḥaidar; Majmūʿ al-Tawārīkh (Collection of Histories) by Sayf al-Dīn Akhsīkatī; Xiyu Xingcheng Ji (Account of a Journey to the Western Regions) by Chen Cheng; Ming Xuanzong Shilu (Veritable Records of the Ming Emperor Xuanzong); Ming Shi (History of the Ming Dynasty); and Xu Wenxian Tongkao (Continuation of the Comprehensive Examination of Literature). Source analysis, combined with the comparative-historical method and the critical cross-referencing of diverse written accounts, forms the methodological basis of this study.

Literature Review

The main hypotheses concerning the origins of the Kyrgyz can be broadly divided into two approaches, conventionally referred to as the “autochthonous” and “migration” theories. Proponents of the former argue that the Kyrgyz have inhabited the Tien Shan and East Turkestan since ancient times. The prominent Sinologist N. Ya. Bichurin is generally regarded as an early proponent of this theory (Bichurin 1950: 38). The “autochthonous” theory is closely associated with hypotheses identifying the Kyrgyz with the ancient Wusun (Usun). This hypothesis was first advanced by N. A. Aristov, who argued that the “popular name of the Wusun” was “Kyrgyz,” while “Wusun” was merely a political designation (Aristov 1876: 274-456; Aristov 2001: 219). According to B. Soltonoev, in the 2nd century BC, the Kyrgyz, led by the Wusun, were defeated by the Xiongnu and consequently forced to migrate from their lands in the Sayan-Altai region to the Tien Shan (Soltonoev 1993: 131–133). T. A. Akerov, in turn, has identified the direct ancestors of the Kyrgyz as the Az-Wusun (Akerov 2005: 39-42), the Hyperboreans (Akerov 2012: 5), or simply the Wusun (Akerov 2020).

Within the “migration” theory, two principal approaches can likewise be distinguished, primarily on the basis of the proposed chronology of the Kyrgyz migration to the Tien Shan. Proponents of the first approach argue that the ancient Siberian Kyrgyz migrated to the Tien Shan before the 15th century. According to V. V. Radlov, the ancient Siberian Kyrgyz were forced to migrate from their original territories in three directions – to the Tien Shan, the Upper Yenisei region, and the lands north of the Sayan Mountains – during the Mongol expansion in the 13th century (Radlov 1929: 20). The view that the Kyrgyz migrated to the Tien Shan during the pre-Mongol or Mongol periods was also expressed by Ch. Ch. Valikhanov (Valikhanov 1958: 59). G. E. Grumm-Grzhimailo argued that the Kyrgyz migrated from the Baikal region to the Tien Shan during the Mongol period (Grumm-Grzhimailo 1926: 450). A. N. Bernstam proposed that the

Kyrgyz migration to the Tien Shan took place gradually, beginning in the 1st century BC and continuing through the 8th-10th centuries (Bernstam 1955: 23). O. Karaev dated the formation of the Kyrgyz people to the 11th-15th centuries and regarded the capture of cities in East Turkestan by the Kyrgyz in the 10th century, including Aksu, as the beginning of this process (Karaev 1966: 105). Yu. S. Khudyakov broadly concurred with Karaev's view. He argued that, during the existence of the Kyrgyz Khaganate from 840 onward, military expansion led some Kyrgyz tribes to move into East Turkestan and occupy part of the Tarim Basin. Subsequently, during the Khitan invasion of the Mongolian steppes, the previously unified body of Kyrgyz tribes was divided into two groups: the Sayan and East Turkestan Kyrgyz. According to Khudyakov, the East Turkestan Kyrgyz subsequently played a major role in the formation of the modern Kyrgyz people in the Tien Shan (Khudyakov 1995: 139). According to A. M. Mokeev, the Kyrgyz people took shape in the Tien Shan between the 15th and 18th centuries through a prolonged process of interaction and mutual influence between two principal components: the ancient and medieval tribal communities of the Tien Shan region and the Kyrgyz tribes that migrated there from the Irtysh region and Altai in the 15th century (Mokeev 1990: 131–137; Mokeev 1996: 204-244; Mokeev 2010). A detailed examination of the scholarly debate surrounding these issues has been provided by S. M. Abramzon (Abramzon 1990: 23-31), A. M. Mokeev (Mokeev 2010: 9-24), Yu. S. Khudyakov (Butanaev, Khudyakov 2000: 134-144), Ch. D. Turdalieva (Turdalieva 2015: 14-26), and R. A. Abdumanapov (Abdumanapov 2015: 10-21).

Results

When examining the numerous theories concerning the origins of the Kyrgyz people, a key issue is determining when their primary ethnic core first appeared in the Tian Shan region. In this context, references to the Kyrgyz in sources from the reign of Emir Timur (the second half of the fourteenth century) help establish the approximate timeframe of their settlement in the Tian Shan. The reign of Emir Timur has been extensively studied in historiography, and a wide range of sources documenting the history of his state has survived. These include Roznamai-yi Ghazavat-i Hindustan (Diary of Timur's Campaign in India) by Ghiyas al-Din Ali ibn Jamal al-Islam Yazdi; Matla‘ al-Sa‘dayn wa Majma‘ al-Bahrayn (The Rising of the Two Auspicious Constellations and the Confluence of the Two Oceans) by ‘Abd al-Razzaq Samarqandi; Zafarnama (Book of Victories) by Sharaf al-Din Ali Yazdi; Mu‘izz al-Ansab (Glorifier of Genealogies); Zafarnama (Book of Victories) by Nizam al-Din Shami; ‘Aja'ib al-Maqdur fi Tarikh-i Timur (The Wonders of Predestination in the History of Timur) by Ibn ‘Arabshah; and other works. These detailed accounts of Emir Timur's state, many of them written by contemporaries, cover various aspects of imperial life, including administrative structures, the formation of tribal "ulus" (territorial-administrative units), military affairs, architectural traditions, political events, clan and family relations, and ethnographic information.

However, despite the abundance of sources describing events in the fourteenth century across the vast territory extending from Khorasan in the west to Mongolia in the east, the Kyrgyz are mentioned in only two of these works. This makes it necessary to examine the relevant passages in these sources carefully within the framework of established chronological approaches to the study of historical sources and in conjunction with a broader range of historical evidence.

Matla‘ al-Sa‘dayn wa Majma‘ al-Bahrayn by ‘Abd al-Razzaq Samarqandi

The earliest mention of the Kyrgyz in a source from the Timurid period appears in the manuscript Matla‘ al-Sa‘dayn wa Majma‘ al-Bahrayn (The Rising of the Two Auspicious Constellations and the Confluence of the Two Oceans) by ‘Abd al-Razzaq Samarqandi. The work was completed in 887 AH (1462-1463)[2] and chronicles events from the beginning of the reign of the Ilkhan Abu Sa‘id in 704 AH (1304-1305) to 875 AH (1470-1471) (Samarqandi 1973: 150). ‘Abd al-Razzaq Samarqandi mentions the Kyrgyz in connection with a campaign into Moghulistan undertaken in 802 AH (1399-1400) by the fifteen-year-old prince Iskandar, a grandson of Emir Timur. Following the death of the Moghul Khan Khizr-Khoja Oghlan, a conflict broke out among his sons, against whom Khudaidad, the “ulus-begi” of the Dughlat tribe, rose in opposition. Prince Iskandar sought to take advantage of this internecine conflict. He had been entrusted with guarding the eastern borders of Emir Timur’s empire together with a contingent of Chagatai emirs assigned to him. Without obtaining his grandfather’s permission, he launched a campaign into Moghulistan. His army passed through the Uch-Barman region and besieged and captured the fortress of Aksu. It subsequently captured the city of Bai, after which Iskandar launched raids into the regions of Kusan and Tarim. Although the prince intended to “reach the farthest limits of Moghulistan,” the emirs accompanying him dissuaded him from proceeding further. The army therefore marched south, conquered Khotan, and only then returned to its camp on the Ili River. Samarqandi records: “As an offering to Timur, [Iskandar] sent – escorted by Sheikh-Yasaul – several sets of nine exquisite beauties from Almalyk and Khotan, as well as enchantresses from the Kyrgyz lands and Pishbalyk; he [Sheikh-Yasaul] arrived at the High Orda in the land of Sham” (Samarqandi 1973: 158). The practice of presenting gifts in groups of nine was characteristic of Turkic-Mongol peoples from ancient times. The number nine held particular sacred significance in their traditions. For example, Genghis Khan possessed a “nine-bunchuk standard” (The Secret History 1941: 158), while medieval Mongol tradition provided for the forgiveness of “nine offenses” (The Secret History 1941: 159, 161, 164, 166, 167). The presentation of gifts in sets of nine was also customary in the empire of Emir Timur. A well-known example is provided by the ruler of Shirvan, Sheikh Ibrahim, who presented Emir Timur with “gifts – nine of each kind, as was the custom among Mongol sovereigns.” He presented only eight slaves, however, declaring: “I myself am the ninth.” Timur was reportedly so pleased with him that he called him his son, bestowed upon him a robe of honor, appointed him ruler of Shirvan and Shemakha, and sent him back to his domains (Ashurbeyli 1983: 192).

The sudden campaign of Prince Iskandar into Moghulistan is also described in the Zafarnama by Sharaf al-Din Ali Yazdi. He writes that the Jetin – that is, Moghul – ulus had fallen into disarray following the death of Khizr-Khwaja-Oghlan. “Emirzadeh Iskandar,” having gathered his Andijan troops, set out for Moghulistan. His forces captured and plundered Yarkand and then raided Saryk-Kamish, Kalpin, Ala-Kul, Yar-Kurgan, Chahar-Tak, and Kinuk-Bagh. After a forty-day siege, the Chagatai army captured the fortress of Aksu. Bay and Kusan were subsequently attacked, and a raid was launched against Tarim. Iskandar’s army then conquered Khotan before returning to Kashgar. There, the prince selected “two groups of nine — Moghul women with faces like peris and Khotanese women resembling houris” and, accompanied by Sheikh-Yasaul, sent them as a gift to his grandfather (Yazdi 1973: 146-147). The similarity between these accounts can be explained by the fact that Samarqandi’s work, in its first part and in its second part when describing events

before 830 AH (1426-1427), presents an abridged version of the work of Hafiz-i Abru. Moreover, where Samarqandi's text diverges from Hafiz-i Abru, the inserted passages are derived specifically from the work of Sharaf al-Din Yazdi (Samarqandi 1973: 150). It is therefore possible that Samarqandi based his account of Prince Iskandar's campaign into Moghulistan on Yazdi's report while modifying it to some extent on the basis of other sources available to him.

In his account of Prince Iskandar's campaign, Samarqandi establishes a geographical parallel between the "beauties of Almalyk and Khotan," associated with the southern part of Moghulistan, and the "enchantresses from the Kyrgyz lands and Pishbalyk," associated with its northern part. Yazdi, by contrast, mentions "houri-like women of Khotan" instead of the "beauties of Almalyk and Khotan" and refers to "fairy-like Moghul women" rather than the "enchantresses from the Kyrgyz lands and Pishbalyk." The reference to the capture of the "enchantresses from the Kyrgyz lands and Pishbalyk" suggests that Iskandar's raids may have extended as far as Turfan and Beshbaliq. O. Karaev cites information from Hafiz-i Abru indicating that Iskandar's army reached "Almalyk and Beshbaliq" and associates the capture of women from the Kyrgyz lands and Beshbaliq with the subjugation of these territories. He further notes that, "according to Eastern authors, the Kyrgyz people at that time were nomadic in the area northwest of the city of Beshbaliq" (Karaev 1995: 67).

An analysis of the routes followed by Iskandar's Chagatai army therefore makes it possible to determine the approximate location of the Kyrgyz tribes during this period.

'Ajā'ib al-Maqdūr fī Tārīkh-i Tīmūr by Aḥmad ibn 'Arabshāh

Ahmad ibn 'Arabshah's work, 'Aja'ib al-Maqdur fi Tarikh-i Timur (The Wonders of Predestination in the History of Timur), was written in Arabic in 1436 and subsequently translated into several languages, including Latin, French, English, and Russian (Akhmedov et al. 1999: 10). In 1992, U. Uvatov translated the work into Uzbek, and the translation was published in two parts (Ibn Arabshoh 1992a; Ibn Arabshoh 1992b). Uvatov based his translation on the Cairo edition of the text, published in Egypt in December 1887 (Ibn Arabshoh 1992a: 61). In 2008, Kh. Bababekov translated the work into Russian, basing his translation on the Uzbek version (Ibn Arabshakh 2008). It is in this Russian translation of 'Aja'ib al-Maqdur fi Tarikh-i Timur that a tumen (a military unit of ten thousand) of "Chagatai Kyrgyz" is mentioned in the description of the military contingent stationed at the Ashpara fortress on the eastern frontier of Emir Timur's empire. The relevant passage reads: *"Among them was a group (detachment) from Arab Iraq and Azerbaijan; there were also a number of men known as 'Joni Qurbon.' They joined those fighters – comprising one tumen (ten thousand) of Chagatai Kyrgyz – to Emir Argunshah"* (author's note: the stylistic features of the translation have been retained) (Ibn Arabshah 2008: 193).

The Uzbek translation by U. Uvatov, on which the Russian translation was based, reads: *"Шулар жумласидан Ҳинд ва Мўлтон аскарларидан бир тоифа, Араб Ироқи ва Озарбайжон қўшинидан бир қавм, Форс ва Хуросон суворийларидан бир гуруҳ, Жони Курбон деб аталадиган одамлардан бирмунчаси бор эди. Улар ўша жангчиларни чиғатой қирғийларидан бир тумон билан (бирга) амир Арғуншоҳга қўшдилар"* (Ibn Arabshah 1992a: 282). Our translation from the Uzbek reads: *"Among them were a group of warriors from India and Multan, a contingent from Arab Iraq and Azerbaijan, a cavalry detachment from Fars and Khorasan, and a portion of the men known as Jani Qurban. They joined these warriors, together with a* tuman *of Chagatai 'hawks,' to Emir Arghunshah."* Regarding the term *"қирғийларидан"*

("hawks"), U. Uvatov notes that the original manuscript uses the term "yasok" (Ibn Arabshah 1992b: 152). Thus, the text of Ibn Arabshah contains no reference to a separate tuman of Chagatai Kyrgyz. It is likely that Kh. Bababekov made a single-letter error, reading *"қирғийларидан"* ("hawks") as *"қирғизларидан"* ("from the Kyrgyz").

To clarify this passage, other translations of Ibn Arabshah's work may be compared. In J. Sanders's English translation, the relevant passage reads: "… *which troops with a tumen of the army of the Jagatais they entrusted to the Amir Argun Shah …"* (Tamerlane 1936: 194). In other words, *"they entrusted these troops, along with a 'tumen' (ten thousand – J. S.'s note) from the Chagatai army, to Amir Argun Shah." At our request, S.A. Tuleubaeva, a specialist in Arabic philology and Doctor of Philological Sciences, translated the relevant passage from a photocopy of the Arabic manuscript of Ibn Arabshah* (The Timurnamah 1882: 199). Her translation of the phrase reads: "*… they added these armed, brave horsemen, along with a yashak (yashak – troops – S. T.'s note) of Chagatai, to Amir Argun Shah."* As in U. Uvatov's note, Tuleubaeva's translation uses the term yasok/yashak. According to S. A. Tuleubaeva, the term yashak/yāshak may represent an Arabic rendering of the Turkic term jasak, meaning "detachment" or "unit." In this context, it may therefore be translated as "troops" or "army." Moreover, in accordance with Arabic linguistic norms and word order, the phrase can be understood as "Chagatai's yashak." There are indeed examples of the term jasak being used specifically in the sense of a "detachment" or "unit." According to K. K. Yudakhin's dictionary, "jasak" was formerly used in Kyrgyz to denote the "retinue of a major military leader," as well as in the compound expression "jasak-jabdyk", meaning "military equipment" (Kyrgyz-Russian Dictionary 1985: 238). It should also be noted that the Ashpara fortress was built by the Timurid prince Muhammad-Sultan on the river of the same name. Today, its ruins form the Chaldybar archaeological site on the border between Kazakhstan and Kyrgyzstan (Karaev 1995: 67; Kozhobekov 2017: 20). According to Sharaf al-Din Yazdi, in February 1398 Emir Timur appointed Prince Muhammad-Sultan to govern the frontier with Moghulistan and ordered him to construct a fortress in the Ashpara region. He assigned several emirs to assist him – Berdy-bek, Haji Saif al-Din, Khudaidad-i Husaini, and Shams al-Din Abbas – and allocated a force of 40,000 horsemen (Yazdi 1973: 144–145). Ibn Arabshah reports: "They occupied the valleys there, sowed fields, and built several fortresses, the most remote of which is called Ashpara. They constructed an impregnable fortress there, poised for raids and devastation" (Volin 1960: 91).

Conclusion

An analysis of Matla' al-Sa'dayn wa Majma' al-Bahrayn by 'Abd al-Razzaq Samarqandi shows that the work does indeed mention Kyrgyz female captives presented to Emir Timur by Prince Iskandar following his campaign in Moghulistan. The sequence of events described in connection with Iskandar's campaign indicates that, at that time, the Kyrgyz were nomadic in areas adjacent to Beshbaliq. When this evidence is considered together with other written sources and ethnographic data concerning traditional nomadic practices, the location of Kyrgyz encampments during this period can be specified more precisely: they appear to have been situated in the mountain gorges of the Southern Altai, immediately north of Beshbaliq. This area provided conditions suitable for a mountain-based nomadic lifestyle involving the use of alpine pastures, a practice that has remained characteristic of the Kyrgyz. The region, situated between the spurs of the Southern Altai and the northeastern spurs of the Tian Shan, was known as "Northern Jete"

(– Jete-yi Shamal), or Northern Moghulistan. Later, the region came under the rule of the Oirat khuntaijis, and part of the Kyrgyz population became incorporated into the Oirat Horde. At the same time, sources from this period also mention an independent "Kyrgyz" domain.

An examination of Ibn Arabshah's 'Aja'ib al-Maqdur fi Tarikh-i Timur, specifically the account of the military garrison at the Timurid fortress of Ashpara, reveals no reference to the Kyrgyz. The term "Chagatai Kyrgyz" appears in Kh. Bababekov's Russian translation, which was based on U. Uvatov's Uzbek translation, appears to result from a translation error. The issue is particularly significant because this reading also influenced the author of the present study. In an earlier article, the author interpreted the passage as evidence for the presence of a distinct Kyrgyz tumen within the Chagatai forces (Abdumanapov 2023: 436). The alleged presence of "Chagatai Kyrgyz" at the Ashpara fortress has likewise been cited in the research of the history enthusiast M. B. Baibosunov (Baibosunov 2024).

This case underscores the importance of meticulous examination of translated historical texts in conjunction with a broad range of sources. In this context, the following observation by the Kyrgyz linguist I. A. Batmanov is particularly relevant: "When discussing the arrival of the Kyrgyz in the Tian Shan in the context of the history of the Kyrgyz language, we refer not to the appearance of isolated groups that subsequently dissolved into other, more powerful tribal confederations, but to the arrival of a collective that – through interaction with other tribal and ethnic groups – preserved its linguistic distinctiveness and served as the core for the eventual formation of the modern Kyrgyz nation" (Batmanov 1947: 48). In line with this interpretation, the present study finds that the historical sources from the Timurid period do not document the presence of the Kyrgyz, as a major ethnic community, in the western Tian Shan. The evidence examined here instead indicates that the Kyrgyz were nomadic in the southern foothills of the Altai during this period, while their presence in the territory of the modern western Tian Shan is attested by sources only at a later date.

Notes

1. Genetic material ancestral to more than 40% of the modern Kyrgyz population – specifically the R-S23592 and R-YP1506 subclades – has been identified in burials associated with the Karasuk archaeological culture in the Minusinsk Basin (Sabitov 2016).
2. Here and throughout the text, dates in the Islamic calendar are correlated with the European calendar using the synchronistic tables of I. A. Orbeli (Orbeli 1941).

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