

THE SONS OF GOG

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The Father of History is entering into his kingdom. Herodotus is no longer regarded as credulous gossip and eager swallower of old wives' tales. He has in reality a sound observer by no means without a shrewd critical sense his writings contain valuable touches of contemporary thought which are ignored by the materialistic school of Karl Marx. These explain the invasion by the Scythians of Assyria and Persia by the demand for the spices and silks of the East. Herodotus has no references to the "struggle for markets" or the problems of "commercial relations". He gives us what is more valuable, a vivid and often detailed description of peoples and their doings which has a profound human interest. He supplies facts, and it is our task to interpret them. After all, man is an animal and history is really a branch of biology in its widest sense.

Among all the ancient folk described by Herodotus the most mysterious were the Scythians and their kinsmen the Massagetae. Who were this powerful people who from their home in the grassy plains of southern Russia shook the powerful empires of Assyria and Persia? Why do they so suddenly disappear from the pages of history? I will endeavour to show that they did not disappear, that they were the same people who were the terror of the civilized world of the East and of Europe through the centuries, from the days when the Prophet Ezekiel (Chap. 38) described them as the countless swarms of savage horsemen of Gog and Magog from the "north parts".

The old Persian historians placed the original home of these Scythians, whom they sometimes called also Goths¹ and Saki or Saci, in that mysterious corner of the globe where the loftiest mountains of the world are knotted into one mass, the Pamirs, Hindu Kush and the Himalayas. This part of Asia was known to the Ancient Greeks, but not to Herodotus, as the Caucasus, whence, according to traditions, there issued the peoples of Europe and India, races which bear the name of Caucasian or Indo-European. This designations are entirely without foundation, for they comprise under one name, Caucasian or Aryan, very different tribes and peoples who have only one feature in common, language.

When the name of Scythians no longer occurs, there appear from time to time in Central Asia more shadowy figures, none knows whence, disappearing again, none knows whither, first one nomadic people, then another, flitting across the stage of the drama. We read of the White Huns or Epthalites, who descended upon the plains of India, of Uigurs, Uichi and others. In these Uichi perhaps, we may recognize the Ouzi of the Byzantine chroniclers, who identified them with the Pechenegs and relate that they and the Kumans spoke the same language as the Turks. This is quite true, for they are all branches of one and the same people. We read of these vague hordes in the writings of the Chinese historians, but these have a special talent for mutilating foreign names and make confusion worse. Then come others who play the same role as Scythians, hordes which poured from the East upon the West, stayed a little time and then disappear once more; they bear strange uncouth names, some of which have left their imprint upon the popular memory; such as Alaus, Avars, and Huns.

Now it commonly occurs in history that an entire people is known under the name of one of its constituent tribes, and we find the old Russian chroniclers writing of Kipchaks, Naimans, Kara Kalpaks, the

¹ The name of Goth has been indiscriminately applied to very different peoples. These Asiatic Goths had nothing in common with the Germanic people who played so important a part in the history of Europe.

Goths of Asia, the Kumans, Pechenegs, Polovtsi, of the Huns, Uzbegs, and Mongols. The Kumans are nothing else but the Men of the Sandy Desert, from the word *kum*, which occurs in Kara Kum, the Black Desert, and Kizil Kum, the Red Desert. This tribe became notorious in south-eastern Europe in the tenth and eleventh centuries. They appear in Balkan history in association with the Pechenegs and the Bulgars, with whom they were eventually absorbed. But the name survives in several place-names, the most famous of which is Kumanovo; it is also recorded that that a large contingent of them settled in Hungary and were absorbed by their kinsmen, the Madyars. The Pechenegs left their name in Pecheneshte, a village in southern Serbia.

It is clear that in Central Asia of those days nomads appeared out of the steppes and dominated the settled population, sometimes for considerable periods, in Bactria, Sogdiana, Persia and other lands. The Arab conquerors of the seventh century had little difficulty in crushing the settled population of Central Asia, but they did not venture to penetrate into the steppe to the north of Syr Daria, then known as the Djehun, and Islam there made negligible progress for ages to come. The Mahomedan religion made its final conquest of the Kirgiz of the steppes and of the mountains only in nineteenth century through the medium of Kazan Tartars and, strangely enough, thanks to the protection which the Russian Government afforded to Moslem missionaries.

The Arab rulers of Bagdad, who invited the nomads of the steppes as cavalry guards, bitterly repented the folly of this ill-advised action, so great an influence did their mercenaries exert in the country afterwards. With the fall of the caliphs of Bagdad the nomads of the northern steppes began to play an ever-increasing part in the political life of Central Asia, and finally the whole country lying between the basin of Syr Daria and of the Amu Daria, known to the Arabs as Maver, Maverranagr and Khorassan, came to be known as the land of the Turks, Turkestan. This is as it should be, for all these nomad cavalry of the steppes, call them what we will, are the same

people; their names are mostly but the names of their tribes and clans of one race, the swarming Turki of Central Asia.

They are the nomads who invaded Russia. The dissention and internecine struggles of Muscovite princes prepared the ground for the dominion of the barbarians; the squabbling rulers often called them in to help them in their struggle for power, just as did as did the Byzantine emperors, with the same fatal results. From the date of the submission of Russian territories to the nomad hordes the numerous previous of these people finally disappear from the pages of history and they all become "Tartars".

These we know. They live t-day in Russia, and there are millions of them. But whither have gone those older hordes who were the scourge of the kings and princes of Muscovy and the steppes from time immemorial? Where could they have disappeared, those numerous and powerful peoplers, who had established their own peculiar culture and nomad form of life? Out of what mysterious laboratory of nations somewhere in the depths of Asia had they arisen?

Unfortunately history gives no answer. This branch of human knowledge is still far from being an exact science. It is to-day in the same state that zoology and botany were before Linnæus. It has not even an accurate terminology nor precise method. It is for this reason that at times there appear various peoples under various names, in various places, at various times. The name "Tartar", for instance, applied by West European learned men to the peoples of Central, Northern and Eastern Asia, takes no account whatever of their origin or of ethnological facts; it is applied indiscriminately to nomad and settled peoples and to peoples of totally different race, as Turki, Mongol and Iranian. It is in no sense a scientific term and ought long since to have been abandoned.

Scarcely better is "Mongolo-Tartar", applied by Russian scientific writers. The "Tartars" of Russia of to-day have nothing in common with the Mongols. For instance, the Kazan Tartars are a tribe of Finnish origin which has accepted Islam and adopted a Turki

language; in descent they are in no way different from the remaining population of Central Russia, which consists of Finnish tribes that have accepted Christianity and adopted the Russian language.

The Crimean "Tartars" who are descendants of Greek and Genoese colonists, are more nearly related to the peoples of Western Europe than are the Russians themselves, Mahommedans though they be. The Tartars of the Caucasus, too, are very mixed; most of them are Iranians and so related to the Persians, which means of Aryan origin.

The question at once arises, how could these different peoples have succeeded each other in these regions? Whence could they have come and whither could they go, away into the Lethe of History?

Now we know that the centre of the continent of Asia could never have played the part of volcano that erupted countless streams of human lava, and the waterless deserts and naked rocky mountains of Central Asia could never have been the cradle of mankind. For some reason men have thought that the nomads of the steppes of to-day came into the plains only a few centuries ago, and that their first ruler was Djagatai, inheritor of the scepter of Genghiz Khan in this part of the northern steppes. There is no foundation for such a theory. Very little historical analysis is required to show that the grassy plains of the Old World were from the most ancient times occupied by people of the Turki race, who are now quite correctly separated from the Mongolian, as they differ in race, religion and language.

The wandering Turki tribes who now live in these steppes are to-day known as Kirghiz. Living in the mountains around are a kindred tribe, the Kara, or Black Kirghiz. To the same tribes belong the Kara Kalpaks and Uzbegs of Turkestan, the Soyoti or Soiloti of the Altai, the Tartars of Siberia and other smaller tribes. The Kirghiz are a numerous people. There are nearly three million of them. They are divided into clans and it is instructive to note that many of these clans bear names that crop up in history from very ancient times; such are the Kipchaks, the Naimans, the Kara Kalpaks, Djagalbai and

many others, including the Sayaki, whom we may fairly confidently identify with the Saki of Herodotus.

We may assume, therefore, I think, with a very tolerable degree of confidence that the Scythians, the Massagetae of Herodotus, the Kipchaks and the Polotsi, the Huns and the Tartars and numerous hordes of savage horsemen of the plains of Central Asia were one and the same people, reappearing constantly under different names on the stage of history, sometimes one clan predominating, sometimes another. Whether they made a settled empire in the Mediterranean or in India, they were essentially the same, until heavily diluted by interbreeding, as the modern Turki nomads, who now roam the steppes, inheritors of the same peculiar culture, born of the conditions of their life, which dates from the very dawn of civilization – the people, in fact, Russia and Europe know to-day under the name of Kirghiz, among whom I have spent the greater part of my life.

The first step in the evolution of their peculiar culture was the domestication of the horse, not that of Western Europe, but the *tarpan*, *Equus tarpan*, the wild horse of the steppe, which must not be confused with the wild horse of Mongolia discovered by the great traveler, Przewalcki, about 30 years ago. That is a totally distinct species. This tarpan, with its astonishing powers of endurance and resistance to dry cold and power of working without corn, gave them the greatest mobility which armies enjoyed up to the invention of steam. The result was the evolution of the pastoral life, their own culture, and a military development which conquered half the known world.

This horse has been the basis of the culture and strength of all the nomad tribes of Central Asia from the beginning of culture, the common factor of all, regardless of name, from the Scythians of Herodotus to the Kirghiz of to-day. And if we read Herodotus with any knowledge of this people, we may find much in common in their habits and manner of life, and in such fragments of the old language as have come down through Herodotus in the form of names of tribes

and, especially, rivers. Many of these last can be interpreted through the spoken language of the Kirghiz of to-day and, indeed, still exist as names of streams in Turkestan.

Herodotus tells us of the carts of Scythians (IV, 121) in which they used to transport all their belongings. To this day in the eastern portion of Turgai Province and Western Siberia you may see in common use among the Kirghiz a primitive form of two-wheeled cart, different in construction from the Russian *telega* and the *arba* of Turkestan. The southern Kirghiz and mountain Saki had, and still have, only camels for heavy baggage. The Russian chroniclers relate how, at the time of "Tartar" invasion of Kiev, there arose such a din from the creaking of wagons, neighing of horses and grunting of camels that people could not hear themselves speak in the streets.

Herodotus tells us that the eponymous ancestor of the Scythians was called Targitaos. Now this rings like a real Turki word. We commonly come across such names as Turg, Tai, Tura, Turgai, Targo. Uti is the name of one of the Turki tribes and Tartugai is a place-name on the Syr Daria.

Among the various tribes he mentions are the Melanchlainoi: we may surely recognize the Kara Kalpaks, that is Black Caps. In the Issedoni, who have left their name in the river Iseti and the lake of the same name, it is not difficult to recognize the contemporary Bashkirs. Their territory lies in the central Urals, the "province of Iseti" of the old Russian maps, as famous for its gold to-day as it was in the days of Herodotus, including the great mining centers of Ekaterinburg and Miass.

Another tribe was called the Arimaspians, which Herodotus tells us, means the One-Eyed People. This word has an Iranian ring, but the meaning is not clear. Yet it suggests the Turki *yarim*, "half"; and recalls *yarim sak*, "One half of something".

Professor Mishchenko considers that the Massagetæ, described by Herodotus as a powerful clan of the Scythians, gave their name to the river Miass. I do not agree, for it was to one of the tributaries of the Ural that they gave their name the Massagat. Up to the time of

the Pugachev rebellion in the reign of Catherine II, this stream was known as the Djaiak or Yaik, and very likely changed its name more than once previously. I venture to suggest that the whole river was originally called Massagat and left the name in the tributary, as has happened to another large river in Asia, the Oxus, which, in the Middle Ages, was known as the Djeukhum and to-day is called the Amu Daria, the original name of Ak Su, or Oxus, that is, "White water", being retained only for its principal feeder in the Pamirs.

The rivers in Herodotus are very interesting; he gives them in Greek dress, naturally, but to those familiar with the Turki languages, the original form may be guessed often with confidence.

As an instance, he calls the Danube the Ister. This name cannot be interpreted by any European root, but the river was well known to the Scythians; I suggest that it may be *issik* or *istik*, meaning "warm", that is, the river which seldom freezes, in distinction to those of their own country, covered with ice every winter.

We have Issik-su, Issik-kul or Istyk-su and Istyk-Kul as place-names for rivers and lakes in plenty. The name of the Don, Tanais or Tana-is or Tana-su, is a common name in Kirghis lands; Tana is a proper name and *su* means "water". It is to be noted that most of the river-names of Scythia given by Herodotus end in -s, which is the Turki word *su*, constantly occurring in river-names throughout all Turki lands. The name Araxes is probably Arak-su, "good drinking-water". The name of Dnieper, Borysthenes (IV, 53) suggests *baratinin-su*, i.e. the navigable river, a name entirely consistent with the role of this great stream through history as a link between the North and the South. The river Hyrgis (IV, 57) is undoubtedly the Turki Irgiz, the name of several streams in the steppes; there is one running into the Volga below Samara, and another in the Turgai district, falling into Lake Cholkar Iguiz Kara. Although these rivers are not the same as that mentioned by Herodotus, it often happens that in Kirghiz districts different rivers have the same name and change names; in any case it is a pure Turki word.

Of the river Hypanis (IV, 53) Herodotus tells us that wild white horses graze near its source; the word suggests the common name Yaipan or Djaipan.

The cause of the great mass movements of these nomads of Asia is a puzzle. It would be ridiculous to attempt to explain them by principles of economic materialism. There was no economic pressure; the peoples were rich, especially in flocks and herds; their homes were productive; grazing was unlimited, and some tribes, as the Massagetae, had great wealth in gold. The nomad is a part of Nature and subject to the same laws as his herds. When these move, for reason of their own, their masters move with them, very likely against their own desire and wish. Other denizens of the steppes are subject to the same impulses. Most famous are the Sand Grouse, *Syrrhaptis paradoxus*, which every now and then swarm in countless thousands away to the distant lands of the West and often enough reach the coasts of Britain. But it is certainly not want of food that impels them on these wild quests in which all perish.

Neither can we explain nomadic movement by shortage of food for the herds. At the time of hunger, that is in winter, when cattle grow thin and die, the nomad does not think of mass migration. Rather, it is the abundance of food and the excessive multiplication of herds that lead to what we may call the colonizing instinct, a phenomenon to be observed as a regular feature in the life of social insects, such as ants, bees and termites.

Neither can we explain these movements in mass of nomad peoples by the search for new grazing lands, as there is no need at all for such emigration; it would be quite enough to send a few scouts to investigate. Further, in ancient times there was plenty of free land available and so no need to go far away into a different climate and different conditions of life.

These Turki peoples have been little studied by the West; yet they will amply repay all attention given to them. They are a distinctive race numbering many millions; they have an ancient and peculiar civilization of their own; they have exerted in the past an immense

influence upon the history of the world, and may yet do so again. We must not forget that they have founded many empires, including the Ottoman and the Mogul. And, too, through the Yakuts of the Lena they are connected by anthropologists with the Redskins of North America.

This interesting people, as they have no literature, are completely without a “historical memory”. Not only have they forgotten their own remote past; they do not even recall more recent events, such as their own voluntary union with Russia only two centuries ago; They have forgotten their own rights and the conditions under which they acknowledged the suzerainty of the Russian Emperors at the time of Elizabeth.

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