

To the memory of prof. Y. Rinchen

The astral procreation: myth versus reality?

Maria Magdolna Tatar

In this paper I intend to deal with a wide-spread myth, known among the Mongols and Turks, from a different, less mythographic, more socio-historical point of view.

1.1. According to a well-known story of the Secret History of Mongols (§17-22), the beautiful Alan yoa gave birth to three sons after the death of her husband, Dobun mergen. When her two elder sons talked about that the slave Maalik was the father, she declared that a radiating man had come to her at night through the roof-opening of through the opening of the door-case and impregnated her with his light before he left again creeping on the light like a yellow dog. So his sons are the sons of heaven, whose destiny is to be great khans. The story was explained several times as a myth and as such immediately compared to the Greek myth of Danae, the beautiful virgin well guarded in a locked room, who was impregnated by Zeus, who transformed himself into a golden snow-fall. She was accused having an incestuous affair with her uncle by her father, who would not believe in the fathering of Zeus. Thus after she gave birth to a son, they were both locked into a chest and thrown into the sea. Fortunately, a fisherman found them and took them to a local king, who accepted them both in his court (Cf. Grimal 1991, 118).

Scholars who have dealt with these doubtless similar myths, conclude with different explanations:

1.1.1. According to Poucha. A Czech scholar (1954), who cited Manchu, Chakhar and Tibetan parallels as well, the myth is of Inner-Asiatic origin and was later borrowed into the classic culture of the Mediterranean peoples. It is hard to agree in his opinion.

1.1.2. Trencsenyi-Waldapfel, a Hungarian scholar (1956) collected a great number of similar myth from the antiquity, from the Greeks, Romans, Persians, Sumerians, as well as from Turkic peoples and has concluded that this myth cannot be of Inner-Asian origin, but rather a borrowing from the

antique world, probably through Iranian-Manichaean transmission by the Turks and the Mongols.

1.1.3. According to Prof. Bira (1989, 1999, 65), this myth shows connections to the Indian or Indo-Iranian world declaring that the Khan's power originated from Light. This idea is born who from the Manichaean cult of the Iranians, probably through the Uygurs. The Indo-Iranian connection cannot be doubted, however, the Greek version is much older than the founder of Manichaeism, the Persian Mani, who was born in 216 in Babylon (died in 276 or 277).

1.1.4. Finch (1995) finds that an Irish myth is closest to the story in the Secret History which may have been borrowed by the Mongols from the Tocharians in Turkestan, whose language belonged to the Western division of the Indo-European languages. Although the idea is interesting, unfortunately, we do not have Tocharian texts at all, which could document their legends or myths.

1.1.5. Recently Dobrovits (1997), a Hungarian scholar dealing with the Mongolian, Kazakh, Tatar, etc. legends concluded with that this motif has wandered through and through Eurasia several times. Its oldest version is reported in the Chinese Pei-shi (chapter 86) as a myth of the Kao-ch'e clans. According to this, the Hun ruler locked his two beautiful daughters into a tower, because he wanted to give them to heaven. But the younger sister came out to marry a wolf, which she assumed was a sacred animal. The people of the Kao-ch'e are their descendants. Among the Kao-ch'e peoples lived the ancestors of the Ogur peoples, whose descendants were the Utigur and Kutrigur Bulgarians. These Bulgarians settled in South-West Pannonia, later South-West Hungary. From them the population in Northern Italy learnt it and interpreted it as a Hungarian story about Attila, the Hun. The Mongols learnt it from the Turks, the descendants of the Kao-ch'e tribes. During the Mongol Empire, some Kipchak Turks borrowed it back again from the Mongols, as the Mongolian names of some characters, like Chinggis, prove it. That explains why the story is known among Kipchak Turks and Mongolians today, and why it was described as an oriental tale in Europe in spite of their obvious similarities with ancient European (Greek and Latin) tales.

1.2. These opinions were mainly based on two elements of the myth:

1.2.1. The woman, often a virgin girl, is locked in and guarded against any visiting man.

1.2.2. The procreating deity is personified by a yellow or fair man, a wolf or dog, or an astral phenomenon like snow-fall, light, etc. In any case, the totems (wolf/dog) are closely connected to the heavenly god.

1.2.3. To determine the ways and development of this myth as far as possible, it is necessary to discuss some other, rather interesting motifs besides of these two mentioned above. Before doing so, let us take a look at two motifs but from a different point of view:

1.2.3. a. Trencsenyi-Waldapfel (1956, 177-215, Dobrovits 129-127) has rightly observed that there are two different secret dwelling places where the girl is held. According to the Greeks, the Persians and the Kazakhs (Radloff 1870,

82-9) the girl is held in an underground, sometimes copper or iron house. According to the tradition of the Huns, the peoples of the Middle-East, the Irish, the Kazan Tatars and in the medieval Christian tradition, the girl is held in a tower. Trencsenyi-Waldapfel meant, that the underground room is a typical, archeologically explainable Greek dwelling place, while the tower is the typical sacred building of the Mesopotamians, where also priestesses were kept for the deity. On the other hand, while the towers and fortresses were actually existed among peoples like the Uygurs, Kitays etc., any underground dwelling in Inner-Asia would mean a grave, not a housing¹. Actually, the development of the versions among different peoples could be traced according to the dwelling places:

The sacred tower of the Mesopotamians were a ritual building, a temple. The glass castle or tower of the Irish people seems to be a synonym for the Otherworld (Ellis 1993, 113), a further, legendary development of a ritual place, where this world and the otherworld meets. In most versions the tower is indifferent, it is not said whether it was built for ritual/sacral or military purposes (the last one being usual among Inner Asian peoples). However, the Hun ruler did not lock his daughters into the tower to keep them away from a man but to give them in marriage to heaven. The tower was built for the daughters, who were called goddesses (Bicurin I, 214). It seems very much like a human sacrifice, e.g. like the woman sacrifice among the Shor people who said that the beautiful girls were sent to heaven alive (Tatar 1992, 338). It is clear, that this tower of the Huns is a ritual, sacred building. This sacred place, identified at least among the Mesopotamians and Huns, developed further: to a mythical place, i.e. the heaven, not only among the Irish, but in the East as well. According to Buryat legends, there were several ancestors, like Boto Bumal (the ancestor of the Novot clan), or the son of Elbite Xara, a 'black' deity and of the daughter of Taizi Xan (the ancestor of the Ekhirit and Bulagat Burvats), who after a mythical procreation and birth in the heaven were put into an iron cradle and thrown or taken down to the earth (Xangalov III, 384-7, I, 420). In other cases this ritual building became a common, real place; the Kazakhs just talked about an iron yurt (which is of course unrealistic), not mentioning whether it was under or over the ground. The Mongolian version just describes an every-day-like situation of Alan yoa, living in a usual Mongolian yurt. The Kazan Tatar version, although based on the Mongolian tradition, replaced the realistic yurt by a tower.

1.2.3. b. The further destiny of the child is another interesting detail. The Irish boy was supposed to be thrown into the sea (Finch 1995, 173). (This is what you would expect that a furious father would do in this barbaric time.) In many cases (Greek, Kazakh, Kazan Tatar, Karachay versions), the child without his mother is put into a box or ship and sent away on a river or on the sea, but miraculously survives. Later he usually was adopted or otherwise came to live a good life and became a king of divine origin or an important hero. It is noteworthy, that the Mongolian version is very realistic again: the

¹ It must be mentioned here that paleolithic pit dwellings existed on the Yenisey river (Levin&Potarov 1964, 17). According to the Chinese sources, pit dwellings were used by the Hun border-guards in the first century BC (Bicurin 1950,1, 78). Similar housings still exist in Siberia and on the Russian North.

son is sent away into the wilderness, but he is not claimed to have survived a journey on the water in a box, like Moses in the Jewish tradition and the son of these astrally impregnated virgins. Therefore it is interesting that according to the Buryat legends also their ancestor, however not astrally, but still mythically procreated by the totem of the tribe, survives such an adventure.² E.g. Buxa noyon, the Bull, impregnated an unsuspecting girl in one version of the story, when she was swimming in the lake Baykal. Her son was put into an iron crib and shot by an arrow across the Baykal, to its opposite bank, where he was adopted by two shamanesses (Baldaev, 1970, 36-7, 41). All these cases are stories about an ancestor and its animal father, the totem. This is the unnatural birth of the hero, mentioned as the third possible form of birth by Heissig and later by Nekljudov (natural birth and birth from a stone being the two other possibilities, sf. 1984, 104-6). However in another Buryat legend, a wife, who was not happy with her husband, became pregnant with the bull, and put her son into a pit, where he was found (Baldaev, 1970, 50), so the story ends realistically.

II. Actually, there are several versions of this myth which has not been taken into consideration before. They are to be found in the Karachay-Balkar epic of the Narts. They are very different from the Karachay version reported by the Hungarian scholar, Besse (1838, 69-71), which is based on the Kazakh version and clearly influenced by Greek traditions.

11.1. a. According to the Nart epos (1994, 508-9), a servant girl went to bring water from the Adyl (i.e. the Volga) every morning. She used to wave to the shepherds on the opposite bank, and this annoyed Sozukku, the most important person among them greatly. He promised to give a hundred lambs to one of his shepherd-boys, if he prevented the girl from waving. The youngest of these shepherds, Bödene crossed the river, and "did what was to be done", and came back again. Whereas the girl went home and explained the delay to her mistress by saying that she turned down the bed after a visitor in a room, when the door opened and a light came into her body and shepherd's dog urinated on the hem of her skirt. She became pregnant and her son was sent away on the river Adyl in a box. Later he was adopted by a childless family and became the great hero, Racykay.

II.1. b. In another version of the same story, a shepherd master promised a reward for the shepherd boys, if they visited the servant girls living on the opposite bank of the Adyl river. One of them did so and raped the first servant girl who came to fetch water from the river. The girl explained her delay to the mistress saying that the moon had shone on her from one side and the sun from the other side and a shepherd's dog had urinated on the hem of her skirt. She became pregnant and her son was thrown into the river in a box. He was adopted by a family and became the hero Racykay (op. cit. 506).

II.1. c. In the third version, Bödene, A Russian immigrant observed a servant girl. Her little dog was surrounded by forty dogs. She then cried out: If she was attacked by some unkind man, she would chase him away. On hearing these words, Bödene decided to put her to the test. He was the strongest of

² Frazer (1923, 74) explained this legend as a totemistic myth.

course and the girl must have explained her delay and disorderly appearance to her mistress by telling that some days ago she was to turn down the bed after some visitors when she cast away her sharovari and started to look for something in them. At that moment the light of the sun came into her body and made her pregnant. The son was put into an iron box and cast into the Edil river. Bödene got the box out from the river and adopted the boy the boy, without knowing that he was his own child (op. cit. 514).

II.2. In spite of many similarities, like the light, which impregnates the girl, the box, etc., these versions differ from the others:

II.2. a. The girl is not a princess, but a servant, she is not held in isolation, on the contrary, she makes the first contact with the man or she is observed by the man during her daily task, namely fetching water from the river.

II.2. b. The man is not a glorious person, like a god, just a shepherd, and even he makes "what was to be done" for a reward.

II.2. c. In the versions of II.1.a-c, the main failure differing from other versions is that the impregnating light is only used as an excuse for the pregnancy, an explanation, rather poetical than credible for anybody, including the informant himself. The heavenly dog, which in the other cases is characterized as a totem, is just a parallel to his master, the shepherd. The sexual act itself is not based on mutual understanding like in the legend of the Huns or on the unconscious state of the virgin girl as it often is in the other variants, not even on her unsuspecting mind versus the pure light, but on rude overpowering. This is rape. The girl's situation is even more difficult because she is controlled by a mistress. It is noteworthy that she tries to justify her condition by blaming some visitors. Was rape possibly more acceptable when guests violated a servant girl? By searching the Mongolian, Kao-ch'e and Buryat variants with this aspect in mind, it is obvious that also those legends explain mythically some socially unacceptable irregularities: one of the Kao-ch'e princesses actually married against her father's will; in Alan yoa's household there actually was a serwaht called Maalik., the mother in the Buryat legend was an unhappily married wife who accepted an extra-marital sexual contact. Mythical/cultic justification to help the illegitimate child is well known from other cultures as well: e.g. all such boys were registrated as "Abramsson" among the Jews, i.e. sons of the ancestor, Abraham.

III. Finally, three regions must be examined whether they influenced these Karachay versions or not:

111.1. Caucasus, Eastern Mediterranean and Pontic region:

III.1. a. In this region, heros often rape girls/fairies who are connected to waters in myths and legends. In an Armenian myth, the hero arrives at an island where he comes across mermaids bathing in the sea. He captures one of them and fathers two children with her (Finch 1995, 157). In the book of Dede Qorqut, the shepherd finds some fairy maidens near a spring, throws his cloak over one of them and rapes her. The mythical Depeqöz ("Top-Eye") is their son, later adopted by Uruz Koja (Lewis 1982, 140-1). In the Ossetic legends of the Narts, Uryzmaq is married to the daughter of the God Waters,

who actually fosters the grandson (Finch 1995,159). The Karachay versions, where any form of housing is missing and the procreation happens on the riverbank, belong to this group. On the other hand, the redaction II. 1. B. shows close similarities with the Mongols and Siberia. Water-side /riverbank were dangerous/ sacred places in Siberia as well, as the many legends about the child/women who went for water but was taken up by the moon witness it. Its variants is known among the Mongols as well, where not only the water-side and water bearing are mentioned, but the dangerous time of evening, when the world is between day and night, sun and moon is described with the same words as they were in Karachay epos, describing the other transition between night and day, the dawn (Sampildendev, 1999, 29-30). It means that motifs could move very long in any directions.

III.1. b. Certainly, urinating is an evident paraphrase of issemination, which can occur on several places. Still it is interesting that the same paraphrase is used in a Greek myth about a mythical procreation: a man, who did not wanted to father any children, became old and impotent and now he wanted very much a son. At advice of Zeus and Hermes, he offered an ox, urinated upon its hide and put in into the grave of his wife whereupon Orion was born (Graves 1955, 41 ,f)³

III.2. The Volga region: The father/adopting man is Bödene, a Russian immigrant among the Narts. Russian here of course means not a person belonging to the historical Russian people, but an immigrant from the North. Most probably, he was a Chuvash. Actually, Vedene is the ethnonym of the southern Chuvash people among the Mordvins (Axmef janov 1978, 128-9), which originates from the ancient name of the Chuvash country, Veda (cf Tatar 1996)⁴ For the first time it occurs in the Russian documents in 1615 as Beteman/Biteman, the name of a Chuvash village (Ajplatov & Ivanov 1992, 97-8, 101). Bödene's role suggests a Chuvash-like component in the Karachay people. Any possible Chuvash or Bulgarian contacts need further investigation⁵. On the other hand, the redaction II. 1. b. shows close similarities with the Mongols and Siberia.

III.3. Central and Inner Asia: The similarities between the Karachay and the Mongol, Kazakh, etc. versions, like the sun and moon shining on the girl, are so general that it hardly could be taken for a direct influence. Still, let me mention here, that the procreation happened through light in the Mongolian, Kazan Tatar, the Kazakh and the Karachay myth reported by Besse (Dobrovits 1997, 130-133). As it is mentioned above, the urinating shepherd dog is just a parallel to his master and a paraphrase, known in a Greek myth. It is not connected to the yellow dog of Alan yoa. "Yellow dog" in the

³ In a newer Jewish (Mandaeus) legend, the young man was hiding for the night in the skin of an ox when an eagle took him up to the girl in the tower. In this case the skin of the ox is a remarkable parallel.

⁴ It has been suggested (cf. Axmef janov 1978, 129) that Bödene is a local variant of the ethnonym of the Pechenegs, namely beceneg, but this is hardly possible phonetically.

⁵ However, if dog as the wolf's taboo name was really a part of a Bulgarian tradition and delivered to the Italians (see below), its lack in the Karachay materials contradicts such a suggestion.

Mongolian myth is a taboo name of the sacred animal which is not a dog but a wolf, as it is actually said in the Kazan Tatar version (written in the 17.^h century) and its 18th century Tadjik redaction (Dobrovits 1997, 130, 132). "Dog" as procreating animal occurs only in the Mongolian and in the Italian version which is based on a Hungarian, perhaps even Bulgarian version (cf. Dobrovits 1997, 129, 134). This motif do not occur accidentally in the two most distant areas in Eurasia, namely in Mongolia and Italy but it rather proves the oriental origin of this Italian version (written in the 16.ⁿ century but based on chronicles from the 11th century). The dog was taken literally by the Italians who did not know that this expression is used instead of the honored, taboo word "wolf".

IV. Conclusions. The Karachay versions have no particular similarities with the Kipchak (Kazakh, Tatar) versions, e.g. the girl is not held in any tower, although their language belongs to the same group. They have parallels with the Caucasian tradition, where this people actually live, but they differ from them as well. The main difference is the realism of the Karachay versions: the girl uses expressions like the sun and the moon shining on her, the light entering her body or the dog urinating on her hem of the skirt as an euphemism. She is not a goddess or a fairy either, but a servant girl who was raped by a shepherd boy during her daily work. As far as realism concern, the Karachay versions are similar to the Mongolian one. However, motifs which are only euphemism in the Karachay versions, still are myths in the Mongolian tradition. The destiny of the child, put into a box, follows the common pattern, wide-spread in Eurasia. On the other hand, the irregularity of the sexual contacts in the Hun, Mongolian and Buryat versions never goes as far as rape. Therefore the Karachay versions are not directly borrowed from any of these other versions, rather a locally developed redaction, based on mythical common places known in the area.

From the two possible sacred places (tower among the Hun and a bank as dwelling of mermaids/faides in the Caucasus) the Mongols, Kipchaks and the Karachay made two every-day places: indifferent towers, yurts and river banks, where water is fetched. Behind the mythical procreation, an irregular sexual contact can be traced at least in the Mongolian and one of the Buryat versions while the Karachay versions clearly talk about rape. It is clear, that the development went from a myth, certifying the heavenly origin of a new family/tribe/state to assuring the life of illegitimate children. This impression is even stronger when the motif of the child, put into a box and sent away on a river occurs in other stories, not connected to the astral procreation. E. g. in the Western Mongolian legend (Sampildendev 1999, 6-8) about the lullaby song, the unconscious girl was put in a golden box and sent away on a river. Some lamas found her and saved her life⁶.

The same procedure was made in other cases of an irregular birth. E. g. according a Hittite legend (possibly from the 2nd century B. C.), the 30 royal sons who were born at the same time from the same mother, were put into baskets and sent on the rivers al the way down to the sea, where the were

⁶ This story is very much like the one of Schneewittchen. It is probably not accidental that in a Gipsy version from the Balkan, the girl (supposed dead) is raped before her life is saved.

brought up (Haas 1977, 14-6, Curney 1977, 7-8). Let me mention here Moses, the Biblical leader again, whose life was in danger because he, a Jewish boy, was born in Egypt. He was put in a basket and sent away on the river to hide his identity. However, the most ancient historical person whose birth was explained by this myth is Sharrukin, the Akkadian king (B. C. 2334-2279). His mother was a priestess (cf. The Hung legend!), his father was an unknown man from the mountains. The mother gave him birth secretly and put him out in a basket on the river Ephrates. Akki, the water-bearer found him and raised him (CT 13, 42-3, CT 46, 46). In these legends, the three central elements of the myth are already present:

1. special mother (queen, foreign immigrant, priestess, in the last case with an irregular sexual contact, which is even mentioned in the astral myths);
2. "irregular birth" (twins being a shame, foreigner, unknown father from another region, in the last case with in irregular sexual contact as well),
3. the child/children was sent away in a basket/box on the river.

As we see, it is the irregularity of the birth which causes the problem for the child, not necessarily a heavenly father. A mythical father, an astral provocation is just one of these irregularities. In my opinion, this motif was originally a solution of a difficult, but not uncommon situation, which later developed into a myth. However, there still are legend of this type with a remarkably realistic attitude (cf. II. I. a-c). this motif originates in Mesopotamia and went through and through Eurasia as many other elements of our culture did. Its ways are important evidences of cultural contacts between many different peoples.

Bibliography

Axmet'janov, R.G. 1978: Ахметьянов Р. Г., *Сравнительное исследование татарского и чувашского языков*, Москва, 1978.

Ajplatov, G.N. & Ivanov, A.G. 1992: Айплатов Г.Н, Иванов А. Г, *История Марийского Края в документах и материалах*, Вып. 1, Йошкар-Ола, 1992в

Alieva, A. I. 1994: Алиева А. И, *Нарты*. Героический эпос балкарцев и карачаевцы (Эпос народов Евразии), Москва, 1994.

Baldaev, S.P. 1970: Балдаев С. П, *Родословные предания и легенды бурят*, часть 1, Мулагаты и Эхириты, Улан-Удэ, 1970,

Besse, J.C. [Ogyallai] 1838: *Voyage en Crimee, en Cavcace, en Georgje, en Armenie, en Asie-Mineure et a Constantinople en 1829 et 1830; pour servir ä Г histoire de Hongrie*. Paris, 1838.

Bicurin, N. Ja. 1950: Бичурин Н. Я, *Собрание сведений о народах, обитавших в Средней Азии в Древние времена*, 1-2, Москва-Ленинград, 1950.

Bira Sh, 1989: Bira Sh, *On the traditional historiographical mutual relationship between India and Mongolia*, - Монгол ба Энэдхэг, Улаанбаатар, 1989.

- Bira Sh, 1999:** Bira Sh, *Early Mongolian Political Concepts*, - Bulletin, The IAMS, New Information on Mongol Studies, No. 2 (24).
- CT:** *Cuneiform Texts from Babylonian Tablets in the British Museum*.
- Dobrovits, M. 1997:** Dobrovits, M. *A toronyba zart läny: Szöveg äs stilus*. Kolozsvär, 1997.
- Ellis, P.B. 1993:** Ellis, P.B. *Dictionary of Celtic Mythology*. London, 1993.
- Finch, R. 1995:** Finch, R. *Mythical Elements in the Secret History of the Mongols*: The Transactions of the Asiatic Society of Japan. IV/10, 1995.
- Frazer, J.G. 1923:** Frazer, J.G. *The golden Bough*. Part VII. Vol. 1. London, 1923.
- Graves, R. 1955: Graves, R. *The Greek Myths*. Penguin, 1955.
- Xangalov, M.N. 1959:** Хангалов, М, Н. *Собрание сочинений*, I-III. Улан-Удэ, 1959.
- Levin, M.G. & Potapov, L.P. 1964:** Levin, M.G. & Potapov, L.P. *The Peoples of Siberia*. Chicago, 1964.
- Lewis, G. 1982:** Lewis, G. *The Book of Dede Korkut*. (Penguin Classics), 1982.
- Nekljudov, S. Ju. 1983:** Неклюдов, С, *Героический эпос монгольских народов*, Москва, 1983.
- Poucha, P., 1954:** Poucha, P, *Zwei Parallelen zur Geheimen Geschichte der Mongolen*: Acta Orientalia Hungarica 4, Budapest, 1954.
- Radloff, W. 1870:** Radloff, W, *Proben der Volksliteratur der türkischen Stämme Süd-Sibiriens*. III. St. Petersburg, 1870.
- Sampildendeв H, 1999:** Сампилдэндэв Х, *Монгол домогийн чуулган*, Улаанбаатар, 1999.
- Taskin, V.S. 1984:** Таскин В. С. *Материалы по истории древних кочевых народов группы Дунху*, Москва, 1984.
- Tatar, M.M. 1996:** Tatar, M.M. *The Iranian Name of ther Burtas People in the Hungarian Sources and their Finno-Ugriac Connections*: Congressus Octavus Internationalis Fenno-Ugristarum, Jyväskylä, 1995. Jyväskylä, Paris V.
- Trencsenyi-Waldapfel, I. 1956/1983:** V.Trencsenyi-Waldapfel, *Danae mitosza Keleten es nyugaton*: Vallastörteneti tanulmányok. Budapest, 1956/1983.

