

Introduction

I began my assignment at Kyrgyz-Turkish Manas University in Bishkek, the capital of Kyrgyzstan, during the 2002-2003 academic year, while I was a faculty member of İstanbul University's Faculty of Letters, History Department. Since my area of expertise is primarily nomads and nomadism as an important element of Ottoman society, from the moment I arrived I was excited about being in the actual world of migration in Kyrgyzstan and about doing related scientific research. The fact that the Kyrgyz people always shared this enthusiasm of mine and saw me as one of their own played an important role in providing impetus to my work. In this regard, I must say that these last 10 years that I have lived in Kyrgyzstan have been the happiest and most productive of my life.

During the first days after coming to Kyrgyzstan, I tried primarily to make an inventory of the research and publications done concerning the nomadic Kyrgyz community. The first thing that caught my attention about these publications was that prior to the Soviet period the focus was on discovering geography and society; during the Soviet period efforts concentrated on identifying and understanding society; while after the Soviet period the focus turned to research on the Kyrgyz community, its identity and the nomadic clans (uruu) or the sub-clans (uruk) that make up Kyrgyz society. Another issue was the importance of data based on oral history sources and field studies concerning Kyrgyz society, which is a nomadic society and which has reached the present day by preserving the value of nomadism. This situation prompted me to think about the importance of oral history sources and field studies regarding the Kyrgyz community.

As time passed and as I came to know the environment and Kyrgyz society more closely, I began to better understand that research and investigations in the fields under consideration would be very appropriate because the observations and determinations I made showed that the nomadic Kyrgyz people, whose history reaches back to long ago periods, have preserved their customs and traditions without many changes up until the present day. At the same time, this situation demanded that in the scientific studies to be made on the nomadic Kyrgyz people, the focus should be on oral history sources, since they do not have many written records.

In order to conduct research in the framework of the stated subjects we followed the following method: first, we began by choosing the issues to be researched, not in a general way but with care taken to choose specific subjects. Next, the fields related to these subjects and the source individuals were determined. In this regard, using the snowball method, our first

source individuals were our university students. Through the students we tried to reach the regions where the research would take place and their mothers, fathers, and relatives, who would be our first source individuals. Subsequently, we were able to find other source individuals through them and in this way the snowball gradually began to grow bigger. So, by starting with the joint projects called 'The Formation Process of the Kyrgyz National Identity During the 20th Century', which has been completed, and the projects called 'Living History of the Central Asian People: The Case of Kyrgyzstan' and 'Eurasia Nomadic Research', which are ongoing, we have ensured that our research reaches a broader section and field, as well as more varied subjects.

As our research advanced, we tried to systemize and conceptualize the data, which is based on observations and oral history, by tying it to the recesses of history, to the extent possible. Additionally, we tried to compare our findings and assumptions on certain matters with the nomads and migrations in Anatolia during the Ottoman period, in particular. Afterwards certain subjects were presented as papers to related congresses and symposia, especially at the international level, and gradually they began to be published.

With the first products of this research seeing the light, we got together and came to the conclusion that a publication would be appropriate. We then collected the published and unpublished papers, reviewed them and re-classified them based on subject. The book that resulted from this classification has three main sections.

Papers concerning the Kyrgyz community's social and administrative structure, based in large measure on oral history sources, are found in the first section of the book. Comparative subjects related to administrative, social, cultural and economic history are in the second section. These comparisons focus mainly on Kyrgyz and Ottoman nomadic societies. In the third section of the book, issues concerning, especially, the time known as the Transition Period, after 1991, are addressed: the rebirth of the community's cultural, social and economic values; the dynamic elements that form the basis for relations between the urban and rural groups; family ties, being a member of the same migrant group and locality ties, the internal solidarity organizations formed by these ties; and the mountain pasture lands of the nomadic Kyrgyz peoples and the integration of these lands into the market economy.

As the papers were compiled, original names and places which were presented and published as papers were footnoted. In addition, since the articles were written at various times, footnotes, marks and abbreviations have some inconsistencies, which we tried to fix and bring more consistency to bear, as far as possible. Also, as we reviewed the papers we noticed

that in some of them statements containing the same thoughts could be found here and there, because they were written at different times. As best we could, we tried to edit statements like these and to add complimentary and comparative information where suitable.

In this study, an effort has been made to preserve the specific names and terms related to Kyrgyz and Ottoman nomads. However, because the Kyrgyz alphabet comes from the Cyrillic alphabet, certain specific names and terms related to Kyrgyz nomads appear in scholarly studies in accordance with the Latin alphabet. In this regard, in scientific studies written in English ‘j’ is used instead of ‘ж’ (Turkish c), ‘i’ instead of ‘и’ (i), ‘ÿ’ instead of ‘й’ (y), ‘kh’ instead of ‘х’ (h), ‘ts’ instead of ‘ц’, ‘ch’ instead of ‘ч’ (ç), ‘sh’ instead of ‘ш’ (ş), ‘y’ instead of ‘ы’ (ı), ‘yu’ instead of ‘ю’ (iu), ‘ya’ instead of ‘я’ (ia). Consequently, the following spellings are preferred: ‘Kyrgyz’ instead of ‘Kırgız’, ‘kymyz’ instead of ‘kıımız’, ‘baatyr’ instead of ‘baatır’, ‘Kalygul’ instead of ‘Kalıgul’, ‘Bishkek’ instead of ‘Bişkek’, ‘khan’ instead of ‘han’, ‘kolkhoz’ instead of ‘kolhoz’, ‘Jibek Jolu’ instead of ‘Cıbek Colu’, ‘Ichkilik’ instead of ‘İçkilik’ and ‘Kaırat’ instead of ‘Kayrat’. It should be pointed out, though, that the spellings in the book have not been adjusted for all names, terms and statements in the Kyrgyz language, but rather just for those names and terms found mostly in international studies.

An important portion of the studies in the book is based on field research conducted while I was assigned at Kırız-Turkish Manas University. In this regard, I would like to respectfully acknowledge the following individuals: Prof. Dr. Karybek Moldobaev (former Rector of the University), Prof. Dr. Seyfullah Çevik (former Deputy Rector of the University) and Ayhan Sürek (former General Secretary of the University). These valued administrators always ensured that the University, known in those days as ‘Golden Bridge’, had a warm atmosphere for scientific studies. Consequently, I would like to extend my heartfelt gratitude to them.

In gathering together these papers for publication as the first product of my continuing studies on the nomadic Kyrgyz community, at all times I received help, and at times arguments on some matters; from friends and colleagues whose names I must mention. These are: Prof. Dr. Anvarbek Mokeev, Prof. Dr. Ahmet Buran, Prof. Dr. Döölötbek Saparaliev, Prof. Dr. Kubatbek Tabaldiev, Prof. Dr. Cengiz Alyılmaz, Prof. Dr. Konuralp Ercilasun, Prof. Dr. Hugjiltu Wu, Assoc. Prof. Dr. Muratbek Kojobekov, Assoc. Prof. Dr. Taalaıbek Abdiyev, Dr. Nurdin Useev, Dr. Emre Gürbüz, Dr. Sawai Kazuaki and Kiyotaka Sugihara. I am aware of the debt of gratitude I owe to these valued friends of mine.

Additionally, I must mention here colleagues who never failed to provide help to me during the course of my research. These colleagues

include Assoc. Prof. Dr. Güljanat Kurmangalieva Ercilasun, who accompanied me on some field research trips and who read through certain sections of the book and Dr. Baktybek İsakov, who ensured that I was able to make contact with many informants during my field research and who accompanied me on most of the field trips and reviewed an important portion of the text. Also, Stambulbek Mambetaliev and Kaırat Belek made sure that I could speak with certain sources related to my research and they were unstinting in their assistance to me. In this regard, I am deeply grateful to these colleagues. .

Before being brought together, some of the articles in the book were written in English and some in Turkish. My valued friend and colleague Jack Snowden took on the important task of reviewing the articles written in English and translating the Turkish articles into English. In this regard, however much I thank Jack Snowden it would be insufficient. In addition, I would like to express my gratitude to my friend and colleague Prof. Dr. Hisao Komatsu, who ensured that the articles in this book, which are the product of nearly 10 years of study, would be published in book format and made available to the scholarly world. Lastly, I must express my deepest gratitude to my relatives, my ‘Kyrgyz tuugan’, who took us into their hearts as they would their own children during our field work and who always showered us with the traditional hospitality of the Kyrgyz people.

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