

## SCTCMG 2019

### International Scientific Conference «Social and Cultural Transformations in the Context of Modern Globalism»

#### TRADITIONAL COMMUNICATION ROUTES OF THE BASHKIRS IN THE EARLY MIDDLE AGES

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#### *Abstract*

The paper describes for the first time the traditional ways of Bashkir movements in the Southern Urals and adjacent lands, shows their relation to transcontinental routes to the Caucasus, Central and Western Asia, and poses the problem of interrelation of roads and the ethnogenesis of the Bashkirs. The reasons for division of the Bashkir land into four roads (Kazan, Osinsk, Nogai and Siberian) during their stay in the Golden Horde, and later in the Russian state are provided. This division is of very ancient origin and is related to the traditional worldview of the people, as well as to geographical features of the Southern Ural landscape, where the Bashkirs were formed as an ethnic group. The four roads across the Bashkir land can be interpreted through the Bashkirs' ancient idea of the tetrahedral structure of the World oriented to the four sides of the world. This idea of the ancient ancestors coincided with the features of the Ural Mountains stretching meridionally from North to South and being a watershed. The Bashkirs very early understood this fact and used it when laying out the routes between the southern and northern borders of their land. That is how the ancient roads "Kunyr Buga" (Brown Bull) and "Kanif Road" were formed. As soon as the relations of the Bashkirs with their neighbors expanded, these roads connected with the transcontinental paths, which led to the Caucasus and Central Asia. After that, both material and spiritual values were delivered to the Bashkir land.

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**Keywords:** Bashkirs, tradition, road, Ural, toponyms, connections.



## **1. Introduction**

It is known that until the end of the 18th century the territory of Bashkortostan was divided into four administrative-territorial areas – roads, the existence of which is mentioned in Bashkir folklore and in historical sources dated back to the Middle Ages. These roads led to Central Asia, the Caucasus, Iran, Iraq and Turkey, with whom the Bashkirs have had stable socio-political and trade ties since time immemorial.

## **2. Problem Statement**

The topic of traditional Bashkir routes of communication proposed by the authors remains poorly explored to date, and the study of this problem is relevant. The authors consider which traditional communication routes of the Bashkirs of the Middle Ages are known from literature and folklore sources, where they ran, and what function they performed.

## **3. Research Questions**

The subject of the paper is the ancient Bashkir roads that connect them with other peoples.

## **4. Purpose of the Study**

The authors used data from the literature to show the presence of ancient Bashkir roads connected to transcontinental routes running both towards the Caucasus and Central Asia, which allowed the expansion of people's relations with their neighbors and penetration of both material and cultural values.

## **5. Research Methods**

The study of the topic is based on a complex method that includes historical-typological and cultural approaches. Historical and typological method is used to study historical sources with reference to the ancient roads of the Bashkirs. Cultural method is used to identify examples of the road from the Bashkir folk poetry.

## **6. Findings**

Roads are one of the fundamental bases of any culture. It is well known that communication routes, as a means of communication, play an important role in the formation of ethnos. An extensive network of roads, a system of lines communicating with centers, where these lines intersected, were used to transport various material values in the form of goods, formed cultural relations, united various tribes into a single entity — into the people, into the state and gave impetus to the development of society. You can use a well-known road “from the Varangians to the Greeks” as an example, which played a huge role in the life of the community of Eastern Slavic tribes and in the formation of the Ancient Russian state. The Great Silk Road should also be mentioned since it played a major role in raising the economy and culture of nations and states that were located along this road bringing together East and West, as well as shaping ideas about the unity of the Old World.

Scientists have already proved that the Bashkir ethnos was formed in the Southern Urals and adjacent lands since the very first data about the Bashkir people are recorded for this territory. Like today, they were called "Bashkort". the Arab travelers Ibn Dast, Ahmed Ibn Fadlan, Abu Zayed al-Balkhi, who visited the Southern Urals in the 9th–10th centuries A.D. knew the Bashkirs as the Southern Ural people. Ibn Dast characterizes the Bashkirs as “an independent people occupying a territory on both sides of the Ural range between the Volga, Kama and the upper course of the Yaik River (Ibn-Fadlan, 1939). Ibn Fadlan and Abu Zayed al-Balkhi, who travelled across the Bashkir lands, recorded the Bashkirs as a people who had long lived in the Southern Urals (as cited in Ibn-Fadlan, 1939; Rudenko, 1955).

The presence of a fixed ethnic territory and self-designation indicated that at that time the Bashkirs had a single identity as an ethnic community. Gurevich (1990), the Russian medieval historian recognized worldwide, wrote, “The moment when society recognizes its origin is always an important stage in its development and an indicator of the maturity of existing relations” (p. 102).

Science established long ago that the word "Ural" was originally used to refer to the territory of the Southern Urals, this is how the Bashkirs called their mountains. At the time, Shishonko (1887), the researcher of the 19th century, was true to say that the name "Ural" was borrowed from the Bashkirs, who used it to refer to the watershed in the current district of the Zlatoust plants and somewhere to the south and somewhere to the north. At first, the Russians also called this part of the ridge the Urals (For example, the Book to the Big Drawing says that the Belaya River flowed out from the Uraltovyja Mountains). Until now, common people refer the Urals only to this part of the ridge (Shishonko, 1887). The Russian people who appeared here later, called the Ural Mountains "Stone" and "Stone Belt" until the eighteenth century. The word "Ural" in relation to the mountain range stretching from the Arctic Ocean to the Mugodzhar mountains was first used by the Russian historian and statesman Tatishchev (1907), and thanks to him, the mountains were called the Urals. Tatishchev (1907) borrowed this name from the Bashkirs, the indigenous people of the southern Ural part of this mountainous country. Since ancient times, the Bashkirs have called their native mountains "Ural", and their native country – "Ural Ile" ("the land of the Urals").

According to Russian historical sources, after the accession of Bashkiria to the Russia, only Bashkirs lived on both sides of the Southern Urals. Gradually, the region was developed by Russians, Tatars, Mari, Mordvinians, Udmurts, Chuvashs and representatives of other nations who came here, each of which has a different time of residence in this area. Now "the Southern Ural" is a large multinational region, which includes the Republic of Bashkortostan and part of the land adjacent to Chelyabinsk, Orenburg, Sverdlovsk regions and the Perm Territory, but none of them, except the Bashkirs, have the mythology with multifarious and deep reflection of the Southern Ural reality. All peoples, except the Bashkirs, appeared in the territory of the Southern Urals later, having passed its stage of myth-making in other regions. That is why these peoples do not have ancient folk works related to the territory of the Southern Urals and explaining the emergence of the Ural Mountains and its natural resources.

The antiquity of the Bashkir residence in the Southern Urals is confirmed by toponyms referred to by experts as the profile of the land. The researchers established that the most ancient part of the Southern Urals toponyms is the Bashkir layer. The Bashkirs still have numerous toponymic legends with mythological content. This feature of the Bashkir land was noted by many pre-revolutionary travelers who visited Bashkiria. In 1857, M.L. Mikhailov, a revolutionary writer, informed Shelgunov (1961) in his letter,

“Orenburg province is full of Bashkir legends. There is no river, no mountain, about which there would be no legend and song”. His words are confirmed by Yumatov (1961), “The Bashkirs have their own special tradition related to any remarkable place”. Specialists established that toponyms, like the names of a person’s habitat, are closely related to mythological thinking, namely, naming. Ancient people, having come to a new place and developed it, gave it a name and thus created this area, cultivated it and adapted it to their life. Thus, the whole territory of the Southern Urals is cultivated by Bashkirs, that is, it is marked by their toponyms and legends.

It can be noted that none of the peoples living in the Southern Urals, except the Bashkirs, have such many-sided basis for their relationship to the Urals supported by their entire spiritual and material culture. It would not be an exaggeration to say that the ideological and thematic basis of the entire Bashkir folklore includes stories that describe the history of the development of the lands in the southern Urals and surrounding areas by the Bashkirs as their homeland and glorify the beauty of their land. The nature described in Bashkir folklore is easily recognizable. This is the nature of the homeland, the Southern Urals. Moreover, the fundamental work of Bashkir folklore, dedicated to the time of the birth of life on earth, that is, consisting of cosmogonic myths, is called "Ural-Batyr". It is known that at times myths were created, to narrate about how this or that object arose meant to create the object. Therefore, in the epic "Ural Batyr", narrating about the creation of the world where the ancestors of the Bashkirs originally lived, the narrators seemed to create both the Ural Mountains giving it a name and the mountainous land, where the Bashkirs settled; and after the death of Ural-Batyr, they buried him there, and the ancestors of the Bashkirs thought that parts of his body turned into natural riches of the Ural Mountains, and the mountains themselves were named after the original ancestor of the Bashkirs. In the early twentieth century, in the traditional culture, the Bashkirs called themselves "children of the Urals" meaning that they originated from their first ancestor of the Urals. We reveal the same idea in the Bashkir shezhere. In particular, in the sheriens of the Burzyan tribe, one of the most ancient ancestors is Ural.

Kuzeev (1993), a famous Russian historian, expert on the ethnogenesis of the Bashkirs, corresponding member of RAS, wrote in regard to the place and role of the Urals and the adjacent lands in the life of the Bashkir people,

*whatever terms are used to designate the indigenous people of the republic and the wider region, the public realizes that the Bashkirs live in their historic homeland. It should be also noted that the perception of this fact by ordinary consciousness of representatives of the Bashkir ethnos is extraordinarily deep; it is reflected in all layers of the rich traditional spiritual culture of the Bashkirs. This trend of the Bashkir nation development will be stable. (p. 132)*

What can be added is that speaking of the original homeland, Kuzeev (1993) was referring to the Southern Urals and the adjacent lands, where the Bashkirs formed as an ethnic group and where they are still living today.

S. Pletneva, a prominent specialist in the field of nomadic civilizations, also dated the formation of the Bashkir people and its highly developed culture in the Southern Urals and adjacent lands back to high antiquity. In her opinion, the Bashkirs, who were formed on these lands very early, never left these lands

in spite of any historical cataclysms and political subordination of them to different states, but continued to dwell here, and this ensured their sustainable and progressive development up to the present. According to S.A. Pletneva, it is only the rootedness of the Bashkirs in one place (in the Urals – author) that can explain the amazing vitality and strength of their centuries-old cultural tradition (as cited in Mogilnikov, 1981).

From the history of the Bashkir people it is known that at the time of the Bashkir annexation to the Russian state, the Bashkir land was divided into four "roads" (Kazan, Osinsk, Nogai and Siberia). This division also existed during the period when the Bashkirs were part of the Golden Horde, and therefore some researchers consider it was introduced by the Tatar-Mongolian government. However, based on the Bashkir folklore and ethnographic materials, it can be stated that the division of the Bashkir land into four "roads" was introduced not by the Tatar-Mongol invaders, but it was "invention" of the Bashkir society (Aminev, 2003). The names of these four roads (Kazan, Osinsk, Nogai, Siberian), which are administrative units, simultaneously designated the roads as communication networks that ran along these four directions. Insignificantly changed, these paths have virtually survived to the present. Thus, the routes Ufa – Orenburg, Ufa – Kazan, Ufa – Perm, Ufa – Chelyabinsk, Ufa – Yekaterinburg, Birsk – Karaidel – Tastuba – Duvan – Mesyagutovo – Chelyabinsk, and Sterlitamak – Beloretsk pass through the places where the roads were laid out by remote ancestors of the Bashkirs.

Regarding the roads from Central Asia to Russia that pass through the Bashkir lands in the Southern Urals and the Cisurals, Pankov (1927) wrote that they could exist in earlier eras and were employed from the 8th to the 14th century, that is in the Khazar, Abbasid, Mongolian-Turkish eras. Perhaps, the roads were used even earlier, as the former masters of the Euro-Asian steppes – the Scythians, Huns, Avars, Oguzes, Pechenegs, Polovtsy, etc. – also moved along the same beaten caravan paths. After the Bashkirs joined Russia, the Russians set off to the East (Siberia, Central Asia) through the Bashkir lands along the roads smoothed out in ancient times. In particular, the Bashkirs informed the Russian authorities about the road running from the mouth of the Sakmara River to Bukhara through the Mugodzhar Mountains (Apollova, 1960). Bashkir roads were part of the transcontinental roads stretching across the vast territories of Eurasia. The study of their history will help us fully understand the resettlement of numerous Bashkir clans and the process of their ethnogenesis.

We assume that the main roads stretching across the Southern Urals towards East-West and South-North played a significant role in the formation of the Bashkir people.

The Ural Mountains, although not so high and not insurmountable, are rather difficult to pass through. Therefore, the roads stretching across the ridges of the Ural Mountains and running in the mountains are laid out with regard to the peculiarities of the local relief. In our opinion, this explains the location of some Bashkir clans and tribes and the connection between them. For example, Bashkirs of the Tabyn family live in Uchalinsk district of Bashkortostan. They also live on the other side of the Ural Mountains in Gafuri district of Bashkortostan. In Uchalinsk district, there are several toponyms of "Kapka" (Gate), through which the local road passes to the western side of the Ural Mountains. Therefore, it can be assumed that the Tabynians of Gafuri district moved from the eastern side of the Ural Mountains to the territory of their residence through "Kapka".

The presence of the road from the side of Chelyabinsk region towards Kazan can also be explained by the location of the Bashkir tribes in the north-west of Bashkortostan (Askinsk, Tatyshlinsk and adjacent districts) and in the neighboring Republic of Tatarstan (former Menzelinsk district, Ufa province).

A large Burzyan tribe lives in the Transurals, and in Samara and Saratov regions of Russia. If we connect the places of its settlement with a dotted line, then we get a thin road lane, part of which is a national highway now, and part is a country road for local needs. After passing Saratov, this road runs towards Volgograd and then to the Caucasus, and the Bashkirs from ancient times used the road for connection with the Caucasus region. In 1707, during one of the revolts, the Bashkir ambassadors headed by Murad went down this road to the Turkish sultan and the Crimean Khan. On the way back from Turkey, they entered into an agreement with the Chechen and other mountain peoples and besieged the Terek fortress (Solovyov, 1993). As evidenced by various sources, the Southern Urals and the Cisurals have long been connected with the Caucasus and the Black Sea region, at least from the beginning of the 1st millennium B.C. or even earlier. According to the Chelyabinsk archeologist Grigoriev (1999), the nearest route from Western Asia to the Southern Urals ran through the Caucasus, and the migrants went down this road to the Southern Urals and founded well-known Sintashta and Arkaim. From there, bronze and iron items, arms, earthenware and bronze dishes, and various types of ornaments were sent systematically to the Kama region: temporal pendants, beads, brooches and belts (Goldina & Goldina, 2010; Goldina, 2012).

According to Chichko (2015), various items of the Sasanian period discovered by archaeologists in the Southern Urals and adjacent territories indicate the connection between the population of these lands and that of the Caucasus and Western Asia.

The road named by Bashkirs "Kunyr Buga Iuly" (road of the brown bull) was laid out with regard to the peculiarities of the local Ural relief. Its other name is "Karauan Iuly" ("caravan route"). All our informants emphasized that the "Kunyr Buga" road runs along the dividing ridge of the Urals, and travellers moving along this road do not encounter major water barriers. Apparently, people learned about the Urals as a watershed a long time ago and successfully used this road. According to our informants, the "Kunyr Buga" road runs through Baimak, Abzelilovsk, Beloretsk and Uchalinsk districts of the Republic of Bashkortostan and further through Chelyabinsk region intersecting the road near the city of Satka that leads to West and East. The name Satka is translated from Bashkir into Russian as intersection.

On this road, the Russian authorities built the Verkhneyaitsky fortress (now the city of Verkhneural'sk, Chelyabinsk region). There was an intersection of roads significant to the Bashkir clans, which the Russian authorities were not aware of until the Bashkir Baim Tarkhan informed them about that. The road stretched to the present city of Yekaterinburg and further to the city of Nizhny Tagil.

Thus, the "Kunyr Buga" road that stretches from South to North connected the southern Bashkirs with the northern ones and was of major strategic importance to the Bashkirs, which is described in Bashkir folklore. For example, the epic "Kunyr Buga" says that the northern Bashkirs came to help the southern ones along this road when enemies attacked them. Therefore, this road was sometimes called "Iau Iuly", which means "military road". A large Bashkir aul Temias is located at the "Kunyr Buga" road (Baimak district of Bashkortostan). There is a high mountain near this place named by locals "Rapat", which is translated from Arabic as "a place where caravans stop to rest". If we take into account the fact that the caravan road "Kunyar Buga" runs not far from the village of Temias, then it is quite possible that travellers

stopped to rest there. Apparently, the location of Temias explains the fact that before the October Revolution this place attracted merchants from all over the Republic of Bashkortostan and other remote districts. Now the road from Baimak to Beloretsk covers part of this road.

In our opinion, the name of the city of Chelyabinsk is also associated with road features. Bashkirs name this city "Siliabe", which in Iranian means "three-way intersection, triangle". Before the Russian authorities founded the city, there was Bashkir settlement of the same name. It was located at the crossroads, and the roads ran to different directions (to the Far East, Eastern Siberia, Kazakhstan and Central Asia). Therefore, the Russian authorities found the settlement convenient for trading with Asian countries.

The road from Ufa to Orenburg stretches through Sterlitamak located on the bank of the Ashkadar River. The name of the river, when translated from Iranian languages, has several meanings: 1) a horse, on which the public messenger rides; 2) a postal horse, 3) a public messenger, a delegate, a messenger; 4) an equestrian, who changes the horse at every stop in order to quickly deliver the message; 5) a foot messenger, who forwards the message to the next messenger at the station to speed up delivery; 6) river crossing (Miller, 1950). Thus, in all of the above cases, the name of the Ashkadar River is associated with the place where one can change a horse and have a rest. Apparently, in the area where the city of Sterlitamak is situated, there used to be a place where travellers could feed a horse, change it and continue their way.

The southeastern Bashkirs preserved some legends about the "Road of Kanifa" ("Kanifa Iuly"). According to the legends, this road does not have water barriers similar to the "Kunyr Buga" road. The road starts in Abzelilovsky district, passes southwards through Baimak and Khaibullinsk districts in Orenburg region, reaches the ford of the Ural River (Iaiyk) near the city of Orsk, and connects with the caravan road running through Kazakhstan to Central Asia. The Bashkirs of Orenburg region named their part of the road "Mysyr Iuly", which means "Road to Egypt" or "Egyptian Road". The locals named the ford across the Guberlya River "Mysyr kiséke" (Ford to the Egyptian side).

## 7. Conclusion

The study showed that the Bashkir land has long been divided into four "roads" called the roads of Kazan, Osinsk, Nogai and Siberia. In addition, people remember the names of some local ancient roads, such as "Kunyr Buga Iuly", "Kanifa Road" or "Road to Egypt" or later names – "Catherine's Road/Queen-woman's Road/Convicts' Road". The residents of the Bashkir land maintained economic and cultural contacts with people of different nations that is evidenced by numerous findings in the Southern Urals, namely various items produced in the Caucasus, in the Western East and in the Middle East.

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