

## EARLY FOREIGN RELATIONS OF THE TURKS

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There have been a large number of Turkish states in the course of the long history of the Turkish people. In order to give an idea of how early the Turks had developed clear ideas of international relations some examples in a very early period, 176 B. C. to 47 B. C. and some during sixth and eleventh centuries A. D. will be given.

The Turks had their first international relations with China. In the prehistoric ages, Mongolia was inhabited by the Turks. China had contact with them since the thirteenth century B. C.<sup>1</sup> and gave them various names. Starting from the third century B. C. China called them Hyung - Nu.<sup>2</sup> The information given by the Chinese historians covering the period from the thirteenth to the third century B. C. is not very clear, and has practically no historical value. But the Chinese documents since the third century B. C. are very clear and give a precise historical knowledge.

Hyung - Nu Turks<sup>3</sup> established the first Turkish state in Central Asia. It lasted from 225 B. C. to 93 A. D. To give an

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<sup>1</sup> Sadri Maksudi Arsal, *Türk Tarihi ve Hukuk*, (İstanbul: İstanbul Üniversitesi Yayınlarından, no. 336, 1947), I, p. 192.

<sup>2</sup> J. M. de Groot, *Hunnen der vorchristlichen Zeit* (Berlin - Leipzig, 1921), Kapitel I; Rahip Bicurin, *Svedenia o narodakh obitavshikh v Sredney Azii v drevnia vremena* (St. Petersburg 1851), 1,1-2; E. H. Parker, *A Thousand Years of the Tartars* (London, 1895), pp. 1-10; M. J. Von Klaproth, *Tableaux historiques de l'Asie etc.* (Paris: 1826), pp. 33-37; Sergi Georgievski, *Perviy Periode Kitayskoy Istoriyi*, pp. 172-182, quoted in Arsal op. cit., p. 192.

<sup>3</sup> Hyung - Nu were of Turkish origin. This view is scientifically proved by the German historian H. J. Von Klaproth in his books, *Tableaux*

idea of their understanding of international relations here is a letter written in 174 B. C. by a Turkish ruler, Mete Bagati, to the Chinese Emperor Hiaowen :<sup>4</sup>

The great Hun ruler, who had access to the throne by God, salutes the Chinese Emperor and wishes him health. Recently we received from Your Majesty the Emperor a letter asking the establishment of peace and kinship between us. This demand was satisfied according to the wishes of both parties and the text of the letters.

Recently, upon the offense from your officials on the border to our Prince of Western Toki, this Prince, with the solicitation of Ilu-Heu Nangju<sup>5</sup> and others and without my permission, started to fight and so acted against the treaty concluded between the two sovereigns, and violated our brotherhood relations and put our dynasty in a hostile position to a neighbor state. We received two letters showing the anger of the Chinese Emperor. Our ambassador with our answering letter has not yet returned. The Chinese ambassador too, has not yet returned. This situation, this misunderstanding between two neighbor countries caused some undesirable events.

The violation of the treaty being the result of the faults of some petty officials, I punished the Prince of Toki by ordering him to attack the Yuechis.

With the help of God, and thanks to the health and vigor of our soldiers, the strength of our horses, our armies won a great victory over the Yuechis; thanks to the

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historiques de l'Asie and Memoires sur l'identite des Thoukhiu et des Hioung-Nou avec les Turcs (Paris : 1825) and the Russian historian K. Inostrantsoff in his book *Hun-Nu-i Gunni* (St. Petersburg, 1900). F. Hirth, German expert on Chinese literature, published in 1899 a very important article in the journal of the Munich Academy, under the title of «Uber Wolga Hunnen und Hiung-Nu.» This was published in *Sitzungsberichte der philosophisch und histor. Klasse der K. Bayer. d. Wiss.* (Munich 1899), Bd. II. Heft II., quoted in Arsal op. cit., pp. 199-200. Leon Cahun, *Introduction à l'histoire de l'Asie, Turcs et Mongols. Dès origines à 1405* (Paris : Armand Colin et Cie, éditeurs, 1896), p. 47 : «Prenant pour type une nation dont il est possible de suivre les origines jusqu'au Ve siècle et avant, la nation des Turcs, nous pouvons dire à coup sur que tous les Turcs étalent des Hiaung-Nous.»

<sup>4</sup> Aarsal, op. cit., pp. 214-216, citing De Groot, op. cit., pp. 76-77 and Rahip Bicurin op. cit., 22-24. Since Aarsal gives a Turkish translation of the original Chinese document we have departed from our practice of citing quotations in the original language and are giving instead an English translation of Aarsal.

<sup>5</sup> This writing is according to Bicurin, op. cit., p. 22. De Groot names the tribe Ho-gi-lo-Ho-lan-si op. cit., p. 76, quoted in Aarsal, op. cit., p. 215.

sharpness of our swords they had to obey us. Besides this, we put under our rule in Central Asia Iolan, Hukut, etc., altogether twenty-six tribes and territories. The whole people of these lands became soldiers in our armies, and all these tribes became a people with us.

After establishing order and security in the northern territories, I want to end wars, to give the soldiers rest to let the horses pasture. I want to renew the old treaty forgetting everything which has happened meanwhile, that, as in old times, the people on the border can live again in peace, small children can grow up and old folks can live comfortably until the end of their lives. Nations can profit that way from peace and security from generation to generation.

Because no answer has yet been received from the Chinese Emperor, I am sending this letter with the minister of the Palace He-u-Tsisen.<sup>6</sup> With him I am sending a camel, two horses. If the Emperor does not desire the Huns to come close to the Chinese border, he must order the officials and the people on the border to move away from it.

This letter shows that the early Turks thought about peace and friendly relations even when they were at the peak of might and power.

The following treaty is another early example of their understanding of international relations. It was concluded between the Hun ruler, Huhanye, and the Chinese ambassadors, Han Tchang and Tchang-Hung in 47 B. C.<sup>7</sup>

The Chinese and the Huns starting from today and for all times to come conclude this alliance to become brothers, not to deceive and cheat and not to attack the following principles:

(1) If a subject of the contracting parties should commit robbery or banditry, the injured party will immediately report the case to the other contracting party, the criminal will be punished and the injury will be compensated.

(2) If either of the two contracting parties should be attacked by a third power the other will help the attacked by

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<sup>6</sup> According to De Groot, *op. cit.*, p. 77.

<sup>7</sup> *Ibid.*, p. 223 quoted in Aarsal *op. cit.*, pp. 218-219.

sending armed forces. May the curse of the heavens fall upon him who breaks this agreement. Sons of both nations! Obey this treaty.

From these two documents we may conclude that the Hyung - Nu or Hun Turks had for their day a remarkably advanced understanding of international relations. They believed:

(1) that the normal state of affairs between the states is peace. Peace is the reward of a loyal observance of the rules of international law;

(2) that relations between states are regulated by treaties;

(3) that treaty violation is a serious matter and may be a cause of war;

(4) that respect for treaties is a sacred duty of human beings;

(5) that states communicate their wishes, requests and complaints through the ambassadors;

(6) that ambassadors must be protected by the state in which they reside. (The Turkish proverb «No death to an ambassador» is a very old one.) and;

✓ (7) that the sanction insuring respect for treaties is war and the curse of God.

These early Turks had a very original ceremony to conclude a treaty.<sup>8</sup> The foreign ambassador who had come to conclude a treaty was taken to the top of a sacred mountain where a white horse was sacrificed by cutting its throat with a knife. Milk, wine and koumiss which is soured and fermented milk of mares used as an intoxicating beverage, was poured into a vessel. The two representatives who were about to sign the treaty would next draw some blood from their bodies and drop it into the vessel. The liquid so formed was called **Ant** in

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<sup>8</sup> Friedrich Hirth, *The Ancient History of China to the End of the Chou Dynasty*, New York, Columbia University Press, 1908), p. 67.

Turkish. The two men put their swords in this liquid and repeated the exact provisions of the treaty aloud. After having sworn to respect the treaty, they drank the liquid. In Turkish today to drink **Ant** means to take on oath and **Andlaşma** which means to conclude an **Ant** means to come to an agreement.

In 554 A. D. Istemi Han had established a new state in western Turkestan after the death of his elder brother, Bumin Han. The latter had established a Turkish state in Central Asia, extending from the Baykash Lake to Manchuria and from Lake Baikal to the Chinese Wall.<sup>9</sup>

Civilization was comparatively high in these states. According to H. G. Wells, «in the fifth and sixth centuries A. D. not merely Persia, but the regions that are now Turkestan and Afghanistan were far more advanced in civilization than were the French and English of that time.»<sup>10</sup> Because it was before the adhesion of the Turks to Islam, their painting and sculpture give abundant proof of their advanced culture.<sup>11</sup>

Istemi Han made an alliance with Chosroes of Persia, the greatest of the Sassanide kings (531 - 579 A.D.).<sup>12</sup> The silk caravans used to pass through Turkestan en route from China to Rome and Constantinople. But before the conquests of Istemi

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<sup>9</sup> According to one view, Bumin Han died in 552 A. D., but Bicurin states that he died in March of 553 A. D., *op. cit.*, 267 quoted in Arsal, *op. cit.*, p. 231. Cahun is wrong when he says that Bumin Han received in 565 or 566 or not later than 567, a delegation from his vassal, because at this time Bumin Han was already dead for eleven or twelve years. Cahun, *op. cit.*, p. 108.

<sup>10</sup> Herbert George Wells, *The Outline of History*, Revised and brought up to the end of the Second World by Raymond Postgate, New York: Garden City Books, 1949, p. 576.

<sup>11</sup> *Ibid.*, p. 577. «In Berlin one may see a collection of wall paintings from Turkestan of this period which anticipate the costumes and equipment of thirteenth century France and Germany (six centuries later), in a quite extraordinary way. All the familiar figures and symbols of the kings, queens and knaves of a pack of cards, for example to be seen depicted in these brilliant pictures. There was a life there as rich and fine as that of European medievalism at its brightest and wonderfully like it.»

<sup>12</sup> *Ibid.*, p. 568: «It is in connection with Chosroes that we hear of a new hunnish people in Central Asia, the Turks, who are, we learn first in alliance with them, then with Constantinople.» «Chosrose», *Encyclopedia Britannica*, Vol. V., 1947, «... meanwhile in the east the Hephthalites had been attacked by the Turks... Chosroes united with them and conquered Bactria, while he left the country of the Oxus to the Turks.»

Han this commercial road was closed and the silk was transported on the ships from China to the ports at the Persian Gulf. To assure the economic welfare of the country this road had to be reopened, but for this to be done, Persia had to give the right of transit to the Turkish caravans. Istemi Han sent a delegation headed by a Turkish diplomat, Manyak Agha, to Chosroes I, who was his son-in-law,<sup>13</sup> to request this privilege. A caravan carrying silk went to Persia with Manyak Agha. However, Chosroes refused the right of transport, since the Persians made greater profit from the ports. They bought all the silk goods brought by the Turkish caravan and burned them in the presence of the Turkish merchants. After this, Istemi Han sent a second delegation, again headed by Manyak Agha.<sup>14</sup> This time the Persians poisoned the Turkish delegation in a banquet given to honor them and spread the rumor that the Turks had died because the hot, dry climate of Persia was unsuitable for them. Only Manyak Agha was able to save his life. When he explained to Istemi Han what had happened, the latter was outraged at these violations of morality and the rules of international law. But instead of declaring war upon Persia he decided upon another course,<sup>15</sup> namely to conclude an alliance with the Eastern Roman Empire for the purpose of forcing Persia to give the right of transit. For this reason Istemi Han sent a diplomatic delegation to the Byzantine Empire.<sup>16</sup> Again Manyak Agha headed the delegation. He brought silks in abundant quantity, his credentials and a letter in Scythic script.<sup>17</sup> The

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<sup>13</sup> Aarsal, *op. cit.*, p. 294. According to Aarsal, Chosroes asked the hand of the daughter of Istemi Han and Turkish ruler gave his own daughter in marriage to him. Cahun says that Chosroes married a Turkish princess called Kayen. He cites the following in support of his statement: *Journal Asiatique*, VI e serie, 7 e vol. Histoire de la dynastie des Sasanides, d'après les renseignements fournis par les historiens arméniens, par Patkanian p. 189. Les Chroniquers persans (Mirkhond p. 389) appelle la princess Kayen, Turkzade «Héritière turque.» *op. cit.*, p. 110. This latter information strengthens the point of view of Aarsal that she was the daughter of Istemi Han.

<sup>14</sup> Aarsal speaks of two delegations, *op. cit.*, p. 297. Cahun speaks only of one delegation. Cahun, *op. cit.*, p. 109.

<sup>15</sup> *Ibid.*

<sup>16</sup> Menander Protektor, Edition de Boor, pp. 192-195 and Dietrich, *Byzantinsche Quellen sur leander und Volkerkunde*, teil II, p. 14-298.

<sup>17</sup> This is old Turkish writing only recently deciphered in which the

Turkish delegation which arrived at the beginning of the fourth year of the Kingdom of Justin (568), were received by that ruler, who asked many questions about Turkhya.<sup>18</sup> After the reception ceremonies, Manyak Agha stated that the real aim of his mission, namely, to conclude an offensive and defensive alliance, declaring that the Turks were ready to fight against all enemies of the Roman power.<sup>19</sup> The Turks offered the market of China and the opening of a direct route by which the raw silk would be sent to Rome and Constantinople. What they demanded in return was a common offensive against the Persians, who were blocking the commercial road to the east. The Eastern Romans did not understand or feigned not to understand, as they wanted to gain time in order to learn who these Turks and their king were.<sup>20</sup> The Turks were full of self-confidence; the Greeks were hesitant and cautious.<sup>21</sup> After having been detained in Constantinople a long time without receiving a definite answer, Manyak decided to leave Constantinople. With him Justinus sent a delegation to İstemi Han,<sup>22</sup> under the leadership of Zemarkos. İstemi Han who had two capitals, Aktag in the western part of his territories and Talas in the eastern part, took the Byzantine ambassador to Talas where he received a delegation from Persia and reprimanded the Persian ambassadors, reciting one by one the mistreatment of the Turkish ambassadors sent to the Persian court and the treachery and violations of international law by the Persians.<sup>23</sup> İstemi Han did everything possible to assure Zemarkos of the sincerity of the Turkish alliance but the latter, «timorous and puzzled by his own mission,»<sup>24</sup> was

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inscriptions of Siberia and of Mongolia are written. Cahun, *op. cit.*, p. 112. Cahun says that it was remarkable that there were interpreters in Constantinople to read and to translate these letters written with the Scythic characters of the Turks, who were the descendants of the old Hyund-Nous.

<sup>18</sup> The word Turkhya is used as such in the Greek sources; Arsal, *op. cit.*, p. 298.

<sup>19</sup> Cahun, *op. cit.*, p. 113. Cahun quotes Protektor, who says that in that way the Turks became friends to the Romans.

<sup>20</sup> *Ibid.*

<sup>21</sup> *Ibid.*, p. 114.

<sup>22</sup> Arsal, *op. cit.*, p. 300.

<sup>23</sup> *Ibid.*, p. 301.

<sup>24</sup> Cahun, *op. cit.*, p. 114.

undecided and returned without concluding an alliance. İstemi Han gave him and sent with him many rich and beautiful presents and ordered a high officer called **Tagma** to accompany the ambassador to Constantinople.<sup>25</sup>

The East Roman historians write that a few years after Zemarkos' visit the Turks sent an ambassador called Anakastes (Ana kardeş) to Constantinople.<sup>26</sup> In 576 A. D., the emperor of the Eastern Roman Empire sent Valentinus to conclude an alliance, but the Turks, angry because of Roman aid to their rebellious vassals, now refused to enter into an alliance.<sup>27</sup>

Another example of the early international relations of the Turks is the Battle of Malazgirt between them and the Eastern Roman Empire on August 26, 1071, which opened Asia Minor to the Turks. Before this, a treaty was concluded between the Turks and the Eastern Roman Empire permitting the Turks to live in the eastern part of Asia Minor. The number of migratory Turks increased rapidly, thus causing concern to the Eastern Romans, who decided to crush the Turks and to drive them out of Asia Minor. The Byzantine army, jubilant from their many victories over the tribes on the frontiers, approached Malazgirt. A peace offer by the Turks was rejected with insult. Upon this rejection, Alparslan, the Turkish ruler, pleaded with his soldiers that the time to raise the Turkish name and honor had arrived. «He put on his garment and mounted his horse to lead his soldiers. Thus he defeated the Roman army of two-hundred-thousand men with his fifteen-thousand cavaliers.»<sup>28</sup> Toward evening the Byzantine Emperor Romanus was taken prisoner and brought before Alparslan, who asked him why he had not kept the treaty between them.<sup>29</sup> Alparslan showed the emperor respect and tried to soften his reverses with hospitality. One day Al-

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<sup>25</sup> Aarsal, op. cit., p. 301.

<sup>26</sup> Edouard Cahvannes. Documents sur les Tou-Klué (Turcs) occidentaux (St. Petersburg, 1903), p. 239, quoted in Aarsal, op. cit., p. 302.

<sup>27</sup> Aarsal, op. cit., p. 304.

<sup>28</sup> Mahmut Esat Bozkurt. Devletler Arası Hak. Ankara, Hukuk Fakültesi Neşriyatı, Sayı : 19, 1940, p. 65, quoting Abdurrahman Şeref, Zübdetülkısas, 1, 379.

<sup>29</sup> Bozkurt, op. cit., p. 66

parslan asked Romanus how he would act if the Turkish ruler himself were a prisoner in his hands. Romanus answered : «To tell you the truth, I would have you whipped until all your flesh were cut in pieces.» The Turkish Sultan replied to this that he would treat him as a king and give him precious clothes. Thus, Romanus was permitted to live in his own imperial tent.<sup>30</sup> Alparslan showed him the respect due an emperor, treated him as his guest and gave him ten - thousand pieces of gold, and set free all Roman prisoners of war. He sent Romanus and all other Roman soldiers with a guard of honor to the border. «Romanus who became prisoner of the generosity and goodness of Alparslan, rather than of his sword, cried aloud when he was leaving him.»<sup>31</sup>

From the point of view of international law, the importance of the war and of the treaty which concluded it were :

✓ (1) New Turkish states began to be established in the western part of Asia Minor;

(2) A treaty was signed between the Seljuks and the Byzantine Empire which provided for the payment of tribute to the Seljuks;

(3) The observance of treaties is the principal rule in international relations;

(4) The treatment of prisoners of war and their repatriation at the end of the war conform very nearly to modern rules of international law; and

✓ (5) The treatment and respect shown to the Roman Emperor was in conformity with the rules of international law.

✓ The Turks, who are an ancient race, managed to maintain themselves in spite of a change in climatic conditions which made their fertile country in Central Asia an immense desert, their endless immigration to west, east and south, the aggressions of powerful neighbors and the conflicts and divisions among themselves. They had an early and a very high civi-

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<sup>30</sup> Ibid., quoting Şeref, *op. cit.*, pp. 381-382.

<sup>31</sup> Ibid.

lization. What were the factors which contributed to their struggle for existence? Was it religion - as in the case of the Israelites, which for centuries kept them from perishing? It is doubtful that religion played a very important role. During their history the Turks were Shaman, Nestorian Christian, some of them Budhist, others Jew; and, finally, in modern times the majority are Moslem. They are a disciplined people, peace-loving and law-abiding. It is true that they fought with their neighbors, but in the beginning most of such conflicts were wars to preserve their existence and it was only later that they were employed upon to build their empire. They had a fine understanding of international relations; but in European eyes the Turks represented Islam, a hostile religion. It is suggested that if it had not been for the fact that the Europeans saw in the Turkish advance a threat to the Christian religion they would not have resisted so bitterly and Europe might have been united under this new force.

✓ To conclude we can assume that fine understanding of international relations, their peace-loving and strict discipline as to law-abiding with a rich and common tradition and history were some important factors which contributed to the struggle of the Turks for existence.