



e-ISSN 2798-8260



Jurnal ISO: Jurnal Ilmu Sosial, Politik dan Humaniora Vol: 4, No 2, 2024, Page: 1-14

# The Status and Role of Women In The Society of Nomads In Central Asia

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DOI: <https://doi.org/10.53697/iso.v4i2.1906>

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Received: 08-10-2024

Accepted: 18-11-2024

Published: 15-12-2024



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**Abstract:** The aim of this research is to study the role and status of women in nomadic society, as well as to identify the specifics of the perception of the image of women in traditional philosophical worldview. The attention given to the study of the role of women and their image in philosophy remains of constant interest, as this issue has both ideological and practical significance. In the context of the continuous transformation of modern society's structure under the influence of various factors, the image of women, their functions, and roles in society are undergoing changes. Primarily, the reasons for the changing image of women include the pragmatization of human relationships, shifts in value orientations, and the increasing complexity of gender and national self-identification processes. The authors identified the significant role of women in nomadic civilization, particularly in the formation and organization of the family and in the upbringing of children. The research also revealed that women of the steppe could participate in crucial decisions concerning their clan and people, as evidenced by the involvement of nomadic women in military battles. The practical significance of this research is determined by the fact that its results can be used in further studies on the role of women in organizing the life of nomads, as well as in research on gender equality. All of the above reflects the relevance of this research and calls for a more comprehensive study of the gender role of women, both in ancient nomadic civilization and in modern society..

**Keywords:** Development, Human Rights, Humanity, Nationality, Society, Spirituality, Ideology, Immunity, Security, Education, Enlightenment.

## Introduction

Discussions about the role and status of women in society trace their origins back to ancient times and continue to this day, as gender studies remain one of the most relevant and pressing topics of modernity. Issues related to gender studies are still actively raised both in the West and in Kazakhstan and Central Asian countries. The specifics of the status of women in the society of ancient nomads are clearly visible in the studies of the nomadic people of Central Asia and Turkic-speaking states. The place of women in the society of the Turkic people of Central Asia is reflected in forms of social dependency and the social structure of nomads. Information from written sources about the status of women in Turkic society significantly complements the results of various scientific studies, which are important for uncovering the aspects of the social history of the nomads in the Central Asian

region. The status and role of women among nomads were largely determined by the specifics of the nomadic economy and the nomads' perceptions of their place in life.

Nomadism is one of the various forms of life that existed and continue to exist along the Great Silk Road. The nomads of Central Asia played a significant role in the cultural exchanges that took place along these historical routes. The nomadic communities living near the territories of present-day Kazakhstan, Kyrgyzstan, Tajikistan, Turkmenistan, and Uzbekistan had very specific social structures based on grazing herds over large expanses of meadows and deserts and traveling significant distances on horseback. Throughout Central Asia, they coexisted with settled populations scattered across arable lands in oases and river valleys. The male and female principles are sources of life's development, remaining vivid embodiments of the unity and struggle of opposites. In connection with globalization, which "blurs" the boundaries of national cultures, as well as the spread of Western values, lifestyles, and thought stereotypes, the image of women in public consciousness is evolving.

The study of the philosophical and artistic traditions of past centuries in the characterization and evaluation of the image of women provides crucial experience for understanding contemporary gender, anthropological, and existential issues. The image of women is an important element of worldview and cultural identity, expressing the uniqueness of the feminine principle, its essence, and mission. It is understood in creative works as a sociocultural phenomenon, a transpersonal, symbolic representation of women, the quintessence of her essential qualities and abilities, which prevail in a given culture and carry its characteristic traits. The content of the concept of the image of women within the context of nomadic worldview is revealed through the unity of metaphysical, anthropological, aesthetic, and sociocultural aspects, which originate in mythological and religious consciousness and receive conceptual and theoretical reflection in philosophy.

The authority enjoyed by certain women and their contributions to history can only be assessed if we understand the overall situation of women in the steppe. To do this, we must study their lives in detail. We will begin with marriage, as the broadest powers of women typically manifested after they entered into marriage through their status as wives, mothers, or widows. Next, we will address women's work, as they engaged in a wide range of activities throughout the day that required the formation and maintenance of many complex relationships. Alongside work, we must investigate the social and economic opportunities available to women, as their daily activities included managing and controlling human and other resources. An additional area of women's activities was focused on hospitality and religious duties. Women also had a profound influence on the family: in the immediate sphere, they managed the upbringing of children with the help of others, while on a broader front, their roles were indispensable.

According to sources, when a Chinese guest arrived at Genghis Khan's native camp in the summer of 1221, he discovered a vast mobile city – "hundreds and thousands of carts and tents". It was managed by the most prominent wife, the empress (possibly Berthe), while Genghis Khan was campaigning thousands of miles to the west, based in a mobile camp overseen by his junior wife, Kulan. This demonstrates that women skillfully managed not only the camps but also the household and family in the absence of men.

In the studies of contemporary Kazakh philosopher Garifolla Yesim, it is stated: "The existence of a woman lies in her essential difference from a man. If we talk about where this difference is reflected, we will find that it lies in the beauty of a woman and in her endless desire to be beautiful. In this, she is similar to a child. A woman who does not strive for beauty contradicts her nature. There are no ugly women" [5; 76]. Famous Kazakh poets and zhyraus considered women as social beings in their works. The woman they celebrated was, first and foremost, a beautiful woman. Undoubtedly, beauty is a natural quality of a woman. However, Kazakh zhyraus did not limit themselves to praising only a woman's beauty, which could be explained by purely male interest in women as objects of pleasure. The poets viewed women not only as ideals of beauty and perfection but also as the guardians of the family hearth and educators of the future generation of the nation. "In nomadic society, Kazakh women had a greater voice in family matters than women in traditional sedentary societies, where they often lived in enclosed spaces and were rarely seen even outside the home" [6; 24]. The Kazakh people particularly valued the aforementioned roles of women, fully understanding that their activities are vital for the future of the nation, mutual understanding among relatives, and the unity of the country as a whole. The zhyrau asserted that, in essence, women should dominate social content and be active citizens of society; therefore, their social activities are especially important.

## Methodology

This study employs analytical and phenomenological methods. The object of the research is to reveal the phenomenon, analyze the role and status of women in nomadic society. An analysis of the literature on nomadic culture is conducted as a way to understand the metaphysics of the concept of women's place and role, as well as a phenomenological analysis of the historical experience of nomads, which helps to identify the unique status of women in society. The specified materials complement each other to a large extent, aiding in the comprehensive reconstruction of the gender history of ancient Turks in the context being examined. The author employs a comparative-historical analysis method and data from archaeological studies. A comparative approach is used to analyze Western European and domestic philosophical traditions regarding the essence and purpose of women. The axiological method was applied in studying the value of women, which is particularly justified in Kazakh philosophy

## Result and Discussion

What was the attitude towards women in traditional steppe society? In the works of many researchers, the view has established itself regarding the high status of women among the nomads of Central Asia. The traveler Plano Carpini noted: "Their wives do everything: they make fur coats, dresses, shoes, boots, and all leather goods; they also drive the carts and repair them, pack the camels, and are very agile and quick in all their affairs" (Плано Карпини, 1957, с. 37). Another traveler, Rubruck, stated: "The duty of women is to drive the carts, set up and take down the dwellings, milk the cows, make butter and curd, prepare skins and sew them... They also sew sandals, shoes, and other clothing..." (Гильом де Рубрук, 1957, с. 100-101; Маковецкий, 1886, с. 32).

Chinese sources assert: "It is exclusively women who stretch and set up the felt tents, receive and unload the pack horses, carts, bundles, and other items". "Wives, they will tell you, both sell and buy everything that the husband needs and manage the household. Husbands do not worry about anything; they go to war and hunt beasts and birds with falcons" (МЭН-да бэй-лу, 1975, с. 80) .

In patriarchal cultures, women generally were not part of the public sphere and could only act through men. Their designated roles were confined to household management and domestic life. However, this did not mean they did not perform tasks traditionally seen as male. Russian researchers such as Andreyev, Levshin, Meindorf, Bolotov, Makovetsky, and Ovchinnikova share a similar view: during migrations, wives had to set up and take down yurts, saddle horses for their husbands, and help them mount, spin wool, weave carpets, roll felt, sew with silk, manage the household, and raise children. The woman was the only labor force in the Kyrgyz family, while the man's duties were limited to overseeing the herds, obtaining means of subsistence, and producing household utensils and weapons (Плано Карпини, 1957, с. 36).

Women were viewed as indispensable labor within the household, serving as the mistress of the home (yurt), the manager of domestic affairs, a mother, and a nurturer of children, while men were seen primarily as providers of subsistence. As we can see, women had significantly more familial responsibilities compared to men. Therefore, it is difficult to agree with the negative assessment of women's status among nomads that some authors present. Recent studies convincingly refute such evaluations (БОЛОТОВ, 1866, с. 184)

### **The High Role of Women In Traditional Kazakh Society.**

Despite such opinions from researchers about nomadic culture as a whole, there was a particularly respectful attitude towards women. The traditions of matriarchy defined the social foundations of many nomadic states around the world. It is well known that the Scythians were the first ancestors of the aesthetics and culture of nomadism, and their successors included the Huns, Turks, and Mongols. It is worth noting that only on Kazakh land did the Turks create statues of deities in female form, representing the goddess Zher-Su. Notably, portraits of women – katuns, the co-rulers of the khans – were also depicted on Turkic coins, as in ancient Turkic society, the highest authority was held not only by the khan but also by his wife. This also led to the sacralization of their lineages, both Khan and Katun.

In the works of K. Arginbayev, it is mentioned that in the absence of a husband, "Kazakh women had to solve all household issues independently". "Women actively expressed themselves within the nomadic society. They gave birth to and raised children, milked cows and mares, sewed clothes, and prepared food. The man, on the other hand, was responsible for protecting and defending his family and ensuring a supply of food; that is, he represented the nomadic society in communication with the outside world", says Z. Kodar. "All of this was determined by the characteristics of nomadic society, which was based not on accumulation and hoarding, but on the immediate expenditure of what was acquired. The role of women in nomadic society was all the more important as they were the only cumulative force in a nomadic lifestyle focused solely on extensive development",

emphasizes Z. Kodar. Despite the conservatism of society itself and the clear male dominance, it is believed that elements of matriarchy were strong within it.

Researchers note that the role of women in traditional Kazakh society was relatively high, despite clear male dominance. Among the Kazakhs, “women were always riding camels, horses, and bulls, and many of them were great equestrians; they did not lag behind men in horseback riding and were ready to participate in the defense of the aul (village)” . A woman could not be easily offended; her kin stood behind her, and they had to be taken into account. Scholars note that Kazakh women had relatively greater independence and freedom compared to representatives of other Central Asian people. This can be seen as a remnant of gynocracy or matriarchy. Indeed, as A. Kodyar writes, “the women of the Steppe differed from the women of other Eastern people in that they possessed much greater independence and freedom, often taking an active part in the fateful decisions of their people. The Steppe gave rise to types of women such as companions and comrades, the khan’s adviser, tribal leaders, witty women, and finally, warrior women. It is striking that among the nomads, women were not designated for entertainment. According to the steppe code of honor, a female tribeswoman could only become a wife in the future”. The status and prestige of both men and women were determined by their affiliation with a tribe, a jüz (a group within the Kazakh people), and, in addition, by their position within the property and political structure.

The image of the ideal wife for a nomad is depicted in the Oghuz epic collection “The Book of Dede Korkut”. She is a caring housewife: the pillar of her home, the one who, when a guest arrives in the steppe, while her husband is out hunting, will feed the guest, offer him a drink, show him respect, and see him off. The wives of the Mongols and Kazakhs had inalienable property rights to yurts (dwellings) along with all their contents, which could not be taken away from them under any circumstances. They were often much more materially protected against their husbands than modern women in most countries around the world. Among pre-Islamic Turks, women had the right to participate in gatherings of the nobility, tois, and kurultais, and the khan made decisions together with his wife, the hatun (Gokalp, 1981, s. 90-91). Questions related to the role of female relatives in the social life of the Turks have repeatedly attracted the attention of scholars. It should be noted that these issues remain underexplored due to methodological difficulties.

Andreev I.G. and Levshin A.I. note the characteristic practice among the Kazakhs of settling women in different yurts. A.N. Bernshtam believes that this distribution of women across various yurts reflected the division of clan economy into a number of individual family households, each of which was headed by a woman and indirectly managed by the head of the clan through her (Бернштам, 1946, с. 94-98). Each yurt, along with its household, under the responsibility of a woman, served as a segment of the overall economy owned by a man. It can be assumed that this arrangement had exclusively practical significance due to the instability of property rights in the context of the ecological dependence of nomadic economy. The distribution of livestock across different sections of the family’s economic territory, firstly, facilitated the care of a large herd and secondly, increased the chances of preserving livestock in the event of any local disasters Among



nomads, it was customary for a bride's dowry to include a yurt. Among the Kazakhs, if a widow does not wish to remarry and prefers to continue living with her father, he would allocate a yurt for her .

The number of women in a family is directly linked to the functioning of the household – as S.E. Tolybekov pointed out, polygamy was a condition for having many children, and the presence of sons with multiple wives implied the availability of numerous herders and warriors .The number of women in a man's family was a kind of indicator of his social status, as it demonstrated his ability to provide for them, automatically elevating his prestige in the eyes of his fellow tribesmen. Materials from various periods reveal a division of labor in nomadic families, where women primarily engaged in household chores, while men focused on hunting, warfare, and herding, tasks that women also participated in (Грач, 1980, с. 256) .

Interesting facts from the studied sources include instances of creating memorial stelae in honor of women, such as stelae with inscriptions. Despite the obvious relevance of reconstructing gender relations in nomadic society, there has been no targeted study of this issue based on burial complexes of the Turks in Central Asia. Nevertheless, researchers note a high degree of similarity between male and female burials of the Turks, pointing out the difference only in the composition of the accompanying items in the burial. The position of a woman was entirely dependent on the ethnic and social status of her husband, as emphasized by Zamza Kodyar. For women of the Tore, strict endogamy was established: they were not allowed to marry a man from "karasuyek" ("black bone"), and if they violated this prohibition, they would lose all the privileges of their clan. Conversely, if a woman from "karasuyek" became the wife of a Tore representative, she was automatically classified as Tore and gained all the privileges of that class, but, of course, within the context of her gender identity.

This certainly reflects the possibility of vertical mobility for women of this class – both ascending and descending. At the same time, this custom emphasizes the fact that the central gender figure in nomadic Kazakh society was the man. Of course, Tore women held a very high social status: they stood not only above all women of other clans and tribes but also above the entire jüz stratification. However, this was not because they were women, but because they belonged to the higher class of "aksuyek" – the Tore class. Marriage, especially among the nobility, was a political act, and a woman played the role of the highest value, possession of which grants rights to kinship and protection. However, if a woman stepped outside her class, specifically by marrying a representative of "black bone", she immediately acquired all the characteristics of that jüz and, within it, of the tribe to which her chosen husband belonged. This led to her social devaluation. Researchers note the Kazakh epic, whose main content revolves around the search for a bride and heroic matchmaking. Childlessness in the epic is often condemned. "The primary function of a Kazakh woman is to bear children and uphold the interests of the family. A woman does not claim equality with a man, as she understands perfectly well that she was created for a different purpose, specifically for what a man was not created for", emphasizes Zamza Kodyar.

A woman in traditional Kazakh society could in no way be considered a victim. She took on household duties to free the man for heroic deeds. The man was expected to expand, increase possessions, and pursue external expansion. The woman, on the other hand, was responsible for preserving, organizing, harmonizing, and converting quantity into quality, as all of this was ultimately done for her, in her name, and for the continuation of the lineage. One could even say that a Kazakh woman, who knew no greater value than the family, was more whole and complete than some Western women, as men and women were created for each other. Thus, we see that in traditional steppe society, gender stratification was not based on the oppression of one gender by the other, but on the principles of differences in male and female constitutions, which determined their distinct roles and functions.

A common form of marriage was the nuclear marriage (monogamy). Alongside it, another form of marriage was practiced – polygamy (having multiple wives). Since we have mentioned that polygamy was widespread among the wealthy class, we must focus on such institutions as *baibishe* and *tokal*. *Baibishe* was the senior wife, and all the others had to obey her without question. The husband was expected to visit his wives alternately, denying none of them the pleasure. This, too, reflected concern for offspring, as in the unstable nomadic life, people often perished in battles and raids. To ensure the rapid reproduction of descendants, men married several women at once. All contentious matters were resolved collectively through negotiations. A very important role in the life of a Kazakh family was the clear distribution of duties, where each woman knew her responsibilities. It is also necessary to highlight the special care for widows that existed in the society. In marital and family relations, the custom of *amengerstvo* (levirate) was practiced, where a widow became the wife of her late husband's brother. This custom indicates that a woman was not left alone after the death of the head of the household (*shanyrak*) but remained under the protection of the clan, which cared for her and her children. Again, this was only with the woman's consent – she could choose not to stay with her husband's clan after his death. She could also choose not to marry the brother, in which case all the father's privileges were passed to her eldest son. If she chose to marry someone else, the children remained in the father's clan, and she left the clan with only her personal belongings. As is known, relatives up to the seventh generation could not marry each other. Thus, in some sense, a woman had freedom, but not in everything. This was a patriarchal society with its own laws, where the final word rested with men, particularly the father. The value of a man was immeasurably higher, as we will see further when discussing punishments.

### **Punishments For Crimes Against Women In The Steppe**

Punishments for crimes against women under the steppe law were much harsher than those for similar acts today. Interestingly, the woman's clan always stood as her protector, safeguarding her interests. The Turks' respectful attitude towards women is evidenced by the fact that, according to Chinese sources, relations with a married woman were punishable by death, while relations with an unmarried girl resulted in a fine and the obligation to marry her. As for the legal status of women, it was decided by *biys'* courts depending on the situation. By the 17<sup>th</sup> century, in Khan Tauke's code of laws "*Zheti Zhargy*", the steppe principle of "blood for blood" had lost its former rigidity, and now

punishments could be mitigated and replaced with a fine. However, the option of compensation was not always granted. The death penalty was legalized in four cases:

1. "for a woman killing her husband", if his relatives did not forgive her;
2. "for the deliberate murder of her child by a mother";
3. if a husband witnessed his wife's act of adultery;
4. if the act of blasphemy was established.

The death penalty, particularly for adultery and blasphemy, was rarely enforced in practice, as such cases required the testimony of four witnesses, a condition that was seldom met. It is well known that the most common form of punishment was *kun* (compensatory payment or restitution). Even a murderer could preserve their life, with the plaintiffs' consent, by paying *kun*. For instance, for the killing of a man (of common status), the perpetrator was required to pay his relatives 1,000 sheep, and for a woman – 500. In the case of killing members of the *Tore* or *Khoja* classes, *kun* was levied as if for seven adult men. The price of a slave had no established value. Rape was equated to murder, yet a criminal could avoid both the death penalty and compensation by marrying the raped girl and paying the appropriate *kalym* (bride price). In some instances, the rights of free individuals, particularly women, were curtailed. For example, women were not permitted to testify in court as witnesses. A wife and children who were aware of a father's crime but did not report it were not subject to any punishment, as "informing on one's father or husband was considered dishonorable". A man who abducted another's wife with her consent could keep her, provided he paid *kalym* to her husband and, in addition, gave him a girl without a *kalym*. A man who abducted another's wife without her consent faced the death penalty, though this could be commuted through the payment of *kun*.

Thus, we can see how the subordinate position of women is solidified in the *Zheti Zhargy*, concludes Zamza Mutashovna. "This is evident in the fact that the life of a common woman is valued at half the price of a common man's life. It is also clear from the fact that only the woman is held accountable for adultery, with no mention of how a man would be punished for the same offense. A woman who kills her husband faces the harshest punishment – death – while the laws do not specifically outline how a man would be punished for the same crime. Moreover, the law differentiates between the punishment for killing a commoner and a noble. If the life of a noble man is valued at 7,000 sheep, it can be assumed that the life of a noblewoman is valued at 3,500 sheep.

This means that the life of a noblewoman is valued at 3.5 times more than that of a common man. Therefore, the laws differ for various social classes. A woman from the highest class is not only of higher status than women from lower classes but also far above common men in status. Another crucial point noted in the *Zheti Zhargy* is that violence against women was not to be tolerated! Previously, customary law distinguished between punishments for the abduction of an unmarried girl (even considering whether she was engaged or not) and a married woman. However, in the *Zheti Zhargy*, the punishment for violence against a woman, regardless of her marital status, is the same – death. While the rest of the legal code reflects the unequal status of women and men in nomadic society, this law highlights a respectful attitude towards women, irrespective of their status. If a woman



did not have a husband, the offender was held accountable to her relatives, who were to decide his fate. Thus, the Zheti Zhargy emphasizes the importance of the kinship group in protecting women from any form of violation. When familiarizing ourselves with these provisions of Kazakh customary law, we must remember that they pertain to crimes, which are exceptional events that disrupt the normal life of the nomadic community. Nevertheless, a detailed study of the Zheti Zhargy reveals that women still held considerable strength in the steppe, as the legal document reflects a struggle between patriarchal society and the indomitable female spirit. A free Kazakh woman could not feel oppressed or diminished. She could express herself not only as a wife but also as a poetess, singer, or participant in horse races. She could win the hearts of the greatest men of the Steppe. Some studies suggest that in horsemanship and archery, nomadic women were on par with men and, in certain cases, even participated in combat.

### **Women In Steppe Politics**

In a deeper study of sources and historical materials, one can find numerous examples where steppe politics was significantly influenced by the presence of women. For instance, certain Kazakh women participated in the khan's council. The involvement of women from aristocratic families in the governance of the state is well illustrated by M. Dulati in his essay "Tarikh-i-Rashidi", where he describes the political events that took place after the death of Khan Qasim in the Kazakh Khanate and the role of his wife, Sultana Naghir Khanum, who acted as a mediator in important state matters between Sultan Said, the khan of Moghulistan, and Taghir, the khan of the Kazakh Khanate (Прохлое Казахстана, 1997, с. 383). All of this indicates the gender competitiveness in traditional Kazakh society, which is only possible within a nomadic lifestyle, where women act as the primary civilizing force. Women in politics are an important factor in the quality and level of international relations. Among the factors contributing to the spiritual, cultural, and ideological cohesion of the people of Central Asia, dynastic marriages among the sultans and khans of Kazakhstan and Central Asia held significant importance. Marital diplomacy sometimes had a decisive influence on the formation and dissolution of individual states and dynasties.

A famous poetic excerpt from the "Secret Legend" attests to the fact that an aristocratic steppe wife was entrusted not only with the management of her husband's and his family's property but also with the protection of her own parents, relatives, and her people. The excerpt describes women from the Kongirat clan, renowned for their beauty:

*With us, the Qonggirat people, from old days,  
To have the good looks of our granddaughters  
And the beauty of our daughters is enough:  
We do not strive for dominion ...  
We lift our good-looking daughters,  
We have them ride on a carriage with front seat;  
We harness a dark male camel,  
We lead them off to the qa'an,  
And seat them on the throne, at his side.*

*From old days, the Qonggirat people  
Have the qatuns as shields,  
Have their daughters as intercessors (de Rachewiltz, 2006, c. 70-72).*

These lines imply that a woman who married the khan of another state was expected to remember her family and people even after she moved to a new life, regardless of whether it was through bride price or levirate marriage. Limited contact after her marriage was not meant to signify a complete break with her native family.

### **Women Warriors Of The Steppe**

There is a persistent notion that warrior women are a derivative of the cultures of exclusively Iranian-speaking nomads, primarily the Sarmatians. Surprisingly, the widespread presence of Amazons among other nomadic people – such as the Turks and Mongols – is almost always ignored. Similarly, the continuity of cultures from the later Turkic and Mongolian nomads to the ancient Iranian-speaking people is often overlooked.

Let us present a few excerpts from historical chronicles and epic tales that recount the significant presence of warrior women among the Turks and Mongols. As is well known, in almost all nomadic cultures, women held a higher social status than among agricultural people. This was connected to the way of life of the nomads, which fostered a certain equality between men and women. Plano Carpini, in “The History of the Mongols”, emphasized: “Girls and women ride and skillfully gallop on horses, like men. We also saw them carrying quivers and bows. Both men and women can ride for long distances and endure”.

The Annals of Burton Monastery (Annales Burtonenses) describe the Mongolian army: “Women, like men, ride horses, fight, and shoot bows. Their armor is made of layered leather and is nearly impenetrable”. Seyfi Çelebi (16<sup>th</sup> century) in “Tavarih” (Chronicle) stated: “After the battle, when they strip the fallen Kalmyks of their armor, it turns out that they are girls. This people possesses such bravery that even the girls go to war clad in military armor”. Johann Schiltberger, in “Journey through Europe, Asia, and Africa from 1394 to 1427”, recounts: “During my time with Chakry, a Tatar lady named Sadur-melik appeared before him and Edige, accompanied by a retinue of 4,000 maidens. This noble lady, wishing to avenge one Tatar king for killing her husband, asked Edige to help her expel that king. It is important to know that this lady, like the women accompanying her, rode horses and handled a bow as skillfully as a man. Preparing for battle, she tied a sword and a bow to each side of her horse or saddle. When the cousin of the king who killed her husband was captured in battle against Chakry and brought to her, she ordered him to kneel, drew her sword, and with one stroke severed his head, saying, “Now I have avenged myself!” This occurred in my presence, and I speak of it here as a witness”.

Many warrior female characters appear in the main Oghuz epic “The Book of Dede Korkut”, including the wives, mothers, and brides of khans and heroes. This epic dates back to the 11<sup>th</sup> century, a time when the Turks conquered all of the Near East. “The Book of Dede Korkut” (Kitab-i Dede Korkut) features stories about Burla-Khatun, the wife of Kazan-Bek: “She mounted forty slender maidens on horses and commanded them to bring a black stallion, then mounted herself, belted on her sword, and set out [in search of her son]... “The

tall Burla-Khatun slashed the black banner of the infidels with her sword and cast it to the ground”.

Interestingly, in the 17<sup>th</sup> century, Adam Olearius, a participant in a German embassy to Persia, left a description of the graves of Kazan-Bek and his wife Burla-Khatun in Azerbaijan. He even noted the unusual length of her tomb, as Burla-Khatun was often referred to by the epithet “tall”. Adam Olearius, in “Description of the Journey of the Holstein Embassy to Moscow and Persia”, wrote: “King Kasan, who died a natural death, is buried near Tabriz by the Aji River. Even now, one can see this tomb. The burial place of his wife, Queen Burla, is shown at the fortress of Urmia. It is said that the grave is 40 feet long. The locals claim that this former nation had people much taller and stronger than the present ones”. The 17<sup>th</sup>-century Khiva historian Abu-l-Ghazi notes that Kazan-Bek’s wife from the Salor tribe (Salor-Kazan-Alp) was of tall stature and was one of seven women who seized power in the Turkic state (il), presumably referring again to Burla-Khatun. Abu-l-Ghazi (1603–1664), in “The Genealogy of the Turkmen”, stated: “The noble people and bakhshi from the Turkmen, knowledgeable in history, tell of seven girls who subjugated the entire Oghuz il and ruled as beks for many years. The first among them was Altun-Gozeki, the daughter of Sundun-bay and wife of Salor-Kazan-Alp; she was of tall stature”.

“The Book of My Grandfather Korkut” (Kitab-i Dede Korkut) tells the story of the bride of the Turkic hero Kan-Turali, Seljan-Khatun: “Kan-Turali opened his eyes, lifted his lashes, and saw his bride on horseback, both the horse and she in armor, not a princess, but a king’s maiden!” Regarding Seljan-Khatun’s military actions: “When Seljan-Khatun saw this, a fire ignited within her; like a falcon entering a flock of geese, she set her horse upon the infidels; crushing the infidels from one side, she emerged on the other side”. “Then Seljan-Khatun urged her horse forward, dealt a blow to the enemies; she did not pursue those who fled, nor did she kill those who begged for mercy. She thought that the enemy was defeated; with the blade of her sword stained in blood, she returned to the tent”. It is highly probable that the basis of the women’s headgear among the Turkmen tribes – the gupba, shaped like the top of a battle helmet – is indeed a decorative copy intended to commemorate that Turkic women once wore protective armor. Excerpt from the Karakalpak poetic tale “Forty Girls” (“Kyryk Kyz”). The poem recounts the struggle of the warrior Gulaim and her female brigade against the Dzungars and Persian ruler Nadir Shah in the 18<sup>th</sup> century. The very idea of women warriors is undoubtedly much older and dates back to the 9<sup>th</sup>-10<sup>th</sup> centuries, a time when Turkic ethnic groups were forming in Central Asia.

*“Forty Girls”*

*Our forces are drawn tight like bows,  
Our horses are well-fed and strong,  
The shafts of our valiant spears are in our hands,  
Equipped with gilded steel.  
You took up the cause like a true warrior.  
You prepare for battles, though you love peace.  
So that the blades don’t rust, you patiently rub  
Resin and fat into the scabbards.*

*You handed swords to your friends, teaching  
To attack and strike like men,  
So that the enemy pays dearly for our blood,  
And does not escape from the maiden's sword.*

Valuable and interesting information about the role of women in nomadic society can be found in L. Gumilev's book "The Ancient Turks", where the researcher demonstrated through extensive historical material that history is rich with legendary women who participated in battles, led tribes, and raised prominent figures. According to the scholar, the restriction of women's rights in the nomadic world is a later phenomenon and may be related to the overall decline that befell Central Asia in the post-Mongol period.

Nevertheless, overall, a respectful attitude toward women is characteristic of the nomadic culture of antiquity. The position and role of women in the social structure of nomadic societies were determined by the very nature of nomadic pastoralism. A woman's social status was initially defined by her role within the economic collective and her functional connections. This status was tied to her place and role within the system of life in nomadic society. At the same time, the existing materials reflect a generally quite high status of women in ancient Turkic society.

## **Conclusion**

Of course, women in nomadic society never aspired to a dominant role within the community. No one undermines the responsibilities and contributions of women in establishing their households and raising children throughout history. It is well known that even Genghis Khan is attributed with the saying: "When her husband goes off to hunt or to war, a wife should keep the home in order and tidy so that when an envoy or guest stops by, he will see everything in its proper place. She should prepare a good meal and have everything ready for the guest. Such a wife creates a reputation for her husband, elevating his name, so that he stands tall like a mountain at public gatherings. A husband's virtues are recognized through the good qualities of his wife. If a wife is bad and foolish, immoral and disorganized, then her husband is judged by her!".

This saying is echoed in a popular proverb: "Жаксы әйел - жаман еркектің басын төрге сүйрейді, жаман әйел жаксы еркектің басын көрге сүйрейді" ("A good woman elevates a bad man, while a bad woman drags a good man to his grave"). This folk wisdom encapsulates a profound philosophical meaning regarding the culture and morality of the people, as well as the formation and upbringing of future generations. Indeed, as a classic author asserted, "The height of culture is defined by its relationship with women". In the understanding of Eastern thinkers, the emancipation of women primarily involves enlightenment and a transformation of consciousness. It is a process of internal metamorphosis and elevation, where a woman evolves into a rational and morally beautiful individual. Everything else is derivative (of course, it was anticipated that, to some extent, clothing, lifestyle, etc., would also change). In the context of shifting socio-economic relations within society, it is time to rethink and establish new ideals. As noted by S. Sultanalieva, new approaches to nomadic existence can pave the way for a Central Asian re-evaluation of women's issues as a whole. Indeed, we must not forget that the treatment of women serves as an indicator of the cultural state of society throughout all eras.

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