

Colour Symbolism in Turkic Culture: A New Look in the Reconstruction of Colour Designation

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ABSTRACT

This article examines the colour symbolism of space (the four cardinal directions) in the Turkic languages. The ancient Turks used colourative vocabulary to refer to the four cardinal directions. In studies on Turkology, it is claimed that each 'corner' has its colour. In this article, the authors set the task to determine the colour symbolism of the 'kindik-centre.' The article uses a mytholinguistic reading of the sign 'circle with the point inside.' This sign in modern Kazakh mythology is used in the reconstruction of images and to explain the symbolic meaning of words. The main research material is the colourative vocabulary of the Turkic languages. In the traditions and cultures of different peoples, along with the four sides of the world, there is a concept of a centre that unites these sides. In some peoples, the centre is symbolised by colour, while in the Turkic peoples, this symbolism is absent. However, as a result of the analysis of linguistic, ethnographic and mythological data, the authors concluded that the colour of the centre of qoñur is brown.

Keywords: Circle with the point inside, colour space, mytholinguistics, qoñur, symbolism of colour, Turkic languages

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INTRODUCTION

The Turkic languages are part of the Altaic language family. Today, about thirty natural languages belong to the Turkic language. The Turkic languages are divided into subbranch, such as Oguz (e.g., Turkish, Azerbaijani, Turkmen), Kipchak (e.g., Kazakh, Nogai, Tatar, Bashkir), Bulgar (Chuvash), Karluk (Uzbek, Uyghur), Siberian (e.g., Tuvan, Khakass, Yakut).

These languages are classified according to their phonetic and grammatical features. However, due to their common origin, they have a lot in common in language and culture. One such concept is the four cardinal directions and their colour symbolism.

Since ancient times, four sides of the world (east, south, west and north) have played an important role in creating a system of coordinates that allowed people to define and describe their position in space, i.e., to orientate themselves in relation to other objects. Podosinov (1999), who studied the peculiarities of the classification of four sides of the world by people living on the Eurasian continent, writes: “The division of the world into four parts, quarters, quadrants, segments are widely documented in many cultures of Eurasia. The number ‘four’ spatially meant the whole totality of space, the whole world, the universe” (p. 484). Levy-Bruhl (1930) believed that for indigenous of North America, the number four was considered sacred:

Almost all Indians “Redskin” have four numbers and multiples had sacred meaning, as they refer specifically to the four sides of the world and to the winds blowing from these sides, and the sign or symbol used for the number four was the Greek cross. (pp. 105-106)

For ancient Turks, the earth was considered square and was denoted by the term ‘*tort bulun*’ (four corners). In the *Kultegin*, a monument of the ancient Turkic script, the four sides of the world are represented as follows: *ilgeri* ‘east,’ *kurigaru* ‘west,’ *bergeru* ‘south,’ ‘the southern side,’ *yirgaru* ‘north’ (Sartkozhauly, 2012).

In the X-XIth centuries written monument ‘*Yryk bitig*,’ one may find expressions such as *Tort buryshstan zhinalgyan* (gathered from the four corners (of the world). Klyashtorny (2001) writes about it this way:

Four sides of the world are meant. The concept of ‘angle’ as ‘side of the world’ with symbolism of geometrical forms, developed among the Turks under the influence of the Chinese cultural tradition. According to this tradition, the geometrical image of the earth is a square formed by four lines (number of yin), each of them is limited by two angles (number of yin) that together expresses the idea of limitedness and multiplicity of the earth, unlike the sky whose geometrical image is a circle outlined by one line (number of yang) that expresses the idea of infinity and unity of the sky; yang embodies male power, yin—female power. (p. 147)

However, in our opinion, it is an extremely one-sided view because, in the linguistic, ethnographic, and folklore heritage of the Turkic peoples, there are many representations of the four corners of the world (Baskakov, 1980; Kononov, 1978a, 1978b; Qondybay, 2004; Temirgazina et al., 2022). According to Kononov’s (1978b) research, the Turkic peoples skilfully used colour symbolism to identify (designate) the four cardinal points. The Turkic peoples linked colours to a particular direction or side of the world (e.g., black is the north, red is the south).

Many studies have been carried out in Turkological science, and many problems have been solved. However, it does not mean that colour symbolism has been studied completely. There are enough unresolved problems on this topic in Turkic coloristry. However, we want to draw scientists' attention to one problem that was not mentioned in these research works. It is the colour symbolism of the concept 'kindik-centre,' 'orta-middle.' The main purpose of our article is to answer (hypothesise) the question of what colour is the symbol of the centre based on linguistic, ethnographic, and mythological studies.

Colourative Vocabulary and Symbolic

The ancient Turks and other peoples used colour names to denote the four cardinal points (Kononov, 1978b; Podosinov, 1999). Kononov (1978b) proves in his article that the word *qara* (black) is associated with the north. For example, the names formed in combination with the word *qara* (black): *Qara orda* (Black Horde), *Qara qum* (Black Sand)—'The northern horde,' 'The main horde;' in the Turkish and Kazakh languages *qara jel* (yel) 'cold northern wind;' the word *qara* within oronim, hydronim and ethnonyms also denote the northern direction.

In the Turkic languages, the antonym for *qara* is the word *aq* 'white.' The word *aq* appears in many toponyms, hydronyms and ethnonyms. Symbolically, white symbolizes the west. For example, the Mediterranean Sea is also called *Ak deniz* (Western Sea) in Turkish. The Caspian Sea has long been

called *Aq teniz* (White Sea; Kononov, 1978b). Apart from *aq* (white), the word *saryg* (yellow) also means 'west.' In the Old Khazar and Bulgar languages, the word *saryg* (sar) yellow means 'white.' For example, the name of the fortress *Sarkel*. It consists of two roots, sar + kel: *kel* or *gil/kil* (house), thus *Sarkel* fortress is translated from the Khazar language as *Belgorod*. In ancient times, translators into other languages (Arabic, Greek, Russian) translated it as 'White house.' In particular, one may see it in the Arabian translator as *al-Beyda*, and in the Russian annals where it is translated as *Belaya Vezha* (Ak Kamal—the White Fortress; Kononov, 1978b). Ashmarin (1898) gives the following information about the *Sarkel*: the name *Sarkel* on the bank of the river Don is explained by the combination of the words *shura*, *shora* 'white' in Chuvash and *kil* 'house,' i.e., *shora kil* (*Sarkel*) 'white house.'

In the Turkic languages *kök* (blue) denotes the 'east.' At the end of the XIV and beginning of the XV century, the Juchi tribe was divided into two khanates. The Khanate in the east was called *Kök Orda* (Blue Horde), and the Khanate on the western side was called *Aq Orda* (White Horde). According to Pritsak (1954), the Turks who inhabited the sacred land *Utuken* in the eastern part of the Mongolian steppe called themselves blue (blue) Turks, i.e., 'eastern Turks.' According to von Gabain's (1962) data, the mountain *Kökmen-dag* (Kukmen tau) is situated east in the Old Manichaeon fragment. Also, *Genghis Khan* called his people by the Turkic tradition *Köke Mongol* (Blue Mongol; Kononov, 1978b).

According to von Gabain (1962), according to the Chinese tradition of Turks, the word *qyzyl* 'red' symbolized the south. She regards the name of the desert *Qyzylkum* as 'southern sand.' Kononov (1978b) states that in the Turkic languages, no data indicates the 'southern' meaning of the word *qyzyl*. In the names of toponyms in the south of Turkey, the word *kyzyl* prevailed (Jahit, 2013).

In general, the views of research on the symbolic meaning of flower names in Turkic languages coincide. However, in the studies of the following years, the generalization of the previous statements of scholars prevails; therefore, we have to review the literature of the Soviet period. Furthermore, the concept of the centre, which interests us, is considered in the study of Lvova et al. (1988), but its colour meaning is not described in their work either.

METHODS

Our work analysed linguistic facts through structural analysis, etymological reconstruction, and comparative and historical methods. We have analysed Turkic language facts, and materials from other languages (for example, Mongolian) have been used. It is known that Turkic languages are polysemy languages. One word can have dozens of meanings. Furthermore, the meaning of the word in the Turkic languages develops from general to specific. Academician Kaidar (2005) writes:

The category of originally Turkic, including Kazakh, monosyllabic

roots and bases, is characterized by semantic filiation, i.e., the sequence in the development of meaning from the general undifferentiated to the more particular and concrete. The sum of the values of all derived formations from the same root morpheme, having not only a continuity with its original meaning, makes up the total, which is the initial in its semantic structure. (p. 165)

Taking into account these features, we used in the study mytholinguistic reading of *the sign of a circle with the point inside* in modern Kazakh mythology (Qondybay, 2004). This method opens the way to a complete understanding of the nature of the word in the Turkic languages. Mytholinguistics is a field that opens the possibility of explaining more fully the history of the development of the word at the junction of myth and linguistics. Myth is a human fantasy, and language is the reality of this fantasy. Therefore, many mythological concepts are preserved in the language. For this reason, to understand two phenomena in Kazakh mytholinguistics, the interpretation of *the sign of a circle with the point inside* is used (Qondybay, 2004; Khassenov et al., 2021).

In addition, it is possible to use this method to describe the development of the human word as a whole. Ivanov (1991) notes that based on the data of the anthropological reconstruction of the development of the speech apparatus from Neanderthals to Homo Sapiens and paleoneurological

reconstruction of the development of the speech zone in the left part of the brain, as in ancient man, the right part of the brain is formed first of all, and then the posterior parts of the left part of the brain, corresponding to a specific name of objects (hill, skull; occipito-parietal), and, finally, the frontal, temporal-frontal (temporal-frontal) divisions, which correspond to syntactically complex constructions. It can be observed in the development of a child. When a child begins to hold a pen or pencil in his hands, the first thing he does is a doodle. Gradually, during the development of the child's brain, the pictures begin to be detailed. After the doodle, he draws images similar to circles and, over time-various images inside the circle. It is known that writing, a stage of human intelligence and consciousness development, was formed gradually; that is, it developed and improved over many years, moving from pictographic writing to alphabetic (Khassenov, 2021). It is how the brain and the child's speech development; that is, the development process goes from the general to the particular. At the same time, the meaning of the word in the Turkic language develops from general to specific. Furthermore, to explain this, we used the Qondybay (2004) method to reveal the nature of the development path of the meaning of words, which we took for research. In general, we will show how this method works below. We think the scientific society will recognize this method as an innovation.

RESULT AND DISCUSSION

Colour Symbolism of the Centre

For the ancient Turks, the names of colours were connected with the four cardinal points. Each colour had a symbolic meaning (blue—east, red—south, yellow/white—west, black—north). Some scholars (e.g., von Gabain, 1962) hold to the opinion that the ancient Turks received colour symbolism for the cardinal points from neighbouring China. In Chinese culture, the colour has an important meaning and indeed coincides exactly with the ancient Turks in denoting the horizontal model of the world (Podosinov, 1999). However, there is one peculiarity in the worldview of the Chinese people. Yellow symbolizes the centre of the world. The 'navel/umbilical cord of the earth' (*jerdin kindigi*), the centre of the world or the middle of the world—in mythology, the central part of the universe, is one of the categories of space modelling in most mythological systems. The world axis (*axismundi*) passes through the object representing the middle of the world (Tokarev, 1988).

In Old Turkic, the concept of the centre of the world is found, but its colour expression is absent. Nevertheless, based on linguistic, ethnographic, and mythological data, it is possible to reconstruct the colour concept of the world centre. The figure below presents the geosymbolism of colour names, as we proposed (Figure 1).

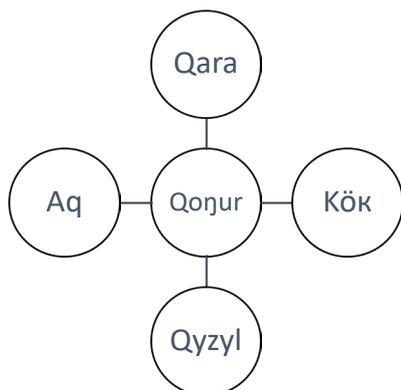


Figure 1. Classification of colours by the side of the world: *qara*—black, *kök*—blue, *qyzyl*—red, *aq*—white and *qoňur*—brown

Podosinov (1999), having studied the concept of four sides of the world in the worldview of the peoples of Eurasia, draws the following conclusions:

So, we see that besides the usual ‘essences’ in any religious-mythological or philosophical-idealistic (which was the worldview of most archaic societies), a ‘fifth essence’ (quintessence —from Latin. quintessential) that would either bind the other four (Indian ‘space’) or give them a divine extraterrestrial impulse, impetus, energy (ether). (p. 515)

It means there should be a centre, a ‘navel of the earth’, which links the four sides of the world (space). In our opinion, the colour symbol of this centre of the world is *qoňur* (brown).

Meanings and Etymology of *Qoňur*

In the etymological dictionary of the Turkic languages, the brown word is

characterized as follows: *qoňur* (Turkmen, Kumyk, Kirgiz), *kongyr* (Kazakh, Nogai, Qarakalpak, Uigur, Altai), *komur* (Gagauz), *kongir* (Uzbek), *kungir* (Tatar), *gongur*, *gönür*, *goğur* (in Turkic dialects). Some languages have variants: *kho:r* (Khakasian) and *khamar* (Chuvash). The meaning of this word in the Turkic languages is associated with colour. However, one name (*qoňur*) is used to denote dark and light colours: *dark brown*—Uzbek; *brown*—Kumyk; *brown*—Tatar; *brown with yellowness*—Kumyk dialect, Kazakh; *chestnut*—Turkish dial. (gour.); *the colour of burnt sugar* - Turkish dial.; *dark coffee*—Turkish dial (gour); *colour between red and coffee*—Turkish dial; *dark yellow, close to coffee*—Turkish dial; *light yellow*—Tur.dial; *dark blonde*—Chagatay (see: Levitskaya et al., 2000). The basic meaning of the Turkic word *qoňur* is dark colours, but some dialects of the Turkic languages have also survived the meaning of expressing lighter shades. In its etymological dictionary, Starostin (1998) associates the base of this word with a form of hyphen **KVŋV*. The characteristic of the word *qoňur* in other languages is as follows: in Mongolian *khonkhor*, *khongar* (light brown), Tungus-Manchu *koňno-mo*, *qōŋŋ*, others (*qara*-black), in Korean *kinil*, *kānār* (shade), in some languages of Central, Eastern and Western Chad (Chadic) *kenúm* (night), *kalme* (dark colour), in the Indo-European languages by form and meaning Turkic *qoňur* correspond to hypotic **kAn(a)k-*, **knāk-* (Starostin, 1998).

The *qoňur* has several figurative meanings in the Turkic languages. For

example, in the Kyrgyz, Qarakalpak and Kazakh languages, *qoŋur/konyr* combined with the word *salkyn* (coolness) has the following meanings: ‘light and pleasant coolness’ (Kyrgyz, Qarakalpak), ‘neither hot nor cold’ (Kazakh). The Evenki language uses the word *konngor*, referring to the wind, expressing the meaning: ‘wind that blows from the south,’ ‘south wind.’ In Buryat also, there is a similar form and meaning: *khongor halkhin*, ‘gentle wind,’ ‘that is, ‘wind from the south,’ ‘south wind’ (Levitskaya et al., 2000, p. 63).

The word *qoŋur* in the Turkic languages is associated with voice and sound: suppressed, hoarse (about voice; Nadelyaev et al., 1969); low, pleasant, thoracic - Kyrgyz (about the voice; Levitskaya et al., 2000). The Kashgari dictionary cites verbs formed from the word *qoŋur*: *qonrady-konyrlady*, *qonyrqai tartty*. Do not use the same words as those used in this manual. It is not used in this case, but it is not used in the same way. In this case, it is not used in the sense of colour but the figurative sense. When a child reaches *müshel jas*—thirteen years (the traditional Kazakh calculation of a person’s age according to the twelve-year cycle (the first cycle ends at the age of thirteen), he changes both physiologically and psychologically, at this point, a change in the voice (voice mutation) takes place, it was called *konrady* in Middle Turkic times, which rather means ‘evolution of the voice’.

The dictionary defines the word combination *qoŋur un* as a sound from the larynx (Kashgari, 1998). In our opinion, this expression is related to singing. The

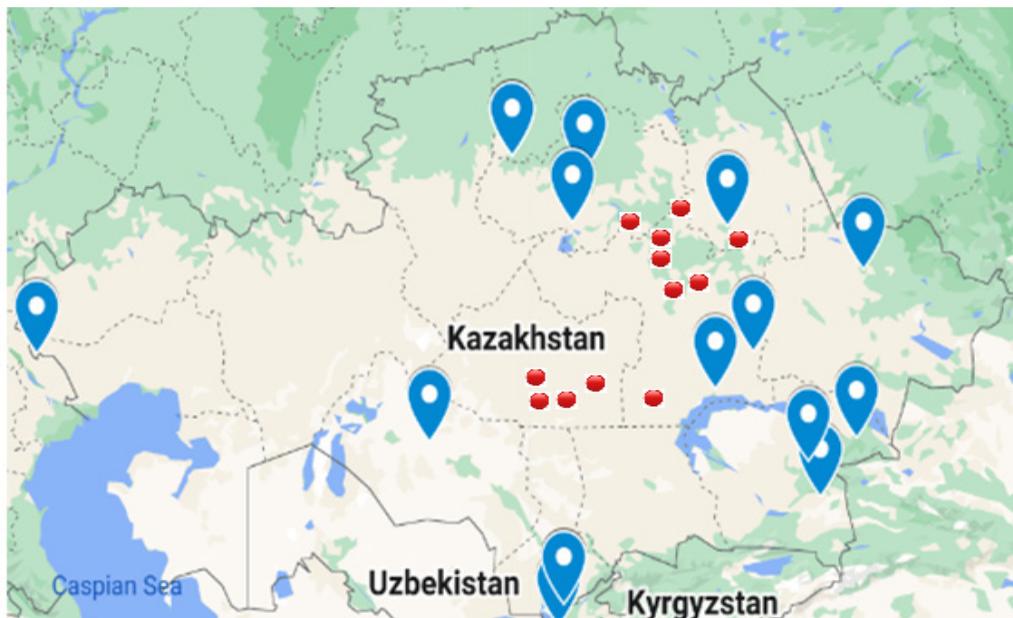
art of ‘laryngeal singing’ has survived until now. Otherwise known as throat singing, i.e., the technique of singing with unusual articulation in the pharynx or larynx. Throat singing is a unique phenomenon in the traditional musical art of many peoples (Bayazitova, 2013; Bürbe, 1964; Ihtisamov, 1988; Lamazhaa & Suzukey, 2019). Furthermore, the sound made by the *komeishi* (in Tuvan: *hoomeizhi*) was called *qoŋur un*. The same word combination is also found in the Kazakh language. For example, Kazakhs call *qoŋur un* the sound of *dombra*, *kobyz* and *sybyzgy* (r. *chibizga*, bashk. *hybyzgy*, others). The music researcher Nazhimedenov (2001) classified (sounds) as pure (*halal*) and impure (*haram*), while he classified *qonyr un* as pure sound and scientifically defined it as follows: *konyr un* - sound, its perception range of 30—75 decibel, i.e., sound or music not exceeding noise of the nature.

For example, the sound power of water flowing simply in nature begins at 27 decibels. The sound power of water flowing down a mountain in a loud waterfall does not exceed 80 decibels. *Haram* — unpleasant sounds that go beyond the certain hearing of the human ear have a negative effect on the heart, blood pressure, the brain (Nazhimedenov, 2001). That is the name of the natural sound—*qoŋur un*, coming from the human larynx and instrument. Also, this sound can be associated with sacral notions, as in ancient times, music was used only in certain rituals and celebrations. Ethnographer Seidimbek (1997) writes that the Turks had a custom on the *Great Day* of

the Equinox to transmit hopes and wishes of the whole Kaganate to Tengri (the Highest) by attracting *togyz küy* (nine küy). Thus, music or *qoňur un* serves as a link between the two worlds, a bearer of hopes and desires of the dynasty, the country to Tengri. Here *qoňur un* has the meaning ‘linking link’ (connecting point), and a clear connection with the concept ‘orta-middle’ is evident.

In the Kazakh language, the meaning ‘orta-middle’ of this word has been preserved: *qoňur* in the phrase *qoňur dawys* ‘pleasant voice’ expresses neither a ‘bass, rough, low, nor a high, thin voice, but a middle voice in between.’ The meaning ‘middle’ of the word *qoňur* has also been preserved in the phrases *qoňur küz* (about autumn), *qoňur tirshilik* (about everyday life), and *qoňur üi* (about the yurt). In the

past, the colour of the yurt determined who was rich and who was poor. In white, light yurts (aq üy, boz üy) lived rich people; in darker (black) yurts (qarasha (qara) üy) poor people and *brown yurts* (qonyr üy)—simple, middle-income people. In the Kazakh language, the word *qonyr* is also used in the meaning of ‘orta’ (middle) in relation to time. In Kazakh, *qonyr küz* refers to the ‘middle of autumn’. Names of mountains, hills and hills in the central part of the Kazakh steppes also contain the word *qonyr* (Figure 2). These hills and mountains are not very high, mostly low, and the most interesting thing is that they are located in the central part of the Republic of Kazakhstan, i.e. in the middle of the vast territory of the country (Qondybay, 2003).



Source. Google maps

Figure 2. Map of Kazakhstan. Locality names with the word *qoňur*. Some hills and mountains are marked in red.

There are different assumptions and hypotheses regarding the etymology of the word *koniyr* (brown). The word *qoŋur* is derived from *kon* (crow) and *qonuz* (beetle). The authors of the etymological dictionary believe that the genetic connection of *qoŋur* with the second word (*qonuz-bug*) is logical. Since the roots of *qoŋur* and *qonuz* have an interchange of *r* and *z* sounds: *kon~qon* and the meaning of this word is *qyj* (manure), *tezek* (dung; Levitskaya et al., 2000). The toponymist Abdrakhmanov (1989) considers the word *qonyr* to be a phonetic variant of the word *khonkhur* (pit, cave, ravine, ditch), which underwent sound changes in the Mongol language. This view was supported by Zhartybayev and Slambekov (1997) in their studies: the word *qonyr* in the oronim of the Qaraganda region *Dara-Qonyr* is the Mongolian word *konkhur*, which means ‘a separate, solitary ravine-beam place’ or ‘hill’.

The word *qoŋur* has many meanings, and its explanation requires a profound etymological analysis. In our opinion, the root of *qoŋur* in the Turkic languages is *qoŋ*. The notions of ‘kindik-centre’ and ‘orta-middle’ influenced the development of colour meanings of this word. The figurative meaning of the word *qoŋur* has retained the meaning of ‘orta-middle’. It can also explain the development of the colourative meaning of the word *qoŋur*. In physics, there is a known law: the entire spectrum of colours is accumulated in a light beam (white light beam). However, we have to keep in mind that the sum of all colours (pigments) gives a brown colour. The colour is a result of colour

mixing, and the colour in the metabolism process is brown. According to the laws of the Turkic languages, the consonants (*q*) and (*k*) and vowels (*o/a*) and (*ö/e*) may alternate with each other (Sagyndykuly, 2009). Then the base *qon* may be changed to *köŋ*. The word *köŋ* means ‘*qyj-dung*’. The colour of *kizek* (dung) is brown. That is, the food of animals eating coloured matter turns brown in the process of metabolism. If you mix the colours representing the four sides of the world, you get a colour similar to brown. Thus, the names of the neutral colour (*qoŋur*) and *dung* (*köŋ~qoŋ*) have the same root meanings, and they complement each other. There is an interesting Filipino legend:

God made some sculptures out of clay that he needed and put them in a furnace. The first sculpture was taken out before its time, and a white man came out of it. He kept the second one in the stove longer, so it burned and became black. Furthermore, the third sculpture was kept in the oven as long as needed. From this statue, God created *kamayungi*, i.e. brown people, Filipinos. (Sumlenova, 1985, p. 37)

Although this legend has no relation with the Turkic peoples, it coincides with the meaning of ‘orta-middle’ of the word *qoŋur* in the Turkic languages.

Mytholinguistic Interpellation of the Meaning of *Qoŋur*

The word *qoŋur* has several figurative meanings. However, all these meanings are interconnected with each other. Therefore,

to uncover and interpret these meanings, it would be useful to use the ideas of a central point in metaphysics and mythology. About this, Guénon (2002), in his book ‘Symbols of Sacred Science’ writes:

The centre is, first of all, the beginning, the starting point of all things, the point of prime cause, without form or dimension, hence indivisible, and therefore the only possible representation of the original One. From it, through its manifestation, everything else came into being, just as the One produces all numbers, which, however, in no way affects or changes its essence... The central point is the Principle, pure Being, and the space which it fills with its radiation and which exists only because of this radiation (‘Let there be light’ in the Book of Genesis), without which it would be only ‘no’ and nothingness, is the World in the sense of its infinity, the totality of all beings and all states of Being that constitute a universal manifestation. The simplest representation of the idea we have formulated is the point in the centre of the circle (Figure 3). The point is the sign of the Principle, the circle is the symbol of the World. (p. 87)

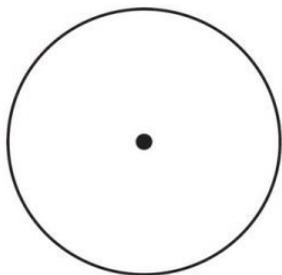


Figure 3. Circle with the point inside

We can only portray our environment, the world, and the universe through symbols. We cannot see and know how the world was created, its image, shape, size, and material it is made of, and how the Creator created it. We can only symbolise it. The simplest symbol to explain natural existence is the point. The point is the navel, the light, the absolute, the foundation (primordial; Guénon, 2002; Khassenov et al., 2021; Qondybay, 2004). The regularity of life is based on this formula. Symbolically, we are created at the point; we return to the same point when we die. Qondybay (2003) described mythical meanings of the sign of a circle with the point inside as follows:

1. Circle—universe, point (ng): ‘human cosmos.’
2. Circle—world water, point (ng): earth, the embryo of the earth in the middle or depth of waters.
3. Circle—mother’s womb, point (ng): seed, embryo.
4. Circle—mother, point: child, offspring.
5. Circle—cave, home, point (ng): people, family, kin in a cave, home.
6. Circle—world waters, point (ng): world mountain.
7. Circle—a ditch, a pit, point (ng): the bottom of a ditch, a pit. (p. 32)

The mythologist names the point as *η* (*ng*). It is associated with the sound a child makes when born. When a child is born, the first word/sound it makes is *η* (*ng*). In Russian, it is called ‘baby cry.’

In the Turkic languages, there is a special name for the first word of a child—*ingə* (*nga*) (Khassenov et al., 2020; Khusainov, 1988). The very first sound that humankind makes is the sound *ŋ* (*ng*). In the Burmese alphabet, the sonorous sound *ŋ* is called *nga*. There are mythical characters called *Nga* (Nenets, Evenki) and *Ngai* (Masai), and in the names of the tribes living in Africa and Australia, the sound complex *nga* is met very frequently. Interestingly, in the transcription of the Proto-Turkic syllabic writing proposed by Kyzlasov (1994), the sonoric *ŋ* (*ng*) is denoted by the sign (⊙), a circle with a point. This sound is also preserved as a part of the word *qoŋur*. This sound could also affect the development of the meaning of the ‘orta-middle/centre’ of the word *qoŋur*, and the base *qoŋ* can clearly characterise the mythical meaning of the concept point. The point symbolises the middle, the navel-centre, the result. It is these meanings that are collected in the word *qoŋur*. The number of directions (lines) extending from the central point may be several. In myths and fairy tales, the number of these directions is four, six and eight. The spiritual centre, khan’s bet, paradise and the holy place are associated with the concept of ‘centre’. This centre has four corners, or four rivers, starting from a spring/river in the centre. Such similar plots can be found in any myth or fairy tale. For example, the Bible tells about the river of Eden, which is divided into four:

A river watering the garden flowed from Eden; it was separated into four

headwaters. The name of the first is the Pishon; it winds through the entire land of Havilah, where there is gold. (The gold of that land is good; aromatic resin and onyx are also there.) The name of the second river is the Gihon; it winds through the entire land of Cush. The name of the third river is the Tigris; it runs along the east of Ashur. Moreover the fourth river is the Euphrates (*The Holy Bible*, 2011, Genesis 2: 10-14).

One may also encounter such notions in some sources of the Turkic peoples. In one of his letters, *Yshbara Kagan* used the phrase ‘four seas,’ ‘four seas’ lying beyond human space, i.e. the absolute limit of the planet. The sea is the edge of the universe. The navel of the Universe (centre of the world) is the holy land Ötüken (Qondybay, 2004). That is, there is a general notion of four seas surrounding the centre of the Universe and four rivers spreading from the main river Eden. The beginning of the four seas and four rivers comes from the sacred place, paradise. It is the symbol of the fifth element or centre. The word *qoŋur* and the base of this word *qoŋ* are associated with these concepts (centre, middle).

Every nation has a notion of the centre of the earth (*zher kindigi*) in its worldview. The Turkic peoples consider Ötüken (Ötükän) (wooded area or mountain) to be the centre (*kindik*) of the earth. Potapov writes that the Old Turkic word Ötüken was the name of the mountain range where the ancient Turks lived, and it means ‘deity of the earth’ (Potapov, 1957). The *ken* component

of the word Ötüken survived in the Kazakh language as *qonys* ‘stasis’ (of nomads), *ata qonys* ‘native land,’ ‘ancestral land.’ The ancient Turks believed that from the Ötüken comes *qut* ‘prosperity,’ ‘grace,’ ‘strength,’ ‘wealth,’ and ‘prosperity.’ The sign of the circle with the point inside the Ötükän symbolises the centre of the world, from which the *qut* ‘goodness emanates.’ The Kultegin monument says that in the middle of the world (i.e., Ötüken) lived Turks, and from the four corners they were surrounded by enemies (Sartkozhauly, 2012). In Turkic languages the alternation of sounds a~e, a~o is regular (e.g. *ken~qan*). *Ken* and *qoŋ* may correspond in form and meaning to *qan*. The word *qan* has the meaning of ‘most’. For example, in the Kazakh language there are the words *qan maidan* ‘the peak of any action’ and *qan bazar*, ‘a large and noisy gathering of people.’

In the Old Turkic language, there is a word *ken* (rud), and its figurative meaning is ‘source’ (Nadelyaev et al., 1969). According to the mythical reading of the symbol with the point inside a circle, the point means ‘source (beginning) of life’ (embryo), ‘fetus,’ and the concept of the circle is associated with ‘mother.’ In the Kazakh language, the word *qoŋur* has a meaning related to a child and is also used in relation to the offspring, the young. For example, in folklore songs, *qoy süyedi balasyn qoŋynrym dep* (The sheep loves its child and affectionately calls it *qoŋur*). In this case, the word *qoŋur* is a synonym for lamb and means ‘offspring/descendant’ (child). A child/descendant is

also associated with the origins of life, with the concept of ‘basis,’ ‘primaevial basis’ (i.e., the beginning of life). One of the most common words, *qoŋ*, is *kindik*, ‘umbilical cord,’ and ‘centre.’ Two different meanings of this word (centre and umbilical cord) are also connected with the point in the sign (Figure 3). We think that Turkic languages derive the names of baby animals from *qoŋ* base. For example, *qoŋjyk* ‘bear cub,’ *kojek/konjek* ‘rabbit cub,’ *kodyq/konjdyq* ‘foal,’ ‘donkey cub.’ In Altaic and Dravidian, the preform **kuŋi* is used in relation to a child (Starostin, 1998). Moreover, we assume that the words *kind* in the Indo-European languages and *kindik* (umbilical cord; navel), *kench* (child), and *kin* (womb; female genital organ, childbearing organ) in the Turkic languages are associated with this preform (Nadelyaev et al., 1969).

CONCLUSION

In general, understanding the nature of the Turkic languages is better based on the symbolic meaning of *the circle sign with the point inside*. With the help of this sign, we can understand the meaning of the unifying centre/middle. Both the word *qoŋur* and its base *qoŋ* are related to this term. The point in the sign symbolises the middle, the centre of the world. This point (centre, middle) connects four lines (four corners). Each corner in the Turkic language had a colour symbol. Furthermore, the colour symbolism of the centre, i.e. the union of all colours, is, in our opinion, *qoŋur*.

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