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A NEW MANUSCRIPT OF "THE BOOK OF DEDE KORKUT"
WITH THE NEW TEXTS AS HISTORICAL SOURCE

Abstract. The new manuscript with the new texts of the epic tales of "Kitabi Dede Korkut" widely was investigated by the scholars from the angle of various fields of study, such as linguistic, literature, folklore, and Turkish Studies last few years. This article is dedicated to examination of the new texts of epic stories as a source for the historical research and ethnic studies. Analysis of the time, religion and geography described in the new texts, as well as the toponyms and eponyms makes it possible to determine which ethnic elements were associated with a given region.

Keywords: Dede Qorqut, Turkmen Sahra, historical source, geography, onomastics, eponyms

“The Book of Dede Korkut”, collection of the Oghuz epic stories, is not only a written monument of literature, folklore, and language of the Oghuz group of Turkic peoples, but also has value as a primary source for the study of some issues of history. Before hand, it is necessary to underline that we cannot apply our modern conception of originality to medieval epics. However, there are many samples of studies, where authors began to review of medieval poetry and epics as a source for the historical research, taking into account the peculiarities of the text. Among the first attempts, one can cite the work of Kahn Ludwig W. Khan [Kahn Ludwig (1939), 208]. It is also appropriate to mention here the work of V.M. Zhirmunsky, who conducted a thorough comparative historical analysis of folk heroic epics [Zhirmunsky V.M. (1962)].

To the question "Can an epic story serve as a primary source for historical research?" the famous Azerbaijani historian Professor Suleyman Aliyarli also had
positive response. Starting from 1980s S. Aliyarli published many articles devoted to the various issues of history, based on the historical analysis of the Book of Dede Korkut. Later in 2012 all these articles were published in a book [Aliyarli S. (2012) Tariximis]. The article titles speak by themselves: “The Book of Dede Korkut and Prehistory” [Aliyarli S. (2012), 127], “Onomastics of the Book of Dede Korkut (Kangly, Bulgar)” [Ibid, 237], “The Book Dede Korkut: problems of comprehensive historical and philological research” [Ibid, 266] and others. These publications are the first attempt to consider epic stories as a primary source for studying the history of the Turkic peoples, especially those belonging to the Oguz group. Notably that the author carefully explored the stories of the Book when studying the ethnogenesis of Azerbaijani Turks, taking semantic analysis as a basis, alongside with the historical approach [Ibid, 10; 178].

Following Aliyarli, while studying the Kipchak tribes, I could conclude that although the epic stories "Kitabi-Dedem Korkut" is a prominent Oghuz monument, there are many traces of the Kipchaks in the Book [Lala A. Aliyeva (2015), Kipchaks, 164]. Its epic hero Qazan Khan Ulash oghlu is the ruler of the Inner Oghuz [Ergin. (1958). Dede Korkut kitabı. II, 36, IV, 123] and no doubt this eponym belongs to the Oghuzs. However Russian chronicles mention the name of one of the Kipchak communities - Ulashevich [Летопись по Лаврентьевскому списку, 644], which literally means Ulash oghlu. Another Russian chronicle, the Hypatian Codex, lists the Kipchak hordes: Toksobichi, Kolobichi, Yetebeci, Terterobichi, Torgolov, and Ulashevichi (Полное собрание русских летописей, 643), in other words, the sons of Ulash are mentioned among them. Moreover, the toponym Ulash exists both in Azerbaijan and Turkey and in the forms of Ulashli and Ulashkend respectively in Georgia and in Dagestan [Yusifov Y.B., Karimov S.K. (1987), Table 11].

A similar method of historical analysis must be applied to the Turkmen Sahra or Günbed manuscript of “The Book of Dede Korkut”. The significance of such kind of study is that scrutiny on the geography of new texts, as well as the semantic analysis of toponyms, eponyms, and other terms, makes it possible to determine which ethnic elements were associated with a given region, mentioned in the newly discovered texts of the “Kitabi Dede Korkut”.
The history about the discovery of the new manuscript is grossly described by everyone who writes about it. Shortly, Veli Muhammed Hoja, a Turkmen origin book collector from Iran, on 12 December 2018 bought from a bookstore in Tehran. The previous owner of the manuscript told Muhammed Hoja that he was descended from the Qajar dynasty and that the manuscript was an heirloom from the library of Agha Muhammed Khan Qajar, the founder of the dynasty [Ercilasun, A. (2019), 5]. We can say that almost simultaneously it was published by Youssef Azmun [Azmun, Y. (2019), Dede Korkut’un Üçüncü Elyazması] and Metin Ekici [Ekici, M. (2019)] in Istanbul. Soon Turkmen scholar Muradgelgi Soyegov published these new stories of the Book in Russian [Soyegov, M. (2019)] and Y. Azmun in English [Azemoun, Y. (2019), The New Dädä Qorqut Tales]. All these publications and translations, alongside with the published original text, was used in this paper. Disputes over the name of the manuscript (Turkmen Sahra or Gunbed) and literary features (whether the manuscript consists of one or two stories) are not included in the scope of the work.

However, the question of what language and time the manuscripts belong to, is very important for the purpose of this study. Professor Metin Ekici, who refrained from expressing definitively about the language of the manuscript, since it does not belong to his field of study, writes that although the text contains lots of words and affixes belonging to Kipchak language, the manuscript’s language has characteristics of Turkmen and Azerbaijani Turkish. He also gives an approximate date for the compilation of the manuscript, around the 17th and 18th centuries [Ekici (2019), 15-25].

In accordance with Ahmet Erculasun's studies on the new texts prove that the narratives and manuscripts of Dede Korkut made its way till the 18th century and the language of the newly discovered texts reflects the features of the vernacular of Tabriz, a major city in the province of Azerbaijan in Iran in our days [Ercilasun, A. (2019), 5-14].

The textual analysis makes it possible to agree with the conclusions of Ahmet Ercilasun. It should be noted that existence of the Kipchak words, as mentions them Prof. Ekici, is also one of the features of Azerbaijani. These conclusions make the new manuscript precious and invaluable for both parts of Azerbaijan.
Interestingly, even in the Soviet period in the Azerbaijan Republic, *ashugs* sang and recited *dastans*, epic stories, in weddings and other entertainment ceremonies, such as “Koroglu”, “Ashig Karib”, “Asli and Karam” and other examples of folklore, unfortunately not the epic of Dede Korkut. Only starting from the 1950s, research on the "Book of Dede Korkut" and its publications revived interest in the epos, and not only scientific, but also public interest. The discovered manuscript proves that, until the 18th century, the epic was not a forgotten sample of folklore. The fact that the manuscript refers to a late time means that the stories were still widespread and tenacious among the population of the whole of Azerbaijan and in the Qajarid era an unknown scribe recorded two stories. While it seems like the first story was recorded incomplete, but the second one was complete.

There is no doubt that the events described in the epic stories relate to the Muslim society. However, the question on the specific denomination of Islam is determined in the first incomplete epic story or in the 13th story (boy) of the manuscript. Here, from the mouth of Gazan Khan, it is stated: “When he said one hundred thousand enemies had come I did not turn round and retrace my steps, I did my ritual ablution in running water and completed my Muhammadan prayer, putting my trust in the One Mighty Creator. O Muhammad, I said, O Ali, help me.” [Azemoun, Y. (2019), The New Dädä Qorqut Tales, 20]. Asking for help in prayer to Allah, the Prophet Muhammad and Ali is a common occurrence among the Shiite communities. At the beginning of the same story, Bayindir padishah is mentioned, which is an eponym of the leading Akkoyunlu tribe and the dynasty Bayindir. The controversy lies in the fact that the Akkoyunlu were Sunni Muslims and their representative could not ask for help from Imam Ali. Of course, here we need to take into account the peculiarity of epic legends, where the events of several distinct periods can lie on top of each other. You also need to consider the fact that some Akkoyunlu tribes, the rivals of the Safavids, later joined Shah Ismail I, passing to Shiism.

The Turkmen Sahra or Günbed manuscript of “The Book of Dede Korkut” contains a lot of ethnonyms such as Āymur, Zu’l-qadr, and others, related to the Turkic tribes, also eponyms associated with the certain ethnicities like Bayindir, Ulash and Afshar. In addition, the texts cover vast territories from the North
Caucasus to Iran and from Kars to Mankishlak in Kazakhstan. It shows that these territories were under political authorities of these ethnicities, or they could freely move on this geography.

According to the toponyms of the manuscript we can shortly describe the geography of the stories covers following territories:

In the eastwards: Turkestan- Central Asia in the medieval sources, Mangyshlak- peninsula in Kazakhstan, Mount Surhab- most likely in Afganistan, as it is associates with the Kabul River;

In the westwards: Aleppo- a city in Syria, Castle Qars- a city in Turkey, Sarikamish- a town in the Kars province of Turkey;

In the Caucasus and Azerbaijan (in the center): Tabasaran- located in the Northern Caucasus, Dagestan of Russian Federation, Darband - located in the Northern Caucasus, Dagestan of Russian Federation, historical city of Azerbaijan, Mount Shah, Shah Dagh- a mountain of the Greater Caucasus range, located in the Qusar District of Azerbaijan, Qabal or Qabala- a city in Azerbaijan, historical capital of the Caucasian Albania, Samur River- a river between Azerbaijan and Russia, Araz and Kura- the rivers in Azerbaijan, Mount Savalan- a mount near Arbadil in Iranian Azerbaijan, Tabriz- the main city of Azerbaijan, Alagöz- a mount in the 40 kilometers of Yerevan, Ağçaqala Sürmeli- historical city, a village in Echmiadzin District of the Republic Armenia, Aq Mangan- most likely mount Armaghan in the Republic Armenia, Bashiachiq- current Kutaisi, a city in Georgia. And for the first time the name Azerbaijan is mentioned in the text of "The Book of My Grandfather Korkut", which is evidence of the connection of this country with the epic stories.

Concluding this brief overview on the newly discovered manuscript based on historical approach, it should be noted that geography and ethnic composition of the epic stories of Turkmen Sahra and previous manuscripts nearly overlaps. And this geography more connected to Azerbaijan and the Caucasus than Central Asia and Middle East. However, basis on the text analysis we can confidently state that these stories belong to the later period that the stories of Dresden and Vatican
manuscripts.

References: