

BOOK REVIEW

Taner Gökdemir, *Kızıl Acaristan Salnamesi (1922) Güneybatı Kafkasya'da Tarih Kimlik ve İdeoloji*, İstanbul: Libra Kitap, 2019, 296 p., ISBN: 978-605-7884-01-5

Keisuke Wakizaka*

The History of the Southwest Caucasus in the First Decades of the 20th Century from Muslim Georgians' Perspective

The main theme of the book “Kızıl Acaristan Salnamesi (1922) Güneybatı Kafkasya'da Tarih Kimlik ve İdeoloji” is the process of independent “Adjarian” identity after the October Revolution in 1917, which is different from Russian, Ottoman-Turkish and Georgian identities and this book provides us with some important information about it. Especially, there are few works focusing on the situation of the Southwest Caucasus (Kars, Ardahan, Artvin, Iğdır, Adjaria, and Samtskhe-Javakheti) and most of them such as Ender Gökdemir's “Cenub-i Garbi Kafkas Hükümeti” (1998) and Erkan Karagöz's “Güneybatı Kafkasya: Siyasal ve Sosyal Mücadeleler Tarihi” (2010) deal with its history from Turkic population's perspective. Under these conditions,

* Dr., the Specialist of KAFKASSAM (Caucasus Strategic Research Center), email: kafkaslikeisuke85@gmail.com, ORCID: 0000-0002-0438-5687

Taner Gökdemir's book analyzes Muslim Georgians' (Adjarians') view on the history of the Southwest Caucasus and this provides us with different perspectives about the region.

Taner Gökdemir argues that there was an attempt to create the independent "Adjarian" identity after 1917 and that the book "Kızıl Acaristan Salnamesi (the Annual of the Red Adjaria)" played an important role in this process in his book. He emphasizes in the conclusion part that while Adjarian intellectuals tried to establish an new independent Adjarian identity free from the influences of Russia, Georgia and the Ottoman Empire, they could not be completely liberated from the Ottoman-Turkish influence and that its strong influence can be seen in the state institutions autonomous Adjaria and even in the style of Kızıl Acaristan Salnamesi. In order to prove this theory, the author translated all of this material and analyzed its structure, style and contents, explaining Adjaria's history.

Especially, in the second chapter, quoting sentences from "Kızıl Acaristan Salnamesi", the author discusses that Adjarian intellectuals tried to emphasize the religious and cultural differences between Adjarians, Ottoman-Turks and Georgians. According to them, Adjarians are different from Georgian because their religion, language and culture were affected deeply by Ottoman-Turks. But at the same time Adjarians are different from Turks because their language is Georgian. Besides, he argues that Adjarian intellectuals tried to establish Adjarian identity on the basis of class struggle between Adjarians and imperialist-chauvinist states such as Russia, the Ottoman State and Georgia because Adjarians failed to put forth national features belonging only to them. That is, he tried to present a theory that when certain groups which failed to put forth put forth national features in their nation-state building process, they head to make use of "class struggle" and hostility against foreign state as a basis of national identity through analyzing Adjaria's history.

However, while Gökdemir emphasizes that Adjarian intellectuals tried to establish a different Adjarian identity on the

basis of class struggle between Adjarians and oppressive imperialist-chauvinist states, he underlines that Adjarian intellectuals in 1920s tried to integrate Islam into socialist state system and that they could not completely get rid of the influence of the Ottoman State in their nation-state building process in the same chapter. The speeches of Adjarian intellectuals published in "Kızıl Acaristan Salnamesi" emphasized that Islam and socialism have many common features and that Islam, Adjarians' religion, is harmonious with socialism. In this way, Adjarian Muslim elites tried to integrate Islam into socialism-communism and to preserve their religion and Islamic traditions and culture in the framework of the Soviet Union. Moreover, Adjarian Muslim elites made efforts to configure to Islamic institutions (the Shariat Court and Vaqf) in the socialist state system and socialist Adjaria's state structure was deeply influenced by the Ottoman State's tradition. In other words, Gökdemir emphasizes that no matter how hard the Adjarian elites tried to deny the effects of the Ottoman States, which they defined as an imperialist oppressive states, the structure of Adjaria and Adjarians' identity preserved Ottoman-Turkish and Islamic traditions. Thus, the contradiction that Adjarians used Ottoman-Turkish elements which they tried to deny as oppressive-imperialist in the process of making Adjarian identity free from Georgian, Ottoman-Turkish and Russian elements came up.

This case which occurred in Adjaria shows us that no matter how hard ethnic groups tried to deny dominant states' elements in the process of nation-state building, they cannot be free from these elements and have to confront with the contradiction that they use dominant states' elements in order to establish a different identity from them. The readers can see this situation in the first and second chapters and the translation of "Kızıl Acaristan Salnamesi".

In fact, Adjaria had been a peripheral area by the Soviet era and scholarship had not focused on the situation of the region sufficiently enough until today. As also for the studies of the Southwest Caucasus, scholars generally focused on the central

region such as Kars and Ardahan and ignored the peripheral areas. At this point, Gökdemir's book has a great importance as a study analyzing the situation of the peripheral region of the Caucasus in detail.

In conclusion, it is never deniable that Taner Gökdemir's book contributed to the studies on Adjaria's history and presented a new theory on nation-state building in the former Soviet area in spite of some shortcomings. In order to understand the process of national identity building in the former Soviet area deeper, Gökdemir's book is an important reference book discussing the case in which ethnic groups do not have completely different elements from other states tried to establish different identity, through analyzing the process of Muslim Georgians' building a different identity as Adjarians.