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KARAÇAY-BALKAR NART DESTANLARI: DEBET, ALAUGAN, KARAŞAUAY*

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Öz

Destan geleneklerinin arkaik tipine ait olan Nartlar hakkındaki efsaneler birçok Kafkas halkı tarafından bilinmektedir. Karaçay-Balkarlılara ait olan "Nartiada", ana versiyonlardan birisidir. Nart şarkıları ile Balkar-Karaçay efsaneleri irili ufaklı bir dizi döngüden oluşur. Her döngü, Nart kabilesinin yeryüzündeki görünümü, kahramanların destansı yaşamının çeşitli aşamaları ve olayları (doğum, kahramanca çocukluk, ilk başarı, evlilik, efsanevi canavarlarla savaşma vb.) ile ilgili bir grup küçük efsaneler ve şarkılardır. Bazı döngüler, biyografik ilkeye göre Nart kahramanlarının isimleri etrafında gruplanan efsanelerden oluşurken, diğerleri şecere ilkesine göre anlatılır. Bunlar arasında Nart demircisi Debet'e adanmış efsaneler ve şarkılar, oğlu Alaugan ve torunu Karaşauay, Balkar ve Karaçay destanlarında önemli bir yer tutar.

Anahtar kelimeler: Nartiada, Nart destanları, Debet, Alaugan, Karaşauay

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NART EPICS OF KARACHAIS AND BALKARS: DEBET, ALAUGAN, KARASHAWAI

Abstract

The Karachay-Balkarian "Nartiada" is one of the main national versions of the all-Caucasian Nart epic. Legends about the Narts, which belong to the archaic type of epic, are known to many Caucasian peoples. Among the Balkars and Karachays, as also among other peoples who are bearers of the Nartiada, the legends consist of a series of large and small cycles. Each cycle is a group of small legends and songs about the appearance on the earth of the Nart tribe, about the various stages and events of the epic life of the heroes (birth, heroic childhood, the first exploit, marriage, the struggle with mythical monsters, etc.). Some cycles consist of legends grouped around the name of the Nart hero according to the biographical principle, others according to the genealogical principle. An important place in the epos of the Balkars and Karachays is occupied by the legends devoted to the Nart blacksmith Debet, his son Alaugan and his grandson Karashawai.

Keywords: Nartiada, Nart epics, Debet, Alaugan, Karashawai

НАРТСКИЙ ЭПОС КАРАЧАЕВЦЕВ И БАЛКАРЦЕВ: ДЕБЕТ, АЛАУГАН, КАРАШАУАЙ

Аннотация

Сказания о нартах, относящиеся к архаическому типу эпоса, известны многим кавказским народам. Карачаево-балкарская «Нартиада» - одна из основных национальных версий. Нартские песни и сказания балкарцев и карачаевцев» состоят из серии больших и малых циклов. Каждый цикл представляет собой группу небольших сказаний и песен о появлении на земле племени нартов, о различных этапах и событиях эпической жизни героев (рождение, героическое детство, первый подвиг, женитьба, борьба с мифическими монстрами и т. д.). Одни циклы состоят из сказаний, сгруппированных вокруг имён нартских героев по биографическому принципу, другие - по генеалогическому. Важное место в эпосе балкарцев и карачаевцев занимают сказания и песни, посвященные нартскому кузнецу Дебету, его сыну Алаугану и его внуку Карашауаю.

Ключевые слова: Нартиада, Нартский Эпос, Дебет, Алауган, Карашауай

Introduce

An important place in the epos of the Balkars and Karachays is occupied by the legends devoted to the Nart blacksmith Debet, his son Alaugan and his grandson Karashauay.

The legends about Debet, equally with the group of tales about the birth of the Nart heroes, are on the most archaic level of the version examined, since they experienced the strong influence of pagan mythology. In the image of the Balkaro-Karachay Debet there is reflected the epoch of the acquisition and the mastery of the blacksmith's craft. He probably can be regarded as a development in the epic context of an image of some mythological being or divinity of the ancient Balkars and Karachays. We find confirmation of this in the legends themselves: according to some variants, he was born from the sacred marriage of the sky and the earth: "The birth of the Nart blacksmith Debet", "The song about Debet" (The motif of the cosmic marriage, out of all the national versions, is encountered only in the Balkaro-Karachay Nart epos. It is also typical of the folklore tradition of the Turko-Mongolian peoples). In other variants ("Debet and Yoryuzmek", "The birth of Deuet-batyr") his father is a celestial being, but his mother is the Nart beauty Ak Biyche. In a variant from the archive of Vs.Miller it is said that God created him out of part of his heart, and he began "the mighty race of Narts". Debet comes forward as the first ancestor also in a publication of P. Ostryakov (Narti, 1994: 305, 427).

In all of these legends Debet is not only the first Nart, but also the first blacksmith and armourer on the earth: God, having created Debet, settled him at the foot of Elbrus and "instructed him in the subtle business of obtaining iron. To mine it from the earth, to process it with heat and coal into steel. And to forge weapons out of the steel" (Narti, 1994: 305).

In the Balkaro-Karachay epic text, Debet, as also Satanay, is endowed with universal functions. In the legends there is continually stressed the role of Debet as the first creator: he was the first on earth to manufacture various articles for ordinary living, arms and armour; he shoed the Nart horses etc. Debet was also a teacher of the Narts: he trained "his fellow-tribesmen to forge iron", as is said in the variant of P.Ostryakov (Narti, 1994: 305).

Linked with the name of Debet are also such cosmogonic motifs as the appearance of stars, the falling star (“Debet, the heavenly blacksmith”).

The special characteristic of the studied epos is that in it, as also in the epic tradition of the majority of Turko-Mongolian peoples, there is observed the cult of the craft of the smith (see Okladnikov, 1949; Pukhov, 1962; Ulanov, 1963; Lipets, 1978). The craftsmanship of Debet in the epos is valued and his praises sung no less than the exploits of the Nart heroes, for, as is said in one of the legends about him, “the Narts would not have been able to overcome their enemies on the earth without the all-shattering weapons of Debet, and the war horses, which he used to shoe”.

In the Balkaro-Karachay version of the Nartiad are there recorded the legends and songs devoted to the Nart blacksmith: “The Nart song about the blacksmith Debet”, “About the first Nart Debet the Golden”, “Debet the heavenly blacksmith”. In the image of Debet there is organically combined in them “the traits of a god, a titan and a man” (Urusbieva, 1979: 51), and there is given a detailed description of his external appearance and at the same time his extraordinary and exceptional nature is emphasised.

In the epos Debet’s smithy is described, the place where it is situated, and the tools of his work. The distinctive characteristic of these descriptions is the epic scale. It is shown especially vividly in the hyperbolic pictures portraying the process of his work.

The invincibility and irresistibility of Debet’s weapons is also explained by the fact that into the smelted iron he added small pieces of the meteorite out of which Yoryuzmek came (“The birth of Yoryuzmek”).

Debet manufactured not only weapons and armour for the Narts. In one of the variants of the legend it is told that he even forged a horse.

The motif of the tempering of the Nart heroes by Debet has not been recorded in the epos studied here. But on the other hand the motif of the “repairing” of the hero after a battle has been partly developed: when Rachikau cut off half the skull of Evil-Tongued Gilyakhsyrtan, Debet made him the missing part of his head out of copper.

The Balkaro-Karachay Debet, as also the Karelo-Finnish Vainamoinen, after a series of cultural actions leaves his people: when he had provided the Narts on the earth with all that they needed out of iron, and the Narts had wiped out the emegens with his help, he... made an iron cart with wings and flew off into the sky on it". In the people's representation, Debet is immortal; according to the legend ("Debet, the heavenly blacksmith"), "he lives there even now. In the sky, as also on the earth, he forges iron".

In the Balkaro-Karachay epos Debet has nineteen sons, whom he marries off, according to custom, starting with the youngest.

The consequence of this custom in many respects determines the fate of Debet's eldest son, Alağan, who grew old while his turn was still coming, and "made himself a laughing stock for all the people" (Nartı, 1994: 427).

According to other variants, the mighty giant Alağan cannot find among the Nart women a wife to match him. The search for a wife and his marriage, is the basis of the tale-subject line of the Nart songs and legends about Alağan.

In all the variants of the legends Alağan is portrayed as a bogatyr of fantastic strength, thanks to which he appears as an indefatigable killer of the emegens (Nartı, 1994: 396, 406).

Alağan took away from the emegens and brought to the Narts a magic cauldron with forty lugs, in which:

...there was no need to put in meat,

Only to fill up with water and kindle a fire –

It fills with the meat of forty oxen (Nartı, 1994:408).

In the cycle, Debet – Alağan – Karaşauay, as also in all the epos of the Balkars and Karachays, the story characters consisted of two hostile tribes, the Narts and the Emegens. One of the original characteristics of this cycle is that precisely in this cycle is there a vivid aesthetic development of the international motif of marriage links between antagonist-tribes. We do not find this in any other versions of the Nartiad.

A special colouring and originality is imparted to the legends about Alağan by the descriptions of his struggle with the emegens, his meeting

with his future mother-in-law, the portrayal of the appearance of the emegen women, their occupations, way of life, their dwelling, and so on.

After marrying the daughter of the emegen woman (and in the Nart song “Alaugan”, it is said that the hero selected his wife among the emegens), he carried her into the land of the Narts. But his monstrous wife (there are variants where she is even portrayed as five-headed) gobbles up not only her own children, but also other people’s. Distressed by this, old Alaugan, through the advice of Satanay herself (in some variants Satanay or Alaugan’s mother) when the emegen woman next gave birth, he stole the baby and hid him in the glaciers of Elbrus, where the baby actually grew up, nourished by its icicles. In the variant of P.Dyachkov-Tarasov, he is nourished with dragon’s milk (Narti, 1994:431).

In some variants Satanay comes forward as the godmother, governess and instructor of Karashauay. She often came to the glacier and looked after the infant. In one of her visits she made for Karashauay a bow and arrows (according to some variants, he made them himself), and little Karashauay, becoming a skilful archer, did not let a single bird pass in the sky. Satanay tested the strength and adroitness of the boy, and only after that did she bring him into the land of the Narts, where he was almost eaten by his natural mother. But the young Nart killed her.

The legends about the marriage of Alaugan to the emegen woman, about the birth of Karashauay and his upbringing on Elbrus are regarded as original epic texts of the Nart epos of the Balkars and Karachays.

For example, in the Ossetian legend about the birth of Suay (Pamyatniki, 1927: 27-37), his father is the old rich man Chandz, and his mother is one of his seven wives, who gave birth to a son after eating the little seeds of a magic apple.

Concerning this legend, Yu.S. Gagloyti writes: “In the Ossetian variant there is absent any mention of Sayyay’s mother being an emegen (a giant), a devourer of children; which motifs are vividly displayed in the Balkar and Karachay variants (Gagloyti, 1977: 110).

In the Ossetian variants, Suay is left in the crevice “of the ice mountains” by order of Chandz himself, because he did not like the child. However, the child survives, and the father takes him home. But when “the

women feeding him with their own milk began dying”, Chandz orders him to be thrown out now to be eaten by the wolves.

As we see, in the Ossetian epos, firstly there takes place a transference of the functions of one hero to another, i.e. the motif of rearing the baby in a crevice of the glacier is here attached also to the name of Batraz. Secondly, there is a rearrangement of the traditional Balkaro-Karachay tale subject about the birth and rearing of Karashauay: if Alaugan (or Satanay, the mother of Alaugan) steals the baby from the cannibal-mother and saves him by hiding him in the crevice of a glacier, then Chandz (Satana, Khamyts) abandons the little Suay (Batraz) with the aim of destroying him.

In the Adyge epos the Nart Shaoy is portrayed as “the son of a formidable mother”, although in no legend is it explained why the mother of this Nart is “formidable”.

As the researcher of the Nart epos, M.E. Talpa, correctly emphasises, “the data hidden beneath the allusions of the Kabardan legend can only be conditional on, and partly reconstructed out of, the Balkar legend about Shauay the son of the cannibal-giantess (emegen), and the Ossetian legend of Sau” (Kabardinsky folklor, 1936: 486).

As we see, M.E. Talpa considered the Adyge legend about Shauey secondary in relation to the Balkaro-Karachay one, for in it are indistinctly heard “only echoes” (Gagloyti, 1977:110) of the traditional motif of the Balkaro-Karachay epos about the cannibal-mother.

An analogous phenomenon is observed also in the epos of the Vainakhs, where the mother of Kinda Shoa “was such a strong woman, that she would break any part of a man’s body, she only had to touch him lightly” (Dalgat, 1972: 319). Therefore Kinda Shoa, as also the Ossetian Suay (Pamyatniki., 1925, Issue 1) and the Adyge Shauey, son of Kanzh (Narty, 1974: 322-325), holds her on a leash.

Legends about the birth of Karashauay are recorded also in Georgia, in Upper Racha. “Although this tale subject is well-known both in the Ossetian and in the Balkaro-Karachay legends”, writes Yu.S. Gagloyti, “as the source of its penetration into the Rachan folklore, one evidently must count the Balkaro-Karachay cycle, where the motif of the birth of Shauay is most fully developed” (Gagloyti, 1977: 197).

Now we turn to the second traditional motif of the Balkaro-Karachay legends about Karashauay: the ability of him and his horse to alter their appearance.

“The ability... of the horse to change his appearance is so typical for a Turko-Mongolian epos” (Lipets, 1984: 53-57) – and is one of the permanent attributes of Gemuda.

In the legends about Karashauay, where the motif of “preliminary underestimation” of the hero is often used, he changes his appearance, not only arraying himself in rags, but also transforming himself. Thus, in the legend “The batyr Karashauay and Gemuda”, while riding towards the place of the race “Gemuda turned himself into a mangy maneless horse, and Shauay into a lame old man in a yellow burka”. In other national versions this motif undergoes some deformation and reinterpretation. For example, in the legend recorded in Georgia, Shavay of the family Genjekva “when he wants to, he arrays himself... in rags and he passes off his horse as lame...” (Dzidziguri, 1971).

In the Adyge epos, when Shaoy “is getting ready for an expedition, he puts on... torn clothes, poor clothes” (Kabardinsky 1936: 64). But it is not explained why he does that. In M.E. Talpa’s commentaries, in connection with this motif it is written: “This motif is clear only from the Balkar legends about Shauay: there Shauay’s bad clothes and the deformity of his horse... is explained by (1) he deliberately hides his strength from the Narts, pretending to be the son of a poor solitary old woman, in order to strike them more forcefully with his exploits; (2) he hides his real appearance when turning up as the suitor of Okanda...” (Kabardinsky folklor, 1936: 586-587).

It seems to us that the given motif of the Balkaro-Karachay epos arises genetically from the traditional motif, of the Turko-Mongolian epos, of the appearance of the hero at the marriage contests or in the camp of an enemy in the form of a dirty ragamuffin or “of a bald lousy fellow” (a tatar kaya), and his “bogatyry horse in an analogous image of a ‘rotten’, ‘mangy’, or ‘dishevelled’ foal” (Zhirmunsky, 1974: 297).

Karashauay in the Balkaro-Karachay epos is endowed also with magic qualities: for example he shows up as a master of extreme cold. In other versions of the Nartiad the hero is deprived of this magic ability. Thus, in the

Georgian version Shavay does not send down cold on to Verzemek's warriors, but pushes off on to them a snow avalanche (Dzidziguri, 1971: 103). In the Ossetian and Adyge legends he is also deprived of this gift; rather, Sosyryko appears in them as the master of intense cold, and he sends down frost on Suay/Shaoy himself.

A specific uniqueness of the Balkaro-Karachay legends about Karashauay is the series of detailed descriptions of his faithful horse: his fast running, his taming, the oaths of the horse and the rider, their testing of each other, the bogatyr horse race, etc.

In this connection, the series of motifs connected to Karashauay's prophetic bogatyr horse, Gemuda, have strong parallels in the epos of the Turkish and Mongolian peoples, in which they are traditional and have been developed in detail (for details see Lipets, 1984: 124-241). Also his provenance is marvellous, from the sea horses. Apart from the variant recorded by A.N. Dyachkov-Tarasov (Nartı, 1994:429), in the Balkaro-Karachay epos several more legends have been recorded where the sea provenance of Gemuda is spoken of: "The Nart Karashauay and Gemuda", "Karashauay puts Gemuda to the test" and others. In the actual legend "Karashauay and Gemuda", it is emphasised that near Gemuda's ears he had gills, and that when he found himself under the water, "he would breathe, like a fish, through these gills" (Nartı, 1994: 438).

Sea horses were also traditional for the Turko-Mongolian peoples. For example, "popular in the Bashkir epos was the ancient mythological tale subject about water horses... and about their lead-stallion Ak-Buzat..." (Lipets, 1984: 125). From the sea-horses came also the winged horse of Kyor-Ogly, Gyr-at. Concerning the marvellous sea dragon-horses encountered in the folklore of the Mongols, they are mentioned in one of his works by G.N. Potanin (Potanin, 1893: 125) and others.

The gift of changing its appearance and the colourful attributes of the sea horse in the general Caucasus Nartiad are typical only for the bogatyr horse of the

Balkaro-Karachay Karashauay.

In distinction from other versions of the Nart epos, in the Balkaro-Karachay one, equally with the prose texts, there is also a range of songs

devoted to Gemuda, “three-legged, copper-eared, damask-steel hoofed” (“Karashauay and Gemuda”, “Gemuda”, “The song to Gemuda”), which possibly belong to the genre “praises to the horse”, which have a wide distribution in the epic traditions of the Turkish and Mongolian peoples (Lipets, 1984: 228).

This bogatyr horse appears in this present epos as a bird-horse-fish. “You are a horse of the land, of the water and of the air”, Karashauay says to him in the legend “Karashauay puts Gemuda to the test”. In actual fact, for this horse there are no kind of spatial limits: he is linked with the ‘underground’ (Alaughan and Karashauay keep him in an underground cave) and with the underwater world (“The Nart Karashauay and Gemuda”).

Many legends of the cycle of Karashauay relate how he puts Gemuda to the test: they have a place-name character and contain an explanation of many particular aspects of the North Caucasus landscape (the double peak of Elbrus, the making of gorges, of the Blue Lake, waterfalls and so on).

A significant number of legends in the cycle of Karashauay are devoted to his winning of the Nart horse-race. The variants of this tale-subject group and the legend “How the Nart Karashauay married the daughter of the all-powerful padishah” reveal a striking similarity with the epos of some Turko-Mongolian peoples (see for more detail Zhirmunsky, 1974: 279-301; Surazakov, 1985: 193- 194). We have revealed especially many parallels to the Karashauay cycle in the Altai epos “Maaday-Kara” (for more detail see Surazakov, 1985: 166-217; Maaday-Kara, 1973).

If in the legends about Debet there are reflected various mythological ideas of the ancestors of the Balkars and Karachays, and for the legends about the marriage of Alaughan a story-mythological interpretation is suitable, then in the legends about Karashauay the bogatyr motifs predominate.

Karashauay not only conducts an irreconcilable struggle with the emegens (“Three Narts and three emegens”, “Shauay and Rachikau”), but with his name there is also connected a classic theme of world folklore, fighting with a dragon. Karashauay fights with a fire-breathing many-headed dragon, symbolising drought in the epos, and appears as a custodian of water. After taking possession of the sources of the rivers, the dragon releases water to the Nart inhabitants only after a human sacrifice (“The song about

Karashauay”) or he himself drinks up all the water. According to the legend, Karashauay, after killing the twelve-headed dragon, “frees all the land from drought” (Nartı, 1994:431).

In this version of the Nartiad, folk fantasy endows its favourite hero with the best qualities. In his image are harmoniously combined not only bogatyr virtues (strength, courage, adroitness and so on), but also high moral qualities (manliness, modesty, being faithful to his word and so on). Inherent in his image are also traits corresponding to the archaic form of idealisation of the hero (the ability to alter his appearance, weather magic, and the gift of foreseeing). The motif of Orpheus is also attached to the name of Karashauay in the epos.

In the Balkaro-Karachay legends Karashauay is invulnerable, unbeatable and immortal. According to the epos, Karashauay is iron-bodied. In the legend “Three Narts and three emegens”, when the emegens threw him into the middle of a huge bonfire, “he did not burn, but became tempered like steel” (Nartı, 1994: 489). In the legend “Karashauay is not dead, he is alive”, it relates how Karashauay and Gemuda, after annihilating their enemies, climbed up Elbrus and they are living there to this day. The eternal youthfulness and immortality of Karashauay and his horse Gemuda are explained by their drinking water from a medicinal spring on the summit of Elbrus.

The comparative analysis that we carried out on the Balkaro-Karachay circle of legends about Debet, Alağan and Karashauay and other versions of the Nartiad, show that the songs and legends about Debet and Alağan (with the exception of a few motifs) are current only among the Balkars and Karachays.

The traditional character, the detailed epic development of the given cycle, the multiplicity of variants and the originality of its legends and songs, the presence of a significant number of parallels with the epos of the Turko-Mongolian peoples and, finally, the declaration of the Nart scholars themselves of the well-developed and complete nature of this cycle specifically in the Balkaro-Karachay environment, give us a basis for speaking about its prime importance in this epic work.

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