

SOME REMARKS ON THE OĞUZ KAĞAN EPIC

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In his book called *Dürerü't-Ticân ve Gureru Tevârihi'l-Ezmân*, Ebû Bekr bin Abdullah bin Ay Beg Ed-Devâdârî, a Mameluke Turkish historian, speaking about the Tartars who entered Anatolia by overpowering Celâleddîn Hârezmşâh and besieged Nusaybin, says :

“Let us explain where these people and those before them came from by consulting their own book called *Ulu Han Ata Bitigci*. It literally means “Great Father Ruler’s Book”. This book is known and highly respected by the Mongols and Kipchaks of the previous Turks just as other Turks have a book called *Oğuznâme* and pass it from hand to hand. In the book their origin and their first ruler, i.e. Oğuz are mentioned.”¹

Ulu Han Ata Bitigci was translated from Turkish into Persian by a physician named Cibrîl bin Bahtîşû’ (?) in 826. Devâdârî made use of this Persian version. The name of Cibril’s father is probably Devâdârî though it is not definitely known by the transcribers. There may be a word like *bahşı* in the spelling *بختیشوع*. Actually the translator’s title is given as physician. We believe that there is a mistake in the title of the book, too. The letter *cim* put between the letters *kef* and *ye* is an error resulting from failing to understand the word. It should be “bitigi” not “bitigci”. In fact the given meaning of the title is “great father ruler’s book” which is the equivalent of “Ulu Han Ata Bitigi”.

One may doubt the truth of the information that Devâdârî supplies in the beginning of the 14th c. 826 is indeed an old date but one can not assume that Devâdârî made up all this information. Presumably, there were two books that were very common among Turks and they had been even committed to paper a long time before Devâdârî : *Ulu Han Ata Bitigi* and *Oğuzname*. Devâdârî, who also mentions *Oğuzname*, doesn’t say anything about its date or translations, but we gather from the way he relates the subject that *Oğuzname* was more common during Devâdârî’s time. He says “just as

¹ Süleymâniye Dâmâd İbrâhim Paşa Library, No. 913, p. 202.

there is a book called *Oğuzname* among other Turks." Here *Oğuzname*, as a more common book, is mentioned as an example to explain how the Mongols and Kiphchaks knew and respected *Ulu Han Ata Bitigi*. Turks passed *Oğuzname*, too, from hand to hand. Their orijin and their first ruler are mentioned in it. Devâdârî then goes on to give a summary of the story of the Cyclops from *Oğuzname*². Apparently, this *Oğuzname* is none of the *Oğuz* epics in hand because here not only the orijin of the Turks and *Oğuz Kağan* are mentioned but also the story of the Cyclops is given. This shows that the orijinal *Oğuz Kağan* epic, that was all about *Oğuz's* life, developed into a big *Oğuzname* in time by including adventures of *Oğuz's* grand children and their lords. This *Oğuzname* must have been popular among the West *Oğuz* people because *the Cyclops* and eleven other stories were later seen in the book of *Dede Korkut* without any relations with *Oğuz Kağan*. There are no traces of the *Dede Korkut* stories in the Uighur versions of the *Oğuz Kağan* epic. Apparently, these stories were not so popular in the area where this epic was written down. As for Reşideddin, he didn't include the *Dede Korkut* stories in his book on purpose because he wanted to write his book like history. When he talks about *Kayı İnal Khan*, he also mentions *Dede Korkut*. He says that *Dede Korkut* has many saintly miracles and stories and that these stories will be mentioned separately³. However, unfortunately, Reşideddin does not mention these stories at all.

The epics, especially the *Oğuz Kağan* epic, are of special importance from the viewpoint of Turko-Mongol relations. This is why the information given by Devâdârî is noteworthy. In his opinion, the book entitled *Ulu Han Ata Bitigi* tells about where the Tatars who followed *Celaleddin Harezmsah* and the people before them came from. "The book is known and highly respected by the Mongols and Kiphchaks of the previous Turks". These lines show that Devâdârî, a Mameluke Turk, doesn't make any distinction between Turks, Tatars, Mongols and Kiphchaks and accepts all of them as Turks. Reşideddin claims that the Mongols are the descendants of *Oğuz Khan's* uncles. *Oğuz Khan* fights with them and drives them into the *Karakurum*. The Mongols, addressing *Oğuz Khan*, say "we are from your race, we are the branches and twigs shooting out from the same root and we are the fruits of the same tree."⁴ These lines show that the Turcomans of Reşideddin's time believe that *Oğuz Khan* and the Mongols are cousins. I find it difficult to believe the idea that this belief among the Turcomans appeared after *Jenghiz*. As for *Abulgazi*, he mentions that *Alınca Khan* has twin sons by the names of *Tatar* and *Moghol*. *Oğuz Khan* is *Moghol Khan's* grandson.

² *ibid.*

³ A. Zeki Velidî Togan, *Oğuz Destanı*, İstanbul, 1972, p. 55.

⁴ A. Zeki Velidî Togan, the same book, p. 20.

Thus the author shows that the Oğuzes are descendants of Moghol Khan, and the actual Mongols are the descendants of Tatar Khan.⁵ It is difficult to assume that all these rumours came into being after Jenghiz. Of course, there may have been additions to these Turcoman rumours after Jenghiz. But we believe that the idea of the Turks being related to the Mongols, which appears central in the rumours, bears traces from much older ages, and perhaps from the time of the Khuns of Mao-tun, who has some similarities to Oğuz Khan. The Turcomans of Reşîdeddîn's time, who talk about the relationship of the Turks with the Mongols in their rumours, were in a way the first Altaists. A detailed study of these relationships in the epics and their comparison with historical materials may lead us to interesting results.

Another point I would like to focus on is a Turkish cosmogony reflected in the Oğuz Kağan epic. Oğuz Kağan marries a girl who comes out of the light that comes down from the sky and has three sons; they are named Kün (Sun), Ay (Moon), and Yultuz (Star) respectively. Later Oğuz Kağan marries another girl living in a hollow in a tree in the middle of a lake and has three more sons; they are named Kök (Sky), Tağ (Mountain) and Tengiz (Sea) respectively⁶. In my opinion, these motives are the modified reflections in the epic of the Turks' first beliefs about the creation of the universe. The names given to the children cannot be a coincidence. It is immediately understood that the first three represent the world of stars and the other three the earth. This point has been mentioned several times before. The first three children bear the names Sun, Moon and Star and thus represent the outer space. Moreover, their mother emerged from a blue beam of light that came down from the sky. The children born to the other woman, Sky, Mountain and Sea represent the earth. Here, the sky is regarded as part of the earth. The second wife came out of a hollow in a tree in the middle of a lake. Acting on these symbols, we can argue that the Turks' first beliefs about the creation of the universe are as follows :

First, the outer space with the Sun, the Moon, and the Stars is created. Here Göktenrı (the Goddess of Space) is involved. (The girl coming out of the light from the sky). And then the earth with its sky, mountains and seas is created. Here the Goddess of Earth and Water is involved. (The girl coming out of a hollow in a tree in the middle of a lake).

In spite of all the changes, losses, and additions through the centuries the mainstream remains the same in the Altaic legends. There is a single god that creates : Ülgen, Kuday or Kayrakan. This god flies over an endless body of water. The earth, the sky, the moon do not exist. In the myth discovered by Verbitski, the God, Ülgen said "Let there be the earth" and it was

⁵ Ebülğazi Bahâdır Han, *Şecere-i Terâkime*, (Edited by Muharrem Ergin), p. 25; Kononov publication, p. 12.

⁶ W. Bang and G. R. Rahmeti, *Oğuz Kağan Destanı*, İstanbul, 1936, pp. 12-14.

created and "Let there be the skies" and the skies were created. Thus he created all the world. Later he created the man⁷. In the Altaic myth discovered by Radloff, first only the God Kuday and the man exist. Kuday creates the earth, the mountains and hills by means of the man⁸. This main line concerning the creation of the sky, the earth, and the moon is expressed in the simplest way in the Orkhon inscriptions (KT E I) as "üze kök tengri asra yagız yir kılındukta ikin ara kişi oğlu kılınmış" (i. e. when the sky above and the earth below were created, man was created in between the two.)

If we accept that the birth of the children and their names in the Oğuz Kağan epic represent the creation of the universe as we mentioned above⁹, we can also say that Oğuz Kağan represents the Man¹⁰. Thus, according to the Oğuz Kağan epic, first the man, then the world of stars and than the earth was created. The struggles which Reşideddin says existed between Oğuz Khan and his father Kara Khan may represent the struggles between the God Kayrakan and the Man as told in the Altaic legends. And Oğuz Kağan's skilful lords who make rafts and carts may stand for the helping spirits of the Altaic legends, whose names came from the Buddhist pantheon. Maytere teaches many things to people, builds carts, determines the herbs that can be used as food. Mangdaşire makes fishhooks and catches fish. He also invents the rifle and gunpowder and shoots squirrels.

When they reflected the Ancient Turks' beliefs in the Oğuz Kağan epic, what kind of reasoning and method did the epic tellers follow? Did they create an epic by personifying directly the worldly and the heavenly things, and gods and their spirits?¹¹ Or did they attribute the creation process and the names of the created which already existed in their beliefs to their forefathers about whose heroic acts and other deeds they inherited some rumours? It is practically impossible to answer these questions using the epic and legend texts which have undergone many changes in time. Nevertheless, the singularities in Oğuz Kağan's birth and marriages, and the obvious relationships of his first sons with the space and younger sons with the earth plus the idea that these relationships cannot be haphazard have involuntarily led us to the Turks' oldest beliefs.

⁷ Abdülkadir İnan, *Tarihte ve Bugün Şamanizm*, Ankara, 1972, pp. 19-20 (taken from Verbitski, *Altayskie inorodtı*, pp. 89-100).

⁸ Abdülkadir İnan, the same book, pp. 14-19 (taken from W. Radloff, *Proben I*, pp. 159-166).

⁹ S. P. Tolstov also has this idea. See : "Perejitki totemizma i dual 'noy organizatsii u turkmen", *Problemi istorii dokapitalistiçeskih obşçestva*, 1935, No : 9-10, pp. 3-41 (from Mireli Seyidov, *Azerbaycan Mifik Tefekkürünün Gaynaglari*, Bakı, 1983, p. 26).

¹⁰ Here one should remember that Paul Pelliot formerly relates the word *oğuz* to the word *oguş* meaning "family". (See : D. Sinor, "Oğuz Kağan Destanı Üzerine Bazı Mülâhazalar", *TDED*, IV/1-2, İstanbul, 1950, p. 4).

¹¹ Mireli Seyidov supports this view. See : M. Seyidov, the same book, pp. 263-264.