

Nomads in the Prose of Medieval Turkish Folklore ("Battal-name" and "Danishmend- name")

TATIANA A. ANIKEEVA¹



The traditional Turkish epic Battal-name and Danishmend-name are considered to have been constructed in the period of the beginning of the formation of Turkish literature (the 14th century), when the Ottoman state emerged and united the separated Anatolian beyliks through aggressive campaigns against the Byzantine lands.

Beside the Korkut tales among the Oguz tribes, the so-called "military epic stories" began to take shape in Turkish folklore. These stories depict the campaigns and battles and are imbued with ideas of gazawat as a holy war for the faith. Despite the fact that the historical background of the "Battal-name" was the Arab-Byzantine wars, it is based on the tradition of the Turkic heroic epic. Both Melik Danishmend (the main hero of "Danishmend-name", a local governor in Asia Minor) and Battal (and their associates) represent the image of the epic hero, empowered with the traditional nomadic Turkic virtues that have been contaminated with the features of a Muslim devotee. "Battal-name" and "Danishmend-name" retained their popularity in Ottoman Turkey until the 19th century.

Many of the themes and motifs of traditional Turkish epic folklore date back to antiquity. Along with the existing Korkut cycles among the Oguz tribes, the so-called "military epic stories" began to take shape in Turkish folklore.

In the 11th century, Turkic-speaking tribes invaded Anatolia under the rule of the Eastern Roman Empire, known as the Byzantine Empire.

After the battle of Manzikert (Malazgirt) in 1071, Turkoman leaders (*beys*), such as the Artuk, Saltuk, Danishmend and Mengücek *beys*, conquered lands in Anatolia and set up a number of small states there: The Saltuks in Erzurum, the Mengüceks in the region of Erzincan and Sivas, the Danishmends in the region of Tokat, Niksar and Malatya, and the Artukid state around Mardin and Har-

¹ Institute of Oriental Studies of Russian Academy of Sciences, Moscow, Russia.

put. The Danishmend conquests in Anatolia were a theme of great admiration among the contemporary Turks and the conquests became the subject of a large anonymous epic called the *Danishmend-name*.

The *Battal-name* and *Danishmend-name* are both dated to the period of the beginning of the formation of Turkish literature, which started in the 14th century. This period is usually associated with the emergence of the Ottoman state and the unification of separated Anatolian *beyliks*; this was accompanied by expansion and the aggressive campaigns of the Turks against the Byzantine lands.

The *Battal-name* and *Danishmend-name* are of the same genre and have a similar plot: one of the main heroes of *Danishmend-name*, besides Melik Danishmend himself, is the grandson of Seyyid Battal: Sultan Dursan. These stories depict the campaigns and battles and are imbued with ideas of *gazavat* as the holy war for the faith.

Gazavat-name, about Seyyid-Battal, has its own historical basis; most probably, it can be seen as a historical memoir about a Muslim (probably an Arab) who participated in the Umayyad campaign against Asia Minor² or being about related events that led to centuries of the Arab-Byzantine wars. The main events of the narrated legend date back to the 9th–10th centuries, but the latest period is the 12th century. In the center of the story of *Battal-name* are the legendary deeds of Battal, who was the son of a noble warlord. The son was sent to perform feats in the “land of the Greeks” from Malatya (or Mytilene).

According to the opinion of Gordlevskiy referring to H. Gregoire³, the Byzantine epics about Digenis Akrites had a great influence on the image of Seyyid Battal-gazi.⁴ However, the similarities between the Turkish epics (like *Battal-name* and *Kitab-i Dedem Korkut*) and the Byzantine epics have not yet been studied in detail.

The images of the heroes in both texts – Melik Danishmend and Seyyid Battal Gazi respectively – are characterised by the same typical features, which are peculiar to the protagonists of the traditional Turkic oral epic. These signs appear in the heroes’ early childhood: he knocks his opponent to the

² V.A. Gordlevskiy, “Gosudarstvo Seldjukidov Maloy Azii”, *Izbrannyye sochineniya*. Vol. 1. Moskva 1960, 75.

³ Gordlevskiy, *Gosudarstvo Seldjukidov*, 75.

⁴ The legend of Digenes Akrites was extremely widespread in the territory of Asia Minor and the Caucasus. The poem “Digenes Akrites” is a monument of the Byzantine heroic epics, extant in several variants; it is based on the processing of folkloric material. The original version apparently goes back to the end of the 10th–beginning of 11th centuries. The number of layers in the surviving versions indicates a different period from the second half of the 11th to the 14th centuries. Digenes (in Greek, “twain-born”) by his origin is associated with the East; he is the son of a Greek woman and a Syrian Emir. The Armenian legend of Kagan Arslan and his bride Margrit is also regarded as a version of the song of Digenes and his fight with Charon. See: V. M. Jirmunski, *Tyurkskiy geroicheskiy epos*. Leningrad 1974, 199.

ground with one kick, he strikes the enemy's head with a club of five thousand *batman* weight with a flick of the wrist (Seyyid Battal Gazi).

Melik Danishmend and his associates are permanently compared to a lion, tiger, or dragon; his war horse is always juxtaposed with an eagle:

ملك دانشمند دخی کافرلر ار اسنده ارسلان کبی اکر دی قیلان کبی صچرردی

Melik Danişmend kafirler arasında arslan gibi egerdi kaplan gibi saçırırdı

“Among the infidels Melik Danishmend growled like a lion, rushed like a tiger” (149b, also 74a, 85b, 120a)⁵

ات عقاب کبی صچرردی

At ukap gibi saçırırdı

“the horse soared like an eagle” (183a, also 64b)⁶

The enemies of Melik Danishmend and Seyyid Battal-gazi (mostly “infidels”) are compared to dogs, donkeys, and sheep. The number “40” which is also characteristic in the folklore of the Turkic peoples, is often mentioned in *Danishmend-name*: “Melik... struck such a blow by his sword that the head flew 40 steps away”, “40 infidels came out one after the other, and Melik Danishmend killed them all” (262a, 161a).⁷

The companions of the main characters are also endowed with heroic features.

The style of the narration in *Battal-name* and *Danishmend-name*, the simplicity of its syntax, the conciseness of the presentation, and its brevity are all features that demonstrate the definite archaic nature of these texts.

سنیلره یغمور کبی اوق دوکدیلر

Sunilere yağmur gibi ok dökdiler

“They shot arrows to the Sunnis like rain” (122b)

اول یازي طولو ادم کودهسی اولمش سیل کبی قان روان اولمش

Ol yazı dolu adam gövdesi olmuş sel gibi kan revan olmuş

“The plain was full of people’s bodies, the blood flowed like a stream” (209a)⁸

The connection of the water and the blood, which is expressed in various figures of speech (metaphor, hyperbole), apparently is fairly stable in Turkic literatures, and could date back to ancient Turkic monuments (see Köl-Tegin monument E 24: *qanyŋ subča yögürti* “your blood run like water”;⁹ Kitab-i

⁵ Folios of the manuscript of *Danishmend-name* (from Sankt-Petersburg State Public library, copied at 1622/23), which were used in the publications and research conducted by V. S. Garbuzova. See: V. S. Garbuzova, *Skazaniye o Melike Danishmende*. Moskva 1960, 163.

⁶ Garbuzova, *Skazaniye o Melike Danishmende*, 164.

⁷ Garbuzova, *Skazaniye o Melike Danishmende*, 168.

⁸ Ibid., 165.

⁹ See: S. Ye. Malov, *Pamyatniki drevnetyurkskoy pismennosti*. Moskva – Leningrad 1951; H. M. Orkun, *Eski Türk yazıtları*. Ankara 1987; T. Tekin, *The Grammar of Orkhon Turkic*. Bloomington 1968, 234, 267.

Dedem Korkut: *Kanlı kanlı sularдан geçit versün* (D75)¹⁰ “let him cross the blood-red river”; “Oguz-name”: *Тутулунч урушунч андаф жаман болди ким Итил мўрпәннүн суғи кин кизил сін сиңгир дәг болди* (Oguz-name 19, III-IV)¹¹ “Fights and battles were so fierce that the water of the Itil river turned red as cinnabar.”

The *Battal-name* and *Danishmend-name* kept their popularity in the Ottoman Empire up until the end of the 19th–beginning of the 20th centuries. In addition to the copies from 1577, 1622, and 1607, some manuscripts of the *Danishmend-name* are dated to the 19th–20th centuries (e.g. MS No. 685 from İstanbul Millet Kütüphanesi copied in 1910¹²). This indicates the popularity of the story.

Both the *Battal-name* itself and the different legends of Seyyid Battal-gazi and his companions existed in Turkish folklore and literature even up until the beginning of the 20th century. The *Battal-name*, or “*Gazavat-name* of Battal”, was often published as a lithography of a typical Turkish prosaic narrative folk tale.¹³ It continued to exist in another later genre of Turkish folklore.¹⁴ The folk texts of the *hikayats* began to be printed in the form of lithographies, and later as typographies in the first half of 19th century, mainly in İstanbul. The technique of lithography (*taşbasması*), which was significantly cheaper than the printing typography press, achieved wide distribution.

¹⁰ *Dede Korkut kitabı. I. Giriş, metin, tipkibasım*. Haz. Muharrem Ergin. 9.baskı. Ankara 2014.

¹¹ A. M. Scherbak, tr. and comm. *Oghuz-name. Mukhabbat-name. Pamyatniki drevneuygurskoy i starouzbekskoy pismennosti*. Moskva 1959, 40. The transcription of the Turkic text is given in accordance with this edition.

¹² See more: Garbuzova, *Skazaniye o Melike Danishmende*, 30–31.

¹³ The Turkish prose narrative folk tale (*halk hikâyesi*, or *hikayat*) takes a special place in Turkish folklore and Turkish literature in general. Frequently, these narrative texts represent folkloric versions of well-known plots from the different literary traditions of the Middle East. The traditional area of the origin and distribution of the Turkish folk narrative *hikayat* is considered to be northeast Turkey and the areas bordering Iran. It has been in existence for a long time mainly in the south of Turkey and in eastern Turkey since the Middle Ages. Throughout their existence, the Turkish folk narratives have taken an intermediate position not only between the literary tradition and folklore, but also between different folk genres, combining the features of fairy tales, folk theatre, and folk poetry. Folk narratives with the contents primarily related to the various traditional narrative genres of Arabic, Persian, and Turkic literatures were already prevailing in general in the second half of the 19th century among printed and lithograph editions, which had a certain popularity among the citizens of the Ottoman Empire. For more detail, see: T. A. Anikeeva, *Turetskaya gorodskaya povest XIX veka*. Moskva 2011.

¹⁴ Sometimes these historical legends, *gazavatname* and *menakibname*, are reasonably considered as one of the sources of the formation of this late genre of the Turkish folklore *halk hikâyesi*. See for example, Ö. Nutku, *Meddahlık ve meddah hikâyeleri*. Ankara 1997, 77.

There is a lithographic edition of *Battal-name* from 1881 in MGIMO Scientific library: *Gazavat-name sultan Seyyid Battal-gazi mükemmel hikayesi*.¹⁵ This edition is remarkable because of the autograph Arabic inscription on its flyleaf:

صاحب هذا الكتاب و مينورسكى واخترته في القسطنطينية في ١٣١٧

Sahib haza-l-kitab w.minurski wa-khtarathu fi-l-Kostantiniyya fi 1317

"The owner of this book is V. Minorski and I bought it in Constantinople in 1317 [A. H.] (1899/1900)". This edition most probably originates from the private book collection of the famous Iranist Vladimir Fyodorovich Minorsky (1877-1966). He probably bought it in İstanbul during one of his first voyages to Turkey, almost before graduating from university (*Lazarevsky Institute for Oriental Languages*) in 1902.

In his paper, V.A. Gordlevsky edited several texts of legends in connection with Seyyid Battal and his companions from various places in Turkey. These legends were recorded by him in 1910-1911:

№ 46. "Yediler ("the Seven"). "In the old burial vault of Eskişehir, seven ascetics of Seyyid Battal Gazi were buried. One of them, Yusuf, was known as *Kesikbaş* ("Severed head") [...] Before the war, the saints left the grave and raised a lot of noise. Such was the case before the last Russian-Turkish war (1910). [...]" № 47. "There is a dry well in a deep cave carved into the cliffs, high above the village of İnönü (around Eskişehir) [...] This is the tomb of St. Kesikbaş. [...] In front of the cave, on a high cliff, there lived a princess named Marty. She worked in the Palace yarn. Seyyid Battal Gazi fell in love with her and kidnapped her"¹⁶

Therefore, we see that the image of Seyyid Battal and his companions as epic heroes retains its features and characteristics regardless of the genre (*hikayat*, historical legends, and the legends about the saints) for quite a long time. Both Melik Danishmend and Battal represent the image of the epic hero empowered with traditional nomadic Turkic virtues that have been contaminated with the features of a Muslim devotee.

Thus, the *Battal-name* and *Danishmend-name* are both monuments of a written epic, which is found on the border between oral and literary traditions, and even between folk narrative and historical writing.

Elements of the traditional epic narrative represented in *Danishmend-name* and *Battal-name* can be seen later in chronicles that use folk canons for the construction of a historical narrative of the Seljukid epoch.

¹⁵ Scientific Library of Moscow State Institute for international relations (MGIMO), MS no 351: lithographic edition, bright blue cardboard cover with embossed and gold rosette, thin yellow paper, İstanbul 1298 h./1881, 358 pages. The language of the text is Turkish. The first page has a stamp of the library of the *Institute of Oriental Studies* of Moscow and another oriental stamp with the date "1305" (1887). There are inscriptions on the flyleaf made with black ink and pencil.

¹⁶ V.A. Gordlevsky, "Osmanskiye skazaniya I legendy. Chast t 1," *Izbrannyye sochineniya. T. 1*. Moskva 1960, 338. This is about the legendary companions of Seyyid Battal, namely, Husseyn Gazi and his brother Şerafettin, as well as Ahmed Tarrak and Abdul Wahhab Gazi, see the records № 167-168 (448-449).