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COMPARISON OF EASTERN AND WESTERN VARIANTS OF THE KOROGLU EPIC

“KO'RO'G'LI” DOSTONINING SHARQ VA G'ARB VARIANTLARINI QIYOSLASH

СРАВНЕНИЕ ВОСТОЧНОЙ И ЗАПАДНОЙ ВЕРСИЙ ЭПОСА «КЁРОГЛУ»

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Abstract

The Koroglu epic is considered one of the most widespread oral narratives among Turkic peoples. Its numerous versions have been recorded across a wide geographic range — from Central Asia and Siberia to Anatolia and the Balkans. These variants are generally classified into two major branches: Eastern and Western. The Eastern variants, predominantly found in Turkistan, typically portray Koroglu (or Goroglu) as a noble-born hero, often born in a symbolic setting such as a tomb — hence the name “son of the grave.” In contrast, Western variants, observed in Azerbaijan, Anatolia, and Bulgaria, depict a hero of humble origins whose father was blinded by enemies — thus earning him the name “Koroglu” (son of the blind). Although the Tobol and Crimean versions are geographically located in the North and East, they share structural and thematic similarities with the Western group. This dichotomy reflects not only regional storytelling traditions but also differing social and ideological values embedded in the epic.

Annotatsiya

Ko'ro'g'li dostoni turklar orasida eng keng tarqalgan dostonidir. Sharqdan G'arbga, Shimoldan Janubgacha bo'lgan turkiy geografiyada bu dostonning turli variantlarini uchratish mumkin. Ozarbayjon, Anadolu, Turkiston, Qrim, Tobol, Bolgariya va boshqalarda bu dostonning turli xil variantlari mavjud. Dostonning mavjud variantlari mavzuviy va geografik xususiyatlariga ko'ra, asosan ikki asosiy guruhga bo'linadi: Sharqiy va G'arbiy variantlar. Sharqiy variantlarga asosan Turkiston variantlari kiradi. G'arbiy variantlarga Ozarbayjon, Anadolu va Bolgar variantlari misol bo'la oladi. Sharq va G'arb variantlari o'ziga xos xususiyatlari bilan bir-biridan farq qiladi. Tobol va Qrim variantlari, geografik joylashuvdan qat'i nazar, mazmunan G'arb guruhiga yaqin deb hisoblanadi. G'arbiy versiyalarda qahramon zodagon emas, balki quyi tabaqadan chiqqan bo'lib, dushmanlar otasining ko'zlarini o'yib tashlashadi. Shuning uchun unga Ko'ro'g'li (kor o'g'li) deb ataladi. Sharqiy versiyalarda qahramon odatda zodagonlar oilasidan chiqadi va onasi uni qabrda tug'adi. Shuning uchun uni Go'ro'g'li (qabr o'g'li) deb atashadi.

Резюме

Эпос «Кёроглу» является одним из наиболее широко распространённых устных повествований среди тюркских народов. Он представлен во множестве версий, охватывающих широкий географический ареал — от Центральной Азии и Сибири до Анатолии и Балкан. Различные варианты этого эпоса зафиксированы в Азербайджане, Анатолии, Туркестане, Крыму, Тоболе, Болгарии и других регионах. Как правило, все версии делятся на две основные группы: восточные и западные. К восточным вариантам относятся в первую очередь туркестанские. К западным — азербайджанский, анатолийский и болгарский. Восточные и западные версии отличаются друг от друга как содержательно, так и по структуре. Хотя Тобольский и Крымский варианты географически расположены на востоке и севере, по содержанию они ближе к западной группе. В западных версиях герой не происходит из знатного рода, а принадлежит к низшим слоям общества; враги ослепляют его отца, и потому героя называют Кёроглу (сын слепого). В восточных версиях герой, как правило, имеет благородное происхождение, и его мать рождает его в гробнице, из-за чего он называется Гёроглу (сын могилы).

Key words: Koroglu, Goroglu, Turkic epic tradition, Western variants, Eastern variants.

Kalit so'zlar: Ko'ro'g'li, Go'ro'g'li, turkiy doston an'anasi, G'arb variantlari, Sharq variantlari.

Ключевые слова: Кёроглу, Гёроглу, Тюркская традиция эпоса, западные варианты, восточные варианты.

INTRODUCTION

Folklorist scholars do not have a unanimous opinion about where, when, and how the *Koroglu* epic was created. Many scholars associate the history of the epic with the Jalali rebellions that occurred in the late 16th and early 17th centuries. According to P.N.Boratav, the oldest version of *Koroglu* is the Uzbek version, which is close to the Turkmen version. [3, p.97] According to the author, mythical elements are more evident in this version. However, the Uzbek version has also

been distorted and lost its original essence. According to P.N.Boratav, the *Koroglu* epic spread from here to Azerbaijan and then to Anatolia. Thus, according to the researcher, the Uzbek variant is the oldest of the existing variants and other variants are derived from it.

In the travel book of the Ottoman traveler O.Çelebi, there is a poem dedicated by a poet named Koroglu upon the death of Ozdemiroglu Osman Pasha.[9, p 61] This poem was published by A. Kutsi.[3, p.114] According to F. Koprulu, this Koroğlu was in the army of Ozdemiroglu Osman Pasha and participated in his campaigns. While analyzing the poet's poems, F. Köprülü draws attention to some similarities between these poems and the poems in the epic *Dede Korkut*. F. Koprulu, who indicates that Koroglu also has other poems, finds it difficult to say who the exact author of these poems is. P.N. Boratav also mentions a poet named Koroğlu who lived in Anatolia in his research. P.N. Boratav notes that there may be several poets with this name. According to the author, the epic originated in Central Asia and spread westward, and the poet or poets in Anatolia were inspired by the epic hero's fame and adopted his name.

According to A.Z.V. Togan, the roots of the epic go back to more ancient times.[1, p.82] According to the author, the roots of the epic go back to before the 16th century, that is, to the period of war between the Gokturks and the Sassanids. According to A.Z.V. Togan, this story is related to the wars of the Oghuz with the Iranians during that period. Scholars such as F. Köprülü and A. Abid also shared his opinion. During the Soviet period, scholars such as H. Araslı and P. Efendiyev associated this epic with the uprisings against the Ottoman occupation in Azerbaijan. The first examples of the *Koroglu* epic have survived to the present day in the form of poetry. These poems were found on an Armenian named Ilyas Mushegian, who was captured by the Russians in 1721. This Armenian was coming from Iran, Southern Azerbaijan. Based on such facts, B. Garriyev claims that the epic originated in Southern Azerbaijan. German scientist K. Reichl also agrees with B. Garriyev's opinions. We also consider B. Garriyev's views more convincing and well-founded, as they are based on serious facts and sound arguments. As can be seen, opinions about the time and place of the epic's creation vary.

METHOD

The article employed theoretical analysis and comparative methods.

DISCUSSION

A number of differences are evident in the Eastern and Western versions of the epic from beginning to end. Eastern versions feature an extensive depiction of the hero's birth. In Eastern versions, the hero's mother usually dies for some reason. For example, in one of the Kazakh versions, Ravshanbek leaves his wife. Then Akanay falls ill and dies. She was pregnant when she died. So she gives birth to a child in the grave and they name that child Goroglu. The meaning of the name Goroglu is "son of the grave". The narration in the Uyghur version of the epic is slightly different, but the result is still the same. One day, Hz. Ali saw a beautiful girl in the garden. Ali wishes that this girl will give birth to a child from him. At that moment, the girl becomes pregnant. The girl is very worried that her brother will find out about the matter. In the end, the girl dies of shame. Then the result is still the same. A son is born to the dead mother in the grave. This boy's name is Goroglu. Western versions usually do not describe how the hero is born. However, there are exceptions. F. Bayat writes: "Although it is said that the Azerbaijani and Anatolian do not have a chapter on the birth of Koroglu, there is a chapter on the birth of Koroglu in the small epic, which is a variant of the Azerbaijani *Koroglu* and was collected from an ashig of Armenian origin in 1912. However, this birth is not similar to the birth in the grave in the Central Asian epic tradition. In the Tabriz copy of the Koroglu (Koroğlu in Azerbaijani Turks) epic, the birth of the hero is given as a separate chapter/part.[2, p.50-51]

In the western versions, Azerbaijani and Anatolian versions, the name of the hero is often explained differently. The hero's father is a mehter and serves his master with kindness. One day, a guest of the master, the pasha, or the khan arrives. The Pasha wants to give his guest a horse and gives this task to his groom. The groom brings a seahorse. Because the horse looks ugly at first glance, both the host and the guest become angry with the groom. Therefore, his master gouges out the groom's eyes, gives the groom the horses, and drives him away. The groom came home and told his son what had happened and entrusted the horses to him. The horses grew and became very strong. The hero rides these legendary horses against the enemy. One of these

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horses is named Qirat, and the other is named Durat. Groom's son's real name is Rovshan, but after his father's eyes were gouged out, he was given the name Koroglu, which means "son of the blind." In one of the Azerbaijani variants of the epic, Koroglu captures Hasan Pasha, who gouged out his father's eyes, brings him to Çanlıbel and makes him Girat's groom. In the Azerbaijani and Anatolian versions of the epic, the hero's father's name sometimes changes to Ali, sometimes Mirza Saraf, sometimes Yusif, etc.

As mentioned, in Western versions of the epic, the hero's father is an ordinary groom. In most Central Asian versions, the hero comes from an aristocratic family. In Western versions, the hero goes with his blinded father to Chanlibel. In the Eastern versions, the hero's family has been the ruler of this place from the beginning, and the hero is the heir and future owner of this place. In western versions, this is a secluded mountain location. Located here, Koroglu and his companions engage in robbery, roadblocks, and caravan robbery. We don't come across this type of plot much in Eastern versions. As can be seen, in the Eastern versions the hero lives in his ancestral homeland, while in the Western versions the hero chooses this homeland later.

The Azerbaijani version of the epic tells a separate story about the hero's sword. Once, when Rovshan (Koroglu) was a child, he found a stone in the field. The child brings the stone and shows it to his father. The child's father realizes that this stone is special. That's why the man keeps the stone. One day, when he knows his son will be a great warrior, he takes the stone to the swordsmith. The man knew that this stone was a piece of lightning. The master tried to deceive the old man but could not succeed. This sword remained with Koroglu and was called the Mısırlı sword. N. Muallimoğlu and D. Kaya also draw attention to these features of the Mısırlı sword.[7, p.102]

In most versions of the epic, various examples of poetry are given from the language of Koroglu and other characters. Especially in the Azerbaijani version, special attention is paid to the ashig of Koroglu. There is a separate story in the epic about how Korolu became ashig. Koroğlu's father tells Koroğlu to drink the foamy water formed by the union of two stars in the spring called Goşabulag and to bring some of that water to his father. Koroglu goes to Goshabulag and drinks the bubbling water himself, but he cannot take the water to his father. This water could have opened the eyes of the Koroglu's father, but the water did not reach the old man. Thanks to this water, Koroglu roars powerfully, defeats his enemies, and becomes a great saz poet. The poets who told epics with this wanted to say that their art came from the truth. B. Garriyev shows that in the Azerbaijani *Koroglu* special attention was paid to the hero's talent for minstrelsy. The Koroglu saz is also a famous saz. The name of this saz is given in the epic as the Bulgurlu saz. It should be noted that the saz is a stringed musical instrument popular among Turks.

In the Azerbaijani variants of the epic, the main woman Koroglu loves is Nigar. Nigar is usually presented as the daughter of the Ottoman sultan, the khotkar. In the chapter of the epic titled *The Arrival of Parzad Khanim in Chanlibel*, Nigar Khanim is the daughter of Jafar Pasha and the sister of Parzad Khanim. It should be noted that khanim is a form of address for a woman in Turks, meaning lady. In the Tobol version of the epic, the name of the girl Koroglu loves is Nikar, that is, Nigar. In the Turkestan versions of the epic, the woman the hero loves has different characteristics. Here, the name of the girl the hero loves is Agha Yunis Pari. Nigar is an intelligent woman with skilled management skills. Agha Yunis Pari, on the other hand, stands out from the ordinary, normal person with his extraordinary characteristics. Her abode is the legendary Mount Gaf. Agha Yunis Pari is not an ordinary woman, but a fairy. In the Uzbek version of the epic, Koroglu marries not one, but several fairies. In the Azerbaijani version of *Koroglu*, Parzad Khanum is not a fairy, but an ordinary person. However, she has strong knowledge in the field of magic and witchcraft. The hero's marriage to a nymph is a common occurrence in Turkic epics. Similar plots can be seen in the epic *Oguz Khagan*. We can also see such plots in ancient Greek legends.

One of the most striking characters in the epic *Koroglu* is Eyvaz. In both Western and Eastern versions, Eyvaz is usually the son of a butcher. In the Azerbaijani version, Ashiq Junun gives Koroglu information about Eyvaz. (Turks call a person who plays the saz and sings poems and folk songs "ashig". As we mentioned, Koroglu is also an ashig in the epic.) The Azerbaijani version shows that Eyvaz is from the Teke-Turkmen region and that Koroglu follows him to Teke-Turkmen. Here, Eyvaz's father is a butcher and his name is Ali. Eyvaz himself is proud of being from Teke-Turkmen. Koroglu tricks this boy and brings him to Chanlibela. In the Eastern versions

of the epic, the plot is slightly different. Here, as in the Western versions, Eyvaz is the son of a butcher. However, in the Eastern versions, Eyvaz is Georgian and not Muslim, but Christian. After Koroglu takes him into his possession, Eyvaz converts to Islam. In some plots, Eyvaz loves Ahmed Khan's daughter. The girl rejects Eyvaz's love. No one helps Eyvaz to reunite with the girl he loves. Eyvaz also became angry and returned to Georgia. However, no matter how hard the Georgian Shah tried, Eyvaz would not turn away from Islam and Koroglu. Then Koroglu goes and rescues Eyvaz and brings him back to Chandibe. In the Eastern versions, Koroglu's companions inform Koroglu about Eyvaz. P.N. Boratav writes about the Uzbek version of *Koroglu*: "Koroglu thought that from now on the forty brave men had no other wishes. But forty brave men said to him: "We have one more wish, and that is Ivaz Khan, the beautiful and brave son of the butcher of Boldurak in the country of Hunkar Shah. Let's bring him too, let him be your son, our master".[3, 29] As can be seen, there are a number of similarities and differences between the characters of Eyvaz in the Eastern and Western versions.

One of the most striking plots in the epic *Koroglu* is the theft of the hero's horse. It is narrated in the Azerbaijani version that the pashas and khans were very afraid of Koroglu. Everyone knew that Koroglu's power lay in Kirat. The men of Mahmud Pasha, the pasha of the city of Tokat, advised the pasha to kidnap Kirat. When the Pasha was looking for someone to do this job, only a bald man named Hamza dared to do it. Hamza comes to Çanlıbel and serves Koroglu, and one day he deceives the hero and steals his horse. In the Turkmen version of the epic, an old woman steals the hero's horse. According to B. Garriyev, the character of Kel Hamza is a reference to the great enemy of the Turkmens, Hamza Mirza. B.Garriyev shows that in some Azerbaijani versions, it is Abbas who steals the hero's horse. This is also a reference to Shah Abbas. It seems that the people were afraid to openly mention the names of those above, and expressed their hatred in this way.

One of the enemy characters that we often encounter in various versions of the epic is Arab Reyhan or Reyhan Arab. Although the Arab Reyhan is an enemy character, he is depicted as a hero and a brave man in the epic. In some Azerbaijani variants of the epic, when Koroglu sets out to bring Eyvaz, he encounters Arap Reyhan. Arap Reyhan also knew that Eyvaz was brave and wanted to add him to his group. After Koroglu takes Eyvaz with him to Çanlıbel, he becomes enemies with Arab Reyhan. In the end, Eyvaz kills Arab Reyhan on the orders of Koroglu. In the Turkestan (Central Asian) versions of the epic, it is also narrated that Koroglu and Reyhan Arab were enemies. The 17th century Khan of Khiva, Abulgazi Bahadır Khan, has a work called *The Genealogy of the Turkmens*. This work contains some semi-legendary information about the history and heroism of the Turks. Here, epic heroes such as Oghuz Khan, Dede Korkut, and Kazan Khan are mentioned. A. Samaylovich provided information about the Haji Molla copy of this work. P.N. Boratav and B.A. Garriyev indicate that there is also information about Koroglu in that copy. In this copy, it is shown that Gurd Bahadır married the daughter of the King of Kınık. The girl's name was Halima Khatun. Gurd Bahadır and Halima Khatun had two sons. The second of the sons was named Rancum Koroglu. Koroglu's nickname was Ruvşen. Koroglu sees Ali in a dream. At that time, Arab Reyhan was the ruler of Iran. The battle between the parties ends with the victory of Koroglu. As can be seen, it is said here that Koroglu saw Ali in a dream and fought with Arab Reyhan.

One of the most striking points in this copy is that Koroğlu sees Ali in his dream. Interestingly, it is possible to come across the character of Ali, one of the well-known leaders of the Islamic religion, in both the Eastern and Western versions of the *Koroğlu* epic. We almost never encounter the image of Ali in the Anatolian versions of the epic. However, in some Azerbaijani versions, the character of Ali can be found. Ali's character is seen in the story of Ağcaguzu. Ağcaguzu is the son of Koroglu. Koroglu and a girl named Bilgeyis love each other. One day, while fleeing from Hasan Pasha's army, an arrow pierced the girl's back and she died. Their baby, who was left in the cave, is suckled by a wolf. Later, Hasan Pasha learned about this child and had him brought to his palace. But Hasan Pasha does not know for sure that this boy is the son of Koroglu. When this boy breaks up with the girl he loves, Ali appears before him and gives his power to this boy for forty days. Ali advises Aghjaghuzu to go to Chanlibel and ask for help from Koroglu. Koroglu helps Aghjaghuzu. When Koroglu returns, Ali appears before him. Koroglu soon realizes

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Ali's power. Ali informs Koroglu that Aghjaghuzu is Koroglu's own son. As can be seen, Ali here is a mythologized figure who possesses extraordinary power and uses this power for good purposes.

The character of Ali can also be found frequently in Eastern versions of the epic. Here too, Ali is traditionally presented as wise and benevolent. The character of Ali in the Uyghur version of the epic is particularly striking. Ahmed Khan has a very beautiful sister named Zülper Ayım. Ahmed Khan is the ruler of a place called Chambil. Ahmed Khan was very protective of his sister. One day, while Ali was passing by the garden where Zülper Ayım was, on the back of his horse named Duldul, he saw this girl. Ali likes this girl very much and in his heart he wishes for her to bear him a child. Meanwhile, Zülper Ayım gets pregnant. The girl told her mother about the situation. Zülper Ayım prays to God to die because she cannot look at her brother's face. God accepts this girl's prayer. Then, a boy is born to Zülper Ayım in the grave. Because she was born in a grave, this boy is given the name *Goroglu*, which means "son of the grave". The character of Ali can also be found in other Turkic epics. For example, the character of Ali is found in the famous Turkic epic *Alpamish* that originated in Central Asia. Another character who resembles Ali in various versions of the epic *Koroglu* is Khidr. In Turkic epics, we come across the depiction of Khidr more frequently than Hz. Ali. Examples of such Turkic epics include *Satug Bughra* and *Dede Korkut*. In these epics, Khidr is usually presented as a guide and savior. For example, in the epic *Dede Korkut*, the wounded Bugac is saved thanks to Khidr. In the *Koroglu* epic, Khidr has undertaken various functions, and in the Uyghur version of the epic, Khidr gives the hero of the epic a lifespan of one hundred and twenty years, which is an example of what we are saying. In the Anatolian variants of the epic, this luminous figure enters the hero's father's dream, which is also an example of what we are saying. We almost never encounter the character of Khidr in the Azerbaijani versions of the epic *Koroglu*. Instead, these variants feature the character of Ashiq Junun, who guides Koroglu. But Ashiq Junun has no extraordinary characteristics. In the epic, he is described as an ordinary person. But Ashiq Junun is a wise man. When Koroglu grows old and his friends leave him, Ashiq Junun gathers everyone together again.

In the *Koroglu* epic, the companions of the hero also have an important place. In the Anatolian versions of the epic, there is almost no accurate information about how many companions the hero has. In the Azerbaijani version, there are 7777 brave men next to the hero. In the Azerbaijani version, these brave men are called "dali". The word "Dali" previously means brave in Turkic. However, today this word means "a person who has lost their mind" in many Turkic dialects. In the Azerbaijani version, Koroglu's heroic companions are widely mentioned. Examples of these brave men include Deli Hasan, Balli Ahmed, Demircioğlu, Halaypozan and others. In the Central Asian variants of the epic, the number of Koroglu's companions is usually forty. This is a number frequently encountered in Turkic epics. Heroes like Shu, Satuk Buğra also had 40 friends. The same thing can be seen in the epics of *Dede Korkut*. However, in the Uzbek version of the epic *Koroglu*, 90 brave men gathered around the hero.

One of the interesting characters that appears in various variants of the epic is Hasan. Hasan is, in some versions, biological son of Koroglu, and sometimes the stepson. Sometimes they are depicted as two brave men who meet by chance. In the Urfa variant of the epic, Hasan is the son of an Indian king. Hasan encounters Khidr. Khidr blesses Hasan. Then, when he faces Koroglu, Hasan defeats Koroglu. Hasan loves the daughter of the Chinese king. Koroglu's companions help Hasan to reunite with the girl he loves. In the Azerbaijani version of *Koroglu*, Koroglu loves a girl named Momina Hanım. When Koroglu breaks up with the girl he loves, he gives his bracelet to Momina so that she can give it to her child in the future. When Hasan grows up, he comes to Çanlıbel. The two heroes confront each other. Hasan defeats Koroglu twice. Koroglu defeats Hasan the third time. Then Hasan says who he is. Father and son recognize each other. In the Central Asian versions of the epic, Koroglu adopts Hasan, like Eyvaz.

In different versions of the epic, the sides the hero fights on are different. The Central Asian variants of the epic portray the hero's battles with the Iranians, which B. Garriyev interprets as a reflection of the wars between the Central Asian khanates and Iran. The Azerbaijani variants of the epic describe the hero's wars with Iran and the Ottoman Empire. In the Anatolian variants, we can see Koroglu fighting against the Ottoman sultan, the Iranians, the Chinese, and the Russians.

In different versions of the epic, the hero's end is also depicted in different ways. In Central Asian variants, the hero's end is narrated in various forms. For example, in one of the Turkmen versions, Shah Abbas' men behead Goroglu. We see a similar plot in the Paris copy of *Koroglu*. In another Azerbaijani version of *Koroglu*, the hero grows old and separates from his companions. But in the end, thanks to Ashig Junun, everyone comes together again. Koroglu continues his heroic deeds again. The Anatolian variants of the epic also depict the hero's end in different ways. For example, in the Maraş version of the epic, Koroğlu disappears in a cave. We see a similar plot in the epic about Seytek. F. Bayat also draws attention to the fact that this motif is characteristic of Turkic epics.

CONCLUSION

As can be seen, there are various versions of the *Koroglu* epic in Turkic geography. Interestingly, many peoples neighboring the Turks were also influenced by this epic and created new versions of it for themselves. Examples of such peoples include Georgians, Armenians, Tajiks, etc. These versions and variants are sometimes so different from each other that they seem like separate epics. Upon careful examination, we can see that the deep mythical motifs of this epic go back to much earlier times. The main reason why the versions and variants of *Koroglu* are so different is related to historical time and geographical space.

However, it should be noted that there are also quite a few similarities between these versions and variants. It is true that in the Eastern versions of the epic, the hero is called *Goroglu*, meaning "son of the grave," because he was born in a grave, and in the Western versions, he is called *Koroglu*, meaning "son of a blind man," because his father's eyes were gouged out. The plot of the Eastern and Western versions is built on these two basic motifs. However, there are many similarities that connect the Eastern and Western versions of the epic. For example, in the Eastern variants of the epic, it is possible to come across depictions of the hero's father or grandfather having his eyes gouged out.

From this comparative analysis, it can be concluded that *Koroglu* is not only a valuable product of Turkic oral tradition but also a monumental epic that occupies a distinguished place in world literature. Despite significant regional differences, the shared mythological structure and core narrative elements demonstrate its unified cultural roots and long-standing importance across diverse Turkic and non-Turkic communities.

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