


EPIC CULTURE IN TURKMEN LITERATURE

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ABSTRACT

Turkmen; with its rich oral cultural products, strong national ties and dynamic lifestyle, it forms an important part of the Turkish cultural circle. In various sources, there is information that the epic is composed of poetry or parable genres, with the mention that it is based on the literary reworking of prose genres such as tales, legends, and narrations, and that it is written as a mixture of verse and prose in literatures based on the Turkish language. In this respect, the concept of epic is considered as an important part of the literary heritage, social memory, written and oral tradition, although it is considered within the category of "parable" in folk literature in Turkmen culture. In this tradition, under the title of "dessan", the concept of the term is quite broad compared to other traditions and Turkish literature, since many topics related to social life are covered besides the themes of heroism, love, religion, history and music. In this study, the nature of the concept of epic, which has an important place in the literary tradition of Turkmenistan, the performers, the musical instruments used, the schools of bahshilik and the ways of epic are emphasized.

Key Words: Turkmen epic tradition, epic performers, bahshilik schools

Türkmen Literatüründe Destan Kültürü

ÖZET

Türkmenler; zengin sözlü kültür ürünleri, güçlü millî bağları ve dinamik yaşam tarzı ile Türk kültür dairesinin önemli bir parçasını oluşturur. Muhtelif kaynaklarda destanın genellikle masal, efsane, rivayet gibi mensur türlerin edebî açıdan yeniden işlenmesi esasında ortaya çıktığından bahisle şiir ya da kıssa türlerinden teşekkül ettiği, Türk diline dayalı edebiyatlarda da manzum ve mensur karışık olarak yazıldığı bilgisi yer alır. Bu bakımdan destan mefhumu, Türkmen kültüründe halk edebiyatının "kıssa" kategorisi içerisinde ele alınmakla birlikte edebî mirasın, toplumsal hafızanın, yazılı ve sözlü geleneğin mühim bir parçası olarak idrak edilmektedir. Bu gelenekte "dessan" başlığı altında kahramanlık, aşk, din, tarih ve müzik temalarının yanında sosyal hayata dair pek çok konu işlendiği için terimin kavram alanı, diğer geleneklere ve Türkiye literatürüne göre oldukça geniştir. Bu çalışmada Türkmenistan edebî geleneğinde önemli bir yer tutan destan kavramının mahiyeti, icracılar, kullanılan müzik aletleri, bahşılık mektepleri ve destancılık yolları gibi konular üzerinde durulmuştur.

Anahtar Kelimeler: Türkmen destan geleneği, destan icracıları, bahşılık mektepleri

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Introduction

1. The Nature of the Concept of Epic in Turkmen

Considering the spread areas of the epic in the Dictionary of Classical Turkmen Literature (Ahallı & Meredov, 1988: 106); A general definition has been made as *the epic genre in the literature and folklore of the peoples of the Near and Middle East and Southwest Asia*. In the Annotated Dictionary of Turkmen Turkish (Kıyasova et al., 2016: 276); The concept of epic, which is defined as a literary genre peculiar to folk literature and classical literature, in which poetry and parable are mixed, themes of love and heroism are handled, of course, has a unique tradition. As a matter of fact, because of this epic tradition, epics; In general, it is similar in terms of language, style and fiction and presents a common framework to the reader.

When the concept of epic is examined within the Turkish literary tradition; It is assumed that it was transferred to divan literature and then to folk poetry and folk language under the influence of Iran (Elçin, 1988: 34). Epic is a type of verse that is performed by the minstrel by narrating a case, an object or a concept that is worth making an epic without subject limitation, and depending on the attitude of the lover to narrate the subject he deals with in the oral culture environment, accompanied by traditional minstrel moods (Çobanoğlu, 2000: 3). In Banarlı's words, the epic is "a folk literature product rooted in history and inspired by history" (1971: 2). Therefore, the epic is considered as one of the oldest folk literature products that emerged in the form of verse after the legends, which are considered to be works that did not gain a full aesthetic identity in the life of a tribe, nation or nation (Elçin, 1986: 72). These anonymous products, which are based on oral tradition, are handled as long, didactic stories formed around the epic and real lives of "hero-wise" personalities who hold the will of the society in their hands in time and space.

To meet the concept of epic, the upper terms *dessan* [dessa:n] and *epos* are used in Modern Turkmen Turkish. Baymuhammet Atalıyeviç Garriyev (Erdem, 2002: 1422) states that the word *dessan* in Turkmen is used in two different senses to express a literary genre in a broader perspective, as well as being used in a narrow framework as in the dictionary, in the name of "an event, historical case, story, poem". According to the Turkmen folklorist Hocamırat Goçmıradov (2010: 144), who maintains similar views on the use of epic in the broad and narrow sense; In its broad sense, it includes heroic narratives, that is, *epos*, while in its narrow sense it covers the subjects of love and social life.

Therefore, in the Turkmen epic tradition, some narrations are called "epos" and some are called "dessan". This situation inevitably affects the definition of epic in Turkmenistan. Seyit Garriyev says that the word "dessan" in Turkmenistan means *the oral and written works of the past, which have a plot, written in verse and prose* (Şahin, 2010: 58-59). According to him, in these works, which are also called "folk epic", the obstacles that boys and girls who love each other face in order to reunite, and overcoming these obstacles and reaching their goals are told. Also, according to Garriyev, "folk epic" was formed later than *epos*. With this view, Garriyev brings the term "dessan" closer to the "folk tale" in Turkey and uses the term only to refer to stories about love. Babış Mammedyazov supports Seyit Garriyev's understanding of "dessan" and expresses the heroic narratives with "epos" and the love narratives with the term "dessan". As Şahin pointed out, since the lexical meaning of the term epic in Turkmen tradition is different, it gives rise to various definitions.

Naciye Ata Yıldız (2015: 74), who draws attention to the scope of the concepts of *epic* (*dessan*) and *epos*, states that unlike other traditions, there are no terms such as *lirio-epos/gashıgtık epos* in the Turkmen tradition, the term *dessan* is more inclusive, and epics with love and social themes cannot be called *epos*. For this reason, he is of the opinion that the area

covered by the term *dessan* is wider than *epos*. To summarize, the term *liro-epic* is used in Turkmen folk literature as opposed to “*liro-epos*” expressed in Kyrgyz, Kazakh, Bashkir, Tatar, and Uzbek written languages. *Epos* for heroic and voluminous works such as Manas Epic, Gorogly/Koroglu Epic in academic literature; It is seen that the terms *epope* or *epic* are frequently used to express both heroic texts and literary genre.

As stated above, there is a terminological difference arising from the scope of the concepts of *epic* (*dessan*) and *epos*, and this difference has been clarified by some researchers. In this context, Çobanoğlu (2013: 14-15) states that the concept of epic has a wide usage including folk tales, religious biographical stories and national epics. However, he says that it is appropriate to use the term *epic*, which consists of the words “epic” and “*destan*”, to distinguish the term *epic* from other terms and *epic destan* used in the Turkic world.

However, this naming will be insufficient in terms of describing epic subjects other than heroic epics, especially in Turkmen Turkish. Because contrary to popular belief, there is the term *liro-epic* in the Turkmen epic tradition and this term includes epics with love and social themes, which are considered under the concept of folk epics. On the other hand, the term proposed by Çobanoğlu does not have a usage to represent the epics of *bahshilik*.

In this context, Aman Kekilov (1979: 44) states that the Turkmen literature before the October Revolution consisted mainly of *lyric* and *lyric-epic* works. He adds that he means folk epics by the term “*liro-epic work*”, but that this expression will, of course, be insufficient to cover all folk epics.

Therefore, although Turkmen folk epics are basically included in the category of epic genres, it can be said that they are lyric-epic works because they contain lyric and drama elements.

2. Turkmen Epic Tradition

As Bekmiradov points out, the existence of three literary traditions (1987: 12-13) is mentioned in the history of Turkmen literature. The first one is the ***Bookish tradition***, in which works in the genre of “*gazel*” are mainly written with the influence of Arabic and Persian literature. This tradition, which is also called the *bookish style*, gained momentum with the pen of the classical period Turkmen poet Devletmehmet Azadi. The second is the ***Oghuznamechilik tradition***, which is based on the folk language and intensely “poetry” works. This tradition, also known as *Turkmen genealogy tradition*, takes its source from ancient national roots and folklore. This literary understanding was especially revived with the works of classical period Turkmen poets Nurmuhmet Andalip’s and Makhtumkuli Fraghi’s. The third is; it is the ***Epic tradition***, in which works written in a mixture of poetry and “parable”, in other words, in verse and prose, are given.

In addition to these traditions, it is necessary to mention the Mahtumkulu school, which brings literature closer to the language of the people and adopts a simple style that everyone can easily understand while preparing their works. As a matter of fact, his style and understanding of art dealt with the daily life of the people as a ***realistic literary tradition*** and had a serious impact on poets and writers after him. In this respect, Makhtumkuli’s poem “*Sevmişem Seni*” has the appearance of an anthology of epics and has undertaken an important function in reminding the realistic literary tradition and reflecting rational thought.

Undoubtedly, Nurmuhmet Andalip is the most important representative of the epic tradition in Turkmen literature, in which epics with heroic themes stand out. The three traditions mentioned also show epistemic conformity with the long-known periods of *formation* (core), *spread* and *compilation* of epics.

In Bekmiradov's opinion (1987: 14), the epic tradition has been shaped by feeding from two main branches (the traditions of the Oghuz and Kipchak Turks) and has survived to the present day. While the *Kipchak epic tradition* was based on *oral literature*, the *Oghuz epic tradition* was built on *written literature*. It is seen that the works in the Oghuz epic understanding were written with two basic methods. The works written in the masnavi verse form are considered in the *classical method* category, while the works written in the poetry type are evaluated in the *folk method* category.

Among the epic poets, Nurmuhamet Andalip is one of the most mentioned Classical Turkmen Literature representatives. Andalip, who is also very busy with translation activities, benefiting from both Turkmen folk oral tradition and written literature, as well as epics such as *Leyli-Mecnun*, *Yusup-Züleyha*, *Zeynelarap*, *Babarövşen*, such as *Oghuznama*, *Sagdi Vakgas*, *Melike-Mährinigär*, *Nesimi*, and *Kıssayı-ı Pırgun*. He also produced various works. In addition to this, Begmirat Gerey (2011: 24) lists Andalip's translated epics in his paper called "Andalip and Oghuznama" as follows: *Maksatnama*, *Dört Peri*, *Mürze Hemdem*.

To summarize the subject; Turkmen literary epic tradition after Nurmuhamet Andalip, in chronological order, besides the distinguished names of the classical period such as *Abdulla Şabende*, *Şeydayı*, *Gurbanalı Magrupı*, *Mırat Talibi*, *Övezmuhammet Bahri*, *Mollamurat Horezmi*, *Mollanepes*, *Seyitnazar Seydi*, *Misgingılıç* and known as *Mollamurt*, *Allahveren Hocaniyaz* (died 1930), one of the representatives of the modern period, continued.

Although there are many classification attempts, Seyit Garriyev first collects Turkmen epics under three main headings according to their mazmuna, idea and subject (1982, from Nuraliyev, 1991). Afterwards, it deals with Turkmen epics in six sub-categories with a thematic classification (Garriyev, 1982: 38-54):

- 1- Realistic love epics: *Leyli-Mecnun*, *Zöhre-Tahir*.
- 2- Fantastic love epics: *Seypelmelek-Methalcemal*, *Gül-Senuber*.
- 3- Heroic epics
 - a. Epics of love and heroism: *Gül-Bilbil*.
 - b. War epics: *Yusup-Ahmet*, *Alı Beg-Balı Beg*, *Hocamberdi Han*.
- 4- Realist epics
 - a. Historical heroic epics: *Dövletyar* (Magrupı), *Batır Nepes* (Misgingılıç), (The epics of Muhammad Rahim and Dovan).
 - b. Biographical epics: *Goşa Pudagım* (Seydi), *Dervüş Bahrı* (Basrı), *Talıbı-Sahıpcemal* (Talıbı).
 - c. Epics on love and social: *Emir-Zerli* (Molla Murt).
- 5- Religious epics
 - a. Love epics about religion: *Yusup-Züleyha*.
 - b. Religious-legendary epics: *Baba Rövsen*, *Zeynel Arap*, *İbrahim Edhem*.
- 6- Translated epics: *Murze Hemdem* translated from Persian by Andalip.

According to Aman Kekilov, most of the Turkmen folk epics emerged on the basis of reworking folk tales. As an example, he states that it would be sufficient to compare the tale "Mämmetjan", which is famous among Turkmens, and *Hüyrlukga-Hemra*, one of the Turkmen folk epics whose author is unknown. He states that this situation is also in question for epics such as *Zöhre-Tahir* Epic, whose author is known (Mollanepes), even though it is known as a story in our country. (Ilyasova, 2018: 8). Kekilov gives the following information about the nature of Turkmen epics (Goçmiradov, 2010: 145):

- 1- Almost all Turkmen epics have emerged on the basis of fairy tales and legends.
- 2- In the narrative, the story and the poem are used alternately and the narrative language is close to the folk language.
- 3- The compositional structure of the epics, the description of the heroes and their qualities are also close to each other.
- 4- The characters and actions of the heroes are given ready for the reader rather than the inferences about the events.
- 5- The beginnings and endings of the events in the epics are similar.
- 6- At the end of the events in the epic, justice is favored and exalted.

3. Turkmen Epic Performers and Musical Instruments

In the Turkish cultural basin, it is seen that the artists who sing epics are generally given names such as *bahşı*, *bagşı*, *baksı*, *destancı*, *ozan*, *şair*, *akın*, *ahun*, *jırav*, *halıpa*, *sazçı*, *gayçı*, *olonghohut*, *cirçi*, *sanavçı*, *sazanda*, *kıssahan*, *yüzbaşı*. The use of “bahşı”, one of the mentioned concepts, apart from the term meanings, is also noteworthy.

According to Talat Tekin, the word *bahşı*, which means *Buddhist monk, teacher*, is a borrowed word from Chinese to Old Turkish. Tekin (2003: 230) states that this word, whose modern Chinese is *bo-shi*, is thought to be the Old Chinese form *pāk-si*, that it is widely used in Uyghur Turkish meaning *khoja, teacher*, and that it has also undergone a meaning change when used together with the Old Turkish word *otaçı*, meaning *doctor*, “baksı” means in Kazakh Turkish *shaman, magician*. “Bakshi” means *doctor, shaman* in Kyrgyz Turkish, “bagşı” same word containing the meaning of *bard, ashik, epic teller, storyteller* in Turkmen Turkish, *clerks and calligraphers who know and use the Uyghur script* in the Ottoman palace are called “bahşı”.

According to the Turkmen epic understanding; the epics, which are thought to be epic works in which an entire event is expressed in the form of prose and poetry, are sung by *gürriñçi*, *şahandaz* and especially *dessançı bagşılar* (epic tellings) from among the people, as well as *kıssahan*'s (qisahan) (Otdıyev & Atdayeva, 2010: 13).

There are written copies of both folk epics and epics with author compiled from bahshis or from the people's mouth. In the copies compiled from the bahshis, the anecdote (prose) and poetry (folk song) sections are given together. However, the copies compiled from the mouth of the people are only anecdotes. Therefore, the copies compiled from the mouth of the people are not performed by the bahshis, but by the *qisahans*.

In the Turkmen epic tradition, bahshis singing folk songs or just telling epics accompanied by musical instruments called *dutar*, *gıcak*, *gopuz*, *gargı tüydük*, *goşa gargı tüydük*, *dilli tüydük*, *goşa/iki dilli tüydük*, *rubab*, *tar*; due to the richness of their repertoire and the bahşı schools to which they belong, they differ from each other in the performance of epics. Considering other differences, it is seen that various terms are used for epic narrators in addition to bahshis in epic terminology.

It is possible to collect the Turkmen bahshi art under two main concepts called *dessançı* and *tirmeçi* (Gurbanova & Yakubova, 2012: 98). In this context, masters who train bahshis materially and spiritually are called *halıpa bagşı* (the master bahshi), and the term *dessançı bagşı* (the epic teller) is used to distinguish those who tell epics from those who sing folk songs. Those who perform folk songs or folk songs in the epic and eposta with the accompaniment of musical instruments, and those who read the poems in the text of the epic are called *tirmeçi bahshi* (tirmeçi bagşı) so that means compiler/performer bahshi; those who, after telling the

“story” part of the epic, perform the parts in the form of “poetry” as folk songs are called *dessançı* (Gıyasova et al., 2016: 276).

However, those who can't play the instrument themselves but sing along with the “tüydük” instrument played by someone else are called *yanamachi* (Gurbanova & Yakubova, 2012: 96); those who utter the stories or narrations in their repertoire or write literary texts are called *kıssaç/kıssahan* (qisahan); generally, those who tell love and lyric epics are called *dessançı şahır* (epic telling poet). As mentioned above, when it comes to epic poets, Nurmuhmet Andalip, one of the most powerful representatives of Classical Turkmen Literature, is among the first names that come to mind. Andalip has brought many works to this rich cultural atlas by benefiting from both Turkmen folk oral tradition and written literature.

4. Bahshilik Schools and Epic Ways (Epic Execution Styles)

In addition to the richness of the repertory and musical techniques of the bahshis, another factor that was effective in the emergence of different “bahshilik schools” or “epic ways” in the Turkmen epic understanding is the nomadic lifestyle (Otdıyev & Atdayeva, 2010: 18). Accordingly, the art of bahshilik on the basis of scattered Turkmen tribes (crew) developed and shaped through various *ways (styles)*, like springs fed from the same source.

Melek Erdem classifies the *Turkmen bahshilik schools* as follows, taking into account the places where the tradition of bahshih is concentrated (1997: 280-284):

1. Dashhovuz School
2. Charcev School
3. Mangishlak School
4. Ashgabat School
5. Merv School

When we look at the literature on the subject, it is seen that regional names such as *Ahal, Mari, Dashhovuz, Lebap, Balkan* are used as a criterion in classifying the “bahshilik ways”.

There are various approaches to the number and nomenclature of bahshish ways in Turkmenistan using different criteria. While some sources give a classification based on stature, others are based on the region. According to the information provided by S. Z. Kominek, Turkmen bahshis were collected in eight “ways” (epic execution styles) (2005, from Şahin, 2010):

- 1- Yomut-Goklen epic style
- 2- Chovdur epic style
- 3- Ata epic style
- 4- Ärsari epic style
- 5- Salir-Sarik epic style
- 6- Ahal-Teke epic style
- 7- Damana epic style
- 8- Kazanjik epic style.

Although there is a tradition of poetry in all of these ways, there is no tradition of epic in the schools of Ahal-Teke, Kazancık, Ata, Ärsarı (Yıldız, 2015: 77). The existence of three types of sound effects draws attention in the formation of Turkmen bahshi ways and in distinguishing bahshis in terms of execution: “cukguldamak”, “hülemek” and “hümlemek”. The

aforementioned sound effects are considered an important criterion in revealing the regional identity of the bahs as well as revealing the performance styles (Taylor & Smith, 2011: 35).

However, it is extremely new and remarkable in terms of Turkmen folklore studies that “epic paths” (epic style) are categorized independently of “bahshilik paths” in the list prepared by Annagurban Asirov within the scope of Intangible Cultural Heritage in 2013 to be submitted to UNESCO.

Results

There are many epic definitions made by epic researchers; it is known that anonymous works written in various forms, in which the adventures of a nation are expressed by combining them around a hero, or after a great event called “epic core” in general, are called epics.

Although it has been stated that the concept of “destan” (epic) in Turkish literature has a wide usage including folk tales, biographical religious stories and national epics and that the term “epik destan” will meet the concept of epic in other Turkish dialects (Çobanoğlu, 2003: 14), in fact, it should be noted that this concept is quite inadequate in describing the scope of love, gardening and other epics on social issues. As a matter of fact, it is not possible to discuss an epic that directly deals with the Turkmen tradition of bahshilik, such as the epic of Necep Oglan, under the title of “epik destan”.

The meaning of the concept of “*dessan*” in the Turkmen literary understanding is wider than the concepts such as *epos*, *epopee*, *epic*, *heroic* borrowed from Western literature in terms of scope and differs from other Turkish communities. In this respect, the term “*liro-epic*” is used in Turkmen folk literature as opposed to the term “*liro-epos*” expressed in Uzbek, Kazakh, Kyrgyz, Bashkir and Tatar written languages.

For example, while the term *epos* is applied to express the heroic and voluminous works such as the Gorogli Epic or the Manas Epic, the terms *epope* or *epic* are used to express both *the heroic texts* and *the literary genre*. The concept of “*dessan*”, on the other hand, is used as a “roof concept” that includes all these narratives, that is, both *heroic issues* and *other topics related to social life*.

It is possible to consider Turkmen epics under six headings in terms of their subjects: *heroic epics*, *love epics*, *religious epics*, *biographical epics*, *fantastic epics* and *translated epics*. All these narratives are important in terms of transferring the Turkmen society’s view of life, traditions and norms of socio-cultural values to the next generations.

The term “*erteki epos*”, which is not found in the epic literature of other Turkish communities, was needed in Turkmen Turkish because the Turkmen epics, which took their source from the Oghuznames and were formed in a period when written literature and oral tradition were intertwined, were mainly built on *fairy tales*, *legends* and *narration* types.

This term, which is associated with the *parable* part of the epics in terms of similarity, evokes a heroic narrative in the form of a fairy tale in terms of genre and content, and also refers to the ancientness of the narrative time. As a matter of fact, the need to indicate the antiquity of this narrative time exists in terms of *arhaic epos* or *könö epos*, which are common in Kyrgyz and Kazakh epic literature.

However, in the study, four epic traditions were mentioned in general. These can be listed as follows according to their historical background: *Oghuznamechilik Tradition*, *Bookish Tradition*, *Epic Tradition*, *Realistic Literary Tradition*.

The Turkmen epic tradition should be perceived as a whole with the donation tradition as well as its rich oral knowledge. In particular, the fact that only a part of Turkmen epics was written down is remarkable in terms of showing the dynamism of the oral tradition and the importance of bahshis. Of course, the epics that came with oral transmission have undergone serious variants over time and their contents have changed partially. However, no matter how the means of transmission have changed from past to present, it is of vital importance for researchers in terms of reflecting the Turkmen nation's self-identity, national character and cultural codes.

The emergence of new epics, especially on the basis of fairy tales and legends, together with the epics arising from written literature, paved the way for the development of the Turkmen bahşilik art and the emergence of *bahşilik schools* or *ways* (*epic styles*), each of which became a separate school over time. Sometimes *place* or *region* names and sometimes *Turkmen clan* names were used as criteria in the classification of the mentioned schools or ways

In addition to this, it is possible to gather the performers of the epic in terms of Turkmen bahşilik art under two main concepts called *dessançı* and *tirmeçi*. In this tradition, the performers use the following musical instruments: *dutar*, *gıcak*, *gopuz*, *gargı tüydük*, *goşa gargı tüydük*, *dilli tüydük*, *goşa/iki dilli tüydük*, *rubab*, *tar*.

As a result, it can be said that the narratives, which started with the heroic stories of Oghuz Khagan in the Turkmen epic tradition, formed a great narrative tradition by benefiting from the cultural accumulation of the neighboring nations in the historical process, and the epic tradition gained a realistic literary identity with the Makhtumkuli's works.

Information Note

The article has been prepared in accordance with research and publication ethics. This study does not require ethics committee approval.

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