

UDC 82-1(512.1):398:94(479+560.7)

NARRATIVE MEMORY AND HISTORICAL ECHOES: EUHEMERISM IN THE *BOOK OF DEDE KORKUT*

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The Kitab-i Dede Korkut, a foundational epic of the Oghuz Turks, reflects nomadic life, heroic ideals, and cultural values while preserving echoes of historical realities from Anatolia, Azerbaijan, and the Caucasus. Although primarily a literary and folkloric corpus rather than a chronicle, this study analyzes the epic through the theoretical framework of euhemerism in order to evaluate its potential as a historical source. Employing an interdisciplinary methodology that integrates history, literary studies, anthropology, and linguistics, the research conducts comparative textual analysis of the Dresden, Vatican, and Turkmen Sahra manuscripts alongside with contemporaneous sources, including al-Mas‘ūdī’s chronicles, medieval Rus’ accounts, and Abul Ghazi Bahadur Khan’s genealogical works. The findings demonstrate that historical events and figures were incorporated into the epic narrative through the processes of time stratification, narrative fusion, and symbolic transformation. Rather than deification, the epic reflects the sanctification of heroes, which corresponds to its Islamic-era writing. Furthermore, tribal eponyms embedded in characters’ names provide valuable ethnogenetic data, while the coexistence of pre-Islamic shamanistic motifs and Islamic elements illustrates the transitional religious landscape of Turkic societies. Overall, the study shows that euhemerist analysis allows for the identification of historical strata within epic tradition, revealing the Book of Dede Korkut as a repository of collective memory and socio-political experience.

Keywords: *Book of Dede Korkut*; Korkut Ata; euhemerism; medieval Turks; Oghuzs; Shamanism

Introduction

Euhemerism is a rationalist approach that bears the name of Euhemerus of Messenia, an important figure in Greek atheism, who believed that myths and legends derived from historical realities. According to him, gods were originally important ancient individuals who were subsequently deified, becoming the divine figures of myths and legends [Jáuregui 2013]. Unlike *anthropotheism*, which is the humanization of God, *euhemerism* is the deification of humans. In addition to the deification of individuals, hero cult is also one of the distinguishing features of mythology. Both deification and hero cult of individuals can be observed in all ancient and medieval myths and legends. These usually serve to explain the unknown, reinforce moral values, or glorify heroic figures. These long narrative poems celebrating heroic actions usually elevate their heroes to an almost divine

status through either explicit deification (attributing divine qualities) or through a hero cult that reflects reverence for saints and legendary ancestors.

Contemporary scholars began to examine the issue of reality and fiction in medieval epics from the early 20th century, among whom Ludwig Kahn was one of the pioneers [Kahn 1939]. *Der guote Gêrhart*, written by Rudolf von Ems in 1220 to 1230, is a Middle High German narrative poem. It tells the story of Gerhart, a virtuous Cologne merchant whose piety and generosity lead him on a perilous journey to the Holy Land. The poem combines courtly and religious themes while emphasizing divine providence. *The Song of the Nibelungs*, a typical chivalric epic, also contains historical context. Another important medieval epic, *Beowulf*, was written in Anglo-Saxon England and set in 6th-century Scandinavia. This epic reflects the transition of pre-Christian Germanic warrior society to Christianity. The transition from pagan beliefs to monotheistic religion makes for a reasonable comparison. Studies on Italian prose romances through the lens of euhemerism show that they combine biographical (individual, episodic, single hero) and compilation (cyclical, interwoven, multi-heroic) models [Krueger 2004, 209].

Medieval poetry and epic literature contain abundant exemplars that warrant euhemerist analysis, yielding discernible historical correlates and analogues. When *Kitab-i Dede Korkut* or, according to the Dresden manuscript, *Kitab-i Dedem Korkut* is examined using the same approach, it can be seen that various historical realities have been transformed into an epic. In many cases, this represents a combination of events spanning multiple centuries and involving multiple historical figures. In this context, *Kitab-i Dede Korkut* encompasses the cult of heroism, semi-deification, in other words sanctification, the interweaving of different historical times in a single narrative, and the merging of many historical personalities into a single person.

The study employs an interdisciplinary approach to examine the *Book of Dede Korkut*, the foundational epic of the Oghuz Turks, through the theoretical framework of euhemerism and historical analysis. While interdisciplinary methodologies have been increasingly applied to Dede Korkut scholarship in recent decades, the paper synthesizes perspectives from history, literature, anthropology, and linguistics to offer a euhemerist reading that places the epic's narratives within their medieval historical context. The analysis built on established interdisciplinary traditions in Dede Korkut studies, seeks to deepen understanding of the epic's cultural matrices and historical strata. Special importance is given to the Oghuz migrations, their conflicts with the Pechenegs and Kipchaks, and later their interactions with the Georgians and other Christians in establishing the historical context, as reflected in the epic's narratives.

From anthropological and cultural perspectives, the epic is accepted as a cultural work reflecting Oghuz identity, values and social structures. Furthermore, the study examining environmental elements and the heroes' attitudes toward these elements attempts to reveal Oghuz ecological relationships. Most importantly, the epic is examined from religious and mythological standpoints, investigating the interaction between pre-Islamic shamanistic beliefs and Islamic influences in the epic's motifs. It is important to note that while the *Book of Dede Korkut* is a monument of the Oghuz Turks, it is a product of the Islamic age. Since Islam does not accept associating partners with Allah, deification is not possible in the epic saga. Here, instead of deification, we see sanctification, heroization, and personification of natural objects.

To examine the subject through a euhemerist lens, a comparative textual analysis of the epic against other medieval sources is essential. The historical analysis of the Dresden and Vatican manuscripts necessitates systematic comparison with contemporaneous documentary evidence. Therefore, the study draws upon several primary sources, including al-Mas'ūdī's 10th-century geographical-historical compendium *Murūj al-dahab wa-ma'ādin al-jawhar* ("The Meadows of Gold and Mines of Gems") [Mesudi 2004], medieval Rus' chronicles [IICPJ 1963], and related historiographical materials. Additionally,

Abul Ghazi Bahadur Khan's 17th-century genealogical chronicle *Shajara-i Tarākima* (Genealogy of the Turkmens), composed in Chagatai Turkic, provides valuable comparative perspectives despite its later provenance [Ebülğazi 1974].

Apart from the Dresden and Vatican manuscripts, in 2019 a new manuscript was discovered in Turkmen Sahra or Gunbed and published almost simultaneously in Istanbul by Youssef Azmun [Azmun 2019] and Metin Ekici [Ekici 2019]. Shortly after, the Turkmen scholar Muradgelgi Soyegov published these newly discovered stories in Russian [Соєгов 2019]. Studies conducted on the manuscript show that the geography and ethnic composition of the epic stories in Turkmen Sahra and in the previous manuscripts almost overlap. It is noteworthy that the Turkmen Sahra manuscript contains Azerbaijan as the location.

Since the 19th century, Friedrich von Diez, Theodor Nöldeke, V. V. Bartold, V. Zhirmunsky, Geoffrey Lewis, Turkish scholars Kilisli Muallim Rifat, Muharrem Ergin, Orhan Shaik Gokyay, F. Kirzioglu, as well as Azerbaijani scholars Hemid Arasli, Ferhad Zeynalov, Samet Alizade and others have examined and translated the manuscript. Suleyman Aliyarli is one of the earliest researchers in Azerbaijan to systematically incorporate the *Kitab-i Dede Korkut* as primary source material in historical analysis. Aliyarli's methodological approach prioritizes the deployment of this epic narrative as evidentiary support for ethnogenetic investigations concerning Azerbaijani populations. T. A. Anikeeva's research on ancient Turkic worldview elements in the Dede Korkut epic shows how pre-Islamic cosmological beliefs persisted within Islamic-era textual tradition [Аниеева 2005; 2018; 2021].

Dede Korkut in Light of Euhemerist Theory

While the *Kitab-i Dede Korkut* does not present explicitly deified protagonists, it incorporates semi-sacred and heroic characterizations. Within the epic's pantheon of significant personages, Dede Korkut, alternatively designated as Korkut Ata, occupies a position of considerable prominence. Although Korkut Ata is not the narrator of the stories, the epic's *Muqaddima* (Introduction) begins with a message about him and he appears with his *kopuz* at the end of each story to complete the narration. The frequent occurrence of the designation Korkut in the epic text reached such prominence that upon Jacob Johann Reiske's discovery of the manuscript in the Dresden library in 1770s, the German Arabist ascribed the poem to Ottoman Prince Korkut. Reiske's assumption cannot be evaluated as the identification of an epic character with a real historical personality. This is most likely a decision taken without conducting an in-depth analysis of the essence of the text.

First, it should be noted that Dede Korkut himself is undoubtedly a generalized image of a shaman, a sacred and mystical religious figure. This idea was put forward by P. N. Boratav and supported by many researchers [Boratav 2010, 34]. Most researchers, indeed it can be said all of them, have concluded that the image of Korkut Ata in the epic carries characteristics of Shamanism and Tengrism from the pre-Islamic beliefs of the Turks. The euhemerist lens is particularly valuable here, as it allows us to distinguish between authentic historical memory and subsequent mythologization. Rather than dismissing Korkut Ata as purely legendary, euhemerism makes us to investigate the historical substrate – real shamanic practitioners whose collective memory became crystallized in a single emblematic figure.

However, there are somewhat different views regarding the identity of Korkut Ata. Kazakh researcher S. Utegaliyeva argues that Korkut is the designer of the bowed and plucked kobuz/gopuz among Turkic peoples [Утегалиева 2023, 17–31]. Despite this alternative interpretation, scholarly consideration must be given to the demonstrable correspondences between Dede Korkut and the 10th-century Kazakh figure Korkyt, who served as an *ozan* (professional bard), utilized the kopuz as the instrumental medium, and

provided narrative closure through his function as tribal storyteller. At the same time, the epic presents him not only as a musician but also as a sage and herald of the future. S. Utægaliyeva acknowledges that Korkut functioned not merely as a musician but also as a shaman, observing that “in the Oghuz heroic epic Korkut is an ozan/uzan (storyteller), while in Kazakh mythology Korkut is primarily a baksy (baksı), that is, the first shaman” [Утегалиева 2023, 20]. Significantly, these two roles – ozan-singer and prophetic figure-shaman – are inherently interconnected. Given that music and musical instruments constitute integral components of shamanic ritual practice, no contradiction exists between contemporary scholarship and earlier research findings.

In the Introduction of the epic, it is stated: “Near the time of the Prophet, peace be upon him, there arose a man called Korkut Ata from the Bayat tribe. He was the complete knower of the Oghuz. Whatever he said would come to pass. He would tell various news from the unseen. The Almighty would inspire his heart” [Kitabi-Dədə Qorqud 2004, 31].

These textual elements provide several critical data points for analysis. The epic chronologically positions Dede Korkut’s lifespan in approximation to the era of Prophet Muhammad, suggesting a seventh-century temporal framework. Additionally, the narrative establishes his genealogical identity within the Bayat tribal unit of the broader Oghuz tribal system. The characterization subsequently presents an idealized construction of Korkut Ata as a figure possessed of sacred and mystical qualities. This literary treatment demonstrates sanctification and mystification processes while explicitly avoiding deification; instead, the text attributes his exceptional status to divine inspiration.

Academic endeavors to establish Dede Korkut’s historical authenticity have yielded evidence of the name Korkut appearing in multiple textual traditions, accompanied by ethnographic documentation of folk beliefs concerning his burial site. French literary figure Alexandre Dumas, while traveling across the Caucasus region in late 1858, reported visiting Dede Korkut’s purported tomb in Derbent. This account was later incorporated by V. V. Bartold in his 1920s research on Korkut, supporting assertions regarding the tomb’s presence in Derbent. Korkut Ata enjoys widespread recognition across Central Asian cultural spheres, with the specific location of his Kazakhstan burial site having been verified through scholarly documentation and photographic evidence published by Abubekir Divayev in 1900. Divayev’s observations recorded the site’s advanced deterioration and potential for complete structural failure [Диваев 1900, 39–40]. The theoretical frameworks subsequently developed by Kazakh scholars regarding Korkut derive their foundation from this documentary evidence.

The cultural memory of Central Asian societies has maintained Korkut as a *baksı* archetype. Scholarly discourse has generated multiple interpretative approaches regarding the semantic and etymological dimensions of the concept. The analysis foregrounds the morphemic root *bak*, traceable to the verbal form *bakmak* (“to look, to watch”). Azerbaijani linguistic conventions designate individuals professing supernatural prescient abilities as *bakhji*. Thus, the *baksı* functions as a shamanic equivalent, specializing in prophetic divination. Consequently, subjecting Dede Korkut’s literary representation to euhemerist analytical methodology reinforces the thesis that Korkut Ata constitutes a synthesized embodiment of pre-Islamic Turkic shamanic institutions. Ethnological research confirms the extended persistence of ancestral belief structures within Turkic cultural contexts. This phenomenon accounts for the epic’s temporal positioning of Korkut Ata within the prophetic period of Muhammad, despite its compilation during the Islamic era.

Applying euhemerist methodology to Dede Korkut reveals a crucial distinction: we are not confronting a deified historical individual (as classical euhemerism would suggest), but rather a sanctified composite figure representing the institution of shamanic authority itself. This represents an Islamic-era transformation of what would have been outright deification in pre-Islamic contexts.

Some Eponyms in the Book of Dede Korkut

Euhemerism theory proves exceptionally productive when applied to the epic's onomastic landscape. Personal names in heroic epics frequently preserve historical realities through the process of eponym formation – where tribal names become personified as individual heroes, or conversely, where historical leaders' names become markers for entire ethnic groups. This section examines how the Dede Korkut epic encodes genuine ethnogenetic information through its character nomenclature.

The epic mentions the names of famous Turkish dynasties, Osman and Bayandurlu. In fact, the Ottoman dynasty and the Kayi tribe to which this dynasty belonged are mentioned in the Introduction of the epic: “Korkut Ata said: Since recent times, power has been in the hands of the Kayi, and no one will take it away from them until the end of time and the end of the world come. This is the Ottoman dynasty he speaks of, and which continues moving forward” [Ergin 1964, D2V2].

From the commencement of academic study and editorial publication of the epic corpus, scholars have pursued the identification of correlations between epic discourse and verifiable historical reality. This investigative strategy aimed to validate the epic's utility as documentary evidence in historical scholarship while simultaneously establishing temporal frameworks for textual genesis. P. Boratav advanced the thesis that Kan-Turaly, a central figure within the Oghuz epic tradition, constituted the identical personage as the historical Akkoyunlu Tur-Ali Bey [Boratav 2010, 32–33]. Viktor Zhirmunsky, through his chronological assessment of the epic's compositional period, concluded that the narrative sequence detailing Kan-Turaly's nuptial union with the Trapezunt tagavor's daughter retained the historical nomenclature of Emir Turaly, founder of the Bayandur Akkoyunlu lineage, who executed raids against Trabzon in 1348. His successor Kutlu-bek subsequently entered into matrimonial alliance with a Trapezuntine royal, sister of Emperor Alexios III Komnenos, in 1351 [Жирмунский 1974, 530].

The predominant character nomenclature within the epic corresponds to diverse Turkic tribal appellations. These mythologized personas likely function not as representations of particular historical figures but as syncretic embodiments of tribal communities or their administrative leadership. Scholarly documentation establishes that Dede Korkut epic traditions and associated folkloric narratives experienced extensive dissemination beyond Oghuz communities, encompassing broader Turkic ethnolinguistic groups [Erdem 1998, IX]. The epic's textual incorporation of multiple elements derived from the ethnic historiography of Oghuz and additional Turkic populations reflects systematic cultural synthesis rather than fortuitous inclusion. The Dede Korkut epic, despite its status as a fundamental historical artifact of Oghuz civilization, concurrently maintains substantial ethnographic vestiges of Kipchak tribal heritage [Aliyeva 2006, 100].

In the Dede Korkut stories, Salur Kazan Khan – the most prominent hero and ruler of Kalyn-Oghuz – is identified as the son of Ulash [Kitabi-Dədə Qorqud 2004, II, 36; IV, 123]. This genealogical detail gains additional significance in light of a recently discovered manuscript from Turkmen Sahra, which contains a previously unknown story dedicated to Kazan Khan's victory over a dragon [Ekici 2019]. The name Ulash appears not only in epic literature but also in historical records. Russian chronicles document a Kipchak community known as the Ulašević [Из истории... 1968, 644], suggesting that this was an established tribal designation.

The Tale of Igor's Campaign provides detailed context for this group's historical role. During Khan Konchak's campaigns in 1185, Rus forces found themselves surrounded by Polovetsian armies on the morning following their initial victory. As S. Pletneva notes, the Rus princes' lack of strategic foresight allowed the Kipchaks to execute their carefully planned counterattack [Плетнева 1990, 163].

The Ipatiev Chronicle offers more specific information about the tribal composition of Konchak's coalition forces, listing the participating armies as Toksobiči, Kolobiči,

Yetebeçi, Terterobiçi, Torgolovy, and Ulaşeviçi [ИСПЛ 1963, 643]. Notably, the sons of Ulaş (Ulaşeviçi) are included among these allied forces. Following their victory, the Kipchak armies divided the captured prisoners, with each group returning to their respective territories. Significantly, Prince Igor's son Vladimir was taken captive specifically by the Ulaşeviçi [ИСПЛ 1963, 644]. The historical presence of the Ulaş tribe across various regions is preserved in the toponymic record of Azerbaijan and neighboring territories. Several place names document this geographic spread:

- Ulaş: Found in both Azerbaijan and Turkey [Yusifov, Kərimov 1987, Table 11];
- Ulaşly: Documented in Georgia and Azerbaijan [Yusifov, Kərimov 1987, Table 11];
- Ulaşkend: Located in Dagestan [Yusifov, Kərimov 1987, Table 2].

The convergence of epic, historical, and toponymic evidence strongly suggests that Ulaş functioned as both an anthroponym and an ethnonym – that is, it designated not merely an individual but an entire tribal group. While the *Kitab-i Dede Korkut* epic presents Salur Kazan as an Oghuz khan descended from Ulaş, the historical record demonstrates that this same ethnonym was associated with Kipchak tribal confederations.

This dual association connects the geographic scope of the epic tradition to the broader cultural and political landscape of medieval Eurasia, illustrating the complex inter-tribal relationships that characterized the region during this period.

The *Kitab-i Dede Korkut* presents numerous eponymic references correlating with Turkic tribal nomenclatures, among which Uran represents a particularly significant analytical case. The personal designation İlek oğlu Donebilmez Dilek Uran demonstrates recurrent textual appearance throughout multiple narrative segments [Kitabi-Dədə Qorqud 2004, VII, 205, 209; X, 250; XI, 287].

Historical documentation establishes Uran as a recognized Turkic tribal entity maintaining settlements within Central Asian geographical parameters. The sources indicate that Turkic military contingents under Alp-Kara Uran's (or Alp-Darkan's) command operated within Khwarazmshah Tekesh's (1172–1200) military structure during 1181. This commander subsequently established matrimonial connections with the Tekesh dynastic house. Juvayni's chronicled accounts detail military confrontations between armies commanded by Kair-Tuku Khan (Kadir Khan/*Inaljik*) and Tekesh's forces. According to these historical testimonies, Tekesh's 1195 military campaign against Kadir Khan encountered opposition from Alp-Kara's Uran detachment. The ensuing battle resulted in Kadir Khan's tactical victory over Khwarazmshah armies through strategic Uran tribal support [Бартольд 1963, 407]. Hamdullah Qazvini's works similarly reference the Uran tribal confederation. Although direct biographical connections between the historical Alp-Kara Uran and the epic character İlek Koja oğlu Dulek Uran remain unestablished, both figures demonstrate shared Uran tribal identity.

The linguistic analysis of Uran reveals its function as military appellative terminology. Etymological investigation traces the word to the verbal stem *ur* ("to call/shout") combined with morphological suffixes *-an* or *-agan* [Севортян 1974, 602]. Kipchak tribal organizations systematically utilized Uran as military rallying calls facilitating warrior consolidation for expeditionary and competitive activities. These vocalizations incorporated names honoring prominent tribal leadership, especially military commanders, or territorial designations reflecting ancestral habitation zones [Аристов 1896, 300]. The Uyghur-script Oghuz Kagan epic employs the formulation *gök böri bolsun-gil Uran* ("may the celestial wolf become Uran") [Ağca 2016, 11]. Ancient tribal appellations similarly served Uran functions. The term simultaneously operates as ethnonymic classification, parallel to tamga-related ethnonyms such as *koshatamgali*, *ustamgali*, *torttamgali* [Шаниязов 1974, 138].

The *Dede Korkut* textual corpus presents the Uran eponym through İlek Koja oğlu Uran's characterization. The anthroponym İlek oğlu Sary Kalmash exhibits connection to

the identical lexical component *İlek* [Ergin 1964 II, 38]. Scholarly interpretations of this nomenclature vary, with readings including “Elek” (Hemid Araslı), “Elig” (O. Gökyay), and “Eylik” (Ettore Rossi and Muharrem Ergin), all warranting inclusion among historical eponymic categories. The most probable historical parallel involves Ilek Khan (998–1013), establishing the Karakhanid state. Since Elek/İlek constituted official Karakhanid titlature alongside *yabgu* and *kagan* ranks, the polity received designation as the Ilek-khanid state (940–1212), with rulers adopting titles such as Bilge Ilik, Arslan Ilik, and Bogra Ilik [Aliyarlı 2012, 262]. The composite designation *Ilek Koja oğlu Donebilmez Dulek Uran* integrates dual eponymic elements, indicating conceptual interconnection. Considering Karluk tribal association possibilities, the Ilek and Uran eponyms potentially represent Karluk ethnic remnants within Dede Korkut narratives.

S. Aliyarlı’s onomastic research on the Dede Korkut epic determined that Kanly Koja requires textual correction to Kangly Koja. His analysis interprets the Kangly Koja eponym as indicating Kangly tribal representation within epic discourse. The seventh story additionally contains *Balgar bir er* (“a Balgar man”), where “Balgar” correlates with Bulgar Turkic ethnicity [Aliyarlı 2012, 237–239].

The Antiheroes of the Epic

Euhemerist analysis extends beyond protagonists to antagonists, whose negative characterization often preserves authentic historical conflicts. The systematic designation of certain groups as “Melik” adversaries in the epic reflects genuine Oghuz-Kipchak hostilities, transformed through narrative convention into recurring confrontations between heroes and anti-heroes. This section demonstrates how euhemerism illuminates the historical substrate underlying epic antagonism.

The textual discourse of the Dede Korkut stories exhibits systematic references to Melik personalities, invariably depicted as hostile elements in opposition to Oghuz interests. Stories II, III, and IV within the *Kitab-i Dede Korkut* document the following nomenclatures: Iron-bowed Kipchak Melik, Sary Aslan Melik, Sofu Sandal Melik, Shoklu Melik, Kara Tekur Melik, and Bugajyk Melik.

Within this onomastic catalog, only one designation explicitly indicates the tribal identity of the associated Melik figure, namely the Kipchak tribal connection. Scholarly examination demonstrates that Kipchak Melik receives consistently negative portrayal as an adversarial force within the Oghuz narrative construct [Ergin 1964, II, III]. The narrative evidence derived from Dede Korkut stories establishes the existence of strained inter-tribal relations between Kipchak and Oghuz communities, characterized by frequent military encounters that align with verifiable historical circumstances.

The euhemerist reading here is revealing: rather than fictional villains, the Kipchak Meliks represent collective memory of real military opponents. The epic’s narrative framework transforms historical inter-tribal warfare into a mythologized struggle between Oghuz heroes and their enemies, yet the ethnic specificity is preserved – a hallmark of euhemerist transmission.

Mirkhond’s historical account of Kipchak regional practices documents a specific mercantile tradition: “Upon a merchant’s purchase of forty slaves in a single transaction, payment would be rendered for thirty-nine while the fortieth would be transferred without cost”. This custom found expression during Sultan Mahmud’s administrative period (1118–1131), when a slave dealer completed the transaction of thirty-nine enslaved individuals and provided the fortieth-nine-year-old Eldeniz (Eldegiz) – without compensation [Mirkhwānd 1727, VI, 10–12]. The slave population originated from captives taken during Seljuk-Kipchak warfare. Historical evidence establishes Derbent’s reputation as a significant slave market during this timeframe. The hostile Oghuz-Kipchak dynamics portrayed within Dede Korkut stories correspond to the prevailing atmospheric conditions of this historical period.

The textual evidence within the stories establishes Kipchak territorial connections with Derbent. Georgian chronicles utilize the specific terminology *Kipchakni Darubendelni* (“the Derbent Kipchaks”) in conjunction with general Kipchak references [Life of David... 2014, 182]. This terminological specificity functioned to prevent conflation between Derbent-residing Kipchak communities and the Kipchak contingents that migrated to Georgia in 1118 under Khan Atrak’s command at David IV’s behest. Historical validation for early medieval Turkic settlement in Derbent derives from Zacharias of Mytilene’s records, documenting the establishment of three Turkic-speaking tribal groups – Savirs, Khazars, Avars, and Bulgars – in the Derbent region between 490–515 CE [Пигулевская 1941, 9–10]. Academic reasoning supports the inclusion of Kipchak components within these tribal categories, despite the chronicler’s apparent unfamiliarity with Kipchak ethnonymic terminology. Pliny’s chronologically antecedent information suggests these populations potentially settled using the Kamak designation. Kagankatvatsi’s chapter 27 provides an inventory of populations that Alexander the Great relocated and established in the Caucasian territories, listing Gargar, Kamicik, and Kefalas. K. Patkanov’s scholarly interpretation posits that “the Kamish people constitute Kubeci” [Каганкатвацци 1861, 70]. N. G. Volkova acknowledges linguistic similarities between kamicik/kamak and Kumyk ethnonymic terminology while rejecting ethnogenetic relationships with Kimak-Kipchak populations [Этнические проблемы... 1978, 26]. V. I. Abayev demonstrates identificational equivalence between Kumyk and Polovtsian populations [Абаев 1973, 323].

As established in prior analysis, Kazan Khan, functioning as the epic’s central heroic figure, receives genealogical attribution as Ulash’s descendant, with this appellation demonstrating correspondence to Kipchak tribal nomenclature preserved in Russian chronicles. This onomastic correlation receives scholarly explanation through documented ethnogenetic connections between Oghuz and Kipchak demographics, notwithstanding their historical pattern of sustained military antagonism [Aliyeva 2006, 118].

The epic’s second story, formally titled “The story of the plundering of Salur Kazan’s house”, presents additional antagonistic figures including Shoklu Malik and his ally Aznaur [Kitabi-Dədə Qorqud 2004, 37–38]. Academic research confirms that *aznauri* terminology denoted a minor feudal category within Georgian noble hierarchy. Historical evidence additionally documents Georgian-Kipchak alliance relationships during the early 12th century period. The narrative includes the specific textual reference: “Kazan bey’s wife and mother came suspended from a black camel’s neck” [Kitabi-Dədə Qorqud 2004, 38].

This passage requires analytical attention regarding its similarity to material preserved in Abul Ghazi Bahadur Khan’s *Shajara-i Tarakima*. The text records that Pecheneg (Bechene) ruler Toymaduk executed military operations resulting in Salur Kazan Alp’s mother Chachakly’s capture, with her liberation occurring after a three-year period [Ebül-gazi 1974, 57]. Multiple researchers, notably P. N. Boratav, have examined these narrative parallels between Dede Korkut accounts of Ulash oğlu Salur Kazan and historical chronicles [Boratav 2010, 31–62]. This comparative methodology has led to scholarly conclusions that these narratives reflect historical Pecheneg-Oghuz confrontations.

Prior to Abul Ghazi Bahadur Khan’s *Shajara-i Tarakima* composition, the 10th-century Arab historian and geographer al-Mas‘ūdī documented Pecheneg populations using the terminology *Bejnak* [Mesudi 2004 37, 93–94], locating their territorial base along Pontic coastal areas. Their settlement patterns demonstrated geographical intersection with other Turkic tribal territories. The implementation of comparable subsistence strategies and economic frameworks, coupled with competition for extensive grazing lands, established conditions promoting conflict between Turkic tribal groups and adjacent populations.

As previously documented, significant parallels exist between recorded historical conflicts involving Oghuz populations against Kipchak and Pecheneg forces. The epic

narrator systematically designates Oghuz enemies as infidels (non-Muslims), explicitly mentioning aznavurs and describing religious architectural transformation from churches to mosques.

The analytical conclusion establishes that the epic functions as a repository of Oghuz collective memory regarding historical conflicts with both Kipchak and Pecheneg populations and Christian state entities. Euhemerism thus reveals how the Dede Korkut epic functions as a repository of historical animosities. The Kipchak and Pecheneg adversaries, the Georgian aznavurs, the transformation of churches to mosques – all preserve genuine historical experiences within a heroic-mythological framework. This is precisely the process euhemerism seeks to decode: the translation of historical reality into legendary narrative.

Elements of the Cultural Anthropology of the Turks in the Epic

While euhemerism traditionally focuses on the deification of historical persons, its analytical framework extends productively to the sanctification and personification of natural objects. The *Kitab-i Dede Korkut* demonstrates how pre-Islamic religious attitudes toward nature – mountains, water, animals – persisted in Islamized form precisely because Islam prohibits human deification but permits reverence for creation. From the euhemerist perspective, this represents not the absence of deification but its displacement onto environmental elements. This section examines how euhemerist analysis illuminates the persistence of pre-Islamic cosmological beliefs within an Islamic textual tradition.

Academic research confirms that systematic religious transformation occurred within Turkic societies following their encounter with the Islamic world [Aliyeva 2025, 34–39]. Irrespective of the mechanism driving this transformation – whether through military expansion or voluntary religious adoption – Oghuz Turkic communities preserved elements of their pre-Islamic religious traditions, as demonstrated through analysis of the *Kitab-i Dede Korkud* narratives.

In addition to Korkut Ata's quasi-deification and the heroic characterization of primary epic figures, the *Kitab-i Dede Korkut* contains extensive traces of pre-Islamic religious and traditional elements. Multiple instances relate to mystical and prophetic themes, constituting an additional dimension of euhemerist investigation. European literary scholarship demonstrates that post-classical academics like Boccaccio and classical commentators emphasized the analytical significance of mythological subject differentiation rather than geographical verification. However, classical poetry consistently employs Mount Olympus as an orientational reference point bridging mortal and mythological historical narratives [Gerber 2021, 120]. Within the *Kitab-i Dede Korkut* framework, the epic's cultural and geographical context maintains close alignment with historical authenticity.

Here, the euhemerist approach reveals not mythologized individuals but the sanctification of social roles. The elevated status of women and mothers in the epic preserves genuine matriarchal elements from earlier Turkic social organization, transformed through narrative convention into a cultural ideal that bridges pre-Islamic and Islamic contexts. Such cultural ideals had tangible manifestations in the legal and social practices of Turkic communities. The position of women in society was so respected that kidnapping of women was punishable offence among Turkic tribes [Pylypchuk 2024, 29].

The recurring phrase *kadınım ana/kadın ana* (“my woman mother/woman mother”) appears throughout multiple stories of *Kitab-i Dede Korkut* [Ergin 1964, I, D24, D28; II, D53, D54; IV, D136; VI, D175]. S. Aliyarlı has documented this expression's correlation with *ögim katun* from Orkhon (Kül-Tigin monument) inscriptional evidence [Aliyarlı 2012, 164]. The terminology *ögim katun* translates as “my mother woman”. Aliyarlı's interpretation positions this as evidence of ancient matriarchal social structures [Aliyarlı 2012, 170]. Linguistic analysis establishes that the Turkic word *kadın* (“woman”) originates from *katun/hatun*, meaning sovereign or queen. The Vatican manuscript version

employs *hatun anam* [Ergin 1964, V12]. The epic's characterization of women as society's respected members corresponds with maternal imagery sanctification. The epic's portrayal of maternal sanctification reflects the complex synthesis of pre-Islamic Turkic traditions regarding women's elevated social status and Islamic values that characterized medieval Azerbaijani society [Aliyeva, Latifova 2025, 12–13]. This sanctification appears in the initial story where Boğaç's serious injury receives treatment through maternal milk and Kazylyk Mountain flora, following Khyzyr/Khydr's mythological guidance.

Dirse Khan's Son Bogach Khan's narrative exhibits maternal sanctification alongside mountainous landscape personification. Kazylyk Mountain receives seven nominal references throughout the epic [Ergin 1964, I, D27, D28]. Bogach's mother treats the mountain as a conscious being and delivers curses against it:

*“Akar senün sularun Kazılık Tağı
Akar iken akmaz olsun
Biter senün otların Kazılık Tağı
Biter iken bitmez olsun”* [Ergin 1964, I, D27].

Adaptive translation of the lines:

*Your waters flow, Kazylyk Mountain
May they cease to flow
Your grasses grow, Kazylyk Mountain
May they cease to grow.*

In the response given by the son's mother, there are expressions like “Kazylyk Mountain has no sin”, “Kazylyk Mountain has no fault” [Ergin 1964, I, D27]. Here it appears as if the mother and son are speaking about a person. Orhan Shaik Gokyay considers this a faint trace of the mountain cult of the Turks in the epic [Gökyay 2007, 1021].

Personification refers to other natural objects and even a dwelling place in the epic, in addition to the mountain. In the second story, Ulaş oğlu Salur Kazan first communicates with his homeland to learn what has happened:

*“Kavum kabile benüm kama yurdım
Kulan ile sığın geyige kofışu yurdım
Seni yağı nereden darımış güzel yurdum”* [Ergin 1964, II, D44].

Adaptive translation of the lines:

*My tribe, my wedge-like land,
My land, full of onagers and moose,
How the enemy could curse you, my beautiful land?*

There is no consensus regarding the location of Kazylyk Mountain. W. Barthold claimed that the Caucasus mountains were referred as Kazylyk Mountain in the epic. However, Orhan Shaik Gokyay argues that Kazylyk Mountain is a small mountain between Tashkent and Sayram [Gökyay 2007, 786]. This oronym can be attributed to both Central Asia and the Caucasus, since the epic covers Oghuz settlement periods in both regions. The Kazylyk oronym is entirely symbolic rather than referring to a specific geographical location.

Although the connection of mountains with shamanism is not explicitly clear in the Dede Korkut stories, certain mountains such as Kazylyk, Karadagh, and Aladagh appear in various contexts [Gökyay 2007, 1020]. The personification of mountains in the epic clearly reflects the mountain cult, which is an obvious remnant of the pre-Islamic beliefs of the ancient Turks.

Another element that Kazan Khan addresses is water: “Water has seen every face, let me communicate with water”, he says. Subsequently, in Kazan's address to the water, he expresses his readiness for sacrifice: “May my black head be sacrificed to you, my water” [Ergin 1964, II, D45]. Here, we can observe elements regarding the epic heroes' readiness to sacrifice themselves for personified natural objects. This clearly indicates the respectful attitude of the ancient Turks toward their environment and ecosystem.

It is necessary to consider Yer Sub, a special deity in the Tengrist cosmological worldview. Yer Sub, which comes after the Sky God, means “earth-water” and represents the earthly natural world consisting of mountains, lakes, trees, and plantations where the spirits of ancestors are believed to reside. As Anikeeva demonstrates, the preservation of Yer Sub concepts within the epic reveals the depth of pre-Islamic cosmological structures that continued to organize Turkic environmental understanding even after conversion to Islam [Аниеева 2005]. The Turkish people living in today’s Kazakh steppes viewed Yer Sub as natural forces that were “spirits or demons living on sacred hills that are considered sacred (*uduk*) places”. Worship of nature is also worship of ancestors [Isaacs 2021, 452].

The most striking moment in Kazan Khan’s communication with nature concerns the wolf. The wolf, as is well known, is the totem animal of Turkish tribes, and there is a legend that they descend from wolf lineage. The *Book of Dede Korkut* has preserved traces of this ancient belief. It is no coincidence that Salur Kazan says: “The wolf’s face is blessed, let me communicate with the wolf” [Ergin 1964, II, D45]. Then Kazan Khan, as in the case of water, declares his readiness to be sacrificed to the wolf: “May my black head be sacrificed to you, my wolf” [Ergin 1964, II, D45].

In this context, a poetic account of Khan Bonyak’s sorcery before the battle on the Vyagra River, which appears under the year 1097 in Russian chronicles, is particularly interesting: *...i yako byst’ polunoshchi i vstav Bonyak i ot’yekha ot rati i nocha volch’skya vyti* (“...and it was midnight and Bonyak arose and departed from the army and began to howl like a wolf”) [ПСРЛ 1963, II, 245]. Thus, the khan-priest of the wolf protector cult sought victory from the wolves, and the wolves responded to him, predicting and guaranteeing future victory. After returning to camp, Bonyak confidently reported this to his ally Prince David. Khan Bonyak, who expected the protection of wolves, and the tribe that had a wolf as a personal totem are clearly connected: the khan was the head of this tribe [Плетнева 1990, 46–47].

Anikeeva’s analysis of ancient Turkic worldview elements in the epic emphasizes that such practices – the wolf cult, mountain personification, water sanctification – form an interconnected system of beliefs rather than isolated superstitions [Аниеева 2005]. This systematic character strengthens the euhemerist interpretation: we are observing not random folkloric motifs but the preservation of a coherent religious worldview that historical Turkic communities actually practiced.

As Gokyay noted, signs indicate that the wolf is still considered sacred in today’s shamanist Turkish communities. While the wolf figure always appears on shaman drums, the gray wolf is also directly addressed in the shaman prayers of the Tuba Oranhay Turks.

The sanctification and personification of natural objects and animals is among the key characteristics of the *Book of Dede Korkut*. The theory of euhemerism offers a valuable opportunity to examine the epic from this perspective. Research conducted from this viewpoint demonstrates the existence of traces of pre-Islamic beliefs and traditions associated with shamanism and Tengrism among the ancient Turks.

The euhemerist methodology thus reveals that the *Kitab-i Dede Korkut* preserves multiple layers of historical religious consciousness: the sanctification of shamanic authority (Korkut Ata), the personification of tribal collectives (eponyms), the encoding of historical conflicts (antagonists), and the transformation of pre-Islamic nature veneration into Islamic-compatible reverence. Each represents a different modality of euhemerist transmission – the translation of historical and religious realities into narrative form. This analysis demonstrates the mythologization and mystification of objects and animals in nature are incorporated throughout the epic. We see mythological creatures unrelated to nature in only two cases: Tepegyoz in “The Story of How Basat Killed Depe-Gyoz” and the Dragon in the Turkmen Sahra manuscript. Undoubtedly, they entered the epic as a result of cultural borrowing. Tepegyoz is generally a creature found in Greek-Roman myths

and can be identified with Polyphemus, the one-eyed giant in Greek mythology who was one of the Cyclopes described in Homer's *Odyssey*. The dragon found in the Turkmen Sahra manuscript is a creature belonging to ancient Iranian mythology and can be considered a result of cultural synthesis.

Conclusion

From the euhemerism perspective, the *Book of Dede Korkut* reveals that the heroes of the epic are not deified prototypes of historical figures. Rather than divine personifications, the epic presents a culture of heroism, mysticism, and sacred valor – often reflecting not an individual historical reality, but a generalized image composed of many. The reason these heroes are sanctified and glorified rather than deified consists in the fact that, although the epic contains numerous pre-Islamic elements, it was written after the Turks had embraced Islam – a religion that does not permit the deification of individuals.

While many of these heroes represent generalized images of the historical past, there are also names that point to specific historical figures. For instance, Alaaddin Turaly Bey of the Bayandur dynasty is undoubtedly the prototype of Kan Turaly, son of Kanly Koja. Notably, many character names in the epic stories incorporate the names of various Turkic tribes. This suggests that the eponyms of the *Book of Dede Korkut* preserve the memory of Turkic tribal identities from the historical past. Consequently, the epic can be used as a source for studying the ethnogenesis of Turkic peoples.

Although the theory of euhemerism may not be directly applicable to the analysis of cultural factors, economics, and customs, it is crucial to emphasize that these elements are extensively reflected in the epic. Returning to the ethnographic, cultural, and anthropological depictions of ancient Turks in the *Book of Dede Korkut*, we observe the sanctification and personification of natural elements such as mountains, water, and animals – especially the wolf, regarded as the ancestor of the ancient Turks. The euhemeristic approach creates conditions for reinterpreting these themes from a new angle. The findings of such a study demonstrate that, even after adopting Islam, the Oghuz Turks retained remnants of pre-Islamic beliefs and traditions associated with Shamanism and Tengrism for a considerable time.

The epic stories of Dede Korkut mythologize Oghuz leaders and tribal conflicts, preserving nomadic traditions and other cultural dynamics within a shamanic-Islamic framework. Cultural practices and customs such as feasts and sacrifices serve as the historical scaffolding for these transformations.

The application of euhemerism theory to the Dede Korkut epic thus yields multiple interpretive benefits. It provides a systematic framework for distinguishing between historical substrate and narrative elaboration, explains how pre-Islamic religious elements persist within an Islamic text, illuminates the ethnogenetic information encoded in character nomenclature, and reveals how genuine historical conflicts become mythologized through epic convention. This theoretical approach opens new avenues for utilizing epic literature as historical source material while respecting the complex transformations that oral and written transmissions impose upon historical memory.

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L. A. Алиева

**Наративна пам'ять та історичні відлуння:
евгемеризм у "Книзі Деде Коркута"**

"Книга Деде Коркута", фундаментальний епос огузьких тюрків, відображає кочове життя, героїчні ідеали та культурні цінності, водночас зберігаючи відгомін історичних реалій Анатолії, Азербайджану та Кавказу. Хоча цей корпус є передусім літературним і фольклорним, а не хронікальним, дослідження аналізує епос крізь теоретичну призму евгемеризму, щоб оцінити його потенціал як історичного джерела. Використовуючи міждисциплінарну методологію, що поєднує історію, літературознавство, антропологію та лінгвістику, дослідження здійснює порівняльний текстуальний аналіз Дрезденського, Ватиканського та Туркмен-Сахра рукописів поряд із сучасними джерелами, включно з хроніками аль-Мас'уді, середньовічними руськими оповідями та генеалогічними працями Абул-Газі Бахадур-хана. Результати засвідчують, що історичні події та постаті були інтегровані в епічний наратив

через процеси часової нашарованості, наративного злиття та символічної трансформації. Замість обожнення епос відображає сакралізацію героїв, що відповідає його ісламському періоду створення. Крім того, племінні епоніми, закладені в імена персонажів, надають цінні етногенетичні дані, тоді як співіснування доісламських шаманістичних мотивів та ісламських елементів ілюструє перехідний релігійний ландшафт тюркських суспільств. Загалом дослідження демонструє, що евгемеристичний аналіз дає змогу ідентифікувати історичні шари в епічній традиції, розкриваючи “Книгу Деде Коркута” як сховище колективної пам’яті та соціально-політичного досвіду.

Ключові слова: евгемеризм; “Книга Деде Коркута”; Коркут Ата; огузи; середньовічні тюрки; шаманізм

*Стаття надійшла до видання 18.10.2025
Прийнято до друку після рецензування 23.12.2025
Опубліковано 14.04.2026*