

SOME TURKIC ELEMENTS IN THE CAUCASIAN NART EPOS

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ABSTRACT

The myths of the Caucasian peoples that have been largely spread in the Caucasus are called Nart epos. The Caucasian mythology narrates that Narts are the ancestors of the Caucasian peoples who believe in that they descent from Narts. Narts have been fearless warriors and clever fighters. Nart epos is the best pattern of acculturation among the peoples of the Caucasus. Nart epos is the national epos of the Caucasian peoples such as Abkhas, Adige (Circassian), Karachay-Balkar, Osset, Chechen-Ingush and Dagestan peoples. The appearance and the origin of Nart epos that lives among the peoples of the Caucasus hasn't been brought to light yet. Although the Caucasian and Indo-European origins of Nart epos have been studied widely by scholars, the Turkic elements of Nart epos have not been examined sufficiently yet. In this paper, some Turkic elements of Nart epos are being studied.

Key Words: Caucasian, mythology, Dagestan.

Nart Epos, Caucasian Culture, Peoples of the Caucasus, Turkic Elements in the Caucasus.

The Caucasus, which is a high mountain range lying between the Black Sea and the Caspian Sea is the home of several ethnic groups and nationalities who are living on this land for hundreds of years.

The geographical conditions of the Caucasus have influenced the social formation of the peoples and in a broad land which has been divided by high mountains, deep valleys and large plateaus, several ethnic groups and languages have occurred.

The Caucasus is not a physical geography or a political geography but it is a cultural geography. The Caucasus has been a country where

many cultures and peoples coexisted. The peoples who share the common *Caucasian Culture* are called the *Caucasian Peoples*. The ethnic groups of this cultural area are Abkhasian, Adige (Circassian), Karachay-Balkar, Osset, Chechen-Ingush and Dagestan peoples. The Caucasian culture which finds its expression in the unity of various ethnic cultures is a complicated phenomenon of history and culture. The Caucasian Culture is the sagas, customs, practices, life styles, music, believes, dances and dressing of the Caucasian peoples which are mostly common among them. Despite their ethnic and linguistic differences, the peoples of the Caucasus share common spiritual values.

In West Caucasus, Abkhasian people live on the south-west slopes of the Caucasian mountains. On the north side of Abkhasians the Circassian tribes live. They call themselves Adige in their own language. The Abazin people who speak a different language also live among the Circassian tribes. In Central Caucasus on the slopes of Elbrus mountain Karachay-Balkar people live. They speak the same Turkic language and they call themselves Alan and Tavlu (Mountaineer). The Osset people who refer to themselves “Iron” are another ethnic group living in Central Caucasus who is Indo-European in origin. In East Caucasus the Chechen-Ingush people live who call themselves Vainakh (Our People) in their language. In East Caucasus there is a large country called Dagestan which is the homeland of more than forty ethnic groups and languages. The main ethnic groups of Dagestan are Kumyk, Lezgi, Avar, Lak, Dargin, Tabasaran, Rutul, Tsakhur and Tat people.

All those people who live in the Caucasus from Black Sea to Caspian Sea are called the Caucasian Peoples. The Transcaucasus which is formed by Georgian, Armenian and Azerbaijan people is certainly a different cultural area from the Caucasus. The Caucasian peoples who live in the Caucasus have definitely different ethnic and social structures of the Transcaucasian– Georgian, Armenian and Azerbaijan –peoples. So the Transcaucasus should be left outside of our subject and study.

The Caucasian peoples have been mixed ethnically for hundreds of years so their cultures and social structures have been mixed and resembled to each other. After the process of amalgamation and acculturation in the Caucasus, different ethnic groups and races have been mixed ethnically and they have shared a common “Caucasian Culture”.

Caucasian Culture is not a pure culture. It has been fed and supported from different sources.

The Caucasus has been invaded by several peoples, nations and tribes during the hundreds of years. All of those people have carried their ethnic and cultural elements to the Caucasus and mixed by indigenous people of the Caucasus. Thus a social and cultural change has been lived among them and consequently all of the ethnic groups in the Caucasus have been mixed ethnically.

There are four sources of Caucasian Culture:

1. The culture of Turkic and Indo-European tribes like Cimmerian-Scythian, Sarmat, Hun-Bulgar, Alan, Khazar, Kypchak who have come and invaded the Caucasus from North steppes.
2. The culture of Greek-Roman-Byzantine-Genoese trade colonists who travelled from the west by the Black Sea and have come to the Caucasus.
3. The culture of some Asiatic tribes who have migrated from the south of the Caucasus, especially from Anatolia.
4. The culture of the indigenous tribes of the Caucasus.

The ethnic psychology and consciousness of the Caucasian peoples are determined by their history. This makes epic songs, sagas and history so popular in the Caucasus. Probably, ethnocentrism most strongly lives among the peoples of the Caucasus on the world. Every nation, every tribe, every ethnic group in the Caucasus puts itself to the center of the Caucasian Culture and claims that all cultural values of the Caucasus diffused to the other Caucasian peoples from them.

One of the common cultural values of the Caucasus which can not be shared among the peoples of the Caucasus is *Nart Epos*.

The myths of the Caucasian peoples that have been largely spread in the Caucasus are called *Nart epos*.

The Caucasian mythology narrates that Narts are the ancestors of the Caucasian peoples who believe in that they descent from Narts.

As it has been told in sagas, Narts have discovered the iron and they have firstly domesticated the horse on the world. Narts have been fearless warriors and clever fighters. They have overcome their superhuman enemies, devils, giants and demons by the help of their intelligence and shrewdness.

Nart epos is the best pattern of acculturation among the peoples of the Caucasus. Nart epos is the common national epos of peoples such as

Abkhas-Abazin, Ubykh, Adige (Circassian), Chechen-Ingush who speaks in various Caucasian languages and Osset who is an Indo-European people that lives in the Caucasus and Karachay-Balkar who is a Turkic people of the Caucasus. Some variants of Nart epos are found in Dagestan even among the Svan people who is a Georgian tribe lives on the southern slopes of the Caucasus Mountains.

The appearance and the origin of Nart epos that lives among the peoples of the Caucasus hasn't been brought to light yet. Today every people even tribe of the Caucasus claims to own Nart epos since it belongs to his ancestors and it has been transmitted to all other peoples of the Caucasus from them.

While Abkhas, Adige (Circassian), Karachai-Balkar and Osset scholars are trying to describe the private names of Nart heroes in their own languages such as Caucasian, Turkic and Indo-European, they also strive to prove that Nart epos has been spread to the Caucasus by their Caucasian, Turkic or Indo-European ancestors.

For understanding the mythological structure of Nart epos we have to know about the main Nart characters of the epos. Although the main heroes are common in Nart epos of the Caucasian peoples, their names are pronounced differently since they speak in three various language groups such as Caucasian, Indo-European and Turkic.

The ironmaster~blacksmith of Narts has been described as a mythological hero in Nart epos. Though his features have close resemblance in all variants, his name appears differently in Nart epos of the Caucasian peoples.

The ironmaster of Narts is *Tlepsh* in Adige Nart epos. He is the apprentice of *Debech* who is the previous ironmaster of Narts (Özbay 1990: 241).

In Karachay-Balkar Nart epos the ironmaster of Narts is *Debek* who is the parallel of *Debech* of Adige variants (Ortabaylanı 1987: 15). But *Debet*~*Devet* names are widespread in Karachay-Balkar Nart epos which are connected to the name of *Prophet David* who is known as spiritual teacher of ironmasters among the Turkic peoples of Central Asia (Aliyeva 1994: 68).

In Abkhas Nart epos the name of the ironmaster of Narts is *Aynarjiy* (İnal-Yıpa 2001: 15). In Osset variants of Nart epos the ironmaster is known as *Kurdalegon* who is the God of ironmasters (Dumezil 2005: 11).

The ironmaster of Narts can strike the iron while it is hot by his naked hands. He has manufactured the iron swords, shields, spears and arrows for Nart warriors. He has invented the first horseshoe thus Nart horses have been able to run far distances.

The most considerable female character of Nart epos is “The mother of Narts”.

Her name is Seteney in Adige Nart epos whose title is “Guashe” that means “Princess” in Adige-Circassian language (Özbay 1999: 61). She is known as Satanay in Karachay-Balkar Nart epos and her title is “Biyche” which means “Princess” in Karachay-Balkar Turkic language (Aliyeva 1994: 71). In Abkhas Nart epos her name is Sataney and she is the mother of ninety nine Nart heroes (İnal-Yipa 2001: 12). In Osset Nart epos she is known as Satana (Dumezil 2005: 38).

As it has been narrated in Karachay-Balkar Nart epos, Satanay Biyche is the daughter of the sun and the moon. Her father is the sun and her mother is the moon. Satanay Biyche can take the shape of everything whatever she wants. According to Osset Nart epos, Satana is the daughter of Wastirci, the God of Warriors. In Abkhas Nart epos, Sataney possesses divine features like a goddess.

There is a clue about the meaning of her name in Karachay-Balkar variants of Nart epos. While she was a little child, a witch has brought up her in a desolate island. Satanay has liked to play with coral stones in this island. The witch has seen that and has decided to name her as Satanay which has meant “little coral stone” (Aliyeva 1994: 299). In Divanu Lugat-it Turk of Mahmud Kashgari we can find the same Turkic word “sata” which means coral (Atalay 1986: 496).

In Nart epos there is an extraordinary character which is known as “The Leader of Narts”.

His name is *Wuerzemec*, who is the son of the Goddess of Sea in Adige Nart epos (Özbay 1990: 150). He is known as *Wrijmeg*, the son of Nart hero *Ihsharteg* in Osset Nart epos (Dumezil 2005: 34). His mother is the Goddess of Sea just like in Adige variant. In Karachay-Balkar Nart epos the leader of Narts is *Örüzmeç* who has born from a comet which has fallen to the world. He has grown up in seven days with the milk of a wolf (Aliyeva 1994: 74).

The name of *Wuerzemec* ~*Wrijmeg*~ *Örüzmeç* reminds us the name of

Uruz Beg, the son of *Salur Kazan* in Dede Korkut.

Another mythological hero of Nart epos is “The Son of Stone” who bears resemblance to ancient Greek hero Achilles and Prometheus.

His name is Sosrukua in Adige Nart epos. He has born from a granite stone. Seteney, the mother of Narts has given him to Tlepsh, the ironmaster of Narts. Tlepsh has hold him with his nippers and has heat him in fire. Then Tlepsh has plunged him into cold water with the aim of steeling his body. Since Tlepsh has hold Sosrukua from his knees, his weakness has been his knees because of not touching to the water (Özbay 1990: 15).

In Karachay-Balkar Nart epos his name is Sosurka or Sosuruk that means “The Son of Granite”. He has born from a granite stone which has lain on the bank of river Volga. Satanay has taken him to Debet, the ironmaster of Narts. Debet has hold him with his nippers and has heat him in fire. Then Debet has plunged him into cold water so that steeling his body. Because of holding Sosurka from his calves, Sosurka’s most weakness place has been his calves. The arrow does not penetrate to Sosurka, since he is the son of granite (Aliyeva 1994: 118).

The same motif can be seen in Abkhas Nart epos. Here, the hero’s name is Sasrikua (İnal-Yipa 2001: 42). In Osset Nart epos the hero who has been born from stone is known as Soslan or Sozriko who resembles closely to Adige, Karachay-Balkar and Abkhas variants of Nart epos (Dumezil 2005: 83).

All Nart heroes possess supernatural powers in Nart epos of the Caucasian peoples. After they have been born they grow up in a short time. They fight with demons, giants, devils, monsters and cyclopes.

Although the Indo-European and ancient Greek origins of some motifs of Nart epos have been studied widely by Western scholars like G. Dumezil and J. Colarusso, the Turkic origins of some motifs have not been studied satisfactorily yet.

One of the common motifs of Nart epos which bears resemblance to ancient Greek epos is the fight of Wuerzemec (Adige) ~ Örüzmek (Karachay-Balkar) ~ Wrijmeg (Osset) with Cyclops, just like in *Odyseia* of Homeros.

Nart hero Wuerzemec~Örüzmek~Wrijmeg sticks a hot iron spit into the single eye of Cyclops in order to make him blind. Cyclops tries to catch him in the cave but he can not find him. Then Cyclops gives a ring to Wrijmeg

as a gift in Osset variant (In another Karachay-Balkar variant Cyclops gives a ring to Sosurka). When Wrijmeg puts the ring on his finger, the ring begins to shout out “Wrijmeg is here!”. Wrijmeg immediately cuts off his finger and throws the ring away. Cyclops waits in front of the entrance of the cave and sends out the sheep one by one between his legs as he is controlling the fur of the sheep with his hand. But Wuerzemec ~Örüzmek~ Wrijmeg gets out of the cave by the help of a sheep fur hiding under it.

Those motifs of Nart epos are more connected to Dede Korkut and Oguzname than Homeros’ *Odysseia*. Let’s look over some similarities and differences of these motifs.

I. In Homeros, *Odysseia* makes blind Cyclops by the help of his friends sticking the branch of an olive tree which has been heat in fire (Emre 1971: 182). This motif reflects the influence of Mediterranean culture because of olive tree.

In Dede Korkut, Basat makes blind Cyclops (Tepegöz) with an iron bayonet that has been heat in fire (Gökyay 1973: 110). This motif reflects the influence of Turkic-Warrior culture.

In Nart epos this motif bears resemblance to Dede Korkut rather than Homeros.

II. Corresponding to the absence of “ring motif” in Homeros, this motif takes part in Dede Korkut. After Basat has made Cyclops blind, Cyclops (Tepegöz) gives a ring to Basat in order to estimate his place in the cave (Gökyay 1973: 111).

It is obvious that the ring motif of the Nart epos resembles closely to Dede Korkut.

III. In Homeros, *Odysseia* and his friends run away from the island after they have made the Cyclops blind (Emre 1971: 184). In Dede Korkut, Basat tries to kill Cyclops (Tepegöz) but he fails because his sword can not cut off the head of Cyclops. Then Cyclops (Tepegöz) tells him that only his own sword can kill him. Thereupon Basat takes Cyclops’ sword and cuts his head off (Gökyay 1973: 112).

In Sosurka variant of Karachay-Balkar Nart epos we can observe this motif which is connected to Old Turkic sagas as well as Oguzname and Dede Korkut. Sosurka tries to kill the five headed giant. He cuts off the four heads of the giant but he can not cut off the fifth one. Then the giant says that he can be killed only by his sword. Sosurka takes the giant’s

sword and cuts his head off (Aliyeva 1994: 129). In Adige variant of Nart epos, Sosrukua kills the giant by his sword. In Osset Nart epos, there are two variants of “to be killed by his sword” and both of them are related to Batraz, a Nart hero. In Osset variants, Batraz kills a giant with his sword and than kills Sayneg Eldar with his own sword (Dumezil 2005: 304).

Ak-Kübek and Salur Kazan epos which has been compiled by W. Radloff in XIX. century from the Altay Turks in Siberia includes the same motif (Ögel 1995: 35). This epos is a part of an archaic Oguzname.

“To be killed only by his sword” is a popular motif of Caucasian Nart epos that has been influenced from the Turkic sagas.

In conclusion, Nart epos is the common national epos of the Caucasian peoples that they proud of its heroes as if they had lived in fact. So every Caucasian people even ethnic group of the Caucasus owns Nart epos as a national value and does not wish to share it with the other Caucasian peoples. Consequently, they claim that Nart epos has been created only by their ancestors and the other Caucasian peoples have adopted it as theirs. But just like the Caucasian Culture which has been fed by several sources for many centuries, there have been many cultures that have influenced Nart epos. Turkic elements of Nart epos are a scientific reality which the scholars must not overlook it.

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