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KORKUT AND MODERNITY: SHAMANIC ARCHETYPE IN THE INTELLECTUAL HISTORY OF KAZAKHSTAN

The article is devoted to the formation and development of the archetype of Korkut in the context of intellectual history of Kazakhstan. As the first shaman and storyteller, the inventor of the musical instrument kobyz, Korkut occupies a special place both in Kazakh science, including history, cultural anthropology and folkloristics, and in literature and art, including music and ballet. It also remains an important element linking Kazakhs to Turkic peoples through common origins in antiquity. The author traces the significance for Kazakh intellectual history and the history of ideas of the image of Korkut, The Book of Dede Korkut, as well as a set of legends among the peoples of Central Asia associated with the legendary burial place of Korkut Ata in the Kyzylorda region of the republic. The interdisciplinary approach to the material, content and comparative analyses of the texts allow us to reveal, firstly, the dynamics of the image of Korkut in the intellectual environment of Kazakhstan, reflecting cultural policy and historical processes, and secondly, several interpretative lines that unite Kazakh scientists and creative intellectuals and develop from the 19th century to the present day. Since the defining studies and statements were made during the Soviet era, this period is given special attention.

Keywords: Kazakhstan, Korkut, Korkut studies, Kazakh intelligentsia, intellectual history, cultural anthropology, modernisation, storytelling, shamanism, literature.

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Қорқыт және замандығы: Қазақстан интеллектуалдық тарихындағы шамандық архетип

Мақала Қазақстанның зияткерлік тарихы контекстінде Қорқыт архетипінің қалыптасуы мен дамуына арналған. Тұңғыш бақсы әрі қиссашы, қобыз аспабының өнертапқышы ретінде Қорқыт қазақ ғылымында, оның ішінде тарих, мәдениет антропология және фольклортану ғылымында да, әдебиет пен өнерде, оның ішінде музыка мен балет өнерінде де ерекше орын алады. Ол қазақтарды түркі халықтарымен ежелгі дәуірде ортақ шығу тегі арқылы байланыстыратын маңызды элемент болып қала береді. Автор Қорқыт бейнесінің, Қорқыт ата кітабының, Орталық Азия халықтары арасында кездесетін және республиканың Қызылорда облысындағы аңызға айналған Қорқыт ата қорымымен байланысты аңыз-әңгімелер кешенінің қазақтың зиялылық тарихы мен идеялық тарихы үшін маңызын қадағалайды. Материалға пәнаралық көзқарас, мәтіндерге мазмұнды және салыстырмалы талдау жасау, біріншіден, мәдени саясат пен тарихи үдерістерді көрсететін Қазақстанның интеллектуалдық ортасындағы Қорқыт бейнесінің динамикасын, екіншіден, қазақ ғалымдары мен шығармашылық зиялы қауымын біріктіретін және XIX ғасырдан бері дамып келе жатқан бірнеше интерпретациялық бағыттарды анықтауға мүмкіндік береді. осы күнге дейін. Анықтаушы зерттеулер мен тұжырымдар кеңестік дәуірде жасалғандықтан, бұл кезеңге ерекше мән беріледі.

Түйін сөздер: Қазақстан, Қорқыт, қорқыттану, қазақ зиялылары, зиялылық тарихы, мәдени антропология, модернизация, әңгіме, шаманизм, әдебиет.

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Коркут и современность: шаманский архетип в интеллектуальной истории Казахстана

Статья посвящена формированию и развитию архетипа Коркута в контексте интеллектуальной истории Казахстана. Будучи первым шаманом и сказителем, изобретателем музыкального инструмента кобыз, Коркут занимает особое место как в казахской науке, включая историю,

культурную антропологию и фольклористику, так и в литературе и искусстве, в том числе в музыке и балете. Он также остается важным элементом, связывающим казахов с тюркскими народами через общие истоки в древности. Автор прослеживает значимость для казахской интеллектуальной истории и истории идей образа Коркута, книги «Сказания моего деда Коркута», а также комплекса легенд, бытующих у народов Центральной Азии и связанных с легендарным местом погребения Коркут Ата в Кызылординской области республики. Интердисциплинарный подход к материалу, содержательный и сопоставительный анализ текстов позволяют выявить, во-первых, динамику образа Коркута в интеллектуальной среде Казахстана, отражающую культурную политику и исторические процессы, а во-вторых, несколько интерпретативных линий, которые объединяют казахских ученых и творческую интеллигенцию и развиваются с XIX в. до наших дней. Поскольку определяющие исследования и высказывания были сделаны в советское время, этому периоду уделяется особое внимание.

Ключевые слова: Казахстан, Коркут, коркутоведение, казахская интеллигенция, интеллектуальная история, культурная антропология, модернизация, сказительство, шаманизм, литература.

Introduction

The academic history of Korkut is usually traced back to 1815, when the Prussian bibliophile and diplomat Heinrich Friedrich von Diez (1751-1817) found in the Dresden Library a manuscript of The Book of Dede Korkut (Book of My Grandfather Korkut) consisting of twelve parts. He published one of the parts and made a copy of the manuscript, which is now kept in the Berlin State Library (Staatsbibliothek zu Berlin) (Жирмунский 1962: 131). Later the German orientalist Theodor Nöldeke (1836-1930) worked with the text, who however did not complete his mission and passed it on to his pupil, Vasily Bartold (Василий Бартольд; 1869-1930). It was Bartold who prepared a commented Russian edition of The Book of Dede Korkut, which was published after his death in 1950 in the edition of the Academy of Sciences of Azerbaijan SSR. It should also be noted that in 1956 the Italian orientalist Ettore Rossi (1894-1955) found in the Vatican Library (Bibliotheca Apostolica Vaticana) another manuscript of the source with six songs. Scholars are currently working with both manuscripts. Among non-Kazakh researchers of the mythology of Korkut we should also mention Grigory Potanin (Григорий Потанин; 1835-1920), Abubakir Divaev (Абубакир Диваев; 1856-1933), Vasily Radloff (Василий Радлов; 1837-1918), Abdülkadir İnan (1989-1976), and Viktor Zhirmunsky (Виктор Жирмунский; 1891-1972).

The first legends about Korkut in the Kazakh steppe were collected and published in the 1850s-60s by Russian travellers and officers. In the early 20th century, a significant contribution was also made by the French researcher Joseph Castagné (Castagné 1930). The movement of The Book of Dede Korkut in German, Turkish, Italian and Russian (Soviet)

academic structures is only one of the lines that are connected to the outer contour of Kazakhstan's intellectual history. What are its internal lines, it remains to be clarified in this article.

Back in the 1920s, the legendary grave of Korkut in the Kyzylorda region was visited by Alkey Margulan (Әлкей Марғұлан), the future founder of the Kazakh school of archaeology and ethnography, and geologist Kanysh Satbayev (Қаныш Сәтбаев), who later became the first president of the Academy of Sciences of the Kazakh SSR. The image of Korkut was important and significant for Kazakh intellectuals long before it became part of Soviet ethnography and long before the translation of The Book of Dede Korkut was put into circulation. This is evidenced, in particular, by the appearance in the magazine 'Sholpan' in 1922 of the poem 'Korkyt', which belonged to the outstanding Kazakh poet Magzhan Zhumabay (Жұмабаев 1989: 220-225), as well as by a heartfelt poem in the form of a shamanic song written by another famous Alash figure Shakarim Kudaiberdiyuly (Құдайбердиев 1988: 224-226).

The interest to the image of Korkut in Kazakhstani society considerably increased in the eighties of the last century. In 1980 a monument to Korkut Aта was erected on the territory of the Karmakchi district of the Kyzylorda region (by B. Ibrayev and S. Isataev). In 1986 The Book of Dede Korkut appeared in Kazakh language in translation by A. Konyratbayev and M. Baidildayev. In 1989 Baku hosted a Soviet-Turkish colloquium on Korkut, in September 1997 a thematic international scientific and technical conference was held at the Korkut Ata University in Kyzylorda, and in 1998 a research centre for the study of Korkut's heritage was established at the Korkut Ata University, and the development of a new separate field – Korkut studies – was outlined. In 1999, international conferences and forums on

Korkut were held in Turkey, Turkmenistan and France.

In the 20th century Korkut became not only an object of archaeological, historical, folklore and ethnographic attention, but also a hero of literary and musical works, as well as a symbolically loaded figure of civil, philosophical-political and spiritual discourse. The aim of this article is to explore in what directions the image of Korkut developed within these discourses during the Soviet period and what fruits they have yielded in the twenty-first century, in the era of independence. In what ways and in what contexts did the archetype of the first shaman and storyteller develop in socially significant statements of Kazakh intelligentsia? What is its relevance now? What are the specifics of Korkut's intellectual history in contemporary Kazakhstan? From this general task follows a smaller one – to fill the gap created by the lack of attention to the images and ideas concerning Korkut presented in the works of such prominent intellectuals of modern Kazakh history as Olzhas Suleimenov and Auezkhan Kodar. Identifying the defining lines in the intellectual history of the Korkut myth makes it possible to take the next step – to find a common methodological platform for integrating and analysing different narratives.

Materials and methods

In 1999, a weighty volume representing a collection of the most significant texts on Korkut was published in Almaty. This encyclopaedic edition, which includes texts in Russian and Kazakh, is a landmark publication and can be regarded as one of the central events in the book history of Kazakh Korkut (Қорқыт Ата 1999). The publication contains a kind of pantheon of prominent figures associated with Korkut. Their photos and brief biographical information are placed in a special tab. Among akyns and writers mentioned are Saken Seyfullin (Сәкен Сейфуллин; 1894-1938), Shakarim Kudaiberdiuly (Шәкәрім Құдайбердіұлы; 1858-1931), Magzhan Zhumabaiuly (Мағжан Жұмабайұлы; 1893-1938), Khalizhan Bekkhozhin (Халижан Бекхожин; 1913-1990), Seisen Muktaruly (Сейсен Мұқтарұлы; 1948-1999), Alimbay Aliaskarov (Әлімбай Әлиасқаров; 1906-1991), Mukhtar Auev (Мұхтар Әуезов; 1879-1961). Among the scientists, specialists in philology, history and ethnography are Shoqan Walikhanov (Шоқан Уәлиханов; 1835-1865), Auelbek Konyratbaev (Әуелбек Қоңыратбаев; 1905-1986), Alkei

Margulan (Әлкей Марғұлан; 1904-1995), Rakhmankul Berdibai (Рахманқұл Бердібай; 1927-2012), Akseleu Seidimbek (Ақселеу Сейдімбек; 1942-2009), Shakir Ibraev (Шәкір Ибраев), Alma Kyraubaeva (Алма Құраубаева), Tynyshbek Dairabai (Тынышбек Дайрабай). Among the musicians who worked with the image of Korkut are listed Ykylas Dukenuly (Ықылас Дүкенұлы; 1843-1916), Akhmet Zhubanov (Ахмет Жұбанов; 1906-1968), Ysmaiyl Nyshan (Ысмайыл Нышан; 1883-1979), Zhappas Kalambaev (Жаппас Қаламбаев; 1909-1970), Sugir Aliuly (Сүгір Әліұлы; 1882-1961), Daulet Maktybaev (Дәулет Мақтыбаев; 1904-1976), Bekbolat Tileukhan (Бекболат Тілеухан). This list, however, lacks the names of Auezkhan Kodar (Әуезхан Қодар; 1958-2016) and Olzhas Suleimenov (Олжас Сүлейменов; born 1936). Both masters, whose works are located in the borderland of science and literature, made a significant contribution by proposing a kind of deconstruction of the image of Korkut in the 20th century. The contribution of the most prominent researcher of Kazakh folklore, Yedige Tursynov (Едіге Тұрсынов; 1942-2016), has not been appreciated. This gap in the intellectual chain of Korkut's 'adherents' should be filled, which is one of the tasks of this publication. It is worth noting that the gap is also characteristic of the extensive bibliographical list on Korkut published in (Қорқыт Ата 1994). To the names mentioned it is worth adding also the creators of intellectual history active already in the XXI century, first of all Zira Nauryzbay (Зира Наурызбай). This will allow for a fuller coverage of Kazakhstan's own intellectual history and historiography of Korkut, which is still under-researched in comparison with the Russian and Soviet ones (Алиева 2014).

It is equally important to conceptualise the development of intellectual discourse on Korkut, to identify its chronological and substantive dynamics, and to clarify its relationship to changing cultural policies and social agendas. For this purpose, significant texts about Korkut were subjected to textual research and content analysis, and then compared with each other and other texts. The results of such analyses were put into a broader historical perspective. It is this approach that will facilitate the integration of various specialised studies of Korkut studies, aiming more at philological, historical, cultural and other special problems (Аймухамбет 2016; Байбосынова 2024; Хабутдинова, Мотигулина 2016, Жуйкова 2020 etc.).

Results and discussion

Before proceeding to the main discussion, it is necessary to say a few words about the mythology and image of Korkut. Korkut Ata (or Dede Korkut) appears in the epic tradition of Oghuz Turks as a wise man who knows well the traditions and customs of steppe life, a storyteller, poet and soothsayer. The main source here is *The Book of Dede Korkut*, created presumably in the XIV-XV centuries, but in its motifs going back to antiquity. If in this book the Oghuz epic is presented in a rather Muslim tone, the folk legends of Central Asia bring to the fore the shamanic essence of Korkut. Korkut is the heritage of many Turkic peoples, which is explained by the history of the heroic epic of the Oghuz – a group of Turkic tribes that left under the pressure of the Kipchaks from the steppe plains of Turan to the shores of the Caspian Sea, to West Asia and to the Danube, and later participated in the ethnogenesis of Azerbaijanis and Turks. As Zhirmunsky notes, the ‘age of the Oghuz’ from the ‘Book of Grandfather Korkut’ reflects the real historical past of the people through the prism of epic idealisation, just as it happens in the epics about Charlemagne, Manas or Dzhangar (Жирмунский 1962: 139). It is important to realise that the legend of Korkut was formed among the Oghuz in their homeland in Central Asia. Therefore, it is not surprising that not only Kazakh folk legends, but also, for example, Alisher Navoi (1441-1501), who deduced Korkut Ata as a sage and prophet, report about Korkut.

The shamanic side of Korkut is emphasised in Kazakh folklore. In a series of articles ‘From the field of Kyrgyz beliefs’, I. Castagné describes Kazakh baksy (shamans) in sufficient detail and retells the tale of Korkut, as well as recounts the battles between shamans and evil spirits, healing and divination techniques, ritual possession, magical costumes and accessories (Кастанье 1913; Castagné 1930). In turn, Zhirmunsky notes that information about the great shaman Korkut is also known to the Turkmen, Karakalpaks, Uzbeks and Nogais of the North Caucasus (Жирмунский 1962: 158). To this we should also add the Bashkirs, in whom Korkut is considered the progenitor of one of the tribes (Идельбаев 2014), and the Kyrgyz, who have Korkut in the shamanic pantheon of spirits (Маничкин 2020: 148).

It is known that there has been a cult around the holy place where Korkut was buried according to legends since ancient times. Pilgrims came here for healing, especially if illnesses were related to

the action of the Aruakhs (Апырак) spirits, as well as for acquiring special abilities, including musical and poetic talent, clairvoyance and magic. In 1927, the tomb was washed away by the waters of the Syr Darya, but a drawing made earlier by Vasily Radloff has been preserved. He also recorded the incantation of a Kazakh baksy (shaman) calling the spirit of Korkut. It is noteworthy that the incantation contained the following image: ‘...if I call him dead, he is not dead, if I call him alive, he is not alive, father of the holy Korkut’ (‘...өлі десем – өлі емес, тірі десем – тірі емес, Ата Қорқыт әулие’) (Жирмунский 1962: 169). It is necessary to say that in Kyrgyz language the word *коркут* is used to refer to both a frightening, frightening person and a terminally ill or recently deceased person, if one informs about the near death or demise to close people (Киргизско-Русский Словарь, I, 1985: 407).

If in *The Book of Dede Korkut* the sage acts as a compiler of a poem about the deeds of numerous heroes, a connoisseur of Oghuz history and a master immersed in the political-historical process, the Central Asian legends bring the plot of Korkut’s own life and death to the foreground. Their central motif is Korkut’s flight from death. He tries to escape his fate, to hide from the angel Azrael or even from God himself, travelling to the four corners of the world and everywhere finding people digging a grave for him. Korkut realises that he must return home, to the banks of the Syr Darya, to the place that appears to be the centre. There he spreads a carpet, and in other variants the skin of the camel Zhelmaya, on which he travelled. Korkut makes the first kobyzy, sits down and plays a melody. It is often specified that the bedding on which Korkut sits floats on the surface of the water. He is still trying to hide from death, believing that it is chasing him on land, but will not find him on the water surface. Korkut played and sang for a very long time, but he got tired and fell asleep. A water snake appeared and stung him. And then he died. He died at the zenith of realising his gift of visionary and storyteller, being an expert in all the worlds he had explored on his journey back to the sacral center of the world (Жексембекова 2013: 171; Турсунов 2001: 131-162).

V. Radloff was not able to give a correct decipherment of the incantation text, but already V.V. Bartold saw in it an indication of a kind of immortality of the ancient shaman, which brings Korkut closer to the prophet Al-Khidr (Hyzyr, Khydyr, Қыдыр Ата) from Muslim mythology who sought and found immortality. It is worth noting that the

cult of the prophet Al-Khidr persists throughout the Muslim East and there are several places honoured as his tomb, including a burial site in Upper Egypt and on an island at the mouth of the Shatt-al-Arab. Within the Muslim Sufi shell one can easily detect an ancient Turkic notion, generally characteristic of shamanism: the shaman is an intermediary between the worlds of the living and the dead, humans and spirits, and therefore he himself is simultaneously dead and alive or neither dead nor alive (Маничкин 2020: 156-159). The mythology of Korkut is also closely intertwined with the mythology of Kambar (Қамбар Ата), revered by the peoples of Central Asia as the patron saint of music and horse breeding. The very making of the kobyz is associated with the sacred act of sacrifice, death, and the involvement of dangerous demonic forces. According to one legend, Korkut overheard the way of making kobyz from shaitans (devils). In the myth of Kambar, the first musical strings are the entrails of gutted game, dried on the branches of a tree. In this connection, cultural scientist Z. Naurzbayeva recalls the legend ‘Munlyk-Zarlyk’, in which the sources of music are the dried up bodies of twin infants hanging on a tree (Наурзбаева 2012: 312). It is interesting that in the Turkmen legend Kambar also spread a mat on the water and played the dutar, and sitting on it he performed a piece of music. This complex of myths combines various motifs of the pre-Islamic period, which later, however, entered the practices of Sufism and folk Islam.

The figure of Korkut at the beginning of the last century went beyond incantation or epic poetry. His mysticism interested Kazakh enlightenment poets, the first representatives of the national intelligentsia. They had a Western education, but remaining faithful to ethnic culture, saw in the image of Korkut a source of knowledge and energy necessary for the transformation of society. The lines of Shakarim Kudaiberdiuly, in which the image of Korkut appears as a mystic who gave his being to the search for truth and devotion to the higher powers, are striking. Combining shamanic and Sufi motifs and acquiring a new philosophical depth, Korkut is likened to a yogi ascetic who, in ecstasy, calls into his transparent, thinning body the spirits and demons that invariably accompany the challenges of art and reason (Құдайбердіұлы 1999: 732):

Бақсымын жырлап сарнаған,
Денем жоқ әсер бармаған.
Мидағы жыным, түгел кел,
Хақиқат іске арнаған!

(Singing my shamanic song,
My body is in a state of absence.
Come, all the demons in my mind,
Devoted to the truth!)

It should be noted that the emergence of the baksy figure outside the traditional environment and its appearance among the creative intelligentsia are processes that began in pre-revolutionary times. The work of ethnographers and the growth of national self-consciousness at the turn of the century contributed to the Kazakh intelligentsia's interest in folklore motifs and traditional spiritual practices. For example, in January 1914, the Prikaz Club in Semipalatinsk (now Semey) hosted an ‘ethnographic literary, musical and vocal evening’ where, after reading poems by Alexander Pushkin and Abai Kunanbayev, shaman Berikbai Satiyev performed ‘a session of invoking spirits with a kobyz’ and a report by journalist and researcher Nazipa Kulzhanova (Нәзипа Құлжанова; 1887-1934) on the incantation poetry of the baksy. The importance of the shamanic line in his interpretation of Korkut was emphasised by Saken Seyfullin, and his words that Korkut was the first and strongest baksy would be published as part of a collection of his works only during the Khrushchev Thaw (Сейфуллин 1964: 170-171).

It is natural that the figure of Korkut also attracted the subtle poet Magzhan Zhumabaev, who published his poem Korkyt, based on oral folk stories, in the journal Sholpan in 1922 (Жумабаев 1989: 220-225). Linking the historical origins of the Turks to the Altai, Zhumabaev portrays Korkut as a reflective wanderer who underwent an existential crisis and wandered ‘alone in the expanses of the Altai’ reflecting on the futility and changeability of life. Magzhan Zhumabayev's Korkut flees not only from death, but also from conformism. He leaves the crowd of tribesmen to gather lone heroes to fight. Obviously, Korkut appears in the poem as a kind of spokesman for the collective destiny of the Kazakh people. He metaphorically signifies Zhumabayev's metamorphosis and the political drama of modernity – the defeat in the struggle for Kazakh national subjectivity when the Alash (Алаш) movement was swept away in the transformation of the Russian Empire into a Bolshevik state. The poem is imbued with a tragic, sorrowful feeling, if not pessimistic.

In the USSR, reading the image of Korkut in the spirit of the Alash poets was impossible because of the struggle against so-called feudal vestiges, reactionary individualism and bourgeois

nationalism. In order to legitimise the first shaman and the legendary inventor of the kobyz within Soviet politics, it was necessary to give him a heroic and popular-democratic dimension. Mukhtar Auezov, who became a classic during his lifetime, undertook this task. Condemning the 'bourgeois-oriented individualists' who 'distorted the meaning of the ancient legend and tried to interpret it as agony and make the name Korkut a symbol of despair and death', he found in folklore narratives 'a predominantly optimistic meaning'. Auezov interpreted Korkut's struggle with the forces of fate, his challenge to God, as the Promethean motif so popular in revolutionary and Marxist aesthetics. Korkut Ata, as M. Auezov writes, resembles Prometheus, and at the same time, above all, 'serves the people', through which he finds his true immortality (Әуезов 1999: 459).

And yet, despite titanism and Promethean progressivism, the image of Korkut retained the motif of ancestral heritage, the connection of times. As can be seen in Khalizhan Bekkhozhin's poem published in 1979 in the journal *Zvezda*, this motif was read in the spirit of diachrony: ancient secrets inspire the modern man who rushes forward on a train, but finds it necessary to greet the grave of the legendary elder by leaning out of the carriage window (Бекхожин 1999: 742-743). Freestyle literary interpretations of Korkut include a Faustian interpretation of his personality in Iran-Gayyp's (Iranbek Orazbayev) poem 'The Spell of Korkut,' written in 1999. As if developing Auezov's Promethean line, Iran-Gayyp paints Korkut as a rebel and god-fighter who did not fit into the dogmatic framework of Islam and went wandering in loneliness and longing, as a result of which he invented the kobyz (Хабутдинова, Мотигуллина 2016). This Tengrian hypostasis of the Korkyt image is also found in Turkic fine arts (Саламзаде 2017) and in contemporary ballet, namely in Damir Urazymbetov's work 'Korkyt's Wanderings' (Жуйкова 2020).

The interpretation of the Korkut archetype was fundamentally expanded and deepened by Olzhas Suleimenov, a poet who made the basis of his literary work and research the signs of Turkic culture in the history of mankind and the creative decipherment of these signs, the so-called 'archeology of sign and word'. In 1969, he created *The Clay Book* (Глиняная Книга). It was written instead of a large poetic work commissioned by the ideological leadership of the republic for Lenin's 100th anniversary, and later critics recognised the work as 'the most brilliant Soviet poem'. And if the film 'The Story of the

Sign of the Cow', which tells the story of ancient writing and myths, created by the poet in 1968, is called by some anthropologists the first decolonial cinema of Central Asia, then *The Clay Book*, freeing the meanings and images of Turkic history from sedentarist and Eurocentric narratives, is perhaps the first decolonial poem in Kazakhstani literature.

O. Suleimenov recognised the Kazakh Korkut in the ancient Egyptian Horus or Hor-father (Hor-ht; Horakhty) – the senior solar deity, the living memory of which, in the writer's opinion, has been preserved by the Turkic peoples. In the famous legend of Korkut's death Suleimenov found the main features of the Egyptian story of the setting sun stung by a water snake (Сулейменов 2022: 237-238).

In *The Clay Book* Korkut is brought out under the Egyptian name Khor-akhte (Horakhty), who is one of the significant characters of the book. He is a judge wise in centuries, who passes judgement on the khan without opening his eyes, but electrifying with his presence the whole drama of what is happening and causing insurmountable horror to those around him:

There were eight judges,
who were silent as lions,
and their blood roared in their veins.
Only the wisest of them all Khor-akhte
slept with his eyelids closed
in his own shadow,
and his blood murmured quietly
in his flabby veins,
that could remind one of noon and the aryk.
But the Ishpak Khan knew
that he was as quiet
like a tiger in the jungle.
His leg is lame, but his mind is nimble.
His eyes are narrow, but his forehead is high.
And any honourable warrior who stood before him
would feel himself a despicable and pitiful thief.
When his eyes opened with a creak
and a rusted eyelid would raise an eyebrow,
then the criminals would fall to the ground screaming,
and the bravest of them pissed blood.
Oh, do not meet that ghastly gaze,
seeping through the maze of twisted wrinkles
as the jungle looks at the deer at night –
the genie who sees everything, but remains invisible.'
(Сулейменов 1969: 169-170).

When Khor-akhte finally awoke to pronounce his harsh judgement, he began to sing. He sang, but no one understood him, for he sang in ancient

Egyptian. Khor-akhte is a sleeping (that is, neither living nor dead) and tired deity from the past, a witness to history. But he is also the personification of a circular movement, a return to the origins, in which the answers to questions about life, nature and man are hidden. Through him Suleimenov reminds us that true knowledge is not always linked to external progress and scientific development alone. On the contrary, in order not to lose the sense of interconnected global connections, historical and social, it is sometimes necessary to delve into the depths of mythology and philosophy of the past.

O. Suleimenov returned to Khor-akhty from The Clay Book in the 2000s. In his opinion, in the image of Korkut, as well as in his name, one can easily guess the Egyptian myth about the struggle of the solar deity with the water serpent Aphoph. The myth linking Egyptians and proto-Turks was edited in the Muslim Oguz environment, but Kazakhs preserved the ancient version of the myth about the god of the setting Sun. O. Suleimenov, searching for 'rhymes of the world' in global history and mythological universals, deduces a clear line of correspondences: the time of sunset corresponds to the old age of Korkut Ata, the struggle with the horizon is the desire to avoid death, and Aphoph is a water snake that bit Korkut. Only the kobyz has been added to the Central Asian myth, Suleimenov states. This deconstruction of the myth allowed him to state that the civilisations of the proto-Türks and Ancient Egypt had cultural and historical interrelations (Suleimenov 2002).

According to Olzhas Suleimenov, the plot underlying the story of Korkut was once depicted by graphic symbols denoting sunset (the Sun descended into the water) and sunrise (the Sun rose above the water), and water was depicted by a wavy line, which combines two interpretations of this sign: firstly, water, and secondly, a snake. As is known, in most mythologies of the peoples of the world, snakes are associated with the water element and are connected with the underworld and the world of water. Late Islamisation, the author believes, allowed the Kazakhs to preserve the Egyptian version of the myth about the god of the setting Sun. Here the time of setting (Korkut Ata felt the approach of death), the struggle with the horizon (the desire to avoid death), and the defeat by the water serpent (water-horizon) are marked: 'Thanks to the fact that the Kazakhs have not yet got rid of shamanism, the oldest myth-legend of the Turkic literature has been preserved, proving the true (almost dated) antiquity of the Turkic culture and language. Proving even the very

fact of the presence of the Turks in Ancient Egypt and not as casual guests, but as active participants of the historical process in the times that we attributed yesterday to prehistory' (Сулейменов 2019: 29). In turn, the plot with the graves that Korkut meets on his way at all ends of the world, Olzhas Suleimenov etymologises with a 'soft' variant of the hero's name: Көп күт – 'Wait for the grave...'. By the way, the name of the hero of the Oghuz epic Gör-ogly is translated as 'Son of the grave'.

Of course, academic historians and specialists are more reserved in their conclusions. Alkey Margulan, who devoted a voluminous essay to Korkyt, sees him primarily as a mythologised portrait of a real historical figure. He specifies that the area where Korkyt lived belongs to the lower reaches of the Syr Darya, and therefore the Kazakhs called it 'Suayagy Kurdym' (Суаяғы Құрдым), denoting the place where the wise old man disappeared into the water. This name can be used as an idiom expressing irrevocably hidden, as in Russian 'концы в воду' what does 'cover up the traces' mean. 'Korkut's story is not mere fantasy. Korkyt is one of those outstanding people who in his time occupied an important place in the life of the community. One can talk about the image of a man who became a legend, but there is no doubt that this image was born out of historical reality,' writes Margulan (Марғұлан 1985: 206).

That's the historian's point of view. And what do folklorists say? The researcher of oral genres and sacred poetry E. Tursunov paid special attention to Korkut. He found in him, as in other figures of Turkic culture, the proof in his struggle against the theory of the British historian Arnold Joseph Toynbee, who proclaimed sedentary peoples as the creators of progress, and described nomads as a 'dead-end branch' of human civilisation. Korkut is a majestic and complex image, but at its core Tursunov finds a shamanic cult. He cites the text of a shamanic song in which Korkut Ata, among sacral forces, neighbours with the maiden Zhaisan, the ancient deity Chinggis, the Vulture Shoyynkara, and the spirits of the generals Kabanbai and Zhanibek (Турсунов 2001: 13). The folklorist interprets the very wandering of Korkut, who, according to the legend, is fleeing from death, as the journey of a shaman who is searching all worlds for the lost or stolen soul of a sick person. At the mythological level, the image of Korkut has features of a cultural ancestor who organises order out of primordial chaos. With the development and complication of social relations, the image of Korkut becomes more complex: 'He

acts as a people's mentor, coordinator of moral and ethical processes in society. He reconciles warring parties if there is a split in a monolithic environment, humanises it with his presence. Korkut blesses peace, birth, the blossoming of nature, people's life, calls for the unity of the people in the face of enemy aggression' (Турсунов и др. 2017: 85).

The most philosophical interpretation of the image of Korkut is found in the works of the Kazakh writer and researcher Auezkhan Kodar, who deconstructs it in the context of existential fear of death and the finitude of human existence (Кодар 2002: 121-131; Кодар 1998). The very name Korkyt, which according to the main version comes from the verb *кoпкy*, which means to frighten or scare, receives a Heideggerian translation in Kodar: it refers to the existential anxiety that the abyss of existence causes in people. This mental experience entered the international philosophical vocabulary as *Angst*. A. Kodar notes that at first Korkut perceives death as a private problem connected with specific circumstances, geographical localisation, but his unsuccessful attempts to find a locality beyond death make him realise that death is something 'that conditions the possibility of being in space' (Кодар 1999: 57). This phenomenological discovery leads Korkut to spiritual therapy through creativity. Time cannot be stopped, but one can enter into unity with it through music. The sound of the *kobyz* allows Korkut to find his personal existence in the face of death. In the context of shamanism, this is *kamlanie*; in the context of philosophy or *Daseinsanalysis*, such an experience can be understood as an entry into authenticity.

In Zira Naurzbayeva's cultural analysis, Korkut's existentialism acquires mystical features. It is horrifying because it is connected with death and first matter: 'Korkut is horrifying because he breaks the superficial layer of consciousness, deprives the illusion of order and draws one further and further into the terrible depths of chaos' (Наурзбаева 2021: 68-69). Z. Naurzbayeva analyses the image of Korkut in connection with the gnostic interpretation of the myth of Nurtolle, compares it with Indo-Aryan stories, passes through the methodological apparatus of esoterism, links it with the Turkic metaphysics of Serikbol Kondybay (Серикбол Кондыбай; 1968-2004), resorts to the traditionalist optics of the French mystic René Guénon and the primordialist theory of the German researcher Hermann Wirth. As a result, Korkut becomes an integrative myth, a kind of spiritual foundation of Kazakh tradition, in fact, a prophet and messenger of Tengrianism,

which is labelled as 'original Islam'. In the image of Korkut, the researcher identifies seven hypostases associated with the reconstructed natural philosophy of the ancient Turks: stone, music, wind, fire, water, mother's milk, and the grave (Наурзбаева 2021). In the esoteric version of myth she proposes, music and death together form the figure of Korkut, constituting his ontology in a way that brings to mind the relationship between art and imagination in Gilbert Durand's structural-anthropological model, where different mythological modes appear as variants of man's encounter with the reality of time and the finitude of life (Durand 1992). Considering Korkut in the context of an anthropology of the imagination could offer an integrative model of the structure of his myth, which would allow us to unify all existing Korkutian narratives and interpretations. However, this is a task for a separate research.

Conclusion

In the Kazakhstani intellectual space, it is not the plots of The Book of Dede Korkut that are subject to greater reflection, but the plots of local Central Asian legends. They have long ago, even before the emergence of ethnographic or folkloristic interest in Korkut, become internal lines of Kazakhstan's intellectual history. In addition to the legends and images themselves, living in the oral tradition, one should add to them the versions recorded by ethnographers and folklore collectors, as well as artistic or semi-artistic interpretations and reinterpretations of the Korkut mythology made by Kazakh creative intelligentsia. Several narratives can be distinguished here. There are, as it were, two lines. One emphasises the heroic, god-fighting, tragic or 'Faustian' spirit of Korkut. Both the interpretations of Korkut by the first Kazakh intellectuals of the Alash era and the Soviet Promethean interpretation of Mukhtar Auezov belong to this line, although ideologically they are opposed. Both approaches reflect the modernist spirit of their time. The other line is built around Korkut's shamanism, its connection with the superindividual, mystical beginning, with the primordial state of mind. This approach is characteristic of ethnographers and artists who are interested in promoting the ancient tradition, the pre-Islamic culture of the Turks and Kazakhs. This line is most strongly developed in the cultural works of Zira Naurzbay, who, however, recognises the multidimensionality of Korkut, including not only shamanism, but also the warrior beginning. This line is continued in our time by

representatives of Tengrianism, neo-shamanism, folk Islam and Sufism, including in the context of discussion with Islamic orthodoxy.

The greatest interest in Korkut in the Kazakhstani intellectual milieu was noted on the eve of landmark, turning points in the history of Kazakhstan: at the beginning of the last century, when local intellectuals worked on national consciousness, and in the 1980-90s, on the eve of and immediately after the nation acquired its sovereign state. Korkut Ata was glorified and inscribed in the nation-building project. A university was named in his honour, monuments were erected, and events were held. At the same time, it has not become an official embodiment of the people's subjectivity and a ubiquitous element of the power cultural landscape, as numerous batyrs (knights, warriors) have become. The shaman Korkut Ata remains as if in the shadow of the facade heroes and symbols of Kazakhstani history, and it is quite natural. Obviously, the heroic ethos is more suitable and understandable for the translation of the national image than the shamanic one. In the 2000s, public interest in and representation of Korkut declines somewhat, but it continues to be one of the nodal points of Kazakh history, culture and ethnography.

The intellectual history of Korkut in Kazakhstan contains a number of profound and interesting secular interpretations of its image. First of all, these are Olzhas Suleimenov's transcultural, global-historical interpretation and Auezhan Kodar's existentialist interpretation. Both of them take Korkut outside the usual discourse. The first places his image at the centre of a discussion of the cultural subjectivity of nomads and their interaction with sedentary civilisations of antiquity (folklorist Yedige Tursunov thinks with a different methodology, but in the same direction). The second makes Korkut a philosophical figure. Here it should be noted that Korkut Ata initially had a supranational function in himself, as he was an ancient hero of many

peoples at once. He is, first of all, an expression of the Turkic world. It is not by chance that the performance of the first Korkut's kyu by the kobyz artist Smatay Umbetbayev in 1981 in Yugoslavia caused recognition and great delight among Turks (Найрзбаева 2021: 104). In this respect, Korkut is a field for the work of cultural diplomacy of Turkic countries and the special interest of Turkey, which claims to be a modern Turanian leader and a direct heir of the Oghuz civilisation. Korkut cannot be a purely national hero, but the writers Suleimenov and Kodar have allowed him to go beyond the Turkic world as well. Olzhas Suleimenov's mythological reconstruction provides for a 'connection' to the global history of religion and writing of all mankind, while Auezkhan Kodar sees in the legend of Korkut a fundamental human experience and one of the earliest attempts at philosophical reflection.

All of the above demonstrates that the richness of the Korkut Ata myth has not been exhausted so far. On the contrary, from it, as from an abyss, new ideas and interpretations can be born. The flexible shamanic character of this myth allows it to remain interesting and fruitful in different epochs and in different cultural and political circumstances. Interest in Korkut will probably experience a new round of revision as we enter another era of worldview and historical revision. Besides, the mystical pluriversality, voluminousness and colourfulness of the Korkut myth meet the ethical and aesthetic demands of modernity.

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