

OGHUZ CULTURAL HISTORY – Literature

As a primarily nomadic people, the Oghuz did not produce literature in the sense that the Qarakhanids or the Seljuqs did, that is, written works of various genres produced in their territory, sometimes with official support, they did make an important contribution to Turkic literature in one particular genre, the epic (*destan*). The Oghuz had a rich oral literature of poetry and epics that were generally accounts of the early history and semi-legendary rulers and heroes of the Oghuz. These epics were later written down and preserved. Among these were the K r-Oghlu and Oghuz Kaghan epics, but the earliest, and best known, is the *Book of Dede Korkut*, also known as the *Oghuz-nama*.

The epic consists of thirteen sections: twelve stories concerning the deeds of twelve different heroes, and a thirteenth section containing a collection of the wise sayings of Dede Korkut, a bard who serves as the common link of the stories. The earliest reference to this work is in an early 14th century work by the historian Ibn Aybek Dawadari, an ethnic Qipchak living in Cairo during the reign of the Mamluks. However, the earliest texts of Dede Korkut are were most likely composed in the early 15th century.

The Oghuz epic tradition was clearly carried to Anatolia, where two epics written in Old Anatolian Turkish stand out: the *Danishmend-name* and the *Battalname*. The *Danishmend-name* recounts the exploits of Danishmend Gazi, an 11th century Seljuq general and founder of the Danishmend beylik in central and northern Anatolia. The work was probably composed in the 13th century, but the earliest texts date from the 15th century. The *Battalname* details the life and deeds of Sayyid Battal Gazi, an 8th century Arab warrior who fought the Byzantines. This work was likely composed in the 12th or 13th century, but the earliest text of the *Battalname* dates from the mid-15th century.

Readings

Agajanov, S. G. "The States of the Oghuz, the Kimek and the K pchak", in Asimov, M. S. and Bosworth, C. E. (eds.). *History of civilizations of Central Asia*. Vol. 4, Part One. Paris, 1998

Discussion Questions

1. Why were the Oghuz epics written down at relatively late dates in comparison to Qarakhanid and Seljuq literary works?
2. What information about the Oghuz can historians learn from their epics?