

**ON THE CONCEPTS OF FEAST, BANQUET, ENTERTAINMENT
IN THE BOOK OF DEDE KORKUT***Metin ÖZARSLAN****Abstract:**

There are many valuable works on the Book of Dede Korkut, also known as Kitab-ı Dede Korkut Ala Lisan-ı Taife-i Oğuzân. However, these studies were not considered as a matter of basic entertainment topics, (in places of entertainment shall be in contact was adopted) it was mentioned, touching upon the matter of entertainment when appropriate. In this paper, in the light of previous studies entertainment culture of Turkey, the information that the book of Dede Korkut embodies has been contextualized as a substantive issue. In this way, moving from this work that sheds light on many aspects of our culture, it was aimed to pay attention to the subjects that could provide the entertainment issue with deep meaning.

Key words: The Book of Dede Korkut, Entertainment.

Introduction

As it is known, The Book of Dede Korkut consists of one introduction part and twelve legendary stories which are connected to each other and at the same time self contained in them. The life of the Oghuz, living around Northeast Anatolia and Azerbaijan, is told in these twelve legendary stories. The Book of Dede Korkut is an epic of the Oghuz, one of the major branches of the Turkish peoples. Better known as *Turkomans*, the name they acquired after their conversion to Islam, the Oghuz migrated farther west than most of the Turkish tribes to become eventually the Turks of Turkey. Both the Seljuks and the Ottomans were descendants of the Oghuz, as were the interim Ak-Koyunlu and Kara-Koyunlu dynasties. Their epic, presented here in English for the first time, constitutes one of the most important literary and historical documents from the world of the Middle Ages (Sümer, Uysal and Walker, 1972: ix).

Before talking about the elements of entertainment, which appears as memorials of ancestors, it will be appropriate to give brief information about the concept of entertainment. Society organizes activities to fulfill their needs of entertainment and rest, and any kind of these activities is called as

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public entertainment. In those activities where people all together have fun, many elements forming the cultural identity are created and experienced in the entertainment areas. With the help of this fact, it is known that entertainments have become areas in which the individual becomes conscious about his/her own self, society, history and culture, and from this aspect, entertainments function as the mirror of society. Moving from this definition and complexion, it is possible to collect the entertainment activities under the following titles¹.

a. Banquets-Feasts

The most obvious kind of entertainment seen in Dede Korkut is large and rich meals which are called as feast or banquet. Many tribes start with such a meal. Feasts are regarded as a part of social life and organized because of many reasons. The men immediately organize feast to talk about social matters and decide on them. In epic poems, we see that Oghuz squires come together and have fun. Some of them start with these feasts organized by Bayindir Khan. These are so rich meals. In the book, in two parts, this *eating habit* told in a more colorful way is given to provide an example and in a way completing each other.

“One day, Salur Kazan; son of Ulas, lion of the Dervish, offspring of the bird, hope of the helpless, supporter of the brave men, leo of Amit race, owner of the heroic horse, father of Khan Uruz, groom of Bayindir Khan, brother of Karagune, uncle of Karabudak, state of Strong Oghuz stood. He made ninety headed houses constructed on the black ground. Silk and multicolored carpets were furnished at one thousand places. Multicolored tent reconciled itself to the sky. Water pots were set in eighty places. Golden-footed jugs were ranged. Nine black eyed, beautiful faced, dressed haired, with red buttons on their breasts, hennaed hands and fancy fingers, loveable heathen girls serve the red wine in golden cups to Strong Oghuz squires. Salur Kazan, Son of Ulas, had drunk from hands of all girls. He gave away tents and marquees” (Gökyay 1975; Ergin 1958)².

It is possible to summarize these feasts as *sack feasts* [organized to strengthen social solidarity and sharing], *offer-necessity feasts* [given to make a wish come true], *hunting feasts* [for the first hunting of the young], *wedding feasts* [organized for wedding or engagement], and *gladness feasts* [given for the freedom of hero or any one from his close neighborhood from captivity]. The feasts in the Book of Dede Korkut are shown with their general qualities:

¹ Look for further information (Özdemir, 2005).

² Look for the big feast that Bayindir Khan organized for quriltai (Gökyay, 1975; Ergin, 1958); Look for the description of the feast that Alâeddin Kaikubat organized after he came to the throne (Köprülü, 2004).

*“These feasts are organized for several means. After every invasion with a victory such eating and drinking organizations, lasting seven days and nights, are made. When the name of a child is given, Strong Oghuz squires are again called and hosted. After his son’s return from the first hunting, Oghuz squires are given feasts. In addition, there are necessity feasts. These feasts are rich ones and different from others; hungry people are allayed, the naked get dressed and the indebted are given help there. Feasts are also organized for big gladsome occasions. Beyrek is celebrated for his coming back to Oghuz after sixteen years by ‘sacrificing from horse, camel, sheep, cattle and setting many slaves free’. Such feast are arranged for weddings too, cauldrons are set and stew is cooked there. This is called as **banquet meal**³. **Sacking feast**, organized by Bayindir Khan yearly⁴, is different from them in terms of significance⁵. These meals are called as eating-drinking, feast or banquet and drink, koumiss and wine have an important place in the meals. As it can be obtained above, cupbearers are beautiful girls of heathen. There is no sign that shows the existence of Turkish cupbearer girls. Because being a cupbearer is regarded as a humiliating duty. In addition, when the house of Kazan is sacked, Shökli Melik asks him ‘how should they lament for it’? And they respond comes from himself too, he says that ‘we must bring Long Tall Burla Hatun, the wife of Kazan and use her as a cupbearer’” (Gökyay, 1975; Ergin, 1958).*

Sacking Feasts:

According to tradition, when Inner and Outer Oghuz squires come together, Kazan Bey get his house sacked and for this purpose, he goes out of the house holding his wife’s hand. Then the sacking starts. The most important feast tradition is *sacking feasts* given by the Beys of Oghuz. For example, in the Legend of Bugach Khan, Son of Dirse Khan, “One day Khan Bayindir, son of Kam Gan arose. He made Damascut tent set on earth. The multicolored shade rose to the sky. In one thousand places, silk carpets were furnished. Khan Bayindir, the greatest Khan, organized feast every year and put Oghuz squires up” (Gökyay 1975; Ergin 1958). As it is seen in this statement too, Khan Bayindir, the greatest Khan, used to organize feast once a year to talk about social matters and take decisions.

The epic, in which the Sack of House of Salur Kazan, a similar feast is seen:

“...Ninety headed marquees were constructed on black place. Multicolored and silk carpets were furnished on ninety places. Big pots were set in eighty places. Golden cups and jugs were laid. Nine black

³ Look at for the meanings of the word banquet and the importance of these banquets for Turkish states, for ceremonies and rituals about these (Köprülü, 2004).

⁴ ‘Triennially’ according to Vatican manuscript. (Gökyay, 1975).

⁵ Look at for sacking feast (Gökyay, 1975).

eyed, beautiful faced, having hair with , with red buttons on their breasts and hennaed hands and fancy fingers charming heathen girls were serving drinks to powerful Oghuz squires” (Gökyay, 1975; Ergin, 1958).

As it can be understood from here, heathen girls are used as drink servers. Turkish girls cannot be charged as drink servers, because being a drink server is regarded as a scornful task.

The Outher Oghuz learn that there is a sack feast, in the tribe in which Beyrek dies when Inner Oghuz becomes inoculated against Outher Oghuz, but they are not invited. Again in the same epic, when Aruz Koja kills Bamsi Beyrek, blood smudges to the dinner table. The tribes of Dede Korkut end up like Union of Oghuz, when that blood smudges on the table (Gökyay, 1975; Ergin, 1958).

Offering-Necessity Feasts:

In the epic of Bugach Khan, son of Dirse Khan, “Dirse Khan comes back to his house, and with the desire of his wife decides to organize an offering feast” (Gökyay, 1975; Ergin, 1958). This feast is called as *offering-necessity feast*. In this feast, different from others, hungry people are allayed, naked ones get dresses, the indebted are given help and people pray to God raising their hands.

First Hunting Feasts:

Another important feast is the one organized for *the first hunting*. Getting his name of a young person depends on his proving his age of maturity, shedding blood, taking off a head and hunting. In the epic of Bugach Khan, son of Dirse Khan, the wife of Dirse Khan decides to arrange a feast for the first hunting of his son” (Gökyay, 1975; Ergin, 1958). In the epic of Uruz Bey, son of Kazan Bey, “Burla Hatun, the wife of Kazan Bey, thinks to prepare a feast to Oghuz squires for the first hunting of his son” (Gökyay, 1975; Ergin, 1958).

Wedding Feasts:

Another important feast is *wedding feasts*. In the epic of Bamsi Beyrek, son of Kam Pure, Bamsi Beyrek wants to marry to Bani Chichek, daughter of Pay Bichen, and the father says that they should call oghuz squires and consult them. In the continuation of the epic, as Yaltachuck, son of Yalanchi, marries to Bani Chichek, during a big banquet Bamsi Beyrek comes, takes Bani Chichek, turns back to his house and “wedding feast” is organized. Another wedding feast is the one that is prepared for Kan Turali, son of Kangli Koja (Gökyay, 1975; Ergin, 1958).

Gladness Feasts:

As it has been explained before, in Oghuz tribes all gladness and happiness is celebrated with *gladness feasts*. In the epic in which the house of Salur Kazan is sacked, a feast, which lasts seven days and nights, is arranged when Burla Hatun, wife of Salur Kazan, and his son Uruz is rescued from captivity. In addition, a feast is organized when Uruz, son of Kazan, is rescued from captivity. A similar feast is prepared with the return of Begrek in the epic of Bamsi Begrek (Gökyay, 1975; Ergin, 1958).

For the Oghuz, feasts have an important place in the focus of entertainments, just like eating and drinking for he focuses of feasts. Because of this, “dinner table” is very significant. Meal is the indicator of generosity, dignity, power, courage, happiness and unity.

Hunting:

Flying and walking hunts have a considerable place for the Oghuz not only for entertainment but also as a necessity of their life (Gökyay, 1975).

Hunting and Share:

We know that hunting is important for the Oghuz. Hunting has become an institution among the Mongolian, Seljuks, and Ottomans since very old ages, even beginning from epics⁶.

In the law of Genchis, there are statues about hunting, and just like that in the explanation of the word ‘sugur’ in *Divanu Lûgati’t-Türk* (Atalay, 1999: II), persistence huntings are mentioned. Public hunting ceremonies among the Seljuks of Anatolia are like the ones of the Genghis and later the Timur. These drives, which are known as a tradition taken from the Seljuks during the first times of Ottomans, became an organization with an obvious name for Ottomans (Uzunçarşılı, 1945; Köprülü, 2004).

It is obviously seen that hunting was as important as war in the tribes of Dede Korkut. Salur Kazan says to Oghuz squirels ‘we do not feel good, let us have a game, go hunting, hunt birds, deer’ and they go hunting. Some of them are drives: “Red armed man went to the red-mountain to hunt.” All squirels of Oghuz attend to the hunting. “If three hundred sixty-six brave men hunt” is said and hunting lasts long. Kazan Bey states, “I will go hunting with food for seven days” (Gökyay, 1975; Ergin, 1958). Two words are used according to the kind of hunting. There are idioms like ‘hunting prey’, used for wild animals, and ‘Fowling’ for hunting the birds which are accustomed to trainings in flying huntings. Ali Shir Navai (Barutçu-Özönder, 1996), who says that hunting and bird are of customs’ of Sultans and take part in their ceremonies, and each one is a separate concern, states that both of them

⁶ Look at for further information (Reşit Rahmeti-W. Bang, 1936), (Temir, 1948).

together are called as 'prey' and the principle of hunting is *deer*. Kashgarli Mahmut calls walking hunting animals as 'deer'; however, he means animals whose flesh is eaten like gazelle, cattle, mountain goat from a general perspective. It is natural that hunting, which has such an important place for the Turks, has some customs of its own. It is possible to see it in the epic of Bugach Khan, son of Dirse Khan: "The son cannot go to hunting without his father. Cowards who are jealous of Bugach complains about him to his father saying, "Your son hunted birds while you are alive" in the same tribe, a big feast is given when the son returns from his first hunting:

"The wife of Dirse Khan said 'It is the first hunting of my dear son', he offered studhorse among the horses, the biggest one of the camels, ram among the sheeps, and said 'I will call the honorable Oghuz squires'" (Gökyay, 1975; Ergin, 1958).

Another important feature obtained in Dede Korkut is 'sharing the hunting'. Kisirca Yenge, nanny of Bani Chickek, wants share from the deer that Beyrek has shot in front of his fiancée's marquee. Beyrek says, "I am not a hunter, I am a squire, son of a squire and all to you."

The custom of 'sharing' the hunted prey between Eastern Anatolia and Azerbaijani Turks, which is still seen, is called as 'ucu' among Altai Turks. This custom can be obtained among the Shors, the Soyots and the Kazakhs, and among the Soyot people there is a punishment of 40-60 bats for those who has not performed this custom. For the Kirghiz people the word 'Soga' means gift given from the booty of war or hunt. There are words about this custom among the Yakuts, Mongolians, in the languages of Kirghiz and Kazakh, in Divanu Lûgati't-Türk, dictionaries of Jagatai and Baburnamah. The custom lives among the Turkish tribes just mentioned and it is known that it is practiced around Gaziantep (Eren, 1950).

Sackings:

Tradition of Sacking:

It is told in the Book of Dede Korkut that the squire Kazan brings Inner and Outher Oghuz squires together every three years and after they gather, he makes his house sacked. The reason of Outher Oghuz's is becoming inoculated against Inner Oghuz comes from this tradition, because Outher Oghuz has not been invited to the sacking. According to the tradition, 'The custom of Kazan squire was that if the fled makes his house sacked, he takes the legitimate of the house and goes out of the place. They sack the property and things in the house.

It seems impossible to follow the roots of this tradition, which was named in our history with a Persian word, "sacking of house". This tradition seems to get lost in the darkness of history; however, with the appearance of the Book of Dede Korkut, a similar type of the tradition is seen among the

natives of North America. Sociologists call the tradition as ‘potlach’ and the principle of it is challenging to the opposite party by arranging a feast full of wastage. The man, who organizes the *potlach*⁷ feast, gives meals, drinks and dresses to the every individual of his clan and later wants them to collect and take the meals, dresses, cauldrons and blankets that is left at the square (Gökyay, 1975).

Fuat Köprülü (1931) claims that it was a necessity for chief of the tribe or khan to arrange communal feasts to his people in the old tribal life of Turks and Turkish states before Islamism, this tradition which was the remaining of an old religious ritual has taken the shape of a law concern, and it can be seen even in Orkhun Inscriptions. Here, Köprülü (1923) mainly talks about *feasts*. He states that for the Karakhanid state is the common property of the reigning family. At the top of this family khan stands. The khan arranges a feast for everyone, which is called as *sacking of house* by Iranians because the khan has the *power of paternal* of his clan. After the meal has been eaten, every pots and pans at the table are sacked.

According to Osman Turan (1948), in the understanding of old Turkish state, khan was regarded as a ‘father’ for all his clan, and he was ‘responsible for feeding, clothing the hungry and the naked community and increasing their number.’ This understanding lasted for the Karakhanid and the Seljuks in the same way. He says that Turkish paganism’s law basis, which takes from religious concepts and rituals, chiefs had to organize communal feasts for their heroes at specific times and with specific ceremonial things, after the feast the chief had to make his property sack; and these feasts got names like *eating-drinking, feast, meal* and they strengthened the control of the chief (Köprülü, 2004; Ziya Gökalp, 2007).

Abdulkadir İnan (1957) explains ‘sacking of house’ according to its Turkish equivalent with the word *kencliyu*, which takes place in Divan-u Lûgati’t-Türk and he states the meaning so ‘it is a table which has thirty ells height like a minaret, and at bairams and weddings of khans it is sacked.’

The sacking tradition, which lasted until the end of XVIIIth century in Ottoman palaces, is seen in older centuries. Arabian ruler Seyfuddevle Sadaka organizes a feast in honour of Melikshah, sultan of the Seljuks, and Seyfuddevle Sadaka obeys Turkish tradition and makes gold and silver sets sack at the table⁸.

In sources, there are more records showing that sacking tradition lasts in Ottoman Palaces. This tradition is performed in ceremonies like sultan weddings or distributing his to the janissary. There is information about this topic in Surname, similar records and in works of foreigners who saw these

⁷ Look at for further information about this topic (Ziya Gökalp, 2007).

⁸ Look at for further information about this topic (Sümer, 1959).

ceremonies that tell the wedding of Shahzadah Mehmed, son of Sultan Murat III.

Traces of the tradition can be slightly seen in Anotolia. In Zile, the property of wedding house is sacked, owner of the house cannot resist; sacking is the right of the guests, it cannot be taken back (Gökyay, 1975). In Cumra, county of Konya, when bride comes to groom's house, she stands by the door and they throw a chicken towards the crowd. The crowd tries to catch the chicken and it is called as 'catching chicken.' This tradition is seen villages of Zile and among Crimean Turks (Öztelli, 1958 and 1963). In Bakir village of Kirkagach, county of Manisa, there is a tradition according to which in the morning of wedding night, groomsmen take some objects like sock or handkerchief and escape from the room of dowry, but they do not take the objects of the bride (Açıköz, 1963).

b. Entertainments

Dances/Games/Plays:

In wedding ceremonies, as it is today, women dance. Unfortunately, its details are not known. Maybe we can say that women adapt themselves to the lute of the Bard and dance so. Because the saz that are mentioned in the Book of Dede Korkut are always played by men (Gökyay, 1975).

48

Shagai Game:

In the Book of Dede Korkut, Bugach Khan plays this game with three boys at the square. Bugach Khan was fifteen years old at those times, so this game should be the play of young man. Today, this game is still played in some parts of Anatolia among men and boys (Sümer, 1959). As it is known this game is played with *shagai bones*. All of the four sides of the bone have their names. Big bones are called as 'saka', little ones as 'honek'. Upper bulge of the bone is called as 'alcı', under part as 'tokan', dip of its side as 'cig', other side as 'tug'. In Maras, the bone is regarded to have two sides as girl and boy, and the game is played with Money like gamble. In actual shagai game, cavity part of the bone is called as 'cık', humped part on the opposite side of this as 'tuk', and from the rest two sides, straight one is named as 'kit', facing side of this as 'say'. Various games are played with this bone. They have separate names and terms about the play. Shagai game can played at home or out, at square⁹. Among Turk nomadics, telling fortunes with these bones is a custom. We see this in the epic of Edige. Abdulkadir İnan tells that he has listened a story from the Uzbek of Samarkand, and this story is about a *shagai fortune* of Saybak Khan when he

⁹ Look at shagai game (Abdülkadir [İnan], 1930), (Müşfika Abdülkadir, 1930), (Enver Sadık, 1933), (Demiray, 1960), (M. Osman, 1934).

is getting ready to surround and attack to the city of Samarkand (İnan, 1954; Gökyay, 1975).

Contests:

Arrow contest and shooting:

Beyrek and his fiancée Bani Chichek are seen performing an arrow contest. Apart from this, in weddings Oghuz squires shoot arrows to the ring of their grooms. In the life of the Oghuz, arrow contesting and shooting present a view like daily concerns¹⁰. In fact, there is a sign about this elsewhere. “While my son Uruz was throwing arrow, he suddenly stood not moving.” (Gökyay, 1975; Ergin, 1958).

Wrestling:

Wrestling is so common that Banu Cicek’s wrestling with Beyrek to see his power is not found something odd (Gökyay, 1975; Ergin, 1958).

Duel:

In the Book of Dede Korkut a ‘duel scene’ is also seen. This duel fought between Kanturalı and his wife, whom he intended to kill for the fear of hurting his pride. There is no record about the presence of such a tradition among the Oghuz elsewhere. However, here a duello scene is directly seen. On the other hand, choosing weapons is not in question. Actually, weapon of the both sides is evident and it is arrow. Here, unlike the duels, Seljen Hatun, who will be the first one to use the weapon because of being a girl, removes the arrowhead of arrow, which she is going to shoot to Kanturalı (Gökyay, 1975; Ergin, 1958).

Horseracing:

Horseracing is just like wrestling. Solely, not just boys compete with each other, but girls also compete with boys, too (Gökyay, 1975; Ergin, 1958).

Animal Wrestling:

Animals of the same kind, not from the same race, have been wrestled with each other. For example, Bayindir Khan makes his bull, which is such a strong one that if he goes to a stone, he can grind it like flour, fights with the adult male camel only in summer and autumn. He watches these wrestling together with Strong Oghuz Squires and feels relieved (Gökyay, 1975; Ergin, 1958).

¹⁰ Look at about sport issue (Eberhard, 1940: 214).

Conclusion

As a conclusion, it is possible to say that there is a concept of entertainment which appears in the Book of Dede Korkut, mainly consists of feasts and much rather is based on eating and drinking. Absolutely this kind of entertainment has many functions. Nebi Ozdemir (2005) who arranges the function of entertainment as “economical”, “political”, “social and psychological” and “cultural” consider “The tribe in which Beyrek Dies When Inner Oghuz Becomes Inoculated against Outher Oghuz” under the title of “political function” and mentions of these matters as an example to this function.

“It is necessary to ensure legitimacy of khanate and sovereignty that khan must host the squires, feed the hungry, clothe the naked, help the indebted and make the great tent sacked. In this story, it is explained that not attending to the sacking banquet means to go against the existing khan and sacking banquet was used to get the approval of sovereignty, won through wars, over the rival groups. Moreover, among the ancient Turks, with the help of feasts and banquets organized for various causes, social justice and peace were founded and the continuation of managing system was ensured” (Özdemir, 2005).

Here, it is only contented with determined concepts of entertainments in the tribes of Dede Korkut within the framework of the notification. However, it is clear that every folkloric occasion includes one or more than one function. From this sentence it can be said that all of the entertainments in the tribes of Dede Korkut separately undertake one or more than one, clear or hidden functions. For example, it is seen that hunting have economical functions, weddings social and psychological ones, contests cultural ones and besides these, they contain different functions too. At the same time, the entertainments in the tribes of Dede Korkut emerge as a lifestyle and this entertainment has specific limitations and rules. Because of this, the entertainments, in the tribes of Dede Korkut, requires to be separately evaluated in terms of functions.

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