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EDIGE AND THE NOGAI EPIC TRADITION

Abstract. This article investigates the epic tradition of the Nogais, focusing specifically on the widely disseminated cycle of the Edige Epic. The Edige Epic is recognized as the most widespread heroic epic in the world, covering the territory of the former Nogai Horde and the Crimean Khanate. The primary material for analysis is the version recorded in 1975 from the jiraw Bekbolat-uwlı Janbaj among the Kara-Nogai group of Northern Daghestan. The historical foundation encompasses events of the 14th–15th centuries, such as the disintegration of the Jochi Ulus and the power struggle between Toktamış, Temür, and Edige. The mythological layer, present in the Kara-Nogai version, includes Edige's descent from the legendary saint Baba Tükli and a demonic girl who transforms into a wolf. A comparative analysis with Kazakh and Karakalpak versions reveals how these mythological motifs, including the substitution of the swan maiden with a dove, serve the purpose of the hero's religious and spiritual legitimization. In conclusion, it is emphasized that the epic plays a vital role in preserving and strengthening the ethnic identity and sense of unity among the Nogai people, as well as in the formation of modern ethnic identities in the Eurasian Steppe.

Keywords: Edige, Epic tradition, Turkic heroic epics, Nogais, Nogai Horde, Crimean Khanate.

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Introduction

The Nogai Horde (1440-1634) became independent during the disintegration of the Jochi Ulus (1242-1502)¹ in the 15th century. The Nogais were the Kypchak Turkic speaking nomadic population of the steppe between the Edil-Jajık (Russian

Volga and Ural) and the Low Danube (Dobruja). They are mostly the descendants of the Cumans of Eastern Europe from the 10th and 13th centuries. This is proven by modern Nogai folklore of the 20th and 21st centuries (Sheikaliev, 1991:6-7). Except the

¹ In the Russian sources the capital of the Jochi Ulus, Sarai by the Edil (Volga) River was mistakenly called as Golden Horde but the local people never used that name. The nomadic state had many hordes (Kypchak Turkic orda "governing center"). The word "golden" could have meant that Sarai was the most important. Besides Sarai the town of Sugnak (near Turkestan) was another center, and the east and western part of the Jochi Ulus were called Kök and Ak orda (Golden 1992: 297).

people of Köten who migrated to Hungary the Cumans accepted Mongol rule under Nogai khan (1235-1300). This is why they started to use the name Nogai's people (*Nogaj eli*).

The disintegration of the Jochi Ulus was triggered by the fact that the Eastern and Western parts (Kök and Ak Hordes) could not agree on the succession of khans. Toktamış khan (1378-1397) ceased power from his uncle Urus khan (1361-1377) with the help of the ruler of Samarqand, Temür amir (1370-1405). Toktamış tried to unite the empire while the western part was ruled by Mamaj *mīrzā* (1361-1380)², a military leader (*beklerbek*) from the Kijat clan. When Mamaj was defeated by the Russians (1378-1380), Toktamış executed him and united the two hordes. But the clans of the Kök (Blue Horde) started to support Edige warlord (*amīr*) from the Manggit clan.

When Toktamış attacked Azerbaijan (Northern Iran) Temür quickly occupied the region during his Iranian campaign (1387). Toktamış turned against Temür and attacked Khwarazm which was a grave mistake. Temür made an alliance with Edige of the Manggit clan and organized a campaign against Toktamış (1391) who retreated up to the Edil (Volga) River. Then Temür defeated him by the Terk River (Russian Terek) north of Daghestan (1395)³. Although Caucasian peoples (Circassian, Chechen, Avar, etc.) supported Toktamış but Edige chased him away (1397) and put a puppet khan Kutlug Temür in his

place. Later he or his son probably killed Toktamış (1406) near Sibir (modern Tümen). In 1410 Edige's son Nuraddin *mīrzā* turned against his father who fled to Khwarazm⁴. Nuraddin backed Temür Kutlug's son Temür khan (1410-1412)⁵ who led a campaign against Edige. Meanwhile Toktamış's son Jalāladdīn khan supported by the Lithuanians occupied Sarai, capital of the Jochi Ulus (1412). Finally Edige was ousted from Khwarazm by Temür amir's son Shahrukh *mīrzā*. After returning to Sarai Edige made peace with his son and helped other puppet khans to the throne (1414-1419). Finally the son of Toktamış Kabırberdi killed him in a battle. During the rule of his son Nuraddin (1419-1440) the Jochi Ulus was divided and the Nogai Horde became independent. Division of the Golden Horde

- 1) Sibir or Özbek Khanate (1428)
- 2) Kazan Khanate (1438)
- 3) Kırım Khanate (1441)
- 4) Kazak Khanate (1456)
- 5) Hajitarkan Khanate (1466)

Shiban's descendent⁶ Abu-l-khair (1428-1468) from Sibir with the help of Nuraddin and Waqqas occupied Khwarazm from the Temürids (1430). Later Abu-l-khair created the Özbek Khanate (1430-1500) along the Syr-daria and ruled from Sıganak and Yasī (Region of Turkestan). In 1456 the Jochid sons of Barak khan (1421-1427) Kerei and Janibeg khans rebelled against Abu-l-khair and founded the Kazak Khanate at the western frontier (Jeti-suw) of Moghulistan (Chaghatai Ulus). Abu-l-khair had a

²The Persian word *mīrzā* is the shortened form of *amīr-zāde* "amir's son". This title was used for rulers who were not from the so-called golden clan of Chingis khan. They could not hold the title of khan because they were descendants of military rulers (*amīr*). The descendants of Temür and Edige used the title of *mīrzā*.

³The famous battle by the Terk river was close to the town of Majar that was also damaged during the war.

⁴It explains the origin of the Karakalpaks who were part of the Nogai Horde but after the attack of the Kazak Khanate they were separated and became the subjects of the Khwarazm (Khiwa) Khanate ruled by the Shibanids and later the Kongirat. Jädigär özbek khan's (1468-1469) grandchild Ilbars khan founded the Khwarazmi Özbek Khanate.

⁵Should not be mixed with Temür amir küregen (1370-1405) the Barlas ruler of Samarqand.

⁶Shiban khan (1237-1266) was Jochi's grandson. Shiban's descendants ruled the Northern part of Kazakhstan (West Siberia or Alash Orda).

debate with the Nogais and he was killed by Waqqas *mīrzā* (1468).

The Non-Muslim (Kalmak) Oirad Tribe (1438-1634) also interfered during their western campaign (1453). During the war between the Kazaks and Özbeks Abu-l-khair's grandson Muhammad gave up the territory of the Özbek Khanate in Turkestan (Syr-darya) and migrated to Mawara-an-nahr (Transoxania) in 1500. He founded the Bukhara Khanate (1506) forced the ruling Timurids out of the region. In the Sibir Khanate Nogais helped the Shibanid (Özbek) Ibak khan (1468-1495) to keep his power against the local Taibuga clan. In 1480 the Russians defeat the remnants of the Jochi Ulus (Great Horde)⁷ by the Ugra River. Their ruler Ahmed khan (1465-1481) with the help of the Nogais (Waqqas' sons Jamgurchy and Musa) killed Ibak khan (1468-1495) in the Sibir Khanate.

The names of these new political units influenced the formation of modern ethnic identities in the Eurasian Steppe (Nogai, Özbek, Kazak, etc.). It is not by accident why the story of the war between Toktamış, Temür and Edige played a vital role in the epic tradition and ethnic identity of these nomadic groups.

Materials and research methods

The core material for this study is a specific version of the Edige and Nuraddin epic cycle recorded from the Kara-Nogai group of Northern Daghestan. This version was originally collected in 1975 by the researcher Tahir Akmambetov from the esteemed *jiraw* (epic singer) Bekbolat-uwlı Janbaj (Yanpoi), who was born in 1953. This paper utilizes the resulting transcribed text, providing the first English translation and in-depth analysis of this particular variant.

The text analyzed originates from the Kara Nogai communities inhabiting the steppe region between the Kum and Terk rivers in Northern Daghestan. The author conducted initial fieldwork among this group in 2013 to establish the contemporary ethnographic context of the tradition.

A key methodological consideration is the nature of the performance itself. Unlike epic traditions in Central Asia, where instruments such as the *dombra* or *kobuz* often accompany the singer, the Nogai epic singers (*jiraw*) in the 20th century typically recited their stories without any musical accompaniment. This unaccompanied recitation style is a crucial characteristic of the Nogai performance tradition, which informs the rhythmic and structural integrity of the analyzed text.

To contextualize the unique features of the Kara-Nogai narrative, a comparative philological and folkloristic approach is employed. The study draws on parallel versions of the epic from other Kypchak-Turkic peoples, particularly:

1. The Kazak version of the Edige epic, used to trace lineage and common mythological motifs (e.g., the swan maiden motif).

2. Karakalpak variants, which share similar features with the Nogai version, particularly regarding the use of the *kögeršin* or *kepter* (dove) instead of the swan⁸.

3. Historical and legendary texts, such as the 16th-century legend recorded by Ötemish Haji concerning the conversion of Özbek khan, to link the epic's mythological genealogy (like Baba Tükli) to broader Turkic and Islamic narrative traditions.

This comparative methodology allows for the identification of local innovations within the Kara-Nogai text and helps

⁷The remaining territory of the Jochi Ulus was the region around the town of Sarai.

⁸For the Karakalpak version by Erpolat jiraw (Däwletnazarov, Bekmuratov, 1990: 12).

determine how specific mythical motifs function to validate the hero's lineage and cultural relevance within the Nogai historical worldview.

Discussion

Edige as an Epic Hero

Obviously, the historical Edige differs from the Epic hero. In the epic story Edige from the Manggit clan is the descendant of a legendary Muslim saint Baba Tükli (or his son Bar-Kaja) and a fairy girl (peri kız). So he has religious and spiritual legitimacy (Somfai 2010). The story Baba Tükli „Hairy Father” is widespread in Central Asia. His original name was Tükles and Tükli comes from that. But we might be dealing with folk etymology. Originally his name must have been Tögeles Baba meaning the Saint of the Tögeles/Töölös clan⁹. In a legend recorded in the 16th century about the conversion of the Jochid Özbek khan (1312-1341) the author Ötemish Haji gave the etymology of the name from the Tükles form.

Özbek khan's conversion to Islam (DeWeese, 1994: 541-543)

The aforementioned khan [Özbek] – peace be upon him – was a great ruler. When he had ruled for several years, he became a Muslim through the favor of God most high.

The cause of Özbek Khan's [conversion to] Islam was [that] inspiration came from God most high to four saints (Arabic walī) from among the saints of that age:

– Go and summon Özbek to Islam!

And by the command of God most high they came to the court (eşik 'door') of Özbek Khan and sat outside [his] royal court (korug). It is related [that] the infidel and diviners of the unbelievers used to display such wonder to the Khan: they would bring a large bowl [full of honey]

and place it before the Khan's assembly, and would prepare the vessel and pitchers; (A ferment made from) honey would be poured into the vessel and the [product] strained into the pitcher, and they would give the essence from the pitcher to him. The Khan considered all his sorcerers as advisors (šayx), and, seating them at his side, he paid them great respect and honor.

But one day [something unusual happened]. When the [saints] came and seated [themselves], the Khan, as on any other day, in observance of the custom of the assembly, came with his advisors, and all of them sat down. As on any other day, his goblet (paymāna) and the honey were brought and placed before the vessel and the pitcher. Quite a long time has passed, during which no honey was poured into the vessel as was usual, nor was the honey strained into the pitcher [as was custom]. The Khan said to his advisors of his:

– Why has this honey been left in abeyance?

The advisors [shamans] said:

– Probably a Muhammadan has come near, and this is his sign.

The Khan commanded:

– Go and look beyond the royal reserve! And if there is a Muhammadan, bring him [here]!

The servants went out investigated beyond the royal reserve. They saw [that] outside the royal reserve four persons of a different appearance were seated with their heads cast down. The servants said:

– What kind of people are you?

They said:

– [Take] us into the Khan's presence!

And they brought them [there]. The Khan's gaze settled upon them, and because God most high illuminated the Khan's heart with the light of guidance, an attraction and

⁹ Written as tükalās in the Arabic scripts but can be pronounced togalās in Persian and tögeles in Turkic.

affection appeared in his heart toward these whom he saw. He asked:

– What kind of people are you, and on what business have you come?

They said:

– We are Muhammadans, and we have come by the command of God most high in order to make you a Muslim.

At this moment the Khan's advisors cried out saying:

– These are bad people; one should kill them rather than speak [with them]!

The Khan said:

– Why would I kill them? I am a ruler (Persian *pādšāh*); I have no cause for alarm from any of you. Whoever's religion may be true, I will be with him; if their religion is not true, why was your work today confounded and left without effect? [So] debate with one another; whoever among you has the religion that is true, I will follow him.

These two parties fell into discussion with one another, and together made much turmoil and contention. At last they gave him their decision: they would dig two oven-pits (Persian *tannūr*) and fire up each one with ten cartloads of tamarisk (Chagatay *söksewül*) [wood]. One person from among the shamans would enter one oven, and one person among these [saints] would enter the other oven. Whoever emerges without being burned, his religion will be true, they resolved.

The next morning they dug two great oven-pits; they gathered tamarisk wood and heated them up. They assigned one to the shamans and the other to the Muslims. These saints (Arabic *'azīz*) were solicitous for one another [saying]:

– Which of us shall go in?

One of them was called Baba Tükles (Tögeles), because all of his limbs were covered with body hair (Turkic *tük*). He said:

– Give me permission; let me go in. You

fix your attention on me.

The [other] saints recited the *fātiha* [blessing] on his behalf. [Then] that Baba Tükles said:

– Prepare armor (jibe) for me.

[And] when they had prepared the armor, he put it on over his bare flesh. Then he began to recite the remembrance (*talqīn*) of God Highest, and moved toward the oven. They say [that] the Baba's body hair stood straight up and came out the eyelets of the armor; everyone saw this phenomenon. He walked [on] and entered the oven. [And] they brought the flesh of a sheep and hung it over the oven, and fastened its opening.

Now we have come to the story of the shamans. The shamans took out one among them by force and threw him into the oven; as soon as he fell in, the ashes [of his body] turned blue and green and the flames [from his body] came out of the mouth of the oven.

When all the people, beginning with the Khan. Saw this phenomenon, their hearts turned away from the infidel religion and inclined to the Muslim way.

And the voice of the Baba uttering [his] recitation came uninterruptedly out of the [other] oven. When it was presumed that the sheep's flesh was fully cooked, they opened the mouth of the oven; [and] Baba, wiping the sweat from his blessed face, came out of the oven; saying:

– Why did you hurry? If you had held off for a time, my business would have been finished.

They saw that the armor was glowing red hot; by the power of God most high not a hair of the Baba's body was burned. When all the people, beginning with the Khan, saw this situation, they at once grasped hold of the hems of the sheikhs' [garments] and became Muslims; praise be to Allah for

Thus, Özbek nation (*tā'ifa*) became Muslim in the time of Berke Khan, [but]

after him they apostatized and became infidels. [But] the great Özbek Khan became Muslim, and since then the Islam of the Özbek nation has not waned. They say [that] Özbek Khan ruled for twenty years, and others say he ruled eighteen years. Then he attained the mercy of God: “Verily we are God’s and unto Him do we return”.

History of the Independent Nogai Horde

The history of the Nogais was really turbulent from the 16th century onward. Kazak Khanate under Qasim khan (1511-1521) got strong and attacked the Nogais’ central territory among the Edil (Volga) and Jajik rivers.¹⁰ Part of the Nogais supported Moscow against the Kırım Khanate when Ivan the Terrible (1533-1584) created the Russian Empire (1547). This alliance proved to be fatal¹¹, the Russians occupied the Kazan and Hajitarkan (Astrakhan) Khanates (1552-1556) that were under Nogai influence before. Political division started inside the Nogai Horde. Yūsuf (1549-1554) and Ismā’il (1555-1563) continued to support the Russians while Ghāzī (Kazı) made an alliance with Kırım. So Ghāzī in 1557 established the Lesser Nogai Horde by the Koban river, which together with the Kırım Khanate became a vassal to the Ottoman Empire.¹² Meanwhile Russian reached the Terk river by supporting the Circassians.¹³ The Kırım Khanate with the help of Nogais

fought against the Russian¹⁴, but finally they were crushed by the Cossacks of the Jajik river (1580).¹⁵

In the 17th century Nogais continued to have inner conflicts (Greater and Lesser Hordes) while Russians started to attack Kırım Khanate.¹⁶ Then the Russians invited some of the Oirad Mongols of the Altai¹⁷ to migrate to the territory of the Nogai Horde. In 1634 the Kalmak Region (Xalimag Tanggachi)¹⁸ was created with Russian assistance by the Edil (Volga) River. The Greater Nogai Horde was destroyed and many Nogais joined the clans of the Bashkurt, Sibir Tatar and Western Kazak (kishi jüz) tribes. The remnants or Kara Nogais migrated to the Kum and Terk rivers (North of the Chechens and Daghestanis). In 1711 the Kalmak and Russian troops attacked the Koban region. After their victory the Russians wanted to colonize the Oirad (Kalmak) tribes so in 1771 many Oirad (mainly Torgaut) migrated to Jungaria.¹⁹

Soon the Kırım Khanate (1770-1783) submitted to Russian rule and many Nogais fled the Koban regions where in 1783 general Suvorov committed a genocide against the Nogais. Some of the Nogais moved to East Circassia (Kabarda) and neighboring regions (Besh-tau, Kyrk-aul, Majar). In 1860 the Russians the occupation of Northern Caucasus²⁰ triggered the Circassian exodus

¹⁰The attack of Sarajčik by the Kazaks in 1521 probably led to the separation of the clans around the Aral Lake and the formation of the so-called Karakalpaks who became the subjects of the independent Shibanida Khwārazm (Khiva) Khanate (1511-1804). Later the Kongirat clan leaders (inak) created the Kongirat Khanate (1804-1920) which had Özbek and Karakalpak origin.

¹¹The epic of Čora batır comes from this era in the Nogai folklore. Čora (1526-1546) was fighting the independence of the Kazan Khanate against the Kırım Khanate.

¹²During the siege of Szigetvár in 1566 Nogai cavalry were deployed by the Ottoman army.

¹³Ivan the Terrible (1547-1575) married the Circassian ruler Temrük mırzā’s daughter Kūchenei (1560), but in 1570 Dawlat Kerei-khan of Crimea subjugated Circassians. During the 17th and 18th centuries the majority of Circassians and Alans converted to Islam thus pushing Christianity out of the region.

¹⁴The Kırım Khanate attacked Astarkhan in 1569 and Moscow in 1571.

¹⁵The first invader of Sibir Yermak (1532-1585) was a cossack from Jajik (Ural) River.

¹⁶They also attacked regions of Poland and Hungary.

¹⁷The Torgūd migrated under Khou-Örleg to the West and some Dörbed also joined them.

¹⁸The common name for the non-Islamic Oirad among the Kypchak and Kyrgyz peoples is kalmak.

¹⁹Nowadays Torgūd live east of the Tarbagatai Mountains in Kobag-Sair District (Xinjiang, China), about 20 thousand people and 30 % of the whole population of the district.

and many Nogai and Kırımli (Crimean Tatars) migrated Dobrudja and Anatolia.²¹ Once a regional power in Eastern Europe the Nogai Horde ceased to exist and their people scattered between various countries (Russia, Turkey, Romania and Bulgaria), But even today they have a strong ethnic identity and the feeling of unity which is expressed and strengthened by their epic tradition.

Results

Fieldwork among the Nogais

I conducted my first fieldwork among the Nogais in 2013 when I visited the so-called Kara Nogai group of Northern Daghestan. This steppe region between the Kum and Terk rivers (not far from the town of Majar)²² were added to Daghestan only in 1957. Nogais number around 50,000 in Daghestan and mainly live in Nogai District (25,000) as well as some neighboring districts (Babajurt 7,500, Kızlar 3,500, Tarumovka/Kara-Bazar 3,000).

Other Nogai groups are:

1) Chechnia (4,000): separated from the Kara-Nogai District in 1957 (Shelkovsk District).

2) Stavropol (22,000): jetisan, jeti-üşkül, jembojluk from Kırım (Neftekumsk District).

3) Karachai-Circassia (16,000): Koban and Kırım Nogais (Nogai District by the Koban).

4) Astrakhan Region (7,000): karagaş nogaj (Krasnoiar District by the Edil/Volga).

5) Western Siberia (10,000): labor migrants (Khanty-Mansi District).

Outside Russia:

6) Dobrudja, Romania (15,000): Nogais from the Kırım Khanate (designated as Tatars).

7) Turkey (around 100,000): mainly from Dobrudja (mostly assimilated).

8) Souther Bashkurtia: some Nogai groups assimilated to the Bashkurts.

9) Lithuania, Belarus, Poland (15,000): so-called Lipka Tatars.

10) Crimea (40 thousand): mixed with Kırım Tatars (Kırımly or Tat).

11) Xinjiang, China (4 thousand): they are designated as Tatars.

In 2013 I met Tahir Akmambetov (born 1953) in Terekli-mektep, center of the Nogai District (Daghestan). In 1975 he recorded the epic story of Edige and his son Nuraddin from Bekbolat-uwlı Janbaj (registered as Yanpoi). Unfortunately the epic singers (jıraw) who could perform whole epic songs had deceased in the 1990s. Meanwhile this text was published in Russian (2016)²³ but this is the first English translation ever published.

In the 20th century epic singers called jıraw in Nogai recited their stories without any musical instrument unlike epic singing in Central Asia where it is usually accompanied with some musical instrument. The Kazaks

²⁰The Circassians were submitted to Russia in 1860 right after Caucasian Imamate (Murid State of Chechens and Daghestanis) 1859 accepted Tsarist rule. In 1864 the Circassian Ubykh tribe around Sochi also submitted to the Russians.

²¹An estimated 7,000 Nogais of the Bucak and Yedisian Hordes settled in Dobruja before 1860. However, the great exodus of the Nogais took place in 1859-1861. Many clans from Camboyluk and Koban Hordes moved westwards to southern Ukraine, and wintered with their co-ethnics there in 1859. They emigrated either through the ports of Feodosia or Kerch or crossing via the Budjak steppes to Dobruja. 50,000 of the Roughly 70,000 Nogais of the Koban and adjacent Stavropol region left Russia for the Ottoman Empire during this period. They induced the Nogais of Crimea to emigrate too. 300,000 Crimean Tatars (which included the Nogais) left Crimea in the year 1860. Similarly, 50,000 Nogais disappeared from southern Ukraine by 1861. Most of these Nogais of Dobrudja later migrated to Anatolia. Other Nogai clans emigrated directly from the Caucasus to Anatolia, together with the Circassians.

²²The town of Majar was first mentioned by Cyril and Methodius when they visited the Khazar khagan in Etıl (Volga River) in 861. They wanted to convert the Khazar khagan to Christianity but he preferred Judaism. Majar was a major commercial town of the Khazar Khanate that continued to be an important trade hub during the Mongol Era (1236-1502). Starting from the 15th century it was controlled by the Nogais.

used the two-stringed *dombıra* while the Karakalpaks the fiddler-like *kobız* instrument. Karakalpaks also emphasized epic singing with a type of throat singing. Unfortunately due to the death of the last Nogai *jıraw* singers in the 1990s I do not have data about their initiation or its link to Nogai spirituality as it can be observed among some other traditionally nomadic Turkic peoples (Somfai Kara 2018: 156-158).

Up until the 20th century Edige epic cycle was widespread among the Nogai diaspora from Romania all the way to Dagestan,²⁴ as well as the Karakalpaks of the Aral Lake and the Western Kazak (Kişi Jüz Lesser Horde) epic singers (*jıraw* or *žıraw*)²⁵. The Edige epic not only describes a 500-year-old historical events but its versions can be recorded from the Low Danube, North Caucasus all the way to Central Asia. We can say it is the most widespread epic story in the world covering the former territory Nogai Horde and Kırım Khanate. The story of Edige and his son Nureddin was recorded among other Kypchak-Turkic peoples kin to Nogais (Karakalpak, Kazak, Bashkurt and Sibir Tatar).

The Kara-Nogai Version

According to the Kara-Nogai version Edige's ancestor was Šašli or „Hairy” Borkaj, who can be identified by the aforementioned Baba Tükli (Tükles).²⁶ The name Borkaj probably comes from Bar-Kaja, who in other versions is mentioned as Baba Tükli. The Nogais originate his name from Böri-akaj „Uncle Wolf”. His son was

Kutlı-Kaja – Edige's father.

Edige's geneology according the Nogai version

Bar-Kaja (Borkaj, Böri-akaj) = Baba
Tükli or Tükles
Kutlı-Kaja
Edige

Edige geneology according the Kazak version:ŭ

Angşıbaj=Baba Tükti-šašti äziz
Par-Parıja
Kutlı-Kaja
Edige

In the Nogai and a Kazak versions Baba Tükli is a hunter.²⁷ According the Kazak version Edige (1352-1419) is the third generation after Baba-Tükles (90 year or the beginning of the 14th century). If Edige is somehow related to Baba Tükles then only two generations (60 years) could have passed which corresponds to the Nogai version.

In the Kazak version Edige's ancestor Baba Tükli married a swan lady – a legend well-known all over Eurasia. But in the Nogai versionban just like in Karakalpak instead of a swan we find a dove (*kögeršin*). It is quite strange since the Manggıt's foremother was a swan according to the Kazak baksı spirit mediators and epic singers. I believe that that changing the swan foremother (totem) to a dove can be explained by eufemism (Nogai *tergew*). They wanted to avoid pronouncing the name of the swan which was a taboo among them. The original meaning of “swan girls” is also suggested by the fact that they

²³See N. Kh. Süjünova (editor): Edige. Nogaiskaja epicheskaja poema. 2016. Nauka: Moskva.

²⁴The Koban Nogai (Karachai-Cherkessia) version was recorded in 1958 from Haži-Isak Kumukov who learned it from Arslan Šaban-uwly (Kangly, Stavropol Region) (Sheikhaliev, 1991:17-52).

²⁵At the beginning of the 20th century extracts from Edige Epic was remembered among the elder Nogais in Dobrudja, Romania (Seres István, 2000).

²⁶According to the Khwarazmian Ötemish Hāji's chronicle of Chingis-nāma (16th century) Baba Tükles was a Muslim saints (*awliya*) and according to the legend he converted Özbek khan (1312-1341) of the Jochi Ulus to Islam.

²⁷Nogai *Angşıbaj* “Hunter Lord” is similar to Buriad Horiodoi *mergen* „hunter” who also married a swan fairy (Somfai Kara, 2010).

landed on the shores of a lake to swim.

Another interesting motif is that according to the Kara-Nogai version the spirits (šibin-jan fly soul) of Kutlu-Kaja's parents turned into stars. This comes from two Pre-Islamic belief:

1) The soul (kut) of a human being flies away after death (like a šibin fly).

2) The spirit of some people also turns into stars.²⁸

*Edige Epic Song performed by Janbaj Bekbolat-uwlı (Yanpoi Dorzhiev).*²⁹

A man called Shashly Borkaj went for a hunt. (He saw) that three kögeršins [fairies]³⁰ landed on the shore of Lake Üš-köl, covered with reeds. Borkaj noticed that the doves took off their dove dresses and turned into three beautiful maidens. Šašli Borkaj saw the beauty of the maidens, and he was so amazed he could not turn his eyes away from them. His name was hairy (šašli) because the 'hair on his belly' was not cut. In other words, it was not shaved. That is why he got that name.³¹ The name Borkaj comes meaning Böri-akaj 'Wolf Uncle'.³² He came out of the reeds, and saw the three piles of clothes of the three kögeršins. Hairy Borkaj took the small dove's clothes and hid them among the reeds.

'I have seen you once and now I want to live with you a thousand times', Borkaj told her when he came out of the reeds.

'God ordained this fate for us (wrote it on our forehead). We will live together not one day but two thousand days', said the

girl without any choice.

They got married and started to live together at the foot of the Šinžır Mountain.³³ One day, Borkaj's wife delivered and gave birth to a boy near the cliff of Kutlı-Kaja. They gave him the name Kutlı-Kaja, but he was also called Aziz.³⁴ He grew up loving the birds [of prey]. He knew from the flight of a bird whether it was tired or not. When Kutlı-Kaja grew up, his father Borkaj and his mother suddenly died.³⁵ Their 'flying souls' turned into twin stars.

There is another motif that differs in all other versions: hogy Kutlı-Kaja obtains his wife during a magical feast who turned out to be a demonic girl (*jinning kızı*), and she was secretly sucking his husband's blood during the night. Kutlı-Kaja managed to defeat her with the help of a charmed horse by cutting off the hair of his wife. The demonic girl was pregnant and she gave birth to Edige the supernatural hero.

A have collected similar legends about demonic girls from a Kyrgyz demon-chaser (kuuču) (Somfai Kara, 2018: 150-152). So in the Nogai version a fairy girl (*peri*) and a demonic girl are the wives of Edige's grandfather and father respectively. In other versions (Kazak, Karakalpak) we find a mythical being (swan girl). The story explains the wild nature of Edige by his birth from a demonic girl (*jin kyzy*). Finally the jin turned into a wolf which was an important "totem" among the Nogais.³⁶ Kutlu-Kaja hear a voice from heaven saying

²⁸ Similar legend can be found in the Southern Siberian epic story of Kögüdei-mergen and the origin of the three stars of the Orion Belt (Maadai-kara epic, 1971; Somfai, 2022).

²⁹ Learned from his father Bekbolat who also knew the stories of Šora-batır (died in 1546) and Mamaj (ruled around 1511-1537). Collected by Tahir Akmambetov (Akmambetov, 1975), Terekli-mektep, Nogai District, Daghestan (Russian Federation), translated by Dávid Somfai Kara (Somfai Kara, 2018).

³⁰ In the Karakalpak and Nogai versions the Swan Lady is replaced by the word kögeršin or kepter "dove" which could be the taboo name (tergew) for swan.

³¹ The meaning of Kutlı-Kaja means „Lucky Cliff”.

³² Borkaj/Böri-akaj comes from name Bar-Kaja.

³³ Šinžır Mountain "Chain Mountain" is an unknown location.

³⁴ The Arabic word 'aziz that means "respected, beloved".

³⁵ Gave away their 'flying souls' šibin-jan.

³⁶ Just like the Kök-Türk (Ashina) Dynasty or the Mongol Dynasty of Chinggis khan.

„Edige, Edige”³⁷, so later he gave his son that name.

‘I don’t have a wife and you don’t have a husband. So, let’s get married’, said Kutli-Kaja. ‘I cannot be your lawful wife (*nikāh*)³⁸. Let’s make an agreement. If I wash myself, do not look at my armpits. When we do the lawful thing (*šari’at*)³⁹, don’t look at my face! When I do the ritual purification (*kusl*)⁴⁰, do not look at my body.’

‘So be it! I won’t look. I am not going to lose anything (my limbs won’t be cut) for that!

Alright, I won’t look!’

Kutli-Kaja lived with that girl for a long time. They had no child. Kutli-Kaja started to look like a dried-out tree, thinking: ‘A child is a solace – a child takes away your sorrow. A child buries the parents when they die.’ But Kutli-Kaja had no child to make him happy. Life without a child made him really suffer. One day he took the red horse hair and wrapped it around his thumb. The (hair) started to talk in a high voice:

‘Your wife is a demon’s (*jinn*)⁴¹ daughter, she came in the shape of a witch (*ters-ajak*)⁴². Oh, she is sucking your blood. That’s why you look like a dried-out tree! Pretend that you are sleeping. When she starts to suck your blood, cut her hair. Throw it on the ground and trample it. By doing this your son will be born and I will turn into a fast horse. We will run away with your son. If you don’t succeed, you will die. You won’t see your son’s birth. You are human so you could violate your *nikāh* (lawful marriage).

While your wife is bathing, lie down, covering yourself in a fleece with holes’, he said.

Edige’s birth

Kutli-Kaja Aziz pretended that he was sleeping. He lay down, covering himself in a fleece with holes, and he closed his eyes. In the moonlight his wife went to the lake and started to bathe. Through one of the holes in the fleece Kutli-Kaja observed that his wife’s gall-bladder was visible through her armpit.

‘What a mean husband, you violated *nikah*!’, his wife thought angrily. She started to walk closer to Kutli-Kaja. Kutli-Kaja opened his eyes. He jumped up and grabbed his wife’s hair, then cut it, and having thrown it on the ground he stepped on it. His son suddenly fell out of her on the ground because the wife was pregnant. The horsehair turned into a fast horse. Kutli-Kaja wrapped his son in buckskin and jumped on the horse. The fast horse flew away like a bird. Suddenly the trees started to wave with no wind. Crows cried and the howling of little owls all around could be heard.

At the top of her head his wife’s black hair appeared like a tumbleweed (*kawmak*)⁴³. Her long teats drew back into her breasts and disappeared. Antlers appeared instead of the teats. Her head seemed covered with the ashes of *tezek*.⁴⁴ Her eyes were like extinguished fire. Yellow pus was flowing out of her nose and blood was flowing out of her ears.

³⁷The name Edige comes from Old Turkic *edgü* “good” borrowed by Mongolic as *edge-* “become well”.

³⁸The Arabic word *nikāh* is the name of a marriage contract between the couple by a Muslim official.

³⁹The Arabic word *šari’at* means the Muslim Law that derives from the Qur’an and Sunnah.

⁴⁰The Arabic word *ghusl* is a full-body ritual washing in Islam. The *tahārat* is ritual washing before prayer.

⁴¹The Arabic *jinn* is a supernatural being who often serve *Šajtan* and cause harm to people but can be tamed by spiritual specialists like *baksı* and *porxan*.

⁴²The Nogai word *ters-ajak* means “reverse foot”. Kypchak speaking nomads believed that witches had reversed feet, their feet were facing the opposite direction.

⁴³The Nogai word *kawmak* or *kambak* “tumbleweed” is a plant in the desert that has an upper part which detaches from its root or stem and rolls due to the force of wind.

⁴⁴The Nogai word *tezek* means dry cow-dung chips that the nomads collected in the steppe for heating.

Suddenly his wife's torso started to shiver and she turned into a wolf. It started to chase them. The wolf had its red tongue out and saliva flowed from its mouth. They felt its breath right at the horse's tail. Kutlu-Kaja stretched out his big (fire iron kösew) arms and hit its (the wolf's) head with a lead whip (*jalaw*).⁴⁵ As soon as the wolf fell down its legs started to quiver and its breast started to heave. Then it took cover in a lair. At that moment his horse shuddered thrice and disappeared without a trace. Kutlu-Kaja lifted the child and ran through the forest. By the time he reached a leafy tree, he was breathing heavily and sat down to rest.

'Does the child have some defect?', thought Kutlu-Kaja with a heavy heart beat. He started to watch the child's body. Suddenly he heard a voice from the sky, saying 'Edige, edige'. Ever since the demon girl turned into a wolf the Nogais started to kill wolves with *jalaw* whips.

When Kutlu-Kaja remained alone with his son, the spirit Kızır-Nijaz⁴⁶ appeared to them and went to fetch some milk for the child. But Kutlu-Kaja could not listen to the baby crying and let a female dog milk him. When Kızır-Nijaz saw what had happened. He scolded Kutlu-Kaja and predicted that Edige would be brave and strong like a wolf but his whole life would be full of wars because he was fed by unclean milk. Later Kutlu-Kaja handed over his son to Esen-baj from the Kerej clan, who gave him the name Kubıgıl. They had to conceal him from Toktamış khan who wanted to revenge on Kutlu-Kaja who stole one of the eggs of the khan's falcon and sold it to Temür shah.⁴⁷

Historical events symbolized by other motifs in the epic story:

1) The quarrel of Toktamış and Timur: the falcon stolen by Kutlu-Kaja.

2) Edige's alliance with Temür: Edige married Temür's daughter.

In the Kara-Nogai also find the motif of the quarrelling women (István Seres, 2000). They argue because of a camel calf (*bota*) and Edige judges their case. Later Edige under the name Kubıgıl figures out the price of Toktamış khan's cart so the khan makes him his horseman. The khan's Orda (military camp) was by Jajık (Ural) River in Sarajčık.⁴⁸ Later his wife noticed that Toktamış got frightened when Kubıgıl appeared in front of him. So the khan tried to find out his genealogy. Only the 200-year-old Sıbıra jıraw could solve that mystery. When Sıbıra jıraw met Kubıgıl, he predicted he would overthrow Toktamış khan. So the khan sent Janbaj to arrest Edige, who sensed the danger and together with the nine sons of Esen-baj escaped to the amir of Samarqand Temür shah.

The motif of the hero's nine companions is wide-spread among the Turkic peoples (Maadaj-Kara, 1971), but we find it only Kara-Nogai version of the Edige. Another characteristic of the Kara-Nogai version is that Temür shah's daughter Appak sılıw was kidnapped by Kabarda-Alp batyr. Historically when Temür's troops defeated Toktamış by the Terk River (Daghystan) in 1395, Kabarda (Circassian) troops assisted him but Temür's daughter was not kidnapped. In the Epic story Edige defeated Kabarda-Alp⁴⁹ batyr and rescued Temür's

⁴⁵The Nogai word *jalaw* is a special lead whip with which the horsemen drove the horses on the steppe. It is also often called *sıbrtkı* and similar to the Hungarian *karikás* whip.

⁴⁶He is the Khidr spirit from Arabic mythology who was identified as Ilija or Elijah in Muslim tradition.

⁴⁷He is the ruler of Mawara-al-nahr or Samarqand Temür amir from the Barlas clan (1370-1406).

⁴⁸Sarajčık became the centre of the Nogai Horde and was destroyed by the Cossacks in.

⁴⁹The Nogai form of the Kabarda name is *kabartı*. Kabarda was the name of the state of the eastern Circassians (Kasogs) in the 15th and 16th centuries. First they allied with the Russians but later they were occupied by the Kırım Khanate in 1571 and converted to Islam.

daughter. Amir Temür awarded him by the marriage to his daughter Appak sylyw who gave birth to Edige's son Nureddin. We have no information that Temür gave one of his daughters to Edige but we know that they made an alliance in 1391.

When Edige marched with a big troop against Toktamiş, the khan and his military leader Janbaj fled from Sarajčyk. Toktamiş said his Orda between the Edil and Jajik rivers. This motif is similar to song of the famous Nogai poet Kaz-tuwgan jraw (16th and 17th centuries) when he says fare to Edil (Volga) River well-known from Nogai Folklore as the song of alang jurt "troubled homeland". Accordyng to the story Toktamiş becomes a *kazak* 'cossack' or 'lawless man'.⁵⁰

Nureddin becomes the main hero of the epic

Edige conquers Sarajčik while Nureddin started to pursue Toktamiş. Nureddin captures Janbaj who promised to ambush Toktamiş. When Toktamiş arrived Nureddin took revenge. Before he died Toktamiş warned Nureddin to kill Janbaj. Later Janbaj convinced Toktamiş's two daughters to lie to Nureddin that his father Edige had made them pregnant. When Nureddin returned to Sarajčik he quarreled with his father and drove him out from the Horde. This has historical base since Nureddin sent his father to Khwarazm after Toktamiş's death (1406) and appointed a puppet khan to the throne (1410). We have no evidence that Toktamiş khant was killed by Nureddin. Later during a hunt for desert fox (*karsak*)⁵¹ Nureddin met his father and made peace with him. Historically Jalal-addin khan with Lituianian support ousted Nureddin (1412) who united with his father in Khwaraz and recaptured Sarajčik (1416).

In the epic story Toktamiş's son Kadirberdi attacked Sarajčik but in the end he made peace with Nureddin and executed Janbaj for treason. According to some sources Qabirberdi became khan (1419) maybe by the help of Nureddin. Some sources say that Edige was killed by Qabirberdi.

Although the Kara-Nogai versions of Edige and Nureddin epic story has several mythical elements (fairy lady turning into a swan/dove, demonic girl, white-bearded old man, talking magic horse, spirits turning into stars, etc.) but it is based on historical events:

- 1) The war between Toktamiş and Timur (14th century)
- 2) Struggle of Edige and Nureddin in the disintegration of the Jochi Ulus (15th century) (Fig.1)

Conclusion

The analysis of the Kara-Nogai version of the Edige and Nuraddin epic cycle demonstrates its profound significance as more than a simple historical account. This widespread narrative successfully functions as a vital cultural text, articulating and reinforcing the collective memory and ethnic identity of the Nogai people and their related Kypchak-Turkic neighbors in the Eurasian steppe.

Our findings confirm that the epic is a remarkable synthesis, skillfully weaving core historical events with rich mythological elements. The core historical conflict, rooted in the disintegration of the Jochi Ulus and the war between Toktamiş and Temür, provides the temporal framework. This framework is then imbued with powerful pre-Islamic and Islamic motifs, particularly

⁵⁰The Kypchak Turkic word *kazak* is the origin of the Cossack (Russian *kazak*) name. Originally it meant some kind of "free man or vagabond" (see Persian *bekār* „free or jobless man“).

⁵¹The *karsak* is a fox type of the Eurasian Steppe, its Cuman name is the etymology of the Hungarian town Karcag.

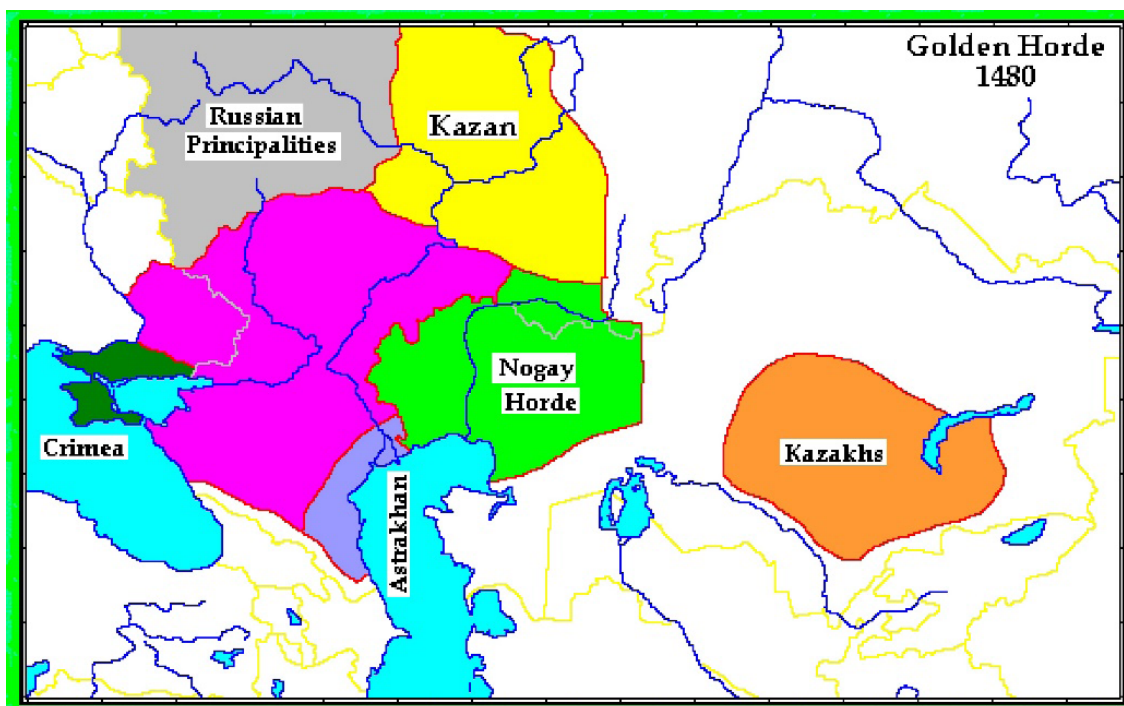


Fig.1. Disintegration of the Jochi Ulus: Nogai and Kazak Hordes in the 15th century.

surrounding the hero's genealogy.

Specifically, the unique Kara-Nogai narrative of Edige's descent from the holy man Baba Tükli and his birth involving a demonic maiden who turns into a wolf, serves a crucial legitimizing function. These elements spiritualize the hero's power, explain his "wolf-like" ferocity, and even provide folkloric origins for cultural practices, such as the Nogai tradition of using a lead whip (jalaw) against wolves. The mythological shift from the swan maiden (Manggit totem) to the dove (kögeršin) further illustrates the adaptive

and localized nature of the oral tradition.

In conclusion, the Edige Epic acts as a powerful source of unity for the scattered Nogai diaspora. By bridging the turbulent historical past of the 14th and 15th centuries with enduring mythical narratives, the epic ensures that the memory of the Nogai Horde remains a living, evolving foundation for contemporary ethnic self-consciousness. The study of this epic is therefore essential for understanding the cultural resilience and shared heritage of the nomadic peoples who shaped the political and cultural landscape of the post-Golden Horde era.

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ЕДИГЕ ЖӘНЕ НОГАЙ ЭПИКАЛЫҚ ДӘСТҮРІ

Аңдатпа. Бұл мақалада ноғай халқының эпикалық дәстүрі қарастырылып, кең таралған «Едіге» эпосы цикліне айрықша назар аударылады. «Едіге» атты атақты эпос – бұрынғы Ноғай Ордасы мен Қырым хандығының аумағын қамтыған, әлемдегі ең кең таралған қаһармандық жырлардың бірі ретінде танылады. Зерттеудің негізгі материалы ретінде 1975 жылы Солтүстік Дағыстанның қара-ноғай тобы арасында жырау Бекболат-уулы Жанбайдан жазып алынған нұсқасы қарастырылған. Эпостың тарихи негізі XIV–XV ғасырлардағы оқиғаларды – Ұлыс Жошының ыдырауын, Тоқтамыс, Әмір Темір және Едіге арасындағы билік үшін күресті қамтиды. Қара-ноғайлық нұсқада кездесетін мифологиялық қабатта Едігенің шығу тегі туралы сюжеттер бар: онда ол әулие Баба Түклі (Баба Түкті Әзіз) мен қасқырға айналатын жын-пері қыздан туған бейне ретінде сипатталады. Қазақ және қарақалпақ нұсқаларымен жүргізілген салыстырмалы талдау аталған мифологиялық мотивтердің, соның ішінде аққу-қыздың көгершінмен алмастырылуының, қаһарманды діни әрі рухани тұрғыдан негіздеу мақсатына қызмет ететінін көрсетеді. Қорытынды бөлімде эпостың ноғай халқының этникалық бірегейлігін сақтау мен нығайтудағы, сондай-ақ Еуразия даласындағы заманауи этникалық бірегейліктің қалыптасуына ықпал етудегі өміршең маңызы ерекше атап өтіледі.

Кілт сөздер: Едіге, эпикалық дәстүр, түркі қаһармандық эпосы, ноғайлар, Ноғай Ордасы, Қырым хандығы.

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ЕДИГЕ И НОГАЙСКАЯ ЭПИЧЕСКАЯ ТРАДИЦИЯ

Аннотация. Данная статья исследует эпическую традицию ногайцев, уделяя особое внимание широко распространенному циклу эпоса «Едіге». Знаменитый эпос «Едіге» признан самым распространенным героическим сказанием в мире, охватывающим территорию бывшей

Ногайской Орды и Крымского ханства. Основным материалом для анализа послужила версия, записанная в 1975 году от жырау (эпического певца) Бекболат-уулы Жанбая среди кара-ногайской группы Северного Дагестана. Историческая основа эпоса охватывает события XIV–XV веков, такие как распад Улуса Джучи и борьбу за власть между Токтамышем, Тимуром и Едиге. Мифологический пласт, присутствующий в кара-ногайской версии, включает происхождение Едиге от легендарного святого Баба Тюкли и демонической девушки, которая превращается в волка. Сравнительный анализ с казахской и каракалпакской версиями показывает, как эти мифологические мотивы, включая замену девы-лебедя на голубя, служат цели религиозной и духовной легитимизации героя. В заключение подчеркивается, что эпос играет жизненно важную роль в сохранении и укреплении этнической идентичности и чувства единства ногайского народа, а также в формировании современных этнических идентичностей в Евразийской степи.

Ключевые слова: Едиге, Эпическая традиция, тюркский героический эпос, ногайцы, Ногайская орда, Крымское ханство.

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