

ИНСТИТУТ УПРАВЛЕНИЯ В ТЮРКО-ИСЛАМСКОМ МИРЕ

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THE *KUTADGU BILIG*: SOME CHARACTERISTICS AND ITS RELATION TO THE IDEA OF RULE

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Mirrors of princes are a specific genre of Islamic literature dedicated to giving advice to rulers, princes, and ministers. There are few mirrors that are composed in verse. The *Kutadgu Bilig* is modeled on the Persian *Shāhnāme* of the poet Firdawsi making the Central Asian heritage of wisdom literature at home in Islamic contexts. The text is written in Qarakhanid Turkish; the form is a didactic poem set as a dialogue between the protagonists. In a Weberian sense the program of advice may be analyzed as rational leadership due to the increasing role of shari'a-based rulership. However, there are other elements of legitimacy in this text blurring the clear distinctions made by Weber. Hence, we may identify it as a unique, non-European case of legitimation of rulership.

The *Kutadgu Bilig* are to be read as an attempt to secure the continuation of the Central Asian tradition in a context dominated by Iranian influences into Central Asia. The protagonists of this work are the king, the vizier, the wise man, and the ascet. All these actors are representing virtues needed for successful rulership. At the same time the roles of all the persons associated with the court are discussed even very personal ones like choosing a wife and raising children.

Keywords: *Kutadgu Bilig*, mirrors of princes, Qarakhanid Turkish, rulership, Central Asia.

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Kutadgu Bilig is a less studied work of the mirrors for princes literature¹. It is a special case since it has been composed in verse.² The „poem’s central text constitutes an allegory, in which qualities, principles, functions and occupations appear in personified forms“ (Marlow, 2023: 145)³.

This work emerged in the 11th century CE in Central Asia. It is based on the model of the Persian *Shāhnāme* (Askari, 2016)⁴ using a Persian poetic form, the quatrain, the meter of Firdawsi’s *Shāhnāme*, the *mutaqārib* (Dankoff, 1983: 8), and had a similar function in the Turkish context as had had the *Shāhnāme* in the Iranian context: making the heritage of Turkish wisdom literature at home in Islamic contexts. The *Kutadgu Bilig* goes back to the time of Turkish migration to Central and Southwest Asia (Dankoff, 1983; Dankoff, 2009).

The area was under the rule of the Qarakhanid dynasty, thus, was in a liminal situation close to the steppe and close to the Iranian world for many years. Languages available were Persian, Karakhanid Turkish, Arabic, and many other languages. *Kutadgu Bilig* was written in Qarakhanid Turkish. The author acknowledged the challenges of writing in Turkish.

The idea of wisdom is called *bilig*; thus, we could translate the title of the poetized work roughly as „Wisdom leading to fame and success of the ruler.“ *Kutadgu Bilig* was presented to the Qarakhanid ruler, a dynasty – following Dankoff – trying to continue the tradition of tribal⁵ aristocracy and just rule. It is possible to read this mirror for princes as an attempt to conceive ideas about the preconditions of a stable government in a time of transformation.

Kutadgu Bilig is a didactic poem that takes the form of a set of dialogues with four protagonists: 1) the king Kün Toğdı, representing the principle of justice, 2) the vizier Ay Toldı, representing the principle of success and fortune, 3) the wise man Ogdülmiş, representing the principle of wisdom, and 4) the ascet Odğurmuş, bringing humankind’s last end into the story and discusses Sufic issues (Dankoff, 1983; Dankoff, 2009: 133; Marlow, 2023: 56).

The structure discernible in the role of the protagonists of this work may be described as the king applying just rule that is made successful by the vizier, the wise man acting as a counselor is steeped in [Turkish and Iranian⁶] tradition joined by ascetic ide-

¹ It inspired, however, modern artwork (Slavs and Tatars, 2015).

² There are few other mirrors for princes with a sizeable poetic element.

³ Marlow has translated extracts of the text worth reading and enabling the reader to have an idea of this unusual text.

⁴ The *Shāhnāme* is now understood as a specific kind of Mirror for Princes. With a double reference to an epic version of Iranian history and what can be learned from it for the rules of rulership.

⁵ “Tribal” is used in a non-technical way.

⁶ For the analogies between Turkish and Persian ideas, e.g., the perceived parallel between the Turkish *kut* and the Persian *farr* (Aneer, 1992).

als of the Sufi ascet adding the teachings of the new Islamic world of knowledge with strong Sufi references⁷.

The topics covered include the role of the prince, the vizier, gatekeepers, secretary, cook, or cupbearer; how to serve the prince; how to associate with people from all backgrounds; how to choose a wife and bring up children; how to deal with servants and everything related to feasts.

„As these topics illustrate, *Kutadgu Bilig*, like other mirrors of the Early Middle Period, seems to address not only the ruler to whom it is dedicated, but the entire courtly audience, and possibly an audience beyond the court as well“ (Marlow, 2023: 57).

To look into this Central Asian mirror using the mirrors of European origin we should look at the conceptualization of rulership and its legitimacy by Max Weber. As Weber said:

„Of course, the “legitimacy” of rule can only be viewed as the *Chance* of being regarded with a relevant degree of respect, and in practice being so treated. It is far from the case that all compliance with rule is primarily, or even always, oriented to this belief“ (Weber, 2019: 340).

Weber continues:

„There are three *pure* types of legitimate rule. The validity of their legitimacy can be secured primarily

1. in a *rational* manner: a belief in the legality of statutory orders and the right of those appointed to exercise rule to give directions (legal rule); or

2. in a *traditional* manner: an everyday belief in the sanctity of long-established traditions and the legitimacy of those whose authority derives from these traditions (traditional rule); or finally,

3. in a *charismatic* manner: the exceptional sanctity or heroic qualities or exemplary character of a person, and of the orders that this person proclaims or creates (charismatic rule)“ (Weber, 2019: 341–342).

Assuming that the increasing role of Shariatic law as sanctioned by the scholars of Islamic law can be described as rational and impersonal, although being characterized by the modern elements of rational rule described by Weber.

For the *Kutadgu Bilig*, there is a traditional manner of ruling discernably based on the Turkish/Central Asian tradition. Last but not least, the *traditional* manner is legitimized by charismatic rule including the newly introduced Islamic elements be it rational, i. e., Shariatic. or charismatic, i.e., Sufi traditions.

We will not argue that there is no ‚pure‘ type of leadership in the case of *Kutadgu Bilig*. Our argument is that this distinction emerging from European contexts – although tried to incorporate non-European perspectives – is not applicable in our case.

⁷ There may be some minor Buddhist references (Dankoff, 2009: 13–15).

Leaving the comparative aspect aside, another important aspect is the introduction of ideas of Turkish origin in the literature of Islamic mirrors for princes.⁸ However, it is difficult to assess the circulation of *Kutadgu Bilig*.

Summary

The *Kutadgu Bilig* is a unique contribution to the literature of Islamic mirrors of princes due to its introduction of Turkish-Central Asian traditions into this genre dominated by Persian and Arabic language texts.

At the same time its structure reveals a hybrid character blending traditional wisdom with the general idea of justice, spiritual ideas based on Sufism. The idea of successful rulership may be classified as charismatic related to Sufism-based charisma. The rationalisation of rulership as based on Shari'a rule brings in another ideal type. *Kutadgu Bilig*, thus, may be regarded as a specific non-European type of legitimation.

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⁸ Another instance of including *Kutadgu Bilig* into this literature is Rüdiger Lohlker, 'Der muslimische Herrscher: Fürstenspiegel als Spiegel islamischer Philosophien der Herrschaft', to appear 2023 in *falsafa – Horizonte islamischer Religionsphilosophie* (in print).

«КУТАДГУ БИЛИГ»: НЕКОТОРЫЕ ХАРАКТЕРИСТИКИ И СВЯЗЬ С ИДЕЕЙ ПРАВЛЕНИЯ

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Зеркала принцев – особый жанр исламской литературы о советах правителям, принцам и министрам. «Кутадгу Билиг» создан по образцу персидского «Шахнаме» поэта Фирдоуси, представляющего собой центрально-азиатское наследие литературы исламского содержания. Текст написан на караханидском турецком языке. Он представляет собой дидактическое стихотворение, содержащее диалог главных героев. В веберовском смысле программу советов можно проанализировать как рациональное лидерство в связи с возрастающей ролью правления, основанного на шариате. Однако в этом тексте есть и другие элементы легитимности, размывающие четкие различия, сделанные Вебером. Следовательно, мы можем идентифицировать эту ситуацию как уникальный, неевропейский случай легитимации правления.

«Кутадгу билиг» следует рассматривать как попытку продолжения центрально-азиатской традиции в контексте доминирования иранского влияния на Центральную Азию. Главные герои этого произведения – король, визирь, мудрец и аскет. Все действующие лица олицетворяют добродетели, необходимые для успешного правления. При этом обсуждаются роли других людей, связанных с судом, в том числе касаясь таких весьма личных вопросов, как выбор жены и воспитание детей.

Ключевые слова: Кутадгу билиг, зеркала принцев, караханидские тюрки, правление, Средняя Азия.

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