

Representation of Ancient Times in Kazakh Historical Novel

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Abstract. The article deals with the peculiarities and national originality of the historical novel in Kazakh literature. The author gives special attention to modern historical works of fiction written by such authors as B. Zhandarbekov (“Tomiris”), D. Doszhanov (“The Silk Road”) and I. Yesenberlin (“The Golden Horde”). All the Kazakh writers interpret the history of Khazakh people in focus of national identity and national self-consciousness.

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1. Introduction

One of the main genres of world literature is considered to be the historical novel – “a type of fiction in which a significant historical event or era serves as a backdrop to a story that may include fictional or historical characters, or a mix of both” [1, 198]. In a historical novel “the subject matter... tends to encompass both public and private events, and the protagonist may be either an actual figure from the past or an invented figure whose destiny is involved with actual events” [2, 107].

All over the 20th century a historical novel has been taking an important place in Kazakh literature. G. Kendirbayeva marks that “... the 20th century was a turning point in the history of the Kazakh people because... segments of Kazakh society realized that it would be necessary to change the traditional nomadic way of life” [3, 6]. The history of Kazakh people may be examined in focus of national identity that “is being conscious of and belonging to a nation, so it is a collective identity that brings people together under a common brand” [4, 11].

After Kazakhstan became an independent state in 1991 the problem of choice between the nomadic and sedentary ways of life have been discussing. First of all, “Kazakh intellectuals discussed the role of Islam in Kazakh nomadic society, the preservation of the Kazakh language and the development of Kazakh culture and literature. The analysis of these discussions is of great interest, because it provides us with an idea of the general cultural atmosphere of Kazakh society in the transitional period of its history” [3, 6].

Most of scholars characterize Kazakhs as “the most significant tribal group of northern central Asia, speaking one of the eastern Turkic languages” [5, 32]. By the second half of the 16th century, “the Kazakhs gained the control of the oases and rich pastures of Syr-Darya from the Uzbeks. This was,

economically and strategically, very important, because it enabled the Kazakhs to access to the winter grazing grounds and the control of the trade of the cities which provided tax revenues, supply of commodities, and rain from cultivated lands of the sedentary population. In addition, this also gave the Kazakhs the control of the bases for defending against enemy attacks. These factors form the important reasons for the division of the Kazakhs into three separate hordes, in other words three nomadic groups: Great Horde (Ulu Zhuz), Middle Horde (Orta Zhuz) and Small Horde (Kishi Zhuz). These hordes also consist a number of tribes, each of which were also united by the common interests of their nomadic economy and geographical reasons. For example, the division into the three hordes was suitable for the geography of the Kazakh steppes and each horde had summer and winter pasture rights in the three areas that the terrain allowed” [6, 11].

According to Mukhtar Auezov, one of the most prominent Kazakh writers, nomadism “was the first historically formed type of culture. All other forms of economic activities were developed later. Various climatic conditions as well as forms of economic activities influence both people’s character and their abilities to adopt culture” [3, 12].

As Masanov stated, nomadism was “a product of the given ecological environment, a way of adaptation of people to the ecological conditions. The natural geographical conditions, lack of water or irrigation facilities and the difficulty of agriculture made pastoral nomadism the only important way of survival. The nomadic life-style required the maintenance of a balance between the available water resources and the size of the population, hence, the low population density was a common attribute.” [cited in 7, 3].

Nomadic way of life is being reflected in historical works of modern Kazakh literature. The

present-day Kazakh writers are opening the world of nomads and medieval towns to the reader.

Nowadays at the head of the Kazakh literature are standing such outstanding authors as B. Zhandarbekov, D. Doszhanov and I. Yesenberlin. Their historical prose blends legend, myth, and realistic detail to depict national traditions and custom of Kazakh people in focus of ancient past.

The dominant subject of Kazakh historical fiction is the unity of clans and tribes that had inhabited the vast Kazakh steppes though it is significant that this aspect in the present-day literature is analyzed in a different way with the comparison of socialist realism.

One of the best novels written by B. Zhandarbekov is "Tomiris" which is the first book of dilogy called "Saka". It was first published in 1982. This large-scale literary work that has been greatly appreciated by readers and critics is about the events taking place in the VI century BC in Kazakhstan. The main subject of the novel is the people's struggle for independence.

A huge army of King Cyrus of Persia, who was wishing to have unlimited power, invaded the boundless steppes inhabited by nomadic tribes of Massageteans. After conquering nomads, the king of Persia would not only have attached their lands to his own possessions, but would also have defended his State's frontiers before going to Egypt. In that case Persia was the only Imperia that could keep its independence. But Cyrus' wishes were not fulfilled because in 530 BC Massageteans under the directions of their queen named Tomiris defeated the Persians. Imagine the power and strength of Kazakhs people's ancestors, if they were not afraid of taking up their swords against the most powerful state in the Middle East!

The author makes it clear that Tomiris will stop at nothing to achieve independence and justice. The freedom-loving warrior is killing Cyrus:

"The Queen has taken Cyrus's head out of her sack. Holding the dead conqueror's hair she was looking the Persian King's face with half-opened eyes and parched lips with great attention. Then has sighed and whispered:

– You were a redoubtable enemy. Really the Master of the world you were!
I shall give you, my worthy enemy, the most precious I have. It's my lover's blood.

And having lifted Cyrus's head high, Tomiris took a leather bag out of Farkhad's hands.

– Massageteans! Your Queen is keeping her word! You were out for blood, king of the Persians... So drink it endlessly!

And Tomiris has put Cyrus's head into the leather sack, full of blood" [8].

The novel's plot is extremely knotty. But nevertheless the novel is interesting and fascinating. And it brings up the feeling of patriotism.

For B. Zhandarbekov Tomiris is a leader under the banners of whom all the tribal chiefs are ready to unite themselves against the common foe.

"Tomiris has exerted all her beauty, intelligence, charm to influence on them. The grateful Bevarasp have engaged to provide the queen a thousand of horsemen. So have done Skilur and Mikhrab. The leaders of Sakaravaks, Komars and Yatis decided to send five hundred horsemen to Tomiris's camp as well. Tomiris has convoked the Head Council of Chiefs and Patriarchs" [8].

Describing the life and the struggle of nomadic tribes and clans, the author showed the enormous difficulties and obstacles they had to overcome. We hear the echoes of the distant past. The author's voice sounds like a warning to the descendants. He reminds again and again that the problem of the people's unity is always relevant, especially for the newly found independence. The vivid image of Tomiris is important for understanding of the national identity. The novel "Tomiris" brings up the young generation to love their country.

Cyrus, a King of Persia, is a dominant figure of the ancient history. So his life and activity have been describing in historical researches with details. Some ancient writers have also created Cyrus' image (f.e. "The Cyropaedia" written in the early 4th century BC by Xenophon of Athens). But Tomiris is an unknown personality both in history and literature. B. Zhandarbekov has filled the gap in our knowledge of the Queen of Massageteans.

The novels by B. Zhandarbekov is populated with bright distinctive characters, many of them are the existing individuals: Astyages, Croesus, Belshazzar, Cambyses, Bardiya, Harpagos and others. But depicting the historical personas B. Zhandarbekov diverges from the traditional canon. Thus Croesus, the King of Lydia, says about Cyrus, who is considered to be a fair and compassionate ruler, the following words: "The leader of a wolves' troop must be only a wolf. Not a sheep". B. Zhandarbekov's motto is to follow the spirit of the age.

Another Kasakh writer who revealed the truth of history to the readers is Dukenbay Doszhan whose novel "Silk Road" is about the destruction of a Central Asian town of Otrar that was a city located along the Silk Road in Kazakhstan. Otrar was an important town in the history of Central Asia, situated on the borders of settled and agricultural civilizations. It was the center of a great oasis and political district, commanding a key point connecting

Kazakhstan with China, Europe, Near and Middle East, Siberia and Ural. But Otrar was conquered by the Mongolians at the head of Genghis Khan. The siege of the city lasted for eight months.

“The Silk Road and Otrar were twins. They couldn’t exist without each other. They were like food without salt, a story without the very beginning or a legend without the end. When the Silk Road appeared, it made possible Otrar’s birth and development. The Silk Road helped Otrar becoming more powerful, flourishing and tenacious of life. Otrar’s glory has been spread all over the world. Otrar appreciated deeply all the hopes pinning on it. Having opened the Great Travelling Book, it sent the rich caravans and the restless pilgrims who were travelling from one corner of the world to another. Towns, cities and fortifications were built along the Road. Thus they both became famous, Otrar and the Silk Road. If the Silk Road was in danger, Otrar with the stone walls and gates was defending it from the enemies.” [9].

The author of the novel is describing the City of Otrar with the pride and love. And in his vivid description the steppe’s image is prevailed. It is necessary to notice that the image of steppe in Kazakh literature is a feature of national style.

The steppe’s image created by D Doszhan is full of metaphors and similes and vivid epithets: “The steppe was like the old bestial calloused skin, and life seemed to have left this wild deserted land. Ominous silence was around ...” [9]

The author of the novel considers that the reason of the city’s destruction were sins and vices of its inhabitants. Not Genghis Khan’s warriors ruined the city but the vicious desires of Otrar’s citizens. So the beautiful city became a shade of the past like the sunken Atlantis.

The novel’s characters were real historical figures but their images have been converted by the author fairly. The author used to repeat the following words: “I like to write historical novels. But history for me is no more than storyline. My heroes live with their own lives”.

One of the most original characters in the novel “Silk Road” is Ilanchik Kadyrkhan, the wise and strong ruler of Otrar. Kadyrkhan is not a sentimental man. He is a political figure, who is able to control his emotions and take the right decision. But Kadyrkhan is always cared about his people’s welfare. But he considers that the wealth and prosperity depend on the knowledge that may be derived from the books. So the ruler continuing the tradition of his ancestors pays a great attention establishing of the famous Otrar library. Even in the most tragic days for Otrar’s people he does not forget about the books: “Books were tied up, packed and

covered with skins to protect them from moisture. Later they were put into the earthenware in which the necks were clayed. The most reliable warriors aboard camels on backs of whom were pots with the books left for the mosque named Kokmardan. There they were taken to the underground vault. Ilanchik Kadyrkhan helped to arrange the jars with the priceless treasures. By dawn the Otrar library was hidden beneath and its entrance was thoroughly sealed up.” [9].

At the end of the novel Kadyrkhan was wounded in battle. He “met his death as a soldier whose conscience is clean before flows” [9].

The trilogy by the most known Kazakh writer Ilyas Yesenberlin “The Golden Horde” which was published in 1983 may be called as one of the world literature masterpieces. The trilogy is devoted to the rise and fall of the Golden Horde. Among its characters there are such historical figures as Batu Khan, Berke, Uzbek, Timur, Mamai, Tokhtamysh, Edige.

Batu Khan, son of the famous Khan Juchi and grandson of Genghis Khan, established the Golden Horde with the capital Sarai on the Volga River. The subject of the novel is the mutual relations between the Golden Horde and the ancient Russia. According Batu Khan’s point of view, the strength of Russians is in brotherhood. The unity helps the Russians to have no fear. Before the death Batu Khan says to his son: “Do not believe that having conquered the country you will conquer its people. Be careful! Conquered lands may be boiled like water in the cauldron”. He advises to manage the Russian people as if it is of his own one.

Nowadays historical novels have gained popularity all over the world. A historical novel in Kazakh literature is an extraordinary and distinctive phenomenon because every work makes clear the sources of ineradicable striving of Kazakh people for freedom and independence.

In A. Bokeikhanov’s view, if a people does not know its own history or has lost contact with its past, this people may ultimately disappear. The scholar draws such a conclusion: “History is a guide to life, pointing out the right way” [cited in 3, 21]. M. Dulatov considered historical literature ‘the soul’ of each people and a pledge of the preservation of their national identity in the future. Peoples without their own history and culture could easily be assimilated by other peoples” [10, 250].

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