



# GENESIS OF THE EPOS “ASIL AND KARAM” AND ITS EMERGENCE IN WRITTEN LITERATURE

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## ANNOTATION

*This article is dedicated to theories on the genesis of the epos “Asil and Karam”. The main attention has been paid to the process of its introduction in the written literature from folklore.*

**KEY WORDS:** *Asil and Karam, Vamiq and Uzra, epos, Avesto, Khorezm, E.E. Bertels.*

## INTRODUCTION

One of the epic genres that has been passed down from generation to generation as a spiritual legacy and accurately reflects the mentality of the nation is dastans (epic poems). “Epos is a great gift of antiquity, a common vision of the era in which it was created and at the same time a vivid monument of the interdisciplinary meaning and form of the interpersonal spirit in the context of vibrant traditional creation and execution”. [1, c.9-10]

### Materials and Methods

Khorezm oasis is one of the ancient cradles of epic creativity. “Each nation’s epos is based primarily on memories of its national history”. [2, c. 209]. From this point of view, the root of the history of the ancient oasis is very deep and it is as old as Avesto. Therefore, more and more romantic dastans became popular in the country. The mythology peculiar to “Avesto” and “Shahname” can be seen at the core of them. The dastan “Asil and Karam” also contains the ancient myths with mythological scenes.

The image “Karam” in it is a mythical standard for lovers and he sang a song on his way towards his beloved, his song came out of his mouth like a burning fire and gained eternal glory with magical distress in the blaze of love”. [3, c. 206].

If the attention is paid to the scene in the dastan “Asil and Karam” connected with fire, the fact that the plot of the work is very ancient attracts us.

In this regard, E.E. Bertels’ ideas are much grounded.

In his book “The History of Iranian Literature and Culture”, E.E. Bertels emphasizes the poet Unsurie, who lived and worked in the first half of the eleventh century, among many Persian writers.

According to the scientist, Unsurie created three dastans, along with many lyrical works. These are the dastans “Vomik and Uzro”, “Hing but u Surkh but” (White Idol and Red Idol), “Shodbahru Aynul Hayot”. [4, c. 24]. It is characteristic that Unsurie worked and carried out his creativity together with Abu Rayhan Beruni. Three of his dastans were translated into Arabic language by Beruni. [5, c.43]. Unsurie himself used Arabic sources to write these works. Among the poems, “Vomik and Uzro” is particularly noticeable. The plot of this dastan has attracted a number of poets who have lived and worked in recent centuries. It is also worth emphasizing that the two scenes in the preface and conclusion of “Vomik and Uzro” are given almost identically by all poets.

There was offered the motive of childlessness in the introduction to the book and there was said that husband and wife give birth to a child on the basis of eating one single apple dividing it into two pieces. The roots of this motive are in harmony with the motives of the ancient Zoroastrian myths and are inextricably linked to the phenomenon of partogenesis in primitive society.

As E.E. Bertels points out, this scene in “Vomik and Uzro” is clearly evident in the plot of the “Asli-Karam” dastan, which is widespread in Azerbaijan.

According to Asli-Karam, an Armenian priest lived in the palace of the king of Iran. Both the king and the priest were childless. Their wives eat the same apple cutting equally that has come from outside. Afterward, the king’s wife bore a son, and the priest’s wife bore a daughter. The king’s son falls in love with the priest’s daughter. When the king



asked the girl for her son, the Armenian said he would not give his daughter to a Muslim and left the palace without a word. Karam wanders throughout the Orient in search of his Asl. He finally finds his lover. But the burning fire of love came out of mouth and Karam began to burn and the fire included Asl in itself and the lover couples turned into ashes. They remained together forever in the form of ash. Although this motive in the work may be seen as a flame of love, it is actually an idea that emphasizes the fact that fire is a means of purifying. [6, c.45].

Since these motives connected with worshipping of the sun and fire are incompatible with Islamic faith, all three works of Unsuri were destroyed. Some of their excerpts and ideas have reached us through the works of other authors. These ancient ideas have entered the written literature through the earliest legends.

As mentioned above, versions of "Asil and Karam" are available in Khorezm either.

There are some serious differences between this version of the dastan and the content given in the E.E. Bertels book. After several years during the period of Zoroastrianism, the plots that had become popular had undergone some transformations and were able to fully absorb the Islamic faith. In the introduction, the phenomenon of partogenesis was completely eliminated. But the motive of childlessness is preserved. The childless king spends the night in the Ali's tomb prays to him for a child and his dream comes true. His son was born. When he gets older, he suddenly arrives at the Armenian residence and meets an unfamiliar girl and they fall in love. However, Asilkhon's father refused to give his daughter to Karam for the reason that Karam's religion is different and moved away. After that Karam's wandering life begins. Finally, under pressure from the Armenian king, the Armenian man agrees to give his daughter to Karam. But he conjures Asilkhon in such a way that if somebody's hand touches her, he will burn. As a result, when she meets Karam and shakes hands, Karam begins to burn and turns into ashes. Asilkhon builds a dome on the ashes of Karam. After 50-60 years Asilkhon enter the immortal world either. At that time the spirits of Karam and Asilkhon changes into the form of a dove and fly away together.

Although the motive connected with fire in the final of the dastan is preserved, its purifying character, the flame of love has been transformed and become a principle of conjuring.

The preface and conclusion were reworked out on the basis of Islamic doctrines and very ancient idea connected with Zoroastrianism became invalid.

Another of the earliest motives in the dastan is the scene connected with a fetish that leads the reader into the mysterious world. When Karam touches the buttons of Asilkhon, fire begins to come

out of him. It is well known that the earliest sources of fetish are linked to stones, rocks and mountains.

The pray of stone-fetishism began in Israel and then spread throughout the world. The worship of the black stone in Mecca is still going on in Arabia.

Some people found attracting stones on the mountain paths or roads and continued to worship them as sacred. [7, c.274].

Fetish amulets of recent times are a continuation of this tradition.

The fact that the fire was created by touching buttons in the dastan "Asil and Karam" is also related to the fetish and this attracts our attention.

In general, the issues of fetish and fire existing in the dastan prove that the work is based on very ancient motives.

As we have already mentioned, the dastan had already been well-known during the time of Beruni and Unsuri and if we consider the fact that the text of the dastan was printed and translated into Arabic language, it directly becomes clear that the plot of the work is ancient. However, it is important to remember that only a few of the surviving texts have survived to the present.

It is natural that any folklore will change over time with the ideology of society.

The dastan "Asil and Karam" has undergone a difficult transformation in connection with the renewal of religious ideology, which in turn has preserved some of the earliest motives in its composition. This episode is shown through the fire motive in the story. The motive of fire is directly linked to the worship of the sun.

Indeed, the later Turkic epos preserved the ancient epic regularities with some changes, because of new historical and ideological conditions within a different ethnic environment. [8, c.103].

It is possible to see the same condition in the dastan "Asil and Karam". Some scientists of Azerbaijan mark the act of singing the dastan among people with 10<sup>th</sup>-12<sup>th</sup> centuries comparing the plot of this dastan with other love-adventures dastans (such as "Loved Gharib and Shahsanam", "Sayod and Hamro", "Hurliko and Hamro"). [9, c.20]. This date is related to the Turkic versions of the work.

It is known that the Persian version of the dastan, created by Unsuri, is very old and associated with the Zoroastrian religion.

The roots of the Turkic story spread in Khorezm have to be traced back to the 10<sup>th</sup> and 12<sup>th</sup> centuries.

The copying of the poem "Asil and Karam" into a manuscript dates back to the early 19<sup>th</sup> century. That's why the influence of Islam on it is very strong. In its turn, it retains more powerful influence of Persian vocabulary than the lexical features of the work. Hence, the poem did not fully escape the



influence of the Khorezmian language, which survived until the 14<sup>th</sup> century. We will cover this in more detail in the following studies.

The date 1241 AH was noted at the end of the written copy we have. This date is 1825.

There are many studies about the dastan. Preliminary information about the work was noted in the work of A.N. Samoylovich. [10, c.130]. There are different opinions on the formation of the plot of the dastan. According to the Azerbaijani scholars H. Orasli and M. Tahmasib, the plot of the work is related to the activity of the Bakhshi singer Dada Karam, who lived in the 17<sup>th</sup> century. [11, c.5]. Azerbaijani folk singer M. Khakimov doubts that Karam was a lover, musician and poet. He is a lover among the common people. [12, c.56]. According to the Turkmen scholar B. Karriev, the poem is one of the works of Turkmen tribes with white sheep and black sheep spread in the 14<sup>th</sup>-15<sup>th</sup> centuries in Iran, Azerbaijan, Armenia, Karabagh, Diyarbakir, Kurdistan and Iraq.

A.Durdieva, who wrote her PhD dissertation about this dastan, agrees this idea. [13. C.13].

There are some research works in the Uzbek folklore about the dastan “Asil and Karam”. However, they do not cover the roots of the formation of the dastan’s plot. [14, c.192-194].

The dastan “Asil and Karam” is a world-wide story and has been distributed as a travelling plot. The dastans based on this plot are popular among the Uzbek, Azerbaijan, Turkmen, Uygur, Kazakh, Tatar, Kyrgyz, Turkish, Iranian, Bulgarian, Armenian, Georgian peoples.

## CONCLUSION

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