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Research article

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## TOPONYMIC ELEMENTS IN THE TURKISTAN-TURKMEN SAHRA MANUSCRIPT OF «THE BOOK OF DEDE KORKUT»

**Abstract.** Among the most distinctive works of the Turkish epic tradition are the manuscripts containing the sayings, poetic passages, and epic narratives attributed to Dede Korkut. Four manuscripts of these works are known today. Rich in language, literature, history, and folklore, they form an essential part of Turkic cultural heritage. The third manuscript, known as the Turkistan Türkmen Sahra Manuscript of Dede Korkut, holds particular significance due to its abundance of toponymical (place name) elements. The manuscript studies the place names found in this manuscript. First, the place names appearing in the twenty-three poetic passages are presented, followed by those occurring in the epic narrative titled “Salur Kazan’s Slaying of the Seven-Headed Dragon.” These are organized and categorized in tables. At the end of the study, the cultural significance of the identified place names within the context of Turkish culture is discussed, without delving into etymological analysis. The researcher categorizes place names under three main headings: natural features (land, water, mountains, passes), cities, and countries or regions. These toponyms encompass a wide geography from China to Europe and from Siberia to India, reflecting the lands, capitals, and cultural environments historically inhabited by Turkic peoples.

**Keywords:** Dede Korkut, manuscripts, epics, poems, toponyms.

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## Introduction

The manuscripts in which the Dede Korkut epics are written are among the most valuable sources of information about the Turkish language, history, literature, and the past of the Turkic tribes, and are considered some of the most important works of Turkish civilization. The first manuscript of Dede Korkut was discovered in 1815 in the Royal Library in Dresden, Germany, and was introduced to the academic world for the first time by Heinrich Von Diez. Diez, who recognized the significance of the manuscript for the Turks, made a copy of it and gave it to the Berlin Library. This work, which includes the sayings and stories of Dede Korkut, contains a preface and twelve epic narratives. On the cover of this manuscript is written: «Kitab-ı Dedem Korkut Ala Lisan-ı Taife-i Oğuzan», which means «The Book of My Grandfather Korkut in the Language of the Oghuz Tribe.» This first manuscript is still preserved in the library in Dresden (Ergin, 1958; Gökyay, 2000).

The second manuscript of the Dede Korkut epics was discovered in 1950 at the Vatican Library by the Italian Turkologist Ettore Rossi. The Vatican manuscript contains a preface and six epic narratives. This manuscript is also still preserved in the Vatican Library. There is no information regarding the authors, the place of writing, or the date of composition of the Dresden and Vatican manuscripts. Based on the linguistic features found in both manuscripts, it is believed that they were written down between the late 15th and early 16th centuries (Sümer, Uysal, and Walker, 1972; Lewis, 1974; Rossi, 1999).

The third manuscript of the Dede Korkut writings was purchased by Muhammed Veli Hoca, who lives in the city of Büyük Kümbet (Gonbad-e Qabus) in the Türkmen Sahra region of Iran. The work was introduced to the academic world for the first time by us during the International Dede Korkut Symposium held in Bayburt, Turkey, in 2019. While the original manuscript is in the possession of Muhammed Veli Hoca, based on the copy of the work he shared with us, we published the book titled «The Book of Dede Korkut – Turkistan/Turkmensahra Manuscript; Istanbul: Ötüken Publishing, June 2019,» thereby presenting this manuscript to researchers.

As with the previous two manuscripts, there is no information about the scribe, the place it was written, or the date of its writing. Additionally, since this manuscript does not have a cover page, its title is also unknown. Despite all this, based on linguistic features, it is believed that the manuscript was written down in the 17th century. This third manuscript includes 23 “Soylama” (poetic passages) and one epic narrative, titled “The Epic of Salur Kazan Killing the Seven-Headed Dragon.”

The fourth and, so far, the most recently discovered manuscript of Dede Korkut was found in the city of Bursa, Turkey, in 2022. This manuscript is currently housed in the Bursa Muradiye Museum of Qur’an and Manuscripts. There is no information about the scribe in the manuscript, and due to missing sections at both the beginning and the end, its full title is unknown. Linguistic features suggest that it may have been written between the late 16th and early 17th centuries.

Following this general information about the Dede Korkut manuscripts, it is now appropriate to move on to the topic of our presentation.

In this paper, I will evaluate the toponymical elements (i.e., place names) found in the third manuscript of Dede Korkut—the Turkistan Türkmen Sahra manuscript, which I introduced to the scholarly world. First, I will present the place names mentioned in the 23 poetic passages (soylamas), then the place names in the epic narrative I have titled “Salur Kazan’s Slaying of the Seven-Headed Dragon” will be categorized and presented in tables. At the end of my paper, I will discuss the cultural significance of the place names identified in the manuscript within the

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context of Turkish culture; however, I will not focus on the etymological analysis of those place names.

### Materials and Methods

Among Turkish folk narratives, epics are particularly rich in place names and other onomastic elements. Some of these refer to cities and rural areas where Turkic tribes have historically established states and lived, while others refer to regions, cities, mountains, rivers, lakes, and passes located in neighboring lands close to where Turks lived. Among the epic narratives, the Dede Korkut epics—along with the soylama poems recited by minstrels (ozans) and bards (bahşıs) in the language of Dede Korkut—stand out as the richest in terms of place names. The onomastic elements in two early manuscripts have been studied by number of researchers, such as Gokyay (2000), Ergin (1958), etc. (Bulduk,1997; Ergun,2003; Golden,2015; Türktaş,2013; Vahid,2021), but the onomastic elements in the third manuscript of Dede Korkut have not been studied.

In this paper, where we examine the place names in the Turkistan-Turkmen Sahra manuscript of Dede Korkut, we found it appropriate to categorize the identified place names into three groups for analysis.

**1. Names of the Natural Places:** Names of locations such as landforms, bodies of water, mountains, passes, etc.

**2. Names of the Cities:** Cities historically inhabited by Turkic tribes, many of which still exist today.

**3. Names of the Countries and Regions:** Names of countries and regions that, throughout history, were within the borders of Turkic states—some of which now lie outside the borders of contemporary Turkic countries, while others remain within them.

### Results and Discussion

I have chosen to present these place names in tables. While creating the tables, I adopted the following structure: serial number, place name, the text in which the name appears, and the page number of the references. In this way, under each table title, I aimed to clearly show what the place name is, how it appears in the text, in which soylama or epic it is found, and its corresponding page number—making it easier for researchers to quickly access information about the place names within these texts. The place name tables we have prepared based on the grouping above are as follows:

#### 1. Names of the Natural Places in the Turkistan-Turkmen Sahra Manuscript of Dede Korkut:

No	Natural Place Names	Description	Page No.
1	The place of Adabasa (Adabasa Yeri)	"In the place of Adabasa, the ground sinks beneath its majesty."	Ekici, 2019; 177
2	Mount Arafat (Arafat Dağı)		Ekici, 2019; 155
3	Aras River (Aras Suyu)	"Cutting through the Aras and Kura Rivers."	Ekici, 2019; 179; 200
4	Mount Çolpa (ÇolpaDağı)	"I had gone to the foot of Çolpa Mountain in Alaçak."	Ekici, 2019; 190

5	The Iron Gate Pass (Demir Kapı Derbend)	"He who conquered the Iron Gate Pass."	Ekici, 2019; 176; 200
6	The Tiger's Tunnel - The Tiger's Bed Pass (Kaplan Tüneği- Kaplan Yatağı Geçidi)	"In the Tiger's Tunnel Pass." "While turning in the Tiger's Bed Pass, he struck his uncle Konur Alp in the neck."	Ekici, 2019; 178, 200
7	Black Water/River (Kara Su)	"On a winter day, from Kara Su to Kuba."	Ekici, 2019; 176
8	The Kura River (Kür Suyu)	"He who crossed through the Aras and Kura Rivers."	Ekici, 2019; 176, 200
9	The Samur River (Samur Çayı, Samur Suyu)	"He who set up a drink on the Samur River."	Ekici, 2019; 176, 200
10	Mount Savalan (Savalan Dağı)	"He used Savalan Mountain for summer pastures."	Ekici, 2019; 175, 201
11	Mount Shah (Şah Dağı)	"He who spreads his shade on the top of Mount Shah."	Ekici, 2019; 176, 200
12	The White Minkan (Ak Minkan)	"He went hunting at Ak Minkan."	Ekici, 2019; 201
13	Alagöz	"At the gate of Alagöz,"	Ekici, 2019; 200
14	Mount Serhab (Serhab Dağı)	"I went on a journey with the lords to Mount Serhab."	Ekici, 2019; 201
15	Sherecan (Şerencan)	"I met a hundred thousand infidels on the plain of Sherecan."	Ekici, 2019; 200

To briefly evaluate this table, the following can be said: In the Turkistan-Turkmen Sahra Manuscript of Dede Korkut, the total number of place, water, mountain, and pass names is 15, broken down as follows: "Pass, Plain, and Place Names: 6";

"River/Water Names: 4"; "Mountain Names: 5". These names correspond to locations in the geographical regions of Central Asia, the Caucasus, Iran, and Turkey.

## 2. Names of the Cities: in the Turkistan-Turkmen Sahra Manuscript of Dede Korkut:

No	City Names	Description	Page No.
1	Baghdad (Bağdad)	"Since ancient times, Baghdad has been the resting place of saints and prophets."	Ekici, 2019; 187
2	Bayburt (Bayburt)	"Bayburt, the land where honey and butter never run dry."	Ekici, 2019; 187
3	Belh (Belh)	"The one who beheaded Alay Khan and Bolay Khan in Belh and Bukhara."	Ekici, 2019; 178
4	Bukhara (Buhara)	"The one who beheaded Alay Khan and Bolay Khan in Belh and Bukhara."	Ekici, 2019; 178
5	Dergezin (Dergezin)	"Faith and justice are inseparable in the cities of Hamadan and Dergezin."	Ekici, 2019; 187
6	Ardabil (Erdebil)	"The city of Ardabil in the land of Azerbaijan is famous in Istanbul for its pilaf."	Ekici, 2019; 187
7	Aleppo (Haleb)	"The conqueror of Aleppo and Damascus." "The Khan of Aleppo, armed with two bows and heavy arrows."	Ekici, 2019; 157, 176, 200
8	Hamadan (Hemedan)	"Faith and justice are inseparable in the cities of Hamadan and Dergezin."	Ekici, 2019; 187

9	Isfahan (İsfahan)	"Isfahan, the city that produces its own viziers."	Ekici, 2019; 187
10	Ican (İcan)	"Ican, the city where the morning star rises."	Ekici, 2019; 187
11	Istanbul (İstanbul)	"The city of Ardabil in the land of Azerbaijan is famous in Istanbul for its pilaf."	Ekici, 2019; 187
12	Kars (Kars)	"In that campaign, I conquered the Aras and Kars fortresses."	Ekici, 2019; 201
13	Kashan (Kâşân)	"Isn't the city of Kashan the bride among all cities?"	Ekici, 2019; 187
14	Karbala (Kerbelâ)	"The soil of Qom is measured by the soil of Karbala."	Ekici, 2019; 187
15	Kiyan (Kıyan)	"Kiyan, the city where the shining sun rises."	Ekici, 2019; 187
16	Quba (Kuba)	"On a winter day, from Kara Su to Kuba."	Ekici, 2019; 176
17	Qom (Kum)	"The soil of Qom is measured by the soil of Karbala."	Ekici, 2019; 187
18	Mecca (Mekke)	"He who goes to Mecca and returns, bearing the honor of a pilgrim." "Mecca, built on flat land, rejoices."	Ekici, 2019; 178, 189
19	Mosul (Musul)	"In Mosul, every house is like a fortress."	Ekici, 2019; 187
20	Sarikamis (Sarıkamuş)	"Sarıkamuş is used as winter pasture."	Ekici, 2019; 175, 201
21	Damascus (Şam)	"The conqueror of Aleppo and Damascus."	Ekici, 2019; 176
22	Shamakhi (Şamahı)	"He who made Shirvan and Shamakhi his domain."	Ekici, 2019; 176
23	Shiraz (Şiraz)	"He rode out, returned on foot—beloved Shiraz."	Ekici, 2019; 187
24	Shirvan (Şirvan)	"He who made Shirvan and Shamakhi his domain."	Ekici, 2019; 176
25	Tabriz (Tebriz)	"The one who shoed horses in the crimson city of Tabriz." "The one who poured forth and migrated from crimson Tabriz."	Ekici, 2019; 176, 188, 200

In the Turkistan–Turkmen Sahra Manuscript of Dede Korkut, the number of city names is 25. Most of these city names still exist today and are located in Central Asia, the Caucasus, and the Middle East. Many of them are found within the modern borders of Azerbaijan, Iran, Iraq, Syria, and Turkey.

It is worth noting that a significant portion of these cities were once capitals of historical Turkic states and principalities. Another important characteristic of these cities is that they were prominent centers of trade, culture, and art, and were thus included in the epics to facilitate communication and resonance between the narrators and the audience. Their inclusion in the Turkistan–Turkmen Sahra manuscript is primarily due to the fact that these cities once served as capitals of Turkic states or beyliks and are part of the broader Turkic cultural sphere.

### 3. Names of the Countries and Regions in the Turkistan–Turkmen Sahra Manuscript of Dede Korkut:

No	Country and Region Names	Description	Page No
1	The Place of Adabasa (Adabasa Yeri)	"At the place of Adabasa, he shook the earth with his might."	Ekici, 2019; 200
2	Akça Castle of Sürmeli (Akça Kale Sürmeli)	"I appointed Lala Kılbaş as governor in Akça Castle Sürmeli."	Ekici, 2019; 201
3	The Land of the Arabs (Arap eli)	"His horse is swift, and he himself hails from the Arab land."	Ekici, 2019; 187

4	Aras (Aras River/Region)	"On that campaign, I took the Aras and Kars fortresses."	Ekici, 2019; 201
5	Azerbaijan (Azerbaycan)	"The anchor of Azerbaijan." "Renowned for its pilaf in the land of Azerbaijan..." "The admiral of Azerbaijan, the sultan's deputy, Ulaş's son Kazan."	Ekici, 2019; 175, 187, 201
6	The Land of Baghdad (Bağdad eli)	"Since ancient times, Baghdad has been the resting place of saints and prophets."	Ekici, 2019; 187
7	The Land of the Circassians (Çerkes eli)	"The Circassian land shines with bright spears."	Ekici, 2019; 187
8	Dagestan (Dağıstan)	"The one who unleashed a storm upon Dagestan with the Lezgis."	Ekici, 2019; 176
9	Derbent (Derbend)	"He who stormed and took the Iron Gate of Derbent."	Ekici, 2019; 200
10	The Land of Ebrul (Ebrul Eli)	"The land of Ebrul survives by crafting horse straps."	Ekici, 2019; 187
11	The Land of Germal Germal Eli	"From olden times, no gossip has come from Germal and Halhal."	Ekici, 2019; 187
12	The Land of Gilan Gilan eli	"The land of Gilan grows pure white rice."	Ekici, 2019; 187
13	The Land of the Georgians Georgia (Gürci eli; Gürcistan)	"The Georgian land, where black hair is braided." "He who struck fear into nine divisions of Georgia."	Ekici, 2019; 188, 158, 177
14	The Land of Halhal (Halhâl eli)	"No gossip has come from Germal and Halhal since olden times."	Ekici, 2019; 187
15	The Land of Cathay (China) (Hita eli)	"The land of Cathay has dark-eyed, slender-waisted beauties."	Ekici, 2019; 187
16	The Land of Yerevan (İrevan eli)	"In Yerevan, Nakhchivan, and Şervel lands: red goats, wicked men."	Ekici, 2019; 188
17	Kabal Kabal	"He brought fresh apples from Kabal on a harsh winter day."	Ekici, 2019; 200
18	The Land of Karhun Karhun eli	"Aren't even the ants like black dogs in the land of Karhun?"	Ekici, 2019; 187
19	The Land of Qazvin (Kazvin eli)	"Men sew furs, their falcons are mighty—the powerful land of Kazvin."	Ekici, 2019; 187
20	The Lands of Kırkbarak (Kırkbarak illeri)	"The one who reached and seized the lands of Kırbarak."	Ekici, 2019; 178
21	The Land of the Kurds (Kürd eli)	"The Kurdish land is settled in harsh, rugged terrain."	Ekici, 2019; 187
22	Mangyshlak (Mangystau, in modern Kazakhstan) (Mangışlak)	"He who spread terror within Mangyshlak." "The one who raided Mangyshlak."	Ekici, 2019; 176, 200
23	Egypt (Mısır)	"He who became sultan on Egypt's golden throne."	Ekici, 2019; 157, 176
24	The Land of Mosul (Musul eli)	"Every house is a fortress in the land of Mosul."	Ekici, 2019; 187
25	The Land of Nakhchivan (Nahçıvan eli)	"Red goats, wicked men—lands of İrevan, Nakhchivan, and Şervel."	Ekici, 2019; 188
26	Pamukçu (Pamukçu)	"He collected tribute from the fourteen villages of Pamukçu."	Ekici, 2019; 200
27	The Land of Rum (Anatolia) (Rum eli)	"Since ancient times, no plague has arisen from the land of Rum."	Ekici, 2019; 188

28	The Land of Sindh (Sindi eli)	In the land of Sindh: dark-faced, white-toothed people.	Ekici, 2019; 187
29	The Land of Şervel (Şervel eli)	"Red goats, wicked men—lands of Irevan, Nakhchivan, and Şervel."	Ekici, 2019; 188
30	The Land of Shirvan (Şirvan eli)	"Red goats, wicked men—lands of Irevan, Nakhchivan, and Şervel."	Ekici, 2019; 187
31	Tabasaran (Tabasaran)	"The Sultan of Tabasaran, the mighty lord of Bayat." "The Sultan of Tabasaran, commander of 24,000 warriors—Deli Dündar, son of Kiyan."	Ekici, 2019; 176, 200
32	The Land of Tarim (Tarım eli)	"One who goes to Tarim rich returns poor."	Ekici, 2019; 187
33	The Land of Ucan (Ucan eli)	"The land of Ucan, within Azerbaijan."	Ekici, 2019; 188
34	The Land of Urumlu (Urumlu eli)	"They became Muslim by the sword—the lands of Urumlu and Uşani since ancient times."	Ekici, 2019; 187
35	The Land of Uşani (Uşani eli)	They became Muslim by the sword—the lands of Urumlu and Uşani since ancient times."	Ekici, 2019; 187
36	Turkistan (Türkistan)	"Salur Kazan, the pillar of Turkistan."	Ekici, 2019; 200

In the Dede Korkut Turkistan–Turkmen Sahra Manuscript, the number of countries, regions, lands, and locality names is 36. Most of these names are still known today. These countries, regions, lands, and localities lie within the borders of Central Asia, the Caucasus, and Middle Eastern nations. The named regions begin geographically with present-day Kazakhstan, Uzbekistan, and Turkmenistan, and stretch southward to India, and westward to Azerbaijan, Iran, Iraq, Georgia, Armenia, Syria, and Turkey.

## Conclusion

Among the most original works of the Turkish epic tradition that have been inscribed is the manuscripts that consist of the sayings, poetic passages and epic narratives that have been attributed to Dede Korkut. There are currently four known manuscripts of the sayings, poetic passages and epics of Dede Korkut. These epic narratives and heroic poems, which present a rich content of the Turkic language, literature, history, and folklore, are especially notable for their toponymical elements in the third manuscript that I have focused on in this study.

I have categorized the place names found in the third manuscript under three main headings and listed their appearances in the text in alphabetical order. In this manuscript, there are 15 names of natural locations (land, water, mountains, passes); 25 city names, and 36 countries, regions, or local names, bringing the total number of toponymical elements to 76.

These places, cities, countries and regional names in the manuscript under investigation reflect the lands where Turkic people have lived. Those cities were the capital cities of historical Turkish states and principalities, especially the Oghuz tribes. Those countries and regions were ruled Turkic people. Some of the countries, regions, cities and natural places have fallen into the Turkic cultural milieu and environment. Most of these place names are still known and used today.

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### **Contribution of the authors.**

M.Ekici – conceptualization, design, writing of *Introduction* and *Results and Discussion* sections.

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### **“Қорқыт ата кітабының” Түркістан–Түркімен Сахра қолжазбасындағы топонимдік элементтер**

**Аңдатпа.** Түркі эпикалық дәстүріндегі ерекше туындыларының бірі — Қорқыт атаға телінетін нақыл сөздер, өлең үзінділер мен эпикалық әңгімелеулер жинақталған



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қолжазбалар болып табылады. Бүгінгі күні осындай төрт қолжазба белгілі. Тілі, әдебиеті, тарихы мен фольклоры тұрғысынан бай бұл мұралар түркі халықтарының мәдени қазынасының маңызды бөлігі болып саналады. Солардың ішінде үшінші қолжазба — «Түркістан–Түркімен Сахра Қорқыт ата қолжазбасы» — жер-су атауларының (топонимдердің) көптігімен ерекше мәнге ие. Мақалада осы қолжазбада кездесетін жер-су атаулары қарастырылады. Алдымен жиырма үш поэтикалық бөлімдегі топонимдер көрсетіліп, кейін “Салор Қазанның жеті басты айдаһарды өлтіруі” атты эпикалық баяндаудағы жер-су атаулары талданады. Бұл атаулар жүйеленіп, кестелер түрінде берілген. Зерттеудің соңында анықталған топонимдердің түркі мәдениеті контексіндегі мәдени маңызы сөз болады, алайда олардың этимологиялық талдауы қарастырылмайды. Топонимдер үш негізгі топқа бөлінген: табиғи нысандар (жер, су, тау, асу), қалалар және елдер мен аймақтар. Барлығы Қытайдан Еуропаға, Сібірден Үндістанға дейінгі географиялық кеңістікті қамтиды. Бұл атаулар түркі халықтарының ежелгі мекендерін, астаналарын және олардың мәдени ортасын бейнелейді.

**Түйін сөздер:** Қорқыт ата, қолжазбалар, эпос, өлеңдер, топонимдер.

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### **Топонимические элементы в Туркестано-Туркмен-Сахринской рукописи «Книга Деда Коркут»**

**Аннотация.** Среди наиболее самобытных произведений тюркской эпической традиции выделяются рукописи, содержащие изречения, поэтические отрывки и эпические повествования, приписываемые деду Коркуту. На сегодняшний день известно четыре таких рукописи. Богатые языком, литературой, историей и фольклором, они составляют важнейшую часть тюркского культурного наследия. Третья рукопись, известная как Туркестано–Туркменосахринской рукописи деда Коркута, имеет особое значение благодаря большому количеству топонимических элементов (названий мест). В статье анализируются названия мест, встречающиеся в этой рукописи. Сначала приводятся топонимы, упомянутые в двадцати трёх поэтических отрывках, затем рассматриваются названия, встречающиеся в эпическом повествовании под названием «Убийство семиглавого дракона Салуром Казаном». Эти данные систематизируются и представлены в виде таблиц. В заключительной части исследования обсуждается культурное значение выявленных топонимов в контексте тюркской культуры, при этом этимологический анализ не проводится. Топонимы классифицированы по трём основным группам: природные объекты (земля, вода, горы, перевалы), города и страны или регионы. Эти названия охватывают обширное географическое пространство — от Китая до Европы и от Сибири до Индии, отражая земли, столицы и культурную среду, исторически населённые тюркскими народами.

**Ключевые слова:** дед Коркут, рукописи, эпосы, стихотворения, топонимы.

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