

THE PROSPECTS FOR A NEW ANALYTICAL APPROACH TO THE DEDE QORQUT KITABI

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Abstract. This study examines Cihangir Kızılözen's two-volume work *The Dede Qorqut Kitabi: The First Study to Bring Together the Dresden, Vatican and Bursa Manuscripts* through an analytical approach. The aim of the research is to determine the work's position within Dede Korkut studies, its approach to textual editing, and the methodological innovations it presents. The fundamental originality of the work under review lies in its re-examination of the text through a comparative and critical approach that evaluates the Dresden, Vatican and Bursa manuscripts simultaneously. Kızılözen reconsiders linguistic units that earlier editions corrected, replaced or declared illegible — usually on the assumption of authorial or scribal error — and proposes that they be reassessed within the context of archaic linguistic layers, the oral narrative tradition of the bard, and the historical development of the Turkic languages. On this basis the work argues that the text preserves a multi-layered linguistic heritage extending from living Turkic dialects to Old Oghuz Turkish and from Old Turkic to Proto-Turkic, together with elements associated with the Kipchak and Karluk areas; the findings further indicate correspondences with Siberian Turkic languages such as Yakut, Dolgan, Tuvan and Altai, as well as with Chuvash. The *Dede Qorqut Kitabi* thus ceases to be a monument assessable solely within the framework of Oghuz Turkic and acquires the status of a multi-layered masterpiece reflecting the linguistic and cultural heritage of the entire Turkic world. The analysis shows that Kızılözen adopts a scientific-critical approach that preserves the original variants of the manuscripts instead of standardising the text according to a single dialect or period. In this respect the work introduces a new methodology to Dede Korkut research and treats manuscript variation not as error, but as evidence of the text's historical and cultural formation.

Key words: The *Dede Qorqut Kitabi*, Cihangir Kızılözen, the Dresden manuscript, the Vatican manuscript, the Bursa manuscript, textual criticism, linguistic layers, Old Oghuz Turkish.

Introduction

My participation in the 30th Dede Korkut Science, Culture and Sports Festival, held in Bayburt—one of Turkey's Dede Korkut homelands—in early July this year, proved to be an unforgettable experience for me in many respects. The most significant of these was my meeting with Prof. Dr Cihangir Kızılözen, a member of the younger generation of Dede Korkut researchers. Originally from Southern Azerbaijan, Cihangir completed his undergraduate degree in the Department of Turkish Language and Literature at Ege University between 1998 and 2002, and his postgraduate studies at the university's Institute of Social Sciences between 2002 and 2004. His master's thesis, entitled 'Lexical Relations between Pre-Islamic Turkic and Persian Languages', marked the young researcher's first serious academic work. Cihangir Kızılözen, who has continued his research without interruption in fields such as the history of the Turkish language (and its dialects), language relations, dialectology and related areas, obtained his PhD in 2009 by defending his doctoral thesis entitled 'The Dialects of the Erdebil Region' at the Institute of Social Sciences, Gazi University; he was appointed associate professor in the field of Old Turkish in 2019 and professor in 2025.

In addition to numerous articles on various fields of Turkology, Kızılözen has published three research books: *The Earliest Traces of Turkish in Persian*, *The Epic of the Turkish Khan Yüce Oğuz* and *The Dede Qorqut Kitabi* [1].

As is well known, research into Dede Korkut, with its increasingly diverse aspects, constitutes one of the fundamental areas—and perhaps the most important—of contemporary Turkology, particularly in the field of Turkic-Oghuz studies. This field encompasses a broad scope of research, ranging from the preparation of a reliable scientific and critical text of *The Dede Qorqut Kitabi* to the examination of the work as a linguistic, literary, historical and ethnological source. It is equally well known that, to date, extremely valuable studies have been produced regarding the preparation of the text of this work. In our view, the most significant feature of Cihangir Kızılözen's work—in which

he prepared a new text of the Dede Qorqut Kitabı—is that he meticulously examined all published texts and elucidated the nature of the existing phonetic, lexical and grammatical variations. In doing so, he has presented one of the most successful examples of approaching the traditions and achievements in this field of Dede Korkut research with respect.

The relevance of the present article stems from this situation: the appearance of an edition that simultaneously takes into account the Dresden, Vatican and Bursa manuscripts requires a separate scholarly assessment of both its textological principles and its consequences for the historical study of the Turkic languages.

Materials and methods of research

The material of the study is the two-volume edition prepared by Cihangir Kızılözen — The Dede Qorqut Kitabı: The First Study to Bring Together the Dresden, Vatican and Bursa Manuscripts [1] — considered together with the earlier academic editions of the monument to which the author himself refers, namely those of O. Ş. Gökyay [2], M. Ergin [3], F. Zeynalov and S. Elizade [4], and H. Araslı [5].

In the «Introduction» to this two-volume work, after mentioning the names of researchers who have contributed to Dede Korkut studies at various levels—particularly those who have compiled the text of the Book in its entirety—the author states that he has accorded special importance to three studies «because they were the first academic works and made significant contributions to the reading and interpretation of the text». These are as follows:

- O. Ş. Gökyay, Dedem Korkudun Kitabı [2];
- M. Ergin, Dede Korkut Kitabı [3];
- F. Zeynalov and S. Elizade, Kitab-ı Dede Korkut [4].

Cihangir Kızılözen, based on his assessments, points out that four fundamental issues have emerged in the studies conducted on Dedem Korkut Kitabı:

- 1) researchers have published certain sections not as they appear in the text, but after 'correcting' them;
- 2) in the studies carried out, certain elements in the text have been replaced with other elements;
- 3) researchers have made additions to certain sections that do not appear in the text;
- 4) some sections of the text, however, could not be deciphered at all.

In the academic literature two main methods are generally followed when evaluating a work: a descriptive introduction and a critical-analytical review. The first of these methods, the descriptive introduction, aims to convey to the reader the work's primary objective, theoretical framework, the problem it addresses, and its general outline without the need to delve into the table of contents, a detailed chapter-by-chapter breakdown, or specific examples within the text. The second method, the critical-analytical review, focuses on evaluating the work by examining its place within the existing literature, the consistency of its claims, its methodological rigor, and the competence of its use of sources, and by testing these through concrete data selected from the text. In this context, the present work is a descriptive book review that aims to introduce the work's purpose, theoretical and general framework, it offers to the scientific literature, rather than subjecting it to a detailed analytical scrutiny.

The research is carried out by means of an analytical–descriptive method: the principles declared in the 'Introduction' to the edition are set out, systematised and then confronted with the textological tradition that preceded them. A comparative–historical approach is used when the linguistic layers distinguished by the author are correlated with the periodisation of the Turkic languages, and elements of the textological (source-critical) method are applied when the treatment of the Dresden, Vatican and Bursa manuscripts is discussed. The interpretation of the multi-layered character of the text additionally draws on the general-linguistic distinction between «language» and «speech» [6] and on the study of the Oğuzname tradition [7].

Results and its discussion

These observations demonstrate that, whilst the author approaches the tradition of Dede Korkut research with great respect, he has not overlooked the problems that have arisen. On the contrary, as a necessity of his respect for this tradition, he has made successful efforts to establish the necessary

scientific principles aimed at resolving these issues.

As stated on the book cover, this work is the first study to evaluate the Dresden, Vatican and Bursa manuscripts together. Naturally, in previous publications, the complete Dresden manuscript—which includes the introduction and the twelve sections—has been taken as the primary source; the Vatican manuscript, being vocalised, has been used as a supplementary source to assist in the more accurate reading of certain disputed words and in the comparison of textual variations. The newly discovered Bursa manuscript, meanwhile, is an extremely important source for the preparation of the critical edition, both because it contains all the chapters found in the Dresden manuscript and because it is a vocalised text. His respect for the tradition of Dede Korkut research, the meticulous care he has shown towards the extant manuscripts, and his extensive knowledge of Turkology have enabled Cihangir Kızılözen to open a new chapter in the history of textual criticism of the Dede Qorqut Kitabı. The methodological basis for this innovation is formed by the following assessments:

Numerous studies have been conducted on the Dresden and Vatican manuscripts of the Dede Qorqut Kitabı. In all studies carried out to date, it has been accepted that hundreds of words in these manuscripts are misspelt; these units, claimed to be incorrect, have been corrected in accordance with the phonetic, morphological and semantic characteristics of Old Oghuz (Anatolian) Turkish [1].

The present-day researcher continues this assessment with the following words:

This study argues, for the first time, that the units in question are not misspelt; on the contrary, it maintains that almost all of them are spelled correctly, that there are different linguistic layers within the text, and that the units previously thought to be misspelt are in fact related to these linguistic layers [1].

Cihangir Kızılözen's high level of expertise as a textual scholar is evident in his ability to present highly complex issues through clear and comprehensible analyses. Indeed, he expresses the view that reading a text in a 'corrected' form gives rise to new problems in the following words:

Of course, the person who copied the manuscript of the Dede Qorqut Kitabı may have made a mistake. But how can we be certain that the version 'corrected' by Muharrem Ergin or Orhan Ş. Gökyay is the correct one? If we accept the reading of M. Ergin, O. Ş. Gökyay or any other researcher as correct, does that text not cease to be the Dresden manuscript and instead become the manuscript of Ergin, Gökyay or another researcher? [1].

This is precisely the crux of the matter. Through the editions of the Dede Qorqut Kitabı published to date, the epic's content and world of meaning have been conveyed to 20th- and even 21st-century readers—and to society at large—with great success. For example, even the edition by Hamid Araslı [5], which was prepared with a broader readership in mind, has played a decisive role in the spread of Dede Korkut (and the idea of Turkism) in Azerbaijan. The same applies to the editions by O. Ş. Gökyay [2], M. Ergin [3], and, more recently, F. Zeynalov and S. Elizade [4]. However, the approach put forward by Cihangir Kızılözen operates on an entirely different level. His aim is to arrive at a text of the Dede Qorqut Kitabı that is competent in every respect, indeed as close to ideal as possible. The need for such a genuinely scientific and critical text is beyond dispute. The first and most fundamental principle of this is to read the text as it stands, without making any form of 'correction' to it.

The author makes the following assessment on this matter:

It is certain that the manuscripts in our possession were copied in the Anatolian region (or, to be more precise, in the Azerbaijan–Eastern Anatolia region – N. C.). However, the linguistic features of the text indicate that the work from which these manuscripts were derived was copied in different periods and in different regions... For this reason, the Dede Qorqut Kitabı cannot be 'corrected' according to any particular region or ethnic dialect. 'Correcting' the Dede Qorqut Kitabı on the basis of any Turkish dialect or variety (or, indeed, language) prevents the linguistic features of the text from being revealed [1].

Whilst addressing crucial points in his assessment of the fundamental problems in previous studies on the text of the Dede Qorqut Kitabı, the researcher subsequently moves on to the issue of the work's linguistic layers. According to the researcher, the manuscripts in our possession today are

quite far removed from reflecting the original text. These manuscripts, which essentially represent the final stage of the text's formation process, contain the following linguistic layers:

–living Turkic dialects (which form the direct source of modern Turkic languages, characterised by varying degrees of divergence in phonetics, grammar and lexicon);

–Old Oghuz Turkish;

–the early phase of Old Oghuz Turkish (the period when Old Turkic began to branch off into Old Oghuz Turkish, or more accurately, into the Old Oghuz, Kipchak, Karluk and other Turkic literary languages);

–Old Turkic;

–Proto-Turkic.

Despite his relative youth, Cihangir Kızılözen has demonstrated the competence to engage in scholarly debate with the great classical academic pioneers. With the following significant assessment, he has undertaken an attempt to re-examine the views of his esteemed predecessors through a modest yet robust scholarly approach:

One of the fundamental problems in research on the Dede Qorqut Kitabi is the attempt to interpret the text solely according to the linguistic criteria of a single period. Researchers who regard the work as a product of the Old Oghuz Turkish period have altered all the archaic elements in the text on the grounds that they were incorrectly written. In doing so, they have effectively modernised the text by adapting its language to Old Oghuz Turkish. Believing that no features of Old Turkic could be found in the work, dozens of structures specific to Old Turkic have been removed; in their place, equivalents consistent with the phonetic, structural and semantic characteristics of Old Oghuz Turkish have been introduced. However, if the period to which the text belongs is determined solely on the basis of linguistic features, the result will be an entirely different Dede Qorqut Kitabi [1].

In fact, this approach constitutes a serious, well-founded critique directed at traditional Dede Korkut textual scholarship. Nevertheless, we are far from describing this textual scholar of the new era as a 'revolutionary'. For, in our view, his approach never oversteps the bounds of scientific modesty. The first reason for this is that Cihangir Kızılözen has learnt a great deal from the Dede Korkut textual scholars who preceded him and has incorporated many of their findings into his own work. The second reason is that the understanding of textual scholarship—which we can now regard as belonging to a bygone era—was not fragmented but was based on a specific principle, namely the adaptation of the text to Old Oghuz Turkish. This approach, being internally consistent, has naturally established a textual tradition for a specific period. Finally, had such a tradition not been established, Dede Korkut textual studies would not have been able to produce a new specialist such as Cihangir Kızılözen.

One of the areas in which the author offers competent and professionally sound assessments is the graphology of written works. His investigations in this field—which previous textual scholars either ignored entirely or failed to give sufficient attention to—shed light on many obscure points. Indeed, in the Dresden manuscript—which is undoubtedly a 15th-century copy—it can be seen that the forms of certain letters differ from the spellings commonly found in the text. It is clear that these examples were written in the Kufic script.

Recalling that the Kufic script dates back to the 2nd and 3rd Hijri centuries (8th and 9th AD), the author adds the following assessment:

It may well be true that the Turks had not yet converted to Islam at the time these works were written. However, this does not mean that any Turkish work could not have been written in the Arabic alphabet. Indeed, when the Codex Cumanicus was written in the Latin alphabet, the Kuman Turks were not Christian. Furthermore, at that time, the Turks had not yet adopted the Latin alphabet either [1].

Thus, the researcher, by distinguishing elements belonging to the most diverse periods of development and differentiation of the Turkic language—from the alphabet (script) to the lexicon and grammatical structure—criticises the tradition of artificially placing the text of the Dede Qorqut Kitabi within the framework of Old Oghuz Turkish both theoretically and, through the objective text

he presents, overcomes this in practice.

Building on this new approach and methodology put forward by Cihangir Kızılözen, we believe it would be useful to clarify two further points in the work's in-depth 'Introduction'. It is particularly striking that, whilst the author has gone as far as the very boundaries of these issues, for some reason he has chosen not to delve into their very essence. The first of these is as follows: the linguistic features in the Dede Qorqut Kitabi, which have accumulated layer upon layer throughout history and have, as it were, become fossilised, do not belong to Old Oghuz Turkish—that is, to a specific period in the history of the Turkic language and all the works of that period—but rather to the text of Dede Korkut itself, which possesses a unique historical structure situated above these periods. Undoubtedly, linguistic elements originating from the earliest Turkic (Proto-Turkic), and even from the Common Altaic period, have persisted throughout all historical periods of the Turkic language. Similarly, Old Oghuz Turkish also bears the strong influence of this historical accumulation. However, this is a separate matter.

As for the layering in the text of the Dede Qorqut Kitabi, to draw on the terminology of the great linguist F. de Saussure, the issue at hand here is not 'language' but directly 'speech' (parole) [6, 113]. The reason for this is that the epic is a product of oral performance rooted in the tradition of the bard.

The second point, which has not been sufficiently addressed in the work, is a continuation of the first. The original text of the Dede Korkut epic, in manuscripts written in various alphabets (and, as far as we know, in Arabic and Persian translations as well), is essentially a 'prose epic' and has emerged as an integral part of the Oğuzname tradition [7, 7].

Although it later branched off from this tradition to acquire the character of a more or less independent book, it has continued to preserve the characteristics—both in content and form—common to all Turkic communities (the Oghuz, Kipchaks, Karluks, etc.). We hope that these topics will also be addressed in greater detail in future editions of the book.

Cihangir Kızılözen's observation that 'the language and plot structure of the Dresden, Vatican and Bursa manuscripts indicate that these manuscripts are based on a common source text' is accurate. Of course, it is possible to assume that this common text dates back to no later than the 9th–11th centuries. However, the Turks' tradition and culture of compiling the Oğuzname, as our author also points out, suggests that we should seek traces of the book's earliest manuscripts in even earlier periods.

It is also a perfectly understandable approach for the researcher to turn, on the basis of linguistic history, to the history of the ethnic group that was both the bearer of this language and the creator of the Dede Qorqut Kitabi. One of the striking assessments he puts forward in this context is as follows:

The epics contained in the Book are the product of a period when various Turkic tribes aimed to form a union, but had not yet reached the stage of becoming a single tribe. Those who joined the tribal union (the Oghuz) may not have constituted the entirety of a single tribe or ethnic group. We might also say that this union was formed through the participation of communities that had split off from the main bodies of the various Turkic tribes [1].

We do not claim to delve into all the details of this extremely profound and multifaceted subject. We merely wish to point out that, just as in the history of peoples, the history of languages is, at its core, a history of differentiation. However, during certain periods in history, the need for a written language and a literary language (socio-cultural standardisation)—which, from the perspective of ethnic communities, is linked to state formation and, from the perspective of languages, is largely connected to state formation—has also given rise to tendencies towards integration to a certain extent within the existing process of differentiation.

In any case, Cihangir Kızılözen's ability to gain insight into the historical relationships between the Turkic tribes (peoples) and Turkic dialects (languages) within the context of the Dede Qorqut Kitabi is a natural consequence of a competent linguist's scholarly interest; this approach cannot be regarded as coincidental. For what is at issue here is the application of the laws governing the development of language—a phenomenon directly linked to the life and existence of the ethnos—to the historical journey of the ethnic community.

The researcher's following observation should be borne in mind:

The language of the Dede Qorqut Kitabi and the meaning of the concept of 'Oğuz' explain one another. The concept of 'Oğuz' cannot be explained without understanding the language of the Dede Qorqut Kitabi; nor can the language of the Dede Qorqut Kitabi be deciphered without understanding the concept of 'Oğuz' [1].

In the first volume of the book, the author presents the text he has prepared after setting out the scientific and methodological principles of his work on the text. This section takes into account the expectations of both the general reader and the specialist researcher. The second volume, meanwhile, contains explanations of over four hundred linguistic elements in the text—the pronunciation of which is controversial to varying degrees—along with a phonetic and grammatical analysis of the text and a bibliography of sources consulted.

Conclusion

Cihangir Kızılözen, having emphasised the aim of his work on several occasions, states that his objective is to demonstrate that 'units claimed by researchers to be incorrectly written are in fact written correctly'. However, he also regards it as natural that there will be those who do not agree with the views he puts forward in his work and who object to them. In his view, 'any criticism based on sound grounds will make a fresh contribution to the study of the Dede Qorqut Kitabi. Conversely, to raise the claim once again that the units in question in the text are misspelt will amount to nothing more than a repetition of previous claims and will make no contribution to the interpretation of the text' [1].

This approach reflects the inquisitive attitude befitting a true scholar. Whilst it offers the opportunity for an objective assessment of the significance of the work presented, it also necessitates approaching a subject as prestigious as the Dede Qorqut Kitabi with the broad and holistic perspective it deserves.

The analysis carried out allows the following conclusions to be drawn. First, the simultaneous use of the Dresden, Vatican and Bursa manuscripts creates for the first time a source base sufficient for a genuinely scientific and critical text of the monument. Second, the refusal to 'correct' the text according to the norms of a single period transfers the study of the Dede Qorqut Kitabi from the plane of normative reconstruction to that of historical stratification, and thereby returns to scholarly circulation dozens of units previously eliminated as scribal errors. Third, the recognition of Old Turkic, Kipchak, Karluk and even Siberian Turkic correspondences within the text extends the significance of the monument beyond the Oghuz area to the Turkic world as a whole, which is of direct relevance to Kazakh Turkology as well. This approach, as set out by Cihangir Kızılözen in his work *The Dede Qorqut Kitabi*, demonstrates once again that in Dede Korkut studies the era of 'claims' is increasingly giving way to that of 'explanations' and 'clarifications'.

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«ҚОРҚЫТ АТА КІТАБЫН» ЗЕРТТЕУДЕГІ ЖАҢА АНАЛИТИКАЛЫҚ ТӘСІЛДІҢ БОЛАШАҒЫ

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Аңдатпа. Мақалада Жиһангир Қызылөзеннің «Қорқыт ата кітабы: Дрезден, Ватикан және Бурса қолжазбаларын біріктірген алғашқы зерттеу» атты екі томдық еңбегі аналитикалық тұрғыдан қарастырылады. Зерттеудің мақсаты — аталған еңбектің қорқыттануда алатын орнын, мәтінтанулық ұстанымдарын және ұсынып отырған әдіснамалық жаңалықтарын айқындау. Еңбектің түбегейлі өзгешелігі — Дрезден, Ватикан және Бурса қолжазбаларын қатар алып, салыстырмалы-сын тұрғысынан талдауында. Қызылөзен бұрынғы басылымдарда «түзетілген», ауыстырылған немесе оқылмайды деп танылған тілдік бірліктерді автордың не көшірушінің қатесі деп емес, көне тілдік қабаттардың, ауызша жыраулық дәстүрдің және түркі тілдерінің тарихи дамуының көрінісі ретінде қайта қарауды ұсынады. Осы негізде еңбекте мәтінде тірі түркі диалектілерінен көне оғыз тіліне, көне түркіден бабатуркіге дейін созылатын көпқабатты тілдік мұраның, сондай-ақ қыпшақ және қарлұқ аймақтарына тән элементтердің сақталғаны дәйектеледі. Автордың байқауынша, мәтінде якут, долған, тыва, алтай сияқты Сібір түркі тілдерімен, тіпті чуваш тілімен ортақ белгілер де кездеседі. Осылайша «Қорқыт ата кітабы» тек оғыз тілі шеңберінде ғана бағаланатын ескерткіш болудан қалып, бүкіл түркі әлемінің тілдік және мәдени мұрасын танытатын көпқабатты шедевр дәрежесіне көтеріледі. Талдау Қызылөзеннің мәтінді белгілі бір диалект не дәуірге қарай біріздендірмей, қолжазбалардағы төл нұсқаларды сақтайтын ғылыми-сын тәсілді ұстанғанын көрсетеді. Бұл тұрғыда еңбек қорқыттануға жаңа әдіснама әкеледі және қолжазбалық айырмашылықтарды қате емес, мәтіннің тарихи-мәдени қалыптасуын танытатын маңызды дереккөз ретінде бағалайды.

Түйін сөздер: «Қорқыт ата кітабы», Жиһангир Қызылөзен, Дрезден қолжазбасы, Ватикан қолжазбасы, Бурса қолжазбасы, мәтінтану, тілдік қабаттар, көне оғыз тілі.

ПЕРСПЕКТИВЫ НОВОГО АНАЛИТИЧЕСКОГО ПОДХОДА К «КНИГЕ ДЕДЕ КОРКУТА»

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Аннотация. В статье с аналитических позиций рассматривается двухтомный труд Джихангира Кызылөзена «Книга Деде Коркута: первое исследование, объединившее Дрезденскую, Ватиканскую и Бурсскую рукописи». Цель исследования — определить место данного труда в коркутоведении, его подход к изданию текста и предлагаемые им методологические новации. Принципиальная новизна рецензируемой работы состоит в том, что текст пересматривается на основе сравнительно-критического подхода, одновременно учитывающего Дрезденскую, Ватиканскую и Бурсскую рукописи. Кызылөзен заново рассматривает языковые единицы, которые в прежних изданиях исправлялись, заменялись или объявлялись нечитаемыми — как правило, со ссылкой на ошибку автора или переписчика, — и предлагает оценивать их в контексте архаических языковых пластов, устной сказительской традиции и исторического развития тюркских языков. На этом основании в труде обосновывается, что текст сохраняет многослойное языковое наследие, простирающееся от живых тюркских диалектов к древнеогузскому, от древнетюркского к пратюркскому, а также элементы кыпчакского и карлукского ареалов; выводы автора указывают и на соответствия с сибирскими тюркскими языками (якутским, долганским, тувинским, алтайским) и чувашским. Тем самым «Книга Деде Коркута» перестаёт быть памятником, оцениваемым исключительно в рамках огузского языка, и приобретает статус многослойного шедевра, отражающего языковое и культурное наследие всего тюркского мира. Анализ показывает, что Кызылөзен придерживается научно-критического подхода, сохраняющего оригинальные варианты рукописей, вместо

унификации текста по одному диалекту или периоду. В этом отношении труд вносит в коркутоведение новую методологию и трактует рукописные разночтения не как ошибки, а как важные данные, проливающие свет на историко-культурное формирование текста.

Ключевые слова: «Книга Деде Коркута», Джихангир Кызылөзен, Дрезденская рукопись, Ватиканская рукопись, Бурская рукопись, текстология, языковые пласты, древнеогузский язык.