

Nadezhda Ye. Tikhonova

The Danishmendname Epic: Conceptualization of ‘Sacred’ in the Scope of the ‘Holy War’¹

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Abstract: The large Turkic epic Danishmendname, which tells us a story about the conquests of Danishmendid dynasty in Asia Minor in the 11th c., retained its popularity in the Ottoman empire up until its collapse. At the same time, current public discourses in modern Turkey reveal the new wave of popularity of warrior epics about the legendary Turkic conquerors. Despite the Danishmendname has been fruitful topic of research, by and large, there are generally comprehensive historical, literary and linguistic commentaries to the manuscripts and its published facsimiles. Recent studies on the topic, though, address the Danishmendname in a broader context of Late Medieval frontier epics as an informed source for cultural and political environment of that milieu. Following this latter approach, we assume that Danishmendname constitutes an excellent case study for investigation of cultural memory of Muslim conquests in Asia Minor for several reasons. This epic not only records multiple layers of complex Muslim-Christian interactions in Anatolia, including the accounts of the First Crusade, but also could shed light on the way the lay people, who transmitted the lore, assigned meaning to the world in which they lived. This world, being very unstable with its flexible identities and no tangible allegiances, was imagined as a ‘house of war’ (dār al-ḥarb), where any means of Islamization were tolerable. So, the Muslim conquerors build/ rebuild mosques in newly captured cities, demolish and desacralize the Christian places of worship (so do their Christian counterparts with the mosques), and even perform a miracle to convince ‘infidels’ to convert to Islam. Similar supernatural deeds of Christian monks, however, are perceived as a sorcery, thus, being desacralized. Given the context, the category of ‘sacred’ becomes observable wherever group identities are challenged and put at stake. Thus, by means of discourse analysis, this paper explores how this certain category was manifested both spatially and spiritually in the scope of the ‘holy war’, which is in the center of the plot.

Key words: Danishmendname, Islamization of Asia Minor, Muslim-Christian interactions, the First Crusade, sacralization/re-sacralization/desacralization of space

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About the author: Nadezhda Ye. Tikhonova, Faculty of Asian and African Studies, St. Petersburg State University (St. Petersburg, Russian Federation) (nadezhdatikhonova@yahoo.com).

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Introduction

In the aftermath of the Battle of Manzikert (1071), which inaugurated mass penetration of Turkic tribes to Asia Minor, two powers among Turko-Muslims were able to acquire prominence and enjoy some longevity — the Danishmendid state (1067–1180) in the southeastern part of the peninsula and the Seljukid sultanate of Rum (also Konya sultanate, 1077–1307) in its central part. The conquests of the Danishmendids in Anatolia became the subject of a large Turkic epic called the *Danishmendname*.

This epic, originally oral, was first written down at the behest of the Seljuk Sultan ‘Izz ad-Dīn Kaykāwus II (1246–1262) by his secretary Ibn Alya in the 13th c. What we have in hand of this epic today is a version edited by warden of the Tokat fortress Arif Ali in the 14th c.² Currently, there are about 18 known manuscripts, preserved in libraries and private collections in St. Petersburg, Paris and various cities of Turkey.³ The earliest one is dated 1577, while the latest — to early 20th c.⁴

Naturally, the *Danishmendname* has been fruitful topic of research. Still, the studies on its narrative are limited to comprehensive historical, literary and linguistic commentaries to the manuscripts and its published facsimiles.⁵

Relatively recent studies address the *Danishmendname* in a broader context of Late Medieval⁶ Turkic frontier epics (usually along with the *Battalname* and *Saltukname*) as an informed source for cultural and political environment of that milieu.⁷ However, there are some loose assumptions based on generalization of several literary sources. Thus, M. Božovich⁸ and Z. Aydo-

² GARBUZOVA 1959: 40–45.

³ NECATI 2006.

⁴ ANIKEEVA 2018: 28.

⁵ GARBUZOVA 1959; MELIKOFF 1960; NECATI 2006.

⁶ The chronological classification of *Danishmendname* as a “late medieval” epic is attributed to the period of its written record by Arif Ali in the 14th c., as the only known version which came down to us.

⁷ KAFADAR 1995; AYDOĞAN 2012; KAYAALP 2012; ANIKEEVA 2018; ANIKEEVA 2019.

⁸ BOŽOVIC 2019: 253.

ğan,⁹ exploring the ethno-geographical scope of such epics, assumed that old Russians (*Uruslar*) as a subcategory of *infidels* [along with Greeks (*Rumiler*), Franks (*Firenkler*), Armenians (*Ermeniler*), Georgians (*Gürciler*) and Circassians (*Çerkesler*)] revealed as late as in the storyline of *Saltukname* for this hagiography depicts the most recent period and covers the broadest geographical area. Indeed, *Uruslar* were mentioned at least thrice in the *Danishmendname*, even though the plot is geographically limited to Asia Minor.¹⁰

In either way, following this comprehensive approach of the latter group of scholars, we imply that the *Danishmendname* constitutes an excellent case study for investigation of *cultural memory*¹¹ of Muslim conquests in Asia Minor for several reasons.

First, as the latest manuscript of *Danishmendname* dates to the beginning of the 20th c., it can be safely assumed that the epic retained its popularity in the Ottoman empire for all this long period. Besides, in modern Turkey there are enough compelling examples of growing interest in the history of early Turkic conquests in Asia Minor. So, there is an active process of publishing translations of medieval Turkic epics into modern Turkish,¹² researching the history of this period,¹³ as well as filming of top-rated TV series and movies about these conquerors,¹⁴ etc.

And even though the epic was written down at least 200 years after the reported events, it was produced and told within milieux that were conscious of earlier layers of Muslim-Christian struggles, embodied in the legends such as those of Melik Danishmend or Battal Ghazi.¹⁵

Certainly, we couldn't even assume how much different was the narrative, transmitted through multiple oral retellings, before it came to us in a written form. It would take us too far afield to deal with the problem of authenticity here, given that such issues have been already addressed to some extent in two

⁹ AYDOĞAN 2012: 109.

¹⁰ (P, 37b) (“*Sāmiya ve Sinōbiya Mihriyānōs ve İstefānōs altmış bin erile gelürler, kamu çerisi Firenkdür ve Urusdur ve Çerkezdür*”).

¹¹ The term “cultural memory” was introduced by French sociologist Maurice Halbwachs in 1920s, and further reconsidered by German Egyptologist Jan Assmann. According to J. Assmann, cultural memory is based on fixed points of the past, which he calls ‘*figures of memory*’, whose ‘*memory is maintained through cultural formation (texts, rites, monuments) and institutional communication (recitation, practice, observance)*’. See: ASSMANN 1992: 129.

¹² NECATİ 2006; NECATİ & MEHMET DURSUN 2006; etc.

¹³ TESCAN 2014: 263–296; ADAK 2022: 673–697.

¹⁴ E.g., “Alparslan: Büyük Selçuklu” (Alparslan: The Great Seljuk), “Uyanış: Büyük Selçuklu” (Awakening: The Great Seljuk), “Kuruluş: Osman” (Foundation: Osman) series, etc.

¹⁵ KAFADAR 1995: 69.

comprehensive monographs on the topic.¹⁶ Rather than focusing on the real historical figures and events depicted in the epic, we engage with the idea that perceptions of the past are no less, and sometimes even more important for understanding the modern history of different peoples and regions.

Indeed, the legendary accounts of Melik Danishmend could shed light on the way the lay people, who transmitted the lore, assigned meaning to the world in which they lived. This world, being very unstable with its flexible identities and intangible allegiances, was imagined as a ‘house of war’ (*dār al-ḥarb*), where any means of Islamization were tolerable.

In the circumstances of the permanent military clashes between Muslims and Christians and continuous Islamization of the region, the category of ‘sacred’ becomes observable wherever group identities are challenged and put at stake. This category most vividly manifests itself both spatially and spiritually in such instances as sacralization/desacralization of holy sites and rituality (categorized either as a miracle or a sorcery), as we will explicate further by implementing discourse analysis.

Thus, the idea under this paper is to investigate through the lens of *cultural memory* how certain category of ‘sacred’ was conceptualized by narrators in the scope of the ‘holy war’.

The primary sources used in this paper are Saint-Petersburg manuscript of *Danishmendname* from the Russian National Library¹⁷ and Parisian manuscript published on the website of the National Library of France in a digitized form.¹⁸

The ‘holy war’ and its conceptualization

“*Hey, Nestor and hey, Shattat, know and be aware that I did not come to Rum to go back after gathering property and treasury, but I came to conquer these lands and cities, to convert their inhabitants to Islam*”.¹⁹ These words

¹⁶ GARBUZOVA 1959; MELIKOFF 1960.

¹⁷ *Danışmendname*. In: Manuscript department of Russian National Library (RO RNB), F. 578 (Fond Dorna-578). [*Hereinafter referred to as sigla S*].

¹⁸ *Kıssa-i Melik Danişmend Ghazi Ahmed ibn Ali (Danishmendname)*. In: Manuscript department of National Library of France (Bibliothèque Nationale de France, Département des manuscrits), Turc 317 (R 24950). [*Hereinafter referred to as sigla P*].

¹⁹ (P, 125b) [*Ey Neştor ve ey Şattât, bilünj ve âgâh oluñ kim ben Rûma anuñ içün gelmedüm ki mâl ve ḥazîne cem’ edem daḥî gerü dönem, anuñ içün geldüm ki bu elleri ve bu şehirleri feñî edüb ḥalkını îmâna getirem*].

of Melik Danishmend clearly state that the idea of his conquests in Anatolia is not just a military raid (*ghazawāt*) but Islamization of the region.

The epic describes the initial stage of Islamization of Asia Minor, which proceeded slowly, given the quantitative predominance of Christians (Greeks, Georgians, Armenians, etc.) and feudal fragmentation of the land, as no political unity was established there up until the second half of the 15th c. under the Ottoman rule.

There is no denying that the epic records multilayered relations between Muslims and Christians, which were not constantly war inclined,²⁰ as could be explicated by multiple instances in the plot (e.g., “*A small group of people, who had escaped the mud-rock flow, came from the city of Sisiye, they joined Melik and embraced the new faith*”²¹). Still, the central theme of the *Danishmendname* is the ‘holy war’ along with Islamization as one of its most desirable outcomes.

Generally this ‘holy war’ is imagined as *ghazawāt* and its participants as *ghāzī*. Though, there are several instances, where the storyteller introduces a certain concept of *jihād*:

“*So, the people of Islam gathered together,
They have come willy-nilly for the Ghazawāt,
All of them, young and old,
Everyone came to fight the Jihād*”,²²

As could be explicated from this line, the *jihād* (in a common sense, a military jihad is a campaign against the infidels sanctioned by the Caliph) was conducted by a ‘united Muslim world’, even though this image of Muslim unity didn’t correspond to reality.

Additionally, it is worth spelling out, that despite the *Danishmendname* clearly addresses the concept of *jihād*, this epic has not been considered in fundamental works on the history of this concept.²³

As the narration goes from both sides of the story — Muslims and Christians, — the former commonly address their rivals as infidels (*kāfirler*) or sorcerers (*cazūlar*), while the self-denomination of the latter is the ‘people of

²⁰ KAFADAR 1995; BOŽOVIĆ 2019.

²¹ (P, 161a) [Ol Sisiyadan bir nice kavm sël elinden kırtılıb Melik katına gelüb tecdîd-i imân êtdiler].

²² (P, 41b) [*Bu dem kim cem’ olubdur ehl-i Islâm| Ğazâ için gelibdür kām ve nākām| dahi bunların uvağı irisi| cihād êmeğe geldi her birisi*].

²³ BONNER 2006.

the cross' (*ehl-i şalīb*). In this sense, Muslim-Christian combats are conceptualized, from the one hand, as legitimate military campaign against those who must be Islamized (namely, non-believers), even if “*from the fear of the sword*”,²⁴ and at the same time as a ‘holy war’ between two great religious communities (‘*ehl-i İslam*’ vs. ‘*ehl-i şalīb*’).

One of the episodes, which accompanied the early stages of Islamization of Asia Minor in the 11th c., was the First Crusade (1096–1099), as one of the motives for its beginning was the appeal of the Byzantine Emperor Alexios I Komnenos (1081–1118) in 1094 to the Pope Urban II to provide military assistance to recapture the territories seized by the Turks after the battle of Manzikert (1071). So, it should come as no surprise that these events were recorded in the *Danishmendname* in the line with the historical events of the earlier period.

From the lens of *cultural memory*, it’s not critical whether the leading character Melik Ahmed Danishmend took part in the First Crusade or were it only his descendants who did, as in legendary accounts a certain person or event could be imagined as a mixture of several characters or historical layers respectively.²⁵ In this sense Melik Danishmend embodies a generalized image of the heroic warrior, who conquered Anatolia and Islamized it, naturally fighting with enemies of Islam, including crusaders.

We could not agree with I. Melikoff in that, as she puts it, “*the Crusade is barely mentioned at the beginning of the book, in a vague sentence listing the main events of the First Crusade*”.²⁶ Actually, in this “*vague sentence*” the Caliph articulates literally the following:

“ ‘*May Allah fulfill your praiseworthy wish!*’ — he said, — ‘*But the Franks have captured Antakya in Syria, and Akka (Acre), and Tarabalus (Tripoli), and Safet, and Nablus, as far as Kudus (Jerusalem); therefore, the Muslim army, first of all, must move to this direction, and if Allah Almighty grants the Muslims a victory and they return unharmed after recapturing these areas from the Franks, then we will send them to the lands of Rum*’ ”.²⁷

²⁴ Literally, “*kılıç korkusundan Müsülmân oldılar*” (They became Muslims from the fear of the sword).

²⁵ ASSMANN 1992: 39–42.

²⁶ MELIKOFF 1960: 134.

²⁷ (P, 4b–5a) [*hayır murādınuzı Allah yetiştüre inşā’Allah! dedi.- Amma Şām elinde Antākiya ve ‘Akka ve Tarabalūs ve Şifāt ve Neblūs ve Kudūs kenarına değin Firenk tutmuşdur, pes Müsülmānlık çerisi gerekdür kim ol yaña varalar, Hağ Te’āla Müsülmānlara fırsat vere ol eli Firenk elinden alalar, selāmatlığ ile gerü geeler, Rūma verbiyemüz, dedi*].

Only after the Caliph learns that the future leaders of the military campaign in Asia Minor, Melik Danishmend and Sultan Turasan, are the grandsons of Emir Omar and Seyyid Battal-ghāzī respectively, he orders his vizier to read the stars about their future, which turns out to be favorable, then he issues an order (*ferman*) for the campaign and provides them with the resources.

The abovementioned episode manifests a sacral significance of the Syria-Palestinian region for Muslims, as a high-priority of reclaiming of this domain “*as far as Jerusalem*” from the Crusaders was articulated by Caliph himself. What is more, being mentioned in the very beginning of the plot, the First Crusade thus contextualizes further Muslim conquests in Asia Minor. Namely, Melik Danishmend obtained a permission to wage his campaign in Anatolia as a ‘*head of soldiers of Islam*’ amid the understanding that somewhere not so far there are crucial Muslim-Christian combats for the ‘holy lands’.

Even though there are no clear denomination of the Crusade and its participants in the epic, as special terms (*haçlı seferleri/savaşları* for the Crusades, *haçlılar* for the Crusaders) emerged much later, it could be safely assumed that the image of the Crusades could be explicated from series of battles with the Franks. The latter, thus, are the prototypes of the crusaders as could be concluded by their appearance, which reflects the cliché images of medieval knights in a heavy uniform and with the crosses on their clothes (“*His horse and his clothes were adorned with crosses*”,²⁸ “*a thousand horses of the infidels and they themselves were (armored) in a blue iron*”,²⁹ etc.)

So, the Franks are those who come to the rescue of the Greeks (“*Franks and Russians and Circassians <...>, armies of 72 nations gathered together, and came to the help of Nestor*”³⁰). Their armies are great in number and come from somewhere afar (“*Thus Selahil-frank came from the country of Franks with a countless army*”³¹). There are also some certain characters such as Atos-frank, about whom it is said that the world has not known such a champion before.

Even though the ‘infidels’ are usually demonized in the epic as arrogant and immoral people, the generalized image of the Franks could be qualified

²⁸ (S, 118b) [*atını ve tınnı tamamet hāçlar ile bezemişler*].

²⁹ (P, 77a) [*biş Kāfir atı ve kendüsi göm gök demür idi*].

³⁰ (S, 219b) [*Firenkler ve Uruslar ve Çerkezler <...> yetmiş iki milletten çeri cem’ olmuş, Nestōra yardımcı gelür imiş*].

³¹ (S, 204a) [*üşde Firengistāndan Selāhil Firenk hēsābsuz çeri ile erdi*].

as a mixture of appreciation and fear. Interestingly, the Crusade Chronicles imagined proto-Ottoman Turks likewise, as Europeans acknowledged them as great warriors.³²

In some instances the indigenous inhabitants of Anatolia are depicted as great warriors as well, as they are referred to be a warrior hero (*bahadur*) or a wrestler (*pehlivan*), but the greatest heroes among them are those who are already converted to Islam (e.g., Artuhi, Efrumiye, Serkis-Ahmed, etc.).

Although infidels in general were imagined as a common enemy of Islam, they obviously composed only tactical, temporary alliance against the Muslim conquerors of Asia Minor, as there are clear ethnical differentiation of the hostile forces (Franks, Greeks, Armenians, etc).

In contrast to their enemies, Muslims themselves are represented in the narrative as a consolidated power. Appealing to Caliph's authority and receiving his sanction to wage *ghazawāt* in Asia Minor is of crucial importance in sense of imagining this unity. So, the Muslim *ghazawāt* even has its clear nerve-center — the Baghdad, the city where the Caliph locates as a spiritual leader of Muslims. There are also several self-denominations of Muslims such as people of Islam (*ehl-i İslam*), people of faith (*ehl-i İman*) and people of God (*ehl-i Allah*),³³ which also emphasize their internal unity.

The category of 'sacred' in the scope of the 'holy war'

In the circumstances of *ghazawāt* with its immediate outcome of Islamization, Asia Minor was imagined as a 'house of war' (*dār al-ḥarb*), where any means of conversion were tolerable. Given the context, the category of the 'sacred' gained its crucial value, as the group identities were continuously challenged and put at stake.

The cultural and social importance of the spatial manifestation of the category of 'sacred', which was initially theorized in the works of M. Eliade, lies in demarcation of the space, both real and imagined, into 'our own' and 'alien'. That is the community asserts its rights to possess a sacred space, as well as justifies the significance of this space for collective memory.

Accordingly, it was crucial for the warlords to manifest their power by demolishing the holy sites of their opponents. So, there are multiple examples, where Muslim conquerors, capturing the new city, first and foremost,

³² MURRAY 2018: 83.

³³ The latter denomination used only in the St. Petersburg manuscript.

destroyed Christian churches, monasteries and temples, subjecting them to desacralization:

“They arrived at the monastery of Derianos, Melik ordered and they destroyed this monastery”.³⁴

So did the Christian warlords with the cities, recaptured from Muslims, with the only difference that their deeds were imagined as those to be reclaimed:

“They killed Muslims, slaughtered their children and wives, destroyed the mosque of Battal Ghāzī and burned the corpses”.³⁵

Each new conqueror, whether Muslim or Christian, according to the narrative, immediately after conquering a certain city and destroying its places of worship, built preaching-houses for his co-religionists. While Muslim conquerors build the mosques (*“And so, having destroyed the churches, they made mosques instead of them, assigned there an imam and a hatip”*³⁶), there are the ‘mirroring’ actions of Christian lords for their subjects (*“Then the infidels recaptured Sisiye [Gömenek], enslaved the wives and sons of Muslims, destroyed the mosques, and founded monasteries instead”*³⁷).

In the scope of continuous Islamization, desacralization of Christian places of worship and their substitution by mosques was imagined as an essential measure of Muslim conquerors in order to prevent new converts from renegadism:

“He converted the people of Anatolia to Islam, Turned their common churches into mosques”.³⁸

Indeed, flexible identities and intangible allegiances of Anatolian population, revealed many instances, where the new converts become renegades. The narrators even use special term ‘*münafıklar*’ (literally, hypocrites) for these forcibly converted Christians.

The epic details the process of desacralization of former Christian places of worship by looting valuables, desecration of relics, etc. For instance, after

³⁴ (S, 60b) [*Deryānōsun deyrine geldiler, Melik buyurdi ol deyrī ḥarāb eylediler*].

³⁵ (P, 7a) [*Müsülmānları helāk ētdiler, ehlin ‘iyālin kılıçdan geçürdiler, Battāl Gāzi mescidini ḥarāb ētdiler*].

³⁶ (P, 139a) [*Andan keliseleri yıkub yerine mescidler yapıdılar, imām, ḥatīb dikkiler*].

³⁷ (P, 127b) [*Çünkim kāfirler gerü Sisiya’i aldılar Müsülmānların ‘avratın oğlanın esir ētdiler, mescidlerin yıkub yerine deyr bünyād ētdiler*].

³⁸ (S, 265b) [*Ehl-i islām eylemiş Rüm ēlini| Mescid eylemiş kamu kilisesini*].

capturing the Derianos monastery, Muslims removed the crosses (made of gold, silver and iron) and burn them out.³⁹

In this very episode, the monks have been rushed themselves to rescue the great cross after it was taken out of the monastery and burned out by Muslims.⁴⁰ That is Muslim narrators clearly define what is ‘sacred’ for their counterparts. In this attitude of self-sacrificing of the monks they depicted the Cross (*haç, salib*) as the key sacrality of Christendom. Still, for Muslims these are just ordinary objects, which should be demolished.

Such cases clearly illustrate how spatial manifestation of the category of ‘sacred’ demarcate boundaries between ‘us’ and ‘them’.

What also serves as a demarcation line between these two religious communities are their rituals and supernatural deeds, categorized either as a miracle or a sorcery, depending on who performs it. So, in the scope of the ‘holy war’ the category of ‘sacred’ becomes observable not only through its spatial manifestation, but also through spiritual one.

Thus, there are several instances, where the Prophet Muhammed or his companions came to dreams or revealed themselves before the leading Muslim characters and instructed them how to act against infidels in a complex circumstances. These instructions usually consist of prayers and symbolic actions, and result in a defeat of Christians, thus being perceived as a ‘miracle’.

For instance, in chapter 15, Melik Danishmend captures eight thousand Christians and invites them to accept Islam. One of the captives, Tariq, declares that all captive Christians will accept Islam if Melik Danishmend performs a miracle similar to those performed by Christian saints, namely, slice the river and stop its flow. Danishmend promises to perform such miracle in the morning or, failing that, to release all the captives. Before going to bed he prays a lot, fasts, and in his dream, he sees the Prophet Muhammed, who tells him the exact prayer and explains the ritual for the miracle to be performed with the God’s help. In the morning Danishmend-ghāzī wakes up with a prayer in his hand, written in green letters, and performs the miracle in front of the captives. Afterwards all eight thousand Christians were willingly converted to Islam.⁴¹

So, the narrators qualify a certain ‘miracle’ as one immanent to Christian saints, that was articulated directly through the Tariq’s speech. Still, being

³⁹ (S, 60b–61b).

⁴⁰ (S, 61a).

⁴¹ (S, 231a–232b; P, 159a–160b).

performed by Muslim conqueror Melik Danishmend, this miracle becomes a valid argument for mass conversion of Christians.

It worth spelling out that the supernatural powers were also attributed to Christian monks, but from the eyes of Muslims, their miraculous deeds are perceived as a sorcery:

*“Do not be afraid of the dragon, it is a sorcery, it is produced by monks. Take the prayer, which the Prophet Khidr conveyed to Artuhi,⁴² reach the monastery with him, recite this prayer in front of the monastery, magic and sorcery will be dispelled”.*⁴³

Again, here we can see, how one of the Muslim prophets prescribes a ritual, which helps Muslim characters to defeat Christians, whose actions were desacralized by qualifying them as ‘magical’. Thus, the category of ‘sacred’ in its spiritual manifestation by rituals and supernatural deeds, once again demarcates the boundaries between ‘us’ and ‘them’.

As the narration goes in two ways giving the chance to hear both sides of the story, the Muslim storyteller cites imaginable ‘direct speeches’ of Christians, in which they, on their turn, labeled certain deeds of Muslims as a ‘sorcery’:

*“On that day, it was such a time that the whole world was seized with a fog, it became dark, the thunder rumbled, lightning struck, and rain fell. The people of Sisiye saw this and said: ‘Melik has committed a sorcery’ ”.*⁴⁴

Being articulated by infidels, these words didn’t gain any legitimacy. Though, such lines of Christian characters serve as a ‘reflection’ of Muslim deeds in the eyes of Christians, which helps narrators to better contextualize the juxtaposition of these two struggling religious communities, and thus, emphasize the ‘otherness’.

⁴² The prophet Khidr appeared to Artuhi and Efrumiye before the battle and conveyed them a prayer to be recited before battles with Christians. The words of the prayer are as follows: «*Bism-illāhi-r-rahmāni-r-rahīm Allāhumma inni as'aluka b-ismika yā Rahmān yā Rahim yā Karim yā Cannān yā Mannān yā Muhyi-l-mawta yā Zī-l-amāni yā Zī-l-fazli wa-l-ihsāni subhānaka lā ilāha illa anta al-amānu al-amān wa birahmatika yā arham ar-rahīmīna wa-l-hamd-ullāh Rabbi-l-'ālamīn*».

⁴³ (S, 58b) [*Ol ejderhādan korkmağil kim sihirdur, ol rühbānlar ederler. gerekdur kim yarın deyre varasız, ol du'ā'i kim Hızır Peygamber Artuhiya vermiş idi ol du'ā'i deyre karşı okuyub, ol sihir ve cāzūlk bātül ola*].

⁴⁴ (P, 161a) [*Ol gün öyle zamāni kim oldu 'ālemi tumān tutdı, karanlık oldu, gök gürlledi, yıldırım şak idi, yağmur yağdı. Sisiya kavmi anı görüb, 'Melik Cāzuluk eyledi' dediler*].

The ‘miracle’ as a phenomenon was attributed not only to certain actions or events, but also to certain sacred sites, such as a common grave of martyrs (*shahids*). So, there is an episode, where their tomb (*türbe*) emanated the light up to the sky and, upon seeing this, the local Christians scattered and abandoned the town of Sisiye.⁴⁵ Thus, through exemplifying the miraculousness of the tomb of Muslim martyrs, resulted in a mass exodus of Christians, the narrators justify the right of Muslims to possess this sacred space.

Additionally, some miraculous instances, such as apparitions of the Prophet Muhammed or his companions in the dreams of infidels, result in their conversion:

“*He said, ‘I saw Muhammed in my dream, he invited me to his religion, and I became a Muslim in his presence’*”.⁴⁶

So, the ‘miracles’ of Muslims are followed either by willing conversion of infidels to Islam (private or mass), or by their defeat/mass exodus, which is finally also resulted in conversion. That is, the epic, depicting the initial stage of Islamization, addresses a ‘miracle’ as an efficient tool to convert Christians, who are imagined as those predisposed to Islam but gone astray.

In this sense, the ‘miraculousness’, being attributed to Muslims, justify their supernatural actions as those tolerable in the scope of all three Abrahamic religions. At the same time, the ‘mirroring’ actions of Christians, being qualified as ‘sorcery’, thus, are condemned and desacralized in the eyes of Muslims.

Conclusion

The *Danishmendname* is usually qualified as a warrior epic. However, as C. Kafadar puts it, “*It is not always easy to distinguish between these warrior epics and hagiographies of holy men, just as it is at times difficult to differentiate a warrior from a dervish or vice versa*”.⁴⁷ Thus, the lead character Melik Danishmend himself performs a miracle in a presence of infidels to convince them into conversion to Islam. This exactly what makes the boundaries between two genres so blurred and once more actualizes the importance of rationalization of the category of ‘sacred’.

⁴⁵ (P, 8a).

⁴⁶ (P, 56a) [Düşümde Muhammedi gördüm, beni dînine da‘vet eyledi, ben daḥî Muhammed öñinde müsülmân oldum dedi].

⁴⁷ KAFADAR 1995: 65.

The epic unfolds a story about Danismendids' conquests in Anatolia of the 11th c., which was divided into numerous principalities of different allegiances (Byzantine empire and its vassal domains, Danismendid Beylik, Seljukid Sultanate, etc.). The narrative, though, is of quasi-historical nature, as it records the accounts of the Crusades along with the events of earlier periods. In this sense, Melik Danishmend is represented as a generalized image of Muslim hero, who conquered the land and islamized it, fighting with the enemies of Islam, including crusaders.

The Crusades is, perhaps, one of the most notorious examples of Muslim-Christian interactions in the Middle East. So, introduction of these events to the plot even better contextualizes the Turko-Muslim conquests in Asia Minor, given the fact that the Caliph authorized Melik Danishmend to wage his campaign in Anatolia, supplying him with human and material resources, amid the 'holy land' being in the hands of Franks. Even after Melik Danishmend died, the Caliph re-sanctioned new conquests in the region by Danishmend's descendants, again granting them the aid, including the military one.

Though the epic records multilayered relations between Muslims and Christians, which were not constantly war inclined, the center theme of the *Danishmendname* is the 'holy war' along with its most immediate outcome of Islamization.

In this sense, Muslim-Christian clashes are conceptualized as both legitimate military campaign against infidels, who must be Islamized, and a 'holy war' between two struggling religious communities.

Although infidels in general were imagined as a common enemy of Islam, they obviously composed only tactical, temporary alliance against the Muslim conquerors of Asia Minor, being divided into certain ethnical groups (Franks, Greeks, Armenians, etc).

In contrast to their enemies, Muslims themselves are represented in the narrative as a consolidated power. Appealing to Caliph's authority and receiving his sanction to wage a '*holy war*' in Asia Minor is of crucial importance in sense of imagining this unity. What is more, the Muslim 'holy war' even had its clear nerve-center in Baghdad, as a capital of imaginary 'united' caliphate.

Indeed, juxtaposition between Muslims and Christians is one of the literary techniques used by narrators to better contextualize their interreligious confrontation. To give a chance of hearing two sides of the story, the narration goes in two ways, involving, — what is imagined to be, — 'direct speeches' of Christian characters.

In the context of continuous interreligious combats, the category of the 'sacred' becomes sizeable wherever the group identities were challenged. In this sense, the processes of sacralization, desacralization and re-sacralization of space are of crucial importance, as they demarcate the space into 'our own' and 'alien'.

Naturally, each new conqueror, whether Muslim or Christian, according to the narrative, immediately after capturing a new city and destroying its places of worship, built preaching-houses for his co-religionists. In doing so, conquerors asserted their rights to certain territories.

At the same time, desacralization of Christian places of worship and their substitution by mosques was imagined as an essential measure of Muslim conquerors in order to prevent new converts from renegadism.

In the scope of the 'holy war' the category of 'sacred' becomes observable not only through its spatial manifestation, but also through spiritual one. So, what serves as a clear demarcation line between two struggling communities are their rituals and supernatural deeds, categorized either as a 'miracle' or a 'sorcery', depending on who performs it. Aside from this, the narrators also address a 'miracle' as an efficient tool for Islamization.

To sum up, the studying of aforementioned processes and imaginations are one of the keys to deconstruct the nature of interfaith relations in Asia Minor or, even more, in a broader region of the Middle East. By explicating attitudes toward such crucial concepts as a 'sacred space' or a 'miracle' in the scope of the 'holy war', this article, hopefully, provides a better understanding of the origins of contemporary regional religious-political conflicts.

Given that the Turkic and Arabic folk literature reveals compelling examples of how similarly Muslim-Christian interactions and their competing for 'sacred space' was perceived by lay people, it is surprising that there are still no comprehensive works, dealing with such comparative analyze.⁴⁸ Further investigations on the topic, thus, may imply a comparative study of the obtained results with the materials of Arabic or Persian epics/ hagiographies of that period.

Abbreviations

S: St. Petersburg manuscript of the *Danishmendname*.

P: Parisian manuscript of the *Danishmendname* (*Kıssa-i Melik Danişmend Ghazi Ahmed ibn Ali*).

⁴⁸ SOKOLOV 2022: 172–181.

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