



THE STUDY OF THE EPIC “ALTUN YARUK” AND THE DEVELOPMENT OF TURKIC WRITTEN LITERATURE

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Abstract: This article discusses the study of the epic *Altun Yaruk*, scholarly views concerning its research, and the significance of the work in the development of Turkic written literature.

Keywords: Ancient Turkic literature, *Altun Yaruk*, Buddhist literature, the Radlov–Malov version of *Altun Yaruk*, S.E. Malov, N. Rahmonov.

Аннотация: В статье рассматриваются вопросы изучения эпоса «Алтун Ярук», анализируются научные взгляды, касающиеся его исследования, а также раскрывается значение данного памятника в развитии тюркской письменной литературы.

Ключевые слова: древнетюркская литература, «Алтун Ярук», буддийская литература, Радловско-Маловская версия «Алтун Ярука», С. Е. Малов, Н. Рахмонов.

It is well known that fiction, as a product of our ancestors' artistic thinking, plays an important role in educating the younger generation as a guide to life and human experience. As emphasized by the President of Uzbekistan, we must never forget our responsibility in protecting young people from various threats entering under the guise of “mass culture,” including drug addiction, religious extremism, and missionary activities. In this regard, we rely on our national traditions formed over centuries and the rich spiritual heritage of our ancestors.

Buddha statues and temples discovered in Khalchayan and dating back to the beginning of the Common Era demonstrate the prominent position of Buddhism during the Kushan Empire. This religious movement, which originated in India, has a long history of entering Central Asia. The spread of Buddhism led to the emergence of a distinctive trend in ancient Turkic literature, known as Turkic Buddhist literature.

During the sixth to eighth centuries, the dominant religion among Turkic tribes was shamanism; therefore, many Buddhist doctrines, customs, and beliefs were not widely known among the Turks. The primary goal of Buddhism is to save all living beings from suffering, protect them, cultivate strong willpower, and direct this strength toward a single noble purpose.

The idea of salvation and deliverance is also promoted in *Altun Yaruk*, a rare masterpiece of ancient Turkic Buddhist literature. This is clearly illustrated in the legend “The Prince and the Tiger”. The work is significant because it advocates the principles of goodness and spiritual purification and played an important role in the spiritual and moral life of Turkic peoples. Furthermore, it reflects the linguistic characteristics of the ancient Turks in the ninth and tenth centuries and contributed to the development of the Turkic literary language.

The history of *Altun Yaruk* dates back approximately to the first century CE. The work consists of a collection of *sutras*. The word *sutra*, derived from Sanskrit, means “short instruction” or “wise saying.” It also carries the meanings of “thread,” “rule,” and “guide.” In

Indian literature, particularly philosophical literature, a sutra is a distinct genre that explains the foundations of a doctrine. In *Altun Yaruk*, several sutras are combined into a coherent whole, creating the impression of pearls strung together on a thread. The sutra genre encompasses legends, dialogues, rules, teachings, and moral advice.

The complete ancient Turkic title of the work is *Altun onglug yaruq yaltiriqligh qopta kötölmish nom iliki atlig nom bitig*, which may be translated as “The Scripture of the King of Scriptures, Golden-Colored, Bright, Shining, and Superior to All Things.” However, it has come down to us under the shortened title *Altun Yaruk*. The Sanskrit title of the work is *Suvarṇaprabhāsa*. During its time, the work was widely circulated among peoples who practiced Buddhism. Because of its significance among Turkic-speaking peoples, *Altun Yaruk* was copied ten times between the tenth and eighteenth centuries and translated into many Eastern languages. The Radlov-Malov version consists of ten books. In 1910, the Russian scholar S.E. Malov discovered the manuscript in a Buddhist temple located in the village of Wenshigu (Vinshgu), Gansu Province, China. The manuscript contains 710 pages and was copied in 1687. Today, this version is preserved in the Asian Museum of Saint Petersburg.

The purpose of our research is to examine the study of ancient Turkic written monuments in Uzbekistan, the ongoing scholarly work in this field, the publication of literary collections, the translation of ancient Turkic texts into modern Uzbek, and the scientific contributions and dedicated efforts of scholars who have interpreted and studied these monuments. Through this work, we aim to promote the rich and unique history of Uzbek literature among a broad readership, the Uzbek nation, and the peoples of the world. Therefore, special attention is given to the contributions of Uzbek scholars and specialists in ancient Turkic literature who have studied, translated, and published *Altun Yaruk*.

The study of *Altun Yaruk* began with the publication of selected fragments of the text in Europe, Russia, and Turkey. The original text was created approximately in the first century CE, and the central idea of the epic is the promotion of the Mahayana branch of Buddhism. In Mahayana doctrine, spiritual and moral purification, as well as inner perfection, occupy a central place. Moreover, the socio-spiritual environment of Central Asia was highly compatible with this doctrine.

Since *Altun Yaruk* belongs to the Mahayana tradition of Buddhism in both content and essence, it is important to note that this teaching became widespread in Central Asia, particularly in the Kushan Empire during the reign of King Kanishka, and was elevated to the status of an official religion.

Following the recommendation of V.V. Radlov, S.E. Malov undertook two research expeditions (1909–1911 and 1913–1915) to Western and Central China to study the languages and ethnography of the Uyghurs, Yellow Uyghurs, Salars, and other peoples and to collect linguistic materials. In 1910, he discovered *Altun Yaruk* in a temple in Wenshigu village, Gansu Province, China. The work was first published in the Old Uyghur-Turkic script by V.V. Radlov and S.E. Malov. Subsequently, it was revised and republished several times with corrections.

The work has consistently attracted the attention of scholars around the world. Detailed information about studies conducted by Turkish, Russian, and German scholars can be found in the works of the Uzbek Turkologist Nasimxon Rahmonov.

The contribution of the distinguished scholar Nasimxon Rahmonov to introducing the work to a wider audience in Uzbekistan and translating it into modern Uzbek is invaluable.

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