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Reviews on *Atabeg* Institution in the Turkic State Organization

Haluk A. Dursun

Marmara University, Turkey

Abstract: Atabeglik, which dates back to the first Seljuks based on the written sources, is a critical institution in the Turkic state organization, including governmental and military qualities. Atabeg in Great Seljuk Empire was basically a title to be attributed to those who were responsible for training of sultan's sons and managing administrative work. Atabegs, appointed as assistants particularly when sultan's young sons were sent to provinces as governors, played an active, significant role in state administration. During the Seljuk period, families of atabegs appeared as successors of the Seljuk dynasty and they established independent states in Syria, Azerbaijan and Persia. Atabeglik institution, first seen in the Islamic world in the Seljuk period, was used with a slightly varying content in a wide range of lands from Memluks, Ilkhanid State to Mughal Empire in the Central Asia.

There has been no separate research on legal origins and nature and the development of atabeglik institution in various Turkic states. There have been different views to date atabeglik institution back to pre-Islamic Turkic state organization although it was first mentioned in the Seljuk period, but the issue needs comprehensive research. Basing the social roots of atabeglik institution on the old Turkic family order is

justified because of the content of the institution and the association with Turkic family law. Terms such as *atalık*, *atake*, *bey-ateke* and Persian originated *lala*, used in various Turkic states in relation to the institution, need to be examined. In the present article, reviews on institutional and operational nature of atabeglik will be mentioned by taking different use of the term *atabeg* in various lands into consideration.

Keywords: Atabeg, Historical Institution, Turkic State Organization, Seljuk Empire, Central Asia.

Based on the written resources, the office of atabeg which was first seen in the era of Seljuk Empire is an important institute which is inherent in Turkic state organization and contains administrative and military features. In its form as used in the Great Seljuk Empire, *atabeg* is basically a title assigned to the persons appointed to train the young princes and manage their affairs. Especially when princes were sent to provinces as ruler at an early age, atabegs who were appointed to train the princes and help them in management of state affairs played an effective and important role in management of the sate.

In the era of Seljuk Empire, the title *atabeg* was granted to Nizamülmülk, the vizier. Following Malazgirt victory, Sultan Alparslan appointed Nizamülmülk to make sure Melikşah, his son, gains experience in state affairs and granted him the title of "*ata hoca*" (elder trainer) or "*atabeg*". On some tablets dating back to 475 based on Hegira calendar (1082/1083 A.D.) discovered in Damascus, names of Abbasid Caliph and Melikşah and his brother, Tutuş, are followed by Nizamülmülk as "vizier, nizamülmülk atabeg". This indicates that the

position of *atabeg* within Seljuk State organization is superior office and it is understood that *atabeg* is used as a superior title (Köprülü 1940: 712).

Atabegs who made their first appearance in state organization as from the era of the Seljuk continued their duty of training the young princes and managing their affairs as commander, vizier or undersecretariat or province governor of the princes when they grew up. After Seljuk sultans dismissed their slaves who were grew up among sultan's household troops and elevated to superior positions, they appointed loyal troops to governor's offices or assigned them to duty of tutoring princes in terms of state affairs and granted upon them the title of atabeg. Although they were of great value in this duty, they also caused great damage to the state structure due to traumas they caused for the purpose of provoking the princes they tutored for sultanate or extend their reign, thereby, elevating their own positions. As atabegs increased their power and expanded their influence despite central government, they also established independent states by taking advantage of the weaknesses of central government in the path leading to independence. As a result of such development of the institution of atabeg within history, states which played important roles in history appeared such as Damascus Atabegs and Börililer (1104-1154) as established by Tuğ-Tekin, Mosul and Aleppo Atabegs (1127-1233) established by İmadeddin Zengî, Azerbaijan Atabegs or also Sons of İldeniz (1146-1225), Persian Atabegs or Salgurlar (1194-1286).

Looking into the era of Anatolian Seljuk Sultanate, atabegs acted as trustee of ruler and tutor of princes. It is known that atabegs of Anatolian Seljuk Sultanate had a wide influence and had a seat in the cabinet. Anatolian Seljuk Sultans used to appoint an experienced commander as atabeg for themselves. These begs who may be described as ruler atabeg used to attend grand assembly and play critical roles in the state affairs.

During the reign of Mongols in Anatolia, the institute of atabeg survived. However, these authorized state officers who acted under the title of *atabeg-i azam* did not have an army under their control, as they did in the era of Great Seljuk Empire or Anatolian Seljuk Sultanate, and acted as a sort of advisor or auditor.

In the era of Memluks, content of institute of atabeg was mostly composed of military duties and they existed as commander of army (atabek al-asâkir). In the era of Memluks, like the Ayyubids, atabekü'l-asakir existed as the highest and most influential office of the state following sultanate regent. Under the influence of Seljuk Empire, we encounter the institute of atabeg in İlkhanid Empire which is an important branch of Turco-Mongol Empire. Again, influenced by administrative organization of İlkhanids, Celayir State granted the title of atabeg to emirü'l-umerâ. In the Ottomans, they called the tutors, namely, atabegs, of the princes "lala". It is also possible to encounter such term in the Seljuk Empire .(Uzunçarşılı 1988: 47-48, 196; Turan 2003: 310-311).

In the Central Asia, Chagatai nation also had the institute of *atabeg*. For instance, Timur would care about his own successors a lot. Parents would not get involved in training of the mirza and this would be considered a state affair. At around the time of birth giving, the pregnant woman would be brought to palace and taken after with great care. However, as soon as baby is born, it would be separated from mother, and would be entrusted to tutors who would deal with everything

concerning the child, namely feeding, clothing and training. Once the child reaches a certain age, children would be assigned to special trainers named atabeg in order for them to learn everything future rules should know (Barthold 1997: 29). When we refer to *Şecere-i Türk* by Ebul'gazi Bahadır Han, we encounter the institute of *atabeg* in the dynasty of Şeybani.

We also encounter extensions of institute of atabeg and title of atabeg (lala) in the Eastern Christian States of the middle ages which had close relations with Turkic states. The first lala we encounter in the Nicea Empire of the 13th century was probably a Christian Turk and he had a title of beg. We can also see the office of atabeg in Georgian Kingdoms . The fact that Thamara, Georgian queen, established the institute of atabeg which follows the vizier in terms of protocol shows that this Turkic tradition was adopted by Christian States of middle ages (Köprülü 1940: 716; Alptekin İA: 39).

Analysis of the philological structure of title atabeg gives us important information. It would be beneficial to mention about the other affiliated terms with similar content which have been derived from the same root. This would guide us in following historical development of the institute of atabeg which survived in the different geographical parts with different names.

When looking into philological analysis of the word, basic features of the words comprising the word and their field of use in their respective cultures give us important information about our key word in terms of content. The first word in the title *atabeg* is the word *ata* which means "father, ancestor" in Turkic dialects, which is principally a term of kinship. The title words and kinship words underwent great changes

through the time. Adoption by the Turks of different cultures played a critical role in such change. Apart from the kinship meaning of this word, we see that this title is granted to persons who are quite knowledgeable about mother land and traditions of the people, escort the rulers and act as some sort of mentor. For instance, the figure named Korkut-Ata, İrkit-Ata depicted in Dede Korkut stories correspond to this concept and they occupy an important place in Oghuz myths with their legendary characters. On the other hand, we also see that Turk sheikhs were given the names *baba* and *ata* after Sufism had a strong influence on the Turks. In the tribe of Yesevi, especially in Harezm, the great sheikhs were given the name *ata*: Hâkim Ata, Çoban Ata, Zengî Ata (Köprülü 1940: 711). Uses of the word *ata* in the culture geography of Turks make us clearly understand meanings of wise man, ruler and scholar given to the word.

The second word in the term Atabek is a name composed of the word beg which describes certain officials at military, political and administrative fields in Turkic state organization together with combinations made with some other words. We can consider the title Beg as one of the fundamental words carrying the layers of Turkic culture in historical process. To some extent, it is one of the key words that is necessary to understand heritage of Steppe Turkic Aristocracy, Steppe state tradition. Its wide and versatile field of use created with derivatives (e.g., *atabeg, ilbegi, on begi, yüz begi, biŋ begi, tümen begi, beglerbegi, inçü begi*) ranging from a superior title to a term of kinship in modern field and a simple greeting and addressing word is found in historical and contemporary Turkic language.

¹ Bkz. Atabeg (TMEN II, 415), *Atabek* "Prizenerzieher; später auch: Titel gewisser Dynasten" Selç. *Atabeg*, RSl.I 451 *atabek* (Çağ.), Osm. *Atabey* "lala".

In the Babur Empire, we notice use of another title that is equal to title of atabeg. In Babürname, the famous history memoirs of Babur, the term atake is used with similar function as atabeg. The word atake which is derived from the same root is quite worth attention. The field of use for the terms atake and atakelik could be considered parallel to that of the word atabeg. Atake must be a combined word composed of ata meaning "father" and eke meaning "elder brother". Based on this, we can conclude that atekelik means "job done or office occupied by the person acting as ateke ". Sheikh Süleyman who compiled words of Chagatai language make the following explanation for the word ateke "fatherhood, ancestry, a rank in Asia during the middle ages"; for the word atekelik "government, landowner, chairmanship; a man sultan trusts like a father; a rank in Turkistan. The person is authorized to listen to requests of the people and notify to the sultan and be aware and knowledgeable about their situations in a bighearted way in his capacity as a father". In Babur state, ateke (~ bey-ateke) and atekelik, like rest of the Turkic states, are worth attention as a critical office connected with tutoring of the young princes and management of the provinces reserved for the princes (Arat 1987: 579-581). The following sentences are included in Babürname for ateke appointed to him in the section where people from household of palace express their opinions: "Sheikh Mezîd Efendi was had been appointed to me as bey-ateke. He was quite good at management and command. He also served (Ebulkasım) Babur Mirza. Apart from Omar Sheikh Mirza, there was no other beg greater than him." (Arat 1987: 13). It is possible to clearly see continuity of the persons holding the office of atekelik at official bodies of the state due to their effective services from the above sentences. The following

sentences are included in his memoirs for an ateke appointed to Humayun, son of Babur: "Kasım Beg was one of the former begs of Endican. Right after Hasan Beg, he was a man of power at my household ...Kasım Beg walked better than the young despite his old age. As a reward, I gave him the province of Bengiş. Upon his arrival in Kabul, I appointed him to Humayun as bey-ateke" (Arat 1987: 13-14).

Based on the information contained in Babürname, we understand that persons coming into this office had vast facilities in material and mental terms and for the appointment of ateke, the procedures and ceremonies were used as the procedures and ceremonies used for appointment to countries and provinces as beg and ruler, and gifts were exchanged . The following sentences are included in Babürname with regards to this issue: "...On Friday, twenty ninth day of month, Mîr-Hurd was appointed to Hindal as ateke and he gave one thousand şahruhî as gift " (Arat 1987: 272). The following expressions are included in another section "...on Saturday, on the twenty ninth of, rebiülevvel (the third month of hegira calendar), Askerî was given a dagger with jeweled belt and hilat (an ornamental piece of clothing given to persons appreciated by sultan), similar to that of sultan, and flag, tail, nakkâre (a small kettledrum), horses of good breed, ten elephants, one Oatari of camels ... Buttoned waistcoats were given to his mullah and two ateke, and nine clothes were granted to his other men" (Arat 1987: 398).

We see that the term *atake* used in Babur Empire is also used in Timur Empire.² Sources show us that these atakes were appointed for tutoring of the women descending from dynasty ancestry. In the era of

² The term of *ataga* is in the same meaning in modern Uigur.

Timur, roles played by women in the state affairs were determined according to former Turco-Mongol traditions, not based on Islam laws. Therefore, care was taken for tutoring of the women too (Aka 1991: 108).

The word Atalik, another term related to our subject matter, had the same meanings as atabeg and lala, and was used as exact synonym of the title atabeg. The term Atalik was used in Golden Horde. Based on the expressions of Ötemiş Hacı and Abdülgaffar Kırımî, Atalık is worth attention as an office to similar to that of vizier. Atalik of Tokta khan was Bacırtık Buga from Uighur Province, while atalık of Berdi Bek Khan was Tulubay from Kanglı province (Kafalı 1976: 121). Besides, we encounter term atalik in Turkic states ruled India in the 14th century. Bayram Han, one of the famous emirs known for his Turkish poems, carried the title Han-1 Hanan (Khan of Khans) as well as Han Baba (khan father) which indicates existence of titles *atabeg* or *atalik*. Sources indicate that there were begs in the Central Asia who carried the title atalık during the era of Khanate. Hive and Buhara Khanate as well as Kashgar Khanate had the office and title of atalik. In the 19th century, Yakub Beg , Kashgar emir, was recognized with his title "Atalık Gazi". Given the fact that, following Cenghis invasion, Khanate was deemed to belong to Cenghis generation among the Central Asia Turks, and even a brave ruler such as Timur did not dare to take on the title Khan, used the titles beg and emir, and once upon a time kept a puppet ruler who was from Cenghis ancestry with him and ruled his country in his capacity as his assignee and he adhered to principle of legitimacy only in formal terms, it will bee better understood on what principles this institute of atalık in Buhara and Hive and Turkish public law stand (Köprülü 1940: 717-718).

We can compare the terms *Atabeg, atake, bey-atake* and *atalık* with the term *lalalık* used in Ottoman state organization. Doubtlessly, the job corresponding to this office had a structure which existed in Turkic state organization under different names and dates back to old times. On the other hand, there were many aspects of the office lalalık distinguishing it from atabeylik in terms of functioning. In principle, it is not so hard to understand why the instate of atabeglik did not emerge in the Ottomans in its format encountered in the other Turkic states which protected feudal and tribal traditions, as seen in its first specimen in the Seljuk Empire (Köprülü 1940: 714).

Dictionary meaning the word lala with a Persian origin is "servant, slave; attendant assigned to look after his mater's child". Within the historical process, this ward came to mean persons who took after tutoring of the children of senior persons, the wealthy, administrators of high rank, beg, khan and rulers, taught these children the art of management, and were responsible for their training in all aspects. Thus, it developed similar to the previous institute of atabeglik, yet it did not assume a political character as atabeglik. We can track down records showing that the word lala was used in the meaning of atabeglik in Anatolia back in the 14th century. In the records of Anatolian Seljuk Sultanate, the words atabeg and lala were used together. There are some records where the words atabeg and lala were used together among the first Ottoman sources. However, since it did not bear features of a political institute like atabeglik, in Ottoman context, the word lala never took on the character of a regent of the heir to throne or the ruler coming into power or the person managing the state affairs in place of ruler within the meaning of atabeg concept. Researchers link the corporate structure assumed by the title lala with the era of Murat the 1st. Decree of Mehmet the Conqueror comprises the first and clear document that prince lalalık adopted an official character. While this position was below Ottoman bureaucratic structuring and hierarchy at the beginning, it grew in importance in the 16th century and further progressed. Since Ottoman princes were stationed in districts and acted as administrator in their respective regions (district beg), lalas were not only responsible for their tutoring but also local administration. In the country administration, head of the officials reporting to the young prince is lala. The institute of lala lost its administrative aspect totally after the procedure of sending the princes to districts was terminated during the era of Mehmet, the 3rd. Change in the Sultanate system and strict supervision of the princes in the palace have a new character to lalalik where education aspect is more dominant, yet led a change in their identities. From such era on, three persons were appointed to prince's staff among the eunuchs and the oldest and most experienced eunuch was appointed as the head lala responsible for tutoring the prince. These lalas selected among castrated eunuchs only looked after tutoring of the princes (Baykara 2003: 70-71).

No study has ever been conducted on legal origin and nature of the institute of atabeglik and its development in the Turkic states. Although this concept was first mentioned in connection with the Seljuk Empire, there are some opinions that track down the origins of institute of atabeglik to Turkic state organization prior to Islam and this issue is in need of being researched from many aspects. There are justified reasons to look for the social origins of the institution of atabeglik in former Turkic family organization and link this institute with former Turkic family law due to its content. However, we are unable to see

traces of institute of atabeglik in Muslim Turkic states of Central Asia established before Seljuk Empire. We do not have sound data as to existence of this institute in Karahan State mostly due to lack of resources. Fuat Köprülü, the renowned Turkish historian, with regards to historical origins of this institute, says that; it is more realistic to think that Seljuk Empire established based on Oghuz tradition continued the institute of atabeglik as a tradition preceding them, such an important institute would not easily emerge all of a sudden in the Seljuk Empire (Köprülü 1940: 713). Another evidence showing the existence of the institute of Atabeglik in the Oghuz tradition is available in Oğuzname by Reşidüddin. In the section of Oğuzname by Reşidüddin which gives the hierarchic classification of the state administration and where persons representing the people were mentioned, vizier and regent are followed by the persons bearing titled antlik, inak and atabeg. We can clearly understand importance of atabegs from this section: "...Ali Han appointed Kilic Arslan, his own son, to administration of the tribes who were able to generate around forty thousand cavaliers. He sent one hundred eighty year-old Bügdüz Kardıçı as regent and vizier with his son by advising his son to perform his duties with integrity and not to leave justice of Kardıçı They all came to Atabeg Kardıçı and conveyed their long list of complaints. Qardıçı gave him lots of advises, yet they did not work ..." (Togan 1982: 71).

Some researchers seeking for origins of the title atabeg in the pre-Islam era say that, the word "atı" as written in the name of "atısı Yollug Tigin" who is the person depicted on Költigin tablet, the oldest written tablet of the Turks as the person who personally inscribed the tablet means subsequent word "atabeg" (the tutor teaching the princes

how to read-write, sports, weapon knowledge and shooting) by comparing this word with content of subsequent title of *atabeg* (Kafesoğlu 1997: 127; Köprülü 1940: 714). In principle, the word "atı" is available in vocabulary of Turkic related to kinship as a word meaning nephew. Therefore, we do not have many materials to support the said corporate meaning of the word *atu*.

The structure varying depending on state of atabeg and atake and atalik which are derived from the same root is worth attention. To conclude, Atabeglik is an important institute which was a title at the beginning, yet occupied high levels of state hierarchy by assuming a corporate character, and turned into a critical office whose social origins can be sought in Turkic customs covering Turkic family and state tradition.

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The International Association of Central Asian Studies Fetisova 3, Mirobod, Tashkent, Uzbekistan Tel: (99871)-291-9540 E - mail: iacas1996@gmail.com

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