V. M. ZHIRMUNSKY (Leningrad): ON THE COMPARATIVE STUDY OF THE HEROIC EPIC OF THE PEOPLES OF CENTRAL ASIA

The peoples of Soviet Central Asia are justly proud of the vast treasures of living epics which still exist in numerous artistic variants as performed by folk minstrels. From the theoretic point of view, we have here a key to the problem of the epic in general, since the ancient, medieval European, Indian, and Iranian epopees have come down to us as reflected in written literary forms and adaptations, which can be understood from the point of view of their creation and propagation only through compa-

rison with the living epic, created and performed in the present, before our very eyes.

This was repeatedly pointed out by Professor A. N. Veselovsky who criticised German philologists for ignoring the living epic tradition in their treatment of Homer and the *Niebelungenlied*. "Western scholars", he wrote, "being little acquainted with the living epic tradition, involuntarily transfer problems of purely literary criticism to the criticism of folk poetry. All criticism of the *Niebelungenlied*, and much of the treatment of the Homeric epic are at fault in this respect... It is absolutely necessary to take one's direction from the epic as it is still sung and to study exhaustively its structure and the stages of its development. On German soil this method is impossible because of the lack of a living epic" [1].

The foundation for the study of the epic art of the peoples of Central Asia was laid by the works of the well known Kazakh scholar Choqan Valikhanov (1837-1865), by the Russian scholars V. V. Radlov, V. V. Barthold, G. H. Potanin, P. Melioransky, by the Tashkent folklorist Abubekr Divayev, and a few others, and, among foreign scholars, by H. Vambery. But only after the October Revolution did the general cultural advance of the peoples of the Soviet Union create the necessary conditions for the broad study of national folklore, which, moreover, was carried out by the scholars of the national republics themselves, with the active support of the central academic institutions. The collection and study of specimens of epic tradition in the USSR have been marked by a number of finds which have considerably broadened our concepts on the Central Asian epic.

Thus, only after the Revolution did the Uzbek epic become the subject of scholarly collection and study. At present, as the result of intensive work done by Uzbek folklorists, there are recorded more than 150 texts (representing 60 plots) from 50 minstrels in most of the regions of Uzbekistan. Alongside the ancient heroic epic (*Alpamysh*) and the later military tale (*Yusuf and Ahmed*) a large segment of the repertoire of the Uzbek minstrels comprises the romantic epic, the so-called popular novel, of heroico-romantic, adventurous or fantastic content. (*Quntugmysh, Shirin and Shakar, Orzigul,* the cycle of *Rustamkhan,* and others). The poems of the *Gorogly* cycle which combine heroic and romantic elements, are also very numerous (there exist, according to tradition, *40 tales of Gorogly*) [2].

In Kazakhstan, in addition to a number of new epic subjects and variants, an extensive epic cycle, *The Forty Nogai Heroes* has been recorded as performed by an 82-year old *aqyn* from Mangyshlaq, Murun Jirau. This work which is constructed as a genealogical cycle, contains formerly recorded subjects from the Kazakh-Nogai epic cycle, and a number of previously unknown ones [3].

The grandiose Kirghiz epic *Manas* was first completely written down from Sagimbai Orozbakov (1867-1930) and Saiaqbai Qaralaev (born in 1890) in two variants, each containing about 250 thousand verses [4]. To the *Manas* are related, in the form of a genealogical cycle, poems about his son Semetei and his grandson Seitek, which in Qaralaev's text account for approximately 300 000 verses. There has been also recorded a number of works, arbitrarily grouped under the heading "minor epics", which belong to various periods and epic genres, ranging from the ancient heroic folk-tale (*Töshtük, Qojojash*) to the historical and domestic epic of the XVIIth-XVIIIth centuries. (*Qurmanbek, Er-Tabyldy, Oljobai,* and others) [5].

In Karakalpakia, the epic poem *The Forty Maidens* which contains approximately 20 000 verses, was discovered in the early forties, as narrated by the minstrel Qurbanbai-bakhshi [6].

In Turkmenia, in addition to tales of the national hero Gorogly, which are by no means collected in full [7], numerous "popular novels" have been published. These are in part of literary origin, and in the corresponding variants are known to other peoples of the Near and Middle East. Among these are: *Tahir and Zuhra, Gul and Bulbul, Gul and Senuber, Shahsenem and Garyp* (a Turkmenian version of *Ashiq Garib,* which had been recorded by M. Lermontov in Tbilisi as early as 1831), *Seipel-Melik* (a fairy-tale from "Arabian Nights" which underwent a classical literary and a later folk adaptation), *Asly-Kerem, Sayat and Khemra,* and others.

Not until the middle 'thirties was it discovered that there existed among the Tadjiks an extensive epic cycle called *Gūrgūli-shō,* which is linked in origin to the Uzbek *Gorogly,* but represents a distinctive national version of that tale. This version was spread *via* regions with mixed Uzbek-Tadjik population by bilingual narrators [8].

The extensive materials which have been collected are deposited in the folk-lore archives of the Union Republics' Academies of Sciences. Some have been published; others are in the process of publication. They are being widely popularised by poetic translations into Russian, which are prompted by the lively interest of Soviet readers in the poetic art of the peoples of the Soviet Union [9].

The study of the epic art of the peoples of Central Asia demands from the scholar a treatment based on broad historical comparison. This is particularly true in relation to such almost universally wide-spread themes, as the ancient epic tale of Alpamysh, the historical epic of Idige (XVth century), the extensive cycle of tales about Köroghli-Gorogly (XVIth-XVIIIth centuries) and, finally, the numerous "popular novels" listed above. These last mentioned tales are partly literary in origin, and are known in diverse national versions, mostly in Azerbaidjan and Turkmenia (as well as in Turkey), but also in various geographic areas in Uzbekistan, Kazakhstan, and Kirghizia.

The peoples of Central Asia have long been linked by community of language, extended contact, ethnic and cultural interaction under the conditions of a common history. The Turkic-speaking nomadic tribes which at various times spread over the extensive territory of the Central Asian steppes, were mixed, in the process of formation and consolidation of nations, not only among themselves, but also with the ancient, largely Iranian, sedentary agricultural population of Central Asia, whose cultural influence on the Turkic tribes was extremely great, though uneven. This influence was particularly strong in Uzbekistan and Turkmenia. In the formation by these nomadic tribes, under the conditions of feudalism, of shaky and short-lived confederations they were often joined by separate disintegrated groups of those larger tribes whose names are to this day encountered among the majority of Turkic-speaking peoples as ethnical or geographical names over the whole area of their temporary or permanent settlement.

The broad interaction among these tribes in the field of epic art is explained by this complicated, centuries-old process of the disintegration of the nomadic population of Central Asia and their unification and consolidation around the most active and durable tribal nuclei, a process

which took place under the conditions of the development of the relationships of feudal states, and by the closer economic and cultural ties between these rising states at a later time.

Thus, the tale of Alpamysh is to be found over the entire large territory inhabited by the Turkic people —from the Altai Range across Central Asia to the Volga and the Urals, on the one hand, and to Asia Minor, on the other. At the same time, it is one of the oldest, if not the oldest of the epic tales of these peoples [10].

The first part of *Alpamysh* is a story of heroic wooing, with competitions in the military skills of riding, archery, and wrestling between the hero and other contenders for the hand of the bride or between the hero and the bride herself, who is represented as a warlike maiden (amazone). In the second part of the tale the hero is captured and imprisoned by his enemies for seven years, escapes with the aid of a miraculously endowed horse or, in some cases, of the daughter of his foe who falls in love with him, returns home in disguise on the day of his wife's marriage to his rival, and re-establishes his marital rights. (The theme of "the husband at the marriage feast of his wife", in a number of details closely akin to the story of the return of Odysseus).

Juxtaposition of all known independent national versions of the tale of Alpamysh permits us to reconstruct the basic stages of its development and dissemination. In its most ancient form, as a heroic folk-tale (which is reflected in the contemporary Altai folk-tale *Alyp-Manash*) this tale existed in the Altai foothills as early as the VIth-VIIIth centuries, at the time of the Turkic Kaghanate. With the advance of the Oghuz it was carried, no later than the Xth century, to the delta of the Syr-Darya where it was independently developed, entering into the cycle of Oghuz epic songs about the heroes of Salor-Qazan. From there it penetrated into Transcaucasia and Asia Minor under the Seljuks in the XIth century. The *Story of Bamsi-Beirek* in *Kitabi dedem Korkut,* with which we have to confront the present-day Anatolian folk-tales about Beirek, is a late, strongly feudalized reflection of the same story in a literary fashioning of the XVth-XVIth centuries. In the XIIth-XIIIth centuries, with the movement of the Qipchaq tribes, the tale, in still another version, penetrated into Kazakhstan, Bashkiria, and the Volga region, where it was subjected to a strong modernization at a later date. (Cf. modern Bashkir and Kazan Tatar folk-tales). In the beginning of the XVIth century it was carried by the nomadic tribes of Sheibani-Khan into Southern Uzbekistan (the Baisun vilayet) where the heroic epic *Alpamysh* was composed on the basis of a heroic song or folk-tale, carried by the Kungrats from their pasturages on the shores of the Aral Sea, and from where it was later spread among the Uzbeks, Karakalpaks, and Kazakhs.

Along the way, in the process of the transition of these peoples from a patriarchal tribal system to that of early feudalism, the heroic tale, which told of the journey of the hero in search of his bride "into a land whence there is no return", was transformed into a heroic epic, replete with specific historical content: the hero's enemies in the Central Asian epic became "pagan Kalmyks", to correspond with the historical situation of the Kalmyk wars (XVth-XVIIIth centuries) and in the Caucasus — the "Giaurs", (Christians) of Gurdjistan (Georgia), and the Bek of the Fortress of Bayburd, who captures Beyrek and his forty young warriors (*jigit*) by treachery. Finally, present-day folk-tales of the Bashkirs and Kazan Tatars

have given the subject a modernized democratic coloring, which reflects the ideology of the contemporary peasant environment: the Tatar Alpamsha is a simple shepherd, competing with other young men for the hand of the Khan's daughter, and must climb a mountain with two heavy millstones under his arms.

The development of the epic on the basis of historical traditions can be shown through an exceptional abundance of both historical and folkloristic sources in the case of the epic tale of Edigei (Idige). This tale has been recorded in a number of variants (more than 30), some original, some translations among Kazakhs, Karakalpaks, Uzbeks, Nogais, Crimean Tatars, and the Turkic tribes of Siberia [11]. The differences in content among the various versions are not very significant; one observes the tendency in the direction of growth of the fable element, which attains its furthest development in the Uzbek dastan — *Tulumbiy* (after the name of the hero's father) [12].

The historical basis for this tale is provided by the feudal struggle within the Golden Horde at the end of the XIVth and the beginning of the XVth century between Tokhtamysh Khan of the Golden Horde and Timur, the ruler of Central Asia, during which Mirza Edigei, of the Mangyt tribe, together with the pretender to the throne of the Golden Horde, Timur-Qutluq, fled to the side of Timur. After the expulsion of Tokhtamysh (1395) Edigei, relying on nomadic elements (The Nogai Horde) ruled as an omnipotent regent during the reigns of several weak khans, and attempted to re-establish the external prestige of the Horde.

The epic tale of Edigei must have been composed in the Nogai Horde, where, in the XVth and XVIth centuries, his descendants were ruling. The extensive area of dissemination of the tale corresponds to the historic limits of the steppe territory which was occupied by the Nogai Horde before its disintegration around the beginning of the XVIIth century. Epic reminiscences of the events of the time of interfamily feuds and feudal wars among the numerous sons of the Nogai prince Musa Khan, grandson of Edigei, have been preserved among Kazakhs and Nogai Tatars. (The epic poem *Uraq and Mamai*).

Popular memory has not preserved any reminiscences of the external policy of the reign of Edigei (for example, his victory over Vithold, Grand Prince of Lithuania, on the Vorskla River, in the year 1399, which is mentioned by the Polish chronicle of Dlugosz and by Russian chronicles, and the unsuccessful campaign against Moscow in 1408-1409). The epic also knows nothing of the internal reasons and circumstances surrounding the events described, the political struggle of Timur and the Golden Horde, of the rivalry and intrigues of the pretenders to the throne, etc. It portrays the relations between Tokhtamysh and Edigei as a simple personal conflict between a cruel and unjust khan and his noble, honest vassal, beloved by the people — a conflict which is typical of the feudal epoch and one which is reflected in the traditional theme of the "expulsion and return" of the unjustly calumniated hero.

These basic details of the tale have overgrown with motifs from folk-lore. The central theme receives a prehistory — the story of the wonderful birth and childhood of the future hero. The hero grows up in poverty, as a shepherd. His playmates choose him as their king. The young shepherd attracts the attention of one of Tokhtamysh' noblemen, or of the Khan himself, by his wise judgements in difficult cases of law, and the latter invites him to the court and takes him into his retinue.

Similarly, many other heroes of Central Asian epic tales, future rulers of the respective peoples, spend their childhood for one reason or another in the family of a shepherd, are raised as shepherds and themselves graze herds. The friendship of the khan's son with simple folk, in the popular conception, must explain in the future his love for his people and his care for them, and determine the patriarchal democratic character of the rule of the "Good King". The epic wanted to see in the hero a simple man of the people, linked to them by his fate, whose advancement to an exalted state is due to his personal merits. The judicial decisions of the young Idige, which are based upon an ancient folkloristic tradition widely spread in the East (Vikramaditya, Solomon, Arji-Borja, etc.) and later in the West [13], are intended to attest to the fact that the shepherd-boy is wiser than the Khan's nobles.

The story of the ancestors of the epic hero also has a legendary character. Idige's kinship is traced, according to tradition, to the popular saint, Baba Tuqlas Shashli Aziz ("The Hairy Saint"), whose cult retained obvious survivals of pre-Moslem, Shamanistic beliefs. With the name of this saint has been connected the story, widely spread in world folk-lore, of the swan-maiden, who becomes for a time the wife of a man who steals her swan plumage [14]. In north-western Mongolia, Potanin recorded a tale about the totemistic ancestors of the Balagan and Alar Buryats, who trace their origin to a swan-maiden. It has a very close, and probably not coincidental resemblance to the tale about the ancestors of Idige [15]. It is possible that here the epic was based upon the ancient tale of the totemistic ancestors of the "White Mangyts", the tribe of the historical Edigei.

The tale of Köroghly-Gorogly, in varying form, is known in the Caucasus — among Azerbaidjanians, Armenians, Georgians, Kurds, and some Northern Caucasian tribes, in the Near and Middle East — in Turkey and Northern Iran (Southern Azerbaidjan and Khorasan), and in Central Asia among the Turkmen, Uzbeks, Kazakhs, Tadjiks, and Central Asian Arabs. Neither national and ethnic boundaries nor differences in religion or language were a barrier to the spread of this story. Under conditions of feudal oppression and enslavement the figure of the popular hero, created by the epic tradition, became an expression of the elemental protest of the masses of the people against their oppressors and acquired the characteristics, first of a kind of a rebel and "avenger of the people", and then of the ideal democratic ruler, friend and protector of his people [16].

The Armenian historian Arakel of Tebriz who was a near contemporary of the events which he describes (d. 1670) gives testimony as to the historical basis of this tale. He names a Köroghly as one of the leaders of the revolt of the *jelali* during the reign of Shah Abbas I. "This is the Köroghli, who composed many songs which are now sung by the *ashugs*". Arakel also mentions the names of two other rebels, who are represented in the epic tradition as Köroghly's comrades-in-arms (Gizir-oghli and Kusa Safar) [17].

The Azerbaidjan traditions of Köroghly represent the first stage in the idealization of the popular hero, and remain within the limits of semi-historical legend. They comprise a cycle of prose stories with interspersed songs, ascribed to Köroghli himself.

The Azerbaidjan Köroghly is a Turkmen-Teke by birth, a brave horseman and *ashug* who sings his own exploits. A renegade from feudal society, a "noble bandit" of the Robin Hood type, he carries on a guerilla against that society, against the khans, beys, and pashas, robs merchant

caravans on the highroad, performs wonders of bravery on his magic horse Girat, in disguise penetrates into the enemy camp, and kidnaps beauties who have caught his eye, whom he seduced by song or by the glory of his exploits. In the understanding of the people the daring warrior (*jigit*) Köroghly is not a bandit and robber, but a brave fighter against the high and mighty, against the rich and powerful, and, at the same time, the protector of the unfortunate masses. Here lies the reason for the unusual popularity of this epic figure.

All other Caucasian and Near Eastern versions of the *Köroghly* are directly descended from the Azerbaidjan variant. They preserve the more important episodes, as well as the general concept of the hero as a "noble bandit" and singer of his own exploits. But they are less close to history, less exact about geographical and descriptive details, more inclined to fantasy (this is especially true of the Armenian version, which is rich in content and has interesting folkloristic elements). These are all indications of a later development, which testify to the evolution of the historical legend in the direction of an epic and "popular novel".

The Central Asian versions of *Gorogly* have a different character, and among them the Uzbek variant represents the most mature epic stage of development of the tale. In the place of the short prose stories we have here a cycle of extensive epic *dastans (The Forty Tales of Gorogli)* retaining the framework of the Azerbaidjanian legendary tales: the hero with his forty warriors (*djigits*) and his wonder-horse Girat, his adopted sons Awaz and Hasan, the fortress of Chambil (Chemli-bel), the blinding of the father as the starting-point of the plot, and the traditional name Kör-oghlu meaning "son of the blind man", at the same time with a fabulous folk etymology of this name, which is characteristic of all Central Asian versions: Gorogly is "the son of the grave", borne in the grave by a dead mother. However the actual character of the hero and his deeds have undergone a considerable change in the direction of further epic idealization.

The Uzbek Gorogly is not a "noble bandit", but a Beg of the Turkmens and Uzbeks, of noble kin, ruler of the land and the city of Chambil, similar to other famous epic rulers like Charlemagne or King Arthur, Prince Vladimir, the Kirghiz Manas or the Kalmyk Jangar. He is a wise and powerful sovereign and at the same time an epic hero, the protector of his people against foreign invaders, alien khans and begs. In accordance with the democratic character of the tale the figure of Gorogly itself becomes the embodiment of the popular ideal of patriarchal authority which looks after the good of the people and in particular the oppressed and unfortunate while the legendary "Age of Gorogly" and his state Chambil acquire the character of a kind of a popular Utopia — a land, where, under the authority of a wise ruler the eternal popular dream of social justice comes to life.

In such epic idealizations of *Gorogly* heroic motifs are combined with motifs from romances and fables. Gorogly's wives are no longer beauties whom he has kidnapped, daughters of khans and begs (as in the Azerbaidjan version), but fabulous fairies, *peri,* in search of whom he sets off into enchanted, unknown lands, where he fights giants, dragons, and other fabulous monsters. At the same time the image of the hero himself acquires fabulous traits.

In a series of *dastans* the heroes are the adopted sons of Gorogly, Awaz and Hasan, the former of which, under the name Awaz-khan becomes the

hero of an extensive cycle of romantic and fantastic adventures, chiefly connected with the obtaining of a beautiful bride, a princess or a *peri* from some far-away fabulous land. After the second generation of heroes follow the third and fourth by genealogical cyclization: Awaz' son is Nurali, Hasan's — Rawshan, the son of Nurali is Jahangir, the great-grandson of Gorogly. The *dastans* which are devoted to these new heroes are most of recent origin and of a heroico-romantic character and repeat in a series of variations the rather monotonous plot patterns and motifs of the popular romances about the quest for a far-away beauty.

The Turkmen version is an intermediate link between the Azerbaidjan and Uzbek versions. Similar to the Uzbek are the Tadjik and Kazakh versions, of which the former is a good representative of the creative and independent transformation of the Central Asian type of that tale.

Thus, against the background of the general traditional subject material, each of the national versions of the tale has its own character, which reflects the historically determined social structure, the psychology and social ideals of the people who have created it. Comparative study of these national variants, in establishing their genesis and historical interrelationship, at the same time facilitates a more profound understanding of their distinctive national characters.

NOTES

[1] А. Н. Веселовский, *Историческая поэтика*, М., 1940, стр. 662.

[2] Cf. *Ўзбек халқ достонлари*, I—III, Тошкент, 1956—1957; В. Жирмунский и Х. Зарифов, *Узбекский народный героический эпос*, М., 1947; W. Fleischer, *Das Uzbekische heroische Volksepos*, „Beiträge zur Geschichte der deutschen Sprache", Bd. 30, Halle/S., 1958, S. 111—156.

[3] *Batırlar ҳыҳ*, т. I, Алма-Ата, 1939; *Қазақ эпосы*, Алматы, 1957; Мухтар Ауэзов и Л. Соболев, *Эпос и фольклор казахского народа*, «Литературный критик», 1939, № 10—11, стр. 210—223; 1940, № 1—2, стр. 169—180; Акад. А. С. Орлов, *Казахский героический эпос*, М.—Л., 1945; *Қазақ әдебиетінің тарихы*, т. I, Фольклор, Алматы, 1960. К. Ж. Жумалиев, *Қазақ эпосы мен әдебиет тарихының мәселері*, т. I, Алматы, 1958.

[4] *Манас. Семетей. Сейтек*, I—IV, Фрунзе 1958—1960; В. Жирмунский, *Введение в изучение «Манаса»*, Фрунзе, 1948; Мухтар Ауэзов, *Мысли разных лет*, Алма-Ата, 1959, стр. 479—557; «Киргизский героический эпос Манас», М., 1961.

[5] Cf. Мединэ Богданова, *Киргизская литература*, М., 1947.

[6] *«Қырқ қыз»*, *Қарақалпақ халқының қаҳарманлық дастаны*, Нокис, 1956.

[7] *Гөроглы*, Ашгабат, 1958.

[8] *Гўрўғли. Эпосй халқчи тоҷик*, Сталинобод — Ленинград, 1941; И. С. Брагинский, *Очерки истории таджикской литературы*, Сталинабад, 1956, стр. 88—119.

[9] Cf. *Узбекские народные поэмы*, АН УзССР, Ташкент, 1958; *Казахский эпос*, Алма-Ата 1958; *Манас, Киргизский эпос. Великий поход*, М., 1946; *Сорок девушек, Каракалпакская народная поэма*, перев. А. Тарковского, ГИХЛ, М., 1956.

[10] Cf. В. Жирмунский, *Сказание об Алпамыше и богатырская сказка*, М., 1959, (contains sources and bibliography).

[11] Among numerous publications, the following contain studies: Ч. Ч. Валиханов, *Сочинения*, СПб., 1904, стр. 223—273; П. Мелиоранский, *Рукопись Валиханова «Сказание об Едиге и Тохтамыше»*, текст и предисловие («Записки РГО по отделу этнографии», прилож. т. XXIX, СПб., 1905); Г. Н. Потанин, *Тюркская сказка об Идыгэ*, «Живая старина», 1897, вып. III—IV, стр. 294—350; Saadet Cagatay, *Die «Ädigä-Sage»*, «Ural-Altaische Jahrbücher», Bd. XXV, H. 3—4, 1953, S. 243—282 (contains bibliography).

[12] Cf. Hadi Zarif, *Өzbek folklori, Xrestomatijə*, Taşkent, 1939, pp. 29—42.

[13] Cf. А. Н. Веселовский, *Славянские сказания о Соломоне и Китоврасе и западные легенды о Морольфе и Мерлине*, «Собрание сочинений», т. VIII, вып. I, Пгрд., 1921, стр. 75—130.

[14] Cf. H. Holmström, *Studier över svanjungfrumotivet*, Malmö, 1919.

[15] Г. Н. Потанин, *Очерки северо-западной Монголии*, вып. IV, СПб, 1883, стр. 23—24.

[16] Cf. В. Жирмунский и Х. Зарифов, *Узбекский народный героический эпос*, стр. 165—279.

[17] Aracel de Tauriz, *Livres d'Histoires* «Collection d'Histoiriens arméniens», traduits par M. Brosset, t. III, SPb., 1874.

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