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KALMAK: THE ENEMY IN THE KAZAK AND KIRGHIZ EPIC SONGS

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After the formation of the Chagatay and Jochi Uluses the local Mongol nobility was converted to Islam and assimilated by the local Kirghiz and Kipchak Turkic nomads. When these Uluses were disintegrated into smaller hordes (Özbeg, Nogay, Kazak, Kirghiz, etc.), the Turkic-speaking Muslim nobility ruled the newly-formed new nomadic states. The epic tradition of these nomads underwent fundamental changes, and the heroes of the epic songs became the historical or legendary founders of the tribes. When the Oirat Mongols and Jungars attacked their territories during in 16th–18th centuries the Buddhist Oirats became the major enemies of the Muslim Turks who called them *Kalmak*. But the meaning of *Kalmak* is broader in the epic tradition of these Turkic peoples: it can mean Non-Muslim or enemy of all kind. The present article analyses the historical and cultural background of the word *Kalmak* in written and oral sources.

Key words: Oirat, Kalmak, Kipchak, Kirghiz, epic tradition, conversion to Islam, Turco-Mongol relations, Chagatay Ulus, Jochi Ulus, Jungaria.

Historical Background

The western conquest of the Mongols played an important role in the history of the Muslim peoples in Inner and Central Asia. The invasion of Chinggis khan's Mongols triggered great migrations at the beginning of the 13th century, especially among the Turkic-speaking nomadic peoples. Mostly Kipchak tribes inhabited the endless steppes between the Altay and the Carpathians (Golden 1992, pp. 277–278). The Kirghiz, who lived east of the Altay and by the upper reaches of the Yenisei/Ulug Kem (Golden 1992, p. 404) had also submitted to the Mongols.[1]

[1] For the peaceful subjugation of the people of the forest (Mongol *hoi-yin irgen*) in 1207, see Ligeti (1971, pp. 204–205).

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After the formation of the Jochi Ulus (Golden Horde) and the Chagatay Ulus, two strong nomadic states ruled most of the Turkic peoples of Inner and Central Asia. Batu khan's raid to the West in 1236 completely destroyed the Kipchak tribal union and the western groups of the Cumans fled to Hungary in 1239.

Some Kirghiz[2] clans also started to migrate, gradually moving southward from the Altay to their present-day homeland where they were ruled by the Chagatay. Their new homeland was called the Tengir-Taw.[3] Muslim sources mention this territory as Moghulistan. In this territory they had close relations with the sedentary population, mostly descendents of Karluk Turks and Iranian-speaking peoples (Soghd, Saka, etc.) and they also mixed with the Kipchaks. This process led to the formation of the modern Kirghiz people, who have a Siberian-Turkic origin, but nowadays their language is closer to Kazak, the most widely spoken of the Kipchak languages (Vinogradov 1966, p. 11).

The Mongols were in the minority compared with the Kipchak and Kirghiz in the aforementioned *ulus*es from the very beginning, so linguistically they were assimilated to them quickly. The acceptance of Islam also accelerated this process. Özbek khan was the first real Muslim ruler in the Golden Horde in the 14th century. In Transoxania the Turkic nobility seized power and later were led by Temür beg of the Barlas, or Timur Lang 'the lame Timur' as he was called in Persian. He was a ruthless emperor, who would destroy the Golden Horde eventually (1395).

Even though the Mongols were assimilated by the Kipchaks and other Turks, their influence was substantial, not only historically but culturally and linguistically. The clan systems of the Kazak and Kirghiz are a good proof of this as it contains quite a few Mongolic clan names (e.g. Naiman, Kerei, Jalair, Kongghirat, etc.). Their languages also have a lot of Mongolic elements, which were borrowed during the period of Mongolian rule. The direction of loan contacts between the two language groups (namely Turkic and Mongol) took a turn after the 13th century (Poppe 1973, p. 44), and it was mostly the Turkic languages that incorporated Mongolic elements during the Mongol Period.

The legitimising force of Chinggis khan and his successors was so strong that only descendents from the Chinggisid clan could claim to become khans even after the assimilation of the Mongols. Kipchak peoples called these Chinggisid nobles *töre*,[4] who were outside the clan system of the people.

When the Golden Horde fell apart, new nomadic tribal unions appeared in the steppe: the Nogay Horde by the Edil (Volga) River and the Özbek Horde in the central part of the Dasht-i-Kipchak. Later some Kazaks broke away from Abu-l-Khair, the Özbek khan in the second half of the 15th century. The Kazaks moved to the Yeti-Su (Russian *Semirechie* 'Seven Rivers') region of Moghulistan, where they made contact with the Kirghiz. The Özbeks under Mohamed Shibani started to

[2] The closest relatives of the Kirghiz are the Altay kizhi and Telengit of the Altay, but one can find Kirghiz among the Tuva and Khakas (Abakan Tatar) peoples as well.

[3] *Tengir-taw* means 'Celestial Mountains', *Tianshan* in Chinese.

[4] Kazak *töre*, Kirghiz *törö*, Mongolic *törö*, which comes from Old Turkic *törü* 'law'. In Kazak there is another term for them: *ak-süyek* 'white bones'.

conquer the dominions of Temür's descendents. Later the whole Turkic population of Transoxania was named after their conquerors. The Kazaks became the masters of the steppe, while the Nogays had to face Russian occupation. By the 16th century Turkic-speaking elite ruled Central Asia, while Chinggisid rulers (the *töre*s) only had nominal power.

Later, when the Oirat invasion began in the region, the migration of the nomadic peoples was completed. The new ethnic composition of Central Asia took shape, and it did not change much until the time of Russian colonisation. In Mongolia proper several small 'khanates' appeared after Chinggisid power declined. Beside the East Mongol Khalkhas and the Southern Mongols (Chakhar, Tümet etc.) the Oirat tribal union of the West became powerful in the 15th century under Togoon and Esen Taishis.[5] The Oirats[6] could not gain control over all territories of Mongolia, so in the 15th century they decided to turn to the West. They made several raids into Kazak and Kirghiz territories. They drove away their livestock and destroyed their nomadic camps. This led to the formation of the Kazak-Kirghiz union against them.

In the 17th century Oirats led by the Choros moved to the Ili Valley where they founded the Zöün-Gar[7] (Jungar) tribal union. Now they became next-door neighbours of the Kazak and Kirghiz. The Russians persuaded some of the Oirats (Torgaut and Dörbet) to move to the Nogay steppe west of the Edil (Volga) River. During their migration around 1630 they raided the Kazaks and then pushed the Nogays out of their territory. Meanwhile, in 1634 Erdeni Baatur Khung-taishi became the ruler of the Zöün-Gar Empire (Atwood 2004, pp. 621–624). Later Oirats also occupied East Türkistan (former Moghulistan), and appointed their own governors (Muslim Khojas) to its main cities, Kashghar and Turfan (Golden 1992, p. 316).

The Kalmaks made treaties with the Russians, who later used the treaties as an excuse for the colonisation of the Kazak steppe. The Kazaks found themselves in a difficult situation. The Kalmaks, their main enemy lived now on both sides, on their western and eastern borders. The Nogays moved to the Crimea Khanate or joined the Kazaks and Bashkurts. Most of the Nogays were assimilated. Nowadays they only preserve they ethnic identity in Daghistan and Circassia.[8]

In the 17th century the Manchu Empire occupied the Southern and Eastern Mongols. The Oirats had to retreat to the Altay region. The Kalmaks then occupied the Yeti-Su (Semirechie) area thus forcing some of the Kazak and Kirghiz to flee. The Kazaks call this attack the 'Great Escape'.[9] Some Kazak clans moved further north, forcing Kirghiz clans even further south. Due to the Kalmak raids Kazaks were

[5] Oirats were not Chinggisid so they used the Mongolian–Chinese title Taishi/Taiji (prince) instead of Khaan.

[6] They call themselves *oirad* with modern pronunciation *öörd*. One of its possible etymology is *oi-arad* forest people (see Banzarov 1891, p. 84).

[7] The Mongolic name means 'the Left Wing'. It is pronounced Dzüün-gar in Khalkha, Jonggar in Kazak and Junggar in Kyrgyz.

[8] According to the data of the Russian census in 2002, about 80,000 Nogays lived in those regions. See also Vinogradov (1966, p. 256).

[9] In Kazak *ak taban šubïrïndï*. This phrase literary means 'white soles of the feet were following each other' (Nüsipbekov 1983, p. 123; see also Golden 1992, p. 342).

united under three Hordes,[10] but soon the Kishi Jüz (Younger Horde) accepted Russian protectorate in the 18th century.

Later the Russians made a treaty with the Manchus against the Oirats, and under Ablay (Adu-l-Khair) khan the united Kazak forcers also defeated them. Soon the Manchus destroyed the Oirat forces and occupied Jungaria (1757). Some Oirats by the Edil River (Mongolic *Ijil*), assuming their former pastures would be left vacant, decided to move back to their homeland in 1770s, but they suffered great losses from the Kazaks during their trip back to Jungaria (Bor-Tala).

Nowadays Oirat groups live in the Altay region (Khowd, Uws, Bayan-Ölgii) of Mongolia (Öölöt, Torgaut, Jakhachin, Minggat, Dörböt, Bayat and the Khoton of Turkic origin), in Xinjiang (Boro-Tala, Altay/Khowog-Sair and Bayan-Gol prefectures: Torgaut, Öölöt, Khoshiut), in Qinghai (Köke-Naur or North Tibet: Khoshiud) and Inner Mongolia (Alasha, Erjine) of China. There are the Kalmaks (Dörböt, Torgaut) of the Edil (Volga) River in Kalmykia. A small Muslim (Sart-Kalmak) group also lives in the Ïsïk-Köl region of Kirghizstan (Kara-Kol).

The impact of the Oirats on the history of Inner Asia was not as great as that of Chinggis khan's Mongols, but they played an important role in the formation of the region's ethnic picture. The Kazak and Kirghiz have bitter memories about them. Some of the Kazak clans (Naiman, Kerei and Uwak clans of the Orta Jüz) moved to Jungaria and the Altay region in the 18th and 19th centuries to avoid Russian rule. They became neighbours with the Oirats and they have been living peacefully with their former enemies whom they still call Kalmaks.[11]

Kalmaks and Oirats

The ethnonym Oirat is totally unknown among the Muslim Turkic peoples, instead, they generally use *Kalmak* to designate the Western Mongols. This word probably derives from the Turkic stem *kal-* 'to stay, remain'. It means something like 'a person who remained infidel' or 'he who did not accept Islam' and it often replaces the Arabic term *kāfir* (Kazak *käpir*, Kirghiz *kapïr*) 'Non-Muslim'.

The rulers of the Golden Horde accepted Islam during the 14th century, but we do not know to what extant the nomad population was Islamised. The raids of the Kalmaks definitely helped the process of Islamisation. Pre-Islamic beliefs of the Kazaks and Kirghiz were also Islamised. Muslim Turks started to separate themselves from the Non-Muslim (Tibetan Buddhist) Kalmaks. Muslim Kazak and Kirghiz stopped mixing with the Kalmaks the way the Kipchaks did with the Mongols in the Chinggisid Era.

The Mongolic form of the words is *qalimaγ*. In my opinion, the palatalisation of the consonant *l* by the vowel *i* is not irregular. For example the Mongolic form of

[10] The *Jüz* (Horde) system is *Ulï Jüz*, *Orta Jüz*, *Kishi Jüz* that mean 'Older, Middle and Younger Hordes'.

[11] Data collected by the author in 1993, Ile, Xinjiang, China.

the Turkic word *alma* 'apple' is *alima*. The Kalmak (Oirat) form is *xal'mg*, where the reduced second *ă* is not indicated in writing. The Russian word *калмык* comes from that form, and the reduced Mongolian *ă* was replaced by the Russian *ы*. The Germans transliterated it into '*ü*', but it has an *a* sound in both the Mongolic and Turkic languages. I suggest that the proper form of their name should be *Kalmak* instead of *Kalmyk/Kalmück*.[12] It is a Turkic word and the Oirats did not use it to designate themselves that way until the 20th century. The term 'Kalmak' sometimes has a pejorative meaning in Inner Asia. The Oirats of Jungaria even today do not like to be called 'Kalmak'.[13]

But the term Kalmak does not necessarily mean Mongol-speaking people. The Kazaks call the Non-Muslim Turkic-speaking Altay-kizhi and Telengit also Kalmaks. There is only one Oirat group in Kirghizstan on the Eastern side of the İsïk-Köl which uses the ethnonym Kalmak. The older generation still speaks an Oirat dialect mixed with Kirghiz. Their origin is obscure, but some scholars believe that they come from the Öölöt tribe of Bayan-Gol that became Muslim in the 19th century. They themselves believe that they belonged to the Kirghiz clans, which became Mongolic speaking under the Junggar rule of East Turkistan. The Kirghiz sometimes call them Sart-Kalmak, where the word *sart* means that they are mostly sedentary people (Burdukov 1935, pp. 47–50).

Kalmaks – The Enemy

Enemies of the Turks of Central Asia are usually described as the Kalmaks in their epic songs.[14] These epic songs played an important role in the life of nomad society. They established ethnic identity and substituted the literacy of sedentary cultures. The members of the nomad society learned about their history, traditions and myths from these epics instead of going to school or reading books. Almost every clan had its particular epic tale, which was passed on from generation to generation. The epic storytellers (Kazak *jïršï*, Kirghiz *jomokču*) were mostly illiterate people, but they were able to memorise thousands of lines from the epic tales. The old and young generations of the nomad camp gathered sometimes on special occasions, and they listened to the epic storytellers with great pleasure. The storytellers performed the epic stories in a sort of trance and chanted them for many days sometimes. The legendary 'great generation' of storytellers (*jïraw* in Kazak), who created the epic stories, mostly lived in those times when the Kazak and Kirghiz fought against the Oirats (Kalmaks). The word 'Kalmak' was used to express the connotation 'enemy' immediately among the listeners. Sometimes other enemies, originally not Oirats, were described as Kalmaks too.

[12] The Oirats of the Edil (Volga) River are called *Kalmyk* after the Russian form (German *Kalmück*).

[13] Data collected by the author in 1993, in Bor-Tala, Xinjiang (China).

[14] In Kazak *batïrlïk jïr*, in Kirghiz *baatïrdïk jomok*, in Özbek *qahramonlik doston*.

Let us see the epic story of Edige first, which is part of the so-called 'Forty heroes of the Crimea' (Kazak *Kïrïmnïng kïrïk batïrï*) epic cycle and most likely of Nogay origin. These epics were probably brought to Central Asia and to the Kazak Steppe when the Nogays had to flee from their homeland and some groups joined the Kazaks and the Özbeks (Karakalpaks). The Nogays of the Caucasus also preserved this epic but in a reduced form (Sikaliev 1991).

Edige of the Mangghit tribe was a well-known historic figure being the leader of the Golden Horde at the beginning of the 15th century. He was the Emir of the so-called Nogay Horde, namely the Kipchak-Turkic clans under his rule began to call themselves Nogays. He was not Chinggisid, so he could not become a khan, but he himself elected the khans of the Jochi Ulus. After the devastating raids of Temür beg in 1395 Toktamïsh, the khan of the Ak Orda lost his power, while Edige controlled the khans of the Kök Orda. He and his Nogays were basically independent from the Golden Horde (Golden 1992, p. 301). Toktamïsh despite his defeat kept on fighting for power until his death.

Edige later became an epic hero for the Nogays. In the Edige epic his father Kuttï-Kïya is a falconer in the service of Toktamïsh. He steals one of the eggs of the magic falcon Kuw-kanat and sends it to Temür beg. When Toktamïsh finds out the treachery he kills Kuttï-Kïya. He tries to kill his son too, but the young Edige is rescued. When he grows up, he takes revenge for his father and becomes the khan himself:

Sonda Sä Temir degen bir kalmak bar edi,
Ol Kuttï-Kïyanïng äkesi Par-Parïya men dos edi.
Kuttï-Kïya Kuw-kanattïng kasïna kelip otïrgasïn,
Sä Temir onï estip Kuttï-kïyaga bir kempir jiberdi,
Bir balapanïn magan jibersin dep.

There was a Kalmak whose name was Shah Temir,
He was Par-Parïya's friend who was Kuttï-Kïya's father.
Kuttï-Kïya was looking after a hunting falcon whose name was Kuw-Kanat,
When Shah Temir heard about this he sent an old lady to Kuttï-Kïya,
He was asking for one of its nestlings.

Shah Temir is actually Temür beg of the Barlas clan, the great conqueror of Central Asia. But in the epic he is the head of the Kalmaks, even though he was a Muslim Turk. In that case the word *Kalmak* just means 'enemy' regardless of the their faith.

Kongrat is a Mongolic tribal name that can be found among the Özbeks and Kazaks. They lived around the Aral Lake and were the rulers of the Khiva Khanate from the 18th century onward. Their most popular epic tale was the Alpamïsh, who was a legendary hero. This name can be found even among the Altay-kizhi of South Siberia in the form of Alïp-Manash (Ulagašev 1985, pp. 7–52), which suggests a very ancient relation.

Bay-Böri (Lord Wolf), the legendary head of the clan had no children and as he was growing old he decided to go on a pilgrimage to the tombs of the sacred fore-

fathers to ask for children. His wish was granted, and his wife gave birth to a boy and a girl. He named his son Alpamïsh and his daughter Karlïgach. When Alpamïsh was ten years old he became very strong and accidentally killed a boy while they were playing a game. The boy's old mother while mourning her son told Alpamïsh about his wife-to-be (Kazak *kalïngdïk*):

Sen baska elding balasïn kïra bergenše,
Mïktï bolsang, Kïtayga kašïp ketken kayïn-atang,
Bay-Sarïnïng kïzï, Gülbaršïn suluw degen sening jarïng edi,
Sonï barïp alsangšï!

Why are you killing the sons of our people?
Your father-in-law, who fled to China (here meaning Jungaria),
Bay-Sarï had a beautiful daughter, Gülbarshïn
Go and take her back, she is supposed to be your future wife.
(Akhmetov 1986, p. 25)

Bay-Sarï's daughter was betrothed to Alpamïsh when they were very young. Thus their fathers became *kuda*, which means they were related by the marriage of their children. But during a *kök-bar* or *kök-börï*[15] game the two *kuda* leaders offended each other.

Bay-Böri bayga kïzïmdï bermeymin,
Bul jalganšï düniyede
Bay-Börining jüzin körmeymin. – dep
Altï ayšïlïk, kïrïk künšïlïk jolga,
Tayša kalmak xanïnïng eline,
Toksan narga jük artïp köšti.

I am not going to give my daughter to Bay-Börü,
I do not want to see his face again in my life – he said.
And he moved to the land of Taisha khan
with his caravan carried by ninety camels,
That trip took six months and forty days.
(Akhmetov 1986, p. 9)

Taisha is most likely the equivalent of the Mongol title *taiji/taisi*. The Jungaria where the Kalmaks lived was considered the land of the Chinese (*Kïtay* in Kazak). This story illustrates that formerly it was possible that Kipchaks mixed with Mongols. Sometimes they moved to each others' territories avoiding interior conflicts. After Islam had become widespread among the Kipchaks this practice ceased to exist. Since then non-Muslim Mongolic or Turkic tribes were called simply Kalmaks, Alpamïs goes to Kalmaks to get back his kidnapped fiancée (Kazak *kalïngdïk*). There he becomes good friends with the Kalmak Kara-Jan. During a feast (Kazak *toy*) he wins a race with his horse Bay-Shubar and triumphs in wrestling too. In return he receives

[15] A sort of horse polo in Central Asia played with a stuffed kid, in Persian *buz-kašī*.

his fiancée back. When he gets home, he learns that another Kalmak khan, Tayshïk drove away all the horses of his clan, so he returns to the enemy to take revenge on the Kalmaks and recover the horses (Akhmetov 1985, p. 41).

The third Kazak epic is about Koblandï batïr from the Kara-Kipchak tribe, who according to legends was a contemporary of the famous Abu-l-Khair khan of the Özbek Horde (Golden 1992, p. 339). This story is quite similar to the Alpamïs legend. The old Toktarbay becomes father with the help of the ancestors' spirits (Kazak *arwak*). Then his son Koblandï turns out to be an excellent warrior from a very young age. He and his tutor Estemi have to take care of the horses together. Once they saw smoke in the sky. The people of the Kïzïl-bash (redheaded) were holding an archery competition (*tengge atïw* or 'golden coin shooting') there. Whoever hits the golden coin hanging on a pole, will receive the khan's daughter. Koblandï wins the shooting contest and marries the khan's daughter, Kurtka.

Argï astïnda bul tawdïng,
Kïzïl-bastïng eli bar,
Köktim-Aymak xanï bar,
Neše mïng san janï bar,
Kurtka degen kïzï bar,
Jurtka jaygan säni bar.
Ay astïna aspanga,
Kurdï bakan kaktïrïp,
Altïn tengge attïrïp,
Tenggeni atïp tüsirgen,
Kurtka sulïwdï sol alar.

On the other side of this mountain
Live the Kalmak people.
Köktim-Aimak is their khan
He has thousands of subjects
His daughter's name is Kurtka
All the people admire her beauty.
(The khan) put up a column
That reaches the sky.
He hung up a golden coin and opened a competition.
He who shoots the coin with an arrow,
Will marry the beautiful Kurtka.
(Nurmagambetova – Kidaish-Pokrovskaia 1975, p. 67)

The *kïzïl-bash* also refers to the Kalmaks in this story. It may refer to the red headwear of the Edil (Volga) Kalmaks. Koblandï finally marries a girl from the Kalmaks, which illustrates that Kipchaks and Mongols could be kinsmen through marriage. The Kazak word *kuda* itself is of Mongolian origin.[16]

[16] Mongolic *quda* means 'people related through the marriage of their clan members', see Poppe (1973, p. 44).

Finally, I would like to mention three extracts from the Manas, the great Kirghiz epic, which is the largest (500,000 lines) epic of Central Asia. The epic recounts the Kirghiz conquest of the Tengir-Taw/Ala-Taw (Tianshan) from their enemy, Alawke khan of the Kalmaks. Jakïp, the head of the Kirghiz lived in the Altay with his people. He did not have a son for a long time, but one day he and his wives had wonderful dreams. In their dreams a magic falcon appeared that predicted the birth of a new conqueror. His future son Manas is destined to take back his people to the Ala-Taw.[17] Jakïp reveals his dream at an assembly, then the wise old Bay-Jigit deciphers its meaning.

Bay Jakïp tüšü tüš eken,
Bul ongunan kelgen iš eken,
Ušu tüšü čïn bolso,
Oyrottu baskan kiši eken.
Kuš bolgondo bala-dïr,
Azïr bala jogunan,
Bay Jakïp köönü ala-dïr.
Ay tiygen jerding baarïsïn,
Alat eken balangïz,
Andan tïnsïn sanaangïz!

Bay-Jakïp had a wonderful dream
This means something good,
If his dream is true,
He will defeat the Oirats.
The falcon means a son,
He does not have a son,
That is why he is in grief.
Your son will conquer
Every land beneath the Moon,
Do not even worry about it!
(Iunusaliev et al. 1984, p. 37, lines 1169–1181)

Interestingly, the common word Kalmak is replaced by the word Oirot. In another place we find *urugu tïrgoot kalmagï* meaning 'Torgaud tribe of the Kalmaks'. In the next extract Manas is forced to work as a shepherd by his father's sheep. During that time he kills a lamb. He wants to cook it so he asks for fire from an old Kalmak passing by. The old man refuses to give fire to him, so Manas drags him off the saddle and takes his firestone away. Later this causes conflict between the Kirghiz and Kalmaks.

[17] Probably the Kirghiz moved to Moghulistan through the Altay from the Yenisei forced by the Mongols. Few Kirghiz-Kipchak tribes remained in the Altay and formed the people of the South Altay (Altay-kizhi, Telengit).

Abïška jayïn surasang,
Altay tïrgoot kalmagï.
– Ütügüngö šooday! – dep,
Ot berbegen balaga,
Toguz jašar balanïng
Toluk ačuu kelgeni,
Kurdan karmap alganï,
Oodara tartïp atïnan,
Čaldï jerge salganï.

If you ask who was that Kalmak,
He was from the Torgaut tribe of the Altay Kalmaks,
– *Shoodai* into your *ütük*[18] – he said,
And he did not give him fire.
The nine-year-old boy
Became very angry.
Grabbed him by his belt,
He pulled him down from his horse,
And he knocked him to the ground.
(Iunusaliev et al. 1984, p. 77, lines 3020–3030)

After this incident the Kalmaks decide to take revenge on the Kirghiz. While Jakïp is taking his son back home from the sheep they see a big dust rising near the horses. It turns out that the Kalmaks have driven their horses away. Manas attacks the Kalmaks with a lasso attached to a stick (Kirghiz *ukuruk*) in the extract of the epic it reads:

Bul emine tozong dep,
Ayran bolup turganï,
Angdap tursa artïnan,
Jïlkïčïsïn tokmoktop,
Altï zubun kalmagï.
On čaktïsï čogulup.
Ortogo alïp kuuganï.

What kind of dust is that?
They were amazed
When they had a closer look, they saw that
Their horsemen were attacked and clubbed
By the Kalmaks from the six tribes,
Ten of them gathered here,

[18] This is an obscene expression, since Kalmak *ütkĕn* means ‘vagina’ while Mongolic *šuudai* means ‘bag’, but also means the ‘scrotum or penis’. Kirghiz do not understand these words preserved only in the epic.

They surrounded the horses and drove them away.
(Iunusaliev et al. 1984, p. 86, lines 3453–3459)

Stealing livestock by the Kalmaks caused most of the nomads' misery. Real battles were rare between them, but the Kalmaks regularly plundered and drove away the horses and sheep of the Kazak and Kirghiz nomad camps, which caused famine sometimes.

Conclusion

As was seen in the extracts from the Turkic epic poems, Kalmaks are mentioned in all of them as enemies. But the relationship between the Muslims and the Kalmaks is more complicated than that. In one of the extracts a Kazak clan joins the Kalmaks; in another the Hero's father is the friend of the Kalmak khan. Koblandï batïr marries two Kalmak girls, and Manas and his Kirghiz people live together with the Kalmaks.

In my opinion, the ethnonym *Kalmak* is of Turkic origin and has a wider meaning than simply the Oirats of the Edil (Volga) River who are considered Kalmyks nowadays. Hostility to the Kalmaks also played an important role in the identity of the Kazak and Kirghiz (Muslim) nomads. It illustrates well the interethnic relations between the Turkic and Mongolic speaking nomadic tribes of the area too. On the other hand, Oirat epic tales do not mention their fight with the Muslims or the Kipchak Turks. This difference can be explained by the completely different structure and motifs of their epics which are more similar to the South Siberian epic type. Furthermore, since the Kalmaks were the invaders of the Kipchak Steppe, they did not suffer that much in these conflicts (Bitkeev–Ovalov 1990, p. 410).

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