

# “THE TRUE NATURE OF THE AOIDOS”: THE KIRGHIZ SINGER OF TALES AND THE EPIC OF MANAS

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IN 1885, THE fifth part of Wilhelm Radloff's *Proben der Volkslitteratur der nördlichen türkischen Stämme* (*Samples of the Folk Literature of the Northern Turkic Tribes*) was published in St Petersburg. The fifth part, like the preceding parts, was published in two volumes: a volume of texts in the original language and a volume of translations into German. German was Radloff's mother-tongue—he was born in Berlin in 1837 and studied at the universities of Berlin and Jena—but German was also a widely used language of scholarship in Imperial Russia. The fifth part is devoted to the oral poetry of the Kirghiz, who at that time were called Kara-Kirghiz (or Qara-Qirghiz [Black Kirghiz]), to distinguish them from the Kazakhs, who were erroneously named Kirghiz by the Russians.<sup>1</sup> Radloff came to St Petersburg in 1858 and spent the rest of his life in Russia, where he was known as Vasily Vasilyevich Radlov and where he died in 1918.<sup>2</sup> Both the text volume and the translation volume of his fifth part have a preface; the two prefaces, in Russian (text volume) and in German (translation volume), are identical in content.

Radloff's preface poses a number of fundamental questions about the creation, transmission, and performance of oral epic poetry, and Radloff explicitly links the observations he had made among the Kirghiz with the Homeric Question. He boldly states:

I believe that the controversy about the “Homeric Question” has led to unsolvable opposing positions mainly because none of the parties has understood, and indeed was able to understand, the true nature of the *aidos*. The *aidos* as the songs of Homer describe him is completely identical to the singer of the Kirghiz songs.<sup>3</sup>

Radloff pleads for comparative epic studies, directing his remarks especially to Homerists. A few years earlier, the literary historian Aleksander Nikolaevich Veselovskiy

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1 After the collapse of the Soviet Union, it has become customary to replace “Kirghiz” by “Kyrgyz” in English, in (partial) accordance to native pronunciation. I have retained the more familiar “Kirghiz,” but write “Kyrgyzstan” for the post-Soviet republic. My transcription/transliteration of Kirghiz follows in the main Turkological conventions. The spellings [ö] and [ü] represent vowel sounds similar to the sounds denoted by [ö] and [ü] in German or [eu] and [u] in French; [a], [e], [i], [o], [u] are pronounced as in Italian; [i] represents an unrounded [i] (as in Russian [ы]); [q] symbolizes a velar [k], [g] a velar fricative (resembling Parisian [r]); [kh] is pronounced like [ch] in German *ach* or Scottish *loch*; all the other consonants are pronounced as in English ([j], [ch], [z], etc.).

2 For a detailed account (in German) of Radloff's life and works, see Temir, “Leben und Schaffen.”

3 Radloff, *Proben der Volkslitteratur* (translation volume), xx; unless otherwise noted, all translations are mine. For an English translation of Radloff's preface, see Böttcher Sherman and Davis, “Samples of Folk Literature.” Radloff's preface is discussed (and partially translated) in Chadwick and Chadwick, *Growth of Literature*, 178–85.

had criticized Western medievalists and classicists in a similar vein for their neglect of living oral poetry:

When Western scholars who have very little familiarity with living epic poetry discuss problems of the folk poetry of past times, they do this as a matter of course along the lines of purely written textual criticism. This is the flaw of the entire scholarship on the *Nibelungenlied* and partly also of that on the Homeric epics.<sup>4</sup>

Although Radloff's remarks did not remain unheard outside Russia, the material that his translations provided was seriously studied only over half a century later, in the third volume of H. M. and Nora K. Chadwick's *Growth of Literature*.<sup>5</sup> Radloff's theoretical challenge, likening the art of the Kirghiz singer to that of the Greek *aoidos*, was taken up somewhat earlier by Milman Parry. Parry was familiar with Radloff's Kirghiz volume, from which he quotes repeatedly, but turned to the South Slavic epic tradition instead. With Parry's extensive field-work, a new level of comparative epic studies was reached and insights into the making of oral epics were sharpened within the framework of a powerful theoretical model. Parry and his one-time assistant Albert Bates Lord have exerted a major influence on classical and medieval studies. John Miles Foley has written the success story of the theory of oral composition, and he was himself a leading exponent of comparative epic studies and oral theory.<sup>6</sup> It seems fitting to contribute a study of the Kirghiz epic singer's art to a volume dedicated to John Foley's memory since its description by Radloff is often considered an early formulation of the oral theory.

### Some Introductory Remarks about *Manas*

*Manas* is the main oral epic of the Kirghiz, both in the Republic of Kyrgyzstan and in China's Xinjiang region, where about 190,000 Kirghiz live, mostly in the Qizilsu Kirghiz Autonomous Prefecture. The Kirghiz epic singers also perform other epics, which are generically lumped together under the title of "kenje epos" (little epic). One of these "little epics," *Er Töshtük*, has in one version ca. 12,000 lines, making it about the length of the *Odyssey*.<sup>7</sup> The "big epic" *Manas* is actually a cycle of epics, of which only the first part is devoted to the main hero, *Manas*. In its "canonical" form, the cycle consists of three parts: *Manas*, *Semetey* (*Manas's* son), and *Seytek* (*Manas's* grandson). The cycle as performed by Jüsüp Mamay, a singer from Xinjiang (1918–2014), comprises eight parts that treat *Manas* and seven generations of heroes descending from him. As can

<sup>4</sup> Text from Veselovsky's lectures on the history of the epic at the University of St Petersburg in 1881; Veselovsky, *Istoricheskaya poetika*, 622.

<sup>5</sup> See above, n. 3; N. Chadwick's discussion of Turkic oral poetry in *Oral Epics of Central Asia*, was re-edited with a supplementary chapter by Victor Zhirmunsky.

<sup>6</sup> Foley's *Theory of Oral Composition* is still unsurpassed. There is, however, no need to list Foley's seminal works in this volume; I would like to draw attention only to Foley's fairly recent survey of oral theory and its importance for medieval studies, "Oral Theory and Medieval Literature," which he wrote together with Peter Ramey.

<sup>7</sup> This is the singer Sayaqbay Qaralaev's version; it is translated (together with the version published by Radloff) in Boratav, *Aventures merveilleuses*.

be inferred from the fact that a "little epic" is anything but little as far as its length is concerned, *Manas* must be a voluminous epic poem. Sayaqbay Qaralaev's (1894–1971) version of the cycle extends to almost half a million verse-lines; Saghimbay Orozbaqov's (1867–1930) *Manas*—only the first part of the cycle was written down—comprises over 180,000 lines; Jüsüp Mamay's eight-generation cycle is about 220,000 lines in length. The earliest text from the *Manas* cycle, "The Funeral Feast for Kökötöy Khan," was put down in writing by Choqan Valikhanov, a Kazakh traveller and scholar, in 1856. This epic (of ca. 3,200 lines) describes the feast that Boqmorun, the son of Manas's old companion Kökötöy, held in memory of his dead father.<sup>8</sup> Radloff printed seven episodes from the cycle, of which five come from *Manas* and two from *Semetej*. These epics (comprising a total of 12,454 lines) have been extensively discussed by Arthur Hatto and re-edited by him with an English translation.<sup>9</sup> In addition, Radloff published and translated an epic on Joloy, one of Manas's enemies, the "little epic" of *Er Töshtük*, comprising 2,146 lines, and four short songs.

Given the truly epic length of the *Manas* cycle, there is no way to adequately summarize the contents of its constituent epics here. I will, therefore, only give the sketchiest of outlines, confining my remarks to *Manas* proper, the first part of the cycle. All the versions that have been written down share a number of similarities and are recognizably versions of the same epic. Nevertheless, even a superficial survey of their contents reveals marked differences. The epic begins with the motif of a childless couple who as a rule are given a child in old age through divine intervention. Manas is the son of old Jaqip, generally called "khan," and his wife Chiyirdi. He grows up to become a formidable hero. Main episodes in the hero's life are fights against various enemies, typically from the camps of the Kalmucks and the "Qitay" (Chinese); his election as khan; the bridal quest for Qanikey, the mother of his son Semetej; his friendship and companionship with Almambet, a Kalmuck who converted to Islam; the funeral feast for Kökötöy, where Manas plays a major role in the funeral games; the fight against internal enemies (in particular Közqaman and his sons); and the "chong qazat" (Great Campaign), the military expedition to "Beijing," which, despite the Kirghiz victory, leads to Manas's death.<sup>10</sup>

The "Great Campaign" is directed against Qongurbay and has as its destination "Beijing." It should be pointed out that Beijing is usually called "Beejin" or "Beyjin" in the epic and that it is historically unlikely that Peking (Beijing) is meant. It is conceived as the capital of the enemies of the Kirghiz, whom scholars have attempted to localize historically, both in place and in time. Most support the opinion that by Beijing the town

**8** Edited and translated in Hatto, *Memorial Feast for Kökötöy-Khan*.

**9** Hatto, *Manas of Wilhelm Radloff*; for Hatto's discussion of these episodes, see "Birth of Manas"; Hatto, "Kukotay and Bok Murun"; Hatto, "Almambet, Er Kökçö and Ak-Erkeç"; Hatto, "Köz-Kaman"; and Hatto, "Marriage, Death, and Return to Life of Manas."

**10** For a summary analysis (in Russian) of the versions of the great singers Saghimbay Orozbaqov and Sayaqbay Qaralaev, see Mirbadaleva and others, *Manas*, 1:444–67; other Kirghiz versions are summarized on pp. 467–89. The second volume of a new history of Kirghiz literature provides a survey of the epic cycle and the epic singers (in Kirghiz); see Akmatatiev and others, *Qirghiz*. On the names "Chinese" and "Beijing," see below.

Bey-tin is to be understood, a locality that was later known under the name Beshbaliq (ca. 120 km east of Urumqi in Xinjiang). It was the ancient capital of the Uighurs and was conquered by the Kirghiz in the ninth century.

There is a similar discrepancy between the meaning of the ethnonym “Chinese” today and as it is to be understood historically in the epic. The term *Qıtay* (*Kitay*) in Kirghiz (and other Turkic languages, as well as in Russian) designates the Chinese. This word goes back to the ethnonym *Qara Khitay*, a people of Mongolian origin, who in the twelfth century dominated Central Asia from the Amu-Darya (Oxus) to the Altay, with their capital Balasaghun in the Chu valley in present-day Kyrgyzstan. In 907, their predecessors, known as *Kitan*, had conquered Mongolia and parts of northern China and founded the Liao Dynasty. The *Qara Khitays’* rule ended with Genghis Khan’s conquests in the early thirteenth century. In the *Manas* epic, the *Qıtay* are historically the *Qara Khitay* rather than the Chinese.

The Kalmucks are a clearer case. They are called *Qalmaq* in Kirghiz and denote a Mongolian people, belonging to the Western Mongols or *Oirat* (*Oyrot*). The Kalmucks began to invade the area of the Kirghiz and Kazakhs in Central Asia at the end of the sixteenth century, which led to much bloodshed through the seventeenth and eighteenth centuries.<sup>11</sup> The discussion about the localization in space and time of Beijing (Beejing) in the “Great Campaign” is closely connected to the question of the epic’s age and development. In 1995, the young Republic of Kyrgyzstan celebrated “Manas 1000,” the thousandth birthday of their major epic *Manas*. This would link the core events of the epic to the tenth century. In the ninth and tenth centuries, the Kirghiz, who had their centre of power on the upper course of the Yenisei, built up what V. Barthold has called the “*Kirgizskoe velikoderzhavie*” (Kirghiz empire), stretching westward into Central Asia and southward into the Tarim basin.<sup>12</sup> After their victory over the Uighurs in 840, the Kirghiz were a major political force in that area. Their power was broken by Genghis Khan at the beginning of the thirteenth century.

While it is possible to speculate about a historical nucleus of the epic in the tenth or even the ninth century, the name of the main hero cannot be identified in historical sources, nor can any early epic texts be found. The latter is understandable in view of the oral composition and transmission of Kirghiz epic poetry, which was first written down only in the nineteenth century. There is, however, one piece of earlier textual evidence. A historiographical work, written in Persian by an unknown author with the title *Majmu’ at-tawarix* (*The Collection of Histories*), which dates to the end of the fifteenth or beginning of the sixteenth century, devotes much space to *Manas*, his clan, companions, and enemies, and quotes six lines from the epic in Persian translation.<sup>13</sup> Clearly, the epic tradition goes back for at least five hundred years, but might indeed be older.

11 The historical background to the epic is discussed (in Russian) in Zhirmunsky, “Vvedenie v izuchenie èposa ‘Manas,’” 68–92; Moldobaev, *Manas*, 43–87; and Kydyrbaeva, *Manas*. On the *Kara Khitay*, see Spuler, “Geschichte Mittelasiens,” 188–95; and Bregel, *Historical Atlas of Central Asia*, 30.

12 Bartol’d, *Kirgizy*, 17–26. On the complicated early history of the Kirghiz, see also Golden, *Introduction to the History of the Turkic Peoples*, 176–83.

13 See Tagidzhanov, “*Sobranie istoriy*,” 22.

## The Metre of *Manas*

Ever since Parry defined the formula as "a group of words which is regularly employed under the same metrical conditions to express a given essential idea,"<sup>14</sup> it has been accepted as a basic tenet of oral studies that metre and formula are closely connected. This implies that any discussion of the formulaic nature of *Manas* has to take the metre of Kirghiz oral epic poetry into account.

Kirghiz metre is syllabic, that is, the poetic line is defined by the number of syllables. The epic metre is a verse-line of seven or eight syllables. There is a caesura generally after the fourth syllable, sometimes also after the fifth or the third syllable. In Kirghiz epic poetry, lines are linked by verse-initial alliteration and rhyme. Neither alliteration nor rhyme is regularly employed, nor do they have to occur simultaneously. Some passages have the same line-initial sound for up to a dozen lines, while alliteration might be virtually absent in other passages.

Rhyme in Kirghiz is somewhat more complicated. In metrical theory, a distinction is made between rhyme and assonance. If two lines are to rhyme, their last stressed vowel plus the following consonants and unstressed vowels (if there are any) must be identical (in sound). In English, the pairs, for instance: *go* : *low*, *ghosts* : *boasts*, *going* : *showing*, *parameter* : *hexameter*, all rhyme. Two lines have the same assonance if their last stressed vowel is identical (in sound), even when the following consonants differ. Examples of assonances in English include: *late* : *make*, *cap* : *hat*, *sniper* : *fighter*, *votive* : *notice*. In Kirghiz epic verse, we find both rhyme and assonance, but with a "twist" that is due to the morphological structure of Kirghiz (a structure also characteristic of other Turkic languages). Kirghiz is an agglutinative language, which means that grammatical categories such as tense, mood, person, number, case, possession, and others are encoded as affixes that are suffixed to the nominal or verbal stem.

Due to vowel harmony, suffixes can take on fairly different shapes. Vowel harmony means that the various affixes which are added to a stem will "harmonize" with the stem vowel. As an example, one of the past endings (third-person singular) will serve; it consists of two affixes: *-Vp + tVr* (V stands for a vowel). This ending can take four forms: *-iptir*, *-iptir*, *-uptur*, and *-üptür*. The basic rule of vowel harmony underlying these forms is that a high vowel is followed by a high vowel, a low vowel by a low vowel, and a rounded vowel by a rounded vowel.<sup>15</sup>

Given the agglutinative morphology, the syntactic structure, and the laws of vowel-harmony of the Turkic languages, syntactic parallelism can easily lead to rhyme. Victor Zhirmunsky has argued that rhyme in Turkic oral poetry originated in just this way, as a further development of syntactic parallelism.<sup>16</sup> As will be seen below, strings of rhyming words (mostly complex verbal forms) are an important means of structuring passages in *Manas*.

<sup>14</sup> Parry, *Making of Homeric Verse*, 272; emphasis his.

<sup>15</sup> My discussion here is somewhat simplified; for a linguistic description of the structure of the Turkic languages (including vowel harmony), see Johanson, "Structure of Turkic."

<sup>16</sup> See Zhirmunsky, "Rhythmico-Syntactic Parallelism."

## How formulaic is *Manas*?

Given the length of *Manas*, anybody familiar with oral epic poetry would expect a highly formulaic style. In his discussion of formulas and formulaic style in South Slavic oral epics, Lord has stressed the necessity of a poetic language for enabling the singer to perform fluently and confidently:

The singer's mode of composition is dictated by the demands of performance at high speed, and he depends upon inculcated habit and association of sounds, words, phrases, and lines. He does not shrink from the habitual; nor does he either require the fixed for memorization or seek the unusual for its own sake. His oft-used phrases and lines lose something in sharpness, yet many of them must resound with overtones from the dim past whence they came.<sup>17</sup>

This is also true of the Kirghiz *manaschī*, the singer of *Manas*. When, however, comparing the formulaic style of *Manas* with that of the South Slavic heroic songs, the lack of formulaic density is striking. Formulas do exist, but they are distributed differently. Moreover, the Kirghiz singer has other means of composing in performance, one of the most important being the use of what might be called “rhyme-strings” (see below).

The clear caesura in Kirghiz verse suggests the half-line as the metrical unit of a formula. As will be seen, both half-line and whole-line formulas occur. There are verbatim repetitions, which are often found with fixed epithets, there are repetitions with variations in the inflectional elements (formulas), and there are repetitions with variations in individual words. Lord and others speak of “formulaic systems” when the varying words belong to the same word-class and are semantically related (synonyms or words of the same lexical field). My aim here is not to go into a theoretical discussion of the formula in Kirghiz epic, but rather to give some idea of formulaic diction by presenting examples from my corpus. These examples will, hopefully, clarify the concept of the formula in the case of Kirghiz.<sup>18</sup>

My examples come from three major versions of *Manas* (the first part of the cycle), those of Saghimbay, Sayaqbay, and Mamay. I am using the four-volume edition of Saghimbay's version, comprising ca. 51,000 lines;<sup>19</sup> the complete edition of Sayaqbay's version, comprising ca. 74,500 lines; and the 1995 revised edition of Mamay's version, comprising ca. 54,500 lines.<sup>20</sup>

<sup>17</sup> Lord, *Singer of Tales*, 65.

<sup>18</sup> For an in-depth study of “traditional phraseology” in the *Odyssey*, *Beowulf*, and South-Slavic return songs, see Foley, *Traditional Oral Epic*, 121–239.

<sup>19</sup> This edition, Musaev, Abdylbaev, and others, *Manas*, is available in digital form from the Kirghiz website, [www.bizdin.kg](http://www.bizdin.kg), accessed July 8, 2016. This edition is not complete; a complete print edition, Musaev, Akmataliev, and others, *Manas*, comprising ca. 180,000 lines, is now available.

<sup>20</sup> Both Sayaqbay's version and Jüsüp Mamay's version are available digitally from [www.bizdin.kg](http://www.bizdin.kg). For the published versions, see Zhaynakova and Akmataliev, *Manas* (Sayaqbay), and Sidiq and others, *Manas* (Mamay). Of my translation of Jüsüp Mamay's version into English (together with the Kirghiz text) two volumes have been published to date (Reichl, *Manas*).

## Epithet formulas

Like the heroes of the Homeric epics and of other heroic poetry, the main protagonist of *Manas* is referred to with a number of adjectival and noun epithets.<sup>21</sup> Some of these, such as "ayköl," are uniquely used for Manas. Literally meaning "moon-lake," "ayköl" is used as a metaphor, evoking the surface of a moonlit lake as an image of generosity, magnanimity, and nobility of heart. Other epithets such as "arstan" (lion) tend to refer predominantly to Manas, but can also be used for other heroes. The word "arstan" occurs 414 times in Mamay's *Manas*. "Arstan" refers to Manas and is coupled with his name in a half-line eighty-nine times; it is coupled with the names of some of his companions fifty-seven times. These 146 half-lines are clearly epithet-formulas, generally comprising the first half-line (see below). As to the other 268 occurrences of "arstan" in Mamay's text, well over 200 refer to Manas. None of these lines are formulaic, with one possible exception, the collocation "qırq arstan" (the forty lions)(Manas's retinue), which occurs seventeen times as the second half-line.

Looking more closely at the eighty-nine cases of the combination of "arstan" with "Manas," we find that in fifty-five cases, the phrase "arstan Manas" occurs as a unit and forms the first half of the line, followed by the caesura and the three or four syllables of the second half-line:

Arstan Manas    x x x (x).

The half-lines completing "arstan Manas" can be variously grouped. No group, however, is of a clearly formulaic nature. By far the most common "filler" of the second half-line is "baatır" (hero) with an inflectional ending (genitive, etc.); this occurs sixteen times:

Arstan Manas    baatır-din (-gha, -dī, etc.)

There is a seventeenth case, where "arstan" is preceded by "jash" (young):

Jash arstan Manas    baatırdin.

The three words "arstan," "Manas," and "baatır" can also be switched. Three times we find:

Arstan baatır    Manas-tin (-qa)

and once:

Baatır Mana    sarstan-din.

When we compare the use of these epithet-formulas with the versions of *Manas* by Saghımbay Ororzbaqov and Sayaqbay Qaralaev, we find that in their texts all occurrences of "arstan Manas" are in the first half-line. In Saghımbay's version there are 131 instances of this collocation, and in Sayaqbay's version seventy-nine. In Saghımbay's text, "arstan Manas" is followed by "baatır" plus an inflectional suffix in sixty-five cases:

Arstan Manasbaatır-din (-i, -dī, etc.)

In other words, half of the lines of Saghımbay's *Manas* with "arstan Manas" are clearly formulaic. In Sayaqbay's text, in contrast, there are only four cases with "baatır" in the

<sup>21</sup> For a study of epithets in Kirghiz epic poetry, see Hatto, "Epithets in Kirghiz Epic Poetry."

second half-line. On the other hand, in seventeen lines “arstan Manas” is followed by “kökjal” plus inflectional suffix:

Arstan Manaskökjal-dī (-im, etc.)

“Kökjal” (blue mane) designates the wolf or, metaphorically, the hero. It is a common epithet of Manas, but is found in combination with “arstan Manas” only in Sayaqbay’s version.

Although the Kirghiz verse is short, whole-line formulas are comparatively rare. For instance, the verb *a(y)qir-* (to shout) in the forms “a(y)qirdī” (shouted), “a(y)qirip” (shouting), “a(y)qirghan” (having shouted), and “a(y)qirat” (shouts) fills the second half-line seven times in Mamay’s text, three times with “arstan Manas” in the first half-line. In Saghimbay’s text we find one other instance of this line, and none in Sayaqbay’s version. Given the length of the texts, one wonders whether these few occurrences of this line can really be classified as formulas. While the collocation “arstan Manas” is formulaic, the verb forms following in the second half-line seem to be dependent on semantics—what is the lion Manas doing?—rather than on formulaic patterning.

## Rhyme-strings

As mentioned above, strings of rhyming words (mostly complex verbal forms) are an important means of structuring passages. In his study of heroic motifs in *Manas*, A. Sykykov (Sidiqov) draws attention to such a string from Saghimbay’s version of the epic.<sup>22</sup> The passage is the following (the rhyming words are italicized):

Zambirek ünü *kürküröp*,  
 Qoqus nayza tiygendin  
 Qoynuna qanī *bürküröp*,  
 Qalqandar sindī *birqirap*,  
 5 Qan tögüldü *shirqirap*.  
 Jebenin oghu *qirqirap*,  
 Miltiqtin oghu *chirqirap*,  
 Jer titirep *künggüröp*,  
 Qulaq tundu *dünggüröp*.<sup>23</sup>

(The voice of the musket was *thundering*,  
 He who was unexpectedly wounded by a spear,  
 His blood was *splashing* from his arm-pit,  
 The shields were splitting and *splintering*,  
 5 The blood was spilt in *rushing* flows.  
 The bows’ arrows were flying and *whizzing*,  
 The guns’ bullets were flying and *buzzing*,  
 The ground was trembling and *groaning*,  
 The ears were deafened by the *booming* noise.)

<sup>22</sup> Sydykov, *Geroicheskie motivy v èpose*, 26–27.

<sup>23</sup> Musaev, Abdyl daev, and others, *Manas*, 2:85–86. In the following SQ stands for Sayaqbay Qaralae, SO for Saghimbay Orozbaqov, and JM for Jüsüp Mamay.

The rhyme-string consists of verbs in a gerundival form (suffix *-p*). Gerunds of this type can be variously translated; for our text, the present participle is a fairly close rendering in English: “The voice of the musket, thundering, [...] the shields were splitting, splintering [...]” With the exception of “*birqirap*,” all the verbs designate sound.<sup>24</sup> They are all characterized by a formans, varying according to vowel harmony (*-ürö-* / *-ira-*), which is preceded by the syllable *-irq-* / *-ürk-* in the first six cases and *-üng* in the last two cases. According to their sound-pattern, these are considered onomatopoeic verbs in Kirghiz.

There are a number of rhyme-strings of this kind in Kirghiz epic poetry (and not only in Kirghiz, but also in other Turkic oral traditions);<sup>25</sup> for reasons of space, however, I will limit my analysis to this string in the three versions of *Manas* considered here. A further limitation concerns the members of this string. I have only followed the combinations of the verb *kürkürö-* (to thunder) with other verbs of similar sound-structure. The net could have been cast wider by following the combinations also of the other verbs in the quotation above, somewhat in the manner of the analysis of compounds in *Beowulf* and other older Germanic poetry.<sup>26</sup> The rhyme-string of the quotation above consists of the following eight verb forms: “*kürküröp*,” “*bürküröp*,” “*birqirap*,” “*shirqirap*,” “*qirqirap*,” “*chirqirap*,” “*künggüröp*,” and “*dünggüröp*.” The verb *kürkürö-* is found in the versions of Saghimbay, Sayaqbay, and Mamay in combinations of two, three, four, five, six, and eight rhyme-words. Saghimbay has thirty-nine, Sayaqbay twenty-eight, and Mamay twenty-one instances of this rhyme-string. All in all, nineteen verb forms occur:

“ <i>kürküröp</i> ” (thundering)	“ <i>dünggür(l)öp</i> ” (booming)	“ <i>irqirap</i> ” (growling)
“ <i>bürküröp</i> ” (splashing)	“ <i>küngküldöp</i> ” (talking through the nose)	“ <i>burqurap</i> ” (crying bitterly)
“ <i>birqirap</i> ” (splintering)	“ <i>düngküldöp</i> ” (droning)	“ <i>churqurap</i> ” (yelling)
“ <i>shirqirap</i> ” (rushing)	“ <i>dürküröp</i> ” (clamouring)	“ <i>qingghirap</i> ” (jingling)
“ <i>qirqirap</i> ” (whizzing)	“ <i>büjüröp</i> ” (romping)	“ <i>shingghira</i> ” (ringing)
“ <i>chirqirap</i> ” (buzzing)	“ <i>zirkirep</i> ” (streaming)	
“ <i>künggür(l)öp</i> ” (groaning)	“ <i>zirqirap</i> ” (speeding along)	

When studying the different realizations of the various possibilities of combining the nineteen verbs of the string, it emerges that the string as such is available to the singers as a pattern to be used, but apart from the “couplet” “*kürküröp*” : “*dürküröp*” is

**24** The verb *birqira-* can also denote sound; in Kirghiz, *birq* is an imitative word: *birq-birq etip* (with a gurgling sound).

**25** See Reichl, “Uzbek Epic Poetry.”

**26** See Brodeur, *Art of Beowulf*, 254–71; see also the discussion of words for treasure in Old English verse in Tyler, *Old English Poetics*.

employed as a flexible structuring device, rather than as a fixed rhyme-string. The singers combine the elements of the rhyme-string differently. Six different combinations of four-element strings, for instance, are found, of which none appear in more than one text. Looking at the eighty-eight passages that provide an instance of this rhyme-string, the general impression is that the majority of the lines are not formulaic. Given the meaning of the verbs, their subjects are, of course, in many cases semantically similar. Verbs expressing sounds like yelling, shouting, and growling are construed with subjects that can emit these sounds; but even here variety is possible. Only occasionally are lines actually repeated (or repeated with only slight variations). I will illustrate this with the “*kürküröp*”-lines. The following groups of related lines can be established:

- 1 A weapon, in particular a gun, is thundering:
  - Töö miltiq ünü kürküröp (SO) (The voice of the big gun [was] thundering)
  - Töö miltiq atıp kürküröp (SO) (Shooting the gun, with thundering)
  - Aqkelte miltiq kürküröp (SO twice) (The gun Aqkelte<sup>27</sup> [was] thundering)
  - Almabash miltiq kürküröp (SO) (The blunderbuss [was] thundering)
  - Sir nayza qoldo kürküröp (SQ) (The spear Sirnayza<sup>28</sup> in the hand [was] thundering)
  - Ayza sunup kürküröp (SQ) (The spear thrust forward [was] thundering)
  - Nayzanın küüsü kürküröp (JM) (The spear's song [was] thundering)
- 2 Wild animal (also metaphoric):
  - Jolborsum turdu kürküröp (SO) (My tiger got up, growling)
  - Qishında buura kürküröp (SO) (The male camel crying in winter)
  - Mas bolghon pildey kürküröp (SO) (Shouting like a drunken elephant)
  - Arstan sherdey kürküröp (SO) (Shouting like a lion)
  - Jolborsu otuz kürküröp (SO) (His thirty tigers roaring)
  - Mas buuraday kürküröp (JM) (Shouting like a drunken male camel)
  - Ach arstanday kürküröp (JM) (Growling like a hungry lion)
  - Sherdin ünü kürküröp (JM) (The lion's voice was growling)
  - Kirgen narday kürküröp (JM) (Shouting like a raging camel)
- 3 A particular person:
  - Qirghil chali kürküröp (SO three times) (The old man Qirghil [was] shouting)
  - Qirghil baatir kürküröp (SO) (Hero Qirghil [was] shouting)
- 4 The wind (rain) is making a roaring noise:
  - Shamal tiydi kürküröp (SO) (The wind came roaring)
  - Qara shamal kürküröp (SO twice) (The black wind [was] roaring)
  - Qara jamghir kürküröp (SQ) (The black rain [was] roaring)
- 5 Thunder:
  - Jasghı kündöy kürküröp (SO) (Like spring thunder)
  - Jashılduu kündöy kürküröp (SO) (Like spring [lit. covered in green] thunder)
  - Ünü kündöy kürküröp (SO; JM three times) (His voice [was] like thunder)
  - Kündöy bolup kürküröp (SQ six times) (Being like thunder)
  - Chaghılghan kündöy kürküröp (JM) (Like lightning and thunder)
  - Jayqı kündöy kürküröp (JM) (Like summer thunder.)

**27** The name of Manas's gun.

**28** Manas's spear. In this and the following two lines, *kürküröp*- denotes the sound of a flying or shaking spear.

As one can see, five groups of formulaic lines, both formulas and formulaic systems, can be established. Clearly the rhyme-string is connected to semantic content, and this content is partially expressed in formulaic first half-lines, with their "formulaicness" ranging from repetition to formulaic system. In over half of the lines with "kürküröp," however, the first half-lines cannot be grouped into such formulaic clusters.

### Radloff's "Vortragsteile"

In his preface, Radloff stresses that a Kirghiz singer does not improvise according to the inspiration of the moment and create a new poem every time he performs, but that he rather relies on certain "Vortragsteile" (or "Vortragstheile," in the spelling of Radloff's German) (elements of recitation):

[o]n the basis of extensive experience in performing, he [the singer] has a whole series of elements of recitation, if I may say so, in readiness, which he combines in a way suitable to the plot of the narrative.<sup>29</sup>

Radloff gives examples of these elements, including: the birth of the hero, his growth, the praise of weapons, the preparations for battle, the *mêlée* and battle din, the heroes' speeches before battle, the description of a feast, the death of a hero, and the lament for a dead hero. He continues:

[t]he art of the singer consists only in stringing together all these ready-made narrative units as the course of the narrative demands and to link them with newly composed verse-lines.<sup>30</sup>

Radloff calls the "Vortragsteile" here "Bildtheile" (literally "picture elements") or, in diminutive form, "Bildtheilchen." He points out that these narrative units can be fleshed out quite differently, depending on the singer and the occasion. Clearly, these "Vortragsteile" correspond to what has been generally called the "typical scene" (also "type-scene") or, in the oral theory, "theme." Although Radloff's discussion acknowledges the individual skill of singers, he stresses the dominant role that these ready-made narrative units play in performance. Note that he says that the art of the singer consists *only* in stringing these elements together and linking them with newly composed verse-lines. This suggests two things: one, that Kirghiz epics consist in their entirety of themes, and two, that the singer is basically a juggler of themes, however variously he may elaborate the different themes. This picture suggests a certain mechanistic character of both Kirghiz epics and underestimates the creativity of the Kirghiz singer of tales. In the following, I want to discuss a scene in three versions of *Manas* to illustrate the creativity of the Kirghiz bard.<sup>31</sup>

When larger narrative units are analyzed, the first impression is one of great diversity. Given the length of the epic, I will only look at one episode and discuss one short pas-

**29** Radloff, *Proben der Volksliteratur*, xvi.

**30** Radloff, *Proben der Volksliteratur*, xvii.

**31** On variation and stability in a mini-scene in different versions of *Manas*, see Reichl, *Turkic Oral Epic Poetry*, 223–35; and Reichl, "Variation and Stability."

sage within it. I have chosen Manas's expedition against Shooruq. Shooruq is the father of one of Manas's wives, Aqılay (called Naqılay in Mamay's text). Although Saghımbay's, Sayaqbay's, and Mamay's versions have the same topic, they differ so significantly from one another that they can hardly be seen as variants. They are three episodes that share some common elements, but seem otherwise to be independent tales.

Saghımbay's version comprises 915 lines in the four-volume Kirghiz edition of 1978–1982, where it is entitled: "How Shooruq Khan, who had come to attack the Kirghiz, was defeated by them." Sayaqbay's version comprises 2316 lines and is entitled: "How Hero Manas defeated Shooruq Khan and took Aqılay as his wife." In the definitive edition of Mamay's *Manas*, this episode is part of a larger section of the epic, entitled: "How Manas mounted his horse and defeated Köngtöy and Shooruq." The Shooruq episode comprises 1727 lines.<sup>32</sup> This episode is also found in the versions taken down from other manaschis, as, for instance, from Moldobasan Musulmanqulov, Shapaq İrismendiev, and İbrahim Abdırakhmanov.

## The Shooruq Episode

Saghımbay's version begins by specifying the ethnic and geographical setting: Shooruq belongs to the people of the Maymun and lives in the Alay mountain range. The Kirghiz move from the Altay in the direction of the Alay. Their use of Shooruq's pasture land for their animals provokes his anger. He decides to attack them and to test their strength by stealing their horses. He collects an army of 280,000 men, among them the heroes Chechender and Kültüqan. His warriors set off, but Shooruq decides to join them only on the following day. He has three sons and two daughters; the oldest daughter is Aqılay, a beautiful girl of sixteen. Aqılay has a portentous dream and begs her father to stay at home. Shooruq interprets the dream positively and leaves home.

When Shooruq wreaks havoc among the Kirghiz, in particular the Noyghut tribe, Manas is informed of Shooruq's raids by Aqbalta and gathers his army. Aqbalta upbraids Manas for having brought the Kirghiz from the Altay into danger and describes the enemy. Manas and his warriors hasten to the Alay region. When they encounter Shooruq's host, it is growing dark and Manas decides to begin the battle on the following day.

On the next morning, Manas and his men pray, put on their armour, and mount their horses. On the opposing side there are the warrior Dögöshö with four thousand men, the hero Chechender with two thousand men, and Kültüqan, who swings his cudgel and sits on an elephant. Manas fires his musket Aqkelte, and thirty to forty men from the enemy camp fall, among them Kültüqan. Chechender pushes his heavy spear at Manas, but Manas wards the stroke off with his sword and cuts Chechender in two. When the Kirghiz attack, Shooruq's soldiers are defeated and flee, along with Khan Shooruq, pursued by Manas. Shooruq decides to prevent his ruin by presenting gifts to Manas. He sends thirty girls to the Kirghiz, at their head his daughter Aqılay. When they reach the

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**32** The texts are edited in the editions specified in nn. 10, 19, and 20 above. A Russian translation of Saghımbay's version is found in Mirbadaleva and others, *Manas*, 2:485–505; an English translation of Mamay's version is found in Reichl, *Manas*, 1:231–79.

Kirghiz, Manas takes Aqılay as wife and the thirty girls are allowed to choose Kirghiz husbands for themselves. The campaign against Shooruq ends to everybody's content with a feast. Sayaqbay's version is considerably longer, but has actually less action; long stretches of the episode consist of speeches and descriptions, which give the text a somewhat static character. The driving force behind the action is Baqay. He advises Manas to attack Shooruq, who has subjugated many tribes, among them the Noyghut of the Alay, and has many beautiful women and girls in his country. Manas agrees, gets ready for the campaign, and departs together with Baqay and his forty companions. When they near Shooruq's abode, Baqay exhorts his warriors and begins the attack. The enemies lose many lives, and their soldiers take flight. Shooruq's warrior Jöjeldet sends a message to his khan to inform him of their desperate situation. Baqay proposes to send Ajıbay as a messenger to Shooruq and ask him to capitulate, accept Islam, and give his daughter in marriage to Manas. Ajıbay delivers his message. When Shooruq looks at Manas from the tower of his fortress, he realizes how magnificent and dazzling a hero Manas is. He descends from his throne and announces that he will submit to Manas, accept Islam, and wed Aqılay to the Kirghiz hero. Eighty girls, led by Aqılay, go to Manas's camp, where a feast is celebrated. Manas marries Aqılay, and his forty companions also find wives. Then the Kirghiz begin their return journey.

Quite different is this episode in Mamay's *Manas*. Manas is still a child (eleven to twelve years old!) and he is still known under the name of Chongjindi (the great madcap); it is only in the course of this episode that he is called by his real name. The campaign against Shooruq follows an expedition against the Kalmuck Köngtöy, who is killed and whose soldiers have fled to other Kalmuck khans and potentates, among them Shooruq. At the end of the Kirghiz's victory over Köngtöy, a feast is organized and Manas is elected khan. When Shooruq is informed of Köngtöy's death, he is of the opinion that the Kirghiz have to be annihilated. In the plain of Sari-Arqa, the Kalmucks build up their military camp. Then the Kirghiz arrive, with Baqay carrying the flag and Aqbalta and Jamghırchı in the vanguard. The two armies take their position opposite each other. There follows a series of single combats. Only then Shooruq enters the battlefield and Jamghırchı rides out to fight him, pulling out a poplar on his way and using it as a weapon. Shooruq does the same and injures Jamghırchı. After more fighting, Manas enters the combat and kills Shooruq. A general mêlée begins, leading to the defeat of the Kalmucks. After the battle, Chubaq enters Shooruq's palace in Sari-Arqa. In the garden, he sees Aqılay (Naqılay) and her forty maidens. Chubaq claims the girls as war-booty and takes them to Manas. After their arrival, the girls are paraded, but Baqay forbids the Kirghiz to call them "booty-girls." The girls are allowed to choose a husband for themselves; Aqılay becomes Manas's wife.

## Analysis

While all three versions agree in the basic orientation of the plot, the differences are numerous and significant. Shooruq is killed in Mamay's version, but survives in the others; in Sayaqbay's text, Shooruq does not even take part in the battle. Shooruq's conversion to Islam plays a role only in Sayaqbay's version; it is not mentioned in the others. The geographical and ethnic details vary also; Saghımbay gives a number of ethnic and

geographical names that are not found in the other versions. Furthermore, the age of the main protagonist, Manas, is different. In Saghimbay's version, this episode comes in the fourth cycle of "adventures," long after Manas's first heroic deeds as a youngster, similar to Sayaqbay's version. In Mamay's version, in contrast, the fight with Shooruq is one of the early exploits of the hero and he is accordingly still very young. Apart from Shooruq, none of the other Kalmuck warriors overlap.

The most noticeable difference between the three versions is their respective style and emphasis. Sayaqbay's text is heavily biased towards speeches; about 40 percent of the text consists of speeches, one of them extending to more than 300 lines. Much information is repeated (not as a rule in formulaic lines), which gives this episode a somewhat long-winded flavour. Mamay's version is focused on action, with a wealth of details in the description of the various combats. Saghimbay's version has more battle scenes than Sayaqbay's, but they are shorter than Mamay's; in addition, he has some motifs not found in the others, especially Aqilay's portentous dream. He also explicitly links the confrontation of the Kirghiz with Shooruq and his troops to the Kirghiz migration from the Altay.

In order to assess the relative quality of these versions properly, both their similarities and their differences, an extensive discussion of the texts would be necessary. Here one sample will have to suffice to illustrate the way in which these versions vary and agree with one another. I have chosen Chechender's fight with Manas in Saghimbay's epic, Baqay's attack in Sayaqbay's *Manas*, and a portion of the fight between Manas and Shooruq in Mamay's version. As will be seen, although all three passages express similar ideas connected to fighting and to the warriors involved in the battle, their differences are striking.<sup>33</sup>

- (1) Saghimbay
- Jana Shooruq jiberdi  
 Chechender attuu balbandi,  
 On eki ming qol menen  
 Manasti közdöy japirdi.  
 5 Kültüqan attuu balbani  
*Kürküröp* kürsü alghani,  
 Jeke özü bir minip —  
 Jetimish qulach pil minip,  
*Kürsüsü bar molodoy,*  
 10 *Qarasa közü qapirdin*  
*Qayqangha qazghan orodoy,*  
*Közündögü chilpaghi*  
*Qaynatghan batman shorodoy.*  
 On eki ming jabilip,  
 15 Aqkelte miltiq bir atti  
*Arstan Manas qaminip.*  
*Aqkeltenin dabishi*  
*Altı künü ughuldu,*  
 Oghu tiyip qapirdan  
 20 Otuz-qırqı jighildi.

**33** I am focusing only on some points in these passages; the words and lines in question are italicized.

*Tütünü bastı tumanday,*  
*Qulap tüshütü Kültüqan*  
*Jer silkingen dubalday.*  
 25 *Nayza saldı Chechender,*  
*Anday nayza salghandan*  
*Alek bolghon nechender.*  
*Nayzasın baatır qaghıptır,*  
*Arstan er qılıch salıptır.*  
 30 *Nayzası tiybey ketkeni,*  
*Nayza salghan Chechender*  
*Ajalının jetkeni.*  
*Jetpekende netkeni,*  
*Törö chapqan bu qılıch*  
 35 *Töbösunö jetkeni,*  
*At-matı menen bölünüp*  
*Jarday qulap ketkeni.*

(Furthermore Shooruq sent into battle  
 A warrior by the name of Chechender.  
 With an army of twelve thousand men  
 He rushed towards Manas.  
 5 The warrior by the name of Kültüqan  
*Was roaring, with a cudgel in his hand.*  
 Alone by himself he was riding,  
 He was riding an elephant of seventy fathoms.  
*His cudgel was like a megalith.*  
 10 *One could see that the heathen's eyes*  
*Were deep-set like storage caves,*  
*The puss in his eyes*  
*Was like a batman<sup>34</sup> of clay from an evaporated salt marsh.*  
 15 *The lion Manas took his precautions*  
*And fired his gun Aqkelte once.*  
*The sound of Aqkelte*  
*Was heard at a distance of a six days' journey.*  
 20 Hit by the bullet of the heathens  
 Thirty to forty broke down.  
*Its smoke rose like fog.*  
 Kültüqan toppled over,  
 Like a wall shaken by an earthquake.  
 Chechender pointed the spear;  
 25 To point such a spear  
 Was quite bothersome.  
 The hero (Manas) warded off his spear,  
*The lion warrior (Manas) swung his sword.*  
 His (Chechender's) spear went past without touching,  
 30 And Chechender, who had thrust the spear,  
 Had come to the point of death.  
 How could he not?

34 A *batman* is a measure of weight with differing values according to region; in the Talas valley in Kyrgyzstan it equals 12 Russian *puđ* (= 12 x 16.36 kg, that is, 196 kg).

- This sword that the noble hero had swung  
Went through (him) from his top:  
35 Split into two, together with his horse,  
He collapsed, straight down like a precipice.)

In this extract from Saghımbay's version, the various moves in the combat between Manas and the two Kalmuck fighters are described in comparatively simple sentences, with common words like "nayza" (spear), "qılıch" (sword), "kürsü" (cudgel), "miltiq" (gun, musket) for the weapons and corresponding verbs like "al-" (take), "at-" (throw, shoot), "sal-" (place, throw), "tiy-" (touch) for handling the weapons. All these words occur repeatedly in any version of *Manas*, unsurprisingly, given the genre of the work. We find also the formulaic half-line "Arstan Manas" (15) (the lion Manas) and the variation "the lion hero" (28). The verb-form "kürküröp" (16) (roaring) is also familiar from the earlier discussion of the "bürküröp" rhyme-string. While a number of lines seem to be unspectacular, that is they express a certain idea plainly, without unusual syntax or lexicon (as, for example, 1–2), others are more specific and, one feels, might be poetic expansions of an idea that occurs also in other parts of the epic. This concerns Manas's gun Aqkelte: its sound is heard far and wide (17–18) and smoke rises like fog from the barrel after a shot (21). Also, the comparisons of Chechender's cudgel with a megalith and the hero's puss in his eyes with clay from an evaporated salt marsh (9–13) give the impression of being part of a traditional set of poetic similes.

The descriptive lines about the cudgel and Chechender's eyes incorporate a rhyme-string: "molodoy" (like a megalith), "oroodoy" (like a storage cave), and "shorodoy" (like a salt-marsh). None of these rhyme-words occurs in Mamay's *Manas*. Sayaqbay has one instance of this string, with only "oroodoy" and "shorodoy"; the lines in his text are different and describe a face: Qongurbay's nostrils are like storage caves and his eye-brows like a salt-marsh. Saghımbay has one more passage, also describing Qongurbay, the Kalmuck-Chinese khan and main foe of Manas and the Kirghiz: "His nose is huge (borodoy), / the sockets of his two eyes / are like dug-out storage caves (oroodoy), / the puss of his eye-lashes / is like the clay (shorodoy) in the gunpowder of marksmen." Although this rhyme-string can be considered a traditional pattern, its occurrence is extremely rare, quite unlike what one would expect of formulaic diction.

(2) Sayaqbay

- Kögala qalqan qolgho alıp  
Kök *ayzani bulghalap*,  
Qara jaaq chong qamchi  
Qabilan Baqay abakeng  
5 Qarmay qalıp imerip,  
Qang dedire Kök Tulpar,  
Taqımgha tartıp jiberip,  
Qaardanıp baqırıp,  
Qaraan qalghan sultanı  
10 "Manastap!"—uraan chaqırıp,  
Baqay chabuul qoydu emi,  
Art jaghınan qırq choro  
Qatar ayza sundu emi.  
Qaardanıp eköölöp,

- 15 Oyron bolghon qula atin  
Onjongdotup bosh qoshtop,  
On eki choro jetelep,  
*Aq asaba tuu bolup,*  
*Ayghaydaghan chuu bolup,*
- 20 Ach ayqiriq *chuu bolup,*  
Arbiniraaq *duu bolup,*  
Qasaba jelek qalqildap,  
Tashti buzup jol salip,  
Töö mingen mingche askerge
- 25 Törö Baqay qol salip,  
Arqasinan qirq choro  
Qatar qaptap etti ele,  
*Ataqtuu kökjal qabilan*  
Aqqula menen *barbaqtap,*
- 30 Oyron töröng *dardaqtap,*  
Oynop-oynop ketti ele.

- (Taking the bluish shield in his hands,  
*Shaking* the blue [iron] spear,  
Holding the black-sided massive whip,  
The tiger Baqay, our older brother,
- 5 Swinging the whip round  
With a flick, pressing the flanks  
Of the racer, his horse Kök,  
Shouting furiously,  
Manas's noble-born support,
- 10 Shouting the war-cry "Manas!,"  
Baqay began to attack.  
Behind him the forty companions  
Pointed their lances in a row.  
Both of them [rider and horse] seized by fury,
- 15 He let his dun horse, tested by adversity,  
Step out heavily, giving it the reins,  
Took twelve companions with him,  
*The white flag serving as a standard,*  
A noise rising of *shrill screams,*
- 20 A noise rising of *piercing yells,*  
The *clamour* increasing in intensity,  
The *war flag* flying in the wind,  
Crushing stones into dust on his way,  
The noble lord Baqay attacked
- 25 A thousand soldiers, riding their camels.  
Behind him the forty companions  
Came up in a row.  
*The famous, mighty tiger (= Manas),*  
*Riding* on Aqqula in *high spirits,*
- 30 Our noble lord, tested in adversity, *riding with bravado,*  
Rode along on his prancing horse.)

This scene describes the onset of battle, with Baqay storming at the enemy, Manas and his forty companions following. It begins with the theme of the arming of the hero in miniature: Baqay takes the shield, shakes the spear, swings the whip, presses the

horse's flanks, shouts the war-cry "Manas!," and attacks. This part of the passage is a compressed typical scene, with elements that reappear in the narrative. They reappear, but not always in predictable form, that is, in formulaic lines. To take only the shaking of the spear, such a typical movement in heroic poetry, we find that neither the verb *bulghala-* nor a synonym occurs in Saghimbay's text. The spear is mentioned often in his version, but it is never shaken. Five instances of "bulghalap" are found in Sayqbay's text, including the present passage. Normally the spear is taken ("nayzani qolgho alip"), but occasionally it is shaken. In three out of five cases, a spear is shaken, and in two, a flag. In Mamay's text, "bulghalap" is used seven times in rhyme-position (and a further three times in other positions). In three out of seven instances, "bulghalap" is used with a spear, but the line is phrased differently each time.

There is no question about the formulaic nature of epithets like "Ataqtuu kökjal qabilan" (28); for "qabilan" (tiger) the remarks made about "arstan" (lion) above are also true. Less obvious are the rhyme-words of the next two lines, "barbaqtap" (riding in high spirits) and "darbaqtap" (riding with bravado). The verbs are fairly specific and show the onomatopoeic ring dear to the singers of *Manas*. The verbs *barbaqta-* and *darbaqta-*, also in their variant forms *barbangda-* and *dardangda-*, are not found in Saghimbay's version. Sayaqbay was rather fond of these rhymes; the pair occurs ten times, but, apart from the rhyme, none of the lines shows any verbal similarity to any of the others. In Mamay's text, "barbaqtap" is found in two passages, once rhyming with "qaldaqtap" (bustling) and "salbaqtap" (dangling), and once with "dalbaqtap" (moving heavily). Again we note that this passage, while treating a typical situation and incorporating some formulaic diction, shows a number of traits that mark its singular and individual character.

- (3) Mamay
- Ketüchüdöy türü bar,  
 Bashti kesip baylanip,  
 Qarap turat qabilan,  
*Aqula menen shangdanip.*
- 5
- Daghî kelgen Shooruqtun  
 Nayzasin qaqtî saydırbay,  
 Qiyirinan mushtap öttü ele,  
 Qiztalaq itke tuydurbay.  
 Büktölüp belden sinbaghan,
- 10
- Sayghanin teshpey qalbaghan,  
*Tökör usta jasaghan,*  
*Ungghusu bolot uchu qurch,*  
 Ötközö sonun Sırnayza,  
 Qabirghani aralap,
- 15
- Baliq etin jaralap,  
 Ortosunan dalinin,  
 Uchu chighip jiltirap,  
 Qaapirdi sayip saliptir,  
 Nayzani tartip alghanda,
- 20
- Qol ariqtai shirqirap,*  
*Shooruqtun qani aghiptir.*

- (Pretending to ride away,  
 Ready to cut off his opponent's head,  
 The tiger kept watch,  
*Sitting gloriously on Aqqula.*
- 5 He warded off Shooruq's spear, that was approaching again,  
 So that it did not touch him.  
 He approached Shooruq from the side, gave him a blow with the fist,  
 But could not cause the cursed dog any pain.  
 He bowed, almost breaking his back,
- 10 And his stab was not for nothing: he pierced him through.  
*The magnificent lance Sirnayza, made by master Bölökbay,*  
*With the back of its blade of steel, its point a sharp sword,*  
 Penetrated the body,  
 Cut through the ribs,
- 15 Wounded the muscles,  
 So that its tip came out shining  
 Through the middle of his shoulder.  
 He pierced the heathen through.  
 When he pulled out the spear,
- 20 *Gurgling like a small irrigation canal,*  
*Shooruq's blood flowed out.)*

Mamay's description is very precise and colourful; he is focused on the action and visualizes the various moves of the combatants vividly. In this he differs from the other treatments of the Shooruq–Aqilay episode. I will take up only a few of his expressions. Manas sits on his horse, Aqqula, "shangdanip." The verb *shangdan-* means "to take on a majestic posture, to look splendid," and is derived from *shang* (grandeur, majesty). This verb occurs once in Saghimbay's *Manas*, describing Qongurbay in a splendid passage with three ornate rhyme-strings following one another.<sup>35</sup>

Finally, a brief comment on the two last lines of the extract. As is to be expected, much blood flows in *Manas*, where battles and single combats form the majority of episodes. There are many lines expressing the same idea, also in similar words. A specific detail here is the comparison of blood gushing from a wound with the gurgling water of a small irrigation canal ("ariq"). While this detail is unique, the verb employed (*shirqira-*) frequently occurs. This verb is found in various contexts, of which only two are formulaic. One is the line "qan tögül-üp/sö/dü shirqirap" (the blood flowing/flowed/if it flows gurgling), which occurs twice in Saghimbay's text and six times in Sayaqbay's (one with slight variations). The second repeated occurrence of "shirqirap" is in the line "közdön jalın shirqirap" (a flame flashing from the eye); it is found (with variations) six times in Saghimbay's text, twice in Sayaqbay's text (plus a further case with "ooz" [mouth] instead of "köz" [eye]), and twice in Mamay's text.

The passage from Mamay's *Manas* tallies with the observations made with regard to similar passages in Saghimbay's and Sayaqbay's versions of the epic. Diction is traditional, with fixed epithets, formulaic lines, and rhyme-strings. Nevertheless, the verses cannot be analyzed as simple concatenations of formulas, nor can the scenes be broken down

**35** Musaev, Abdyl daev, and others, *Manas*, 3:236–37; Mirbadaleva and others, *Manas*, 3:439 (Russian translation).

into formulaic themes. There is much fluidity and creative variability in Kirghiz verse, both on the level of the verse-line and of narrative units like themes or typical scenes.

### The True Nature of the aoidos?

Radloff's purpose in comparing the Kirghiz *manaschi* to the aoidos was to draw attention to the fact that a living tradition of oral epics can give insights into the workings of oral poetry and can therefore throw light on the Homeric Question. Radloff refers in his preface to a study by Benedictus Niese, entitled *Die Entwicklung der homerischen Poesie* (*The Development of Homeric Poetry*), published in 1882. Radloff criticises Niese's interpretation of some lines from the *Odyssey*, which lead him, according to Radloff, to the wrong conclusions. The lines in question are, as a matter of course, quoted in Greek and translated neither by Niese nor by Radloff. They come from Book 8 and refer to the singer Demodocus at Alcinous's court; they read in Robert Fagles's translation:

In came the herald now,  
leading along the faithful bard the Muse adored  
above all others, true, but her gifts were mixed  
with good and evil both: she stripped him of sight  
but gave the man the power of stirring, rapturous song.<sup>36</sup>

Niese refers to these lines at the end of a sentence in which he asserts that "the singer practices his art professionally: he has learned it and he is under the power of the Muse, who inspires his song."<sup>37</sup> The verses from the *Odyssey* attest to the power of the Muse. Radloff thought that Niese concluded from these lines also that the singer has learned his art. This is probably a misunderstanding, but Radloff's emphatic denial of any learning process with regard to the Kirghiz epic singers is noteworthy. He writes:

The singer learns only passively by hearing. He does not perform known songs, because songs do not exist in the period of authentic epic poetry; there are only subject matters that can be put into verse, in the way the Muse, i.e., the inner singing-power of the singer, inspires the singer.<sup>38</sup>

There is no doubt that in a truly oral situation there are no texts that can be learned or memorized, as Lord and others have pointed out. But Kirghiz singers—and the same is true of some other Turkic oral traditions—do learn both the technique of performance and the epics themselves from other singers, in particular a master singer, who might be the father or a relative of the apprentice singer. The learning process implies attendance at the master's performances and imitation and trial performances under the master's guidance. In some traditions, there is a formal performance that marks the end of apprenticeship, when the teacher's blessing is given.<sup>39</sup> Among the Kirghiz, various regional "singer schools" can be distinguished. This means that singers perform in a

<sup>36</sup> Homer, *Odyssey*, 8.71–75; Fagles translates Greek "aoidos" as "bard."

<sup>37</sup> Niese, *Entwicklung*, 9.

<sup>38</sup> Radloff, *Proben der Volksliteratur*, xx.

<sup>39</sup> See Reichl, *Turkic Oral Epic Poetry*, 62–87.

particular style, specialize in particular parts of the *Manas* cycle, and trace their art back to the models of singers whose performances they have attended and who acted as their masters in the early stages of their formation.<sup>40</sup> This is, of course, the traditional situation, which was still prevalent in the first half of the twentieth century, before singers could use printed texts for memorization.

Even modern singers, however, if they want to become part of the Kirghiz oral epic tradition, will have to have more skills than a good memory. What Radloff called "die innere Gesang-Kraft" (the inner power for song) is an important element in a singer's vocation.<sup>41</sup> It is a widespread custom among Kirghiz manaschis to have an initiation dream or vision. Manas himself or some other hero of his retinue appears to the singer and urges him to become a manaschi. A present-day manaschi, Talantaaly Baqchiev (b. 1971), who is well known for his performances of a number of episodes from the *Manas* cycle, traces his art through his teacher and his teacher's teacher back to Sayaqbay Qaralaev, whose grandson he is on his father's side. Baqchiev reports that he had a number of dreams in which Manas, but also Qanikey and others, appeared and told him to become a singer. When I asked him in 2010 in Bishkek whether he had memorized any texts, he answered, "If had memorized a text I could perform for a maximum of only twenty minutes." He went on to tell me about his dreams and about his relationship to Sayaqbay, from the point of view of both biological and artistic descent.<sup>42</sup>

Although Radloff repeatedly stresses the word-power of the Kirghiz singers and underlines their creative poetic skills, his remarks about "Vortragsteile" and "Bildteile" suggest a mechanistic art, highly formulaic and perhaps, in its repetitiousness, monotonous. This, however, is not the case. No doubt, Kirghiz epics show many traits of oral epic poetry worldwide, including formulaic diction and composition by themes, and *Manas* is by rights well represented in general works such as the Chadwicks' *Growth of Literature* or Maurice Bowra's *Heroic Poetry*.<sup>43</sup> But as I have tried to show, Kirghiz epics also have their individual physiognomy (with rhyme-strings, for instance, as a powerful poetic device) that sets them apart from other, better-known epic traditions, and they surprise the student of oral poetry by the creative energy of singers like Saghimbay Orozbaqov, Sayaqbay Qaralaev, and Jüsüp Mamay. Whether the singer of *Manas* shows us the true nature of the aoidos is another matter. It is for the Homerist to decide whether the Kirghiz singer of tales is a useful complement to the South Slavic singer of tales to further a better understanding of the art of the aoidos. Radloff's comments, both about the Kirghiz singer and the aoidos, have to be viewed critically; but the fact remains that Radloff's volume of Kirghiz oral poetry is a pioneering contribution to oral epic studies.

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40 Kydyrbaeva, *Manas*, 289–341.

41 Radloff, *Proben der Volksliteratur*, xx.

42 On the present-day situation of the performance of *Manas*, see Reichl, "Oral Epics."

43 Bowra's knowledge of *Manas* was, like N. Chadwick's, based on Radloff's edition and translation. Bowra, who refers to *Manas* frequently, also used Lipkin's Russian translation of the epic.

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