

SACRED VOICES OF THE PAST: Russian and Soviet Research into Kyrgyz Epic *Manas*

1. GENESIS

Manas is the most renowned epic poem in Central Asia. It describes life, war and peace, victories and tragedies, battles, and the birth and death of the civilization built by the most ancient people of Central Asia, the Kyrgyz. It is their sacred book, chronicles, and encyclopedia. Its contents cover all their important life issues in a genealogical sequence of epic narrations centered on the main national hero figure, Manas. According to V. M. Zhirmunsky [1962:85], “for the Kyrgyz people, who were illiterate before the Great October revolution, the heroic epic *Manas* is the only record of their centuries-long history.”

Manas consists of over a million lines. According to Zhirmunsky [1962:282], *Manas* is longer than any other of the famous world epics. Saiakbai Karalaev’s version of *Manas*, for example, is twenty times as long as Homer’s *Iliad* and *Odyssey* together, five times *Shāh-nāme*, and two-and-a-half times as long as the *Mahabharata*.

Kazakh ethnographer Chokan Chingisovich Valikhanov, who gave us the first written version of *Manas*, called it “The *Iliad* of the Steppes.” According to him “*Manas* is the encyclopedic collection of all Kyrgyz myths, fairy tales, legends, brought to one time and grouped around the

same hero champion, Manas" [Valikhanov 1904:71–72].

Despite its huge size every Kyrgyz knows the main plot of *Manas*, can name all the main characters, and describe the content of the most important episodes. It is impossible to meet a person who cannot recite the most imaginative lines from the epic by heart or read some of them [Musaev 1979:5].

The origin of *Manas* is difficult to explain. As Professor E. D. Polivanov suggested [1936:42], the huge size of the epic, based on a complicated poetical form with prosodic regulation and alliteration, refutes the hypothesis of *Manas* having a single author.

Everyone can tell fairytales, claim the Kyrgyz, but only professionals can tell them as an artistic performance. Kyrgyz consider that *Manas* belongs to the genre style "*jomok*"—"the narrative of the past." One should say that not only heroic genre images are represented in *Manas*: there are laments (*koshok*); songs of complaint (*armans*); a statement of a will (*kereez*); educational songs (*sanaat nasiyyat*); descriptions of rites of passage (weddings, engagements, feasts, mourning, burial); episodes of land division; tales of moving from one land to another, and so on.

Manas is considered to be an art of syncretism where the remarkable singing of an inspired performer, his emotional excitement, his rich mimicking gestures and body movements are reminiscent of the theatre. "For centuries the *Manas* epic has played the role of an education book-novel influencing the audience as a play, as a staged performance, screen, reflecting historical events from the past of the nation" [Yunusaliyev 1958:iy].

2. STUDY OF MANAS: FROM DATA COLLECTION TO PUBLICATIONS

From the 19th century on Russian scholars, anthropologists and archaeologists conducted long-term fieldwork in Kyrgyzstan collecting data and information on its rich culture. In Saint Petersburg there was a Russian Association of Supporters of Human History, Anthropology, and Ethnography which collected materials and observations on that and other areas [Skryabina 1907:216]. Searching through handwritten notebooks in the Archives of the Russian Academy of Science in Moscow at the Institute of Ethnography and Anthropology (Archiv Instituta ethnografii i antropologii Akademii Nauk SSR), I found interesting descriptions of observations of the large variety of healing rituals among the Kyrgyz from the banks of Syr-Darya river [Skryabina 1907:20].

In 1950 the Russian Academy initiated serial fieldwork in Kyrgyzstan to collect different ethnographical material on local customs and rituals (in 1953,'54,'55). In the fieldwork notes, in seven notebooks, a large collection of biological and ethnological data was gathered from the area [Mahovaya and Vasil'eva 1950–55]. What about the special attention paid to *Manas*?

The first mention of *Manas* was found in a manuscript in the 15th–16th centuries, *Madjmu at-Tavarih*, by Saif ad-din, the son of Ahsikant Shah-Abbas.

In 1856 a famous Kazakh scholar and ethnographer, Chokan Valikhanov, met with a Kyrgyz singer and heard his singing of *Manas*. It impressed him deeply. He wrote down one of the episodes of *Manas*, the first recorded memory. The scholar, who valued *Manas* highly, transcribed some of the epic, for example, “Memorial service of Koketei.” The short description of the content of *Manas* was published after his death [Valikhanov 1904:92].

The first person who tried to provide a transcription of *Manas* was academic V. V. Radlov, an outstanding Russian scholar and Turcologist. During his travels in Siberia and Central Asia in 1862–69 he met Kyrgyz *manaschi* and wrote down episodes, covering three quarters of *Manas*. In 1885 he published altogether 12,454 lines in Kyrgyz and German, with 9,449 lines from the first part of *Manas* and an additional 3,005 lines from *Semetei* and *Seitek* all together. His aim was to record the language, not the artistic content. Radlov had also written the fairytales *Djoloji-Khan* (5,322 verses) and *Yer-Tyeshtyuk* (2,146 verses) which were connected to *Manas* [Radlov 1885].

Another author who studied *Manas* was the Hungarian scholar G. Almashi. In 1911 he published the episode “Der Abschied des Helden Manas von seinem Sohne Sémetéj” (Farewell of Manas with his son Semetei) in the journal *Keleti Szemle*, which although not extensive has a certain scholarly value [Almashi 1911]. An interesting fact is that there is no such episode in any existing version of *Manas*. More than that, according to Sagymbai Orozbekov's and Saiakbai Karalaev's versions, such a subject could not be performed, as Manas's son Semetei was born after Manas returned from war.

However, according to local scholars, the study of *Manas* was taken seriously only after the Revolution. Before then the study of *Manas* had a sporadic character, but it progressed in Soviet times thanks to the attention of the Communist Party [Musaev 1979:28].

In the book *Sud'ba eposa 'Manas' posle Octyabra: Sbornik dokumentov* [Abdykarov and Dzhumaliev 1995:11], we found document from the

protocol no. 66 of a meeting of Buro Kyrgyz VKPB, January 10, 1935, reflecting on the needs of publication of Kyrgyz epic *Manas*:

§ 12. About the publication of *Manas* (Comrad Joldoshev)

1. In principle accept the publication in 1935 of *Manas* in two languages. (RRS: Russian and Kyrgyz)
2. For SNK to define the financial support for publication.
3. The team of the committee to approve at the next OKVKPB meeting!

Signed: Secretary Torekul Aitmatov.

Some curious facts about the size of the epic are revealed in that document, including “Among present here comrades there are some who remember that *Manas* performance took 16–18 days and that was not enough to cover full size of it” [Abdykarov and Dzhumaliev 1995:13]. Attention was paid to the fact that the style and composition of *Manas* has changed over centuries and with different schools of performance. Present comrades told the story of how some performers had to give up their performance job after failing the *manaschi* competition [Abdykarov and Dzhumaliev 1995:18–19].

Great attention was paid to the content but unfortunately dialect features of individual performers did not attract much attention, as is clearly seen in the examples of Saiakbai Karalaev and Sagymbai Orozba-kov.

During Soviet times the documentation, publication, and study of *Manas* received attention. The first part of *Manas* was the fragment of *Semetei* published in Moscow in 1925 on the basis of the Arabic alphabet from Tynybek.

From 1935 the study of *Manas* was the focus of attention: *Pravda* [Sep. 28, 1936] published an article on *Manas* pointing out its great importance. From 1940 there was extended publication of a series on *Manas* based on a collection of recordings from different performers. First was the *Childhood of Manas*, based on a version transcribed from Sagymbai, the son of Orozbaka. After that publication, a number of brochures with the most popular episodes from the epic were published in the *Series Manas* [Musaev 1979:27]:

- in 1941—seven books;
- in 1942—two;
- in 1944—one book.

After the Conference on *Manas* held in Frunze in 1952 two books on *Manas*, one on *Semetei* and one on *Seitek* were published. So those four volumes covering all the main events of *Manas* are a blend of short versions of Karalaev's performance [Musaev 1979:28].

In parallel to the Kyrgyz version of *Manas* some steps were taken towards a Russian translation. For example, Professor E. Polivanov had spent much time translating, writing articles, and so on.

All publications were made on the basis of the Sagymbai Orozbekov's and Saiakbai Karalaev's versions. Publication between 1937–40 was not just in books but also in local and all Soviet Union newspapers, magazines, and so on [Musaev 1979:29]. After that the first version in Russian was finally published in 1946, both as a separate publication and also as part of a series of different epics of Soviet peoples. Some samples were published abroad. That was essential progress in making *Manas* famous among a wider number of people and nations [Musaev 1979:30].

All together *Manas* has been recorded in three different versions held in the folklore archive of the Kyrgyz Academy of Science: Sagymbai Orozbekov (1867–1930); Saiakbai Karalaev (1894–1971); and Shapak Rysmendiyev (1859–1950). Separate parts of *Manas* were recorded from other *Manaschi* like Togolok Moldo, Moldobasan Musulmankulov, and others.

In the book *Varianty eposa "Manas"* [Kydyrbaeva et al. 1988:3], there is a statement that "If before the complete version of trilogy *Manas* was discussed in the performance of Saykбай Karallaev, today we have to add to that the version performed by Mambet Chokmorov (1896–1973) recorded between 1959 and 1972. It consists of 397,557 verses, among them *Manas*—302,608, *Semetei*—71,609, and *Seitek*—23,340 verses. It is stored in the manuscript archives of the Kyrgyz Academy of Science (catalogue nos. 212–230)."

3. HISTORICAL PRECEDENTS AND HEROIC PROTOTYPE

The *Manas* epic is strongly connected to other Central Asia epics reflecting similar historical situations, primarily focused on the idea of protection of national identity from the conquest of the world.

At the beginning of the epic *Manas* the Kyrgyz people, conquered by Kalmuks and Chinese, lost their independence and national identity performing pagan rituals. But then as a boy *Manas* became the khan, uniting the tribes under his leadership. He began campaigning across the nations of Central Asia: Eastern Turkestan, with their Chinese rulers,

Western Turkestan (from the banks of Issyk-kul' lake to Namangan and Andijan, Tashkent and Bukhara, where Manas brought his bride), in Afghanistan, and a great campaign against China which ended with the conquest of Beijing. According to Orobakov's version *Manas* undertook ten campaigns in all [Zhirmunsky 1962:140].

A history of conquest similar to that of Manas features in another Central Asian epic of Oguz-Khan, the legendary ancestor of the Turks-Oguz tribes [Zhirmunsky 1962:116]. According to the collection of manuscripts of Rashid ad-din (beginning of the 14th century), the hero Oguz-Khan converted to Islam, taking over the pagans of Central Asia living in cities like Tashkent, Sairam, Samarkand and Bukhara, Balkh and Kabul, reaching the frontiers of India (Kashmir) and China, Iran, Syria and Egypt [Rashid ad-din 1958:81–87; Radlov 1893:49–52; Kononov 1958:45–48].

Local Kyrgyz scholars studying *Manas* argue that the most difficult question concerns the variants of *Manas* [Musaev 1979:60]. Indeed, different manners and styles of performance distract from the main plot of the epic but at the same time help us: “to understand correctly and fully appreciate the richness of the essence of *Manas*, you cannot examine this epic beyond time and space, without knowing something of the historical background of the Kyrgyz people” [Musaev 1979:92].

The question of the birth and formation of the epic *Manas* has attracted a lot of research. However, time and time again it has proved to be the question that baffles most of the researchers and discussion has invariably remained inconclusive. According to Musaev [1979:93], “The tale of *Manas* is eleven hundred years old.” There is no indication of the time of its inception in the actual text of the epic *Manas*, although Sagymbai Orozbekov's version contains this verse attributed to Manas himself: There is no actual historical basis for this estimate of the age of the epic. So, according to the academic Zhirmunsky, the question of timing, formation, and development of the epic, as well as the historical events and characters reflected in *Manas*, is a complex one which can currently be established only on the basis of a defined set of assumptions.

Three main hypotheses exist on the subject:

1. The view that the epic arose as a result of the interaction between the Uighurs, at the time when Kyrgyz people inhabited the banks of Enisey-Orhon river (7th–9th century). The main proponents of this view, Professor M. Auesov and Professor A. N. Bernshtam suggest that the core events of the epic were based on the wars between the

Turks and Uighurs, the heritage of which is reflected in some of the Orxon-Enisey statues, particularly the historical facts that in the 10th century the Kyrgyz had defeated the Uighurs, who had initiated the attack, and established a sizeable nomadic state as a result [Auesov 1962; Bernshtam 1942],

2. Professor B. M. Yunusaliev, a well-known linguist and Turcologist who contributed heavily to the study of *Manas*, suggested that the initial key events described in the epic describe the wars that took place between the Kyrgyz people and tribes who spoke a language closely resembling Mongolian. This idea is based on thorough analysis of the content, linking it to historical facts as well as ethnographic, linguistic, and geographical data [Yunusaliev 1958],
3. One of the established researchers of the *Manas* epic, academic B. M. Zhirmundsky, noted that the presence of materials indicative of a defined concept of a nation and a distinct world view, leads to the conclusion that the described events occurred in the 15th–18th centuries [Zhirmundsky 1962].

All the above authors base their hypotheses on factual evidence extracted from the epic itself. Indeed, the richness of the material makes it possible to make inferences both in favour of and against the above-mentioned hypotheses. We must bear in mind that the various versions of the orally-propagated epic contain many more facts, rendering all the research to date by no means exhaustive, leaving the dating of the origins of the epic open for further study. As a result we are not able to favour one hypothesis over another: they simply coexist as alternative schools of thought. A broad overview of *Manas* allows us to draw one indisputable conclusion: the events around which the epic unfolds are manifold, highlighting whole distinct layers of history, thus suggesting that the formation and accumulation of the epic took place over a considerable length of time. So, when the question is asked regarding the origins of the epic, we are called to examine it in the context of its multi-layered historical nature, beginning from the ancient times and marking events of great historical significance on the path of the Kyrgyz people in time.

What was the *Manas* prototype? According to the hypothesis by Professor A. N. Bernshtam, the oldest part of *Manas* is the great campaign, based on the real historic event of the great victory of the Kyrgyz over the Uyghurs at the mouth of the Rivers Orhon and Tola (in the

north-west of Mongolia) which was the end of Uyghur state (according to Chinese sources in the year 840). This is supported by writing on a gravestone at the mouth of the river Selengi. As Professor A. N. Bernshtam says, the first line reads “On the land of Uyghurs the father Yaglakar-khan came.” Bernshtam associated Yaglakar-khan with the Kyrgyz khan and the Uyghur state which was destroyed in 840. The date of death of that khan is 847, according to Chinese sources [Bernshtam 1942:10–11]. So, Yaglakar-khan could be the prototype for *Manas*, and the great campaign of *Manas* could be the great campaign of Yaglakar-khan against the Uyghurs.

So, *Manas* is not an isolated heroic epic, but a mainstream Central Asian document based on the real history of Central Asia. One can find evidence of this in the historical names and events of Central Asia in the 15th–18th centuries.

The main and the most important style profile of *Manas* is exactly that of a heroic epic, not fairytale-like narration but pure heroic epopee. Like the Uzbek *Alpamysh*, Kazakh heroic recitations, Russian narrations, epic songs of the Southern Slavonic people, the German *Nibelungen*, and the French *Songs of Roland*, *Manas* is a typical heroic epic genre where myth and fairytale coincide in one historical human image.

4. PERFORMERS OF *MANAS*

Manas is performed only by men. Performers of *Manas* were usually people from simple backgrounds. Every single *manaschi* affirms that it was not a teacher who taught him *Manas*, but the spirit, explaining the inspiration to perform *Manas* as a supernatural gift or power. Usually this takes the form of *Manas* calling the singer to perform, appearing with his escort or son in a dream and threatening the singer with future illness and misfortune if he refuses to perform the epic.

This phenomenon of esoteric knowledge transmission is widespread amongst Turkic-speaking people [Bertels 1948:137]. According to Rahmatullin [1968:94]: “the legend of spiritual contact is something special about *Manas* himself, as it brings the image of *Manas* to the highest accomplishment and prestige.” There is a widespread opinion that the fact of becoming a *manaschi* is possible only when there has been a dream about it. Probably such a dream makes a performer more confident in his talents and his destiny [Musaev 1979:47].

Folk poetry from its early times was associated with special powers which helped in hunting or war. The belief that singing was magical

or enchanted followed musical performance from the beginning. At the early stage of social history a singer was also expected to be a shaman or healer. Such anticipation was the result of the separation of poetry from its initial connection to ritual. A magic singer, for example Karello-Finn, hero of *Kalevala* Veinemenen, or Korkut in the medieval epic Turk-Oghuz “*Uzan*,” was at the same time the wise leader of the tribe, adviser, and shaman. *Bakshy* in central Asia has the same double meaning: an Uzbek *bakshy* is a singer of epics and a healer-shaman. A Turkmen *bakshy* is just folk singer, a Kazakh *bakshy* just a healer-shaman. A *Manas* singer in the past was also a healer, acting as such to prevent complications in labor for people and for domestic animals [Musaev 1979:91].

There is a myth about the famous 19th century *Manas* singer Keldibek showing his extreme magic power. It said that when Keldibek sang the yurt shook. The strength of his singing moved the air; the weather changed and a hurricane arose. In the centre of that storm *Manas* appeared with his escort and the land trembled from the sound of their horses [Auevov 1962:18]. This is closely associated with the idea that the singer’s inspiration is a mystical gift of paranormal power coming from the deity. That idea is related to the nature of shamanism spread throughout Siberia and Central Asia, particularly within the Turkic-speaking world.

Manas performer Saparbek Kasmambet absorbed the best forms of its performance listening to famous *Manaschi*, including Saiakbai Karal-aev, from early childhood. Today he is an award-winning bard-improviser and a storyteller, but when he was twelve years old he went through a severe illness, dreaming about *Manas* every night, hearing voices and sounds of battle and war. His mother told stories about that difficult time:

Once Saparbek woke up in the night claiming the horses of *Manas* surrounded their house. He wanted to get out of the house but his mother, seeing he was ill and feverish, would not let him go. When she went out in the morning, to her surprise she found that the grass around the house had been trampled by horses—in a village where there were no horses! To get the boy out of trouble his mother slaughtered a goat to appease the spirits. Soon he recovered, and after that he began to perform *Manas*, as his mission had been approved by the spirits. However, as he jokes himself, his voice is not deep and strong, but high and weak like a goat’s. If his mother had had enough money to slaughter a lamb, he would sound like a real singer! [from my personal interview, April 30, 2006, London]

The story of Mambet Chokmorov's performance of *Manas* is another interesting example of esoteric knowledge transmission. As a child spending days in solitude as a shepherd on the high mountains, he started to recite *Manas* without other people present. Then the right part of his body slowly started to become paralyzed (which probably happened because he recited those sacred epics alone with no audience). His uncle, after learning of that fact, slaughtered a horse as a sacrifice and taught Mambet to recite in front of an audience. Mambet accepted this, but only in his parents' house. His mother, who was also *Manas's* devotee, often seeing *Manas's* main characters in her dreams, assisted. Slaughtering a lamb, she arranged for Mambet's performance at home. "When I had said only 'Azreti Manas' (Saint Manas) the rest had gone from my memory. It turned out I was reciting non-stop the whole night. After that I had to perform *Manas* for forty days in a row in different houses. So, I became *manaschi*" [Chokmorov: manuscript, no. 214, notebook 1].

Unfortunately, today very little is known about the process of teaching performance of *Manas*. Apparently there are two schools of performance: the Tyan-Shan' school (Orozbekov) and Issyk-Kul school (Karalaev). There were differences in their versions of performing *Manas*, but it is still unclear how those separate schools developed, and what the most important issue in their style of knowledge transmission was. The most famous 19th century *manaschi* were Keldibek, Balyk, Tynybek, Choyuke (the teacher of Karalaev) etc. Some details are known but information about training is non-existent [Musaev 1979:92].

Manas performers call themselves *manaschi* or *jomokchu*—epic singers and improvisers on the basis of *Manas*. Today there is another classification: *manaschi* means epic singer of the first part of *Manas*, and *semeichi*, singer of the second part, that of *Semeiti*. Performance of all three parts by the same performer occurs very rarely. However, more recorded memory and transcriptions have been made of the *Semeiti* part than of the *Manas* part.

All *Manas* performers were distinguished by their rank:

- a) **Great artist and executor of *Manas*—*chon jomokchu***: knows the whole epic by heart; is a professional performer; created his own version of *Manas*; is highly esteemed among Kyrgyz people, like Sagymbai Orozbekov and Saiakbai Karalaev.
- b) **Real *manaschi*—*chynnyi manaschi***: performs artistically, creating his personal versions; able to create a school of students-apprentices, like Manaschi Moldobasan Musulmankulov, Bagysh Sazanov,

Togoloko Moldo, Shapaka Rysmyndeev, and Mambet Chokmorov to follow his tradition.

- c) ***Manaschi craftsman—chala manaschi***: have learned some parts of *Manas* and perform in public; had the chance to learn from another skilful performer; went through extensive training; performed for the Kyrgyz audience and listened to advice and suggestions how to perform better; went through an “initiation rite” receiving agreement from the audience.
- d) ***Manaschi beginner—yurenchuk manaschi***: those who have just begun to study *Manas* for themselves, learning its technique and who are restricted to perform publicly [Musaev 1979:37–41].

There are also other classifications of the *Manas* performers offered by scholars. For example, according to Kazakh writer Muhtar Auezov, among *Manas* performers there are two distinguished groups: one is the *chon manaschi*—those who know and perform the complete three-part version, explaining the genealogy of all main characters. These are few, but they are extremely popular in their country and they have pupils. The second group, *chala manaschi*, consists of performers who know only short parts of the epic which they have learned by heart and which they perform over several evenings. These performers promote and popularize the epic. These are the main performers of *Manas* today [Auezov 1961:2].

According to folk legends, the first performer of *Manas* was Yyrchi uul, the son of Yyrman. The legend says he lamented *Manas* at his funeral, praising his heroism. Later the famous singer-improviser Toktogul collected popular songs and united them in *jomok* (epic). Yyrchi uul was one of forty colleagues of *Manas* mentioned in the epic, but Toktogul was a legendary epic singer.

There is a proverb in Kyrgyzstan about Toktogul reflecting the popularity of that image [Musaev 1979:34]:

“Toktogulday yurc hy bol,
 Tolubaidai synchy bol,
 Jeerenedei Chechen bol!”
 (“May you be as amazing a singer as Toktogul,
 May you be as knowledgeable as Tolubai,
 May you be as eloquent a speaker as Jeerence”)

Another famous performer of *Manas* was Noorus, who lived in the 18th century. In the 19th century popular *Manas* performers included Keldibek Baryboz uulu, Balybek (Bekmurat) Kumar uulu, his son Naimanbai, Tynybek Djapy uulu, Chonbash (Narmantai) Choyuke Omur uulu Tynybek, and others. The performer who lived in Soviet times, Sagymbai Orozbekov, studied with them and learned his skills from them [Musaev 1979:34].

The most famous historical figures among *manaschi* were Sagymbai Orozbekov and Saiakbai Karalaev.

Sagymbai Orozbek Uulu (1867–1930) Originally from the northern border of the Issyk Kul Lake. His father had been a very famous *sur-nay* performer but left this world early, when his son was twelve years old. Sagymbai began to perform *Manas* from the age of fifteen or sixteen. He was popular for creating his own songs, laments for dead people, and was a leading presenter at festivals and celebrations. His *Manas* performance became fixed from 1922 and after four years of recordings the first part of *Manas* was finished in 1926. He absorbed the best tradition of *Manas* reciting from many contemporary performers. According to V. Zhirmunsky [1962:284] the most accomplished and the only classical version of *Manas* performed today is that of Sagymbai. Though there are some pan-Turkic versions of epic narration, or separate parts not closely related to *Manas*, his is still the only highly distinguished and pure artistic form of the epic [Musaev 1979:51–55].

Saiakbai Karalaev (1894–1971), an outstanding *manaschi*, was called the Homer of the 20th century. He had a difficult childhood and in 1918 had to join the Soviet Army, where he fought until 1922. His grandmother influenced him in his interest in *Manas*—he learned the first episodes of *Manas* from her. Even in the Soviet Army he performed *Manas* to lift the spirits of the warriors. The performer himself explained the involvement of *Manas* in his life through fortunetelling dreams. From 1935 to 1937 his performance was recorded: 84,830 lines/verses were fixed. *Semetei*, *Seitek*, and its continuation were also written down, together making 500,553 verses in all. If *Manas* is the longest epic in the world, Saiakbai's is the longest of all recorded versions.

Though his version is not as artistically rich as Sagymbai's, he dedicated his life to *Manas*. His acting talent was amazing: an audience without any knowledge of the Kyrgyz language could understand everything from his performance by his tone of voice, gestures, mimicry, and so on. He was granted the title People's Artist of the Kyrgyz Republic and many other distinguished names and titles [Musaev 1979:55–59].

Artistic versions of *Manas* created by the most virtuoso performers

are based on interaction with the audience, reflecting social changes in the life of Kyrgyz people. Usually coming from a folk background, the same epic song was performed differently in front of simple audiences and those of feudal rulers. Ideological influences on *Manas* are seen in the different versions of the epic marked by feudalization of its content when *Manas* was getting a strong feudal image. Comparative study of different versions of *Manas* clearly shows the ancient early stages and later levels of content [Musaev 1979: 90].

5. MANAS AS A DOCUMENT OF CENTRAL ASIAN RITUALS AND CELEBRATIONS

The epic *Manas* contains much historic evidence of rich religious practices introduced in different rituals, celebrations, and customs [*Manas, Semetei, Seitek...* 1995]. *Manas* as a historical document touches upon the daily lives, traditions, morals, and psychology of different Central Asian peoples—Kyrgyz, Chinese, Uyghurs, Kazakhs, Uzbeks, and others [Zhirmundsky 1962:92]. Many rituals especially renowned through the whole area are reflected in that epic.

In *Manas* rituals often are introduced as various celebrations. Bay Jakyn, following his wives' wishes, threw a celebration in the common tradition of "Tule": explanation of dreams. He invited neighbors and guests to interpret his and his wives' dreams. People told him that the dreams were to predict the birth of his son [*Manas, Semetei, Seitek...* 1995:7].

Another example is naming a newborn baby. In the Central Asian area this is a very important moment of life, having a magic sense. The usual custom of the oldest member of the tribe giving the name, or the local shaman predicting the future, was and still is popular in the area [Zhirmundsky 1962:100].

The name *Manas*, given by an unnamed wise man *dubana* (i.e., *divany* or shaman in the Orozbekov version, or mysterious *Hizr* in the Karallaev version), or four prophets ("tort paigambars" transcribed by Radlov), is introduced in the epic in repetitive lines:

His name—*Manas*!
His speech—of *Manas*!
Himself—*Manas*!

Similarly in another Central Asian epic *Korkut* the name for the

newborn son of the khan is given by the wise head of the tribe, the singer, and shaman Korkut himself. In the Uzbek *Alpamysh* the holy Ali plays that role, taking on the image of “*divany*” (shaman) to appear at the birth celebration of the main hero [Samoilovich 1911:299].

Another moment typical in Central Asian epics is the raising and training of the main hero by a shepherd. In the Uzbek version of *Gorogly* it was Idige; the future conqueror Manas spent his childhood in the family of the shepherd Oshpur [Zhirmundsky 1962:101].

Manas, like many other historical heroes and rulers, was married several times; to the member of a neighbouring royal family: “Manas was married to Karabeyrk (an Uyghur princess)—and the beauty of the newly-weds’ Yurt was praised in song by Jasan” [*Manas, Semetei, Seitek...* 1995:13]. Later Manas married Kanykei, the daughter of Tajik khan Temir from Bukhara. Their engagement was also developed as an epos. Jakyp, the father of Manas, searched throughout the whole world for a beautiful girl equal to his son. At last he found such young princess. He was asked to pay a fortune for that girl (Kalym) but Jakyp brought three times more to show his wealth [Zhirmundsky 1962:102].

Very often the epic marks the beginning of new customs and traditions related to family events and to rites of passage. “When Khan Koke-toi died all the people who were near his deathbed cried and wept. From that time it became the Kirgiz custom. Later, in the Karkyra valley many days were spent in commemoration of that event: competitions, fights, games, five days’ shooting” [*Manas, Semetei, Seitek...* 1995:26].

In *Manas* even the military actions reflect the symbolic meaning of musical instruments. For example, the size and structure of the army legions were indicated by different symbols including musical instruments. “A hundred—by stick, thousand—by *urnay*, ten thousand—by *kerney* (brass trumpet), a hundred thousand—by flag.” So wind instruments as an integral part of folk environment were used for military celebrations [*Manas, Semetei, Seitek...* 1995:31].

As we can see in the epic’s content, Manas was a Muslim practicing regularly: “When Manas was praying in the morning (*azan*) Konurbay crept up, and when Manas bent his head, Konurbay struck his neck with his sword blade. Wounded, ill and bleeding Manas went home” [*Manas, Semetei, Seitek...* 1995:40].

We can also see how animism and paganism were practised by the Kyrgyz at that time. Manas’s wife Kanykey prayed desperately to the sacred tree: “Help me, sacred tree! No one helps us! We are hungry! We are tired! Give us strength!” [*Manas, Semetei, Seitek...* 1995:48].

According to local custom, Kanykey abandoned her son Semetei to

save his life. She stepped over a fresh-cut young tree, let the baby step over a razor blade and dog's bowl, and announced that never and nowhere would she admit he was her son [*Manas, Semetei, Seitek...* 1995:49].

6. MUSIC IN *MANAS*

Unlike other epic performances, *Manas* is performed without instruments, but is accompanied with emotional mimicry and gestures. The rhythm of *Manas* is also very rich. Every event is realized and performed in different rhythms [Abdykarov and Dzhumaliev 1995:20]. The meter is based on 7–8 syllables. The rhyme is always the same according to the ancient archaic character [Zhirmundsky 1962:87].

As V. V. Radlov mentioned in his research the Kyrgyz epics were so impressive and emotionally vivid that he transcribed them translated into rhyme. The extent of the epic necessarily required specific structural and artistic forms. It is based on stable forms, which is why every single episode of *Manas* consists of three parts; exposition, development, and recapitulation [Musaev 1979:176].

Performance based on single separate episodes was the only acceptable way of giving the audience a view of the whole epic. More than that, every performance began with a short introduction narrating the previous events in prose. Such a reminder was the only way of keeping the listeners updated. These reminders were used at the beginning of performance and in the middle of narration to make it easier to follow events. Professor Auezov called it “*prolog v vide zachina*” i.e., a prologue as a setting up of a plot [Musaev 1979:179].

Smaller passages linking one action with another one, one part of narrative to another part, or when a new episode is introduced, are delivered through a monologue by the performer himself addressing his audience. Usually he uses a short prearranged set of lyrics in which names or places can be changed but the rhythm remains the same [Musaev 1979:180].

In *Manas* performance the content itself along with melodic chanting is highly valuable and signifies the style of training and individual ability to perform.

V. V. Radlov [1885:xv] had noticed the melodic development in *Manas* performance is based on only two tunes. One is fast and is used for description and narratives, while the second, slower and more solemn, is developed as a recitative to reflect the dialogues of heroes but amongst known *Manas* performers the richest variety of those two styles of tune

is used by Saiakbai Karalaev.

Musical study has been insufficient, but there are special reasons for this related to the nature of the epic. Fundamental and complex research is needed to provide a global view on this great human art phenomenon, the monumental epic *Manas*.

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