ROUTLEDGE REVIVALS

Turkic Oral Epic Poetry

Traditions, Forms, Poetic Structure

Karl Reichl

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Originally published in 1992, *Turkic Oral Poetry* provides an expert introduction to the oral epic traditions of the Turkic peoples of central Asia. The book seeks to remedy the problem of non-specialists' lack of access to information on the Turkic traditions, and in the process, it provides scholars in various disciplines with material for comparative investigation. The book focuses on "central traditions" of this region, specifically those of the Uzbeks, Kazakhs, Karakalpak's, and Kirghiz and looks at the historical and linguistic background to a survey of the earliest documents, portraits of the singers and of performance considerations of genre, story-patterns, and formulaic diction, and discussions of "composition in performance", memory, rhetoric and diffusion.

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Preface to the Reprint 2017

This book was written to familiarize the reader with the world of Turkic oral epic poetry, the vibrant oral tradition of a great number of Turkic-speaking peoples, extending over a vast area from Turkey to Xinjiang in western China and Yakutia in eastern Siberia. Much of the book was written during my visiting professorship at Harvard in 1990, where Albert Lord was a frequent interlocutor. Soon after its publication, Metin Ekici, then a doctoral student of the University of Wisconsin at Madison, now Professor of Turkology at Ege University in Izmir, proposed translating the book into Turkish. The Turkish translation was published in 2002 and is now in its third printing. In 2008 a Russian translation was published in the series "Issledovaniya po fol'kloru i mifologii Vostoka" (Studies in the Folklore and Mythology of the East) of the Russian Academy of Sciences, and in 2011 a Chinese translation came out in the series "Folkloristic Studies" of the Chinese Academy Social Sciences. While these translations enjoy great popularity and are all still in print, the original has long been out of print. A reprint makes the English version again accessible, and I am most grateful to Routledge for making this possible.

Since the original publication there have been changes in various Turkic oral traditions and there have been advances in the field of Turkology. These changes, however, only impinge marginally on the argumentation of the book. This study of Turkic oral epic poetry is both introductory and descriptive in orientation, bringing together various oral traditions that share a common linguistic and cultural heritage, and analyzing them within a theoretical framework indebted to Oral Theory. What has changed since the 1980s and early 1990s, when the research for this book was conducted, can be summarized under two headings: 'death and revival' and 'editions and editorial projects'. In the past years a number of epic singer-narrators mentioned in this book have died and in some cases with their death oral traditions came to an end. Among the singers I have recorded are the Karakalpak *baqsï* Genžebay Tilewmuratov (d. 1997) and the Karakalpak *žïraw* Žumabay Bazarov (d. 2006), whose *Edige* appeared in 2007 in a bilingual edition.[1] The Kazakh *aqïn* Šeriyazdan Soltanbay-ulï from Xinjiang died in 2005. In 2014 two Kirghiz singers from Xinjiang died: Mämbet Sart (better known in later years under the name of Sart-aqun Qadïr), whose version of the epic *Qurmanbek* I was able to record a second time in 2011, and the great *manasčï Džüsüp*

[1] *Edige. A Karakalpak Oral Epic as Performed by Jumabay Bazarov*, edited andtranslated by Karl Reichl. FF Communications 293 (Helsinki, 2007).

Mamay, whose *Manas* I am in the process of translating.[2] With Žumabay Bazarov the last traditional Karakalpak *žïraw* has passed away. There is, however, a group of young epic singers (*žïraws*) , who are eager to keep the tradition alive, although they have learned their art from books and recordings rather than in the traditional way by word of mouth from a master singer. Similar revivals can be observed in other Turkic-speaking regions, for instance in Yakutia, where the renewed performance of epics has also been stimulated by the inscription of the Yakut oral epic on UNESCO's Intangible Cultural Heritage List in 2008.

In all Turkic-speaking areas there have been remarkable advances in editing and publishing the oral epic heritage since the early 1990s. In Kyrgyzstan the festival "Manas 1000" was celebrated in 1995 and in its wake the voluminous versions of the *Manas* cycle by the great Kirghiz singers Saġïmbay Orozbaqov and Sayaqbay Qaralaev have been published in their entirety. In Uzbekistan a similar national festival, called "Alpāmiš 1000", was held in 1999, and the most accomplished version of this epic (by the singer Fāzil Yoldāš-oġli) was published with an unabridged text and a scholarly Russian translation in the same year.[3] Between 2004 and 2014 a hundred volumes of Kazakh folklore texts, mostly epics, were published in a series entitled *Babalar sözi*, "the words of the forefathers". Similar editorial projects, aiming at a much fuller publication of the epics preserved in the various archives than hitherto attempted, have also been undertaken in other areas, in Azerbaijan, Tatarstan, Bashkiria, Yakutia and elsewhere. There is also more audio and video material available; an excellent source of Central Asian music, including the music of epic, is the website of *The Music of Central Asia*, edited by T. Levin, S. Daukeveya and E. Köchümkulova.[4]

There is no denying that the book could be updated bibliographically[5], and there are, of course, many more questions that can be asked about the oral epics in the Turkic-speaking world, but to ask and attempt to answer these questions is the material for a new book.

Bonn, July 2017

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[2] *Manas in the Version of Jüsüp Mamay*, translated by Karl Reichl. Xinjiang Manas Research Centre Publications. 2 vols. (Beijing, 2014-2015).

[3] *Alpamyš. Uzbekskij narodnyj geroičeskij ėpos*, edited by T. MIrzaev and translated by M. Abduraximov (Tashkent, 1999).

[4] Bloomington, IN, 2016. See http://www.musicofcentralasia.org.

[5] I have provided an up-to-date account, with bibliographical references, of the various Turkic oral epic traditions in the relevant entries of the *Encyclopedia of Turkic Languages and Linguistics*, edited by Lars Johanson, Éva Á. Csató et al. (Leiden: Brill, forthcoming).

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General Editor's Foreword

The purpose of the Albert Bates Lord Studies in Oral Tradition, as of its companion the journal *Oral Tradition*, is to bring before an interdisciplinary constituency essays, monographs, and collections that, in focusing on one or more oral or oral-derived traditions, offer insights that can be useful for investigators in many of the more than one hundred language areas now influenced by this field. Thus the first six volumes have treated, in order, orality and the Hebrew *Mishnah* (Jacob Neusner), *Beowulf* and shamanism (Stephen Glosecki), the Hispanic ballad (Ruth Webber, editor), the ballad tradition of "Count Claros" (Judith Seeger), memorization and the Middle English romances (Murray McGillivray), and Marcel Jousse's *The Oral Style* (Edgard Sienaert and Richard Whitaker, translators). Future books in this series will include studies of Beowulf and the Bear's Son folktale, African trickster tales from Togo, modes of identification in Homeric epic, and a collection of articles on a variety of areas for Alain Renoir. The overall aim is to initiate and to sustain conversations among scholars who, because of the categories according to which we are segregated in modern academia, seldom if ever have a chance to talk to one another. With this goal in mind, we extend a warm invitation to new voices to join the conversation—both as readers of these and other volumes and, hopefully, as authors with contributions to the ongoing discourse.

This seventh volume in the Lord series, Karl Reichl's Turkic Oral Epic Poetry, answers a longstanding need by providing an expert introduction to the oral epic traditions of the Turkic peoples of central Asia. It was in fact this set of traditions, particularly the Kirghiz, in which Milman Parry was initially interested as he contemplated extending his theory of traditional oral composition from its textual base in Homer to a fieldwork demonstration of how actual epic bards compose orally. Since

political complications prevented Parry and Albert Lord from pursuing central Asian traditions, following in the footsteps of Wilhelm Radloff,[1] they journeyed instead to the former Yugoslavia (a historical irony of considerable proportions) to investigate the unlettered tradition of Serbo-Croatian epic. This change in plans was of enormous import for the comparative study of oral traditions, since it would now be the South Slavic, and not the central Asian, epos that would serve as the model for a far-reaching new theory that over the next fifty to sixty years would have a significant and permanent impact on so many different language areas. In the meantime, as Reichl points out, the Turkic traditions did not receive the comparative, international attention for which Radloff had argued, and which Parry had planned to devote to their study.

The present volume seeks to remedy the problem of non-specialists' lack of access to information on the Turkic traditions, and in the process to provide scholars in various disciplines with material for comparative investigation. Professor Reichl's credentials for the undertaking are distinguished and unique: first trained as a medievalist with primary interest in Old English, he has done extensive fieldwork in Turkic-speaking areas of the former Soviet Union and China and is also a member of the same Bonn Seminar on Central Asia founded by Radloff. He focuses on the "central traditions" of this region, specifically those of the Uzbeks, Kazakhs, Karakalpaks, and Kirghiz, with some attention as well to the epic poetry of the Turkmens, Azerbaijanians, Turks (of Turkey), Altaians, Tuvinians, Yakuts, and Bashkirs. Reichl's account is chiefly descriptive, proceeding through a historical and linguistic background to a survey of the earliest documents, portraits of the singers and of performance, considerations of genre, story-patterns, and formulaic diction, and discussions of "composition in performance," memory, rhetoric, and diffusion. The result is a thorough and splendidly organized tour through some of the world's most important, but least understood, oral epic traditions, one for which scholars in many fields will be grateful.

I might close this preface on a personal note. When in 1986 I first told the late Albert Lord of the pending inauguration of a series in his honor and asked whether he had any thoughts concerning possible directions or contributions, the very first project he mentioned was a book on Turkic oral epic by Karl Reichl. Now, some six years later, that suggestion takes tangible shape as the seventh volume in his series, and I know he would be very pleased indeed.

John Miles Foley

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Notes

1. Especially important for Parry was Radloff's *Proben der Volkslitteratur der nördlichen türkischen Stämme*, vol. 5: Der Dialect der Kara-Kirgisen (St. Petersburg: Commissionäre der Kaiserlichen Akademie der Wissenschaften, 1885). An English translation of the preface is available in *Oral Tradition*, 5 (1990): 73-90. On Radlov's influence on Parry, see John Miles Foley, *The Theory of Oral Composition: History and Methodology* (Bloomington: Indiana University Press, 1988), pp. 10-13.

Contents

Preface

Although a book on Turkic oral epic poetry needs no apology, such a book coming from a medievalist calls at least for an explanation. While still a student in Munich I bought a book with the title *Der Sänger erzählt: Wie ein Epos entsteht.* It was A. B. Lord's *The Singer of Tales*, which had only just come out in a German translation. It made fascinating reading and first revealed to me the relevance of living oral epic poetry for the study of medieval epic poetry, in particular of works such as *Beowulf* or the *Chanson de Roland*, epics which have come down to us in written form but betray their origin in an oral milieu. The path to Central Asia was opened for me only later when I discovered that the Bavarian State Library possessed a complete set of Radloff's *Proben der Volkslitteratur der türkischen Stämme.* Radloff's translations, in their charming, antiquated German, introduced me to a world of heroism and passion, romance and adventure, marvel and magic, which has held me spellbound ever since. The parallels to medieval narrative were obvious and seemed worthy of further exploration. It has been a long way since then, and on the way I met fellow-travelers, medievalists like me who had already studied Turkic oral epic poetry from a comparative point of view and on whose work I could build, standing, in the words of Bernard of Chartres, like a dwarf on the shoulders of giants. Although, in the end, I did not write a comparative study of Turkic oral epic poetry, the medievalist perspective will nevertheless be clear to the reader, in the types of questions asked as well as the general methodological orientation of the book.

In the course of doing research for this book I have become indebted to many people and institutions. The German Research Foundation (DFG) gave me grants for a number of extended research trips to Central Asia, both in the former Soviet Union and in China. The German Academic Exchange Organization (DAAD) sponsored a visiting professorship at the University of Nukus in Karakalpakistan. I have

repeatedly been the guest of the Uzbek Academy of Sciences and the Chinese Academy of Social Sciences. Among the native scholars who have helped me with my research, I would like to express my gratitude in particular to Tora Mirzaev, head of the Folklore Department of the Uzbek Academy of Sciences in Tashkent, and to Professor Qabïl Maqsetov, formerly of the Karakalpak Branch of the Uzbek Academy of Sciences in Nukus, now at Nukus University. I have received much encouragement for my work on Turkic oral epic poetry through my membership in the Research Group on Central Asia at the University of Bonn, and I am grateful to Professor Walther Heissig for asking me to join the *Sonderforschungsbereich.* I am also grateful to Professor John Miles Foley for inviting me to write this book for the "Albert Bates Lord Studies in Oral Tradition."

My special thanks go to Professor John Stevens of the University of Cambridge and to Professor A. T. Hatto of the University of London for having made many valuable and thought-provoking comments on the manuscript of my book and for correcting a number of errors, inaccuracies, and stylistic infelicities. For imperfections that remain, I am solely responsible. Since the time when I was his student in Cambridge, Professor Stevens has encouraged me to see the literature of medieval England in a wider perspective, and I am grateful for his more than professional interest in my work. Professor Hatto has supported me in my study of Turkic oral epic poetry since we first met at the second *Epensymposium* in Bonn in 1979, and his advice has not only been of profit for this book but has also enriched my research into Central Asian oral epic poetry in general. I would finally like to record my gratitude to the late Professor A. B. Lord, whose closer acquaintance I was privileged to make during my time as a visiting professor at Harvard. His *Der Sänger erzählt* has had a decisive influence on my work, and I feel honored that my study of Turkic oral epic poetry will appear in a series bearing his name.

Karl Reichl

Introduction

> Be Homer's works your study and delight,
> Read them by day, and meditate by night;
> Thence form your judgement, thence your maxims bring,
> And trace the Muses upward to their spring.
>
> Pope, *An Essay on Criticism*

The Homeric poems have not only had a profound influence on Western literature, from Virgil to James Joyce and beyond, their continued study has also deepened our appreciation of epic and heroic poetry in general. The world of the *Iliad* and the *Odyssey*, this "wide expanse... That deep-browed Homer ruled as his demesne" (Keats), has become a familiar world for the Western reader, guiding him when he first approaches epic traditions other than that of Ancient Greece. But while a knowledge of the *Iliad* and the *Odyssey* might help us in the understanding and interpretation of both Western and non-Western epic poetry, the study of contemporary or near-contemporary traditions of oral epic poetry can also throw light on the Homeric poems themselves. Turkic oral epic poetry was brought to the attention of comparativists as early as 1885 when Wilhelm Radloff pointed out the relevance of Kirghiz epic poetry to the Homeric question in the preface to the fifth volume of his monumental *Proben der Volkslitteratur der türkischen Stämme Süd-Sibiriens*:

> I believe that the dispute about the "Homeric question" has led to such irreconcilably opposing views mainly because none of the factions has understood — or could indeed understand — the true essence of the *aoidós*. The singer of Kirghiz epic poetry is a perfect example of an *aoidós*, as the Homeric songs themselves describe him.[1]

[1]Radloff 1885: xx; for a recent translation of Radloff's preface to the Kirghiz volume into English see Radloff 1990. — References are by author/editor and year; when two dates are given, the first date stands for the edition used, the date in

Neither the "analysts" nor the "unitarians" have, however, taken up Radloff's suggestion to settle their dispute by a close study of Kirghiz oral epic poetry. Quite apart from Homeric scholars like U. von Wilamowitz-Moellendorff, who have denied the legitimacy of comparing the *Iliad* or the *Odyssey* to oral epics such as those collected by Radloff, the references to Radloff's material in Homeric scholarship are generally slight and superficial. E. Drerup included Kirghiz epic poetry in his survey of oral epics, as does M. P. Nilsson in his discussion of the origin and transmission of epic poetry, but neither seems to have made any close study of the texts edited by Radloff.[2] When in the 1930s the "Homeric question" was finally tackled by investigating a living tradition of oral epic poetry, it was not possible for Western scholars to do any field work on the Turkic traditions in Central Asia. Milman Parry and Albert B. Lord turned to Yugoslavia instead, but they were both aware of the importance of Turkic material for the study of the "Homeric question," as is shown by several references to Kirghiz and Turkic epic poetry in their writings.[3]

Although Radloff's material was seriously studied by some Western scholars, in particular by H. M. and N. K. Chadwick in the third volume of their *Growth of Literature* (1932-40) and by M. Bowra in his comparative treatment of the heroic epic (1952), the mass of material collected and edited in this century has remained a largely untapped source for Western comparativists. Victor Žirmunskij has written a bibliographically updated appendix to a reprint of Nora Chadwick's survey of Turkic ("Tatar") epic poetry, but most of the texts and studies he quotes have remained unknown to all but a few specialists.[4] With some notable exceptions, the situation has not much changed since the days of A. N. Veselovskij, who, in a course of lectures held in 1881, criticized Western scholars for their lack of first-hand acquaintance with genuine oral poetry and hence their proneness to treat medieval popular epic poetry solely in terms of written literature:

brackets for the original publication; for full bibliographical details see the bibliography at the end of this book.

[2]See Drerup 1920; Nilsson 1933: 184ff.

[3]See Parry 1971 [1932]: 329, 334; Lord 1960: 281; compare also Lord 1987a.

[4]Chadwick, Zhirmunsky 1969. For short surveys of Turkic oral epic poetry in a Western language see Boratav 1964; Hatto 1965; Başgöz 1978a.

> Western scholars, who are very little acquainted with living epic poetry, involuntarily transfer questions of purely written literary criticism to questions of popular poetry in the older period. This is the fault of the whole criticism of the *Nibelungenlied* and partly the criticism of the Homeric epics.
>
> (Veselovskij 1940: 622)

There is nevertheless today a growing number of scholars who have become interested in oral epic poetry, and there seems therefore to be room for a book on Turkic oral epic poetry in a Western language. As will become evident in the following chapters, however, the variety of Turkic epic traditions and the sheer volume of recorded texts forbid an exhaustive treatment of Turkic oral epic poetry in a monograph of the given scope. The present study can therefore be no more than introductory. In writing this book I have been greatly indebted to the work of Turkologists and comparativists, and this indebtedness will be duly recorded in the references to the work of Western, Russian, and native scholars.

The point of departure for the following analysis and discussion of the Turkic oral epic is the conviction that — in Nilsson's words — "a comparative and empirical study of all existing epics is the only method for attaining a better understanding of the origin and development of Greek epics,"[5] and, I would add as a medievalist, of those medieval epics for which an "oral background" can be assumed. Nilsson has the origin and development of the Homeric epics and other poetry rooted in oral tradition in mind. It is, however, not only the historical, but more importantly also the aesthetic aspect which is at stake here. For the appreciation of a classical or medieval epic poem which is surmised to have originally flourished in an oral milieu, though (necessarily) extant only in writing, it is of prime importance to know what distinguishes a work of oral verbal art from a work of written literature. There is a significant difference between interpreting the Anglo-Saxon *Beowulf* as the work of a learned poet who uses Germanic legend to write an epic inspired by Virgil's *Aeneid* (or who writes perhaps even some kind of Christian allegory in a Germanic garb) and seeing the epic as the work of an oral poet, intended to be performed in a context of oral story-telling like that evoked in *Beowulf* itself when the *scop* tells the tale of

[5]Nilsson 1933: 185.

Finnsburh (lines 1063ff.). In his *Preface to Paradise Lost* C. S. Lewis stressed this intentional aspect of a work of art:

> The first qualification for judging any piece of workmanship from a corkscrew to a cathedral is to know *what* it is — what it was intended to do and how it is meant to be used. After that has been discovered the temperance reformer may decide that the corkscrew was made for a bad purpose, and the communist may think the same about the cathedral. But such questions come later. The first thing is to understand the object before you: as long as you think the corkscrew was meant for opening tins and the cathedral for entertaining tourists you can say nothing to the purpose about them.
>
> (Lewis 1942: 1)

The term "intentionality" is a loaded term, and it is perhaps less controversial to use a different theoretical approach. Lewis' dictum that a "piece of workmanship" is what it is by virtue of "how it is meant to be used" can be expressed also in structuralist terms: a work of art is a work of art not by virtue of some intrinsic characteristic but rather by virtue of the rules which regulate its use. In order to understand a text one must therefore know the conventions behind it, the rules that regulate its use, or, to employ yet a different theoretical metaphor, the code in which it is transmitted. It is with the code of oral poetry that this book is ultimately concerned. But although the motivating forces behind this study of Turkic oral epic poetry come from comparative literature and literary theory, the orientation of the book is descriptive rather than theoretical and comparative. The book is basically conceived as a descriptive analysis of Turkic oral epic poetry (with references to contiguous oral traditions), or rather of certain traditions and certain features and problems of Turkic oral epic poetry. The parallels with other epic traditions will, of course, be obvious to the comparatively-minded reader; I will, however, not pursue these parallels systematically in this book.

The focus of the book will be on what I term the "central traditions." By "central traditions" of Turkic oral epic poetry I mean the epic traditions of the Uzbeks (and Uighurs), Kazakhs, Karakalpaks, and Kirghiz. These are also the peoples among whom my own field work has been conducted. By subsuming these traditions under one heading I do not want to imply that they form a homogeneous group; there are marked differences between the various members of this group, and the Kirghiz tradition in particular occupies a special position. Apart from these central traditions I will touch upon a number of traditions on the

western and eastern fringes of what used to be called Western and Eastern Turkestan, i.e. on the epic poetry of the Turkmens, Azerbaijanians, and Turks of Turkey to the west and southwest of Central Asia proper and on the epic poetry of the Altaians and Tuvinians further east. Occasional references will also be made to other traditions more marginal to this central area, such as that of the Yakuts in northern Siberia or of the Bashkirs south of the Urals. Chapter One will provide some basic information on these and other Turkic peoples, on their languages and cultures.

Before some background information on the Turkic world is offered, a few general remarks on the terminology employed in this book might be helpful. A number of native terms like *dastan* or *baxši* will be found in my discussion of Turkic epic poetry. The meaning of these words is explained at their first occurrence; for the reader's convenience, however, a glossary of these terms will be found at the end of the book. It will be remarked that some of these terms, as well as personal and geographical names, occur in varying forms. Instead of *dastan* the reader will, for instance, also come across the forms *destan*, *dāstān*, or *dästan*. Variations of this kind are due to dialectal variations among the Turkic languages; these variations should not, it is hoped, impair the readability of the text. In the use of both native and English terms I have tried to be as consistent as possible. As far as English spellings of native names and terms are in common use, I have preferred these to transliterated forms.[6] I hence employ the spelling "Kazakh" rather than "Qazaq," which would be more correct according to the transliteration and transcription system used in this book. It should be noted that the Kazakhs were called "Kirghiz" in the 19th century and the Kirghiz "Kara-Kirghiz." I haved indicated deviations from modern usage in quotations from Radloff and other authors. Sometimes more than one English form is in use, such as "Turcoman," "Turkmen," or "Turkmenian"; I use "Turkmen" when referring to both the language and the people and "Turcoman" only in quotations when this word occurs in an English text.

In order to avoid confusion, the distinction between "Turkish" and "Turkic" has been carefully maintained throughout the book. "Turkish" refers to the language of the Turks of Turkey; older forms of Turkish

[6]The Russian terms *rajon* and *oblast'*, denoting administrative districts, have been translated as "district" and "province," respectively.

(before Ataturk's language reforms in the 1920s) are generally referred to as Ottoman or Ottoman Turkish. "Turkic," on the other hand, refers to the language-group to which Turkish belongs; it is a general term like "Germanic" as opposed to "German." No knowledge of a Turkic language is assumed on the part of the reader. All quotations from Turkic texts will be translated into English, and the linguistic and stylistic peculiarities of the texts analysed will be clarified for the non-specialist to the extent that their understanding is essential for my general argument. Unless indicated otherwise, all translations are my own. I have tried to translate the quotations from Turkic epic poetry fairly literally, preserving, however, English idiom as far as possible.

One further group of related words can easily lead to misunderstandings, and my use of them should be taken note of: "Altai" denotes the geographical area of the Altai Mountains in Central Asia; "Altaian" denotes the people living in and around the Altai and the group of closely related Turkic languages and dialects they speak; "Altaic" denotes a (proposed) language-family consisting of the Turkic, the Mongolian and the Tungusic languages (see Chapter One, pp. 25f.).

Finally, a few comments on my use of the terms "version" and "variant" are called for. According to Žirmunskij and other Russian and Central Asian scholars there is a difference between "variant" and "version."[7] The various texts performed by a singer are considered performances of his variant. We have hence a singer A's variant of the epic of *Alpamïš*, a singer B's variant of this epic etc. Related variants can then be grouped together into a version. We can there distinguish between the Uzbek version of *Alpamïš*, the Kazakh version of *Alpamïš* and so on. Although this distinction is useful when discussing the relationship between different texts of an epic across a wider area (see Chapter Ten), I will not follow this terminological usage here and use both terms interchangeably. The distinction between "variant" and "version" is not commonly made in Western literary studies, nor is it followed by all Russian and Central Asian scholars.

[7]See Žirmunskij 1960; Mirzaev 1968: 25-30; Putilov 1988: 137ff.

A Note on Transcription and Pronunciation

Before going into a more detailed description of the main Turkic-speaking tribes and their history in Chapter One, I will end this brief introductory chapter with a note on transcription, transliteration, and pronunciation.[8] For Russian I have adopted the international transliteration system, normally favored by linguists, rather than the English system of transliteration (hence writing "Ščerbak" instead of "Shcherbak" etc.).[9] For Chinese (occurring only in the bibliography) I have used the Pinyin transliteration system. For the various Turkic languages I have mainly followed the transcription system employed in the *Philologiae Turcicae Fundamenta*,[10] with the exception of Turkish (of Turkey), which is quoted in the official modern orthography. Other Oriental languages, such as Arabic and Persian, have been transliterated in the form customary among linguists. Many Arabic and Persian words have entered the Turkic languages; when transcribing Turkic texts they have been rendered in their Turkic form and no attempt has been made to restore their Arabic form.[11]

In transcribing or transliterating Turkic texts my main concern has been for clarity and consistency. I have therefore attempted to use the same system for all Turkic languages, all of which (with the exception of Turkish) are today written in non-Latin alphabets, as far as an official orthography exists. In the former Soviet Union all Turkic languages are

[8]By "transliteration" the rendition of one script by another, such as the Cyrillic by the Latin, is meant; by "transcription" the rendition of an oral text in writing is meant. Both occur in the following, as some of my examples come from printed editions and manuscripts, some from tape-recorded texts.

[9]If a Russian name also appears in a different form in a publication in English or another Western language, I have generally left the Russian form of the name and put the non-Russian form in brackets in the bibliographical references, writing e.g. Žirmunskij [Schirmunski]. The same applies to Turkic names, which often appear in a Russian form in publications from the former Soviet Union. Here the first name given is the Turkic name, the name in brackets the Russian form (e.g. Äwezov [Auezov]).

[10]Deny et al. 1959-64.

[11]Thus I transliterate the word for storyteller, *qïssaxān*, in the Turkic manner, rather than according to the Arabic and Persian roots of this word (< Arabic *qiṣṣa* + Persian *xwān*).

at present written in a modified version of the Cyrillic alphabet, although in some Central Asian republics the spread of the Arabic alphabet is noticeable. In China the Turkic languages are written in a modified form of the Arabic alphabet; the attempts at introducing a Latin script have not been successful. My transcriptions are "broad transcriptions," i.e. they are phonemic rather than phonetic. A number of nuances which the linguist would expect to find in a Turkological work have been ignored.[12] This applies in particular to the transcription and transliteration of Uzbek and Uighur. In the writing of Uzbek and Uighur (in Cyrillic and Arabic) no distinction is made between a close and an unrounded /i/-sound, a basic distinction in the Turkic languages (see below). This is due to the loss of vowel-harmony in these languages, at least in the standard varieties (see Chapter One). In spoken Uzbek and Uighur the /i/ is very often an unrounded /i/-sound; but as the laxness of this vowel is not regulated by the laws of vowel-harmony, I have adopted the practice of native orthography of symbolizing all /i/-sounds by <i>.

The following remarks are offered as a rough guideline to pronunciation.

— Apart from the cases discussed below, consonants are pronounced like their English equivalents, vowels like their Italian or Spanish equivalents.

— Long vowels are written as <ā> (also <â> and <aa>), <ē> (also <ee>), <ī> (also <î> and <ii>), <ō> (also <oo>), <ū> (also <û> and <uu>), <öö>, <üü>, and <ää>. The values of <ā>, <ē>, <ī>, <ō>, and <ū> correspond

[12] In Turkmen, for instance, the sibilants, transliterated as <s> and <z>, are pronounced as dental fricatives. In Karakalpak an initial /e/ is pronounced as [ye], an initial /o/ as [uo]. Variations also occur in the pronunciation of the development of Old Turkic /y/ in an initial position. In standard Kazakh and Karakalpak this sound is a [ž], but in many Kazakh and Karakalpak dialects it is a [dž]; even more variation is encountered in the development of Old Turkic initial /y/ in the various Altaian dialects. I have marked dialectal traits only in exceptional cases (see pp. 238ff.).

roughly to those they have in Italian or Spanish; for <ö>, <ü>, and <ä> see below.[13]

— In Uzbek, Persian, and Tajik words <ā> stands for a dark vowel as in English *ball.*

— The Turkic languages have an unrounded, central /i/-sound, transcribed as <ï> and written as <ı> in Turkish; its sound can be approximated by pronouncing German <ü> or French <u> without rounding one's lips.

— The rounded vowels <ö> and <ü> are pronounced roughly like their German equivalents, as in German *schön* and *München*, respectively.

— <ä> stands for an open /æ/-sound as in English *at.* The difference between an open and a closed /e/ sound has, however, not been expressed systematically, in particular not in the case of Turkic languages in which this distinction is not phonemic; here <e> can stand for both an open and a closed vowel.

— Consonants have approximately their English values, but the following conventions and exceptions should be noted:

— The voiceless and voiced sibilants as in English *shoe* and *rouge* are transcribed as <š> (= Turkish <ş>) and <ž> (= Turkish <j>), respectively.

— The voiceless and voiced affricates as in English *chin* and *jump* are transcribed as <č> (= Turkish <ç>) and <dž> (= Turkish <c>), respectively.

— The /r/ is trilled in the Turkic languages.

[13]In accordance with native orthography, I have symbolized long vowels by doubling the letter rather than by using the macron when transcribing/transliterating Kirghiz, Yakut, Altaian, and Tuvinian. The graphemes <â>, <î>, and <û> are mostly confined to Persian and Arabic loan words in Turkish.

— The velar nasal as in English *sing* is transcribed as <ŋ>.

— The velar voiceless fricative as in Scottish *loch* is transcribed as <x>, its voiced counterpart is transcribed as <ġ>. The latter is written <ğ> in Turkish; in Standard Turkish it is virtually unpronounced, with, however, compensatory lengthening of the preceding vowel.

— The semivowel /y/ as in English *you* is transcribed as <y>.

— The consonantal value of the sound transcribed as <w> is in Turkic words generally that of a labiodental fricative as in English *vat*, in Arabic and Persian words that of a bilabial fricative or labiovelar semivowel as in English *web*. After vowels, as e.g. in Uzbek *Rawšan*, it stands for a vowel or semivowel (compare the /au/-sound in English *bough*).

— Rarely some additional symbols are used in the transcription of Turkic texts:

— <d'> in the transcription/transliteration of Altaian and Yakut texts symbolizes a palatal /d/, partly realized as an affricate; compare the pronunciation of /d/ + /y/ in English *would you*.

— <ð> in the transcription/transliteration of Bashkir symbolizes a voiced dental fricative as in English *they*, <θ> a voiceless dental fricative as in English *thin*.

— <a'> in the transcription/transliteration of Tuvinian symbolizes a pharyngealized ("throaty") vowel.

— <ă> in the transcription/transliteration of Chuvash symbolizes a reduced vowel (ï, o).

— <ç> in the transcription/transliteration of Chuvash symbolizes a palatalized sibilant (sy, zy).

— As to the transcription/transliteration of Arabic and Persian words the following points should be noted:

— Silent <w> in Persian words is transliterated by <ẉ>.

— In Arabic words the so-called emphatic consonants are symbolized by a dot beneath them (e.g. <ṭ>). The dot is also used to mark the emphatically pronounced /h/: <ḥ>.

— <'> symbolizes in Arabic words the *hamza*, a weak glottal stop.[14]

— The Arabic *ʿain*, a guttural stop pronounced with a tightened larynx, is symbolized by <ʿ>.

[14]This is not to be confused with the use of <'> in the transliteration of Russian words, where it denotes palatalization.

Chapter One

The Turkic Peoples:

Backgrounds and Contexts

Arabī asl, fārsī šekar,
hindī namak, turkī honar.

Arabic is the root, Persian is sugar,
Hindi is salt, Turki is art.

These lines, attributed to one of the greatest Central Asian poets of the late Middle Ages, Mīr Ali Šīr Navā'ī (1441-1501), reflect not only the poet's pride in his own language, but also the multilingual context of the Turkic world. Ali Šīr Navā'ī wrote in Chaghatay, the predecessor of Modern Uzbek and Modern Uighur, a language which had come, like Turkish, under the strong influence of Arabic and Persian. The Persian and Arabic element in many Turkic languages is, of course, due to the fact that most speakers of Turkic idioms belong to the Islamic world. But this is not true of all Turkic-speaking peoples. The Yakuts of northern Siberia were at the beginning of this century still mostly shamanists, the Karaims in Lithuania and the Ukraine profess the Jewish faith, the Gagauz in Bulgaria and Moldavia are Christians, and the Tuvinians in the Altai Mountains were until recently Buddhists. All the Turkic languages spoken by the various Turkic peoples,[1] whatever their cultural and religious milieu, do, however, despite external influences from other languages, form a comparatively homogeneous language-family with well-defined structural traits. There is

[1]The expression "Turkic peoples" is to be understood as short for "Turkic-speaking peoples."

no space here for an extensive discussion of linguistic structure; information on the most characteristic features of the Turkic languages can, however, be found in the section on the Turkic languages at the end of this chapter.

Beginnings

The earliest documents in a Turkic language are runic inscriptions, of which the most important were found in the valleys of the Orkhon and the Yenisei rivers (see Figure 1, p. 29). These inscriptions date from the beginning of the 8th century A.D. onwards and record the warlike feats of various Turkic *qaġans*, or rulers, of the Second East Turkic Empire (which flourished from about 680 to 740). They have been set down as a record as well as a warning for future generations; as the memorial inscription for Prince Kül puts it: "See these writings and learn a lesson!"[2]

The history of the Turks is, of course, older than the earliest documents in Turkic. The nomadic society depicted in the inscriptions is certainly not that of a people in the first stage of its ethnogenesis. The Turkic world had already undergone a fairly complex tribal fragmentation as a result of centuries of migration, conquest, defeat, and assimilation. This earlier history can only be reconstructed with the help of non-Turkic chronicles and annals, in particular the works of Chinese historiography. The ethnic and linguistic identification of peoples like the Hiung-nu (Eastern Huns; 2nd century B.C.) is, however, more than problematic, as is their relationship to the later Western Huns and the precise linguistic make-up of Attila's troops.[3] It is tempting to speculate

[2]Quoted from Tekin 1968: 263. On the dating of the runic inscriptions see Kononov 1980: 14ff., 19-20.

[3]There is a fairly extensive literature on the early history of the Turkic peoples, but many points remain unresolved. Detailed studies of the Old Turkic empire (6th to 8th c. A.D.) are Kljaštornyj 1964 and Gumilev 1967; the classic study of the nomadic empires of Eurasia from the Scythians to the Mongols is Grousset 1952; for surveys of Turkic history in Central Asia see Spuler 1966; Menges 1968: 16-55; Hambly et al. 1969; Kwanten 1979; Sinor 1990; an older study of the history of the Turkic peoples is Barthold 1962. On the Hiung-nu see Sinor 1990: 118-49; on the language of the Huns see Benzing 1959. — The early history of the various peoples of Central Asia is also extensively treated in the Academy histories of the various Central Asian republics (Uzbekistan, Kazakhstan, Kirgizia etc.).

that the two singers at Attila's court, seen by the Byzantine historiographer Priskos on his embassy to the Huns in A.D. 448, were singing in Turkic. His report would then be the first historical reference to Turkic praise poetry.

> When evening came on torches were lighted and two barbarians stepped forth in front of Attila and recited poems which they had composed, recounting his victories and his valiant deeds in war. The banqueters fixed their eyes upon them, some being charmed with the poems, while others were roused in spirit, as the recollection of their wars came back to them. Others again burst into tears, because their bodies were enfeebled by age and their martial ardour had perforce to remain unsatisfied.
>
> (Chadwick 1932-40: I, 575-576)

But quite apart from the fact that these singers might have been Goths, as Germanists like to suppose, it is far from certain that the retainers of Attila's court spoke a Turkic idiom.[4]

Whatever the precise linguistic affiliations of the "northern barbarians" who have posed an ever-present threat to the Chinese from time immemorial, and whatever the genetic relationship between the Turkic, Mongolian, and Tungus languages, there can be no doubt that all these peoples have similar origins if not a common origin in northeast Asia and that they are culturally very close in their early stages of societal development as hunters of the taiga. This cultural proximity applies also to the later stages of Turks and Mongols as nomadic peoples, roving over the steppes of Eurasia.

This is not the place to retrace the history of the Turkic peoples, but it is important to realize, when discussing Turkic oral poetry, that it does not exist in a timeless void, but is intimately connected to the complex and diverse historical development of the Turkic tribes and nations. There is a certain correlation between the various types and forms of Turkic oral epics and their respective "historical depth." We find among certain Turkic peoples such as the Altaians, Yakuts, and Tuvinians epic poetry which is deeply imbued with shamanistic ideas and has its historical roots in the archaic world of northern Asia.[5] This

[4]On the identification of the two "barbarians" performing at Attila's court as Goths see Chadwick 1932-40: I, 576; Heusler 1943: 113-114; on their identification as Turks see Žirmunskij, Zarifov 1947: 8. Compare also Hatto 1965: 115.

[5]For a short sketch of this world see Johansen 1959; for a more detailed survey see the articles in Fitzhugh, Crowell 1988.

type of poetry must be seen in connection with the epic poetry of other Siberian peoples, such as the various Tungusic and Palaeo-Asiatic peoples, including the Ainu of northern Japan. At the other end of the historical scale, so to speak, we find the oral epic poetry of the Islamized Turks such as the Ottoman Turks (the Turks of Turkey), the Uzbeks, and the Uighurs, who have come heavily under the influence of Persio-Arabic literacy and literature. Here oral and literate traditions cannot always be separated into independent strands; their symbiosis has resulted in particular forms and modes of oral epic poetry. The most widespread genre of this type of epic poetry is the love-romance; its typical form is the mixture of verse and prose (see Chapter Five).

The World of the Nomad

The central core of Turkic epic poetry is formed by the epic traditions of peoples such as the Kazakhs, the Karakalpaks, and the Kirghiz. It is in their epic poetry that we encounter the best reflection and expression of the world of the Central Asian nomad, a world in which many Turkic tribes have lived from the time Turkic peoples first appeared on the historical scene until fairly recently, in some cases until now. This world had its historical apogee in the time of the Mongolian expansion in the 13th and 14th centuries, the most powerful *empire des steppes*.[6] The "heroic time" of the oral epic of the nomadic Turks is the time of their freely roaming over the steppes of Central Asia, as in the days of the Golden Horde (13th to 15th c.). Historically, a number of epics typical of this group reflect, however, a later era, the time of the tribal wars between the Western Mongols and the Turks (16th to 18th c.).

Nomadism in the Eurasian steppes predates the putative origins of the Turkic world by many centuries. The oldest extensive description of a Eurasian nomadic tribe is Herodotus' account of the Scythians in the fourth book of his *Histories* (5th c. B.C.). He characterizes them as "pastoralists" (*nomádes*), warlike horsemen with barbarian customs such

[6]See Grousset 1952.

as head-hunting, horse-sacrifices, and drinking fermented mare's milk.[7] Although head-hunting is no longer practiced, fermented mare's milk (called *qïmïz*) is still a delicacy among the Central Asian Turks. William of Rubruk, the Franciscan friar who traveled to Mönke's court in Karakorum in the years 1253 to 1255, has left us a detailed description of how *qïmïz* was prepared among the Tatars of the South-Russian steppe.

> Cosmos, that is mare's milk, is made in this way: they stretch along the ground a long rope attached to two stakes stuck into the earth, and at about nine o'clock they tie to this rope the foals of the mares they want to milk. Then the mothers stand near their foals and let themselves be peacefully milked; if any one of them is too restless, then a man takes the foal and, placing it under her, lets it suck a little, and he takes it away again and the milker takes its place.
>
> And so, when they have collected a great quantity of milk, which is as sweet as cow's milk when it is fresh, they pour it into a large skin or bag and they begin churning it with a specially made stick which is as big as a man's head at its lower end, and hollowed out; and when they beat it quickly it begins to bubble like new wine and to turn sour and ferment, and they churn it until they can extract the butter. Then they taste it and when it is fairly pungent they drink it. As long as one is drinking, it bites the tongue like vinegar; when one stops, it leaves on the tongue the taste of milk of almonds and greatly delights the inner man; it even intoxicates those who have not a very good head. It also greatly provokes urine.
>
> (Dawson 1955: 98-99)

He has also given us a vivid picture of their nomadic way of life:

> And so on the third day after leaving Soldaia [on the Crimea] we came across the Tartars; when I came among them it seemed to me as if I were stepping into some other world, the life and customs of which I will describe for you as well as I can.
>
> The Tartars have no abiding city nor do they know of the one that is to come. They have divided among themselves Scythia, which stretches from the Danube as far as the rising of the sun. Each captain, according to whether he has more or fewer men under him, knows the limits of his pasturage and where to feed his flocks in winter, summer, spring and autumn, for in winter they come down to the warmer districts in the south, in summer they go up to the cooler ones in the north. They drive their cattle to graze on the pasture lands without water in winter when there is snow there, for the snow provides them with water.
>
> The dwelling in which they sleep has as its base a circle of interlaced sticks, and it is made of the same material; these sticks converge into

[7] *Histories*, IV.2 (fermented mare's milk); IV.64ff. (head-hunting); IV.72 (horse-sacrifice); see Godley 1920-25: II, 200/201; 260/261ff.; 270/271ff.

> a little circle at the top and from this a neck juts up like a chimney; they cover it with white felt and quite often they also coat the felt with lime or white clay and powdered bone to give it a more gleaming white, and sometimes they make it black. The felt round the neck at the top they decorate with lovely and varied paintings. Before the doorway they also hang felt worked in multicoloured designs; they sew coloured felt on to the other, making vines and trees, birds and animals.
>
> (Dawson 1955: 93-94)

This description could actually come from the great Turkologist of the 19th century, Wilhelm Radloff, who has given us a detailed and precise account of the Central Asian Turks in the ethnographic record of his travels among them.[8] The felt-yurt is still the dwelling of the nomadic or semi-nomadic Turks of Central Asia, conforming, despite regional variations, to the general pattern outlined by Rubruk.[9]

Nomadism is a form of life conditioned by economic necessities; as raisers of livestock the nomads have to move their animals to different pastures during the different seasons of the year. Their economically conditioned mobility has been enhanced from early times by the use of horses.[10] From the first millenium B.C. we encounter horsemen on the Eurasian steppe. How important the horse was to the Scythians is shown by Herodotus' report of a horse-sacrifice at the death of a nobleman (IV.72), a practice confirmed by archeological finds and later encountered also in the Turkic world. The Scythians and Sakas have left us pictorial representations of horses and riders; famous are their beautiful gold-ornaments, such as the "flying horse" from the Issyk kurgan (barrow) in southeast Kazakhstan, dating from the 5th or the 4th c. B.C.[11] "For the Kirghiz [= Kazakh]," writes Radloff, "the horse is the embodiment of all beauty, the pearl of the animals. He loves his horse more than his beloved, and a beautiful horse often tempts an

[8]See his *Aus Sibirien*; Radloff 1893.

[9]For the description of a Kazakh yurt see Radloff 1893: I, 457ff.; on Kazakh yurts see also Mukanov 1979; on Karakalpak yurts see Ždanko, Kamalov 1980: 27-57; on Kirghiz yurts see Dor 1975; on the different constructions of the yurts used by the nomadic Turks see also Basilov, Zirin 1989: 97-101. For a historical survey see Vajnštejn 1976.

[10]For a detailed account of nomadism among the Tuvinians see Vajnštejn [Vainshtein] 1980, in particular pp. 83ff.

[11]See Basilov, Zirin 1989: 33; on the "animal art of the steppes" see also the appendix to Grousset 1952: 623-637.

honest man to theft. Horse-theft is considered a kind of heroic deed, while the theft of other animals provokes only contempt. A Kirghiz is very loath to leave his riding horse to the use of another."[12] It is hardly surprising that in Turkic epic poetry the horse plays a role on a par with that of the hero and his companions (see Chapter Nine, pp. 296ff.).

Despite the importance of nomadism in the cultural and historical development of the Turkic peoples, it must be emphasized that one of the most important early medieval sedentary civilizations in Central Asia was also Turkic, namely that of the Uighurs, who flourished in Eastern Turkestan (the Tarim basin of present-day Chinese Xinjiang) between the 8th and the 14th centuries. The Uighurs, whose aristocracy was Manichean while the population was mostly Buddhist, have left a rich literary heritage.[13] Among the Uighur manuscripts which have come down to us there is one work which merits our attention here, the fragment of an epic on Oġuz (Oghuz) Qaġan from the 13th century (or possibly later). Another work originating in the Tarim basin is also of importance in this context, a Turkic dictionary, written between 1072 and 1078 by a member of the Karakhanid dynasty, Maḥmūd of Kashgar, which contains numerous illustrations from oral poetry, also from epic poetry. These works will be discussed in greater detail when it comes to putting Turkic oral epic poetry into its historical perspective (see Chapter Two).

The Turkic Peoples of Central Asia

In stressing the variety and diversity of Turkic epic poetry, a number of peoples and languages have been mentioned. It might be useful at this point to give a short survey of those peoples whose epic traditions will be dealt with in this book (see Figures 2 and 3, pp. 30-31). My main emphasis will be on the epic poetry of the Uzbeks, the Karakalpaks, the Kazakhs, and the Kirghiz. The Uzbeks live predominantly in Uzbekistan; they are also found in northern Afghanistan and in

[12]Radloff 1893: I, 441.

[13]On Old Turkic literature see Gabain 1964; on Old Turkic epic poetry see Chapter Two.

northwestern China. Their language belongs together with Modern Uighur to the central group of Turkic languages, languages which have developed from the Turkic dialect spoken and written at the courts of the Karakhanid rulers in the 11th and 12th centuries (Bālāsāghūn, Kashgar, Samarkand, Bukhara). Modern Uighur is spoken mostly in Xinjiang by the Uighurs, the largest linguistic minority of "Chinese Turkestan." The speakers of these two closely related languages have been under the influence of Iranian languages (Persian and Tajik) for centuries; in some areas (such as Bukhara or northern Afghanistan) Turkic-Iranian bilingualism is the rule. Although the speakers of Uzbek and Uighur are the typical city-dwellers of Central Asia and boast of a rich literary heritage, oral epic poetry is nevertheless cultivated both among the Uzbeks and among the Modern Uighurs of Eastern Turkestan (whose name is, incidentally, of recent date and is possibly a misnomer, insofar as their direct descent from the earlier Uighurs is doubtful). It came as something of a surprise when the serious recording of Uzbek epic poetry, which only started in the 1920s, uncovered a flourishing tradition of oral epic poetry, in particular among the nomadic and semi-nomadic Uzbeks, the so-called Kipchak-Uzbeks.

From the 11th century onwards the Turkic Kipchaks roamed over the vast steppes between the Caspian Sea and the Aral Sea, an area which was called after them *Dešt-i Qïpčaq*, the steppe of the Kipchaks. From medieval Russian sources the Kipchaks are known as Polovtsians; it was against the Polovtsians that Igor Svyatoslavich led his ill-fated military campaign, of which the celebrated *Lay of Igor's Campaign* tells. In the 13th century Batu, Chingis Khan's grandson, extended Mongolian power over the territory occupied by the Kipchaks as well as into Eastern Europe and founded the khanate of Kipchak, the realm of the Golden Horde, with Saray on the Volga as its capital. Kipchak was in fact the language of the Golden Horde, a language from which Modern Tatar, Kazakh, and Karakalpak, as well as a number of smaller Turkic languages, are descended.[14] At the end of the 14th century the khanate of Kipchak collapsed under the attacks of Timur and finally disintegrated into several smaller khanates. The khanates of Kazan and of

[14]The precise descent of these Turkic languages and their relationship to one another as well as to other Turkic languages is disputed; see also below on the Turkic languages.

Astrakhan lasted into the middle of the 16th century, the khanate of the Crimea even into the 18th century.

Further east Timur had erected the second Mongolian Empire, with Samarkand as his capital. Timur's realm was, however, of short duration, and decay set in after his death in 1405. In Transoxiana, the land east of the Oxus (Amu-Darya), a new power came to the fore in the second half of the 15th century, the Uzbeks under Muḥammad Shaibānī. Uzbek rule in Transoxiana (Arabic *māwarā'-an-nahr*, "the land beyond the river") resulted in three Turkic khanates, that of Khiva (the ancient Khwarezm), of Bukhara, and of Kokand. These khanates continued well into the 19th century, when they finally became incorporated into the Russian Empire.

Muḥammad Shaibānī's success in bringing Māwarānnahr under Uzbek rule was built on his grandfather Abu'l Khair's attempts to subjugate the Timurids in the first half of the 15th century. These attempts were, however, marred by opposition to Uzbek power from within. The clans which broke away from Abu'l Khair were called Kazakhs; when the Uzbeks under Muḥammad Shaibānī occupied Transoxiana, these Kazakh clans became the rulers of the steppes north of the Syr-Darya. They formed three hordes or khanates, the Great Horde (*Ulu žüz*), the Middle Horde (*Orta žüz*), and the Little Horde (*Kiši žüz*). In the beginning of the 17th century the Kazakhs were involved in a bitter and bloody war against the Mongolian Oirats or Kalmucks, who invaded their territory north of the Aral Sea and the Caspian Sea. The Mongolians were to continue to be a threat for the Kazakhs. The 17th and the first half of the 18th century are characterized by incessant fighting between the Kazakhs and their Mongolian aggressors, who had founded a powerful nomadic state in the Dzungarian steppe.[15] From the end of the 18th century onwards the Kazakhs increasingly came under Russian and Chinese rule. Today the Kazakhs live in a wide area from the Caspian Sea to the Tienshan Mountains. They are mostly found in Kazakhstan, but also in China, in Xinjiang, where they are the second-largest Turkic-speaking minority, with a large number of them still practicing a nomadic way of life.[16]

[15]For the history of Dzungaria see Zlatkin 1983: 59ff.

[16]On the history of the Kazakhs, especially their recent history, see Olcott 1987.

Like the Kazakhs, the Karakalpaks (Turkic *qara qalpaq* means "black hat") belonged to the Golden Horde. It is believed that the Karakalpaks originally descended from the *čërnye klobuki*, "black hats," first mentioned in Russian chronicles of the 12th century. These belonged to the group of Oghuz-Pecheneg Turks, but they were apparently later "Kipchakisized" by being incorporated into the Golden Horde.[17] From the 15th century onwards they migrated to the east; their presence in Central Asia is first attested for the 17th century. They have been living on the lower course of the Amu-Darya, south of the Aral Sea, since about the middle of the 18th century. First dependent on the khanate of Khiwa, they became part of the Russian Empire when Khiwa fell in 1873. Today the Karakalpaks live mostly in Karakalpakistan (in Uzbekistan). Although nomadism is on the decline, many traits of the nomadic world can still be found in Karakalpak society, one of them being their traditional tribal organization. The Karakalpaks divide into two *arïs* (literally "thills, shafts between which a horse is hitched to a wagon"), the Qoŋïrat and the On Tört Urïw (the Fourteen Tribes). The former are further subdivided into the clans of the Šüllik and Žawïnġïr, the latter into the clans of the Qïtay, Qïpšaq (Kipchak), Keneges, and Manġït.[18]

Best known among all Turkic peoples for their oral epics are probably the Kirghiz. They live mostly in the region of the Tienshan and Pamir Mountains, both on the Russian, Chinese, and Afghan sides.[19] Like the Kazakhs, the Kirghiz have clung to their nomadic way of life until the present day. Their epic poetry has been made famous through Radloff's translations and in particular by his discussion of the "Homeric question" with reference to the improvisational art of the Kirghiz epic singer. The history of the Kirghiz is complicated by the fact that a people bearing the name "Kirghiz" is found along the upper course of the Yenisei already in the 9th century. In A.D. 840 a Kirghiz federation defeated the Uighurs, who at that time were still settled in what is present-day Mongolia, thus causing the migration of the Uighurs into

[17] See Menges 1947: 5; Muminov et al. 1974: I, 89-101.

[18] See Ždanko 1950; Nasyrov 1983: 60f.

[19] As a result of the civil war in Afghanistan the Kirghiz have fled and are now settled in the vicinity of Lake Van in Turkey; on the Kirghiz of the Afghan Pamirs see Dor, Naumann 1978.

the Tarim basin. The relationship between the Kirghiz of the 9th century and the ancestors of the present-day Kirghiz is, however, far from clear, and it cannot be proved that today's Kirghiz descend from the Yenisei-Kirghiz. By the 13th century Kirghiz clans had moved into the Tienshan area and become part of Chaghatay's realm. During the Oirat raids of the 17th century some Kirghiz clans fled into Eastern Turkestan. In the 18th and 19th centuries the Kirghiz came successively under the rule of the Manchu, the khans of Kokand, and Imperial Russia. Today the majority of the Kirghiz live in Kirghizia; in Xinjiang there are about 100,000 Kirghiz, most of them living in the prefecture of Qïzïl-Su west of Kashgar.

Linguistically the Kirghiz are closely connected to the (Southern) Altaians of the Altai Mountains, from whom extensive recordings of epic poetry have also been made. The Altai is presumably the original home of the Turks, and it is perhaps no coincidence that some of the most archaic features of the Turkic peoples have been preserved among the Altaian Turks, in particular shamanistic beliefs and practices. This is also true of other Turkic tribes living in and around the Altai, such as the Tuvinians, the Khakas and the Karagas.

When discussing the traditions of what I have loosely termed here the central core of Turkic epic poetry, it will become clear that the edges of this central core are blurred, both towards the east when we move from the Islamized Turks to the shamanistic world of the Altaians and Tuvinians, and towards the southwest when we move from the nomadic milieu of Central Asia to the sedentary Turks of Transcaucasia and Anatolia. The Turks of the southwest of the Turkic linguistic area are descendants of the Oghuz, who migrated from their original home in Central Asia to the southwest from the 10th century onwards. In 1071 the Seljuks, an Oghuz tribe, defeated a Byzantine army near Malazgerd in eastern Anatolia, opening the way for the Turkish conquest of Asia Minor. While both the Turks of Anatolia and the Balkans and the Azerbaijanians of Transcaucasia and northwestern Iran have produced basically sedentary Near Eastern civilizations, the Turkmens of northeastern Iran and Turkmenistan, also descendants of the Oghuz, have preserved their nomadic way of life into the present century. Oral epic poetry flourishes among all of these Southwest-Turkic peoples; there is furthermore an important early Oghuz epic extant in two 16th-century manuscripts (but of considerably older date), the *Book of Dede Qorqut* (see Chapter Two).

Before concluding this necessarily brief and sketchy survey of the Turkic peoples, at least one more Turkic-speaking people should be mentioned, the Yakuts of northern Siberia. They must have originally lived in the area around Lake Baikal, from where they moved northwards, hence coming into close contact with peoples such as the Tungusic Evenki and Lamut and the Palaeo-Siberian Chukchi and Koryak. It is uncertain when this migration took place, as there are no historical records about Yakut history prior to the beginning of the Russian expansion into their territory in the first half of the 17th century. Owing to their remote and inhospitable habitat, the Yakuts have like the Altaians preserved a number of archaic customs and traditions, which are also reflected in their epic poetry. Although the framework of this book does not allow for an extensive discussion of Yakut epic poetry, reference to the Yakut *oloŋxo* (epic) will have to be made occasionally when it comes to discussing archaic layers in the Turkic oral epics of Central Asia.

The Turkic Languages

In a book on poetry and poetic texture some remarks on language and linguistic structure might not seem out of place. The typologically most characteristic feature of the Turkic languages is agglutination. Grammatical categories such as number, case, possession, tense, or mood are expressed by clearly distinguished affixes, "glued" to the stem of the word. Let us take the English expression *in my arms* as an example. In this English phrase plurality is encoded by a suffix (*-s*), while location and possession are expressed by free morphemes, the preposition *in* and the possessive pronoun *my*. In the Turkic languages all three grammatical categories are expressed by suffixes added to the stem of the word, i.e. to the lexeme translating English *arm*. Thus we have in Turkish:

kol –	lar –	ım –	da
arm –	PLURAL –	POSSESSIVE – 1st PERSON SINGULAR	LOCATIVE

Compare Uzbek *qol-lar-ïm-da*, Kazakh *qol-lar-ïm-da*, or Yakut *xol-lar-ïm-ŋa*. To give just one more example: In the English sentence *I didn't come*, negation is expressed by a free morpheme (*not*), often contracted and used as a clitic (*n't*), tense by a suffix (*-d*), "amalgamated" with the

stem of a free morpheme (*did* from *do*), and person by the personal pronoun *I*. In Turkish, as in other Turkic languages, the corresponding sentence consists of just one word, with clearly distinguishable affixes:

gel –	me –	di –	m
come –	NEGATION –	PAST –	1st PERSON SINGULAR

Compare once again Uzbek *kel-me-dim*, Kazakh *kel-me-dim*, or Yakut *käl-be-tim*.

In these forms a second trait of most Turkic languages is implicit, vowel-harmony. Vowel-harmony is basically a process of assimilation: the various affixes can assume different forms in order to match the quality of the stem-vowel. Thus the plural-suffix in Turkish is either *-lar* or *-ler*, depending on whether it is affixed to a stem with a velar or a palatal vowel: *kol-lar*, "arms," from *kol* with a "dark" vowel, but *it-ler*, "dogs," from *it* with a "light" vowel. Vowel-harmony is also found in other languages, such as Mongolian or Hungarian; it endows the language with a melodious flow and leaves a quite distinctive acoustic impression on the hearer.

Vowel-harmony is only one linguistic trait the Turkic and Mongolian languages (such as Khalkha Mongolian, Kalmuck, Buriat and others) have in common. The Turkic and Mongolian languages are also very similar in morphological and syntactic structure; furthermore, they share a number of lexical items, not all of which seem to have been borrowed from one language into the other. It is possible that the Turkic languages are genetically related to the Mongolian languages, and with them in turn also to the Manchu-Tungusic languages (such as Manchu, Nanay, Evenki, Lamut and others), spoken in the far eastern fringe of northern Asia. The Turkic languages would then like the other two language-families go back to a common Proto-Altaic language. Linguists are, however, divided on this issue, the critics of the "Altaic hypothesis" arguing that the similarities between these languages could very well have arisen through a long process of contact and intermingling, a process which seems to have been going on for a long time already when Turkic or presumably Turkic tribes are first mentioned in Chinese sources. Comparative philology, so successful in the reconstruction of Proto-Indo-European, yields far less reliable results in the case of the Altaic languages. The main reason for this is simply a matter of dates: