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THE SYSTEM OF CHARACTERS IN THE HEROIC EPIC OF THE KAZAKH PEOPLE

Heroic poems represent one of the most significant genres of the Kazakh epic, distinguished by their thematic depth, complex artistic structure and broad ideological scope. The epic serves as a cultural heritage that reflects the historical memory, spiritual worldview, aesthetic sensibilities and national aspirations of the people. Within Kazakh heroic epics, ideas such as national consciousness, patriotism, unity, justice, bravery, defense of the homeland and prioritizing the public good over individual interests are widely expressed. In this context, a typological analysis of the character systems in heroic poems provides a deeper understanding of the epic's nature, its genre-specific features, and its historical and social functions. The object of this study is the system of characters in Kazakh epics. The article examines the typological characteristics of the character system in the Kazakh heroic epic based on the poems "Alpamysh Batyr", "Kambar Batyr", "Er Targyn" and "Edige Batyr". The study comparatively analyzes the artistic structure of the heroes' images, their personal qualities, heroic ideals, and their functions at both the tribal and broader societal levels. The analysis shows that, in the epics, heroes mainly appear as protectors of their tribe and community, whereas in the Nogai cycle, their role expands and aligns with national and state interests. Accordingly, the character system becomes increasingly complex in response to historical circumstances. The results indicate that the system of characters in Kazakh epics has an evolutionary trajectory, with the hero's role developing from a tribal figure to a national, historically significant persona.

Keywords: folklore, Kazakh epic, typology, character system, heroic figure.

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Қазақ халқының батырлық эпосындағы кейіпкерлер жүйесі

Қаһармандық жырлар – қазақ эпосының мазмұндық тереңдігімен, көркемдік жүйесінің күрделілігімен және идеялық ауқымымен ерекшеленетін іргелі жанрларының бірі. Эпос – халықтың тарихи жадын, рухани дүниетанымын, эстетикалық талғамын және елдік мұратын танытатын мәдени мұра. Қазақ қаһармандық эпосының өн бойында елдік сана, отансүйгіштік, бірлік, әділдік, ерлік, елді сыртқы жаудан қорғау, халық мүддесін жеке бастың мүддесінен жоғары қою идеялары кең көрініс табады. Осы тұрғыдан алғанда, батырлар жырындағы кейіпкерлер жүйесін типологиялық аспектіде зерттеу эпостың табиғатын, жанрлық ерекшеліктері мен тарихи-әлеуметтік қызметін тереңірек түсінуге жол ашады. Зерттеу нысаны ретінде қазақ қаһармандық эпосындағы кейіпкерлер жүйесі алынды. Мақалада кейіпкерлер жүйесінің типологиялық сипаты «Алпамыс батыр», «Қамбар батыр», «Ер Тарғын», «Едіге батыр» жырлары негізінде талданады. Зерттеу барысында батырлар бейнесінің көркемдік сипаты, олардың тұлғалық ерекшеліктері, ерлік ұстанымы, сондай-ақ ру-тайпалық және жалпыхалықтық деңгейдегі қызметі салыстырмалы талдау арқылы қарастырылады.

Талдау барысында эпостардағы батырлардың негізінен ру намысын қорғаушы, қауым мүддесін сақтаушы тұлға ретінде көрінетіні, ал ноғайлы циклындағы жырларда олардың қызметі кеңейіп, елдік, мемлекеттік мүддемен сабақтасатыны айқындалады. Осыған сәйкес кейіпкерлер жүйесі де тарихи жағдайға байланысты күрделене түседі. Зерттеу нәтижесінде қазақ эпосындағы кейіпкерлер жүйесінің эволюциялық сипаты анықталып, батыр тұлғасы ру-тайпалық кеңістіктен жалпыхалықтық, мемлекеттік деңгейдегі тарихи тұлғаға дейін дамиды.

Түйін сөздер: фольклор, қазақ эпосы, типология, кейіпкерлер жүйесі, батырлық тұлға.

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Система персонажей героического эпоса казахского народа

Героические жыры представляют собой один из наиболее значимых жанров казахского эпоса, отличающийся тематической глубиной, сложной художественной структурой и широким идеологическим диапазоном. Эпос является важным культурным наследием, отражающим историческую память, духовное мировоззрение, эстетический вкус и национальные устремления народа. В казахском героическом эпосе широко представлены идеи национального самосознания, патриотизма, единства, справедливости, мужества, защиты родной земли и приоритета общественного блага над личными интересами. В этом контексте типологический анализ системы персонажей в героических жырах позволяет глубже понять природу эпоса, его жанровые особенности и историко-социальную функцию. Объектом исследования является система персонажей казахского эпоса. В статье анализируются типологические особенности системы персонажей казахского героического эпоса на основе жыров «Алпамыс батыр», «Қамбар батыр», «Ер Таргын» и «Едиге батыр». Исследование сравнительно рассматривает художественную структуру образов батыров, их личностные качества, героические идеалы и функции как на уровне рода и племени, так и на уровне всего народа. Анализ показывает, что в эпосах батыр предстает в первую очередь как защитник рода и общины, тогда как в жырах ногайского цикла его роль расширяется и соотносится с национальными и государственными интересами. Соответственно, система персонажей усложняется в зависимости от исторических обстоятельств. Результаты исследования показывают, что система персонажей казахского эпоса имеет эволюционную траекторию: роль батыра развивается от племенного героя к национально значимой исторической личности.

Ключевые слова: фольклор, казахский эпос, типология, система персонажей, героический образ.

Introduction

In the folkloric heritage of the Turkic peoples, Kazakh heroic epics occupy a distinctive place in terms of their genre development and depth of content. Kazakh heroic epic constitutes one of the cultural legacies that have preserved the historical memory, worldview, and spiritual values of the people. Within epic narratives, the valor of warriors who defended their homeland, along with social ideals and traits of national character, are synthesized and conveyed through vivid artistic imagery. From this perspective, the study of the system of epic characters provides an opportunity for a deeper understanding of the spiritual world of the people, their historical consciousness, and their modes of artistic thinking. The system of characters in Kazakh heroic epics is marked by structural complexity. Alongside the central figure of the hero, it encompasses his companions, adversaries, wise counselors, female figures, and mythological images, all of which together form an integrated artistic system. Each character type fulfills a specific function, contributing to the development of the plot, the ideological content, and the aesthetic unity of the epic. Therefore, a typological approach to these characters allows for the identification of their interrelations, structural roles and symbolic meanings.

The typology of characters in Kazakh heroic epics constitutes one of the significant issues in literary studies that requires dedicated scholarly examination. This is because each epic character performs a specific function, influences the development of the plot and contributes to the explication of the work's ideological content. The hero, his companions, adversaries, wise elders, female figures, and mythological characters together form an integrated system that determines the structural foundation of the epic.

In this regard, the purpose of the study is to identify the typological structure of the system of characters in the Kazakh heroic epic, analyze their artistic activity, interconnection and continuity with the national worldview. Kazakh heroic epics were selected as the research material. In particular, the epics "Alpamys Batyr", "Kobylandy Batyr" and "Er Targyn" were analyzed. In these works, the system of characters is clearly reflected and makes it possible to identify the typological structure. The methodological framework of the study is based on hermeneutic and comparative approaches. In terms of their central ideas and thematic scope, these epics may be regarded as unparalleled works. They encompass, among other themes, the widely discussed concept of the "Mangilik el", as well as a range of values associated with developed societies and

democratic ideals: peace, national unity, patriotic consciousness, social cohesion, collective effort, the prioritization of communal interests over individual concerns, support for the vulnerable, resistance to aggressors, and the aspiration for a prosperous and harmonious life in one's homeland – along with the active pursuit of these ideals. The findings of the study demonstrate that the system of characters in Kazakh heroic epics possesses a multi-layered and complex structure. By examining the character system of Kazakh epics, this study sheds light on the typological and structural features of epic characters. The results provide a basis for further discussion and research in literary studies, folklore studies, and cultural studies.

Material and methods

The study is based on a corpus of Kazakh heroic epics. The primary corpus includes “Alpamys Batyr”, “Kobylandy Batyr” and “Kambar Batyr” from the 100-volume collection “Бағалар сөзі” as well as epics of the Nogai cycle such as “Edige”, “Er Sayin” and “Orak-Mamay” along with the cycle “The Forty Heroes of Crimea”. The theoretical foundation of the study is formed by the works of prominent scholars of epic studies, including R. Berdibayev, Sh. Ybyrayev, B.U. Azibayeva, V.M. Zhirmunsky and V.Ya. Propp. The system of characters in these epics, their interrelations and their artistic functions constitute the central focus of the research. In addition, in order to achieve a deeper understanding of the epics, the study draws upon the works of both domestic and foreign scholars who have examined these texts. On the basis of existing scholarly research, the typological features of epic characters are analyzed.

The study employs comparative-historical and historical-textual methods, on the basis of which the characters of Kazakh heroic epics and their artistic features are examined through a comparative lens. Particular attention is given to the core ideals embedded in Kazakh epic tradition – statehood, the love of freedom and the enduring aspiration for independence within the collective consciousness – each of which is comprehensively elucidated. The historical reality reflected in the epics, as well as the socio-cultural atmosphere of Kazakh society in different periods, are thoroughly analyzed and form a central focus of the research.

Through the systematization of Kazakh heroic epics and scholarly interpretations related to them, the principal conclusions relevant to the research topic are synthesized. Previous scholarly perspec-

tives and arguments (such as the distinction between clan-tribal epics and those reflecting state-level concerns) are integrated into a coherent analytical framework and structured in accordance with the aims of the study. Furthermore, the political and social conditions of the historical periods in which the Kazakh people lived, along with the influence of nomadic civilization and the transformations it brought to social life, are examined in comparison with historical evidence.

Literature review

In Kazakh literary studies and folklore scholarship, the study of heroic epics is directly connected with the exploration of the sources of national spirituality. Among the foundational works in this field are the fundamental insights on epic tradition presented in the 12-volume collected works of M. Auezov, as well as the studies of Q. Zhumaliyev, which address issues of Kazakh epic and literary history. These works have served as a basis for scientific methodology and have laid the methodological foundations of epic studies.

The majority of scholars regard Kazakh heroic epics as a reflection of the people's historical memory and their enduring aspiration for freedom and statehood. The deep-rooted nature of this tradition, as well as its origins in a shared Turkic cultural continuum, has been substantiated from a comparative-historical perspective by such scholars as V.M. Zhirmunsky and V.Ya. Propp.

When talking about the development of the folklore of the modern Turkic peoples, it is necessary to mention the famous Turkologist N. Katanov. He was one of the first to translate many Turkic folklore works into Russian (Taimova & Begmanova, 2022).

In the analysis of the internal typology, narrative structure, and genre-specific features of Kazakh heroic epics, the works “Subjects of Kazakh Epic” by B. U. Azibayeva and “Epic Heritage” as well as “Kazakh Epic: Issues of Genre and Stages” by R. Berdibayev are of particular significance. B.U. Azibayeva correlates the development of Kazakh epic tradition with a two-thousand-year historical trajectory and systematizes it into clan-tribal and Nogai cycles. R. Berdibayev, in turn, examines the ideals of statehood and heroism in epic narratives in connection with the socio-historical context of different periods. These studies provide a comprehensive analysis of the developmental stages of Kazakh epic poetry and its distinctive artistic features. In addition, Sh. Ybyrayev's work “The World of Epic”, which explores the poetics of heroic epics,

offers important insights into the internal structural organization of epic texts and contributes to a deeper understanding of their compositional principles.

R.S. Lipets' analysis of the image of the hero and his horse, as well as A. P. Okladnikov's studies on Yakut epic tradition and its connections with the Southern Turkic world, further expand the conceptual scope of Kazakh epic studies. In the comparative study of Turkic heroic epics, the classical works of V.M. Zhirmunsky and V.Ya. Propp play a crucial role, as does F.I. Uрманче's research on the heroic epic traditions of Turkic peoples (Lipets, 1984).

The primary textual basis of the research is formed by the volumes of heroic epics included in the 100-volume series "Бабалар сөзі" ("Babalar sozi"). This extensive collection provides a comprehensive opportunity to analyze the textual diversity of Kazakh folklore, the integrity of epic narratives, and their role in representing folk ethics and the national cultural code. For instance, through the versions of epics such as "Alpamys Batyr", "Kobylandy Batyr", "Edige" and "Er Sayin" preserved in "Babalar sozi", the artistic representation of social values and historical reality within Kazakh society has been clearly demonstrated. In addition, the anthology "Spiritual Heritage", compiled by K. Sattarov, along with works on the history of Kazakh folkloristics, provided a basis for evaluating these epics within the framework of historical continuity.

In general, within literary studies, Kazakh epics are examined from several perspectives: as reflections of pre-colonial socio-historical realities, as narratives that resolve tensions between authority and the people on an epic scale and as carriers of the national cultural code.

Results and discussion

The well-known epic scholar B. U. Azibayeva, while encompassing the two-thousand-year history of heroic epics, classifies them into two conditional groups. This classification is based on the epic's central idea of defending the homeland and protecting the land. The scholar divides heroic epics as follows: "1) the classical examples of Kazakh epic tradition, i.e., works that depict heroes who fight for the independence and peace of individual clans and tribes and who are portrayed as invincible; 2) the Nogai cycle within Kazakh heroic epic tradition, i.e., works that depict heroes not of individual clans or tribes, but of the broader Nogai people" (Azhibayeva, 2014, p. 34). She attributes epics such as "Alpamys Batyr", "Kobylandy Batyr" and "Kambar Batyr" to the first group, defining them

as "vivid examples of tribal epics". To the second group – the Nogai cycle – she includes epics such as "Karasay and Kazi", "Er Sayin", "Orak", "Shora Batyr", "Er Kokshe", "Mamai", "Er Kosay", the cycle "The Forty Heroes of Crimea", as well as "Er Targyn" and "Edige". Based on the extensive variant richness and recurring motifs of the first group, she traces their origins and formative stages back to the ancient Turkic period. Regarding the genesis of the second group, the scholar notes: "The historical background of these epics is constituted by the events of the 14th–17th centuries, when the Golden Horde and the White Horde collapsed and were replaced by the Crimean, Astrakhan, Kazan, Nogai, and Kazakh khanates".

As can be observed, Alpamys acts in the interests of the Konyrat tribe, while Kambar fights for the future of the Argyn tribe. Similarly, Kobylandy was born among the Kipchak tribe and engages in battles on their behalf. The epics of the Nogai period are also heroic epics, in which concern for the fate of the entire people constitutes the primary aim of the hero. Regarding this, the scholar R. Berdibayev states: "In other Kazakh heroic epics as well ("Karasay and Kazi", "Shora Batyr", "The Forty Heroes of Crimea" etc.), the major heroic deeds of warriors fighting not for personal interests but for the peace of the entire people or tribe are placed in the foreground" (Berdibayev, 1997, p. 39).

"The main theme of heroic epic is the defense of one's clan-tribe and native land from invading enemies. Therefore, its plots, both in their entirety and in individual episodes, are directed toward revealing this theme" (Azhibayeva, 2014). This statement applies to all heroic epics, as it defines their fundamental idea and thematic core. It is of great significance that the people who created and preserved these epics over centuries, as well as the generations who inherited this spiritual legacy from their ancestors, have maintained this essential nature of the narratives. For the people, nothing is more important than the peace, unity, and stability of the homeland. At the same time, historical reality – marked by centuries of continuous warfare, its suffering and fear, and the destinies of noble warriors who took up arms in defense of their land – explains why these epics emerged as embodiments of a single lofty ideal and aspiration, and why they have consistently preserved this ideal throughout their existence. The problem of studying the epic continues to be relevant. The heightened scientific and public interest in the work is linked to the desire of peoples to explore the roots of their history, to understand the influence of integration processes on the formation of their spiritual

values, and the involvement of their nation in world culture (Lalakova, 2018).

The ideals of statehood and heroism represent a supreme value for any nation. However, history has demonstrated that only noble heroes endowed with exceptional qualities are capable of bearing such lofty ideals. Concern for the destiny of the nation is not a trait accessible to every individual. Therefore, it has been observed that the people themselves elevate into epic tradition the names of those who have set noble goals, devoted themselves to the unity and integrity of the country, and distinguished themselves through remarkable deeds. From this perspective, it is noted that “the main driving force of the plot, as well as the bearer of the epic’s ideas and conceptual framework, is the epic hero, the batyr. This is precisely why heroic epics are named after their protagonists” (Azhibayeva, 2014). The clearly defined heroic purpose of warfare and combat actions can be observed, for example, in the epic “Kobylandy”. To substantiate this statement, an excerpt from the epic is provided below:

*Қобылекең жетіп келеді
«Қолыма алдым найза» деп,
Тигізейін пайда» деп.
Таң атқанда Қобыланды
Шаһарды үш айналды
(Бабалар сөзі, V.36, 2006, p. 82)*

*Translation:
Kobylandy the hero arrived.
“I have taken up my spear,” he declared,
“And bring them relief and help,” he said.
At first light, Kobylandy
Rode around the city three times.*

Through this, we can clearly observe that the hero’s handling of the spear is not a pastime of idle amusement, but rather stems from his concern for bringing benefit to his people. The longest and most continuous wars in the history of the Kazakh people were fought against the Kalmyks. In this regard, earlier historical enemies such as the Mongols, Dzungars, Oirats, and Shurshuts are not consistently encountered in the narratives. It is understood that these names in fact refer to different tribal or ethnic formations within a single broader people. However, in epic works, only the name “Kalmyk” or its substitute term “kafir” (“infidel”) is typically used. Heroic epics in which the Kalmyks serve as the primary enemy broadly include all works of heroic narrative tradition. In the epic “Kobylandy Batyr”,

for instance, the hero’s opponents are sometimes referred to as Kalmyks and at other times as Kyzylbashs. This phenomenon itself is characteristic of the principles of epic generalization, as reflected in scholarly opinion: “This is a direct manifestation of the laws of epic synthesis” (Berdibayev, 1997) which serves as strong evidence supporting our argument.

Another reason for the recurring appearance of only a limited number of enemies in certain epics can be understood from the following perspective: “For the bard and the listening audience, the specific identity of the enemy is not of primary importance. What matters is defeating that enemy, restoring what has been lost, re-establishing the unity of the people, and attaining a peaceful life. The same can be said regarding the nature of epic adversaries in other narratives. The fact that in the entire corpus of Kazakh epics the adversaries are essentially reduced to two – Kalmyks and Kyzylbashs – further supports this view” (Berdibayev, 1997). In other words, the predominance of the didactic and formative function of these epics often outweighs the strict significance of their historical accuracy.

The elevation of heroic epics to a high cultural and historical level is directly connected to the ideals and aspirations of the people. In ancient epics, the hero is primarily concerned with personal and family interests, whereas in heroic epics we observe a significant growth in worldview, cognition, and ideological purpose. As one scholar notes: “The heroic epic is formed over centuries. In the course of its formation, it assimilates at a new level and in a new quality the fundamental parameters of the archaic epic that existed before it, which themselves underwent evolution and transformation” (Azhibayeva, 2014). In this sense, the main hero no longer pursues personal gain. For him, nothing is more important than the people, the native land, and its unity and peace. He is ready to risk his life for these ideals. For example, in the epic “Sain Batyr”, the seven-year-old Sain prefers death over retreating after a long battle with the enemy. Ultimately, the severely wounded hero suffers defeat. At the same time, the scholar M.O. Auezov, in his research, suggests that in the original version Sain Batyr likely dies in battle. This is because Sain ignores the prediction of a diviner who had forewarned him of the campaign’s failure and still sets out on the expedition. According to the scholar, the victorious ending was added later as an interpolation (Azhibayeva, 2014).

We observe that the heroic deeds performed by epic warriors for the sake of their people are pre-

sented through distinct artistic narrative techniques. By employing hyperbolic imagery and unparalleled forms of exaggeration, the narrator constructs an idealized and flawless image of the hero. Within this framework, all available possibilities of imaginative language are utilized. From the very beginning, the batyr is depicted as one who does not burn in fire, does not sink in water, and matures not by years but by days. In battle – whether facing an enemy army of ten thousand or engaging in single combat with another hero – he consistently demonstrates the highest model of heroism. A.P. Okladnikov's statement that "the struggle of great heroes is equivalent to a global catastrophe" (Okladnikov, 1965) is therefore not an exaggeration. He is invariably portrayed as fearless and unwavering in the face of enemies. Supporting this idea, scholars further note: "The nature of heroism in epic poetry is distinct. The protagonists here confront any danger for the sake of the people, engage in battles with enemies, and endure various hardships, trials, and ordeals; in the end, they achieve victory and fulfill their destiny. Such depiction of 'invincible heroes,' along with the attribution of the noblest qualities to them, reflects the boundless imagination of the people and defines the unique nature of epic poetry" (Berdibayev, 1997). For instance, in the epic "Alpamys Batyr", even though the hero is fully capable of destroying the unbelieving Kalmyk forces, he first waits for the opposing side to initiate combat. This restraint itself reflects a profound sense of dignity and nobility.

«Дін білмеген көп қалмақ
Жібермеске ұқсаған.
Ашуы келіп батырдың,
Қылышын ұстап ойланып,
Бір шығарып, бір қойып»
(Бабалар сөзі, V.33, 2006, p. 62).

Translation:
The countless Kalmyk warriors,
strangers to his faith,
Appeared determined not to let him through.
Anger flared within the hero,
He gripped his sword and paused in thought,
Unsheathing it, then returning it to its scabbard.

In the epic narrative, the batyr does not always engage in large-scale battles solely to defend his homeland from foreign invaders. It is necessary to note that, in many cases, warfare is also motivated by the aim of liberating the people or repelling threats posed to them, as well as by the desire to

reclaim or win the hand of a beloved woman. F.I. Urmanche classifies the motives of the hero's combat in two main categories: "The cause and motivation of battle may, in general terms, be of two types: the struggle or fight for obtaining a wife or rescuing her after abduction; and the defense of the native land from foreign oppressors who attack the hero's country and home, or have already seized them" (Urmanche, 2015). Thus, the primary reasons for conflict in epics – whether vengeance or the liberation of a beloved – can ultimately be generalized as concern for the fate of the native land. Naturally, it is also evident that the fundamental cause of warfare in these epics is the struggle for one's homeland and ancestral territory.

As we observe, wars are most often triggered by the aggression and arrogance of foreign powers.

They may come driven by desire for land, for the country itself, for livestock and wealth, or even to claim the exceptionally beautiful daughter of that land. In such narratives, the most intelligent and most beautiful girl of the community is typically destined for the hero alone. These foreign lands are portrayed as Kalmyks and Kyzylbashs and are referred to as "enemies", "infidels" or "faithless ones".

Having initiated the conflict, they inevitably encounter unexpected resistance. The one who opposes them is the main hero, who has not yet had the opportunity to fully demonstrate his strength. The protagonist, that is, the batyr, is first stirred to action by the need to defend his people, and secondly by the news that the enemy has invaded his homeland. He returns from the battlefield victorious and earns honour and glory.

As an illustration, let us consider the epic "Kambar Batyr". 1) The Kalmyk khan Makhiya, having heard of the extraordinary beauty of Azymbay Khan's daughter Nazym, begins to plan how to take her for himself. 2) Meanwhile, Nazym has already fallen in love with the hero Kambar from afar, even meeting him before the enemy arrives. Kambar, although he has seen the girl, distances himself, thinking: "If I become infatuated, what will happen to my people of ninety clans?" Thus, according to the logic of the narrative, the khan's daughter belongs only to the hero. Despite the presence of many nobles, wealthy men, biys, and princes – altogether gathered as guests in eighty households – none of them succeed in their hopes of winning the twelve-year-old Nazym. The storyteller therefore singles out Kambar as the only one worthy of her among the multitude. 3) Kambar is a young batyr – twelve years old (in some versions eighteen) – known primarily for sup-

porting his poor people through hunting, though he has not yet distinguished himself in major battles. 4) Ultimately, Kambar rescues both his Nogai people and the beautiful girl with dark eyes from the forces of the twelve thousand Kalmyk army.

Here, the hero's love for his people of ninety clans is clearly evident. Even after defeating the enemy, he speaks without hesitation to a powerful khan like Azymbay: "If you are going to give your daughter, then give her quickly, for my distant people are suffering from hunger". When game in the hunting grounds becomes scarce, he continues to act for the sake of his people:

*Тоқсан үйлі тобырдың
Тілегін, Құдай, бермедің.
Біреуі аштан өлсе де,
Обалы менің мойныма,
Көзінің жасы зарланып,
Көз жасы зарлап ақса,
Төгілер менің қойныма (*
Бабалар сөзі, V.43, 2006, p. 18)

Translation:
Of the ninety households of the destitute
Their plea, O God
With Your divine power behold
If one of them dies of hunger
The blame will rest upon my shoulders
Their tearful, grieving eyes

When setting out for battle, he also entrusts his mother with the instruction that he has hidden a horse-sized amount of gold beneath a tree and asks her to distribute it among his people. In addition, he leaves behind a large supply of hunted game meat to serve as monthly provisions. Although Kambar's love for his impoverished people is not explicitly stated, the narrator conveys it implicitly, through subtext, in such a way that it becomes clearly understandable to the listener.

One of the most elaborately structured epic representations of wars with foreign invaders is the epic "Kobylandy Batyr". In this work, the hero fights both the Kalmyks and the Kyzylbashs. The battles against Khan Qazan, the land of the Kyzylbashs, Koibikti Batyr's people and Khan Alshagyr are each depicted with distinct narrative features. After Kobylandy raids Khan Qazan's land and the territory of the Kyzylbashs, and along the way kills Koibikti Batyr, he returns only to find the burnt remains of his own village. His home has collapsed, his household destroyed, and no living soul is left in his settlement.

Overcome with grief, his eyes filled with tears and his heart burning with sorrow:

*Таң ата Қобылан қараса,
Батпағы жатыр, көлі жоқ,
Сандалып жүрген бала жоқ.
Табанына тиді шоқ,
Жанды қара бірде жоқ.
Балта кеспес мұртына
Сүйексіз тілім бел қылды.
Шауып келді Қобыланды
Бұлаңдаған Құртқаның
Отауын тіккен орнына*
(Berdibayev, 1997, p. 37).

Translation:
At daybreak, Kobylandy looked about him
and saw,
The marshland was there, yet the waters
were gone,
Not even a lone child wandered
the deserted plain.
His heart burned with anguish,
For not a single living soul could be found.
Beneath his mighty warrior's mustache,
Words of grief and resolve rose to his lips.
By mid-morning,
Kobylandy rode swiftly,
To the dwelling place of the graceful Kurtka,
Where her bridal yurt had once stood.

In the epic "Kobylandy Batyr", the heroes, from beginning to end, fight for the interests of the Kipchak people and, in a broader sense, for the Nogai community (Berdibayev, 1997). The image of the hero therein is revealed through his multifaceted prowess in defending his homeland and his beloved, demonstrating a lofty model of courage and valor.

"The people's disapproval of unjust wars and of inflicting unprovoked harm or oppression upon others is clearly reflected in the epic itself. In the epic "Kobylandy Batyr", it is well known that, on their return after defeating Khan Qazan, Kobylandy and Karaman attempt to plunder the land of Koibikti, which leads them into unexpected difficulties. On this occasion, Kobylandy himself is captured and is freed from captivity only with the help of Karlıga. This serves as one example of how epic consciousness never deviates or errs in matters of justice and injustice" (Berdibayev, 1997), – a statement by the scholar R. Berdibayev that carries profound meaning. As we can observe, epic narratives possess their own inherent sense of justice, measure,

and resolution. Since the original versions of these works – created by authors whose names have faded from historical memory – remain unknown to us, folklore compositions, including epics, are regarded as products of collective creativity. From the moment of their emergence, they have been transmitted orally, refined through the discernment and intellect of countless generations, maturing over time while meeting the demands of each historical stage and continually striving toward perfection. For this reason, they are considered creations of the people. Folklore is not only a cultural, unified system that unites people, but also an ethnophilosophical phenomenon that reflects the worldview of an entire nation (Baltymova, et al., 2020).

In the epic “Er Targyn”, the protagonist is comprehensively portrayed as a heroic figure and a defender of the people’s interests. Conversely, in Bashkir versions, he is depicted as an outsider and an oppressor. While the Kazakh narrative presents Er Targyn as a figure twice deceived by the Khan, the Bashkir versions characterize the warrior himself as deceitful, treacherous, and loathsome to the populace. Numerous such parallels can be identified.

In the Nogai Khanate tradition, the young warrior Targyn arrives at a feast hosted by Aksa Khan.

While participating in various competitions, he captures the attention of the Khan’s daughter, the beautiful Akyunduz. The Khan does not agree with the marriage of his daughter to a warrior from another community. Therefore, with the consent of Akyunduz, Targyn takes her away. After learning about this, Aksa Khan gathers his warriors and promises to give Akyunduz in marriage to the one who is able to catch and bring back the couple (Бабалар сөзі, Т.40, 2006).

This episode shows the social values and traditions presented in the epic. Marriage with representatives of other communities was not welcomed because it could weaken existing kinship relations and reduce the prestige of the clan. The pursuit of the young couple is entrusted to Khuzhak, an elderly warrior serving Aksa Khan. His appearance in the story underlines the importance of experience, loyalty, and respect for traditional customs.

A common feature of the epics “Alpamys”, “Er Targyn”, and “Kambar Batyr” is the hero’s service to his people. In “Alpamys”, the actions of the main character are connected not with personal benefit but with the interests of the Qongyrat community. As Berdibayev (1997) points out, this focus on the welfare of the people is one of the main reasons why the epic has remained popular for many generations.

Similar ideas are also reflected in Alpamys. Besides demonstrating his strength and bravery, Alpamys takes responsibility for protecting his native land and ensuring the safety of his people. The epic shows the formation of Alpamys as a defender of the community in the following passage:

«Екі жаста Алпамыс
Ер қаруын сайлады.
Үш жасына келгенде,
Үшқан құстай ойнады.
Төрт жасына келгенде,
Төреге берді әділдік»
(Бабалар сөзі, Т.33, 2006, p. 75).

Translation:

*At the age of two,
Alpamys began to use a warrior’s weapons.
At the age of three,
he played like a flying bird.
At the age of four,
he administered justice like a ruler.*

Alpamys is a long-awaited child for whom his parents prayed for many years. From the very beginning, he is destined to care about the welfare of his people. Therefore, his image in the epic is important not as a historical person but as an artistic representation of the people’s ideals. The image of Alpamys was created from the people’s dream of an extraordinary hero who could defeat enemies threatening the peace and well-being of the homeland and invading foreign lands. A real batyr should possess wisdom, bravery, nobility, loyalty, and intelligence. Alpamys combines all of these qualities, which makes him one of the most outstanding heroic defenders in the epic tradition.

In the epic Edige Batyr, one of the main themes is the unity of the people. We understand that Edige did indeed exist in historical reality, that as a ruler he was concerned with the unity of his people, and that he defended the integrity of his state. In the epic, however, the hero’s role as a defender of the people is less prominently emphasized, and he ultimately meets his death. In this regard, considerable debate has arisen among scholars concerning the generic classification of the work; as we have noted in our article published abroad, there appears to be a consensus that, in terms of genre, it should be regarded as an example of a historical-heroic epic.

V.M. Zhirmunsky also conducted large-scale comparative and typological research on the “Edige” dastan. We see that the section entitled “The

Edige Dastan” of his voluminous work devoted to the study of the heroic epics of the Turkic-speaking peoples fully addresses this issue (Allamberganova, 2019).

A comparative study of various versions of the Edige epic shows that, against the backdrop of the general tradition of the plot, each of them has its own national originality, reflecting the historically established social structure, psychology and social ideals of the people who created it (Janabayev, 2021).

In the “Shora Batyr” epic, where Shora, at the request of his father and mother, sets out toward the city of Kazan, a journey said to take nine months. Riding his horse Shubar, he covers the nine-month journey in just four months and arrives to find the city surrounded by a large Kalmyk army. Without hesitation, the hero cries “Allahu Akbar” and launches a lone attack against the massive enemy force. He also condemns them as “impure infidels who even slaughter pigs at their father’s feast”.

*Қалаға таяу келгенде,
Түйдектеген шаң шықты.
Шаң астына қараса,
Келте қара ту шықты.
Ту астына қараса,
Тоғыз мыңдай қол шықты,
Қазылған арба жол шықты.
Қалмақтың жатыр қырық мың қол,
Мәстектерін матаған,
Әкесінің тойына
Шошқа сойып атаған (Propp, 1999, p. 62).*

*As he drew near the city,
Great swirling clouds of dust rose into the air.
Peering through the dust,
He spotted a dark battle banner.
Beneath that banner,
Stood a force of nearly nine thousand warriors,
Their wagon tracks deeply carved into the ground.
Beyond them lay an encampment of forty thousand Kalmyk fighters,
Their horses securely tethered,
Gathered for a feast in honor of their father,
Celebrating with the slaughter of a pig.*

The epic “Shora Batyr” is not only widespread among the Kazakh people but is also widely circulated among the Crimean Tatars, Nogais, and Tatars. Scholars have likewise paid attention to its variants disseminated among other Turkic-speaking peoples.

There are many typological similarities in the Kazakh, Nogai, Karakalpak, Tatar versions. It is not

a mistake to have or not have certain motives and themes in national versions, they complement each other. The sublime spirit of the heroic epic is preserved in all versions (Asanov et al., 2016)

In any epic narrative, regardless of whether the central figure is designated as a king, khan, warrior, hero or giant, his primary function is to defend his people. Numerous typological similarities can be observed between the Kazakh epic “Shora Batyr” and its Tatar variant. In general, “Chura Batyr” constitutes a heroic epic that depicts some of the most significant historical events reflected in folklore. The Kazakh version of “Shora Batyr”, however, is distinguished within the corpus of Turkic literary traditions by its particular historical features and, in terms of content, differs from other Turkic epics.

The analysis demonstrates that, in the Kazakh versions of the epic, the hero’s fate is not depicted within a tragic framework. Rather, the narrative reflects issues that were of particular relevance to the Kazakh people of the time. At the same time, it shares a number of parallels with versions found among other Turkic peoples. Each variant portrays Shora Batyr, in accordance with the conventions of the genre, as an epic hero endowed with characteristic traits, while also linking his destiny to his native city (Narymbet, 2020).

In the Kazakh tradition, this understanding is especially relevant because heroic epics are not only literary texts but also carriers of collective memory, value systems, and oral performance conventions.

In the majority of epics, the hero, still in early youth – typically between the ages of six and thirteen – immediately becomes involved in affairs of the people and sets out to face the enemy. In such narratives, maternal upbringing is rarely foregrounded. The boy matures with remarkable speed. For this reason, the role of the mother intensifies around the motif of the hero’s birth and then fades thereafter; she reappears only at the end of the epic, when the fully formed warrior returns to his people.

By contrast, the image of the hero’s beloved or wife is considerably more expansive. This figure appears across nearly all Turkic epics. Even in cases where the grandmother or elder female relatives are absent (as in the epic “Er Targyn”), the motif of the wife is consistently preserved.

The hero’s spouse is portrayed as a model figure, elevated to the status of a typological ideal, much like the hero himself. As noted in scholarship, “heroic epics create artistically perfected images of women” (Бабалар сөзі, V.45, 2006). She is invariably depicted as a beautiful, eloquent, and intelligent maiden, whose external appearance corre-

sponds harmoniously with her inner moral qualities. She remains loyal and dependent upon the hero, yet assumes responsibility for household and property in his absence, maintaining her noble and aristocratic demeanor. Even if her strength does not match that of the hero, she is courageous and resolute. Her characterization brings together a wide range of expressive linguistic and poetic devices. In the collective memory of the people, she is remembered as both extraordinarily beautiful and intelligent, and storytellers narrate her image with particular artistic delight.

At this point, it is appropriate to discuss the concept of “motif-characterization”. First, the hero’s own image is constructed, followed by the portrayal of his wife and other secondary figures through the same principle. The female image in heroic epics is not accidental; it is a typological construct embodying an idealized set of attributes. Precisely because it is a type, the motif of detailed characterization becomes particularly significant. These figures are deliberately given comprehensive descriptions, which are subsequently validated, refined, and clarified through various narrative situations.

This is what may be termed motif-characterization: a fully established narrative device in Turkic epics for individualizing the hero’s wife. It plays a crucial role in revealing the hero’s own image. Closely related to this is the extensive use of poetic devices in constructing the female image. Descriptions such as “Gulbarshin, beautiful as the moon, like a well-fed foal of a barren mare” show the traditional figurative language used to describe female beauty in the epic. With the help of artistic devices and expressive images, the epic creates an ideal image of a future bride.

The idea that “epic heroes often represent not real historical individuals, but those whom people consider ideal” (Babalar sozy, T.35, 2006) can also be applied to female characters. These women are based on real social ideals and represent the image of the perfect woman in the epic tradition. In all epics, female characters take an important place. In the epic *Kambar Batyr*, for example, Nazym falls in love with Kambar without seeing him. This shows her wisdom and good judgment, because she values courage and noble character rather than wealth or social position. Like Targyn, Kambar is neither a khan nor a man of noble origin, but Nazym admires him for his bravery and strong spirit.

The epics *Alpamys* and *Kobylandy Batyr* are also notable for their vivid female characters. The creation of such ideal images shows the artistic skill

of the epic tradition. At the same time, epic poetry influenced the development of later literature. Since epics reflect the values, hopes, and ideals of the people, their themes and moral principles remain closely connected.

For this reason, the concept of the “perfect human being” can be applied to many epic characters, whose images are built around this ideal. These images have been refined over centuries, shaped by the collective consciousness of countless generations, and tested against evolving aesthetic standards. As a result, they have matured into fully developed artistic archetypes through a continuous process of cultural evolution. It is precisely for this reason that the image of Gulbarshin and the image of Kurtka are considered closely related and structurally comparable archetypes. Turkic cultures rely on comparable devices of magnification and formulaic recurrence. In both contexts, repeated structures do not simply organize narrative sequence but also amplify the symbolic centrality of the hero, the horse, and the heroic act itself (Abysova, 2024).

In the majority of epic narratives, alongside the hero’s protective parents, beloved spouse, loyal companions, the people and homeland, and even his swift and graceful horse, it would be unjust to overlook the presence of a small number of female characters who extend a helping hand in moments of crisis. At times, these women, guided by the dictates of the heart, renounce their native land and kin. They may suddenly become adversaries of the hero’s own father or brother. In general, it can be concluded that in folklore works, female figures significantly contribute to the completion of the heroic image. This is because, in epic tradition, the destinies of auxiliary female characters and heroes are portrayed as closely interconnected. These women do not take up arms or participate directly in warfare; rather, they are depicted as they are in real life. Their defining qualities include intelligence, patience, moral integrity, loyalty to the hero, and maternal compassion toward their children. For this reason, they are often portrayed in epics as kind mothers and wise wives.

In the epic “*Kobylandy Batyr*”, Karlyga is the spirited and spoiled daughter of Kobikti, the Kyzylbash khan Kobikti. She is a secondary character in the narrative; however, her heroic nature only becomes apparent at the outbreak of war. Despite this, she is regarded as one of the central figures, as many of the epic’s events unfold around her actions. She rescues Kobylandy from captivity, summons young warriors to assist him, and engages in battle with

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