

# ORAL TRADITION AND THE LITERARY HERITAGE

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## Part One

# PERSIAN LITERATURE

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## Literature in Arabic

By the year 700, Arabic had become the official language of the caliphate and state business was increasingly conducted in it. In 742, in Khurasan and Transoxania, a knowledge of Arabic was indispensable and obligatory for civil servants. The result was that in the course of the first two centuries, the Islamic literature of the Iranian peoples was created mostly in the Arabic language. However, the great role played by the Iranians in the development of literature, science, philosophy and Arab culture as a whole involved not only their introduction of a purely Iranian current into general Arab civilization, but also their contribution to the appearance of Arabic prose and philosophy by making translations of certain Greek, Indian and especially ancient Iranian works a part of Islamic cultural life. There were also many literary and scholarly works written in Arabic by authors of Iranian origin such as °Abd Allāh Ibn al-Muqaffa° (724–59), Ibn Khurradādhbih (820–c. 912), al-Tabarī (d. 923), Abū Nasr Muhammad al-Fārābī (d. 950), Abū Mansūr °Abd al-Malik al-Tha°ālībī (d. 1038), Abū Rayhān al-Bīrūnī (973–1048) and Ibn Sīnā (Avicenna) (c. 980–1037), with pure literature, above all poetry, coming from such poets of Iranian origin as Bashshār b. Burd (714–84), Abū Nuwās (762–813) and others.

The first Iranian to make a significant contribution to the development of Arabic literature was Ibn al-Muqaffa°. He was born in Gor (Firuzabad) to a Zoroastrian family and, having automatically received a knowledge of Pahlavi (Middle Persian) and of the Zoroastrian faith from his father, went on to study Arabic in Basra. From the age of 20 he was occupied with translating from Pahlavi into Arabic such works as the *Khwadāy-nāmag* [Book of Lords], *Āyīn-nāma*, *Mazdak-nāma*, *Kitāb al-Tāj* and *Kalīla wa-Dimna*. To the pen of Ibn al-Muqaffa° also belong such works as the *Risālat al-sahāba* (on the structure

of the ruling institution), *al-Adab al-kabīr* (on politics and the rules of communication), *al-Adab al-saghīr* (on morals and ethics) and other writings.<sup>1</sup>

The Arabic works of Ibn al-Muqaffa<sup>c</sup>, in virtuoso style and form, served for centuries as examples for imitation and study for many writers. Another poet of Iranian origin who wrote verse in Arabic was Isfahan-born Ziyād al-<sup>c</sup>Ajam. Bashshār b. Burd, a descendant of Iranians from Tukharistan, vaunted his Persian ancestry. In his poems he sang of the bravery, courage and heroism of his ancestors, describing slave girls, musicians and women of the street. Bashshār b. Burd called himself a *zindīq* (free-thinker); he resorted to hyperbole, describing wine and banqueting, was free in his speech and imitated madness, and yet his lucid, enchanting comparisons and metaphors and the profound philosophical content of his works testify to his intelligence.

Literature in Arabic continued to function in Khurasan and Transoxania well after the appearance of Persian literature in the native tongue. To begin with, there were poets who wrote in both Arabic and Persian. Of the 415 authors whose names are listed in al-Tha<sup>c</sup>ālībī's anthology the *Yatīmat al-dahr fī mahāsin ahl al-<sup>c</sup>asr* [The Unique Pearl of the Age Concerning the Praiseworthy Aspects of the People of the Age], 124 lived in Khurasan and Transoxania during the rule of the Samanids (875–1005) and at the beginning of the eleventh century, writing either in Arabic or in both Arabic and Persian.<sup>2</sup>

During the rule of the Buyids and the Ziyarids, literature developed mostly in Arabic. In the areas subject to them, literature in Persian only appeared at the beginning of the eleventh century. The contemporaries of Rūdakī (d. c. 941) – the poets Murādī, Mus<sup>c</sup>abī, Shāshī, Husayn b. al-Marwarrūdī, Abū Shakūr al-Balkhī, Abū Sulaymān al-Khattābī, Abū Bakr al-Khwārazmī (author of an excellent *dīwān* and fine Arabic epistles), Abū <sup>c</sup>Alī al-Iskafī, Abu 'l-Hasan <sup>c</sup>Ahajī and Abu 'l-Hātim Warrāq, a bilingual poet – occupy a prominent place in the development and rise of Arabic literature. However, among them special note should be made of Abu 'l-Fat'h al-Bustī (971–1009), the author of *dīwāns* in Persian and Arabic and translations into Arabic from Persian of some poems by Daqīqī and poems from Abū Shakūr al-Balkhī's *Āfarīn-nāma* [Book of Celebration] (see below).

Ibn Sīnā was not only a great physician and philosopher but also made a significant contribution to the development and rise of literature in Arabic, with his scientific and philosophical works, including poetic *qasīdas* (odes) and so on. Of particular interest are his *urjūzas*, poems in the *rajaz* metre, which deal with the deontology of medicine, the soul and ethics in general.

<sup>1</sup> Latham, 1990, pp. 48–77.

<sup>2</sup> Zand, 1967, pp. 161–4; Abdulloev, 1984, pp. 40–57.

In areas of Iranian culture, the tradition of Arabic belles-lettres continued to exist up to the fifteenth century. Thus the Arabic *qasīdas* of Sa<sup>c</sup>dī Shīrāzī (d. 1292) are worthy of attention. The writings of such authors as those mentioned above are among the best examples of Arabic literature, making the works in Arabic of the Iranian peoples a significant part of that literature as a whole.

## Literature in Persian

By the end of the eighth and the beginning of the ninth century, bilingual poets appear, with verses in Arabic and Persian. One of the first poetic fragments tells of the destruction of Samarkand. Still earlier, the inhabitants of Balkh had subjected to derision, in poetic form, the Arab governor of Khurasan, Asad b. <sup>c</sup>Abd Allāh, who had been sent in 726 to put down a popular rebellion in Khuttalan (now a region of Tajikistan) but was forced to return after suffering a defeat. For a long time afterwards, children are said to have sung these satirical verses in the streets of Balkh.

The ninth century saw the appearance of poets in Persian such as Abū Hafs Sughdī, Muhammad Wasīf, Hanzala Bādghīsī (d. 835), Bassām Kurd, Shahīd al-Balkhī, Mahmūd Warrāq (d. 836), Fīrūz Mashriqī (d. 896), Abū Sālih Gurgānī, Muhammad b. Mukhallad and Mas<sup>c</sup>ūd Marwazī. Only fragments of these poets' works have come down to us, although Hanzala Bādghīsī is said to have been the author of a *dīwān*.<sup>3</sup>

The tenth century saw the first period of the flowering of classical New Persian literature, its opening being connected with Rūdakī and its end crowned by the creator of the *Shāh-nāma* [Book of Kings] epic, Firdawsī (d. c. 1020). Although few examples of the writings of most tenth-century poets have come down to us, with the exception of Daqīqī and Firdawsī, they seem to have been prolific, and Rūdakī and several other poets allegedly had their own *dīwāns*.<sup>4</sup>

The leader and mentor of all the writers of the tenth century was Rūdakī, from one of the remote mountain villages of Panjikent (presently in Tajikistan). He found his way to the palace of the Samanids at Bukhara, where he became especially famous as a court poet during the rule of Nasr I b. Ahmad (914–42). He wrote highly artistic verse in the *sahl mumtanī<sup>c</sup>* (ingenious simplicity) manner, which was smooth and easily comprehensible; his themes included the praise of pure, untainted love, the description of natural beauty in all its freshness and the grandeur, reason and moral foundations of humankind. *Qasīdas* (odes), *ghazals* (lyric poetry), elegies, *qit<sup>c</sup>as* (fragments), *rubā<sup>c</sup> iyyāt* (quatrains;

<sup>3</sup> Lazard, 1964, Vol. 1, pp. 10 et seq.

<sup>4</sup> On the importance of poetry, and especially lyric poetry, as the supreme expression of the Persian literary genius, see Yarshater (ed.), 1988, pp. 20–32.

sing. *rubāʿī*), *musammats* (stanzaic poems) and *mathnawīs* (poems in couplets), with the creation of his own tradition, all developed in Rūdakī's work. He wrote a didactic poem, *Kalīla wa-Dimna*, which was 12,000 *bayts* (couplets) in length, and also a *qasīda* entitled *Mādar-i may* [The Mother of Wine]. His *dīwān* became widely known, as did his *mathnawī*, *The Circles of the Sun*, his *Sindbād-nāma* and other works. On the evidence of Asadī Tūsī, a poet and lexicographer of the eleventh century and a connoisseur of Rūdakī's work, the great poet's legacy consisted of 180,000 *bayts*. His work gave an impetus to the development of Persian poetry, and for about 50 years Rūdakī was the leader of the poetic pleiad at the Samanid court, but at the end of his life he was driven from it, became blind and died in poverty.<sup>5</sup>

Shahīd al-Balkhī (d. 937), a friend and colleague of Rūdakī's, wrote poetry in both Arabic and Persian and was also an excellent calligrapher. Many of the popular writers of this period, such as Abū Shakūr al-Balkhī, Kisā'ī Marwazī, Daqīqī, Murādī, Khusrawānī, Abū 'l-Hasan Gurgānī, Tāhir Chaghānī, Munjik Tirmidhī, Abū'l-Fat'h al-Bustī and Maysarī, came from various parts of the eastern Iranian world and were attracted to Bukhara and the Samanid court.<sup>6</sup>

The first known woman poet to write in Persian was Rābiʿa (*fl.* under the Ghaznavids?), daughter of Kaʿb, born in Balkh and renowned for her beauty, learning, quick wit and poetic talent. While still young, she was killed by her brother because of her love for his slave Bektāsh. Her tragic fate inspired many later writers, including Farīd al-Dīn ʿAttār (thirteenth century), Ridā-Qulī Khan Hidāyat (nineteenth century) and some Persian and Afghan writers of our own time. Rābiʿa was mainly a virtuoso of love poetry after the manner of Rūdakī's lyrical poetry.<sup>7</sup>

A significant part of tenth-century Persian literature is made up of exhortations, including instruction in good manners, the advocacy of justice and humanity, the exaltation of art, science and knowledge, the glorification of wisdom and the hymning of friendship; these themes are particularly characteristic of the poetry of Rūdakī and his contemporaries.

Abū Shakūr al-Balkhī was apparently in the vanguard of literature at this time. Born in Balkh in 915, he came to maturity in Bukhara and died some time in the 960s; he was a disciple and close friend of Rūdakī's. Of his literary legacy, there have unfortunately come down to us only a few scattered lyrical fragments, isolated couplets from two lost *mathnawīs* and part of an *Āfarin-nāma*. This is a poem of a didactic character, of which only about 300 couplets have survived, in which al-Balkhī extols learning and art and the

<sup>5</sup> Browne, 1906–20, Vol. 1, pp. 15–17, 355–6, 455–8; Rypka et al., 1968, pp. 144–5; Moayyad, in Yarshater (ed.), 1988, pp. 122–4.

<sup>6</sup> Browne, 1906–20, Vol. 1, pp. 143–4; Lazard, 1964, Vol. 1, pp. 20–1, 62–70.

<sup>7</sup> Moayyad, in Yarshater (ed.), 1988, pp. 125–7.

human longing for a knowledge of good and of truth, praises shyness, modesty, honour, conscience, boldness, courage and patience, along with the ability to keep secrets and preserve friendship, and denounces ignorance, greed, envy and deceit.<sup>8</sup>

Another important poet of the tenth century was Abū Mansūr Muhammad Daqīqī (931–78), whose birthplace is uncertain. He considered himself a disciple of Rūdakī and Shahīd al-Balkhī. He started by serving at the court of the rulers of Chaghaniyan; later, in Bukhara, he composed at the demand of the Amir Nūh II b. Mansūr (977–97) a *dastān* (heroic poem) of 1,000 couplets about Gushtasp, one of the heroes of the Iranian national epic; Firdawsī subsequently included these verses in his own work. They describe the rule of Gushtasp, the appearance of Zoroaster, and the wars between Gushtasp and Arjasp, ruler of Turan (Daqīqī locates his Turan in a vague ‘China’); he eventually falls victim to the intrigues of enemies and is murdered by his own slave.<sup>9</sup>

The collecting of stories and legends about the reigns of the ancient Iranian rulers and their systematic arrangements, culminating in the writing of the *Shāh-nāmas*, must have responded to certain spiritual and social needs of the time. In 957 several pieces of older epic literature were compiled, by order of the Samanid commander Abū Mansūr Muhammad °Abd al-Razzāq, into the *Shāh-nāma* known as that of Abū Mansūr. In 963 Abu ’l-Mu’ayyad al-Balkhī, and three years later, Mas°ūd Marwazī, each wrote a *Shāh-nāma*. The initiative taken by Daqīqī here was a significant step along this path, opening up the way for Firdawsī.

The most highly developed poetic genre was the *qasīda*. Its contents were mainly panegyric, but sometimes included philosophy, a complaint, the account of some experience, etc. So far as we know, the founder of this genre in Persian literature was Rūdakī, but he was also the first to renounce praise as the sole content of the *qasīda*. His follower was Majd al-Dīn Abu ’l-Hasan Marwazī (953–1049), who, having attained maturity, wrote *qasīdas* essentially on philosophical, ethical and medical subjects. The *ghazal* developed as a gentle lyrical genre, very close to music and usually performed with a musical accompaniment. At this time, the masters of such poetry – Rūdakī, Shahīd, Daqīqī and others – used as themes for their *ghazals* the portrayal of love and depictions of spring and of life’s delights.

The greatest national epic of the Iranian people is of course the *Shāh-nāma* of Abu ’l-Qāsim Firdawsī, the first version of which was completed by the author in 994. Firdawsī was born c. 930 in the district of Tus, to a family of *dihqāns* (landowners), and died c. 1020.

<sup>8</sup> Lazard, 1964, Vol. 1, p. 27–30, 94–126; Rypka et al., 1968, p. 144.

<sup>9</sup> Browne, 1906–20, Vol. 1, pp. 459–62; Lazard, 1964, Vol. 1, pp. 32–6, 136–62; Rypka et al., 1968, pp. 144–5, 153–5.

The theme of the *Shāh-nāma* embraces the history of the reigns, the legendary events and the fates of 50 Iranian rulers, from Kayūmarth to the last of the Sasanians. The epic deals with Iranian conceptions of the discovery of fire, the working of metals and the emergence of agriculture; with the appearance of the prophets Zoroaster, Mani and Mazdak; with the struggle of the forces of good, under the leadership of Ahura Mazdā, against the powers of evil, led by Ahriman, and the fight of the blacksmith Kāva with Zahāk, who tried to destroy the entire human race on earth; with the origin and adoption of the national feasts Nawrūz, Sada and Mihragān; and so forth.<sup>10</sup>

From the end of the tenth century to the first quarter of the thirteenth century – that is, until the Mongol conquest – literary circles emerged and disappeared at various provincial courts, such as Ghazna, under the patronage of Sultan Mahmūd and his descendants; the title ‘Prince of Poets’ or laureate was created for <sup>c</sup>Unsuri by Mahmūd. Significant literary circles also appeared in other cities, under the patronage of local princes and governors, including those at Merv, Samarkand, Urgench, Isfahan, Nishapur, Tabriz, Khujand and as far as Lahore in north-western India.<sup>11</sup>

The literature of the eleventh and twelfth centuries continued the attempts at the simplification of language begun by Rūdakī and his circle. This eventually resulted in the emergence of a common literary language understood in Transoxania and the Iranian lands, the eastern Caucasus and many parts of the Indian subcontinent, in time, penetrating also to Anatolia. The poetic genres of the tenth century now developed in form and content, as did the prose of the eleventh and twelfth centuries. However, service at court often ruined literary talents. An example of the apparent irreconcilability of true talent and the court milieu is seen in the work of Awhad al-Dīn Anwarī (1090–1175), who is regarded as a master of the ode and whose output is reflected in his *dīwān* of 15,000 *bayts*. After over 30 years at court, he grew tired of the intrigues and rivalries and renounced state service and court poetry; he then exchanged panegyrics for caustic satire and criticism, its barbs turned against those whose praises he had earlier sung. At the same time, he wrote a famous ode, *The Tears of Khurasan*, reflecting the tragic events of 1153, the invasion of the Turkish Oghuz and their pillaging of the towns of Khurasan, and expressing the theme of the passing of Iranian grandeur and splendour.<sup>12</sup>

<sup>10</sup> Browne, 1906–20, Vol. 2, pp. 129–48; Rypka et al., 1968, pp. 155–62; Levy, 1969, pp. 64–80; Hanaway, in Yarshater (ed.), 1988, pp. 96–104; Banani, in Yarshater (ed.), 1988, pp. 109–19.

<sup>11</sup> On the role of the local courts of Khurasan and Transoxania in the efflorescence of Persian poetry at this time, see Clinton, in Yarshater (ed.), 1988, pp. 75 et seq., and on the lyric poetry of the Ghaznavid court specifically, see Rypka et al.; 1968, pp. 172–7; Moayyad, in Yarshater (ed.), 1988, pp. 127–32.

<sup>12</sup> Browne, 1906–20, Vol. 2, pp. 364–91; Rypka et al., 1968, pp. 197–9.

To Abū Mansūr °Alī Asadī Tūsī (eleventh century) goes the credit of creating, within the form of the *qasīda*, a special genre called *munāzara* (disputatory poem), i.e. tenson. Five *munāzaras* have been preserved: *The Debate of Day and Night*, *The Debate of Arab and °Ajam*, *The Debate of the Bow and the Spear*, *The Debate of the Zoroastrian and the Muslim* and *The Debate of Sky and Earth*. The *munāzara* is made up of questions and answers, the author in this context having a greater advantage than his opponent. The form had existed in ancient classical literature, and it now became widespread, attaining perfection in the fifteenth century.<sup>13</sup>

In the eleventh and twelfth centuries almost all poets composed *rubā°iyyāt*, this laconic form often reflecting wise speech, philosophic thought, the flame of love, the essence of being, the precepts of Sufism and so on. The high point of *rubā°ī* composition in Persian literature was reached in the work of °Umar Khayyām (c. 1048–1123). Born in Nishapur to the family of a tent-maker (*khayyām*), he received his primary education in his native town, then moved to Balkh. From 1066 to 1070 he lived in Samarkand, from 1070 to 1074 in Bukhara and from 1074 to 1092 in Isfahan, where he occupied himself with scientific work (see Chapter 7 above).<sup>14</sup>

°Am°aq Bukhārī (d. 1147) and Sūzanī (d. 1173) are rightly regarded as the masters of satire, characterized by such motifs as the denunciation of ignorance, wrathfulness, conceit, envy, malice, greed, usury, evilness of temperament and other qualities of the human spirit. Another poet, Adīb Sābir Tirmidhī, likewise complained, in a well-worn vein, that in his intrigue-ridden time there was no nobility or kindness, courage or humaneness left.

A major feature of eleventh- and twelfth-century literature was the rise of court poetry, essentially embodied in *qasīdas*. Zahīr Faryābī (1156–1201) considered this the best poetic genre, even though court poetry and the highly developed *qasīdas* were limited in theme and content and never went beyond the conventional framework of glorifying courage and splendour.

The *mathnawī* remained a leading literary genre at this time, but now with a basically lyrical and romantic character, revolving round the hero's amorous adventures. The content of °Unsurī's poem *Wāmīq u °Adhrā'* was taken from the history of ancient Greece. Other long poems like °Ayyūqī's *Warqa u Gulshāh* (2,100 *bayts*) and Fakhr al-Dīn Gurgānī's *Wīs u Rāmīn* describe the customs, history and way of life of the ancient Persians. The theme of *Yūsuf u Zulaykhā*, by °Am°aq, was taken from the Old Testament and the Qur'an. All these poems are in the *mutaqārib* metre, that is, that of the *Shāh-nāma*. Certain themes of

<sup>13</sup> Browne, 1906–20, Vol. 2, pp. 148–52; Rypka et al, 1968, pp. 164–5.

<sup>14</sup> On °Umar Khayyām as a *rubā°ī* writer, see Levy, 1969, pp. 35–42; Elwell-Sutton, in Yarshater (ed.), 1988, pp. 147–60.



European stories and poems, such as the story of Tristram and Isolde, resemble the subject of Gurgānī's *Wis u Rāmīn*, though this is probably fortuitous; the latter poem involves a tragic love story with shades of satire and humour.<sup>15</sup>

In the eleventh and twelfth centuries a new form of poetry appeared, dealing with morality, religion and philosophy. The best examples of this kind of poem are perhaps the *Hadīqat al-haqīqa* [The Garden of Reality] of Sanā'ī and the *Mahzan al-asrār* [The Treasury of Secrets] of Nizāmī Ganja'ī. Literature with Sufi themes emerged under the influence of Arabic Sufi literature, involving brief tales of a moralistic intent, *ghazals* and especially *rubā'īyyāt* and prose *munājāt* (prayers and hymns). The *shaykh* of Mayhana in Khurasan, Abū Sa'īd b. Abi 'l-Khayr (967–1049), employed *rubā'īyyāt* and *dubaytīs* (quatrains in vocal music) with Sufi themes; he was followed by 'Abd Allāh al-Ansārī (1006–88) and, finally, Abu'l-Majīd Sanā'ī (1074–1150), who was born in Ghazna and also lived in Balkh and Herat, and whose works embrace many Sufi themes. His lengthy *Hadīqat al-haqīqa* treats of asceticism from the point of view of Sufism, while in his *Sayr al-ibād* [Journey of the Devotees], he speaks of abstinence, withdrawal from the courts of the rulers, wine, love, beauty, philosophy and the hopes and aspirations of the people. This work influenced not only Nizāmī, Awhadī, 'Attār, Sa'dī, Jalāl al-Dīn Rūmī, 'Iraqī, Hāfiz, Jāmī and others, but also non-Sufi poets like Khāqānī, Salmān Sāwajī and others.<sup>16</sup> Poems of the type of the *Mahzan al-asrār* and *Laylā u Majnūn*, many *ghazals*, the majority of *rubā'īyyāt* and some *qasīdas* portray the perfect human being (*al-insān al-kāmil*), call for unity and discuss essence and quality, non-being and being, the unity of essence and asceticism.

Persian prose also developed significantly at this time. The language of the artistic prose of the eleventh century is free of artificiality and is simple, alive and expressive, as in the *Qābūs-nāma* [Book for Qābūs]. Poetic insertions are common, demonstrating an inalienable connection with poetry; and several prose works of this time were written on the principle of the narrative within a narrative, i.e. within a frame, such as the *Kalīla wa-Dimna* of Abu 'l-Mā'ālī Nasrallāh, the *Sindbād-nāma* of Abu 'l-Fawāris and the *Abū Muslim-nāma*, among others. It was also at this time that the literary and, in particular, poetic criticism in Persian was born, represented by such works as Muhammad b. 'Umar al-Radūyānī's *Tarjumān al-balāgha* [The Interpreter of Eloquence], Rashīd al-Dīn Watwāt's *Hadā'iq al-sihr* [The Magical Gardens] and Shams-ī Qaysī Rāzī's *Mu'jam fī ma'āyīr ash'ar al-ajam* [Dictionary of Persian Poetic Measures].

<sup>15</sup> Bürgel, in Yarshater (ed.), 1988, pp. 161–6; *EP*<sup>2</sup>, 'Mathnawi. 2. In Persian' (J. T. P. de Bruijn).

<sup>16</sup> Browne, 1906–20, Vol. 2, pp. 317–22; Rypka et al., 1968, pp. 236–7; Levy, 1969, pp. 97–8; Moayyad, in Yarshater (ed.), 1988, pp. 132 et seq.

The ancient tale of the *Sindbād-nāma* had an Indian basis, and there had already been translations of it into Persian and Arabic; in 1161 Zahīr Samarqandī made a new Persian translation. The *Sindbād-nāma* tells about a woman swindler, and the basic idea of the work is the dream of a very good, just ruler. There further appeared such popular literature as the tale of *Samak-i ʿAyyār* [Samak the Adventurer], portraying many highly developed heroic characters, hence resembling the novels of more recent centuries. The author Farāmarz (who lived at an unknown period) collected a large number of folk tales and rewrote them around the adventures of a bold and resourceful hero Samak, so that the overall work gives the impression of a single whole. The action takes place in Iran, Armenia and the Arab world, and many characters in the tale have Persian names.<sup>17</sup>

Another prose work from this time that is worthy of attention is the *Sarguzasht-i Mahsatī* [The Adventures of Mahsatī], written by Jawharī Zargarī Bukhārī (second half of the twelfth century), of which manuscripts are preserved in St Petersburg and Baku. It relates the misadventures of a woman poet and singer, Mahsati Khujandī, and her love for the son of a *khatīb* (preacher), Ganja Amir Ahmad; hence it belongs to the genre of adventurous tales.

The thirteenth-century Mongol invasions destroyed or temporarily submerged many of the ancient literary centres of Transoxania and Khurasan, and many great writers fled or were killed. Hence in southern Iran, Anatolia, India and other places, new literary centres began to function; Saʿdī, Jalāl al-Dīn Rumī, Amīr Khusraw Dihlawī and their followers were produced by these circles. Northern India was important as an outlying area of Iranian cultural influence, with centres in such places as Lahore, where later Ghaznavid poets like Abu ʿl-Faraj Rūnī (1039–1108) and Masʿūd-i Saʿd-i Salmān (1046–1121) were active. Muhammad ʿAwfi fled from the Mongol invaders to India and in 1221–2 compiled an anthology entitled *Lubab al-albāb* [The Heart of Hearts], thus preserving examples from 300 years of Persian poetry. His other work, *Jawāmiʿ al-hikāyāt* [Collections of Stories] (1233), included over 2,000 stories, tales, legends and anecdotes.<sup>18</sup>

The incomparable master of words of the late thirteenth century, however, was the Indian-born Amīr Khusraw Dihlawī (1253–1325). His ancestors were from Qarshi in Transoxania, but he himself was born in Patiala. He became famous for his *Khamsa* [Quintet], written in 1298–1301 in response to that of Nizāmī. His five *mathnawīs* on Indian subjects and events of his own time, and his treatises on the theory of literature and music, constitute a worthy contribution to the general development of Persian literature, while his

<sup>17</sup> Rypka et al., 1968, p. 222.

<sup>18</sup> Browne, 1906–20, Vol. 2, pp. 477–9; Rypka et al., 1968, p. 222.

romantic poem *Duwal Rānī Khidr Khān* exalts and advocates friendship between Muslims and Hindus.<sup>19</sup>

The fifteenth century in the eastern Iranian world is unequalled in the richness of its literature, with its colourfulness and diversity, the number of its poets and writers, and the liveliness of its literary circles. Thus °Abd al-Rahmān Jāmī (1414–92) summed up the achievements of 600 years of Persian literature. He joined the Naqshbandī dervishes, visited Samarkand and Tashkent many times and went once on the Pilgrimage to Mecca. Jāmī’s masterpieces are his *Haft awrang* [Septet], three *dīwāns*, the *Bahāristān* [Spring], scientific treatises and a voluminous biography of Sufi mystics, the *Nafahāt al-uns* [Breaths of (Spiritual) Companionship].<sup>20</sup>

°Alīshīr Nawā’ī (1441–1501) was a disciple and friend of Jāmī’s. A classic writer of Chaghatay Turkic literature, he also contributed greatly to the flowering of Persian literature, with a *dīwān* in that language.<sup>21</sup> But the dominant style of the period was the imitative style known as *nazīra* (response) and *tatabbu*<sup>c</sup> (poem following on a previous model). *ghazals* were written most often in imitation of Sa°dī, Amīr Khusraw and Hāfiz. Fattāhī of Nishapur (d. 1449) and the poetess Mihr-i Harawī (d. 1449) wrote *nazīras* to the whole *dīwān* of Hāfiz, while in spiritual and didactic poetry, great attention was focused on Nizāmī’s work.

Amongst didactic religious literature, Nasīmī (executed in 1412) spread the ideas of the Hurūfī sect, while authors like Jawharī Samarqandī wrote a *Siyar al-nabī* [Life of the Prophet], and the *Hawār-nāma* of Ibn Hishām (d. 1470) dealt with the supposed struggles of °Alī b. Abī Tālib in Khurasan. Mainstream poets like Kātībī Turshīzī (d. 1435), °Ārifī, Harawī (1388–1449), Fattāhī Nishāpūrī (d. 1449) and Ahlī Shīrāzī (1454–1535) used complex artistic means of expression in their poems: figures and tropes, play on words, similes, double rhymes, double rhythms and other artificial, formal devices, thus sacrificing content to form and creating what are known as artificial *qasīdas*. Finally, one may mention the long poem *Bihruz u Bahrām* by Kamāl al-Dīn Binā’ī, written between 1484 and 1497, as an outstanding example of ethical poetry; it consists of 77,000 *bayts* dealing with the most important issues of ethics, government, education and social science, and emphasizing

<sup>19</sup> Browne, 1906–20, Vol. 3, pp. 108–10; Rypka et al., 1968, pp. 257–9; Bürgel, in Yarshater (ed.), 1988, pp. 170–1, 174–5.

<sup>20</sup> Browne, 1906–20, Vol. 3, pp. 435–6, 445–8, 507–48; Rypka et al., 1968, pp. 286–8; Levy, 1969, pp. 158–60; Bürgel, in Yarshater (ed.), 1988, pp. 175–6.

<sup>21</sup> Barthold, 1962, p. 196.

intelligence, education and social milieu as the main components in a person's intellectual and cultural formation.

## Part Two

# LITERATURE OF THE TURKIC PEOPLES

(A. Kayumov)

The earliest surviving written records of the literature of the Turkic peoples are from the sixth to the eighth century. Examples are provided by the inscriptions on the tombs of the Turkic rulers Kōl Tegin (d. 732) and his brother Bilge Kaghan (d. 734), the military commander Tonyuquq and others. Written in the Old Turkic alphabet, often misleadingly called Turkic runes, they are known as the Orkhon-Yenisei inscriptions.

Examples of the oral folk tradition of the Turkic peoples and some fragments of literary works in Turkic are to be found in the Middle Turkic–Arabic dictionary *Dīwān lughāt al-Turk* [Compendium of the Turkic Dialects] compiled in 1071–4 by Mahmūd b. Husayn b. Muhammad al-Kāshgharī, who lived in the town of Balasaghun, in the heart of the Karakhanid state. He laboured for many years collecting material for his work, visiting all the regions in which Turkic peoples lived, from China to Transoxania, Khwarazm, Bukhara and Ferghana. Before compiling his dictionary, al-Kāshgharī wrote a book (now lost) on the grammar of the Turkic languages, the *Jawāhir al-nahw fī lughāt al-Turk* [Gems of Grammar Concerning the Turkic Dialects]. The dictionary, however, contains many fragments of poetry and proverbs illustrating the use of individual words and phrases. Considerable space is devoted to a *marthiya* (elegy) for Alp Er Tonga (10 quatrains);<sup>22</sup> an imagined dispute between summer and winter (23 quatrains); and a description of summer scenes (11 quatrains). Many verses concern battle scenes, hunting and other aspects of life. A whole verse cycle is devoted to the theme of love, including descriptions of the beloved and the youthful lover's lament over the bitterness of separation and the scant attention that he has received from his beloved. A good many of the verses have a didactic content; they propound moral standards and good behaviour. One may take two or three examples:

<sup>22</sup> Alp Er Tonga ('Brave, Rich Tonga') was the name given to an ancient Turkish ruler known historically as Afrāsiyāb.

Has Alp Er Tonga died?  
 Has the evil world remained in place?  
 Has time taken its revenge upon him?  
 Now the heart is torn apart.

A poetic description of early summer:

The storm has brought heavy clouds.  
 Raindrops fall splattering,  
 Pushing aside the light blue clouds.  
 It is uncertain where they will go.

The poet gives a tender and touching description of love at first sight:

The beautiful girl captivated me  
 With her languid eyes, black beauty spot and rosy cheeks.  
 She captivated me, and then ran away.

The *Dīwān lughāt al-Turk* contains a number of proverbs and sayings, which encapsulate centuries of experience from everyday life, such as ‘Knowledge is a sign of well-being’; ‘Two mountains cannot come together, but two people can’; ‘Politeness begins with speech’; ‘Don’t look at the face, look at the worthiness’; and ‘Whoever respects his elders will be happy.’

The poem *Kutadghu bilig* [Knowledge that Brings Happiness] by Yūsuf Khāss Hājib Balāsāghūnī was composed at around the same time as the *Dīwān lughāt al-Turk*. The author completed his work in 1069 and presented it to the Karakhanid ruler Tamghach Khan Ibrāhīm. The poet was awarded the high title of *khāss hājib* (chamberlain of the royal court) for his magnificent work.

The theme of the poem is simple: the just and renowned ruler Kün Toghdī has in his service a wise man called Ay Toldī. After Ay Toldī dies, his place in the ruler’s service is taken by his son Ögdülmīsh, whose intelligence and zeal for work have earned him the ruler’s favour. The poem consists almost entirely of the wise advice of Ögdülmīsh to the ruler Kün Toghdī. These wise thoughts cover all aspects of life and existence: the government of the country, relations between people, and ensuring the triumph of good over evil, peace and the well-being of the country. The main heroes of the poem are in fact symbols. As the poet says in the introductory section of the poem, the ruler Kün Toghdī symbolizes justice; Ay Toldī as vizier, symbolizes the state; Ögdülmīsh stands for wisdom. The vizier’s kinsman Odghurmīsh, who is invited to Kün Toghdī’s court, is a symbol of sobriety, courage and contentment. The entire poem consists of the discussions between these heroes, and the questions and answers they exchange.

The government of the country should be founded on truth and justice, says the ruler Kün Toghdī, addressing his vizier, Ay Toldī:

I serve only the truth, and all kinds of people  
 Come to me for my verdict.  
 There is justice in the world and it  
 Is the same for lords and for slaves . . .

Whether you be a stranger or my own son  
 The sentence is the same and there is only one law.  
 The ruler who has a bad reputation  
 Has no right to judge and to govern.  
 Only a rule which is just  
 Will ensure that the lords may continue to live.

The poem consists of 74 chapters in Middle Turkic written in the *mutaqārib* metre (in the *arūd* metrical system); it is the earliest extant major work of epic poetry in a Turkic language. Of the three known manuscript copies, two are in Arabic script and one in the Old Uighur script.

The most popular poetic works of the twelfth century, still widely known among the people, are the quatrains of the Sufi poet Ahmad Yasawī known as the *Dīwān-i hikmat* [Compendium of Wisdom] (wisdom, here, meaning religious poetry). Being handed down from generation to generation, these quatrains have undergone a certain amount of formal adaptation and appear to have been recited according to contemporary linguistic norms, since their current form scarcely differs from modern literary Uzbek. In his verses, the poet protests against oppression and violence, social injustice and repression and calls for humility and patience, advocating reliance on the will of the Almighty.

A number of philosophical and didactic works in Middle Turkic appeared in the twelfth century. They include the *Hibat al-haqā'iq* [The Gift of Truths] by Ahmad Yūknēkī and *Qissa-yi Rabghūzī* [Rabghūzī's Tale], an account of the life and times of the prophets by the poet Rabghūzī. At the same time, there were a number of poetic works singing the praises of earthly human love, such as the *Mahabbat-nāma* [Book of Friendship] by Khwārazmī, the *Ta'ashshuq-nāma* [Book of Love] by Sa'īd Ahmad, the *Latāfat-nāma* [Book of Charm and Subtle Wit] by Khujandī and the *Dah-nāma* [Book of Ten Chapters]. Well-known works of classical Persian poetry were also translated at this time into Turkic, including *Khusraw u Shīrīn* by Qutb and the *Mahzan al-asrār* [The Treasury of Secrets] by Haydar Khwārazmī.

In the late fourteenth century and the first half of the fifteenth, there was a marked increase in the volume of written literature in Eastern Turkic. It was at this time that Dur Beg wrote his poem *Yūsuf u Zulaykhā*, while Uzbek lyric poetry was enriched by the works of such outstanding poets as Lūtī, °Atā’ī, Sakkākī, Gadā’ī and others.

The noticeable increase in the volume of written Turkic literature in the periods mentioned was followed in the latter half of the fifteenth century by the appearance of °Alīshīr Nawā’ī (1441–1501), a towering figure in Uzbek and world literature. His name is associated with a great flowering of poetry, prose, historiography, the fine arts, book-making, calligraphy, music and architecture, and generally a higher level of support for literature and the arts. Nawā’ī was highly placed in the administrative of Khurasan, whose capital was Herat, and he had a great influence over the ruler, Sultān Husayn Bayqara (1469–1506). It was Nawā’ī’s patronage of literature and art that ensured their rapid growth. Nevertheless, it was his own contribution that was the decisive factor here.

Chief among Nawā’ī’s Chaghatay Turkic works are the *Khamsa*, a cycle of five poems, composed during the period 1483–5. They comprise *Hayrat al-abrār* [The Bewilderment of the Righteous], *Farhād u Shīrīn*, *Laylā u Majnūn*, the *Sab<sup>c</sup> a-yi sayyār* [Seven Pilgrims] and *Sadd-i Iskandar* [Iskandar’s Barrier]. The main focus of the cycle is its exaltation of man; its heroes, who include Farhād, Shīrīn, Laylī of Qays, Dilārām, Bahrām, Sa<sup>c</sup>dī and Mihrnāz, are well-rounded characters, exemplifying the best features and the highest virtues of individuals destined for great things. One might cite the following lines:

A man who does not feel human grief  
Is unworthy to be called a man

or:

Know, O people of the world, enmity is a bad thing.  
Live in peace and friendship one with the other,  
There is no better destiny!

Iskandar (Alexander the Great), the hero of the poem *Iskandar’s Barrier*, built a mighty rampart protecting a prosperous valley against attack by Yājūj and Mājūj (Gog and Magog), so that he emerges as a saviour of the people from impending disaster. But at the same time, Nawā’ī condemns Iskandar’s desire to become the ruler of the entire world: the dry land, the oceans and even the ocean floor. He shows the futility of Iskandar’s campaigns of conquest in his description of the death of the ruler of the world: Iskandar ordered that his hand should be left hanging out of his coffin so that people could see that the hand that had held sway over the whole world was departing from this life empty, like the shrivelled branch of a tree, and thereby draw their own conclusions.

Nawā'ī was the author of four collections of lyric poems in Chaghatay Turkic and one book of verse in Persian. The main theme of his lyrical writings is earthly human love, the basis of human happiness, which ennobles man and enriches his spiritual world. Where love prevails, there is no room for evil. Nawā'ī's fine poems, couched in various forms such as the *ghazal*, *mukhammas*, *musaddas*, *mustazād*, *rubā'ī*, *qit'a*, *sāqī-nāma* and others, thus constitute a high point of poetic achievement; he also wrote many prose works.

In his works, Nawā'ī demonstrated the great potential, beauty, wealth and euphony of his native language, showing that it was possible to produce fine works of literature in it. He is therefore rightly regarded as the founder of Chaghatay literature and the Chaghatay literary language, later to evolve into Uzbek.

## Part Three

# TIBETAN AND MONGOLIAN LITERATURE

(G. Kara)

## Tibetan literature

Tibetan literature emerged in the Tibetan empire during the seventh to the ninth century. It evolved from oral tradition and, by recording and reinterpreting historical lore, served the imperial rule, perpetuating its glory and affirming its legitimacy. By recording its archaic funeral rites, myths and other holy texts that formed an important part of the literary tradition, the early literature also served the pre-Buddhist, animistic religion of Bon. As a powerful rival to the old faith and imported into Tibet from northern India, Nepal and China, Mahāyāna Buddhism also appeared here. Transformed by the powerful influence of northern Buddhism, the Bon religion all but disappeared, leaving Buddhism as the dominant ideology in Tibet for the last fifteen or so centuries.

The new religion transmitted many elements of non-Buddhist Indian culture, ethical thought, poetic and grammatical theory, together with stories from the great epic cycles such as the *Rāmāyana*, poems like Kālidāsa's *Meghadūta* and collections of tales like the *Pañchatantra*. Most of the Buddhist scriptures were translated into Tibetan from Buddhist Hybrid Sanskrit (many of them in the centuries of the empire), some works were



adapted from Chinese translations, while others go back to Khotanese Saka and Bru-zha versions. A particularly important role was played by Khri-srong Ide-brtsan (755–97), during whose reign the old translations were reworked and a new style developed. After the imperial period the diligent work of translations continued in western Tibet, in Ladakh and in Zangskar, for example by Rin-chen bzang-po (958–1055).

The translations led to numerous commentaries, and commentaries on commentaries, creating a vast ‘secondary’ literature. Nevertheless, Tibet is far from being a mere ‘literary province’ of India and Indian Buddhism. Old and new, secular and sacred traditions of both Buddhist and non-Buddhist, indigenous and foreign ideas inspired a vast literature, out of proportion to the size of the Tibetan population. Its oldest known monuments are the eighth-century stone inscriptions of the imperial period, such as those of the Zhol pillar *rdoring* (long stone) located beneath the Potala in Lhasa. One of them mentions the Tibetan victory over the Chinese army, and an inscription in the Gtsug-lag-khang (Lhasa) of the early ninth century reports on the treaty of 821–2 between the ‘marvellous ruler Khri-gtsug Ide-brtsan’ and the ruler of T’ang China; antithetic parallelism and an elevated style make this prose text poetic.

In the same grotto of the Dunhuang Thousand Buddhas’ sanctuary in which the long scroll of the *Extracts of the Annals* had been hidden were found the Old Tibetan historical narratives: the *Imperial Chronicle* and the *Genealogies with the List of the Principalities* and the *Origin of the Rulers*, including among other topics an account of the mythic origin of the dynasty of divine rulers.

The most important monument of Old Tibetan literature, the *Imperial Chronicle*, probably compiled during the reign of Tibet’s last anti-Buddhist emperor Glang-dar-ma (838–42), is not strictly a chronicle, but a literary history of the origin and deeds of the early Tibetan rulers, their country and councillors, and the important families. It abounds in mythic and poetic elements, legends and songs. The narrative of the life and death of Dri-gum, the last divine sovereign, relates that he was given the wrong name and became the victim of his own haughtiness. He gave his magic weapons to Lo-ngam, his equerry, whom he forced to fight with him. Defeated and killed by his subject, the ruler was unable to ascend to heaven. The majestic heroes of this narrative often sing songs of strophic structure; six-syllable verses form three- or four-line units with parallel sentences. The Tibetan princess sings about her sorrow at the foreign court; members of the important clan of Dbas offer their loyalty in verse to their lord, the emperor Khri-srong-brtsan: in their song they promise not to poison the ruler.

Among the non-Buddhist Tibetan manuscripts of Dunhuang are collections of Bon myths, tales and maxims. An old allegorical story tells how the wild horse was tamed;

another manuscript of Buddhist and Confucian works contains the *Parables of Mother Sum-pa to be Taught to Future Generations*. ‘To nourish a child without teaching him is the beginning of darkness,’ says one of the 111 wise sayings.

Instead of the Bon cult of his ancestors, Emperor Khri-lde srong-brtsan (c. 800–14) chose the faith of the Three Jewels: Buddha, his Teaching and his Community. According to the inscription on the stone pillar of Skar-chhung, he ordered his descendants to be faithful to Buddha’s religion and never to abandon it, even if ominous tokens or dreams suggested this. However Glang-dar-ma, a descendant of his, rejected the new faith, and the persecution of Buddhists ceased only with his assassination in 842. But his death also meant the end of the Yar-lung dynasty and of the unity of the Tibetan nation. The borderlands, the eastern Tsong-kha and especially the western Mnga-ris, gave refuge to Tibetan Buddhist culture.

From those parts of Tibet started the renaissance of Buddhism and its ‘second spreading’ (*phyi-dar*) over Tibet. Many Tibetan men of letters went to India and Kashmir to study the various schools of Buddhist Mahāyāna philosophy and practise yoga, tantra and magic. They studied at the Indian universities of Nalanda and Vikramashila. Rin-chhen bzang-po (958–1055), an eminent scholar, translator and writer from westernmost Tibet, founded several monasteries which became centres of religious and literary activity. The Order of the Followers of the Advice started with his Indian contemporary, Atisha (1002–54, in Tibet since 1042), and with Atisha’s disciple, Brom-ston (Teacher Brom), founder of the monastery of Rva-sgreng in the heart of Tibet (1057). The Order of Sa-skyā (‘Whitish Earth’, a place in south-western Tibet) was established in 1073 and became very significant in the political and cultural life of the country, particularly in the thirteenth and fourteenth centuries. The order and the principality led by it gave several great writers to Tibet.

Mar-pa of Lho-brag (‘Southern Rock’, 1012–96), famous translator, master of mystic hymns (Skr. *doha*) and preacher of the Teaching of the ‘Great Seal’ of mental transfiguration, also learned in India, in Bengal. He was the inspirer of the Order of the Tradition (*Bka’-rgyud-pa*) and teacher of Mi-la ras-pa (1040–1123), Tibet’s most famous mystic poet and hermit.

Many monastic orders, schools and rites came from the religious communities, whose number was steadily growing. In the eleventh and twelfth centuries there took root the movement to ‘rediscover the hidden treasures (*gter-ma*) of teaching’, with the development of a large apocryphal literature. Many of these ‘rediscovered’ works were ascribed to Padmasambhava, the legendary Indian Buddhist missionary of Tibet, magic conqueror of its hostile demons. A collection of such ‘rediscovered treasures’ is the twelfth-century *Rgyud-'bum* [Hundred Thousand Traditions] of the Old Orders. In the thirteenth century,

Guru Chhos-dbang is said to have found the older biography of Padmasambhava, while a later *Life* of the magic teacher was ‘rediscovered’ by O-rgyan gling-pa Kun-mkhyen tshul-khrims in 1352.

Another well-known work ‘found’ by him was the fourteenth-century *Bka’-thang sde Inga* [Fivefold Memorial], which preserved some genuine old pre-Buddhist historical and literary traditions, along with apocryphal prophecies (*lung-bstan*) of a later age. A source which O-rgyan gling-pa used in compiling the *Fivefold Revelations* was the *Gzer-myig*, a rediscovered old treasure-book of tales. The so-called *Book of the Dead*, a collection of instructions, hymns and prayers in prose and verse, advice for the mind erring between death and rebirth, represents a special genre of the ‘rediscovered treasures’. The most famous of these writings bears the title *Bar-do thos-sgrol* [Redemption from the Intermediate State by Hearing]. Originally said to be found by O-rgyan gling-pa, it was reworked in the sixteenth century by its first editor, Shes-rab ‘od-zer.

The *Great Guide [dkar-chhag] to Bsam-yas* (also known as the *Sba-bzhed*, twelfth or thirteenth century) describes the legendary history of the great monastery founded in the eighth century. This chronicle also lists the miraculous deeds of Padmasambhava and his hidden works to be rediscovered by later ‘treasure-finders’. A similar, apocryphal history, the *Bka’-chhems Ka-bkol-ma* [Testament Hidden in the Pillar], dating from the thirteenth or fourteenth century, is ascribed to Emperor Srong-brtsan sgam-po; tradition claims that its alleged discoverer was Atisha.

Tradition also has it that it was Atisha who transplanted the Indian tales of the *Bewitched Corpse* (*Vetalapañcavimsatikā*, Tibetan *Ro-sgrung*) to Tibet. The late versions of the Tibetan collection embrace mostly Tibetan tales. From the Indian material, only the frame story with the Corpse remained tinged with Buddhist influence. One of the tales, the story of the half-man, half-bull Yak Horn Ma-sang and his struggle with an ogress, is also found in other works, such as the narrative collection of the *Father’s Teaching* and the *Son’s Teaching* (*Pba-chhos*, *Bu-chhos*), from Brom-ston’s eleventh-century tradition. A famous collection of Buddhist parables, the *Dpe-chhos*, was composed by Po-to-pa Rin-chhen-gsal (1031–1105); later authors added ample commentaries to it.

Scenes of Mi-la ras-pa’s eventful life – his sinful and painful youth, dominated by a bitter family feud and his mother’s quest for revenge, his studying black magic, then his Buddhist conversion and his sufferings in the service of his teacher Mar-pa, followed by his life as a hermit in the mountain wilderness – are often shown on painted scrolls. These scrolls are an illustration to his *Life* (Tibetan *rnam-thar*, a rich genre), transmitted in written and oral forms. A large work relating his life with his verses, the *Mi-la’i Mgur-bum* [Hundred Thousand Songs of Mi-la], was compiled by Sangs-rgyas rgyal-mtshan

(1452–1507), also known as ‘Heruka, the Madman of Tsang’ or ‘He Who Wears Bone Ornaments’. (Another *Mgur-'bum* contains the verses of Sgam-po-pa, one of Mi-la’s disciples, 1079–1153.) Metaphorical images that were also popular in later poetry help to depict the nature of the Land of Snow in these songs: the white lioness with turquoise mane on the glacier, the eagle – the king of birds – on the cliff, the striped tiger in the forest, the golden-eyed fish in the lake. Seclusion from worldly vanities and unity with the utmost truth of the Law, the long path from the depth of suffering in the world of illusions to the bliss of enlightenment in meditation, are the messages of his *Life and Songs*.

The *Fivefold Memorial* (on the Sovereigns, the Imperial Consorts, the Ministers, the Translators and Pandits, the Gods and Demons) contains an early mention of Ke-sar of Khrom (or Phrom = Rūm, the Islamic name for Byzantium), Tibet’s great epic hero. It follows the old tradition about the divine origin of the Tibetan rulers, describes the teachings of the pre-Buddhist Bon religion in long verses with the legend of Gshen-rab myi-bo, the first teacher of the Bon; it tells the story of how the magic Guru Padmasambhava subdued the demons of the country, and relates how he converted an imperial consort who was ready to seduce a monk.

The didactic fables of the Indian *Pañchatantra* illustrated the *Legs-par bshad-pa'i rin-po-chhe'i gter*, or *Sa-skya Legs-bshad* [Treasury of Good Sayings], a versified ethical guide for the noble, written by Sa-skya Paita Kun-dga' rgyal-mtshan (1182–1251?), the fourth of the great religious and political leaders of the Sa-skya order and principality. This great scholar and politician, who was wise enough to find a more or less peaceful way of dealing with the Mongol warriors and who attained privileges for his order, left some 60 ethical, epistemological and philosophical works incorporated in the *Sa-skya bka'-'bum* [Hundred Thousand Words of Sa-skya]. In his *Treasury*, he admonishes people to distinguish between proper and improper, wise and foolish, good and bad behaviour, and he praises quality and moderation and eulogizes Buddha’s Law.

Numerous admonitions (*gdams*) and versified benedictions were written for the members of the Mongol imperial family by Phags-pa Blo-gros rgyal-mtshan (1235–80), the next great Sa-skya high priest, the emperor Qubilay’s Tibetan monk. His enormous *oeuvre* also contains an encyclopedic work (*Shes-bya rab-gsal*), a brief chronicle of the Tibetan sovereigns (*Bod-kyi rgyal-rabs*, 1273) and the important letter sent to the Tibetan monastic orders from the Mongol court in 1274. He requested and promoted the Tibetan translation of such Indian works as Dain’s *Kāvyaadarśa* [Mirror of Poetry], Kālidāsa’s *Meghadūta* [Cloud Messenger], the *Buddhacarita* [Buddha’s Life] by Aśvaghōṣa, and Harśadeva’s drama, *Nāgānanda*, all incorporated in the Tibetan Buddhist canon.

In the middle of the fourteenth century, when apocryphal literature was still flourishing, Bu-ston Rin-chhen-grub (1290–1364), another great scholar and writer, head of the monastery of Zha-lu, canonized the Tibetan Buddhist scriptures: the Kanjur (*Bka'-gyur*), the Word Translated, and the Tanjur (*Bstan-gyur*), the Teaching Translated. The two collections, contained in over 330 volumes, include more than 4,000 works. The Kanjur (usually in 108 volumes) is divided into several sections. These comprise the Teaching Transmitted (Tantra, *Rgyud*), Metaphysics (Prajñāpāramitā, *Sher-phyin*), the Sutras (*Mdo*, partly narrative works), the Ratnakūta (*Dkon-brtsegs*, the Mound of Jewels, with legends), the Avatamsaka (*Phal-chhen*, the Great Universe of the Buddhas) and the Vinaya (*Dul-ba*, mostly the Discipline). In the Tanjur, the section on the Explanation of the Sutras (*Mdo-grel*) contains the metaphysical works (*Sher-phyin* and *Dbu-ma*, Nāgārjuna's teaching of the Middle Way, the Voidness, that dissolves the contradiction of the Buddhist 'nominalists' and 'realists', of the object negating its subject, and of the subject negating its object), the *Sems-tsam* with yoga, the Abhidharma and the *Jātakas* (*skyes-rabs*, stories from the Buddha's earlier lives). Other subjects are: discipline (*Dul-ba*), the letters of advice (*Sprin-yig*), epistemology (*Chad-ma*), grammar (*Sgra-rig-pa*), medicine (*Gso-rig-pa*), arts (*Bzo-rig-pa*), ethical guides and various treatises. Under the influence of the Buddhists, the followers of Bon compiled their own scriptures that grew larger than the Buddhist canon.

Bu-ston, founder of the Zha-lu-pa school, was also the author of a history of Buddhism (*Chhos-byung*, 1320) and numerous large treatises on philosophy and tantra. His *Life* was written by his disciple Sgra-tshad-pa Rin-chhen rnam-rgyal in the fourteenth century.

The most influential personality in the cultural history of Tibet was Blo-gros grags-pa (1357–1419), or Tsong-kha-pa, a native of the Onion valley, in the Koko Nor region; his birthplace, Kumbum, is one of the holiest spots in the Tibetan world. A reformer of monastic life and founder of the Yellow Hat Order (*Dge-lugs-pa*, Followers of the Virtue, with the monastic discipline restored), Blo-gros grags-pa was a prolific writer whose literary activity embraces nearly the entire universe of Buddhist knowledge. He wrote prose and verse, long treatises and short letters; his most famous work is the *Lam-rim chhen-mo* [Great Gradation of the Path to Enlightenment], in 10 chapters, which he also expounded in shorter versions. In his *Rigs-pa'i rgya-mtsho* [Large Sea of Righteousness], in 27 chapters, he gives his own interpretation of the teaching of the Middle Way; his *Yid-chhes gsum-ldan* [Threefold Devotion] offers a guide to the 'deep path' of Naropa's Six Yoga Principles; his *Legs-bshad gser-gyiphreng-ba* [Well-Told Golden Garland] is a sizeable treatise on metaphysics. His 210 writings are gathered in 20 volumes added to the Peking Tibetan Tanjur.

The *Hundred Thousand Words of Pearls*, or *Mani bka'-bum* [Collection of Spells], a widely known apocryphal work (*gter-ma*) 'rediscovered' in the twelfth century and

reworked in the fifteenth or the sixteenth century, represents a compilation of historical and religious legends, teachings and descriptions of magical practices. It is based on both written and oral sources. One of the best parts is the captivating story of the marriages of the first Tibetan emperor.

Several versified sentences and wise sayings are found in the *Pott bse-ru*, the history (*gdung-brgyud*) of the Rlangs family (c. 1400). From among the historical works of the late Middle Ages, the *Red Annals* (*Deb-ther dmar-po*, or, in Middle Mongolian, *Hu-lan deb-tber*) by Tshal-pa Kun-dga' rdo-rje (fourteenth century) is known in an earlier and a later redaction. The *Rgyal-rabs gsal-ba'i me-long* [Bright Mirror of the Sovereigns] chronicle, with legends and historical narratives ascribed to Sa-skya Bsod-nams rgyal-mtshan (1312–75), and first printed in 1478, describes the origin of the world, Buddha's life and the fate of his teaching in China and Mongolia up to Togon Temür, the last Mongol ruler in China. *Inter alia* it tells how Avalokiteśvara, the Bodhisattva of compassion, led the Tibetan people of the Land of Snow to Buddha's redemption, how this people originated from the union of a monkey (the compassionate Bodhisattva) and a mountain demoness (identified later with Tārā, the goddess of redemption), and how Tibetans were ruled by their early sovereigns. The story of the monkey and the demoness is repeated in the history compiled by 'Brug-pa Pad-ma dkar-po (White Lotus of the 'Brug-pa Order, 1526–92), a devotee of the yoga of the 'swift way'.

The *Deb-ther sngon-po* [Blue Annals], 1478, the largest chronicle of the period, was written by Gzhon-nu dpal (Translator of Gos, 1392–1481). This is mainly the history of the monastic orders and schools, with the 'lineages' of their teachers and disciples, the transmission of their particular teachings, their religious ideas and their systems. Elements of political history appear only in the frame of the movements of ideas.

Pad-ma dkar-po's contemporary and fellow-monk, 'Brug-pa Kun-legs, was another great mystic poet. This mendicant friar and yogin sang his songs to his own accompaniment. His poetry is full of symbols: the turquoise dragon stands for the sky and the waters, the elephant for power, the conch-trumpet and the drum for fame and renown, whereas the dragon's drum is the rolling thunder. In his *Long Song*, composed in verses of varying length, he bitterly criticizes the avaricious, lewd monks and the haughty rich.

A new age begins in the late sixteenth century with the alliance between the most prominent Tibetan religious leaders of the Yellow Hat Order (the leading force of the theocratic system) and the Mongol rulers struggling for the restoration of their empire, and with the as yet far-away shadow of the emerging Manchu power over eastern Inner Asia.

## Mongolian literature

Concerning the art of the word among the pre-thirteenth-century peoples of Mongolian tongue, we have information from Chinese sources and from some extensive epitaphs and minor inscriptions in Kitan scripts. Two quatrains of a Kitan shamanistic funeral rhyme are preserved in Chinese translation; they represent an early example of antithetic parallelism: winter and darkness versus summer and brightness. Kitan inscriptions, only partly deciphered and in most cases only vaguely parallel to their Chinese versions, contain hundreds of verses: the characters of the 'assembled' or 'small' script clearly indicate the main elements of prosody. This poetry seems to have numerous Chinese elements: metaphors, allusions and perhaps also end-rhyme. Kitan men of letters translated Chinese classical poetry into their own language. Works written by Kitan poets in Chinese (e.g. by Xuanyi, Emperor Daozong's consort, sentenced to commit suicide in 1085, or by Yelu Chucai, 1189–1243, Chinggis Khan's Kitan Buddhist counsellor) form a particular group within Chinese poetry.

The literature of the Mongols proper began with inscriptions, historical narratives and diplomatic letters. A short but famous monument is the laconic message about an archers' race held after Chinggis Khan's return in 1225 from his victorious campaign against West Turkistan. The later, and wordier, official Sino-Mongolian epitaphs, such as that of Chang Yingrui (1335), and other epi-graphic monuments of the fourteenth century, such as the inscription eulogizing the Buddhist shrine of Karakorum (1346), tell us more about the world of the Chinese subjects of the Mongol empire than about the Mongols themselves. Nonetheless, these texts also show how the Mongols assimilated Chinese forms and content, such as Confucian ideas in alliterative verses, here and there with end-rhymes, an innovation that has not been able to take hold even in modern Mongolian poetry. Mongolian, or, better, 'Altaic' alliteration, a most important feature of Mongolian prosody, is the repetition or consonance of the beginnings of two or more parallel rhythmic units: lines or halves. Alliteration likewise appears in many versified passages of *The Secret History of the Mongols*.

### *THE SECRET HISTORY OF THE MONGOLS*

This extensive historical narrative was compiled in the thirteenth century. Its exact date is much debated, but it seems certain that the first possible year for the earliest redaction, relating the genealogy and the deeds of Chinggis Khan, is 1228. It was composed by the anonymous author(s) from oral tradition concerning the remote past and from the memory of contemporaries concerning recent events. The work itself has had an eventful history,

having been preserved and come down to us in several versions. The most complete was used in the late fourteenth century as a textbook for the Bureau of Interpreters of the Ming dynasty of China. The text, originally written down in the Uighur script, was transcribed in Chinese characters used as syllabic symbols. With diacritics, these formed a fairly accurate system of transcription. With a few exceptions, each Mongol word also received an interlinear Chinese gloss. The Chinese divided the text into 12 (in another version into 15) chapters, the whole broken up, for learning purposes, into 282 paragraphs and each of them accompanied by a Chinese summary.

This narrative, consisting of some 100,000 Mongol words and containing more than 650 proper names including ethnonyms, was copied into the *Yong-le Ta-tien*, a large encyclopedic anthology of the Ming. Most of it perished in a fire, but *The Secret History* survived, thanks to a copy made before the calamity. Another and perhaps older copy of the text written in the Uighur script was used by Blo-bzang bstan-'dzin, the seventeenth-century compiler of the *Altan tobchi* [Golden Summary], into which he copied about two-thirds of *The Secret History*. For the work's place in Mongol historiography, see Chapter 4 above, pp. 181–3.

The original narrative must have had much in common with the *lost Altan debter* [Golden Book] mentioned as one of the sources in the *Jāmi'c al-tawārīkh* [Compendium of Histories] written in Persian by the historian Rashīd al-Dīn. (Another parallel source, the *Record of the Campaigns Led Personally by the Holy Brave Emperor*, is known in Chinese translation only.)

*The Secret History* (this title must have been given in the late fourteenth century) is a complex work in which prose and verse, myth and history, oral tradition and literature, brief stories, epic fragments, battle-songs, odes, elegiac songs, versified 'political and diplomatic' messages carried by the khans' messengers, monologues and dialogues, vivid descriptions of battles, proverbs, genealogies, regulations and laws, form the texture of a magnificent saga of nomadic lore. The main values exalted in this story of the Golden Clan's origin and its first two ruling generations are glory and fame, loyalty, bravery, excellence and skill in warfare, wealth and wisdom, wit, beauty and noble origin. The following is a summary of its contents:

1. Temüjin's ancestry, his genealogy from the mythical Grey Wolf and Fallow Deer up to Yesügey, his father (9 + 3 + 9 generations). Stories attached to the branches of the genealogical tree: the One-Eyed Duwa and his brother Dobun; the latter's widow, Alan the Fair, is visited by a divine night visitor, Bodonchar the Half-Witted; one of her sons is begotten by the nocturnal visitor who left the tent by climbing up the beams of the light of dawn. Yesügey ravishes Hö'elün, the newly wed wife of Chiledü of the



- Merkit tribe. Temüjin is born and named after a subdued Tatar chief. His betrothal. His father is poisoned by vengeful Tatars.
2. Temüjin's youth. His mother is abandoned by her people. Temüjin is captured by the Tayichi'ut, his rival relatives; he escapes. Eight fallow geldings are returned by him from the robbers, with the help of a new friend, Bo'orchu. He allies himself with To'ril Ong kan, the Kerait (Kereyit) ruler, Temüjin's father's sworn brother. The Merkit take revenge for Chiledü's wife; Temüjin's Lady Börte is ravished.
  3. Lady Börte is released with the support of Ong kan and Jamuka, Temüjin's distant relative. Great friendship, then a split between Jamuka and Temüjin. Temüjin's first enthronement as Chinggis Khan, and the first organization of his court.
  4. Jamuka's confederacy against Chinggis. Chinggis is defeated, withdraws to the Onon river. Jamuka's terrible revenge for his murdered brother; horrified, many of his followers join Chinggis. His feast at the Onon river; his brother wounded in a quarrel with Büri, the Jürkin wrestler. Chinggis' campaign against the Tatars. The Jürkin revolt is suppressed and Büri's back is broken. Serfs and companions for Chinggis; abandoned sons of enemy nobles given to Chinggis' mother as his younger brothers. A confederacy raises Jamuka as sovereign (para. 141, with the first exact date: a Year of the Hen, 1201); his campaign against Chinggis and Ong kan fails. Chinggis is seriously wounded in his fight against the Tayichi'ut; he is rescued by Jelme, his true warrior. Jebe (Arrowhead), a brave enemy, is forgiven and favoured. The Tayichi'ut are defeated by Chinggis.
  5. A Tayichi'ut prince is captured by his own subjects, then released for fear of the severe punishment that Chinggis Khan used to mete out for treason. Chinggis' campaign against the Merkit. A summary of Ong kan's misdeeds. Threatened by the Naiman, he flees to the Kara Kitan. Jamuka's double game on the enemy's side. Chinggis helps Ong kan and his son Senggüm, pursued by the enemy. Senggüm's plot against Chinggis Khan fails.
  6. Battle between Chinggis and Ong kan at the Kalakajit sands; great losses on both sides. Jamuka's double game, ostensibly on Ong kan's side but actually against Chinggis. Senggüm wounded. Chinggis Khan's son Ögedey badly wounded but rescued by Boro'ul. Chinggis' messages warning his former allies, now enemies: Ong kan, Jamuka, Senggüm and others. He defeats the Kereyit army; Ong kan and his son flee.
  7. The booty taken from the Kerait is distributed (but the Kerait Jakagambu is saved because of his daughter Ibaqa); Ong kan accidentally killed by a Naiman frontier

guard; Senggüm's death in the desert; the loyalty of the wife of Senggüm's horseman is appreciated by Chinggis. The dead Ong kan's head is honoured at the Naiman court; the ominous laughter of the dead. Gürbesü, the Naiman empress, despises the 'malodorous Mongols'. Chinggis Khan's regulations: the decimal organization of the army, duties of the quiver-bearers and the guard, etc. Unfurling of the standard in summer 1204, then Chinggis' move against the Naiman empire; Emperor Tayang is frightened; Jamuka's eulogy of the Mongol warriors increases fear at the Naiman court. Chinggis vanquishes the Naiman and 'takes' the haughty empress. Another campaign against the still powerful Merkit; Lady Kulan of the Merkit offered to Chinggis.

8. Pursuit of Merkit and Naiman groups; the Merkit destroyed. Captured by his companions, Jamuka is brought to Chinggis. Jamuka and Chinggis have a long talk about their former friendship; Jamuka refuses Chinggis' offer of favour and asks for an honourable death: without his blood being shed and with a proper burial (1205). Chinggis Khan enthroned (again) as Universal Ruler (1206). Jebe pursues the Kara Kitan emperor. Chinggis appoints the commanders of the Ninety-five Thousands. Favours for merit. Writing of the *Blue Book* [Register].
9. Distribution of favours continues. Regulations for the army, the guards; their hierarchy.
10. Eulogy of the elder bodyguards on night service; 10,000 guards for Chinggis Khan's personal service. Duties of the guards on night service. Submission of the Karluk people. Submission of the Uighur kingdom. Sübetey destroys the fleeing Merkit princes and Jebe puts an end to the Kara Kitan empire. 1207: Chinggis' adopted son Jöchi leads a campaign against the People of the Forests and the Northern Tribes; wars with the Kori Tumad (southern Siberia). Chinggis Khan's favours for his kinsmen. Fall of the overly influential Kongkotan clan and its leader, Tebtengeri, the sorcerer.
11. Chinggis Khan's first campaign against the Chin empire. His first campaign against the Kashin (the Tangut or Hsi Hsia empire). 1214: his second campaign against the Chin. His envoys killed by the Sarta'ul, the Muslims of West Turkistan. Before his western campaign: the question of the Khan's heir raised by Yisüi, his Tatar consort. Quarrel between Jöchi and Cha'adai. Apology for Börte, who brought Jöchi from her Merkit captivity. Ögedey accepted as heir. 1219: the seven-year Western Campaign begins; Chinggis accompanied by Lady Kulan. Ögedey's misdeed; youngest son Tolui's faithfulness. Sübetey's Western Campaign. Governors appointed over the territories conquered. 1225: back home, Chinggis on the Tu'ula (Tola) river.

12. The Tangut campaign, the Hsi Hsia empire attacked (1226–7); Chinggis Khan's death (1227). Ögedey enthroned (1228), his campaign against the Chin empire. Tolui's self-sacrifice for Ögedey's life. The Chin defeated. Baghdad conquered. Jöchi's son Batu's complaint against Ögedey's son Güyük and other princes. Regulations for the guards renewed. Ögedey's merits and self-critique. Postscript.

The wise sayings of Chinggis Khan and his heritage were preserved in Rashīd al-Dīn's Persian history and late sixteenth- or seventeenth-century collections. He and other Muslim writers further recorded anecdotes concerning Ögedey's generosity; the emperor Möngke's learning from Mahmūd Yalavach about Iskandar (Alexander the Great) and about Aristotle; and Ögedey's and Chagaday's contest in reciting aphorisms.

The diplomatic letters sent by the Mongol rulers of Iran to Philip the Fair of France and to the Pope at the turn of the thirteenth and fourteenth centuries are written in a lively, almost colloquial style, full of pride and self-confidence. A good example of this correspondence is Arghun's message (1289) to the king of France, concerning a plan for a joint campaign against Damascus and Jerusalem, in which he also asks for some fine French falcons and 'stones of various colours'. In his letter to Pope Nicholas IV (1290), he proudly refuses any intervention in the affairs of religion (and, needless to say, in the affairs of state): 'We, Chinggis Khan's offspring, decide ... whether or not we accept baptism.' Sultan Öljeitü's letter (1305) to Philip the Fair is a message suggesting a renewal of the friendship between the two sides which, 'though far from each other, feel as if they were near' (an old formula also found in earlier Uighur letters from Dunhuang).

The Mongolian inscription of 1340, carved in Uighur script on a stone stele in Yunnan, southern China, commemorates the peace restored during the governorship of the Mongol prince Aruk. The text runs as if told by himself, in the form of an edict, but apart from the obligatory official formulas, it is an unusual confession of modesty and of his feelings towards the local people. It is finished with a rather practical though pious decision: the depositing of a significant sum in a monastery, with the interest given for the recital of the Buddhist scriptures. A long Buddhist verse in alliterative stanzas and in Emperor Qubilay's imperial square script forms part of the hexaglot inscription adorning the Juyongguan Gate of the Great Wall (1345).

However, translations of Buddhist canonical and extra-canonical works from Tibetan and Uighur form the bulk of classical Mongol literature. They include, for example, the Mongol version of the Sutra of Golden Light, *Suvaraprabhāsottama*, with the Dream of the Golden Drum and with spells and *jātakas*, among them the famous story of the compassionate prince and the hungry tigress; the *Pañcarakā* [Five Protectors], five books full of spells and magic practices; one of Shakyamuni Buddha's Lives (*Lalitavistara*, with

Mongol verses, translated by Shirab Sengge, early fourteenth century); Sa-skya Paita's *Legs-bshad* or *Subh-itaratnanidhi* [Treasury of Good Sayings], first translated into prose by Sonom Gara; and Shantideva's long poem, the *Bodhicaryāvatāra* [The Journey to Enlightenment]. Such works brought many new ideas and sophisticated notions, new forms and topics to the Mongols' literary expression. The 1312 xylograph edition of the Mongol *Bodhicaryāvatāra* with commentary, a work of Chosgi Odsir (Tibetan, Chhos-kyi 'od-zer), contains his postscript with his name and benediction, written in good alliterative quatrains. Through his merit of translation and commentary, he proudly asks to be reborn as the best of the monks. Chosgi Odsir is also the author of a strophic hymn honouring the fierce goddess Mahākālī; parts of his alliterative verses survived in the fragment of a fourteenth-century block-printed concertina-book.

Voices of a different world can be perceived in a Mongolian poem from the territory of the Golden Horde written in Uighur script on birch bark. It consists of an allegoric dialogue between a fledgling and the mother bird, and the vivacity of the alliterative verses is felt even in the very fragmentary state of the manuscript.

Buddhist verses translated from Tibetan and a version of the *Alexander Romance* (probably translated from an Uighur version) were both copied in the same fourteenth-century manuscript found in the Turfan basin; Alexander's Mongol name, Sulqarnai (> Arabic Dhu 'l-Qarnayn), shows that the source of the Turkic (Uighur) original goes back to the Muslim Arabic tradition.

These and other, in many cases, fragmentary, monuments of the Mongol literature of the Middle Ages represent a great variety of forms, genres, topics and ideas, reflections of the cultural environment, the religions and the nations united by Chinggis Khan and his successors in Mongolia and southern Siberia, China, Tibet, western Asia and eastern Europe. The decline of the Mongol World Empire in the late fourteenth century marks the beginning of a long, dark period of decadence for literary activity. From the fifteenth century, which saw the internal wars of the Eastern and Western Mongols, only a few written monuments remain, such as a xylographed book with the Buddhist goddess Tārā's woodcut images, spells and prayers. It was in the late sixteenth century, with warfare still raging, that attempts to restore unity led to the renaissance of Buddhism and Buddhist literature as well as to the revival of Chinggis Khan's cult among the Mongols. Such unity was then lost again, but the art of the Mongol word, whether written or oral, religious or secular, has never ceased to delight the Mongol mind.

## Part Four

# THE LITERATURES OF NORTH-WESTERN INDIA

(*C. Shackle*)

The period between 750 and 1500 is in many respects one of transition in the cultural history of the peoples of the southernmost part of the Central Asian region, namely those of the Indo-Gangetic plains and the surrounding areas of present-day Pakistan and northern India. In the history of literature, as in that of other arts, these centuries came after the preceding Golden Age attained by classical Hindu civilization under the Guptas and their imperial successors. In their turn, they were followed by the Mughal period of the sixteenth and seventeenth centuries, which saw both the climactic phase of the high Indo-Muslim culture and the production of many of the classic works of Indian and Pakistani vernacular literatures. While the period 750–1500 is certainly not without its great literary achievements, these consequently tend to be rather heterogeneous in character, as well as often appearing in some degree of isolation from one another.

Both these characteristics are to be understood in relation to the complex transformations in cultural life associated with the large historical cycles of the period, which here assumed patterns considerably different from those in other parts of the Central Asian region. These began with the dissolution into regional kingdoms of the last substantial Hindu empire of northern India, that ruled by the Gurjara-Pratihāras of Kanawj. This later encouraged the Muslim conquests from the north-west. These in turn progressed towards a re-establishment of centralized authority, now under the Sultans of Delhi, until the overstretched Tughluq empire again broke up into local states, characteristically under Muslim rulers though mostly with largely non-Muslim populations. On the one hand, therefore, the profound cultural consequences of the transition from Hindu to predominantly Muslim political authority were inevitably reflected in marked changes in the typical languages, styles and contents of literature. On the other hand, these changes themselves naturally resulted in the loss of many texts, with the consequence that the literary history of the period is not only complex but also necessarily very incomplete. The surviving literature is

therefore here described in terms of broad generic categories which cut across regions and languages, after the immediately-following initial sketch has served to acquaint the reader with the important shifts in the types of language used for literature during the period.

## Literary languages

In India, choices of literary language have often been expressions of religious allegiance. This process began with the rejection of Sanskrit, seen as the language of the Vedas, by Buddhists and Jains in favour of the then more colloquial Pali and Prakrit. It was therefore natural that the re-establishment of Brahminic Hinduism should have supplanted these later Indo-Aryan languages with a revival of Sanskrit – which had long since ceased to be a spoken idiom – as the dominant cultural and literary language of northern India. Although the spread of Muslim political authority led to its place largely being taken by Persian, Sanskrit continued to be the medium of significant works until at least the thirteenth century, especially in such peripheral regions as Kashmir and Bengal.

Around the beginning of our period, a closer approximation to the spoken languages of the time had already been achieved with the literary cultivation (particularly in western India, where Jainism remained influential) of the post-Prakrit form of Middle Indo-Aryan called Apabhramśa. Over the centuries Apabhramśa (the ‘fallen away’ language) soon became a fossilized literary idiom, although some features of the sophisticated lyrical poetry for whose composition it was typically reserved – such as the regular use of rhyme – are quite distinct from Sanskrit literary norms and look forward rather to the later lyrical traditions of the New Indo-Aryan languages.

The literary cultivation of these vernaculars as early as the tenth century is indicated by stray disparaging references in Sanskrit texts to poets composing in *bhūtabhāshā*. (‘demon language’) instead of the recognized standards of Sanskrit, Prakrit and Apabhramśa. It was, however, the Muslim conquests which eventually provided the decisive impetus for the development of the vernacular literatures through their abolition of the cultural hegemony of the Sanskritic literary norms which were so closely associated with the stifling prestige of Brahminic authority. As the imported standard language of an élite religious minority in India, Persian (considered in Chapter 13, Part One, above) was only partly fitted to replace Sanskrit as an all-embracing literary medium. For many more popular types of verse – including lyrical, romantic and heroic poems – the regionally diverse New Indo-Aryan languages came to be used, with preserved works becoming increasingly numerous from c. 1300 onwards.

These include early forms of such presently well-distinguished languages as Bengali, Sindhi, Panjabi or Kashmiri (besides the neighbouring languages of the Iranian family, Pashto and Baluchi). It is to be noted, however, that some of these languages are much less securely attested for the pre-1500 period than is sometimes suggested by the natural enthusiasm of some indigenous scholars for establishing the earliest possible date for the origins of their particular literature. A more rounded picture can be gained through comparing the individually isolated works of one literature with those composed in other languages. These also, most importantly, include those languages of the Gangetic region which have nowadays often come somewhat confusingly to be classed as dialects of Hindi. From west to east, these languages are Rajasthani; the Khari Boli of the Delhi region, which is the ancestor of both modern Hindi and Urdu and was even then drawn upon as a cross-regional vernacular lingua franca; the Brajbhāshā spoken to its south-west; then the eastern Avadhi and the Maithili of Bihar.

## The courtly heritage

Being both overshadowed by the supreme achievements of the classical period of Kālidāsa and his contemporaries and subsequently marginalized by the rise of the vernaculars, later Sanskrit literature tends to receive understandably scant attention from literary historians. Its vast bulk alone, however, certainly far exceeds the quantity of literature produced in all other Indian languages throughout the centuries under review. Much of this bulk is the product of commentators, encyclopedists and anthologists more notable for their industry than their originality. Much of the rest is distinguished only by an ingenuity alien to the taste of later generations, like the eleventh-century *Rāmapālacharita*, which celebrates the achievements of King Rāmapāla of Bengal in such a way as to let each verse also be interpreted as a description of the exploits of the divine hero Rama.

Certain works of the period are, however, rightly recognized as literary achievements of the first rank. In a literary tradition remarkable for its general indifference to history (hence the uncertainty as to the dates of most of its authors), the most original is Kalhana's unique *Rājataranginī*, a great verse chronicle of the kings of Kashmir composed in the twelfth century, which is notable both for its individual vignettes and for its powerful evocation of the operations of fate through time. Remarkable in a quite different way is an eleventh-century masterpiece from Kashmir, Somadeva's *Kathāsaritsāgara*, a colossal assemblage of inter-linked stories of every conceivable type told in the most elegant verse. If only because of its bulk, this is less approachable than the *Hitopadeśa*, a collection of prose fables with

inserted verses which was composed on the basis of the famous *Pañchatantra* as a primer of literary Sanskrit by the twelfth-century Bengali writer Nārāyana.

Although such great story-collections form one of India's major contributions to world literature, Sanskrit poetic tradition is dominated by the lyric. No poet of the period quite equalled the classical achievements of Kālidāsa in this genre, but the prolific Kashmiri poet Bilhana (*fl. c. 1100*) came close in his *Chaurapañchāškā*, whose 50 verses describe recollections of a clandestine affair with a princess. For future poetic developments in medieval India, however, by far the most significant poem produced in Sanskrit was the twelfth-century *Gītagovinda*. Composed in Bengal by Jayadeva, this is a post-classical collection of rhymed lyrics designed for singing, which owes more to Apabhramśa than to earlier Sanskrit example, and whose devotional subject-matter, the love of Krishna for the milkmaid Rādhā, was to exert a religious appeal far exceeding the precious bounds both of the Sanskrit courtly lyric and of the Persian *ghazal* which was to replace it.

## The rise of the vernacular lyric

The early development of the vernacular lyric, whether in its secular or its devotional varieties, can hardly be reconstructed from the scanty materials which survive. A peculiarly interesting early glimpse of the overlap between Apabhramśa and the beginnings of New Indo-Aryan is provided by the *Rāula-vela* (partially preserved in a central Indian stone inscription of *c. 1050*), a poem which describes different ladies of the court in verses whose language is recognizably appropriate to the regions they come from. Equally tantalizing, though for different reasons, is the *Sandeśarāsaka*, an isolated late Apabhramśa masterpiece (of Rajasthani or Panjabi provenance and dated *c. 1200?*) remarkable for the sophistication and freshness with which its artfully varied lyrics treat the familiar theme of a traveller to Multan being asked to convey messages from the poet to the beloved from whom he is separated.

In terms of cultural history, the *Sandeśarāsaka* is also particularly notable as the work of a Muslim poet, called Addahamāna, i.e. °Abd al-Rahmān. Early Muslim participation in indigenous Indian poetic traditions is otherwise not well attested, although the Lahore court poet Mas°ūd-i Sa°d-i Salmān (1059–1121), chiefly remembered for his Persian *qasīdas* (odes) and *habsiyyas* (prison poems), is said also to have composed a *dīwān* of poetry in 'Hindī' or 'Hindawī', the Persian terms indifferently used to indicate almost any Indian language. Apart from the Sufi poets whose work is described in later sections below, the only notable Muslim author of the period associated with vernacular lyrics is the greatest Indian-born Persian poet, Amīr Khusraw of Delhi (1253–1325). His *Ghurraṭ al-kamāl*



(1293) explicitly refers to his ‘few Hindī poems’ (*chand nazm-i hindī*), but most of the verse riddles (*paheliyān*) and other ‘Hindī’ poems nowadays ascribed to him seem of doubtful authenticity and marginal quality.

The one indisputably great vernacular lyricist of the period is Vidyāpati (*fl. c. 1400*), a Brahmin poet associated with the Hindu kingdom of Mithila in Bihar. His *Kīrtilatā*, elegantly describing a visit by one of its rulers to the neighbouring Muslim state of Jawnpur, is written in a modernized type of Apabhramśa (termed by him *Avahattha*), which includes both Sanskritic and Persian loanwords. Vidyāpatī is, however, above all famous for his extraordinarily fresh and musical lyrics in his native Maithili, whose predominantly secular sentiments belie their seemingly religious guise, for all the fact that many revolve around Krishna and Rādhā. For a truly devotional harbinger of the Krishnaite lyric which was to become so dominant a genre in *Brajbhāshā* and many other Indian literatures during the following period, one must rather look eastwards to the cycle of ecstatic Bengali poems by the fifteenth-century poet Chandīdās known as the *Śrīkrishnakīrtana*.

## Early romances

While the devotional aspect of the lyric aligns it with the religious epic, the latter did not give rise during the period to genuine re-creations in vernacular languages which would transcend the status of such popular adaptations of the Sanskrit *Rāmāyana* as that executed into Bengali by Krttibās (fifteenth century), or into *Brajbhāshā* by Vishnudās in 1442. More notable literary achievements were to result from the closer literary links between the lyric and another narrative genre, namely the verse romance. The classic handlings of local folk romances, however – whether these furnish the basis of verse narratives or the symbolic imagery of secular or mystical lyrics – mostly date only from Mughal times. Although many of the romantic tales which were thus to receive later literary shaping were indeed probably in oral circulation at this period, it would therefore be misleading to extrapolate such material back to it, in a necessarily uncertain attempt to reconstruct the repertory of contemporary oral tradition in such languages as Panjabi or Sindhi.

Indications of the likely nature of this tradition are provided by a few surviving texts. One is the anonymous popular Rajasthani cycle of *Dholā-Mārū*, which describes how Mārūni of Pugal sends a message to Dholā whom she married as a child. For a while detained in Narvar by his other wife Mālvanī, Dholā crosses the desert on his camel and, after several adventures, brings Mārūni safely back to Narvar. Significantly, this story is glimpsed rather than fully narrated in the oldest versions, which consist of succinct isolated couplets (in the *dohā* metre shared by Apabhramśa with most New Indo-Aryan literatures),

which would doubtless have been linked by improvised narrative in performance by professional minstrels. Rather more courtly shaping has gone into another Rajasthani romance, the *Viśaldevrās* (c. 1450) by Narpati Nālha, which describes the separation suffered soon after their marriage by a princess from her husband, the Rajput prince Visaldev; in this, the stock cast of romantic characters, such as confidantes and messengers, is enlivened by a rather vivid royal mother-in-law.

For the transmutation of folk story into literary masterpiece, another element was required, provided in only one vernacular work during the period under review. This was the *Chandāyan* (1379) written in Avadhi by one Mawlānā Dāwūd, a Chishtī Sufi who used the artistic example of the Persian *mathnawī* (poem in couplets) to reshape the tale of the love of Lorik and Chāndā as a spiritual allegory. Having no surviving predecessors or immediate successors, Dāwūd's great achievement was to have effected the classicizing of the love-story (*premākhyān*) without losing all the freshness of its folk origins or the rich details of its Indian setting, the last being carefully preserved in the ordered sequence of its cantos (*khand*), each consisting of a *chaupāī* followed by a *dohā*. Only in the sixteenth century was the remarkable model of the *Chandāyan* to be matched by still greater masterpieces of the genre.

## Heroic poetry

The many wars of the period, mostly associated with the long process of Muslim conquest, naturally provoked much heroic poetry. On the side of the conquerors, Persian was the main medium of celebration, and many a *qasīda* or *mathnawī* was composed in honour of their victorious kings by the court poets, most memorably by Amir Khusraw, the panegyrist of seven sultans.

Vernacular poetry was therefore left with the task of celebrating the glorious defeats of the Delhi Sultans' noble Rajput opponents. The greatest of these was the climactic defeat in 1192 at the hands of the forces of the Ghurid sultan Muhammad of Prithvīrāj, the last Chauhān Rajput ruler of Delhi, whose court bard Chand Bardā'ī is the putative author of the *Prithvīrāj-rāsau*, the greatest Hindi heroic poem, filled with descriptions of battle. The origins of the poem, which exists in several recensions of different length, are certainly somewhat later and are connected with the bardic traditions of Rajasthan. These traditions gave rise to a large literature on subsequent struggles, typically culminating in the mass self-immolation (*jauhar*) of the ladies of the Rajput leaders, as happened after °Alā al-Dīn Khalji's conquest in 1301 of the fort of Ranthambor commanded by the Chauhān Hammīr, celebrated not only in Hindi and Rajasthani bardic poems but even in a late Sanskrit epic,

the *Hammīra-mahākāvya* by the Jain monk Nayachandra Sūri. A later episode in the same war, the defeat of the chivalrous Kānhadadev of Jalor and the *jauhar* of his queens, is the subject of an epic masterpiece of early Gujarati literature, Padmanābh's *Kānhadade-prabandha* of 1456.

Comparable bardic traditions may certainly be supposed to have existed at this time in many other languages, but only indirect evidence is available, often from a much later period. In Panjabi, for instance, the strophic form called *vār* was used for heroic ballads, but the earliest surviving texts are the religious adaptations by Guru Nānak and his successors in the Sikh *Ādi granth* (1604), whose rubrics nevertheless indicate the titles of the secular models whose tunes are to be followed. Many Panjabi heroic legends are, however, known only from the work of nineteenth-century folklorists, like the great cycle constructed around the legendary Raja Rasālū of Sialkot, supposedly related to the pre-Ghaznavid period. Similar considerations apply to the tribal ballads in Baluchi, of which a large number related to the great fifteenth-century Mir Chākūr Khān and the subsequent war between the Rind and Lāshārī tribes. In Pashto, nothing appears to have survived from this period, in spite of the claims sometimes advanced for the authenticity of the poetry – including both heroic and devotional verse – cited in the *Pata Khazāna* (1729) by Muhammad Hotak of Kandahar, which purports to be a biographical dictionary (*tadhkira*) of Pashto poets dating back as far as the eighth century.

## Didactic verse

The earliest living classics of many literatures of the region consist of didactic verses devoted to more or less heterodox teachings, for whose expression the hierarchies of language (earlier referred to as so enduringly typical of Indian civilization) made the vernaculars a natural medium of expression. The earliest of these collections of verses, like the semi-Tantric Old Bengali *Charyāgīti* (c. 1200?) or the crabbed Hindi couplets expounding *Nāth-yoga* teachings which are known as the *Gorakh-bānī* (c. 1350?), are of greater interest as philological or religious texts than as literary creations, particularly given their great reliance on the paradoxical juxtaposition of incongruities (*ultābāmsī*).

While also employing similar devices, the collections which have continued to enjoy a much wider currency than these rely far more on such more readily appreciable resources as proverbial sayings, often vivid details drawn from daily life, and a simple and direct lyricism. It is thanks to these elements, rather than her use of the technical terminology of Shaivite *Hatha-yoga*, that the short verses (*vākh*) of the poetess Lal Ded (c. 1350) continue to be cherished as the earliest classics of Kashmiri literature, where their status is

approached only by the more overtly didactic work (*śrukh*) attributed to Shaykh Nūr al-Dīn (d. 1438), the revered founder of the unorthodox Rīshī order of Sufis.

Elsewhere in medieval India, the use of vernacular languages for the composition of occasional verses by other Sufi teachers is occasionally attested in the vast Persian hagiographic literature of the period. For Hindi, this tradition begins to be fully attested only with the colonial extension of the language to the Deccan from the early fourteenth century, particularly in relation to Khwāja Bandanavāz Gesūdarāz (d. 1422) and the Chishtī spiritual dynasty which stemmed from him. It is with these Sufis and such contemporary writers as Fakhr al-Dīn Nizāmī, author of *Kadam rāo padam rāo*, a rather artless vernacular *mathnawī*, that the Dakanī Urdu literary tradition begins. At a much earlier date, the great Chishtī saint known as Bābā Farīd Shakarganj (d. 1265) is reliably credited with the composition of verses in Panjabi, principally preserved in the later *Ādi granth*, compiled by the Sikh Guru Arjan in 1604. As is the case with all these assemblages of early didactic poetry, probably not all the verses attributed to Farīd – who came to be regarded as the founder of Panjabi literature – are authentic, and their dialectal base also seems likely to have been altered from an original Siraiki (Multani) base.

Similar factors have governed the transmission of the hymns (*ginān*) of the Indian Nizārī Ismaʿīli community, which are especially remarkable for their free use of Hindu concepts and images to interpret Ismaʿīli ideas. The formative teacher in this tradition is Pīr Sadr al-Dīn (d. 1416?), the language of whose compositions has not only been much modernized over the centuries, but also modified by conversion from its original Siraiki and Sindhi base to Gujarati forms more intelligible to the modern Ismaʿīli community.

Their preservation through sixteenth-century collections which finally entered the *Ādi granth* has ensured a rather more reliable transmission for the verse of the Sants, the great teachers of the popular *nirgun bhakti* tradition that is one of the most striking responses of the medieval Hindu world to the challenge of Islam. Mostly of low-caste origin and illiterate, the Sants used their ‘holy men’s jargon’ (*sādhukkarī*), a combination of the Khari Boli Hindi of the Delhi area with forms from the surrounding languages, for verses and hymns whose rough-hewn power spread their teachings of the necessity for devotion to the One God without adherence to the misguided orthodoxies of either Brahminic Hinduism or Islam. The first of the major Sants was Nāmdev, a fourteenth-century calico printer from Maharashtra, but by far the greatest was Kabīr (d. c. 1450), a nominally Muslim weaver from Benares, who is particularly notable for his mastery of the gnomic *dohā*. Called *sākhī* (witness), Kabir’s verses – whose continued oral circulation evidences their enduring status as one of the formative elements of the popular culture of the vast Hindi region – provide marvellously pithy asides on the human condition, with particularly sardonic reflections

on religious hypocrisy. Though less trenchant than those of Kabir, their own more tender quality has assured a continued popularity for the humbler Hindi lyrics of his follower Ravidās (or Raidās).

If the apogee of the Sant tradition is in many ways reached after the close of this period around 1500, in the magnificent hymns of Guru Nānak (1469–1539) which begin the Sikh tradition, this is entirely in keeping with the general cultural trends of the time, which made the sixteenth century the definitive start of the greatest vernacular literary achievements in this region.

## Part Five

# THE KYRGYZ EPIC *MANAS*

(*R. Z. Kydyrbaeva*)

The epic *Manas* is a classic example of the oral poetic culture of nomads. It can be seen as an imaginary history of the Kyrgyz people, in which myths, fairytales, legends and historical events are inextricably interwoven. It is a unique key to the folk memory of the Kyrgyz concerning the deeds and exploits of their ancestors; it is also their forebears' legacy of honour and valour, of dignity and loyalty, and of love for their land, the land of their birth. Unlike the epics of many other peoples, *Manas* is entirely in verse and in its most monumental versions, formed by the trilogy *Manas*, *Semetei*, *Seitek*, it contains 500,000 lines. In sheer volume it exceeds many of the world's most celebrated epics. *Manas* has been transmitted orally from generation to generation and evolved as a many-layered work through the efforts of talented bards, known as *manaschi*. In the process of transmission it has expanded into a huge poem, absorbing fresh historical events and characters and subjecting them to the conventions of epic narrative, thus making the composition more complex.

The first known written reference to the epic is in a manuscript by a mullah, Sayf al-Dīn, *Majmū' al-tawārīkh* [Compendium of Histories], written probably in the period from the fourteenth to the sixteenth century. In 1856 the Kazakh orientalist C. C. Valikhanov set down an episode, *The Funeral Banquet in Commemoration of Köketei*,<sup>23</sup> and in 1885

<sup>23</sup> Valikhanov, 1961.

V. V. Radlov published the Kyrgyz text in Russian transcription with a parallel translation in German.<sup>24</sup> From the 1920s, versions of the epic were already being systematically recorded from the words of story-tellers, such as Sagymbai Orozbekov, Sayakbai Karalaev, Tynybek Zhapiev, Togolok Moldo and Moldobasan Musulmankulov. Incomplete editions of different versions were published separately.<sup>25</sup>

In the recent past, in the nineteenth and early twentieth centuries, the story-telling tradition of the Kyrgyz people was apparently widely developed and found in every part of what is now Kyrgyzstan. At that time, the Kyrgyz had not yet lost a keen interest in their epic, which survived in all its magnificence and monumentality. The nomadic way of life of the Kyrgyz, with its patriarchal foundations, was responsible for the vitality of their epic memory as against other manifestations of spiritual culture. The ancient legend, alive and flourishing, and with all the specific characteristics of oral narratives, crossed the threshold into the twentieth century and in the early 1900s still very much retained its place in the spiritual life of the people. Unfortunately, many of the story-tellers' names are known to us only through folk tradition, although the history of the Kyrgyz art of improvisation does record several names of well-known story-tellers who worked *c.* 1900. The last 100 years or so have brought us the names of such outstanding *manaschi* as Kel'dibek, Akylbek, Nazar, Tynybek, Balyk, Dyikanbai, Zhandake, Donuzbai, Suranchi, Chonbash, Teltai, Kalmyrza and Choodon. The direct successors of this unending tradition of story-tellers in the Soviet period were Choyuke, Mambet, Sagymbai, Sayakbai and the still-thriving Shaabai, Khava and Seidene. In its present form, the epic is the product of the artistic transformation of Kyrgyz history.

The United Nations declared 1995 the year of *Manas* and in that same year the Kyrgyz Republic celebrated the epic's accepted millennium, attesting to the enormous significance of the epic in the spiritual life of Kyrgyz society. The ideas of the fight for independence, for the unification of the Kyrgyz clans and tribes and for the free country, bequeathed by their ancestors, the land of Talas Alatau, have taken on new meaning and coincide in some measure with the tasks of contemporary Kyrgyzstan, and this is why the ideas rooted in *Manas* resonate with particular significance even now. A new interpretation and reading of the epic have paved the way for a revival of spirituality through a return to the sources which created that spirituality, and for the acknowledgement of lost traditions and customs.

The most important episodes of the epic are the following: the birth and childhood of Manas, the hero's campaigns, his marriage to Kanykei, Koketei's wake and the poisoning of Manas by his Kezkaman relations. The whole spirit of the epic centres on the idea of

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<sup>24</sup> Radlov, 1885.

<sup>25</sup> Anon., 1978–82; 1984–91.

unification, an idea that runs through *Manas*. It constantly stresses that fragmentation and intestine strife are signs of weakness:

Terrible is the fire that flares in the soul,  
 Terrible the foe who is one of your own . . .  
 (*trans. S. Karalaev*)

The first part of the trilogy concludes with the defeat of the warrior hero Manas in Peking, China, leaving Almambet, Syrgak, Er Kokcho and Er Toshtyuk, his most courageous and loyal followers, dead and Manas himself mortally wounded. This ending leads on naturally to the continuation of the epic cycle. In Manas' testament there is talk of tribal feuding and the weakening of the power of the Kyrgyz people, united by Manas. The birth of Semetei, son of Manas, already prefigures future revenge for the defeat of his father. This is the origin of the second part, *Semetei*, linked by idea and subject-matter to the first, and containing the exploits of Manas' son and of his comrades-in-arms, who manage to defeat foreign invaders. The third part of the trilogy, *Seitik*, is an epic narrative about internecine fights in which Semetei's son, Seitek, restores justice among the Kyrgyz clans. The portrayals of Semetei and Seitek reflect the popular desire to preserve the legends of Manas in the heroic lives of his descendants.

To varying degrees, the epic mirrors actual historical events which shaped the destiny of the Kyrgyz people. The early Middle Ages left their mark on the construction of the plot: the history of the Turkic Kaghanate and the period of the Mongol invasions, which coincided with the large-scale migrations and assimilations of peoples and tribes throughout Central Asia; it was also the period at which the Dzungarian Khanate was formed, which extended into the territory of Central Asia. As *Manas* continued to evolve, plot motifs connected with the theme of the Nogoi and the history of the Golden Horde (thirteenth–sixteenth century) were introduced into the epic. Nogoi Khan entered the family tree of the Manas clan, appearing in many versions as the grandfather of Manas; Dzakyk, Manas' father, is referred to as Nogoi's fourth son.

The beautiful and the ideal receive a distinctive treatment in which traces of the early epic can be detected, and these qualities come across particularly clearly in the description of Manas himself. Ideals determine the hero's behaviour, giving him epic strength, and throughout the narrative Manas displays his valour in every crisis. Ungovernability, excessive strength, unmotivated excesses of unruly behaviour are characteristic features both of Manas himself and of his followers, and these aspects of his character are constantly stressed:

You say drink water, he drinks poison,

You say take off your hat, he takes off a head,  
You say shed blood, he rips open a stomach,  
Never retreat in battle,  
Never run from death,  
Do not step back from an army seen . . .  
(*trans. S. Karalaev*)

Such ‘exaggeration and excess’ in the description of the hero goes with the concept of the ideal in the epic. The epic hero behaves with valour in various situations: in single combat and in mass battle scenes. The epic system of convictions and feelings is a product of its own internal aesthetic; the relationship to war cannot only be negative. When the epic describes battle scenes, it is not only depicting grief and death but the joy of victory and satisfaction with what has been accomplished – ‘blood drained from the veins’ of the enemy, ‘tattered tents’, ‘broken wings’, ‘sliced-off lips’, ‘caved-in chests’, all serve as celebrations of victory over the multitudinous forces of the opponent. Grief, death and triumph exist side by side, various and contradictory feelings coexist and mesh with each other.

*Manas* corresponds to the developed, classical form of heroic narrative but one that has not eliminated the ancient layers of a pre-state epic present within it, i.e. echoes of the archaic, oral art which is characteristic of primitive communal societies. There are many traces of pagan belief preserved in *Manas*, such as belief in the magical powers of objects and words. Many echoes of the shamanism so widely prevalent in the epic works of the peoples of Central Asia are also reflected in the Kyrgyz epic. These rudiments of shamanism are most often to be found in the set pieces which have become part of the work’s artistic system, such as *alkis*, *kargish* (blessings, curses), *arman*, *kereez* (pity, testament) and, to some extent, *kosh ok* (ritual lamentations). These set pieces may have constituted the basis, the primary material that has contributed to the formation of the epic genre.<sup>26</sup>

Of all the forms of shamanistic art, it was the art of words that took on a stable form. The word proved to be the richest in content and the most versatile, contributing thereby to the development of the artistic genres of ceremonial poetry. Ceremony and ritual poetry, crystallized in the depths of shamanistic mysteries, also, in various forms, accompanied the progress of the epic’s plot: birth ceremonies and namings, marriage and funeral rites, various kinds of blessings and curses. All of them are consistent with a spirit close to that of the shamanistic spell. Without these scenes the epic would lose one of the most important

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<sup>26</sup> Divaev, 1889, p. 10; Korogly, 1972; Kyrgyz, 1993, p. 6; Radlov, 1989, pp. 366–7; Valikhanov, 1961, p. 487; Vasilevich, 1969, p. 164; Zhirmunskiy, 1962, pp. 270–1.



elements illuminating the everyday and battle scenes, as well as the ordinary course of events.

The poetics of shamanistic folklore are most clearly revealed in monologues, where curses are proclaimed, sending down the evil eye, bringing disaster on the enemy or on trouble-makers within the clan. In the Kyrgyz folk consciousness, and more specifically in the epic, there is a belief that the worst harm that can be done to a person is delivered through a curse from the mouth of an old person or woman with warts on the palate or in the throat, or a particular mark on the pupils. The wife of Manas, Kanykei, had a wart on her tongue, and so everyone was wary of falling under her *kargish*, for *kargishi kata getpegen* ('her curse was never mistaken'), as the epic says. It was known that, depending on the circumstances, words uttered by shamans might be sources of succour as well as of terrible tyranny. In *Manas*, this particular role played by words is not lost as, in rage at his own friend, the hero Manas utters such curses:

You shall not delight in your *bajge*, but eat your own fat,  
and drink the blood of your own heir,  
You shall not delight in winning races,  
but eat the liver of seven of your forebears!  
(*trans. S. Orozbekov*)

This allowed elements of shamanism (plot, rhythm, magic ceremonial) to be incorporated into the epic. It should be pointed out that the pagan layer in the epic dominates the much later Islamic layer. In the features of the characters and the description of the landscape, in the nature of the formulaic, fixed poetic style, in explanation of the cosmogonic world and categories of space and time, in the nature of the syncretic unity of mythology and reality; in brief, throughout the basic system of artistic thought and vision of *Manas*, there is a close connection with the epic world of the Central Asian peoples. Therefore, it would be wrong to look at the Kyrgyz epic in isolation from the Central Asian epic tradition as a whole. In the history of the oral poetic culture of the nomadic peoples of Inner Asia there were periods of high achievement, linked to the history of the Turkic tribes; this occurred in the sixth to the tenth century, when the tribes settling the region came together in a powerful union and laid the foundations of the Turkic Kaghanate (see Volume IV, Part One, Chapter 9).

Altai, the birthplace of the Kyrgyz hero Manas, is the land which, according to the epic, was 'irrigated at his birth with the blood of his umbilical cord'. It was in this region of Central Asia that the pre-epic, original archaic plot of the Kyrgyz epic was created, leaving a profound impression on its entire artistic structure. In almost all the versions of *Manas*,

one repeatedly finds persistent models, which in many ways resemble the inscriptions in the ancient Turkic so-called runic script, for example:

He was himself beneficial,  
 Forty-two years was he Khan,  
 Gathered solitary kites and turned them into [worthy] birds,  
 Gathered slaves and turned them into a people,  
 Gathered gold [so much] that like stones they [lay scattered],  
 All that wandering people  
 He made into a great nation . . .  
 (*trans. S. Orozbekov*)

The very text of the epic, its compositional structure and stylistic qualities evoke the eulogy of Kol Tegin by Bilge Kaghan: ‘Then, by the grace of Heaven, and because of great fortune, I came to rule over the realm as Kaghan. Once Kaghan, I fully raised [gathered] the fallen, poor people I made rich, and a people who were few I made many.’<sup>27</sup>

Both texts are about the head of the clan, the tribe and the people: in the first, ‘Khan’, in the second ‘Kaghan’. Both texts refer to a wandering, scattered people, small in number, which, under the wise leadership of the Khan or Kaghan, becomes ‘many’ and ‘forty tribes’ (in the epic), an ‘exhausted people’ and a ‘people dragging out an existence like that of a slave’ (in the epic), rising up and acquiring prosperity thanks to the endeavours of its leader. In both cases, events are set out by means of stylistic parallels: ‘a poor people I made rich, a small people I made many’, ‘gathered solitary kites and turned them into [worthy] birds, gathered slaves and turned them into a people’. As can be seen, the individual poetic phrases and plot motifs of the Kyrgyz epic and the ancient inscriptions are identical in style. It is thought that the artistic and expressive resources of the inscriptions were drawn from a broadly based oral poetic culture, which had long used oral tributes.

The Kyrgyz epic has many similarities with Altaic, Yakut, Khakass, Tuvan and Mongol epics. Pan-Turkic creativity is evident in the representation of the thoughts, deeds and emotions and the external features of the characters, and in the development of the epic situations. The clearest correlation between the Kyrgyz and Altaic epics appears in the poetic presentation of complicated situations expressed in the form of laments (*arman*); the lament of the Altaic hero Alyp-Manash, who has been taken prisoner, is almost identical to the lament of Manas, poisoned by his own relatives, the Kezkaman.<sup>28</sup> The only difference in this instance lies in the greater detail of the Kyrgyz epic and the greater concision of the Altaic. As for the poetics of *koshok* (ritual lamentations), there is hardly any

<sup>27</sup> Malov, 1951, pp. 28, 35.

<sup>28</sup> Anon., 1985.

difference in terms of stylistic construction. The Yakut and Kyrgyz epics are, very probably, the only works of the Turkic-speaking peoples in which an all-engulfing cascade of external and internal alliteration is the driving force behind the rhythm and organization of sound. Identical devices in both epics express instantaneousness, swiftness, dexterity and speed. For instance, in the Yakut epic *Niurgun Bootur the Swift*, when the hero Kün Erbiya asks that the children be released ‘to the middle, primordial Mother Earth’, the old people are silent as long ‘as it takes to cook meat’;<sup>29</sup> in the Kyrgyz epic a similar turn of phrase serves to highlight the swiftness and dexterity of Manas, who is able ‘in the time it takes to cook meat’ to defeat the enemy’s forces. There is much in common between the Yakut and Kyrgyz epics as regards the description of the hero’s appearance, his physical strength, morose air and god-like aspect.<sup>30</sup>

While the Altaic and Yakut epics come close to the Kyrgyz work mainly in terms of poetics and stylistics, *Manas* resembles the Mongol epic in terms of individual plot motifs. In the original historiographical work of the Mongols, the *Altan tobchi*, the names Usun and Koke Chos are mentioned, honoured by Chinggis Khan with the title *beki* because they ‘did not conceal what they heard or saw, nor did they hide or suppress but always revealed’.<sup>31</sup> It is hard to resist the temptation to compare this episode with the *Manas* characters Usen and Kokchokoz, who were victims of Kalmuck raids: snatched from the Kyrgyz, they were eventually assimilated by the Kalmuck. Subsequently, thanks to the unificatory endeavours of the hero Manas, they were returned to the Kyrgyz and lavishly rewarded with land, livestock and household goods and chattels by Manas. As they had taken on the appearance and habits of the Kalmuck, Manas arranged the Muslim ceremony of circumcision, so as to purify them of ‘unclean pollution’. Manas’ power, his fearlessness and valour aroused the envy of Kokchokoz’s family and they secretly prepared to poison the hero. It is possible that they are the very same Usun and Koke Chos who ‘did not conceal what they heard or saw’ from Chinggis Khan, that is, they were secretly informing the Mongols of Kyrgyz plans. This motif evidently developed on the basis of some actual event in Kyrgyz-Mongol relations and then found expression in the epic.

With the passing of time, the epic increasingly incorporated accounts of actual historical events. Proof of this can be found in the events described in the *Majmū‘ al-tāwarīkh*, in which history is interwoven with elements from folk legends and epics. The work probably dates from the fourteenth to the sixteenth century, and is the first written source in which *Manas* is mentioned and the events of the epic dealt with as real history. Written

<sup>29</sup> Anon., 1947, p. 78.

<sup>30</sup> Kydyrbaeva, 1980, pp. 56–62.

<sup>31</sup> Anon., 1973, p. 154.

by the mullah Sayf al-Dīn of Akhsikent, it depicts Manas fighting on the side of the Muslims against the Kalmuck Dzholoi, and converting the captured prisoners to Islam. It was a time of intensive Islamic indoctrination in a nomadic pagan environment, and this had several implications. The Turkic-speaking culture of the period began to be exposed to the influence of the Arab and Iranian cultures and languages. Gradually, as the influence of Arab-Iranian literature grew, many Turkic poetic works were consigned to oblivion. It was at this time that the figures of Rustam and of Iskandar (Alexander the Great) were introduced into *Manas*. Many Islamic motifs were brought into the epic just as the nomadic and settled cultures were coming into contact with one another, forming strange combinations with pagan themes. According to E. G. Yakovlev:

In various regions and at different historical periods Islam and the national cultures of the peoples who came within its sway interacted with and influenced each other. Yet even where Islam came closest to the depths of the popular and mythological artistic consciousness, it could not accommodate or assimilate the original and inimitable features of the cultures of those peoples.<sup>32</sup>

The clashes and interaction between the pagan, epic world and the world of Islam assumed rather distinctive forms. Thus respect for old people, in particular grey-bearded old men, which is the everyday ethic of nomads, was widely reflected in the epic in the depictions of Koshoi and Bakai. Onto the personal qualities of the sage and mentor, fresh qualities drawn from Islamic ethics, such as a saintly and prophetic aura, were successfully superimposed. Hence in the epic, the figure of the old man Koshoi, the comrade-in-arms of Manas, is characterized by such basic qualities as wisdom, outstanding heroism, bravery and shrewdness, and it is thought that the new, more religiously related qualities such as those mentioned above were added when Islam was introduced. The borders are blurred between the established image of the hero and the newly assimilated quality of Islamic holiness. A shift occurred within the artistic system, with the imperceptible introduction of aesthetic changes into the very heart of the epic. Henceforth, shining heroism was not the only virtue extolled, nor was the hero's external appearance – so terrifying to the enemy – the only focus of hyperbole: the qualities of the saint and the prophet, and the hero's ability to deal with his spiritual mentors were also praised. The latter aspects of the image took root because qualities such as the sagacity of an old man made wise through experience had originally been stressed in the figure of Koshoi.

The Kyrgyz heroic epic *Manas* came into being and developed over the many centuries of the Kyrgyz people's complicated and arduous history. It mainly took shape in two major ethno-cultural regions, southern Siberia and the more Islamized Central Asia. At every

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<sup>32</sup> Yakovlev, 1985, p. 197.

historical stage in its development, there are clear genetic and typological links between it and the extended pan-Turkic epic heritage. The time-span played a not insignificant part in the evolution of the epic genre and the transformation of its images and its plot motifs.