

EPIC STORIES THAT BRIDGE THE ANCIENT AND PRESENT WORLDS IN TAJIKISTAN

LOLA HOJIBOEVA

Tajik National University

Epics form a considerable part of the cultural heritage of the Tajik. The oral epic traditions in the Tajik culture appeared and formed in the most ancient period of its history, originating from the mythology of ancient Iranian peoples.

Avesta is a well-known written source, which includes the mythological concepts of ancient Iranian peoples, particularly the ancestors of Tajik, about the universe. The fragments of this source contain the earliest epic elements narrating about fights and battles, which afterwards served as plots for the most ancient oral and written stories and legends. One should note that these elements were of a certain universal character: they do not demonstrate enmity and fight among people - fight, battles, and, therefore, heroic exploits and feats occur between the man and other forces that are often presented as daews. For example, the *Avesta* type of the first man (*Gaya Maretan / Gev Mart / Gev Mars*), created by Ahura Mazda, is presented as a figure of the first king - *Kayumars* - with some changes in the oral epic stories (*dostons*) and later in *Shohnoma* by *Firdawsi*. He ruled the society where people, animals and birds were in a primordial harmony and brotherhood. The first collision of two adversarial forces occurred when *Ahriman* (*Avesta: Angra Manyu*), overpowered by envy watching the world

of light and kindness created by Ahura Mazda, sent his creation, the daew, into this world, who killed noble prince *Siyomak* by way of guile, thereby provoking enmity between himself and *Kayumars*. This line of events predetermines a further epic development of the plot: for the first time facing the death of his like, who, moreover, was his dear son and prince, *Kayumars* and all his kingdom were overcome by the deepest grief and mourning, from which they got out at the call of *Ahura Mazda*. For the first time, an army was formed to fight with the dark force, *Ahriman's* creation. The great army was formed of all the people, animals and birds from *the kingdom of Kayumars*, with the king himself forming the final link. Led by Hushang, the son of killed *Siyomak* and great-child of *Kayumars*, the army was seeking to revenge. Therefore, for the first time a great epic battle was described. The fight of the man, who had been created by *Ahura Mazda* and who represented the world of light and kindness, with the destroying force of *Angra Manyu* was glorified.

The presence and participation of certain intangible supernatural force in them is a distinguishing feature of the heroic deeds representing these plots in an epic genre and giving a unique color to them. In the history of the Tajik mythology and ancient culture this force is formulated and interpreted in the conception *farr [-a] (farr[-a]-i ezadi; farr[-a]-i kayoni)*. So, the universal scales of epic plots reflected in the 'Avesta' sources, - that is, in *Avesta*, *Bundahishn*, *Dinkart* etc., in the 10th century, with some changes, formed the base of *Shahname* by Abumansuri, *Shahname* by Mas'udi Marvazi, the first (mythological), stage of *Shahname* by Firdawsi, *Shahname* by Sa'olabi and others.

Further development of the earliest epics can be traced in some mythological plots, such as those of poems about *Tahmuras*, *Jamshed* (*Avesta: Yima*), *Zahhok*, and later in the plots of works of the early

athletic period (the story about Faridun and his sons and so on). At this very point the initial stage of the formation of the epic elements ended and the new stage of their further development began, when the genre of epic developed as an integral phenomenon. Here, one should pay attention to the classification of Tajik epic pieces in oral and written traditions, which will allow us to study the general mechanism of the forming of this genre more closely.

As is well-known, the genre of epic stories (*hamosa*) comes from oral traditions. In accordance with the classification generally accepted in literature today, for the first time offered by Z. Safo in his fundamental investigation *Hamosasaroī dar Eron*, where the author refers to modern Iran, Tajikistan, and Afghanistan under the name of 'Iran', the following varieties are present in the Tajik-Persian literature:

- National - *hamosai milli*
- Historical - *hamosai ta'rikhi*

The first variety includes epic pieces that were developed as a form of expressing admiration and glorifying the heroes of different times. The cores of these epic stories go back to the earliest period of the formation of the eastern Iranian group of peoples, who were the ethnic ancestors of the Tajik.

Those epic stories were usually devoted to athletes and knights, that is, to those who defended kindness. Songs, stories, legends and, later, poems were composed in their honour. The principal aim - to defend the fatherland and home - was expressed in their persons and propagated by glorifying courage, heroism, and athletic deeds.

A considerable part of the Tajik epic heritage held in the oral traditions belongs to this variety. From the history we know that later, in different periods of the history of the Tajik culture and literature, oral versions

of epics served as the main sources of written epic works. This kind of modified epic stories includes *Ayotkori Zariron* (about the military campaign of king *Gushtosp* (*Kavi Vishtaspa*) and his brother, commander (*Zarir*), *Kornomai Ardasher Bobakon* (about Ardasher's victory over Ardavon and his other heroic deeds), *Dostoni Rustamu Isfandiyor* (a story about Rustam and Isfandiyor), *Kitobi Kailuhrospshoh* (a book about king Durosp, Gushtasp's father), *Nomai Pironi Visa* (the letter of Piron Visa, the councilor of king Afrosiyob), *Dostoni Bahromi Chubin* (a story about athlete Bahrom Chubin) and others. The heroic deeds and actions of the whole pleiad of rulers were also glorified in *Khudainamak*, an annalistic book of the pre-Islamic period, and some others. The tradition was stably continued in the Islamic period of the Tajik culture. Continuing those traditions of epic pieces in the Islamic period different authors compiled *Shohnoma* (9th-10th century), *Garshospnoma* (about athlete Garshosp's heroic actions) by Asadi Tusi (11th century), *Bahmannoma* (about Bahman, Isfandiyor's son) and *Kushnoma* (about Kush with elephant's tusks - pildandon - Zahhok's cousin) by *Iranshah Ibn Abulkhair* (11th-12th century), *Faromarznoma* (about Faro-marz, Rustam's son) and *Bonugushaspnoma* (about the athletic deeds of Bonugushasp, Rustam's daughter) by unknown authors (11th century), *Barzunoma* (about farmer-athlete Barzu, Suhrob's son and Rustam's grandson) by *Ato Ibn Ya'kub* (11th century),

Savsannoma (about a female musician - romishgar - who captivated athletes) (11th century), *Shariyornoma* (about athlete Shahriyor, Barzu's son and Rustam's great grandson) by Usmon Mukhtori Ghaznavi (late 11th-early 12th century), *Ozarbarzinnoma* (about Ozarbarzin, Faro marz's son and the grandson of Rustam and the king of Kashmir), *Bezhanoma* (about athlete Bezhan, Gev Gudarzid's and Bonugushasp's son), *Luhrospnoma* (about king Luhrosp, Gushtosp's father), *Dostoni Kuki Kuhzod* (a story

about Rustam's victory at a very young in his duel with athlete Kuk), *Dostoni Shabrang* (a story about the fight of Rustam with Shabrang, a white daew's son), *Jahongirnoma* (about Jahongir, Rustam's son, his duel with his father and his death from a white daew), *Somnoma* (about athlete Som, Zol's father and Rustam's grandfather) by Khoju (13th century) and others.

In the present-day Tajik culture these epic stories have the form of declaiming, singing with the elements of theatre. The following are the most popular:

The cycle of stories (*dastans*) about Rustam is the most popular and best-known epic work that has remained to the present time in the oral cultural traditions nakkoli, shohnomakhoni etc. These stories exist both in the poetical and the prosaic versions.

The story about *Suhrob* is a well-known Tajik epic story that belongs to the genre of tragedy and has been preserved in an oral form.

The story about *Barzu* continues the cycle of epics about the athletic family of Som Narimon, Rustam's grandfather and Barzu's great grandfather; Barzu, Suhrob's son and Rustam's grandson, who was born after his father's death, is glorified as the main hero. In the medieval period the plot of this epic, which had appeared in ancient times and has reached our days, was reflected in a separate epic poem by Ato Ibn Ya'qub, a Tajik and Persian poet of the late 11th early 12th century, who was also mentioned as Atoii Rozi under the nickname of Nokuk in some sources. The oral versions of this epic have the form of prose embellished with some poetical fragments².

The story about *Bonugushasp* includes texts of an epic character, where the feats and athletic deeds of *Bonugushasp*, the daughter of Rustam, the key figure in Tajik epics, are eulogised and glorified.

Amir Hamza is a folk epic known under names of *Dostoni Amir Hamza* (a story about Amir Hamza), *Rumuzi Hamza* (Hamza's symbols), *Qissai Amir*

Hamza (a legend about Amir Hamza) and *Hamzanoma* (about Hamza). Later the oral text served as a base for the formation of a written version that was told to have been created by order of Hamza Ibn Abdulloh, one of the officials of Khurasan (9th century), its plot being developed further in a later period, in the 11th and 12th centuries. Today qissai Amir Hamza (Kulob region) is known in folklore.

The second variety, to which the stories of historical character belong, reached its peak of development starting from the 12th century, that is, it practically appeared on the stage, when, peculiar to the early Middle Ages, the type of national epics gave place to the themes glorifying historical personalities and figures. *Iskandarnoma* by Nizami, a great Tajik and Persian poet and thinker (12th century), was at the beginnings of the traditional epics. A worthy continuation is traced in well-known poems of other Tajik classicists - Amir Khusraw Dehlavi (13th century) and Abdurahmon Jomi (15th century). Many stories about Iskandar (Alexander the Great) have been written. Later, this tradition was taken by the Uzbek literature, the piece of Alisher Navoi (15th century) being its perfect example.

The historical epics also include religious epic stories, which appeared in the Islamic culture, glorifying and eulogising the deeds of the Islam leader. They include primarily *Khovarnoma* (Khovaronnoma), *Sohibqironnoma*, *Khudovandnoma*, *Hamlai Haidari* and other works. Today, this kind of epic is known as the *na't* / *madh* genre in the Tajik culture. Here it should be noted that *na't* represents the cyclic form of pieces. In the Tajik musical culture this vocal tradition of epics exists under the name of *na'tkhoni/maddoh[i]khoni*.

Therefore, the epic stories of the Tajik exist primarily in the *doston* genre. *Qissa* (hence, the form of creation is *qissakhoni*, *qissagui*) is another

genre of epic stories in the Tajik culture. This tradition also includes singing, narrating, dancing, dramatising etc. Unfortunately, the present-day Tajik culturology and ethnography possess but scanty information on this issue. The epics *qissa Kosimi Zarrinkabo*, *Kosimnoma* and others remain popular among people. The so-called *qissahoi boboi (bobogi)* represents a separate tradition. They have formed a separate type of performance branch under the name of *bobokhoni*.

Together with the primordial Tajik epic stories that go back to the early centuries, the epic traditions of the Tajik also include stories taken from the neighbouring nations and epics. *Gurugli/Gurguli* and 'Alpomish' belong to them.

Epic *Gurugli/Gurguli*, which was genetically taken from neighbouring people, was given a new life within the Tajik culture. Relating the *dostons* about Chambuli Maston and his heroes in Tajik, *Gurugli/Gurguli* has the form of a musical performance and fairy tale. Guttural singing that is untypical of the Tajik vocal art is used in musical performance. The form of fairy tale *Gurzod* (Tajik: *born in a grave*) is also found in some Tajik sources.

The epic *Alpomysh* is known to have the form of a fairy tale only. According to the data of the Folklore Fund of Institute of language and literature at AS of RT, we know about the records of *Alpomish* in Tajik (Leninabad Region, present-day Sughd Region in Tajikistan, Qashqadarya Region in Uzbekistan, 1950s). According to researchers, elements typical of the Tajik version were formed in it.

It was a review of the most famous epic stories known to have been preserved in the oral traditions of the Tajik.

Reference

- 1 Safo Zabehullo. "Epos in Iran". Tehran: Firdaws, 2011. p. 6.
- 2 Rustam and Barzu, "Mardumgiyoh" (Scientific Journal of Folk culture). Dushanbe: 1993, №2. pp. 91-95.
- 3 Dushanbe: 1993, №2. pp. 91-95.
- 4 Avesta. Kniga 1. Dushanbe, 2014. 839 P.
- 5 Braginskiy I.S. Iz istorii tadzhikskoy narodnoy poezii. Moskva, 1956.
- 6 Bundahish. Dushanbe, 2006. 196 P.
- 7 Merosi khattii boston (Drevneye pis'mennoye naslediye). Kniga 2. T. 1. Dushanbe, 2014. 478 P.
- 8 Ne'matzoda T.N. 'Barzunoma', 'Shakhriyornoma' i ikh vzyaimosvyaz' s 'Shokhnoma'. Dushanbe, 2005. 19 P.
- 9 Ripka, Yan. Istoriya persidskoy i tadzhikskoy literatury. Moscow, 1970. 440 P.
- 10 Rustam va Barzu (Rustam and Barzu). "Mardumgiyoh" (nauchnyy zhurnal narodnoy kul'tury). Dushanbe, 1993, №2. p. 91-95.
- 11 Safo, Zabiholla. Hamāsa Sarayı Dar Iran (Epos v Irane). Teheran, 2011. 680 P.
- 12 Ferdawsi, Abulqosim. Shohnoma. T. 1. Dushanbe: Irfon, 1964, 468 P.