

THE ARTISTIC INTERPRETATION OF THE IMAGE OF BOBUR IN KYRGYZ EPICS**Sulaymanova Mehrinsa Ibraximovna**

Andijan State Pedagogical Institute, Associate Professor, PhD

e-mail: mexrinsasulaymonova@gmail.com

+99893-623-12-85

Abstract

This article examines the depiction of Babur in the Kyrgyz folk epic “Kurmanbek” under the name “Bakburhan” as an unparalleled hero and just ruler, as well as the reflection in folklore of historical elements related to his rule in Afghanistan. In addition, the article analyzes the artistic interpretations of the Uzbek ethnonym in the epic and the image of Babur’s daughter (Kanishay).

Keywords: epic, historical epic, ruler, shah, historical element, ethnonym.

It is well known to us that literature and the science of history resemble two different streams flowing from the same river. While real events that occurred in history are presented in a factual and evidence-based manner through facts, documents, and sources, in artistic literature those same events are expressed through images, artistic devices, and aesthetic impact. Therefore, studying and interpreting history and literature in a harmonious and integrated manner opens up many hidden truths and enables a deeper understanding of the past.

From precisely this point of view, the frequent appearance of the Uzbek people, their most famous historical figures, and the names of places and territories located within the territory of Uzbekistan in the works of Kyrgyz folk oral literature is of great importance and worthy of attention. This situation can be interpreted as yet another vivid confirmation of the close historical, cultural, and spiritual ties that have existed between the Kyrgyz and Uzbek peoples since ancient times. In this regard, it is appropriate to express our own thoughts on Kyrgyz folk oral literature and the historical aspects reflected in it.

Indeed, the folk oral literature of the Kyrgyz people is extremely rich and vast in terms of its form, content, and especially its scale. In terms of its breadth and richness of content, it stands out among the examples of folk oral literature of the world’s peoples. Historical events, in particular, occupy a special place among the events incorporated into the content of the epics. Along with illuminating the life of that era, they impart to the work historical authenticity, a deep expression of national spirit and ethnic identity, and transmit the people’s past, customs, and heroic traditions to future generations.

One of the most important and famous examples of Kyrgyz folklore is the epic “Kurmanbek”. The Kyrgyz people’s epic “Kurmanbek” is an epic work based on the historical events of the 15th–18th centuries, known as the “Kalmyk period” in the history of Central Asia, the Mongol Khanate, the Kazakh, and Nogai peoples, as well as on the real biographies of historical figures such as Kurmanbek and Akkan. The main hero of the dastan, Kurmanbek Batyr, is a historical figure who fought against the Kalmyk invaders. The toponyms in the epic, that is, the place names, serve as geographical traces of the historical events. It is also particularly noteworthy that Babur is mentioned in this epic. In the epic, the name Babur appears not as “Bobur”, but in the form “Baqbur”. The rendering of the name Bobur as Baqbur is related to a phonetic phenomenon in the Kyrgyz language, namely the process of adaptation. This is a widespread occurrence in the assimilation of foreign names in Turkic languages. The portrayal of Babur in the epic as an unparalleled hero, invincible and courageous ruler corresponds to his real historical image.

In the epic “Kurmanbek”, the Khan of Afghanistan, Bakbur (that is, Babur), is described as follows:

Kyrgyz text:

*Соодагерден, кербенден,
Узун-көрүп келгенден,
Урууда жок кыз уктум,
Бактылуу баатыр, эрлерден.
Кабары жүрөк дөгдетти,
Как ошо кызды алам мен.
Оогандын ханы Бакбурхан
Опсуз баатыр деп угам.
Эрдигине ишенип,
Беттесе беш миң кол кууган,
Оюмдагы эр экен [2.228].*

translation:

*From merchants and from caravans,
From all that I have heard and learned,
I heard of a maiden unmatched in her tribe,
A fortunate hero among men.
The news stirred my heart with longing
— “I will take that girl as my own.”
The Khan of Afghanistan, Boburkhon,
I have heard is an unparalleled hero.
Believing in his lion-like courage,
He who puts a thousand armies to flight when he
confronts them
— He is the man of my dreams.*

From the verses quoted above, it is clearly evident that in the epic, Babur is portrayed as an invincible great figure — that is, he is described as an unparalleled hero who, when facing the enemy, would put their army to flight regardless of its size.

Considering that the Baburid (Mughal) Empire founded by Babur ruled from 1526 to 1858, and taking this into account, the epic “Kurmanbek” also depicts historical events from the 15th–18th centuries.

According to historical sources, Babur, with 200–300 of his retainers, crossed the Hisar Mountains into Afghanistan and, taking advantage of the internal conflicts there, captured Ghazni and Kabul. After conquering Kabul, Babur immediately set about establishing an independent state: he organized his army, introduced strict internal discipline, and restored order. He regarded Kabul and Afghanistan in general as his own homeland and began extensive work on construction, urban development, handicrafts, and agriculture. He established magnificent gardens such as “Bagh-i Shahrara”, “Bagh-i Jahanara”, “Urta Bagh”, “Bagh-i Wafa”, and “Bagh-i Babur”. He turned the Bala Hisar fortress inside the city into his residence, had it repaired and rebuilt, constructed new buildings, and lived there with his family. It was in this fortress that his children — Humayun, Gulbadan Begim, Kamran, and Hindal — were born [3].

Zahiriddin Muhammad Babur, the founder of the Baburid (Mughal) dynasty, ruled over the territory of Afghanistan (Kabul) from 1504 to 1525, before establishing his empire in India [4].

As can be seen from the above, Babur, as a great ruler of his time, became widely renowned in many places and enjoyed high prestige and respect throughout the states of Central Asia as well. Such a historical process and historical figure naturally influenced the Kyrgyz people and their oral literature of that period.

The recognition of Babur as the Khan of Afghanistan (Oogan) in the epic has a solid basis for connecting it with the historical events of that time. If we turn to the historical facts mentioned above, it is true that during this period Babur occupied Afghanistan, developed and beautified it as his own homeland, and strengthened his power there for more than twenty years.

The English scholar William Erskine said the following about Babur: “In terms of his generosity and courage, his talent, his love of science and art, and his successful engagement with them, no monarch in Asia can be found equal to Babur.”[5]

Such praise is also reflected in the epic:

Kyrgyz text:

*Оолуктурбай баланы
Тыйбайсыңбы, койгун деп.
Ойдогусун кылгандай
Ооганда жок биздин кек...
Бир айчылык жол болот,
Тил алсын балам, кор болот...*

Translation:

*“Don’t frighten the child,
Don’t press him, just let him be,” she said. “As if
he could do what he wants at home... In
Afghanistan, there is no one to match our
vengeance...”
“It is only about a month’s journey,*

*Оогандын ханы Бакбурхан,
Анын арбагы көптү жапырган.
Жыгылган жок эмгиче
Жер жүзүндө баатырдан.
Туу жайылтып, кол келсе,
Жеке эле жалгыз качырган* [2.229].

*Let him obey, my child, or he will suffer...”
The Khan of Afghanistan, Baqburkhon,
His terrifying presence has put many to flight.
No hero has yet been defeated on this earth Until
now.
When an army raises its banners and comes, He
alone puts them all to flight.*

Mirzo Muhammad Haidar writes the following about Babur in his “Tarikh-i Rashidi”: “...He was a monarch adorned with various virtues and endowed with praiseworthy qualities. Among all these virtues, his courage and generosity stood out above the rest...” [6].

These qualities of his are also beautifully interpreted in the epic:

Kyrgyz text:

*Кокусунан жыгылсам,
Качырып кирип барбаңар.
Кастык кылбай балага,
Казкара качса кармаңар.
Сайышамын армансыз,
Жалгыз бала, жалгыз мен.
Жолобогун эч бирөөң,
Тилек менен туш келген,
Бала да босо багы бар
Бактысына ишенген* [2.237].

Translation:

*If I suddenly fall,
Don't let him run away.
I won't do it on purpose to the child,
But if the toy horse runs off — catch it.
I'll fight without regret,
A lonely child, and lonely me.
Don't any of you come near me,
Whoever approaches with bad intent —
Even if he's just a child, he's lucky,
He believes in his own fortune.*

These verses are taken from the episode where Kurmanbek Bakburhon went before Bobur, intending to test his strength, fight him, defeat him, and thereby win his daughter.

The main idea in these verses is true bravery and justice. That is, in battle one should not act with malicious intent, betrayal, or attack with the help of many people. Instead, an open, honest, and single combat is required.

“A lonely child, and lonely me” expresses the young Kurmanbek’s self-confidence and fearlessness. “Even if he is a child, he is fortunate, for he trusts in his own luck” conveys his reliance on fate, justice, and his own strength.

This depiction fits very well with the historical figure of Zahiriddin Muhammad Babur: In the “Baburnama,” he portrays himself as a just, courageous, and heroically fighting commander. In his battles, he often valued single combat and showed respect to his opponents. Through this episode in the epic, folk oral literature glorifies Babur as an ideal ruler and hero.

These verses not only reflect epic heroism, but also embody eternal human values such as inner strength, justice, and faith in one’s own fortune.

It should also be noted that the ethnonym “Uzbek” can be found in the epic. This ethnonym is also mentioned in the events connected with Babur.

Kyrgyz text:

*Азыркы күндө Курманбек
Жыйырма төрттө жаш болсо,
Он төртүнөн бер жакка,
Эр сайышка маш болсо,
Кыргыз менен кыпчакка
Кызматы менен баш болсо,
Өзбек калкы кадырлап,
Өзүнүн элин көбүнүн,
Каргадай бала кезинен,
Кармашарга жоо күтүп,*

Translation:

*In the present day, if Kurmanbek
Is twenty-four years old,
Since he was fourteen,
If he has been a champion in men's battles, If
he has become a leader to Kyrgyz and
Kipchak With his service,
Honored by the Uzbek people,
Becoming the head among many of his own
people —
From his young childhood,*

*Кандай баатыр болсо да
Алып жүрсө кан бүркүп. [2.239]*

*Waiting for the enemy to fight,
No matter how heroic he is,
They raise and carry him as their khan.*

This example is taken from the episode where Kurmanbek, after defeating Bakburhon, consults with the palace officials about giving him his daughter.

In the epic, upon hearing about the beauty of Bakbur's daughter and the bravery and courage of her father, Kurmanbek sets out on a journey with the intention of marrying Qanishai (in Kyrgyz tradition, women of khan's lineage were called Qanishai. It is likely that Babur's daughter was also addressed this way because she came from a khan's bloodline).

According to historical sources, by order of her father, King Babur, Gulbadan Begim was raised under the care of her grandmother, that is, Mahim Begim — the mother of Humayun Mirza. Mahim Begim was Babur's most beloved senior wife and was regarded as the wisest and most learned among the ruler's wives. [7]. Gulbadan Begim, who was brought up by such a wise and learned woman, also grew up to be well-educated and intelligent. Therefore, her beauty became famous throughout the world. In the epic, Qanishai is described in this way:

Kyrgyz text:

*Бакбурдун жалгыз бир кызы,
Адамзаттын жылдызы.
Жоругун айтып көргөндөр,
Жоруй келсе нур кызы.
Күмүштөн аппак Канышай,
Кийгени жибек кырмазы [2.228].*

Translation:

*Bakbur's only daughter,
The star of all humankind.
Those who try to praise her beauty
Call her the daughter of light.
Silver-white, pure Qanishai,
Clad in crimson silk.*

Indeed, Babur's daughter Gulbadan Begim was born and grew up in Afghanistan. We can see that this fact corresponds to the information presented in the epic. In other words, Kyrgyz epics also mention that the beauty of Gulbadan Begim, who grew up in Afghanistan, and the fame of her father Babur spread throughout the world. This, in turn, once again proves the historical basis of the Kurmanbek epic.

It is natural that legends about the beauty and upbringing of Gulbadan Begim entered regional folklore, since the influence of Babur's state extended from Central Asia and Afghanistan as far as India. Her portrayal in the epic as the "star of humankind" and the "daughter of light" represents an idealized image of her historical personality. This image is rooted in Gulbadan Begim's real-life qualities –her refined upbringing, erudition, interest in poetry, and her ability to write historical works such as Humayunnama – which, in folk oral tradition, evolved into a symbol of universal human ideals.

Since ancient times, all Turkic peoples, unlike today, were not geographically divided by borders, and therefore they maintained close relations with one another, including kinship ties and regular social interactions. In the epic, it is said that Kurmanbek crossed the Amu Darya (Urgench river) in order to make Kanishay, the daughter of Babur, his beloved.

Kyrgyz text:

Эрдигине чыдабай,
 Үргөнчтүн суусун ким кечсе, Атманын
 чыксын Бакбур, – деп,
 Арачы коюп дүрбөтсө,
 Аянышпай сайышып,
 Аңтара салып ким кетсе,
 Как ошондон жыгылсам, Канышайды
 берем, - деп
 Кандай күчтүү эр кечет,
 Үргөнчтүн суусу терең, – деп, Үйүндө
 Бакбур айтыптыр
 Бала баатыр келер деп.
 Үргөнчтүн суусун кечейин,
 Бир тилекке жетейин.
 Оогандын ханы Бакбурга
 Бир беттешип өтөйүн. [2.228]

Translation:

“Unable to endure his bravery,
 let Bakbur himself come forth —
 whoever dares to cross the waters of Urgench, let
 him mount his horse and set out,” he said, and sent
 messengers to stir them up. “Whoever fights without
 mercy in battle, overthrows and drives me back,
 it is from him alone that I would fall.”
 “I’ll give you my head,” he says, “What a strong
 man can cross!” “The water of Urgench is deep,” he
 says, In his mind, Baqbur is speaking: “A brave boy
 is coming,” he says.
 “Let me cross the water of Urgench, Let me reach my
 goal. Let me meet face to face With the Khan of the
 Afghans — Baqbur.”

Urgench is located on the territory of Uzbekistan. “Urgench suvi” (the water of Urgench) is not the name of a body of water, but most likely refers to the Amu Darya canal in the Urgench region. In the epic, the expression “Urgench suvi” is interpreted as a poetic name for the Amu Darya River. This phenomenon is explained by the fact that in epics, rivers are often named after cities.

Urgench is the capital of Uzbekistan’s Khorezm Region. It is a historical and modern city located along the Amu Darya River and the Shovot Canal. It was founded in the 17th century in a new location by people who had migrated from the ancient city of Kuhna Urgench (Old Urgench) [8].

From the information provided above about Urgench, we can see that it exactly corresponds to the period when the epic “Qurmanbek” emerged. Through the expression “Urgench suvi” (the water of Urgench), the epic artistically depicts the mighty flow of the Amu Darya River. This once again proves the unity and organic interconnectedness of the Turkic world.

In general, the presence of elements related to Babur and his daughter, as well as the exact existence of current geographical names in the epic “Qurmanbek”, further strengthens the historical basis of the epic. This demonstrates the connection of Kyrgyz folklore with the history of other peoples and serves as a vivid example of cultural exchange among the peoples of Central Asia.

The epic reflects not only the Kyrgyz people’s struggle against the Kalmyk invasions, but also the overall historical picture of the region, passing on the national spirit and historical memory to future generations. Such elements emphasize the layered nature of the epic and its transformation from folklore into a historical source.

In conclusion, we can say that the image of Baqburkhon in the Kyrgyz epic “Qurmanbek” is interpreted as an artistic reworking of the historical figure Zahiriddin Muhammad Babur in Kyrgyz oral folk literature. This is because he remained imprinted in the people’s memory as the most famous Central Asian ruler, poet, and warrior of that era.

In folk art, a historical figure is often idealized or, conversely, “defeated” as a rival. In this case, Baqburkhon’s defeat by Qurmanbek is interpreted as a motif that strengthens the Kyrgyz people’s pride in their heroism.

Of course, this should not be viewed as direct documentary evidence, but rather as a typical example of artistic reworking and transformation common in folklore.

References:

1. Baburnama. – Translated into modern Uzbek by: Vahob Rahmonov, Karomat Mullahujayeva. – Tashkent: “O‘zbekiston” National Publishing House, 2019. – 440 p.
2. Anthology of Kyrgyz Literature: Volume 2. Short Epics. / Compiled by: T.N. Abylkasymova, M.E. Ibraev. – Bishkek: Main Editorial Office of “Kyrgyz Encyclopedia”, 2012. – 680 p.
3. <https://ziyouz.uz/ozbek-sheriyati/ozbek-mumtoz-sheriyati/bobur/>
4. https://uz.wikipedia.org/wiki/Boburiylar_davlati
5. <https://islom.uz/maqola/20228>
6. <https://ziyouz.uz/ilm-va-fan/tarix/sarkarda/zahiriddin-muhammad-bobur-1483-1530/>
7. <https://ziyouz.uz/ilm-va-fan/tarix/temuriy-malikalar/gulbadan-begim/>
8. <https://uz.wikipedia.org/wiki/Urganch>