

On the Attributes of Heroic Virtue (Valor, Glory, Heroic Name) in Heroic Poetry and Ancient Turk Texts

L. N. ERMOLENKO (*Kemerovo State University, Russia*)



In heroic epic poetry of diverse languages and historical periods one can distinguish a stratum of notions of non-material values that serve as marks of heroic virtue (glory, valor, heroic name). Glory is one of the most ancient epic concepts. A. I. Zaytsev wrote that research in comparative linguistics has reconstructed the motif of "eternal glory" in pre-Indo-European poetry as "the central motif of heroic epos from its earliest forms".¹ The motifs of glory, glorious name and valor occur in the Homeric epos.²

In the *Mahabharata* – the most ancient Indian epic – the heroic or greatest valor was often mentioned in connection with the murder of an enemy in battle.³ The murder of an enemy is the most significant act and merit of a warrior in the *Mahabharata*, thus there are epithets such as "one who overwhelms (destroys) enemy heroes", "destroyer of most selected enemies", "destroyer of enemies", "one who overwhelms the Kshatriyas". Glory is also connected with the military valor. The *Mahabharata* contains the notion that glory is granted in a mortal combat destroying not only body but also sins, the virtuous being taken to heaven.⁴ Glory is regarded as resulting from death in battle. Ya. V. Vassilkov and S. L. Neveleva in their commentaries to a translation of *Karnaparva* stress that the following contrast often appears in the *Mahabharata*: "warriors losing their body (*deha*) in battle, acquire glory (*yaśas*) instead".⁵ The bodies of those who perished spread "sacred glory to all ten sides of the world",⁶ their glory fills "the entire space of the

¹ A. I. Zaytsev, "Praindoevropeiskie istoki drevnegrecheskogo eposa," in *Problemy antichnogo istochnikovedeniya*, Moscow–Leningrad 1986, 96.

² Zaytsev, "Praindoevropeiskie istoki," 65, 68; I-V. Shtal', *Gomeroovskiy epos. Opyt tekstologicheskogo analiza «Iliady»*. Moscow 1975, 146, 154.

³ *Mahabharata. Kniga sed'maya. Dronaparva ili kniga o Drone*. Perevod s sanskrita i komentarii V. I. Kal'yanova, Sankt-Peterburg 1993, 9, 141, 210.

⁴ *Mahabharata Kniga vos'maya. O Karne (Karnaparva)*. Perevod s sanskrita, predislovie i kommentariy Ya.V. Vassilkova i S. L. Nevelevoy, Moscow 1990, 119.

⁵ *Mahabharata* 1990, 255, n.192.

⁶ *Mahabharata* 1993, 74.

world".⁷ Meanwhile, in the *Mahabharata* glory is considered not only as posthumous. Karna states: "Whether I shall sacrifice myself in battle, accomplishing a feat of arms, or otherwise, shall I overpower foes, all the same I shall gain glory ... I shall achieve the greatest glory in the world...!"⁸ Sometimes glory is associated only with victory over an enemy. Shalya tells Karna: "If you win, then eternal glory will be yours, If you are overcome, heaven is still ready for you."⁹ A characteristic feature of glory is light. Surviving warriors, having vanquished their enemies, are aglow with glory (together with battle heat).¹⁰ The military banner of Arjuna also flames with glory.¹¹

In the Iranian epic *Shahnama* glory is also connected with military feats – the murder of an enemy in combat. With hope set on the arrival of Kai-Khosrow, Goodarz urges the warriors: "Keep your bloody burthen – Foes vanquished by you in battles; we shall appear with them before *shah*; and then glory and honor will fall to our share".¹² Hunting on enemy territory is also regarded as a glorious action. Give offers Rostam wishes to enjoy themselves hunting in Afrasiab's domain: "In Turan steppes we shall hunt to our heart content, so that the world will ring with our fame".¹³

The motif of glory is not exclusively an Indo-European phenomenon, it is also noted in some Turkic and Mongolian epics. In the Yakut *Olonho* epos and historical legends the expressions "(high, great, loud) glory" are often mentioned along with "(terrible, glorious, good) name", both of these can be attributes of epic heroes and heroines, their enemies and even of beautiful brides. Heroic name and glory by themselves are expected to frighten foes. Abaasy rebukes Er Sogotokh: "Neither my terrible name, / nor my loud glory fearing, / not frightened by your fate, / you ... arrived here".¹⁴ The glory and name of *Olonho* heroes are so weighty that "even a horse is unable to raise them", "even a bull is unable to move them".¹⁵ The high glory of a hero decreases as he is oppressed by an enemy, suffers damage, defeat and, on the contrary, increases as he wins a victory. The dying Abaasy blesses his enemy: "You won, so let your glory rise".¹⁶ Yakut

⁷ *Mahabharata* 1990, 123.

⁸ *Mahabharata. Kniga Tret'ya. Lesnaya (Aranyakaparva)*. Perevod s sanskrita, predislovie i kommentariy Ya.V. Vassilkova i S. L. Nevelevoy, Moscow 1987, 574.

⁹ *Mahabharata* 1990, 207.

¹⁰ *Mahabharata* 1993, 39.

¹¹ *Mahabharata* 1990, 232.

¹² *Firdowsi. Shakhname. Tom tretiy. Ot skazaniya o bitve Postema s khakanom China do tsarstvovaniya Lohraspa*. Perevod Ts. B. Banu-Lahuti. Kommentarii A. Azera i Ts.B. Banu-Lahuti. 2-e izdanie, ispravlennoye, Moscow 1994, 318.

¹³ *Firdowsi. Shakhname. Tom pervyi. Ot nachala poemy do skazaniya o Sokhrabe*. Izdanie podgotovili Ts. B. Banu-Lahuti, A. Lahuti, A. A. Starikov. 2-e izdanie, ispravlennoye, Moscow 1993, 443.

¹⁴ *Yakutskiy geroicheskiy epos. «Moguchii Er Sogotokh»*. Novosibirsk 1996, 231.

¹⁵ *Stroptiviyi Kulun Kulluustuur. Yakutskoye olonho*. Perevod A. A. Popova i I.V. Pukhova, Moscow 1985, 466; cf. *Yakutskiy geroicheskiy epos*, 95.

¹⁶ *Yakutskiy geroicheskiy epos*, 365; cf. 253, 259.

historical legends reflect the belief that a warrior gives up his high name to the enemy who overcomes him and consigns him to the earth. Tisikaen Byogyo, having become aged, decides: "Now I am aged, nearby no strong man was born deserving to bury my bones. Rather than yield my high name to them [enemies who fled but who can return. – L. E.], allowing them to bury me, I had better grant this honor to myself", – after that he went to a hill of his alas, dug a hole for himself and, having covered himself with earth, buried himself alive this way".¹⁷ In other cases, enemies express to the glorious warriors their intention "to hit ... each other's chest and perform [a] dance of victory ... over the high name".¹⁸ In legends glory is connected not only with the murder of a famous warrior, but also with marrying a beautiful woman.¹⁹ In Buryat epics there occurs a formulaic expression of the greatness of heroic name and glory: "My name is well-known, / My glory is loud!".²⁰

The Old Turkic (mainly Orkhon Turkic) runic inscriptions maintain evidence of the concept of "glory" among the Old Turks. The inscription of Tonyukuk runs that he was an companion to the Ilterish in knowledge and in glory (*čab*).²¹ But further on it is stated in a more concrete way: "... their [Turkic people. – L. E.] Khagan is a hero (*alp*), and his counsel is a wise man (*bilgä*)".²² Küli-chor is also said to have become after five battles (Khagan's?) "associate in knowledge (*bilgä*) and in military valour (*čab*) (glory. – L. E.); he was a hero (*alp*) and powerful man (*bögä*)".²³ The inscription in honor of Kül Tegin tells about the name (*at*) and glory (*kü*) of the Turkic people.²⁴ The inscription in honor of Bilgä Kagan suggests that the Old Turks ascribed the notions of the (well known) name and glory to the Chinese as well: "In the south among Tabgachs their name (*at*) and glory (*kü*) perished".²⁵ According to the interpretation of I. L. Kyzlasov, an inscription found near the Mugur-Sargol highway tells of the destruction of the glory (*kü*) of a thousand (definitely, enemy) heroes.²⁶ In the epitaph of Tonyukuk and the Ongin

¹⁷ *Istoricheskie predaniya i rassказы yakutov. V dvukh chastyakh. Chast' 1. Izdanie podgotovil G. U. Ergis. Moscow; Leningrad 1960, 222.*

¹⁸ *Istoricheskie predaniya i rassказы yakutov, 256.*

¹⁹ *Istoricheskie predaniya i rassказы yakutov, 221.*

²⁰ *Buryatskiy geroicheskiy epos «Alamji Mergen molodoy i ego sestritsa Aguy Gohon», Sost. M. I. Tulokhonov. Novosibirsk 1991, 145.*

²¹ S. E. Malov, *Pamyatniki drevnetyurkskoy pis'mennosti. Teksty i issledovaniya. Moscow-Leningrad 1951, 61–65.*

²² Malov, *Pamyatniki drevnetyurkskoy pis'mennosti, 61–67.*

²³ S. E. Malov, *Pamyatniki drevnetyurkskoy pis'mennosti Mongolii i Kirgizii. Moscow-Leningrad 1959, 27–29.*

²⁴ Malov, *Pamyatniki drevnetyurkskoy pis'mennosti, 31–40.*

²⁵ Malov, *Pamyatniki drevnetyurkskoy pis'mennosti Mongolii i Kirgizii, 17–22.*

²⁶ I. L. Kyzlasov, "Novye svidetelstva uiguro-khakasskikh vojn IX veka," *Sovetskaya Arheologiya* 3 (1979), 280.

inscription the word "glory" (*kü, külüg*) is used in the expression "glorious (brave) men".²⁷

The Yenisei Turkic inscriptions give its due to valor (*erdäm*) or heroic valor (*er erdäm*). And the first monument from the valley of the Chaa-Hol River emphasizes the public status of valor: "My heroic valor (*er erdäm*) I gave up to the service to my state..."²⁸ In the inscription on Tuvinian stele D a deceased hero declares that his valor pertains not only to his state but also to his khan.²⁹ In a monument from the valley of the Abakan river, valor (*erdäm*) is mentioned in connection with the khan's reward – promotion in status.³⁰ For the sake of valor, the heroes of some Yenisei inscriptions set off as ambassadors,³¹ their mission occasionally ending in death.³² They fight for the sake of valor.³³ It is obvious that heroic valor is connected to the murder of an enemy. Uyuk-Oorzak inscription 1 reads: "My acquisitions for my people [consist in] in my military valor: I killed fifteen men".³⁴ It can be compared with the burial mound Bai-Bulun (the second monument): "My heroic valor (*er erdäm*). My belt with forty-two (high ranking) decoration clasps! I killed thirty heroes (*er*) among enemies!"³⁵ On the other hand, the murder of an enemy is a matter of "state" significance. "To the divine state my benefit is brought: I destroyed nine [enemy] men (*er*)", runs the text of the second monument from Kyzyl Chyraa, the epitaph of Külüg Togan.³⁶ In other Yenisei texts it is not stated whether the person whose name or title is accompanied with the epithet *külüg* has military merit.³⁷ In general, the murder of an enemy is made a merit of the deceased as, for instance, in the inscription from the river Oya known as the "monument to a hero (*er*)",³⁸ or emphasis is placed on the death of a hero in a battle.³⁹ The monument by the settlement of Ochury tells of the death of a hero allegorically, as the death of his valor.⁴⁰

²⁷ Malov, *Pamyatniki drevnetyurkskoy pis'mennosti*, 63–68; Malov, *Pamyatniki drevnetyurkskoy pis'mennosti Mongolii i Kirgizii*, 9–11.

²⁸ S. E. Malov, *Yeniseiskaya pismennost' tyurkov*. Teksty i perevody. Moscow–Leningrad 1952, 35–36, 83.

²⁹ Malov, *Yeniseiskaya pismennost' tyurkov*, 100.

³⁰ Malov, *Yeniseiskaya pismennost' tyurkov*, 94–95; cf. Valour "causes" rising: *ibid.* 62–63.

³¹ Malov, *Yeniseiskaya pismennost' tyurkov*, 57–58.

³² Malov, *Yeniseiskaya pismennost' tyurkov*, 59.

³³ Malov, *Yeniseiskaya pismennost' tyurkov*, 79.

³⁴ Z. B. Chadamba, D. D. Vasilyev, "Tyurkskie runicheskie nadpisi Uyuk-Oorzak," *No-veishie issledovaniya po arkheologii Tuvy i etnogeneze tuvintsev* (1980), 134.

³⁵ Malov, *Yeniseiskaya pismennost' tyurkov*, 97.

³⁶ Malov, *Yeniseiskaya pismennost' tyurkov*, 80.

³⁷ Malov, *Yeniseiskaya pismennost' tyurkov*, 17, 21–23, etc.

³⁸ Malov, *Yeniseiskaya pismennost' tyurkov*, 52, 94–95.

³⁹ Malov, *Yeniseiskaya pismennost' tyurkov*, 26, 55.

⁴⁰ Malov, *Yeniseiskaya pismennost' tyurkov*, 49.

In some Old Turkic texts there appear combinations of the notions of heroism (*alp*) and valor-bravery (*erdäm*).⁴¹ Both of them are linked with glory. Küli-chor, who “fought Tabgachs so much” is reported to be “... equally glorious for his heroism and bravery”.⁴²

Either coupled with words meaning valor (*erdäm*, *er erdäm*) or by itself the “heroic name” or “heroic (manly, courageous) name” (*er ati*) is often mentioned in runic texts. The first monument from the valley of the river Baryk contains the expression *er erdäm ati*.⁴³ The issue of the monument from the valley of the Ak-Yus river is yet great heroic name (*ulug er ati*).⁴⁴ The would-be military leader Kül-tegin received his heroic name (*er ati*) at the age of 10.⁴⁵ At the same time, the monument of Hemchik-Chirgaky bears testimony that the deceased, for the sake of acquiring a heroic name (?) committed seven feats in battle overseas.⁴⁶ For the purpose of immortalizing a heroic name a posthumous “eternal” monument was constructed, according to the inscription from the valley of the Abakan river.⁴⁷

A heroic man, a warrior himself, is usually called in Old Turkic inscriptions *er*, sometimes *alp er*,⁴⁸ or occasionally *bögä*, *bükä*⁴⁹ and *batur*.⁵⁰ S. G. Klyashtorny considers that the notion *er* (“man-warrior”) was applied to all men in Old Turkic society who had a man’s name (*er ati*).⁵¹ I. L. Kyzlasov supposes that name, *tamga*, bowl and belt were the attributes of the *er*, which he received “during the ceremony of appellation of an adult name” (*er ati*).⁵²

The men-warriors of the Old Turkic inscriptions served the *kagan/khan* and the *el*. Klyashtorny writes: “The guarantee of well-being of ‘eternal *el*’ was the *kagan* selected by heaven, and fidelity to the *kagan* of *begs* and ‘all the people’ was declared as the main condition of *el*’s existence”.⁵³ In these conditions the notions “glory”, “valor” and “heroic name” connected to the idea of benefit of *el* and the *kagan/khan* were to assume official importance. (And it seems these notions did not always bear military sense.) On the other hand, these notions are close to epic

⁴¹ Malov, *Pamyatniki drevnetjurkskoy pis'mennosti Mongolii i Kirgizii*, 27–28; Malov, *Yeniseiskaya pismennost' tyurkov*, 60–61.

⁴² Malov, *Pamyatniki drevnetjurkskoy pis'mennosti Mongolii i Kirgizii*, 27–29.

⁴³ Malov, *Yeniseiskaya pismennost' tyurkov*, 21.

⁴⁴ Malov, *Yeniseiskaya pismennost' tyurkov*, 68.

⁴⁵ Malov, *Pamyatniki drevnetjurkskoy pis'mennosti*, 31–40.

⁴⁶ Malov, *Yeniseiskaya pismennost' tyurkov*, 73.

⁴⁷ Malov, *Yeniseiskaya pismennost' tyurkov*, 96.

⁴⁸ Malov, *Yeniseiskaya pismennost' tyurkov*, 53.

⁴⁹ Malov, *Pamyatniki drevnetjurkskoy pis'mennosti Mongolii i Kirgizii*, 27–29; Kyzlasov, “Novye svidetelstva uiguro-khakasskikh vojn IX veka,” 280.

⁵⁰ Malov, *Yeniseiskaya pismennost' tyurkov*, 56.

⁵¹ S. G. Klyashtorny, D. G. Savinov, *Stepnye imperii drevnei Evrazii*. Sankt-Petersburg 2005, p. 153.

⁵² I. L. Kyzlasov, “Runicheskie nadpisi na dvukh poyasnykh nakonechnikakh,” *Drevnosti Altaya. Izvestiya laboratorii arkeologii, Gorno-Altaysk* 6 (2001), 137.

⁵³ S. G. Klyashtorny, “Obraz kagana v orkhonskikh pamyatnikakh,” *Folia orientalia* 36 (2000), 171.

ones. Researchers have repeatedly paid attention to similar features in both the Old Turkic epitaphs and the heroic poetry of modern Turkic peoples. I. V. Stebleva, who carried out the reconstruction of the poetic form of Orkhon and Yenisei texts, stated:

'Glorification of the past of the Kök Turk people, legendary and epic image of kagans, creation of the hero knight Kül-tegin image typical of that period, testify that Orkhon texts were created under the influence of retinue epic (*druzhinniy epos*), developed in the military leader's environment. In respect of genre they can be regarded as historical heroic poems.'⁵⁴

The authors of papers devoted to revelation of the stylistic and conceptual similarity of epics – of the Altai,⁵⁵ Yakut⁵⁶ and Turkic peoples of Siberia and Central Asia⁵⁷ – and of Orkhon-Yenisei inscriptions are unanimous in recognizing such similarity. At the same time they point out a different folkloric source reflected in the poetics of Old Turkic texts. S. S. Surazakov supposes that "the stylistic source" (for both Orkhon inscriptions and epics) could have been found in "lofty, ... pathetic speech" – a folk genre which emerged in high antiquity and survived up to the present day.⁵⁸ P. A. Troyakov considers runic inscriptions to contain "echoes of a specific historical epos" which emerged logically in the process of development of the oral epic tradition.⁵⁹ N. E. Petrov, having collated the poetic forms of Olonho and Orkhon inscriptions, comes to the conclusion that both of them were created "within the tradition of ancient heroic epos". The author admits that this tradition might have been of Hun origin.⁶⁰

The ideas of N. E. Petrov on antiquity and continuity of heroic-epical tradition of Turkic peoples seem to me quite reasonable. The conclusion that the tradition of Turkic Mongolian heroic epos dates back to the period of early nomads was drawn earlier by M. P. Gryaznov (1961). He detected analogies to the heroic epic motifs of modern Turkic and Mongolian peoples in representational monuments of Scythian and the Hun-Sarmatian period from South Siberia and Mongolia. Developing M. P. Gryaznov's approach I have tried to prove the existence of a

⁵⁴ I. V. Stebleva, "Drevnyaya poeziya," in *Pamyatniki drevnikh tyurkov VI-XII vekov*, Perevod A. Prelovskogo, Stikhotvornaya rekonstruktsiya, nauchnyi perevod, sostavlenie, vstupitel'naya stat'ya, komentarii I. V. Steblevoy. Moscow 1993, 8.

⁵⁵ S. S. Surazakov, "Skhodnye cherty stilya v orkhonskikh nadpisyakh i epose tyurkoyazychnykh narodov: (Na primere altaiskogo eposa)," in *Tipologiya narodnogo eposa*, Moscow 1975, 5–20.

⁵⁶ N. E. Petrov, "O stikhotvornoy forme olonho i eie svyazi s poeziei orkhonskikh tyurkov," *Sovetskaya tyurkologiya* 5 (1979) 41–49.

⁵⁷ P. A. Troyakov, "Analogii geroicheskomu eposu tyurkoyazychnykh narodov v orkhono-yeniseiskikh pamyatnikakh," in *Fol'klor i istoricheskaya etnografiya*. Moscow 1983, 74–88.

⁵⁸ Surazakov, "Skhodnye cherty stilya v orkhonskikh nadpisyakh," 259

⁵⁹ Troyakov, "Analogii geroicheskomu eposu tyurkoyazychnykh narodov," 87.

⁶⁰ Petrov, "O stikhotvornoy forme olonho," 49.

centuries-long representational tradition, whose source was found in heroic epics, among ancient and medieval nomads.⁶¹ The evidence of this tradition could be the representations in works of art of such epic motifs as struggle, hunting, feasting (subject constitutive ones) and, more particularly, though universal, those of fury, blood-thirstiness, laceration-combat, etc., significant in the descriptions of an epic hero, his horse and weapons. To prove the existence of certain epic motifs (as well as formulas, metaphors, epithets) at a particular historical period I have also investigated written sources, including Old Turkic inscriptions. As a result, besides analogies to attributes of heroic virtues and, in particular of glory, I have succeeded in revealing in (Orkhon) inscriptions parallels to one of the fundamental motifs of the heroic epics – the motif of fury.⁶² For example, the comparison of an army with fire in Old Turkic texts obviously corresponds to the burning metaphor of fury in epics. The inscription of Tonyukuk tells of enemies, the Türgesh people, who "... came *flaming as fire*".⁶³ The epitaph devoted to Kül Tegin tells that the army of Türgesh khan came "*like fire and wine*",⁶⁴ while the text of the monument to Bilgä kagan runs as follows: "*The army of Türgesh khan approached like fire and whirlwind*".⁶⁵ The latter two passages reveal associations of military valor with intoxicating drink, and that of fury with the natural element of wind, associations of this kind being widespread in epic poetry.

As a whole, the analogies with heroic epos in runic inscriptions testify, in my opinion, not only to the existence in the public consciousness of categories identical to epic ones, but also to a certain role of the "epic mentality" in forming the official ideology of Old Turkic literate societies.

⁶¹ L. N. Ermolenko, *Izobrazitel'nie pamyatniki i epicheskaya traditsiya: po materialam kul'tury drevnikh i srednevekovykh kochevnikov Evrazii*. Tomsk 2008.

⁶² Ermolenko, *Izobrazitel'nie pamyatniki*, 101, 222, etc.

⁶³ Malov, *Pamyatniki drevnetyurkskoy pis'mennosti*, 69

⁶⁴ Malov, *Pamyatniki drevnetyurkskoy pis'mennosti*, 41.

⁶⁵ Malov, *Pamyatniki drevnetyurkskoy pis'mennosti Mongolii i Kirgizii*, 21.