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SUMMARY

The heroic epos, popularly called "uliger", is the apogee of Buryat oral poetry. The epos represents the historic memory of the people expressed through heroic idealization. It is an art form which, in epic form, contains the group's understanding and evaluation of their past.

The uligers are long epic folk poems (from 5000 to 15000 lines of verse) which recount Buryat history, the long struggle of the ancestors for ethnic unity and integrity, as well as their relations with neighbouring groups. The uligers also recount how the Buryats gained their spiritual strength and found their historic fortune. The poems contain very specific epic reflections of reality expressed in standard plot structures with characteristic narrative forms and imagery. Thus, the uligers in concrete form reproduce the characteristic traits of folk cognition. Here the depth of the epic generalizations combines with the everpresence of vivid concrete incidents of the day—to-day or historic reality; the panoramic and multi-faceted scope of life is underscored by vivid sketches of the epic world and a myriad of realistic details.

In the recent past the uligers were widespread among all local groups across the entire Buryat territory. They were performed during both private leisure times and on ceremonial communal occasions. These epos were always iniversally recognized as the most superior among all other forms of oral poetry. While the people delighted in folk tales, they listened carefully to the uligers, which were considered to contain important truths about the past. The **Alamzhi Mergen** uliger in this volume, was recorded between August 18—20, 1903 by Tsyben Zhamtsaranovich Zhamtsarano, during his field work among the Kudin, Upper Lena, and Ol'khon Buryats, conducted under the auspices of the Russian Academy of Sciences. The recording was done during the course of a two day and two night performance of Elbon Shalbykov, a 53 year old Buryat in the Khandaa ulus, Buyanov family, Kapsal department (now known as the Ekhirit-Bulagat district, Ust'-Ordynsk Autonomous region, Irkutsk province). The uliger was first published in 1913 as a part of a new series **Examples of folk literature of Mongolian tribes**, Texts. Volume 1. (The Works of Buryat Folk Literature. Collected by Ts. Zhamtsarano. Part 1. Epic works of Ekhirit-Bulagats. Alamzhi Mergen. (Byliny). St. Petersburg: Imperial Academy of Sciences Publishing House).

In his 1913 publication of the uliger, Ts. Zhamtsarano used the format of the five-line stanza, and the uliger contained 5297 lines of verse.

The performance of uligers always varied from region to region and this diversity reflected local narrative traditions. The art of the "uligershin" (performer) demanded high narrative as well as musical and singing skills. The telling of uligers also required fidelity to tradition and accuracy in recording and declaiming the ancestral text. This practice created folk confidence in the authenticity of the uliger contents. Because of this, the "uligershin", as a rule, strictly kept to the "canon" of the oral text, avoiding any digression or improvisation. At the same time, all of the great uligershins were, to a certain degree, poets, who valued the poetic merits of the uligers. These factors combined to produce distinctive variants of the uligers which differed in both the inclusiveness and detailing of the plot structure, as well as in poetic stylistics. In his performance, each uligershin thus continued the ethnic epic tradition as well as expanded and enriched it, to the best of his abilities.

The narrators were very popular performance artists who enjoyed wide respect and esteem. The listeners found abiding truths in the legends of "the ancient times" and in the heroic exploits of "the praiseworthy men of old". They delighted in the beauty of the uliger world and in the everchanging scenes of the heroic past generations. They also carefully listened to and repeated the metric verses and familiar intonations of the legends. In the past, the uligers were performed at set times and under suitable circumstances. Often this occurred at leisure hours during the fall or winter evenings among a circle of neighbours. Both the uligershin and his audience prepared for such evenings and eagerly anticipated these encounters with the legends about "the deeds of long ago". The uliger performance was received very earnestly, with profound emotion, and considered to be very powerful and "purifying".

Scholars consider the Buryat heroic epos to be typologically older than the Turkic epos of Central Asia. The Buryat epos, like those of Central Asian and Siberian groups, reflects the elemental features of ancient social relationships present from the patriarchal tribal period system to the early period of state formation. The contents of the epos, which essentially glorifies military feats and guards ethnic autonomy, does contain numerous plots derived from ancient myths. The heroes do battle not only with foreign conquerors — the Khans — but also with demonic beings — "the mangad-khais". The heroic epos of the Central Asian and South Siberian tribes was preceded by various myths and legends about cosmogenic heroic giants. The epos arose as a heroic song recounting the feats of epic heroes. The texture of the uliger contains an interweave of more ancient hunting motifs with later themes of heroic match-making and battles with hostile tribes. The epos engenders meaning to ethnicity, one derived from past lives lived and experiences gathered by the group, as well as the people's expectations of the things to come. Academician B. Ya. Vladimirtsov noted that "the Buryat epopees are real epopees and . . . they could not have arisen suddenly, but must have formed slowly and slowly coalesced into those forms we now observe". For example, the uliger motif of the struggle with the mangad-khais — anthropomorphic beings — could have arisen in the context of trapping life of its creators.

There are two main themes in uliger plots: 1) the battle of the epic hero with the monsters and enemies; 2) the match-making and marriage of the epic hero, accompanied by the travel adventures and trials of the groom. The epic tale is permeated with the heroic perception of life: the ancient collective's resistance to the outside is expressed through the titanic battle with alien forces, a struggle which, from the onset, is the responsibility of the uliger epic hero (Mergen, Khubun, Bator). The epic hero's mission is realized through leaving his native land, and extensive travels through and residence in alien regions. Throughout this sojourn he is confronted with barriers and obstacles, each more perilous than the last, and with new enemies constantly taking the place of the vanquished ones. All these happenings hamper the hero's journey and keep him from reaching his goal. Behind the various journeys and trials of the hero, behind his struggles with hostile forces, and behind all the scenic descriptions, stands the ancient world in its full grandeur and severe primordial beauty. It is this world where the epic events take place: feats are accomplished, hostile strongholds taken, monsters and insidious enemies vanquished.

The uliger epic world is full of bright colours and blaring sounds: the paths of the epic heroes and their eternal enemies — the mangadkhais — cross in the wide Tamshin steppe at the foot of high mountains. The struggle between them takes titanic, sometimes theomachistic form. Tribal kinfolk, heavenly deities, and miraculous forces are drawn into the orbit of this mighty stand-off. The figurative world of the uliger is a rich and multifaceted one: the episodes involve not only the main hero but numerous other personages as well.

The epic Hero stands at the center of the *Alamzhi Mergen*. All the uliger action threads center around him. The epic Hero spends most of his time outside his native land, travels a great deal, and is constantly on the move. In a certain sense he spends his life in the saddle. His life unfolds in the outer world: he travels long and wide, meets a multitude of people and anthropomorphous beings the mangadkhais who personify the unknown, sometimes hostile, natural and social forces. With all the twists and turns of fortune, the Hero is almost never alone. Thus, he can not be seen as the lone hero. *Alamzhi Mergen's* journey to his betrothed Bulad Khurai in a distant kingdom, and their subsequent marriage is more than an event in the personal biography of the Hero. It is rather a social event which concerns the interests of all his tribesmen. The happy completion of the wedding journey is a triumph for the whole world, and the newborn heir to the Hero is usually pronounced as the son of the entire kin group — tribe. His position and role amongst the tribesmen is expressed in the lines: "He was born a master of free lands, he established himself khan among subjects without a khan" (verses 290—293). He is the elder and the military chief of the tribal union. He takes upon himself the mission of resisting hostile forces and constantly strives to meet unbeckoned strangers outside his native land. The epic Hero is strong, manful and to a certain extent invulnerable. Although his enemies have enormous strength, huge stature, and great stamina and vitality, they pale before the Hero in mental prowess. Their spiritual essence and structure is more primitive. In his military feats, *Alamzhi Mergen* is quite close and related to Gasar, the main epic hero of Mongolian language epics.

Alamzhi Mergen's main feat is the battle with the 600-headed mangadkhai. Following the epic tradition, the confrontation takes place on a wide plain near a lone steppe tree. At first, neither side has an advantage in the combat, and it is only through the appeal for help to the heavenly genius-guardian Esege Malan-babai that the Hero can vanquish his fierce enemy. The mangadkhai's middle head is slain and the multi-headed monster "becomes a thing of another world". A similar fate awaits his wife as well. Alamzhi Mergen, however, falls victim to the betrayal of Khara and Shara Zutan. He is vanquished and passes on his role as a groom in heroic courtship to his sister Agui Gokhon. Following the customs of tribal society, ones espoused by the epic heroes, the sister sets off on a long and distant journey and, engaging in numerous battles, experiences the full hardships of the voyage. Leaving her native land (in the form of Alamzhi Mergen) she enters that majestic world which is filled with unknown mysteries, menacing natural forces, and hostile beings. This world has numerous seas, mountains climbing up to heavens, and animals and monsters galore. These are hostile forces which are capable of inflicting irreparable harm to the epic hero and of keeping him from fulfilling his destiny in life. This world, however, also contains friendly forces such as the great fish Burbot and the giant bird Eagle. The first helps the Hero cross the sea, the second carries him over the high mountain.

The epos reflects the essential truths of life: good and evil forces do battle in the world, there are friends and enemies — all are entangled into a tight knot and one needs great deal of valour and spiritual strength not to falter in the hour of trial and to overcome all obstacles with dignity. The uligers contain both totemistic and animistic concepts of the ancient folk. The personification of nature, the presence of anthropomorphic and zoomorphic personages, and the depiction of people found in the uligers — all reflect the different stages of a slow process of mastering the innermost meaning of life and of natural phenomena. In the uligers, all live beings, objects, and natural phenomena are endowed with sense and reason.

The sky and celestial phenomena occupied an important place in the folk consciousness of the distant past. In days gone by, people imbued the sun, the moon, the stars, snow, rain, thunder, and lightning with spirits. The heavens were perceived as a supreme being, both spiritual and material, who predetermined the flow of life as well as the nature of life on earth. In portraying celestial life, the uligershin recreated order on earth in accordance with the folk mores and customs.

The Hero's valiant steed occupies a special place among his helpmates. This horse is not only swift and enduring, but also endowed with a keen mind and a gift of human speech. The image of the slender light bay steed in *Alamzhi Mergen*, like that of the blue steed in the uliger *Abai Geser*, is an artistic interpretation within the folk tradition of the Mongolian and Turkic peoples (Aranzal in Kalmyk *Dzhangar*, and Tulpar in Turkic epos).

The hostile forces are depicted close to human form, but they retain animal features. Zoomorphic and anthropomorphic features are present on the portrayal of the mangadkhais — monsters with a multitude of heads and horns. They have varying numbers of heads — 13, 33, 67, 77, 108, 300,

500, 600 and 1008. Alamzhi Mergen vanquishes in battle a mangadkhai "...who had six hundred heads, sixty pole-like horns" (verses 1538—1539). The mangadhais are known for indomitable temper and rabid anger. They fight to the bitter end trying to vanquish the hero by any and all means. Their multiple heads symbolize the monster's might and vitality. They possess not only great physical strength but also magical powers. They are the eternal antagonists of the epic heroes. The Hero does battle with them to the limits of his endurance, sometimes perishing at the end. Although the contents of the uligers are filled with dramatic conflicts, battles, and losses in the epic hero's camp, the epos is also filled with life-affirming enthusiasm, optimism, and a joyous perception of life.

Spatial and temporal concepts are crucial to the understanding of the epic world. The constant travels of the heroes in the course of their quests along the cardinal axes is characteristic for the epos of the Mongolian peoples. The division of the world into polar opposites reflects the opposition of one's native land to all things foreign and more — the opposition of the human realm to the anti-human one. All the uliger action is projected into a sort of epic time which is seen as preceding the historic one. The epic time moves as if dependent on the major events in the lives of the heroes. Time as a real phenomenon can be seen in the epos through the integral perception of all the epic events. The poetic memory about "the beginning of time" is embedded in the uliger in the form of constant images depicting the pristinely beautiful happy world. The uligers are filled with motion, battles, and with the aspiration for a just order in life in accord with the ideal concepts of the tribal world.

The *Alamzhi Mergen* uliger is composed of a set of complete, large structural elements. A short prologue is followed by incipient action (the birth of Alamzhi Mergen, his coming of age), the development of action (the battle with and victory over the mangadhai, the defeat of the hero, his replacement by his sister Agui Gokhon, nuptial journey to his betrothed), culmination (resurrection of the Hero and marriage to Bulad Khurai, the trip home by the hero's sister, the punishment of Khara and Shara Zutan by the hero), and the epilogue.

Ts. Zh. Zhamtsarano highly prized the artistic merits of these epic treasures, their poetic style, underscoring "...the marvellous style of the uligers (e. g. *Alamzhi Mergen*)". In discussing the nature of narration in *Alamzhi Mergen*, he noted that "...in places, it expresses fairly strongly — the sadness, doubt, despair, and resolve of the heroes". Elements of the artistic style of the uligers are perfectly suited to the epic reflection of life. The most important feature of all folk-lore poetics and, in part, the poetics of the uligers, is the "...artistic variation — a successive reiteration of the same idea through different lexico-poetic means". This variation serves the same function in organizing the semantic and artistic contents of the composition as does initial alliteration in organizing the phonic composition. Figurative allegory — an artistic device whereby the descriptive poetic locution serves as a substitute for a common noun (or a proper name), is often used also. The model for this is the phraseological combination of words.

The use of common passages — stable literary formulas which are repeated, in variation, throughout narration — is characteristic for the style of *Alamzhi Mergen*. These “constant passages” include, first and foremost, song inserts (*sag daralga*) which are recited between major episodes. Variation in these inserts provides new shades of meaning to the composition, while their constant presence serves as a link between the different plot sections. The text contains statements such as “after that” which function along two lines: 1) to highlight a relatively autonomous episode or description in the narrative flow, and 2) to permit the *uligershin* to pause briefly during the long narration. The epic formula, to some extent, depends on the context within which it occurs. Because of this, in Russian it assumes more than one form of expression. These formulas, found repeatedly in the narrative, thus function both as “bearing supports” and as agglutinates which bind the verbal matrix of the *uliger*.

The epic depictive arsenal contains a multitude of poetic forms — tropes and figures. Metaphors and metonymies occur relatively infrequently. The metaphors present are most often undeveloped, simple, and with figurative meanings akin to metonymies. Many of the comparisons are metaphoric as well, in linking objects, often unexpected ones, through some features: “There is meat without a knife there, there is firewood without an axe there; “When it was easy without belts; when it was warm without mittens” (verses 15—16). The epithets, in most part, are constant, often appearing as parts of attribute series. These epithets, together with the linked defining words, make up stable form sets and semantic units. The *uligers* also contain paired epithets constructed on a common figurative base. Such traditional epithets as “white”, “black”, “yellow”, and “red”, have their own artistic history. They contain not only colour semantics but often also convey emotions and judgements. The epithets “white”, “red”, “silver”, and “gold”, are positive determinants. Figurative parallelism occurs often in the verses as well.

The hyperbole is widely found in the *uliger* poetics, being used to convey excessive artistic exaggeration. This is because the epic world depicted is seen as one of primary creation, the epic heroes being glorified are considered to be god-like beings, and the battle between good and evil presented as a singular titanic combat.

The text of the *uliger* has a metrical structure grounded in recitation. Its semantic structure is constructed on the syllabic principle. Among the Buryat, the traditional performance of the *uligers* was sing-song in nature, with the melody and words forming a closed entity within which the text predominated. Ts. Zh. Zhamtsarano wrote that “...among the *Ekhirit-Bulagat*, the *uliger* is sung from beginning to end loudly and in a drawn out manner. Those present join in singing, echoing the words back to the narrator at specific times, e. g. at the meeting (*ugtalga*), during the stops (*sey'i daralga*), and during the farewell taking of the heroes (*udeshilge*).” Comparing the *Ekhirit-Bulagat* and *Khorin* performances of the epos, Ts. Zh. Zhamtsarano noted acapella singing of one melody, calling this phenomenon “an epic poem.” This singing style differs considerably from the *Khorin* one, which Ts. Zh. Zhamtsarano, based on its multiple melodic themes, identified as “an epic drama”.

Each uliger has its own individual melody. The recorder of the **Alamzhi Mergen** uliger underscored the refrain lines. This allows us to see them as segmenting features used by the recorder to separate out musico-poetic periods. In **Alamzhi Mergen** the length of these varies from 5 to 330 lines.

We can use the melodies of the Ekhirit-Bulagat epos, tape-recorded in 1962 by the Buryat folklorists S. P. Baldayev and M. P. Kholmonov during the performance of the Ekhirit-Bulagat narrator B. Barnakov, to hypothetically approximate the musico-stylistic specificities of **Alamzhi Mergen**. Most often B. Barnakov sings out the opening long sounds. We can assume that he could have sung the epic texts in a different melodic manner than did Elbon Shalbykov in performing **Alamzhi Mergen**. The identified features of uliger melodies allow us to imagine how E. Shalbykov would have sung the **Alamzhi Mergen**. An extant phonogram, recorded in the Kudin steppe from an unknown performer, shows that this performer, like B. Barnakov, "played with" the musical formulas he knew and left unchanged only the most general structural features of the melody. The performer appears to have been feeling out the main tune, and it is only during the closing phase that we can talk about a stylized musical formula. It is important to note that the uliger melody has the features similar to those of song melodies while, unlike song melodies, also retaining the principle of the recitative. The tune in the uliger is fairly mobile within the melodic formula. A comparison of the melodies shows that the Ekhirit-Bulagat epos developed within its own melodic tradition, one different from those of the song tunes. Its system of reference tones is stable in contains third, fourth, fifth, and, more rarely, sixth intervals. The rhythmic is also stable and occur in two forms which differ from each other only initially (the spondee and the pyrrhic). Ts. Zh. Zhamtsarano noted that the responsoring segments were very drawn out (e. g. ugtalgyn duun — the "call song", udeshelgyn duun — the "farewell song", and the sag daralga — the "pause filling song").

Overall, the music of the Ekhirit-Bulagat epos contains many archaic features. They impart a specific character to the melody which is expected to create a certain emotional atmosphere of harking and participation during the performance of the epic masterpiece.

The cognitive and artistic characteristics of the **Alamzhi Mergen** uliger reviewed above permit us to understand more fully the national specificity and originality of the Buryat heroic epos.