

An Epic about Attila in Chuvash Literature: Attilpa Krimkilte

Bülent Bayram

Introduction

The topic of the epic is a field of research on Chuvash folk literature which attracts the most attention. This topic enters into the field of interest of researchers in many aspects. First of all, the question whether there is an oral epic in the oral tradition of Chuvash folk literature. Among the texts collected from the oral tradition, it has attracted the attention of researchers that there are no lengthy epic works in poetic form. For this reason, researchers have long followed the traces of poems with epic characters in Chuvash folk literature. However, it is not possible to speak of the existence of this kind of work without an element of doubt. This does not mean that there are no epics with these characteristics among the Chuvash, because the collected materials contain stories and the heroes of stories in short prose narratives such as the heroic tales or long wedding poetry such as *Salamalik*. The efforts to uncover these traces constitute the first phase for a view by researchers of Chuvash epics. The second phase of the works consists of bringing together all the products of folk literature with epic characters in a compilation. In this way, many poems and prose have been brought into anthologies by associating them by epic genre. Among these texts, different examples of folk literature come together, such as legends, myths, fables or folk poetry. Certain poems which attract attention among these texts open another phase to the eyes of researchers of Chuvash epics. This is because among the epic texts are not only anonymous poems, but there are also compilations written down by poets in the modern period of Chuvash literature. These poems attempt to create long epic in Chuvash literature in the manner of the *Kalevala* or the *Shahnameh*. In this way, many poets have written down epics, drawing on oral and written sources. This is a remarkable process. The subject of the present study, *The Story of Attilpa Krimkilte* (Attila and Kriemhild) is a work of this type. In our study, a general evaluation will be made of the process of epic creation in Chuvash literature, the literary epics which emerge in this process, and the creativity of Yuhma Mishshi, after which the sources of the epics, which are claimed to have been collected from oral sources, and their relation to oral culture will be discussed.

Literary Epics in Chuvash Literature

The topic of epic in Chuvash literature, as mentioned briefly above, has become a field of study in which folklore and modern literature have become entwined. This is because a significant part of Chuvash epic poems, especially those which are in poetic format, are works of the modern literature period. This kind of work has been especially encouraged by the Chuvash intelligentsia, and many works have been written down in the course of forming a Chuvash national epic. Among the Chuvash, it was I. N. Yurkin who spoke about the need to write long works, making use of materials with epic characters, to awaken national sensitivities (Yumart & Trofimova 2004: 6–7), and it was M. K. Sheshpil's work *Virman Achisem* 'Forest Children' which may be accepted as the first example of this. The hero type in this work is in many ways reminiscent of the hero of an epic (Odyukov 1973: 94). Not content with producing works of literature, poets have been encouraged by penning theoretical articles on the necessity of creating an epic. In this way, articles by Stepan Lashman written in 1924 in the magazine *Suntal*, entitled *Yuri-Sivisene, Halapsene Puhsa Yirkeleme Poema Shirma Pul-sh i?* and *Simah Vaklas Yirkepe*, may each be taken as a turning point. Lashman used works in folk literature on Chuvash *alps* 'heroes' to invite those interested to write a Chuvash "Ulipiad" (Lashman 1924: 94).

In a way, this invitation was the beginning of a process of epic creation which continues to this day. Within this process, many literary stories have been written. The most notable of these are the following poetic works: N.I. Shelepi; *Konstantinapol Huline Tuni* 'The Founding of the City of Constantinople', *Pyulerti Valem Huša* 'Valem Hoca of Biler', *Essepe* 'Essepe' and *Uhsah Timir Pyulere İlni* 'Aksak Timur's Taking of Biler'. Shelepi is one of the names which stands out in works writing the Chuvash story with the works that he wrote (Shelepi 1915, 1925; Bayram 2012: 13). The works *Ulip İstoriyi* 'Alp History' (Yumart & Trofimova 2004: 261–266); Shuyin Hivetiri's *Ulip* 'Ulip' (Hivetiri 1996, 2009, 2013), and Yuhma Mishshi's *İltinpic* 'İltinpic' (Mishsh; 1993) and *Attilpa Krimkilte* 'Attila and Krimkilte' (Mishshi 1997) which are to be found in I. Z. Petrov's 1918 *Tutarsem Pyulere İlni* 'The Tatars' Taking of Biler'; G. I. Komissarov's *Tilpay* 'Tilpay' (Yumart & Trofimova 2004: 244–246); S. Elker's *Ulip* 'Ulip' published in 1927 (Odyukov 1973: 85); Ivan Ivnik's *Hura Shirha* 'Black Yorga'; V. Ektel's *Samana Tyupinchen* 'From the Depths of Time' are counted among the important texts of the history of Chuvash epic writing.

Even if these epic texts are compilations, it is important that the topics are based on Chuvash folklore, and that many of them were published after being collected from oral sources. The concern to prove that the Chuvash have long epic verse poems is generally remarkable. For this reason, literary epic poems about Chuvash heroes were published in the *Halih Eposi* 'Folk Epic' volume of the series *Chuvash Folk Creativity*, which began publication in the post-Soviet period (Yumart & Trofimov 2004). Because the last three of the epics listed above (Ulip, İltinpic and Attilpa Krimkilte) were long, they were published separately and not in the Folk Epics

volume. Hivetiri's *Epic of Ulip* can be seen as the peak of the process of Chuvash epic creation.

Yuhma Mishshi (Yuhma Mikhail Nikolayevich) and the Epic of Attilpa Krimkilte

The epic which is the topic of our article is one of two works published by Yuhma Mishshi. Mishshi is a researcher who works to illuminate the corners of Chuvash history and the Chuvash heroes which have remained in the dark, and to fill in the periods not illuminated with historical documents with works of literature. Mishshi was born on 10 April 1936 in the village of Sikit (Russian Sugut) in the district of Patiryel in the Chuvash Republic. He graduated from the I. Ya. Yakovlev Chuvash State Pedagogy University and completed his postgraduate studies in the field of literature at the Maxim Gorki Institute of Literature. He is the writer of more than two hundred books on ancient and medieval Chuvash history and such diverse types of writing as poetry, prose, experimentation and newspaper writing. His writings are about the ancient Chuvash, ancient Chuvash cities, ancient Chuvash gods and heroes, ancient Chuvash government and especially the Idil (Volga) Bulgar State. He accepted the Idil Bulgars as the ancestors of the present-day Chuvash and produced works on this topic. In his works on poetry and prose, his concern is to build up a Chuvash-Bulgar connection. His passionate writing on this subject and his transfer of this point of view have caused a number of problems. Problems of the relationship of history and literature which occur in almost the whole world are seen here. It is not possible to separate his work on history from his work on literature. Thus, if the effect on his readers and the Chuvash in general is to be discussed, he seems to be fighting in his works against the theories associating the Bulgars with the Kazan Muslim Tatars. In this way, we see him working to prove the Chuvash-Bulgar connection and to convince his readers of it (Afanasyeva 2020; Bayram 2018: 3).

Mishshi enters the area of interest of our article with his poetic works. Among his works, two stand out for their connection with epics. Mishshi's *İltinpiik* (Mishshi 1993) and *Attilpa Krimkilte* (Mishshi 1997), which frequently make use of Chuvash history. These two works are important in the creation of the Chuvash epic in modern literature.

The Epic of Attilpa Krimkilte, the subject of our article, was published in 1997 by *Vuchah* publications in Cheboksary. The words *Drevnechuvaskiy Epos* on the cover gave the message that this was an ancient epic. Immediately beneath it was the explanation *Avalhi chivashsem shinchen haylanı payıtsem šavri ye chivashsen avalhi eposı (kışsıyı)* 'Peyits about the ancient Chuvash or an ancient epic of the Chuvash'. As well as the emphasis in these statements on the age of the epic, the newly-coined word *kışsıy* as an equivalent to the term 'epos' is noticeable. Such new words are to be seen also in the text of the epic.

On the inside cover of the Chuvash language publication is a summary of the epic, and detailed information on the role of Yuhma Mishshi in its publication. In later sections, it is stated that the text of the epic has been preserved for hundreds of years by oral tradition, and that it has been set down from oral tradition. Here, Mishshi's role is described in Chuvash as *Śirsa ilse, puhsa-pĕĕmletse pichete hatĕrkelenĕ, asĕrhattarusempem ĩlantarusene tata hiššĕmahne śĕrakanĕ* "the compiler, the person bringing it together and completing it, and the writer of the reminders and explanations".

The text of the epic was published in German in Berlin in 1993 under the title of *Attil und Krimkilte: Das tshuwaschische Epos zum Sagenkreis der Nibelungen*. (Misch 2011). The epic is assessed in the context of the Nibelung in the German edition and Yuhma Mishshi is recorded as compiling and bringing together the epic. This translation includes writers assessing the Epic of Attilpa Krimkilte in the context of the Nibelung tales, and articles including those setting the time of Attila in history. The edition contains the original Chuvash text along with the German translation. It is interesting that the text is assessed as a new epic in the Nibelung cycle. Much could be written on the original text and the German translation.

The Epic of Attilpa Krimkilte according to Yuhma Mishshi

In the section titled *Avallĕh Chani* "Bell-Sound of the Past" of the complete text edition of the epic, Mishshi gives information on how he performed the compilation, the variants and the people who were the sources. According to the information he gives, three variants of the epic have been preserved. The first variant was collected from the village of Yuhma-Upi by F. I. Ivanov, who was born in 1913 and was brought up and worked as a teacher in the village of Sikĕt in the district of Patĕryel in Chuvash Republic. There is a close relation between this text and the history of the village. According to Mishshi, the village was founded by a person called Aransaypik. Aransaypik was from the lineage of Upi Pattĕr and migrated in the 14th century from the city of Biler, which was the capital of the Idil Bulgar state to the banks of the Shaval and Unkĕ rivers. Upi Pattĕr was a close friend of Īlttĕnpik, the last Chuvash-Bulgar king. What forced Upi to migrate to the afore-mentioned places was Mongol pressure after the death of Īlttĕnpik. Mishshi describes in detail, giving exact dates, the history of the village and of other villages which those of Upi's lineage had founded (Mishshi 1997: 67). According to this information which he gives, but without giving any sources, the people who preserved the Epic of Attilpa Krimkilte until today are people from this lineage. The information on the three variants mentioned are as follows.

The first variant was collected from Yuhma Upi's son Vashankka Yarukov-Lisittsin in 1913 by F. I. Ivanov. Mishshi maintains that those who told or recorded the epic were removed or punished in Stalin's time. There is a statement in the work of Ivanov: "We are the remains of the ancient Huns. Later on they gave us the name

of Bulgars, and now we're Chuvash." The text which he collected from Vashankka has come down in its entirety to the present day. Mishshi found these collections in the ruins of Ivanov's house (Mishshi 1997: 68–69).

In this section, Mishshi talks about the narrator, Pitrov Lisitsin. He says that Lisitsin was an extraordinary storyteller with a rich repertoire and that many texts collected by him are preserved in the archives of the Humanitarian Institute. Mishshi notes that he had heard many tales and stories from him, but he didn't collect them because he was only 11 years old, and he only realized their value much later. When his grandmother was collecting the epics of *İltinpek* and *Shichi Pike-Eltti* from Ishta Nashuk, she remembered what *Pitrav* had recounted about Attila. He asked his grandmother to recount that one too, but he notes that his grandmother did not know it well. This is because those coming from the Upi clan know better what is said about Attila. At this, Mishshi went to Pitrav, who is his aunt, and collected the Epic of Attila (Mishshi 1997: 70–71).

Mishshi collected another variant of the Epic of Attilpa Krimkilte in 1962. Unlike the others, this variant from Filip Il'darovich Stepanov was not in verse but in prose. Il'darovich heard this variant from a storyteller by the name of Mattuhha in the village of Hurapha. According to Mishshi, this variant is distinct from the text which he collected from Pitrav (Mishshi 1997: 71).

Mishshi relates that these collections and even information about the epic did not appear for a long time due to the events of the Stalin era. He mentions this in notes on the period when he worked with P. P. Yurkin in 1959 and 1960. Here, he says that anyone who wanted to publish this epic was declared an enemy of the people, and files were kept on them in the KGB archives (Mishshi 1997: 72). Mishshi gives no sources here for his ideas. Therefore, it is not possible to say that, apart from a few texts which have been ascertained in the archives of the Humanitarian Institute, any evidence has been found in official documents that these texts have been destroyed. Much work has been done on operations carried out in Stalin's time, and many things have been brought to light, but it must be said that nothing serious has yet been done regarding the events mentioned by Mishshi.

In one of the sections of a long piece of writing mentioned above, Mishshi advances several claims, such as that he collected the Epic of Attilpa Krimkilte from oral variants, that it was widespread among the Chuvash, that it dealt with the Hun ruler Attila, and that the Chuvash-Bulgar-Hun connection was proved by historians. He presents the work Attilpa Krimkilte as an epic of oral tradition showing the historical relations of the Chuvash.

In both the Chuvash and German language texts of the epic, the most noticeable characteristic of the expressions describing the epic are the claims that it depends on oral sources. Thus, it is necessary to accept that the Chuvash people have kept alive in their oral tradition an event which happened hundreds of years ago. However, a short summary of the parts of the epic given below casts serious doubts on whether such detail is preserved. The sections of the epic and short summaries of them are as follows.

The first song: Attil is a famous commander and ruler of the Chuvash. The Chuvash who he leads attack their enemies, the Chuha. The Chuha are led by their king and commander Chupayrek. A fierce battle is fought on a great plain. In the end, Attil's army destroys the enemy and takes a great number of captives. Among these is a girl called Krimkilte.

The second song: When Attil sees Krimkilte, he forgets his victory and becomes totally captivated by the girl. He forgets that he has a wife and children. Unexpected love takes complete control of him. But Krimkilte does not love him, and this troubles Attil. He believes that Krimkilte will certainly love him one day, and so he spends all his time with Krimkilte. He completely forgets his duties as ruler and military commander.

The third song: Attil's abandonment of all the business of governing and only spending his time with Krimkilte greatly troubles the Chuvash. One of Attil's closest friends is Marka Alp. He cannot hold back and comes to Attil and begins to speak to him. Attil becomes angry sends him away not only from himself but from the Chuvash.

The fourth song: Marka Alp's exile from the Chuvash greatly pleases enemies of the Chuvash living in different places. The enemies of the Chuvash are the Yaman, the Suyin, the Kaytash, the Vakiver and the Chuha. They all come together and start to attack the Chuvash. Krimkilte's father Chupayrek is also among the enemies.

The fifth song: When he hears that his enemies have united and attacked the Chuvash, Attil seems to come to himself. He tries to bring his scattered army together. First, he calls one of his most trusted friends, Aytaman. But Aytaman does not come and tells Attil that he is ill. Attil understands that it was wrong to exile Marka Alp, but there's nothing to be done. Attil gathers his scattered archers and sets off against the enemy.

The sixth song: Another fierce battle takes place on the great plain. The enemies are numerous, and Attil is alone against them. Aytaman and Marka Alp are no longer with him as before. Nevertheless, the Chuvash fight heroically against the enemy, but still the absence of Aytaman and Marka Alp is felt. They can no longer surround the enemy as Attil realizes it earlier. Chupayrek invites Attil to single combat. After speaking together and trying to convince each other, Attil and Chupayrek fight a duel. After a long fight, they see that neither will be able to defeat the other.

The seventh song: After reaching an agreement with his enemies, Attil returns, and once more forgets everything and spends all his time with Krimkilte. He tries to persuade Krimkilte, and finally she agrees to marry him. Attil prepares for the feast. He orders that the kings of the neighbouring hostile peoples should be invited. Only Hirkke understands that Attil's idea is mistaken and tries to change his mind. But Attil does not listen to him, and preparations for the feast continue. Krimkilte's father Chupayrek also comes to his daughter's wedding feast.

The eighth song: Aytaman also comes to the great feast, having recovered from an illness. Attil accepts him and meets him. All the people sing festive songs, dance, and make merry.

The ninth song: The feast comes to an end. Preparations are made to put the couple in the nuptial chamber. Everyone is making merry and singing happy songs. Eventually, the people begin to disperse, leaving Attil and Krimkilte together. Aytaman makes new friends. These are from the Chuha, Putan, Vakiver and Kaytash. Krimkilte suddenly comes running to the people and tells them that Attil has unexpectedly died. Everybody is confounded, and the guests leave quickly.

The tenth song: All of the Chuvash people are anxious, and they start to wonder how they can live without Attil. At that moment, news comes that enemies are preparing an attack from a different direction. The Chuvash quickly begin to assemble warriors, and name Aytaman as their commander. But Aytaman is nowhere to be found. Some people say that he has gone with Krimkilte to the Chuha. The Chuvash realize that they are facing a great disaster.

The eleventh song: When Marka Alp learns that Attil is dead and that Aytaman has betrayed his own people, he returns with his warriors, and the Chuvash select him as their ruler and commander. The Chuha and the other people do not know that Marka Alp has returned to his own people, and so they gather their warriors and advance on the Chuvash. Marka Alp also gathers his forces and is victorious over them, taking Krimkilte and Aytaman prisoners and routing his enemies.

The twelfth song: The Chuvash demand that the prisoners Krimkilte and Aytaman must be judged and executed by being torn to pieces, and the pieces fed to the dogs, but Marka Alp does not accept. He says that shaming them is better than killing them. They cut off Krimkilte's hair and Aytaman's beard, and leave them in the wilderness. He thinks that they can no longer live there after Attil's death even though the enemy vanquished. They search for a new home, and as a result, Marka Alp leads them to where the Chuvash live today.

It is seen that the text consists of twelve sections telling the whole story, with poems of praise and advice at the beginning and end. An examination of the form, episodes and wording of the epic are outside the scope of this article. The topic which we wish to dwell upon is the sources of the text and its relation to Chuvash oral culture.

The Sources of the Epic of Attilpa Krimkilte

The text depends on oral sources according to Yuhma Mishshi, who is recorded in the book as collecting and arranging the text and also publishing it, and those whose opinions he quotes in his publication. Three variants have survived. In fact, disregarding the lack of a Chuvash epic in oral tradition, some researchers have tried to present certain collected works as the product of oral tradition (Mishshi 1997; Bayram 2018: 3).

It is seen that Mishshi makes an effort to attach the *Epic of Attilpa Krimkilte* to oral sources by means of various arguments. The most important argument leading him to this conclusion is the silence of sources from before the 16th century on the history of the Chuvash. Unlike today, the Chuvash are not mentioned in sources before

the 16th century. This does not mean that the Chuvash did not exist before the 16th century, but it does create a problem as to which state or which people they are to be associated with. This Turkic people is first named with the present-day ethnonym *Chuvash* in the 16th century. The names such as Suvar, Subar, Sabir or Sibir are associated with the Chuvash, but they are highly disputed.

However, the existence of materials on this in Chuvash tradition is in fact unarguably clear. It does not seem very possible for material from the Hunnic period to have survived in the form of such an epic. This is shown by work on epics in general and by surveys of Chuvash oral tradition. This will be discussed more fully in later parts of the article.

There are data on the existence of the oral tradition but they were not published for various reasons. First of all, the lawyer G. M. Lomonosov's letter to Mishshi is worth mentioning. According to Lomonosov, scientists reached important conclusions on ancient Chuvash history in the 1930s. He himself remembers the discussions about the epic of Attila. These epics were preserved from ancient German folklore, others thought that the epic was part of a Chuvash folk memory. A third group emphasized that the epics have nothing to do with ancient German folklore. After 1936 it was forbidden to talk about the relationship of the Chuvash with the Huns and Bulgars, and many people died in camps or prisons because of this. The epic of Attila also shared in this fate. So, they were not recorded or published. Lomonosov warns Mishshi that the time may not have come to publish the epic and warns him not to bring the material out into the open because he may face problems (Lomonosov 1997: 79). To tell the truth, even though the information given by Lomonosov is extremely remarkable, we have come across no documents relating to these discussions. Finding such documents would completely change the writing of the history of Chuvash epic research.

After Lomonosov's letter a note by the writer Raisa Shevlepi is found entitled *Attil patsha śmchen vattisem kalatchĭ* 'the old people used to talk about Emperor Attila' in 1972. According to this, she herself remembers old people talking about Attila. Shevlepi spent her childhood in the village of Shatra in the district of Shirpyu, and she heard tales about Attila from her grandmother, who lived in the village of Shiner, and whom she often used to visit with her mother. As she was a child, she did not record these stories, but the story told in *Attilpa Krimkilte* published by Mishshi was the same as one of the stories told by her grandmother. The record of this reached the reader forty years later (Shevlepi 1997: 80).

The professor of history Gennadiy Tafayev contributed to the transmission of the epic with his writing entitled *Epir hunsen tĭhĭmĭ*. "We are the grandchildren of the Huns." According to him, it was common knowledge that the Chuvash were descended from the Huns. The fact that the Epic of *Attilpa Krimkilte* had been preserved in folk memory until today was an indicator of this. It was difficult to say when the epic was composed, but it must have been dated after the death of Attila. According to Tafayev, the sages of old Chuvash had used this epic to advise rulers and to tell them how to behave (Tafayev 1997: 81). All Tafayev's academic and

popular writing presents interesting information on the folklore-fakelore-history relationship. These are rich enough to be the topic of separate comprehensive studies.

The final person to give his thoughts on the text of the epic is an academician in the field of education, P. P. Matveyev. Writing in 1993, he gives certain information which can be found in historical sources. According to him, the Chuvash have never forgotten Attila. While he was working as a newspaper editor in Shupashkar district, he often went to the villages, and on one of these trips he recorded a story called *Attilpa Marka Ulip* 'Attil and Marka Alp' from an old person in the village of Kivshurt-Marka. According to this story, Attil was a famous Chuvash ruler. He had a wife and children, and a companion by the name of Marka Alp. Because of a lot of gossip, Attil separates from his companion Marka Alp, and after that, he surrounds himself with people of ill intent. One of these gives a slavegirl to Attila. This girl takes Attil's sense away. His wife is very clever, but she cannot succeed in bringing Attil to his sense. Knowing that Attil is in that condition, the enemies of the Chuvash gather and attack him. Attil is no longer able to fight as earlier, but he destroys the enemy. The enemy disperse to different places and he returns home. Attil marries the captive girl, and suddenly dies. The girl escapes with someone who hates Attil. When the enemy hear that Attil has died, they start to attack. Marka Alp returns and brings the Chuvash together and protects them. For this reason, the Chuvash have kept the names of Attil and Marka Alp in their memory for centuries (Matveyev 1997: 79–80).

The people from different professions who have stated their views on the text of the epic maintain that the text exists in oral sources. Written culture began to spread among the Chuvash with the creation of the Chuvash alphabet by I. Ya. Yakovlev in 1873 and the first writers, poets and journalists from the Chuvash School which was opened in the town of Simbir (Güzel 2014). For this reason, Chuvash literature for many years continued to exist in oral form. In Russia, considerable material has been collected on Chuvash oral culture in Tsarist Russia and in the Soviet period. From this point of view, it is not very difficult to find an answer to the question of whether there is a source to create this epic from the material currently at hand. Among collected oral materials there are large anthologies which are published arranging tales containing historical topics.

The second section of the sixth volume of the series *Chivash Halih Simahlih*, which is one of the first comprehensive studies of Chuvash historical stories, is divided into myths and different kinds of stories known by the name of *halap*. *Halaps* are divided into *Ulip Halapšem* and *İstori Halapšem*. Tales relating to historical periods are classified chronologically as 1) 13th century – ancient period and Bulgar period, 2) 13th–14th centuries – Golden Horde and Kazan Khanate period, 3) 16th to beginning of the 20th centuries – the period after union with Russia' (Odyukov & Sidorova & Yumart 1987). The beginning of this classification include 22 texts from the Bulgar period.

The publication of Chuvash folk literature texts began in the period after the Soviet Union from collections of oral sources and unpublished archive material. The most notable of these texts were published in the series *Halih Pultarulihi* 'Folk Creativity'.

In 2007, a volume containing historical tales was published under the name of *Īstori Halapĭsem*. Here, there is a more detailed classification than in the previously mentioned book. Historical stories are classified according to their historical periods, and the stories of each historical period are further classified among themselves according to topic. The main headings of classification are as follows:

1) Ancient period, 2) 10th century to first half of 13th century – Bulgar State period, 3) Second half of 13th century to first half of 16th century – Golden Horde and Kazan Khanate period', 4) First half of 16th century to 20th century – the period after the union with Russia (Terent'yeva et al. 2007). The first heading takes in the 1st–9th centuries, which includes the Hun period. This main heading is classified into a) *Yĭhnesĭl* 'Lineage and parentage' and b) *Patshasempe pattĭrsem* 'Kings and heroes'. If there are materials which would constitute a source for the Epic of Attilpa Krimkilte, they would naturally be placed in this section. However, the 26 texts in this section does not contain works which can be the oral source of the Epic of Attilpa Krimkilte. There are stories concerning the time of the Huns, Khazars, Bulgars and Danube Bulgars, but these were not collected from Chuvash oral tradition, but rather directly from historical sources and writings such as N. Ya. Bichurin's *Radi vechnoy pamyati: Poeziya, Ocherki, zametki. Pisma*, S. A. Pletneva's *Hazary*, N. V. Nikolskiy's *Kratkiy kurs etnografii Chuvash*, M. I. Artamonov's *Istoriya hazar*, and N. I. Ashmarin's *Bolgary i Chuvashi*. These works used the information of Byzantine records. It is evident that a significant part of the 26 texts in this section quoted historical works, and has nothing to do with oral epics.

Among these texts, only one, which is noted as having been collected from oral sources, can be associated with the epic. A text, published in 1975 under the title *Atil Patsha* was collected by N. I. Yegorov from A. A. Ovchinikova, who lived in the village of Shyulti Kincherti in the district of Vĭrmar in the Chuvash Republic. There is a note to the text in handwritten archive records saying that Attila was a leader of the Western Turks (Terent'yeva et al. 2007: 396).

V. D. Dmitriyev, who has produced serious work on the relation between Chuvash historical stories and Chuvash history, has dealt with Chuvash history in the Bulgar State and before under the title *O drevney zhizni Chuvashy i Bolgarskom vremeni* in his work entitled *Istoricheskiye predaniye Chuvash*. As a historian, Dmitriyev puts together texts collected from oral sources with written sources to illuminate the obscure periods of Chuvash history. The part of his work relating to ancient Chuvash history is the same as the period including the Epic of Attilpa Krimkilte. However, the only one text can be related to the topics of Mishshi's epic, is the story collected by N. I. Yegorov which was quoted above (Dmitriyev 1993: 33–34).

There are also texts from the oral sources collected concerning Marka Alp, one of the heroes mentioned in the Epic of Attilpa Krimkilte. This topic was mentioned by P. P. Matveyev in his work in which Mishshi's epic text was published. There are two variants of Chuvash heroic stories in which Marka Alp is mentioned. The first of these was collected by Yuhma Mishshi, who was the author of the Epic of Attilpa Krimkilte. He collected the story from his own grandmother in 1951 in the village of Sĭkĭt in the

district of Batıryel in Chuvashistan. The stories about Marka Alp are widespread among the Chuvash. According to Yuhma Mishshi, Marka Alp was a historical hero, and is a personality who is often met in Chuvash folk literature and Marka is also widely used as a toponym (Mishshi 1997: 84).

Aside from the stories mentioned above, no other texts have been found which could constitute a source for the Epic of Attilpa Krimkilte. It is not possible to talk about the existence of any rich oral material such as that maintained by those contributing with articles and letters to the production of the book in the construction of the text. Although certain names from Chuvash folk culture are mentioned from time to time in the text of the epic, these are not of a kind to form the backbone of the text of an epic.

Mishshi's efforts are related to the nature of the epic genre to prove that the Epic of Attilpa Krimkilte was a poem collected from oral sources. The relation of the epic to national identity has been the topic of much research. The findings of Lauri Honko stand out as being in accordance with this topic. According to him, the epic stands out for its context and functions more than for its literary value. This function is closely connected with the role the epic plays in the construction of a national identity. Honko divides epics into three groups: literary epics, epics based on tradition, and oral epics. He associates the writing of literary epics more with political concerns than with literary concerns (Honko 2009: 111). The insistence by Mishshi and others who have stated their thoughts on the work on presenting Attilpa Krimkilte as an epic from oral tradition without showing any concrete proof must be evaluated as related to its functions.

There are other signs which support the idea that rather than having been collected from oral sources or constructed on oral sources, this epic was literary making without using oral sources. There are some references to historical events and heroes. For example, even though there are few information about the Asian Hun ruler Modu in historical sources, it is noticeable that the name Modu is mentioned directly in the text. In explaining the line *Chi maltanhi patshi vřsen Mette*, this information is given: "A famous ruler and commander who brought the old Hun and Chuvash clans together in the most ancient times and formed a government. These events happened in the 2nd century BC. Modu is referred to as Mote in Chinese sources." (Mishshi 1997: 83) It is a reference to an event which happened 1700–1800 years ago. It is difficult to claim that the name of a hero could be preserved orally and not in writing for such a long period of time. Even though an epic in oral tradition may preserve traces of the time when it was formed, it usually continues to exist by renewing itself in a dynamic way, exchanging old heroes for new heroes and old historical events and geographical locations for new ones in each historical period. If historical events are not written down, names of people and places are mostly forgotten, and new names replace them. Thus, these names, which could not be found in materials collected from oral sources, may be assessed as being not from tradition but signs of an attempt to reconstruct history.

Beside the name *Modu*, there are also other points which can be seen as the results of reconstruction, such as that *Īltīn kineke* in the line *Chi chaplı purlıhi ‘Īltīn kineke’ visen* is explained as the holy book of the Zoroastrian Chuvash in ancient times (Mishshi 1997: 83), or that *Īltīn tu* in the line *Īltīn tu tavrashınche...* is claimed to be the name given by the ancient Hun-Chuvash to the Altay Mountains (Mishshi 1997: 83). With regard to words, for example *elteper*, can be explained as the name of Chuvash kings in ancient times, and *lamtay* is said to be used to name the ancestors of the ancient Chuvash.

Conclusion

The Epic of Attilpa Krimkilte is a text which needs examination from many aspects, such as its language and use of words, folklore and literature, the folklore-literature identity relationship, and the literature-history relationship. An attempt is made to evaluate this work as a work which has been collected from oral tradition on the one hand by Yuhma Mishshi, who is the author, and on the other by people who have contributed to the book in which the epic was published with letters and articles, or as a work built on oral sources. However, when we examine the works of Chuvash oral folk literature, especially that of a historical nature, we cannot talk about the existence of material which would amount to an epic. There is no oral source which Attil appears as the Hun-Chuvash leader. The texts given in the article, including those collected from oral sources relating to King Attil and Marka Alp, do not have the content to support an epic of Attilpa Krimkilte. In the context of Yuhma Mishshi's general creativity, the Epic of Attilpa Krimkilte is not the only work of this kind with a question mark hanging over it. Mishshi has been the author of many works, sometimes from the world of fantasy, sometimes supported from doubtful historical sources on topics directly connected with the Chuvash. He is a writer who has put his signature to many works in an attempt to rewrite Chuvash history himself. In this way, although the Epic of Attilpa Krimkilte is an important work in the process of creation of a Chuvash epic, it is far from being an oral epic. Finally, it is not an oral work or one built mainly on oral tradition. It must be seen as a newly-created work, making very little use of oral tradition.

References

- Afanasyeva, E. P. *Yuhma Mihail Nikolayevich* (<http://enc.cap.ru/?t=prsn&lnk=1286>)
Date of Access: 23.10.2020
- Artamonov, M. İ. 2002. *Istoriya hazar*. Sankt Peterburg.
- Ashmarin N. İ. 1902. *Bolgary i Chuvashi*. Tipolitografiya Imperatorskago Universiteta.
- Bayram, B. 2010. *Çuvaş Türklerinin Kahramanlık Anlatmaları (Alplar)*. Ankara: Türk Kültürünü Araştırma Enstitüsü Yayınları.
- Bayram, B. 2012. Çuvaş Edebiyatında İstanbul Şehrinin Kuruluşu Manzumesi ve Onun Kaynakları Üzerine. *Türk Dünyası Araştırmaları*, 99 (196), 173–200.
- Bayram, B. 2018. Çuvaş Edebiyatında Bir Telif Destan: İltınpik. *Türk Bitig Türklük Bilimi Araştırmaları Kırklareli Üniversitesi Çağdaş Türk Lehçeleri ve Edebiyatları Bölümü Yıllığı*, (ed. Bülent Bayram), Edirne: Paradigma Akademi Yayınları.
- Bayram, B. 2014. Çuvaş Halk Edebiyatında Tür ve Şekil Adlandırmaları. *Trakya Üniversitesi Edebiyat Fakültesi Dergisi*, 4, 8, 59–83.
- Bichurin (İakinf), N. Ya. 1991. *Radi vechnoy pamyati: Poeziya. Stat'i, ocherki, zametki. Pis'ma*. ChKİ: Cheboksary.
- Dmitriyev, V. D. 1993. *Chuvashskiye istoricheskiye predaniya – Ocherki istorii Chuvashskogo naroda d drevnih vremen do sredini XIX veka*. Chuvashskoye Knizhnoye İzdatel'stvo: Cheboksary.
- Güzel, S. 2014. Çuvaş Türklerinin Kimlik İnşasında İvan Yakovleviç Yakovlev Etkisi. *Milliyetlerin Kesişme Noktası İdil-Ural Çalıştayı Bildiri Kitabı 12-13 Nisan 2014 / Kırklareli* (ed. Bülent Bayram), Kırklareli Üniversitesi Yayınları.
- Hivetiri, Sh. 1996. *Ulıp-Chivash Eposı*. Shupashkar.
- Hivetiri, Sh. 2009. *Ulıp*. Chuvashskoye Knizhnoye İzdatel'stvo, Cheboksary.
- Hivetiri, Ş. 2013. *Ulıp* (Ed. Bülent Bayram), TÜRKSOY Yay., Ankara.
- Honko, L. 2009. Ulusal, Bölgesel ve Bireysel Anlamda Destan ve Kimlik. *Karadeniz*, (Çetin Kolkaya), 4, 103–115.
- Lashman, S. 1924. Yuri-Sivisene, Halapsene Puhsa Yırkelese Poema Şirma Pulı-shi? *Suntal*, Cheboksary.
- Letopis vizitiytza Feofona ot Diokletiana do Tsarey Mihaila i sina ego Feofilakta*, Moskva 1984.
- Matveyev, P. P. 1997. “Attilpa Marka Ulıp.” *Attilpa Krimkilte*, Shupashkar., 79–80.
- Mischi, J. 2011. *Attil und Krimkilte Das tschuwasschische Epos zum Sagenkreis der Nibelungen*, Rhombos-Verlag, Berlin.
- Mishshi, Y. 1993. *İltınpik-Chivash Halıhñ Avalhi Eposı*, (ed. Yuhma Mishshi), Shupashkar.

- Mishshi, Y. 1997. *Attilpa Krimkilte* Attila and Krimkilte', (ed. Yuhma Mishshi); Vuchah; Shupashkar.
- Movses Kalankatuatsi 1984. *Istoriya strany Alaunk*. Erevan.
- Nikolskiy, N. V. 1928. *Kratkiy kurs etnografii chuvash*. Cheboksary.
- Odyukov, Í. Í. 1973. "Chuvashskiye Skazaniye Ob Ulpah. *Voprosi Russkoy i Chuvashskoy Filologii*, V1p. III, Cheboksary.
- Odyukov, Í. Í. & Sidorova, Y.S.& Yumart, G.F. 1987. *Chivash Halih Simahlihi. Mifsempe Halapsem*. Vol. VI (2), Shupashkar: Chivash Kineke Izdatel'stvi.
- Pletneva, S .A. 1986. *Hazary*. Moskva.
- Shelepi, N. Í. 1915. *Konstantinapol' Huline Tuni Sinchen Chivash Vasttisen Kalani*. Kazan.
- Shelepi, N. Í. 1925. *Essepe Essepe', Suntal*, Cheboksary.
- Tafayev, G. Í. 1997. "Epir Hunsen Tihiml." *Attilpa Krimkilte*, Shupashkar.
- Terent'yeva, O. N. & Yefimova, O.N. & Semenova, V.P. 2007. *Istori Halapisem*. Shupashkar: Chivash Kineke Izdatel'stvi.
- Yumart, G. F. & Trofimova, Í. .G. 2004. *Chivash Halih Pultarulihl. Halih Eposl*. Shupashkar: Chivash Kineke Izdatel'stvi.