



Central Asia

CULTURE

From the Manas Epic

In 1995 Kyrgyzstan and UNESCO celebrated the 1000th anniversary of the Manas epic. The epic belong to a rich oral tradition and tells of the formation of Kyrgyzstan through the exploits of the hero Manas. The excerpt presents part of the introduction and then tells about the funeral of an important person and friend of the hero Manas.

The Beginning of the Fairy Tale

The event which has been known since
The olden times
Should be narrated now.
Innumerable years have passed since,
Dressed in chain armour
Running when seeing an enemy,
Fast like whirlwind,
The man ferocious like the tiger
has passed.
Who was it? If not the hero?
How many people have passed
through the centuries!
Since that time
The sea got dry and turned
into a desert.
The mountain peaks reaching the sky
have vanished and turned
into a bog.
The peoples living on earth
are getting less! . . .

Kokotai's last will

Let the last will that I'll leave
be an example for the others:
Respect your people,
Do not break accord [solidarity]
of near and distant relatives.
Will the father's last will
reach the son
who came of the Kyrgyz—
the great tribe,
Most of them are of Kara kurt tribe.
. . . .

You, who let me rule
Over the mysteries of the world
Have you left us forever?
Have you left us in sorrow
Without meeting me at least once?
He has left forever for the other world
And those who are alive
Should follow the tradition

to arrange ush.*

It appeared that my ancestor
spoke about curious things
this is why I should go to Manas.

* funeral repast

. . . .

Kokotai's funeral repast should
be famous among the peoples
And it should also upset the enemies.
It should be an unforgettable
day till the end of the world.
The famous land of Karkura
is appropriate for horse races,
and for arranging the funeral repast.
. . . .

Messengers with the news were
Sent for Kokotai's funeral repast.
The horse Maaniker with the
young lad Aidar by name
soared upwards and took him
away under cloudless sky.
. . . .

The people gathered for the ush—
Kokotai's funeral repast.
The people came from different sides
to see this sight.
. . . .

The sound of Kernej* was heard
Somebody played jezhnai*
The earth shook from the people's voices
The banners shone decorated
with patterns,
This is how Manas appeared
And everybody met him with
shouts, noisily.

* mystical instruments

. . . .

The guests were treated to various dishes
They were served milk with
raisins.
With kazy and djal to be served**
One dish for twos

And those who were bad eaters
Took the dish home.

*dried grapes

**kazy: a kind of sausage.

From "Fragments of the Epos Manas from the Version of the Great Manaschy Sagynbay Orozbakov" from *The Kyrgystan Freenet* website. Accessed April 5, 2002, at <http://www.freenet.bishkek.su/kyrgyzstan/epos.html>.

Understanding What You Read After you have finished reading the selection, answer the following questions.

1. What details given in this excerpt tell the reader that this is a legend?

2. What details do you think probably accurately describe Kyrgyz culture? Why?

3. Based on the excerpt, what character traits do the Kyrgyz value?

Activity

Compose epic stanzas that reflect life in Kyrgyzstan today.