



**Karl Reichl, ed. & trans. *Edige: A Karakalpak Oral Epic as performed by Jumabay Bazarov***

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KARL Reichl's study, transcription, and translation of the *Epic of Edige* is a beautiful piece of philological-textological work. It provides a solid basis from which lofty theorizing may be spun.

We begin with the content of the epic. The story begins with the birth of the protagonist and ends with his death (see JASON n. d., chapters 6 and 18). In between are episodes of the protagonist's adventures, such as fighting ogres, demonstrating Solomonic wisdom, courage, cunning, combating enemies, heroic weddings, and so on, all widespread oral-literary themes registered in folk-literary catalogs. The story has two parts in which many episodes repeat themselves: the biography of a father and his son. These two, as well as their main enemy (*Tokhtamysh*) and their main helper (*Sätemir*, or *Timur Lenk/Tamerlane*) are historical figures, as is the struggle for power and authority between them (chapter 2). Yet, the *Epic of Edige* is a story, and not a historical chronicle, never mind historical truth. It is a work of oral literature and built accordingly on all literary levels.

The introduction (15–178, chapters 1–9) describes the ethnic group (chapter 2); the historical background of the work's content (chapter 3); the tradition of this epic in four akin ethnic groups: Noghay, Kazakh, Tatar, Bashkir (chapter 3); the Karakalpak Edige tradition itself in detail in versions of two performances, with a list of extant versions manually and audio-recorded since the end of the nineteenth century (chapter 4); problems of the work's transmission by means of apprenticeship (chapter 5); origins of the story and the genealogy of transmission including performers of past generations and their variant versions (chapter 6); literary patterns (chapter 7); problems of performance and its transformation into written form (chapter 8); and the musical aspect (chapter 9). This list of themes for describing a work may be compared to other such lists describing works published lately in the West as well as in the former Soviet Union. There is already a good foundation on which to develop a standard for the description of the works and the reviewer hopes this will be done. The publication of the text (179–282) and its transcription into Latin script are discussed (57; 157, note 263; and 11–13), respectively. The text is accompanied by linguistic notes (432–55), mostly translations of rare, dialectic, archaic, and foreign words, and the performer's phonetic inconsistencies. The translation is accompanied by a commentary which brings similar formulae from other texts and ethnographic explanations.

This work and the method of its publication merit careful consideration, which would amount to separate monographs. Therefore, for this short review, we have

chosen to discuss a few editing problems.

The first is the quality of the text. The text can be considered composite: it is composed of two versions by the same singer. Sections I–XXVIII were audio-recorded in 1993 from a sung performance and sections XXIX–XLI were taken from a dictated version in 1986 (57 and 157). This practice is considered debatable and was used as the “lesser evil,” as sections XXIX–XLI in the 1993 audio recording were flawed. A future investigator of the *Epic of Edige* should be aware that there are sizable differences between the two texts (the two versions differ among others in the distribution of verse and prose in the work; see 57). When we are lucky enough to have more than one version recorded from the same performer, more problems of the same order await the scholar.

The second is performance. How can an oral performance, consisting of voice, musical components, words, movements, props, stage, and audience behavior be transmitted to paper, into words, interspersed here and there with only a photo or sketch? The author discusses this problem and expresses doubts of the usefulness of the “performance fashion” (problems of phonetic transcription, 143–53; text and performance events, 153–61). It is not exactly clear why, after expressing doubts about this “fashion,” the author nevertheless cedes to its demands (160–61). Thus, we are informed when the performer sips tea (156, 160); what connection does this have with the poetic or musical patterning or the meaning of the text? The tea-sipping does not even mark the ends of episodes, for example, 304, line 3: the tea-sipping is in the middle of an episode. Did the author-editor intend to show the senselessness of the “performance-description method”?

The third problem is that of translation. This reviewer is not competent to judge the transcription of the original language or its translation, on which we, poor outsiders and comparatists, depend. The English of the translation is impeccable; and yet, does it transmit precisely what the singer said? Some passages in verse are quoted in the introduction (text vs. translation) and disturbingly, lines are transposed; this can be seen in lines which carry names and are thus easily recognized. For example (140; as diacritics are irrelevant they are disregarded here):

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|---------------------------------|--|
| [1] Minsan Nogay ishinde        | [1] Among the innumerable Noghay         |
| [2] Mina xalqtin xizmetker(i)   | [3] Kenjembay, the son of Keneges [,]... |
| [3] Keneges uli Kenjembay-ay... | [2] A servant from this people [,]       |

In the translation, lines [2] and [3] are reversed. In their proper order [1], [2], [3], as actually spoken, the text sounds more poetic (see the full text on 181 and its translation on 286). The discussion of the relationship of the original and the translation of the prose sections has to be left to people who read Karakalpak. An old-fashioned interlinear word-by-word translation would have been useful.

To summarize, aside from these editing problems, this work is very important. In addition to forming the basis of *Edige* scholarship, it raises thought-provoking issues in the study of oral literature and will serve as a basis for additional scholarship.

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KARL REICHL should be praised for taking the trouble to include in his publication of the *Epic of Edige* the musical component (chapter 9) which is usually not presented in publications of oral-literary works. In this, he follows the practice of the publication of ballads; they are his second field of interest on which he strongly relies in his epic studies. For such an exemplary publication of German ballads see MEIER et al. (1935 ff), with earlier versions from the nineteenth century, both accompanied by musical notation.

The idea that publications of specifically epic works should be accompanied by descriptions of the musical aspect and its relationship to the texture of the work is by now standard practice in Russian scholarship (see JASON 1996). In the West, this phenomenon was noticed for different ethnic groups by the 1920s (see STEPHAN (1920–1921) for Arab nomadic and rural populations and Jews in the Near East).

The difficulty with such presentations resides in mastering expertise in both poetics and musicology and the cooperation of several experts is usually demanded (as is the practice in Russian publications). Alas, fulfilling this demand has its difficulties. Fortunately, Reichl is endowed with this double expertise. In his efforts, he was assisted by Mrs. Damaris Unverzagt (Bonn, Germany) and by S. Erdely (MIT, Cambridge, MA) with the transcription of the musical examples.

It is not simple to put to paper (“textualize”) the oral, audible, performed text; no one is better qualified to bewail this than Reichl (178). Despite the evident difficulty, Reichl has succeeded in providing a detailed description of the musical elements and their relation to the performance of the *Epic of Edige*. No less important is the addition of a CD, which includes excellent recordings of material studied in the book thus offering direct exposure to the authentic performance.

Reichl gives an interesting classification of five distinct modes of performance; these are “narrating, declaiming, narrating-declaming; singing and singing in a recitative (‘reciting’) (with two variants, one closer to speaking the other closer to singing)” (166). It would have been extremely useful to explain, if at all possible, how particular passages in the performance are linked to one mode or another, and whether there are traditional pre-established norms. My feeling is that in general, the performer allows the model-bound structure to emerge empirically in accord with his personal outlook and that in using the characteristic motives the performer may or may not be aware of his usage.

Some of the musical terms Reichl used are not entirely satisfactory: for instance, with the term “melody,” which he used in places where “motive,” “formula,” “small pieces,” or at best “melody type” is frequently used in folkloristic and ethnomusicological literature. “Melody-type” refers to the use of short melodic fragments drawn from a fund of melodic and rhythmic material. In this respect, one may question the application of the statement “More than forty Karakalpak *jiraw* melodies are known,” (166) and what the characteristics of these melodies are.

In conclusion, Reichl’s study clearly shows us the importance and usefulness of the comprehensive approach in describing this genre, including its musical component and aspects of its performative practice. For this, he deserves our congratulations.

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