

## The Great Campaign: How the Troops Set Out

(Translation from the Kyrgyz by Dr. Helen M. Faller)

1. Illuminating us like the all-seeing moon, great-souled Manas,<sup>1</sup>  
With a face like a ripe grain of wheat,  
And eyes like the evening mist,  
Which shine on us as do the sun and the moon,  
Born, our Manas,  
From an alloy of silver and gold,  
Born, our Manas,  
Singular is he on earth.
2. Just as the big cat,<sup>2</sup>  
Approaches his prey from the side,  
Grey-maned, with his tail held between his legs,  
Manas also attacks from the side.
3. It becomes clear it is Allah's behest,  
When from above descends what is pre-ordained,  
And only the son of god can fulfill it.
4. Great-souled Manas, the big cat,  
Left Talas<sup>3</sup> with his army.  
He set out for the lands,  
Of the Chinese khan.<sup>4</sup>  
If death overtakes Manas, then he dies.  
And he will see the place from which there is no return.
5. And thus with his innumerable troops,  
And all twelve khans,  
Manas left Talas on his great campaign.

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<sup>1</sup> Manas – the main hero of the *Manas* epic, the ancient leader of the Kyrgyz people, and the khan who united the numerous tribes of the Kyrgyz and played a progressive role in the founding of the Kyrgyz nation.

<sup>2</sup> The Kyrgyz word is *kabylan* – a general name for the big cats, including tigers, leopards, and panthers. In epics “*kabylan*” signifies the knight.

<sup>3</sup> Talas is the name of Manas' homeland, to this day located within Kyrgyzstan's borders.

<sup>4</sup> Khan – “king” in Kyrgyz and related languages; here, a tribal leader.

6. Having gathered a countless number of warriors,  
And collected supplies and provisions,  
Khan Koshoi<sup>5</sup> headed the campaign.  
And following behind him came:
7. Kozubek from the Khanate of Kokand,  
Malabek of Margilan,  
Synjibek of Andijon,  
Alybek representing six cities,  
The leader of the Kazakhs, Khan K kch ,  
And Budaikhan's Muzburchak.  
And, at the same time, see,  
Came Irbis of Eibittaz,  
And Ormonbek of Tekechi.  
From the Altai Mountains came Shygaikhan,  
From the River Ile,<sup>6</sup> Teyishkhan came,  
And Jamgyrchy from Eshtek.
8. And then if you look, you will see,  
Koshoi, khan of the Katagan tribe,  
Who has gathered at his side,  
An enormous mass of soldiers.  
And then if you look, you will see,  
Dressed in a helmet of blue-grey,  
Playing with his bluish shield,  
The aged Bakai himself leading the way.  
If he is in the rear-guard, then it is befits a great soldier.  
If in the avant-garde, then he brings victory.
9. And Almambet, Chubak, and the young Syrgak are marching.  
Chege, who beats the drum, has come.  
Oyoz plays the double-reeded flute.  
And Jaisang, the great *Manas* singer, is there.  
From the most honorable elders to the most respected fighters,  
All forty choro<sup>7</sup> are here.
10. Blotting out all white light,  
The dust rises up from the earth in dark columns.

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<sup>5</sup> Koshoi – one of the main positive figures in the *Manas*; a wise and just old leader and a strong, unbeatable knight, despite his great age.

<sup>6</sup> Ile – a river that flows in Kazakhstan and China.

<sup>7</sup> Choro – a collective noun used to refer to the hero *Manas*' forty best knights and bravest fighters. Almambet, Chubak, and Syrgak are three of them.

- The white flag is held high,  
And the soldiers' cries can be heard from afar.  
They march on night and day,  
Eh, cruel earthly fate!  
Thus the enormous army of Manas,  
Comes closer to the edges of Beijing,  
Towards Chaianduu,<sup>8</sup> on the very edge of the steppe,  
Where the heat beats directly on your brain.
11. And if you look, then you will see,  
Where Alexander the Great left no trace,  
And the prophet Soloman gave no council,  
Where the divine Hazret Ali never set foot,  
And Muhammed's Chaliyar dared not make himself known,  
Thus ask you about the events that took place at Beijing.
12. The warriors of Beijing, the stronghold of the Chinese,  
Are always prepared to fight.  
The city on all sides is surrounded,  
By a wall forty meters high.  
On top of the wall, you will see,  
A net is entwined,  
And below, in the moat at its foot,  
Seethes scorching hot salt water.
13. The city of Beijing has forty gates.  
On one of them is emblazoned,  
The all-seeing eye of Kutman.  
And written on each gates these words:  
"From now on until ever after,  
No enemy foot shall step inside."
14. The light of god illuminates this place.  
It is no place for play.  
In China's Beijing,  
No soul hides unseen,  
Just as it is written on the gate.
15. Day had only begun to break –  
Libra's scales were setting in the west,  
And light's rays had only begun to touch the earth.  
Ten thousand troops,  
Stilled by night and sleep,

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<sup>8</sup> Chaianduu – a toponym, the translation of which from the Kyrgyz means "the place where there are a lot of scorpions."

- Stood on the steppe at Chaianduu.  
 One of the Chinese khans arrived.  
 It was the mighty khan Kongurbai.  
 He brought with him countless soldiers.  
 The Chinese swarmed everywhere.  
 The earth simply could not hold them.
16. The whitish cloth waved like a banner.  
 There was whistling and din all around.  
 The bluish cloth waved like a banner.  
 The pack was screaming all around.  
 Such was the Chinese assault.
17. From that side then,  
 Manas' soldiers stood in a solid ring.  
 And everyone advanced to attack.  
 Chege the dobulbas-player,  
 Hit his dobulbas.<sup>9</sup>  
 And Oyoz the surnai-player,  
 Gave the surnai<sup>10</sup> his voice.
18. God keep us from witnessing this!  
 The bluish cloth stood then like a banner.  
 The din and racket made your head spin.  
 "Khan Manas!" they yelled.  
 The shout "Kyrgyz!" resounds from afar.  
 It was a formation of Kyrgyz warriors,  
 Advancing to attack.
19. At that very moment the soldiers clashed two-by-two,  
 And began fighting desperately.  
 They pierced each others' breasts with their spears.  
 Their coats up raised around their heads –  
 Oh, take care!  
 They smote each other,  
 With their swords.  
 In that battle pairs of soldiers,  
 Fought on and on without lifting their heads.
20. And then, if you look, then you will see,  
 The heavens are clear while the earth churns.  
 Only Allah all-seeing is able,

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<sup>9</sup> Dobulbas – a traditional Kyrgyz drum used as a signal to begin battle or the hunt.

<sup>10</sup> Surnai – a traditional Kyrgyz wind instrument.

- To discern the sapling from the soil.  
Dust roils like water boiling atop an icy surface.  
It is a terrifying sight to see such hellish sufferings,  
And it is not possible to tell any one knight from the others in the fray.
21. God save us from bearing witness to this!  
At that very moment,  
The knight Almambet, Lion of Aziz Khan,  
Mounted on his horse Sarala,  
Screamed forth his terrifying cry.  
Proclaiming “Khan Manas!”  
Almambet began to fell countless Chinese,  
To the left and to the right.
22. If you were to ask about Almambet,  
You will see, he is one of those who came,  
To request his own kingdom on the edges of Beijing.  
All the secrets of military affairs,  
He knows like his five fingers.  
You will see, he is not of the simple folk,  
And his undergarments are of the finest silk.
23. Almambet came with soldiers to attack the Chinese,  
Breaking hills and laying new roads.  
When this all took place,  
When God did not know the limits of man’s rage.  
With a cotton string girdling his waist and his wide boots,  
Kongurbai, the khan of the Kechili,  
Received an offer he could not refuse, ai!
24. Arrayed in arms,  
His sword, as always, secured to his side,  
Kongurbai separated the warriors with his spear,  
And gathered the archers in a special detachment.  
Kongurbai began to prepare himself.  
In that seething skirmish,  
His rage overflowing, Kongurbai,  
Directed the bridle of his horse Algar,  
And took charge of the battle.
25. And then if you look, you will see,  
Among the horde of soldiers,  
Kongurbai caught sight of Almambet.  
At that moment our hero, Almambet,  
Turning in a veritable whirl,  
Was exterminating from back to front,

Boundless numbers of Chinese soldiers.

26. And seeing him, Sir Kongurbai,  
Shouted to Almambet Sir Kongurbai:  
“Eh, cruel fate, you renegade coward!”  
“Having saddled his unworthy horse Sarala,  
Almambet left home, that unworthy slave,”<sup>11</sup> thought Kongurbai.  
“Having learned the wisdom of magic,  
That slave departed.  
His spear throw was the most accurate,  
In all the universe.”
27. And thinking that if Almambet remains alive,  
He will destroy us to our very roots,  
Kongurbai came upon him in the midst of densely packed ranks.  
Having discovered him in the saddle of his horse, Sarala,  
He knocked Almambet to the ground.  
And Khan Kongurbai attacked from the side.
28. At that moment, deprived of his horse Sarala,  
With the exclamation “Chymachyn!”<sup>12</sup>  
Almambet lost hope of keeping his life.  
Having been thrown from his horse,  
Almambet fell to the ground.
29. And then an uncountable number of Chinese,  
Surrounded our famous warrior,  
And began to form a ring.
30. And at that moment, Sir Kongurbai,  
(Everything he does, he does his own way,  
Just like a widow who loses her husband.)  
Moved his mount Algara to one side.  
He galloped over to his soldiers faster than an arrow.  
And with the cry, “Hold him, hold him!”  
Gave this order to his knights:  
“Take this fugitive.  
Poke out his eyes,  
And break both his arms.  
Then drag him straightaway  
To the aged ruler of Beijing!”
31. At that point the weakened Almambet,  
Despaired for a moment. He did not know what to do.

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<sup>11</sup> See the Quarrel of Almambet and Chubak to learn more about Almambet.

<sup>12</sup> May be translated as, “I am fallen!”

- And then, roused to fury, Almambet,  
Grabbed by the sheath,  
His golden sword that had descended from the heavens,  
A gift from Manas, as sharp as Ali's sword, *zulpukor*.  
Almambet unleashed his big cat spirit and began fighting ferociously.
32. Almambet started defending himself on all sides.  
Upon those who wanted to capture him with a noose,  
He launched himself with his spear.  
Almambet had no intention of putting himself,  
At the mercy of his enemies.
33. At that time the battle raged.  
And the arrows flew just like a downpour of rain.  
The bullets whistled, falling like hail.  
Syrgak, the descendent of Khan Ula,  
The clever, bold daredevil,  
Finally reached Almambet.
34. And then our Syrgak,  
In the midst of a dense rank of soldiers,  
Spotted Almambet defending himself.  
And he turned,  
The head of his horse.
35. With the cry "Yaalla!"  
Proclaiming the name of the hero "Manas!"  
Syrgak jumped into the fray.  
When he looked in front of him,  
He saw not earth, but a veritable flood of Chinese.  
And at that moment, look you,  
The Chinese engulfed him.
36. And then our Syrgak,  
Flew faster than an arrow.  
He grasped Almambet by the right shoulder,  
And lifted him off the ground,  
Just like a little child.  
He threw him onto his horse  
And to the envy of all the enemies,  
Rode away with him from the field of battle.  
Thus, Syrgak saved Almambet.
37. At that moment,  
All the Kalmyks were struck dumb.  
All the Chinese opened their mouths.

The arrows poured over them like a downpour of rain.  
The bullet fire began to descend like hail.  
Our heroes chased after them in pursuit.