

# The Quarrel of Almambet and Chubak<sup>1</sup>

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

1. From the sky-blue field clad in a sheepskin coat,  
Mounted on his horse Kökala,  
Arrayed in arms,  
His sword, as always, secured to his side,
2. Appears Chubak, the descendent of Akbalta.  
Of enormous height and shoulders broad,  
His handsome countenance bestowed by God,  
He speaks to Almambet these words:
3. “In those days when in the wide Valley Talas,<sup>2</sup>  
Together in arms stood the Argyn, Kyrgyz, and Nogai,<sup>3</sup>  
By day they amused themselves drinking *kymys*,<sup>4</sup>  
By night virgins played for them.
4. “In those days, Chinese slave,<sup>5</sup>  
My neck was encased in a collar,  
And I worshipped you like a god.  
Before your journey to Beijing,  
You evil Chinese slave,  
I requested, “Take me with you.”  
I pleaded with you then,  
Where is that oath you made to God,  
And where is that letter that you wrote?
5. “Eh, cruel fate, Chinese slave,  
When I set out on the road,

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<sup>1</sup> Almambet and Chubak are two of the warrior Manas’ forty *choro* (brave knights). Manas is the central hero of the *Manas* epic, the ancient leader of the Kyrgyz people, and the khan – king – who united the numerous tribes of the Kyrgyz and played a progressive role in the founding of the Kyrgyz nation.

<sup>2</sup> Talas is the name of Manas’ homeland, to this day located within Kyrgyzstan’s borders.

<sup>3</sup> The names of three Central Asian tribes.

<sup>4</sup> *Kymys* is fermented mare’s milk, a great favorite in Central Asia.

<sup>5</sup> Almambet was the son of the Chinese khan who came over to the side of Manas. Chubak calls him a slave in order to insult him.

- To the stalwart city of Beijing,  
You remained in the rear-guard,  
And did not think of me.
6. “You, guileless Chinese,  
Turn the head of your horse.  
Stay where you are and take heed!  
When you move in the avant-garde,  
Without thinking or guessing,  
Should I be in the rear-guard?”
7. “Chinese slave, do you heed my words?  
They approach Beijing by five different routes.  
Do you agree, Chinese slave,  
That I should go there as well?”  
Attacking Almambet,  
Spoke the hero Chubak.
8. Then Almambet said some words,  
“Eh, cruel fate, my dear Chubak,  
Set out in the avant-garde,  
And lead the soldiers to Beijing.  
Only do not scream at me all the time ‘Chinese.’  
Go and take as a trophy,  
Burulcha, the daughter of Esenkhan,  
And the Chinese governor’s daughter, Birmyskal, for yourself as prizes,”  
Spoke in response Almambet.
9. And then Chubak began once more,  
Attacking Almambet again and again:  
“You filthy pagan, Chinese slave,  
Cruel fate, be damned!  
Thus it turns out that you,  
To the khan of the Chinese people,  
Were thinking of fleeing?  
You filthy pagan, Chinese slave,  
Maybe I should smash your fort?  
Or having freed your spirit from your body,  
Rip out your belly?”
10. “The horde has many tribes of Turks,  
And so you wanted to leave us.  
You were thinking of fleeing?  
To the Chinese khan,  
Taking with you the hero Syrgak.”  
Thus the impassioned Chubak,

Said these words to Almambet.

11. And in that moment the brown eyes of Almambet  
Flashed and narrowed with anger,  
His face became so white his freckles disappeared.  
And at that moment on Almambet,  
The heavens collapsed,  
As if all at once he perceived sixty dark thoughts.  
And he said to the hero:
12. “Oh, think about it, Chubak,  
For whom do I attack Beijing?  
For whom do I advance upon the Chinese?  
Ah, think about it, Chubak!  
The great leaders of China,  
I was one of their sons,  
The military leaders gallant and brave,  
One of their sons I was.
13. “Like you, I left my father in my land,  
And moved to Talas forever  
I became a knight for the hero Manas  
So wherein lies our dispute, I do not understand, Chubak?!  
Seemingly pre-ordained by god, since you disavow my faith.  
I came from the Chinese khan to Talas.  
In service to the glorious hero Manas.  
Therein lies my fate!
14. “With my soul I embraced your faith and customs.  
Here where people do not relieve themselves sitting down,  
And the wings of their robes do not sweep the ground.  
I converted to your faith, and worship  
The Kyrgyz spirits Kalyipa and Sultan.<sup>6</sup>
15. “What a clumsy oaf are you, Chubak!  
Whom have I asked to make me khan?”  
Thus spoke Almambet.  
Prancing on his steed Sarala,  
Golden and angry Almambet,  
Blanched in anger.
16. And thus the freedom-loving warriors,  
Could no longer contain their feelings of enmity.  
And they each bared their swords as if to attack.

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<sup>6</sup> Kalyipa and Sultan are guiding spirits of the Kyrgyz and other Turkic tribes.

17. At that very moment arrived,  
The great-souled Manas.  
The hero understood everything in an instant.  
In their anger and passion, you see,  
The warriors could kill each other.  
And so the great-souled Manas,  
Separated them  
And they were reconciled forever after.