

УДК: 39(575.2)(082)

MATERIAL CULTURE IN THE KYRGYZ–KARAKALPAK EPIC “KURMANBEK”: A AS AN EXAMPLE OF WEAPONS

Anarbekova Venera Erkinbekovna¹

¹Jalal-Abad International University, Manas, Kyrgyzstan

Abstract. The article examines the Kyrgyz epic Kurmanbek and the Karakalpak epic Kurbanbek from a historical and ethnographic perspective, viewing them as artistic reflections of the hard period spanning the sixteenth to eighteenth centuries—preserved in the historical memory of Central Asian peoples as the “Kalmyk era”. In the Kyrgyz tradition, several variants of the epic have been written, whereas among the Karakalpaks it has been preserved under the title Kurbanbek and is known and existed against the Kalmyk khan Sheirkan. Although the epic is a work of artistic literature, it can also show as an ethnographic layer of evidence that reflects the nomadic society’s notions of security, the warrior’s status, social hierarchy, and martial ethics. Methods. As the empirical base, Kyrgyz and Karakalpak epic texts were used. The first method was ethnographic classification (typological) analysis: weapons and protective equipment were grouped according to their function (offensive/defensive), contexts of use (single combat, assault, defense), and their role as social markers. The second method was terminological and semantic (contextual-lexical) analysis: the meanings of military terms, their epithet patterns, and their narrative roles were interpreted within their textual contexts. Results. In the epic the analysis demonstrates that, weaponry is not merely an “attribute” but a structured system that signals of the hero’s social position and martial competence. In the Kyrgyz material, defensive equipment such as the helmet (tuulga), chest armor (charaina), and mail/lamellar armor (soot/chopkut) is portrayed not only as protecting the warrior’s body but also as a status marker that is presented also delineates the warrior’s rank. In the Karakalpak variants as well, the rtial equipment complex combines stable defensive elements with offensive weapons—such as the bow and arrows, spear, sword, and knife/dagger—thereby reflecting combat tactics as an interplay between far and close-quarters fighting is shown. Weapon names and their contexts of usage the security model of the Kalmyk era. Moreover, a number of weapon-related terms preserve cognate Turkic vocabulary, attesting to Kyrgyz–Karakalpak cultural proximity and to the transformation of shared historical experience into artistic memory. Conclusions. The weapon-related realities in the Kurmanbek/Kurbanbek epic constitutes through an important ethnographic source: its depictions of weaponry and martial equipment, it preserves in artistic form the military and social practices of the Kalmyk era, the warrior’s status, and nomadic conceptions of security. The weapons-and-armor complex in the Kyrgyz and Karakalpak texts systematically reveals historical and ethnographic parallels between the two traditions.

Keywords: Kurmanbek/Kurbanbek epic; Kyrgyz people; Karakalpak people; Kalmyks; weaponry; military clothing

МАТЕРИАЛЬНАЯ КУЛЬТУРА В КЫРГЫЗСКО-КАРАКАЛПАКСКОМ ЭПОСЕ «КУРМАНБЕК»: НА ПРИМЕРЕ ОРУЖИЯ

Анарбекова Венера Эркинбековна¹

¹Жалал-Абадский международный университет, Манас, Кыргызстан

Аннотация. В статье кыргызский эпос «Курманбек» и каракалпакский эпос «Курбанбек» рассматриваются в историко-этнографическом ракурсе как художественные отражения тяжёлого периода XVI–XVIII вв., сохранившегося в исторической памяти народов Центральной Азии под названием «калмакская эпоха». Отмечается, что в кыргызской традиции зафиксировано несколько вариантов эпоса, тогда как у каракалпаков он бытует под названием «Курбанбек» и известен мотивом борьбы против калмацкого хана Шеиркана. Хотя эпос является художественным произведением, он рассматривается и как этнографический пласт, отражающий представления кочевого общества о безопасности, статус воина, социальную иерархию и нормы воинской этики. Методы. В качестве эмпирической базы использованы кыргызские и каракалпакские эпические тексты. Первый метод — этнографическая классификация (типологический анализ): вооружение и средства защиты были сгруппированы по их функции (наступление/оборона), условиям применения (единоборство, нападение, оборона) и роли в качестве социального маркера. Второй метод — терминологико-семантический (контекстно-лексический) анализ, значение военно-оружейных терминов, их эпитетное сопровождение и сюжетная функция были интерпретированы в текстовом контексте. Результаты. Анализ показал, что вооружение в эпосе выступает не просто «атрибутом», а представляет собой определённую систему, отражающую общественное положение героя и его воинскую компетентность. В кыргызском материале такие средства защиты, как туулга, чарайна, соот/чопкут, изображаются не только как предметы, сохраняющие тело воина, но и как статусные маркеры, обозначающие его ранг. В каракалпакских вариантах комплекс воинского снаряжения, наряду со стабильными элементами защитного оснащения, включает и наступательное оружие — лук и стрелы, копье, меч, нож/кинжал, — что отражает тактику боя, основанную на сочетании дальнего и ближнего сражения. Наименования оружия и контексты его употребления раскрывают модель безопасности, характерную для калмакской эпохи. Кроме того, в части оружейной терминологии сохраняется общий тюркский лексический слой, что подтверждает культурную близость кыргызов и каракалпаков и превращение общего исторического опыта в художественную память. Выводы. Эпос «Курманбек/Курбанбек» является важным источником этнографической информации через реалии вооружения и воинского снаряжения он в художественной форме сохраняет военно-социальные практики калмакской эпохи, статус воина и представления кочевого мира о безопасности. Комплекс вооружения в кыргызских и каракалпакских текстах системно выявляет историко-этнографические параллели.

Ключевые слова: эпос «Курманбек/Курбанбек», кыргызский народ, каракалпакский народ, калмаки, вооружение, военная одежда и снаряжение

Introduction

This article describes on the Kurmanbek epic, which is depicted the historical events of the sixteenth to eighteenth centuries—as a hard period is remembered in Central Asian historical memory as the “Kalmyk era.” There are three variants of Kurmanbek epic in Kyrgyz people. In 1923, Qaim Miftakov recorded the first variant from the Manas narrator M. Musulmankulov. It consists of approximately 2,500 lines of verse. The second variant of the epic was written down and submitted in 1933 by Kalyk Akiev, it contains about 5,500 lines. The third variant was recorded in 1958 from T. Kalandarov, who lived in the resident of the Jergë-Tal district of the Tajik SSR, and comprises 360 lines. In addition to these three folk variants, a prose version of Kurmanbek prepared by A. Tokombaev and was published in 1924 in the Alma-Ata in journal Cholpon [1, 4]. The fifth variant was published in 1998 by the poet Asanbay Jusupbekov, it consists of 19,535 lines of verse [2, 510]. These facts show how widely the Kurmanbek epic has been performed among the people. Although a number of performers contributed to the epic’s origins, composition, and formation, however, the names of most have been forgotten and have faded from popular memory. For example, both Osmonkul Bөлөbalaev and Sarykunan Dyikanbaev learned the epic from Kalyk Akiev. From Adi Omuraliev, who is, 82-year-old inhabitant of the village of Kalmak-Kyrchyn in Suzak District, the Jalal-Abad Regional Television and Radio Company’s correspondent and journalist Rysbek Salbarov recorded on audiotape a version of the epic comprising roughly 800 lines of verse accompanied by prose narration, and has kept. No one recorded the epic from the poet Abysh Ymetaliyev, a resident of the village of Özgörüş in Üch-Terek District. Likewise, the epic was not written down from Kasym Dubanaev of the village of Zerger in Özgön District; this missed opportunity is still retold by the poet Jolboldu Alibaev and his fellow villagers. Similar examples are cited regarding well-known and unknown poets from Aksy, Nookat, Bazar-Korgon, Chatkal, and Talas, each of whom performed Kurmanbek according to their own talent and creative capacity. People still note today that no one wrote their versions down at the time, nor did the performers themselves have them dictated to anybody [2, 6].

The Kurmanbek epic is found not only among the Kyrgyz but also among their Karakalpak neighbors, where it is known as Kurbanbek. The events depicted in the epic likewise correspond to the Jungar period. In the Karakalpak version, Kurmanbek sets out against the Kalmyk khan Sheirkan. Kabul Maksetov, who prepared Kurmanbek for publication, argues that “Kurbanbek emerged before the sixteenth century, at a time when the Karakalpak people were united with the Nogais in an alliance” [3, 126]. Indeed, in Central Asia the Kyrgyz, Kipchak, Kazakh, Naiman, Nogai, Turkmen, Uzbek, and Karakalpak people—as well as tribes such as the Qongurat, Zhelden, and Kangy—repeatedly united within a single khanate and later separated again under particular historical circumstances. Consequently, their oral traditions have preserved works that share common plots and narrative patterns [1, 6]. In our analysis, two variants of the Karakalpak epic Kurbanbek are suggested. The first version performed by the bard Kurbanbay (Zhyrau) Tajibaev, recorded in 1938 by Shamet Khozhoniyazov and Sadyrbay Maulenov, and published in 2010 in Volume 22 of the multi-volume edition of Karakalpak folklore [4, 368-400]. The second variant, titled Kurbanbek Baatyr, was recorded in 1961 from K. Abdizhamilov by the bard Kyias (Zhyrau) Kairatdinov and published in Volume 45 of Karakalpak Folklore [5, 121-152].

Research Methodology

The article uses the textual materials of the Kurmanbek epic in its Kyrgyz and Karakalpak variants as its primary empirical base. As the first method, an ethnographic classification (typological) analysis was used. Material culture elements attested in the epic (weaponry,

clothing, and terms for objects associated with ritual practices) were classified into thematic groups, and their functions (martial, economic, traditional), contexts of use, and significance as social markers were systematized. As a result, the ethnographic content of these units was identified in relation to practices shaped by the security and mobility conditions characteristic of the Kalmyk era. As the second method, a terminological and semantic (contextual-lexical) analysis was applied. Using this approach, weapon-related lexemes were chosen from the texts and their meanings were interpreted within their contexts. The analysis interpreted the figurative and empirically grounded ethnographic features reflected in the use of these terms, their functional significance (e.g., weapons as markers of status), as well as the artistic mechanisms that reinforce ethnocultural specificity". The combined use of these two methods made it possible to analyze material culture in the epic as an ethnographic source and to substantiate its capacity to preserve historical memory.

Results

In folk usage, *kural* ("weapon/tool") and *jarak* ("arms/armament") form a near-synonymous paired expression that, through historical development, has converged into a unified concept of "military equipment/armament". This convergence can be explained by the transformation of utilitarian tools and implements into items with military functions in response to evolving social needs. The emergence of weaponry was appeared to the growth of production and pastoral economy, as well as to the living conditions of steppe societies organized in tribal formations. Key factors included defense against external threats, the pursuit of dominance through the use of force, the accumulation of wealth, and the expansion of pasturelands [6, 71].

Analyzing folkloric information helps to trace the origins of weaponry and to identify its historical layers. For instance, in the Kyrgyz Kurmanbek epic, martial weapons are depicted as follows:

Чарайна , соот , туулга ,	Charaina, mail armor, and a helmet,
Жалаң темир кийинген,	Clad entirely in iron,
Кыраан бүркүт сыяктуу	Like a fierce golden eagle,
Кабактары түйүлгөн,	Their brows tightly knit—
Капаланган бирөө жок [1, 17].	there is not a single sad person.

In the late medieval period, helmets underwent few changes and continued in use into ethnographic times. Protective garments worn in battle to safeguard the warrior's body—often described as bullet-resistant—were generally referred to as chopkut, soot (armor), and ton (a protective coat), a terminology also attested in the Manas epic [8, 163-164].

In the Kurmanbek epic, chopkut is described as follows:

Телтору ат болсо мингеним,	If I were to ride a dappled (Tel Toru) horse,
Темир чопкут ичинде,	I would be clad in an iron chopkut (armor),
Телегей болсо кийгеним,	If my garment were broad and flowing,
Элимдин зарын эске албай,	Yet I would not heed the anguish of my people...
Болобу бекер жүргөнүм? [9, 93].	Could I live on in idleness, doing nothing?

Armor not only protected the warrior's body but also signaled his rank. Archaeological finds from burial sites and images carved on rock surfaces indicate that in the medieval period such armor was used by ruling elites, prominent military commanders, and selected heavy-armed warriors. In terms of manufacture, armor made of interlinked iron rings (chain mail) was used. It is also possible to discern warriors' armored jackets and waist-belts fashioned from iron plates. Depictions of such plated (chopkut) armor most often seem to represent high-ranking, heavily armed Turkic soldiers [15, 290]. Warriors referred to armor worn in battle—such as the charaina—as *kīyak* (cf. Mong. *quyag*). Research likewise confirms that among the Yenisei Kyrgyz one type of military clothing was also called *kīyak*, and that it remained in use until the early eighteenth century [10, 209].

Бала баатыр Курманбек,	The young hero Kurmanbek,
Башында темир туулга,	With an iron helmet on his head,
Көөдөндө, соот чарайна,	And on his chest, armor and charaina,
Сексендеги эр Экез	Faced the eighty-year-old warrior Ekez—
Карсылдашты далайга [1, 25].	They clashed again and again.

In the Karakalpak epic, the hero Kurbanbek got married with Shemshiya Sulu, the daughter of Seiilkhan, as his wife; he defeats and subjugates his enemies, offers assistance to ordinary people in a place called Temirlan, turns his pasturelands into a flourishing (green and well-watered) area, pitches his own *örgö* (orda/camp), and lives in prosperity together with his spouse.

Жуптан айыл шалады,	Building pair villages ,
Нийетим мениң ғазап деп,	Intent on bringing suffering,
Сазлап ерлеп алады.	He adjusted his horse tack,
Жаў куралы бес курал,	Girded on the enemy's "five weapons" (full battle set),
Курсанып беле орады,	And strapped his arms to his waist.
Бадана саўытын кийип,	He donned his chain mail,
Қалқанын беле байлады,	Fastened his shield at his belt.
Жедел берип өзине,	Making haste, fully prepared,
Қара атқа минип алады [5, 122],	He mounted his black horse.

The shield (*qalqan*) was a key item of defensive equipment for Turkic warriors. In Turkic languages it is designated by the term *qalqan*, which also has parallels in the Mongolic languages [11, 19].

In the Kyrgyz epic:

Баарысы тегиз жылтырап,	All of them gleamed evenly,
Туулга соот кийинсе [1, 18]...	Once they donned their helmets and armor...
Қара каз тулпар минейин,	Let me ride strong black warhorse,
Жалама соотту кийейин,	Let me put on my lamellar armor,

Жалгыз келген баланы,	The youth who came a lone,
Чымырканып качырып,	Startling him into flight—
Чындап найза салайын,	Then truly thrust with my spear,
Байкайынчы ошонун	And see for myself
Баатырлык, бакты, таалайын! [1, 58].	His valor, his fortune, his fate!

The moment Bakburkhan finished speaking, he lay in wait on the slope of Bas Döbö, having unfurled his banner and wheeled his horse about—yet he failed to drive off the young hero Kurmanbek:

- Казкара тулпар ат минип,	Riding a dark black stallion warhorse,
Кабаттап темир соот кийип.	Layering on iron armor,
Качырды Бакбур баланы,	Bakbur drove the boy into flight,
Ат куйругун шарт түйүп... [1, 59].	With his horse's tail tightly knotted...
Алтын соот күрөөкөн,	O elder, your armor is gold,
Сөгүлгөн чалым, эсенби?	Strong and seasoned—are you well?
Күлүгүн аяп уулунан,	An old man who spared his swift steed for his son,
Бөлүнгөн чалым, эсенби? [1, 108].	O elder separated one, are you well?

Kurmanbek of the Kyrgyz, having gathered forty warriors from among the Kyrgyz and Kipchak people, completed the full band of forty warriors. With his forty men at his side, he reached out against enemies on all fronts, striking down their heros and strongmen and earning the name “the young hero.” He prepared forty black horses for his forty companions and equipped them with a complete set of martial gear—charaina armor, helmets, chopkut armor, shields, battle-axes, spears, swords, rifles, and even a shalk etme, a weapon used for swift close combat—thereby bolstering his men’s morale. By then, he himself had reached the age of sixteen. Determined to avenge the humiliation of the Kyrgyz and Kipchaks at the hands of the Kalmyks, Kurmanbek declares that he will go to the Kalmyks and reclaim their lost vengeance and grievance.

Үзөнгүтө бут салып.	Placing his foot in the stirrup,
Кырк жигити жанында	With his forty warriors at his side,
Кыраандын көөнү шаттанып,	The valiant one’s spirit exulted;
Өзү жыйырма, үч жашында	At the age of twenty-three,
Ок өтпөскө жасаткан	He wore upon his head an iron helmet,
Темирден туулга башында.	Made to withstand bullets,
Чарайнасы тагылуу [1, 13].	With his charaina strapped on.

In Karakalpak epics, weapons of war are primarily represented by the saryjai, spear, sword, armor, shield, helmet (tuulga/duwlyga), battle-axe, mace, and others. By function, these

weapons can be grouped into three categories. The first comprises long-range weapons: the bow and arrows (*okjai*) and its arrows, and the *qoramsaq* (quiver/*kolchan*), i.e., an arrow-case; in general, this set is referred to as a *saadak*. The second category contains close-combat weapons: spear, sword, axe, mace, and others. The third category includes defensive equipment: armor, shield, helmet, and related items [7, 53].

Another type of sword mentioned in the epic is the curved sword (*iymek kylych*, “curved blade”), also referred to as *semser* (*shamshar*). According to historical sources, *shamshars* emerged in the seventh to eighth centuries and, although not completely, to a certain extent replaced the straight sword. The difference is that the straight sword was used by heavily armed cavalry, whereas the *shamshar* was more suitable for lightly armed mounted warriors [7, 36].

Шет жерлерге араласқан,	He ventured into foreign lands;
Қарсыласса қас душпан,	When a mortal foe stood against him,
Қылыш урып қан шашқан,	He struck with his sword and spattered blood—
Ерғара деген бай болды [5, 121].	Thus Ergara became a wealthy man.

Deste is used to denote the *shamshar*’s handle (grip); the text specifically notes that it is made of bone and draws attention to the blade’s curvature.

Кумыры бийдей енди бий,	The biy Kumary gives him a keen (damask) dagger,
Алмас канжар береді,	Handing over the dagger,
Берип, сөйлеп, канжарды...	He said...
Жылай берди Кумыры бий,	Kumary biy wept,
Қурбанбекти ғош жигит,	And—over a brave young man like Kurmanbek—
Басына канжар салады [4, 384].	He raised the dagger to his head.

One of the close-combat weapons is the dagger (*kanzhar*). Although it is neither as widely used nor as frequently described as the sword, it stands out as a distinctive weapon with its own specific function. For example, the dagger could be used after single combat to humiliate a defeated strongman or hero. In the *Alpamysh* epic, there is an episode in which *Alpamysh* defeats *Karazhan* in wrestling and is said, about to mock him. All of this suggests that, according to certain regularities, the requirements embedded in national everyday traditions were preserved across different historical stages, or in some cases were set aside [7, 63]. In Turkic languages, the notion of “dagger” is conveyed through a number of borrowed terms. The most widespread across the Turkic linguistic area is the Arabic loanword *xanjar*, first attested in fourteenth-century Khorezmian written monuments [11, 15].

The next weapon considered in the analysis is the spear, which in the *Karakalpak* tradition is depicted as follows in the battle between the giant *Alshagyr* and *Kurbanbek*:

Алшағырдай дөйүне,	Against a giant like Alshagyr,
Керилип урды ақ найзаны.	He thrust his white spear with full force.
Батырдың кеўлин тындырды,	The hero's heart was put at ease;
Деўдин кийген саўыты,	His spear bent and broke
Найзаны бүклеп сындырды...	The giant's armor...
Атлардан жерге түседі,	They dismounted to the ground,
Жаў-жарағын шешеді,	Stripped off their war-gear,
Хәрким онашын алып,	Each took up his club (mace),
Керип урды кулашты [5, 136].	And fought, striking with all their might.

Here the weapon the spear is described. The spear has been known since the tenth to eighth centuries BCE. It was most often used in single combat between heroes. In epic texts it is described through such poetic epithets as the “white spear” and the “bell-adorned spear”.

This suggests that its spearheads may have been made of high-quality, rust-resistant steel. The “bell-adorned spear” appears to have been used for specific purposes: to provoke the enemy, unsettle him, and weaken him through psychological pressure. At the same time, the bell-adorned spear—i.e., a spear fitted with a bell—also functioned as a ceremonial and decorative item. The epic materials indicate that it was produced by specialist craftsmen who employed ornamentation techniques as extensively as possible.

Thus, the spear can be regarded as a product of Karakalpak traditional craftsmanship. As an artisanal object, it stands out for its aesthetic refinement, practical ergonomics (maneuverability), and historical significance [7, 65].

Курбанбектей гош жигит,	A brave youth like Kurbanbek,
Басына канжар салады,	He set a dagger to his head,
Баудай басын кеседі,	Cut off his head like a stalk of wheat,
Суудай канын ишеді,	And drank his blood like water.
Келлесин кесип залымның,	Severing the villain's head,
Найзаның ушына миндирип,	He mounted it upon the spear's tip,
Залымның атын жетелеп,	Leading the villain's horse by the reins,
Алдында енди Курбанбек [4, 382].	Kurbanbek went on ahead...

The spear (kop'yo) was the primary offensive thrusting weapon of the Turkic warrior. It consisted of a long shaft with a stone, bone, or metal spearhead (arrowhead/point) fixed at the tip. It formed part of the standard martial equipment of both lightly armed mounted warriors and heavily armored cavalry. In Old Turkic written monuments, the spear is attested as *sünüg* ~ *süngü* (< *siŋ-*), deriving from a verb meaning “to enter, pass through, pierce, penetrate.” The Proto-Turkic form *siŋgü* spread widely across Turkic languages in various phonetic variants: Turkmen *sünği*; Kazakh and Nogai *süngi*; Kyrgyz *süngü*; Karachay-Balkar and Kumyk *siŋgü*; Tatar *söŋgi/söŋgo*; Bashkir *söŋö/söŋgö/höŋgö*; Karakalpak *süngü*; and Uyghur *sünüg* [11, 12].

Later, in Turkic languages, earlier terms for the spear were changed by the Persian loanword *najza* (originally [nejze]). According to written sources, both *najza* and *zyda* had several types of spearheads [11, 12].

Here is the meeting of Kurmanbek with his brother Sultan:

Атым Султан Қараман.	My name is Sultan Karaman.
Алтын тажы басында,	A golden crown is upon my head,
Екки арыў қасында,	And at my sides are two noble argymaks.
Садағын аузы шапшақлы,	The mouth of my quiver is wide,
Атыңның мойны қылшақлы,	My horse's neck is beautiful and well-built.
Садағында салганын,	In my quiver are the arrows I have set,
Еле жәўхар пышақлы [4, 374].	And at my waist is my precious jeweled dagger.

The main weapons of Turkic warriors included the bow and arrows, dagger, axe, and mace, along with associated equipment such as the *saadak* set, belt-girdles, quivers (*kolomsoq/kolchan*), and armor. These weapons and items of gear were produced by local craftsmen, while some were procured by warriors themselves to meet their specific martial needs. Among the armaments of Turkic warriors, bows and arrows are most frequently attested as primary weapons compared to other types of gear [12, 43-46]. Arrowheads were made of iron and, depending on their form, were produced in a range of designs—three-bladed, triangular, quadrangular, rhomboid, and round—of various sizes. Some arrows were fitted with bone whistle components that produced a whistling sound in flight; similar examples made of bone and wood are also known.

However, these types of arrows were used on the battlefield primarily against lightly equipped opponents whose bodies were not protected by armor [13, 115-116]. In Turkic societies, arrows functioned not only as weapons of war but also carried significance as symbols of delegated authority [14, 233]. As protective armor (*soot/chopkut*) became widely used in military practice, warriors shifted to employing new types and forms of combat arrowheads.

Especially in the ninth to tenth centuries, narrow, longer armor-piercing arrowheads—rhomboid, triangular, and quadrangular—came into wide use, and the earlier three-bladed arrowheads began to lose their prominence. In the period from the tenth to the fourteenth centuries, arrowheads with flat, lens-shaped, and rhomboid forms became increasingly widespread. Such changes confirm that the bow remained widely used in Central Asia both before and after the Mongol period. The evolution in manufacturing forms was driven by wartime demand: flat arrowheads did not require much time to produce, making it possible to supply warriors with the necessary arrows within a short period. By using larger arrowheads, it was possible to inflict severe wounds on light cavalry and infantry, making it easier to take them out of action on the battlefield [15, 286]. A *saadak* is a container or pouch for arrows; it was made from leather, rawhide straps, felt, *taar* (woven cloth), or thin sheet metal. Its surface and mouth were decorated in various ways, and its edges were adorned with tassels or fringes. Two different types of straps were attached to the *saadak*: one for slinging it over the shoulder and another for hanging it from a belt. The size of the *saadak* was made according to the number and length of arrows. It was used by warriors and hunters. The verse lines cited above likewise refer to the *saadak*'s wide arrow-opening.

Қырық садақшы қалмақтың,	Forty Kalmyk archers,
Қырқ хасыл зор мергени,	Forty noble master hunters,
Султандайын ғош жигит...	Against the hero youth Sultan...
Омыраўдан қырық мерген,	Forty archers, aiming at his chest,
Парлатып окту атады.	Loosed their arrows in a flash.
Султан атлы батырдың,	The armor of the hero named Sultan
Саўытлары сөтилди,	Armor was pierced through,
Бели жандай бүгилди [4, 376].	And his waist bent like a bow.

A bow is a handheld weapon used for shooting arrows. It consists of a flexible, springy curved stave (made of wood and sometimes reinforced with bone and horn overlays) and a bowstring that draws the stave tight. In the written monuments of the Karakhanid and Chagatai periods, the bow is denoted by the word *ja*. The etymology of *ja* has not been definitively identified. In various phonetic forms, *ja* remains the principal term for “bow” in many modern Turkic languages: Turkmen *ja:j*; Turkish, Gagauz, Azerbaijani, Nogai, and Crimean Tatar *jaj*; Uzbek *joj*; Kazakh *zaj*, *zaq*; Kyrgyz *ža:;* Karachay-Balkar *jaja*; Tatar *jaja*; Bashkir *jaja*, *jaq*; Karakalpak *zaj*; Altai *da:;* Uyghur and Yellow Uyghur *_/o*; Khakas *ca.jaq*, *uhca:;* Shor *ca-jaq*; Tuvan and Tofa *sa:;* Yakut *sa:;* and Chuvash *su*. In Chagatai written monuments, another term for the bow is attested as the Persian loanword [katäp]. This form entered Oghuz languages (Turkish, Turkmen *keman*, Azerbaijani *kaman*) and Karluk languages (Uzbek *kamop*, Uyghur *kamal*). In general, bow names in Turkic languages are typically motivated by the object’s external appearance or the material from which it is made [11, 7].

In Kipchak-group languages—Kazakh, Kyrgyz, and Karakalpak—the meaning “arrow” is expressed not only by *oq* but also by *zebe*, a term thought to be of Mongolic origin (< Mong. *zebe*, “bow arrow”) [15, 287].

In the medieval Turkic and Mongol periods, warriors kept arrows and bows in special cases and in pouch-like *saadaks*. Arrow cases—*kolomsoqs* (quivers)—were made of wood or of layered birch bark. Depending on the design of the case, the arrowheads were stored facing either downward or upward. The bases of these cases were made of wood, while the sides were reinforced with bone and decorated with carved ornamentation. They were carried attached to the belt by iron or bronze hooks [15, 287].

Саутына жапкан маўыт.	A maut , cloth draped over his armor,
Жағасы алтын берк саўыт [4, 377]...	A coat of mail whose collar was adorned with gold.
Алған колға ақ мылтық,	A white rifle was taken in hand,
Қурманбекке атылды.	And fired at Kurmanbek.
Ақ мылтықтың тутининен,	From the rifle’s smoke,
Ай билен күнлер тutyлды [4, 377].	The moon and the sun were eclipsed.

Armor is first and foremost protective clothing. Accordingly, within folk belief that armor possesses a “life-preserving” power, “mystical” (sacral) numbers such as “seven layers” and “nine layers” were added in order to “reinforce” its perceived potency. This is because such

sacred numbers, firmly embedded in performers' consciousness, were often used to intensify an object's perceived efficacy or to endow it with a renewed, auspicious quality. Another important point is that sacred numbers were employed in connection with various national everyday concepts across different historical stages [7, 66]. Mounted heroes used both lamellar armor made of metal plates and woven (mail) armor. Under such armor, a short vest sewn from maut—a smooth woolen cloth, as noted in the example above—was worn; in historical literature this garment is referred to as a khaftan [16, 247]. In the cited passage, it is further stated that the collar of this maut garment was decorated with gold.

Turning to the firearms mentioned in the examples above, by the late sixteenth century Central Asia saw the emergence of another type of handheld firearm—the rifle (myltyq). was called myltyq. Over time, myltyq became the most widespread designation for a rifle across Turkic languages: Turkmen, Kazakh, Kyrgyz, Nogai, Karachay-Balkar, Tatar, Bashkir, Karakalpak, and Altai myltyq; Uzbek and Uyghur miltiq; Khakas myltyx; Shor myltyy; and (dialectal) Tuvan myldyk [11, 10].

Discussion. The historical-ethnographic and terminological-semantic analyses demonstrate that in the Kyrgyz Kurmanbek and Karakalpak Kurbanbek epics, the weapons-and-armor complex is not merely a decorative artistic detail. Rather, it constitutes a material-culture layer that conveys systematic information about the nomadic security model, martial competence, and social hierarchy. In the epic narratives, defensive equipment (helmet, charaina, armor/chopkut, shield) is presented not only as providing bodily protection but also as a symbolic marker that clarifies the warrior's rank and status and highlights him as part of a "selected force".

Offensive weapons (bow-and-arrows/saadak, spear, sword/semser, dagger, rifle, etc.) reliably reflect combat tactics—namely, the interplay of long-range and close-quarters engagement. Such detailed depictions, situated within the context of the "Kalmyk era," illuminate the substance of popular historical memory concerning social mobility, defensive and offensive strategies, and the hero's public mission.

Another important finding is that weapon-related terminology and its epithet patterns (e.g., poetic descriptors such as "white spear," "bell-adorned spear," and "golden armor") serve to reinforce values embedded in the ethnocultural worldview, sacral concepts, and aesthetic norms. Comparing the Kyrgyz and Karakalpak materials shows both the preservation of a common Turkic lexical layer and the presence of certain terms reflecting historical contacts. Together, these features attest to the cultural proximity of the two peoples and to the encoding of shared historical experience within epic tradition through comparable artistic mechanisms.

Thus, the Kurmanbek/Kurbanbek epic should be regarded as a valuable ethnographic source: through its depictions of weaponry and martial equipment, it preserves in artistic form military and social practices, the warrior's status, and nomadic conceptions of security.

As a future direction, it is recommended to: compare each weapon type attested in the epic more systematically with archaeological finds, museum collections, and written sources; map the terminological specificities of regional variants (linguo-ethnographic cartography); and examine, at a comparative typological level, the "status-marker" function of weaponry across other epics—especially Manas and Karakalpak heroic narratives.

References

1. Kurmanbek—Zhanysh, Baiysh: epos. Frunze: Kyrgyzstan; 1970. 384 p. (Academy of Sciences of the Kyrgyz SSR, Institute of Language and Literature).
2. Zhusupbekov A. Kurmanbek. Jalal-Abad: [publisher not specified]; 1998. 510 p.
3. Maksetov KM. Karakalpaksky epos. Tashkent: Fan; 1976. 179 p.
4. Qurbanbek. Qurbanbay jyrav Tajibaev varianty. Jazyp alganlar: Shamshiet Khojaniyazov, Sadyrbay Maulenov (1938). In: Qaraqalpaq folklori. Vol. 22. Nukus: Ilim; 2010. p. 368-400.
5. Qurbanbek batyr. Qiyas jyrav Kairatdinov jazyp algan: Q Abdizhamilov (1961). In: Qaraqalpaq folklori. Vol. 45. Nukus: Ilim; 2012. p. 121-152.
6. Khoshniyazov Zh. Qaraqalpaq qaharmanlyq dastanlarynda qural-jaraklardyn dareklik ahmiyeti. Uzbekiston Respublikasy Fanlar Akademiyasy Qoraqalpogiston boliminin Akhborotnomasy. 2012;(3(228)):70-73.
7. Khoshniyazov Kh. Milli dastanymyz—ruwhy ham materiallyq madeniyatymyzdyn hasyl ulgileri (Qaraqalpaq qaharmanlyq dastanlaryny tarihy-folklorlyq izertlew tajriybeci). Nukus: Ilim; 2018. 65 p.
8. Mamytbekov Z. Ch. Otrazhenie zhizni i bor'by kyrgyzov v epose "Manas". Bishkek: [publisher not specified]; 1993. p. 163-164.
9. Kurmanbek. Seitbek. In: El adabiyaty seriyasy. Vol. 5. Akmatalliev A, Kebekova B, Mukasov R, Sarypbekov R, Ahmedov O, editors. Bishkek: Sham; 1998. p. 93.
10. Karataev O.K, Eraliev S.N. Dictionary of Kyrgyz Ethnography. Bishkek: Biyiktik; 2005. 388 p.
11. Loseva-Bakhtiyarova T.V. Voennaya leksika tyurkskikh yazykov (nazvaniya vooruzheniya) [dissertation abstract]. Moscow: [institution not specified]; 2005. 15 p.
12. Tabaldiev K. Sh. Kurgany srednevekovykh kochevykh plemen Tyan'-Shanya. Bishkek: [publisher not specified]; 1996. p. 43-46.
13. Tabaliev K. Sh, Soltobaev O. A. Predmety vooruzheniya iz pogrebeniy Tsentral'nogo Tyan'-Shanya (I pol. II-go tysyacheletiya n.e.). In: Voennoe delo i srednevekovaya arkheologiya Tsentral'noy Azii: sbornik statey. Kemerovo: [publisher not specified]; 1995. p. 115-116.
14. Bichurin N. Ya. Sobranie svedeniy o narodakh, obitavshikh v Sredney Azii v drevnie vremena. Vol. 1. Almaty: [publisher not specified]; 1998. p. 233.
15. Kyrgyzstandyn tarykhy: bayyrky mezgilden bugunku kungu cheyin. 3 vols. Vol. 1, Bayyrky mezgilden XVII kyyymga cheyin. Asanov TI, Bedelbaev AB, Zhakypbekov ZhZh, et al., editors. Bishkek: [publisher not specified]; 2016. 648 p.
16. Amir Temur va Ulug'bek zamondoshleri hotirasida. Tashkent: O'qituvchi; 1996. 247 p.

Received / Получено 02.02.2026

Revised / Пересмотрено 22.02.2026

Accepted / Принято 20.03.2026