

Chechen Heroic “Illi” and the Ballads of the Eastern Georgian Highlanders

(similarities and differences)

Khvtiso Mamisimedishvili

Professional Biography

Khvtiso Mamisimedishvili is Doctor of Philology; he works as an Associate Professor of Ivane Javakhishvili Tbilisi State University. Prof. Mamisimedishvili is an expert on Folklore and Caucasin studies; he has participated in numerous academic conferences; he is an author of more than a hundred scholarly papers, several monographs and handbooks. Dr. Mamisimedishvili is a member and a leader of a few folklorists' expeditions. He is an author of the books *Vineyards and the Georgian Highlanders* (Publishing House „Lomisi“, Tbilisi, 1997), *Pankisi, the Past and the Present* (TSU Press, Tbilisi, 2008), *Crosses and Icons in Cultic Texts* (Publishing House „Intelekti“, Tbilisi, 2009), *Ossetian Folklore* (TSU Press, Tbilisi, 2015).

Abstract

Chechen heroic *illi* and Georgian *ballad* present precisely and powerfully the mentality of the warrior society of the Chechen and Georgian highlanders, their heroic ideals and the psychology of the people who are involved in battles on a daily basis. As a result of comparative study artistic, structural and conceptual similarities as well as differences between the two genres of folklore have been revealed.

Keywords: *Folklore, Chechen, “Illi”, Georgian Ballad.*

“Illi” is one of the most important genres of the Chechen folklore. Like the Georgian ballad, it describes the reality of the 17th, 18th and 19th cc., the heroic acts of young men, their riots as well as their battles for protecting their community and their villages, with the purpose of either revenge or rescuing their beloved ones.

A Chechen song of “Illi” presents a poem praising a particular heroic act. “Illi” like a ballad is a piece created in lyrical-epic genre, in which a dramatic plot is accompanied by the deep emotional feelings of the narrator. The Chechen Illi often consists of more than 60-70 lines and exceeds considerably the examples of Georgian heroic poetry. The folk text as a rule really exists in the moment of saying and performing. The Georgian highlanders: The Tushetians, the Pshavs and the Khevsurians just like Chechens used to perform the epic poem accompanied by a musical tune on a musical instrument. Therefore, The Khevsurians call the ballads “simghere” (from simghera - a song or singing) considering its syncretic

nature and the manner of performance. In Chechnyan the same name applies to the epic-historical poem which is called Illi that means a song.

Georgian ballads and the Chechen “Illi” have similar ideologies, similar moral values. These two genres of folklore present accurately and strikingly the mentality of the Chechen and Georgian highlander warrior societies, their heroic ideals, the psychology of the people involved in fighting on a daily basis. The ideal hero of the Georgian ballad is called „კაი კმა” “kai kma” (good fellow), which finds its equivalent in “Illi” as “дика к|ант” (dika kant), or Iah Yolu Kant“ (яхь йолу к|ант).

Georgian ballads differ from the genre of “Illi” by the glorious and eminent death: he dies with dignity and fame. According to Z. Kiknadze “the hero of the ballad leaves home with the intention of not coming back” (Kiknadze, 2001:254), since according to the Georgian epic texts, the ordinary death of a man means falling on a battlefield, while dying home, in bed equals unlucky, disgraceful and dishonorable death.

Contrary to the Georgian ballads, the Chechen Illi ends with the victory of the main character. The exception may only be one or two songs among which is “The Illi on the Fall of the Village of Daadi from Tsantaro” (Илли, чеченская..., 2011: 140-153). The victory of the hero is such a fundamental law for the texts in the genre of Illi that Khochbar, who dies in all the versions of the Dagestanian Ballad, escapes the ordeal, the flaming bonfire, finds his way through by fighting and survives in the Chechen epic song. In Chechen text the double of khochbar is called Bahadur Khushpar (Илли, чеченская..., 2011: 118-123).

In the Georgian ballad the action takes place in even more realistic circumstances. The authenticity of the story is confirmed by the detailed description of micro-toponyms and the action space. It is true that the names of Geographical locations are also mentioned in Chechen epic songs, but Illi rather frequently contains semi-fairy tale plots and tries to submit the narrated story to its own structure.

Chechen song sometimes does not reveal the first name of the character since the main hero of Illi is often an orphaned boy whose father is dead. The nameless character of the illi song is often referred to as the son of a widow. (жерочун к|ант).

In the opinion of V. Propp, a historical song is not created in the same way as are the other texts of verbal folklore. A historical song is largely created by the participant of the historical event, witness or the one who knows about the subject (Пропп, 1976: 112). In the same way as the Chechen texts of illi, in the ballads of the Georgian highlanders are based on real stories of battles, i.e. they describe real facts. Both have real people as their main characters, who in most cases knew the society in which the song was created.

A Georgian scholar researching the genre of ballad T. Makhauri, refers to several models of Georgian folk epic ballad. They are: 1. Ballads based on the stories of combats and mutual

murders. 2. An unequal fight of the hero with his enemy. 3. The theme of captivity: rescuing the hero from custody or the death of the hero in captivity. 4. The rise and fall of the hero (Makhauri, 2003: 24-42).

Chechen Illi more or less knows all these four models, but the motif of liberation of the fiancé from the violent kidnappers is presented more colorfully. Unlike the Georgian ballads, the main character of the Chechen Illi marries his liberated fiancé. Such an ending draws illi closer to the fairy tale finale.

The lower time line in the ballads of the Eastern Georgian highlands does not pass beyond the 17th c. The songs tell us about the heroic deeds and fights of boys starting from the beginning of the 17th c., when Zurab, the Duke of Aragvi fought tirelessly against the Pshavs and Khevsuians for securing his own supremacy and ending with the middle of the last century, when the masses of the Khevsurians were brought to lowland at the decision of the Soviet Government. One of the last stages of the folk performances of the Georgian highlanders is marked with passionate epic songs for those Chechen soldiers who managed to continue their fight for liberation in the mountains of Caucasus even under their deportation. (Mamisimedishvili, 1997: 56-57). After this, we may say that new songs of heroic character have not been created in Georgian folklore.

Ballad has its own specific signs, as G. Kalandadze explained “ballad is a poetic work belonging to lyrical-epic genre. It is lyrical as long as the personal feelings of the narrator are expressed in it, his/her spiritual world, while it draws near epic creations by its descriptive content. (Kalandadze, 1957: 7).

The number of characters is limited in ballads due to the tense and compact plot. According to X. Sikharulidze, “in older cycles of heroic stories the heroism is usually linked with one hero, therefore there is also one character occupies the central place in the work” (Sikharulidze, 1949: 240).

In the heroic ballads of Tusheti, Pshavi and Khevsureti the stories take place in eastern Georgia and also in the highlands of the modern day Chechnya and Ingusheti. Therefore, the folk songs reflect the toponyms originating from the neighbouring Ingusheti and Chechnya such as Maisti, Mitkho, Chante, Pkhachekha, Jarega, Tituli, Arlo water, Terelo, Teretego, Sakhano grove, Ghilgho, Khamkha, Netkhicho, Tkobaerdi, Nekapso, Timgha...

We often encounter Chechen and Ingush characters in ballad songs with first names: Istabar, Kibila, Siragha, Kortua, Astemura, Andaruko, Elimarza etc...

Ballads inform us about some of the local customs and religious beliefs of the Chechens. In spite of the rise of Islam the Chechens and Ingushs still venerated the cross and a patron saint in the beginning of the 20th c. One of the Khevsurian ballads says:

“The Kists will head towards the lowland, they called upon their cross” (Shanidze, 1931: 84).
or

“The Ghilghvs will come to Ghilgho, they called upon their cross” (Shanidze, 1931: 85).

It is a common knowledge that the word cross in the highland dialects of Georgia stood for a patron saint as well as a chapel, which the local population was seriously committed to.

It is worth noting that the Chechen characters in the Georgian heroic ballads are referred to by an ethnonym “Kisti”. The same name is used by Vazha Pshavela as a reference to the Chechens and Ingushs in his epic poems, where he creates unforgettable literary images of Kist heroes.

The Chechen as well as the Georgian folk heroic poems pose the necessary stylistic elements to be a lyrical deviation, rhetorical exclamation, address, dialogue. Unlike the Chechen heroic song, repetition of the already stated, long addresses and military appeals are not characteristic to the Georgian ballads, which describe the dramatic events more briefly and laconically. Since the texts of the “illi” genre involve the motifs characteristic to fairy tales as well as ballads, we may consider that these two genres preceded the formation of “illi”. As they assume “at the earlier stage of development when ballad was a song designed for a team-dance, its text was distinguished by being short and when the song eventually parted with the dance and ballad turned into a narrating poem, its length and size also increased. Therefore relatively later ballads appear as fairly long poems of lyrical-epic character”.

Fundamental difference between the Georgian ballads and Chechen heroic songs is the finale. The hero of a Georgian ballad mainly dies on the way in a duel (pkhoveli and Shavaneli, I encountered a Kipchaq, Ghamberd and Shakhana, etc...). Therefore the Georgian “Singhere” (song) only conveys the final minutes of the life of the main character. Whereas, the Chechen illi describes the victory of the hero over the enemy and his safe return home. In spite of differences the thematic of the Chechen illi and the main motifs are not alien to the Georgian ballad and vice versa, we might encounter the particulars of the Georgian heroic ballad in the texts of Chechen song. In both of them the action sometimes takes place in the same dimension of time and space. Such structural and conceptual links between the Georgian highlanders and the Chechen people were formed as a result of a long term close relations between them.

Georgian characters in Chechen heroic songs

Like the Georgian ballads, in the Chechen heroic songs we encounter the theme of the relationship with neighbours. Georgian characters, single motifs related to Georgia and its beliefs are reflected in the following Chechen songs *Illi about the highlander shepherd*, *Ili about Zhamirza; the Son of Madi from Chechen*; *Illi about the Georgian Prince Anzor and an*

Ossetian Virgin; Illi about the fall of the village of Daad from Tsantaro; Illi about the Anzor's Daughter, Zaze; etc... (Илли, чеченская..., 2011).

In the songs of Illi genre Georgia and the Georgians are rather hyperbolized. Georgia is presented in the Chechen songs as a mighty, glorious, rich country and the Georgians appear as athletes who are often just and kind, sometimes arrogant and brutal invincible conquerors.

In the Chechen illi about a Mountain Shepherd a young fellow visits Kadar the mullah with a request of explaining his dream. At his arrival in Dagestan, he sees a few mullahs sitting cross-legged on a Georgian carpet while they are studying wisdom from books. The text about the origins of the carpet draws the reader's attention rather especially. The word "Georgian" in this case implies to the high quality of the thing or an object since the mullahs were meant to sit on the best carpet, which according to the spirit of the text could have only been the Georgian one. On the other hand, in this particular episode of the song mentioning an object of the Georgian origin may actually be indicating a real situation. As it is commonly known, during the attacks by the Leks, the Dagestani feudals were removing from Georgia objects of treasure, which were meant to be used for different purposes. The Georgian carpets were so famous in northern Caucasus by their high quality that they obtained a special place even in Chechen heroic songs.

According to the same song, Georgia was regarded as the richest sight recalling an image of a fairy tale country where one can find and access the most inaccessible thing on earth. In order to learn the meaning of his strange dream, the Chechen young man is required to accomplish the order of a wise old man Insi Iraskha: He has to bring to him the right shoulder of a special lamb that should allow him to tell his fortune. The shepherd boy could not find even in that very "Great Georgia" a seven year old white lamb that would not have even one white hair, in the end he finds one in Tusheti (Илли, чеченская..., 2011: 47).

The song about Zhamirza, the son of Madi from Chechan tells us about the failed march of the Georgian general Ortham to Chechan-Aul. Ortham surrounded the village by his troops and request the Beautiful Albika to be given to him. Yet, Jamirza who returned from his trip unexpectedly beheaded the Georgian general (Илли, чеченская..., 2011: 59-71). The defeat of the Georgian general is considered as the greatest heroic act in the song.

The song about the Georgian prince Anzor and an Ossetian girl is based upon the same motif. According to the song the Georgian prince fell in love with an Ossetian girl, who was the youngest sister to her five brother. Prince Anzor promises that he will not ravage Vladikavkaz, he will not destroy the mosque, will not touch the population of the city: he will not hurt either women or children if the girl is given to him. Prince Anzor let a huge army head towards the city. On the third day of the battle the brothers of the girl fell on the battlefield one by one. The wounded eldest brother asked his sister to run to Chechnya on horseback and ask for help. As it happened, The Chechen Zaitan Shikhmirza from the village

Gexi helped the Ossetian girl, he defeated the countless army and forced the Georgian prince Anzor to run away from the battlefield. The survived brothers gave their sister to Zaitan Shikhmirza as a sign of gratitude (Илли, чеченская..., 2011: 95-101).

Both Chechen songs present their antiheroes as mythologized Georgian characters equipped with special powers. Both - the General Ortam and the prince Anzor emerge into a real world from the world of almost a fairy tale or demonism in order to kidnap a beautiful princess (ძებოთუბნახვო). They stand out by their arrogance and cruelty. Both ballads are constructed on traditional epic episode called *Battle for the Fiancée*. Even though in a different song called *the ballad about the fall of the village of Daad from Tsantaro* the theme of military-political confrontation is dominant. Daadi from Tsantaro built a new Aul – Dada-Yurt, the military groups of which terrified the princes of surrounding or remote areas. The aul used to get refilled by the stolen sheep and precious goods which was equally distributed to the villagers by Daad from Tsantaro. The princes of neighbouring and remote areas who were bothered by the Daad's attacks, addressed the Padishah Emperor for help. Padishah sent a messenger to Georgia on the same day and ordered a Georgian commander to destroy the village of Daad from Tsantaro. The Georgian commander according to the illi was sitting in his garden and listening to music performed on zurna, he was drinking Georgian wine and eating a smoked barbeque. He sent numerous soldiers to Chechnya headed by a proud giant Anzor. The illi has an immensely thrilling episode. It conveys using traditional elements the preparation of the Dada-Yurt population for the great war, their self-sacrifice and their death. The illi describes the giant prince Anzor as especially brutal who did not spare the village population, neither women, nor children and the elderly (Илли, чеченская..., 2011: 140-153). However, it is commonly accepted in history that Dada-Yurt has never been conquered by a Georgian commander. It was destroyed in 1819 by a Russian general A. Ermolov. Georgian commanders in alliance with the Russians might have been taking part in the expedition led by general A. Ermolov among the others, that would contribute to creating an image of enemy our of the Georgians in the eyes of the Caucasian people. I think that the mythological beliefs about Georgia and the Georgian people in Chechen songs must be originating from the times, when the Georgian kings and princes used to organize grand expeditions in northern Caucasus with the purpose of spreading Christianity and securing their political influence. According to I. Munaev the real historical and military-political events were turned by folklore into the traditional epic topics describing the battle conducted for acquisition of one's wife (Илли, чеченская..., 2011: 227).

The song about Anzor's daughter Zaze presents the Georgian character of the host of the Chechen fellow. Who makes such a sacrifice that is practically impossible in real life (Мунаев, 2011: 134-139). The foundation of illi is a Chechen folklore impression of Georgian hospitality and best hosting tradition. Everything starts with a fairy motif: a nameless main character, a Chechen orphan saw in his dream Zaze, the beautiful daughter of prince Anzor. The young man being hopelessly in love said farewell to his mother and went to Georgia

where the Anzor's daughter lived. He bravely greeted gathered Georgians on his arrival and asked them who was the oldest and who was the wisest in the village. One of the villagers realized that he needed a host and asked him to his own house. The Georgian host first gave the Chechen boy delicious dishes, meat and alcohol, then asked him about the purpose of his visit. The stranger opened up his heart to the Georgian host:

“I dream of at night and see in front of my eyes during a day
Zaze, the beautiful daughter of Anzor the Georgian
I am drying like a tree without water in wilderness
Heartbroken by her majestic beauty
And I came to see the one I have not seen yet
In real life clearly
And after seeing her I will not leave without Zaze” (Илли, чеченская..., 2011: 137).

It turned out that Zaze had given a promise of marriage to the Georgian man. In spite of this, the host in his kindness managed to suppress his own feelings for the woman, took the feelings of the guest to his heart and persuaded Zaze to marry the Chechen fellow instead.

Anzor is probably the most widespread name of a nobleman in the texts of Chechen illi . Majority of the Georgians in Chechen songs are called Anzor as unusual as it may sound. The Georgian tradition does not know the female name Zaze at all. It is true that the song about the Anzor's daughter Zaze combines fairy elements, but it is redesigned according to local reality and is attuned to the folk customs. This detail emphasizes the trustworthiness of the story and grants the episode an artistic credibility.

The earlier time reflected in Chechen epos is the epoch of the saga and goliaths. The mythical period of the battles between the daeva and heavenly beings preceded historical time in Georgian folk tradition. According to Z. Kiknadze, the fight of the ballad hero against internal and external enemies presents the archetypal paradigms of the battles between the patron saints of the village community and daevas (Kiknadze, 2008: 259). As a result of the battles between daevas and patron saints were created the military and religious societies of the highlands of eastern Georgia. According to U. Dalgath, “The Heroic-epic texts differ from the sagas of Erstkhо population by the emphasis on local-ethnographic side. It presets not only such traditional epic themes as a fight for a fiancé, driving away cattle, tradition of revenge, but also historical-patriotic themes” (Далгат, 1972: 209).

Illi is not an epos in its classical understanding, since its heroes are not related to one another like they are in sagas. However, in Chechen heroic songs we encounter the same kinds of tropes that were characteristic to ancient epen. According to I. Munaev, the existence of such artistic elements in the texts of illi must be conditioned by the influence and authority of the epos about the saga of the Erstkhо (Илли, чеченская..., 2011: 16). The hand-to-hand

fighting of the hero against the enemy is presented by illi in a form of hyperbolic formula reflecting the time of the fight:

|уьйранна болийна т|ом суьйренга белира,
Суьйранна болийна т|ом |уьйренга белира»
„The battle that started in the morning lasted till the evening,
The battle that started from the evening lasted till the next morning“
(Илли, чеченская..., 2011).

Presenting a battle this way is more characteristic to a fairy epos. In general, even though the heroic songs that are dedicated to the heroic acts committed by particular people belong to the later period of folk oral tradition, but we find some fairy-mythological elements in them.

Bibliography:

Kalandadze, G.

1957 *Georgian Folk Ballad*, Tbilisi.

Kiknadze, Z.

2001 *The Will of Avtandil*, The publishing House Merani, Tbilisi.

Kiknadze, Z.

2008 *Georgian Folklore*, TSU Press, Tbilisi.

Mamisimedishvili, Kh.

1997 *The Vainakh and the Georgian Highlanders*, Publishing House Lomisi, Tbilisi.

Makhauri, T.

2003 *Georgian Folk Heroic Ballad*, Publication “Lomisi”, Tbilisi.

Sikharulidze, Kh.

1949 *Georgian Heroic Historical Oral tradition*, TSU Press, Tbilisi.

Anthology of Folk Poetry

2010 *Anthology of Folk Poetry*, Compiled by Z. Kiknadze and T. Makhauri, Publishing House Memkvidreoba, Tbilisi.

Далгат У. Б.

1972 Далгат У. Б., Героический эпос чеченцев и ингушей, исследование и тексты, издательство «Наука», Москва.

Илли, чеченская...,

2011 Илли, чеченская народная поэзия (илли, узама), Составитель Мунаев И. Б., ФГУП «ИПК «Грозенский рабочий», Грозный.

Пропп В. Я.

1976 Пропп В. Я., Фольклор и историческая действительность. Избранные статьи. «Наука», Москва.