

## SIMILARITIES BETWEEN UZBEK AND ENGLISH EPIC TRADITIONS

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### Abstract

This article presents a comparative analysis of epic traditions belonging to two ancient literary cultures – Uzbek and English peoples. The study examines similarities and differences between their epics, focusing on narrative structure, thematic features, heroic ideals, and cultural values embedded in these works.

### Keywords

epic, folklore, poetic form, heroic epos, epic narrative, mysticism, intercultural dialogue, literature

**Introduction.** The epic, as a syncretic genre of folk oral creativity, occupies a central place in the cultural and artistic heritage of the Uzbek people. It serves as a poetic chronicle of the nation, reflecting its historical experience, worldview, moral ideals, and social values. Each epic embodies the people's perceptions of justice, truth, freedom, heroism, and the struggle for noble ideals. Epics also preserve spiritual and philosophical reflections, religious beliefs, and exemplary heroes who embody the aspirations of their society

In traditional Uzbek culture, epic performance follows a specific ritualistic pattern. Epics were usually recited from late autumn to early spring during evening gatherings. Festive events often required the presence of a *baxshi* (folk bard). The performance began after a small feast, followed by lyrical preludes (*terma*) that prepared the atmosphere for the epic recitation. After polling the audience's preference through the term "What shall I sing?" (*Doston terish*), the *baxshi* would begin the epic chosen by the listeners.

Prominent Uzbek epics such as *Alpomish* could be performed over several days or even months. Historical accounts mention that in the late 18th century, Amin *baxshi* performed *Alpomish* for three uninterrupted months without boring his audience. The magnitude of the Uzbek epic tradition is further evident in the

existence of multiple schools, each with its unique performing principles and stylistic norms.

Uzbek epics are diverse not only in quantity but also in thematic and semantic depth. They encompass themes such as heroism, love, devotion, and adventure, though each epic has its own dominant idea. Even if certain motifs or plot structures overlap, the artistic interpretation often distinguishes one epic from another. For example, although *Alpomish*, *Oshiq G'arib and Shohsanam*, and *Tohir and Zuhra* share common narrative types, their conceptual focus assigns them to different categories – heroic and romantic epics respectively.

Scholars such as V. M. Zhirmunskiy, H. T. Zarifov, M. S. Saidov, T. Mirzayev, and B. Sarimsoqov have developed various classifications of Uzbek epics, differentiating them into heroic, romantic, historical, battle narratives, and epics preserved through both oral and written sources.

Epics worldwide have traditionally addressed social, moral, and philosophical issues, celebrating values such as patriotism, bravery, loyalty, friendship, and altruism. Early examples of world epics include Homer's *Iliad* and *Odyssey*, Dante's *Divine Comedy*, and Firdausi's *Shahnameh*. Depending on their subject matter and narrative approach, epics can be heroic, adventure-based, romantic, didactic, mythological, or historical.

This article specifically examines the similarities between the Uzbek epic *Alpomish* and the Old English epic *Beowulf* – two monumental heroic narratives from distinct cultures but with noteworthy parallel elements.

**Comparative Analysis of *Alpomish* and *Beowulf*.** Both *Alpomish* and *Beowulf* are products of ancient warrior cultures and portray central heroes embodying the highest virtues of their societies. They fight for justice, protect their people, and confront supernatural or malevolent forces.

#### **Shared Characteristics.**

1. **Heroic Ideals:** Both protagonists – *Alpomish* and *Beowulf* – are depicted as unparalleled warriors, ready to sacrifice their lives for the welfare of their people.
2. **Warrior Ethos:** Both epics emerge from societies that glorified martial skills. The heroes' physical strength, courage, and loyalty are celebrated throughout the narratives.
3. **Struggle Between Good and Evil:** The central theme in both works is the triumph of good over evil. Each hero battles destructive forces that threaten societal harmony.

4. **Mythological and Supernatural Elements:** Just as Beowulf confronts Grendel, Grendel's mother, and a dragon, Alpomish also faces supernatural adversaries as well as treacherous foes.

5. **Loyal Companions:** Alpomish is accompanied by his faithful friend Qorajon, while Beowulf is supported by Wiglaf. These relationships symbolize loyalty and camaraderie.

6. **Royal Lineage:** Both heroes are born into noble families, receiving military and leadership training from their fathers. Elements of early state governance are evident in both epics.

### Major Differences.

1. **Form of Transmission:** *Beowulf* is a written literary work preserved in a single manuscript, though its author remains unknown. It has undergone minimal alteration. *Alpomish*, however, is a product of oral tradition and has evolved across centuries, recorded only in the 20th century from oral performance.

2. **Genre Features:** *Beowulf* contains stronger mythological and legendary elements. *Alpomish* integrates both poetic and prose sections, reflecting typical oral-epic stylistics.

3. **Cultural Orientation:** *Beowulf* reflects Anglo-Saxon pagan and early Christian worldview, whereas *Alpomish* embodies Turkic-Islamic cultural values shaped in Central Asia.

4. **Narrative Structure:** The structure of *Beowulf* is linear and unified. *Alpomish* contains numerous variants, digressions, lyrical passages, and improvisational elements typical of oral epics.

Despite these differences, both epics play foundational roles in their respective national literatures and continue to be revered.

**Conclusion.** Although *Alpomish* and *Beowulf* originate from distinct linguistic, cultural, and historical contexts, they share numerous thematic and structural parallels. Both are heroic epics emphasizing bravery, loyalty, patriotism, and the triumph of good over evil. Their differences lie mainly in form, transmission, narrative style, and cultural symbolism.

Ultimately, each epic stands as a monumental achievement of its people:

- ✓ *Alpomish* expresses the Uzbek nation's devotion to life, hope, and love.
- ✓ *Beowulf* symbolizes Anglo-Saxon ideals of courage, sacrifice, and noble leadership.

Together, they demonstrate how different cultures can produce epics that are unique yet philosophically interconnected.

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