

# Alim Ch'ischoqwe

## THE KABARDIAN LITERARY GIANT

### Кыщокъуэ Алим (Алим Кешоков)

Alim Pschimaxwe Ch'ischoqwe (Кыщокъуэ Пщымахуэ и къуэ Алим; Keshokov) (1914-2001) was born in Kabarda in eastern Circassia (now the Kabardino-Balkarian Republic) into a peasant family of average means. His native village, Schheliqwe (Щхьэлыкъуэ; *aka* Shalushka) is situated at the foot of 'Waschhemaxwe (Уашхьэмахуэ), or Mount Elbrus (5,643m), the highest mountain in Europe, in the Chegem Region. Ch'ischoqwe (Keshoka), People's Poet of Kabardino-Balkaria, penned many works of prose and has more than 20 collections of poems. He won the prestigious Maxim Gorky Literary Prize. Ch'ischoqwe's verse breathes the air of the sunlit valleys and stern heights of his native Kabarda and sings the rich inner world of the mountain Circassian, his life, valour and love.

Online works by Ch'ischoqwe are available on this webpage.

In celebration of Ch'ischoqwe's birthday (22 July), in the newspaper [Elbrus News](#), no. 84 (4012), 25 July 2007, p3 (prepared by Raye Zhemix'we).

Short biography of [Alim Pschimaxwe Ch'ischoqwe](#) in Russian.

The following collection of poems is from his work 'Starlit Hours', which was published by Progress Publishers, Moscow, in 1981, and is one of a very small number of literary works by Circassian writers that have been translated into English.

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**OF WORDS OUR ANCESTORS WERE SPARING  
Imagined things do move me deeply...**

Of words our ancestors were sparing.  
They would send no volleys up the skies.  
Kissing their daggers before warring,  
They would never utter boastful cries.

They were true to the one inscription  
On hard steel that bore no speck of rust:  
"Do not leave your sheath without good reason,  
With glory back in it be thrust!"

A man not by his words they measured  
Only by the valour of his deeds.  
For my dealing in words so freely  
They would have censured me indeed.

Not always have I followed strictly  
The rules my forebears held so high.  
Imagined things do move me deeply  
Yet never have I stooped to lies.

Translated by Valentina Jacque

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## I HEARD THE CALL OF MOUNTAIN PEAKS

I heard the call of mountain peaks.  
My path was crossed by the raging stream.  
I ventured in and fought towards  
The cloudy mountains of my dream.

I heard the call of mountain peaks.  
The wind like ounce hit me square.  
I bore the blow, and baffled jinn  
Saw seething winds slink to their lair.

I heard the call of mountain peaks.  
A wall of fog soon hid my way.  
Yet on I plodded, like a man,  
And kept my fear of dark at bay.

I heard the call of mountain peaks.  
An avalanche came down with a roar.  
I hid myself from spates of stone,  
Then climbed undaunted as before.

I heard the call of mountain peaks.  
I dreaded looking o'er the edge  
Of precipice, yet on I climbed  
Each treacherous ledge by treacherous ledge.

Then near the top I gazed around  
At shining summits – just to see  
A younger climber who had found  
A steeper pathway above me.

Translated by Sergei Syrovatkin

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## THE CHERKESSKA

Where whispering winds above the cherry-trees float,  
Where morning's pallid coat-flaps curl,  
A bold Caucasian wore his *cherkesska* coat,  
Sewn by some dark Circassian girl.

While galloping at full stretch he'd take sure aim,  
He tried to be the ace in every race,  
And in his heart he kept his loved one's name,  
And powder in each cartridge case.

And every ploughman underneath the blue,  
And every mower above the gold,  
Bore on his breast those sixteen cartridges too,  
Which tight the black gunpowder hold.

Where waters beat down upon the stony cheek  
Of the ravine, uprearing tall,  
The *cherkesska* sat well on a waggoner's back,  
And on the general at the ball.

By generations in high honour kept,  
This custom not for nought we note:  
The face of him who on the battlefield slept  
Was covered by his *cherkesska* coat.

It might be white, like a field in hoary frost,  
Or black as a furrow in the dale,  
But the name "*Cherkesska*" never will be lost.  
To change it tongues will ever fail.

Translated by Walter May

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## THE COLOUR OF JOY

The colour of joy has for ages been white,  
Like the cherry-tree blossom in spring.  
And the crests of Elbrus, and Kazbek's jagged height  
Pure light, spotless white, to us bring.

The bell echoes over my dear native glade  
To the swallows with flashing white breasts.  
At the wedding the bride, all in white arrayed,  
Is feasting among merry guests.

But night, rolling over the high mountain bars,  
Steeps Caucasia in dark from above,  
And speaking the language of white-faced stars,  
Confesses its undying love.

And so, if my hair has begun to go white,  
It means that in broad light of day  
The herald of grief, from the herald of joy,  
Once stole his swift stallion away.

Translated by Walter May

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## **FIRE**

The red falcon of ancestral legend,  
Wings outspread in bloodthirsty greed,  
Fire swoops on its victim with relish  
And devours it with gluttonous speed.

Robbed of prey, it will weaken and languish,  
Droop and fold up its flickering wings,  
Writhe on snow or on grassland in anguish  
And expire amid a black ring.

Translated by Raissa Bobrova

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## MY NATIVE LAND

You are the height that raised us high,  
Quite often higher than earthly fame.  
You're a cherry branch, whose petals fly,  
Whose bloom is an unfamiliar flame.

You're all the past and present of bread,  
The past and present of the hearth.  
You drink the dawn sky's cup of red,  
With snow's white tablecloth beneath.

You lifted up with praise the deed,  
And therefore it is no surprise –  
Your dreams are full of prophetic seed,  
Your waking hours – their valour lies.

You will not start to vainly swear;  
You live, and count hot words not worth.  
To me, a true Caucasian here,  
My native land, you've given birth.

I'd like to break in herds you've bred,  
Bold horses on your upland heath,  
And drink the dawn sky's cup of red,  
With snow's white tablecloth beneath.

Translated by Walter May

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## **BAKHSAN**

Where the glaciers' graven profiles are white,  
Where the wind is of highwaymen's clan,  
Kind and motherly mountains swaddle you tight  
In soft fleecy clouds, Bakhsan.

Winding paths are like horse-herds' white lassos,  
And below them, be it fine or wet,  
Clear like conscience, your waters swiftly flow  
On their ancient basalt bed.

Bit and bridle jingling and eagle's scream  
At your cradle bid you farewell.  
Then to faraway sea, in a seething stream  
You rush blind, rocking trout in your swell.

Where the sea's salt waves tumble to and fro  
Crashing hard against white sand,  
I know how you long for the clouds and the snow  
Of your mother mountain, Bakhsan.

Translated by Sergei Syrovatkin