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Folklore and Folklorism in Kazakhstan

Abstract

In the sphere of traditional Kazakh folk art we can identify the following sub-spheres: a) the oral tradition itself, i.e., the traditional musical and poetical art of the Kazakhs; b) folklorism "from above," i.e., ideological (political) folklorism; c) folklorism "from below," i.e., that which appears in both city and village under the influence of folk art (pop music, "amateur talent activities," professional art, ideological folklorism, and "scientific folklorism," etc.); d) "scientific folklorism," i.e., authentic folklore that is consciously studied, reproduced, and popularized by specialists and amateurs in order to better understand and preserve it.

Analysis of the modern situation of Kazakh musical folk art shows the leading role of Kazakh traditional musical and poetical art. There are two reasons for this: a) the high professionalism of the Kazakh oral tradition, developed over the course of centuries; b) the relatively late appearance of urbanization in Kazakhstan, and its confinement to a relatively small portion of the native population.

Under the present conditions of growing urbanization, falling numbers of folklore bearers, shrinking spheres of traditional folklore, and the negative influence of ideological folklorism, "scientific folklorism" may be the only way to preserve and understand authentic folklore. Scientific folklorism also plays the important role of encouraging the modern development of the folklore itself.

Key words: Kazakh oral tradition — folklorism — folklorism "from above" — folklorism "from below" — scientific folklorism

THE MUSICAL AND POETICAL ART OF THE KAZAKHS AT PRESENT

FOLKLORISM may be defined as the professional artistic creation of folklore in all its forms: in science and in pedagogy, on the stage, at festivals and during holidays (including ceremonies), in the mass media, in recordings and advertisements, in tourism, in crafts, and in everyday life. The broadest display of the cultural phenomena of folklorism unites various often controversial manifestations, reflecting the complicated processes of cultural life. In spite of the fact that the term "folklorism" entered into scientific usage comparatively recently and originally bore a negative connotation (mainly characterizing the use of folklore in the commercial tourism industry [MOSER 1962, 1964; BAUSINGER 1961, 1969]), the folklorism phenomenon had been in existence for a long time. At present the meaning of this term has been extended to a wide range of secondary folklore in the nontraditional environment.

Traditional Kazakh musical folk art may be divided into the following basic subspheres: a) the oral tradition itself; b) folklorism "from above"; c) folklorism "from below"; and d) so-called "scientific folklorism."

a) The oral tradition is the traditional musical and poetical art of the Kazakhs. Its main characteristic under modern urban conditions has been, in my opinion, its ability not only to maintain its traditional forms of composition and performance but also to continue its development, absorbing and reworking other types of folk art. The main reason for this lies in the nature of the Kazakh oral tradition itself. The existence in this tradition of a wide and complex institution of high professionalism has, over the course of centuries, determined the respective functions of the composer and the performer. Furthermore, the fixed system of training pupils and the concert character of the performances have, in conjunction with other factors, promoted a relatively painless transition from traditional to modern forms of performance. These new forms include exhibitions on stage, television, and radio, in addition to recorded performances.

Another factor that has been of help in maintaining the traditional forms of composition in an urban context has been the fact that the cities themselves are a new phenomenon in the people's cultural life. Even now the majority of the republic's native inhabitants continues to live in rural areas. Popular performers were therefore able to adapt the familiar atmosphere of traditional popular music from their native villages (*auyls*)¹ to the new situations in which they found themselves.

Notwithstanding the fact that this performing tradition is constantly subjected to the growing influence of various kinds of "amateur talent activities"² (folklorism, modern stage, pop art, etc.), preliminary studies suggest that at the present time this tradition is the predominant one in the overall system of modern Kazakh people's art.

b) Folklorism "from above" refers to ideologically or politically motivated folklorism. In Kazakhstan, as in the entire former USSR, amateur talent activities were encouraged not only as a new form of Soviet folk art to organize the people's artistic endeavors but also as the most important means of realizing the government's official cultural policy. Every genre of traditional Kazakh art experienced the ideological influence of this policy. For instance, in the widely popular genre of *aitys* (poetry competition by folk-song performers [*akyns*]) the emphasis was always placed on patriotic and economic themes (the glorification of official party policy, socialistic production, etc.). This ideological aspect ultimately led to the genre's deterioration and loss of uniqueness.

In the cultural life of the 1920s and 1930s we can clearly observe a drive toward homogenizing the folklore of the different peoples in the USSR. One of the earliest manifestations of this drive was "folklore-creation," in which new genres and forms of folk art were introduced to areas where they had never been present before. In Kazakhstan these new forms included theatrical folk dress (which had no precursor in folk life), folk dance, folk instrument orchestras, and tourism-oriented folklore. "National characteristics" distinguishing one culture from another became empty external signs, and were exploited for the furthering of "socialist internationalism" and the "equalization" of the peoples and cultures of the USSR.

Such developments—manifestations of ideological folklorism—ultimately influenced not only the external form of folkloristic works but also their inner structure, interpretation, and representation. For example, the organization in 1934 of the first orchestra of Kazakh popular folk instruments was guided by the experience of musical performance in Europe. Founded by the academician A. Zhubanov and named after eminent *dombra*³ player Kurmangazy, the orchestra was an immediate success and led to the formation of similar ensembles throughout the

entire republic. The appearance of this orchestra was an important event in the cultural life of the republic, and greatly influenced the structure of the traditional performance itself as well as the forms and methods of training performers.

c) Folklorism "from below" refers to folklorism that appears in both city and village under the influence of different folk arts: pop music, professional art, ideological and scientific folklorism, etc. These are spontaneous, independent, and voluntary forms of popular creative activity. In a certain sense, this category of folklorism encompasses the development of folklore itself. Also included are the activities of the so-called amateur folk composers, whose works are usually strongly influenced by modern pop music. Examples of this widespread and popular form of folk art are the duos and trios of performers who sing folk songs in two- or three-voiced arrangements. These, along with the no-less-popular family ensembles (whose repertoires are usually not limited to folk songs), came into being as a result of the influence of amateur talent activities upon traditional forms of popular performance.

d) "Scientific folklorism"⁴ refers to the study, reproduction, and popularization of authentic folklore by specialists and amateurs in order to preserve and better understand it. This form of folklorism is a comparatively late phenomenon in the cultural life of the Kazakhs. The desire to preserve authentic folklore and to understand it as a particular art has an international character. A good example is the interest in folklore shown by Hungarian youth in the seventies (ISTVÁNOVITS 1965; BODOR 1981; ZELNIK 1978, 1981, 1983). Most of the initiators of and participants in this type of folklorism are urban intellectuals, professional artists, scientists, or students. The broad diffusion of folklore in both traditional and nontraditional areas creates the illusion of easy availability and tends to make us take it for granted. But against the contemporary background of growing urbanization, falling numbers of folklore bearers, shrinking spheres of traditional folklore, and the negative influence of ideological folklorism, it becomes obvious that these illusions of easy availability lead to distortions in folklore and misunderstandings of its nature.

In the former USSR one expression of scientific folklorism was the appearance of a new type of folklore-ethnographic ensemble:⁵ Pokrovskii's Ensemble of Russian Song (Moscow), Matsievskii's Chamber Folk Ensemble (Leningrad), the Kiev Ensemble, the Estonian ensembles "Leigarid" and "Hellerö," and others. Kazakhstan folklore-ethnographic ensembles include "Zhetigen," "Otrar Saży," and "Sherter" (these will be further discussed in the third part of this article). These ensembles

share an approach to folklore that is studied, conscious, and professional; they treat it as an art form, and strive to be "authentic."

Scientific folklorism sees folklore as a cultural value from the past that has a permanently growing meaning in the cultural life of a society, enriching and developing its spiritual world. Scientific folklorism preserves folklore most creatively when folklore is viewed, not as a museum piece that needs careful preservation and an occasional dusting (though folklore of this type may be of great historical, ethnographic, and philological interest), but as an actively developing cultural value. Thus folklorism is not a matter of simply ascertaining the existence of various folklore forms in modern society, but of continually creating new folklore; it is, in other words, a particular folklore perspective and Weltanschauung.

THE KAZAKH ORAL TRADITION AND ITS MODERN MODIFICATIONS

Even the most cursory glance at the modern musical life of Kazakhstan reveals a quite striking process of development, with an intense interaction of the various (sometimes conflicting) forms of contemporary popular art. Traditional Kazakh oral art, modern amateur talent activities, and folklorism itself coexist and interact in a complex interlacing. The influence of other fields of creative activity—modern art, commercial art, etc.—complicate the situation still further.

The present study will examine the traditional musical and poetical art of the Kazakhs as a means of better understanding the nature of the developmental processes in contemporary people's art in general. Although we will not consider other fields where the phenomena of folklorism also occur (people's applied art, literature, tourism, etc.), we will proceed on the assumption that the changes taking place in musical and poetical art—which have traditionally played a leading role in the Kazakh folklore system—reflect, in an obvious and concentrated form, those changes occurring in modern Kazakh people's art in general.

We will first consider the dynamics of the developmental process and establish some general patterns, after which we will examine some of the changes that occurred during the historical period from the establishment of Soviet power in Kazakhstan to the present. The choice of these topics was dictated by the limits of this study and by the fact that until now there have been no reports on these issues.

Our preliminary designation of the three traditional areas in contemporary people's musical and poetical art is as follows: 1) professional popular song, 2) epic art, and 3) instrumental music. This division will facilitate our elucidation of the characteristics of traditional Kazakh folk art under its new, nontraditional conditions.

The Professional Popular Song

A. Zhubanov, an eminent Kazakh composer, wrote as follows about the genre of popular song:

Kazakhstan is rich in song. In these songs are imprinted the centuries-old history of the people, their hopes, their expectations, their grief and joy, their thoughts and dreams. The songs sound everywhere: in the endless Kazakh steppe, in noisy fairs and markets, in novels, in smoke-filled cobhouses and yurts, in free surroundings and in torture chambers. The nomad's life was unthinkable without song. (ZHUBANOV 1961, 166)

A. Zataevich, an outstanding musician and researcher and one of the first collectors of Kazakh folk songs, reported the existence of various performing and composing traditions as well as the high professional skill of the Kazakh singers:

I can only say that with the gradual expansion of my acquaintance with professional singers, serious amateurs, and connoisseurs of singing in general, I have felt a growing surprise at and admiration for their enthusiastic, yet unusually careful and strict, attitude towards the reproduction of the native songs, and for the original vocal skill they all demonstrate. One can positively state that in their singing technique—their great lung capacity, their gradual slackening of long-drawn-out sounds, the fullness of their phrasing, etc. (I am speaking, of course, about the best singers)—they are able to nonplus qualified professional vocalists. One finds oneself wondering where the skill for such an aesthetically colorful and technically organized vocal transmission comes from. (ZATAEVICH 1925, 11)

Over the centuries four traditions of folk song developed in the professional institution of Kazakh popular singing:

- a) The Western Kazakhstan tradition, represented by such famous singers as Mukhit, Shyntas, and Shaikhy. This tradition was continued in Soviet Kazakhstan by A. Kurmanov and G. Kurmangaliev.
- b) The famous Arka (from the Sary-Arka Region) tradition, practiced on a large scale in central and eastern Kazakhstan and represented by such excellent popular singers and composers as Birzhan, Akhan, Madi, Aset, Yestaï, Boluan-Sholak, Maïra,

- Zhayau Musa, and Gaziz. Their skill and their songs have continued to our time through the performances of the first generation of Soviet popular performers, such as M. Yerzhanov, K. Baizhanov, A. Kashaubaev, and Z. Yelebekov.
- c) The traditions of the Seven Rivers region and southern Kazakhstan, which found their classical expression in the creative work of the famous singers Suyunbai, Dzhambul, and, later, K. Azerbaev.
 - d) The tradition of Abai, the outstanding Kazakh poet and enlightener of the nineteenth century. His songs, strongly influenced by the traditions of Russian romance, formed an original trend in the boundless musical heritage of the Kazakh people.

The songs of southern Kazakhstan and the Seven Rivers region (the southeast part of Kazakhstan) were characterized by simplicity, clarity, and conciseness of form. The famous songs of the Arka tradition were distinguished by broad and long-drawn-out melodies of lyric nature, and represented, according to the figurative expression of the academician B. Asaf'ev, the Kazakh "florid polyphony."

Kazakh song performers are called *akyn*, *olenshi*, and *anshi*. These categories are not, however, mutually exclusive. The *akyns* play the leading role in this hierarchy because they not only perform but also compose their songs; the great *akyns* may also perform both epic poems and songs of the epic genre. The *olenshi* and *anshi* mainly perform lyrical songs that are rich in form and technically demanding. However, they also sing comic songs, songs from everyday life, and songs from traditional ritual. As a rule these talented singers possess excellent voices and polished vocal technique.

In order to reach the peaks of performance skill an *akyn* must go through several important stages of training. M. Karataev, an eminent Kazakh scholar, defines the following stages. First, the student becomes acquainted with the richness of the people's song and learns by heart songs and poems preserved in the people's memory. Second, the student *akyn* learns the artistic secrets of the more experienced *akyn* whom he has chosen as his teacher. He follows his teacher everywhere, taking part in all festivities both local and distant (the institution of wandering is a necessary stage in the process of training). Third, the *akyn*, having achieved creative maturity, shows his skill during the *aitys*, an original musical and poetical contest involving two *akyns*. This takes place in public and is a serious test for the young *akyns*.

A real *akyn* combines the improviser's talent, resourcefulness, wit, and skill to answer a song with a song during competition. The song must be socially relevant, must be grounded in a knowledge of the reality of the situation, and must express the views of a certain social group. In order to become an *akyn* one needs, in addition to native ability and a knowledge of life, great training, a mastery of traditional genres and techniques, and a knowledge of the richness of the musical tradition accumulated over the generations.

(KARATAEV 1960, 63-64)

We will consider the *aitys* in greater detail below.

The period from the mid-nineteenth century to the early twentieth century was of great importance for Kazakh traditional culture. In the people's memory it remains the "golden century" of Kazakh song culture; it was marked by a flourishing of the Arka song tradition, the most eminent representatives of which (Birzhan, Akhan, Zhayau Musa, Aset, Ibraï) created songs characterized by complicated melodic design, subtle lyricism, unusual virtuosity, and symphonic scope. The traditions of this school were continued by the excellent Soviet-period singers Ye. Zhusupbekov and M. Yerzhanov.

Zhusupbekov and Yerzhanov were representatives of the first brilliant pleiad of professional Kazakh town singers and instrumentalists, which also included D. Nurpeisova, K. Zhantleuov, R. Omarov, Zh. Kalambaev, D. Myktybaev, and G. Kurmangaliev. They brought to the town stage the breath of the living folklore tradition, the richness and originality of the various styles, and the performance-manner of songs and *kyuis* (instrumental pieces performed on the *dombra*). Though unacquainted with the rudiments of musical knowledge, they were experts in various performance traditions as a result of having grown up in an atmosphere of popular musical performance. Passing on their skill to talented representatives of the younger generation, they became, in the figurative expression of Zh. Karmenov (one of their pupils and an eminent Kazakh singer), the "golden bridge" between the nineteenth-century and contemporary performance traditions.

Today folk-song performers are trained at the Republican Stage Studio, which opened in 1965 in Alma-Ata (the capital of Kazakhstan). Its students, gifted representatives of Kazakh youth, must spend two years studying *dombra*-playing technique and the principles of folk-song performance. In the studio's first days its leading teachers were Zh. Yelebekov and G. Kurmangaliev. Their pupils Zh. Karmenov, K. Balbosynov, A. Yenkebaev, and K. Kulysheva have become the most popular present-day performers of folk songs. The modern people's tradition,

a more complex and contradictory stage of development, is reflected in the creative work of this new generation of performers. In their performances one clearly feels a striving for the mastery of traditional principles of performance under new conditions. In spite of some shortcomings resulting from the influence of the stage environment (superfluous sentimentality, etc.), they are looking for new means of artistic expression so that these traditions may be made accessible to the present-day audience.

At the same time, the performance of folk songs by other students of the studio often differs little from pop-song performances. As Karmenov notes, this leads to a situation in which performers pay insufficient attention to such things as diction and the peculiarities of *dombra* playing during a song. He notes also that performers nowadays must devote more attention to folk-song history and expand their repertoire beyond the limits of popular song. "On the *dombra* it is not the fingers that play, but the soul" (KARMENOV 1980). Karmenov organized a popular series of television lecture-concerts entitled "Asyl Mura" [Precious heritage], which considered not only the history of folk song and its performers but also historical events that played an important role in the people's fate.

The *aitys* is one of the most popular musical and poetical genres of the Kazakh people. Participation in the *aitys* is, as mentioned above, a way for the *akyn* to win popularity and gain social recognition of his skills.

The *aitys* is a public singing contest, an artistic "duel" that comprises a strict and impartial test for an *akyn*. As these contests always take place on the occasion of a festivity or holiday, the public forms both audience and active judge. (KARATAEV 1960, 67)

Aityses were mass performances in all regions of Kazakhstan up until the middle of the past century. From the late nineteenth century, however, the *aitys* lost its mass appeal in many regions. The song contest as a mass genre took place mainly in the former Uly Zhuz,⁶ i.e., in the territory of the present Alma-Ata, Dzhambul, South Kazakhstan, and Kzyl-Orda regions. (AUEZOV 1961, 355)

In Soviet Kazakhstan *aityses* were timed to coincide with great anniversaries, popular festivities, and so on. Republican *aityses* were carried out in 1919, 1922, 1934, 1939, 1943, 1961, 1980, and 1984. Thanks to the joint initiative of the Ministry of Culture of the Kazakh SSR and

Kazakh television, regular contests between various regions of the republic were carried out in addition to the republican *aitys*. Transcriptions of the most interesting performances were published in all regions of Kazakhstan.

At the same time, these televised *aitys* (particularly the one marking the hundredth anniversary of Azerbaev in 1984) highlighted serious problems concerning the current *aitys* tradition, its transmission, and its current role in the cultural life of society. For example, because of the time limits imposed by television the participants in an *aitys* often record and memorize their texts beforehand, and even prearrange the structure of their performance. In these cases the very soul of the *aitys*—its sparkling, instantaneous, and situational improvisation (*suyryp-salma*)—is lost. The situation is indicative of more serious problems: the weakening of the *aitys* tradition in the everyday life of the people and the absence of a professional school for the *aitys*. Traditionally, training for the *aitys* began in childhood. The writer K. SEĬDEKHAŃOV (1985) notes that the famous poetess Sara was fourteen years old when she competed against the renowned Birzhan. He also notes that such well-known *akyns* as Dzhambul and Shashubai began participation in *aitys* at the age of thirteen.

These television programs also showed that participants who performed successfully in traditional *aitys* and in *aitys* between a young man and woman were sometimes lacking in the other forms of the contest: the *aitys*-riddle,⁷ the false *aitys*,⁸ the *kaiym-aitys*,⁹ etc. In order to be in good artistic form, an *akyn* must always improve his or her skills, participating in the great and small festivities of their *auls*, districts, regions, etc. But the tradition of holding *aitys* at such ordinary events is, unfortunately, lost at present.

R. BERDIBAEV, a philologist, also points out that the *aitys* participants no longer pay sufficient attention to the melody that accompanies their recitations (1980). Often they utilize melodies from popular songs or *terme* (edifying songs of the epic genre), whereas in the traditional *aitys* a special melody—*konyr auen*—is employed. This has been found to be the best way to concentrate the audience's attention on the semantic content of the text and (thanks to its spirited rhythmic design) give the whole recitation a combative and belligerent character.

In modern *aitys* the performances tend toward such themes as production, patriotism, and (especially) everyday life, a trend that has watered down the aesthetic content of the *aitys*. The genre makes very high demands of the *akyn*: the performance of the two contestants must comprise a perfect artistic whole. Moreover, it is not enough that the individual text of each *akyn* be of high artistic quality: the requirements

of the *aitys* state that not only must it take the form of a dialogue between two skilled artists, it must also discuss the artistic and moral ideals of the society and time.

Epic Art

The epic tradition in Kazakhstan has deep roots in the history of the people and is widely found throughout the republic; especially rich traditions of epic narration can be found at present in the southwest of the republic, centering in the Kzyl-Orda Region. The uniqueness of the tradition today lies in its continuing popularity and in its maintenance of a formal system of training. There exist four schools of epic singers (SARAEV 1982):

- a) The school of the narrator Nurtugan, which is popular on the western coast of the Aral Sea; the traditions of this school continue in the creative work of B. Omarov.
- b) The school of the famous narrators Tasbergen and Zhanbergen, which is widely found in the Kazalinsk District. This school has a distinctive kind of guttural singing, popularly known as "Tasbergen's handbell." At present the school is represented by M. Akzholov.
- c) The school of Shorayak Omar and Turmagambet, which is popular in the valley of Syr-Darya. The well-known narrator Zhienbai sang in the tradition of this school. His son Rustembek and grandsons Koshenei and Bidas, as well as the narrator S. Tulepova, continue the tradition.
- d) The school of the narrator Nartaï, which is well represented in the Shieli District. At present its traditions are exemplified in the performances of T. Bayakhunova, A. Abuov, B. Zhusupov, and others. It is also found in the neighboring Chimkent and Dzhambul regions, and is especially well preserved among the Kazakhs of Mangyshlak (West Kazakhstan), Karakalpakia (the autonomous Republic of Uzbekistan), and Turkmenia.

In the past there were, in addition, the following:

- e) The schools of such narrators as Bukhar, Mergenbai, Nausha, and Shapai that once existed in the central and eastern regions of Kazakhstan, but have been pushed aside by instrumental and folk-song genres. Famous *akyns* like Suyumbai, Dzhambul, and K. Azerbaev, who lived in the present-day Dzhambul Region of southern Kazakhstan, were also singer-narrators.

- f) The school begun by the legendary Korkyt,¹⁰ which was located in Atyrau (western Kazakhstan). Arkalyk, Durbek, Saraï, Kaztugan, Marapaï, Abyl, Nurym, Kashagan, and Muryn Zhyrau also belonged to this school of narration.

The performers of epic tales were called by the Kazakhs *zhyrau* and *zhyrshy*, from the word *zhyr* (epic). The *zhyrau* sings historical epics, a great number of which he usually knows by heart, including *terme*,¹¹ *osiet*,¹² *tolgau*,¹³ as well as romantic epics of a later, bookish origin known as *dastans*.¹⁴ In Kazakh history the *zhyraus* were not only performers of epic poems but also wise tutors and leaders of their tribes, counselors of the khans, and fearless warriors and protectors of their people's history and traditions. As a rule they were eloquent and talented representatives of their people. They took an active part in all important social events of their tribe; later they chronicled these events and embellished them with their commentaries and reflections in epic poems (*zhyrs*).

The *zhyrshy* performs only poems and songs of the epic genre, mainly short epics—the above-mentioned songs of the epic genre dominate his repertoire. The *zhyrshy* represents a later transformation of the institution of the *zhyrau*; in the modern Kazakh language a *zhyrshy* of great authority and popularity who knows many long epic poems may also be called *zhyrau*. One interesting form of modern folkloristic influence upon the practice of epic narration—one related to “amateur talent activities”—was the formation of the brigades of *zhyrshys* in the Kzyl-Orda Region who perform on tour both in the region and far beyond its borders. The organizer of the first such brigade was Nartaï, a well-known narrator; today one is headed by M. Kokenov, a people's *akyn*.

Something of the present state of epic tradition was shown in a popular Kazakh television program entitled *Terme*, which indicated some of the important changes taking place in the structure of the epic performance and in its training system. The young participants on the program often performed songs of the epic genre—*terme* in particular—using song melodies. Even specialists in this area often had no clear idea about the original technique of performance of epic works; as a result they classified *terme* as *kissa*¹⁵ or *dastan*, and *zhyr* as *tolgau*,¹⁶ or vice versa. The program fulfilled an important educational purpose, however, by providing lectures on the different schools of narration in the epic tradition, their eminent representatives, the systems of epic genres and their peculiarities, etc. Each performance was followed with remarks by A. Yenkebaev, a well-known singer who also took an active part in the

series' preparation. His traditional exclamations—obligatory during a traditional epic performance—helped create the proper conditions for an “epic audience” and allowed the television spectators to become accustomed to the particular aesthetics of the epic works.

Among the Kazakhs the epic has always been accompanied by music, but only recently has it become a subject of musicological research in the republic. Until recently Kazakh epic art was mainly the province of the philological sciences, which had analytical traditions of their own. What is needed for the future, however, are theoretical studies of the performance aspect of epic art.

Instrumental Music

The leading role in the instrumental heritage of the Kazakhs is played by the *dombra* (fig. 7). The instrumental pieces performed on this two-stringed instrument are called *kyuış*; *kyuış* pieces are short and are generally given titles. They are also performed on the *kobyž* (a two-stringed bow instrument: fig. 1 and 2) and the *sybyzgy* (a wind instrument, a type of pipe). There are two traditions of *kyuış* performance on the *dombra*: a) a western one represented by players such as Kurmangazy, Dauletkeri, Turkesh, Dina (a pupil of Kurmangazy), and Seitek; b) an eastern one represented by players such as Tattimbet, Baubek, Toka, Kyzdarbek, and Sugir.

Kyuış composed in the traditions of western Kazakhstan are called *tokpe-kyuış* (from *tögu*: scatter, spill, strew). They are distinguished by their breadth, rapid tempo, symphonic scope, and monumental nature. The *kyuış* of eastern and central Kazakhstan are called *shertpe-kyuış* (from *shertu*: pinch, nip; pizzicato), characterized by their subtlety of nuance, natural performance, and particular lyricism.

The creative work of such excellent *dombra* players as D. Nurpeisova, L. Mukhitov, A. Khasenov, N. Bukeikhanov, and A. Zhantleuov during the first years of the young Kazakh Republic, as well as the skill of the professional singers of that time, formed another “golden bridge” (to borrow Karmenov’s expression) linking the brilliant past with the present.

In traditional Kazakh musical performance the principle of ensemble play was absent. Musical scores came into use only after the introduction of Russian and foreign classics and the formation of folk orchestras to play popular *kyuış*. Gradually the playing-by-ear of *kyuış* was abandoned in favor of performances based on approximate notation.

The living transfer of *kyuış* performance from one *dombra* player to another was characteristic of Kazakh *dombra* music for many cen-

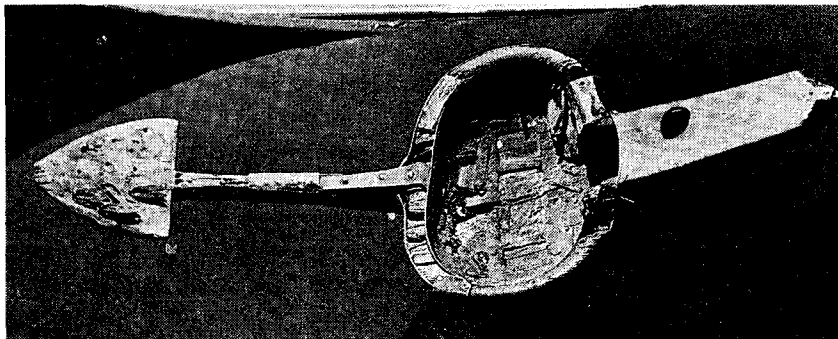


FIGURE 1. *Kobyz*. Unknown master, sixteenth century. Belonged to the shaman (*baksy*) Sharas. From the *auyl* Karay in the Zhambul region.

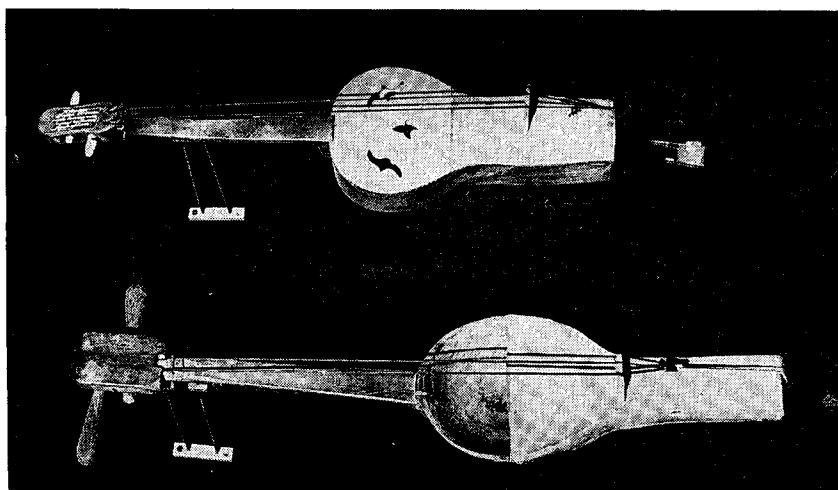


FIGURE 2. *Kylkobyz* of Ychals, 1843–1916 (bottom), and *kobyz* of Myktybaev, 1904–1975 (top).

turies. This method developed the musical memory, observation of phrasing, dexterity, and performance skill of the young musician-*kyuıshy*. (GIZATOV 1976, 43)

Kazakh traditions of professional training were maintained for some time at various musical institutions, the graduates of which reinforced the use of popular folk instruments in the orchestras they joined. The traditions found expression in the pedagogical methods of L. Muchitov (a leading *dombra* player of the Kurmangazy folk instrument orchestra from the days of its foundation), who taught at the Department of Popular Folk Instruments of the Alma-Ata State Conservatory from 1945

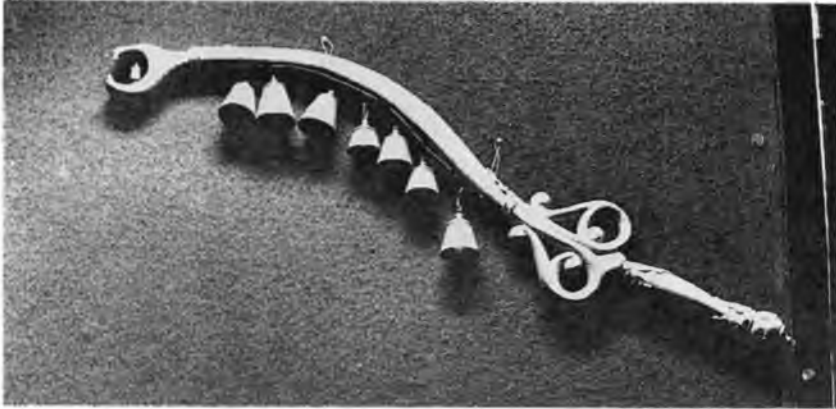


FIGURE 3. *Konyrau*. Bells with different musical tones.

until 1952. Later, deviations from traditional training methods led to a split between composing and performance practices, which have traditionally been closely linked. It also led to a decline in improvisation and other skills. A. Mukhambetova writes on the traditional relation between composition and improvisation:

This is to be expected. A performer on a people's instrument is usually a composer as well, with his compositions realizing themselves in the process of performance. In those *dombra* players with the ability to instantly engender musical ideas one can observe great improvisational skills; conversely, an active, dynamic playing style favors the creation of new musical ideas. (MUKHAMBETOVA 1982, 65)

Folk instrument orchestras play the western Kazakh *tokpe-kyuis* because the artistic peculiarities of this genre better suit it to orchestral performance. *Dombra* players, on the other hand, prefer the *shertpe-kyuis*, which, because of its fanciful and intimate nature, is less appropriate for orchestras. One reason the orchestras prefer the *tokpe-kyuis* (the reason which, to my mind, explains the situation) is the widespread opinion that the intensification of the sound during orchestral performance—as though the sound was being “increased” by ensemble play—represents at the same time a better version.

THE DEVELOPMENT OF FOLKLORISM IN KAZAKHSTAN

One special characteristic of folklorism in Kazakhstan is that it developed in the womb of the amateur talent activities of the 1920s, which



FIGURE 4. *Dabyl* (below) and *shyndauly* (above), used to send out military or peace signals.

arose out of the people's great enthusiasm for and interest in new forms of collective artistic activity. In Kazakhstan these new forms of creative work found expression in the appearance of theater performances and the first Kazakh national operas, which consisted wholly of popular songs and *kyuis* and which had not previously existed in Kazakhstan. The amateur talent activities of the young Kazakh Republic combined traditional genres and the new forms of collective creative work in a whimsical and at the same time natural form.

At the same time, the amateur activities of the 1920s contributed to the emergence of professional artistic expression in Kazakhstan: opera, ballet, and symphonic and vocal music. These activities gave to the republic its first professional masters of Kazakh art—Kulyash and Kana-bek Balseitovs, K. Dzhandarbekov, Ye. Umurzakov, K. Kuanyshbaev, Sh. Zhienkulova, and others—and provided such gifted performers as

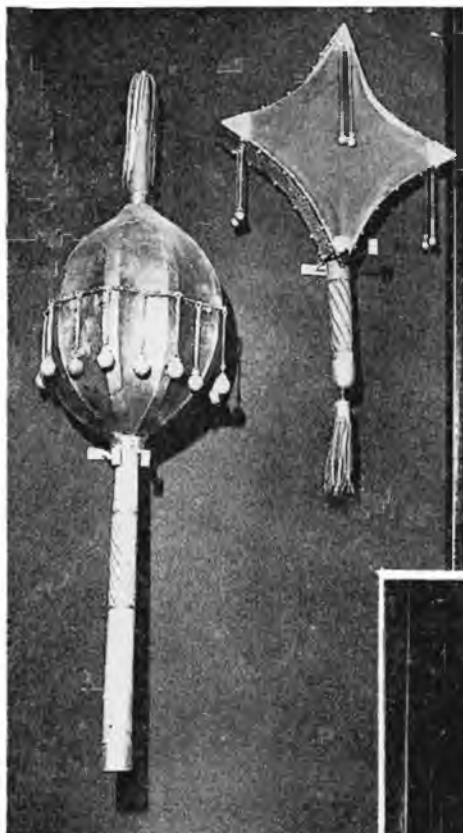


FIGURE 5. *Dadyga* (left) and *takyldak* (right). Sound resembles the knock of a woodpecker.



FIGURE 6. *Asatayak* (or *asay-musay*). Once used to accompany the ritual tunes of the *baksy* (shaman).



FIGURE 7. *Dombra*, among the most popular of Kazakh instruments. The name is of Kypshak origin and means “tambourine.”

A. Kashaubaev, I. Baizakov, and M. Yerzhanov with their chance to win recognition and popularity.

A special role in Kazakh musical history was played by the first Kazakh operas: *Kyz Zhibek*, *Zhalbyr*, and *Yer Targyn* (libretto by M. Auezov and K. Kamalov, music by Ye. Brusilovskii). These operas—another product of the amateur talent activities—were performed for the first time at the 1936 “Decade of Kazakh Art and Literature” exposition in Moscow and proved a great success. Because of their distinctive character and regional uniqueness, the operas (the music of which consisted almost entirely of arrangements of popular songs and *kyuis* and the settings of which derived from well-known people’s epics) can be traced, in my opinion, to an original type from the initial period of Kazakh folklorism. Interestingly, the above-mentioned operas, which received such an enthusiastic reception by the audiences of the time,

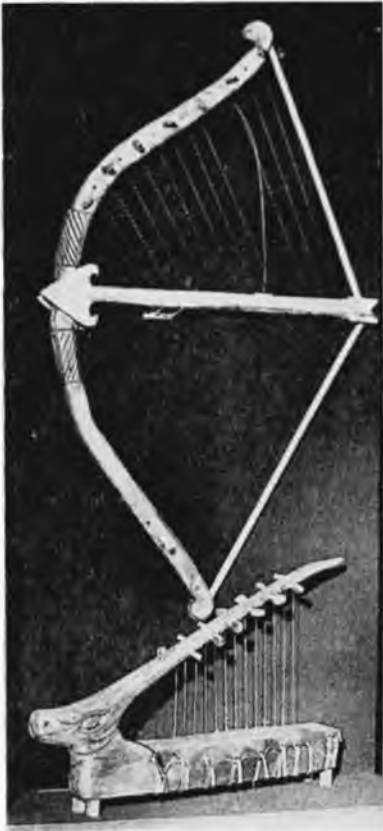


FIGURE 8. *Adyrna*. Played by placing it on the knee, supporting it with the left hand, and plucking it with the right hand.

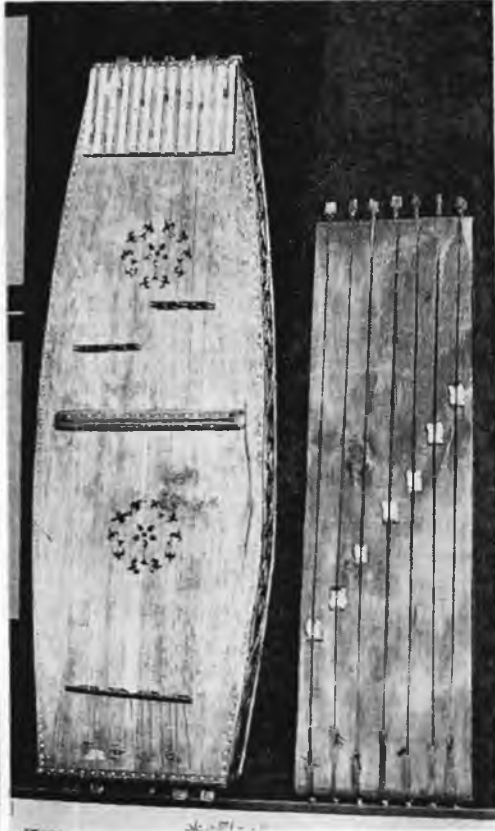


FIGURE 9. *Zhetigen*. Ancient seven-stringed instrument mentioned in folk legends. Reconstructed on the basis of descriptions.

were criticized by some specialists as “quotation operas” or “mosaic operas,” i.e., as forms of “folklore parasites.”¹⁷

The appearance of these operas was associated with a number of specific developments in the republic’s musical culture. In the absence of professional theater and music, it was the Kazakh song that, as an integral part of traditional culture, was adapted to the opera genre. The unusual richness and variety of Kazakh folk song, ranging from lyrical, playful, and comical songs to song-laments, provided everything necessary in both form and content for the characterization of the opera’s personages. The composition was carried out by the composer Ye. Brusilovskii. The brilliant Kazakh singers who first performed in these operas were largely products of the amateur talent activities;

FIGURE 10. *Sazgen*. Instrument mentioned in the Korkyt legend.

(All photos were taken at the Republican Museum of Popular Folk Instruments in Alma-Ata, Kazakhstan.)

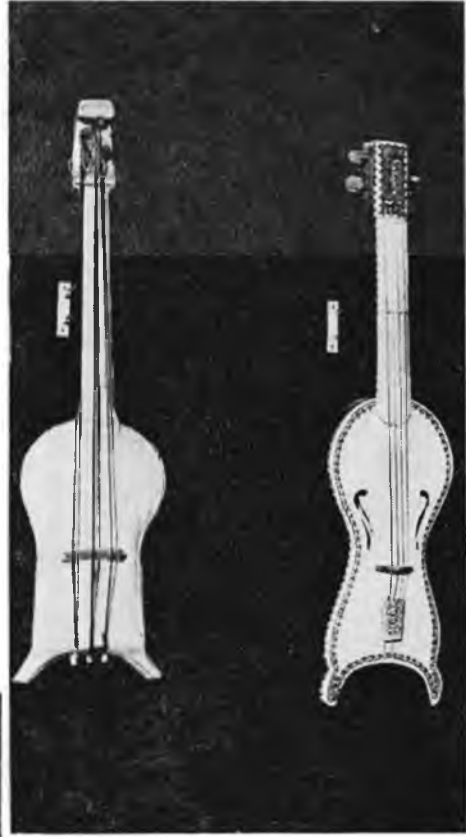


FIGURE 11. *Zhelbuaz* (or *mes*). Of goat skin; featuring two reed pipes, two tongues, and numerous holes.

having no professional training, they remained, in essence, folk-song performers accompanied by an orchestra. These early operas can thus be included in the field of folklorism despite the fact that they were also expressions of “the advance of vocal performance, the emergence of choral singing and vocal technique, the appearance of Kazakh symphonism, the spread of musical education in the republic, [etc.]” (GONCHAROVA 1967, 7).

After watching the operas *Kyz Zhibek* and *Zhalbyr*, academician B. V. ASAF'EV, noting their peculiar charm and great success, wrote:

The epic in its essence, song, radiates a great number of intonational nuances, from the most tender lyricism to dramatically saturated and very expressive narration. This singular responsiveness of the melodies allows one to note, with the help of the most subtle intonational vibrations, the figurative contents of the verse; as a result the music and poetical speech, mutually penetrating each other, form a thrilling expressive unity. (1936)

In another article, about the opera *Er Targyn*, he wrote about the creatively valuable arrangement of popular music by Brusilovskii, who “uses song to accentuate . . . the development of the action,” thereby forming “a national-song operatic style” (ASAF'EV 1937).

Another original phenomenon of folklorism during the initial period was the foundation in 1934 of the above-mentioned Kurmangazy Orchestra of Kazakh folk instruments. Consisting originally of eleven *dombra* players, this group—the first orchestra in Kazakh history—followed traditional methods of learning *kyuis* and traditional techniques of performance. The sound of the small ensemble was therefore similar to that of one big *dombra* multiplied several times. All folk songs and *kyuis* were performed by the ensemble in unison and without scores, harmonization, or special instrumentation.

The Kurmangazy Orchestra was modeled on the famous Russian orchestra of folk instruments founded by V. V. Andreev. Increases in the ensemble's size (which followed soon after its foundation) and the inclusion in its repertoire of Russian and foreign classics led inevitably to the improvement of the folk instruments and to the introduction of scores, thereby changing the orchestra's composition and structure. Playing methods were also developed on the basis of a study of the Andreev orchestra's experience.

Because of the difficulties of ensemble play, Zhubanov, the orchestra's leader, introduced the so-called method of “air orchestration,” in which all *kyuis* were learned by ear from the best *dombra* players. The

musicians memorized each phrase, each melodic and rhythmical turn, and each playing technique individually. Next the *kyuïs* was “distributed” in the instrumentation most suitable for unison performance. It was also determined which group of instruments would play the main theme, in which register, and using which strokes; the other instruments would either double the melody in the octave or play the accompanying tunes that supported the development of the main musical theme. Through the method of air orchestration the traditional principle of playing by ear was preserved.

The work in folk-instrument restoration carried out by the Russian experts B. and E. Romanenko and K. Kasymov during the 1930s and 40s led to the appearance of new instruments specifically intended for the orchestra. These included new types of *dombbras* (a tenor and a bass *dombra*, a *dombra* violin, and a *dombra* contrabass [there is also a *dombra* viola that is popular among the people]), a *kobyz*-violin with a third string added, and an improved *syrynai* (a Kazakh accordion).

The orchestra’s sound, altered by the restoration of these folk instruments, is only remotely reminiscent of that of the traditional *dombra*, about which A. Zataevich, having heard it in the steppe for the first time, wrote enthusiastically:

The sound of this, one would think, modest and simple two-stringed pizzicato instrument is distinguished by one excellent property: close by, it produces an impression not of a small instrument but of a big, sizeable, even mighty one that is sounding from far away. It is like a grandfather clock with an excellent gong that produces an effect not, one would think, like that of a delicate mechanism, but like the remote ringing of a big bell. True, this effect would be utterly lost in any town hall. But it is clearly heard there where it is especially popular and is listened to in times of relaxation: in the cosiness of the Kazakh *yurta* lost among the everlasting silence of the boundless steppes. (ZATAEVICH 1931, vii)

Even today no satisfactory solution has been found to the problems associated with the manufacture of Kazakh folk instruments. At present the republic has two centers for making such instruments: the Alma-Ata furniture factory and the musical instrument factory in the Osakarovsky District, Karaganda Region (central Kazakhstan). The quality of their products, which are supposed to supply the needs of the entire population, is very low. Thus hand-crafted instruments made in accordance with traditional standards are generally employed during both training and professional performances. Supply problems could be

solved by raising the quality of the state enterprises' products and by providing state support for the instrument craftsmen.

The interest of Kazakh society in its cultural heritage, particularly evident during recent decades (1960s–1990s), allows one to speak of a new stage in the growth of the popular consciousness on the one hand, and, on the other, in the qualitative development of folklorism in the republic. The beginning of this stage was initiated by important discoveries in archaeology, ethnography, and linguistics that deepened and expanded the existing knowledge of Kazakh history, and enriched the world of science with new data as well. This new stage found expression in the appearance of a new, “historical” wave of Kazakh literature produced by a generation of writers (I. Yesenberlin, O. Suleimenov, A. Alimzhanov, M. Magauin, etc.) seeking to comprehend the past of their people and express it in their works. M. M. AUEZOV, a literary critic, writes,

“To comprehend the past means to achieve the height of the future. Knowledge of the past allows one to either resist or encourage the events of the present, and provides a concrete formula for determining good and evil,” says Zhomart, a character in A. Alimzhanov’s novel. These words, perhaps, reproduce exactly the atmosphere of socially important innovation that emerged among the Kazakh creative intelligentsia in connection with the process of artistic comprehension of the people’s historical past that began in the 1960s. (1972, 127)

Characteristic of the folklorism of that period were the folklore-ethnographic associations of various types that became popular among the people. One event that stimulated the appearance of such groups was the discovery by the republic’s musicologists of more than forty ancient folk instruments known in recent times to only a few people. The tireless search for these instruments and the reconstruction of certain of them on the basis of ethnographic, historical, and other sources was begun by B. Sarybaev, a professor at the Alma-Ata Conservatory. In recent newspaper articles he has called for the organization of folklore ensembles to play the ancient instruments and for their use in the Kurmangazy Orchestra (SARYBAEV 1982). At the beginning of the 1970s Zhetigen, the first folklore-ethnographic ensemble, was created on his initiative. Its membership consisted of students of the Department of Popular Folk Instruments of the State Conservatory. The ensemble’s performances were invariably successful and attracted the attention of specialists.

The ensemble set as its goal the popularization of the ancient involved by raising the quality of the state enterprises' products and by instruments, and devoted particular attention to demonstrating the sound of this or that instrument. The ensemble's repertoire consisted of well-known popular songs and melodies that acquired new and interesting sounds after arrangement for the ensemble's instruments. These tunes were usually performed solo by one of the instruments with accompaniment by the others.

Later other folklore-ethnographic ensembles appeared, such as "Otrar Sazy," "Sherter," and "Murager." These groups did not limit themselves to demonstrations of the ancient instruments but tried instead to discover new means of artistic expression for them, ones that would allow them a style and manner of their own, an individual artistic "face." Unfortunately, these ensembles, in their desire to demonstrate as many of the instruments as possible during their performances, often lose sight of the artistic specificity of folkloric works.

Among present-day folklore ensembles there are also some like Sazgen, in whose performances one can clearly sense the aspect of publicity, expressed in its attempt to underline the exotic. This ensemble, organized at the Republican Museum of Popular Folk Instruments, performs mainly for foreign tourists visiting the museum, serving as a "living" illustration of the instruments.

The ancient instruments have already been affected by the process of folk-instrument improvement that began with the foundation of the Kurmangazy Orchestra. This, unfortunately, has led to the creation of new instruments that are different in many ways from the originals.

The maintenance and development of traditional forms of Kazakh musical and poetical art under urban conditions—new for the traditionally nomadic culture—represents one of the main challenges to the folk arts in Kazakhstan. Despite the fact that the traditional layer of these arts is subject to the growing influence of various kinds of amateur talent activities, theater performances, pop music, etc., preliminary studies in this field indicate that the traditional layer remains central in the general system of modern Kazakh people's art.

This conclusion highlights the necessity for further and more detailed analyses of the traditional forms of Kazakh musical and poetical art, of the other spheres of folklorism, and of the contours of their present transformation. At the same time, the sphere that we have considered in this article must be further defined if we are to characterize and delimit its associated phenomena, and to determine the place of folklorism in the general system of modern Kazakh culture.

NOTES

1. The *auyl* is a group of yurts, the traditional village of the Turkic nomad and seminomad population in Central Asia.
2. "Amateur talent activities are a form of folk art. They include the creation and performance of artistic works by amateurs who perform either collectively (circles, study groups, folk theaters) or alone (singers, reciters, dancers, acrobats, etc.);" *Bol'shaya Sovetskaya Entsiklopediya* 1978, vol. 28, 414.
3. A two-stringed pizzicato instrument used throughout Kazakhstan (fig. 7).
4. This term is used in a conventional sense to indicate the science of folklore. This usage differs from that of GUSEV, for whom it indicates the use of folklore in the various sciences (1977, 127-35).
5. Ensembles of folk instruments that perform traditional folk music.
6. Uly Zhuz (Great Horde) is one of the traditional Kazakh tribal divisions established in the fifteenth century. The territory where they live is the southern and southeastern parts of Kazakhstan. Two other tribal divisions are: 1) the Orta Zhuz (Middle Horde), who occupy the territory of the center and part of East Kazakhstan (the so-called region of "Sary-Arka"); 2) the Kishi Zhuz (Little Horde), whose traditional living area is West Kazakhstan.
7. *Aitys*-riddle: in this type of competition two *akyns* present riddles in turn and attempt to solve them. In this form of *aitys*, the *akyns* pay a great deal of attention to the character and contents of the riddles and their solutions.
8. The false *aitys*: in this form of *aitys* the *akyns* must demonstrate richness of imagination and eloquence by inventing the most improbable and unheard-of stories. The *akyn* whose story is the most fantastic and beautiful is declared winner.
9. The *kaiym-aitys*, one of the simplest forms of this genre, comprises the so-called everyday poetic songs of competition, which were once quite popular among the Kazakhs. It may be performed by ordinary people during holidays and festivals. A *kaiym-aitys* consists of four-line verses; the first two lines are usually repeated by both performers. This form makes participation easy for starting *akyns* and ordinary people.
10. Korkyt: the legendary patron of the ancient Turkic people. He was also a famous *zhyrau*, singer, and composer. Korkyt is the most important figure in the epic poems of the Turks of Central Asia. He is said to have been a sacred person with miraculous powers.
11. *Terme* (collapsible, prefabricated, combined): a recitative, improvised genre of Kazakh epic. It is accompanied by a special melody and has a philosophical, social, and moral character. A *terme* has a 7-8 syllable poetic structure and is relatively short in length.
12. *Osiet*: edifying songs.
13. *Tolgau* (meditation, reflection): a recitative, improvised genre of Kazakh epic. A *tolgau* is a poetic monologue that contains the author's personal reflections and conclusions about the past and future, about life, and about other philosophical and general moral problems. The *tolgau* has a tirade form of poetic structure.
14. *Dastan* (history, theme, fable, romance, tale, story, news): epic poems of romantic character, widespread among the Arabic, Persian, and Turkic peoples during the tenth through the fifteenth centuries. *Leili-Mäzhmun* and *Farhat-Shyryn* are among the most popular *dastans* of Arabic-Persian origin among the Kazakhs. *Alpamys*, *Kozy-Korpesh-Bayan-Sulu*, *Korogly*, and *Korkyt* are some of the *dastans* popular among the Turkic peoples of Central Asia. The Kazakh national *dastans* are

Kyz Zhibek and *Koblandy*.

15. *Kissa* (table, story, case, affair): widespread epic poems in the Near and Middle East and also in Middle and Southeast Asian countries. They spread among the Turkic peoples of Central Asia through Arabic folklore and literature. At the end of the nineteenth and beginning of the twentieth centuries such epic poems of Arabic and Persian origin as *Abulharris*, *Bahram*, *Bozshigit*, *Gulshahra*, *Munlyk-Zorlyk*, *Zarchum*, *Zhusup-Zlich*, the *Sal-Sal*, *Seifulmalik*, and *Shakir-Shakirat* were published in the Central Asian towns of Omby, Kazan, Tashkent, and Ufa. Later they became popular with the peoples of Central Asia.

16. Other epic forms are the *saryn* (tune/melody; direction) and the *nakyl soz* (word of direction). All of the above-mentioned shorter forms are based upon the main epic genre, the *zhyr*, and together with it create the general system of the Kazakh epic genres.

17. The first Kazakh operas were not medleys. In spite of the fact that it was principally Kazakh musical folklore that was used in these operas, they form a specific type of Kazakh professional opera and characterize the initial period of the emergence of professional art in Kazakhstan.

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