TRADITIONS OF THE KARAKALPAK BAKHSHI ART

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ТРАДИЦИИ КАРАКАЛПАКСКОГО БАХШИЙСКОГО ИСКУССТВА

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QORAQALPOQ BAXSHICHILIK SAN'ATI AN'ANALARI

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Key words: karakalpak folklore, bakhshi art, jiraw, epic poem, epic tradition, kobyz, dutar, master-apprentice, musical heritage, performance style.

Summary. The article analyzes the origins, historical roots, and core traditions of the Karakalpak bakhshi and jiraw art. It examines the musical and poetic nature of the performance, as well as the functional and instrumental differences (kobyz and dutar) between jiraws and bakhshis. Special attention is paid to analyzing the works of prominent folklorist scholars who have studied this unique phenomenon, and the socio-cultural significance of preserving the "ustaz-shakird" (master-apprentice) traditions in the modern world is substantiated.

Ключевые слова: каракалпакский фольклор, искусство бахши, жырау, дастан, эпическая традиция, кобыз, дутар, наставник-ученик, музыкальное наследие, стиль исполнения.

Резюме. В статье анализируются истоки, исторические корни и основные традиции каракалпакского бахшийского и жырауского искусства. Рассматриваются музыкально-поэтическая природа исполнения, функциональные и инструментальные различия (кобыз и дутар) между жырау и бахши. Особое внимание уделяется анализу трудов известных ученых-фольклористов, исследовавших это уникальное явление, а также обосновывается социокультурное значение сохранения традиций «устаз-шакирд» (наставник-ученик) в современном мире.

Tayanch so'zlar: qoraqalpoq folklori, baxshichilik, jirov, doston, epik an'ana, qobiz, dutar, ustoz-shogird, musiqiy meros, ijro uslubi.

Rezyume. Мазкур мақолада қорақалпоқ бахшичилик ва жировчилик санъатининг тарихий илдизлари, шаклланиш босқичлари ва асосий анъаналари таҳлил қилинган. Ижронинг мусиқий-поэтик табиати, жиров ва бахшилар ўртасидаги функционал ҳамда чолғу асбобларига оид (қўбиз ва дутор) фарқлар очиб берилган. Шунингдек, ушбу ноёб ҳодисани тадқиқ қилган йирик фольклоршунос олимларнинг ишлари таҳлил қилиниб, "устоз-шогирд" анъаналарини сақлаб қолишнинг бугунги кундаги ижтимоий-маданий аҳамияти асосланган.

INTRODUCTION. Oral folk art, particularly folklore, is an invaluable treasure that embodies the historical memory, spiritual worldview, and ethno-cultural traditions of every nation. Among the peoples of Central Asia, Karakalpak folklore stands out for its antiquity, unique performance style, and rich epic heritage. The most significant and substantial branch of Karakalpak oral folk art is the art of bakhshis and jiraws. This art has served not only as a musical and literary phenomenon but also as a living bridge, transmitting the people's past, hopes, socio-political views, and heroic history from generation to generation. Bakhshis and jiraws have been considered the spiritual leaders, cultural promoters, and chroniclers of the Karakalpak people. Through their creativity, dozens of major heroic and lyrical-romantic epics such as "Alpamysh", "Qirq Qiz" (Forty Girls), "Edige", "Qoblan", "Maspatsha", and "Garib Ashiq" have survived through the centuries to reach us today. This article analyzes the traditions, performance characteristics, distinct regional schools of the Karakalpak bakhshi and jiraw art, as well as the invaluable contributions of folklore scholars in scientifically studying this heritage.

METHODS. This scientific article employs comparative-historical, typological, descriptive, and source-study analysis methods. The texts of epics, the performance styles of bakhshis, and the

"master-apprentice" traditions are comprehensively examined based on modern approaches in folklore studies. Furthermore, the research relies heavily on the fundamental empirical and theoretical studies conducted by prominent ethnographers and folklorists who have documented the Karakalpak oral tradition over the past century.

RESULTS AND DISCUSSION. The study of Karakalpak epic storytelling reveals a complex, multi-layered cultural phenomenon that extends far beyond simple musical performance. It is a syncretic art form combining literature, music, theatricality, and historical archiving. Our analysis of the bakhshi and jiraw traditions yields several key findings regarding their etymological distinctions, organological features, performance techniques, thematic repertoire, regional variations, and pedagogical continuity.

Etymological and Typological Distinctions: The Jiraw and the Bakhshi The Karakalpak epic tradition is structurally dichotomous, categorized primarily by the type of performer: the jiraw and the bakhshi. Our historical and linguistic analysis indicates that these two figures emerged during different socio-historical periods and fulfilled distinct societal functions.

The Jiraw: The term jiraw is derived from the ancient Turkic root jir or yir, meaning "song" or "epic verse." The jiraw represents the most archaic layer of Karakalpak folklore. Historically, jiraws were not merely entertainers; they served as spiritual guides, military advisors to tribal leaders (khans and beks), and custodians of the tribe's genealogical and historical memory. Their art is deeply rooted in shamanic practices, which is evident in their performance style and the instrument they use. The jiraw’s primary social function was to incite bravery in warriors before battles and to chronicle the heroic deeds of the ancestors. The Bakhshi: The term bakhshi has a more complex etymology, likely tracing back to the Sanskrit word bhikshu (a Buddhist monk) or the Chinese po-shih (a learned master or teacher). While in some Central Asian traditions the term retained its primary meaning as a shaman or healer, in the Karakalpak and Uzbek traditions, it evolved to designate a professional musician and epic storyteller. Bakhshis emerged in a relatively later, more settled period of Karakalpak history. Unlike the martial and austere jiraws, bakhshis became associated with lyrical storytelling, romantic epics, weddings, and public festivities. Organology and the Acoustic Symbolism of Instruments A fundamental result of our research is the observation that the musical instrument is not a passive accompaniment but an active co-narrator in Karakalpak epics. The physical construction and acoustic properties of these instruments dictate the psychological atmosphere of the performance. The Qobiz (Qilqobiz): The jiraw's instrument is the qobiz, a two-stringed bowed instrument carved from a single block of wood, with an open resonator covered by camel skin. The strings and the bow are made of undyed horsehair. Acoustically, the qobiz produces a rich, raspy, and deeply resonant overtone series. Our analysis shows that the qobiz is designed to mimic the sounds of the natural and spiritual world—the howling of the wind across the Aral steppes, the cry of a swan, the galloping of hooves, and the wailing of human sorrow.

The Dutar and Ghijjak: The bakhshi relies on the dutar (a two-stringed plucked lute) and frequently performs in an ensemble with a ghijjak (a spike fiddle). The dutar allows for highly rhythmic, rapid, and percussive playing techniques. This rhythmic agility is crucial for the bakhshi, whose epics contain complex poetic meters and require rapid shifts in tempo to match the dynamic plots of romantic and adventurous tales. The Scientific Study of the Heritage and Transcribing the Oral Tradition The process of transferring these oral masterpieces into written text was a monumental task undertaken by scholars in the mid-20th century. Transcribing epics from live performances was an incredibly complex process because the performer’s memory is inherently linked to the musical rhythm. Qalli Ayimbetov, one of the leading figures in Karakalpak folklore studies, recalls this difficulty: At the time of writing, it was difficult to dictate a song sung with the “qobiz” using prose. When a “jiraw” sings with a “qobiz”, the rhyme of the lyrics becomes more melodious. He put down the kobyz and, unable to harmonize the rhyme when singing, performed it with great difficulty.[1p88]

The performing talent of Karakalpak jirov-bakhshis, the uniqueness of their repertoire, and their talent for playing music and reciting words are not only national characteristics but also an integral part of the folklore of all Turkic peoples. [2p14]. Furthermore, the pedagogical significance of these works was emphasized by Najim Dawqaraev: "The qualities of patriotism and courage in Karakalpak heroic epics are an important source in shaping the worldview of the younger generation. " [3p84].

Vocal Techniques and Psycho-Emotional Impact The vocal techniques employed by these artists serve as the primary vehicle for emotional transference. Jiraws utilize a specific throat-

singing technique known as tolgaw. This requires constricting the vocal cords and utilizing the chest cavity as a primary resonator, producing a low, guttural, and highly dramatic sound. The psycho-emotional impact of the tolgaw, combined with the drone of the qobiz, frequently induces a state of deep contemplation in the audience.

Bakhshis, conversely, employ an open, high-pitched, and highly melismatic vocal style. Their voices are trained for clarity and endurance, allowing them to sing over the energetic strumming of the dutar. The bakhshi's performance is highly theatrical, using extensive facial expressions and bodily gestures to portray different characters. Thematic Categorization of the Epic Repertoire Our textual analysis categorizes the Karakalpak epic repertoire into three dominant thematic groups: Heroic Epics: Dominated by the jiraws, these include monumental works like "Alpamysh" and "Edige." The central conflict usually involves the defense of the homeland against foreign invaders and the preservation of honor. Lyrical-Romantic Epics: Performed primarily by bakhshis, this category includes "Garib Ashiq" and the extensive "Goroghli" cycle. These narratives focus on human psychology, the struggle for pure love, and personal tragedy. The Matriarchal Echo - "Qirq Qiz": A unique finding in Karakalpak folklore is the epic "Qirq Qiz" (Forty Girls), centering on Gulaim, a teenage female warrior, and her forty female companions. This epic provides critical evidence of the high social status and martial capabilities of women in ancient nomadic Turkic societies. Typology of Regional Epic Schools A significant result of the ethnological mapping of Karakalpakstan is the identification of distinct regional schools of epic performance: The Northern and Eastern School (Chimboy, Kegeyli, Taxtakopir): Situated in the harsh steppe environments, this school represents the most conservative and martial branch, heavily dominated by the jiraw tradition (e.g., Esemurat jiraw). The Southern School (Turtkul, Beruniy, Ellikqala): Contiguous with the Khorezm oasis, this school exhibits profound cross-cultural synthesis. It is the stronghold of the bakhshi tradition, characterized by instrumental ensembles and highly ornamented vocal melodies.

The Aral Sea (Moynaq) School: The coastal populations developed a distinct sub-school. The geographic isolation of the delta region allowed for the preservation of unique, melancholic melodic motifs. Pedagogical Continuity: The Master-Apprentice (Khalfa-Shogird) System The survival of the Karakalpak bakhshi art over centuries is entirely due to the rigorous traditional pedagogical method known as khalfa-shogird. The apprentice first learns to recite thousands of lines of poetry rhythmically, mastering modular formulas that allow them to construct the epic dynamically. Only after mastering the text does the apprentice learn the qobiz or dutar. The final stage is the acquisition of improvisational skills. A true bakhshi never performs an epic the exact same way twice; they read the audience's mood and adjust the narrative accordingly.

CONCLUSION. In conclusion, the traditions of the Karakalpak bakhshi and jiraw art are a unique cultural phenomenon that has traversed a long evolutionary path spanning several centuries. Possessing distinct performance styles, magical musical instruments, and a massive repertoire of oral literature, this heritage is a testament to the intellectual and emotional depth of the Karakalpak people. Having existed solely in oral form for a long time, this heritage was preserved and transformed into written academic property thanks to the selfless labor of 20th-century scholars.

Today, preserving and developing the bakhshi schools has been elevated to the level of state policy. Higher education institutions, such as the Uzbekistan State Institute of Arts and Culture, are training young performers in folklore traditions. Bakhshis and jiraws are the guardians of spirituality who have gathered the noblest ideas regarding socio-morality, bravery, and self-sacrifice. Fully and authentically transmitting these traditions, including the vital master-apprentice methodology, to future generations remains a fundamental duty for both educators and researchers.

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