DIFFERENCES BETWEEN THE KARAKALPAK BAQSI AND JIRAW TRADITIONS

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Summary. The article describes the differences between two groups of performers in Karakalpak folk art, the baqsı and the jıraw. It compares the dastans (oral epics) they perform, the musical instruments they play, the structure of their songs and their performance schools, and outlines what the two traditions have in common.

Keywords: baqsı, jıraw, duwtar, qobız, dastan, terme, tolǵaw.

In Karakalpak oral literature, the performers of dastans (oral epics) fall into two large groups: the baqsı (a singer-poet who performs with the duwtar, a long-necked plucked lute) and the jıraw (an epic reciter-singer who performs with the qobız, a bowed string instrument). Both groups perform and create folk epics and songs, yet they differ from one another in their performance traditions. For this reason, an understanding of the difference between the baqsı and the jıraw is one of the basic prerequisites for understanding Karakalpak folklore. The first difference concerns the dastans they perform. Karakalpak dastans are divided into two large groups: heroic dastans and ashıq (love-romance) dastans. Heroic dastans were sung by jıraws to set melodies, accompanied by the qobız, whereas ashıq (lyro-epic) dastans were performed by baqsıs with the duwtar [1, p. 8]. Heroic dastans such as “Alpamıs”, “Qoblan”, “Máspatsha”, “Qırıq qız” and “Edige” spread through the performance of jıraws and have come down to our time. The ashıq dastans widely known among the Karakalpaks, such as “Ǵárip ashıq”, “Sayatxan-Hamra” and “Ashıq Nájep”, were performed by baqsıs.

The second difference lies in the musical instrument. Jıraws sang to the accompaniment of the qobız, with a rasping, husky voice. Baqsıs, by contrast, made the duwtar the principal instrument for performing songs and dastans. With the duwtar, a baqsı performed not only songs but also melodies of his own composition. Writing about the baqsı Berdaq, Qalmenov points out that almost all Karakalpak poets were also musicians and spread their poems among the people by singing them to the duwtar, and that for this reason poets came to be called “baqsı” [2, p. 3]. It follows that the origin of the term baqsı is connected with singing to the accompaniment of the duwtar.

The third difference appears in the performance of shorter genres. Alongside dastans, jıraws also performed termes and tolǵaws of didactic and philosophical content [1, p. 8]. A terme is a reflective song-poem; a tolǵaw is a meditative poem composed to depict a particular historical event and the person associated with it, and such poems were recited by jıraws. In structure, tolǵaws do not conform to a fixed stanza length or rhyme order: they take the form of flowing (“shubırtpa”) lines of seven to eight syllables. By the nineteenth century baqsıs had also begun to perform termes. However, the termes of baqsıs differ from those of jıraws in that they are not composed of flowing lines but are arranged in four-line stanzas and follow definite rhyme patterns (a-a-a-b or a-a-b-a). In our view, this shows that the structure of baqsı songs is more regular than that of jıraw songs. The fourth difference concerns their schools and lines of succession. In the textbook by Jarimbetov and Orazımbetov, the Karakalpak jıraw school is said to begin with the great jıraw Soppaslı Sıpıra, who lived in the fourteenth century. His path was continued by the jıraws Asan Qayǵı, Dospambet, Shalkiyiz and Múyten, and, in the eighteenth and nineteenth centuries, by Jiyen jıraw and Qazaqbay jıraw [1, pp. 8–9]. The major representatives of the jıraw school in the twentieth century are named as Óǵiz jıraw (Xojambergen Niyazov), Qurbanbay jıraw Tájibaev, Esemurat jıraw Nurabıllaev and Qıyas jıraw Qayratdinov. The art of the baqsı, for its part, was represented in the nineteenth century by Aqımbet baqsı and Muwsa baqsı, and in the twentieth century it was continued by Japaq baqsı Shamuratov, Esjan baqsı Qospolatov, Ámet baqsı Tariyxov and Genjebay baqsı Tilewmuratov. The melodies “Muwsa sen yarı” and “Arıwxan”, which the Karakalpak people love to listen to, are associated with the name of Muwsa baqsı. The origin of the terms themselves also helps to explain the difference between the baqsı and the jıraw. Performers of dastans are called jıraw and baqsı among the Karakalpaks, baxshi among the Uzbeks and Turkmens, and aqın or jırshı among the Kazakhs [1, p. 31]. In the ancient Turkic art of the word, poetry in general was called jır or yır, and its performers were called yırağıw (jıraw); these terms have been in continuous use in the cultural life of the Karakalpaks from that early period to the present day. Thus the root of the term jıraw goes back to the ancient Turkic jır tradition, whereas the emergence of the term baqsı is tied to singing to the accompaniment of the duwtar. As Qalmenov indicates, Qallı Ayımbetov writes in his book

“Xalıq danalıǵı” (“Folk Wisdom”) that the art of the baqsı came to the Karakalpaks from the peoples of Central Asia; that the Karakalpaks learned it from the Uzbeks and Turkmens of Khorezm; and that the art of the baqsı was added to the older art of the jıraw [2, p. 11]. According to this view, the jıraw tradition is the older art of the Karakalpak people, while the baqsı tradition was added later. The textbook by Jarimbetov and Orazımbetov likewise describes the art of the jıraw as an ancient art with a centuries-old tradition that has existed for as long as the Karakalpaks have existed as a people. Both traditions are precious to the Karakalpak people: the one sings of the heroic history of the nation, the other of the themes of love and fidelity. Alongside the differences, the two traditions also have much in common. Both groups are regarded as folk performers and creators, and both introduce changes into the works they perform according to the wishes of their listeners. Qalmenov writes that baqsıs did not perform the large dastans as they stood in earlier manuscripts but adapted them in their own way to the conditions of Karakalpak life [2, p. 11]. The two traditions were also not entirely separate from each other: in the nineteenth century baqsıs began to perform termes, which had been a genre of the jıraw, while Shankot jıraw of Bukhara performed the dastan “Qırıq qız” on the qobız and, besides that, performed the poems of Maqtumqulı with innovations of his own.

A distinctive example among the jıraws is Shankot jıraw of Bukhara. Qalmenov writes that what set him apart from the other jıraws of that area was that he performed not with the laqay (a small instrument resembling the duwtar, fretless and two-stringed) but with the Karakalpak qobız. This example once again confirms that the art of the jıraw is bound up with the qobız.

Table 1. Summary of the differences between the jıraw and baqsı traditions

Feature	**Jıraw**	**Baqsı**
Instrument	qobız (bowed string instrument)	duwtar (long-necked plucked lute)
Main repertoire	heroic dastans (“Alpamıs”, “Qoblan”, “Qırıq qız”, “Edige”)	ashıq (lyro-epic) dastans (“Ǵárip ashıq”, “Ashıq Nájep”) and lyrical songs
Verse form	flowing lines of 7–8 syllables (tolǵaw, terme)	four-line stanzas with fixed rhyme (a-a-a-b, a-a-b-a)
Origin of the term	ancient Turkic jır / yır (poetry)	singing to the duwtar

In conclusion, the baqsı and the jıraw are two great traditions in Karakalpak folk art that complement each other. Jıraws performed heroic dastans on the qobız, in a rasping voice, in songs of flowing lines, whereas baqsıs performed ashıq dastans and lyrical songs on the duwtar, arranged in four-line stanzas. Knowing these differences helps young performers to choose their repertoire correctly and to preserve the performance style that is characteristic of each tradition.

References

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Rezyume. Maqolada qoraqalpoq xalq san’atidagi ikki guruh ijrochilar, ya’ni baxshi va jirov o‘rtasidagi farqlar bayon etilgan. Ular ijro etgan dostonlar, chalgan cholg‘u asboblari, qo‘shiqlarining tuzilishi, ijro maktablari taqqoslanib, ikki an’ananing umumiy tomonlari ko‘rsatiladi.

Резюме. В статье описываются различия между двумя группами исполнителей в каракалпакском народном искусстве — баксы и жырау. В ней сравниваются исполняемые ими дастаны, музыкальные инструменты, на которых они играют, структура их песен и исполнительские школы, а также указывается, что общего между двумя традициями.

Kalit so‘zlar: baxshi, jirov, dutor, qo‘biz, doston, terma, tolg‘ov.

Ключевые слова: бақсы, жырау, дутар, қобыз, дастан, терме, толғау.