

# The history and theory of folklore as a form of worldview

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**Abstract:** This article explores the history and theoretical foundations of folklore as a form of worldview, focusing on the development of oral folk art in Karakalpak culture. Folklore, which emerged as a primary means of artistic expression, played a crucial role in reflecting the social, economic, and political life of the people. The study examines the syncretic nature of early artistic forms and their evolution into distinct literary genres—lyric, epic, and drama. Special attention is given to Karakalpak folklore, its genre classification, and its function in shaping national identity and cultural continuity. The study concludes that folklore serves as both an artistic and philosophical means of understanding reality, preserving historical memory, and transmitting cultural values through generations.

**Keywords:** Folklore, oral literature, artistic worldview, genre classification, Karakalpak folklore, lyric, epic, drama, cultural heritage, oral tradition, literary theory.

**Introduction:** As a result of this complex development, which spanned many millennia, humanity acquired the ability to experience aesthetic pleasure and be influenced by the surrounding environment, events, and phenomena. More precisely, in the history of world culture, a remarkable form of art emerged, revealing the delicate and diverse mysteries of life's phenomena. Art has shaped multiple forms of artistic expression reflecting life's phenomena, such as architecture, sculpture, painting, music, and more. Alongside these art forms, "literature—often regarded as the highest and most intricate art form,"<sup>1</sup> the "art of words"<sup>2</sup>—also emerged. From the dawn of human consciousness to the present day, it has continued to evolve and expand.

In the words of the Russian literary theorist V.G. Belinsky, "Artistic literature exists in a person's free speech, possessing both harmony and imagery, as well as a clearly expressed concept." Therefore, poetry encompasses all other aspects of art, utilizing all the means available in various forms of art. Poetry stands out as an integral form of art, incorporating all its elements and capturing their distinctive characteristics.<sup>3</sup> From this, it follows that fiction is

divided into three types based on the artistic depiction of life's phenomena, events, and the portrayal of a specific person—that is, in terms of genre: lyric, epic, and drama.

However, before the division of fiction into genres, it had a syncretic nature, embodying features inherent in all three genres—lyric, epic, and drama. An example of this is the chorus performed by large groups of people in ancient Greek and Roman literature. During the performance of a chorus in ancient communal societies, emotionality (characteristic of lyric poetry) was expressed through the performers

sorrows and joys, while the content of events (a feature of epic poetry) and, at times, dialogues (a characteristic of drama) were also conveyed through song. Additionally, the performers' movements, gestures, and facial expressions were combined during the performance, creating a theatrical effect.

Over time, these syncretic features were classified separately, leading to the emergence of distinct forms of art: lyric, epic, and drama. "These forms evolved from century to century—the old ones disappeared, while new ones emerged. This dynamic process is a fundamental law that has existed, continues to exist,

and will persist in the nature of the genre."<sup>4</sup>

Aristotle was the first philosopher to classify fiction into genres. Based on the development of fiction in his time, he divided literature into three types in the third chapter of his work *Poetics* ("Different Methods of Expression")<sup>5</sup>. Building on this theoretical foundation, V.G. Belinsky later wrote his well-known article *Divisions of Poetry by Genre and Type*, in which he presented a clear and remarkable idea about genre.<sup>6</sup>

The word genre comes from French<sup>7</sup> and, in our view, is synonymous with the meaning of "category" or "type." Therefore, it would not be incorrect to use the word genre to refer to the three main types of literature: lyric poetry, epic poetry, and drama. In our opinion, this represents the concrete emerging from the general.

When discussing the literary genre, we have the right to analyze its origin, formation, and development over long historical periods, as well as its subject matter and artistic reflection in relation to time. This is because "genre is an evolving concept. The development of genres is a living process. Genres emerge, evolve, transform, disappear, and reappear."<sup>8</sup> However, this development is closely tied to the historical formation and evolution of national literature in each nation. Therefore, in our view, the way literature emerged among different peoples—when and how it appeared—serves as the foundation for the historical and theoretical basis of literary studies in those cultures. Aristotle, who regarded literature as a "copy of nature" or an "imitation of nature,"<sup>9</sup> demonstrated that this process occurs in three distinct ways.

That is, the "imitator" can depict events and the real life in which they unfold as an observer—"like Homer, he can describe events as something separate from himself."<sup>10</sup> Through such an artistic representation of objective reality (epic), the genre of epos emerges.

Additionally, the imitator can reflect reality by "copying nature" without altering their own identity, remaining unchanged.<sup>11</sup> In this case, they respond to life's events through personal emotions, creating truth through spiritual feelings and sensations. On this basis, the genre of lyric poetry arises.

The author, by depicting "all the portrayed characters in motion and, at the same time, as individuals engaged in decisive dramatic action,"<sup>12</sup> creates a sharply dynamic and eventful reality of life. In this context, the drama genre emerges.

The distinction between these three unique genres in the artistic representation of life's reality through three different approaches is determined by what they depict (subject) and how they depict it.

The three genres we are analyzing, in addition to their role in the artistic representation of life's reality, are classified into the following genre forms (scales):

- **Lyric genre:** Lyric poetry, elegy, satire;
- **Epic genre:** Short story, novella, novel;
- **Drama genre:** Tragedy, comedy, drama.

The theoretical classifications given above correspond to scientific analyses conducted in relation to written realistic literature.

And before the formation of written literature, the oral form of artistic expression—folklore—emerged among the peoples of the world, fulfilling its function and remaining a spiritual treasure of the people to this day.

In the history of Karakalpak literature, folk oral creativity developed from early periods, and we would not be mistaken in stating that it took shape alongside the formation of the Karakalpak language.

"Folklore, by its nature, is closely connected with philosophy, pedagogy, and other forms of art. It is especially intertwined with the history and ethnography of the people."<sup>13</sup>

The entire history of the Karakalpak people, whose written records have been preserved in limited quantities, has been artistically reflected in folklore. Karakalpak folklore is recognized worldwide as one of the richest examples of artistic expression shaped by genuine folk wisdom. The term folklore itself means folk creativity, highlighting its deep-rooted connection with the people.

The Karakalpak people have referred to their oral folk art by various names, including "dastan" (epic poems), "fairy tales," "qissa" (narratives), "proverbs," "riddles," "songs," "folk songs," "aytis" (poetic contests), and "legends." Moreover, they have collectively called these works "the people's sorrow," "the people's song," or "the people's word."

The first scholar to classify Karakalpak folklore by genre was N.Davqarayev. The second scholar to conduct such a classification was Q.Ayimbetov. Later, based on the scientific conclusions of these researchers, K.Ubaydullayev carried out his research work. Following them, the folklore scholar and professor Q.Mambetov further classified Karakalpak folklore, and this method of classification has been consistently applied as a definitive approach to this day. According to Professor Q.Maqsatov, folklore is divided into two main genres:

1. Lyric genre
2. Epic genre

The scholar classifies large-scale folk works that artistically depict events in Karakalpak folklore under the epic genre, including dastans (epic poems), jirlar

(narrative songs), *tolgʻovlar* (lamentations), etc. Under the lyric genre, he includes songs, poetic contests (*aytis*), *terme-tolgʻov* (lyrical and philosophical songs), proverbs, children's songs, ritual songs, and others.

The folk nature of folklore works is manifested in their ideological content, closely intertwined with the social, political, and economic life of the people. In the multi-genre Karakalpak folklore, one can find profound ideas created with masterful artistic expression in works that can truly be called folk-centered.

Our people have created numerous epics related to the seasons of the year and historical events, which have been passed down for centuries. Through such songs, they instilled in people a deep love for nature and society. Depending on the seasons, there are wise sayings such as: "All ninety are half-winter when winter falls, and I'm afraid of you in the heat of summer." "Sumbula gives birth stretching, and the horse grows fat in the heat of summer." "Drink poison in winter, drink what you earn in spring." "If your brain doesn't boil in the heat of summer, your pot won't boil." "Autumn's work is more than a flower." "If you plow the land in the autumn month, if you don't plow in the autumn month, in the hundred month." («Тоқсанның бәри қыс жайса жары қыс, саратан сеннен де қорқаман», «Сүмбиле туғар суңқыйып, ат семирер қунтыйып», «Қыстың күні зәхәр иш, тапқаныңды бәхәр иш», «Саратанда мийиң қайнамаса, қазаның қайнамайды», «Гүздің жұмысы гүлден көп», «Жер айдасаң гүз айда, гүз айдамасаң жүз айда») These proverbs highlight the uniqueness of each season and how people should adapt to them. Traditions associated with the Navruz holiday are also widely reflected in seasonal folk art.

In the epics *Alpamysh*, *Edige*, *Forty Girls*, *Er Shura*, and *Jahansha*, which were created in connection with the past history of the Karakalpak people, there is a profound ideological content that instills deep love for the homeland. Thus, in all genre forms of Karakalpak folklore, we observe the artistic depiction of motifs that resonate deeply with the hearts of the people, evoking their best emotions and reflecting the realities of life.

When substantiating the social and chronological features of Karakalpak heroic epics from a historical perspective, scholars have examined the content of the corresponding plots and the opinions of researchers on the subject. For example, historical sources indicate that the Matriarchy period corresponds to the early stages of the ancient social system. It emerged among some peoples before the establishment of Patriarchy, and certain governing characteristics of this system persisted even during the transition from a tribal society to a feudal society.

According to the examples found in our epics, this system must be recognized as a pre-patriarchal social structure. Among our people, mothers whose names have been passed down to the present day—such as *Ariwxan* and *Aqsholpan*—are known as clan leaders and revered folk heroes. Additionally, legendary figures such as *Zanay*, the ruler of *Samiram*, *Tumaris*, the queen of the *Massagetae*, and *Gulayim*, the brave daughter of our people, hold a significant place in history. Therefore, defining the exact timeframe of the Maternal (matriarchal) period in centuries remains a subject requiring further study. However, it is undeniable that the period of Motherhood persisted for a long time in the historical past of our ancestors, leaving a lasting imprint on their social consciousness. It is evident that in recent historical and social stages, our epics have established themselves as invaluable sources, reflecting the natural conditions in which people take pride, cherish, and find spiritual fulfillment in their memory. Another historical basis for this claim is that many researchers associate the geographical location of the maternal period with the regions of Central Asia and the Caucasus. Of course, this does not imply that matriarchal societies did not exist elsewhere. However, the preservation of a significant amount of mythical information about the maternal period in folklore from these regions and its emergence in large epic works provide further clarity in supporting the aforementioned ideas.

In conclusion, in this article, we analyze the history and theory of Karakalpak folklore as a form of worldview and come to the following conclusion:

1. The national folklore (oral folk art) of each nation is formed and developed in close connection with the distant history, socio-economic and political life, culture, and national ethnography of the people to whom it belongs. Therefore, when studying artistic folklore from which direction, from what point of view, it is advisable to analyze it through a historical approach. From this point of view, we rely on the opinions of our predecessor scholars<sup>14</sup> and accept that folklore was the primary form of society's worldview at the time of its creation. The reason is that folklore not only artistically depicts the lifestyle of the people but also serves as a unique form of life expression. For example, in folklore, songs in the form of "*Badik-gulapsan*" were traditionally used by *porkhans* to heal sick people in ancient times. Additionally, the performance of traditional songs such as "*Fatiha*," "*Bet Ochar*," and "*Beshik Qoʻshigʻi*" fulfilled the socio-cultural needs of the people.

2. In our opinion, lyrical and epic genres in the development of artistic folklore are considered literary types. This is because, when depicting the reality of life,

special attention is given to the peculiarities of artistic language. In all works characteristic of literature, the conformity of form—its outward appearance—is determined by the conformity of content from a philosophical point of view. However, in folklore, the unity of form and content is not preserved as a strict requirement, as it is in realistic literature, because folklore is considered a form of folk art. Therefore, such parameters as variant and version are inherent in folklore;

3. It is evident that the works of the epic genre in Karakalpak oral literature—such as *Forty Girls*, *Edige*, *Sharyar*, and *Alpamysh*—as well as national dastans and lyrical works (traditional songs, folk songs, Karakalpak proverbs, etc.) served as clear manifestations of the people's worldview. At the same time, folk epics and lyrical works fulfilled both ideological and artistic functions as forms of understanding the world. In carrying out this role, works were created that embodied the most distinctive aesthetic characteristics of these forms. The secular ideas and themes expressed in these works became the foundation for the artistic and aesthetic inspiration of the people, motivating them to strive for new, real-life goals.

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