



THE ORIGIN OF THE AYTIS: A HISTORICAL-TYPOLOGICAL PATH FROM WORLD FOLKLORE THROUGH THE TURKIC PEOPLES TO THE KARAKALPAK TRADITION

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Abstract. *The article examines the origin of the aytis genre (a poetic contest between two performers) in a consistent sequence, from the verbal-contest traditions of world folklore, through the Turkic peoples, to Karakalpak aytis. First, examples of verbal contests from Mesopotamian, ancient Greek and Italian traditions are presented as a typological background. Then the earliest Turkic written debate poem (Mahmud al-Kashgari), the ozan tradition and the ashıq atışma of Anatolia, and Azerbaijani and Kazakh-Kyrgyz aytis are compared. On Central Asian material, the transition of badik, zhar-zhar and qaym-aytis from ritual roots to verbal contest is traced. In the Karakalpak part, ritual songs collected by Q. Ayimbetov (bádik-gúlapsan, porxan zikiri, yaramazan, xawjar, bet ashar), sheshenlik (the art of the orator), juwap (the girl-boy reply contest), contest elements in epics and the aytis of poets are analysed in the Turkic context. As a result, a staged model of the formation of aytis is proposed as a scientific hypothesis, and its confirmed and unconfirmed parts are separated.*

Keywords: *aytis, verbal contest, munazara (debate poem), ozan, ashıq, bádik, zhar-zhar, qaym-aytis, epic, Karakalpak folklore, typology.*

INTRODUCTION

Aytis is a genre based on two performers standing against each other before listeners and competing in poetic speech. Among the Kazakhs and Kyrgyz it survives as a living art and in 2015 was inscribed on the UNESCO Representative List of the Intangible Cultural Heritage of Humanity [1]. In Karakalpak oral literature, too, aytis is widespread in the form of the aytis of sheshens (orators), the girl-boy aytis and the aytis of poets [2, p. 118].

It is insufficient to consider the origin of aytis within a single people. The idea of competing through words occurs independently in several cultures, and among the Turkic peoples it has been preserved under its own names (aytis, aytish, atışma, deyishme, aytishuv) and performance traditions. The article therefore follows this sequence: verbal contest in world folklore; the earliest Turkic written debate poem and the ozan-ashıq tradition; ritual roots and aytis on the Central Asian steppe; the Karakalpak tradition.

The aim of the article is to systematize the origin of aytıs in this sequence, relying only on scholarly sources that were actually read. The tasks are: 1) to identify the universal forms of verbal contest; 2) to distinguish the Turkic debate poem (munazara) and the ozan-ashıq tradition from aytıs; 3) to examine the ritual roots in Central Asia (bádık, zhar-zhar); 4) to place the Karakalpak material in this context; 5) to propose a model of the formation of aytıs as a scientific hypothesis.

The study relies on the historical-typological and comparative methods. Two circumstances are taken into account. First, there is no direct written evidence about the earliest stages of aytıs, so some conclusions rest on typological similarity and are not asserted as genetic links. Second, the article cites only works the author read directly; in some places the information is taken from an abstract or an encyclopaedic entry rather than the full text, and this is stated explicitly.

1. VERBAL CONTEST IN WORLD FOLKLORE: A TYPOLOGICAL BACKGROUND

One of the oldest written examples of verbal contest survives in Mesopotamian literature. According to C. Mittermayer, eight Sumerian disputations on precedence have survived; in each, two opposing conceptions of everyday life are set against each other and discussed in dialogue form, and such texts were used to teach the art of oratory in advanced literacy training [3]. G. Jarring also notes that the munazara was widely known in Arabic and Persian literature and existed earlier in Akkadian and Sumerian literature [4, p. 6]. Three features are important here: two opposing sides, their speech in the form of a dialogue-contest, and the educational function of the genre.

In the ancient Greek tradition, too, verbal contest occurs within poetry. The work known as the "Contest of Homer and Hesiod" (Certamen) describes two great poets competing against each other; according to the Harvard Classical Inquiries material, in all surviving versions Hesiod wins and Homer is defeated [5]. Thus the opposition of poets and the determination of a winner were known in ancient poetic tradition as well. However, in this article this source is taken not as a direct source of the aytıs genre but as a typological parallel, because the material says nothing about the improvisational character of performance or about direct interaction with listeners.

Improvised poetic verbal contests are also preserved today in various cultures. For example, V. Pagliai analyses, from an anthropological point of view, conflict, cooperation and the preservation of mutual face among performers in the Italian "contrasto" tradition [6, pp. 87–100]. Thus a contest of two poets is not a phenomenon peculiar to the Turkic peoples alone but a universal typological model. The distinctive features of Turkic aytıs are its ritual roots and its performance with a stringed instrument (dombıra, komuz, saz).

2. THE TURKIC MUNAZARA AND THE OZAN TRADITION



As the earliest written example of verbal contest in Turkic literature, G. Jarring names the munazara "The Contest between Winter and Summer" in Mahmud al-Kashgari's "Diwan lughat al-turk" [4, p. 6]. In later periods the munazara developed in Turkic written literature: Jarring mentions 15th-century Uzbek munazaras (Ahmadi, Amiri, Yakini) taken from Rustamov's study, the works of Lami'i and Nev'i in Ottoman literature, and Kazan-Tatar and Bashkir examples. He considers Navoi's "Contest of the Two Languages" close to a munazara in content but not a complete example of the form [4, pp. 6–7]. In the excerpt of Jarring used here, al-Kashgari's munazara is given only by its title, so no conclusion about its poetic structure is drawn in this article.

The munazara and aytis cannot be regarded as one and the same. The munazara is a genre of written literature in which the contesting sides are mostly conventional figures (summer and winter, two languages). In aytis, by contrast, the contestants are real people who resolve the situation before listeners at the same moment, by improvisation. It can therefore be hypothesized that Turkic verbal contest has two lines: a written-literary munazara line and an oral-performance aytis line. This hypothesis is the author's interpretation and has not been fully tested.

The earliest principal representative of the oral line is the ozan. In his article, Y. Poyraz reports that pre-Islamic ozans played the kopuz (an instrument close to the qobiz, the earliest form of the saz) to strengthen the effect of their words, and sang in syllabic metre and in the form of the "koshıq". According to the same article, from the 16th century the ozan tradition weakened and passed into the ashıq tradition: ashıq literature began to form in the 16th century and matured in the 17th, and in the 17th century the word "ozan" acquired a negative sense and the term "ashıq" came into wide use [7, pp. 245–273]. Poyraz does not specifically examine the origin of the atishma genre; the article only recounts the history of the transition from the ozan tradition to the ashıq tradition.

3. ANATOLIA AND AZERBAIJAN: ATISHMA IN THE ASHIQ TRADITION

According to the UNESCO description, the ashıq is a performer who is "called" in a dream and has passed a long apprenticeship; he plays the saz, his songs are mostly devoted to love and end with the poet's pen name (maxlas); he performs at weddings, in coffeehouses and at public festivals, and takes part in contests of wit and creativity with other ashıqs [8]. Thus in the Turkish tradition the contest takes place within the institution of ashıqlıq: apprenticeship, instrument, repertoire and contest are inseparable.

Analysing the ashıq tradition of Chukurova, E. Artun shows that the terms qarshılashma, deyishme and atishma are often used interchangeably. By his distinction, atishma is a contest in which ashıqs "strike" at each other with sharp words within a fixed metre and refrain; deyishme is a conversation on a general theme (no winner is determined); and qarshılashma is a contest held with



the aim of surpassing the opponent [9, pp. 73–116]. In the Chukurova tradition, the performance consists of seven stages: greeting, recalling earlier masters, the main contest, testing knowledge through riddles, mockery and teasing, mutual placating, and a farewell song [9, pp. 73–116]. Such a sequence has the character of etiquette. The greeting and farewell formulas may come from a ritual-customary root, but Artun does not present this as the origin of the genre; only the author's observation is given here.

In the Azerbaijani tradition, the names *deyishme* and *meyxana* are listed among the names of Turkic *aytis* [10, pp. 126–138]. An encyclopaedic entry also notes that *meyxana* is mostly performed without instrumental accompaniment [11]; however, this source is secondary and was not verified against a specialist study.

Tleuberdina et al. note that Turkish *atishma* relies more on fixed formal rules than Kazakh *aytis*, which is mostly improvised [12]. This makes it possible to distinguish two main types of *aytis*: the contest within the institution of *ashıqlıq* (Anatolia) and improvisational *aytis* in the steppe tradition (Central Asia).

4. THE CENTRAL ASIAN STEPPE: FROM RITUAL ROOTS TO AYTIS

In Kazakh and Kyrgyz *aytis*, two *aqins* compete with the *dombira* or *komuz*; the theme is mostly set by the listeners, and the winner is determined by judges according to criteria of skilful performance, rhythm, resourcefulness and wit; traditionally men took part in *aytis*, whereas today many women take part as well [1].

The deepest roots of *aytis* are among the hard questions. Tleuberdina et al. link the origin of *aytis* with ritual songs, wedding compositions, choral performance, competitions of young men, competitions of girls and folk games; as the oldest forms they name the wedding duet *zhar-zhar* and the incantation-healing song *badik*, which form the basis of *qaym-aytis* [12]. The name *qaym-aytis* itself derives from the Old Turkic verb "*qaymaq*" (to give a reply), and later, more complex types (*türe-aytis*, *sóre-aytis* and written *aytis*) developed on its basis [12]. The work also shows that the common elements and texts of *aytis* began to form in the Turkic regions from the second half of the 19th century.

M. Satinbekova considers *badik* songs among the oldest folklore traditions of the Turkic peoples of the Turkestan region, and shows that they occur in Kazakh, Kyrgyz, Karakalpak and Uzbek folklore, which indicates a common Turkic cultural heritage. Until the early 20th century *badik* was sung to heal sick livestock; among the Kazakhs it changed in structure and function and turned into the humorous-playful "*badik aytis*" of young people. Satinbekova notes that "*badik*



aytıs" influenced the formation of the early aytıs genre but is a distinct type, and that it is incorrect to judge it by the standards of present-day aytıs [13, pp. 458–468].

The historical-ethnographic recording of aytıs is connected with 19th-century Kazakh material. As the Astana Times material reports, the 1871 aytıs of Birjan sal and Sara Tastanbekqızı was written down by Júsip Shayxislamulı and first published in Kazan in 1898 [14]. Encyclopaedic sources likewise report that aytıs entered ethnographic study in the 19th century and became known through the aytıs "Birjan and Sara" and "Ulbike and Kúderi" [11]. Thus the ritual roots are old, while the recorded aytıs samples are comparatively recent, which forces the older stages to be studied only by reconstruction, not from direct evidence.

The names in the Turkic peoples also point to a common root. Zh. Kozhabekova and A. Pangereyev give the names of aytıs as follows: Kyrgyz aytış, Azerbaijani deyishme and meyxana, Turkish atışma, Karakalpak aytıs, Karachay-Balkar aytış, Uzbek yar-yar, Crimean Nogai deyishmeje, Kumyk takmak, and Crimean Tatar chın and mane [10, pp. 126–138]. These authors note that among some peoples the genre survives only as a tradition, whereas among the Kazakhs, Azerbaijanis and Turks it survives as a living art. Tleuberdina et al. liken Uzbek asqıya to Kazakh sóre-aytıs and distinguish aytıs as improvised poetry from asqıya as improvised prose [12].

5. VERBAL CONTEST IN EPICS AND THE SHAMAN-BAQSHI ROOT

Elements of aytıs occur not only in ritual songs but also in epics. J. Eshonqulov shows that in the epic "Alpamıs", the hero, in the guise of Qultay, is not recognized until he conducts a "óleń aytışuv" (verse exchange) with Barshın, and that this episode is present in almost all variants of the epic. In the Oghuz variant the hero Bamsi Beyrek takes the guise of a "dallı ozan", that is, a baqsı [15, pp. 11–12]. He compares this with Homer's "Odyssey" and expresses the view that in ancient times the words shaman and baqsı had one meaning [15, pp. 11–12]. This motif of exchange and recognition is important as a typological trace of aytıs within the epic; but the comparison with the "Odyssey" is Eshonqulov's interpretation and we did not compare the Homeric text directly, so this view is taken only as an untested typological parallel.

Karakalpak epics also belong to this context. Q. Ayımbetov regards the xawjar contest of Gúlshın and Qultay in the epic "Alpamıs" as a sign that folk ritual songs entered the epic [2, p. 31]. The verbal exchange of Garıp and Shasánem in the epic "Garıp-ashıq" is not a contest but takes the form of a lyrical dialogue [16], so it is preferable to regard it as a form close to the structure of aytıs.

6. KARAKALPAK AYTIS: FROM RITUAL ROOTS TO THE AYTIS OF POETS



Q. Ayimbetov's work "Karakalpak Folklore" presents a number of ritual songs closely connected with aytıs. They may be considered especially in connection with the origin of the aytıs genre.

Bádik and gúlapsan. Ayimbetov regards bádik as a survival of the oldest rites; when the bádik song was sung for a child who had developed sores, the sick child was laid in the middle before sunset and the people sang together, and in the bádik songs the fire-worshipping period of earlier people is visible [2, p. 26]. The gúlapsan song, close to bádik, also served healing [2, p. 27]. This Karakalpak material falls directly into the common Turkic badik layer cited by Satinbekova.

Porxan zikiri. Ayimbetov reports that the porxan (shaman) played the qobız and summoned spirits and jinn, that young men and women gathered around him and jumped in rows, and that in some cases the young men wrestled with the porxan [2, p. 27]. This form is not aytıs, but it shows the oldest element of opposition between the performer and the participants.

Yaramazan, xawjar and bet ashar. Yaramazan was sung with a chorus in the month of fasting and is connected with giving "pátiya" [2, p. 30]. Xawjar and yar-yar are one word, and after the wedding leader has sung, the girls and boys repeat the refrain [2, pp. 31–32]. Bet ashar consists of two parts, aytım and bet ashar proper; some of its long variants resemble the aytıs genre, and in one of them a young man asks the bride about her well-being and the bride answers [2, pp. 32–35]. Xawjar-yar-yar belongs in one typological row with the Uzbek yar-yar and the Kazakh zhar-zhar; this in itself shows that the path from wedding dialogue to aytıs is possible in Karakalpak material as well.

Sheshenlik and juwap. Ayimbetov calls the aytıs of sheshens the first type of aytıs: sheshens competed in poetic speech, settled disputes, led weddings and reconciled two peoples, and Jiyrenshe sheshen is named as the type of the sheshens of the past [2, p. 118]. The girl-boy aytıs is juwap; in the past there were sheshen young men and charming girls who made juwap aytıs their profession, but their aytıs were not committed to writing [2, p. 119]. Yu. Paxratdinov shows that being defeated in a juwap is considered shameful [17], while Ayimbetov divides juwap into three types: simple juwap, juwap of permission and juwap of aytıs [2, p. 120]. Bazarbaeva reports that Allambergenov divides aytıs into three types: the simple juwap of girls and boys, aytıs in the form of a riddle, and the aytıs of poets [18, pp. 113–115]; Allambergenov's book (1989) was not read directly by us.

The aytıs of poets. This stage is confirmed by historical sources. A short version of the aytıs of Ájiniyaz and Qız Meñesh was published in 1878 in the newspaper "Türkistan wálayatı" [2, p. 127]. The aytıs of the poet Qulımbet and Mullah Ábiybákir was printed in 1905 [2, p. 128]. The aytıs of Seyfulgábiyt and Qazı Máwlik belongs to 1913–1914 [2, pp. 131–133], and there are also the aytıs

of Aypbergen and Máten [2, pp. 133–134] and the 1926 aytis of the poets Sadiq and Ram [2, pp. 134–135]. Thus the written texts of Karakalpak aytis of poets are confirmed from the second half of the 19th century, which agrees with the observation that the texts of aytis began to form in the Turkic regions in this period [12].

7. COMPARATIVE TABLE

The data above are summarized in the table below (the number in square brackets is the number of the source in the reference list).

Table. Comparative overview of aytis and related forms of verbal contest

Tradition	Old or ritual form	Type of verbal contest	Source
Mesopotamia	Sumerian disputations (two opposing sides)	Written dialogue-contest, educational function	[3]; [4, p. 6]
Ancient Greece	Contest of Homer and Hesiod	Contest of poets, winner determined	[5]
Turkic written munazara	Al-Kashgari's "Contest between Winter and Summer"	Written-literary debate poem	[4, p. 6]
Anatolia, Azerbaijan	Ozan, kopuz; later ashıq, saz	Atışma, deyishme, qarshılashma; fixed stages	[7, pp. 245–273]; [9, pp. 73–116]; [8]
Kazakh and Kyrgyz steppe	Badık, zhar-zhar, qaym-aytis	Improvised aytis (aqins, dombıra, komuz)	[13, pp. 458–468]; [12]; [1]
Uzbek	Yar-yar; "óleń aytishuv" in "Alpamis"	Dialogue within the epic; asqıya (prose)	[15, pp. 11–12]; [12]

Tradition	Old or ritual form	Type of verbal contest	Source
Karakalpak	Bádik-gúlapsan, porxan zikiri, yaramazan, xawjar- yar-yar, bet ashar	Aytis of sheshens, juwap, aytis of poets	[2, pp. 26–35, 118– 135]

8. THE FORMATION OF AYTIS: A SCIENTIFIC HYPOTHESIS

On the basis of typological similarities, the following stages are proposed to explain the origin of aytis. This model is based not on chronology but on the sequence in which the structure and function of the forms developed, and it is a scientific hypothesis.

Stage zero (universal): the idea of competing through words. It occurs in Mesopotamia, Greece and other cultures [3; 6, pp. 87–100]. This stage is taken not as a direct source of Turkic aytis but as a typological background.

First stage: ritual-magical word. Forms such as bádik, gúlapsan and porxan zikiri rest on belief in the healing and protective power of the word and are connected with collective action [2, pp. 26–27; 13, pp. 458–468].

Second stage: ritual-wedding dialogues. Zhar-zhar, xawjar, yar-yar, yaramazan and bet ashar preserve a two-sided structure (leader and chorus, young man and bride) [12; 2, pp. 30–35]. The word takes on the meaning of "giving a reply" (qaymaq) and opens the way to qaym-aytis.

Third stage: everyday verbal contest and professional performance. In the Karakalpak tradition sheshenlik and juwap [2, pp. 118–120], in the Turkish-Azerbaijani tradition the institution of the ashıq [8], and among the Kazakhs and Kyrgyz the aqın tradition [1] reflect this stage.

Fourth stage: the aytis of poets and its recording. From the second half of the 19th century, Kazakh (Birjan and Sara, 1871) and Karakalpak (Ájiniyaz and Meñesh, 1878) aytis were committed to writing [14; 2, p. 127].

Some parts of this model are confirmed by sources (ritual forms, 19th-century written texts), but the causal link between the stages, especially the transformation of bádik into aytis in Karakalpak material, is not shown in direct sources. The model is therefore only a hypothesis and must be tested against Karakalpak archival and field materials.



CONCLUSION

The article traced the origin of aytıs consistently from world folklore to the Karakalpak tradition, and the following conclusions were reached.

First, the idea of competing through words is universal. Sumerian munazaras in Mesopotamia, the Contest of Homer and Hesiod in Greece and the "contrasto" in present-day Italy form such a typological background, but they are not asserted to be a direct source of Turkic aytıs.

Second, two lines can be distinguished in the Turkic tradition: the written-literary munazara (beginning with al-Kashgari) and the oral-performance line (ozan, ashıq, aqın). Aytıs belongs to the second. This interpretation is the author's hypothesis.

Third, in Anatolia the contest developed within the institution of ashıqlıq, whereas on the Central Asian steppe aytıs formed from ritual roots such as badık and zhar-zhar through qaym-aytıs; the common texts of aytıs began to be written down from the second half of the 19th century.

Fourth, in Karakalpak material bádık-gúlapsan, porxan zikiri, yaramazan, xawjar-yar-yar, bet ashar, sheshenlik, juwap and the verbal exchange in epics are typologically close to the old roots of aytıs, while the aytıs of poets is confirmed by written sources from 1878.

Fifth, the proposed staged model of the formation of aytıs is a scientific hypothesis, and in the future it must be tested against Karakalpak archival and field data, as well as against the full text of Allambergenov's book (1989) and the old Turkic written monuments.

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