



THE AYTIS GENRE IN KARAKALPAK FOLKLORISTICS: ITS TYPES AND CLASSIFICATION

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Abstract. *The article examines aytis, one of the best-developed genres of Karakalpak oral creativity, from the standpoint of folkloristics. It analyses scholarly definitions of the term, the place of the genre in folklore and written literature, its internal types (the aytis of sheshens, or orators; the girl-boy aytis, also called juwap; and the aytis of poets) and the classificatory features of each. The three kinds of juwap (simple juwap, juwap of permission and aytis juwap) are described, and the aytis of poets is illustrated with well-documented examples: Ajiniyaz and Qiz Meñesh, Berdaq and Ótesh, Qulimbet and Ábiwbákir, and Sadıq and Ram. The article also shows the improvisational nature of aytis, its dependence on a particular situation and its change in response to the demands of the age. Its results may be used in preparing teaching and methodological literature in folkloristics and in teaching the aytis genre in higher education.*

Keywords: *aytis, folkloristics, genre, juwap, girl-boy aytis, aytis of poets, sheshenlik (the art of the orator), improvisation, classification, Karakalpak folklore.*

INTRODUCTION

Karakalpak oral creativity is distinguished by the richness of its genres. Alongside epics, folktales, proverbs, riddles, historical songs and songs of everyday custom and ritual, there is a genre peculiar to folk creativity that arose purely as a contest of verbal art: aytis. Aytis differs from other genres in that two sides stand directly against each other and compete in words by means of improvisation.

In folkloristics the problem of aytis has been studied in two directions. First, aytis has been investigated as a manifestation of the folk poetic experience, with attention to its origin, types and poetics. Second, in the period when aytis passed into written literature, it was examined from the standpoint of literary history, according to its place in the work of individual poets. Nevertheless, it is difficult to say that the precise boundaries of the concepts associated with aytis, the internal division of the genre and the question of separating its folkloric and literary layers have been fully resolved to this day.

The aim of the article is to determine the generic nature of Karakalpak aytis on the basis of scholarly sources, to classify its types and to show the distinctive features of each type through



concrete examples. The principal sources are the section "Aytıslar" (pp. 118–135) of Q. Ayımbetov's "Karakalpak Folklore" (1977), the lecture text on folklore by Yu. Paxratdinov, the textbook materials of Q. Jarımbetov and Q. Orazımbetov, and the collection of lectures by B. Qalmenov.

1. THE DEFINITION OF AYTIS AND THE PLACE OF THE GENRE IN LITERATURE

In explaining the nature of aytıs, Q. Ayımbetov cites the view of the Russian Turkologist S. E. Malov: aytıs is a contest of poetic art and raises the culture of folk creation. This definition identifies two principal features of aytıs: first, its character as a contest, that is, a rivalry; and second, its demand for a high level of verbal art [1, p. 118].

According to Q. Ayımbetov, in Karakalpak oral literature aytıs was a firmly established genre in the repertoire and was widespread in the past. The genre developed in its own right as the aytıs genre of literature. The author notes that there were individuals who made verbal rivalry and verbal contest their profession, and that most of them were eloquent people who displayed their mastery of speech at weddings. Here the social basis of aytıs becomes visible: it was an inseparable part of the life of the people, of weddings and festivities, and of gatherings.

The concept of aytıs did not enter folkloristics at once. As Yu. Paxratdinov's lecture shows, aytıs has long been mentioned as a distinct genre of Karakalpak folk oral art: O. Kojurov and Q. Ayımbetov presented aytıs as one of the genres of our folklore, whereas N. Baskakov, when dividing Karakalpak folklore into kinds, placed juwap and aytıs among the songs of girls and young brides. The lecture also notes that the volume of N. Dáwqaraev's "Complete Collected Works" devoted to folklore contains a separate section entitled "Aytıs and Juwap". Aytıs thus acquired its status as a genre through the research of several generations of scholars.

Yu. Paxratdinov describes an important feature of aytıs as follows: without a particular history, a particular time, a particular place and two sides reciting from memory, it is hard to imagine aytıs, and the distinctiveness of the genre lies precisely in this. Aytıs is therefore defined by three conditions: a situation (an event, a place, a time), the presence of two sides, and improvisation. If one of these conditions is missing, what remains may be only a poetic dialogue or a play on words [2, p. 27].

2. THE TYPES AND CLASSIFICATION OF AYTIS

The aytıs genre is not internally homogeneous. Q. Ayımbetov divides aytıs into three types: the aytıs of sheshens, the girl-boy aytıs (juwap) and the aytıs of poets. Each type is examined separately below, on the basis of the sources.



The aytis of sheshens. In the past, sheshens were eloquent people who settled disputes by the power of speech, led weddings and reconciled two peoples. They built their speech mostly on the proverbs of the people. As Q. Ayımbetov points out, the sheshens, masters of speech, perfected aytıs by adding their own verbal skill to the use of folk proverbs. Yu. Paxratdinov's lecture also notes that the concept of sheshenlik aytıs is now treated as a distinct type of aytıs: the aytıs of juwap, the aytıs of poets and the aytıs of sheshens are included under aytıs and studied as a genre in their own right [1, p. 118].

The girl-boy aytıs (juwap aytıs). This type is a poetic verbal contest between girls and boys and between young men and young brides, and it has survived among the people to the present day. Q. Ayımbetov calls the girl-boy aytıs juwap aytıs and shows that in the past there were eloquent young men and charming girls who made juwap aytıs their profession [1, pp. 119–120].

The aytıs of poets. This type represents the most developed form of aytıs, at the highest literary and aesthetic level. It was the first item in the repertoire of the qıssaxans (reciters of qıssa tales): after reading a qıssa, the qıssaxans read out the poets' aytıs, which the audience found highly engaging. This view is confirmed in B. Qalmenov's collection of lectures, which notes that the aytıs and eulogy genres of the folk poets in literature formed a permanent part of the qıssaxans' repertoire [1, p. 125] [3, p. 25].

Yu. Paxratdinov's lecture also mentions the minor types of aytıs: bádık, gúlapsan, zikir salıw, yaramazan and pátiya are separated from the songs of custom and studied as genres in their own right. The classification of aytıs is therefore still incomplete, and the generic place of some types remains a matter of dispute.

3. THE GIRL-BOY AYTIS (JUWAP): ITS TYPES AND POETICS

According to Q. Ayımbetov, there are three kinds of juwap: simple juwap, juwap of permission and aytıs juwap. Simple juwaps occur in everyday speech under the influence of proverbs [1, pp. 120–121].

The juwap of permission is connected with the poetic exchange between girls and boys at the moment of leaving a gathering. When young men come to girls, or girls to young men, they ask permission when they leave, and it is considered proper for permission to be given in poetic words. In such a situation a stable formula of the juwap of permission occurs:

«A reply for a reply, what reply is there to the biy's reply? There is no separate reply for each: one reply for all of you.» (literal translation)



In this example the word "juwap" is repeated and the lines are rhythmically complete. Such formulaic stability is connected with the way in which the genre is preserved orally: the performer applies a memorized model to the situation.

The aytıs juwap is the most complex kind and develops into a long verbal exchange. If young men who want to prolong the festivity ask permission to leave, the girl gives her reply in the form of a riddle. The example cited by Q. Ayımbetov runs as follows:

The girl: «There is one reply, the red rose; there is one reply, the nightingale; there is one reply, the dúldil. Which will you choose, dear quda bala? Decide for yourself.» (literal translation)

The young men: «If you take the nightingale, you will leave; if you take the dúldil, you will arrive. If your red rose, which has taken form, withers, what will you do?» (literal translation)

In this example the structure of reply and counter-reply is clearly visible. The girl offers the young man a choice, while the young men's side remains within the same system of images (rose, nightingale) and answers the girl's words with a sharp counter-question. Both sides thus stand against each other within one system of images, through those very images.

Q. Ayımbetov also notes the great importance of the riddle in this type of aytıs. A form of giving riddles to one another by speaking riddling words was called jazbaq, and in the girl-boy aytıs, as well as in the aytıs of poets, the contestants made full use of riddles to test each other's verbal skill. This shows how closely the aytıs genre is connected with minor genres such as the riddle and the proverb [1, pp. 114–115].

On the dependence of the girl-boy aytıs on the situation Yu. Paxratdinov writes that a juwap is connected with the moment, action and event at which the contest takes place. For example, a juwap given when a young man enters a house and speaks to the girls sitting there without paying them any attention is one kind of aytıs. Such juwap aytıs are still very common among the Karakalpaks today, and are used between girls and boys and between young men and young brides in order to defeat one another. Moreover, in the Karakalpak tradition it was considered shameful to be defeated in a juwap. This custom shows that aytıs is not only a contest of artistic speech but is also connected with the folk tradition of conduct [2, p. 26].

Q. Ayımbetov offers the following important observation about the girl-boy aytıs: because the names and aytıs of the girls and boys were not committed to writing, they were lost, and only legends about them have survived among the people. For example, there are legends about girls who were never defeated in speech, such as Xiyuwalı qız and Mehter qız. Some juwap contests became incomprehensible to later generations as the age changed, and their songs were lost. These



facts explain why the girl-boy aytis is so poorly preserved in written sources: the genre lived directly in an oral environment and lost its meaning when separated from the situation.

4. THE AYTIS OF POETS: HISTORICAL EXAMPLES AND TEXTOLOGICAL PROBLEMS

The aytis of poets is the largest and most developed type of the genre, and its principal feature is its connection with the work of known poets. Q. Ayımbetov considers that it can almost be said that the Karakalpak poets of the nineteenth century did not write down the aytis genre of literature. These aytis are therefore of twofold importance, both for the history of written literature and for folkloristics.

The aytis of Ájiniyaz and Qız Meñesh. Q. Ayımbetov notes that no complete, textologically studied and edited text of this aytis has come down to us. A short version of the aytis was published before the revolution, in 1878, in the issues of 12 September and 9 October of the newspaper "Türkistan wálayatı", which appeared in Tashkent, and a Kazakh version was published in Alma-Ata in 1965 in the second volume of the book "Aytıs" [1, p. 127].

In historical narratives Ájiniyaz speaks with Qız Meñesh under the titles "By the water", "At the wedding" and "As guests", and the last line of the aytis is taken to mean that Ájiniyaz and Qız Meñesh contested at one wedding for three days. Ayımbetov notes that the variants of the aytis differ from one another in their circumstances and that in some cases narratives told in prose are interspersed between the verses. Because the cause and circumstances of the beginning of the aytis were not committed to writing, it became incomprehensible to later generations. This raises the principal textological problem: it is difficult to examine the text of an aytis apart from the situation in which it lived. For this reason the Ájiniyaz–Meñesh aytis has not been fully studied from the textological point of view.

The textbook of Q. Jarımbetov and Q. Orazımbetov gives an extract from the aytis itself. In the extract the two sides greet each other and ask about the road and the journey. Meñesh says, «If there is a wedding, singing verses and making merry», and Ájiniyaz replies, «I have come to see my kinsfolk and to greet my father and mother». These lines show the traditional opening formulas of aytis: greeting, defining the situation and asking about the journey. Yu. Paxratdinov assesses this aytis as the classical peak of the aytis of poets in folklore and notes that it contains such meaningful examples of the composition of artistic speech that they are hard to find in other aytis. Q. Ayımbetov also notes that this aytis shows the past traces of the friendship of the Kazakh and Karakalpak peoples [4, p. 87] [2, p. 26].



The aytıs of Berdaq and Ótesh. According to Q. Ayımbetov, in the aytıs of the poet Ótesh and Berdaq, Berdaq wrote a poem saying that the Múyten clan knew nothing but fishing. Ayımbetov gives two explanations: first, it was a general tradition for poets to write verses about an aytıs; second, in Karakalpak custom there was a habit of joking with one's maternal kin, since Berdaq composed his poem mocking the Múyten, his maternal kin, and the poet Ótesh answered it in the form of an aytıs. The author also notes that the disputes between individuals, clans and tribes are visible in the aytıs of the past. The aytıs of poets is thus important not only as a literary contest but also as a source reflecting social and historical relations [1, p. 126].

The aytıs of the poet Qulımbet (1852–1912) and Ábiwbákir (1858–1919). In the history of Karakalpak literature this aytıs is called "The aytıs of the poet Qulımbet and Mullah Ábiwbákir". According to Ayımbetov, it was the first of the many aytıs of poets to be printed, in 1905, and so became known in the printed word. That the aytıs was conducted through letters of greeting and appeared as a book proves that Qulımbet was a well-known poet. The aytıs consists of 224 lines and is in the Kazakh language. At that time there was a tradition of writing in two languages as a result of mutual contacts: for example, Qulımbet was a Karakalpak poet and Ábiwbákir a Kazakh aqın, and the two letters of greeting written by them in verse were included in the book [1, pp. 128–131].

The significance of the aytıs lies in the fact that it provides valuable material on the literary language norms of the time and proves the existence of contacts between the Karakalpaks and the Kazakh, Uzbek and Turkmen peoples. In his last letter Qulımbet gives, by way of reply, information about the division of peoples, maps, rivers and lakes, and the various peoples he knew (Turkmen, Kazakh, Kyrgyz, Uzbek). This type of aytıs was thus also used as a test of knowledge: the poets' geographical and ethnographic knowledge formed part of the material of the aytıs.

The aytıs of Seyfulgábiyt Májitov and Qazı Máwlik. According to Q. Ayımbetov, in 1913–1914 the poet Seyfulgábiyt Májitov sent, from the banks of the Tallıq river, a poem in the form of a letter of greeting with various riddles to the well-known poet Qazı Máwlik of the town of Shımbay, in the name of a girl called Sapura. The distinctive feature of this aytıs is that the verbal contest was conducted by means of riddles, arithmetical calculation and alphabetical order. Qazı Máwlik composed a poem by arranging the word "Sapura" in alphabetical order and wrote his replies to the questions through riddles and calculation. This type of aytıs shows the union of intellectual and poetic skill in the poets. Ayımbetov also notes that the qıssaxans included the aytıs of these two poets in their repertoires and recited them in verse [1, pp. 131–133].

The aytıs of Aypbergen and Máten. The poets Aypbergen and Máten, who lived north of the town of Qońırat, wrote poems to each other and replied in verse. Q. Ayımbetov writes that Máten



composed a poem mocking Aypbergen and, departing from custom, slandered clans, and that at the request of the young men of the Qiyat and Ashamaylı peoples Aypbergen replied to Máten in verse with a sharp tongue. Aypbergen's reply was read before the public and spread widely through the qıssaxans. This shows that aytıs was not merely a verbal contest between two poets but was disseminated widely among the people through the qıssaxan tradition [1, pp. 133–134].

The aytıs of the poets Sadıq and Ram (1926). The aytıs of the poets Sadıq and Ram took place at a place called "Jańa bazar" or "Ayaq hawlı" in Qaraqalpaqstan (now in the Kegeyli district). At a wedding, young men incited Ram, had the words with which he would contest Sadıq written down on paper and kept ready, and meanwhile deceived Sadıq and took him unawares to the wedding. Sadıq then, unprepared, began by improvisation to sing his aytıs aloud. Sadıq's reply spread widely through the qıssaxans. This aytıs is an example that clearly shows the improvisational nature of the aytıs of poets [1, pp. 134–135].

Q. Ayımbetov considers the aytıs of the poets Ram and Sadıq to be the last example of the aytıs of poets in literature. It is also noted that the dramatist Ábdıraman Ótepov staged the aytıs of poets in his aytıs scene "Jezdejan". The author further notes that aytıs was a genre that held a strong place in the repertoire of the bards and qıssaxans of the past, but that today it is losing its active role.

5. THE GENERIC FEATURES OF AYTIS

The analysis of the materials above makes it possible to identify several stable generic features of Karakalpak aytıs.

First, its improvisational nature. Aytıs is not a text prepared in advance but speech created on the spot, in response to the situation. Some poets prepared beforehand (the poet Ram), while the other side replied by improvisation (the poet Sadıq).

Second, the two-sidedness of the participants. Aytıs always takes place between two sides, who put questions to each other, give sharp replies and display intellect and verbal skill in order to win.

Third, the presence of a particular situation. Aytıs takes place in a particular setting (a wedding, a visit, the bank of a river, a gathering). On the example of the Ájiniyaz–Meńesh aytıs, Q. Ayımbetov shows that the many variants of an aytıs differ from one another in their circumstances, and that if the situation in which an aytıs began is not included in the text, it becomes incomprehensible to later generations.

Fourth, poetic form. Aytıs is embellished within a poem of large scale by the repetition of lines, rhyme, riddles, imagery and elements of the proverb. Elements of prose are also interspersed in the aytıs.



Fifth, social and historical content. The aytıs of poets reflects historical problems such as clan, people, historical relations and the friendship of peoples. According to Q. Ayımbetov, the aytıs of Ájiniyaz and Meñesh is a historical trace of the friendship of the Kazakh and Karakalpak peoples and is of great importance as a sign of the friendship of peoples in the past.

CONCLUSION

The results obtained make it possible to formulate the main theses on the generic nature of Karakalpak aytıs.

First, aytıs is a genre in its own right in Karakalpak folklore, and its principal features are two-sidedness, improvisation and the presence of a particular situation. Aytıs is not merely a poetic dialogue but a contest of artistic speech that performs a definite function in the social life of the people.

Second, the aytıs genre is divided into three main types: the aytıs of sheshens, the girl-boy aytıs (juwap) and the aytıs of poets. Each type has its own poetic and functional characteristics. The classification of aytıs still requires study, and in particular the generic place of minor types such as bádık, gúlapsan and zikir salıw needs to be established.

Third, the aytıs of poets stands on the boundary between folklore and written literature and serves as a valuable source for both. A full textological study of most examples, such as the Ájiniyaz–Meñesh, Qulımbet–Ábiwbákir and Sadıq–Ram aytıs, has not yet been carried out, and this remains an important direction for future research.

Fourth, aytıs has reduced its active role at the present time, but examples of the girl-boy juwap aytıs and of the aytıs of poets are preserved in the memory of the people. Teaching the aytıs genre in higher education within folkloristics and continuing the work of collecting and preserving its examples is an important condition for passing our national heritage on to future generations.

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