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The effect of ancient totemic beliefs on the Kazakh traditional singing

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Abstract

The Kazakh musical culture has undoubtedly a rich history that stretches back to ancient time. The philosophy of the Kazakh people is laced with mythological beliefs, with belief in higher forces, magic. Music has always had a sacral meaning for the Kazakhs; all the major life stages were accompanied with the corresponding folk songs. Totemic beliefs occupy a special place in the philosophy of the Kazakh music. This article seeks to establish the relationship between totemic in the Kazakh culture and traditional singing. The evolution of totemic symbols and their role in the life of Kazakh people were observed.

Keywords: Kazakh culture, Traditions, Song art, Totemic, Sacral meaning.

El efecto de las antiguas creencias totémicas en el canto tradicional kazajo

Resumen

La cultura musical kazaja tiene, sin duda, una rica historia que se remonta a la antigüedad. La filosofía del pueblo kazajo está ligada a creencias mitológicas, a creencias en fuerzas superiores, magia. La música siempre ha tenido un significado sagrado para los kazajos; todas las principales etapas de la vida fueron acompañadas con las canciones populares correspondientes. Las creencias totémicas ocupan un lugar especial en la filosofía de la música kazaja. Este artículo busca establecer la relación entre totémico en la cultura kazaja y el canto tradicional. Se observó la evolución de los símbolos totémicos y su papel en la vida de los kazajos.

Palabras clave: Cultura kazaja, Tradiciones, Arte de la canción, Significado totémico, Sacro.

1. INTRODUCTION

Human thinking at the earliest stages of its existence equated all animate and inanimate (animism), attached great importance to the analogy, handled various kinds of magical images and symbols. In the course of their practical activities, people do not deal directly with the world around them, but with representations of the world, with cognitive pictures and models. The representation of the world is its comprehension, interpretation. The world was presented to human through the prism of his culture, in particular, through language; it is a metaphor that is a kind of "picture of the world", which is not the same among the carriers of different cultures or in separate historical periods of the same culture. An ethnic group builds its culture in connection

with the need to find spiritual harmony between itself and the environment. Cultural identity of any ethnic group is carried out through art (AKATAEV, 1993).

The world picture, which has its own purely ethnic features, is determined by the belonging of the subject of the vision of the world to a certain national culture. The national world picture is a “coordinate grid”, in which this people captures the world, it is a cosmos (in the ancient term: the world system, world order) people depicts in their work. The music reflects a way of thinking of people who created it, their attitude, mentality, painting the world model through their meanings in "national and cultural colors". In ancient times, music played a major role not only in the knowledge and understanding of the world, but the world itself for the Kazakhs was musically designed and musically structured. Moreover, music (more precisely, its traditional forms) was the most important element of ethnic memory and ethnic codification, which to a much greater extent – in contrast to other forms of art and even literature – preserved and reflected the features of the ethno genesis of the Kazakhs and their ethnic history.

Mythological consciousness was the main means of understanding the world. The study of the mythological world picture makes it possible to read the lost pages of the past, to remember the former spirit, sacredness, perception of the world. Through the myth, the past was connected to the present and future, a spiritual connection of generations was provided, value system was established, certain forms of behavior were maintained. Through legends, tales, historical

traditions, mythological images entered the literature, music, and painting – culture of peoples. The myth got down from the historical arena, but the search for answers about the origin of the world, human, the mystery of the origin of musical instruments, etc., prompted by the mythological consciousness, did not stop.

The study of the characteristic features of the world picture of the Kazakh music requires consideration of purposeful aspects related to the human's understanding of the world and human's place in it, "not about what the world is, but about what it means for the being living in it" (UNDERHILL, 2009), with the process of creating cultural values, their functioning in society, with the storage and transfer of cultural experience. The origins of culture are reflected in traditional rites, rituals associated with producing and practical activities, with "mythology (sacral sphere), with ritual and magical practice, which is based on the worldview of the nomad" (OMAROVA, 2009).

Music is an emotional discovery of the deep tendencies of this world explaining the mystery of movement, the mystery of being. The images of the world might include the world of mental images, such as legend, tale, ballad, saryn, kyui, akzhelen, zhoktau, zhyr, that reflect the wise philosophy of contemplation, high generality of folk psychology. Traditional music of the Kazakhs, being a carrier of spirituality, creativity, philosophical thought, is an encyclopedia of figurative and emotional system, one of the means of self-identification of the nation, its "genetic code".

The study of the conceptual and mythological world picture of the Kazakh traditional music is due to the need to replenish the knowledge on the system that reflects the diversity of instruments, performers, because they all constitute the world picture, that is reflected in the music of the Kazakh people. The study of a separate genre in the genre system, instruments and performers works, ultimately, for learning and contemporary reinterpretation of traditional music, the transfer of constants of the ancient world-outlook, philosophical system, spiritual levels of the universe of the Kazakh people. It reveals the essence of the world of traditional music and spirituality of the Kazakh people, it is necessary to focus on the main element and guide – on the mythological consciousness, which is the basic part of traditional culture, the world model in the mytho-consciousness.

It is impossible to imagine a human life that does not rely on a certain set of beliefs – from the most primitive to the most complex philosophical systems. It follows that faith, in its modern ideological and traditional forms, and remains an essential part of any culture.

Shamanism, as an ancient religion dating back to Paleolithic, is based on the belief in the existence of spirits and in a special mediator – the shaman, chosen by spirits. The Yakuts called shamans *Oyun*; Mongols called them *Boge* or *Udagan*; Kazakhs and Kirghiz called them *Baks*, Turkmens – *Bakshi*; Buryats and Mongols – *Byo*; Eskimos – *Angakok*; Altaians, Khakas, Tuvans – *Kam*. Hoppal wrote about the need for special intermediaries between the human collective and the spirits (Deities):

The duty of shamans is to serve the spirits and use them to protect their tribesmen from harm. Shamans communicate with spirits in an ecstatic state. At the same time, the guardian spirit can merge with the shaman into a single whole, incarnate in him (HOPPAL, 1995).

It is believed that the help of spirits gives shamans “supernatural powers that can ensure successful fishing, predict the future, avert misfortunes, find the loss, find out the causes of diseases, treat the sick, accompany the souls of the dead to the afterlife” (PEARSON, 2002).

The conceptual and mythological world picture of traditional Kazakh music reflects the diversity of the world in its complex, subtle and profound manifestations, bringing us to a subtle, but very real phenomenon, referred to as “national spirit”, reflecting “the spiritual world of the people from the elementary sensations to the highest motives to a complicated intellectual activity.” Music, representing a world picture, is present in it directly, defining its features. Assessment of the depth and understanding of the meaning of the world of traditional music is impossible without knowledge of the history of the Kazakh people, style of thinking. To comprehend and decipher the cultural significance of music is possible only by means of immersion in culture, using semantic codes – linguistic and cultural concepts, culture determines the concept (this is a mental projection of the elements of culture), and music is the sphere in which the linguistic and cultural concept is defined.

Therefore, the world picture is extremely diverse; it is always a kind of vision of the world, its meaningful construction occurs in accordance with a certain logic of worldview. Comparing different cultures and their worldview can reveal specific national features of world

perception. Shamanism, as an ancient religion, is based on the belief in the existence of spirits and on a special intermediary shaman – baksy, in whose hands was concentrated all the magical practice, rooted in the era of primitive syncretism. The secret of the influence of Baksy's music lies in the special character of the kobyz sounds, which mysterious low timbre is able to evoke the corresponding hypnotizing mood, giving the melody a "mystical", "otherworldly character". The correlation of ancient forms and meanings, contained in the anthropomorphic structure of the structure of kobyz, conceals the hidden, inexplicable energy and is of a sacred nature. Folk etymology is called "etymological magic, which merges with other, non-linguistic (ritual, mythological) types of magic." We use this concept in relation to the etymological versions of the concepts of Baksy and kobyz, which store obscured or erased in the language semantic secrets of the features of the world picture of the Kazakh people.

2. METHODOLOGY

In the course of this study, the authors used such research methods as historical analysis, literary sources analysis, and musical-theoretical analysis. It was impossible to imagine systematic studying of ancient mythological form and monotheism as an independent object as early as forty years ago. Methodological base for research of this problem constitutes the ethnographic and research works of such specialists in folklore of the 19th century as Ch. Valikhanov, A. Divaev, D. Banzarov and the monographic works of foreign scholars such as M. Bois, V. Turner, L. Levy-Brul, O. Fradenberg, S. A. Tokarev, V. N. Basilov, E. M. Meletinsky and others (VALIHANOV, 1958; TURNER, 1983;

FREIDENBERG, 1978). The ideas of different ancient superstitions, beliefs and Islamic influences on verbal poetic creativity and their reflection in customs and ceremonies were studied by many researchers of Kazakh folklore such as M. Auezov, A. Margulan, B. Uahatov, B.Abylkasimov, C. Kaskabasov, E. Tursunov, A. Seidimbek and in theological, ethnographic, philosophical research works by T. Shulenbaev, S. Aktaev, H. Arginbaev, A. Toleubaev, G. Kasimov (AUEZOV, 1971; MARGULAN, 1983; UAHATOV, 1974; ABILKASYMOV, 1993; KASKABASOV, 1992). These research works confirm the importance of ancient mythological beliefs in the worldview of the Kazakh people. The stated aspect of the study is successfully developing in the field of musicology as well. Systematic description of world mythological picture was conducted in the fundamental work “Traditional world view of turkeys of South Siberia” (SAGALAEV & OKTYABRSKAYA, 1990), where on the basis of presentations of a number of Turkic peoples, social status of shaman and role of singing in the life of studied people were analyzed.

3. RESULTS AND DISCUSSION

Kazakh ancient totemic beliefs, related to the funeral-mention rites, dualistic ideas about afterlife and ceremony of initiation, according to researchers S. Raimbergenova and G. Omarova (RAIMBERGENOVA, 1993; OMAROVA, 2009), supplemented the content of semantics of ancient kyui-legends about lame and sacred animals. S. ELEMANOVA (2000) also focused on initial character of wedding *sinsu* and *betashar*. Integral approach in the study of wedding

ceremony allowed not only to expose its ethnographic specific, but also subtle semiotics of ceremony. Articles devoted to the songs of zharapazan outlined the evolutional way of religious presentations in the Kazakh song. Mythological layer of the Kazakh ancient folklore lyric poetry was studied by D. AMIROVA (2003), where the author tried to look into the world of daily life of that time and recreates the view of ancient ideal of sound, based on an imitation of sounds of the nature. This explains the position of A. BERDIBAI (1997), which the most archaic part of the song sounds reasonably, because it rudimentary exists till today as a non-lexical adding to the verse.

Human life has long been associated with animals. For many millennia, human has had various forms of communication with the animal world. Initially, animals were considered deities, then were a labor force, some animal inspired ancient people with fear, some – brought joy, provided food and clothing. The obvious fact is that human and animal were in constant contact, close communication between human and animals reflected in the language as a way of adapting ancient human to the world around him.

In the Kazakh traditional music, as well as in the music of many Turkic and Mongolian peoples, there are instrumental folk tunes, kyui-legends named after animals and birds. Their abundance is associated primarily with the hunting and cattle-breeding life of these peoples, but such musical thematic line involving the images of animals and birds characterize, obviously, not only the household activities of people. Animalistic images of the Turkic-Mongolian peoples should be

interpreted primarily as images of totemic nature, the first ancestors of certain genera and tribes, images of sacred animals – symbols of well-being, vitality and luck (RAHIMBERGENOVA, 1993). The cult of totemic and sacred animals (magical ritual practice of propitiation of spirits) discloses a rich tradition of sound vividness on Turkic-Mongolian musical instruments (OMAROVA, 2016)

The special role of folk music in the life of the Kazakh people is reflected in numerous ancient myths and legends, which confirms the deep historical roots of this layer of culture. Few things can compare in depth and beauty with these myths and legends in Kazakh folklore. They were created by ancient tribes and peoples who took part in the ethno genesis of the Kazakhs, which in turn multiplied the rich cultural traditions of their ancestors. Musical myths and legends, which are an integral part of the traditional religious system, place the musical instrument on the highest level of the universe as the Creator and carrier of the cosmic order, the conductor of pure energies that unite the Cosmos, Nature and Man in a harmonious whole (MERGALIEV, 2007).

The idea of the origin of the family, tribe from some mythical animal-ancestor was reflected in the objects – totems. Weapons, horse bridle, battle flag were decorated with them, so that totems would make them invulnerable, lead to victory, hand the supernatural power of the totem over to them. Amulets – "tumars" – are also known as talismans against undesirable influences from the outside (SKLYAR & KAMALOVA, 2015).

The Turkic culture of hunters, cattle-breeders and warriors not only knows the life of nature from everyday observations, but also vividly senses the intuition of the unity of all organic life, the created world, all creatures that, similarly to human, are born for life and death. And yet, listening to Kazakh *kyui* about animals and birds, it is impossible to get rid of the feeling: this knowledge of animal behavior, the revelation of the unity of organic life and brotherhood in death – it does not stop here. There is something deeper and stronger in the attitude of nomads to nature.

Therefore, it is natural that the basis of totemic myths is the ideas about the relationship between a certain group of people and totems – species of animals and plants. The archaic belief in the relationship of all species of animals and plants, probably originated in the collective unconscious, contributed to the sacralisation of totem trees and plants (NAURYZBAEVA, 2013). In folk representations, trees are often perceived as living beings: they feel, breathe, and talk to each other and even to people with special abilities. For the same reason, many taboos are associated with trees: they cannot be beaten, cut down, desecrated. The so-called "construction sacrifices" associated with totemic were considered as compensation for cutting the trees that were used for building a house, bridge, etc (FATKULLINA, 2015).

In this regard, an interesting example given by the researcher of Kazakh folk lyrics F. B. KENDYBAEV (1964) should be mentioned: in his book "History of the Turkish-Mongolian peoples" academician

V. V. Bartold gives a passage of an old song: "In forty glorious basins is there a basin where the bones of the Kirghiz would not lie? In the forty birches that grow on the ridge, is there a birch that would avoid the touch of the axe of the Kirghiz".

This song is an echo of some invasion of intruders. One might think that the lines about birches are a parallelism, and they should be in front. However, this is not a parallelism, but a laconically drawn picture of a terrible disaster. Birch trees were touched with an axe to feed on birch sap. Exactly this picture is depicted in the poem by I. Dzhanugurov "Steppe" (TOPOROV, 1992). Stored in the depths of the ancestral memory of mankind, the idea of the divine nature of the birch and the forced necessity to strike the trunk of a totem tree with an axe, as a violation of archaic norms of respectful coexistence of all species of plant and animal world, to which man belongs, represents the drama and tragedy of people driven to extreme despair, as the researcher says.

The Kazakh people are rich in songs. These songs capture the centuries-old history of the people, their hopes, aspirations, grief and joy, their thoughts and dreams. The song was heard everywhere: in the vast Kazakh steppe, in noisy fairs and bazaars, in smoke-filled huts and yurts. With a ringing, jubilant song, the strong-voiced Dzhigit opened the door, the song was sung by young women and men at evening games behind the village, the song greeted the birth of a child, a person was paid last respect with a song. Giving the girl in marriage, they sang the wedding song "Zhar-Zhar"; in the days of Muslim

festivals, Zharapazan was sung behind each Yurt; carol singers and Kazakh sorcerers – duans, baksy – walked over the villages with a song as well. As wrote G. Potanin, a friend of Chokan Valikhanov, a great expert in Kazakh culture: “It seems to me that the whole Kazakh steppe sings” (ZHUBANOV, 2002).

Shamanism (baksylyk) is one of the oldest forms of religion of the Kazakhs. Shamans (Baksy) were the main actor in this religion, they were the senders of religious worship and intermediaries (mediums) between the world of the living and the world of aruakhs – ancestral spirits. Moreover, shamans were skilled healers, fortune tellers and prophets, predicting the future. In their healing and other magic, shamans actively used music as a powerful means of emotional and psychological impact on a person. Therefore, musical performance was an integral part of the shamanic ritual.

Each baksy had his own personal melody, called saryn. This melody he used in his singing and playing the instrument. Shamanistic ritual consisted of three stages: at first baksy played the kobyz for quite a while, bringing himself in the necessary emotional and psychological state, then, addressing his guiding spirits, he began to sing to the accompaniment of the kobyz. In his singing, baksy named the spirits, asked them for help and for advice. Only then did the actual healing begin. At the same time, baksy turned the Kyl-kobyz into a certain tambourine – shaking it, making the suspended bells sound, and simultaneously struck the leather membrane stretched in the lower part of the instrument. The main purpose of shamanic music was to

create a certain psycho-emotional atmosphere. With his playing, baksy brought himself (and, at the same time, the seek person) into a state of trance, which was necessary for the successful implementation of medical or other magic. In a state of trance, baksy performed various “tricks” – pierced his body with a needle, touched a hot iron, stood on a hot coal, etc.

All this enhanced the effect of psychological influence on people and caused confidence in the abilities of baksy. Thus, it can be considered that in the musical culture of the Kazakh people, shamans-baksy were the first professional musicians. Later, other types of folk-professional art – the art of akyns and zhyrau – emerged from their environment and separated in different style.

One of the types of Kazakh folk song tradition is Akyn art. Akyn is a singer, poet, and improviser. The main sphere of activity of akyns is participation in aitys, which is a song and poetry competition. In addition, the akyns performed some family rituals: Bet ashar – the opening of bride’s face, memorial Toi, etc. Akyn activity was associated with elements of totemic, the most ancient forms of beliefs. Every akyn had their own animal guardian spirit. For example, such a totem of Zhambyl was the lion. During the aitys, these spirits helped the akyns to win the contest.

The sounds of nature, the cries of birds and animals are familiar to nomads since childhood. This knowledge, reflecting the centuries-old experience in the familiarization with the surrounding world, was

necessary for them in the producing and ritual activities. Subtle observations and accurate statements about the habits of birds and animals, onomatopoeia stemming from their voices are contained in the narrative and other genres of musical and poetic creativity of the Turkic peoples, including fairy tales, proverbs, and sayings. Images of birds and animals “act almost exclusively as a psychological parallel to the human condition” and “often become symbols-generalizations of human characters, thoughts and aspirations” (ZHUBANOV, 1958).

This “psychological parallelism” that occurs between the images of nature and human feelings, experiences, researchers refer to the universal phenomena that arose in the era of primitive animism. In ancient Turkic mythology, cults of birds and animals occupied a special place. Most of them (the cults of the swan, horse, ram, camel, wolf, deer, bull, etc.) originated in ancient times in the cattle-breeding tribes that inhabited the steppes of Eurasia (Saks, so-called Asian Scythians, VII-IV centuries BC, Usuns, and Huns). In the transformed form they were preserved in the monuments of spiritual and material culture of many Turkic peoples (Kazakhs, Altaians, Kirghiz and Tuvans) until the twentieth century.

The cult of birds is one of the most stable among several Turkic-Mongolian peoples. According to shamanic beliefs, the bird language makes it possible to communicate with the natural and otherworldly world. In the past, the cult of the Swan (“Akku”) was popular among the Huns, and later among the Kazakhs and other Turkic peoples (MARGULAN, 1959). The cry of this sacred, noble

bird in popular representations had a magical power of influence. Cults of birds and animals, zoomorphic representations associated with them, are reflected in the structure of musical instruments. Many of them, mainly chordophones, were decorated with figures of birds and animals, or resembled them in shape.

In the Paleolithic Period, an important prerequisite for the emergence of ritual and mythological foundations of Kazakh folklore was a ritual of initiation, and also a primitivism in the collective folklore myths, charms and spells. The essence of initiation was to replace the soul of the child to "adult", while the neophyte was dying and being born again started a "new" life as a fully socialized man. The result was the recognition of an adolescent by adult members of the tribal community. Similar views are prevalent among Kazakhs until today. Thus, the motif of the "new birth" of a new social quality shows the song *Betashar* in the Kazakh wedding ceremony, in which the time of removing the covers from the head of the bride has demonstrated its new birth and belonging to the husband's family. Song *Betashar* is preceded by a ceremony of bride's farewell with her settlement. Bride performed the songs *synsu*, *tanysu*, *koshtasu*, *ay-zhar*, *aryz olen* and others. In its semantics all these songs resemble a funeral lament.

Reincarnation, the transition to the "other" state, lies at the heart of the Kazakh traditional age, 12-years cyclization of human life - *Mushel* - in which each new period of life was associated with its system of genres and musical performance specialization. Intermediate

between each successive period of the life of "a dangerous year" marked a kind of "transition" to a new quality.

4. CONCLUSION

Totemic beliefs have deeply penetrated into the Kazakh culture, which is evident when closely examining its traditional music, songs and other forms of art. In this work, the authors made an attempt to trace the role of totemic and mythology in traditional culture of the Kazakh people. After the conducted analysis, it is possible to conclude that the image of a bird was especially high-valued and respected in the Kazakh traditions. In Kazakh mythology, the image of a bird was related to ceremonial practice, and deeply penetrated into the art and poetry. The image of a bird became the national pattern, found reflection in the Kazakh traditional jeweler art.

Almost among all peoples, a bird is associated with the upper world and sun. In the days of saks and oguses, the birds of the hawk's family were sacral. An eagle and griffin were depicted in the metallic decorations of saks, where a bird was interpreted as the symbol of universe. The cult of birds is proved by the names of the Kazakh tribes (urans). A golden eagle and an eagle-owl was also associated with protective force for Kazakhs. This is the reason why it is possible to find a great number of songs and musical works dedicated to birds.

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