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Surprises of Typology

From the World of Ancient Greek and Kazakh Lyric Poetry

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“Firstly, I do not subscribe to the rigid doctrine that the insider alone understands.... Secondly, I do not believe in scholarship as the sole key to a great work. A reader or listener genuinely attuned needs none of the philologist’s equipment to enter into the author’s world. He may find treasures old and new in a translation of a translation of a translation. Schopenhauer became acquainted with the Upanishads through a Latin rendering of a Persian rendering...”

David Daube (“Zukunftsmusik,” 1985). Quote after: *Collected Works of David Daube. Vol. 2. New Testament Judaism.* University of California at Berkeley, 2000. P. 366, 367.

1.

I only know ancient Greek lyric poetry through Russian translations (Vikenty V. Veresaev, Yakov E. Golosovker, Viktor N. Yarkho, and others), and I feel a certain awkwardness intruding upon a world which I have not researched in the original. I do not think that the epigraph I have cited above could fully excuse this impudence, so let me begin with how I became fascinated by such an unexpected typological parallel.

It should be noted that the unexpectedness is relative. Often, when reading ancient poetry in Russian translation and Kazakh poetic texts in the original (since the overwhelming majority of it hasn’t been translated into any other language at all), I have been struck by the concordance of their poetics and system of thinking. Only in the mid-1990s, when the first high quality translations of traditional Kazakh poetry of the 15-17th centuries began to finally appear, penned by the young Kazakh poet Kairat Zhanabaev,¹ did the similarities seem to materialize.

In 1997 I was at the University of California at Berkeley where my esteemed spouse, Izaly I. Zemtsovsky, was conducting a graduate seminar on folkloric theory. This gave me the opportunity to familiarize myself completely with an ancient Greek text in English which I had not read before.² It happened that one of my husband’s students, Yelena Baraz,³ a classicist, asked his opinion about the text—a mystery of the ancient world—hoping that

¹ See, for example, the collection of his translations in the new Russian language magazine *Shakhar* (Citation 29, p. 34-42).

² Citation no. 31, p. 83-85.

his folkloric erudition would shed some light on the nature of its genre. Considering the dialogic character of the passage, Zemtsovsky immediately recalled comparable materials presented in an article by folklorist Alan Dundes about the oral duels of Turkish boys, in which the winner calls the loser “old woman.”⁴ Not disputing that parallel, I in turn recalled the Kazakh traditional *aitys* (literally, ‘talk together,’ referring to a *battle of words*, usually a dialogic competition between two or more poets or bards). The *aitys* is an idiosyncratic type of singing duel. I gave my hypothesis on the similarity of this ancient Greek text with the special *written aitys* genre, where an *aitys* is recorded in letters.

In the spirit of the law of **typological succession**, pioneered by Boris N. Putilov,⁵ it is by no means fantastic to claim a parallel between the genre of oral-written Kazakh poetry, dated approximately between the 16th and 20th centuries CE, and the genre of oral-written ancient Greek poetry, dated (in this case) around the 7th century BCE. It is a question of – using the fortunate expression of Putilov – the preservation and comparison of particular “typological conditions.”⁶ In this case we are witnessing the birth of a practically unexamined type of poetry: the unique phenomenon of the **oral-written** tradition, specifically the oral-written tradition of the *dialogic competition* genre.

It is very important to take note of two fundamental qualities of this genre. The first concerns the oral-written form manifested as part of poetic, improvisational singing competitions. The second concerns, more broadly, the types of cultures and particular places where this seeming “world of competition” takes place.

2.

³ As of this writing, in 2009, Baraz is an Assistant Professor in the Department of Classics at Princeton University.

⁴ Citation no. 32

⁵ A note on the law of typological succession: According to Putilov, historical-typological links and relationships operate throughout the course of the historical process of folklore and encompass all of its aspects. They are universal, constant, and continuous. Putilov stressed the law of “typological succession” that he himself elaborated. The essence of this folkloric law is that various common features of a given folklore are as if internally successive, i.e., some of its works and types arise as a result of inheritance and development of that what has been achieved by others, i.e., by the folklore of other ethnicities. Succession is not the commonness of parallels but the sequence of relationships. According to this law, the traces of prehistory of a given genre (or form) in folklore of an ethnic group or nation we can find in the folklore of other peoples (or nations). Folklore is developing with some enigmatic breaks in the chain of succession: those links in the chain of tradition which are absent in one folklore can be reconstructed, according to the law of typological succession, by a proper study of another folklore. See also citations 23, 22, 1 (section “Plot typology and typological succession”), 24, 14.

⁶ Citation no. 24; additionally (added in English translation): F. B. J. Kuiper. The Ancient Verbal Contest. *Indo-Iranian Journal*, 1960. Vol. 4. p. 217–81. [repr. in Kuiper, F.B.J. Ancient Indian Cosmogony. Delhi, 1983. P. 151–215.] See also a Russian article: Agapkina, T.A. “Fol’klornyj tekst v etnograficheskom kontekste: Slovesnye poedinki, ix formy i funktsii v vesennem obriadovom fol’klore slavian,” in: Slavianskie Literatry, Kul’tura i Fol’klor Slavianskikh Narodov. Main editor S.V.Nikol’skii. Moscow, 1998. Pages 439-454.

This is a question of song competitions that manifest not just in one format— oral or written— but in both simultaneously. Song competitions occur in famous oral poetry in many ethnic traditions, from Central Asia and Japan to Africa and Polynesia.⁷ However, competitions such as these, in the format of letters, or written lyrics, and then read aloud (passing them along orally), and also written song dialogues, are a phenomenon that may really be exclusively Kazakh in nature.

It is known that poetic competitions among Kazakhs took place on social holidays and feasts: always at large gatherings (written about by Viktor M. Zhirmunsky⁸). By tradition, the loser was supposed to recall by memory the entire *aitys*, with all its dialogues and retorts. The classic example of such an *aitys*, preserved in folkloric tradition, is “Birzhan-Sara,” concerning two *akyn* poets: improvisational poets and singers in the tradition of the Turkic-language culture of Central Asia, usually Kazakh or Kyrgyz, who took part in competitions. In this classic example, the loser, the splendid young *akyn* poet Sara (Sara Tastanbekkyzy, 1878-1916), commemorated her duel with the eminent *akyn* poet Birzhan (Birzhan-sal Kozhagululi, 1831-1897). Subsequently, an introduction to that oral text was added with the story of the life of Sara, written by the *akyn* poet Argyn. That addition to the text of the improvised traditional oral *aitys* was the first record of an *aitys*’ performer, in the place of a literary record. From there it was just one step to the **self-recording tradition**, and Kazakhs took that step with their famous written *aityses*.

Another famous poet, Shalkiiz (1465-1560), wrote:

Ink is black and paper is white,
They are calling you to pour out art on the pages...
If you get a letter with a fancy seal...⁹

Shalkiiz belonged the tradition of *zhyrau* poets: a singer who sings only epics, more like a shaman than an *akyn*. Additionally, the *zhyrau* did not enter competitions (as did *akyns*). Epic poets such as Shalkiiz give us the phenomenon of **oral-written** art: they improvised, sang and composed, recording it in writing at the same time. And this tradition, unexpected for folklore but normal in the early stages of a society’s development of literature, known equally to ancient Greeks and Kazakhs, continues in Kazakhstan to the present day. I should confess that we ethnomusicologists have long preferred to ignore the oral-written art phenomenon, instead focusing on proving the oral nature of our literature, so much an unbroken part of musical performance, that we might lightly relegate this tradition to the sphere of folklore and only folklore. Meanwhile, our singers and folk storytellers have shown us suitcases of writings in Kazakh. Among these were many sets of lyrics, some in Arabic, more rarely in Latin and more recently in Cyrillic. The musical notation generally was missing, so it was as if all that poetic wealth was not part of folklore, in its then-conventional sense (i.e., folklore being defined as poetic texts with music, sung broadly and anonymously). At the same time we did not know yet that in the Russian epic tradition, on which we were virtually compelled to focus during the Soviet years, there also were

⁷ Citation 33, p. 229.

⁸ Citation 11, p. 638.

⁹ Citation 19, p. 44; “fancy seal” may refer to receiving a letter from a government official {Tr.}

many literary sources not taken into consideration by folklorists.¹⁰ Meanwhile, even our young "informers," folklore experts, were always writing something in their secret journals, each to their own ability. It gives the impression that the carefully hidden written manifestation of the Kazakh traditional epic and lyrics found tangential support only in the publications of a few Kazakh texts which had their own authors¹¹ and were dated with reasonable certainty¹²

I present here, in chronological order, a few significant examples not yet discussed in Russian language scholarship. (The translations from the Kazakh language below were done by myself especially for this comparative study.)

Akyn Kashagan Kurzhimanuly (1841-1929) participated in *aitys* competitions, the texts of which are preserved in traditional memory. The following excerpt is typical in character and style. The text was recorded in 1967 from the *akyn* Kumar Zhusupov.¹³ The publisher called it "Spoken to Izbas."

"They say," began the *akyn* Kumar, "there was a young *akyn* named Izbas, egged on by judges¹⁴ and local officials¹⁵ he resolved to humble Kashagan with his childlessness and poverty. In that way he made bold to stretch himself with such pacers¹⁶ of the poetic word as Kashagan and Sattygul. In this way he bullied Kashagan:

If you are Kashagan, don't be shy, show your power!
Will the rider with a spear atilt, on a leaping steed
Leave you in peace, whether you run or don't run?¹⁷

Then Kashagan snubbed him (i.e., "shut him up") thus:

My great forefather is Er Kosai,
My own name is Kashagan,
My life has drawn out seventy years already.
My name is known not only to the *Adai* but also the *Alshyn*.¹⁸

¹⁰ See, for example, citation 20. P.G. Gorshkov, one of the Northern Russian folk storytellers, even wrote epic poems about himself which began: "I read wonderfully, I have a brilliant memory, {carrying stories like the heroes who travel} from Chernigov to Tsargrad {Constantinople}, from Tsargrad to White Moscow, nobody is better at memorization than me, nobody is better-read!" Citation 18 and citation 1, p. 112, recorded by A. M. Astakhova in Zaonezhye (the historic name of a region in Northern Karelia, Russia – {Translator's Note [hereafter Tr.]}).

¹¹ In Soviet times, folklore was considered collective art, by definition having no authors. For Kazakhs, these folk artists were professionals and their work should have authors. {Tr.}

¹² See, for example, citations 21, 2, 3, 17, and others.

¹³ Citation 15, p. 227 and 229.

¹⁴ *Bii* – a traditional honorific for someone of stature in a community, such as judges or county supervisors {Tr.}

¹⁵ *Volostnye*- supervisors of the local volost, a local administrative district {Tr.}

¹⁶ A type of horse known to be swift {Tr.}

¹⁷ There is a play on words here. The Kazakh word "Kash" – the root word in the famous *akyn* Kashagan's name – means "to run away."

¹⁸ The *Adai* and the *Alshyn* are Kazakh tribal groups. Kashagan himself was of the *Adai*. Obviously, this reference could mean to him: "known to all Kazakhs."

And so, these days, when I’m reaching seventy,
Your eye, Izbas, has rested on me,
Thinking— he’s a senile old man with weak limbs!
I do not respect you even as much as the mosquito, the gnat, or the fly.
Am I right or not? What do you say?
You, truth-knowing, commanding!
Your idle talk reached the hearing of the people.
To relentlessly persecute *akyns* and *zhirshes*¹⁹ such as myself
Is your unquenchable desire.
Oh Izbas, you who has touched me!
Your hole, which is the size of an eye, will become the size of a lake!²⁰
In vain you have exalted yourself, you reveal the flaw of your lips.
I only answer you in order to entertain people,
Otherwise this would be an empty waste of time.
My words are shining gold; yours are dirty coal.
If you say this isn’t so, let’s take it to a court of experts.
They say they throw sinners that lie like you into the scorching heat of hell.
By your own nature you are an ass, while I’m *Tulpar*²¹
The tramping of whose hooves is heard not only by the Adai but the Alshyn.
Having insulted me, you have drawn to your own misfortune the attention
Of such a one who since youth was a master of wit, and has spellbound crowds, like me.
Not only for the Adai but also for the Alshyn I am equal to a *khan* or *hakim*.²²
You are not even a pacer anyone would notice,
But a harmful one, obsessed, unconsciously catching on the wrong thing,
From which I will knock the demon! ...
<...>
Why, by what right, do you dare sneer at an old man
Who has no relation to you whatsoever?!

Re-reading my own translation,²³ done literally, I must ask: how is it that it has a familiar, striking similarity to Russian translations of ancient Greek verses? Doesn’t it seem that there is as close a relationship between the original Greek texts and the Kazakh texts as between the Russian translation of the Greek texts and the Kazakh texts?

There is similarity with the written poetry of the Greeks, and what is more the next example demonstrates it perfectly. It is a question of the phenomenon of *written recordings of aityses* – written and circulated by the authors themselves.

The overwhelming majority of works by the *akyn* Zhusup Eshniyazuly (1871-1927), according to the testimony of Ruslan Akhmetov,²⁴ are *aityses*, all of which are written down! Even more remarkable is the *aityys* with Zhusup Kadyrbergenuly, both because of the volume (809 lines) and artistic merit. Here is the history of that *aityys* in letters.

¹⁹ *Zhirshy* – a Kazakh traditional epic storyteller. {Tr.}

²⁰ This is an allegorical insult, i.e., “you shit all over” (обосрешься). (“Your hole” means “your anus.” {Tr.})

²¹ *Tulpar* – the winged steed of Kazakh legend, parallel to ancient Pegasus.

²² *Khan* – Central Asian title for a sovereign or military ruler; *Hakim* – Arabic or Urdu honorific for a judge, arbitrator, mayor or governor. {Tr.}

²³ The author refers to her own translation from the Kazakh to the Russian. {Tr.}

²⁴ Citation 17, p. 300-301

In 1908 the *akyns* of the region, Syrdari Nakyp-Khodzha and Zhusup Kadyrbergenuly, engaged in an *aitys*... through correspondence! During this *aitys* Zhusup tries to drive back his opponent with the following argument: “Why do you need songs? Isn’t your religion enough for you?” With this the dispute had become a merciless verbal duel, and was stopped by their kinsmen.

Zhusup Eshniyazuly, knowing about this *aitys*, writes his first letter to Zhusup Kadyrbergenuly, starting with these words: “The acknowledgement of singing as a great (unpardonable) sin must be shameful for you, al-Hajji!”²⁵ Further, citing an eastern legend, he comes to the conclusion: “In order to teach others, a man must himself be a worthy example. His soul must be clean; otherwise the poet will remain without listeners and will become a laughing-stock.” At the same time, Zhusup Eshniyazuly reproaches his addressee for the desire, after pushing aside others, to show off by himself.

A few other poets, learning about the course of the contest, begin writing (sic!) protest songs with the goal of keeping the *aitys* from turning into a scandal. In 1915, the famous poets Ibrai and Danmurnyn stopped the duel, and, after choosing worthy representatives of each side, gathered in the center of the Akmecheti District (the present-day city Kzyl-Orda). There, the representatives, previously unacquainted with Zhusup, met and made peace. In that way, this seven year-long written *aitys* was successfully brought to a close in 1915.

The last example is from a collection of songs recorded between 1984 and 1994 and was the first published collection of letter-songs (*khat-olen*), created by Kazakh soldiers and their friends and families during World War II (1941-1945).²⁶ This book documents the surprising phenomenon of a mass, nation-wide correspondence. As confirmed by the folklorist Talasbek Asemkulov, the *khat-olen* is one of the foundational genres of Kazakh poetry, which began in the Ancient Turkish period. Asemkulov sees them in epitaphs, carved as Turkish runes on rocks. “Kazakh literature couldn’t depart from the main canons of the Ancient Turkish oral art form. Therefore, the ancient tradition – the transmittal of military and psychological experiences through letters – was solidly affirmed in the Kazakh folkloric and literary tradition.”²⁷ Many letters and messages were turned into excellent songs. The oral and the written do not simply coexist in the tradition, but seemingly overflow one into another, one from another, forming a special type of cultural art form – a phenomenon not of some intermediate phase, but an independent oral-written form.

In this way, regardless of the obvious, multiple and indisputable factors, the role of writing in the Kazakh song tradition wasn’t simply quieted during the Soviet years, but rather seemed to go unnoticed. The three main reasons for this are ideological. First: if folklore is the art of the oral tradition, then writing it down lessens it, makes it less worthy, in agreement with accepted doctrine. Second: given that the Soviets forced the Kazakhs to using the Cyrillic alphabet, the admission of any other literary capability, moreover in an Arabic alphabet, was not permissible and was practically anti-Soviet. Third: the oral-

²⁵ *Khodzha* – al-Hajji, or El-Hajj, is an honorific title given to a Muslim person who has successfully completed the Hajj (pilgrimage) to Mecca. {Tr.}

²⁶ Citation 28.

²⁷ Citation 28, p. 22

written texts sometimes contained sharply accusatory content, truthfully chronicling people’s suffering at the military fronts and during their travels, content which did not meet the standard of the censor’s office for folkloric poetics.

Finally, there was a fourth reason, something special which brings song-letters together with ancient Greek material: their merciless frankness, mean-spirited ridicule, derision, harassment, and insulting threats, i.e., all that distinguishes the famous ancient *iambic poems*²⁸ by *Archilochus*²⁹ Archilochus in particular interests us. In the ancient world, iambic meter was linked with specific iambic topics, sometimes openly cynical (so-called *invective* songs). This form came to literature from folklore. “It is usual to introduce into [this form] abuse of your opponent, caustic remarks, mean-spirited threats, to pour out a sense of humor or mockery; the personal nature of invectives allows the creation of iambs out of habit... taking the form of personal appearances on different particular occasions. This is the way of Archilochus and Hipponax.”^{30,31}

Speaking of typology, we must consider not only parallels in genre, but also the cultural and psychological contexts of the subjects of the works being subjected to comparison. Therefore, the following observation is very important: “In antiquity every single work is addressed to somebody: Greece, ignorant of the epistolary genre, renders its entire body of literature as though it were a single message. However, the first appeal is not of an abstract nature, but rather concrete and material.” This was noted by Olga M. Freidenberg, as though she was thinking of the Kazakhs.³² This similarity of poetic genres, however, isn’t the only typological parallel attracting our attention.³³

3

The question at hand is really one of the place and meaning of the competitive moment in traditional culture. Alexander I. Zaitsev consistently and convincingly demonstrated the competitive moment using ancient Greek texts.³⁴ Moreover, he advanced the daring

²⁸ Poems created in the Ancient Greek tradition of iambic verse meaning both a metric foot, (an “iamb” being one metric foot: two syllables, short-long) and also a genre and tone of vicious personal attack. {Tr.}

²⁹ *Archilochus* – c. 680-645 BCE, famous Greek satirical poet, also a mercenary soldier, known for his meanness. {Tr.}

³⁰ *Hipponax* – mid-6th century BCE, famous Greek satirical poet with an infamously malicious character, he is sometimes credited with the invention of parody. He invented his own version of the iambic trimeter, making it end with a spondee, the so-called ‘limping iambic’ or *seazon*. {Tr.}

³¹ Citation 27, p. 295; “If they are iambs, that means they are mockery.” Citation 27, p. 288.

³² Citation 27, p. 140.

³³ In no way do I stop with the one other kind of typological similarity, about which even Viktor M. Zhirmunsky wrote: “The similarity between the *Odyssey* and *Alpamysha* makes it possible to raise the question about the earliest connections between ancient Greek and Central-Asian culture— more precisely, about eastern influences on Greek culture” (Citation 12, p. 335). I’m only focusing on clear typological parallels, such as the three-part understanding of the term “iamb” in Ancient Greek tradition— as a poetic meter, as a stanza, and as a genre— an understanding that corresponds with the analogue three-part understanding of the term *zhyr* in the Kazakh tradition.

³⁴ Citation 13.

hypothesis that Greece experienced its unusual cultural blossoming between the 8th and 5th centuries BCE precisely because of the fundamentality of the competitive component of ancient Greek society, as a result of the psychological dominance of the *Agon*.³⁵

The following digression (which, unfortunately, must be condensed here) explores the fact that we allow ourselves, *a la* Zaitsev, to call Kazakh culture *Agonic* (or – in our case – *aitystic*). This digression does not in any way pretend to the status of proof—which can only be attained in a special monograph. Hoping that such a monograph about the competitive nature of Kazakh culture will someday be written, for now I only want to focus on this aspect in the ways that it is most important for us, historically and typologically. A serious explanation of the separate typological parallels of Kazakh and ancient Greek culture is only possible against the background of this broad understanding.

An enumeration of types and forms of *aitys* is simply striking, all permeated with qualities of dialogue and question-and-answer: horse sport; competitive games between adults, young people both male and female, and children; Kazakh traditional song genres; rites, rituals and customs. Unfortunately, we still lack a complete nomenclature to describe these phenomena in Kazakh ethnography and folklore. I will list only a few examples, without stopping to consider the parallels known to me from the related cultures of the peoples of Southern Siberia, Central Asia, and the Caucasus.

Folk holidays and games: *baiga* (a contest of riders) and *alaman baiga* (a long-distance horse race), *zhorga zharys* (contest of pacers³⁶), *saiys* (single combat between riders with lances), *audaryspak* (fighting on horseback to unseat your rival), *kokpar tartu* (a race to catch a goat-carcass being dragged by a lead rider), *zhambu atu* or *altyn kabak* (target-shooting with bow or guns at a full gallop), *kamus alu* (traditional trick riding), *kazakhsha kures* (wrestling competition), the competition of representatives from different societal groups, always including blacksmiths and masters of wit, a rope-pulling contest,³⁷ and also *kyz kuu* (“overtake the young woman” – the prize is marriage) and many wedding games of this sort— a competition between the bridegroom and the bride, the bride’s girlfriends of bride and the bridegroom’s attendants,³⁸ and other group contests between the two families brought together in the marriage.³⁹ Similar *Agonic* ritual games always took place in large gatherings, at events where different families would gather – primarily weddings and funeral feasts. To the present day the wedding song *zhar-zhar*, with dialogue between male and female groups, is the most popular game. On the basis of epic legends “it is possible to think that the *zhar-zhar* was also used for singing contests on various themes during weddings.”⁴⁰

³⁵ *Agon* – Ancient Greek word meaning a contest, competition, or challenge that was held in connection with religious festivals; also, the struggle between characters in Ancient Greek drama. {Tr.}

³⁶ In the West, this might be called Standardbred horse racing with pacers (horses that use a parallel, not diagonal trotting gait, and are faster than trotters). {Tr.}

³⁷ In the West, this would be called “tug-of-war.” {Tr.}

³⁸ *Djigit* – literally, horseman/young man on horseback; here, meaning friends of the groom. {Tr.}

³⁹ See in the book, citation 16, p. 196-206.

⁴⁰ Citation 7, p. 237.

The numerous varieties of the *aitys* itself are the central genre field of Kazakh poetic culture. I will only name a few genres: *kыз бен zhigit aitysy* (an *aitys* between a young woman and young man), *din aitysy* (a religious *aitys*), *zhumbak aitysy* (an *aitys* with riddles), *akyndar aitysy* (an *aitys* between akyns), and others.⁴¹ There were *aityses* between *akyns* on narrow themes (for example, *may olen*, *su olen*, *zher olen*; such an *aitys* tested the geographical knowledge of the *akyns*) and also large-scale competitive singing improvisation at weddings (*kaim olen*). Dialogue was used also in charms (*badik*)⁴² and in children’s songs (for example, the argument between the nanny-goat and the ewe – in fact, an animal *aitys*!)⁴³ Competitions between musicians were also popular (*tartys*).⁴⁴ *Aityses* are so beloved by Kazakhs, they sometimes extend not only for days, but past midnight, right through to sunrise.

According to Edyge D. Tursunov,⁴⁵ there are three conditions for the participation in contests (in addition to professional mastery): 1) representatives from the same family, as well as those who are related through the paternal line, may not compete with each other; 2) each participant is obligated to praise his family and to criticize the rival’s family; and 3) forms of address contradicting normative ethics are permitted during the contest. As a result, every kind of *aitys* or *tartys*⁴⁶ was a major event of social significance.

We need to give special attention to the make-up of groups of itinerant singers, *sal*, *sere*,⁴⁷ and bards (*akyns*): according to tradition, groups included, in addition to musicians, a humorist (master of wit), blacksmith/jeweler and strongman/wrestler. In the make-up of such “brigades,” it was as though the implied basic poetic metaphors were personified: the *smithing* word, the *triumphant* word, the *muscular* word, the *striking* and *well-aimed* word. The image and its embodiment traveled together – the word being sharpened simultaneously as idea and as visible act. Competitiveness became literally the body and soul of the culture. It isn’t by chance that “The Letter of Tatiana” from *Eugene Onegin* by Alexander S. Pushkin, translated by Abai Kunanbaev⁴⁸ in the end of the 1880s, became a true folk song for Kazakhs. It became popular together with the reply letter of Onegin, added by Kunanbaev in accordance with the folk tradition of the *aitys*, and, as usual, the letter and the answer “were created with one and the same musical motif.”⁴⁹ Out of the whole novel only precisely that *love duel* entered Kazakh singing tradition in a persistent way.

⁴¹ Citation 34, p. 77.

⁴² *Badik* – a spoken charm or incantation. {Tr.}

⁴³ For more on these kinds of *aityses*, see citation 6, p. 318-359; 435.

⁴⁴ For more details, see citation 4.

⁴⁵ Citation 26, p. 122.

⁴⁶ An *aitys* between musicians, as noted previously. {Tr.}

⁴⁷ Citation 26, p. 122. The author traces the origin of *sal* and *sere* to the institution of secret male ritual relationships during the period of military democracy. We will not forget that the ruling class in the Greek society of the Homeric epoch was a military aristocracy. (See also citation 5.) It is essential to recall the traditional permissibility of the anti-social behavior of *sals* and *seres*, which permitted that they never had to say goodbye to anyone. (The *sal* {*caɪ*} and *sere* {*ceɹə*} in Kazakh culture were traveling folk artists, who were given wide latitude in their social behavior. {Tr.})

⁴⁸ Abay Ibrahim Qunanbayuli (1845-1904), written in Russian as Abai Ibrahim Kunanbaev, was a Kazakh poet, musician, composer, and philosopher. {Tr.}

⁴⁹ Citation 8, p. 64.

To a certain extent competitiveness equalized all social, age and gender groups. Even protected members of family and society such as fathers could be drawn into a game with teasing. There is a unique Kazakh saying about this: “if you find the appropriate words, then you can even play with father.”

Agon in ancient Greece and *aitys* in Kazakhstan gave rise to a specific culture of word and behavior, considerably different from Neo-European literary forms. Therefore, for example, epic genres and the “institution” of epic poetry as a whole, in spite of its antiquity, passed more naturally into the European literary traditions known to us than the extremely archaic institutions of the *aitys*, practically inseparable from its traditional native practice. In their time they permeated literally everything, beginning with any celebratory meal and ending with the competitions of the epic folk storytellers. As it is known, in ancient Greece the institutionalized competitions of *aidos*⁵⁰ go back to the preliterate epoch. Noting that the professionalization of ancient Greek *aidos* and rhapsodists⁵¹ contributes to the development of competition between the traditional storytellers of epics, Alexander I. Zaitsev gives parallels from the epic traditions of the Turkish peoples of Central Asia (referring also to the book by Esmagambet Ismailov about *akyns*, 1957), the Buryat and other ethnic traditions of antiquity. Let me present a few characteristic quotations from Zaitsev’s book which relate to Greece regarding so-called competitive societies.⁵² “We have evidence speaking about the early permeation of *Agon* into the most varied genres.”⁵³ “The competitive principle permeated ancient Greece as early as elementary education, in the hands of teachers of reading and writing, music and gymnastics.”⁵⁴ “In ancient Greece, in both the archaic and classical epochs, the public’s opinion of a man was the most important regulator of individual behavior in all its real manifestations.”⁵⁵ “The tendency toward public abuse of enemies and rivals, which is already vividly manifest in Homer, is characteristic for Greeks of all epochs.”⁵⁶ “The Greek is focused on approval and reprimand.”⁵⁷ “Sensitivity to reprimand and mockery is very characteristic for the people of ancient Greece.”⁵⁸ “The condition of competition and *Agon*, in which ancient Greek literature was developed from folklore, led to the early development of authorship claims.”⁵⁹ Again it occurs to me: is the respected Alexander Iosifovich Zaitsev not writing about the Kazakhs here?!

Again and again I wish to emphasize the most important point: we are not just typologically comparing the separate poetic texts of ancient Greeks and Kazakhs, but also their cultures, the types of their cultures; we are comparing the very nature of their competitiveness.

⁵⁰ *Aoidos* – in Ancient Greece, an oral epic poet who performed with a lyre. {Tr.}

⁵¹ *Rhapsodos* – in Ancient Greece, a singer of epics, usually depicted with a staff. {Tr.}

⁵² Citation 13.

⁵³ *Ibid*, p. 153.

⁵⁴ *Ibid*, p. 83

⁵⁵ *Ibid*, p. 81

⁵⁶ *Ibid*, p. 79

⁵⁷ *Ibid*, p. 76

⁵⁸ *Ibid*, p. 80

⁵⁹ *Ibid*, p. 155

Let us at last turn to the text of Archilochus, and to the poet himself.

Naum L’vovich Sakharnyi emphasizes in the preface to *Hellenic Poets in the Translations of Vikenty V. Veresaev*⁶⁰ that we see amorous themes in European poetry for the first time in the verses of Archilochus, and the revelation of this theme has the striking frankness and directness of erotica. In revenge for causing him an offense Archilochus was truly “scorpion-tongued:”

... in this I am a great master—
With terrible harm to pay back whoever causes harm to me.

In preserved fragments Archilochus is revealed to be a master of different poetic genres. Some of the fragments bear a striking resemblance to typical Kazakh verses recited in the style of *terme*⁶¹—strung in a necklace of instructive sayings:

Heart, heart! By the threatening {military} rank arose the misfortunes before you.
Take courage and meet them chest-first, and let us strike the enemies!
Let there be ambushes all around-- stand solidly, do not quiver.
If you are victorious, do not put your victory up for show,
If they are victorious, do not be distressed, {do not} lock yourself up in your house, do not cry,
Moderately celebrate success, moderately grieve your miseries.
Learn that rhythm that is hidden in human life.
It is improper to mock the dead...

Archilochus, a poet of the second quarter to middle of the seventh century BCE, was born on the island of Paros c. 680 or 700 BCE. His personal tragedy recalls a tragedy typical of traditional Kazakh society. He was in love with Neobule, the youngest daughter of Lycambes, a famous citizen of Paros. At first Lycambes consented to the marriage, but then changed his mind, probably because of the prohibition on marrying away the younger daughter before the elder daughter, or perhaps because Lycambes learned that Archilochus’ mother was a slave. Archilochus, enraged, responded to this offense with a full poisonous volley of iambs: songs in which both Lycambes and his former fiancée were dragged through the mud.

... but believe, that I am a master
At being a friend to my friends, but biting my enemies
As does an ant...

According to the legend, the disgraced Neobule and her sister hanged themselves out of despair, and their father also committed suicide.

⁶⁰ Citation 9.

⁶¹ Terme – Literally, ‘to string,’ as in ‘to string something like pearls,’ or ‘threading’: a talkative, improvisational Kazakh genre where the author lists a string of aphorisms or pieces of advice {Tr.}

Ancient iambs were terrifying, almost like Kazakh *aityses*, and made a personal issue into an issue between clans, thus carrying a private matter to the public level, discussed openly and judged socially.

Archilochus, as would a Kazakh *sal* or *sere*, consciously having thrown away the protocol of conventional standards of behavior, directly declared that he did not want to take tradition into consideration, and felt like he could make free with his relations with others:

In my youth a steep mountainous ravine was I...

You will often amass, amass money-- amass it at length and with difficulty,
And into the stomach of a corrupt wench suddenly and utterly you would spend your money completely on that whore.

His elitism wasn't socio-economic, but rather of moral virtue. In fragment 64 D he speaks ironically about being of high birth. His opinion of himself was more important than his real status.

Here is a full translation⁶² of Archilochus' so-called *Cologne fragment*:⁶³

'...but if you're in a hurry and can't wait for me
there's another girl in our house who's quite ready
to marry, a pretty girl, just right for you.'
That was what she said, but I can talk too.
'Daughter of dear Amphimedo,' I said,
'(a fine woman she was—pity she's dead)
there are plenty of kinds of pretty play
young men and girls can know and not go all the way .⁶⁴
-- something like that will do. ⁶⁵ As for marrying,
we'll talk about that again when your mourning
is folded away, god willing. But now
I'll be good, I promise—I do know how.
Don't be hard, darling. Truly I'll stay
out on the garden-grass, not force the doorway
-- just try. But as for that sister of yours,
Someone else can have her. The bloom's gone—she's coarse
-- the charm too (she had it)—now she's on heat
the whole time, can't keep away from it—
damn her, don't let anyone saddle me with that. ⁶⁶
With a wife like she is I shouldn't half

⁶² This is a translation from Greek to English. {Tr.}

⁶³ In the original Russian article, the translation into Russian from the Ancient Greek original was done by **Yelena E. Baraz**, especially for the article, for which the author offers her deep gratitude. The English version presented here was done by **Martin Robertson**, a specialist in the field of Greek painting. (Note that the formal reference to this fragment is usually notated *P. Colon. inv. 7511.*) {Tr.}

⁶⁴ This translation has condensed the meaning for the purposes of rhyme. Another English translation by Guy Davenport (1995) preserves some references that the Russian translation also preserved:

*Among the skills of the delicious goddess
It's green to think the holy one's the only.*

Here, read Aphrodite for "delicious goddess," and sexual coition for "the holy one." {Tr.}

⁶⁵ There is an omission in the original that here is filled in by the context.

⁶⁶ That is to say, he wouldn't want intimacy.

give the nice neighbors a belly-laugh.
You're all right darling. You're simple and straight
-- she takes her meat off anyone's plate.
I'd be afraid if I married her
my children would be like the bitch's litter
-- born blind, and several months too early.
But I'd talked enough. I laid the girl
down among the flowers. A soft cloak spread,
my arm round her neck, I comforted
her fear. The fawn soon ceased to flee.
Over her breasts my hands moved gently,
the new-formed girlhood she bared for me,
over all her body, the young skin bare;
I spilt my white force, just touching her yellow hair.

Unfortunately, we do not have either the beginning or end, so we don't know to whom the given fragment is dedicated. The only thing that is clear is that it reflects a dialogue. The author relates the remarks of his participants, entirely as would a Kazakh singer, who conveys the remarks of the participants in an *aitys* ("then this is what she said" and the like). This is why I was so happy to read in Alexander I. Zaitsev's book about how **"the verses of Archilochus, evidently, were also performed in *Agons*"⁶⁷-- read: in *aityses*.** The situation arises, already familiar to us in the analytical masterpieces of Ivan Ivanovich Tolstoy: "...in this case it is hardly worthwhile to assign ancient Greek sources as explanations for Russian fairytales. Rather, it follows to do the contrary, i.e., to search in Russian folklore for explanations of ancient Greek sources."⁶⁸ I would repeat this methodological recommendation, replacing in it only the word "Russian" with "Kazakh" and the word "fairytale" with "song-poetry." The living Kazakh oral-written tradition, with its vibrancy and its typological completeness explains the nature of ancient Greek poetry, which we have only in fragments, and, as in this case, without obvious context. **Thanks to Kazakh source material, it becomes possible to advance the hypothesis about the typological affinity of the Archilochus fragment to the genre of the *aitys* in letters.** The correspondence between Him and Her, which in time becomes public property, is copied and is performed by others. This genre is in part a written genre, i.e., purely poetic, but does not cease to be, in essence, also an oral genre, and is performed based on the prevailing oral (if it is fitting, quasi-song, improvised) traditions.

In the case of the Kazakh "written *aitys*," we have, in essence, all the stages of composition and development of this genre, which is, at first reading, unique. To be exact, both forms are known to us: first, from oral *aityses* by way of their written commemorations in the tradition, then back into oral form, and secondly, from written *aityses* created through correspondence, once again back into the oral tradition. Gradually, a type of poetics was forged, sustaining the test of both traditions—oral and written. Certainly, the rhythmical basis of Kazakh syllabic versification contributed to this process; however, it is known that ancient Greece also had its own, most persistent system of versification, which also contributed to the stability of poetics in both forms—oral and written. Moreover, we shouldn't forget that a lot of that which has reached us from the ancient world in the written form in fact predominantly tended to be sung (see the

⁶⁷ Citation 10, p. 154

⁶⁸ Citation 25, p. 12

publications of Tadeusz Stefan Zieliński [Russian: Faddei F. Zelinsky], Ivan I. Tolstoy, Iosif M. Tronsky, Olga M. Freidenberg, Miron G. Kharlap, and many others).

Nevertheless, in the case of ancient Greek literature we do not have all the stages of the historic-artistic process that are of interest to us, but, on the basis of the law of typological succession (Boris N. Putilov), it is right to extrapolate the Kazakh experience onto the ancient Greek experience. In other words, we are right to propose the hypothesis that the poetic fragment presented here reflects one of the stages of manifestation of the love (or matrimony) theme in the *Agon* genre.

This written genre (more precisely, this oral-written genre, which is preserved in the written form) – if you will, the genre of “letters from the amorous front” – is one of the stages of manifestation of the “amorous duel” genre, a favorite since ancient times. During the epoch of Archilochus this genre might have had, and should have had, various and parallel forms: 1) oral, 2) written and 3) written-oral (or, better: oral-written), when a letter recorded the oral tradition and was repeatedly interconnected between the two forms.

We observe here a rare example of the most interesting phenomenon of the “circulation of genres in tradition,” an example that is historically very early, but in this case typologically very productive and historically very persistent (and let us also note, until now, practically not studied). Truly, the boundaries of orality and literature (written language) can be maximally transparent on the condition that orality remains strong functionally and cognitively in the culture, such that written language doesn’t interfere with it, but supports it. Here we have our own kind of *folkloristics*, whose recording of an oral tradition does not interfere with *folklore*— both varieties of “poetic dueling” are of equal stature in a way: they *flow into each other* without damaging the poetics; you could even say they help each other to be preserved in that poetic form that is most desired and beloved by society. The *aitys*-Agonic form is forged in the river bed of both interconnected traditions.

The Kazakh present-day experience suggests that we should read the ancient Greek texts as chronologically distant, but typologically close in terms of worldview, e.g., the ancient Greek experience can be considered alive in the Kazakh present-day. That which has been preserved helps to reconstruct that which has not been preserved. The living sheds light on the long dead. The fragments of the past find not only form, but also, in their way, a voice, and reveal themselves as signs of a long-ago type of behavior.

Examples of “amorous duels” can easily be multiplied along a whole series of multi-ethnic oral traditions, just as with the genre of the letter-song.⁶⁹ However, in this case the issue is not so much one of the genre of poetic duels as such, as one of (a) the traditional nature of the phenomenon of the *written contest* and (b) the traditional nature of this contest’s *co-existence* with the oral contest (c) in the context of a culture with a *competitive* nature.

⁶⁹ In the book “Tenement Songs,” a book by ethnomusicologist Mark Slobin (Citation 35, p. 152-153), there is, for example, an example of the Jewish song in Yiddish in the same genre: “songs – ‘letters from Russia’” (“A brivele fun rusland,” 1912). My gratitude goes to Izaly I. Zemtsovsky for the kind reference to this example.

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