

On the Phenomenon of the “Third” Science¹

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I would like to share a few doubts that have arisen in the course of my ethnomusicological research into the Kazakh oral tradition. It may be the case that, from a philosophical point of view, these doubts are no longer novel; but from the perspective of an ethnomusicological empiricist, they may yet stimulate scientific thinking.

Truth be told, I have lived with these doubts for a long time, since my first folkloric expeditions to study the musical heritage of Kazakhs in Kazakhstan, Turkmenistan, and Uzbekistan. That was more than thirty years ago. By that time, a certain scholarly paradigm of Kazakh folk culture, as constructed in educational materials and a modest body of research publications, already existed. The divergence of this paradigm from the realities of Kazakh traditional culture could not, one would have thought, have escaped notice. The scholarly understanding of Kazakh traditional culture ran, as it were, in parallel with the traditional culture itself; and, to my surprise, the two were not even “communicating vessels.” My doubts increased when I began to recognize the nonuniformity of existing interpretations within the Kazakh tradition itself. I wanted to free the reality of the tradition from a scholarly apparatus that was alien to it. I wanted to understand what was actually going on in the folk tradition, as well as in its scholarly conceptualization—or, more precisely, in scholarly conceptualizations in other languages.

During the second half of the 1950s, the well-known English scientist and writer Charles Percy Snow (1905-1980) pointedly raised the issue of what he called the “two cultures.”² It was a remarkable idea—timely and cautionary. I immediately wanted to suggest that there might be *two sciences* in Kazakhstan—one made up of Russian-language scholarship, and another made up of

Kazakh-language scholarship. Surprisingly, there was almost no intersection between the two; there seemed to be no dialogue. The illusion of clarity that might arise when operating within one paradigm on its own would fall apart upon consideration of the other. It was as if Russian-language and Kazakh-language scholarship were seeing and writing about different things, and between them stood a wall of incomprehension. Though many researchers were, in a practical sense, reasonably proficient in both languages, it seemed to me that they either did not read each other or did not feel the need to. Kazakh-language scholarship existed as if in isolation, hardly ever going beyond the bounds of its own academic domain. Translations of this scholarship into other languages were almost nonexistent, even though scholars were, in these works, developing highly interesting ways of conceptualizing the national tradition. These works were not simply written in Kazakh; they were also rooted in the Kazakh way of thinking. They were created by people who possessed knowledge of certain things that had inevitably eluded the attention of Russian-language scholars.

Knowledge of a foreign language and mastery of another way of thinking are by no means the same thing. Whether voluntarily or not, Russian-language scholarship has superimposed a network of terminology onto the culture under study, terminology taken at second hand and alien to the culture itself. This is not as harmless as it might at first glance seem: as a result of this process, Kazakh folklore, a highly typical example of nomadic art, has not so much been brought into the orbit of an actively developing international science (with its obvious “agricultural” dominant), as it has been “trampled” by it, transformed (if not deformed) according to the norms of a profoundly different system of thought formed on the basis of an absolutely different set of cultural traditions.

Books written in Kazakh and in Russian evince different types of thought. The contrast, in fact, is so startling that I did not dare record my observations at the time. I was bewitched by the magic of terminology that had been consecrated by the authority of the international scholarly community and was generally accepted. At a certain point, the main issue had been forgotten—the fact that the culture described in such a way was left to “lie” (a very Kazakh image, by the way, usually said of guests in a home) “under seven seals”: it existed apart, far from scholarly disputes, far from all “oases” of urban print culture, according to specific laws of its own. Kazakh culture existed under oppressive conditions: everyday life had been warped by the Soviet government. But the culture lived on, like an enigmatic sphinx eluding description, and even the infamous amateur performance art of the Soviet years could not fully break up the “selfness” of steppe civilization. Under the surface, there remained in this culture something that was not on display, something that was nourished by old ideas and that, in turn, nourished those who still lived in everyday conditions that did not differ substantially from the highly traditional.

Later, when delving deeper into the study of Kazakh epic genre systems, I discovered the nonuniformity of the interpretations of these systems within the Kazakh oral tradition itself.³ It became clearer and clearer to me that there was *a minimum* of not just two, but *three sciences*—Kazakh oral tradition, scholarship written in Kazakh, and scholarship written in Russian—and that there was no overlap among them. They reflected three different ideals, three modes of scholarship. Built into them were also three different views of the world, three conceptions of reality—three different realities, even. It seemed that no one had yet studied these three sciences as such.

Today, I consider it timely at least to point out this fact, which has become so clear to me, and to give an outline of some of the characteristic traits of the “third” science—that is, the science of Kazakh oral tradition—the least known outside of the tradition itself.

It is possible that the majority of questions surrounding modern anthropological work can be connected to the three sciences. As an ethnomusicologist, I find that the specific musicological question regarding the various aural perceptions of the tradition is also related to this curious culturological phenomenon. It would seem that there are also *three types of hearing*—the hearing of folk musicians (which we will take as one type, although in reality there are, of course, many); the hearing of players and singers who are connoisseurs of the tradition; and the hearing of observers who come to study Kazakh tradition from other, usually European backgrounds.

It has long been my intent to write about Aleksandr V. Zataevich's (1869-1936) way of hearing—an intent, however, that unfortunately remains unrealized.⁴ Zataevich was a prominent musician who made unprecedented contributions to Kazakh musical culture: the fundamental published collections of Kazakh melodies in his aural notation remain a magisterial and essentially enigmatic phenomenon of world ethnomusicology. When filtered through Zataevich's exquisitely fine hearing, which arose from a quite different musical tradition, the Kazakh *melos* in these collections comes across as a deeply peculiar, almost fringe occurrence of musical culture. It is an artifact of three seemingly different cultures: Kazakh traditional culture; Kazakh “European-oriented” culture; and the culture of Aleksandr Zataevich himself, a personal “musical diary” of his travels throughout Kazakhstan.

In working on epos, I myself have fallen under the spell cast by the classic works and concepts that have arisen from study of the great epic poems of ancient times. However, in the Kazakh tradition, which is so rich in what are called “little”—or, as I've defined them, “orbital”—epic genres, the situation unfolded in a very different way. In spite of the richness of our living epic tradition, we have nothing like the Yakut *Olonkho*, which takes many days to perform, or the grandiose Kyrgyz *Manas*. What *do* we have, then, and how is it defined by Kazakhs themselves?

No one, of course, in the traditional milieu speaks of the “epos,” just as no ethnophores speak of “folklore.” These scholarly terms originate in the world of the European written tradition. Kazakhs have their own term, *zhyraulyq*, which comes from the traditional word for an epic singer, *zhyrau*. The question arises: is *zhyraulyq* epos, as traditionally defined in the global study of oral epic tradition, or not? The answer is self-evident. Traditionally, the *zhyrau* was not, by any means, *only* an epic singer; he also fulfilled a multitude of other essential social functions in traditional nomadic society. To that extent, his repertoire was not identical to epos in the European scholarly understanding of that term. Analysis of folk terminology and of the traditional system of *zhyrau* genres, as this system takes shape over the course of a *zhyrau*’s full epic “séance,” reveals the deeply original stratification of that cultural universe commonly designated—though never entirely encompassed—by the single term “epos.” It is enough to recall, for example, that for Kazakhs, genealogical legends also come into the orbit of “epos.” Regularly reinforced by “epic singing,” consciousness of the past, with all its historical “thickness” concentrated as though into a single body, is highly important for the support of the traditional society’s social health. When the *zhyrau* lifts his audience to the heights of epos, an epic union occurs in which you—the listener—and the legendary Qorqyt are one and the same. Together with the *zhyrau*, you travel the great path into the past and future of your people. For those not involved, the performance may seem to be little more than a kind of concert—but it is not that way for you. For you, the *zhyrau*’s unending philosophical exhortations, reminders, and aphorisms—the *bastau*, *tolghau*, *terme*, and the *zhyr* itself—all constitute the single and long-awaited moment of true, fully fledged, exultant ethnic being. Every performance act lifts you up and purifies you. In the end, this is no less than an apotheosis of the phenomenon of ethnic identity, or ethnic self-identification—a phenomenon that is now so relevant and topical in global scholarship.

Almost all genres of what is called oral professionalism among the Kazakhs develop on the basis of contests (the *aytys* of singing *aqyns*, the *tartys* of *dombra* players, etc.). Only the epos is not performed in contest, for in the traditional epic milieu, everyone seems to know everything, including the grading scale. This scale includes not only epic memory, for example, but also the personal qualities of a given *zhyrau*: *zhyraus* have their own code of behavior, violation of which is forbidden by tradition.

The *zhyrau*'s repertoire, as such, is generally known only to representatives of the scholarly world. They consider the corpus of his songs to be an objective phenomenon. The *zhyrau* himself does not know this; no book of his songs can be representative of his real knowledge. The epos is not a collection of well-known "epic tales"; it is everything that an epic storyteller sings—and he sings a great deal. Strictly speaking, the *zhyrau* has only his voice. The epic text does not belong to him. He "reads" the text from his instrument, and the epic *dombra* assumes the function of a mediator between the storyteller and the world of his ancestors, the world of spirits. The act of storytelling is like a union of "above" and "below" by way of the instrument. Only during the act of storytelling, which is always accompanied by the storyteller's own playing on the *dombra*, does a song descend "from the seven heavens" along the instrument, by way of its fingerboard, to the storyteller himself; this act of storytelling, furthermore, varies in duration each time, depending on a number of factors.

During the act of storytelling, the storyteller's spine will very gradually seem to "warm up," as if it were yet another mysterious radio receiver between the *zhyrau* and his protectors, who give him epic knowledge in moments of inspired interaction with the epic audience. The spirits, as it were, stand behind him and help him sing, literally supporting him so that he will not miss the precious information that has seemed to come down to him along his spine... This is not

improvisation. It is a particular kind of linking up with and tuning into tradition, to its invisible source. (This is why it is so important for the storyteller to sing on his own territory, to feel the energy of his own land.) Much in the performances of an epic singer is close to shamanism. People say of a good *zhyrau* that “he has a spine” (“*arqasy bar*”), thus describing his ability to fall into an “epic trance” during which texts come down to him, one after another. It can be said that the birth of epic texts begins only in this time and place.

The *dombra* is like a *tulpar*, a magical winged horse: it is not a humble instrument, but the only means of flying along with the *zhyrau* to the heights of poetry and knowledge. Before this moment, even the *zhyrau* does not know how many songs are known to him. This uncertainty has nothing to do with the circumstances of the *zhyrau*’s everyday life, nor is it a defect of his memory; instead, it is in the nature of the way epics come to life.

It is never said that the *zhyrau* sings: he literally creates history. Real and mythological history, like Time itself, exists and moves only in this great moment—in the moment of the *zhyrau*’s “epic interaction” with his audience. For this reason, he must sing regularly. There is no act of catharsis without an act of socialization: such is the law of the epic milieu.

Tobyq, *qulyp*, and *tiek* are all names for a bridge made of bone situated beneath the *dombra*’s strings; it is passed down to the student as a gift—literally, it is the “lock” or the “(door) latch” to the musical instrument (according to traditional beliefs, there can be seven such “locks”). Handing down the bridge to the student symbolizes the potential of unlocking epic art itself. The key that student must find himself, but the lock, of course, is more important. The storyteller must perform the opening of this symbolic lock every time he sings; only then will all the texts in the tradition magically open themselves to him—texts arranged, as it were, on nine levels: one on the

earth, one beneath the earth, and seven above. Playing between these levels goes on continually—it is precisely in this way that the storyteller opens up his miraculous ability to remember texts.

The Kazakh people have their own concept of “epic memory.” Texts of the epic repertoire come to the storyteller as though from three non-contradictory realities. First, a text inheres in the historical memory of representatives of a given tradition, reflects the reality of the epic moment, and comes to the *zhyrau* as though without his participation. Second, the *zhyrau* has his own memory, that is, the history of his own life, and the given text is a fact of that life. Third, the *zhyrau*, in performing a text in modern conditions, thereby penetrates with it into reality, reconceptualizing that reality and creating it anew.

It is apropos to mention that these same “epic” texts, when performed at the request of a collector, sound different. The epic milieu gives the storyteller creative strength; on a stage, however, the *zhyrau* fades, for he loses his socially justified gift, his energy, his calling to be more than a singer. (Here I am not speaking about the topic of my previous article—the existing stratification of traditional culture in modernity and its metamorphoses.⁵)

The study of storytelling is one of the decisive keys to understanding epos in general. Where the epic tradition no longer exists, surviving texts do not in and of themselves reveal the secrets of epic art. The epic tale itself needs to come into being, and it cannot be disrupted—that is, it cannot be killed, for it is something that is always living. The *zhyrau* and his audience live together only in the moment of storytelling, through the highest moments of socialization. This socialization is also unique—it is effected through its own kind of “epic trance”: listeners are not so much attending to the concrete words of the storyteller as they are walking together with him along the sacred “epic path.” One must listen to the *zhyr* so that the soul will not die. For this

reason, the *zhyrau* will sometimes sing to himself in the steppe, when from an ordinary perspective, it would seem that he is completely alone...

Incidentally, there is no word in the Kazakh dictionary for the verb “sing.” It appeared in the lexicon relatively recently, in response to the uncaredful questions of collector-musicologists, who were answered, as usual, with their own words. The Kazakhs themselves have several classifications of “singing,” according, for example, to the method of sound production (with the throat, chest, etc.), the type of movement that accompanies the “singing” (hence the expression “to swing” a song in an *aytys*), or the hand motions involved (hence “to sculpt” a song with an instrument), etc.

The last example of *folk science* I wish to consider here is connected to what might be called the hidden syncretism of Kazakh epics and lyrics—hidden from the outsider, of course. From the outside, the actual mechanism of this hidden poetic syncretism is not simply mysterious, but invisible, if not unperceivable. Tradition, however, comes to terms with this syncretism easily, for it knows that a truly artistic text must have many meanings. Interpretive clarity is always taken to be a historically late characteristic, as a simplification and reduction of original meaning. The same Kazakh text can be read and interpreted differently each time, from different points of view. It can be said that its content depends on interpretation. Strictly speaking, the content is located *behind the text*—such is the particular nature of traditional poetics. Its polysemy is also reflected in the grammatical indeterminacy of its verbal constructions, which makes them so difficult to translate into another language; the structure of the other language in fact deprives Kazakh traditional poetics of this inherent polysemy. By propping up one and only one of the possible interpretations of the text, translation kills the poetic richness and depth of the poetry, turning the wealth of a hologram into a poor diagram.

I would say that Kazakh poetic grammar creates, from a semantic perspective, a *fractal system*. A single text can be interpreted in completely different ways and so permit completely different ways of understanding it. This is similar to what we find in a pointillistic drawing: up close, nothing is recognizable, but from a distance, a variety of images appears, depending on the viewer's perspective. It is for a similar reason that a performer's interpretation prior to the act of performance is so important for Kazakh lyric (and not only for instrumental *küys*). This mandatory performance introduction significantly "channels" the reception of the text. For example, the word "*kökshe*" can have three different associations: 1) Kökshetau Mountain, 2) a girl's name, 3) the name of a *batyr* hero. If the singer, prior to singing, says that the song's author—a certain *sal-seri* (traditionally an itinerant, professional lyric singer)—started singing upon seeing Kökshetau, then that is one song. If the author says that he saw the beautiful Kökshe and describes her poetically without naming her directly, then that is a different song. And if the singer chooses the name of a *batyr*, then the so-called lyric epos opens before us—and in that case, everything changes in the *same* song: the kind of performance, the kind of perception, and the listeners' post-performance evaluation.

Kazakh poetics is a poetics of possibilities. For a song in this poetic system, there are not only variants of a text, as is generally accepted in folkloristics. There are not even, strictly speaking, various versions of one *siuzhet*, or plot (for there is no *siuzhet* here in the European sense of the word). Rather, there are various possibilities for the poetization of reality. (I would not connect this particularity of Kazakh poetics with the well-known phenomenon of the archaic diffuseness of images, about which specialists in the early stages of poetry have written.⁶) Since the words themselves remain the same across possibilities, the poetic text reveals its hidden meanings in the rays of different interpretations, just as ultraviolet light reveals to us things we

cannot see in normal light. Translation into another language, providing only one possible interpretation among many, attaches its own interpretation to the text, thereby depriving the text of its ability to uncover itself. Here we have a kind of dual phenomenon—the self-realization of the singer through the self-realization of the song.

Every living performance in the tradition releases the song, as it were, into freedom—into the freedom of interpretations. Performance in the Kazakh language makes possible not only the act of art but also its aftereffect, leaving space for the listeners to exercise their poetic imagination. The real world is in absolute harmony; it is only our imagination that develops; and our “imaginative absolute” is included in the act of art (Yakov Golosovker).⁷

In brief, Kazakh sung poetics is ruled by only one absolute—the *imaginative absolute*, that is, that which gives art absolute poetic flexibility, depth, and life. This *imaginative absolute* makes the song part of a particular artistic composition, a poetic act traditionally consisting of 1) the verbal introduction of the performer himself, 2) his musical performance, and 3) the “aftereffect” of this performance, the reaction to it. In other words, interpretation (or, more precisely, the entire gamut of interpretations) becomes part of the “song’s body,” making that body a living component of culture.

This is not an “opus”; it is a moment of the poetic self-tuning and self-realization of the “poetic milieu.” Thus, the “grammar of listening” turns out to be the “grammar of hearing” (cf. Charles Hockett’s “Grammar for the Hearer”⁸). And thus, Izaly Zemtsovsky’s concept of “ethnohearing” includes nothing less than the phenomenology of a poetics—the phenomenology, not yet fully revealed, of the traditional poetic thinking of Kazakhstan’s “third science.” This science is free of the magic of foreign terminology and thus represents the tradition not in the form of an impenetrable sphinx, but as the life-giving joy of existence.

¹ Alma Kunanbaeva. "O fenomene 'tret'ei' nauki." In *Sud'by traditsionnoi kul'tury: Sbornik statei i materialov pamiati Larisy Ivlevoi* [The Fates of Traditional Culture: A Collection of Articles and Materials in Memory of Larisa Ivleva]. St. Petersburg: Dmitrii Bulanin, 1998: 187-194.

² Charles P. Snow. "The Two Cultures and the Scientific Revolution: The Rede Lecture." New York, 1959.

³ See my articles for further details: "Spetsifika kazakhskogo epicheskogo intonirovaniia [The Specific Character of Kazakh Epic Intonation]," *Sovetskaia muzyka* [Soviet Music]. 1982. Vol. 6: 78-81. "Fenomen muzykal'noi epicheskoi traditsii v kazakhskom fol'klоре [The Phenomenon of the Musical Epic Tradition in Kazakh Folklore]," *Artes Populares*, 14. Budapest, 1985: 121-133. "Kazakhskii epos segodnia: Skazitel' i skazanie [Kazakh Epic Today: Narrator and Narrative]," *Sovetskaia etnografiia*. 1987. 4: 101-110. "Zhanrovaia sistema kazakhskogo muzykal'nogo eposa: Opyt obosnovaniia [The Genre System of the Kazakh Musical Epos]," *Muzyka eposa: Stat'i i materialy* [The Music of the Epos: Articles and Materials]. Editor and compiler Izaly I. Zemtsovsky. Yoshkar-Ola, 1989: 82-112; "The Kazakh Zhyrau as the Singer of Tales," *Ethnohistorische Wege und Lehrjahre eines Philosophen: Festschrift für Lawrence Krader zum 75 Geburtstag. Hrsg von Dittmar Schorkowitz* [Ethnohistorical Paths and Apprenticeship of a Philosopher: Festschrift for Lawrence Krader on His 75th Birthday]. Frankfurt am Main, 1995: 293-303.

⁴ The short abstract of Pernebek Shegebaev's "Slukh Aleksandra V. Zataevicha [The Hearing of A. V. Zataevich]," in *A. V. Zataevich i problemy sovremennogo etnomuzykoznaniiia: Materialy Vsesoiuznoi nauchno-prakticheskoi konferentsii* [A. V. Zataevich and Problems of Modern Ethnomusicology: Materials from the All-Soviet Academic Conference]. Alma-Ata, 1991: 21-24), is dedicated to other aspects of this same phenomenon.

⁵ See Alma Kunanbaeva, 1/ "The Kazakh Epos Today," *Bulgarian Folklore*, Sofia, 1987, II: 10-25; 2/ "Changes in Contemporary Kazakh Epic Performance," in *Contemporary Traditional Musical Cultures of the Peoples of the Near and Middle East (Second International Musicological Symposium, Samarkand, October 7-12, 1983)*. Moscow, 1987: 46-50; 3/ "Contemporary Kazakh Epic Tradition and Some of Its Research Problems," in *Stylistic Trends in Soviet Music in the 1960s and 1970s*, Leningrad: Ministry of Culture, 1979: 148-164.

⁶ For more, with a reference to Heinz Werner, see Wayne Shumaker, *Literature and the Irrational: A Study in Anthropological Backgrounds*, New York, 1960 (Chapter 6).

⁷ Iakov Emmanuelovich Golosovker. *Logika mifa* [The Logic of Myth]. Moscow, 1987.

⁸ Charles Francis Hockett. "Grammar for the Hearer." In Roman Jakobson, ed., *The Structure of Language in Its Mathematical Aspects*. Providence, Rhode Island, 1961: 220-36.

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