

## Hermeneutical Aspects of Kazakh Heroic Epic Study

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**Abstract:** Annotation: This paper identifies two main directions in the study of folklore: historical and poetic, which are considered from the standpoint of the theory of knowledge. Despite the refusal of the Soviet era folkloristics from the scientific principles of the historical study of folklore, the authors are tended to believe that the scientific postulates of the historical school are still lasting and they require further scientific development. For the first time the hermeneutical aspect of studying the Kazakh heroic epic is offered as a methodological approach.

**Key words:** Folklore • Epic • Historicism • Poetics • Typology • Synchronicity • Diachronism  
• Onomastics • Hermeneutics • Epic tradition • Ethnic nature

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### INTRODUCTION

Folklore, especially the heroic epic of a people, is a distinctive phenomenon, which is characterized by historicism and poetics. In the study of folklore art system was engaged the whole galaxy of scientists of the twentieth century, including prominent foreign researchers in the face of W.R.Bascom [1], D.Ben-Amos [2], Robert Georges [3]. Soviet scientists represented by V.M.Zhirmunsky, A.K.Borovkova, B.N.Putilova and others also put forward their theoretical postulates. Scientific advances of folkloristics of that period can be grouped around such cognitive methods of study, as poetic, historical-poetic and typological.

**The Main Part:** The folkloristics of the Soviet period of the early twentieth century was dominated by the concepts of the historical school. Many scientists approached to study of epic heritage of different people from this position. However, the resolution of the Central Committee of All-Union Communist Party of Bolsheviks [hereinafter referred to as the CPSU (b)] from 1946 regards the magazines “Zvezda” and “Leningrad”, on the pages of which “anti-Soviet” writers and poets were allegedly published, for many years thrown scientists from

methodological principles and achievements of historical school. Throughout 1946-1948, party organs of the Union republics have taken similar resolutions discrediting not only scientists, but also the science of folkloristics in general. The political ban was imposed on the spread of many epic tales of the Soviet people, which were recognized as the heritage of the past feudal society.

So, in 1944 the Central Committee of the CPSU (b) of Tatarstan adopted the resolution concerning the epic “Yedigei”, the spread of which was considered to be harmful to the Soviet reader. In fact, the problem was that one of the heroes of the epic “Yedigei”, Tohtamys, according to Russian historian Karamzin, repeatedly won and even burned Moscow.

This suggests that the folkloristics of the Soviet period approached to the study of the epic heritage of USSR people from the ideological position. Consequently, numerous epics, including Kazakh epic, need a new study. This can be accomplished only through a hermeneutical approach to the textual criticism of the Kazakh epic heritage.

Touching on the methodological aspects of this concept A.Etkind writes that “new historicism is not the story of events, but people and texts in their relation to each other... Through the text with its history, the history

is seen as such, sometimes collectively, sometimes in small ways. And the increasing and coverage degree depends on the strength of text and another on the strength of reading” [4].

It is not a secret that in the former Soviet Union space some folklorists held by an opinion that the heroic epic was the phenomenon of art. On that basis all onomastic names appearing in the epic perceived by them as fiction which was remote from the historical and ethnic process. However, referring to the opinion of the same A. Etkind, it can be added that many things depended on the attitude of the researcher to the text. The “strong reader” has its own vocabulary, which he puts into the texts, giving them his strong reading... Such a reading has a success, which meets the central issues of the contemporary culture” [4].

Soviet scholars noted the similarities in the epic tradition of Turkish-speaking people. Foreign scientists and folklorists wrote about the same impact [5]. Hence there was the predominance of poetic approach in the studies of Kazakh scientists.

It is well known that not all samples of Kazakh folklore are correlated with the ethnic process. However carefully reading the texts it is not difficult to find traces of the ethnic history in the heroic epos, which can be explored from the perspective of the historicism principle in the science. The historical-comparative method, the underlying cause of which was seen by V.Gatsak in unilaterally artistic and cognitive approach to the object under study, is not able to explain the ethnic nature of Kazakh epic. Hence there is a need for more in-depth methodological development of the epic as an object of the scientific knowledge.

Some folklorists limiting by concepts which were expressed at the turn of 50 - 60 years of the twentieth century, that the epic creates its own fiction reality, had a few deal with the problems of techniques enrichment of research, methodological achievements, ethnology, ethnogeography, ethnic history, onomastics and ethno folkloristics. Ignoring the achievements of the new historical direction representatives such as S.Azbeleva, N.Kravtsova, A.Petrosyan, M.Plisetsky and others, argued that the epic was a literary and verbal phenomenon. It is sufficient to say that such conservatism which indiscriminately rejected the historicism of the epic, was even far from the internationally accepted definition of the term “folklore”, worked out at the meeting of government by the conservation of folklore experts at UNESCO in Paris, which took its place on March 1, 1985 [6].

In the study of the ethnic nature of the heroic epic the unilaterally typological approach made nothing significant. Hooked on this direction, scientists did not realize that their researches, in a definite sense, had a compilation nature, because on theoretical and methodological level, they represented only a repetition and adaptation of typological study techniques to the nature of the Kazakh heroic epic. For this reason, some Kazakh scholars hold the opinion that the epic was the art truth. Some of them even didn't want to put up with the fact that in folkloristics could coexist several scientific fields.

The folklore is a multifunctional phenomenon. There are few suitable scientific hypotheses arising only from certain features of the heroic epic. The study of epic in historical-ethnic and artistic and poetic aspects - that's one of the problems of modern epic studies. All this should be based on a new textual study of the epic heritage. Otherwise, such important components of the epic became missed out from the field of scientific knowledge as historicism, ethnic and geographical belonging to any ethnic group, tribe, region. The unilaterally artistic approach cannot be the result of a comprehensive study of the epic, therefore, the result of absolute scientific knowledge. The hermeneutical approach is necessary, i.e. a new reading of the text of epic stories and new scientific findings.

There are many typological features in Kazakh heroic epic: the similarities of motifs and plots, which are usually issued as the originality of epic poetics. But this is only one side of the issue. Artistic and historical epic scopes have different functions which individually cannot explain the heroic epic specifics.

The reflection of historical and ethnic reality in epic tales varies. However, the ethnic origins of the Kazakh heroic epic are worthy because the ethno geographical nomenclature containing numerous historical and ethnic information still remains outside of the scientific knowledge. It feels while trying to study onomastic names, which are abundant in the epic. Consequently, not only the motifs and themes should be the subject of scientific knowledge, but also anthroponyms, ethnonyms and toponyms. Many personal names, including historical and geographical names in the epic, fall under the direct influence of ethnic consciousness, for which elements of imagination and artistry are alien to. And considering it to be a typology and not a true story is unconvincing. For example, Korkyt, Alpamys, Kobylandy are anthroponyms formed on the basis of ethnonyms. The ethnical nature of Kazakh epos can be observed in the “Book of my

grandfather Korkut”, “Alpamys” and “Kobylandy” which are the epic legends of separate Turkic-speaking tribes: Oguz, Konyrat and Kipchak. Belonging to the abovementioned stories to the called ethnic groups is observed in all existing versions (variants) and it hardly can be considered historical and typological correspondence. Each ethnic base of these epic stories is stable and unchanging.

Attitude of folklore to stories was considered in the works of V.Abaev, S.Abramzon, G.Vasileva, M.Gryaznov, B.Karmysheva, S.Kiselev, A.Okladnikov and other scientists - historians, ethnographers and folklorists. And N.I.Kravtsov argued that epic is not a poetic treatment of stories and a special way of preserving the historical reality in people's memory [7]. Also L.Tolstova, V.Pimenev and T.Dolgih wrote about historicism of folklore. S.Serov and R.Lipets with great sadness wrote that this important issue is developed only by ethnographers and archaeologists [8], A.Nalepin, after researching of American folklore, claimed that the exaggeration of the folklore's role as a historical source is less significant mistake than underestimation of its historical essence [9]. All these thoughts shed light on these scientific problems.

So, what is the ethnic nature of the Kazakh heroic epic? What is the relationship between epic and ethnic process? Which degree of ethnonyms stability is in heroic epics? What category of historical sources can be counted to heroic epic? All these issues need detailed study. The time, when the epic was the object of a poetic study, passed. New problems of epic study emerge related to the ethnic nature of the Kazakh heroic epic. This is that problem which has remained out of sight of the leading Russian folklorists of the twentieth century.

Of course, some representatives of the historical-comparative method touched in some degree the issue of historicism of epic. However, they limited with the study of the process of poetics formation, i.e. the art system, thus bypassing the very historical process. Such definitions as “epic era”, “epic consciousness”, “epic time”, so often used by poetic direction supporters need additional scientific justification. To what type of historical formation of social consciousness can they be related? These concepts aren't used by representatives of ethnography and ethnology; they are used by folklorists, considering the epic in isolation from the ethnic history of tribes.

Based abovementioned, we do consider that many epic genres, including Kazakh heroic epic, are created in the wake of the historical events under the direct

influence of the ethnic process. “Traditions, legends and epics form a treasure from which people over the centuries and millennia drew knowledge of history - their history and history of the world” [10]. However, these theoretical postulates attracted our folklorists badly, being so enthusiastic about poetics of the Kazakh epic. It seems that folklorists are coasting the epic study of 60 - 70s. However, few features are taken into account of the epic traditions of Kazakh people and forms of existence of the epic genres.

The epic tradition is valuable because it preserves variety of ethnographic information. Among them ethnonyms such as oguz, kipchak, kiyat, konyrat; anthroponyms - Korkyt, Kazan, Bamsy-Beyrek, Aruz, Alpamys, Kobylandy, Er Targyn; toponyms - Barshyn, Baisyn, Karaspan, etc. which bear some historical and ethnic and ethno-geographical information.

Geographical distribution of the epic is also an ethnic sign. This is due to the fact that the formation of the Kazakh nation, covered the period from the fourteenth to the sixteenth centuries, occurred in the environment of the oguz-kipchak, nogaylinsky uluses, within the state of nomadic Uzbeks and Mogolistan.

There is a lot of information about earlier events which were echoed of the ethnic history of ancient Turkish tribes in heroic stories. The depth of historical past reflection depends on the age of the epic tradition. This applies to the melody - the music recitation. Therefore, to determine the ethnic identity of the epic it is necessary to study not only the plot and traditional motifs, but also the functional value, the semantic properties of a musical tune. What kind of meaning carries this or that tone? What tune is the most ancient stratum and what is a layering? What style is in the basis of a certain epic storytelling? Which similarities are between the various demonstrations of musical epic tradition?

For modern epic study the unilaterally poetic study is a traveled distance [11]. We are fully in agreement with the opinion that “negativism towards the use of folklore as a historical source, [often shown by folklorists] impoverishes recoverability of the ethno genesis and the ethnic history, the ancient social relations and the ancient culture of people of the world” [10].

All this suggests: what categories of scientific knowledge are appropriate for the study of the heroic character of the Kazakh epic? It is known that folklore is an indicator of collective consciousness and literature is an indicator of individual consciousness. If this problem is considered from a position of ethnology, it will mean the following: collective consciousness is an ethnic

phenomenon and individual is a poetic one. Consequently, epic consciousness is an artistic phenomenon, an aesthetic category. It cannot replace ethnic consciousness and the process, which are the main determinant indicators of an epic story belonging to any tribe. Here is found the scientific fallacy studying folklore from the position of individual consciousness, i.e. as a literary work.

The same problem in the mainstream of modern foreign folkloristics is considered by Lisa Gabbert, which separates folklore texts from the folkloric process and offers to base on the materials of field works [12].

Highlighting the methodological aspects of this problem L.I.Emelyanov wrote: "We mean the problem of historicism and especially the one aspect which provides the study of folklore relationship to reality, to specific events and facts of national history" [13]. These judgments are fully applicable to the Kazakh folklore.

We often limit ourselves to the fact that the heroic epic does not traverse specific historical events, that it is difficult to detect the historical chronology, the linear timing. However, an epic arises, even if not without delay, but still in the wake of the ethnic process. It is mobile where the epic tradition functions based on the ethnic identity and consciousness of tribes. Besides the epic as a folk memory, is not in the state and should not cover all the fine details of historical events. It is postponed by highlights of ethnic process, such as the fight Kipchak with Kyzylbasy, Konyrat with Kalmyks, i.e. indigenous ethnic groups with strangers.

Although ethnonyms appearing in the Kazakh epic belong to different segments of historical time and represent a stage-wise phenomenon, on the basis of ethnonyms, toponyms and anthroponyms, as well as through the skilful removal of various layers, it is still possible to trace the separate episodes of the past era. The resistance degree of ethnic data in the epic is entirely dependent on the level and activity of ethnic consciousness. And where the epic tradition functions and consciousness of people dominates, it is impossible to change the ethnic character.

**Concluding Part:** The heroic epic, in the words of L.N.Gumilev, is the result of memorial phase of the ethnical process. This means that ethnical nature of the heroic epic is impossible to deduce from his artistic system. This is the same methodological mistake that led to the separation of the epic stories from ethnic tribes.

From the epistemological position ethnic consciousness in the epic is the basis and poetic

consciousness is a superstructure. The first is an ethnographic phenomenon; the second is the aesthetic one. In other words, historical and ethnic process is the primary phenomenon and artistic and aesthetic synthesis is the secondary one. These categories are peculiar to different stages of scientific and theoretical study of the epic. Only such an approach of the epic study can rely on strong foundations of the scientific knowledge.

Ethnic consciousness is the conscious being of an ethnic unification: the clan or the tribe. It manifests itself in the epic as a social-informational consciousness, with its cognitive properties. From the standpoint of the theory of knowledge, consciousness is knowledge, without which cannot be a self-consciousness. This suggests that we miss the most important thing while studying the heroic epic - the level of knowledge of individual tribal groups.

To achieve the scientific truth, the considerable importance is so-called social consciousness, the main function of which lies in the quantization of the business and intellectual practices of the older generation.

Social memory, which, along with the preservation of a variety of information, can capture and evaluate these phenomena, is often incomplete, fragmentary. Therefore, it's reflection in the epic may have a different shape and condition.

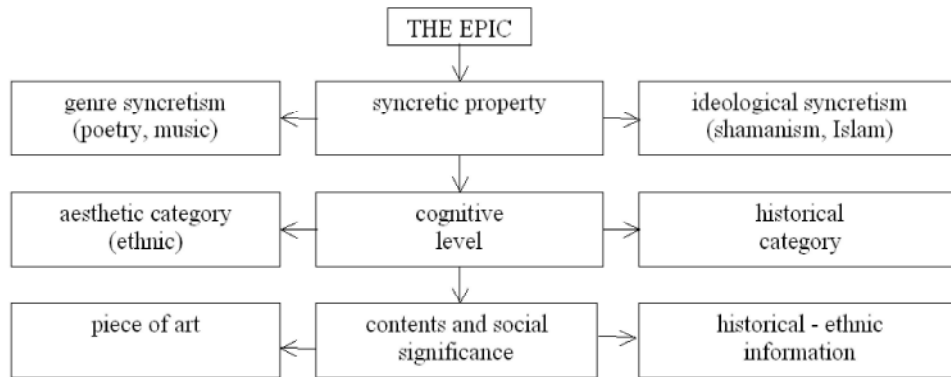
## CONCLUSION

Ethnic nature of the Kazakh heroic epic is the original phenomenon. It is difficult to observe in the first Russian epics, in which are found oikonymical titles showing another level of epic thinking and hence a different stage of social consciousness.

On the basis of hermeneutical approach the cognitive nature of the Kazakh heroic epic can be shown in the final scheme:

In this regard, it is also necessary to clarify the theoretical aspects of the ethnic and aesthetic study of the epic, because poetics is synchronous and historicism is diachronic study. They constitute two different spheres of the epic study. At simultaneous study typological and diachronic - historical and ethnological methods are used. It allows us to speak about the Kazakh heroic epics as an indirect ethnic source. The heroic epic, unlike other genres of folklore, arises in the wake of the ethnic history.

The Formula of this scientific theory is the following: there is no ethnic group without the heroic epic and without the ethnic process there is no epic tradition.



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