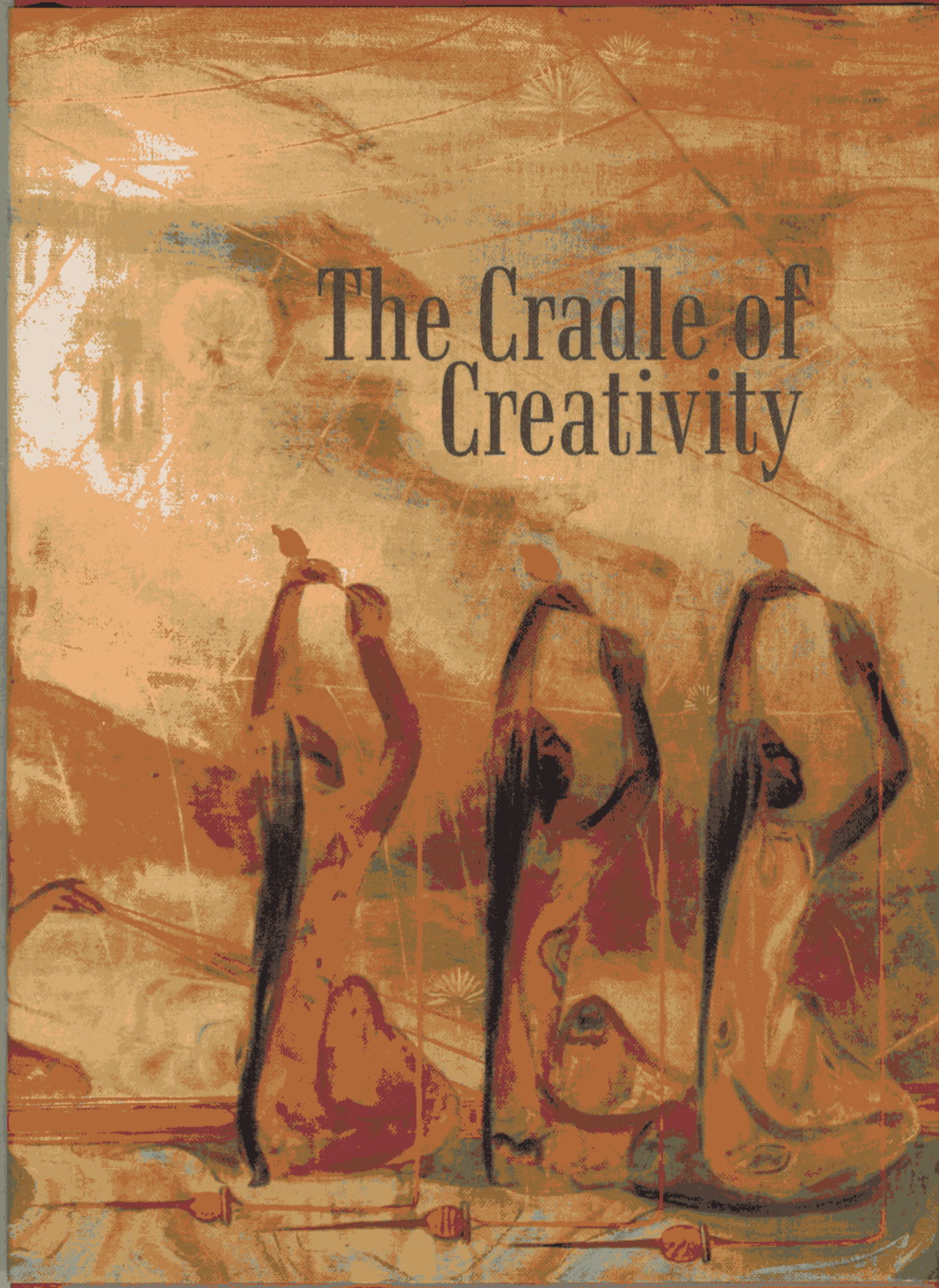


Seit KASKABASOV

The Cradle of  
Creativity



DDC 398  
BBC 82  
K 28

PUBLISHED UNDER THE AUSPICES OF THE  
MINISTRY OF COMMUNICATION AND INFORMATION OF  
THE REPUBLIC OF KAZAKHSTAN

**Seit Kaskabasov**

**K 28** *The Cradle of Creativity. Translated from Russian  
to English by Chris Lovelace.*  
Astana: Audarma, 2010. – 464 p.

ISBN 9965-18-314-7

The unquenchable strength and unbridled imagination of the Kazakh people found their reflection in folkloric art. In this book, masterpieces of Kazakh folklore are analyzed; socio-historical foundations and aesthetic essentials are explored in epic memorials, historic songs, and legendary tales and fables; and international connections of Kazakh folklore and interaction between various aspects of folk art are demonstrated.

This work is directed toward specialists and those who work in the field of culture and art.

*The fragments of T. Togusbayev's painting are used in the design of the cover page.*

DDC 398  
BBC 82

ISBN 9965-18-314-7

© Seit Kaskabasov, 2010  
© Audarma Publishing House, 2010  
© The A. Kasteev State Museum of Arts  
of the Republic of Kazakhstan

*Dedicated to the bright memory  
of my father, who did not return  
from the front of the Great  
Patriotic War, 1941-1945.*

## **KAZAKH FOLK THEATER**

The peculiarities of pre-Revolutionary life for the Kazakh people (a combination of nomadic and semi-settled lifestyles with livestock herding and semi-agricultural economic types, the weak development of market and urban culture, and the combination of feudal and tribal social organizations) has determined the character, content and form of all kinds of folkloric creativity. This includes the dramatic arts, by which are meant such elements as the rituals, games, narrative and musical folklore that are directed by aesthetics, i.e. the artistic-imaginative reproduction of human activity.

Nomadic life created peculiar forms of popular amusement and recreation. For example, the impending migration from winter to summer settlements gave people a general emotional uplift. Everyone was happy about it, because they knew that the herd would be content in the new pasture. People wished each other well as they invited each other into their homes, since they anticipated departing on their separate ways, and all exchanged kind farewells. Preparation for the migration itself (dismantling

the yurt, packing up belongings) was accompanied by certain rituals and songs. The migratory trail from winter to summer settlements, usually a distance of 250-300 kilometers or greater, represented a long journey with brief stops, so various games and amusements were arranged. The time when the nomads arrived at their summer encampments (*dzhaylau*) was especially festive, and people meticulously observed the customs and rituals as they erected their yurts. A cheerful atmosphere reigned throughout: It seemed that the very spring air of the steppe was saturated with songs and jesting. Between yurts *dastarkhans* were shared, and the people of the steppe passed around cheerful aphorisms. Once they had settled in with their clannish and tribal accoutrements, people at the summer settlement invited each other over as guests in turn, arranging races, *aitys akynov* (poetry competitions with improvisational singers), and conducted a variety of national games. Also, the majority of weddings, along with their etiquette (numerous rituals, and songs with their own festive ceremonies), took place at this time.

Various forms of popular dramatic art marked the life of the Kazakh herdsman. Some of them were directly connected with life itself, with everyday living and housekeeping. Others represented special spectacles and games for entertainment. A third type could even be seen as the rudiments of professional theatric arts in the broad sense.

To the first group belong the various activities and oralpoetic compositions that accompany all sorts of domestic and housekeeping rites, and wedding and funereal rituals. We provisionally call them «calendarial labor and ritual forms of popular dramatic creativity».

The second group is composed of diverse popular games and performances of an amusing nature, which are enacted during big popular gatherings and various celebrations where a multitude of people would gather from different clans and tribes, villages and provinces. This



group is called «special amusing forms of popular dramatic creativity».

And, finally, into the third group are placed the activity of poet-songwriters called *sal-seri*, the theatrical performances of amateur daredevil stuntmen and professional actors at fairs, as well as the first drama troupes organized at the beginning of the twentieth century. This group is provisionally named «rudimentary forms of professional dramatic theatrical art».

### **Calendarial Labor and Ritual Forms**

All aspects of popular dramatic art, just like all folklore as a whole, are governed by certain periods of the people's working calendar. The Kazakhs arranged every big event - be it a wedding feast, a ritual affair connected to animal husbandry, a yearly commemoration of the dead, etc - into the spring-summer season, when the harsh winter was already behind them, the birthing of the animals had already passed, and the villages had moved to the summer encampments. The majority of popular holidays, games and rituals were held at this time. There also existed separate games that fell in the winter and the early spring. Some amusements took place in the early fall.

An especially great meaning was placed on the celebration of New Year, in antiquity called «*uly*s». People met the first day of the New Year, March 9 (22), «*Ulystin uly kyn*» («The Great Day of Ulys») in a joyful, holiday mood as they generously laid out feasts for one another. The arrival of New Year coincided with the end of the birthing of the herd and the day of the Great Spring Equinox. On this day they prepared milk-based dishes, and expressed kind wishes to each other when they met, or while visiting. Games and *aityses* were arranged between young men and women. The struggle between winter and summer was imitated in the games «Chilly Old Dough-Woman» (*Testianaya starukha-merzliachka*) and «White Ram».

Winter was symbolically represented by an old woman made out of dough, who was supposed to convey the condition of the departing (dying) winter in her movements. The theme of the struggle between winter and summer resounded in the singing competitions of the young men and women. But in the poetic disputes, the magical side was already giving way to the aesthetic, and the young people hid their feelings allegorically in their verses.<sup>1</sup>

This collection of rites and games was connected to the work activity of the Kazakh husbandman. In the summer on the *dzhaylau* when the mares first started giving milk, ritual refreshment was provided, which was called «the Beginning of Koumiss». This was accompanied by a holiday for all the people, «*Seyil*» («Procession»). During this holiday, songs were sung in honor of the patron of horses, «*zhylkyshty-ata*» («the Father of Horses»). The same sort of amusements and ritual refreshments were arranged at the end of summer or in early autumn, when the mares stopped giving milk.<sup>2</sup>

Various holidays also took place during the summer and fall sheep-shearing. A number of work activities connected to shearing the sheep, separating the wool and cleaning it were accompanied by songs, jesting, and proverbs in which the women often shared their most treasured thoughts and feelings. In the preparation of *koshmy* mats, the women would push rolled-up, unfinished mats with their feet to the home of respected people and say «*koi basty*» («the sheep will trample you»), at which point they would receive the customary gifts.<sup>3</sup>

The guessing game «*Qol duzak*» («Hands in Snares») was unusual. The game consisted in «Mister Az» («*Az myrza*») and «Ut the Beautiful» («*Yt bikesh*») trying to snare each other, and, depending on who won, one could forecast what the winter would be like next year. The young man and woman usually played this game at the end of

February, which was called *Ut* by the ancient Kazakhs. If the young man won (performing in the name of Mister Az), then it was thought that the winter would be severe; but if the young lady won (*Ut* the Beautiful), then it would be gentle and warm.<sup>4</sup>

Yet another game connected to the domestic life of the Kazakhs was «badik» («*badik*»). *Badik* represented an evil spirit that sent all sorts of illnesses upon the herd. The game was played mainly in the summer. The youth would gather in one yurt and organize an *aitys*. Young men and women would mock *badik*, the imagined spirit of illness, in song, and they would demand that he depart their lands and not torment the flock, for which they threatened him with reprisal. Moreover, the song (stanza) of each participant in the *aitys* ended in a sort of refrain with the words, «*kosh-kosh!*» («Scram, scram!»), which were uttered by the chorus; that is, all the participants in the game joined in with «*kosh-kosh!*» During the game, besides the *aitys*, various comic routines were performed in connection with expelling the evil spirit. Toward the end of the game, all participants went outside and withdrew to the field, as if to drive the evil spirit far away so that he would not return again. Incidentally, this was also a novel way for young people in love to meet and get alone together.<sup>5</sup>

Undoubtedly, at the heart of this game lies the notion of the existence of evil spirits: Those masters of illness who, in the event of an irreverent attitude toward them, would strike people and livestock with illnesses. The game, then, is a memorial to the means and methods of combating these spirits. Obviously, in the actions - which is to say more precisely, in the scenes of expelling the spirit of *badik* - the main role used to be played by the *baksy* (shaman) performing in the capacity of a priest as the leader of the capture. The participants supported him with their cries, singing and movements. In the game, the distinction was preserved between the coryphaeus and the choir on the

one hand, and the imaginary spirit on the other, with the battle taking place between them.

The so-called «game of the *baksy*» («*baqsy oiyny*») - i.e., the shaman's channeling séance - is a clear example of the combination of theatrical and ritual elements. It is precisely here that the priestly characteristics of the shaman are revealed: In his ability to enter into contact with the other world and his knowledge of the means to do battle against its representatives - the imagined spirits of illness that have supposedly possessed a person. His séance was mainly conducted in the ailing person's yurt, and it took place before the public. In point of fact, this represented a «one man theater» consisting of several parts: prologue, invocation of the spirits, battle with the evil spirits, and finale.

Usually the *baksy* began his trance by playing a bow instrument, the *kobyz*, after which he would begin singing. Gradually, the tempo of the music and singing would get faster and faster until it became shrill, and, after a certain time, this would give way to its own form of whirling and pantomimes to represent - to his thinking - the actions and movements of the spirits as they were fighting to the death. This included the good spirits (the shaman) and the evil spirits (illnesses). All of this would happen at high speed as the *baksy* yelled out unintelligible phrases, actively gesticulated, and rapidly altered his facial expressions. Gradually, he would fall into an ecstatic state, jumping and whirling as a dervish, performing all sorts of acrobatic tricks, licking red-hot iron (often, an axe), or swallowing a saber to its hilt. He also did other illusions, and finally fell into a swoon, which meant that his soul had reached the world that was unattainable for mere mortals. Here he joined himself to spirit-protectors and engaged in battle against the evil spirits. After some time, he came to his senses and, in front of those gathered, informed the sick person what the spirits had told him.



As we can see, the whole session of the shamanic séance possessed a theatrical form. Everything the *baksy* did during the séance pursued one goal: To make a strong emotional impression on everyone present and cause them to believe in the supernatural abilities of the *baksy*, who sometimes really did succeed in imbuing people - in the first place, the sick - with faith in what had transpired.

It must not be said that all *baksy-shamans* were charlatans, out to defraud the people with all sorts of truths and untruths. Not infrequently, one encountered truly gifted people among them who not only had good musical and vocal abilities, but also possessed much experience in folk healing methods. On some occasions, they even had hypnotic abilities, with which they worked unbelievable magic tricks similar to those of modern illusionists. In other words, singer, musician, dancer, acrobat, illusionist and physician were all combined in one person. All of this caused respect among the people for the *baksy*.

Of all the types of dramatic popular creativity, the closest to the theatric arts is the wedding tradition. «The dramatic nature of the wedding», writes V.E. Gusev, «came as a result of the fact that the rite itself arose on the basis of the ancient forms of marriage, which had resulted under the conditions of complicated relationships between opposing sides (clans, communities); this later developed, ultimately, into the structures of feudal society, and it reflected contradictions that were characteristic of the domestic-economic structure and familial lifestyle of that age. Therefore, wedding activities expressed not only the festive, happy side of the event, but also the sad, sometimes tragic fate of the girl who was marrying a «stranger from a strange land», who was delivered over to the «foreign side» to become a victim of patriarchal mores. The drama of that original life situation determined the endurance and traditionalism of dramatic situations in the rite itself. They were even required in such cases when the marriage was

done for love, based on the willing agreement of both sides, to the joy of relatives and the bride and groom».<sup>6</sup>

The Kazakh wedding may be structurally divided into three parts: matchmaking, an intermediate (prenuptial) period, and the wedding feast. Each of these parts has a number of pieces. Matchmaking includes the arrival of the in-laws from the groom's side to the village of the future bride, the agreement of both sides on the time of the wedding feast and the size of the dowry, and the departure of the in-laws. The intermediate (prenuptial) period takes time, during which the whole dowry (or one third of it) is paid, and the bride and groom meet. At this time, frequent meetings take place between the young people, the so-called «marriage game» («*qalyndyq oinau*»). The marriage feast consists of two stages: a.) a feast in the bride's village and her send-off; and b.) the arrival of the wedding train to the village of the groom, with another feast.

The matchmaking itself as a spectacle has quite an interesting relationship to its etiquette, which strictly regulates the behavior and conduct of the matchmakers of both parties, especially the guests: Their role is strictly delineated, as is the responsibility of every other person. The matchmaking is presented, as it were, in a dialogue that consists of the performance of two groups of people. The party of the young woman, having been notified in advance, meets the guests with dignity, while others help the guests to dismount from their horses gradually and without haste. Again accompanied by hospitable people from the family of the girl's father, they enter yurts that have been especially erected for them. According to custom, on the first day of their arrival no discussion about matchmaking is brought up at all. They give the guests the opportunity to rest after their long journey, after which there is discussion around a generous *dastarkhan* between the parents and the guests about this and that, about everyday life. Yet no one from the receiving party gives occasion to switch the conversation to the main topic, in

observance of the custom. In the ceremony of meeting and entertaining the guests, there reigns an atmosphere of underscored importance to the proceedings; propriety has its place in their behavior and conversations, though everyone knows perfectly well why these people have come, and what awaits shortly. They expressly avoid the topic of matchmaking.

In all of this, the elements of theatrical art dictate. Only on the following day is any conversation brought up concerning matchmaking. The party of the groom begins the discussion of matchmaking from a distance with allegories, mentioning various proverbial sayings or parables about matchmaking, family, and so on (and this also has its proprieties). Yet the girl's relatives do not speak openly of their intentions; all is in the sub-text until the attitude of the guests to the proposal is revealed, which - more often than not - is positive.

After they arrive at an agreement, only close relatives from both parties (parents or their proxies) remain in the main yurt to further agree on the manner and timing of the wedding, and the payment of the dowry. And it is only now that all ceremonial pretense is dropped, and the parties engage in mutual, joking banter, and people begin to enjoy themselves as women and people from the girl's village engage in various games and activities connected to the wedding rituals.

A large number of games differ from those of the second, prenuptial (intermediate) period. At this time, the groom visits the bride to make her acquaintance, and then these meetings become frequent. Each arrival of the groom (especially the first) is met with various rites and games, which take the form of interesting spectacles and amusements. Usually the meeting between the bride and groom is organized by the *snokhi* (the wives of the girl's oldest brother). The groom arrives with his closest friend or closest relative, who is not much older than him. The arrival of the groom is accompanied by jesting games,

which sometimes have - apparently - sacral significance. The groom is obligated to give a ransom, or at least gifts. Thus he proceeds through such «obstacle-games» as «entering the yurt» («*esik ashar*»), «the handshake» («*qol ustasar*»), «stroking the hair» («*shash sipar*»), and so on.<sup>7</sup> With the arrival of the groom, various games are organized for the youth.<sup>8</sup> This period of sweet encounters between the bride and groom is known to the people as the «marriage game» («*qalyndyq oinau*»).

The third stage of the wedding (i.e., the wedding itself) is especially exhibitionist and theatrical, beginning in the village of the bride. Once the appropriate time has passed as the dowry has nearly been paid in full (or at least more than half), a delegation headed by the father (-in-law) or his representative travels to the bride's village, which is notified in advance. The arrival and reception of the father-in-law is viewed in the village as a holiday, which turns into its own sort of comedy. The receiving party subjects the in-laws to tribulations by means of a variety of comic, playful activities. Here is how the academician S. Mukanov, a writer who knew the ethnography and folklore of his native country very well, wrote on this subject:

*One of the forms of popular comedy was performed during the wedding. The father-in-law would depart for his in-laws' with a retinue of many people who were close to him. From the village, where the in-laws were expecting him, mounted young men (dziggit) would ride out to meet them. But this meeting was not quite a friendly one. The reception committee laid hands not only on the dignitaries among the in-laws, but also threw the rest off their horses, clad them in all sorts of clothes, and sullied their faces. The in-laws knew about this, and rode in full readiness to rebuff them. The skirmish began. The victors brought the vanquished in the most comic states that this served as an occasion for the ridicule and laughter by all.<sup>9</sup>*

In all probability, such trials or skirmishes are relics of ancient ritual competitions between two intermarrying phratries or clans. Incidentally, V.E. Gusev also writes concerning the remnants of such trials in Russian wedding rituals, where he rightly observes:

*[F]rom the viewpoint of dominant structure, the wedding is distinctly divided into two parts: the strictly dramatic... and the celebratory. In the first part, moments of conflict, trial motifs, adversity and struggles from both sides dominate. In the second, the conflict is «resolved», reconciliation occurs, the rite acquires a eupeptic and happy character; although for the bride there remain some elements of trial as she engages in sometimes comical, playful acts (the bride parodies various activities, the mummies «execute» the father-in-law and «look for» the bride who has hidden herself).<sup>10</sup>*

Deep dramatic substance and theatricality characterize not only the wedding itself in the bride's village, but also the wedding songs that are sung in connection with her sending off. Especially emotional are the scenes when the bride sings her farewell song, the «*synsu*» («lament»), and the choirs of young men and women each sing in turn the «*zhar-zhar*» («spouse-friend») song. These songs have not only a ritual-functional significance, but also a certain aesthetic meaning, since they are sung by people gathered at the feast and not merely according to custom.<sup>11</sup>

These songs are heard on the last day of the wedding feast in the village of the young lady. As the fun that has lasted for two to three days now comes to an end, a large audience gathers at the yurt where the bride is with her friends and those close to the *zhenge*<sup>12</sup> in order to hear the bridal «*zhar-zhar*» and «*synsu*» songs, bid the bride farewell, and conduct her on her way. Moreover, all the young ladies and the women from the village enter the yurt, while the *dziggit*s remain outside. Thus, two groups



are formed, which become two choruses when the «*zhar-zhar*» song is sung. In his investigation into wedding poetry M. Auezov writes, «This song is sung by bilateral choirs of *dziggit*s and women as a singing dialogue between two groups of young people. In contrast to other wedding songs, the «*zhar-zhar*» has a fixed musical form and text. Both choruses have their refrains, where the happy, buoyant song of the *dziggit*s is answered by the sad chorus of girls.

The song is started off with one or two couplets by the chorus of *dziggit*s, who represent the *dziggit* side. After each line in the song, both choruses repeat the refrain «*zhar-zhar!*» The text of the men's chorus is always jocularly comforting: The song tries to persuade the girl not to cry over the separation from her mother, since she will be replaced by her mother-in-law, just as her father-in-law will take the place of her father. Nor should she bemoan leaving her home, since it will be replaced by the yurt of the groom in his village...

The chorus of young women, representing the side of the bride, answers every couplet that the *dziggit*s (young men) sing. In a sad canto, the girls contend with what the *dziggit*s are singing: the loss of carefree youth, separation from one's home and friends, which nothing can replace.<sup>13</sup> Here is an example of a *zhar-zhar* song that is widely known among the people:

#### Men's Chorus:

She has returned from the market with everything good,  
*zhar-zhar!*  
They bring in the velvet to the home of the bride, *zhar-zhar!*  
My head is crushed like a vice, what attire, *zhar-zhar!*  
Your *saukele*<sup>14</sup> is high, and trimmed with beaver, *zhar-zhar!*  
Do not cry without end for your father, *zhar-zhar!*  
Your father-in-law shall replace your father, *zhar-zhar!*

## Women's Choir:

The pond by my home is pure, like a mirror, *zhar-zhar!*  
I see in that mirror my own face's pallor, *zhar-zhar!*  
By moonlight the water is shining so bright, *zhar-zhar!*  
Carefree girlhood has gone with no trace, *zhar-zhar!*  
How can I not shed bitter tears, *zhar-zhar!*  
No one shall ever replace my father, *zhar-zhar!*<sup>15</sup>

The song is sung by one person, while the chorus sings the refrain. As S. Mukanov observes, «Usually the one who sings this song is the *dziggit* who loves the girl that is being given in marriage».<sup>16</sup> But cases are not uncommon where the «*zhar-zhar*» is sung by one of the gifted young people from the girl's village, who is then rewarded with the appropriate prize after signing the song.<sup>17</sup>

After the «*zhar-zhar*» song ends, they prepare the bride for her journey. All of her dowry (the yurt with its accoutrements, household utensils, carpets, *koshmymats*, precious items, furs and other gifts) is packed onto camels, the herd is gathered in the amount the parents have agreed upon for their daughter, a horse (usually with a white coat) is brought wearing an expensive bridle, saddled and covered with a silk-cloth caparison.

At last, the moment comes when the bride must say goodbye to her carefree girlhood, to her relatives and loved ones, with the people of her village and her close friends. This just might be the most telling and emotional act in the whole wedding affair. The girl's marriage, her departure from her native home, is often perceived as a departure into alien territory, into distant lands: as crossing over into the other, the unknown, even to that which is opposite to the present world. This is because, for the Kazakhs, it is customary for a daughter to be considered a guest in her father's house, and until her marriage she enjoys great privileges and lives carefree. The older men do not address her directly, and in the home they never speak of marriage or matchmaking. So the girl, having

become a bride, experiences a bitter sense of her loss of freedom - full as it was of care and tenderness - when the time comes for her to leave for the groom's village.

Moreover, she is leaving for distant places, to a foreign clan. For, according to ancient Kazakh custom based on exogamy outside the clan, marriage between kinsmen was forbidden. It was permitted to join in the bonds of marriage «only among people having no blood relative within seven generations. With the territorial dispersion of clan groups it happened very seldom that a girl would marry someone from her native lands, from the nearby villages. On the contrary, marriages were always preferred with representatives of distant clans».<sup>18</sup>

The impending separation, the departure to a distant, foreign land, and the loss of her erstwhile freedom – as well as the consciousness that she is marrying not for love - all produce in the girl a feeling a great stress, and gives birth to very sincere and stirring lament songs: not only about her personal woe, but about the fate of all women.

According to custom, the girl was supposed to compose the «synsu» song herself. It was not allowed to use famous songs that had been sung before by someone else. Therefore, the girl had to demonstrate great improvisational ingenuity and uncommon skill. Often, gifted young women created genuinely poetic songs that then remained for a long time in the memory of fellow villagers and kinsmen, eventually making their names famous among the people. Following tradition, during the singing of the «synsu» the girl's friends would accompany her as she visited the yurt of every relative in her village and the neighboring village. With weeping she would embrace every person in the yurts of those people close to her, lamenting, and dedicate a quatrain to each one. Thus, she would visit all her relatives and kinsmen. Not just her friends, but all the women of the village would accompany her as they sang and cried with the bride to express their sympathy as they recalled their own fate, and the fate of women in general.

The words of the «*synsu*» song were addressed as a farewell to the girl's loved ones, to all her fellow villagers, kinsmen, to her native land, to nature. In the song, the bride spoke of happy days spent under her parents' roof and regretted that they had passed so quickly. She poured out the feelings brought about by this irrecoverable loss and her impending departure to a foreign land. Here, for example, is how one of these «*synsu*» sounds:

A goose swims the river, following the flowing water;  
She has had to forsake her native home so young.  
You are dripping blood into the water, your blood will flow away;  
You are getting married, and a stranger will take you away.  
On the *koshmy* of a white wagon I grew as a flower;  
I bathed in the milk of white mares.  
Aye, in vain did my mother rear me;  
For, poor me, I must marry an unkind man by force.<sup>19</sup>

The procession of women ended with a return to the bride's yurt, where her parents, kinsmen and the groom's people with the father-in-law at the head were waiting for her. Having bidden farewell to her parents with a hug, the bride mounted a steed that had been brought to her, and which was led to the distant approaches to the village was led by the bridle by her friends, beloved *zhenge*, and younger brothers.

Once they have traveled a sufficiently far distance, farewells are said to those accompanying her. It is customary for the bride to be brought into the groom's village by the mother, the beloved *zhenge*, someone from the younger brothers and a few of her closest friends.

Usually the trip tends to be long. The wedding train arrives in the groom's village after several days. But the bride is not brought into the village immediately. Upon their arrival, a group of women - composed of those closest to the *zhenge*, sisters and relatives of the groom - leaves the village to meet the bride and the people accompanying her. They cover the bride with a large, white silk scarf (or

shawl), and four women each hold one side of a great cover (cloth) over her as they lead her into the village, so that none of those gathered at the feast may see her face. Upon entering the yurt designated for her and her retinue, the women surround and cover the bride, so as to not show her to anyone. At this time the rites of cleansing by fire («*otqa mai quyuu*») and provender of victuals («*shashu*») are performed.

On the following day begins the feast (*toi*), which, depending on the wealth of the organizers may last two days, three days, or longer. In significance and scope the feast in the village of the groom surpasses the feast given in the village of the bride, because here the wedding is a joyous occasion, and only a holiday atmosphere reigns. Not a solitary note of sadness or regret may occur at this feast announcing the beginning of the wedding (*toi bastar*). Here the master of the feast sings, and wishes for happiness and success are expressed to him and everyone gathered. It is announced where and what kind of amusing diversions will take place: horse races, running competitions, goat fighting, wrestling, riding tournaments, fun games, and, finally, poetry contests between improvisational *akyns*. In the evenings, youth games are organized, such as *alty-bakan* (swings), *aksuiek* (white bone), and others.<sup>20</sup>

At the wedding feast in the groom's village, the greatest theatricality is set aside for the scene when the bride is presented to the relatives of the groom and to all the assembled public. Usually the organizers select beforehand a young *dziggit* the same age as the groom,<sup>21</sup> one who possesses poetic gifts and vocal ability to sing the «*betashar*» song (the «Revealing of the Face»). This is accompanied by its own acts, in the form of obeisance to the bride and uncovering her face. This song of acquaintance is divided into two parts, which break down into their own internal divisions. The first part includes a.) praising the bride, and b.) listing her responsibilities. The second part contains a.) a description of the parents and relatives of the groom, and



b.) demanding gifts for the bride. During the performance of the second part, the bride, flanked on each side by women accompanying her, bows as a sign of respect and greeting. Toward the end of the second part, the singer reveals the face of the bride and demands gifts for the unveiling (*korimdik*). The rite of presenting the bride through song simultaneously carries both a somber-celebratory aspect and a jocular nature.

During this rite, the bride stands encircled by the youth with her face hidden by a cover that is held on two sides by the young *zhenge* of the groom. When the singer sings a song, she «must only listen and recall the instructions and demands that the song enumerates for her...

The song lays out before her a detailed regimen for the ancestral family where she, as a future mother, will occupy a place of honor.

Usually the song begins with praising the beauty and youth of the bride, and then quickly switches to how she must treat her husband, how she must obey and honor him. The song especially enumerates in detail the responsibilities of the young wife with respect to the husband's parents. Furthermore, the song instructs her how to conduct herself with other elders of the clan, with younger people in the village and with guests, and teaches her the laws of complex human relationships within the clan community.

In order for the song not to bore those in attendance, the listing of details is interspersed with humorous sayings, proverbs and puns». <sup>22</sup> «The singer, knowing those close to the bride and groom, imitates the mannerisms and postures of the one he's singing about», <sup>23</sup> jokingly mocking the staid and severe old people who know how to demand a lot for themselves but get stingy when giving gifts for the unveiling». <sup>24</sup>

Characterizing each of the parents and relatives of the groom - and mimicking them - demands great artistic skill from the singer. Reconstruction of their manner of gestures, poses and expressions - not to mention

describing their appearance and features of their character in song - must combine solemnity and suaveness. The singer's skillful emulation of the person he has presented to the bride and to whom, by custom, he has demanded reverence would produce a roar of laughter and fun for everyone. The very comic-solemn tone of the rite and the song witnesses to the fact of the originally dramatic nature of the wedding activities.

As with many peoples, the main person for the Kazakhs throughout the wedding affair is the bride. In the «*zhar-zhar*» choral songs of the men and women, in the «*synsu*» farewell lamentations of the bride, in the «*betashar*» songs of acquaintance, and in the varied nature of rites accompanying these songs and the wedding itself, a fairly complex image is painted of the bride herself. She represents that carefree, happy daughter who loved the parents who raised her like a flower, like a white camel calf, and bathed her in mare's milk. She represents that unhappy girl, given by an unkind father to alien people, and for whom no place is found in her native home. She represents that gentle, ideal young wife, white as eggshell, sensitive as a magpie. In these wedding songs a typical, generalized image is created, which is incarnated by every girl who gets married. As she performs all the required songs by tradition, it is as though she is playing herself in the traditional role of a bride. Every bride when she performs the traditional wedding songs feels as though she is «me» and «not me»; i.e., combined within the girl are both herself specifically, and the general image of the Kazakh woman. Already in this, one can detect elements of the actor's craft.

In the Kazakh wedding tradition, the groom is very passive. He does not actively participate, but merely fulfills the instructions of the groomsman and the forms of custom.<sup>25</sup> Nonetheless, the groomsman («*kyeu zholdas*») is his complete opposite. Usually, the one selected for this role is either the groom's closest childhood friend («*dos*»)

or someone from among the older relatives (most often, a brother-in-law), who are distinguished by great wit and resourcefulness, know how to sing, improvise and make jokes well, and - most importantly – they must know very well the customs and rites associated with the wedding process. In this sense, he is reminiscent of the groomsman in the Russian traditional wedding.<sup>26</sup> They have much in common, because they have the same function, which itself goes back to the ancient ritual contests between competing phratries and clans. With time, however, once the original significance was lost, the groomsman and his activity would take on a semi-ceremonial - though overall artistic-aesthetic - character.

The theatric and dramatic essence of the wedding tradition is affirmed in that the wedding was one of the first folk customs to be translated to the professional stage of Kazakh theater.<sup>27</sup> «So now the performance of the wedding (or its parts) remains one of the most beloved forms of rural amateur performance»,<sup>28</sup> folk theater and teleplays. V. Gusev correctly writes that «the traditional wedding underwent a complex evolution: from a magic ritual, it went to a ceremonial activity, then from there it went to folk games and stage performances to create its own essential part of folk theater».<sup>29</sup>

### **Recreational Forms of Dramatic Popular Creativity**

This group includes the sorts of popular amusements that have as their goal the recreation of the performers themselves, as well as the public in attendance. They involve various games, competitions and tournaments arranged during formal holidays, especially at wedding feasts (*toi*) and annual memorials for the dead (*as*). In character and significance, these are fully public presentations with the participation of a large number of people, since their goal is to entertain those who are

gathered, and they are organized only for the spectators. The distinction between performer and spectator is present here, though the performer is not a professional and is selected from among the very same multitude of spectators. With regard to the many events in which tens and hundreds of people participate, the amusements performed only at the *as* and the *toi* have a sporting-gaming nature. These are horse racing («*baige*»), running competitions («*zhayau zharys*»), striking an ingot of gold or silver at full gallop with a dart or lance («*zhamby atu*»), pursuing a girl («*qyz quu*»), goat scrimmage («*kokbar*»), strongman wrestling («*kyres*»), and others. It is possible to judge how much the people loved and appreciated them from the fact that «the initiator, or rather, the master of ceremonies would designate three prizes: to the winner of the *baiges* as the best horseman, to the winner of the *kyres* (a national wrestling form) as the best strongman, and the best *akyn* in the song tournament».<sup>30</sup>

For the spectator, particularly amusing are the *bajge* (horse racing), *kokbar* (goat fighting), *qyz quu* (girl chase) and *kyres* (strongman wrestling).

For the *baigi*, a suitable place is selected beforehand, and the start and finish lines are marked. «Kazakhs do not put their horses into a circle. The horses contend with each other by running a straight distance of ten to forty kilometers. All the horsemen are led to the designated place (starting line, S.K.) by impartial individuals designated by the people, called *aidaushi*. At the finish line there also stand impartial, trustworthy people called *dayagachi*, who take off the head-covering of the rider in order not to mistake to whom the victory for the race belongs, who it is that should receive the prize».<sup>31</sup>

Horse racing, especially the moment when the racers approach the finish, produces a great fervor of sensations in the spectator. No one remains unmoved, people root for the race and the rider competing in the name of their village and clan. Therefore, the victory of a horseman is

seen as the victory of the whole clan or village. So this stirs up passions all the more, and sometimes sparks disputes. The fans feel that they are not merely spectators, but are riders themselves. Other temperamental spectators will run out from the crowd to a tired jockey trudging along, pulling him by the bridle, leading him along, pulling and pushing from behind as they try to help him in every way to get the finish first (or at least second or third). Zealous fans later throw a caparison over the mount, saddle it for themselves, and take it far away from human eyes to avoid evil stares.

Another interesting sporting event is the goat scrimmage, which is called *kokbar*.<sup>32</sup> The game begins when the master of ceremonies, after announcing the *kokbar* slaughters a goat, removes its head, and - after tightly binding up the neck - gives the carcass to *dziggit*s grouped according to their clans or villages. From each group a strong *dziggit* rides out on a sturdy steed. Then several *dziggit*s gather to fight over the carcass lying on the ground. Once one of them manages to lift it, he gallops to the side of his group with the goat tucked between the stirrup and his leg, or else laid across the saddle. Everyone throws themselves into the pursuit after him as they try to take the goat from him in full gallop. Someone, as a rule, catches up to him and takes the goat, but then has it taken from him in turn. After all, it is not so easy to break free from a large group of people with a heavy goat's carcass and gallop away. And of course, the other players don't allow him to carry off the prey immediately. In such a *melee*, it is impossible for anyone to take the carcass from someone else, lay it across his own horse, and tear himself away from the pursuit. Therefore, it is only the strongest and most agile *dziggit* who can engage fearlessly in the fray, in the battle for the carcass, as people from the village or clan come to his aid. They let him have a strong horse and, whenever someone or other takes the goat from someone else and stows it on his horse, they surround him from all sides so that no one else can ride up to them. Only



in this way, with the combined efforts of all, is it possible to seize the quarry. According to the rules of the game, if the *kokbar* is carried off very quickly, then the one into whose yurt it is brought must replace it with another goat. But sometimes people play differently. As S. Mukanov writes, once the victor has escaped from his pursuers he «carries the quarry to the girl of his fancy, who accepts the gift, and in exchange gives a new goat for the game to continue».<sup>33</sup> The game begins again. This time the winner takes away the *kokbar* for good, and there where he delivers it the goat is boiled whole, and the entire village consumes all the boiled meat.<sup>34</sup>

Here also, during the flow of the game the fans follow the play with sharp eyes, and express their feelings very emotionally, whether joyfully when success meets the representatives of their clan or village, or with consternation when the people from their village are losing or give up the *kokbar* to the other side. In contrast to the *baige* fans, the goat scrimmage fans stay in their role as mere observers, and do not enter directly into the game.

The game «*qyz quu*», the «girl chase» that is also played during great holidays and weddings, may be called a form of popular dramatic creativity. The basics of the game are as follows: The young people divide into two groups (*dziggit*s and girls). According to the rules, the first girl suggests for a certain *dziggit* to catch her (usually she calls out someone that she favors). If he catches her before she gets to the designated place, then he has the right to kiss her in front of everyone. But if he does not catch her, then on the way back the girl lashes him with a whip until they get back to the place where the chase began.<sup>35</sup>

The game is distinguished by its fun, cheerful tone. The pursuit of the girl and the kiss in front of everyone that follows it produces in the people a storm of delight and approval.

And when the girl whips the boy, this produces laughter for all.