

**THE DEVELOPMENT AND TRANSFORMATION OF THE KARAKALPAK  
EPIC: FROM ORAL TRADITION TO MODERN LITERARY INTERPRETATION**

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*This article explores the evolution of the Karakalpak epic from its origins in oral folk traditions to its transformation into a vibrant part of written literature. It examines the role of jyrau in preserving and shaping the epic through centuries of oral transmission. The article further analyzes the transition to written form, highlighting the contributions of Russian ethnographers and Karakalpak intellectuals in recording and publishing these works. Special attention is given to the Soviet period and its complex influence, balancing ideological reinterpretations with efforts to promote academic study and translation of the epic. Finally, the article discusses the significant contributions of Tulepbergen Kaipbergenov in adapting and popularizing the epic for modern audiences and touches on contemporary trends in epic writing, which continue to reflect the cultural identity and spiritual values of the Karakalpak people.*

The Karakalpak epic is an integral part of the spiritual culture and national identity of the Karakalpak people. Its origins lie in ancient times, when folk tales, legends, and heroic narratives were passed down orally from generation to generation. The epic reflected not

only the way of life, worldview, and values of the people, but also served as an important means of education, unification, and preservation of historical memory.

Over time, especially with the development of writing and literature, the epic heritage began to transition into a new form – being recorded, analyzed, and reinterpreted within the literary process. This path – from oral tradition to literary adaptation – became an important milestone in the development of Karakalpak literature, allowing for the preservation of unique works, adapting them to modern realities, and opening them up to new generations of readers and researchers.

The Karakalpak epic has its roots in deep antiquity, when the word was not just a means of communication, but a sacred carrier of memory, traditions, and wisdom of the people. In the early stages of development, it existed exclusively in oral form – in the form of tales, legends, heroic poems, and songs, passed down from mouth to mouth, from generation to generation.

This article examines the transformation of Karakalpak epic traditions from oral performance to written and contemporary literary forms, focusing on their cultural, historical, and artistic significance. [1, p. 22-23]

A central role in this process was played by *«jiraw»*– folk storytellers, poets, and musicians, endowed with the gift of improvisation and exceptional memory. The jiraw did not simply reproduce memorized texts; they were living carriers of tradition and, at the same time, its creators. In each performance, they could introduce new motifs, details, or images reflecting current realities, the mood of the people, important historical events, or personal experiences. One of the characteristic features of the Karakalpak oral epic was its collectivity. The epic was created and processed not by an individual author, but by an entire people. Each jiraw contributed their individuality, style, and interpretation to the common heritage. Thanks to this, many versions of the same works were formed, differing in content, tone, symbolism, and composition. This variability enriched the epic tradition, making it multifaceted and profound.

An important element of the oral epic was its musicality. Epic works were performed to the accompaniment of national musical instruments, among which the dutar stood out in particular. The melody helped to enhance the emotional impact of the text, emphasize key moments of the narrative, and hold the listeners' attention. Among the most famous examples of the Karakalpak oral epic, one can highlight *«Qırq Qız»* (Forty Girls) – a heroic poem about forty warrior-maidens defending their land with courage befitting heroes;

«Alpamis» – a majestic work about a valiant hero who fights for justice and love, overcoming difficult trials; and «Er Ziywar»– a touching poem where the motifs of tragic love, self-sacrifice, and heroism are intertwined. [2, p. 30-35]

These epic works became not only the cultural pride of the Karakalpak people, but also a vital source for understanding the national soul, historical path, and artistic thinking. The oral stage of their existence was the foundation on which the written literary tradition later began to form. The transition of the Karakalpak epic to written form became an important stage in its development and preservation for future generations. Oral creativity, passed down for centuries from jyrau to jyrau, gradually became the subject of scientific interest and literary fixation. The first attempts to record and publish examples of Karakalpak folklore date back to the late 19th and early 20th centuries, when researchers began to realize the value and uniqueness of this cultural tradition. A major role in this process was played by two main groups of figures. On the one hand, there were Russian ethnographer-scientists, such as A. A. Divaev and V. V. Radlov, who were among the first to draw attention to the richness of Karakalpak folklore. They systematically collected, recorded, and analyzed oral epic works, many of which were first documented by them.

On the other hand, Karakalpak enlighteners and writers also deserve great credit for preserving the epic heritage – among them Murat Ajiniyazov and Berdaq are particularly noteworthy. Recognizing the importance of the national cultural heritage, they actively participated in its recording, publication, and popularization among the people.

One of the first recorded epic works was the heroic epic «Alpamis». Its text was recorded in the early 20th century and published in Russian in 1922, which became a significant event in the study of not only Karakalpak, but also Turkic folklore as a whole. Later, the epic was translated and published in the Karakalpak language, which contributed to its return to the people themselves in a new form - printed, accessible, stable. Thus, the transition to written form became not only an act of cultural preservation, but also an impetus for the further development of the epic tradition, its rethinking and adaptation to the changing realities of the time.

One of the most important trends of the Soviet period was the development of academic study of folklore: special institutes, scientific departments and research centers were created, where systematic work was carried out to collect, analyze and publish epic works. Scientists went on folklore expeditions, recorded stories of jiraw, collected oral and written versions of epics, thereby creating a rich scientific base. [3]

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In addition to scientific and publishing achievements, the inclusion of the epic in fiction also played an important role. Karakalpak writers and poets willingly turned to the images and motifs of folk tales, reinterpreting them in the context of modernity and socialist ideals. Vivid examples of successful adaptation of the epic in the literature of this period are the novel «Bakhtiyar» by Ibragim Yusupov, inspired by the motifs of the famous epic «Alpamis», as well as the poem «Qırq Qız» by Berdakh, in which the heroic legend about forty warriors was reinterpreted taking into account the ideological realities of the time. These works demonstrate how the traditional epic foundation could serve as a source of inspiration for creating new, relevant literature. [4, p. 49]

Tulebergen Kaipbergenov (1929–2010), an outstanding Karakalpak writer, poet, playwright and public figure, was also actively involved in popularizing the heroic images and characters of the Karakalpak epic. He had a huge impact on the perception and popularization of the Karakalpak epic in literature. Kaipbergenov did not just use epic motifs, but deeply penetrated the essence of folk wisdom, masterfully reinterpreting epic plots and images to make them accessible and understandable to a wide audience.

Literary adaptation of epic plots became one of the foundations of his work. Kaipbergenov created several works in which he not only retold traditional epic plots, but also enriched them with new meanings and interpretations. Thus, in the novel «Karakalpak Tale» he traced the centuries-old history of the Karakalpak people, introducing into it elements of heroism and historical destiny, reflected in the epic. In this work, he managed to convey the spirit of the national epic, while adapting it to the needs of the modern reader. [5]

The works of Tulebergen Kaipbergenov have been translated into many languages, which contributed to the popularization of the Karakalpak epic outside of Karakalpakstan. Notably «Karakalpak Daughter» and potentially other novels such as «Makhambet» achieved broader recognition through translations into various languages, contributing significantly to the popularization of Karakalpak literature beyond Karakalpakstan. While precise dates for early translations are often difficult to ascertain, it is likely that Russian translations of 'Karakalpak Daughter' emerged as early as the 1960s or 1970s during the Soviet era, facilitating wider dissemination."

The contribution of Tulebergen Kaipbergenov to the development of Karakalpak literature and to the popularization of the epic is difficult to overestimate. His works became

not only an important milestone in the literary process, but also an important link in the preservation and actualization of the folk epic for future generations. [6, p. 188]

In the 20th and 21st centuries, Karakalpak literature was not limited only to preserving and rethinking the traditional epic heritage. On the contrary, a new direction is being formed at this time — the creation of original epic works that reflect the realities of modernity, the most important historical events and the spiritual searches of the people. These works preserve the spirit of heroic legend, but address new themes, including war, collectivization, national identity, environmental problems and globalization.

The central place in new epic works is occupied by the theme of spiritual and moral values. Through the fates of the heroes, the ideas of love for the homeland, devotion, justice and strength of spirit are revealed. Examples of such works include Tulepbergen Kaipbergenov's novel «Karakalpak Tale» (1983), which intertwines mythological elements and a realistic narrative about the fate of the people, as well as Eskender Aimanov's book «The Truth of Aral» (1996), which epically comprehends the environmental disaster of the Aral Sea region. Mukhamedzhan Ajiniyazov in the novel «Sarshandar» (2004) tells about the life of peasants in the 20th century, filling the narrative with motifs of struggle and heroism.

Modern authors also turn to philosophical themes, exploring the spiritual destiny of the people through the individual experiences of the heroes. Thus, Kairat Zhumanazarov in the novel «The Spirit of the People»(2012) describes the spiritual journey of the hero through the historical epochs of the Karakalpak people. Alimbay Utemuradov in the work «Alpamis in Our Time» (2018) attempts to present the hero of the ancient epic Alpamis in modern conditions, raising questions of the loss of national identity, spiritual disunity and environmental crisis. These works testify to the vitality and development of the epic tradition in Karakalpak literature. [7, p. 124].

Thus, the Karakalpak epic has come a long way of development — from oral folk legends to literary works that continue to sound in modern realities. The epic tradition is not only preserved, but also developed thanks to the efforts of writers such as Tulepbergen Kaipbergenov, Eskender Aimaanov, Kairat Zhumanazarov and others. Their works demonstrate that the epic remains a living source of inspiration, moral guidelines and national identity. In the context of globalization and cultural changes, the appeal to the epic acquires special significance, helping to preserve historical memory, spiritual values and the uniqueness of the Karakalpak people. The epic literature of Karakalpakstan is not only a

rich heritage of the past, but also a living, developing layer of modern culture, capable of responding to the challenges of the time and speaking to the reader in the language of eternal truths.

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