

CHAPTER VII
KAZAKH SOVIET
ORAL ART

ORAL ART ON THE EVE OF THE REVOLUTION

Study of the oral art of the period immediately preceding the revolution does not present as many difficulties as study of the earlier folklore, as a considerably large proportion of the more recent creations have been preserved and the names of many of the contemporary *aqyns* are known. It has been noted that after the defeat of the initial resistance against the Russian invader much of Kazakh folk singing became dominated by the expressions of dejection, pessimism, and cynicism of a defeated people. By the end of the last century there could be noted a striking contrast between the new positive, secular literature of the young intelligentsia and the more traditional oral art of the Kazakhs. By the revolution of 1905, however, two new trends in Kazakh oral art could be observed: first, some of the earlier spirit of national revolt was regained; and, second, the beginning of expression of social protest began to be injected in increasing measure in the oral art. It was not until the year 1916, however, that these trends of social and national protest began to issue forth more boldly. In June, 1916, when the imperial government issued a decree calling for the mobilization of the Central Asian population for nonmilitary work at the front, the decree was met by a storm of protest among the Kazakhs, who had never known forced military service. Rising discontent rapidly blossomed into a full-blown revolt, which shook all of Russian Central Asia.¹

The revolt and its leaders were echoed and re-echoed in a

¹For a detailed treatment of the 1916 revolt, see Edward D. Sokol, *The Revolt of 1916 in Russian Central Asia*, "The Johns Hopkins University Studies in Historical and Political Science," Series LXXI (1953), No. 1.

vast store of oral creations including revolutionary songs in the old epic spirit, in which battles were celebrated, leaders of the uprising praised, and resistance urged, as well as less militant songs reflecting the more tragic aspects of this era, the lyrical songs, and the weeping songs over the death of heroes.

As in the revolutionary period of the nineteenth century, the new heroes of the anti-Russian struggle took their place in the folk tradition alongside the old *batyrs*. Again the *aqyns* became not only active participants in the struggle, but also leaders and propagandizers, wandering from *aul* to *aul* calling on the people to rise. One of the most outstanding *aqyns* of this period of whom we have definite knowledge was Byzaubaq (Bzaubaq), who composed many stirring appeals to the population in which we find the traditional hyperbolic epical style and the note of national protest of the nineteenth century, combined with a new sense of social consciousness. Here is one of Byzaubaq's songs:

Tsar Nikolai is perplexed and upset:
The enemies' armies are drawing close from all sides.
There are also not a few internal enemies,
Enemies are everywhere, and he's in despair.
And the miserable courtiers cry,
Give him advice, but it's all in vain.
They want to take all our youth,
Since they've not enough soldiers of their own.
But even if we give in to them now,
And send our men far to strange shores,
What will it matter—the tsar will continue to oppress.
Even if we offer our lives for him.
Much suffering is now in store for you, oh my people,
Your forehead is already covered with cold sweat
But if, as one, we rise against them,
They will not be able to destroy us all, my people!
No, a tsar's heart knows no compassion.
Kazakhs, give now your answer to the tsar!
Is it worth while to live the life of a slave,
Only to reach a good ripe age?
Listen to what the *aqyn* sings to you:
Misery awaits you from the tsar's hands
Even if you offer your son to him.

Go then, my people,
Go then, in war against the tsar!

Where are now the *aqsqaqs* and the wise leaders?
Or do we no longer have strength in our hands? Oh look!
They are leading your most beautiful ones to the tsar!
Why are you silent? Is there no heart in your breast?

Oh youth! You are the beauty of our land!
The time has come! Just listen to the thunder of the storm!
To horse then, and let your steel shine in the sun,
Like a deadly scythe in your hands!
The day of sharp suffering has dawned
Oh come you all! Close your ranks my people!
Oh place no faith in cowards who speak sweetly to the foe.
To arms! Our land is calling to us!
Oh my people! You are so proud, so strong, so much alive!
Oh listen to my battle cry, to my fiery call!
You will be happy after bloody fight,
After defeating the enemies of your liberty.²

The new more realistic trend emerges more clearly in another song, by the *aqyn* Qulbaš, which also appeals to the people to take up arms. This song, presented in the form of a letter to the *aqyn's* brother, is couched in surprisingly simple language with far less recourse to standard folklore devices and metaphors than is found in the poem of Byzaubaq. The *aqyn* asks his brother if he has seen the tsar's manifesto and then describes the preparations for the uprising and the growing revolutionary mood in the steppe.

The times have become evil,
Under the heaviness of the tsar's hand.
What can we expect from the authorities,
Since for them we are but beasts of burden?
Hearts have become inflamed in anger against them,
The *džigits* are eagerly awaiting the rising.
They will not submit to the decree,
But are going into battle.³

² Bzaubak, "Prizyv akyna Bzaubaka k vosstaniyu," Sobolev, ed., *Pesni* pp. 343-44.

³ Qulbaš, "Pis'mo Abdrakhmanu i ego otvet," Sobolev, ed., *Pesni* p. 340.

VII. KAZAKH SOVIET ORAL ART

In a song of unknown origin entitled "Hangmen" the fury of the Kazakhs at the treatment by the Russians is most impressively expressed.

Rumors are flying across the steppe,
Rumors about human misery.
Ajtkhoža dies under the whip,
And Uzakh under the bayonet.
Above the blue waves of the Issyq-qul
A hot battle took place,
And from the deadly bullet of the tsar,
Many a *džigit* laid down his life.
And in the bloody Qaraqol
Over their captive victims
The authorities have revenged themselves
Behind the steel of prison doors:
Submissively here soldiers were shooting
In prisons, among stone walls,
And our delegates were falling,
Washing the courtyards with their blood.
By night the prison had almost emptied;
They rolled the bodies into ditches and
Ending this bloody business,
The enemy raced towards our *auls*.⁴

While a considerable number of the revolutionary songs had begun to deviate somewhat from the early tradition in their new brevity and acuteness and in their growing realism and relative poverty of traditional epic clichés, many songs of this period remained primarily expressions of the national folklore tradition. These more traditional folksongs, similar to the songs of sad news (*estirtü*) and weeping songs (*džoqtau*), were frequently concerned with expressions of grief over the added sufferings of the Kazakhs, who now met death not only on the battlefield, but also in Russian prisons. One of the most well known of the modern mourning songs is the *džoqtau* about the death of the leader of the 1916 uprising, Amangeldy Imanov.⁵ Here we find all the metaphoric variety of the old epic songs. Amangeldy's wife calls on the *džigits* to listen to her because "your falcon has

⁴ "Palachi," Sobolev, ed., *Pesni* pp. 337-38.

⁵ "Plach zheny Amangeldy," Sobolev, ed., *Pesni* p. 346.

forsaken its nest." The death of the hero is compared to that of a horse which has tired itself by running and the hero himself is depicted as a "bright mirage, which at noon passed before the people, and then disappeared from sight." When the widow turns her ire against the enemy, the murderers of Amangeldy, her thoughts are expressed in a typical passage eulogizing the deceased and branding the enemies.

May the enemies' eyes be blinded forever,
 May their lying mouths become dumb.
 How dared they shoot into the heart of our hero,
 Whose name was the hope of all the people,
 Who from his youth was known as good
 Even among foreign peoples,
 Who had become eternal friends with
 The Tatar, the Russian, the Kazakh, and Uzbek,
 Who equaled a sultan in greatness,
 Never afraid of the enemies,
 Though he did not love fighting,
 Whose words were heard and understood
 By any man, be he a Tatar, a Russian, a Kazakh or Uzbek?

What can the people do now, but compose a song
 When there is nothing more for which to live,
 When they have lost their leader,
 When they mourn the death of their hero,
 Who was the master of this peaceful house,
 Who was the horse for the horseless,
 The warm fur for the unclothed,
 Who loved the poor, like a father himself,
 Whose house was open for you day and night?

THE SOVIET PERIOD

Attitudes towards the Oral Tradition

The ancient tradition of oral art has continued to play a most vital part in the cultural life of contemporary Kazakhstan; and many of the ancient Kazakh epics, legends, and other oral forms have been recorded and printed and have even been translated into other languages of the USSR.

Soviet attitudes, however, towards the traditional oral art

have undergone constant and considerable revision and change and show conflict and uncertainty concerning the value to Soviet society of expressions of early Kazakh culture. In the early Soviet period attitudes among some Kazakh groups towards their own traditions paralleled the attitude of those Soviet Russian writers who attempted to reject all tradition. There were groups in the twenties in Kazakhstan who seriously disputed the idea that the traditional art should be revived and could become an integral part of the new culture. Such extreme left groups expressed fear lest the glorification and romanticization of the past in the traditional epics evoke a renewed nostalgia for the old order of nomadic life. Thus this frequently dominant group of Kazakh Bolsheviks adopted a rigid and uncompromising attitude towards the national heritage and even went so far as to prohibit the recital of a number of ancient epics such as *Ajman Solpan* and *Qyz-Džibek*. Such attempts to overcome national traditions through eradication of the folklore heritage were also frequently accompanied by attempts to change the substance of the old epics and folk songs and to inject into them new elements in order that they might express ideas of the new society. Thus old folk melodies and songs were frequently forbidden or performed in an utterly changed form.⁶

In the 1930's, however, as attitudes toward the arts were relaxed all over the Soviet Union in the wake of the successful conclusion of the first Five-Year Plan, and as conditions became somewhat eased in Soviet Kazakhstan, this unyielding attitude towards the traditional oral art began to give way to a more tolerant one and eventually to an attitude quite opposed to that of the earlier Kazakh Bolshevik critics. During the thirties and through the period of the Second World War, it became a generally accepted principle that the old folk art should be revived and widely distributed, and that the oral traditions of the Kazakhs should be valued as an important aspect of the Kazakh cultural heritage. The outward impetus toward the new acceptance of past traditions was very possibly Gorky's famous speech at the first All-Union Congress of Soviet Writers in 1934, in

⁶ See T. Zhurgenev, *op. cit.*, p. 19.

which he stressed the importance and value of the study of the oral folklore. This new attitude acted as a powerful stimulus to the recording of the art of the past; teams of folklorists traveled throughout Kazakhstan, recording well-known and half-forgotten epics and other folklore productions, frequently directly from the recitations of the elder *aqyns*. A special organization, the Institute of National Culture, was founded in Alma-Ata in 1934, with the express purpose of preserving the old heritage. A special folklore section in the Kazakh branch of the Soviet Academy of Sciences (KazFAN) was also organized to facilitate the study of the oral tradition. As part of the efforts of this new establishment, exhaustive research on questions of Kazakh folklore was carried out by such Kazakh writers and critics as Sejfullin, Džansugurov, Muqanov, Togžanov, Turmanžanov, and Džoldybajev, as well as by a number of Russian writers and critics as Leonid Sobolev, Academician A. S. Orlov, Mark Tarlovski, and others. By the beginning of the war, the study of Kazakh folklore had become an established science. The Kazakh Academy of Sciences (ANKazSSR) had established an Institute of Language and Literature, with the avowed aim of inaugurating scholarly collections of folklore; and the first volume of the History of Kazakh Literature was published, under the editorship of M. Auezov, devoted entirely to the study and analysis of the popular traditions of oral art. During this time there also appeared the first Kazakh monographs on this subject, as well as the first doctoral dissertations on folklore.

In the period immediately following the Second World War the prevailing attitudes towards the Kazakh folk tradition in general, and some of the heroic epics in particular, fell victim to the rigid and frequently doctrinaire attitudes which have characterized Soviet policy on questions of the arts since the historic decree of the Central Committee of the All-Union Communist party regarding the literary journals *Zvezda* and *Lenin-grad* in 1946 and the attack by Zhdanov on the Russian writers Akhmatova and Zoshchenko. The views expressed in the party decree were to be of far-reaching effect also in Kazakhstan.

The first official Kazakh echo of the 1946 decree on literature came in the beginning of 1947 in a supplementary decree of the Central Committee of the Kazakh Communist party.⁷ This decree, although officially directed at the work of the Institute of Language and Literature of the Kazakh Academy of Sciences, went far beyond this framework and set standards for the writer, critic, and historian of literature and folklore which were destined to set the tone of official and unofficial criticism for many years to come.

In the field of folklore studies, the decree criticized the work of the Institute in the strongest language. The first volume of a projected four-volume history of Kazakh literature, which had appeared under the editorship of the well-known author and literary critic Mukhtar Auezov, came in for specific attacks. This work, which was devoted in its entirety to the epic tradition, was attacked for what was called a "mistaken relationship to the past," for an idealization of feudal traditions, for overlooking the essential note of social conflict in the heroic epos, as well as for certain nationalistic overtones. While the decree was couched in general language, in subsequent articles the new attitude was outlined in more detail and thus the ground was laid for at least a partial rejection of the epic.

The attacks on certain Kazakh epics took two principal forms. Epics were attacked for presenting socially undesirable materials and for nationalist coloration. These attacks were, however, not new. In 1945 one of the standard histories of Kazakhstan, Abdykalykov and Pankratova's *History of the Kazakh SSR*, which was itself a product of the Academy of Sciences, had been attacked for failing to view the past, in the spirit of historical materialism, as a history primarily of class struggle and for having presented Kazakh history rather from the point of view of the struggle for national independence. This, according to the reviewers, had led the authors of the *History* into the pitfalls of

⁷ V TsK KP (b) Kaz., "O grubykh politicheskikh oshibkakh v rabote Instituta yazyka i literatury Akademii Nauk Kazakhskoi SSR," *Vestnik Akademii Nauk Kazakhskoi SSR*, Nos. 1-2, Jan.-Feb., 1947 (Alma-Ata), pp. 9-11.

glorifying feudal heroes and of taking a "one-sided view" of the joining of Kazakhstan to the Russian empire.⁸

It was pointed out, as an example, that the authors had glorified such "feudal heroes" as Edige, a Turkic hero who lived in the end of the fourteenth and the beginning of the fifteenth centuries who is the central figure in epics of many Turkic nationalities. Edige had come under attack before.⁹

The Kazakh version of the epic about Edige was condemned again by so high placed a personage as B. N. Stepanov, second director of the propaganda section of the Central Committee of the Kazakh Communist party, in an article¹⁰ which outlined in detail the 1947 decree of the Kazakh party and criticized Kazakh scholars for paying excessive attention to the traditional epos, while ignoring Soviet folklore. The epics *Edige* and *Alpamyš* have since continued to be attacked in the Soviet press for showing a positive attitude towards the khans, for lack of consideration for the common popular masses, and for a glorification of aggressive warfare, carried out for the sake of the conversion of the Oirats to Islam.¹¹

While criticism of these epics has been directed chiefly at their "harmful" social content and religious coloration, attacks on other epics and on some of the non-epic oral productions of the eighteenth and nineteenth centuries have been of a

* Views regarding the accession of Kazakhstan by the Russian Empire in the nineteenth century had been considerably revised after the Second World War, in line with the general stress on the leadership of the Russian people among the multi-national populations of the USSR. The hitherto prevalent view, which had also found expression on Abdykalykov and Pankratova's *History*, that the joining of the area to Russia had been the result of armed occupation by a colonial power was now partially rejected and the event was pictured as a "voluntary" adhesion which provided the Kazakhs with protection against further aggression from the East. Considerably more stress has been laid since then on the cultural advantages gained by the Kazakhs as a result of the contact with Russian culture.

⁸ The Tatar variant of this epic had come under scrutiny as early as 1944 in a decree of the Central Committee of the All-Union Communist party concerned with political shortcomings in the Tatar Autonomous Soviet Republic, and had been labeled an idealization of the feudal period of the khans.

⁹ B. N. Stepanov, "Za vysokuyu partiinost' v obshchestvennoi nauke Kazakhstana," *Vestnik Akad. Nauk KSSR*, Nos. 1-2, 1947, pp. 11-25.

¹⁰ See *Pravda Vostoka*, Jan. 29, 1952; *Lit. Gaz.*, Feb. 14, 1952 (on *Edige*), and M. Bogdanova, "Ob epose 'Manas'," *Lit. Gaz.*, May 27, 1952 (on *Alpamyš*).

more fundamental character. The works criticized have been primarily those which celebrated the struggle against the Russians in the preceding century. When Stalin, in 1946, proposed his now famous toast to the Russian people, in which he stressed the primacy of Russian leadership in relation to the other nationalities in the Soviet Union, he set in motion a wave of Russian nationalist feeling. This trend found expression not only in the frequently advanced claims of Russian primacy in the scientific advances of the world, but also in a Russian attitude of superiority vis-à-vis many of the non-Russian nationalities of the USSR, in relation to whom the Russians were considered as "older brothers" and leaders toward progress. In accordance with this attitude, there could be heard, in the years following Stalin's pronouncement, sharp criticisms of works appearing among the non-Russian peoples of the USSR for failing to give proper credit to the role played by the Russians in the cultural development of the minorities. Artists who failed to heed this new line and who continued to write works critical of the Russian administration of the nineteenth century were condemned as "bourgeois nationalists" for having failed to point out what was called the dual effect of the Russian occupation: the negative one of the political and social measures taken by tsarist officials, and the positive one of contact with Russian culture and with Russian revolutionary and democratic thinkers. The assault against these "bourgeois-nationalist" tendencies in the non-Russian literatures was launched, as is so common, by *Pravda* in a leading article in which the Ukrainian poet Sosyura was taken to task for what was called the nationalist tone of one of his poems. Soon after the *Pravda* assault on Sosyura, the Central Committee of the Kazakh Communist party promulgated a decree (August 14, 1951) "Against Ideological Mistakes in Kazakh Literature." In the wake of this decree there appeared in the Kazakh and Russian press numerous articles critical of contemporary Kazakh writers for their lack of stress on the positive aspects of Russian occupation in the nineteenth century and for overly sympathetic attitudes towards the heroes of the Kazakh anti-Russian struggle of the preceding century. There

emerged a distinct revision of official attitudes towards the leaders of the nineteenth-century anti-Russian struggle, such as Tajmanov, Serkebayev, and Kenesary Qasymov, as well as towards the oral creations which had arisen about these men and towards the *aqyns* who had sung about them. Kenesary, who heretofore had been celebrated as a national figure of great stature, was reduced to the position of "a leader of the feudal-monarchist movement of the nineteenth century"; and the *aqyns* Dosqoza and Nasynbaj, who sang about him, were now termed no longer truly national creators, but were rather condemned as "court *aqyns*," servile to the desires of the feudal aristocracy and inimical to the needs of the popular masses.¹²

Despite the new condemnatory attitude towards many of the folklore productions of the past, research in the oral traditions continues as evidenced by the large number of publications of old epics and by the increased number of dissertations on the subject not only of the older folk art, but also on the subject of the disputed *aqyns* of the eighteenth and nineteenth centuries.

Modern Oral Creations

Side by side with the research in, and the rediscovery of, the folklore heritage and the printing and collecting of the ancient songs and epics, there has emerged another trend in Soviet Kazakhstan: the growth of modern oral art. The student of literature and oral art, however, finds himself somewhat at a loss in characterizing these creations. While what we most commonly call folklore is generally considered the quasi anonymous and practically unconscious creation of a people in reflection of their general culture and the most striking events in their lives, in a modern society these qualities of oral art are frequently lost. Modern Kazakh oral art is neither anonymous, nor truly spontaneous. Insofar as modern Kazakh oral art serves primarily as a propaganda function, it is more of interest to the sociologist than the student of literature and oral art. But inso-

¹² See "Do kontsa iskorenit' ideologicheskoye izvrashcheniya v kazakhskoy literature," *Lit. Gaz.*, Sept. 6, 1951; K. Nurmakhanov, "Poema razoblachayushchaya khana Kenesary," *Lit. Gaz.*, Feb. 16, 1951.

far as the modern oral art also developed from the true Kazakh traditional folk art, it can also boast of some literary merit. We might perhaps consider the position of Soviet Kazakh oral poetry as between what is conventionally termed folklore and modern written poetry, and as embodying a propaganda value which is a peculiar characteristic of the arts in the modern Soviet state.

Kazakh Soviet oral art is composed of many new Soviet epics, songs, legends, and tales, which are performed by a multitude of new singers. The vigor of this tradition can be explained not only by the historical heritage of oral art and by the prevalence of social elements in much of the pre-Soviet tradition of oral art, but also by Soviet policies of encouragement to modern *aqyns*. The *aqyns* are given special consideration by the regime and are encouraged to sing and create and to train new generations of singers who will not only be versed in the old heritage, but who will also express the ideas of a new society. Such a folk art, singing of collectivization instead of the nomadic wandering, of Stakhanovites instead of the traditional brave *batyr*, could, it is clear, act as a powerful asset for the political and cultural reorientation of Soviet Kazakhstan.

The *aqyn's* role today is that of a living newspaper and news commentator combined with that of a political agitator. The poetry of the *aqyns* which touched on contemporaneous happenings was of particularly great importance during the first decade of the existence of the Soviet regime in Kazakhstan, when lack of communications and printing facilities and the low general level of literacy so greatly limited channels of communication between the authorities and the masses of the population that, save for the bards, there was no way to reach the inhabitants of far-flung *auls*. In these years, and in many respects also today, the *aqyns'* creations appear to have been largely inspired by official pressures and social attitudes. Not only did the *aqyns* spread news, but they also frequently acted as the propaganda arm of the new government, in which capacity they are still fulfilling a most significant function today.

There are today throughout Kazakhstan a large number of modern *aqyns*. Although it is difficult to ascertain their total number, since many of the *aqyns* are active in relatively inaccessible places, crude estimates range from one hundred¹³ to two hundred,¹⁴ and it must be assumed that the number of actual performers is considerably higher since there are innumerable semi-professional *aqyns* in each district, on each collective or state farm, and even in the major industrial enterprises, which are not included in the above estimates. Many of the contemporary *aqyns* are old men who have kept alive the art of Kazakh singing from the past. Probably the most famous of the older *aqyns* is Džambul Džabajev (1846?-1945). Džambul is today heralded as the most significant Soviet *aqyn*, celebrated not only in Kazakhstan but throughout the entire Soviet Union. His work is not only published in Kazakh, but is widely translated into Russian and the other languages of the USSR. Yet this celebrated Soviet *aqyn* can probably best serve as an example of the difficulties encountered by the researcher, whose material is limited to published Soviet sources, in any attempt at arriving at a sober and objective viewpoint concerning the spontaneity of these modern oral creations and the application of the term "popular" to them. There is no doubt that Džambul was an exceedingly gifted bard, for we possess a number of his pre-Soviet works which testify to a high degree of versatility and poetic skill. Yet much of Džambul's work produced during the Soviet period causes one to wonder how much was created spontaneously and how many of his numerous songs about Soviet leaders and other common Soviet themes were written under the pressure of social circumstance. There is some indication, which has come to this author from Kazakh and Russian informants now outside the Soviet Union, that not all the works attributed to him were created by Džambul and that songs of his have been altered by those who have recorded or translated them. A number of younger *aqyns* also have attained fame, such as Sajadil Kerimbe-

¹³ K. Altaiski, "Akyn Džambul," *Literaturny Kritik*, No. 12 (1936), p. 211.

¹⁴ M. Ritman, "Literatura sovetского Kazakhstana," Sobolev, ed., *Pcsni* . . . , p. 352.

kov, Ötep Öngarbajev, Gali Ormanov, Qazangan Bajbolov, Tuleubaj Urqumbajev, Kenen Azerbajev, to name only a few of the best known younger bards.

General Characteristics of the New Oral Art

The most traditional group of Soviet Kazakh folk songs are those which celebrate the new Soviet *batyrs*. No longer is the *batyr* a legendary or historical Kazakh hero who leads his people in battle against a superior enemy. The new *batyr* may be an outstanding Civil War leader or a Party leader. He may belong to any of the many nations of the USSR and he characteristically represents the new life of the people. There have been created innumerable songs and legends about Soviet leaders and in particular about Lenin and Stalin. The Soviet leader, be he Stalin, Lenin, or a local Kazakh leader, is often compared in typical epic fashion to a falcon, to a strong young horse, or to a tiger, who is superior not only in strength, but also in wit, before whom all enemies tremble. He is characterized, as were the legendary heroes, as the benefactor of the collective, who leads it, or attempts to lead it, to a better life. There are also maintained many of the other characteristics of the traditional epic style, the frequently high-flown hyperbolism, the characteristic epic repetition and slow movement, and the ever-present typical epithets and symbols used for both friend and foe.

A typical epic treatment of the *batyr* is given in a song by an unknown *aqyn* about the Civil War leader Frunze. From a formalistic point of view many of the passages could easily have been taken directly from any of the older epical descriptions of the hero. There is the characteristic poverty of descriptive material concerning the physical characteristics of the hero, instead of which there are the typical clichés. The hero is depicted as an almost mystical personage whose origin is unknown and who astounds everyone by his tremendous forcefulness and leadership:

He rode through the marshlands, he rode through the grass,
He rode through the yellow dunes of sand.
Behind him in dense blueness,

Thousands of bright bayonets were swinging.
 And in the *auls* much talk was aroused
 About his strength and bravery, like that of a lion.
 "Who is this?" the wind would ask the grass.
 "Frunze!"—whispered the grass to the wind.
 He appeared as a dream,
 His fame carried him on.
 "Whence comes he?" the wind would ask the grass.
 "Stalin has sent him."¹⁵

It is not surprising that the image of Lenin and Stalin which has been created should lend itself so easily to an adaptation to traditional treatment in the manner of the old *batyrs*, complete with the miraculous circumstances surrounding the heroes' birth and death and the common heroic metaphors and similes. A typical example is the following song about Stalin by the contemporary *aqyn* Bek:

He is great, his speech
 Is stronger than the mountain's base.
 He has gathered in himself the tears of the ages,
 He has gathered in himself the grief of the ages,
 He has gathered in himself the gladness of the ages,
 He has gathered in himself the happiness of the ages,
 He has gathered in himself the wisdom of the ages,
 He has gathered in himself the strength of the ages.
 His life is great and simple,
 It is unbounded like a dream,
 And he, like the morning, arises over the world.
 Stalin is the name which the whole world gives him.¹⁶

Or the following:

Bold, beautiful and strong is the *džolbars*,¹⁷
 The striped hero of the steppe,
 But many times stronger,
 Many times braver than the *džolbars*—are you!

Sharp-sighted is the falcon, and the eagle of the steppe,
 Looking o'er the earth from soaring heights;
 But it is you who have brought the people these heights,
 More far-sighted than the falcon—are you!

¹⁵ In K. Altaiski, "Zhivyye rodniki Kazakhstana," *Izvestiya*, March 1, 1938.

¹⁶ "Vozrozhdyonny narod," *Lit. Gaz.*, May 15, 1936, p. 1.

¹⁷ *džolbars*—"tiger."

The people know much wisdom,
 Having come to the sun from darkness.
 But the people follow you, for
 Wiser than all on earth,—are you!¹⁸

In addition to epic songs, there are also the modern mourning songs or *džoqtau* bemoaning the death of a leader or popular public figure. This folk poetry follows closely the traditional mourning song repertoire with the characteristic lyrical and mournful tone and the standardized eulogies to the deceased and the personified participation of nature on the fate of the *batyr*. A most common theme of the modern *džoqtau* is the death of Lenin. There is hardly a Kazakh *aqyn* who has not, at one time or another, composed a song in commemoration of the first Soviet leader. A typical example is the song of the *aqyn* Alibek, commemorating Lenin's death and praising Lenin's lifetime activities and achievements.

Like a granite rock you used to stand,
 Like a precious diamond you used to shine,
 Like a nugget of gold you used to be, Lenin,
 The prophet of sickle and hammer you used to be.
 Your right judgment was merciless,
 With one blow you shattered
 The three-hundred-year-old house of the Romanovs.
 You have dug up all the roots of evil.
 You've burned out the nest of violence from the very root.
 Anger and fear are shaking Capital,
 To the tsars and *bajs* you were horror,
 The cedar bent like a rod.
 You have helped us to become people,
 You have helped us to breathe freely,
 You gave courage to the timid,
 You gave us liberty and happiness.

Why did you die so much before your time?
 Your death has taken a father from us.
 Bitter is the weeping of the Soviet people,
 Bitter is the weeping of the whole toiling world.
 Lenin-*batyr* died before his time:
 Oh, may he have eternal peace.

¹⁸ Rakhim Qulbajev, "Asqan-dana," *Pravda*, May 16, 1936, p. 4.

May his dust rest in peace undisturbed!
 In his glory, with great sadness,
 In bitter tears, I sing my *džyr*.

In the village of Gorki, which is near Moscow,
 Death stood behind his head.
 The white snow was darkened by a black shadow,
 The sun and the moon were darkened that day,
 The whole world was clad in mourning that day,
 And in this village, once unknown,
 There died my leader, my golden one!
 But the mourning will not deprive us of our manliness.
 We weep, and yet we march ahead.
 Our faith, as steel so blue,
 Just like your work, will never die.
 Be not afraid, oh father, we, your children,
 Shall never deviate from the road you trod;
 As before, your guiding star is leading us on,
 And your glory will never darken.¹⁹

In this song there is exemplified a common Soviet theme, the picturing of Lenin as a personal friend whose loss is an individual loss to each Soviet citizen. This tendency is not foreign to the traditional Kazakh epics in which the loss of a leader was often mourned as that of a saviour and father of all the people. The new note is the positive attitude, so common in Soviet literature, with which the song ends, in contrast to traditional note of dejection and sadness which is found in the traditional *džoqtan*.

This new mood is even more marked in the folk songs which are primarily concerned with picturing modern Soviet life. One group of such might be called "songs of contrast." In such songs, particularly characteristic of the *aqyns* Doskej and Nurpejs Bajganin, the past and present fate of the Kazakh people is counterposed. The initial mournful section in which the past of the Kazakhs is depicted in sombre colors is generally followed by a section in which the new life is invariably depicted in gay and hopeful tones. These songs are also rich in the typical colorful metaphorical language of the early folklore. An example of these songs of contrast is the following poem by the contemporary *aqyn* Doskej:

¹⁹ Alibek, "Nash otets," *Lit. Gaz.*, No. 28, May 15, 1936, p. 1.

Between the Altaj and the Irtysh,
 Across the steppes Doskej used to wander.
 About the great national misery
 His songs would sound forth sadly.
 For, did not in olden times the greedy *baj*,
 The powerful tsar, rule over our people.
 Like a pumpkin their bellies
 Would grow fat from the people's misery.
 The title of *aqyn* Doskej could not obtain then.
 He used to drive the cattle over the steppe,
 With his melancholy song.

Only at the end of my years,
 When I became old and grey,
 Like the moon, so silvery white,
 Suddenly the falcon of luck came flying
 From heaven and sat down in my head.
 And standing at the very gates of heaven,

.....
 Doskej has arisen as an *aqyn*.
 Who has caused this, that the old man would start
 To sing, when he was already ninety years old?
 Who is he?
 He is Stalin! Stalin alone
 Has prompted the *aqyn* to sing.
 For Stalin—is the suñ of men!
 For Stalin—is the heart of men!²⁰

One of the most common subjects of the modern Soviet Kazakh songs is that of the settling of the nomads in collective farms and the introduction of agriculture. In the published sources this is depicted as a most happy event which brings to the Kazakh, whether a farmer or a cattle breeder, security from the inclemencies of nature and enables him to augment his cattle holding by scientific breeding. The many songs about collective agriculture are of particular interest in the light of the traditional attitude of contempt for agricultural pursuits, which had been prevalent in Kazakh society.

In springtime, when the earth was awakening,
 Messengers brought us a decree from the Kremlin.

²⁰ Doskej, "Genii mira," A. Drozdov, M. Zenkevich, A. Tazhibaeu, eds., *Sbornik sovremennoi kazakhskoi literatury* (Moscow, 1941), p. 26.

And we, like the cranes, flying in the sky,
Crowded together in our fields.

We plowed the land. Our blood was boiling.
In the blue spring we turned the virgin soil—
With the brown tractors, powerful like the black *tulpar*,
And obedient to the rein.

The work was gay, the work was hard,
But our land became soft and black,
And in torrents we poured, like a rich shining rainfall,
The grain, like liquid amber.

.....
If now a wanderer from far away lands,
Should ask us, what shines there like sun in the distance?
We should answer that the large patches of gold
Grow from the abundant *kolkhos* land.²¹

Complementing the songs on the new settled economy are those which depict the introduction of industry, which has doubtless been of the greatest influence in the transformation of Kazakh society. There are innumerable songs which are directly devoted to the development of the oil, coal, and other industries. But the industrial event which has been most often sung about is the introduction of the railroad to the steppes, which was heralded with the building of the Turksib railroad line. This event, which for the first time brought the Kazakh steppe into closer contact with the rest of the country, is depicted in innumerable songs, legends, and epics, many of which are written in the old traditional manner, as is illustrated in the following selection:

A group of scouts has come,
But this time the Kazakhs welcome them.
Like the legendary horse,
The Turksib will be met and greeted by all the land,
And it will warm our hearts with joy.²²

In many of the songs of the new industrialization, particularly in those depicting the new technical achievements of the

²¹ Džambul, "Pesnya o zerne," *Zemlya radnaya (shornik)* (Moscow-Leningrad, 1939), p. 69.

²² Abdykalykov, Pankratova, *op. cit.*, p. 522.

country, there can be observed a new trend of realism, which, however, is still strongly tempered by the old folklore formulae:

Those who used to be slaves and serfs,
Have now been made heroes by the Turksib.
The simple shepherd, tempered by work,
Has now become dispatcher of the train,
And has thus gained *batyr*-like power.
He used to herd the sheep, and beat them with the whip,
But now with steady hand,
He draws the diagram of railroad traffic.²³

Frequently these Kazakh oral creations are concerned with propaganda against the old way of life and particularly with attacks against Islam and against the Mohammedan clergy. Islam is pictured as not only the enemy of Soviet power, but also as the enemy of all progress of mankind. This attitude is not only a reflection of the new ideology but was also born out of the struggle of the nineteenth-century intelligentsia to bring to the Kazakh people Western thought and such reforms as universal education and later a new script, all of which measures were opposed by the religious hierarchy. Much of the anticlerical folklore is satirical and light in character, picturing the weaknesses of the clergy and accentuating well-known characteristics. Some of the anticlerical folklore is also concerned with the clash of Mohammedan beliefs and traditional superstitions with modern scientific thought. The following is a typical legend which attempts to combat the traditional myth of the healing qualities of certain Mohammedan saints and members of the clergy:

A long time ago on the river Chu, there was the grave of a saint, and many pilgrimages were made to this grave. An old dervish was living there and, in the name of the saint, this dervish would heal the sick and tell fortunes. I was his assistant. One day I decided to make a pilgrimage to Mecca and set off on an old donkey which the dervish had given me for the trip. On the seventh day of the trip my donkey fell down and died. I sat down near him and began to cry, as I was fearful of the difficulties of the long trip without my donkey.

Suddenly I saw riders approaching on the road. Fearful lest they might accuse me of having killed my donkey by carelessness,

²³ *Ibid.*, p. 524.

I quickly buried him in the ground at the side of the road. When the riders saw from my dress that I was a dervish, they asked me about the reason for my tears.

I answered them: "With my best friend I had started out to the town of the prophet. But my friend died right here, and I am now bitterly crying over his grave."

"Your friend must have led a virtuous life, if you weep so sadly over him," said the riders, who threw me some gold and rode on.

However, I had hardly been able to rest from this experience when I saw from the distance a great mass of people approaching me. These were inhabitants of the near-by town. It seems that the riders had spread the news in town that a saint had died near by. Now the inhabitants had come to beg me to stay and live near the grave of my friend, promising to pay me well for this. It seems that in this town there had never been a grave of a saint.

I thought for a while and decided that the dust of the dead ass might yet be useful to me and agreed to stay. From then on I had plenty of presents and the number of pilgrims multiplied year by year.

One day my former teacher looked me up. He had heard so much about the glory of my saint that he wanted to find out how matters really stood. When I told my former teacher the whole story I thought he would be very angry, but the old dervish began to laugh and to slap me on my shoulder. Then I finally decided to ask the old dervish the question which I had never dared before to ask him. "Tell me, my teacher," I asked, "who was the saint on whose grave you yourself live?"

"That was the mother of the saint on whose grave you now live," my teacher answered laughing.²⁴

The outbreak of the war encouraged anew the activities of the *aqyns*, who became again the chroniclers of the battles of their people and who were now utilized directly for purposes of morale building. During the war years there could be noted in the literature of the entire USSR a return to, and romanticization of, the national traditions, even of those of imperial Russia, if they coincided with the goals of the national war struggle. Thus past Russian military heroes were glorified, even those who had previously been condemned for their propinquity to the interests of the monarchy. Generals like Suvorov and Kutuzov were again celebrated in the rapidly growing number of histori-

²⁴ As told by the horse keeper Bajmurat Nurazov of the *sovkhos* "Pakhta-Aral," in *Izvestiya*, May 17, 1936, p. 3.

cal novels concerned with previous wars in the defense of Russia. There was a conscious revival of certain folk traditions, as exemplified in Tvardovski's poem about the Soviet warrior *Vasilii Tyorkin*. The same tendencies, in a far more accentuated form, can be noted in Kazakhstan. Kazakh *aqyns*, encouraged by official propaganda which stressed the ties between the hero of the ancient epics and the modern Kazakh warrior-*batyr* who fought against the Germans in the front lines or on the assembly lines, began to create an increasing number of songs in the traditional epic style. They returned to many of the epic formulae and the formal characteristics of the epics, mourning and farewell songs, many of which had been gradually abandoned in favor of more contemporary forms and language during the years of industrialization and collectivization.

Typical of such epic works is a poem by one of the older *aqyns*, Nurpejs Bajganin (died 1945), entitled "The Twenty-five."²⁵ This poem tells of the famed Panfilov Division, which fought in the defense of Moscow and in the ranks of which there were many Kazakh soldiers. The story is told, in general, in the traditional heroic style, with many typical epic images and formulae. The poem is concerned with the defense of Moscow, symbolizing here the Soviet Union as a whole. The poem, in contrast to the epic tradition, centers upon not one but two *batyrs*. One, Tölegen Tokhtar-uly, is a Kazakh steel worker, turned soldier. While he fights in traditional *batyr* fashion, his superiority in battle is caused not by a mysterious supernatural quality, but by motivation of twentieth-century patriotism. Consequently he is not, like his epic forebears, invulnerable and he dies in battle. The other *batyr* is not even a Kazakh, but a Russian: General Panfilov himself.

With the exceptions of the position of the *dramatis personae* and the setting of the poem in modern industrialized Kazakhstan, the poem comes closer to the epic tradition than any other modern work. Tölegen is a typical *batyr* and is compared to the famed *batyr* of ancient times Qoblandy. When he goes to battle, he goes with his faithful lance

²⁵ *Kaz. Prav.*, December 5, 1943, p. 3 (fragment).

which flew from the rock
Like the eagle, its ancestor.

When Tölegen rides against the enemy, he rides so fast that he has no time to stop for sustenance and so, like the legendary heroes, he bends down in full gallop and plucks the magic root *boryq*, which gives him strength. He rides, like the legendary heroes,

Stubbornly, faster than the birds
He guides his horse straight across the steppe.
And, becoming one with his horse, terrible of sight, winged,
Tölegen races after his detachment.
Look at the *batyr*, my sons!
He shines with the bright light of a full moon.
Who can be his equal? What giant
Can defeat him in hand-to-hand battle?
Who will dare to battle him in bloody struggle?

Three days and three nights he flies through the steppe,
He spurs on his steed, straight through the steppe
And completes a six months' trip in three days. . . .

Panfilov, whose stature as a hero is even greater than that of Tölegen, is also a famed *batyr* in the tradition of the epical figures:

Panfilov's glance is like a ray of light, like a golden arrow,
His voice, like the beautiful voice of the eagle.
With his breath he brings fear and death
To the enemy on the battlefield;
His sword hews bloody furrows,
Deadly is the swirling of his lance.

When he shouts, the earth trembles all around

The depiction of Tölegen's battle against the Germans is almost an epic description of an ancient battle scene:

When an eagle arises in the hills,
Let the Volga lands tremble
And the ducks hurry to hide:
The hero's soul knows no obstacles!
Like an eagle, 'midst mountain crags

Powerful in his fighting flight,
So Tölegen, like a storm of the steppes
Flew, circled, blinded,
And left on the field of battle
The thief, now a spiritless corpse.
Like cane on the riverbank in the storm
The enemy trembles and bends to the ground.
Remember: as long as the battle lasts
The *batyr* will not tremble in the saddle!
Hundreds of Germans lie in the field. . . .
Tölegen, the crag, Tölegen the giant
Is equal to hundreds of enemies:
"My anger will answer for me!"

The episode of Tölegen ends with the hero's death at the hand of the Germans, after he has run out of ammunition. His faithful friend sings a traditional mourning song, drawing, in traditional fashion, comparisons to the world of nature, to indicate the magnitude of the loss and the permanence of the memory of the deceased:

When a steed gallops by, a deep track is left behind,
Which hundreds of years cannot smooth out of memory;
When the eagles depart; the craggy mountain heights
remain behind,
When rains have passed, the earth retains its rich attire
And the fields remain covered, like a green rug
.
Poets leave noble words to the people,
The coward leaves behind but accursed shame,
But the hero lives for ages in immortal glory.

Many shorter war songs were composed by established *aqyns* and by new *aqyns* who emerged only during the war years, such as Toleu Qobdyqov, Sapargali Alymbetov, Nurlybek Bajmuratov, Nartaj Bekežanov, many of whom were soldiers at the front. The war songs are varied and numerous. There are short appeals to the soldiers to fight bravely and to live up to the memory of the legendary *batyrs*, songs glorifying specific battles, songs of mourning, as well as a great number of short songs celebrat-

ing the *aqyns* as continuing in the ancient traditions of fighting with their words side by side with the people.²⁶

One of the most significant traditional forms of singing, the *ajtys*, the singing competition, has taken a particularly popular turn since the war years, and is today being used quite frankly as an important means of propaganda and of mobilizing the population behind government decrees in the economic drives which are continually taking place in Soviet Kazakhstan as they are in the rest of the USSR. *Aqyns* are being increasingly organized, not only in the ranks of the Kazakh branch of the Union of Soviet Writers, of which many are members, but also in the frequent regional *aqyn* conferences, at which singing competitions take place and, it may be assumed, policy as to suitable subject matter is discussed. The first large-scale *aqyn* congress, to which bards from all over the republic were invited, took place in Alma-Ata in May, 1938, in honor of the seventy-fifth anniversary of Džambul's career.²⁷ One year later, the first of a series of all-Kazakh *ajtys* was held,²⁸ inaugurating a period of increased attention to this form of singing by the Kazakh government and party. Officials of government and party began, with increasing frequency and frankness, to stress the significance of the *ajtys* as a propaganda device. The Semipalatinsk party secretary for propaganda, B. Bleubajev, stated at the occasion of the All-Kazakh *ajtys* of 1943:

The *ajtys* is a popular and easily accessible form of political mass work. We are using it broadly for an even higher mobilization of the working people of our district for a speedier destruction of our enemy.²⁹

The organ of the Central Committee of the Kazakh Communist party declared in the same year:

It is clear that it [the *ajtys*] is one of the methods of artistic and political education of the workers. The circle of *ajtys* themes can be

²⁶ E. G. Toleu Qobdyqov, "Vse dvesti millionov . . ." *Kaz. Prav.*, December 5, 1943, p. 3; Sapargali Alymbetov, "Akyn Džambul . . ." *ibid.*, Nurylybek Bajmuratov, "Ya, akyn," *ibid.*

²⁷ *Lit. Gaz.*, May 15, 1938.

²⁸ M. Ritman-Fetisov, in *Kaz. Prav.*, September 6, 1947, p. 3.

²⁹ *Kaz. Prav.*, December 5, 1943, p. 3.

broadened considerably if the *aqyns* will sing not only about events of local importance, but about events all over our country and abroad.³⁰

In 1943 the press reported suggestions on the part of the Communist party to use the *ajtys* extensively to encourage the spirit of socialist rivalry in all parts of the national economy; and in October of the same year this suggestion was given official status by a resolution of the Central Committee of the Kazakh party, establishing regular district and republican *ajtys* gatherings.³¹ As a result of this attitude, there have been held all over the republic numerous singing competitions in which the rival singers represent different industrial, agricultural, or cattle-breeding institutions which have entered into socialist competition with each other. They may be representatives of individual mines of the Karaganda coal district,³² or representatives of two major industries, such as the *ajtys* between representatives of the coal and copper industries held in August, 1943,³³ or representatives of different Kazakh geographical regions vying with each other.³⁴

These modern "agitational" *ajtys*, which are reported in great detail in the Kazakh daily press, represent a strong mixture, indeed, of the traditional form and the new socialist content. How these modern *Meistersinger* compete in emulating, in song, their industrial or agricultural enterprise, can best be illustrated by a description, taken from the Kazakh daily press,³⁵ of an *ajtys* between the copper and coal industries. This *ajtys* was held in the coal city of Karaganda. There had been considerable preparation on the part of the participating *aqyns*, who had spent much time at the rival industry to acquaint themselves with the conditions present there. The *ajtys* was held on the stage of the Karaganda municipal theater, against a backdrop which represented the stage as a large *džurt*, with panoramic views of the coal mines in Karaganda and the copper mines

³⁰ *Ibid.*, August 27, 1943, p. 2.

³¹ "Vozrozhdyonnyj ajtys—moshchnoye oruzhiye v arsenale politicheskoi agitatsii," *ibid.*, December 4, 1943, p. 1.

³² As for instance in an *ajtys* reported in *Kaz. Prav.*, June 22, 1943, p. 4.

³³ *Ibid.*, December 12, 1943, p. 3.

³⁴ *Ibid.*, November 16, 1943, p. 4.

³⁵ *Kaz. Prav.* December 5, 1943, p. 3.

of Balkhaš respectively at the wings. The *aqyns* were seated against the panorama of their respective industry. Political leaders of both districts also had been given seats inside the "džurt." The *ajtys* began with the traditional treat of *qumys*, which was poured by Kazakh girls. Representing Karaganda was the coal miner-turned-*aqyn* Qošen Eleulov, while the copper miner Šašubaj Qošqarbajev represented the Balkhaš district. The latter opened the *ajtys*, singing the praises of the Balkaš heroes of labor and criticizing the shortcomings in the coal production. Qošen then answered Šašubaj's criticism, singing about the heroes in the coal industry and criticizing, in turn, the copper industries. The audience participated actively in the *ajtys*, as was the custom in the traditional competitions, by interjecting calls and general heckling or signs of approval. While traditionally the outcome of the *ajtys* was left in the balance, until one of the two opponents acknowledged defeat, the results of this particular *ajtys* was not determined, it appears, by the relative artistic prowess of the *aqyns*, but seems to have been a foregone conclusion which depended on the relative production figures of the vying industries. And, the report states, since both industries were working equally well, the *ajtys* ended in a tie.

It is quite apparent that while oral art plays a part in Kazakh life even today, it is primarily the forms of the traditional art which are employed, while the content is a new one, determined by Soviet society and political thinking. Such an unspontaneous and political art can hardly be considered as genuine folklore in the traditional sense of the word. Rather, an old and once spontaneous and rich art is now being consciously fostered and used for educational and political propagandistic goals. This phenomenon, however, which can be understood only in terms of Soviet attitudes towards the role of art in society, is not entirely foreign to the spirit of the traditional oral art, which, particularly in the nineteenth century, had strong didactic and patriotic tendencies. It is this characteristic of much of Kazakh oral art which has facilitated the adaptation of this ancient art to modern purposes.

CHAPTER VIII

EARLY SOVIET
KAZAKH LITERATURE

DURING THE 1920's Kazakh literature was still almost entirely dominated by the already familiar genre of poetry, inherited from the rich tradition of oral art, and the few attempts to produce prose and drama were limited indeed. Not only did early Kazakh literature suffer from the inevitable problems which must be met in the infancy of any art, but creative activity also suffered under the many theoretical conflicts concerning the character of the new literature. Contributing to these difficulties was the deep ideological split among Kazakh intellectuals over attitudes towards the new regime and toward the new literature. After the Communist Party Resolution on Literature in 1932, which called for a revision of some policies towards literature and urged a greatly increased program of translations from the Central Asiatic literatures, Kazakh writers began to show more independent activity. Thus the history of Kazakh Soviet literature may be conveniently divided in two periods: that preceding 1932 and that following 1932. The literature produced before 1932 can best be considered in relation to the main historical trends within Kazakhstan: first the period of revolution and War Communism, then the period of the New Economic Policy, and, lastly, the period of the first Five-Year Plan, since in these early years Kazakh literature was particularly vulnerable to the political pressures of the day and since no stability had yet been achieved in the creative activities of the young Kazakh writers.

Kazakh Literature and Cultural Considerations

There are particular problems involved in the evaluation of literatures of recently literate nations, whose historical develop-