



GENRES AND FEATURES OF KARAKALPAK FOLKLORE

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<https://doi.org/10.5281/zenodo.17222296>

Abstract. This article explores the genre composition and distinctive features of Karakalpak folklore, which serves as a vital expression of cultural identity, historical memory, and artistic creativity. The study highlights the main genres, including epic, lyrical, didactic, and ritual forms, and examines their functions within Karakalpak society. Epic narratives such as “*Qırq Qız*” and “*Alpamis*” preserve heroic ideals, while lyrical songs and laments reflect personal and communal emotions. Didactic folklore transmits wisdom through proverbs and riddles, whereas ritual and mythological texts connect daily life with spiritual beliefs. The analysis also identifies key features of Karakalpak folklore, such as oral transmission, collective authorship, genre syncretism, symbolic imagery, and performative traditions. Consequently, Karakalpak folklore emerges as both a cultural repository and a dynamic social force that shapes identity and moral values across generations.

Keywords: Karakalpak folklore, genre composition, epic traditions, lyrical folklore, proverbs, riddles, ritual texts, symbolism, oral tradition, cultural identity

Introduction. Folklore has always been a vital expression of a people’s worldview, history, and cultural identity. In the case of the Karakalpak people, whose history is marked by migrations, struggles, and close interaction with neighboring Turkic and Persian-speaking communities, folklore serves not only as an artistic reflection of daily life but also as a repository of collective memory. Therefore, the study of the genre composition and features of Karakalpak folklore is crucial for understanding the cultural richness and aesthetic values of this nation. Moreover, Karakalpak folklore illustrates how oral traditions function as both entertainment and moral guidance, thereby shaping social consciousness across generations [2, 148-150].

When examining the genre system of Karakalpak folklore, it becomes evident that it is both diverse and multi-layered. Broadly speaking, the folklore can be divided into epic, lyrical, didactic, and ritual genres, although many sub-genres exist within each category.

To begin with, epic genres occupy a central place in Karakalpak folklore. Among them, the dastans (long narrative epic poems) such as “*Qırq Qız*” and “*Alpamis*” are particularly significant. These works not only narrate heroic deeds but also serve as symbolic representations of national ideals like bravery,



loyalty, and resistance against foreign oppression. Furthermore, shorter epic tales and legends often deal with historical events or mythical figures, thereby blending history with imagination [4, 52-54].

In addition, lyrical genres such as songs, lullabies, and laments reflect the emotional and aesthetic sensibilities of the Karakalpak people. Love songs emphasize sincerity and devotion, while wedding songs carry symbolic meaning connected with fertility, harmony, and the continuity of kinship ties. Similarly, laments (*joqlawlar*) convey grief and social commentary, often addressing not only personal sorrow but also collective misfortune, such as famine or war.

Equally important are didactic forms such as proverbs, sayings, and riddles, which encapsulate practical wisdom and moral guidance. Proverbs, for instance, are frequently used in everyday speech to resolve disputes, teach younger generations, or reinforce communal norms. Riddles, on the other hand, play a dual role: they function as intellectual games while simultaneously transmitting knowledge about nature, human life, and social relations.

Moreover, ritual folklore is represented by prayers, charms, and seasonal ceremonies. These texts often combine mythological elements with practical beliefs concerning fertility, health, and protection from evil forces. For example, spring rituals are tied to agricultural cycles, reflecting the strong connection of Karakalpaks to land and water resources. Mythological narratives, meanwhile, explain the origins of natural phenomena, sacred places, or clan identities, thereby strengthening a sense of unity and belonging [5].

Having outlined the genre composition, it is also necessary to highlight the main features that distinguish Karakalpak folklore.

First and foremost, the folklore is primarily oral in nature, passed from generation to generation by storytellers, singers, and elders. Consequently, there is no single author; instead, collective creativity ensures that texts remain dynamic and adaptable to changing circumstances.

Furthermore, Karakalpak folklore demonstrates a remarkable syncretism of genres. For example, a single dastan may incorporate lyrical songs, proverbs, and mythological motifs, thus blending different forms into one cohesive performance.

Another distinctive feature is the strong reliance on symbolism and metaphorical thinking. Animals, colors, and natural elements often serve as metaphors for human qualities or cosmic forces. Thus, folklore becomes a coded system of values, where bravery might be symbolized by a falcon and resilience by a camel.



In addition, folklore performs an important social and ethical function. It not only entertains but also educates, guiding individuals toward communal ideals. Through epic heroes, wise sayings, and ritual practices, Karakalpak folklore reinforces moral codes and ensures the transmission of cultural identity.

Lastly, the performative aspect of folklore deserves attention. Many genres, especially songs and epics, are performed with musical accompaniment, such as the traditional instrument *dutar*. Performance settings range from family gatherings to large community celebrations, thus underlining the communal nature of folklore.

Conclusion. In conclusion, the genre composition and features of Karakalpak folklore demonstrate its profound richness and cultural significance. Epic narratives preserve historical memory, lyrical forms express personal and collective emotions, didactic genres pass down wisdom, and ritual texts embody beliefs and traditions. Furthermore, the main features of this folklore—oral transmission, syncretism, symbolism, social function, and performativity—reveal its enduring role in shaping the cultural identity of the Karakalpak people. Therefore, the study of Karakalpak folklore not only enhances our understanding of a unique cultural tradition but also contributes to broader comparative folklore studies, highlighting the universal human need to narrate, remember, and celebrate through oral art.

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