

UDC 780.6  
DOI 10.59850/SARYN.2.13.2025.259

### Assel Alina\*

2nd year Doctoral Student, Dombira Department,  
Kurmangazy Kazakh National Conservatory (Almaty, Kazakhstan)

ORCID ID: 0009-0002-1976-1443

email: [asselalina84@gmail.com](mailto:asselalina84@gmail.com)

### Saule Utegaliyeva

Doctor of Sciences in Study of Art, Full Professor, Musicology and Composition  
Department, Kurmangazy Kazakh National Conservatory, Honored Worker of Kazakhstan,  
Holder of the Kurmet Order (Almaty, Kazakhstan)

ORCID ID: 0000-0001-9867-8511

email: [sa\\_u@mail.ru](mailto:sa_u@mail.ru)

## ARTICLE

# KAZAKH DOMBRA OF THE ARKA AREA IN THE PAST AND PRESENT: A STUDYING EXPERIENCE

*The authors have reviewed and approved the final manuscript and affirm that there is no conflict of interest.*

\* Corresponding author

email: [asselalina84@gmail.com](mailto:asselalina84@gmail.com)

Received by editorial: 20.12.2024

Accepted to publish: 27.05.2025



© 2025 The Author(s). Published by Kurmangazy Kazakh National Conservatory. This is an Open Access article distributed under the terms of the Creative Commons Attribution-NonCommercial-NoDerivatives License (<http://creativecommons.org/licenses/by-nc-nd/4.0/>), which permits non-commercial re-use, distribution, and reproduction in any medium, provided the original work is properly cited, and is not altered, transformed, or built upon in any way.

CITE

Alina, Assel, and Saule Utegaliyeva. "Kazakh Dombra of the Arka Area in the Past and Present: A Studying Experience." *Saryn*, vol. 13, No. 2, 2025, pp. 81–97. DOI: 10.59850/SARYN.2.13.2025.259.

KEYWORDS

dombra, Arka area (Central Kazakhstan), *shertpe* style, traditional *kuishi*, comparative analysis, morphology, ethno-organological heritage.

ACKNOWLEDGEMENTS

The authors would like to express their gratitude to the Kurmangazy Kazakh National Conservatory, the *Saryn* editorial staff, and reviewers for high professionalism, attentiveness, friendly attitude, useful consultations and feedback. Special thanks to the master and *kuishi* Kalken Kassymov, the family of Dauletbek Saduakassov, and the relatives of the writer, ethnographer Kamel Zhunistegi for provided materials during the fieldwork in Karaganda region (August 2023, July 2024).

**ABSTRACT.** The dombra is a two-stringed plucked chordophone widely used in the traditional musical culture of the Arka area (Central Kazakhstan), that is dominated by the *shertpe* style. This style of playing is characterized by advanced melody, free rhythm, and expressive sound plasticity. The study presents the first comparative analysis of dombras used by traditional *kuishi* of the late 19th and early 20th centuries, such as Abdi Rysbekuly, Sembek Aidosuly with instruments of contemporary performers Dauletbek Saduakasov, and Kalken Kassymov.

This article is based on materials collected in the Karaganda region and aims to identify sequence and transformations in the instrument's morphology and ergonomics. It describes dombra samples and compares their form, material, frets number, and string quality. The study applies a comprehensive methodological approach, including comparative-typological, comparative-historical, and systemic-ethnophonetic methods (Igor Matsievsky). The empirical basis consists of interviews with dombra artisans Kalken Kassymov (b. 1949) and Yerdos Rakhimbekov (b. 1976), as well as materials from folklore and ethnographic fieldworks (Karaganda, August 2023, July 2024).

Comparative analysis of the instruments revealed morphological differences: forms of the instrument include trapezoidal, pear-shaped, and rounded, along with variability in the frets number (from 12 to 14). The dombras of Sembek, Dauletbek, and Kalken show similarities in body shape and volume. The popularity of the trapezoidal form (*kalak* dombra) in the studied area apparently has connection with the comfortable positioning of the right hand on the side parts of the body, as well as specific features of the plucking technique.

The results indicate that the Arka dombra school is associated with the widespread use of the trapezoidal *kalak* dombra, which is optimal for the *shertpe* technique and stable sound production. Contemporary types of the *kalak* dombras undergo constructive changes, adapting to stage requirements. They are widely used in practice and preserve the ethno-organological heritage, playing a significant role in the performance of *shertpe* kui.

CONTRIBUTIONS OF AUTHORS

**Assel Alina** – collection of fieldwork materials, data and types of Arka dombra, measuring the structural parameters of the dombra, main text drafting, compiling the references.

**Saule Utegaliyeva** – adjustment the article outline, classification of the material, writing an abstract, editing the text.

UDC 780.6  
DOI 10.59850/SARYN.2.13.2025.259

### Асель Кайратовна Алина\*

Құрманғазы атындағы Қазақ ұлттық консерваториясы домбыра кафедрасының  
2-ші курс докторанты (Алматы, Қазақстан)

ORCID ID: 0009-0002-1976-1443

email: asselalina84@gmail.com

### Сауле Исхаковна Утегалиева

Өнертану докторы, Құрманғазы атындағы Қазақ ұлттық консерваториясы  
музыкатану және композиция кафедрасының профессоры, Қазақстанның  
еңбек сіңірген қайраткері, «Құрмет» орденінің иегері (Алматы, Қазақстан)

ORCID ID: 0000-0001-9867-8511

email: sa\_u@mail.ru

## МАҚАЛА

# АРҚА ӨҢІРІНДЕГІ ҚАЗАҚ ДОМБЫРАЛАРЫНЫҢ ӨТКЕНІ МЕН БҮГІНІ: ЗЕРТТЕУ ТӘЖІРИБЕСІ

*Авторлар қолжазбаның соңғы нұсқасын оқып, мақұлдады және мүдделер қақтығысы жоқ деп мәлімдейді.*

\* Жауапты автор

email: asselalina84@gmail.com

Редакцияға түсті: 20.12.2024

Басылымға қабылданды: 27.05.2025



© 2025 The Author(s). Published by Kurmangazy Kazakh National Conservatory. This is an Open Access article distributed under the terms of the Creative Commons Attribution-NonCommercial-NoDerivatives License (<http://creativecommons.org/licenses/by-nc-nd/4.0/>), which permits non-commercial re-use, distribution, and reproduction in any medium, provided the original work is properly cited, and is not altered, transformed, or built upon in any way.

**Дәйексөз үшін**

Алина, Асель, және Сауле Утегалиева. «Арқа өңіріндегі қазақ домбыраларының өткені мен бүгіні: зерттеу тәжірибесі». *Saryn*, т. 13, № 2, 2025, 81–97 б. DOI: 10.59850/SARYN.2.13.2025.259. (Ағылшынша)

**ТІРЕК СӨЗДЕР**

домбыра, Арқа өңірі (Орталық Қазақстан), шертпе күй, қалақ домбыра, дәстүрлі күйшілер, салыстырмалы талдау, морфология, этноорганологиялық мұра.

**АЛҒЫС**

Авторлар Құрманғазы атындағы Қазақ ұлттық консерваториясына, *Saryn* журналының редакциясына және рецензенттерге жоғары кәсібилік, зейінділік, достық қарым-қатынасы, пайдалы кеңестері үшін алғыстарын білдіреді. Қарағанды облысына экспедиция сапары (тамыз 2023, шілде 2024) кезінде материалдарымен қамтамасыз еткен шебер-күйші Қалкен Қасымов пен Дәулетбек Сәдуақасовтың отбасына, сондай-ақ жазушы, этнограф Кәмел Жүністегінің туған-туыстарына ерекше алғыс айтамыз.

**Аңдатпа.** Домбыра — Арқа (Орталық Қазақстан) аймағының дәстүрлі музыкалық мәдениетінде кең таралған екі ішекті шертпелі хордофон. Бұл аймақта дамыған әуенімен, еркін ырғағымен және мәнерлі дыбыстық әртүрлілікпен шертпе стилі басым.

Мақалада алғаш рет XIX ғ. соңы мен XX ғ. басындағы дәстүрлі күйшілер (Әбди Рысбекұлы, Сембек Айдосұлы) қолданған домбыралармен қазіргі заманғы орындаушылардың аспаптарына (Дәулетбек Сәдуақасов, Қалкен Қасымов) салыстырмалы талдау жүргізілді.

Мақала Қарағанды облысында жиналған материалдарға негізделген, сондай-ақ заманауи үлгілерді сипаттаумен, пішінін, материалын, перне байлау санын, ішектердің сапасын салыстыра отырып, аспаптың морфологиясы мен эргологиясындағы сабақтастық пен өзгерістерді анықтауға бағытталған. Домбыра түрлерін зерттеуде салыстырмалы-типологиялық, тарихи-салыстырмалы, сонымен қатар жүйелі-этнофондық (Игорь Мациевский) кешенді зерттеу әдістері қолданылды. Эмпирикалық базаны шеберлер Қалкен Қасымовпен (1949 ж. т.) және Ердос Рахымбековпен (1976 ж. т.) сұхбаттар, сондай-ақ фольклорлық-этнографиялық экспедициялар материалдары (Қарағанды, тамыз 2023, шілде 2024) құрайды.

Аспаптардың салыстырмалы талдауы олардың морфологиясындағы айырмашылықтарды анықтады: трапеция тәрізді, алмұрт тәрізді және дөңгелек пішіндер, сондай-ақ перне санындағы вариативтілік (12-ден 14-ке дейін). Сембек, Дәулетбек және Қалкеннің домбыралары көлемі мен пішіні жағынан жақын. Қарастырылатын аймақта трапеция тәрізді (қалақ домбырасы) пішіннің танымалдығы орындау барысында оң қолдың ыңғайлы орналасуына және қағыс амалдарына әсер ету ерекшеліктерімен байланысты болуы керек.

Нәтижелер Арқа домбыра мектебі шертпе техникасы мен тұрақты дыбыс шығару үшін оңтайлы қалақ трапеция тәрізді домбыраның таралуымен байланысты екенін көрсетеді. Заманауи модельдер сахналық талаптарға бейімделе отырып, конструктивті өзгерістерге ұшырайды. Қалақ домбыралары іс жүзінде кеңінен қолданылады және этноорганологиялық мұраны сақтайды, осылайша шертпе күйлерді орындауда маңызды рөл атқарады.

**АВТОРЛАРДЫҢ ҮЛЕСІ**

**А. К. Алина** – Арқа домбыраларының түрлері мен мәліметтерін жинау, домбыра нұсқалары құрылысының өлшемін шығару, негізгі мәтінді жазу, дереккөздер тізімін рәсімдеу.

**С. И. Утегалиева** – мақала жоспарын жөндеу, материалды жүйелеу, аңдатпаны жазу, мәтінді редакциялау.

UDC 780.6

DOI 10.59850/SARYN.2.13.2025.259

**Асель Кайратовна Алина\***

Докторант 2-го курса кафедры домбры Казахской национальной консерватории имени Курмангазы (Алматы, Казахстан)

ORCID ID: 0009-0002-1976-1443

email: asselalina84@gmail.com

**Сауле Исхаковна Утегалиева**

Доктор искусствоведения, профессор кафедры музыковедения и композиции Казахской национальной консерватории имени Курмангазы, заслуженный деятель Казахстана, кавалер ордена «Құрмет» (Алматы, Казахстан)

ORCID ID: 0000-0001-9867-8511

email: sa\_u@mail.ru

**СТАТЬЯ**

# КАЗАХСКИЕ ДОМБРЫ АРКИНСКОГО РЕГИОНА В ПРОШЛОМ И НАСТОЯЩЕМ: ОПЫТ ИЗУЧЕНИЯ

*Авторы прочитали и одобрили окончательный вариант рукописи и заявляют об отсутствии конфликта интересов.*

\* Корреспондирующий автор

email: asselalina84@gmail.com

Поступила в редакцию: 20.12.2024

Принята к публикации: 27.05.2025



© 2025 The Author(s). Published by Kurmangazy Kazakh National Conservatory. This is an Open Access article distributed under the terms of the Creative Commons Attribution-NonCommercial-NoDerivatives License (<http://creativecommons.org/licenses/by-nc-nd/4.0/>), which permits non-commercial re-use, distribution, and reproduction in any medium, provided the original work is properly cited, and is not altered, transformed, or built upon in any way.

**Для цитирования**

Алина, Асель, и Сауле Утегалиева. «Казахские домбры Аркинского региона в прошлом и настоящем: опыт изучения». *Saryn*, т. 13, № 2, 2025, с. 81–97. DOI: 10.59850/SARYN.2.13.2025.259. (На английском)

**Ключевые слова**

домбра, Арка (Центральный Казахстан), стиль шертпе, традиционные кюйши, сравнительный анализ, морфология, этноорганологическое наследие.

**Благодарности**

Авторы выражают благодарность Казахской национальной консерватории имени Курмангазы, редакции журнала *Saryn*, рецензентам за высокий профессионализм, внимательность, доброжелательное отношение, полезные консультации и отзывы. Отдельная благодарность мастеру-кюйши Калкелу Касымову и семье Даулетбека Садуакасова, а также родным писателя, этнографа Камела Жунистеги, которые предоставили материалы во время экспедиции по Карагандинской области (август 2023, июль 2024).

**Аннотация.** Домбра – двухструнный щипковый хордофон, широко распространенный в традиционной музыкальной культуре региона Арка (Центральный Казахстан). В этом регионе доминирует стиль *шертпе* с развитой мелодикой, свободной ритмикой и выразительным звуковым многообразием. В исследовании впервые проведен сравнительный анализ домбр, использовавшихся традиционными кюйши конца XIX – начала XX века (Абди Рысбекулы, Сембек Айдосулы), с инструментами современных исполнителей (Даулетбек Садуакасов, Калкен Касымов).

Статья основана на материалах, собранных в Карагандинской области, и направлена на выявление преемственности и трансформаций в морфологии и эргологии инструмента с описанием современных образцов и сравнением формы, материала, количества ладовых перевязей и качества струн. Исследование опирается на комплексный методологический подход, включая сравнительно-типологический, сравнительно-исторический и системно-этнофонический (Игорь Мациевский) методы. Эмпирическую базу составляют интервью с мастерами Калкеном Касымовым (р. 1949) и Ердосом Рахимбековым (р. 1976), а также материалы фольклорно-этнографических экспедиций (Караганда, август 2023, июль 2024).

Сравнительный анализ инструментов выявил различия в их морфологии: зафиксированы формы – трапециевидная, грушевидная и округлая, а также вариативность в количестве ладков (от 12 до 14). Домбры Сембека, Даулетбека и Калкена близки по форме и объему корпуса. Популярность трапециевидной формы (домбры *калак*) в исследуемом регионе, по-видимому, связана с удобством положения правой руки на боковых частях корпуса, а также особенностями штриховой техники.

Результаты показывают, что аркинская домбровая школа связана с распространением трапециевидной домбры *калак*, оптимальной для техники *шертпе* и устойчивого звукоизвлечения. Современные модели подвергаются конструктивным изменениям, адаптируясь к сценическим требованиям. Домбры *калак* широко применяются на практике и сохраняют этноорганологическое наследие, играя важную роль в исполнении *шертпе*-кюев.

**Вклад авторов**

**А. К. Алина** – сбор экспедиционных материалов, сведений и видов аркинской домбры, осуществление обмера строения домбры, написание основного текста, оформление списка источников.

**С. И. Утегалиева** – корректировка плана статьи, систематизация материала, написание аннотации, редакция текста.

## Introduction

*Kui* is a type and genre of Kazakh folk instrumental music (Kunanbayeva, Yelemanova 110), where *kui* for *dombra* (a type of two-stringed long-necked lute) is especially popular (*Music Atlas* 110). In accordance with the methods of sound production, there are two main distinguished styles: *tôkpe* (from Kazakh for “continuously pouring”, suggesting sprawling brush movements) and *shertpe* (from Kazakh for “clicking”, plucking the strings with the fingers of the right hand). The first one became widespread in the western region of Kazakhstan with more dynamic music and emotional character. The second style is more common in central, eastern and south-eastern Kazakhstan (Zhubanov, *On the History* 125–148).

In accordance with the above mentioned, there are two types of the *dombra*. As noted by Bolat Sarybayev: “The main distinguishing features of the *dombras* from the western part of the country are: large size, oval body shape, thin fingerboard with 12-14 frets<sup>1</sup>. In the eastern and central regions of Kazakhstan the most often met *dombras* have short and thick neck (7-8 frets) with flat (trapezoidal, triangular) body shape” (100). Some scholars define them as *қауақ* (bowl-shaped) and *қалақ* (scoop-shaped) *dombras*. The first type is characterized by a louder and stronger sound (*tôkpe kui*), while the latter has a softer and more lyrical tone (*shertpe kui*).

Nowadays, the instrument has been reconstructed<sup>2</sup>, chromaticised, the strings are made of fishing line (artificial fiber catgut is less often used). The modern *dombra* already has 19 frets, it is used in solo, ensemble and orchestral music practice. In addition, this instrument most often accompanies singing. In the past, *dombra* had a non-tempered strings and a variable number of frets, depending on the region and creator of the instrument.

The article is devoted to the study of *dombra* in the Arka<sup>3</sup> area (Central Kazakhstan), where instruments of different shapes and numbers of frets are still preserved.

## Objectives

The article has set the following objectives:

1. The ergo-morphological characteristic of the modern types of musical instruments used in the abovementioned Arka area (district of Karaganda region) is given;
2. A comparative analysis of modern *dombras* with instruments of the past (shape, manufacturing materials, number of frets, quality of strings) is set.

1 Here we are talking about tied frets.

2 The *dombra* was modernized by the Romanenko brothers.

3 Saryarka is one of the most prominent geographical, natural-historical and cultural areas of Kazakhstan, located in the heart of the country. The term itself originates from local vernacular and translates as “yellow elevation” or “sun-scorched plateau with hills”, evoking the region’s distinct coloring and undulating terrain. This landscape is not only geographically significant but also culturally rich, particularly known for its enduring tradition of instrumental *dombra* music, most notably the Arka school of *shertpe kui*.

## Methods

Here we rely on a comprehensive approach, which implies a comprehensive study of the object, in the interrelation of all its components. The study of *dombra* types uses *comparative-typological*, *comparative-historical*, and *system-ethnophonic* methods (Matsievsky 34–39). The study of the Arka *dombras*, their morphological and ergological properties

provides an appeal to the musical samples created for them. The *kuis* of a number of local tradition representatives such as Sembek, Abdi, D. Saduakassov are published in Bilal Iskakov’s compilation (Iskakov 262, 269, 353).

It is significant to refer to the works of domestic ethnomusicologists devoted to the study of the *dombra* in general (Akhmet Zhubanov, Bolat Sarybayev, Kairolla Juzbassov, Saule Utegaliyeva) and more broadly of Kazakh *dombra* music (Bagdaulet Amanov, Assiya Mukhambetova, Pernebek Shegebayev, Saira Raimbergenova, Gulzada Omarova, Raushan Nesipbai), especially *shertpe kui* (Ualy Bekenov, Bilal Iskakov, Aitzhan Toktagan, Zhangali Juzbai). The authors used different expeditionary materials, as well as independently collected ones. Taking into account the vastness of the region, the study was limited to folklore fieldwork records found in Karaganda region (August 2023, July 2024).

The article reviews *dombbras* from the collection of the writer K. Zhunistegi (1939–2023), belonging to such *kuishis* of the past as Sembek (1864–1931) and Abdi (1868–1931) (late 19–early 20 century, Arka area). Besides, the instruments of contemporary bearers of traditions, such as D. Saduakassov (1938–2012) and K. Kassymov (1949) are no exception. The latter one is also a very well-known *dombra* artisan.

So, below we consider the abovementioned tasks.

“The name ‘Arka’ is associated with the central part of Kazakhstan. This includes Akmola, Karaganda, part of Kostanay and Pavlodar regions. On this territory the so-called Arka *dombra* style is widespread” (Omarova 120). Karaganda region is located in the central part of the Republic of Kazakhstan. In the south it borders with South-Kazakhstan and Zhambyl, in the north with Akmola, in the east with Pavlodar, in the north-west with Kostanay, in the east with East-Kazakhstan, in the south-west with Kyzylorda, and in the south-east with Almaty region (Encyclopedia 9). (See fig. 1).



Fig. 1. Geographical map of Karaganda region (2022)

1. Karkaraly district
2. Abai district
3. Aktogai district
4. Shet district
5. Bukhar-Zhyrau district
6. Nura district
7. Osakarov district

Source: Kazakhstanskaya Pravda, 15 April 2022, kazpravda.kz/n/predstavlena-karta-razdeleniya-gorodov-i-rayonov-na-karagandinskuyu-i-ulytauskuyu-oblasti/

According to A. Zhubanov, the musical instrument called “dombra” has been preserved among many people. The word “dombra” itself comes from the Arabic “dunba” and “burre”, meaning “lamb’s rump” (*Kazakh Folk Musical Instrument – Dombra* 8)<sup>4</sup>. Another version gives the term from the Iranian word “tanbur” (see *dombra/dombura/tanbura*) (Utegaliyeva 19).

Erich von Hornbostel and Curt Sachs classify this type of instrument by the index: 321. 321 as a chordophone having a body, a neck, in some cases a fingerboard and frets (253).

The frets on the neck of the traditional Kazakh dombra are called *perne*. Their arrangement reveals local and region differences of the instrument. Kazakh dombra artisan Kamar Kassymov gave the name *bunaq* to the frets made of sheep intestines (Jumabayev, Berdibay 65)<sup>5</sup>.

Under the study in the Arka area (Karaganda region) the so-called *qalaq* dombra is the most common. Instruments presumably belonging to the performers Sembek and Abdi were found in the collection of the writer and connoisseur of Kazakh music K. Zhunistegi. He made a significant contribution to the preservation of regional cultural traditions by collecting artifacts (ancient types of instruments, etc.). We also familiarized ourselves with materials from the personal archives of artisan and performer K. Kassymov, and *kuishi* D. Saduakassov. The dombras of contemporary musicians are in the authors’ possession.

## Discussion

The dombra of **Sembek Aidosuly** (1864–1931) was made by the artisan Karamende Abbrakhman in 1926–1928. Of course, the instrument has been passed down from generation to generation and over time its appearance changed. The dombra was restored by the teacher and artisan A. Rakhymzhanov (Zhunistegi 107–113) (see [fig. 2](#)), and has a trapezoidal shape with a beveled bottom part<sup>6</sup>.

*Ergological features.* The instrument is hollowed out of a single piece of wood. The front part is spruce (you can notice the small metal nails connecting the lid with the body)<sup>7</sup>. At the moment the lid of the instrument is glued. The other parts are made of pine. The gluing process is a delicate matter. According to artisan and *kuishi* Kalken (from the interview), the lid of the instrument used to be fixed with small wooden nails. With vacuum installation, the wooden nails are fully embedded in the body of the instrument and securely fixed, so they never detach. But over time, modern

craftsmen began to use new materials such as glue.

*Morphological features.* The instrument (made in early 20th century) has a trapezoidal shape and consists of such parts as the head (*bas*), stand (*tiek*), pegs (*qulaq*), neck (*moiyn*), body (*shanaq*), soundboard (*bet taqtai*) and fixing for the strings (*tùime*), and sound hole in the form of a triangle.

4 It’s about the fat tail part of it (the lamb).

5 The word *bunaq* means a place where something is rounded and becomes segmented and carved (e. g. a stick) or a notch. *Qazaq tilinñ sózdigi [Kazakh Language Dictionary]*. Dike-press, Almaty, 1999, p. 112.

6 The beveled bottom part is also present on the dombra of D. Saduakassov.

7 When making a dombra the choice of wood for the soundboard is crucial for the quality of the perceived sound. Thanks to the selected wood species (spruce, pine) the instrument can give a resonating effect.

The *dombra* of the *kuishi* **Abdi Rysbekuly** (1868–1931)<sup>8</sup> has the side and front parts inlaid with an ornamental pattern, indicating the high skill of the instrument’s maker<sup>9</sup>. The front part has a burnt inscription of the word “Omar Khayam” in Arabic. Unfortunately, the Persian part of the text could not be deciphered (see [fig. 3](#)).

*Ergological features.* The instrument has a more complex and detailed construction: it consists of different parts, including side walls and soundboard. According to the contemporary craftsman Ye. Rakhymbek (1976), the front side and neck are made of pine, and the side parts are made of poplar tree. At the moment the soundboard is glued to the body.

*Morphological features.* Unlike the previous one, this *dombra* has a triangular shape (upper part of the body), and the back is more convex. The head (*bas*) has the form of a spatula, the neck got 16 imposed frets, and the body is elongated.

To better understand how their shape affects the sound and timbre, the following measurements of the two instruments were taken (see [Table 1](#)).

The comparative analysis of the given data shows, that in spite of size similarities of some parts (head,

pegs, width of the back part of the body, length and width of the base), these two *dombras* differ from each other (in terms of total length).

Sembek’s *dombra* due to the neck length and body volume is not large. Given that the body of the Abdi’s instrument is larger, its base is correspondingly wider. Having the different length of the neck, the number of imposing harmonies is also unequal. Instruments with a larger body have a stronger sound. Since these *dombras* belong to the ancient types, initially they may have strings made of natural materials like sheep intestines, etc. However, after the thorough restoration, these *dombras* got strings made of fishing line. Marlena Kokisheva



**Fig. 3.** Abdi’s *dombra*. Front view.  
Source: K. Zhunistegi’s personal collection, photos taken by the author Assel Alina (Karaganda region, Shet district, Aksu-Ayuly village, 2 July 2024).



**Fig. 2.** Sembek’s *dombra*. Front and back view.  
Source: K. Zhunistegi’s personal collection, photos taken by the author Assel Alina (Karaganda region, Shet district, Aksu-Ayuly village, 2 July 2024).

- 8 According to the story of K. Zhunistegi, *dombra* was found at one of the aul residents Kamen Yesimgaliyev, back in the early 20th century. In those times, instruments of this kind could already be considered relics (Zhunistegi 108).
- 9 The *dombra* has some damage, cracks, bent bottom and hollow sides, indicating a long history of use, and possibly improper storage (Zhunistegi 108).

**Table 1.** Comparative measurements of Sembek's and Abdi's dombras

Parts of the Instrument	Musician Names	Sembek. Year of creation 1923	Abdi. Year of creation 1917
Head		8 cm	9 cm
Tuning pegs		2 pcs	2 pcs
Neck length of dombra		40,5 cm	52 cm
Length of the front part of the body		36,2 cm	43 cm
Width of the front part of the body		15 cm	22 cm
Length of the back part of the body		38 cm	43 cm
Width of the back part of the body		6,5 cm	6 cm
Base length and width		12,5 cm 9 cm	11 cm -
Total length of the instrument		86 cm	104 cm
String quality		Fishing line	Fishing line
Number of frets		12	16

Source: Made by the authors using data from the folklore fieldwork in Karaganda region (August 2023, July 2024).

and Valeriya Nedlina in their work give a precise description of the Kazakh traditional instrument dombra: "The size and design of the instrument perfectly fit the nomadic way of life: a compact instrument, relatively simple in its structure" (664).

One of the artisans and performers is **Kalken Kassymov** (1949). *Kuishi* demonstrated his experimentally made dombra, which had an additional soundboard (*qosymsha qaqpak*) attached to the bottom of the body. The uniqueness of this instrument is in sounds that are extracted without using the resonator hole (see [fig. 4](#)). In the formation of the instrument, we can see the influence of modern trends aimed to strengthen the sound. Therefore, a double soundboard of dombra (its larger area as well) allows to achieve a more powerful sound.

*Ergological features.* The instrument is made of composite parts. The soundboard is made of spruce, and other parts are made of pine. The dombra has a trapezoidal shape (*qalaq dombra*), with a flatter body and wide bottom. It's got a rather nasal timbre. It should be noted, that the master uses his own special approach when tying the fret of dombra: he makes punctures through the neck and passes the fishing line through them to set the fret. Because the fins are firmly attached, they will not shift excessively.



**Fig. 4.** K. Kassymov's dombra. Front, back, side view. Source: K. Kassymov's personal collection, photos taken by the author Assel Alina (Karaganda city, 10 July 2024).

*Morphological features.* The instrument (mid 20th century) consists of head (*bas*), pegs (*qulaqtar*), neck (*moiyn*), front part (*bet taqtai*), and has an additional soundboard (*shanaq*), stand (*tiek*) and string attachment (*tùime*). The extra soundboard enhances the sound of the instrument.

**Dauletbek Saduakassov** (1938–2009) is one of the brightest performers of Arka *shertpe kuis*. His grandson Zhusip presented his grandfather’s instrument consisting of 13 frets (see [fig. 5](#)). The master is Zagit Suragan Kuanganuly, a resident of Taldy village (Karaganda region, Aksu-Ayuly district).

*Ergological features.* The instrument (beginning of the 21st century) has a trapezoidal shape. The dombra has a glued body, assembled from composite parts. The front side is made of spruce, and the other parts – of pine tree. The back part of the instrument is beveled to the bottom.

*Morphological features.* The parts are the head (*bas*), pegs (*qulaqtar*), neck (*moiyn*), soundboard (*bet taqtai*), body (*shanaq*), soundboard stand (*tiek*), and string attachment (*tùime*). In addition to the usual round hole, there are additional *f*-holes on the sides. The lowel beveled section and additional vents intensify the sound of the instrument. There is a sense of modernity in this type of dombra.

The measurements of these two dombras are shown in [Table 2](#).



**Fig. 5.** D. Saduakassov’s dombra. Front and back view. Source: D. Saduakassov’s personal collection, photos taken by the author Assel Alina (Karaganda region, Shet district, Aksu-Ayuly village, 2 July 2024).

**Table 2.** Comparative measurements of K. Kassymov’s and D. Saduakassov’s dombras

Parts of the Instrument	Musician Names	Kalken Kassymov. Year of creation 2023	Dauletbek Saduakassov. Year of creation – unknown
Head		8 cm	7 cm
Tuning pegs		2 pcs	2 pcs
Neck length of dombra		48 cm	49,3 cm
Length of the front part of the body		37 cm	37,5 cm
Width of the front part of the body		16 cm	20 cm
Length of the back part of the body		38,5 cm	35,5 cm
Width of the back part of the body		8,4 cm	8,5 cm
Base length and width		12,5 cm 9 cm	- 7 cm
Total length of the Instrument		95 cm	94,5 cm
String quality		Fishing line	Fishing line
Number of frets		18	13
Additional soundboard		4 cm	-

Source: Made by the authors using data from the folklore fieldwork in Karaganda region (August 2023, July 2024).

Kalken's dombra is equipped with additional soundboard, the bottom of the instrument is not flat, but slightly curved. This enhances amplification of the sound.

Comparing the old Sembek's instrument and the modern Kalken's dombra, one can notice that they are quite similar in terms of the total length. However, Sembek's dombra has an old pattern of 13 frets, and Kalken's instrument got 18 frets (see Table 3).

**Table 3.** Comparative measurements of Sembek's and Kalken's dombras

Parts of the Instrument	Musician Names	Sembek. Year of creation 1923	Kalken. Year of creation 2023
Head		7 cm	8 cm
Tuning pegs		2 pcs	2 pcs
Neck length of dombra		49,3 cm	48 cm
Length of the front part of the body		37,5 cm	37 cm
Width of the front part of the body		20 cm	16 cm
Length of the back part of the body		35,5 cm	35,5 cm
Width of the back part of the body		8,5 cm	8,4 cm
Base length and width		7 cm	12,5 cm 9 cm
Total length of the Instrument		94,5 cm	95 cm
String quality		Fishing line	Fishing line
Number of frets		13	18
Additional soundboard		-	4 cm

Source: Made by the authors using data from the folklore fieldwork in Karaganda region (August 2023, July 2024).

## Results

### Comparative analysis of current samples with instruments of the past.

By comparing the dombras of the 19–20th centuries with modern instruments some similarities and differences were identified.

**Similarities.** Traditional materials like pine and spruce (so called "resonance wood") are still popular in dombra making. A striking example is ancient type of dombras (Sembek, Abdi). Due to its lightness and excellent acoustic properties, spruce is often used for top soundboards. Pine is also frequently used due to its availability and processing. One of the distinctive properties of this wood: once dry, it no longer absorbs moisture.

**Differences.** In general, the examined dombras have a trapezoidal shape, and are more compact. The Abdi's instrument has its peculiarities. It is characterized by a more voluminous curved-arc-shaped body (in length of 43 cm), which strengthens the sound of the instrument. At the same time, the sound of smaller dombras is more chamber-like (the length of Sembek's dombra body is 38 cm). Besides, in comparison with other types, the total length of the Abdi's dombra is 104 cm. In terms of dimensions, it's getting close to dombras of Western Kazakhstan. It is known that three-cornered types are found among Kazakhs, Nogais and Kalmyks of the Lower Volga region in Russia. Kalken and Dauletbek have instruments with similar characteristics.

Talasbek Asemkulov defines three types of *qalaq* dombra: *iyqty* (shouldered), *bùirli* (wineglass shaped), *sauyrly*<sup>10</sup> (from Kaz. – croup-foot of mountains)<sup>11</sup> (with an enlarged lower section) (85).

The shape and volume of the instrument's body can influence the sound and playing comfort. In our opinion, Sembek's dombra is more traditional, fits the definition of *iyqty* (shouldered), with an extended upper part of the body. The dombra of the artisan and performer K. Kassymov has a more voluminous lower part, which allows it to be referred to the *sauyrly* type.

String materials have also evolved from natural to modern synthetic ones. "In the 1950–60s, folk composers and performers used strings made from animal entrails, which gave a soft and rich sound. Such sound was described by the term *koñyr dauys* (Kazakh for "velvet voice") (Nazhimedenov 93). "Intestinal (lamb, goat) or vein (from Kaz. *shek* – intestine, string; *qoidyn*, *eshkinin shegi* – strung from lamb, goat intestines), as well as *zhìbek* (from Kaz. – silk) strings are mainly used on plucked chordophones (simple and compound). They were popular before the reconstruction of stringed instruments in the early twentieth century" (Nazhimedenov 96). "At the same time, fishing line, which replaced intestines strings, was preferably distinguished by its durability" (Utegaliyeva, "Timbre-register Sound" 109).

Modern instruments and strings allow to create more complex and diverse music, adapting to the requirements of the time, including instrumental pieces by Kazakh composers.

The dombras of Sembek, Abdi, and Dauletbek have 11–13 frets, on modern Kalken's dombra their number increases to 19. Despite the common principles of their design, these differences emphasize the individuality of each instrument.

The number of frets in correlation with Abdi's *kui* "Zar Qosbasar", Sembek's *kui* "Naz Qosbasar", and Dauletbek's *kui* "Tolqau" match. The number of harmonies identified on the instruments of Abdi, Sembek, and contemporary *kuishi* Kalken and Dauletbek are actually coincide with those used in the *kuis* of the authors. In Sembek's *kui* "Naz Qosbasar" the climax is given on sound *a*<sup>1</sup> (Iskakov 269). In Abdi's *kui* "Zar Qosbasar" the highest sound is *g*<sup>1</sup> (Iskakov 262), which is also present on his dombra. The actual sound structure of dombra and *kui* coincide. The sound range of *kui* "Tolqau" (Iskakov 353) by Dauletbek fits with the sound range of his dombra. Besides, musicians (masters) themselves can create experimental types of dombras, as we mentioned above.

These differences emphasize the individuality of each instrument, despite the general principles of their construction. The study by Balzhan Junussova, et al. noted the positive outcomes of modernizing ancient stringed instruments: broad coverage of classical and modern global repertoire, concert, ensemble, and orchestral functions (13).

Of all the listed instruments, only Sembek's dombra is made of a single piece of wood, while other *kuishis* have instruments assembled from component parts. The exceptions are the craftsman Kalken, and the performer Magauya Khamzin, with an additional soundboard.

10 The term *sauyrly* is characterised by polysemy. One of the meanings of *sauyr* refers to the lower part of a horse's thigh.

11 *Sôzдіk [Dictionary]*. Aruna, 2023, p. 160.

## Conclusion

Based on the above, some preliminary conclusions are drawn:

1. The popularity of the trapezoidal *qalax* dombra in this area is probably not accidental. In our opinion, this type of instrument to some extent corresponds to the stroke technique of *shertpe*, including the character of cues. It is most convenient for playing by plucking (with all fingers or only one). In this case, the right hand in a horizontal position, rests on the "sides" of the body. As a result, its position when extracting a sound on each string acquires additional stability. The strength of finger picking is increased.
2. The considered instruments reflect a kind of evolution of the East Kazakhstan dombra: from its ancient types to modern ones. The size of the formerly miniature dombra began to increase. Nineteen-fret dombras make it possible to play a wider repertoire. Instruments with a voluminous body still help to enhance the sound.
3. In addition, the influences of modern trends related to sound reinforcement are evident (additional soundboards and *f*-holes).
4. In the past, traditionally, instruments with fewer frets were used. They contributed to the appearance of micro-intervals usually found in folk music. Unfortunately, it is difficult to extract micro-intervals on a modern dombra with 19 frets.
5. *Shertpe kuis* are mostly performed on the concept stage. Therefore, the sound of dombra must be stronger. That's why craftsmen strive to intensify the sounds of the instrument.

## REFERENCES

- Assemkulov, Talasbek. "Dombıraǵa til bitse." ["If the Dombra Could Speak."] *Zhuldyz*, no. 5, 1989, pp. 185–190. (In Kazakh)
- Hornbostel, Erich von, and Curt Sachs. "Sistematika muzykal'nykh instrumentov." ["Systematics of Musical Instruments."] *Narodnye muzykal'nye instrumenty i instrumental'naya muzyka [Folk Musical Instruments and Instrumental Music]*. Collection of Articles and Materials in 2 Parts. Trans. from German by Israel Alender, edited by Igor Matsievsky. Part 1. Moscow, Sovetskii kompozitor, 1987, pp. 229–261. (In Russian)
- Iskakov, Bilal. *Saryarka sazday. [Saryarka Motives]*. Edited by Gulmira Sharipova, et al. Almaty, Kurmangazy Kazakh National Conservatory, 2007, pp. 262, 269, 353. (In Kazakh)
- Jumabayev, Asset, and Aizhan Berdibay. "Kamar Kassymov, a Musical Instruments Artisan for the Kurmangazy Kazakh National Orchestra of Folk Instruments." *Saryn*, vol. 12, no. 2, 2024, pp. 54–74. DOI: 10.59850/SARYN 2024.3.12.180. (In Kazakh)
- Junussova, Balzhan, et al. "Advanced String Instruments in the Musical Culture of Kazakhs, Kyrgyz, and Uzbeks." *Música Hodie*, vol. 24, 2024. DOI: 10.5216/mh.v24.79380. (In English)
- "Қарағанды. Қарағанды облысы. Табиғат және табиғи ресурстары. Халқы. Зhalпы ақпарат." "Karaganda. Karaganda Region. Nature and Natural Resources. Population. General Information." *Astana: Entsiklopediya [Astana: Encyclopedia]*. Edited by Aitmukhamed Abdulin. Almaty, Atamura, 2008, pp. 9–25. (In Kazakh)
- Kokisheva, Marlena, and Valeriya Nedlina. "Kuy: Traditional Genre in Contemporary Music of Soviet and Post-soviet Kazakhstan." *Acta Histriae*, 24, 2016, 3, pp. 663–676. DOI: 10.19233/AH.2016.28. (In English)
- Kunanbayeva, Alma, and Saida Yelemanova. "Kazakhstan." *Grove Music Online*, 2001. DOI: 10.1093/gmo/9781561592630.article.41866. (In English)
- Matsievsky, Igor. *Narodnaya instrumental'naya muzyka kak fenomen kul'tury. [Folk Instrumental Music as a Cultural Phenomenon]*. Edited by Saule Utegaliyeva. Almaty, Daik-Press, 2007. (In Russian)
- "Natsional'nye muzykal'nye instrumenty tyurkoyazychnykh stran." ["National Musical Instruments of Turkic-speaking Countries."] *Muzykal'nyi Atlas [Music Atlas]*. Edited by Gulnaz Abdullazada, et al. Baku, Elm və təhsil, 2024, p. 110. (In Russian)
- Nazhimedenov, Zhumageldy. "Қазақтың қасиетті қоңыр ұні." ["Kazakh Sacred Velvet Sound."] *Қоңыр және Dombra (dombra ұнінің акустикалық ерекшеліктері) [Velvet Sound and Dombra (Acoustic Features of the Dombra Sound)]*. Edited by Schmidt Aitaliyev. Almaty, KazMOGZI, 2005, pp. 90–96. (In Kazakh)
- Omarova, Gulzada. *Kazakhskiy kyui: kul'turno-istoricheskiy kontekst i regional'nye stili. [Kazakh Kui: Cultural-historical Context and Regional Styles]*. 2012, Institute of Art Studies of the Academy of Sciences of Uzbekistan, PhD thesis's abstract, [uchebana5.ru/cont/1591424.html](http://uchebana5.ru/cont/1591424.html). Accessed 2 December, 2024. (In Russian)
- Predstavlena karta razdeleniya gorodov i raionov na Karagandinskuyu i Ulytauskiy oblasti [A Map of the Division of Cities and Districts into Karaganda and Ulytau Regions is Presented]. *Kazakhstanskaya Pravda*, 15 April 2022, [kazpravda.kz/n/predstavlena-karta-razdeleniya-gorodov-i-rayonov-na-karagandinskuyu-i-ulytauskiy-oblasti/](http://kazpravda.kz/n/predstavlena-karta-razdeleniya-gorodov-i-rayonov-na-karagandinskuyu-i-ulytauskiy-oblasti/). Accessed 2 December, 2024. (In Russian)
- Sarybaev, Bolat. *Kazakhskie muzykal'nye instrumenty. Albom. Glava IV. Srtunnye instrumenty. [Kazakh Musical Instruments. Album. Chapter IV. String instruments]*. Alma-Ata, Zhalyn, 1978, pp. 85–125. (In Russian)

Skryabina, Yekaterina. "Domrovoe ispolnitel'skoe iskusstvo: iz istorii professional'nogo obrazovaniya." ["The Art of Domra Playing: From the History of Professional Education."] *Muzykal'noe iskusstvo i obrazovanie*, vol. 10, no. 4, 2022, pp. 164–178. DOI: 10.31862/2309-1428-2022-10-4-164-178. (In Russian)

Utegaliyeva, Saule. "Tembro-registrovaya zvukovaya model': tembr i zvukovysotnost' v muzyke tyurkskikh narodov." ["Timbre-register Sound Model: Timbre and Sound Pitch in the Music of Turkic Peoples."] *Zvukovoi mir muzyki tyurkskikh narodov: teoriya, istoriya, praktika (na materiale instrumental'nykh traditsii Tsentral'noi Azii)* [*Sound World of Music of the Turkic Peoples: Theory, History, Practice (on the material of the Central Asian Instrumental Traditions)*]. Edited by Violetta Yunussova. Moscow, Kompozitor, 2013, pp. 106–219. (In Russian)

Utegaliyeva, Saule. "Turkskie muzykal'nye instrumenty v narodnoi terminologiy." ["Turkic Musical Instruments in Folk Terminology."] *Hordofony Tsentral'noi Azii. [Chordophones of Central Asia]*. Edited by Token Zhakyp. Almaty, Kazakparat, 2006, pp. 16–20. (In Russian)

Zhubanov, Akhmet. "Kazakhskiy traditsionnyi muzykal'nyi instrument – Dombra." ["Kazakh Folk Musical Instrument – Dombra."] *"Musicology" collection, vol. VIII–IX*. Edited by Pyotr Aravin, et al. Alma-Ata, KazGU, 1976, pp. 8–20. (In Russian)

Zhubanov, Akhmet. "Қазақтың халық музыка аспаптарында орындау тарихы жайлы бірнеше сөз" ["On the History of Performance on Kazakh Folk Musical Instruments."] *An-kui sapary [A Travel to Song-Kui]*. Edited by Boris Yezakovich, et al. Almaty, Gylym, 1976, pp.125–148. (In Kazakh)

Zhunistegi, Kamel. "Bes Dombrya zhãne kokeikestì syr." ["Five Dombbras and Hidden Secrets."] *Shyraǵdan [Luminaire]*. Edited by Zhanatai Shagatai. Almaty, El-Shezhire, 2007, pp. 107–113. (In Kazakh)