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#### ARTICLE

# THE AQQU–GAQQU INTONATIONAL COMPLEX AS A MECHANISM OF CULTURAL MEMORY IN ARTISTIC INTERPRETATIONS OF THE EPIC QYZ ZHIBEK

*The author has reviewed and approved the final manuscript and affirms that there is no conflict of interest.*

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**KEYWORDS**

*Qyz Zhibek*, epic, *Gaqqu*, *Aqqu*, intonational archetype, cultural memory, Kazakh musical culture, Kazakh opera, Kazakh film.

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**DECLARATION OF GENERATIVE AI**

By this declaration, the author confirms that artificial intelligence tools were used as an auxiliary means during the preparation of the "The *Aqqu–Gaqqu* Intonational Complex as a Mechanism of Cultural Memory in Artistic Interpretations of the Epic *Qyz Zhibek*" article. Specifically, artificial intelligence tools were used for: checking and improving the linguistic presentation of the text during translation into Kazakh and English (ChatGPT neural network). AI was not used for the creation of research results, formulation of conclusions, data analysis, development of the research concept, or generation of scientific content. The author bears full responsibility for the content of the article, the accuracy of the presented data, the correctness of references and citations, and compliance of the work with the requirements of research ethics.

**ABSTRACT.** The article explores the formation and transformation of the intonational archetype *Aqqu–Gaqqu* in interpretations of the epic *Qyz Zhibek*. It examines how the image of *Zhibek* became associated with the swan symbolism long established in Kazakh culture. As a result, the epic narrative found expression in folk song, drama, opera, cinema, and instrumental music. Particular attention is paid to the canonization of the swan image as one of the heroine's key symbols. The relevance of the study is reinforced by the anniversary events of 2025 associated with the Sultan-Akhmet Khodzhikov's film *Qyz Zhibek*.

The research materials include the epic *Qyz Zhibek*, Ukili Ybyrai's song *Gaqqu*, Yevgeniy Brusilovsky's opera *Qyz Zhibek*, Sultan-Akhmet Khodzhikov's film *Qyz Zhibek*, the *kuis Aqqu* by Ykhlis Dukenuly and Nurgissa Tlendiyev, the songs *Gaqqu*, *Qyz Zhibek*, and *Aqqu-kui* published in Alexander Zataevich's collections.

The methodological framework combines historical-cultural and comparative-historical approaches, Boris Asafyev's theory of intonation, intertextual analysis, and Jan Assmann's theory of cultural memory. The study demonstrates that the swan image was not an original feature of the epic narrative. Rooted in an earlier cultural tradition, it emerged through successive reinterpretation and is defined here as the *Aqqu–Gaqqu* complex. The findings show *Gaqqu*, having absorbed earlier musical traditions, became a foundation for later interpretations, while Nurgissa Tlendiyev's *kui Aqqu* represents the culmination of this process. The study concludes that the *Aqqu–Gaqqu* complex functions as a mechanism of cultural memory, ensuring the continuity of the artistic image of *Qyz Zhibek* across diverse genres of Kazakh art.

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#### МАҚАЛА

# «ҚЫЗ ЖІБЕК» ЭПОСЫНЫҢ КӨРКЕМ ИНТЕРПРЕТАЦИЯЛАРЫНДАҒЫ МӘДЕНИ ЖАДЫ МЕХАНИЗМІ РЕТІНДЕГІ «АҚҚУ–ГӘККУ» ИНТОНАЦИЯЛЫҚ КЕШЕНІ

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

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## Дәйексөз үшін

Харламова, Татьяна. «Қыз Жібек» эпосының көркем интерпретацияларындағы мәдени жады механизмі ретіндегі «Аққу–Гәкку» интонациялық кешені». *Saryn*, т. 14, № 2, 2026, 34–54 б., DOI: <https://doi.org/10.59850/SARYN.2.14.2026.367>. (Ағылшынша)

## Тірек сөздер

Қыз Жібек, эпос, Гәкку, Аққу, аққу бейнесі, интонациялық архетип, мәдени жады, қазақ музыкалық мәдениеті, қазақ операсы, қазақ фильмі.

## Алғыс

Автор «Қыз Жібек: 55 жылдан кейін» атты арт-диалогтың ұйымдастырушылары мен қатысушыларына шынайы ризашылығын білдіреді. Автор Күләш Байсейітова атындағы Қазақ ұлттық өнер университеті кітапханасының қызметкерлеріне мерзімді басылым материалдарынан маңызды тарихи мәліметтерді жинақтау мен сақтаудағы ұқыпты әрі қажырлы еңбектері үшін алғыс білдіреді. Сондай-ақ зерттеуді жетілдіруге бағытталған пайдалы ұсыныстары мен кәсіби пікірлері үшін өздерінің құнды уақытын бөлген рецензенттерге, сондай-ақ мақаланы баспаға дайындау мен жариялау барысында көрсеткен қолдауы мен көмегі үшін *Saryn* журналының редакциясына терең ризашылық білдіреді.

## Жасанды интеллект құралдарын пайдалану туралы мәлімдеме

Осы мәлімдеме арқылы автор «Қыз Жібек» эпосының көркем интерпретацияларындағы мәдени жады механизмі ретіндегі «Аққу–Гәкку» интонациялық кешені» атты мақаланы дайындау барысында жасанды интеллект құралдарының тек көмекші құрал ретінде қолданылғанын хабарлайды. Атап айтқанда, жасанды интеллект құралдары: мәтінді қазақ және ағылшын тілдеріне аудару кезінде тілдік рәсімделуін тексеру және жетілдіру мақсатында (ChatGPT нейрожелісі). Жасанды интеллект ғылыми нәтижелерді жасау, зерттеу тұжырымдарын қалыптастыру, деректерді талдау, зерттеу тұжырымдамасын әзірлеу немесе ғылыми мазмұнды генерациялау мақсатында қолданылған жоқ. Автор мақаланың мазмұнына, ұсынылған деректердің дұрыстығына, дереккөздерге сілтемелердің корректілігіне және жұмыстың ғылыми этика талаптарына сәйкестігіне толық жауап береді.

**Аңдатпа.** Мақала «Аққу–Гәкку» интонациялық архетипінің «Қыз Жібек» эпосының көркем интерпретацияларындағы қалыптасуы мен трансформациясын зерттеуге арналған. XX ғасырда Жібектің эпикалық бейнесі қазақ мәдениетінде бұрыннан қалыптасқан аққу символикасымен сабақтасып, эпикалық сюжет халық әні, драматургия, опера, кино және аспаптық музыка сияқты әртүрлі көркемдік формаларда көрініс тапты. Ерекше назар аққу бейнесінің біртіндеп кейіпкердің негізгі символдарының біріне айналу үдерісіне аударылады. Тақырыптың өзектілігі 2025 жылғы мерейтойлық оқиғалармен айқындалады.

Зерттеу материалы ретінде «Қыз Жібек» эпосы, Үкілі Ыбырайдың «Гәкку» әні, Евгений Брусиловскийдің «Қыз Жібек» операсы, Сұлтан-Ахмет Қожықовтың «Қыз Жібек» фильмі, Ықылас Дүкенұлы мен Нұрғиса Тілендиевтің «Аққу» күйлері, сондай-ақ Александр Затаевич жинақтарындағы «Гаку»<sup>1</sup>, «Қыз Жібек» және «Аку-кюй»<sup>2</sup> ән-күйлері пайдаланылды.

Зерттеудің әдіснамалық негізін тарихи-мәдени және салыстырмалы-тарихи тәсілдер, Борис Асафьевтің интонациялық теориясы, интермәтіндік талдау және Ян Ассманнның мәдени жад теориясы құрайды. Зерттеу аққу бейнесінің эпикалық сюжеттің бастапқы сипаты емес екенін көрсетті. Ол дәстүрден бастау алып, көп мәрте көркем қайта пайымдау нәтижесінде қалыптасқан және осы жұмыста «Аққу–Гәкку» кешені ретінде белгіленеді. «Гәкку» әні өзіне дейінгі дәстүрлерді бойына сіңіріп, кейінгі интерпретациялар үшін негіз болды. Нұрғиса Тілендиевтің «Аққу» күйі осы интонациялық архетип эволюциясының қорытынды кезеңі ретінде қарастырылады. Қорытынды ретінде «Аққу–Гәкку» кешені мәдени жадтың маңызды механизмі ретінде бағаланып, Қыз Жібек бейнесінің қазақ өнерінің әртүрлі жанларындағы сабақтастығын қамтамасыз ететіні дәлелденеді.

1, 2 Редакция атауды сақталған ноталық материалдар негізінде көрсетеді.

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#### СТАТЬЯ

# ИНТОНАЦИОННЫЙ КОМПЛЕКС «АККУ–ГАККУ» КАК МЕХАНИЗМ КУЛЬТУРНОЙ ПАМЯТИ В ХУДОЖЕСТВЕННЫХ ИНТЕРПРЕТАЦИЯХ ЭПОСА «КЫЗ ЖИБЕК»

*Автор прочитал и одобрил окончательный вариант рукописи и заявляет об отсутствии конфликта интересов.*

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**Ключевые слова**

Кыз Жибек, эпос, Гакку, Акку, образ лебедя, интонационный архетип, культурная память, казахская музыкальная культура, казахская опера, казахский фильм.

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Автор выражает благодарность организаторам и участникам арт-диалога «Кыз Жибек: 55 лет спустя». Благодарность работникам фонда библиотеки Казахского национального университета искусств имени Куляш Байсеитовой за кропотливый труд в сборе и сохранении важных исторических сведений из материалов периодической печати. Глубокая благодарность рецензентам, уделившим свое ценное время и давшим полезные рекомендации для улучшения исследования, а также редакции журнала *Saryn* за терпеливый труд и помощь в издании статьи.

**Заявление об использовании инструментов искусственного интеллекта**

Настоящим заявлением автор отмечает, что при подготовке статьи «Интонационный комплекс “Акку–Гакку” как механизм культурной памяти в художественных интерпретациях эпоса “Кыз Жибек”» инструменты искусственного интеллекта применялись исключительно в качестве вспомогательного средства. А именно для проверки и улучшения языкового оформления текста при переводе на казахский и английский языки (нейросеть ChatGPT). Искусственный интеллект не использовался для создания научных результатов, формирования выводов, анализа данных, разработки концепции исследования или генерации научного содержания. Автор несет полную ответственность за содержание статьи, достоверность представленных данных, корректность цитирования источников и соответствие работы требованиям научной этики.

**Аннотация.** Статья посвящена исследованию процессов формирования и трансформации интонационного архетипа «Акку–Гакку» в художественных интерпретациях эпоса «Кыз Жибек». Рассматривается длительный процесс переосмысления эпоса, в ходе которого в XX веке происходит сближение эпического образа Жибек с существовавшей ранее в казахской культуре символикой лебедя. Вследствие чего эпический сюжет получил воплощение в различных художественных формах: народной песне, драматургии, опере, кинематографе и инструментальной музыке. Особое внимание уделяется механизму канонизации образа лебедя, который постепенно становится одним из ключевых символов героини. Актуальность обращения к данной теме усиливается юбилейными событиями 2025 года.

Материалом исследования послужили эпос «Кыз Жибек», песня «Гакку» Укили Ыбырая, опера «Кыз Жибек» Евгения Брусиловского, фильм «Кыз Жибек» Султан-Ахмета Ходжикова, кюи «Акку» Ыкыласа Дукенулы и Нургисы Тлендиева, а также песни «Гаку»<sup>3</sup>, «Кыз Жибек» и «Аку-кюй»<sup>4</sup> из сборников Александра Затаевича. Методологическую основу составили историко-культурный и сравнительно-исторический подходы, интонационная теория Бориса Асафьева, интертекстуальный анализ и теория культурной памяти Яна Ассмана.

В результате исследования установлено, что образ лебедя не является изначально заданной характеристикой эпического сюжета. Он исходит из традиции и формируется в процессе его многократных художественных переосмыслений. Данный интонационный архетип обозначается как комплекс «Акку–Гакку». Показано, что песня «Гакку», вобравшая предшествующие традиции, становится основой для последующих интерпретаций. Кюи «Акку» Нургисы Тлендиева рассматривается как итог многолетней эволюции интонационного архетипа, сформированного в процессе художественных прочтений эпоса. Делается вывод о том, что интонационный комплекс «Акку–Гакку»

выступает важным механизмом культурной памяти и обеспечивает преемственность художественного образа Кыз Жибек в различных жанрах казахского искусства.

3, 4 Названия приводятся редакцией в написании, зафиксированном в сохранившихся нотных материалах.

## Introduction

The history of any national culture represents a continuous process of preserving and reinterpreting artistic images. In many cases, particular symbolic and semantic complexes prove to be more enduring than the works in which they first appeared. As these images pass from oral tradition into written and artistic forms (including literature, music, theatre, cinema and other arts) they retain their fundamental semantic core. At the same time, throughout their historical development, they acquire new artistic functions and meanings. This process gives rise to a distinctive dialogue among authors of different eras, in which each creator not only interprets an existing text in a unique way, but also enriches it, turning a new work into a creative continuation of the previous work.

One of the most significant examples of such cultural continuity in Kazakh art is the epic *Qyz Zhibek*. Originating within the oral lyric-epic tradition, its narrative underwent a long process of historical development. Initially, it existed in multiple oral versions preserved in the performance practice of *zhyrau* and *aqyns*; later, it was documented in written form and became the subject of scholarly study. Subsequently, the epic inspired numerous artistic adaptations in drama, opera, cinema, and choreography. Each new engagement with the narrative reflected the aesthetic principles of its time and enriched the interpretation of its characters and events with new layers of meaning.

The relevance of addressing this topic is reinforced by the anniversary events of 2025 associated with the history of the epic *Qyz Zhibek*, Sultan-Akhmet Khodzhikov's film *Qyz Zhibek*, and the name of Yevgeniy Brusilovsky<sup>5</sup>, all of which have encouraged renewed reflection on the mechanisms through which cultural memory is preserved in Kazakh art.

Of particular interest in this process is the gradual formation of the swan image as one of the most enduring symbols associated with the image of Zhibek. Its emergence cannot be explained solely by the epic tradition or by any single artistic work. Rather, it is the result of a long process of interaction among poetic, musical, and stage interpretations. A significant role in this development was played by Ukili Ybyrai's

song *Gaqqu* [Swan], in which the image of the beloved is metaphorically embodied through the symbol of the swan. This song later became the basis for the musical characterization of Zhibek in Brusilovsky's *Qyz Zhibek*, the first Kazakh opera, and decades later received a new interpretation in the cinematic adaptation of the epic and in the music of Nurgissa Tlendiyev. Despite differences in genre conventions and artistic objectives, all of these works preserve a set of stable intonational features that makes it possible to speak of a unified intonational-semantic archetype.

In this context, the formation and transformation of the *Aqqu-Gaqqu*

5 *55 Years Later* art dialogue, held on April 25, 2026, at the *Tan Art Residency* creative space. This event was jointly organized by scholars from the Kulyash Baisseitova Kazakh National University of Arts, the Foundation of the First President of the Republic of Kazakhstan, and the *Tan Art Residency* community. The inspiring discussions regarding the artistic heritage and interpretations of the *Qyz Zhibek* epic during this forum served as the primary catalyst for the present study. The ideas developed in this article gained significant momentum through the vibrant exchange of insights among researchers, film critics, artists, and cultural figures.

It is highly symbolic that this research was compiled during a period marked by a series of major cultural milestones in Kazakhstan. These include the historic anniversaries of both the *Qyz Zhibek* epic and its iconic film adaptation, alongside the centenary celebrations of the prominent composer Yevgeniy Brusilovsky and the acclaimed actress Meruert Utekeshova. These events have once again revitalized the discourse on cultural memory, artistic continuity, and the preservation of national musical heritage.

intonational archetype in Kazakh musical culture is of particular scholarly interest. The present article examines this process as the result of a long-standing artistic dialogue. It traces the evolution of the image from the epic tradition and the song *Gaqqu* to its embodiment in opera and, subsequently, in Tlendiyev's *kui Aqqu*. Particular attention is paid to the mechanisms through which this intonational complex has been preserved and reinterpreted, thereby ensuring the continuity of cultural memory across different genres of Kazakh art.

The object of the study is the process of canonization of an artistic image through the formation of a stable intonational symbol. The subject of the study comprises the mechanisms of preservation and transformation of the *Aqqu–Gaqqu* intonational archetype. It is important to emphasize that the swan image has an independent history within traditional Kazakh culture. The song *Gaqqu* and the numerous instrumental *kuis* entitled *Aqqu* represent different forms of musical embodiment of this image that developed independently of one another (*Amanova*). Therefore, the present study does not focus on the origins of these traditions; rather, it examines the process of their artistic convergence and subsequent canonization in twenty–twenty first century interpretations of the *Qyz Zhibek* epic.

For the sake of clarity, it should also be emphasized that the tradition of the *Aqqu* *kuis* is not genetically related to the epic *Qyz Zhibek* and emerged long before the artistic interpretations discussed in this article. Moreover, sound imitation based on the reproduction of the voices of birds and animals belongs to the most ancient layers of musical thought and is found in the cultures of many peoples. In Kazakh culture, the image of the swan possesses a wide range of mythological and symbolic meanings, including associations connected with ancient beliefs and shamanic practices. Therefore, the *Aqqu* *kuis* examined in this study are by no means regarded as derivatives of the *Qyz Zhibek* narrative. Rather, they represent an independent cultural tradition that was subsequently incorporated into the process of shaping the musical image of *Zhibek*.

The body of literature employed in this research is of particular importance. The aim is not to retell or reiterate well-established facts concerning the musical thinking of different peoples, the phenomenon of sound imitation, the epic itself, opera productions, or the creation of the film adaptation. These subjects have already been extensively addressed in scholarly literature. Nevertheless, a concise review and systematization of existing research are necessary for understanding the logic of artistic continuity and for identifying the mechanisms through which enduring cultural symbols are formed. Examining diverse interpretations within a unified historical and cultural context makes it possible to trace the consolidation of the swan image as one of the key symbols accompanying the evolution of *Zhibek's* artistic representation.

Thus, the present study draws upon a wide range of scholarly sources reflecting different stages in the existence and interpretation of the epic. The use of works devoted to the history and poetics of the Kazakh epic tradition, ethnographic studies, research on the variability and historical transformation of the plot, as well as musicological publications examining Brusilovsky's opera and the music of Tlendiyev, makes it possible to reconstruct a comprehensive trajectory of the development of this artistic image.

Particular importance is attached to classical studies of Kazakh folklore and epic tradition by scholars such as Shokan Ualikhanov, Vassily Radlov, Grigory Potanin, Mukhtar Auezov, Seyit Qasqabassov, and others. A significant contribution to the contemporary study of the work has been made by research devoted to various national versions of the epic (Rakhimov), its stage interpretations (Sattybayeva and Yeskendirov; Rakisheva et al.), as well as its musical embodiment (Mussakhodzhayeva; Omarova; Kazken). Taken together, these studies provide clear evidence of the enduring scholarly interest in *Qyz Zhibek* as one of the key texts of Kazakh national culture. They also demonstrate a gradual expansion of research perspectives — from questions of origin and genesis toward issues of interpretation, artistic transformation, and cultural reception.

Reference to the works of Kazakhstani musicologists devoted to the traditional musical culture of the Kazakhs and the Turkic world as a whole made it possible to consider the image of the swan as an independent and multilayered phenomenon that existed long before its artistic reinterpretation, as well as to identify the cultural and historical prerequisites for the subsequent formation of the *Aqqu–Gaqqu* intonational complex. In this regard, particular importance was attached to studies examining the Kazakh musical tradition as part of the broader Turkic cultural sphere, as well as issues of comparative research into Turkic musical cultures and the commonality of their intonational and formal-generative processes. These questions have been addressed in the works of Saida Yelemanova, Gulzada Omarova, Saule Utegaliyeva. Equally valuable are studies devoted to the mechanisms of preserving vocal and instrumental traditions, including the works of Dina Amirova, Abdulkhamit Raiymbergenov, as well as Saule Amanova's research on the ancient *Aqqu kuis* and related scholarship.

Texts from periodical publications of different years also occupied an important place in the study<sup>6</sup>. Newspaper and magazine materials made it possible to reconstruct the cultural context surrounding the creation and reception of particular artistic versions of the work, to identify authorial intentions and the specific features of public and critical reception, and to trace the process through which cultural memory surrounding the image of *Zhibek* was formed in different historical periods.

The corpus of sources examined in this study includes the epic *Qyz Zhibek*, Ybyrai's song *Gaqqu*, Brusilovsky's opera *Qyz Zhibek*, the feature film *Qyz Zhibek* with music by Tlendiyev, the *Aqqu kuis* by Ykhlis Dukenuly and Tlendiyev, as well as the songs *Gaqqu*, *Qyz Zhibek*, and *Aqqu-kui* published in Alexander Zataevich's collections.

## Methods

The interdisciplinary nature of this research is determined by the need to consider a work of art as part of a broader cultural and historical process. Throughout historical development, individual artistic models, plots, and structural elements may be preserved, reinterpreted, and endowed with new artistic functions while maintaining their connection to earlier traditions. Accordingly, the methodological framework of the study combines historical-cultural, comparative-historical, musicological, and interpretive approaches.

The historical-cultural method made it possible to trace the principal stages

6 Periodical publications dating from 1968 onward were provided from the collections of the Library of the Kulyash Baisseitova Kazakh National University of Arts.

in the existence of the *Qyz Zhibek* epic, identify the mechanisms of its artistic canonization, and determine the place of individual interpretations within the broader process of the narrative's development. The comparative-historical method was employed to examine and compare different versions of the work.

The principal musicological tool of the study is Boris Asafyev's theory of intonation. Proceeding from the premise that intonation functions as a carrier of artistic meaning and cultural memory, musical works are understood as processes of meaning-making. This approach makes it possible to trace the continuity of intonational patterns across works of different periods and genres, as well as to investigate the mechanisms underlying the formation of the stable *Aqqu–Gaqqu* intonational archetype associated with the image of Zhibek.

An important role in the study is played by the intertextual approach, which makes it possible to examine the epic, song, kui, opera, and film as interconnected cultural texts linked through relationships of continuity, quotation, reinterpretation, and creative extension. Within this framework, each new interpretation may be understood as part of an ongoing cultural dialogue extending across generations.

Methodologically, the study also draws upon Jan Assmann's theory of cultural memory. Within this theoretical framework, the image of the swan and the associated intonational complex (*Aqqu–Gaqqu*) are regarded as a stable symbolic code that facilitates the preservation and transmission of artistic meanings between different generations of authors, performers, and audiences. The application of this theoretical model makes it possible to investigate not only direct instances of musical quotation and borrowing, but also the more complex processes involved in the formation of collective cultural associations.

## Results and Discussion

The history of *Qyz Zhibek* represents a complex, multi-stage process: from oral tradition to written fixation, from canonization to scholarly interpretation, and subsequently to a wide range of artistic adaptations. It is essential to emphasize that there is no single "original" text of the epic; rather, all versions should be regarded as equally valid manifestations of a living tradition, while each new artistic realization may be understood as a continuation of an ongoing cultural dialogue with the epic heritage.

The formation of the *Qyz Zhibek* epic is generally associated with the oral poetic tradition of the seventeenth–eighteenth centuries. The work organically combines elements of heroic narrative, love lyricism, and social as well as clan-related conflicts. Its plot reflects the historical realities of nomadic society, including intertribal relations, marriage customs, and concepts of honor, status, and duty. Researchers, particularly Seyit Qasqabassov, have noted that the narrative motifs can be traced back to events of the fifteenth and sixteenth centuries connected with the formation of the Kazakh Khanate, internal conflicts, and a complex political environment (Qasqabassov). As Gulnara Nurpeissova observes, "By this time, the ethnic and political consolidation of the Kazakh people had largely been completed, along with the formation of a unified national consciousness. The people had acquired a strong and distinctive spiritual foundation, and the poem *Qyz Zhibek* became the embodiment of this spiritual unity

of the nation" (1). Nevertheless, these historical events underwent substantial artistic transformation within the oral tradition; therefore, the epic should not be regarded as a historical document. Rather, it represents a poetic reconstruction of social reality.

For a long period, *Qyz Zhibek* existed exclusively in oral form. Its principal bearers were the *zhyrau* – guardians of epic memory, and the *aqyns* – improvisational poets. Each performance was inherently variable, depending on the individual performer and incorporating elements of improvisation. Consequently, the epic does not possess a single fixed version: differences appear in plot details, character interpretation, composition, and poetic structure.

The transition to written documentation began in the nineteenth century within the broader context of scholarly interest in Turkic folklore. A significant role in this process was played by Radlov and Potanin. Their studies did not result in the creation of a "canonical" text. Rather, their efforts were aimed at documenting individual narrative motifs associated with the life of nomadic society and at recording the very nature of the epic tradition, including its oral character and variability. The records of *Qyz Zhibek* produced during this period were fragmentary in nature, and no unified version had yet emerged. More broadly, the works of Radlov and Potanin provide valuable insight into the mechanisms through which the epic tradition functioned.

The next stage is associated with the activities of Zhusipbek Shaikhsislamuly, who published one of the first complete versions of *Qyz Zhibek* in Kazan in 1894<sup>7</sup>. This publication marked a transition from scattered recordings toward a more systematic canonization of the text. According to researchers, approximately sixteen original versions of *Qyz Zhibek* are known today, confirming the persistence of textual plurality even after the epic entered written circulation (Nurpeissova 1).

In the twentieth century, the epic became the subject of systematic scholarly inquiry. A particularly important role was played by Auezov, who introduced *Qyz Zhibek* into the sphere of academic research (*Ocherki istorii*). He defined the genre of *Qyz Zhibek* as a lyric-epic work, distinguishing it from heroic epics and thereby shifting the focus from feats of heroism to the realm of human emotions. The work came to be understood as a tragedy of love in which not only the sequence of events but also the inner motivations of the characters are of central importance. Auezov analyzed the artistic structure of the epic, compared its various versions, participated in their publication and scholarly editing, and examined the work within the broader social and cultural history of Kazakh society. In doing so, he effectively transferred *Qyz Zhibek* from the sphere of oral poetic tradition into that of scholarly knowledge and theoretical reflection.

In parallel, the twentieth century also marks the beginning of the epic's artistic reinterpretation. In the 1930s, Gabit Musrepov created the musical stage play *Qyz Zhibek*. Written according to the principles of dramatic composition, the work intensifies contrasting narrative lines and more clearly delineates the characters. The epic material thus acquires the form of a literary drama. In Musrepov's interpretation, the logic of conflict becomes more pronounced, the narrative gains compactness

7 Shaikhsislamuly was not only a collector, but also a performer (*zhyrshy*). In addition, he was an active publisher of Kazakh oral folk heritage in various cultural centers (Kazan, Ufa, Tashkent, and Saint Petersburg). Owing to his efforts, such works as *Aiman-Sholpan*, *Alpamys*, *Kenesary-Nauryzbai*, and others entered printed circulation.

and stage-oriented structure, and the image of Zhibek acquires greater psychological depth. The social dimension is also significantly strengthened, particularly the theme of pressure exerted by clan-based norms and the tragic conflict between these norms and individual choice (*Qyz Zhibek. Muzykal'naya p'esa* 14). This marks a shift from epic narration to drama as a form of artistic interpretation.

Based on Musrepov's libretto, a musical play was created in 1934, followed by Brusilovsky's opera *Qyz Zhibek*, which became one of the key milestones in the development of Kazakh professional musical culture. The opera incorporates a substantial number of folk songs and kuis (around fifty), which led the composer to hesitate in classifying it as a fully-fledged opera. Brusilovsky himself referred to it as an "ethnographic collection" and a "potpourri of folk songs" (Mussakhodzhayeva 33). The central number of the opera — the aria of *Qyz Zhibek* traces its origins to the song *Gaqqu* by the *aqyn* Ybyrai. It is precisely at this point that the formation of an intonational-semantic complex begins, one that later unites vocal and instrumental intonation. At this stage, this connection is not yet conceptualized as an independent artistic phenomenon; however, even in Brusilovsky's opera, the image of Zhibek becomes fixed through the musical symbolism of the swan.

The further development of the narrative is associated with cinema. In 1970, director Khodzhevikov created the film *Qyz Zhibek*, which consolidated a visual canon for the reception of the epic in mass culture. At the same time, the screenplay of the film differs both from the folkloric version and from Musrepov's stage adaptation. The creators sought to reveal, through cinema, the traditional way of life of the Kazakh people and to reconstruct the historical atmosphere of the past. Particularly indicative are Musrepov's reflections on the screenplay of the film: "What will our film be about? The plot, at first glance, is traditional. The protagonists are driven by love — this eternal feeling underlies every epic. But the film is not only about the love of two young hearts. It is a philosophical reflection on the formation of a nation, the fate of its people, their sorrows and aspirations, and their centuries-old dream of freedom" ("Segodnya na Kazakhfil'me" 3). At the same time, the authors did not aim at a strictly historical reconstruction. This indicates a continuing process of interpretation and adaptation of the narrative within new cultural conditions. Nazira Ilyassova notes that "although the film version of the epic tale about *Qyz Zhibek* is an original work, it shares many similarities with the opera production of the same name by Ye. Brusilovsky" (3). This is reflected both in the interpretation of the main characters and in the musical numbers. Thus, similarly to the opera, which incorporated more than fifty examples of Kazakh traditional music, the filmmakers also appeal to the "auditory experience of the viewer, providing certain situations with additional semantic layers" (Ilyassova 3).

In addition to the operatic material, most notably the song *Gaqqu*, which functions as a kind of leitmotif in the film, the musical concept of the cinematic version also incorporates a number of well-known traditional Kazakh compositions familiar to the audience. Among them are the kui *Konil Ashar* by Torekesh ("The Scene where Bekezhan and Tolegen Prepare for Battle with the Dzungars", Episode 2), *Yerden* by Ykhlis ("The Scene with the Suitors Who Arrive to Propose to Zhibek,

Believing Her to Be a Widow", Episode 2), and others<sup>8</sup>.

8 A detailed analysis of the musical score of the film is provided in the study by Nazira Ilyassova.

In the following decades, the epic continues to exist in various artistic forms, including choreographic interpretations such as the ballet *Gaqqu*, compiled from music from Brusilovsky's opera (by analogy with Rodion Shchedrin's *Carmen Suite*) and staged by Bulat Ayukhanov with Shara Zhienkulova in 1967, and later in the musical interpretation by Aida Isakova – the ballet *Gaqqu*, dated 2006.

Thus, the narrative of *Qyz Zhibek* extends beyond literature, opera, and cinema, retaining its capacity for new artistic reinterpretations. "The story of *Qyz Zhibek* is a very rewarding subject. It is romantic, danceable, heartfelt, filled with tenderness, femininity, humanity, and warmth. It can be developed in any genre," notes Ayukhanov in an interview (Sablina).

Despite the diversity of genre interpretations, a number of stable artistic constants are preserved across all versions of the work. One of the most significant is the musical image of *Zhibek*, associated with the song *Gaqqu* and the symbolism of the swan. This line is of particular interest to the present study.

The association of *Qyz Zhibek* with the swan gradually became firmly established primarily through Brusilovsky's operatic interpretation of the epic. During the period of creating the opera, the composer was actively engaged in ethnographic work, studied Kazakh folklore, and perceptively recognized that the swan symbol in Kazakh tradition extends far beyond a mere characterization of external beauty. This symbol embodies ideas of spiritual perfection, purity, and the noble nature of womanhood.

The song *Gaqqu* by Ybyrai, in the process of cultural and historical transformation, acquires the status of an intonational archetype, first of the image of *Qyz Zhibek* and later, more broadly, of love, femininity, and strength, extending beyond its original genre and functional framework<sup>9</sup>. It is also important that *Gaqqu* did not exist in a single fixed version, which is confirmed by the Brusilovsky's own words in a dispute with Auezov regarding authorship: "You say that a song has an author. Are you unaware of how a given song reaches us and how many authors it acquires along the way? Take, for example, *Gaqqu* <...> Who is the author of this song? Ybyrai? But what he composed, according to Zataevich's transcription, is absolutely not similar to the *Gaqqu* performed in the stage production. In the conditions of non-written, oral folk creativity, a song lives in constant variation, dependent on the memory, creative talent, and vocal abilities of the performer..." (qtd. in Mussakhodzhayeva 33).

In the collection of Zataevich, we identified several versions of the song's transcription: *Gaqqu* under No. 159, recorded from Fatyl Beissembayev in the Pavlodar region (*500 kazakhskikh pesen* 116) (see Ex 1); and *Qyz Zhibek* under No. 750, recorded from Abish Ospanov in the Qarqaraly district (*1000 pesen* 279) (see Ex 2). The *Gaqqu* variant, used as the basis for the aria of *Zhibek* and presented in the 1936 libretto brochure prepared for the Decade of Kazakh Art in Moscow, represents an intermediate form between these two examples (*Qyz-Zhibek. Muzykal'naya p'esa* 20) (see Ex 3).

Each melody contains a stable set of expressive features. Among them are a smooth cantilena, wave-like melodic development, variability of melodic

9 The origins of the song can be traced to the lyrical tradition of the *sal* and *seri* singers of the second half of the nineteenth century. According to both oral accounts and literary sources, the composition emerged from the composer's personal romantic experience connected with a young woman named *Khakima*, whom he poetically addressed as *Gaqqu* [Swan].

116

159. Га́ ку.  
(Лебедь)

Фатыл Бейсембаев.  
Павлодарского р. Алкогольской вол. аул 1.

Бодро.  $\text{♩} = 184$ .

Га - ку! Га - ку! Ха-ля ли и га - ку!

Ex. 1: The song *Gaqqu*.

Source: Screenshot from Zataevich, Alexander. *500 kazakhskikh pesen i kyuiiev Adaevskikh, Bukeevskikh, Semipalatinskikh i Ural'skikh [500 Kazakh Songs and Kuis of the Adai, Bukei, Semipalatinsk and Ural Regions]*. Alma-Ata, Narkompros Kazakskoi ASSR, 1931, p. 116. (In Russian). The collection was obtained from the *Archive of the National Electronic Library of Kazakhstan* (<https://kazneb.kz/ru/bookView/view?brld=1553153&simple=true>)<sup>10</sup>

750. Кыз Жибек  
(Девушка Жибек)

Сообщил ОСПАНОВ Эбиш  
Каркаралинского у. Моентинской вол.

Довольно скоро, с размахом.  $\text{♩} = 84$

не замедляя

Ex. 2: The song *Qyz Zhibek*.

10 **Editorial Note:** To improve the reproduction quality of archival photographs, the images underwent digital restoration using AI-assisted image generation technologies (Gemini and ChatGPT). The restoration process was limited to correcting visual defects, enhancing image clarity, and improving the visibility of details without altering the original content of the photographs. However, it should be noted that AI image generation algorithms may introduce minor changes to certain visual characteristics. Consequently, complete fidelity of the restored images to the original photographs cannot be guaranteed.

Source: Screenshot from Zataevich, Alexander. *1000 pesen kazakhskogo naroda [1000 Songs of the Kazakh People]*. Almaty, Daik-Press, 2004, p. 279. (In Russian). The collection was obtained from the *Archive of the National Academic Library of the Republic of Kazakhstan* (<https://nabr.kz/bookView/view/?brld=416749&simple=true&green=1#>)

## Гак-ку. Ария Жибек

Ex. 3: *Gaqqu*. Zhibek's Aria.

Source: Screenshot from the libretto: *Kyz-Zhibek. Muzykal'naya p'sa v 4 deistviyakh i 5 kartinakh Gabita Musrepova [Qyz Zhibek: Musical Play in Four Acts and Five Scenes by Gabit Musrepov]*. Alma-Ata – Moscow, Kazakhskii gosudarstvennyi muzykal'nyi teatr, 1936, p. 20. (In Russian). The brochure was obtained from the *Archive of the National Electronic Library of Kazakhstan* (<https://kazneb.kz/index.php/en/bookView/view?brld=1554565&simple=true#>)

formulas, quartal intonations, and pentatonic structure. The incorporation of *Gaqqu* into the opera by Brusilovsky as the aria of the main heroine consolidated a specific intonational version of the song. Notably, in the collection *Gaqqu*, which includes arias and songs from the repertoire of Kulyash Baisseitova, the operatic aria of Zhibek is presented in two versions: the melody composed by the composer and the version performed by Baisseitova. It was precisely her performance interpretation that became fixed in collective perception a particular intonational image of *Gaqqu*, and subsequently it began to be perceived as a musical symbol of Zhibek, capable of existing beyond the vocal genre (see Ex 4).

Ex. 4: *Gaqqu*. Zhibek's Aria from the opera.

Source: Screenshot from the libretto: *Kyz-Zhibek. Muzykal'naya p'sa v 4 deistviyakh i 5 kartinakh Gabita Musrepova [Qyz Zhibek: Musical Play in Four Acts and Five Scenes by Gabit Musrepov]*. Alma-Ata – Moscow, Kazakhskii gosudarstvennyi muzykal'nyi teatr, 1936, p. 20. (In Russian). The brochure was obtained from the *Archive of the National Electronic Library of Kazakhstan* (<https://kazneb.kz/index.php/en/bookView/view?brld=1554565&simple=true#>)

A comparison of the different versions of the song *Gaqqu* makes it possible to speak of a stable intonational core alongside significant variation in melodic formulas. Despite differences in ornamentation and rhythmic organization, all the examined versions reveal clear common features. First of all, one notes the predominance of smooth stepwise

motion, wave-like developmental patterns, quartal melodic formulas, and intonational movements within the interval of a fourth (fourth-third, second-fourth, third-second, and other variants). An essential element is the ornamentation of structural tones, which generates a characteristic decorative quality of the melodic line. Another shared feature across all versions is broad phrasing and extended melodic unfolding. Thus, the collective intonational core of *Gaqqu* is represented in the version performed by Baisseitova.

However, the formation of the musical image of Qyz Zhibek is not limited to the history of the song *Gaqqu*. In parallel, Kazakh instrumental tradition developed its own line of artistic interpretation of the swan image, represented by various versions of the kui *Aqqu*. In this regard, it is noteworthy that in Zataevich's collection, under No. 183, a dombra kui *Aqqu* is recorded (*500 kazakhskikh pesen* 123), transcribed from Kshukbai Dzhayukov in Semipalatinsk (see Ex 5).



183. Акү-күй.  
(Күй „Лебедь“)

148  
Кшукбай Джэулюков  
гор. Семипалатинск.

Скоро и одинаково. ♩=144.

Домбра \*)

*pf*

Размашисто.

*f*

Ex. 5: *Aqqu* Kui.

Source: Screenshot of a kui fragment from: Zataevich, Alexander. *500 kazakhskikh pesen i kuyiev Adaevskikh, Bukeevskikh, Semipalatinskikh i Ural'skikh* [500 Kazakh Songs and Kuis of the Adai, Bukei, Semipalatinsk and Ural Regions]. Alma-Ata, Narkompros Kazakskoi ASSR, 1931, p. 123. (In Russian). The collection was obtained from the Archive of the National Electronic Library of Kazakhstan (<https://kazneb.kz/ru/bookView/view?brld=1553153&simple=true>)

An important place in the history of Kazakh culture is also occupied by the *qobyz* kui *Aqqu* by Ykhlas Dukenov (see Ex 6). The very existence of such examples testifies to the independent musical life of the swan symbol outside the epic narrative and outside Ybyrai's song tradition.

Here we observe a different type of musical embodiment of the swan image. While in the song *Gaqqu* the swan is represented indirectly through a poetic metaphor of the beloved, in the instrumental kuis it acquires a direct sonic and imitative expression. The musical development is constructed through a gradual densification of texture, increased rhythmic pulsation, intensification of dynamic tension, and expansion of the melodic range. The kuis *Aqqu* reveal the dynamic aspect of the image, creating an impression of wing movement, flight, and the cry of swans.

**11. Аққу**

Ex. 6: *Aqqu* of Ykhlas.

Source: Screenshot of a kui fragment from: *Qylqobyzga arналған khrestomatiya [Anthology for the Qyl-Qobyz]*. Compiled by Abdimanap Zhumabekuly, Almaty, Bilim, 2012, pp. 266–267. (In Kazakh). The collection was obtained from the *Archive of the National Electronic Library of Kazakhstan* (<https://kazneb.kz/la/bookView/view?brld=1112481&simple=true#>)

Of particular interest is the preservation in these kuis of certain intonational features related to the song tradition, which supports Saule Utegalieva’s thesis that “on the one hand, the human voice reveals the instrumental nature of music; on the other hand, the musical instrument strives to imitate the voice” (23). Thus, the compositional techniques of the kuis preserve wave-like motion, quartal intonational formulas, and other elements already observed in the song *Gaqqu*.

“Despite its oral form <...> the tradition proved to be a stable yet at the same time sufficiently flexible means of creating and preserving music” (Yelemanova 10). In Kazakh musical culture, two independent yet complementary lines of musical representation of the swan image gradually emerge. The first is associated with the song tradition and became fixed the image of the swan as a symbol of idealized femininity and beauty. The second is represented by instrumental kuis and reveals the plastic and sonic-imitation characteristics of the image. Their gradual convergence allows us to speak of the formation of a unified intonational-semantic complex *Aqqu-Gaqqu*. This complex is most fully realized in the musical dramaturgy of the film *Qyz Zhibek* with music by Tlendiyeu.

Unlike the opera, where *Gaqqu* exists as a complete vocal number, in the film its intonational complex functions much more freely: it may appear in vocal or instrumental form in scenes associated with the image of Zhibek, or emerge as individual intonational allusions. At the same time, the *Gaqqu* intonational complex becomes part of the film’s soundscape and forms a stable system of associations between musical material and visual imagery.

Significantly, the cinematic version further strengthens an important artistic motif first introduced by Musrepov and subsequently consolidated by Brusilovsky through musical intonation in the opera: the association of Zhibek with swan symbolism. According to recollections of participants in the production process, the film was originally intended to bear the title *Aqqu*. Swans were specially brought to the filming location and were

envisaged as one of the central visual symbols of the picture (Ilyassova). Although the final title preserved the connection with the epic source, the image of the swan remained an essential component of the film's artistic concept.

Such a development was not accidental. As demonstrated above, the consolidation of the swan image as a symbolic embodiment of Qyz Zhibek resulted from a long process of interaction between epic tradition, poetic imagery, and musical semantics. Consequently, by the time the film was produced, the swan had already been perceived as an established cultural symbol.

The kui *Aqqu*, composed by Tlendiyev, represents a logical culmination of this process. For the first time, the work so clearly unites two lines of artistic interpretation of the swan image: the vocal tradition deriving from the song *Gaqqu* and the instrumental tradition represented by the kui genre.

Significantly, the intonational foundation of the composition is based on the canonized version of *Gaqqu* that had become firmly established in cultural memory through Brusilovsky's opera. The opening intonations of the kui already reveal affinities with the characteristic melodic turns of *Gaqqu*. At the same time, this is not a case of direct quotation. Rather, the composer preserves only its most recognizable intonational nucleus.

On the other hand, the music of the kui demonstrates a clear continuity with the instrumental tradition of representing the swan image, particularly with Ykhlās's kobyz kui *Aqqu*. Like Ykhlās's composition, Tlendiyev's work is built upon distinctive sound-imitative devices. Its musical language likewise evokes associations with the beating of wings, free flight, and the cry of a swan (see Ex 7).



Ex. 7: *Aqqu* of Nurgissa Tlendiyev.

Source: Screenshot of a kui fragment. The musical score was obtained from the website: [https://kazakwa.ucoz.com/load/notalar/n\\_tlendiev\\_quot\\_a\\_u\\_quot\\_i\\_variant/2-1-0-329](https://kazakwa.ucoz.com/load/notalar/n_tlendiev_quot_a_u_quot_i_variant/2-1-0-329)

These analogies make it possible to speak of the preservation of a stable figurative model. Tlendiyev's composition thus emerges as a unique point of convergence between the two traditions, in which the intonational complex *Aqqu–Gaqqu* attains its most complete realization. At the same time, each tradition emphasizes different facets of the same image: the song tradition shapes the semantics of femininity, while the instrumental and sound-imitative elements convey the plasticity of movement, the sense of flight, and the idea of freedom.

It should therefore be emphasized that Tlendiyev's kui is not merely another artistic engagement with the image of the swan, but rather the outcome of a long historical interaction between the vocal and instrumental traditions. Within this composition, the *Aqqu* and *Gaqqu* traditions ultimately merge, resulting in the image of Qyz Zhibek acquiring the status of a stable musical archetype within Kazakh culture.<sup>11</sup>

## Conclusion

The present study has traced the process of formation and transformation of the *Aqqu–Gaqqu* intonational archetype in artistic interpretations of the epic *Qyz Zhibek*. The analysis has demonstrated that the image of the swan was not an original characteristic of the epic narrative and was absent as a central symbol in its early versions. Its consolidation in cultural memory resulted from a long process of artistic dialogue among different genres and forms of art.

A key role in this process was played by Ybyrai's song *Gaqqu*, in which the image of the beloved is conveyed through swan symbolism. The incorporation of this song into Brusilovsky's opera *Qyz Zhibek* as the musical characterization of the heroine led to the formation of a stable intonational-semantic complex, subsequently reinforced through the performance interpretation of Baisseitova.

At the same time, an independent line of artistic representation of the swan image developed within the instrumental musical tradition, embodied in the various *Aqqu* kuis. Unlike the song tradition, these instrumental works emphasized the plastic and sound-imitative dimensions of the image, achieved through musical representations of the bird's movements and calls.

The fullest convergence of these two traditions occurred in the musical dramaturgy of the film *Qyz Zhibek*, particularly in Tlendiyev's kui *Aqqu*. In this work, the canonized intonations of *Gaqqu* are combined with the musical imitation of natural sounds characteristic of the instrumental tradition. As a result, a unified intonational archetype emerges, linking the image of Zhibek with swan symbolism.

The *Aqqu–Gaqqu* intonational complex, whose formation began long before the textual fixation of the epic, functions as an important mechanism of cultural memory. It ensures the continuity of artistic meanings across different artistic genres. Its development demonstrates how stable musical intonations are capable of preserving and transmitting culturally significant images and of shaping enduring symbols of national culture.

11 For purposes of illustration, a montage was created from excerpts of musical works associated with the swan image: *Aqqu* (Ykhlas), *Gaqqu* (Ybyrai), *Gaqqu* – Zhibek's aria from Brusilovsky's opera, and *Aqqu* (Tlendiyev). The excerpts were assembled for comparative analysis of shared intonational features and to identify the musical-semantic connections that unite these works. The recording is available at: <https://youtu.be/5VnwwvUizYw>.

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