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The Poetics of Folk Love Songs of the Crimean Tatars

Abstract: The author of the article investigates the poetics, genre, and style structure of the folk love songs of the Crimean Tatars. Based on the works by such folklorists as Oleksiy Olesnytsky, Asan Refatov, Yahya Sherfedinov, Fevzi Aliyev, Ilyas Bakhshysh and others, but primarily on authentic texts, she allocates two main genres of folk lyrics of the Crimean Tatars, in which love motifs dominate. The most ancient is *maqam*. Characteristic of these lyrical compositions, a deep dramatic quality dictates a special emotional expressiveness. It is clearly shown with the help of exquisite figuration, such as wide chants in singing. Philosophical meditation is also a typical feature of these folk works. The other lyric genre, *tiurkiu*, is very widespread in the folk songs of Crimean Tatars, especially from the 19th century to our time. It covers laconic songs, which have easy lively rhythms. In the love *tiurkiu*, apart from the most widespread songs about unhappy love, it is also possible to distinguish two more genres: songs about overcoming alarms and troubles and songs about happy love. The perceptive description of the sadness and happiness of love, expresses a wide range of feelings, delicate shades of mood, an abundance of outstanding intonation, picturesque metaphors and symbolic concentration of the laconic imagery, the dynamic development of the lyrical plot, where the shapes of the narrative plot can often be guessed, the coherence and liveliness of the composition (line, retrospective, mosaic), the system of expressive repetitions, which

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reinforces the ornamental quality and, simultaneously, the clear coherence of the narration, the sophisticated sound and rhythmic organization: these are the main peculiarities of the poetic world of the Crimean Tatar folk love song.

Keywords: Crimean Tatars, folklore, love song, poetics, genres *maqam* and *tiurkiu*.

The brevity of the lyrical song, its special artistic concentration provides for the connection of outstanding energy, emotional saturation with sophisticated friskiness and ease of poetic expression. These genre-stylistic features are also very characteristic for Crimean Tatar song folklore and they stipulate the lively and frisky structure of the lyrical song, which is one of the most ancient and also one of the most enduring and most popular art phenomena extended for many centuries. It is noteworthy that the famous Turkish traveler Evliya Chelebi, who described his Crimean journeys made in the mid-seventeenth century, gives the widespread songs, dealing with the love theme and having the picturesque images and lively rhythms, as the evidence of the sophisticated language of the inhabitants of central Crimea¹.

Crimean Tatar folklore had been created over many centuries, but its systematic collection and scientific research began only at the turn the 20th century. One of the pioneers was the Ukrainian and Russian folklorist Oleksiy Olesnytsky, who edited a rather solid collection of Crimean Tatar folk songs in 1910, in the Lazarev Institution of Eastern Languages in Moscow². Later, writers, composers and folklorists such as Arkadiy Konchevsky³, Vyacheslav Paskhalov⁴, Asan Refatov⁵, Yusuf Bolat and Ibraim Bahshysh⁶, and Yahya Sherfedinov⁷ made big contribution to the studying and editing of Crimean Tatar folk songs. Thanks to their great effort, the compilations of Crimean Tatar folk songs were edited not

1 E. Chelebi, *Kniga putieshestviy: pokhody s tatarami i putieshestviya po Krymu (1641–1667)*, Simferopol 1996.

2 A. Olesnitski, *Piesni Krymskikh turok*, Moscow 1910.

3 A. Konchevski, *Piesni Kryma*, Moscow 1929.

4 V. Paskhalov, *Muzykal'naya struktura krymskikh piesien*, [In:] *Piesni Kryma*, ed. A. Konchevski, Moscow 1929.

5 H. Refatov, *Kyrymtatar yirlary*, Simferopol 1932.

6 Yu. Bolat, Ibr. Bakhshysh, *Kyrymtatar yirlary*, Simferopol 1939.

7 Ya. Sherfedinov, *Piesni i tantsy krymskikh tatar*, Simferopol-Moscow 1931; idem, *Zvuchit kaytarma – Yanray kaytarma*, Tashkent 1979.

only in the 1920s and 30s, but also during the deportation of the Tatars. At the beginning of the 1990s and later, the newest editions appeared in Simferopol: primarily, the solid compilations of Fevzi Aliyev⁸, Ilyas Bakhshysh⁹, and Ablyaziz Veliyev and Server Kakura¹⁰. All of them make useful material for modern researchers and interpreters of Crimean Tatar folk song.

The questions of genre classification of the fictional works, including the folklore ones, are considered the most difficult. The majority of folklorists, particularly such as Murtaza Velijanov¹¹, Fedora Arnaut¹², Lyudmyla Yefremova¹³, Lyubov Kopanytzya¹⁴, come round to the opinion about impossibility to use the single criterion while determining the genre specifics of folklore compositions. Vladimir Propp expresses this point of view in many of his works, including those dedicated to the song lyrics; he highlights among the other criteria a very important one – the way of performance¹⁵. Considering not only the immanent peculiarities of the relevant folklore compositions, but also the characteristic way of performance, which is dictated by these peculiarities, we can identify two really different genres in the love song lyrics of the Crimean Tatars. Appealing primarily to the method of the esthetic-philological analysis of the folklore text and the method of the comparative matching, the proposed article deals with specific features of these different, yet united by the common theme, folklore genres. They were not until our time the subject of special scientific studies with the exception of some definitions in the folklorist's preface to the anthology by F. Aliyev¹⁶.

- ⁸ F. Aliyev, *Antologiya krymskoy narodnoy muzyki – Kyrym khalk muzykasynyn antologiyasy*, Simferopol 2001.
- ⁹ Il. Bakhshysh, *Kyrymtatar khalk yirlary*, Simferopol 2004.
- ¹⁰ A. Veliyev, S. Kakura, *Kyrymtatar muadzhyr tiurkiuleri*, Simferopol 2007.
- ¹¹ M. Velidzhanov, *Kyrymtatar khalk yirlarynyn siozleri akkynda*, [In:] *Crimean Tatar Folk Song*, book compilers Il. Bakshysh, E. Nalbandov, Akmesdzhyt 1996.
- ¹² F. Arnaut, *Pisni u gagauziv. Poniattia zhanru «tiurkiu»*, “Skhodoznavstvo” 2008, № 43; idem, *Stanovlennia i formuvannia zhanru gagauz'koyi lirychnoyi pisni*, [In:] *XI A. Kryms'ky Oriental Readings: Abstracts of International Scientific Conference*, Kyiv 2007.
- ¹³ L. Yefremova, *Chastotny catalog ukrayyns'koho pisenmoho folkloru . Part 1: Description*, Kyiv 2009.
- ¹⁴ L. Kopanytsia, *Pisenni zhanry ukrayyns'koho folkloru*, Kyiv 2004.
- ¹⁵ V. Propp, *O russkoy narodnoy liricheskoy piesnie*, [In:] *Narodnyye liricheskiye piesni*, Leningrad 1961; idem, *Poetika Folkloru*, Moscow 1998; idem, *Pryncypy klassifikatsyi folklornykh zhanrov*, “Sovietskaya Etnografiya” 1964, № 4; idem, *Skazka. Epos. Piesnia*, Moscow 2007.
- ¹⁶ F. Aliyev, *Antologiya krymskoy narodnoy muzyka...*, op. cit., p. 9–10.

Crimean Tatar songs are various in their themes, motives and genres. However, the biggest chapter of Crimean Tatar folklore lyrics is dedicated to love songs, just like in Ukrainian folklore. There are many songs, describing the beauty of girls and women, showing the fair comfort of first feelings of love, the poetic strength of love, and also many sad songs.

Among the examples of Crimean Tatar folklore love lyrics we can highlight a considerable number of songs about unhappy love. This is noticed particularly by researchers such as O. Olesnytsky¹⁷, Ya. Sherfedinov¹⁸. The motive of unhappy love, perhaps, for a reason, belongs to the most widespread poetry in the world, especially folklore. The wish to express with the help of words and musical tunes sadness, caused by a one-side crush or the cruelty of unpleasant life circumstances, has always accompanied people and sometimes it conditions the appearance of extraordinary art inspiration.

In the Crimean Tatar folklore we can allocate a special type of the song composition, wherein a thematic motive – the motive of hopeless love – is dominant. Even though it is hopeless, it often revives the soul, fills it with the feeling of being fully alive, not only with feeling of desperation and bitterness, but also with alarming and sweet anxiety. Such songs, according to folklorists, have an ancient origin¹⁹. They have a real poetic sophistication and particularly picturesque metaphors; a bright emotional saturation and a variety of psychological shades condition the fancy of the melodies, the flexibility of the intonations and the spectacular connection of moody rhythms. This extraordinary genre of the song is called *maqam*. Typical of the eastern musical poetry, a wide glistening singing style is especially tangible here. Characteristic of these lyrical compositions, a deep dramatic quality dictates a special emotional expressiveness. It is brightly shown with the help of art complicity, primarily, wide glistening singing. Specific examples of maqams are such songs as “Yeshyl’ yaprak arasynda kyrmyzy gul” (“Red Rose among the Green Leaves”), “Sioyletme beni” (Don’t force me to speak), “Bakyn, dostlar” (“Look, my Friends”) and others. Sad feelings are often connected here with fair hopes.

¹⁷ A. Olesnitski, *Piesni Krymskikh turok*, p. 9.

¹⁸ Ya. Sherfedinov, *Zvuchit kaytarma...*, p. 6.

¹⁹ F. Aliyev, *Antologiya krymskoy narodnoy muzyka...*, p. 10–11; Il. Bakhshysh, *Kyrymtatar khalk yir-lary*, op. cit., p. 39; Ya. Sherfedinov, *Zvuchit kaytarma...*, p. 66.

Bitterness of feelings, caused by separation of lovers, is exposed in many love songs. The motive of separation develops in such a typical folklore work as “Eki puhu” (“Two Owls”). Reckless separation oppresses the persona, who sees the environment as dismal. Some compact landscape details in the text (canyon, river) allow us to suppose that the persona, trying to reduce his confusion appears alone in the mountains. Very often owls symbolize anxiety, worry, separation in folklore and literature. Obviously not by chance the first of many meanings of such an image as owl in “Vocabulary of Symbols” by W. Kopalinsky is loneliness²⁰. A roll-call of two owls touches upon persona’s emotional wound:

Two owls cried out of the canyon,
Calm down, owl because I am fed up with the tortures.

The persona imagines the owls’ unbearable bawl as that a happy feathered couple, and notices how they united by means of the silver stream of a blue river. Hence, the next stanza is filled with a contrastive parallelism:

Two owls drink water from the same river,
Two martyrs didn’t accept each other.

The third stanza is the most mysterious and perturbed:

A toy-pistol’s eyes are similar to corals,
A cruel hunter, why did you ruin my soul²¹.

The figurativeness of this stanza reaches a many-sided symbolism. The main sad atmosphere, presented in the song, reaches its climax. Defined parallelism is denoted between the figure of the lyrical character and the image of an owl. We can suppose that it might be shot down, expressing the allegory of unmerciful destiny, a dreadful fate. It is possible to feel the eternity of emotional feelings of the persona. Two stanzas define a lyrical plot of the song, which reveals a huge power of these feelings.

²⁰ W. Kopaliński, *Słownik symboli*, Warszawa 1990, p. 396.

²¹ Ya. Sherfedinov, *Zvuchit kaytarma...*, p. 75–76.

Most of the Crimean Tatar folk songs have such a feature as the interplay of bright image details, but in maqams, having the brevity of images, this feature is the most expressive. The portrait features of the beloved one (two moles, gentle waist etc.) are touching signs of an idealized person. The internal and external beauty of the beloved girl or woman is not described, but felt in the high dramatic or tender reverie of the song's plot. The landscapes are also described in this way. They have a penetrative psychological quality and have the aim to express the state of mind of the lyrical narrator. An appeal to tireless natural forces, such as a rapid (or tender) wind, flying clouds, thick fog, steep flow of the river in the mountains, variation of the sea waves, is used quite often and accompanies the experience of the captive lover.

The other lyric genre, *tiurkiu*, is especially widespread in the folk songs of the Crimean Tatars. It covers laconic songs which have easy lively rhythms. Love motives are widely represented in this genre. Among the love *tiurkiu* and maqams there are a big number of songs, dealing with one-side crushes, the longing of hopelessly-in-love suffering and the pain of separation. It is easily understandable from the psychological point of view because it is the sadness which encourages the person to accept responsibility, the wish to express the soul's pain, and to find sympathy and understanding. The typical examples of the song about unhappy love are the folklore composition "Al gull'er achkan" ("Red Roses bloom"), "Suv akar tynyk-tynyk" ("Clean Water is running and running"), "Uch karanfil" ("Three Carnations").

In the love *tiurkiu*, apart from the most widespread songs about unhappy love, it is also possible to distinguish two more genre types – songs about overcoming alarms and troubles, and songs about happy love.

In the songs about overcoming alarms and troubles, the elegiac sad motives are also felt, but they are not leading in this context. Sadness and desperation, which are reflected here rather expressively, are overcome and give a way to feeling of a more life-affirming character. Brave perception of bitter reality and also hope for the mutual understanding with the beloved person, against life troubles, against hard experience, as well as faith in the invigorating power of love – these motives prevail in this kind of songs. The tender happiness of love against the bitter alarming, connected with fierce passion, is described, for example, in the tender-melody songs "Akyz seni nerelerden izlerim" ("Where should I look for your Foot-prints, Girl").

The drama of love and, despite this drama, the exciting feeling of the divine power of love, which is capable of raising the human spirits – such emotional range fills the laconic (three short verses) song through “Yukse Minare” (“The High Minaret”). Along with the depth of the plot, this song is quite unconstrained, playful, emotional and impressionistically unobtrusive. The lively rhythm, the peculiar combination of inner and final rhythms, anaphoric roll calls (the similarity between the initial lines of the first and second verses, the beginning of the third one consonant with them), the peculiar expressive figurativeness multiply the poetic influence of the song:

The High Minaret, the black eyebrows,
I have sent the gold, silver and copper money
To my beloved one.

The High Minaret, your eyebrows are black,
I fill the sounds of the violin and tambourine
With grief.

I have passed by the High Minaret,
Bakhchysaray, I drank the cool water
From you fountain²².

It seems that different images, such as the High Minaret and the black eyebrows of the beloved woman are put into the same line accidentally. It seems as if it is a simple architectural association of Bakhchysaray, where the lyric character meets his beloved one, and where there are a lot of minarets (let’s recollect the short story of the Ukrainian writer Mykhailo Kotsibynsky “Under the Minarets”, the action of which takes place in Bakhchysaray). However, the further tone and figurative order of the song convince us that it is not an accidental combination. The persona glorifies love, and presents it at a height, which is compared to the divine one. That is why the character can express his grief (“efkiar”) through the violin and the tambourine and finally realizes it in the song. It can be noted that the poetic formula of the complicated and even paradoxical feeling of the

²² Ibidem, p. 180.

fulfillment of life is applied here in a peculiar way. We can also find here an example of incomprehensible joy, which can be aroused by dramatic love, the formula, which is present in song such as “Vardym cheshme bashyna” (“I came to the Fountain”): “Aylama istemedim/ oynap, kuliup kecherdim” – “I don’t want to cry,/ So I feel joy and laugh”²³. Such complicated moods are also evoked in the song “Tavha bardym” (“I went to the Forest”): “Oynamasan kul’mesem/ Yanar menim yuregim” – “If I do not dance and enjoy myself,/ My heart will burn”²⁴.

The social motive is presented in a peculiar way in this song. In most folklore works, where you can find such motives, there is the following plot – the girl marries a rich man, while the poor man in love suffers. However, in such songs the persona is not the poor one. He sends gold, silver and copper coins, but she remains indifferent (nobody can buy her love!). Having done the thoughtless action with this money, our hero, who is full of love and strong feelings, does not lose hope. He recollects the moment, when he drank the cool water from the Bakhchysaray fountain. There is a final picture, which suits the whole poeticism of the song. This picture is impressionistically unconstrained, though it is quite vivid. It conceals an expressive symbolism inside, as the drinking of cool water in hot weather is a set folklore parallel, which leads to the pleasure of love. This parallel is represented clearly in this song.

The song “Yukse Minare” is quite laconic, but it is also full of outstanding emotional and spiritual strength. The clear, intricate, and at the same time unconstrained playful figurativeness of this song, where abundant money plays a sufficiently important role, truly reveals another richness. This is the richness of complicated emotional experience, passionate love.

The songs about happy love are determined as a separate kind. Elegiac, sad motives are also sometimes felt in these songs, but, as a rule, they just shade and make more expressive the leading motives of inspired enchantment or perceptive admiration of the beauty and soul’s glory of the beloved girl of the lyrical narration’s subject. Good examples of these songs are “Bugun’ aynyn on diorti” (“Today is the fourteenth Day of the Month”), “Nazlym, aman” (“O my Beauty”), “Tat kyzy” (“Girl from the Hills”), and “Evleri bar suv bashynda” (“There is a High House near the Water’).

²³ Ibidem, p. 89.

²⁴ Ibidem, p. 96.

Humorous accents are often expressed together with strong lyrics in many Crimean Tatar folk love songs, which allows us to characterize them as those which are near or even belong to the genre of joking songs (“shakaly”). In a way it makes them nearer the plenty of Ukrainian folk songs, where the connection of lyrics and humor is a noticeable poetic feature. Most of the joking love song can be determined as songs about happy love. Humorous features are noticeably felt, for example, in the songs “Karanfil” (“Carnation”), “Er guzel'den yar olmaz” (“It’s impossible to love all Beauties”), and “Kara biber” (“Black Pepper”).

In tiurkius, more often than in maqams, the lyrical character thinks about the particular reasons for his unhappiness. Gossips, the negativity of strangers and sometimes closer people are often the reason. One noticeable genre-stylistic feature of tiurkiu is the important role of every-day life images, such as minaret, creek, water mill, wind mill and bazaar, which are described more often here. The wide use of Crimean toponyms, landscape features, where the peculiarities of the Crimean environment are described, is also connected with this fact.

It is noticeable that it is the tiurkius about unhappy love (unlike maqams) that express the social motives, and notes the incompatibility of materialism and feelings of true love. Many folklore compositions deal with the bitter experience of the beloved girl’s marriage for money and wealth. The songs where a girl marries against her wishes impress with their drama, sometimes tragedy, just like the song “Bir danem Ayshe” (“My incomparable Aishe”).

The complaint against hard destiny because of the material inequality of people in love also sounds in songs about overcoming anxiety and troubles. However, here these motives are described in another way. Being crushed, a young man feels pain because his beloved girl was not tempted by his wealth, so he hopes to attach her by his true feelings. In songs about overcoming life troubles the accent on the necessity to protect love from jealous eyes and wicked tongues is especially widespread, just like the stress on the importance of not forgetting about being careful, emphatic, delicate with the young man who is in love, even if he has the hottest feelings.

Tiurkius, just like maqams, mainly have two types of composition – one of them has a coherent development of the emotional state: from the easy feeling of worry to the extreme tension; the other has a retrospective manner – firstly, it notes the insufferable feeling of separation, then it mentions the way towards this state. The composition of the songs about overcoming troubles and the faith

in tomorrow is more complicated, as a rule. Here, in many songs, the coherent lyrical narration is ruined by the retrospective derogations with markers or implications of the reasons for the trouble, so in this way we somehow can imagine the scope of the plot. In certain songs, dealing with overcoming troubles, the composition has a more effortless, mosaic character, where we can notice the features of a holistic lyrical plot and, sometimes, the plot can be narrative.

In the compositional structure and system of images of many songs the poetic parallelism plays an important role. Sometimes it has a local (used in one or two verses), but more often a detailed character, pervading the whole song. Sometimes the parallels are expressive and bright, especially in maqams, but also in tiurkius, about unhappy love; sometimes they are rather discreet and can only be guessed in the effortless song narration, which is more often characteristic of the songs about overcoming troubles and songs about happy love.

The beloved girl is at the centre of the system of images, and her great beauty is stressed by some eloquent portrait strokes. There are more such strokes in tiurkius than in maqams, though they are also described extremely briefly. These strokes predominantly have a traditional character and are met in many songs – black eyebrows, brown eyes, white hands etc. The memory of tender and pleasant language connects these details – and it is especially characteristic of songs about happy love. Often, the portrait features of the beloved girl are delicate and enchanting, and then her eyes, black as coal or two olives, shine like stars, and the cheeks of the beloved girl are like roses, her waist is like a young tree, her lips are like honey, and her voice is like nightingale's one. On the other hand, the charm of the beloved girl is described not just with the help of external description, but also thanks to the inspired admiration or deep feeling that she evokes. Often, especially in the songs about happy love, the admiring recourse to the girl becomes more expressive thanks to mentioning her name, which makes the song especially soulful.

Just like in maqams, in many tiurkius images of natural powers are widespread and act like a picturesque analogy of the humans' experience. The image of fire is used very often, and it is only sometimes a symbol of the life blood of a patient feeling, and, as a rule, it is an equivalent of the suffering which burned the soul. The images of water frequently appear in the texts of the songs, and they are associated with the passage of time, life flow, etc. The shining of fountains, the noise of rivers, the mysteries of the sea's force – these images make

many songs especially expressive. However, unlike the burning of fire, the force of water is mainly live-affirming. In the southern lands, particularly in Crimea, drinking cold water is often read as a symbol of a love affair in a song. For instance, “Ippiydjan, you are a sip of water” is sung in one song (Ippiydjan – it is the name of the beloved).

Apart from cool water, sweet fruits can also be an analogy of a love affair, e.g. apple, pear, peach, pomegranate, persimmon. Flowers are also often mentioned in love songs. Comparing the girl to a rose or a clove, and the boy – to a tulip is rather common here. Irises or sweet basil are often used as symbols of love. Traditional images of birds also have an important function; these birds are, primarily the nightingale, and also pigeon, crane, and lark... In many songs bird images appear not occasionally, but they take on a universal metaphoric meaning, and become the centre of the image system.

The image of a sweet garden, blooming or rich with fruits, reminds the listeners about love affairs, and become the universal metaphoric meaning in many songs. Also, the image of mountains is widespread, and it is mainly the analogy of life and soul troubles which should be overcome by one who is in love.

A fancy system of repetitions is quite characteristic for the rhyme organization of Crimean Tatar folk song; it makes the poetic language pleasantly ornamental and at the same time clearly coherent. Anaphors, epiphoras, echoing of the same phrases and lines, permanent refrains (it is interesting that refrains are rarely used in maqams and tiurkius about unhappy love) – all of these really make the expressiveness of the lyrical narration stronger. In the system the expressive repetitions amplifying particles and song interjections play a noticeable role. The interjection *aman*, which can be translated approximately as “what a pity” is the most widespread. It is noticeable that this interjection is almost not used in the songs about happy love, where we can find several other interjections – the most often *yar*, and also *aydy*, *allay*, *ah*...

I In almost all love songs occurs fancy rhyming, which conforms to their emotional saturation and image expressiveness. Rhymes are mainly exact and rich here. As a rule, they take the last three-syllable stress of the line, though there are also more wide rhymes covering four syllables and shorter concerning only one syllable. Characteristic for eastern poetry, the so called *rediph* is often met. It is the continuation of the exact rhyme by the tautological one, which makes the rhyming especially melodious.

The laconic song genre mainly requires an exact regular rhythmic. The main unit of the verse rhythm of Crimean Tatar folk song is the four-syllable stress, often clearly limited by caesura. In maqams, songs of extended voice, the lines are longer – they are formed with two, sometimes three four-syllable stresses, connected with three-syllable, that is the host of the last rhyme. In other songs mainly occur a connection of one four-syllable stress with one three-syllable (the host of the rhyme). Nevertheless, often, especially in maqams, there is a rejection of this rhythmic base, and so the rhythm has certain liveliness, caused by the character of the lyrical narration. Sometimes we can also find the connection of two four-syllable stresses, which makes the sad monotony of the song stronger, or the connection of a three-syllable stress and a two-syllable, which makes the liveliness more expressive (it is especially characteristic of refrains).

The perceptive description of the sadness and happiness of love, expressing a wide range of feelings, delicate shades of mood, a richness of outstanding intonation, picturesque metaphors and symbolic concentration of the laconic imagery, dynamic development of lyrical plot, where the shapes of the narrative plot can often be guessed, coherence and liveliness of the composition (line, retrospective, mosaic), the system of the expressive repetitions, which reinforces the ornamental quality and, simultaneously, a clear coherence of the narration, sophisticated sound and rhythmic organization – these are the main peculiarities of the poetic world of the Crimean Tatar folk love song.

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