

# Folklore Features: Links Between Arab and Turkic Peoples

Sharustam Shomusarov and Nargiza Shaumurova

*Tashkent State University of Uzbek Language and Literature named after Alisher Navoi, Tashkent, Uzbekistan*

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Abstract: This article suggests three methodologies for examining the reciprocal influence and connections between the traditions of oral art from cultures around the world. It elucidates the characteristics of Arabic folklore's impact on the oral creativity of Central Asia's Turkic communities, as well as the influence of Turkic peoples' folklore on the oral creativity of Arabs. The term "Arab folklore" is used in reference to the oral art of Arabs who migrated to the region between the 8th and 13th centuries and resided in various parts of Central Asia.

## 1 INTRODUCTION

Comparative folklore studies provide an effective and comprehensive approach to researching the oral folk art of various cultures worldwide. We suggest utilising the following three methods to examine the mutual influence and connections between the oral art traditions of different peoples:

a) Comparative folklore studies of a historical-genetic orientation: Here, common aspects in the folklore of various cultures are considered as phenomena linked to their ethnic commonality. That is, the historical roots of certain epic works share common artistic foundations. However, the evolutionary development of the historical-folklore process results in the emergence of national versions of the initial plot.

b) Comparative folklore studies of a historical-typological orientation: Such research reveals common features in the folklore of peoples who share no ethnic lineage.

c) Folklore studies of a historical-comparative orientation: In this approach, similar topics in the folklore of various cultures are considered products of mutual cultural-ethnic relations, literary influence and connections, and shared criteria for the development of artistic thought. In the comparative research of Central Asian Turkic and Arabian folklore, we suggest employing the historical-typological method.

When discussing the interrelationship between the oral creativity of Central Asian Turkic peoples and Arabian folklore, it is crucial to highlight the presence of bilateral literary influences.

The impact of Arabian folklore on the oral art of Central Asian Turkic peoples is noted for its following peculiarities:

1) Arabian mythology, particularly Islamic sayings and ancient mythological Arab tribal views of the world and humanity, have enriched the topical system of the Turkic peoples' epic folklore genres - myths, sayings, and legends.

2) The popularisation of Arabian folk legends has broadened the artistic boundaries of Turkic folklore's epic genres.

3) Numerous historical legends and sayings have emerged based on Arabian folk stories about the Prophet Muhammad (pbuh), his companions, and scientists renowned in the Muslim world.

4) Prophets mentioned in the Qur'an, as well as traditional characters of historical personalities popular in Arabian folklore and linked with the spread of Islam, have served as a basis for the emergence of the cult of saints, locality names, and sayings about "pirs" (patrons).

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\* Corresponding author

5) Recitation of Arabian tales, which were part of the "1001 Nights", at Central Asian cultural centres, led to the dissemination of Arabian tale topics and the emergence of a series of tales, the historical-genetic roots of which trace back to Arabian folklore.

6) The widespread performance of examples of medieval Arabic folk creativity - "siyra" by narrators (raviys) "among town and village workers, craftsmen, merchants, and ordinary men" (N.Ibragimov. (1994).), paved the way for the creation of an original genre in the literature of Turkic peoples - the genre of "qyssa".

7) Creative links between the folklore of certain peoples do not always serve as a basis for the emergence of new literary phenomena or artistic enhancement of available genres. According to T. Mirzaev and B. Sarymsakov, starting in the late 8th - early 9th centuries, the "dissemination, mainly, of written poetry, as well as written poems and stories, which on their topical origins trace back to the folk epic, at Central Asian cultural centres resulted in the gradual evanescence of one of the important genres of Turkic peoples' pre-Islamic folklore - the Scythian epic." Thus, there's no basis for discussing the creation or peculiarities of folk poems from the 8th and subsequent centuries (9th - 10th). However, beginning in the 9th - 10th centuries, the epic of Central Asian peoples, including those of the Turkic cultures belonging to the West Turkic dominion, saw strengthening of Islam. This was particularly evident in the interpretation of motifs (the supernatural birth of heroes, aid from divine powers, prophetic dreams, and so on).

Therefore, in such an epic, Islamic beliefs and views supplanted local pre-Islamic views and ideas. The second direction in the system of folklore ties between the Central Asian Turkic peoples and the Arabs represents the influence of the oral art of the Turkic peoples on Arabian folklore.

In this context, we use the term "Arabian folklore" to denote the oral artistic works of those Arabs who remain in Central Asia to this day.

Following the conquest of Central Asia, a portion of the Arab tribes that migrated to these lands settled and remained. Over centuries, a portion of the Central Asian Arabs forgot their own language, adopting the languages, customs, and folklore of their neighbouring Uzbeks, Tajiks, Turkmens, and Kazakhs. Yet in some villages, particularly in areas

of dense Arab settlement, the Arabic language has been preserved. According to I.N. Vinnikov (I.N. Vinnikov. (1969)), a specialist in the language and folklore of Central Asian Arabs, in the 1930s there were 1,750 Arabs living in the territory of Uzbekistan who spoke their own language.

These individuals primarily resided in Bukhara (in the villages of Jughary and Chandyr in the Ghizhduvan District) and the Kashkadarya province (in the villages of Kamashi and Jeynau in the Beshkent District).

I.N. Vinnikov, who organised special expeditions in 1936, 1938, and 1943 to study the folklore of the Bukharian Arabs, recorded many tales, sayings, and oral stories. He also collected proverbs and adages, as well as information about Arab customs. Vinnikov published many works dedicated to the research of the dialect and oral art of the Bukharian Arabs.

Furthermore, to some extent, N.N. Burykina, M.M. Izmailova, and G.V. Tsereteli (G.V. Tsereteli. (1956)) studied the folklore of Central Asian peoples. In these works, which are dedicated to the customs, rites, and folklore of Central Asian Arabs, the authors focused particularly on the study of the texts of recorded works and their linguistic analysis. The oral folk art of the Arab population, residing far from the main areas of Arab habitation and among ethnically foreign peoples, has yet to be fully examined through the lens of folklore studies. This issue should be addressed in the future as a distinct research direction.

There are two main aspects in the study of the folklore of Central Asian peoples. Firstly, a comparative study of the historical roots of Central Asian Arab folklore, based on comparisons with materials recorded in the main Arab residential areas. This would allow the identification of the ancient roots of each myth, tale, song, or proverb, and the stages of artistic development. Secondly, the revelation of the influence of Turkic and non-Turkic peoples' oral art on the development of the folklore of Central Asian Arabs. As mentioned earlier, this task involves studying the impact on Arabian folklore within the system of folklore ties between Arab and Turkic peoples. These types of research are necessary to define the primary criteria of the main tendencies of artistic relations between the folklore of Arab and Turkic peoples.

In the foreword to his work, "Yazyk i folklor buharskih arabov" ("Language and folklore of

Bukharian Arabs”), discussing the peculiarities of Bukharian Arab folklore and its connection with the oral art of Turkic peoples, I.N. Vinnikov wrote: “Sixty-seven texts, which are included in this collection, sixty-two are records of folk tales. It should be noted that the Arab element in these tales, as they are defined, is not significant.

Many of these tales reflect the folkloric plots of the East, common among Persian and Turkic speaking peoples. Some of them emerged under literary influence, and here we can observe an interesting process of the second transformation of old folk motifs, which have gained literary form, back into folklore. It is not difficult to find close parallels for some of them in folklore records made in Egypt, Syria, Iraq, and other Arab countries. Those tales, the emergence of which relates to popular examples of Central Asian epics, form a special group of tales. They are primarily interesting because they allow us to judge the initial forms of these epic works of art and the genuine folk element in them. We are speaking about tales like "Ahmad and Yusuf", "Gurghly", and others.

While acknowledging Vinnikov's substantial contributions to the study of language and folklore of Central Asian Arabs and the publication of oral folk-art texts, we wish to propose our own views on certain issues:

1) As has already been mentioned, out of the 67 texts in Vinnikov's collection, the author classified 62 as tales, rightly emphasising the genre diversity of the published samples of Arabian folklore. However, following the scientific criteria recommended by distinguished scholar V.Ya. Propp (G.V.Tsereteli. (1956).) to define the genre characteristics of works related to the epic type, we have arrived at different conclusions regarding the genre affiliation of the texts published by I.N. Vinnikov. Fifty-one (rather than 62) out of the published 67 texts belong to the genre of the tale. The remainder of the texts pertain to other genres of Arabic oral folk art: seven are legends ("Forty girls", "Mustafa", "Ali", "Zain al-arab", "Zufunun", "Iskander", and "Yusuf"); four are sayings ("Khatib and farmer", "Arabic tax", and "How a woman was thrice thrown off the minaret"); two are anecdotes ("There was a man" and "There were four shirins"); and three are oral narratives ("Emir Alimkhan", "The cemetery of Arabs", and "Alim ibn Kurban").

2) I.N. Vinnikov has categorised the recorded tales based on the historical-genetic basis of their subject matter into four types:

- a) Pure Arabic tales;
- b) Tales adopted from the folklore of Turkic and Persian-speaking peoples;
- c) Tale versions of folk novels;
- d) Tales created based on the themes of the epics of the Turkic peoples of Central Asia.

The classification of texts in the aforementioned collection, undertaken by I.N. Vinnikov, although not entirely accurate (as it did not consider the origins of topics, legends, sayings, oral stories and anecdotes, as much as their sources), nevertheless has important scientific significance, as it covers all subjects of tales.

The works included in the collection attest to the fact that the folklore of Arabs residing in Bukhara Province has, from ancient times, developed under the influence of the oral folk art of Turkic peoples, who possess rich epic traditions. In particular, local folklore, with its dastans (epics), tales, and songs, has naturally had a profound impact on the oral folk art of other people's residing in this territory. Arabs, who have been living alongside Uzbeks for centuries and have been in close cultural relations with them, were unable to preserve the main features of their own folklore, as they did not have direct contacts with the primary area of Arab residence. They became distanced from their culture and oral art traditions. As a result, the system of plots pertaining to the epic genres of Uzbek folklore has penetrated into Arab folklore, leading to the emergence of new versions.

Over the span of centuries, under the influence of adjacent epic performer traditions, the stratum of traditional Arabian folklore began to lose its original form. The following factors have contributed to these changes which have occurred in the artistic development of the folklore of Central Asian Arabs:

- a) Territorial factor - the co-residence of Arabs from Bukhara and Kashkadarya with Uzbeks over many centuries;
- b) Ethnic-social factor - the exposure of Central Asian Arabs to the artistic influence of Turkic peoples with rich traditions;
- c) Religious commonality factor - both Arab and Turkic peoples profess the same religion;

d) Language factor - in territories where peoples of different ethnic origins and language families co-reside, the performance of folklore acquires unique linguistic expressions. For instance, Uzbeks, Karakalpaks, and Turkmens live alongside each other in Khorezm, Karakalpakstan, and some districts of Tashavuz province. The bakhshi-narrators (traditional epic singers) may perform the same dastan (epic) in the Uzbek, Turkmen, and Karakalpak languages, depending on the ethnic composition of the audience. Therefore, a bilingual or multilingual environment is an important feature of the performing skill of narrators in this territory and is considered an original epic tradition. Folklore researchers have documented cases where the same narrator is said to have performed the same dastan (epic) in several languages (for example, both Uzbek and Karakalpak versions of the dastan "Shirin and Shakar" were recorded from the Karakalpak narrator-singer Kurbanbay Tajibaev (N.Madrakhimova. (1995))). Consequently, if bilingual practice is one of the peculiarities of the art of folklore performance, then, naturally, it must also play a role in the development of the epic art of Central Asian Arabs.

I.N.Vinnikov has emphasised that Central Asian Arabs, who have had close cultural ties with Uzbeks and Tajiks, were fully or partly assimilated with them by the first half of the 20th century. The scientist wrote about this as follows: "Arabs have lost their own language and cultural traditions, pertaining to them, and have adopted the language and culture of Uzbeks and Tajiks" (I.N. Vinnikov. (1961)). Thus, the Central Asian Arabs have gradually lost their own language and adopted Uzbek and Tajik. Perhaps, at some point, Arab tribes might have been bilingual, speaking both their native language and a second non-native one. If this was the case, it is entirely plausible that at certain stages of the historical-folklore process, the epic plots adopted from local folklore were performed by Arabs in two languages. The folklore materials recorded in the 1930s from Arabs who were said to reside in Bukhara Province and still preserved their own language, show that the majority of tales told among Arabs were created based on plots adopted from the folklore of Turkic and Persian-speaking peoples during the epic inter-influence. The comparative study of plots of Arab and Central Asian tales gains profound significance in the research of the influence of Turkic peoples' folklore on the oral folk art of Central Asian Arabs, as well as in the revelation of the peculiarities of mutual penetration and assimilation of oral art traditions of peoples who are different in their language and alien in their ethnic

origins. As an example, let's compare the Arabic tale of "How a Young Man Wanted to Marry His Sister" with an Uzbek tale of "Golden Cradle", recorded by Fattah Abdullaev from the resident of Urganch, Kutlimurod Masharipov. In accordance with the classification of Aarne-Thompson, the author of a directory of folk tale topics, the theme of the tale "Sister and Brother" is denoted with the number 450.

According to T. Rakhmanov, who has demonstrated using the tale "Yoriltosh" ("Open up, the Stone"), this plot found in Uzbek folklore differs from the versions described by Thompson. In Thompson's directory, the plot of the tale "Sister and Brother" begins with the banishment of the heroes - a brother and sister. However, in versions like "Yoriltosh", the beginning of the tale is different: the stepbrother wants to marry his stepsister. Upon learning this, the girl runs away from home. In a vast field, she seeks shelter and asks a massive rock to hide her (in some versions, it's rushes). The rock (or rushes) opens and conceals her. Her father, mother, brother, and elder sisters, who follow her, ask the rock to open, but it disregards their requests and only opens upon the request of the little sister (or little brother). Then the siblings set out on their journey. From here, the plot of the tale unfolds in line with the theme of the tale "Brother and Sister" described by Thompson.

The comparative study of themes in such Uzbek folk tales and the common themes in tales of other people's allows us to reveal shared, identical aspects of the historical-cultural development of these peoples. On one hand, this helps to uncover the mutual influence and interconnections of the tale epos of various peoples. Both tales were created based on one of the plots - widespread in the folklore of Turkic peoples of Central Asia - and revolve around a traditional theme: they tell stories about the adventures of sisters who flee their homes after learning that their elder brother wants to marry one of them. Variations of such tales are found in the folklore of other Central Asian peoples, particularly in Turkmen folklore.

In the Turkmen tale "Two Sisters", the elder son wants to marry, purchases a ring, and announces that he will marry the girl whose finger fits the ring. The mother of the young man selects girls, but the ring doesn't fit any of them. When his sister tries the ring on - it fits her. Thus, the young man wants to marry his sister. But the girl escapes from home and hides in the rushes.

In the analysed Uzbek and Arabian tales, we see somewhat different interpretations of the denouement. These tales introduce another element of the theme, which triggers the events. They tell stories about how the parents wanted to marry off their son and consulted with him. He declared his beautiful sister as his bride. Offended, his sister flees the home, and in the Uzbek tale, she hides in the rock, but in the Arabic tale, she hides in the rushes. These tales were composed based on ancient myths related to marriages between relatives (incest). Ethnographer J. Frazer suggests that this was one of the customs related to ancient marriages during the transition from matriarchy to patriarchal order and made its way into the tales through myths.

Kh. Egamov has specifically researched the representation of marriage and family relations of the Turkic peoples in fairy-fiction tales, conducting a comparative analysis of Uzbek, Turkmen, and Azeri tales on this topic. "In such tales, we see the dismantling of matrimonial forms that are present within the kin," he wrote, "It's no secret that endogamy has limited marriages within a certain group and family. The girl's escape upon learning of her brother's intentions demonstrates the influence of endogamy, and the tale has preserved traces of the elimination of exogamy."

The aforementioned opinion on the theoretical foundations and originality of folklore connections between the Arab and Turkic peoples can be summarised as follows:

- 1) The roots of the artistic connections in the folklore of the Arab and Turkic peoples trace back to very ancient times. The relationship of the folklore of these peoples, despite not sharing a common ethnic origin, is seen as a process of mutual literary influence.
- 2) Comparative folklore studies recommend analysing literary sources from historical-genetic, historical-comparative, and historical-typological perspectives when comparing the oral creativity of different peoples.
- 3) The literary relationships and mutual influence in the folklore of Arab and Turkic peoples are based on territorial and religious commonality, as well as general historical and social processes.

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