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THE CURRENT PRACTICE OF THE NATURAL SACRED SITES WORSHIP AND THE LOCAL NARRATIVES FORMATION IN KAZAKHSTAN

(using Ulytau region as an example)

Abstract. The actual revival of the natural sacred sites worships and the inclusiveness of its new elements is an ongoing dynamic process. It correlates with the updating of the narrative, which is related to these sacral sites.

The article aims on identifying and analyzing the current practice of honoring of the natural sacred sites and the narratives associated with these sites. The focus of the study are the Ulytau worship natural sites and related narratives. The key study issues are: the prerequisites for contemporary revival of the natural sacred places veneration and attributed narratives; the reason for its updating demand; and the core nature of these processes.

For a long period, the Ulytau region has been attracting the interests of historians and archaeologists, and a certain academic knowledge has been collected here. However, the specific nature of the Ulytau cultural code formation, functioning and preservation of has been never a subject of an adequate studies. The article benefits from the works of Kazakh and Russian scientists, as well as fact-finding field surveys and in-depth interviews of the local inhabitants and sacred sites keepers of (*baksy*, *shyrakshy* and assistants). The findings were collected within the period of years 2016-2018.

In the course of preparation of this article the authors used the retrospective and comparative-historical methods. The article presents an analysis of the current worship practice of the natural sacred sites and the related narratives, which reflect the new cultural elements in this practice.

Keywords: sacred natural sites, worship tradition, local narrative, cultural dynamics, identity, Kazakhstan.

Introduction. Since ancient times all cultures attribute a practice of veneration of the natural sacred places as the inalienable spiritual and devotional element. Nowadays we can observe Currently, a kind of renaissance for this phenomenon: an appearance of a new sacred places; preserving and updating of the ritual practices and related narratives. The demand goes from the grass-roots level, and there is no single algorithm, however, one can identify some common motivations and tendencies along with certain regional peculiarities.

The growth of ethnic and pilgrim tourism today provides a significant impact on the traditional ritual practices that have been continuously shaped within a specific regional historical and cultural context. Hence, the pre-Islamic cultural layers do not compete with later impact, but synthesize with it in a quaint complex system of spiritual values and beliefs. One can observe this manifesting in current worship practice to sacred places and objects.

Currently, this process implements by amending some new elements, which have not been used previously. These elements are incorporated in the traditional practices based on verbal knowledge provided by elder inhabitants. The amended recommendations become guiding instructions within a short time.

The article is aimed to identify and analyze of the incorporated worship elements and specific features of a narrative changes related to the given sacred sites and events. The key study questions are: the nature of present-day veneration practice of natural sacred places and its narrative; the reasons for updating and the essence of these processes. The study was implemented in the context of traditions of

pilgrimage to the Ulytau shrines, which are considered of being the important historical and cultural Kazakhstan focus areas. Ulytau region is closely interconnected with the formation of the Kazakh's state, being at some point, ideological and political center of Kazakhstan.

Methods. The article uses the analytical, retrospective and comparative-historical methodology approaches. The research problem area considers findings of two field expeditions to the Ulytau region (2016-2018) with a focus on four natural objects (Terekty-Aulieh mountain area, Aulie-Tau, Orkesh-Tau, and Yedyge mountains). The study used mainly a method of in-depth interviews with pilgrims, site-keepers (shyrakshys), shaman (bucksy) and local population.

It should be noted that some natural sacred sites in Ulytau from the medieval period and more recent, also became the burial places of the ruling and spiritual elite representatives. That's why the authors also found appropriate to refer to the previous studies of modern pilgrimage practices in the Almaty region (a total of six objects, mostly man-made, - graves of batyrs, biys and bucksy, which are known for its healing and expurgatory power).

Results. Ulytau (also known as "Sary-Arka") is the geographical center of Kazakhstan and the immense territory of hills and hummocks. The region owes its name to the homonymous mountain group (its highest point is about 1,100 m). Eventually, in Sary-Arka there are more picturesque mountain groups. Despite of this fact, most of archaeological and historical monuments of the Stone Age sites, petroglyphic drawings, Saka burial mounds, ancient sites, and also evidence of ancient metallurgical production as well as mausoleums and other monuments of the Middle Ages are concentrated in Ulytau.

The Ulytau region is a 'land of promise' in the historical and cultural landscape of Kazakhstan. Looking chaotic, the cluster of man-made historical and archaeological monuments of various epochs links to the Ulytau mountain group (natural site) which has a sounded sacred meaning, this sacral sense became the originating source for the remarkable and numerous¹ folklore stories (only few are known in our days), as well as transfer of relict worship rituals and renewed cults of sacred places. Perhaps such a one-place combination of magic, religious and social meaning have predicted the specific Ulytau role as focal center of Kazakh steppe and the cradle of the Kazakh nation.

The two points are important: the meaning of toponym 'Ulytau' is 'Great Mountain' and settled expression «Ұлытауға бардың ба, ұлар етің жедің бе»², which is still in common use by Ulytau inhabitants (elder people from other regions continue using it). Formally, the given expression goes back to the great historical meeting in Ulytau of the representatives of three hundred tribes from all three Kazakh's Zhuzes. They agreed on alliance and joint military campaign against their common enemy - Jungars and took an oath by putting their ancestral tamgas on the sacred rocks of the mountain. The oath rite had been supported by ritual meals of an ular bird. Nowadays the expression serves as a very stark reminder and reproach on keeping one's promise [1, 14], [2, 78], [3, 392].

The adequate analysis of the current worship practice of natural sacred sites should be considered concurrently with a local narrative, which had shaped the transfer of pilgrimage rites to a large extent. As noted by Danto A. [4], a narrative in this case was an 'explanatory story' which includes traditions, myths, legends and sketches about sacred places, and also their keepers' oral stories guiding the practice of reverence. Hence, the 'explanatory story' also implies the historical knowledge of nomadic Kazakhs, which Yudin V.P. [5] named 'verbal historiography of steppes'.

We share the vision of Chideister D. in his consideration of the sacral space creation through the synthesis of ritualization and interpretation [6, 36-37]. Hence, these *specific* spaces are thought of as 'providential' ones and so it are traditionally provided to us, and we transfer it further in the same way. In reality man creates the sanctity of an object or site through the sustained ritual practices and desired meanings' interpretations.

Although the Kazakhs esteem the entire Ulytau region for being the sacral area, we aimed on four current and most important ethnic and religious pilgrimage sites: Terekty-Aulieh eco-site (located 210 km

¹The oral history of Ulytau, folklore and mythopoetics in particular, has never been collected or considered by academicians. On a large scale, the "historical and political" narrative of this region, preserved in relative integrity, dates back to the 16th-18th centuries, or to the era of Kazakh state formation; and "religious" one – to the pre-Islamic times and the Middle Ages (most often fixed on the images of cultural heroes).

²Have you ever been to Ulytau, did you eat a snowcock there?

away from Ulytau Mountain) and Aulietau, Edigetau and Orkeshtau Mountains. Contrary to tourism, the pilgrimage states to be mandatory the visiting to all four sites.

The given sacral natural sites have the regulations for venerating practice is regulated, and table 1 shows the comparative features of the traditional and modern worship elements.

Table 1 – Elements of Ritual and Ceremonial Procedures at the Ulytau Sacral Natural Sites

Rites Elements	Traditional Practice (the second-half of the 20th century -1980s)	Present Day Practice (1996-2018)
Compliance with a dress code (<i>rules for men and women</i>)	Obligatory for pilgrims. Optional for other visitors.	Obligatory for pilgrims. Optional for other visitors.
Ritual purity (<i>mental and corporal ablution</i>)	Obligatory for pilgrims. Optional for other visitors.	Obligatory for pilgrims. Optional for other visitors.
Beads bidding (Surah of the Qur'an)	Mandatory for every visitor	Mandatory for every visitor
Ritual sacrifice ('living soul')	Obligatory for wealthy pilgrims. Optional for other visitors.	Obligatory for wealthy pilgrims. Optional for other visitors.
Voluntary donations in cash and/or food	Obligatory for wealthy pilgrims. Optional for other visitors.	Obligatory for wealthy pilgrims. Optional for other visitors.
Attributes of the sacral site (1): 'nodular magic' – tying of animate and inanimate objects (<i>including tugs</i>)	'Knotting' or 'nodular magic' was exercised on animate objects - trees, bushes and tugs (wooden pole used for flags)	Tying of inanimate objects, like fences, gratings and tugs is being exercised in addition to the animate objects.
Attributes of the sacral site (2): <i>tribute offer of fabric and/or textiles</i>	No information available	Tribute offer of white fabric, (<i>aktyk</i>) and colored textiles (<i>oramaly</i>)
Ritual use of water from a sacred source (<i>drinking, ablution</i>)	Mandatory for every visitor	Mandatory for every visitor
Various worship procedures at the natural sacral site (<i>rolling downhill, moving along a sacred path in rocks including passing through a narrow cleft, round tour, rotation, etc.</i>)	Passing through a narrow cleft in stones, reclining and touching/kissing stones, was known for Terekty-Aulie. Reclining and touching/ kissing stones of Zerdesh-Baba cave was known for Aulietau. Touching stones of the mountain cleft was known for Orkshtau	All elements are continuously followed. The newly added elements refer to the sacral amount of 'seven': a seven-fold rotation of the body, a seven-fold solar-wise round walk with open arms around a stone pyramid, a seven-fold rolling downhill ' <i>Aulie Sirganaga</i> ' (so-called <i>saint's slide</i>)
Ritual use of fire (<i>lighting of candles</i>)	No information available	Lighting of seven candles is continuously practiced
Ritual use of stones (<i>constructing "pyramids", cast of stones, etc.</i>)	No information available	A new element (as per informants)
Sacrificial meal	Obligatory for pilgrims	Desirable for every visitor, but not obligatory
Overnight stay at the site a	Obligatory for pilgrims visiting Orkeshtau Mount. Optional for other sites	Mandatory for pilgrims visiting Orkeshtau Mount
Presence of a site-keeper - <i>shyrakshy</i> and a master of rituals in a sacred place (healer, bucksy, etc.). Guiding for visitors includes rites, procedures, history of the site and associated folklore	There was no keeper - <i>shyrakshyi</i> at sites (no information available). The elder (senior) person (<i>aksakal</i>) from the visitors' group took a role of a ritual mediator. In case of female visitors it was the eldest women	Now the <i>shyrakshy</i> is available on Aulietau Mount and some other sites. A <i>shyrakshy</i> and masters of rituals (healer, <i>bucksy</i> , etc.) provide necessary guidance.

The second column compiles the data on traditional rites and procedures, which were collected in 1940s-80s from the elder residents (see the list of the informants attached). The third column presented data which were collected during the field studies (conducted by the authors and archaeologist Bedelbaeva M.V. [7]). The table 1 shows the identical elements in both groups: compliance with a dress code, ritual purity, praying, ritual sacrifices, various forms of voluntary donations, adherence to a spring water sources, and overnight stay at sacred site. Almost all of the described elements are known for standard

pilgrimage practice while visiting the Kazakhs' sacral natural sites. Some aspects have already been documented by researches [8-12]. The coincidence of the traditional and newly adopted rites procedures has been documented for 7 elements from 14 (50%).

Nowadays, the range of involved elements has been modified and notably expanded. The so-called 'nodular magic' – the procedure of tying trees and bushes with scraps of material – is wide-spread in Central Asia. In case of absence of trees and bushes pilgrims tie its symbolic analogue – *tugs* (wooden poles). A number of the researchers, who studied this tradition, noted the visible presence of that tying scraps of material in Central Asia, mainly on graves of saint persons or of equal to them (following Islamic tradition) [13, 113-114]. Castagne J.A. [14, 53] also mentioned a long pole with strands of horse hair and various scraps near the entrance of the Sunak Ata Mausoleum (Turkestan). In Kazakhstan this element can be observed frequently at known petroglyphs sites of Bronze Age and other cultural epochs, which are not necessarily related to Muslim rituals [15, 160-162].

At present, the tradition of tying scraps of material extends to other landscape objects nearby: isolated stones and man-made stone hills (*turs/obo*), *tugs*, which one stuck into rock clefts. These objects can be apart from specific sacred site parts (fence of a grave, tree, etc.). The practice of tribute offer of fabric and/or textiles is very common (white cloth patterns (*aktyk*), kerchiefs (*oramals*) etc.).

Apparently, the ritual range of worship process has been extended significantly, as one can observe from modern pilgrimage to the sacred Mountain of Aulieu-tau - the highest point of the entire Ulytau group and the burial place of seven outstanding and high-credited persons - *akyns* and *bucksys* (some of them were buried with the spouses). Apart from customary reading of Qur'an at the site, pilgrims make three/seven-fold walk around a grave or other ritual object in the form of an impressive *tur/obo*. Sometime pilgrims also rotate themselves, fondle stones, talk to them, tie them with fabric, bring the 'owned stone' from outside and build it into the existing hill or a new one. No one explains the reasons for such a manipulation, but pilgrims immediately follow the initiative and everyone tries to join the common procedure. Often it is a keeper-*shyrakshy* and 'mediators' (*healers*, *bucksys et al*) to invite pilgrimage to proceed. Similar processes are observed in other regions of Southern Kazakhstan apart Ulytau.

Pilgrims follow strictly clockwise order in walk round tour at the Ulytau sacred places is exercised, which is typical for many religious and spiritual practices world-wide. Probably, the Ulytau rits originated also from the Buddhist practice, which had been widely spread in medieval time at the territory of modern Kazakhstan. The findings from known researches conducted in Southern Kazakhstan [16-20] provided basis for this, and also studies of the ancient Buddhist Kyzyl-Kent temple (located in Karkaralinsk, Karaganda region) may serve as an example. According to the hypothesis of the archaeologist E.R. Usmanova¹, the moving of the monks around this cross-shaped temple formed shape of a 'living *mandala*' - a sign of Universe.

Hence, it should be noted that the elderly representatives of the Ulytau local community indicated that even twenty or thirty years ago it was sufficient just to ascend the holy mountain to worship it.

Abdrakhman Tukmanbetov, the keeper-*shyrakshy*, moved to Ulytau in 2012. He received so-called mountain 'call', which was sent to him through a prophetic dream (*ayan*) of Bakbergen Ayashev, the local healer-*bucksy*, give rise to his decision. Abdrakhman Tukmanbetov needed to migrate to Ulytau from Uzbekistan, where he lived before. It took for him more than a year and a half to realize his mission and settle in Kazakhstan to serve the sacred mountain. A. Tukmanbetov kindly agreed to accompany the given field expedition to Auliye-Tau.

The Ulytau region abounds in sacred natural sites and it is sprinkled with related legends, tall stories, popular beliefs and folk tales, which were handed over from previous generations. The authors collected a certain part of this folk narrative with the assistance of informants and works of Z. Chumakova² (see table 2).

All narratives presented in table 2 can be divided into four key groups. The group 1 includes eight narratives associated with cults of water, mountains (gorges, caves, stones, etc.) and trees. The group 2 includes two narratives on cults of animals - a horse and a snake. The group 3 includes six narratives related to legendary heroes - prophets and saints, warriors, military leaders, governors, shamans-*bucksy*,

¹Emma Radikovna Usmanova - Senior Researcher, Saryarkinsky Institute of Archeology, Karaganda State University. Named after E. Buketov.

²Chumakova Z. Holy spring with poplars, or Terekty-Aulieu // Zhezkazgan newspaper. 2003, 15 August. P. 3.

Table 2 – Characteristics of local narrative of the Ulytau sacred natural places

Sacred places	Plot of a Narrative
1	2
<p>Terekty Aulie (Holy poplar place) is a historical and archaeological complex with more than fifty objects monuments dated from the Neolithic age to the XIX century: petroglyphs, neolithic sites, settlements and necropolises of the Bronze age, old mining pits, mounds of early Iron age and <i>mazars</i> of IX, XVII-XIX centuries of the Kazakh's tribes <i>baltaly</i> and <i>bunalaly</i>. There are also burials similar to anonymous mass grave (presumably military). Rock paintings belong to different epochs: bronze age (end II - the beginning of the I millennium BC), the Saka era (XII century BC - the first centuries of our era) and medieval petroglyphs of the Middle ages. Almost 90% of the petroglyphs shows the horse images from the Bronze age.</p>	<p>The name 'Terek' in the Kazakhs' worldview is the World Tree (Baiterek), which is a common Indo-European archetypal cultural concept</p>
	<p>Local community believes the water from spring source to have a holy curative feature; they apply it in case of various diseases. There is a legend about the sacral total number of sources ('seven sources'), but nobody can identify its exact location.</p>
	<p>The legend about a rock painting 'Dancing horses' tells that a long time ago a young herdsman was very fond of playing dombra in the natural boundary. Once the owner of these horses followed the herdsman to monitor. He surprisingly noticed the herdsman relaxing in the shade and playing dombra. Then he saw graceful horses dancing, and at the next moment the owner was dancing himself enchanted by the music.</p>
	<p>The legend about Khazret-Ali and his horse Duldulu: once upon a time he was trying to escape from his enemies, Khazret-Ali was badly wounded, and reached Terekty. Next to the poplars, he saw a life-giving spring, surrounded by thick grass and cane. After washing his face and drinking a spring water, Khazret-Ali found that all body scars and scratches had disappeared, and he felt no fatigue. He prayed to Allah then, and one of the granite hills still has traces and imprints of his knees and hands. The rock niche became his crash pad, and there are hoofprints of his legendary horse Duldulu. They say that since that time the natural boundary had been renamed as Terekty-Aulie.</p>
<p>Aulietau (Holy Mountain, another name <i>Akmeshit</i> or White Mosque) is the highest point of the Ulytau mountains. It is 1,134 meters above sea level. In spite of the need to climb over 500 m to the top of the mountain, pilgrims visit this sacred place.</p>	<p>Narrative about the serpent: A double-headed serpent lives inside an ancient well with siliceous veins. This serpent is considered to be a keeper of this holy place.</p>
	<p>Narrative about the spring source. The legend associates this Aulietau spring with the name of Gulsara Ana, healer. The spring is considered wonder-working at present time also. Mr. Abdрахman Tukmanbetov, the <i>shyrakshy</i> of Aulietau Mount, recommended to solicit the mistress permission in praying before tasting spring water. Local inhabitants advise to throw a coin - a token payment for water.</p>
	<p>Narrative about seven saints. There are burials of Yirza-Ana, Kali-Ata, Tursyn bucksy-Ata, Gulsara Ana, Sapar aulie Ali, Tana Ana and Murat-Ata at Aulietau Mount. According to the legend all of them were famous <i>bucksys</i>, <i>zhirshys</i> and <i>akyns</i>. Sapar aulie Ali was considered to be the master of Aulietau Mount.</p>
	<p>Narrative about Asan Kaigy. Asan Kaygy (XV century) was the famous nomad philosopher, poet-<i>zhyrau</i> and sage, the main ideologist under the sultans Kereye and Zhanibek, founders of the Kazakh Khanate. He was buried in Aulietau. The folks associate the close female burial of Tana-Ana with the name of the eldest wife of Asan Kaygy.</p>
	<p>Narrative about Zerdesh-Baba: a long time ago young man Zardesh made an overnight stop at a cave of Aulietau Mount. In his dream he was led to the top of the mountain. Then the sky lit up with gold, and everything sparkled. He sang the song which originated from his heart. The light beam touched him and then Zardesh got sacral knowledge from the Most High to convey to people. The next day Zardesh came to the people in the valley and start teaching the New Doctrine of Good and Justice. He informed the people about his enlightenment at the mountain, and his new knowledge about the way to common happiness. Then Zerdesh started his travel and reached Iran, where he launched <i>Zoroastrian</i> and people named him Zarathushtra (originated from the Kazakh '<i>Zharatusha</i>' or 'The Creator').</p>
	<p>Narrative about the shaman center - <i>baksy ordasy</i>. The local population believes that long time ago there was a center of shamans - <i>baksy ordasy</i> at the foot of Aulietau Mount and some of shamans were buried on its top. the folks say that, Alexander the Great (in Kazakh - <i>Eskendir</i>) used the services of the Ulytau <i>shamans-bucksy</i>.</p>
<p>The 'Dancing birches' at the foot of Aulietau Mount are considered to be sacred, that's why nowadays pilgrims decorate tree stems and branches with fabrics.</p>	

<i>Continuation of table 2</i>	
1	2
Edigetau (Edige Peak) is located 35 km to West of the of Ulytau village.	The legend says that Edyge batyr and Tokhtamysh (Toktamys), Khan of the Golden Horde were buried at the top of the Edige mountain. Edyge-batyr is the founder of the Nogai Horde, as per folk legends of the Kazakhs, Karakalpaks and Bashkirs. The inhabitants of Ulytau keep the saying about Biy Edyge time - «Едыгеның майлы журты», which means ‘well-fed people of Edyge’.
Orkeshtau (or Emschetau) - the lowest Ulytau peak, which looks like a female bosom. <i>Orkesh</i> - the literary term for a woman's breast, and <i>emschek</i> – for common use.	Local inhabitants translate the image of the Ulytau mountains as a lying young woman, and the Orkeshtau mountain then will form her bosom. This small mountain became the popular place for women's pilgrimage. It starts with Gulsara Ana spring and ends at the top of Orkeshtau. Childless women are advised to make an overnight in the gorge of this mountain and solicit a child.
Modern narratives	

folklore representatives (*akyn*, *zhirshy*, etc.). Modern narratives, which are characterized by a combination of various worship narratives, we include in the group 4.

The first group includes the numerous amount of narratives of Ulytau and perhaps the most archaic elements, which reflect animated natural force of water. Heaven water (rain, hail, rainbow) and ground water (rivers, springs) is considered as ‘live-giving’ and possesses a status of *kiye* (‘sacral’). Different aspects of sacral water in Turkic and Kazakh cultures were raised in the studies of Konshina N.Ya. [12], Poyarkova V.F. [21], Potapov L.P. [22; 23], Shulembaeva K.Sh. [24], Tokhtabaeva Sh. Zh. [25], Stasevich I.V. [26] and others.

The toponym *Orkeshtau* (‘Bosom-Mountain’) is notable. Bogoraz V.G. [27] stated that an identification of natural objects with parts of a human body can be considered to be one of primarily human’s religious belief. The current female worship practice at the given lower mountain coincides with Mongols and Tibetans veneration of caves and gorges equaling it to a mother's womb mountain [Potapov P., 23, 81].

The second group of narratives has a small number of elements, which apparently have a specific value for understanding of the cultural history of the region. Contrary to other areas, here there are relict elements of the sacral horse cult. Petroglyphs of Terekty-Aulie are the largest known compendium of the horse-related rock paintings in Central Asia [28, 560].

The story of the holy sheikh Khazret Ali and his horse Duldulu is one of the stable narratives in the horse-related folklore of Ulytau. Local residents strongly believe that rocks of Ulytau keep the saint’s foot and hand prints, and also his horse's hoof prints. The peculiar signs of human foot and horse hoof can be observed in the Arganat mountains (Ulytau region), in the Sary Su river-valley and in the Karkaraly mountains (Kokshetau).

Margulan A.Kh. et al. [29, 13] noted that so-called Tulpartas stones with pictures of horse's hoof can be observed almost everywhere. The narrative about Khazret Ali is well-known to the Western Pamir inhabitants: they use term ‘kadamjoy’ to mark the legendary worship sites where the saint Hazrati ‘Ali and his orse Ali ‘Dul-Dul (Zayn al-Abidine) made a stop [30, 208]. Stassevich I.V. [20] described similar sacred stone with printmarks of hands and knees of praying prophet Suleiman (prophet Muhammad in other version) at the holy Mount Tahti Suleiman.

Shulembaev K.Sh. provided a vivid example from South-Eastern Kazakhstan: ‘... close to a Chapaev farm in Kurdai district, there is a hill, known as Holy Hill. Mullahs, using a misconception about the mountain, made up a legend about the prints of the prophet’s knees, palms and feet left by him on a stone during praying (*namaz*)” [24, 42]. Thus one can see how the worship practice of natural sacred place combines various mythological and religious visions, cults of horse and mythologic hero, pre-Islamic and Islamic cultural layers.

One more important narrative in the sacred landscape of Terekty-Aulieu is associated with the Serpens image (snakes). ‘Kazakhs nomads were always in positive favor of Serpens/snakes, which were considered as mentors and assistants. A Serpens has symbolized the sacral forces of Water/Earth and other associated magic features. The Kazakhs, being in high honor to the Earth and Water, extend this worship

to the image of a snake; and one can still observe the strong solid complex of taboos, beliefs and procedures up to nowadays' [28, 129].

Previously mentioned toponym 'Terekty'/Baiterek (World Tree) in Turkic/Kazakh mythology associates with aidahar (dragon/Serpens). The dragon comes every evening to the World Tree to eat the Samruk Bird golden egg (symbol of the day light). The narrative about a snake as a guardian and protector is fairly frequent in folk stories in Ulytau sacral places. For example, a shyrakshy Sembai told about a huge Serpens known to be the keeper of the Zhoshi Khan Mausoleum (Dzhuchi Khan). The spring of Gulsary-ana is also under protection of a snake, according to the local shyrakshy.

The third group of narratives is the most big' it compiles the narrative stories related to mythologic heroes. The main persons for Ulytau region are: prophet Zarathushtra, holy Khazret Ali, Edyge batyr, Khan Toktamys, seven holy Sufis-bucksys (Yrza-Ana, Kali-Ata, Tursyn bucksy-Ata, Gulsara Ana, Sapar aliye Ali, Tana Ana, Murat-Ata), Asan Kaygy and others. In our vision we can observe a specific time axis linking the Iron Age with the twentieth century.

The above three groups are compiled of the most consistent narratives, and it can be appropriate to define a stable semantic nucleus, which shapes the interpretation of a sporadic amendments. Those amendments, in its turn, transform and/or create a new ritual elements in the pilgrimage practice.

There is one more interesting group of stories about an obstacles for pilgrims in reaching the sacral site. These can be some natural obstacles, like steep paths or its total absence, thickets of thorn bushes, bad weather, etc.). However, some 'supernatural force intervention' can be counted as a reason for this obstacle: the mountain spirits-*aurakhs* get angry, or a pilgrim has some unholy thoughts, etc. While these reasons are popular among pilgrims, we have the impression of *shyrakshy's* initial influence for most of such cases.

Eventually, the pilgrims and tourists get a narrative and information about a sacred place from *shyrakshy*, and they perceive it with variable extent of trust, especially if it's irrational. However, in most cases, people follow the instructions made by *shyrakshy* (it should be noted that guiding recommendations from the keepers in Ulytau are advisory only).

It is possible that later after the visit, a pilgrim tells the story in his/her own way story. The narrative is being picturized by pilgrim's imagination and degree of involvement into the sacral action. As a result, an amended narrative contributes to the expanding of the sacral object's worship process.

Conclusion. The analysis presented in the article showed that worship practice of natural sacred places is changeable, like any other element of culture. Both changes of the narrative and procedures impact equally on the transformation of the pilgrimage rites. It is impossible to verify whatever was the leading influence – narrative or procedure.

Study of the samples of Ulytau pilgrimage cases confirmed that a narrative defines specific sites of pilgrimage (closely referring to a local folklore in form of legends, stories from mythological heroes, animals and events); also narrative impacts on certain types of ritual procedures (but not all). Pilgrims and tourists contribute to amendments of worship of the given sacral sites, depending on strength of their faith, mentality, wide-scope etc., thus strengthening the veneration.

Pilgrimage to Auliye-Tau combines Islamic elements (Quran recitation, prayers, appeal to the Islam moral values, sacrifice, etc.) and visible pre-Islamic and non-Islamic rites as appeal to ancestors/*aruakhs*, who guard this sacred place, 'nodular magic', animism (worship of water, soil, wind, sun), construction of turs/*obas* (it can be found everywhere on the way to the top of the mountain) and walking around the largest ones, etc.

A majority part of rites practices at natural sacred places is identical to rituals conducted at the artificial (man-made) holy objects. However, it should be noted that man-made sacred objects are more relevant to Muslim rituals (*mazars*, graves, cenotaphs). This should be the result of impact of the accompanying narrative, which determines specific nature of the pilgrimage practices.

While analyzing similarities and disappearances of ritual pilgrimage to sacral objects, one comes across an alive and dynamic myth-making process. We believe that here we are not dealing with the reversion of a man of today to any delusions and throwbacks (although sometimes this happens). It is rather man's desire to acquire some stability as necessary element of a sustainable environment, both in private life and in other social relations.

‘Bringing-in’ of tourists and pilgrim-beginners to the worship practice of sacred objects, when they carry out most of procedures without debating, whenever they are believers or non-trusting people, can be explained by the intuitive need to join the collective memory and collective conscience (here rationality steps backward). Then the existing narrative and newly emerging mythological narrative consolidate as a whole and become a specific tool for preserving and translating the cumulative social experience.

There is a concern that the process of the obvious veneration of natural sacred sites through synthesis of narrative semantic interpretations and practical actions, can be affected by some ‘narrative speculations’, which can damage the autochthonous cultural traditions. Thus, in Ulytau study we observed the pushing of modern Islamic narratives and practices, almost unfamiliar to the local population. This moves back to shadow the known, familiar and understandable pre-Islamic context.

This can be a real threat to the unique endemic cultural features which are very specific to different sacred places and objects. This can be also the reason for known reluctance of the local communities to initiatives of enhanced popularization of the sacred places, infrastructure development (visit centers, etc.).

The fact-finding academic studies; active regional/local studies; meaningful can be efficient in opposing such speculations and perversion of history. The community involvement is inevitably demanded for comprehensive research and promotion of native intangible cultural heritage.

This is of a particular concern of today, when Kazakhstan people restore ethnic and cultural memory and look for their place in the global world.

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ҚАЗАҚСТАНДА ТАБИҒИ НЫСАНДАРДЫ ҚАСТЕРЛЕУДІҢ ҚАЗІРГІ ТӘЖІРИБЕСІ ЖӘНЕ ЖЕРГІЛІКТІ НАРРАТИВ

(Ұлытау өңірі негізінде)

Аннотация. Табиғи салттық нысандарды қастерлеу тәжірибесін өзектендіру және онда жаңа бөліктердің пайда болуы белсенді динамикалық үрдіс болып табылады, сонымен осы киелі орындарға қатысты нарративтің жаңаруы тікелей байланысты болады.

Мақала киелі табиғи жерлерді қастерлеудің қазіргі тәжірибесіне жаңа бөліктерін және онымен байланысты нарративті айқындауға және талдауға бағытталған. Осы зерттеудің проблемалы аясы ерекше қастерленетін Ұлытаудың табиғи нысандары және нарративтері болып табылады; бұл ретте негізгі мәселе болып мыналарды атауға болады: киелі жерлердің және оның нарративтерін қастерлеу тәжірибесінің заманауи ренессансы немен түсіндіріледі; олардың жанартылуы неге орын алады; осы үрдістердің мәні неде?

Ұлытау өңірі бұрыннан тарихшылар мен археологтардың қызығушылығын тудырып келеді, белгілі бір ғылыми бастама жинақталған, алайда оның мәдени кодын қалыптастырудың, болуының және сақталуының ерекшелігі осы күнге дейін арнайы ғылыми зерттеудің пәні болмады. Осы мақаланың әдіснамалық базасын қазақстандық және ресейлік ғалымдардың зерттеулері, ал фактілік материалы – жергілікті халықпен және қасиетті жерлердің сақтаушыларымен (бақсы, шырақшы және олардың көмекшілері) 2016-2018 жж. екі далалық экспедиция барысында авторлармен жүргізілген интервью болып табылатын далалық зерттеулердің нәтижелерін құрайды.

Мақаланы дайындау кезінде оның құрылымында жаңа мәдени бөліктерді объективті түрде айқындайтын қасиетті жерлер мен оның нарративін қастерлеудің қазіргі тәжірибесіне талдау жүргізуге мүмкіндік берген ретроспективалы және салғастырмалы-тарихи әдістер қолданылды.

Түйін сөздер: қасиетті табиғи жерлер, кастерлеу дәстүрлері, жергілікті нарратив, мәдени динамика, сәйкестік, Қазақстан.

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СОВРЕМЕННАЯ ПРАКТИКА ПОЧИТАНИЯ ПРИРОДНЫХ ОБЪЕКТОВ И ФОРМИРОВАНИЕ ЛОКАЛЬНОГО НАРРАТИВА В КАЗАХСТАНЕ

(на примере Улытауского региона)

Абстракт. Актуализация практики почитания природных сакральных объектов и появление в ней новых элементов является активным динамическим процессом, с которым непосредственно связано обновление нарратива, относящегося к данным священными местам.

Статья направлена на выявление и анализ новых элементов в современной практике почитания священных природных мест и связанного с ними нарратива. Проблемным полем настоящего исследования выступают особо почитаемые природные объекты Улытау и нарративы; при этом ключевыми видятся следующие вопросы: чем объясняется современный ренессанс практики почитания священных мест и его нарратива; почему происходит их обновление; и в чем суть этих процессов.

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При подготовке статье использовались ретроспективный и сравнительно-исторический методы, позволившие провести анализ современной практики почитания священных мест и сопутствующего нарратива, объективно отражающего новые культурные элементы в ее структуре.

Ключевые слова: сакральные природные места, традиции почитания, локальный нарратив, культурная динамика, идентичность, Казахстан

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