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## THE MODERN KAZAKH RITUAL OF VENERATING HOLY SITES: THE MAUSOLEUM (KESENE\*) OF QABANBAI BATYR KOZHAGUL-ULY

### Анотація / Abstract

У статті проаналізовано звичаї пошанування священних місць у казахів. Предметом цих студій став обряд вшанування мавзолею Каракерея Кабанбай батира (1692–1770), розташованого за 17 км від нової столиці Казахстану – Астани. Основними матеріалами для дослідження є польові записи автора, інтерв'ю з паломниками. Використовувався також метод включеного спостереження. Святі місця є невід'ємною частиною релігійного (сакрального) простору, а також політичних та геокультурних ландшафтів. Обряди їх пошанування включають такі складові: виконання необхідних релігійних норм перед початком церемонії та в її кінці, відвідування святилища та святого місця, обхід навколо нього, читання молитов, здійснення підношень. За допомогою методу інтерв'ю автор дослідження отримав важливу інформацію про зв'язок між різними ритуалами казахського народу та релігійними віруваннями. Відвідувачі мавзолею Кабанбай батира Кожагул-ули стають свідками та учасниками феномену «живої релігії», у якій найважливіше значення мають особисті «переживання» та релігійний досвід вірян, а не питання суворого дотримання релігійних канонів. Віра стає дедалі індивідуалізованішою, відображаючи особливості сучасних соціально-економічних відносин та повсякденні проблеми пересічних людей, які задовольняють свої релігійні потреби біля пам'яників, що вшановують представників минулої та сучасної еліт. У статті простежуються різні типи взаємодії між давнішими домусульманськими поглядами та ісламськими світоглядними традиціями.

Автор також дійшов висновку, що міграційні тенденції в різних регіонах республіки змінили характер політичних, соціальних та економічних процесів. За нових умов старі простори переосмислюються та піддаються новій сакралі-

\* The definition 'mausoleum' is translated in modern Kazakh as 'kesene', 'kumbez', 'mazar' (Arabic).

зації, що базується на давніх релігійних світоглядних традиціях. Подальший характер міграційних процесів та особливості внутрішньої політики й надалі всебічно впливатимуть на розвиток однієї з давніх народних форм казахської релігії – пошанування священних місць, пов'язаних з відомими політичними та духовними лідерами.

**Ключові слова:** ритуал вшанування святих місць, Кабанбай батир Кожагул-ули, релігійний ландшафт, політичний ландшафт, геокультурний вимір, ієротопія, казахи, Казахстан.

The customs of veneration of the sacred places among the Kazakhs are analyzed in the article. The subject of the submitted study concerns the mausoleum dedication ceremony of Karakerey Kabanbay Batyr (1692–1770), located 17 km from the new capital of Kazakhstan, Astana. The main materials for the study consist of the author's field records, interviews with pilgrims. The method of participant observation has been also used. The holy places are an integral part of the religious (sacred) space as well as also of the political and geocultural landscapes. The rites of honoring them include the following components: the fulfilment of the necessary religious norms before the beginning of the ceremony and in its end, visiting the shrine and the holy place, walking around it, reading prayers, making offerings. Using the interview method, the author of the study has obtained important information about the relationship between various rituals of the Kazakh people and religious beliefs. Visitors to the mausoleum of Kabanbai Batyr Kozhagul-uly become witnesses and participants in the phenomenon of 'lived religion', in which personal 'inner spiritual feelings' and the religious experience of believers are of the utmost importance, rather than the issues of strict compliance with religious canons. Faith is becoming increasingly individualized, reflecting the peculiarities of contemporary socio-economic relations and the everyday problems of ordinary people who satisfy their religious needs at the monuments honouring representatives of the past and current elite. Various types of interactions between more ancient pre-Muslim views and Islamic worldview traditions are traced in the article.

The author has also concluded that the migration trends in various regions of the republic have changed the nature of political, social and economic processes. Under the new conditions the old spaces are being reinterpreted and subjected to a new sacralization based on ancient religious worldview traditions. The further nature of migration processes and the peculiarities of inner policy will continue to have a comprehensive impact on the development of one of the ancient folk forms of Kazakh religion – the veneration of sacred places associated with well-known political and spiritual leaders.

**Keywords:** ritual of veneration of holy places, Qabanbai Batyr Kozhagul-uly, religious landscape, political landscape, geocultural dimension, hierotopy, the Kazakhs, Kazakhstan.

**Introduction.** The problem of the relationship between religion and the origins of power has occupied an important place in the scientific thought since the publication of the works of the 'fathers' of anthropology. James Frazer (1854–1941) believed that in many countries and among many peoples, primitive forms of religion, particularly magic, claimed to control the great forces of nature for the benefit of humankind. He wrote: «In a society that trusted the claims of specialists in this field, they became important and influential people. And it is not surprising that, thanks to their established reputation and the fear they inspired, some of the sorcerers attained supreme power over their gullible tribesmen, becoming chiefs and rulers» [12, p. 64]. Much later, J. Frazer's theses were subjected to critical analysis by the Soviet ethnographer, historian and religious scholar Sergei Tokarev (1899–1985). In the afterword to the edition of J. Frazer's works, S. Tokarev presented his arguments for their

criticism: «Tribal chiefs and petty kings did not wield power because they were attributed with magical powers; on the contrary, they were attributed with magical powers because they wielded power. Admittedly, in each individual case, this relationship may not be apparent, but it becomes immediately noticeable when viewed from a general historical perspective on the connection between phenomena. Although the two sides of the priest-kings' activities – the sacred and the secular – were intertwined in a very complex way, they were based not on magical but on secular functions of the leader» [11, p. 797].

Nevertheless, this scientific problem remains controversial even today. World history knows many examples of religious figures becoming major political leaders. For example, the shaman Teb Tengri (Kokochu) had such a great influence in the Mongolian state that he challenged Genghis Khan's political power [10, p. 89]. In contrast, the image of political and

military leaders in the popular consciousness could be subject to sacralization. This study was devoted to analyzing one example of this phenomenon.

In 2022–2023, the author of the article has conducted field ethnographic research in the settlements of the Tselinograd district of the Akmola region of the Republic of Kazakhstan – the villages of Qabanbai Batyr, Qoyandy, and Sofievka – with the aim of studying the peculiarities of the religious worldview of the Kazakh population. These settlements have a multi-ethnic population, which is currently represented mainly by Kazakh and Russian-Slavic ethnocultural communities. The mausoleum of Qabanbai Batyr Kozhagul-uly (Karakerey Qabanbai Batyr) and the National Pantheon of Kazakhstan, which are included in the republican register of ‘100 sacred shrines’, are located in the territory of the aforementioned district.

#### **Presentation of the main article material.**

Karakerey Kabanbay Batyr (in Kazakh: *Қаракерей Қабанбай Қожағұлы*, real name – *Erasyl*) was a talented military organiser of the people’s struggle against the Dzungar invaders in the 18th century. The biography of the batyr is the story of a commander who spent 40 years on horseback fighting for the freedom of his country. In battle, he showed exceptional fortitude and bravery, for which he received one nickname after another: ‘*Izbasar*’ is successor to his father’s heroic deeds, ‘*Narbala*’ is a young strongman, like a one-humped camel, ‘*Daraboz*’ is special among his peers, ‘*Qaban*’ is disturber of the peace of enemy forces. The last nickname is a widely recognised name in the form of ‘*Qabanbai*’, which, in turn, becomes the battle cry of the ‘*Qarakerey*’ clan [1, p. 32].

In 2001, the name of the batyr was given to a settlement near the capital, formerly known as Rozhdestvenka (until 1986 called as ‘Friedensfeld’, i.e. ‘Free Field’). History tells us that the village was founded in the Kazakh steppes by Germans deported during World War II, as were some others – Dolinka (in German: Gnadefeld (obsolete),

Karaganda Region), Novodolinka (Tselinograd District, Akmola Region), Romanovka (now Rakhymzhan Koshkarbayev, Tselinograd District, Akmola Region), Novomarkovka (now Mailan, Ereimentau District, Akmola Region), Telman Collective Farm (now abolished, Pavlodar District, Pavlodar Region), Kellerovka (formerly Kellerovsky District, Kokchetav Region, now Tayynshinsky District, North Kazakhstan Region) [5, p. 184].

It is also known that after Kazakhstan has gained independence, migration processes intensified, characterised by the outflow of the Russian-Slavic and predominantly Russian-speaking population abroad [8, p. 199]. The relocation of the country’s capital from Almaty to Akmola (now Astana) in 1997 has played a central role in changing social trends in the north of the republic. Over the years of independence, the proportion of Kazakhs and other ethnic groups, predominantly professing the Islamic religion, has increased in the new capital and the surrounding settlements. The remoteness of the region from spiritual centres – Turkestan (the mausoleum of Arystan Bab, the mausoleum of Khoja Ahmed Yasawi, etc.), the underground mosques of Beket Ata and other holy places – forced political circles and local communities to take active measures in the process of rethinking and re-sacralising the space.

In 2000, 17 kilometres south of the capital, on a high hill, the mausoleum and memorial complex of Kabanbai Batyr was erected, near which the National Pantheon of Kazakhstan was created in 2020.

It is known that the outstanding Kazakh hero (‘*batyr*’) Kabanbai (Karakerey Kabanbai batyr Kozhagul-uly) spent most of his life in the far east of Kazakhstan. There are two settlements in the eastern regions of the country that also bear his name. Many streets in various cities and villages of the republic have been named after the batyr. Today, the mausoleum created in his honour and located near the capital has become the centre of the national pantheon, where many famous figures of modern Kazakh history are buried. The settlement with a complex history

and ethnic composition (earlier names – Fridensfeld, Rozhdestvenka), now bearing the name of Kabanbai Batyr, has once again become part of the sacred territory.

As it is noted above, a National Pantheon was built near the mausoleum. The National Pantheon is a place for the burial of deceased (fallen) persons, representing an architectural object of memorial significance, established for the purpose of perpetuating the memory of outstanding figures of the state, science, culture, as well as persons who contributed to the development of Kazakhstan. The Pantheon is under the jurisdiction of the local executive body of the capital. The pantheon's territory includes: a memorial building; a museum of memory (20th–21st centuries) with a monument called the Wall of Memory; administrative, utility and auxiliary buildings; grave structures; a park and adjacent areas [9, p. 52].

The mausoleum of Kabanbai Batyr was built in the shape of a military helmet in the Kazakh style, made of red brick. A high staircase leads to the mausoleum, near one of the levels of which the burials of the National Pantheon are located. The mausoleum is a domed structure, 25 metres high and covering an area of about 40 square metres. The base of the mausoleum is circular, from which the straight walls of the mausoleum rise upwards. The dome of the mausoleum is crowned with an iron crescent pointing towards the Kaaba. A small bridge made of grey paving stones leads to the entrance to the mausoleum, which is fenced off from the rest of the territory by two low metal fences on either side. In front of the bridge, there is an inscription in Kazakh and Arabic on a granite slab in the shape of an open book (according to the text in Kazakh) – the 255th verse of the 2nd surah 'Al-Baqara':

Аса қамқор, ерекше мейірімді Алланың атымен бастаймын!

«Бір Алладан басқатәңір жоқ. Ол мәңгі тірі, бар нәрсені басқарып тұр. Ол қалғымайды, ұйықтамайды. Оның басқаруына көктегі, жердегінің барлығы кіреді. Оның хұзырында өзінің рұқсатынсыз шапағат жасайтын кім болмақ? Алла олардың алдындағысында

(дүниедегі), кейінгісінде (қияметте не боларын) біледі. Ал олар Алланың білдіргенінен басқа ештеңеніде сезбейді. Оның ауқымына аспанда, жерде сияды. Аспандыда, жердіде қорғау Аллаға қиың емес. Оның мәртебесі жоғары, барлығынан биік» (255).

Құрметті мұсылман қауым! Аллаһ тағала тілеген тілектеріңізді қабыл еткей. Әмин!

The end of the inscription is in Kazakh, there is an inscription in Arabic to its right<sup>1</sup>. The spelling and punctuation of the inscription are preserved.

Here is the translation of the inscription into English:

*«In the name of Allah, the Most Gracious, the Most Merciful!*

*«Allah – there is no god [worthy of worship] except Him, (He) – the Most Alive [eternal and ever-living], Existing [existing without need of anyone, and everyone needs Him]; neither slumber [half-sleep] nor sleep overtakes Him; (only) to Him belongs (everything) in the heavens and on earth. Who (can) intercede (for anyone) before Him without His permission? He knows what is ahead of them [the future] and what is behind them [the past], and they comprehend nothing of His knowledge (about Himself and what He knows) except (only) what He wills (for them to know). His Throne [al-Kursiy – the place of His feet] encompasses the heavens and the earth, and it is not difficult for Him to protect them [the heavens and the earth]; truly, He is the Most High [above all that exists], the Great (in His essence, power and distinctions)!<sup>2</sup>*

*Dear Muslim community! May Allah the Almighty accept your wishes. Amen!>.*

The walls inside the mausoleum are decorated with inscriptions from the Quran mentioning the names of Allah, as well as paintings and carpets with religious themes. At the entrance to the mausoleum, there is an inscription on the crossbar that reads 'Karakerey Kabanbay Batyr.' In the centre of the interior, there is a small granite tomb (cenotaph) with an inscription at its base: 'Qabanbay Batyr' (QOZHAKULULY ERASYL) 1692–1770'. The upper and lower borders of the inscription feature a traditional

Kazakh ornament called 'ram's horns' (in Kazakh – 'қошқар мүйіз').

**The religious experience of the mausoleum guardian.** In modern times, the mausoleum of Kabanbai Batyr is visited by dozens and hundreds of pilgrims from different regions of the country and from abroad, including elderly people, groups of women of different ages, groups of clergymen (imams), and wandering mullahs.

During our visit, the central figure and most important informant was the mausoleum's caretaker, Kamal Abdrakhman (born in 1949, Taldy-Kurgan region (now it is Zhetysu region), Kazakh, 'Naiman' clan) (hereinafter also referred to as K. A.)<sup>3</sup>. Under the pretext of a conversation about the customs and traditions of the Kazakh people, we brought up the topic of the mausoleum and Kazakh rituals of honouring the holy places.

During our visit to the shrine and the conversation that took place, inside the main room of the mausoleum, the mausoleum keeper (in Kazakh it is 'shyraqshy') said the following prayer:

Уа, Тәңірім Аллах,  
Оқытылған құран аяттарын әдеттегідей  
қабыл ете гөр,  
Өзінің ризашылығын қабыл ете гөр,  
Мұхаммед Мұстафа (с.ғ.с.)  
Барша әулие адамдар атына қабыл ете гөр,  
Шын аты қалып қойған Ерасыл  
Қаракерей Қабанбай әулетінің атына  
қабыл ете гөр,  
Тәңірім Аллах марқұмдардың жаны  
жәннатта жүрсін деп иман еткейсің,  
Біліп білмей істеген күнәміз,  
Осы аяттарды гафур ете гөр...  
Әрбір шаңыраққа Ерасылдай перзент  
қабыл ете гөр.

O God Allah  
accept the recited verses of the Quran  
show your mercy  
Prophet Muhammad Mustafa (peace be  
upon him!  
accept on behalf of all holy people

accept on behalf of all holy people  
the forgotten real name Erasyl  
bless the souls of the dead so that they may  
dwelt in paradise  
forgive our transgressions  
accept these verses.  
Bring a child like Erasyl to every home<sup>4</sup>.

The mausoleum keeper then continued the prayer by reading a surah from the Quran, after which all those present (including the author of this article) raised their hands in accordance with Muslim tradition<sup>5</sup>.

Based on the text of the prayer, it can be concluded that, according to the beliefs of the faithful, the entire territory of the mausoleum is a microcosm, and the concepts of 'paradise' (in Kazakh it is 'zhumaq') and 'the other world' (in Kazakh it is 'o duniye') can be associated with the macrocosm. Questions about the end of the world were also raised in a conversation with the mausoleum caretaker, but he refused to discuss them. The 'dominant symbol' of the ritual is the veneration of the spirit of the holy ancestor, the famous Kazakh hero Kabanbay Batyr (18th century), to whom visitors to the mausoleum addressed various requests. However, in their prayers, pilgrims first and foremost mentioned the name of God. Most often, they asked for help in healing from diseases, achieving prosperity, etc.

It should be noted that the mausoleum of Kabanbai Batyr is not the actual burial place of the famous figure, but rather a memorial (cenotaph). Nevertheless, people come here on pilgrimages and perform rituals similar to those described above.

The ritual of venerating shrines has become more organised in modern times. At all shrines, you can see groups of pilgrims led by women ('shyraqshy') who have taken on the role of mentors and show the way. These mentors gather a group of pilgrims, plan pilgrimage routes to shrines, and take care of transport and other organisational matters. They familiarise pilgrims with the basics of Islamic doctrine and rituals, moral norms, teach them the rules of conduct

during the pilgrimage, and recommend that they wear white clothing [6, p. 221]. For example, the caretaker of the Niyaz Bi mausoleum (near the village of Taito, Tselinograd district, 30 km from the capital) reported that after prayers, divine grace descends from the dome of the mausoleum (*Allanyn nury zhauady*)<sup>6</sup>.

After the prayer, we had a long conversation with the mausoleum caretaker about Kazakh worldview traditions:

– *Mausoleum caretaker K. A.*: As far as Kazakh customs are concerned, we have forgotten a lot. You are talking about Kazakh customs, the ancient traditions of our ancestors such as the Saka, the Huns, the ‘heavenly’ Turks. All of them are mainly related to religion. For example, in the old days, as soon as a child was born, the women of the village and neighbours performed the ritual of the ‘competing cauldron’ (in Kazakh it is *zharyskazan*). All the women in the neighbourhood cooked food in boiling cauldrons. After giving birth, the woman received *kalzha* – a dish made from lamb. The bride was required to taste the *kalzha*. It was said that after this, the child’s neck would strengthen and he would quickly become hardened. In addition, the Kazakhs had and still have a ritual of ‘laying in a cradle’ (in Kazakh it is *besikke salu*). After the first washing, the child was dressed in a ‘dog’s shirt’ (*it zheide*, also in Kazakh it is *it koylek*). Forty days later, the child underwent the tradition of ‘removal from the forty days’ (in Kazakh it is *qyrqynan shygaru*). After that, the umbilical hair was removed (in Kazakh it is *qaryn shash*), and the ‘dog’s shirt’ was taken off the child. A ‘dog’s shirt’ is a garment woven inside out. When we were children, when this ritual was performed, we would put this ‘dog’s shirt’ on the neck of one of the yard dogs, put sweets in the hem of the ‘dog’s shirt’, and then catch up with the dog, catch it and bring the ‘shirt’ to the eldest grandmother. She gave us the sweets and passed the ‘dog’s shirt’ to the woman who did not have a child. Another remaining custom is the naming ritual (in Kazakh it is *at koyu*). Usually, when older people, grandparents, live in the house,

the parents of the child consult with them and choose a name.

– How is the tradition of *tusau keser*’ carried out?

– *Tusau keser*’ (literally ‘cutting the umbilical cord’) is currently being performed incorrectly. When performing ‘cutting the umbilical cord’ in the child’s home, the child is carried on all fours, if there is enough space, e. g. in the yard, the child is carried to the east. After tying the child’s legs with ropes, they are cut with a single stroke of a knife from behind. Those who do not have a son cut their own ropes to make way for him, and those who do not have a daughter cut their ropes so that a daughter will be born. In honour of the country, the region (in Kazakh it is *el*), from the house where they came to celebrate when their daughters got married, these shackles were added to the dowry to make way for them. What is *tusau*’ made of? For example, it can be woven from green grass. The meaning is clear. *Kogen*’ (literally ‘prosper’) is symbolic and festive. In addition, the ropes can be made from sheep intestines or ‘colourful threads’.

– What do you know about the tradition of ‘mounting a horse’?

– ‘Not mounting a horse’, Kazakhs do not call it ‘mounting a horse,’ but ‘mounting an *ashamai* saddle’ (in Kazakh it is *ashamaigha mingizu*).

– What do you know about the ‘age of *mushel*’?

– The period of transition from twelve to thirteen was called *mushel*. Twelve means wholeness.

– Do you know about the custom of ‘pouring oil into the fire’ (in Kazakh it is *otka mai kuyu*)?

– First of all, the daughter-in-law was escorted to her new home, stepping over the threshold with her right foot. Then a little oil was poured into the fire. After the ‘pouring of oil’, the daughter-in-law greeted the elders and received their blessing.

– What do you know about the custom of *sarkyt beru*’ (‘giving gifts’)?

– If a person comes to the memorial service of an eighty-year-old man, why not take gifts? After all, you can take them so that God will give

you the same longevity. Then, when we went to a wedding or other celebrations (in Kazakh it is 'toi'), the Kazakhs prepared gifts. But not like in modern times.

– Let's go back to the previous custom. Why do they 'pour oil on the fire'?

– So that the hearth at home does not go out, but burns for a long, long time. When a daughter-in-law returned to her father's house, gifts were always given, but not 'buyimtai' (literally 'product', 'thing'), but 'kalau' (literally 'desired').

– What do you know about burial traditions?

– As a rule, according to the customs of the Kazakh people, the funeral of a deceased person lasts two nights. There is a reason for this – it is necessary to inform relatives of the bad news. The 'zhoqtau' ritual (mourning the deceased) was performed for two days. Isn't there a similar ritual, such as the mourning of Bozhey in the novel 'The Way of Abay'? After two days had passed, the deceased was buried on the right side, making a niche in the burial pit (Zhetysu). Nowadays in Saryarka<sup>7</sup>, they dig straight down and erect a small brick structure next to the burial site.

– What do they call the deceased?

– 'Marqum' (the deceased).

– Are windows, pictures and mirrors covered during this time?

– We didn't have any pictures back then. No, there is no such tradition.

– What do you know about the traditions of mourning the deceased?

– These customs still exist today. For example, in the East Kazakhstan, Taldykorgan and Semipalatinsk regions, even now, after a person has died, men stand at the door holding sticks, listening to mournful songs, while people shout and weep. And inside the house, women sing mournful songs.

– What do you know about the tradition of distributing 'zhyrtys'?

– 'Zhyrtys taratu' is something that has been happening since ancient times. In the past, when an adult died, their belongings were distributed as 'tabarik' (alms). If the person had reached the

age of ninety, his clothes were used to wipe the face. This is also a sign of the deceased.

– Will 'konak asy' ('guest meal') be organised in our time?

– It didn't exist before, but now it has appeared. After all, the essence of this custom is to give tea and food to people who have come from far away.

– What do you know about the traditions of memorial services on the 'third', 'seventh' and 'fortieth' days?

– I don't know, but Kazakhs usually held memorial services on the 'third', 'seventh' and 'fortieth' days and on the 'anniversary'. Now, in some places, memorial services are held on the 'third' and "hundredth" days, as well as on the 'anniversary'; these are also Kazakh traditions. According to Kazakh rituals, memorial services are held on the third ('ushi'), seventh ('zhetisi'), fortieth ('kyrky'), hundredth ('zhuzi') days, and on the anniversary ('zhyly').

– When is 'alastau' ('purification') performed?

– 'Alastau' is performed in case of illness, when a child is panicking, they are purified with salt and fire. To protect the child from the evil eye and bad words, they were distracted and purified using the above methods.

– Is the tradition of 'erulik' still practised today?

– 'Erulik' is a tradition that was practised when someone moved house; in their new place, the new owners were invited to a meal by their new neighbours, thereby showing that they would be peaceful neighbours and demonstrating their peacefulness. Kazakhs call this 'erulik'. Therefore, one of the Kazakh proverbs says: 'A nomadic, mobile country is an armed country' (in Kazakh it is 'Yeruli el – karuly el'). After the old owners had performed the ritual, the neighbours invited them to the festivities the next time. This has been preserved to this day. None of the traditions of the Kazakh people exist in Sharia law; these are our ancient traditions<sup>8</sup>.

Then the mausoleum keeper has started to tell about the life of the batyr Kabanbay, when a young man aged between 25 and 30 entered the

inner room. He was wearing a Kazakh skullcap; after giving the author of the article a slightly reproachful look, this young man sat down directly opposite the tomb, crossing his legs ('Turkish style').

**Practices of individual faith of pilgrims to the mausoleum.** The mausoleum keeper, seeing the young man, told him to begin reading the prayer himself. Then the man, in a very melodious and melodic voice (baritone), recited a prayer consisting of verses from the Muslim holy book:

Sura al-Fatiha  
 Bismillahir-Rahmanir-Rahim!  
 Alhamdu lillahi rabbil-'alamin,  
 Ar-Rahmanir-Rahim, Malik yawmi d-din!  
 Iyaka na'budu wa iyaka nasta'in,  
 Ihdina s-sirata l-mustaqim,  
 Syrat al-lyazina an'amta alayhim  
 Gayri al-magdubin 'alayhim wa la al-dallin.  
 Amin.

Arabic for 'The Opening of the Book':  
 In the name of Allah, the Most Gracious, the  
 Most Merciful!  
 Praise be to Allah, Lord of the worlds,  
 The Merciful, The Compassionate, The Lord  
 of the Day of Judgement  
 We worship You alone and ask for help from  
 You alone  
 Guide us to the straight path  
 The path of those whom You have blessed  
 Neither those upon whom wrath has fallen,  
 Nor those who have gone astray. So be it.

This was followed by three recitations of Surah al-Ikhlās (The Purification):

*Bismillahir-Rahmanir-Rahim!*  
*Kul huwa Allahu Ahad*  
*Allah as-Samad,*  
*Liam yalid wal yam yulad,*  
*Wa liam yakun lahu kufuwan ahad.*

*In the name of Allah, the Most Gracious, the  
 Most Merciful!*

*Say: 'He is Allah, the One'*  
*Allah is Self-Sufficient*

*He neither begets, nor He was begotten,  
 and there is none like unto Him.*

After the prayer, the mausoleum keeper said, 'Qabyl bolsyn!' ('May the prayers be accepted!'). Later in the interview, the keeper mentioned that he has performed the hajj twice. A graduate of the Kazakh State Institute, the Higher Party School, a former professional journalist, and an employee of regional professional associations and cinematography services of the Kazakh SSR, he has become a renowned expert on Kazakh folk customs and traditions, as well as the custodian of the mausoleum of his distinguished ancestor<sup>9</sup>.

Crowds of pilgrims continue to flock to the mausoleum, especially in the summer. According to Kazakh rites, it is customary to spend the night at the graves of saints, reading prayers and making requests. However, only a few pilgrims stay overnight at the mausoleum of Qabanbai Batyr Kozhagul-uly. There are several reasons for this, such as its proximity to large population centres and the presence of an elderly caretaker. Among the pilgrims, one can find groups of young women of different nationalities. After completing their prayers, believers bring 'sadaqa' (alms; varying amounts, depending on their financial situation – from 1,000 tenge<sup>10</sup> to 30,000 tenge) [7, p. 148].

**Conclusion.** The characteristics of traditional and modern rituals of reverence for sacred places among the Kazakhs are linked to ancient religious beliefs – a deep connection between the living and the spirits of their ancestors. Although the ritual of venerating sacred places includes many Muslim rituals, it is based, like some other rituals, on pre-Muslim worldview traditions [3, p. 125]. Since ancient times, family ties have helped nomads to survive physically in the harsh steppe conditions, so knowledge of one's history and the history of one's ancestors is considered most valuable to people [4, p. 16].

The ritual of veneration at the mausoleum of Qabanbai Batyr Kozhagul-uly includes the following components: the fulfilment

of the necessary religious norms before the start of the ceremony, a visit to the shrine and the holy place, the reading of prayers, a circular walk, the making of offerings, and the fulfilment of the necessary religious norms after the completion of the ritual. Personal religious 'experiences' and religious practice form the main basis of the 'lived religion' ('everyday religion') of the Kazakhs [14, p. 4; 15, p. 1121]. The performance of religious rites at the mausoleum reflects the individual nature of modern people's beliefs. At the same time, these beliefs combine pre-Islamic and Islamic worldview traditions. For example, the performance of one of the Islamic precepts, the hajj, is considered an obligation in the popular consciousness of many pilgrims, who also perform rituals of veneration of local shrines. This type of interconnection between pre-Islamic and Muslim elements can be attributed to the symbiosis of religious traditions [13, p. 200]. In general, it can be said that the thesis

of representatives of interpretive anthropology that 'religious phenomena act as a system of symbols and contribute to the emergence of strong, comprehensive and stable moods and motivations in people, giving these ideas an aura of reality in such a way that these moods and motivations seem to be the only real ones' [2, p. 2] is confirmed by materials from contemporary Kazakh ethnography.

Migration trends in different regions of the republic have changed the nature of political, social and economic processes. Under the new conditions, old spaces are being reinterpreted and subjected to a new sacralisation based on ancient religious worldview traditions. The further nature of migration processes and the peculiarities of domestic policy will continue to have a comprehensive impact on the development of one of the ancient vernacular forms of Kazakh religion – the veneration of sacred places associated with well-known political and spiritual leaders.

### Примітки

<sup>1</sup> Author's field materials of 2022–2023.

<sup>2</sup> Quran online 2025.

<sup>3</sup> Author's field materials of 2022–2023.

<sup>4</sup> Author's field materials of 2022–2023.

<sup>5</sup> Author's field materials of 2022–2023.

<sup>6</sup> Author's field materials of 2022–2023.

<sup>7</sup> The name of a steppe plain in northern and central Kazakhstan; the name of a region.

<sup>8</sup> Author's field materials of 2022–2023.

<sup>9</sup> Author's field materials of 2022–2023.

<sup>10</sup> The tenge (in Kazakh: теңге) is the national currency of the Republic of Kazakhstan.

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