

## Rituals of the Agricultural Cycle of the Kazakhs: Rite of Calling for Rain

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**ÀBSTRACT** This paper is devoted to the ancient agricultural Kazakh rite – *tassattyq* “call for rain”, which has not lost its significance till date. This is evidenced by numerous ethnographic data collected by researchers for several years of field research in different regions of Kazakhstan. The Kazakh people have retained a wide range of relicts of rituals and rites, dated back to pre-Islamic traditions, which were influenced by Islam. The Rite “*tassattyq*”, which is important in ceremonies of the annual cycle of calendar rituals, reflects the close relationship between human beings or communities and nature and is permeated by the idea of fertility, prosperity, rich harvest and good offspring of cattle. These ideas and practices have been preserved for the ceremonies associated with agricultural activity of the Kazakhs in our days.

### INTRODUCTION

A rather extensive literature is devoted to calendar rites, rituals and festivals of annual cycle, their role in the traditional culture of diverse people, for example of Buryats (Dashieva 2015), Chuvashs (Semenova 2015), Left-Bank Dniester people (Gavreluyk 2015), Tatars (Iskhakov 2013, Urazmanova 2001), people of Near East (Kalendarnye 1998) and so on. However, not all of them are represented with sufficient fullness, particularly the agricultural ritual of summoning the rain. The literature provides evidence of the existence of this rite among many people. We know, for example that Chuvashs and Tatars in the time of drought, close to ponds, arranged collective meals with refreshment, meat of sacrifice or ritual porridge, accompanied by prayers for rain, throwing into the river the boiler (Semenova 2015: 99-106). Rites of summoning the rain with animal sacrifices were typical for Finnish-speaking people of the Volga and Ural (Nagaev 1999: 70). Ceremonies intended to cause rain by throwing stones in the river, turning a special boulder on the sacred places (these stones can rightfully be called “rain stones”) were widely practiced among the Avars-Andalaltsevs, the people of Dagestan and the Caucasus (Ali-gadzhieva 2008: 14-16). Researchers marked common and distinctive features of this ritual. So, along with common features of the ritual prayers for rain among the Tatars-the Kryashens and Chuvashs, the main difference can be observed in the Tatar-Kryashen rite of summoning the rain;

the organizers, the main actors, and often the initiators of the rite are women, while in the Chuvash rite of calling for rain; the priority of the women is not marked (Semenova 2015: 102), it was not revealed in the Kazakh rite’s call for rain (AFD). The literature provides information about beliefs and the abilities of the man who died from a lightning strike, make it rain, particularly among the Adyghe peoples, Nogai, Armenians (Yarlykapov 1998: 177-178). These views are noted among the Kazakhs. According to Akishev, in the past, people have associated the lightning with jada stone (1980: 205). Researchers noted that the rite of summoning the rain have not become a thing of the past among the ethnic (Astrakhan) Kazakhs in Russia. Due to awareness of the performers and participants’ rite, the ritual prayers and the sacrifices are returned to Allah, for accepting them, and in turn could shed rain (Syzranov 2011: 98). It should be noted that the Kazakh rite of summoning the rain has not received adequate coverage in the literature, there are no specific studies that fully disclose the contents of the rite of summoning the rain, its place and significance in the agricultural ritual culture of the Kazakhs. In modern literature, there are only fragmentary information about this rite. Contributions have been made in the coverage of this issue for example, Karmysheva (1980: 251), Akishev (1980: 204-208), Mustafina (2010: 168-172) alongside other researchers. New ethnographic materials help to expand understanding of the role and significance of this rite in the traditional culture of the Kazakhs both in the past and up till this

present day. In this literature, a subject of discussion is the etymology of the word- "*tasattyq*". Azhigali allows for the assumption that in this rite, there is a manifestation of the ancient Arabic ritual of throwing stones ("throwing stones on *satanas*"), which he wrote based on the words of his relator (2001: 14, 53). He suggested that the tactics of the term reflects the "complex historical and cultural interference" from the ancient Turkic "tas atu" "throwing rain stones" to the Arab "*tasaddaka*" – "the sacrifice" (2001: 53). According to his supposition term "*tassattyq*" reveals "most complex cultural-historical interference": from ancient Turkic tas atu – "throwing rain stone" to the Arabic *tassaddaka* – "sacrifice". He also noted that "the ritual of summoning the rain could be conducted in Sufi tradition: for example, in South Kazakhstan, for this purpose they practiced underground solitary prayer for a long period "*chillkhana*" (cell)" (2001: 53). According to the opinion of the researcher, the term "*tassattyq*" comes from the Arabic "*tasadduk*". Phonetic consonance Turkic "tas atu" and Arab "*tasaddyk*" played a key role in the dissemination and adoption of the term "tassattyq" because it was associated with rain stone "*tas*", "*zhai tash*", which played an important role in the rite of summoning the rain among the Turkic people. In favor of this assumption is the fact that the person who was given the gift to call for rain among the Turkic peoples, according to sources, did not throw a stone rain. Fraser cites numerous details about the rituals associated with beliefs on the ability of stones to cause a rain, if they are dipped in water or sprayed with water (1983: 78-79), but he does not report facts of throwing stones into the water.

Kazakhs *tasattyq* understood much more broadly: as a rite of sacrifice, which is performed not only on the occasion of drought or torrential rain (in order to stop), but also on other vital occasions.

The Kazakhs, like many people of Central Asia, the rites of sacrifice – *Kudayi* – were committed on different occasions: on the occasion of the Muslim feast of sacrifice – *Kurban-ait*, in the rituals associated with the tradition of veneration of saints (*auliye*), on the joyous occasion and in order to prevent undesirable events in family life, in funeral, wedding rites, and so on. Among them, the rite to call rain – *tasattyq* – occupied an important place in the complex of rites

having followed the agricultural activities of Kazakhs.

### Objectives of the study

In the ritual culture, historical perspective and modern life of humans all around the world, a special place belongs to the rites and rituals associated with agricultural activities of the rural population. They reflect ties and contacts of many people; they also reflect ethnic and cultural interaction. Agricultural rites of the Kazakhs, like other nations, are closely associated with certain climatic conditions.

The paper is devoted to the ancient agricultural Kazakh rite – "call for rain", which has not lost its significance till date. This is evidenced by numerous ethnographic data collected by researchers for many years of field research in different regions of Kazakhstan. The study summarizes the extensive and varied empirical material, highlights the main elements of the rite "call for rain", reveals the universal and unique characteristics, both general and local manifestations of this rite.

Agricultural activities of the Kazakhs since ancient time, as of other people is deeply connected with different world outlook traditions and rites which have been transformed over centuries of existence in different historical periods and as a result, has lost some archaic features.

### METHODOLOGY

The calendar cycle of rites and rituals is a complicated complex of ceremonies and beliefs, rising up in different historical periods. The methods of the research require scientific approach, taking into account the specifics of each epochs. Complex approach to the study of heterogeneous materials is a necessary prerequisite for the most up-to-date illumination to problems of ethnic history, and also for modern development of the culture of the Kazakhs.

The paper is based on interdisciplinary research of origin, development and functional orientation of calendar rites and ceremonies with the application of the principle of historical method. In the research, methods of participant's observation, ethnographic survey, interviewing, discourse analysis, as well as qualitative, quantitative methods, and comparatively-historical analysis were used.

## OBSERVATIONS AND DISCUSSION

## To the Question of the “Rain Stone” – Djede

The rite to call a rain dates back to the ancient view of Turkic people about “rain stone” – *djede, tash, yada, ede, suu-tash, zhai tas*, existing among the people of Central Asia from the earliest middle age, till the end of XIX century. The word, “yada” was considered to have been borrowed from Avest *jatu* (magic), new-Persian *yadu* (magician) which possibly is an evidence of early influence of Iran on ancient Turkic peoples (Malov 1947: 153–154). Based on some data, *djada* presented certain minerals, evidently nephrites (Akishev 1980: 205–208). According to views of the ancient Turks, this stone could bring rain and thus harvest, that is the reason why the possession of this stone became a symbol of power. “From sources, some *data* about bloody wars that occurred between different Turkic tribes for the possession of *djada* were kept. They were proclaimed based on the ideology of ancient Turkic people, that borders of power cover all four corners of the world, that is the “whole world”. In connection with this, it is interesting to know about their forefather *Buka-khan*, in Uigur legend that his dominion over the four sides of the world became dependent on possessing a sacral jasper (possibly nephritis) having the form of a cone. Geometric figures, like rhombus, square and rectangle, made from different materials (from a stone to a dough) in most symbolic classifications are connected with the idea of correctly organized space (earthly sphere, “female” line of binary system) and with representations about fertility. Diamond – shaped form of pendants from *Otrar* (the famous medieval town in Southern Kazakhstan) evidently is not an exclusion here (Akishev 1980: 205). In accordance with a legend possessor of this stone, *Oguz-khan* who was respected as a hero-forefather by many Turkic-speaking people. In Turkish language, the ancient Turkic name of magic stone was kept only with the meaning *yad bond-jugu* (“bead-poison”), expanded exceptionally in *Erzurum* region (East Anatolya). It means “talisman from evil eye” (Kalendarnye 1998: 163).

The first data about *yada* refers to VII c. (Malov 1947: 152). Information about rain stone is given in “*Kitab akhbar al-buldan*” (“Book of countries”) by *Ibn al-Fakikh*, and also in the works of *Khamadani* and *Gardizi*. In accordance

with one Turkish legend, *djada* was found in a mountain behind which the sun rose. There was so much heat to the point that people hiding from burning rays of the sun during the daytime lived underground and went out only at night. Rescue from this disaster came to them when they got to know that wild animals while saving themselves from heat took a stone *djada* into their mouth and raised their head to the sky – and instantly, there appeared clouds and it rained. To call rain, they rubbed the stones with each other, took them into their teeth, turned to the sun and made an invocation (Akishev 1980: 204). Latest information about shamanising with the help of this stone was also discovered. (Malov 1947: 152). According to sources, lighting up the events of the battle period for the throne in *Maverranachr* after *Ulugbek*’s death, *Uzbek* heroes in crossing through waterless steppe in hot times resorted to witchcraft: magicians with help of the stone “*yada*” called cold, rain and snow (Bartol’d 1964: 165). *Turki* of East Turkestan also called rain with help of stone “*bezoar*”. It is known that texts of two *risalya* (statutes artisans) from West Turkestan, which in details described necessary terms under which the action of the stone became successful, and also are given tips on reinforcing the features of the stone in case they are lost (Malov 1947: 154). Land farmers of *Otrar* oasis had the rites of calling rain throughout the whole period of vegetation and historically – from the very beginning of history of agricultural region till the end of XIX c. (Akishev 1980: 208). Among *Kazakhs* and *Kirghiz*’s summoners, rain was called *dzhadashy*. Only people, who had the stone “*zhai-tash*” had the gift of *djadashy*. According to beliefs, the stone *zhai-tash* was found in stomachs of some sheep and cows or a simple stone was turned into *zhai-tash* with the help of forty-days praying and complex procedure in water. It was added that the stone *zhay-tash* not only had magic ability to influence weather but also has the ability to harm people. There existed a representation that in case of “lost stone who sees it first was overtaken in trouble, disease and death” (Bayaliev 1967: 120–121).

Call for rain with the help of *yada* was widely spread among Muslims. It is considered that *Timur*, whose gravestone was cut out from dark-green nephritis, did invocations for rain with the help of *yada* (Akishev 1980: 205). There are also known facts that *Tatars* gathered the stones in

sacks, praying over each stone and then emptied them into waterless river bed till water appears (Malov 1947: 152). During drought in Tashkent in 1869, local inhabitants were told allegedly that Kazakh mullahs (ministers of Islamic cult), prayed for rain keeping a stone "ida" in their hands (Gordlevski 1962: 375). In ethnographic literature, "the deep penetration of Islam with its developed rites in this shaman ceremony" was noted. In Kazakh's prayer "yada" published by Malov, there are mentioned Koranic formulas, along with Cod - "God's prophet", saints, *khojas* (1947: 154). The invocation of rain written in Almaty region also testifies to the influence of Islam (Seifullin 1964: 172–174). The main participants in the rite of the Kazakhs, as well as many of the people of Central Asia became a mullah (Islamic cult minister), who read prayers from the Koran, asking God to give rain. He often acted as the organizer of the ceremony. If there was no mullah in a certain country or place, supplications were ascended by any of the rite participants (AFD).

#### **Rite for Calling for Rain Among the Kazakh Rural Population and its Manifestations In Our Days**

Rite for calling rain *tassatyq* or sometimes so-called *Kudayi* (sacrifice) did not lose its meaning till date. This is evidenced by numerous ethnographic data collected by researchers for several years. *Tassatyq* is arranged in arid weather threatened with drought and also in ceaseless rains threatened with flood. Village population club together to buy either a horse, a bull, a cow or a sheep, and necessary products for meal: tea, sugar, sweets and cookies. They prepare ritual meal: *beshbarmak* (meat with pieces of thin rolled out paste), *kuyrdak* (roast meat) or pilaf. Usually *tassatyq* is situated near a small river, an *aryk*, a channel, a lake, along a road that people with good intentions could taste sacrificial food (AFD). A lot of relators noted that the blood of sacrificial animals should stream down into the flowing water. This was an obligatory term for long expected rain. Other relators insisted that the blood of sacrificial animals should be buried into a hole of earth in that place where the rite was performed (Merken and Sarysu districts of Djambyl regions; Ili district of Almaty region, Esil district of North-Kazakhstan region, Baidibek district of South-Kazakhstan region) (AFD).

As witnessed by relators, *tassatyq* is often accomplished near *mazar* (an old, holy gravestone construction) usually at old cemetery, blood of sacrificial animal is buried into the earth (AFD). Without fail, before and after the ritual meal, mullah or one of the villagers prayed appealing to God with request for rain, grace and health for all those present and in commemoration of their ancestors. Thus, according to information from one of the residents of the village Shayan (Baidibek district, South Kazakhstan region), recorded by the researcher in 2002, the rite *Kudayi* is situated near a local stream Shayan, where women fry boursaks (bun), and sacrifice a sheep (AFD). Mullah turns to God asking for rain and prosperity. At the end of the ceremony, he blesses all villagers present (AFD). In the village of Bulak (of Esil district of North Kazakhstan region) *tassatyq* are organized by all residence of the village or with only residents of one street. With the money collected, they buy a cow or sheep. They tend to gather near the river or lake. They bring their children and all cattle. First of all, mullah reads a special prayer. After him, separate participants of the rite, read the supplication (whoever knows it). Then all present read prayer and they turn to the ritual meal. Blood of sacrificial cattle is poured out into water and the bones of sacrificial animals are also thrown into water. It is acceptable to treat (to feed) everybody even a strayed dog. After meal across this place, they all brought cattle with high noise. Both adults and children bathe in water, and threw water at each other. All gathered villagers try to make much noise. It is considered that these actions must call rain (AFD).

In the Turkestan district of South Kazakhstan region, residents for the rite of summoning the rain prepare ritual food: corn or wheat soup – *Kudayi kozhe* (God's *kozhe*). *Kozhe* brought from different houses is merged into one pot and stirred. The rite is performed on Shymkent highway, so that any traveller could enjoy a traditional meal (AFD). Similar ritual is also known among some other people for example, by the people of Nagornyi Dagestan (Gadzhiev 1991: 80). In Ili region of Almaty district during *tassatyq*, it is accepted to pour water on each other (AFD). In Western Kazakhstan, in Atyrau district during drought, all inhabitants of a village club together to buy a cow or a sheep. Usually *tassatyq* is organized far from the settlement, in the field, on a high place. Mullah or anyone who

knows the supplication reads a special prayer. It is considered God-pleasing if all participants of the ritual read the prayer (AFD).

It is necessary to note that participation of children has a special importance in the rite *tassatyq*. Villagers bring as many under aged children as possible. It is considered that children are pure and sinless compared to adults that is why their request reaches God more quickly (AFD). Children's participation is also noted by the researchers in Turkestan. One of the local inhabitants Teregabylova said that not long ago (during Soviet time), in drought spring local mullah, gathered all his 6-7 year old pupils, approximately 20-30 people and set off to mazar (domical tombstone construction) of Gaukhar ana – the daughter of Khodja-Ahmed Yassau'i's (famous Sufi philosopher), where the rite (a sheep was sacrificed) was arranged. Children appealed to Allah with request for rain (Mustafina 1992: 124–125). Rite with children's participation is also known among Fergana Uzbeks. Children's participation in the rite is also known among Turks. Headed by *khodjas* (religious educated people), children sing songs of praise, go to the city and give the poor food (Gordlevski 1968: 74, 164–165). This rite is well known among Tajiks (Peshereva 1959: 123), Tatars (Yarlykapov 1998: 100–101), Chuvashs (Semenova 2015: 101) as well. According to the beliefs of Tajiks, 12-year-old children are considered as holders of the special "grace" that makes successful any good initiative. They had been invited to participate in the ceremonies connected with the vegetation of plants, the evocation of rain or stoppage of the rain (Peshereva 1959: 123). In the Nogai ritual invocation of rain, the procession of children, particularly girls carried a wooden doll from house to house, and then threw it into the water. Among the Steppe Nogai, a procession of the children went to the cemetery where the doll and one of the graves was drenched in water (Yarlykapov 1998: 172–173).

In the Madeniet village (Aiyrtau district, North-Kazakhstan region), they write with ink a special prayer "duga" on a horse skull and then sank it in the river and tied it to a cane. If after this, it rains long and strongly, the skull is pulled from water. If there is no water body near a village the skull is dipped in a barrel of water (AFD). Similarly, rite *tassatyq* with the skull of an animal is arranged in Zerende district of North-Kazakhstan region and in Central Kazakhstan (AFD).

For example, in the village Karaotkel \ Ilyinka (Zelinogradsky district, Akmola region), a collective meal is settled by the bank of the river Kozykosh. Before sacrificing an animal (obligatory healthy animal), *Kurban bata* (blessing) is read. Blood of sacrificed animal is buried in the earth; bones are gathered and left among canes. After meal, a prayer is read in memory of the ancestors (*aruak*). The local mullah writes a special prayer, *zhanbyr dugasy* (a prayer asking for rain) on the skull of the animal. Usually, children or other participants of the rite sank the skull in water and tied it to a cane (AFD). This rite is also known among Turkish people: "sometimes, instead of stones they sank into the water the skull of a horse, on which they preliminarily wrote a verse from Koran (*ayat*), or a funeral board (*teneshir*)". Bashgez wrote that this rite could symbolize death of drought (Kalendarnye 1998: 163). And the Alpine mountaineers of Dagestan wrote verses from the Koran on the bull's skull and then with prayers, plunged him into water (Gadzhiev 1991: 80). Kyrgyzs considered "a skull of a racer" along with mountain sheep horns, and dog's hair to be sacred, and it was used to cure children's illnesses. In the meaning of talisman – horse skull is also known among Yakuts (Bayalieva 1967: 117–118). The researchers considered, that the use of horse skull in the rite of calling rain by Kazakhs has ingenious connection with the exclusive role of a horse in traditional culture of Kazakh people.

Meanwhile, the Kazakhs use a sheep skull in the rite of *tassatyq* (AFD). The Kazakhs have linked the cause of the drought to the appearance of human remains on the surface of the earth. So, the inhabitants of the village of Bayan (Sergeev district, North-Kazakhstan region) Ishingali Kasymov assured the researchers that if human remains are on the surface of the earth, the rain will not spill. He remembered during the time of war at the center of Uzunagash village (Zhambyl district, Almaty region) was found a human skull on the surface of the earth. As soon as it was buried, it started to rain (AFD). Similar ideas were preserved among some people in the tradition of veneration of the saints: the appearance of the legs of the buried saints on the surface of the earth was considered as the cause of the drought (AFD). To call for rain, some of the people of mountainous Dagestan were forced to dig out an old grave, to take the bones of the deceased and to bury it in another place, prelim-

inarily pouring the bones with water (Bayaliev 1967: 80).

Many people vest their deceased with ability to call rain. But not every deceased was vested with the ability to call rain on request of people. As Yarlykapov notes, only the happy chosen ones by supreme divine, and taken by Him to the heavens possessed such abilities. For example, the Adyga people considered that being killed by lightning that is by the God of Thunder and lightning Shible is not worth feeling sorry and to bemoan over. Such deceased was buried with honors on-site of death, and his grave was considered sacred. During drought, farmers with relatives killed by the lightning visited his grave to pray to God and ask Him for rain. But Armyans, until the late nineteenth century, dug up the skull of those that drowned or died from lightning and plunged it into the water, wanting to make it rain" (Yarlykapov 1998: 177–178). Yarlykapov noted that "Nogais in the rite of summoning the rain first of all visited a grave of the deceased who died an unnatural death, perhaps, killed by lightning (1998: 178). The existence of such views are represented not by accident: according to some sources the stone "zhada" was directly linked to lightning (Akişev 1980: 205).

The Kazakhs are familiar with different ways of calling rain. In spring of 1989, during the researcher's stay in the Kuzulkum district of South-Kazakhstan region, she visited the house of local mullah – Namazbay. It is necessary to note that spring that year was extremely arid. During the discussion, her attention was drawn to a tree in the yard. It was notable that one of its branches was tied in a folded piece of paper, which fluttered under rush of wind. In the words of Namazbay, it was a duga – a fragment of prayer for calling of rain. Namazbay's assurance on the day when he hung the duga there appeared clouds and the next day it rained (Mustafina 1992: 125).

The rite of *tassattyq* is usually timed to Thursday or Friday as these days, especially Friday are considered "Muslim honorable days". The imam of Khorgalzhyn village (Korgalzhyn district, Akhmola region) *tassattyq* putting a skull into water was performed in the middle of the 90s of XXc. and is witnessed by Mantikov. Usually, during this rite mullah reads a special ayats, and children gathered around him after each read ayat and threw a stone into water. The amount of thrown stones should be equal to 70 (AFD).

The rite of "*tasattyk*" occupies an important place in the agricultural ritual culture of the Kazakhs in our days. The new ethnographic data revealed, that rites with a skull of sacrificed animal are not seldom. Field studies in 2015 in Aktobe region, has allowed the widespread of this rite in different regions. One of them was arranged in spring, in the village of Koopa (Khromtau district, Aktobe region). With the money raised by the villagers, they bought a sacrificial animal product, required for a ritual meal. The ceremony was held by the bank of the river. Before and after eating, the servant of Islam prayed, asking God for rain. A characteristic feature of the ritual is casting into the water, the skull of a sacrificial animal and dousing each other with water. This ceremony is mandatory if there is no rain during the month (AFD). A similar ceremony the researchers revealed in April 2015 in Kishkenekol village (Valikhanov district, North-Kazakhstan region). The skull of the sacrificed animal facing the sky with mouth wide open was submerged and tied to canes, to avoid being carried away by a strong current (AFD). In Spring of 2015 in mass-media, there was the information about the rite of summoning the rain, which was conducted by the villagers Karabau Kyzylkoginskii district of Atyrau region due to dry weather. "In the ravine near the village we put the tent, laid the table, the elders read a prayer. The assembled villagers sacrificed an animal. The Villagers said that their prayers were answered - the same day it rained" (Ak zhaiyk 2015). The rains that fell in April are considered "blessed rain, bringing rich harvest, health and well-being".

It should be noted, that Kazakhs *tassattyq* is performed not only on the occasion of drought but with the aim to stop prolonged rain.

## CONCLUSION

Rite "*tasattyq*", which is important for the rites and rituals of the annual cycle of calendar rites, reflects the close relationship between human beings or communities and nature and is permeated by the idea of fertility, prosperity, rich harvest and good offspring of cattle.

The rite to call rain exists among the Kazakhs and among some other people as element of the calendar ritual culture. The rite reveals the involvement of mullahs who read prayers asking Allah to bestow the rain. In this sense, the archaic features of the rite were not perceived as

incompatible with Islam. Consequently, the participation of cult servants in rite of calling rain is legitimate and is not a deviation from the norms of Islam. The paper summarizes the extensive and varied empirical material, highlights the main elements of the rite “call for rain”, and reveals the universal and unique characteristics, general and local manifestation of this rite.

### RECOMMENDATIONS

Customs and rituals associated with agricultural rites are essential elements of the traditional and everyday culture of the people. This explains the need to explore them in all aspects and manifestations, especially in today’s socio-economic development, rapid urbanization, which has a decisive influence on the rituals of agricultural cycle, and their content. New data allow us to enrich our understanding of this rite, to identify its role and importance, as well as its regional features in the past and up till date.

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