

## Barrows “with Moustaches” and Other Archaic Beliefs of Kazakhs

Marat Syrlybaev<sup>1</sup>, Ulan Umitkaliev<sup>2</sup>, Zhanagul Omirbekova<sup>3</sup>,  
Daniyar Tleugabulov<sup>4</sup> and Gany Omarov<sup>5</sup>

<sup>1,2,3,4</sup>*L. N. Gumilyov Eurasian National University, Astana, Kazakhstan, 010000*

<sup>5</sup>*Al-Farabi Kazakh National University, Almaty, Kazakhstan, 050040*

*E-mail: uumitkaliev@bk.ru*

**KEYWORDS** Nauryz. Rite. Sun Worship. Tasmola

**ABSTRACT** Widespread in Central Kazakhstan, barrows “with moustaches” of the early Iron Age’s Tasmola culture have been the object of attention for archeologists for more than half a century. The complex of the barrow “with moustaches” usually consists of two separate mounds. There are a “big” mound from the western side and the “small” one from the eastern side from which departs to the east the two stone ridges (“moustaches”). The authors note that there is a consensus in the concepts and opinions of researchers on the functions of burial mounds in the ancient society. The authors consider that it is inadequate to represent the barrows “with moustaches” only as funerary monuments. The aim of this paper is to consider these type of monuments as a complicated complex performing cult-ritual functions. The authors made the first attempt to link semantics of these barrows with pre-Islamic archaic beliefs of the Kazakh people.

### INTRODUCTION

Current problems associated with complex structures of barrows “with moustaches”, as well as their features, began to appear at the start of the study. The barrows “with moustaches” with their special designs have always attracted considerable attention. Therefore, it is difficult to find scientists who do not express their views on these burial structures. Comprehensive and systematic research started in 1946 and was carried out by the Central Kazakhstan archaeological expedition led by Margulan.

Actually, the Tasmola tribes settled in the territory of Central Kazakhstan. Its borders are as follows, that is, from the Tengiz Cavity with absolute heights from 300 to 500m to the Ulytau Highland with heights from 500 to 1134m and the Balkhash-Irtysh watershed with heights reaching 1.5 km (Yarygin and Lapin 2015).

Research started with the excavation by the Central Kazakhstan Expedition of the cluster of barrows with stone ridges in the Ulytau in the western part of Central Kazakhstan. In the absence of the studied monuments of human remains, Margulan came to the conclusion that they were used for ritual purposes at their time. According to Margulan, barrows “with moustaches” were either the cult buildings that were erected at the place of the ceremony of funerary feasts or were a place of commemoration.

Margulan (1966) made one of the first scientific postulations about mounds with mustaches. Margulan (1966) considered that the Central Kazakhstan was the site of a special concentration of barrows “with moustaches” that at other places do not occur in such quantities.

Margulan (1948) believed that such barrows continued the tradition of erecting burial structures during the Begazy-Dandybay era. They look like long corridors of mausoleums of Begazy burial mounds, thereby serving as worship centers of the sacred Sun. At the same time, he named these ritual monuments erected for funerary feast. They are connected with the worship of ancestors from the early Iron Age tribes.

Orazbayev (1969) also held the opinion that the barrows “with moustaches” are cult-ritual structures. According to Orazbayev (1969), such monuments have been associated with ancient religious beliefs and the tradition of horse sacrifice and with the idea of worshipping the sacred solar deity.

In 1950-1960, Kadyrbaev made the first typology of these monuments. He dated them and substantiated the Tasmola archaeological culture of the early Iron Age of Central Kazakhstan (Margulan 1966).

Kadyrbaev (1966) revealed the ritual significance of barrows “with moustaches” and supported the views of other scientists. Kadyrbaev (1966) believed that a large number of horse bones

in the graves were caused by the special veneration of these animals.

A large number of bones were also found in graves at a later Turkic period. Talus bones of sheep also occurred at this time. Such finds are characteristic for the Turkic-Mongolian peoples, including Kazakhs (Sydykov et al. 2015; Umitkaliev 2016).

Sorokin (1981) considered that the two components of the complex of the barrow “with moustaches”, a large mound and the small mound satellite, were built at different times. According to Sorokin (1981), a little later a small mound was built close to the large mound for the burial of a horse and pottery vessels, and the stone ridge departs from the small mound to the east. The entire complex has been adapted for commemoration ceremonies. Sorokin (1981) attributed barrows with stone ridges to the group of complexes of the ancient era without burial, such as the deer stones and medieval stone balbals and other structures of this type.

Since the late 1990s, Beisenov has been carrying out a full-scale study of the problem of barrows “with moustache”. He has put on record all known barrows. According to Beisenov’s information, there are more than 300 of barrows “with moustaches” in the Republic of Kazakhstan. More than eighty percent of these monuments are situated in Central Kazakhstan or in adjacent northern regions. Archaeologists have excavated more than 50 barrows “with moustaches”, most of them concentrated in Central Kazakhstan (1997). Presently researchers find several monuments in the territory of the East Kazakhstan (Zhuniskhanov 2016).

Researchers can detect a consensus on the concepts and opinions of archaeologists on the functions of barrows “with moustaches” in ancient society, as these have developed consistently.

### Objectives

The paper highlights one of the pressing problems of the Kazakh archaeology, that is, the barrows “with moustaches”. The barrows “with moustaches” as the early Iron Age’s Tasmola culture have been the object of attention of archaeologists for more than half a century. But the problems associated with their complex structures, as well as their features, still continue to be relevant.

The aim of this paper is to consider these type of monuments as a complicated complex perform-

ing cult-ritual functions. The authors made the first attempt to link semantics of the barrows “with moustaches” with pre-Islamic archaic beliefs of the Kazakh people.

### METHODOLOGY

The barrows “with moustaches” of the Tasmola early Iron Age culture of Central Kazakhstan have been the object of attention of archeologists for more than half a century. They are regarded as complex systems with special semantics.

A complex of barrow “with moustaches” usually consists of two separate mounds. There is a “big” mound on the west side, and a “small” one from the east, from which depart two stone ridges to the east (“moustaches”) (East Sary-Arka. The past and the present of Karkarals 2004).

Beisenov (2001) confirms his scientific concepts regarding the semantics of these monuments by the following conclusions. These monuments were seen as special gates, a bridge for the transition of the soul of the deceased to the other world. Stone ridges are a kind of sacred path through which the soul passes into the world of the dead. A symbolic fire was lit at these stone ridges. It turns out to be the fire road or fire ladder. The ignition of the fire on these ridges is associated with the ratio of the fire from the early Iron Age tribes. The fire, which turned the cold to warmth, turned darkness into light and had other special properties, were deemed to be capable of changing one thing into another. If to be exact, its purpose was to transfer things from one state to another. Because of this, in some places there was a special way of burial, that is cremation for burning the body of the deceased. Researchers suggest that the fire kindling on the stone ridges of barrows “with moustaches” was a kind of fire transition. The soul of the deceased was sent on its way by it to another world.

### OBSERVATIONS AND DISCUSSION

The direction of the “moustaches” of the barrow to the east, both of the mounds, the remains of ash and fragments of pottery under the stone ridges and the bones of horses under the mound of small barrow constitute a single complex structure. The functions which this structure performed at that time were also complex and important. Therefore, these functions were transferred from generation to generation and have been further devel-

oped, even after these buildings that occupied a special place in the society lost some significance over time (Umitkaliev 2004). One of the factors that influenced it was the solemn commemoration events. This shows the level of development of philosophical ideas in society. There were long and harsh winters, and consequently the difficulties such as cold, hunger, disease, high mortality rates and the general hardships of life (Zhuniskhanov 2016).

According to the results of excavations of settlements in the Northern and Central Kazakhstan, the main factors in choosing a site for housing in the Bronze Age and Early Iron Age were suitability for human life and the location on the leeward, sheltered side.

Beisenov studied Saks' settlements in recent years. He said that the Saks built their homes on the sunny and warm leeward slopes of hills. At the same time, they have provided all kinds of protection from the cold. So to keep warm, they kept livestock in pens around the house. They also poured a thick layer of ash around the walls of the house in order to ensure the cold outside did not enter the home. But all this and the only fireplace located in the middle of the stone structure were not enough. Thus, in ancient times, the winter months for people represented a very scary and dangerous time of the year.

The authors compare the construction of houses in ancient times to the life of the Kazakh people. So it is true to say that for the Kazakh people the winter was very difficult and full of hardship with high mortality. As the winter in these parts lasts six months, among the Kazakhs the end of the winter meant a return to life. During the winter months, the strength and health of the people got drained. A lot of people were not able to survive this harsh time.

It should be noted that in the western regions of Kazakhstan until now, it remains the custom to celebrate "*korisu*" (literally, see each other) on March 14<sup>th</sup>. This means the preservation of the ancient traditions among the people. So after six months of winter, the snow melts and one can move through the roads. The steppe people start to travel. People meet each other, rejoice and congratulate each other on the departure of winter, like the return to life.

The Kazakh people are glad, as with the arrival of spring, domestic animals start to produce offspring. Livestock grow fat on fresh green grass and people have dairy products in abundance. With

the arrival of spring, on the day of celebration of Nauryz, people prepare smoked meat that was left from "*sogym*" (meat prepared for winter). From the remnants of food, grain and millet, people prepare a festive meal "Nauryz kozhe". So people are happy that the hard times are behind and now all is well (Umitkaliev 2016).

Such interesting analogy one can note comparing the barrows "with moustaches" and folk traditions in Kazakh ethnography during the celebration of Nauryz or the New Year.

Researchers are interested in the preservation of the ancient traditions associated with the cult of the Sun in celebration of the new year by Kazakhs. This includes the meeting of the first sunrise of the new year with the worship and greeting of the first sun and the tradition of dedication of the first bowl of koumiss to the sun during the celebration of the first milking of mares in the new year. Even Herodotus and Strabo wrote that Massagets worshiped the sun, and in its honor performed the ritual sacrifice of a horse.

In the holy night before the new year called "*Hizir*", people fill the bowl with milk, ayran (dairy drink), koumiss (a drink from the mare's milk), shubat (a drink from the camel's milk) and other dairy products like holy water. Also, people pray for prosperity, rich harvest and good rainfall. When in the holy night the new year appears on the doorstep, men light a candle at the place of honor in a yurt. When the evening falls and the sun sets over the horizon, the two singers go to the middle and start aytys of "dead and alive". It symbolizes the constant struggle between good and evil, light and darkness, summer and winter. With them on the scene come mythological characters of the old woman Kaltyrauyk Kamyrkempir and her two sons Akpan and Tokpan. Young girls Akboran, Azmyrza and Ut confront them. In aytys good wins and evil goes to sunset, and the evil characters scatter in different directions.

When the darkness falls, people kindle two large fires. The youth are divided into two groups and they take up the wooden sticks with oil rags wound on the ends. They set fire to them and pass between the fires. They sing in chorus, "Alas, alas, paleden kalas!" ("Fire, fire, cleanse us from the bad!") They clean the surrounding countryside by fire and then jump over the fire themselves. It is a rite of purification based on the belief in the sacred properties of fire. The rite is named "*Alastau*".

Throughout the night the young people are swinging on the special swing “*altybakan*” and playing various folk games. They also organize “*aitys*”, that is, singing contest with the accompaniment of *dombra* (two-stringed musical instrument). That evening the young people sing all well-known songs and perform all “*kui*” (tunes on the *dombra*). In the morning they all climb the nearest hill and greet the sunrise.

In this New Year’s morning, the first two hours after sunrise is considered a magical time. At this time the Sun brings happiness and abundance. A Kazakh proverb states, “Whoever meets the first sun of the new year and it shines on his head, to him will be sent the grace of the new year.” So there was a tradition to meet the sun on the first day of the year, “*Nauryz*”. People bow to the brightly shining sun, its rays fill the countryside and come into the house as a long-expected bringer of happiness and grace (Kazbekov 1991).

### CONCLUSION

Thus, the authors do not consider such ethnographic parallels rooted in antiquity as random coincidences. It had already been made a negligent attitude to Kazakh history. The heritage of nomadic people freely living for centuries in the Country of the Great Steppe was cut off from their descendants. Therefore, contemporaries need to remember and to keep intact the ancient traditions for the preservation of their national identity.

### RECOMMENDATIONS

Researchers suppose that there will be new information and judgments about the functions and purpose of the barrows “with moustaches” in the process of further careful study. The authors consider that it is not enough to provide the barrows “with moustaches” only as funerary monuments connecting the “real world” and the “world of the dead”. This is not surprising, because the nomads considered the burial place of their ancestors to be sacred, and spent certain days there as

their traditional religious celebrations. In the tradition of any nation, activities related to religious beliefs are carried out in certain places. If one listens to the opinions of the above researchers, one will learn that the barrows “with moustaches” are not simple burial structures.

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