

Aigine Cultural Research Center

Sacred Sites
of the Southern Kyrgyzstan:
Nature, Manas, Islam

Edited by Gulnara Aitpaeva

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This publication is a result of the participatory research conducted by the Aigine CRC, together with traditional practitioners and experts, in Batken, Jalalabad and Osh provinces for the last three years. The first part of the book contains oral history of natural and historical sacred sites, as well as, sacred sites related to Manas and Islam. The second part of the book contains life stories on interconnection of people, sacred sites, animals, plants and the stars.

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NOTE FROM THE EDITOR

This book represents a collection of field notes and interviews. All the data were first recorded, then transcribed by the team of the Aigine CRC. Informants gave their consent to be interviewed and also agreed their interviews to be published in a book. There were cases when the informants asked not to indicate their full name; therefore, we have included only the first letter of their names.

In the majority of cases, we tried to give exact pronunciation of Kyrgyz words in the English transliteration. We have used the transliteration below.

The text abounds in a great number of Kyrgyz words such as *apa*, *ata*, *mazar*, which have been transcribed into the Latin alphabet, but not translated into English. This has been done to keep the personal titles and the nature of the Kyrgyz text. These words are italicized and explained either in the footnote or glossary.

The glossary includes words and concepts mentioned in the articles, and they are important for understanding Kyrgyz spiritual culture. Definitions are based on field data collected in Batken, Jalalabad and Osh provinces of Kyrgyzstan.

All verse texts in the book are translated word-for-word.

There are cases when a sacred site and a village or a certain place share the same name. In these cases the names of the sacred sites are italicized, while the names of villiages/places are not.

Transliteration

Kyrgyz alphabet	Transliteration	Pronunciation notes
Ӣ	<i>iy</i>	Semivowel, as in <i>yes</i>
Ң	<i>ng</i>	Nasal n, as in English <i>thing</i>
Ө	<i>o</i>	Front vowel, as in German <i>schön</i>
У	<i>u</i>	Front vowel, as in German <i>für</i>
Ы	<i>y</i>	
Х	<i>kh</i>	

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The team of the Aigine Cultural Research Center express their deepest gratitude to traditional practitioners and experts, who contributed to publication of the books dedicated to sacred sites of the southern provinces of Kyrgyzstan.

Aigine CRC is also grateful to The Christensen Fund and its Regional Office for understanding the importance of studying the sacred sites and traditional spirituality and for rendering financial support to implement the projects.

We also would like to express our gratitude to the team of translators, Baktygul Tulebaeva, Cholponai U-G, Gulmira Aldakeeva, Guljan Kudabai-Gallagher, and Kyial Toksobaev. And our special thanks to the team of editors, Dr. John Newman, Dr. David Montgomery, Dennis Keen, and Jennifer Webster.

Aigine CRC thanks all the associates for their invigoration and help in conducting our work.

INTRODUCTION

The history of the project. In 2010-2012, Aigine Cultural Research Center carried out field works on exploring sacred sites in southern provinces of Kyrgyzstan. Research studies in Osh, Jalalabad and Batken provinces included identification, description and writing down of the provenance and functioning of these sites. Whenever possible, sacred sites were also photographed. Based on the conducted research, in 2011-2012, books were published on each southern province. This publication is a collection of materials from three previous books published in Kyrgyz language.

Definitions. Sacred sites in Kyrgyzstan represent areas of dry land and bodies of water, as well as constructions and items, which are spiritually or/and religiously meaningful for local people and where sacral practices and rituals are performed (Wild & McLeod, 2011). Sacredness, or divine presence, in each site are of different origin, including spiritual, religious, mythological, epic, historical and contemporary, as well as personal, family, community, ethnic and state-related.

The Kyrgyz use such defining words as *mazar*, *kasiettuu jer* and *yyik jer* to refer to sacred sites. The word “mazar” is derived from Arabic, and initially it meant “a place visited by people, a pilgrimage destination, usually a tomb of a Muslim saint,” while later this word gained a more specific meaning and started to be defined as a “shakhid’s burial site” (Islam, 1991). Today, in Kyrgyzstan, both in the south and in the north, the word “mazar” can mean various sites and items that are regarded as sacred by people. “Kasiettuu jer” means a site that has a special spiritual power and impact. The word “yyik”, depending on the context, can be translated both as “holy” and “sacred”. In the very beginning, and sometimes even now, we use both terms, occasionally adding the word “sacral”. And yet gradually, as we were carrying out our work, the word “sacred” took over and is used predominantly now. As it seems to us, it conveys the meanings attached to the Kyrgyz words more accurately. They place a slightly bigger emphasis on the divine rather than human, spiritual rather than material, and unseen rather than visible.

Major working principle of the Aigine CRC. While studying the country’s sacred sites throughout the span of seven years, Aigine CRC knows that the main condition and principle conducive to the effectiveness of such activities is responsible collaboration with local dwellers of different age group, social status and ethnicity. Only through establishing trust-based and long-term relations with local intellectuals and those who know the past and nature, as well as spiritual practitioners and different-level authorities, it is possible to identify, describe and study the provenance and functioning of sacred sites.

In the course of participatory research activities in southern provinces more than 400 sacred sites were identified. This number includes those sites that were added to lists and depicted. In actuality, this number may be slightly vaster, particularly in Osh province. Field activities in this region commenced during the tragic summer

of 2010 when the Kyrgyz and Uzbeks, the two ethnic groups that have been living in this area side-by-side since long ago and making a pilgrimage to the same sacred sites, clashed in a heavy conflict. This shattered the investigation capabilities of our working group significantly.

A network of sacred sites in the south. In the course of three-year participatory research, it became obvious that the south of Kyrgyzstan is permeated by a network of sacred sites. If we are to describe the main features of this network, it should be noted that it is a big, diverse, dense and solid network covering the entire region.

It includes sites of absolutely different types and origin. These sites can be grouped and classified based on such basic features as the function they serve, type of origin, time of emergence, etc (Aitpaeva, 2011). In this book, on the basis of two features such as type of origin and time of emergence, we have separated the following four major groups: 1) Natural sacred sites; 2) Sacred sites related to Manas; 3) Historical sacred sites; and 4) Sacred sites related to Islam. The four chapters of the first part of this book are dedicated to these four groups of sacred sites.

Natural sacred sites in the south. In the south, as well as all over Kyrgyzstan, there are plenty of natural sacred sites, or those not made by hands. The majority of such sites are an outstanding example of the fact that Kyrgyz people, like other peoples, who have been living amidst mountains since long ago, hiding from bad weather in caves and worshipping the warmth of the sun and the moon, could not imagine their existence without nature. Natural sacred sites that are densely scattered all throughout southern provinces are testimony to the fact that those inhabiting these areas had developed respectful and caring relations with the natural world. And they carry on with this tradition today. Understanding the power of nature and its grace is one of the reasons supporting the ancient tradition of worshipping special nature zones.

While processing the collected information, we have made an attempt to systematize natural phenomena that, as believed by people, are sacred, namely: lakes; caves; mountains; springs; rocks and sand; and trees.

In nature everything that exists is inextricably intertwined. Wherever there are naturally emerged lakes, they will be decidedly surrounded by sand or rocks, or oftentimes by both. Springs are always breaking through the mountains and caves, while the majority of sacred lakes are situated high in the mountains. Trees grow in the vicinity of or amidst rocks. Burial sites that are not perceptible by the eye are located amid rocks. Such burial places are scattered all over the country. In the 21st century there is hardly a place on earth where such sites wouldn't exist. Grass and trees grow around or immediately upon unnoticeable tombs. Natural combinations make the abovementioned division very conditional. Systematization has been carried out to identify the main natural components of sacred sites and to emphasize their diversity.

In the south of the country, as well as all over Kyrgyzstan, the number of natural sacred sites is much larger than that of sacred places erected or designed by

humans. And this may serve as some sort of an indicator of the type of religiosity and spirituality that exist in the country. They are inextricably interconnected with nature.

Traces of Manas at sacred sites in the south. It is known from the Kyrgyz classical heroic epic, *Manas*¹, that the main hero Manas united the fragmented tribes and created one people referred to as the Kyrgyz with their own territory. Traces of the great epic hero were identified in all areas where the research study was carried out. If we take into account stories told by pilgrims, the remains of the hero lie not only in Talas, but also in Batken, Osh and Jalalabad. In fact, all local narratives about Manas' burial sites are based on cultural issues. According to one unwritten law of nomadic tribes, burial places of warriors and other leaders were kept secret. This rule was observed in order not to allow the enemy to open a tomb and commit sacrilegious acts against bodies placed therein. If it not known where exactly Great Manas lies, then his tomb, indeed, can be located in any part of the country.

Historical traces in sacred sites of the south. History or information about the past can be preserved and reach descendants in various ways. In history, due to some reasons, certain linking events may oftentimes be lost. People who are aware of these events may pass away, not having the time or not being able to share their knowledge. Written documents about these events can be burned, torn, soaked or damaged otherwise. And yet there is one powerful source of historical knowledge that is hard to obliterate, and this is *Jer Ene*, or Mother Earth, and the names that people use to refer to it. Throughout the span of three years while field works were carried out, we had a chance to become reassured, once again, that this is a reliable and unique source.

Oral history. In this case, a specific use of the term “history” should be highlighted. This implies oral history, or that information and knowledge that is preserved in the memory of concrete individuals. Such history is very much different from what is known as academic history. All dates, names and events are interpreted in an individual, and from the academic point of view, in an arbitrary manner. Indeed, it is difficult to verify them. At times, it is impossible to embrace them with an academic mind. And yet such information resembles springs that spout out from beneath the ground as they choose and *akkan suu*, or waters flowing in unknown ways. It is more effective to accept such knowledge as something that simply exists, or as springs, and to try to understand their meaning and purport. It was not our

1 Classic heroic epic trilogy, *Manas*, contains around 500,000 lines and is an integral part of Kyrgyz folklore. The epic itself and those who narrate it, known as *manaschys*, played a significant and uniting role in traditional Kyrgyz society, which is more important than its volume. The *Manas Epic* is one of the biggest epics in the world and contains tremendous wealth of information accumulated over centuries. Scholars and writers of the 20th century as Akmatyaliyev A.A., Akmolodoeva B.A., Asankanov A.A., Kadyrbaeva R.Z., Moldobaev I.M., have been rightfully emphasizing the grand proportion and encyclopedic nature of the epic. The greatest word-man, Chyngyz Aitmatov, introduced the following epithet, “ocean-like *Manas*”. Today, along with the encyclopedic nature, reflecting many aspects of traditional lifestyle in society, another feature of the ancient epic is gaining paramount importance. The *Manas Epic* is not only a historical account of previous ages and storage of collective folk knowledge. The *Manas epic* is a living and progressively developing phenomenon. New versions of the epic are emerging that differ from classical versions, as well as, new *manaschys*, the epic narrators appear [ed.]

task to verify historical validity of narratives that were heard on sacred sites, as this could be the topic of a separate research study. We believe it is of paramount importance that the country's sacred geography has preserved specific information which is hard to find anywhere else.

Modern history. Kyrgyz land which is sewn together by sacred threads is undergoing new stages of its history, and these stages are reflected in the emergence and names of new sacred places. As one example, we can mention a sacred site called *Sheyit* or *Asker Kurmandygy* (People Killed Innocently or War Victims) which is situated in the mountains in the Batken province. This example is unique and can serve as a basic model that was presumably used in the appearance of sacred sites in the ancient times. We can also find a similar example in the north of the country. Located in the vicinity of capital city Bishkek, a memorial referred to as *Ata Beyit* (Fathers' Tomb) has gained sacredness approximately based on the same model, although it has other overtones and meanings to it.

Islamic mazars. The fact that Islam is more entrenched and widespread in southern provinces as compared to, for instance, Issyk-Kul and Talas regions where we carried out our research studies earlier, can be observed through a large number of sacred sites related to this religion. Among pilgrims visiting sacred sites or *mazars*, faith in the Almighty – Allah – and sacred places is undivided and strong. On the basis of field materials, we have systematized *mazars* which are predominantly Islamic in nature, and they are presented in the fourth chapter of Part 1 of this book.

It is worth mentioning that some believers are against worshipping sacred sites, insisting that it is a heavy sin, or *shirk*. However, on the basis of our three-year research, we can state with certainty that among the majority of Muslims living in the south of the country Islamic faith is closely intertwined with the belief in miraculous power of sacred sites.

It should be mentioned specifically that the names of sacred sites and the history of their appearance, development and preservation indicate most vividly the connecting links between the north and the south, or in other words, they point to the unity of Kyrgyz land. In the south, we encountered sacred sites dedicated to such legendary heroes as Er Tabyldy, Kurmanbek and Janysh-Bayish. We detected sacred sites with the same names and similar history in the north. It may well be that the same valorous warriors were protecting northern and southern Kyrgyz territory, or maybe they were different people with similar names and destinies. Most importantly, such places unite various parts of the country into one whole in a symbolic fashion.

The sacred sites related to Islam play another important role. These sacred sites unite people of different ethnic groups by being a common geographical and religious legacy of different people living in the south. For instance, we were guided by Uzbek people to Kojo-Kaiyr sacred site, while a Tadjik family accompanied us to Kojo-Bilal sacred site. The head of the Tadjik family is the guardian of that sacred site.

Sacred sites as accumulators of knowledge. Part 2 of this book is dedicated to a body of knowledge which is, in one way or another, related to sacred sites, or if not sacred sites themselves, then the outlook on life and vibrations found there.

Narratives collected from among bearers of traditional knowledge in various parts of the South of Kyrgyzstan include stories about stars that help humans deal with their earthly matters such as sowing and harvesting crops, animals and plants to which people turn to in case of illness and difficulties, the lunar calendar that Kyrgyz nomads were using to move from one place to another in ancient times, traditional nutrition bringing health and longevity, miraculous healing and about strengthening people and health improvement through connecting with sacred sites. All this is yet a tiny portion of that wealth of information which is preserved among the people and in the depth of the earth.

The last part of the book is the glossary. It is composed of those concepts used in practices related to sacred sites. Definition of concepts is based on field data collected in Batken, Jalalabad and Osh provinces of Kyrgyzstan. The work on the glossary shows that it is a high time to compose a glossary of terms used by people in the area of traditional practices. Pilgrimage to sacred sites is type of a traditional practice. Defining such terms as *kaiyp duino* that are found in other dictionaries do not reflect or comply with contemporary meanings, since they were defined in the paradigms of purely materialistic knowledge.

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PART 1

SACRED SITES IN THE SOUTH OF KYRGYZSTAN

Chapter 1

Natural Sacred Sites

The south of Kyrgyzstan represents a large and ramified network of natural sacred sites, or those not made by human hands. As far back as 80 to 100 years ago there were no in-patient hospitals and clinics on the territory of present-day Kyrgyzstan, but there were mountains, rocks, trees and springs that were known for different healing properties. Therefore, when people were hit by maladies or when they were in dire need of resolving other difficulties, they would turn to special places, worship them and request help from the Creator.

There is an obvious difference between natural sacred sites and those created by humans. This difference has to do with a tremendous diversity of natural sacred sites. If we take a look at water only, these are sacred lakes, rivers, brooks and springs. Alpine lakes contain pure waters nourishing all living beings around them, including humans, animals, birds and plants. According to spiritual practitioners, other invisible forces gather around lakes, such as spirits of nature and ancestors. Crystal-clear waters running down from tall glaciers can nourish the soul and the body. Springs spouting out from beneath the surface of the earth can heal wounds and sores, while mountain and cave springs share their power with all living beings that need water.

Living amidst nature, our ancestors knew how to take everything necessary out of it. However, even in very ancient times there were cases when humans were treating nature as something lifeless, manifesting ruthlessness and exterminating animals (Aitpaeva, 2006) or plants. In such cases, sages and elderly people were saying, “*Jaratkan jazalait*” (“The Creator will punish”). Until present day, traditional practitioners such as healers, messengers and epic chanters believe that every mountain, river or cave has its own spiritual benefactor or master: “*Eesi bar, koldoochusu bar.*”

Although lifestyle of the Kyrgyz people has changed drastically, and they moved to sedentary life more than 70 years ago and became rather estranged from nature, their faith in the might and benevolence of nature has not fallen into oblivion. It may well be that one of the reasons for preserving this ancient faith lies in the fact that properties of sacred sites and their miraculous power are still clearly manifested in

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all sorts of situations, such as curing those who are ill, finding a physical or spiritual path, protecting domestic animals and fulfilling people's wishes.

When we were carrying out our research on sacred sites, we were meeting with pilgrims and traditional practitioners, and miraculous properties of springs, bottomless lakes and sublime rocks, and secrets of mountains, hills and fields would be revealed to us even more.

In the south of the country, as well as all throughout Kyrgyzstan, the amount of natural sacred sites largely exceeds the number of human-made holy places. While processing information collected in three years, we have systematized natural phenomena that are deemed sacred by people in the following way: lakes; caves; mountains; springs; rocks and sand; and trees.

The vast majority of natural sacred sites are combined or mixed. Quite often we had to ponder on where some sacred sites belong to – mountains, springs or trees. In such cases we tried to take into account what, as narrated by locals and those in the know, was the most important component in that specific sacred site – water, a tree or a rock. The purpose of such systematization is to single out major natural components of sacred sites and emphasize their diversity.

This chapter contains narratives and legends related to provenance of sacred sites as preserved in oral folk memory. Also, this section has embraced a compilation of personal stories told by those who came in touch with holiness of nature.

Sacred Lakes

Kyz-Kol

Kyz-Kol is located 32 kilometers from the Jalalabad city of Suzak region in Jalalabad province. This is a closed lake where no water flows out. In the southern part of the lake, there is a small forest and the lake itself is surrounded by reeds, black wood almond trees, and bushes. People who pass by the lake make wishes and tie pieces of clean cloth on the almond branches. Even if the trees around the lake dry out, local people are afraid to cut them down.

The lake is 50 meters wide and 100 meters long. Visitors come to *Kyz-Kol* in the spring to cure sores on their bodies. Elderly people do not allow others to swim in the lake. Every year people perform sacrifice rituals by slaughtering an animal for God and sharing a meal together.

The way the sacred sites such as *Kyz-Kol*, *Kelin-Tash*, and *Ak-Koinok* received their names is related to the same story. Once upon a time there lived a girl who lost her parents and became an orphan. There was no place for her to go and that is why she stayed with her brother. As her sister-in-law was a very querulous person, the girl did not grow up freely. Once there was a great party. The girl had nothing to wear and she secretly wore her sister-in-law's dress and went to the party. When

she went to the party her sister-in-law recognized her dress and chased after the girl demanding that she take it off. The girl ran away from her sister-in-law and when she reached the edge of the village, she took off the dress and threw it to her sister-in-law saying, “Here, take it!” That is why the lower boundary of the village is called *Ak-Koinok*, or “white dress”.

She ran a bit farther to the lake, and before jumping into water she cursed her sister-in-law with the words, “*Tash bol*” or “turn to stone” and drowned. The sister-in-law, who could not catch her, came to the shore and turned to stone just as she had been cursed. That is why that side of the lake is called *Kelin-Tash*, or “stone bride”. In the past, the stone was by the lake, but people who passed by were afraid of the stone, so they took it to the local graveyard.

Some elder people recall that in the past the lake was full and its boundaries almost reached the road. But ever since the death of the young girl the lake is considered sacred and from then onward, people perform sacrifice rituals, bring ritual bread *jeti tokoch*¹, read verses from the Qur’an and pray.

People say that the lake is bottomless and its spirit is *Ak-Tailak*². During the Soviet times, when *kolkhozes*³ were being established, many Russians resided in Kyz-Kol village. Once a Russian person took a swim and stated afterwards, “The lake is not bottomless. It does have a bottom. We will open one side of the lake and use the water for irrigation.” Hence, he opened the lake. Remarkably, the water of the lake flowed out, but didn’t blend with other waters. Local people emphasize that even if other waters flow in or flow out the water from the lake does not blend with any of them. As for the person who opened the lake, an odd sore appeared on his neck and a little later his family members became contaminated and they all passed away.

When people had difficult times and misfortune fell upon the community, the surface of the lake would turn red. According to what people say, during the years of World War II, throughout the whole war, the surface of the lake remained bloody red. Only after the war came to an end its surface cleared up and assumed regular color. The surface of the lake also turns red when the nearby trees are cut down.

Abdivahab Mamarasulov, a native of the Ak-Talaa village, shared the following story, “Usually when my uncle was ill, he would only be ill for seven days and then recover. However, once he became quite sick and could not recover for a month. He went to the hospital, but nothing helped. At last, he did not know what to do and went to the sacred lake to pray. He kneeled at the beach and started chanting verses from the Qur’an, in a short while sharp rays began to appear from the lake, then a large cobra emerged, opened its mouth and stared at him. He also saw a group of girls merrily engaged doing embroidery nearby. Suddenly the whole lake seemed to become a beam of light itself and that was a magnificent scene. My uncle looked

1 *Jeti tokoch* [Kyrgyz] – seven pieces of small, round and thin bread fried in oil [ed.]

2 *Ak-Tailak* [Kyrgyz] – a white colt [ed.]

3 *Kolkhoz* [Russian] – a collective farm [ed.]

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back at cobra without any fear and kept chanting verses. “I came here to worship and find cure to my ailment”, he said and continued praying. The cobra without making a wink kept staring at the man from middle of the lake. He returned home in a good spirit and elevated mood and henceforth became a clairvoyant.”

Elderly people teach the following prayer when someone lights a candle and prepares ritual bread, “I honor and worship you. May the scent of this freshly made bread do you good. Please, guard the land and people of Kyz-Kol, and among them protect my family and friends.”

Kuptan-Ata

A beautiful lake, as if made by the Creator himself, lies on the eastern side of the mountains in the Arslanbap village of Bazar-Korgon region in Jalalabad province. It's often quite cold here due to heavy snow. But the snow starts melting in June and one can fully marvel the beauty of this large and deep lake. It is of a peculiar interest that there is a flag placed in the middle of the lake, but nobody knows who placed it there and when. In fact, it is quite challenging to reach the center of the lake; however, the flag is there. According to local people, once when the flag fell down a person swam there and tried to put it back. He succeeded in his endeavor and put the flag back to its place, but drowned on the way back. The lake is quite deep, the water is of a clear blue color and it is difficult to swim there. The mirror-like surface of the lake reflects the sky, clouds, trees and flowers as if it was a nature museum.

Many people come here to make a pilgrimage, venerate the lake and ask for their wishes to be fulfilled. There are also childless couples coming here to solicit for a child or families intending to perform a ritual *aidar chach aluu*¹. Usually pilgrims visiting *Kuptan-Ata* sacred site stay for several days and over the last five-six years number of wooden houses have been built here. Also people put up a Kyrgyz traditional house, yurt, thus improving conditions for pilgrimage.

Kol-Tulpar-Ata

In understanding of traditional practitioners, one of the aspects of sacred sites is their location in high mountains and hard-to-reach places. The sacred lake *Kol-Turpar-Ata*, which is 20-25 kilometers from Hilya village in the mountains where the Nooken region begins, is also situated in a place that cannot be easily reached. People say that the Creator must have created the lake so high with a purpose of preserving its purity for a long time. One cannot reach the place on a vehicle; it is possible to go there only by horse or on foot. The surrounding forest serves as an extra protection and, at the same time, beautifies the lake.

¹ *Aidar chach aluu* [Kyrgyz] – cutting the hair on the back of a child's head that remained from his birth, or to make a first baby hair cut [ed.]

In local people's belief, a stallion comes out from the lake late at night. That is why this sacred site is called *Kol-Tulpar-Ata*. Here, the word *ata*-father is used as a sign of respect to the spirit of the stallion, *tulpar*, and to the sacred lake, *kol*, in general. In the opinion of local elders, the stallion of the lake is a *kaiyp* – a spirit that perished from the world of the living, but didn't enter the world of the dead. In order to see the stallion spirit, one must stay overnight there and remain awake the whole night. Some people go to this lake in order to breed their mares with the stallion, and they stay there for several days and nights without sleeping to shepherd their mares.

There are number of Kyrgyz national games played during holiday celebrations and festivities in the Nooken region such as *ulak tartysh*¹ and at *chabysh*². As for a prize, winners receive various kinds of things, from animals to home utensils. There are certain people who always participate in such races and win first prizes. People say that some of the greatest racehorses are descended of that particular stallion from the lake. One of the fastest and strongest Kyrgyz racehorses was Ak-Baipak – an all-time first place winner. People believe that Ak-Baipak was an offspring of the stallion from the lake.

There is another lake that is 50-60 kilometers away from Kol-Tulpar-Ata. People say that they see the same stallion at his lake too. It is also believed that in that lake, besides the stallion, people see other domestic animals like camels, horses, sheep, goats etc.

Usually when people make pilgrimage to these sacred lakes, they pray for fulfilment of their cherished wishes, but most often pilgrims ask for livestock here. There is a general belief that if a person makes pilgrimage to these lakes, stays overnight, performs praying ritual and, before leaving the place, takes a dry tree branch home, then makes *kazyk*³ out of it and uses it for tethering livestock, then animal breeding will accelerate and the person will become rich. People say that there was a saint living in these areas who would admonish pilgrims by saying, "If you respect this place, I will multiply number of your livestock ten folds". However, one must treat the sacred lakes, as well as, pilgrimage practice with respect and belief.

Uch-Kol

There are lakes that originate from underground water. Such lakes with crystal blue water remain cold all year round and even on frosty days the surface of the water does not freeze. One of such lakes is *Uch-Kol*. People say that the lake is bottomless and the water flows out of the lake from two sides.

1 *Ulak tartysh* [Kyrgyz] – a national game, where horsemen try to fetch a carcass of a dead goat from each other [ed.]

2 *At chabysh* [Kyrgyz] – horse race [ed.]

3 *Kazyk* [Kyrgyz] – a wooden or iron stick to tie livestock to [ed.]

The lake is located in the Kashka-Suu village of Kara-Kulja region in Osh province. According to local people, in the beginning there were three lakes in this area, but two of them dried out and the third, the biggest one remains until today. There are number of pine trees around the lake and the water stemming out from the lake flows into the nearby river. In spring and summer this place becomes very crowded. Mostly, people who pass by stop here; they take a rest and recite verses from the Qur'an. There is a spring called *Kotur-Bulak* adjacent to the lake. The spring water helps to heal various skin diseases and sores. Lake *Uch-Kol* is surrounded by vast mountain pastures as well.

One of the local residents, Rysmendi Mamasaliev, shared his story, "In summer, we used to live in one of the nearby *jailoo*¹. Once, my grandfather, mother, uncles and I came to *Uch-Kol*, unfolded tablecloth with some ritual food and recited verses from the Qur'an. Suddenly, upon approaching the shore of the lake I saw a horse-toy with a carriage and immediately started asking to take it for me. Everyone, my grandfather, mother and uncles ran up to me quite alarmed. After I told them what I saw, they became frightened. Then my grandfather walked closer to the place where I saw the toy and confirmed my words. We came to where we sat and recited the Qur'an verses once again. This story happened when I was five or six years old. After this incident, my mother was afraid that I would go to the lake and drown, so she left the summer pasture and went home. Ever since, before going to the pasture I always make a halt at the lake, recite verses from the Qur'an, look at the water and fish, my mood always brightens when I look at them, and only then I go to the pasture."

There are various stories told about the origin of this lake. Once upon a time there lived a poor man with his family in this area. One day, the man with his son and wife left in search of food, leaving three daughters alone at home. They suffered because of hunger and shortly after the youngest and the middle daughters died. The eldest one lived three more days despite her hunger, but after three days she also passed away. Their bodies were left in three places and after some time there appeared three lakes. Later two of these lakes dried out and turned into a swamp, but one of them did not. It is believed that the third lake is on the spot where the eldest daughter passed away, and no one knows how deep it is.

Majority of pilgrims who come here is elderly people. They perform sacrifice ritual, prepare ritual bread and tie ribbons to tree branches whispering their wishes and stating about the purity of their thoughts, intentions and deeds.

Kulundu-Ata

Kulundu-Ata is located in the Alai-Kuu valley of Kara-Kulja region in Osh province. According to local people, there is a spring nearby this sacred site. The place where water springs forth is somewhat deepened and thus resembles a *kazan*². According

1 *Jailoo* [Kyrgyz] – summer pasture in the mountains [ed.]

2 *Kazan* [Kyrgyz] – an iron cauldron [ed.]

to local people's belief, usually childless couples make pilgrimage to this spring and solicit for a child and with the help of the Creator their wish gets fulfilled. A pilgrim should put one hand into the spring and if the future baby is a girl, then by will of God, beads will be placed in person's hand, in case of a boy – *chuko*¹ will be placed in pilgrim's hand.

One of the local residents told us a story of one couple. Sulaiman, now deceased, and his wife Syrga could not have children for a long time. Once, they heard about this sacred site and made pilgrimage here; with their pure intention and strong belief they put their hand into the spring and found two *chuko* in their hand. Shortly after, his wife gave birth to two sons, Nasibai and Shokon. Nasibai has since passed away, but Shokon is still alive although he is an old man now and works as a veterinarian.

According to Jengishbek Tokurov, a resident of the Sharkyratma village, "Once upon a time there lived a poor old man and he had only one mare. He used to graze and water his mare around the lake, one of such days the old man fell asleep near the lake. A strong wind woke him up; upon opening his eyes he saw huge waves and a grey stallion emerging from the lake. It came towards the old man's mare and circled around her and went back to the lake and disappeared. A year after that the old man's mare gave birth to a wonderful foal. Only one day after its birth, the foal started to run and play, jumping over its mother. The old man sensed that the foal would not be an ordinary horse, but turn into a great racehorse. Thus love of gain took over the old man. He desired to have not one racehorse, but two and he took his mare back to the lake. The same phenomena repeated itself and the grey horse appeared from the lake. But this time the horse took the foal by its neck, led it to the lake, and both disappeared. So the old man who wanted to have two racehorses, lost even the one he had."

Ai-Kol

Lake *Ai-Kol* lies in the embrace of high mountains, 1,700 meters above the sea level, in the Golbo village of Leilek region in Batken province. From the dim and distant past, local people call it sacred *Ai-Kol*. To reach the lake, pilgrims pass through Golbo village and the left side of the Too-Jailoo pasture. Before *Ai-Kol* there are such lakes as *Gadandyk-Kol*, *Sut-Kol* and *Jashyl-Kol*. *Ai-Kol* is the farthest of them; one can reach it only on horse and should take food sufficient for a week.

The beauty of the lake and its surrounding is revealed even if one looks at it from distant mountain top. According to a village resident, Marzia Abdieva, once upon a time there lived a king in this region, who had an only daughter. She was in love with a young man, but one day the king arranged engagement of his daughter to a different man. The girl disobeyed her father's will and ran away from home to the mountains of *Altyn-Beshik*. She stayed there and mourned for a while that

1 *Chuko* [Kyrgyz] – a bone of a hoof joint of sheep and other animals used for playing various traditional games [ed.]

she could not be with her beloved, and then vanished into the world of *kaiyp*. The surface of the lake stays calm, but the bottom of the lake rages and the water goes underground and mixes with the waters of the Sarkent Mountain. People say that the lake was created from the girl's tears. Her name was Aidan and the lake was named after her. Before it was called *Aidan-Kol* (Aidan's lake), but later it was shortened to *Ai-Kol*. It is believed that the water of that lake cures certain diseases like scabies, eye inflammation and etc. However, the lake is quite far from the village and not every pilgrim can reach it.

Sacred Caves

Emchek-Ungkur

Since ancient times caves were of a great service to men. Hunters used them as shelter and a place to hide their game during a bad weather. Now these caves, where the traces of our ancestors remain, have turned into sacred sites. One such sacred site is *Emchek-Ungkur*, one-and-a-half hour drive north from the Kara-Alma village in the Suzak region of Jalalabad province.

Certain knowledgeable people emphasize miraculous features of this cave. The entrance of the cave is of an average man's height. Then the cave starts getting narrower and narrower, and toward the end one should crawl to reach the end of the cave. There are smaller caves inside it, which are reminiscent of rooms. In each of the small caves there are stone silhouettes of breast nipples of different animals hanging from the ceiling. One silhouette looks like a cow's udder and another cave's ceiling looks like a sheep's udder. Another interesting thing is that water drips down from those formations like milk dripping from breasts. Pilgrims place a dish underneath the dripping "nipples" collect the water and drink it. There is a belief that if people drink this water then their illnesses will be cured.

Dunguromo

Dunguromo is an example of another marvelous place in Kyrgyzstan. By entering the cave one is astonished by the symphony of nature. There is a waterfall inside the cave and it seems that it sings a song of nature. As the waterfall "roars" inside the cave, people named it *Dunguromo* – the roaring one. This sacred cave is located on one side of a big hill in the Ylai-Talaa village of Kara-Kulja region in Osh province. There is a heap of big rocks towards the entrance of the cave. It is quite cold inside the cave. One cannot walk on the jagged rocks on the left hand side of the cave. One has to walk along the right side and slide down along the two-three meter mud path. There are many white stones at the bottom. At the end of the cave there is a waterfall that is about four-five meters high. If to touch the water falling from the waterfall one can notice how cold it is and it seems as if small stones are falling down on their hands. The water that falls down flows among the pile of stones, which are below the waterfall, and one cannot tell where the water goes. There are special rules for taking ablution in this water.

One has to go barefoot, roll their pants up, and wash their feet three times when they first enter. Then one washes their face and rinses their mouth and then again washes their feet three times. If one is strong in spirit, then they go around the waterfall three times. There is another ritual performed at *Dunguromo*, people believe that if one takes a small white stone and sucks on it for a long time while being inside the cave, then that person will have a strong health.

Dunguromo is not a very big cave. There is a small tree near the cave. Like at other sacred sites, people tie pieces of cloth to the tree here as well. The heap of big rocks towards the entrance and on the top of the cave is believed to be there on purpose. One should not shout or talk loudly inside the cave; otherwise the rocks will fall down and block the entrance of the cave. According to one of the guardians, there are no cases when the rocks fell, but his grandfather would say that there were cases when the rocks blocked the entrance. It was said that the strongest men of the village would come and put the rocks back in its place and open the entrance. There is a flowing river on the lower side of *Dunguromo*, as well as, two small ponds called Damba one and Damba two. Upon completing rituals inside the cave, pilgrims come out and bathe in these two ponds, as it is believed that only after bathing one would get rid of all the evil and misfortune.

Not so many people, except for the residents of the village, know about *Dunguromo*. In summer, people's visits to this place are unending. Pilgrims come here to find recovery from their illnesses, be purged of sin, while others come for recreation and some out of pure interest. In July, people from summer pastures organize a "Dutch treat", together they make a pilgrimage to *Dunguromo* and perform sacrifice ritual and pray to purify their thoughts and intentions.

According to Konur-ata, the guardian of this sacred site, "Villagers call me the guardian of *Dunguromo*, but I don't consider myself as a guardian. I only live near the cave. In the summer time, together with my sons we lay stone paths to the cave and do other maintenance activities. There are no springs where I live, and that is why we drink the water flowing out from *Dunguromo*. We try not to go to *Dunguromo* in the evenings because it is a very scary place. When I was little, there was a man named Niaz who lived alone in the village. People say that he used to come into *Dunguromo* and talk to somebody for a long time. On the one hand he seemed to be insane, but on the other he was considered a very knowledgeable and educated man. Perhaps, Niyaz did not talk to anybody in the cave; maybe he just had some spiritual bonds with the cave. He would wander here and there, and sometimes he would fall asleep at the entrance of *Dunguromo*. According to people, he had a strong health and never was sick; some people connect his healthiness with *Dunguromo*. Sometimes, at gatherings he would say, "Later you all will see that there will be a time when you are in the summer pasture and I will be in the village and we will be able to talk to each other." Now I think that maybe he was referring to the mobile phones that we have today."

Chil-Ustun

Chil-Ustun is in the mountains between Aravan and Anjian regions, and is referred to a road leading to Mecca and people consider it sacred. There is another more well-known sacred site, *Dul-dul-At*¹, three kilometers from *Chil-Ustun*. There is also a park, 500-600 meters just before the sacred site.

The cave is located on top of the *Chil-Ustun* Mountain. In general, the mountain is very rocky and there is almost no vegetation or running water either. On the road leading to the cave, there is a sign indicating existence of two bat species living in the area that are included in the *Red Book*².

According to some village residents, the meaning of *Chil-Ustun* stems from the following, the word *chil* is a shortened version of the word *childe*³, which in local dialect means “forty”. There are forty *ustuns*⁴, twenty of them look upwards, into the sky and remaining twenty are pitched down; thus the name of the place, “forty logs of wood”. There is a spring called Chyl-Chyl on the top of the mountain. The water of the spring neither overflows nor dries up, but flows drop by drop without changing its pace.

There are only two ways leading to the cave. It's difficult to say which way is the easiest, by hopping on one leg or jumping from one stone to the next on a narrow mountain path. There was one person in the village who knew the way to the cave. He would go to the mountain on a narrow path by jumping from one stone to another and would come back to the village in the same fashion. When people asked where he was, he would say that he went to Mecca by using the way inside the cave. Local people say that if one wants to make *hajj*⁵ and go to Mecca, then they can find a way through the cave. One can reach the cave with a person holding one end of a rope, while another comes down inside the cave by holding the other end of the rope.”

It takes three hours to reach the top of the mountain. According to those who know the way to the cave and lead pilgrims, one should have extra pair of shoes, because one pair of shoes gets torn apart upon reaching the mountain top. The road to the top is not only difficult, but also quite dangerous.

1 This sacred site is located on the eastern side of the A.Anarov village of Aravan region in Osh province [ed.]

2 *Red Book* [Russian] – list of rare and endangered plant and animal species [ed.]

3 *Childe* [Kyrgyz] – forty days of frost in winter and forty days of heat in summer [ed.]

4 *Ustun* [Kyrgyz] – logs of wood [ed.]

5 *Hajj* [Arabic] – pilgrimage to Mecca [ed.]

Sacred Mountains

Too-Moiun-Ata

Kyrgyz people, when giving names to sacred waters, mountains, caves and etc., based their name choice on place's history. There are also cases in which names were given through finding similarities with other things. This is the case with the mountain in the Ak-Shar village of the Nookat region in Osh province, which resembled a lying camel; thus the name of the mountain, *Too-Moiun-Ata* or "camel-mountain". Local people believe that the resemblance of the mountain to camel is act of God.

A village resident, Moidun Jakypov said the following, "It is said that there is uranium in *Too-Moiun-Ata*. Grass does not grow in the mountains where there is uranium. Whoever climbs up to this mountain gets sick. In 1939 when the Russians blew up *Too-Moiun-Ata*, both, those who blew it up, and those who were looking for uranium all died.

Local people say that there is an old man in a white coat in *Too-Moiun-Ata*. Not everyone can see the old man, only some people. Therefore, one who goes there should first do ablution and be clean. People who have been there talk about existence of the tempting one in the mountain. I will tell you a story related to *Too-Moiun-Ata* that happened with me. In the past, we used to sow wheat above Sary-Tash area. I do not remember how old I was then. In the evening we were riding a horse and leading another horse behind us. Our foreman, Abduvali, was in front of us. When we reached the barn fire started appearing at the hooves of our horses.

The horse I was riding had a halter on but no bridle. Abduvali turned into an opposite direction. I shouted at him asking him to return, but he did not return. At last, he went to *Too-Moiun-Ata* and stopped. His horse could not move. Then I understood that there was the tempting one in the mountain, which comes in a form of a snake. Some people say, "Be careful at *Too-Moiun-Ata*. There are people who become sick after going there."

Some people fall down even when sitting and some get sick there. This place is sacred like *Sulaiman-Too* in Osh. People residing near *Too-Moiun-Ata* live in abundance because the mountain is located in a favorable spot. Because it is very hot in this place people have had difficult times during some years and they could not go outside from 12 p.m. to 5 p.m.

It is said that there is a man wrapped in a white piece of cloth who appears and disappears upon *Too-Moiun-Ata*. There was a cave at *Too-Moiun-Ata*, which was ten meters long. People visited this cave, prayed, slaughtered a sheep or foal, and recited verses from the Qur'an. They considered *Too-Moiun-Ata* as sacred and prayed here. Then, one of the high-rank officials from Uzbekistan, who became an ambassador ordered to dig out canals here. The cave was also blasted in three places. It was all done to prevent people from making a pilgrimage. However, local people assert, "They did this to take rocks from *Too-Moiun-Ata*." In fact

government officials were trying to please the Soviet authorities through banning the pilgrimage practice. When people heard about the high-rank official's death, they asked how he died and were told that he had died in an explosion. This could be interpreted as retaliation for blowing up the cave at *Too-Moiun-Ata*. No one knows where he was buried. Everything is in the hands of God, but one should not harm sacred sites. Other people mentioned that one Russian person had also died because he wanted to take away a stone from *Too-Moiun-Ata*. There is no grass where people walk at the sacred site."

A local resident, Kalima Matkalykova said the following: "I believe in the sacredness of *Too-Moiun-Ata*. Cherished dreams come true if one comes here to pray. I go to the spring with my family. We wash our faces and hands and pray. People who come to the spring to pray call it *Shypaa-Bulak*. Primarily it cures sores, and secondarily it is good for stomach illnesses. As our ancestors said, *Too-Moiun-Ata* is a very sacred place. When one goes on the *hajj*, the pilgrims are asked if they ever visited *Too-Moiun-Ata*. I heard this from my grandfather. This place has its guarding spirits. Because I live here, those spirits also protect me. Everything is going well for me."

Sacred Springs

Urkyz Bulagy

Urkyz spring is a small spring with cold, clean water in the Kolduk village of Ozgon region in Osh province. This spring is surrounded by thick grass. This spring helps to cure sores and other diseases. The water of this spring comes from underground. Before it was left unattended but now a local resident, Ibadat Usonova, who was born in 1947, looks after the spring and cleans the area. Only those local people who know about it visit the spring. She became the guardian of the spring. She is a healer herself and uses the water of the spring to cure certain illnesses.

Ibadat Usonova told us the following story. "My son Esen fell ill. I took him to a healer in Osh city and tried to cure his fright. After three days of treatment the healer said, "You are of noble origin. There is a spring where you live. Nobody looks after it. You can go there, clean it, and look after it."

Upon our return to our village, I searched for that spring in the mountains and ditches, but I could not find it. One year later I suddenly bumped into it. When I was coming down from the upper side of the mountain I saw water flowing down the slope and flowing into a ditch. I followed the water to its origin and came to a cliff where there was a tree. The following day I took a sickle and cleaned the spring there. I lit a candle, recited verses from the Qur'an, besmoked the area with juniper branches and made ritual bread. Ever since we come here and drink the water from the spring.

My mother-in-law was a clairvoyant and used to foretell since childhood. She also used *dem saluu*¹ in order to cure people's illnesses. Later when she became old and weak, I received her blessings and now I heal children. I also do *dem saluu* and use other traditional healing methods to cure illnesses.

Now the sacred site is purified unlike it was previously. Only after five or six years I started to recognize the sacredness of this spring and named it *Urkyz*. Now people call it *Urkyz* spring. Probably the God knows everything. I needed to compare the spring with something sacred through its name, and not being aware myself, I chose to name it *Urkyz*, which is closely connected to sacred *Umai-Ene*².

This sacred site, like other sacred sites is a place for praying. When one visits a sacred site, one has different feelings. It can be unnerving to proceed because of sounds that emerge. When I begin to recite incantations the sounds seem to dissipate. Incantations can settle you and heighten one's mood."

Mazar-Bulak or Kyz-Mazar

There is a sacred spring near the hawthorn and willow trees at the entrance of the Bakmal (Chontok) village of Ozgon region in Osh province. The water in this spring never freezes. In winter it is hot and in spring and summer it is cold.

It is said that this sacred site is one of five such springs. They originated in the Soviet period, and there are two springs in Ozgon, one in Jalalabad, and one in China. The following is an account of a village resident, Aliman. "In 1958 I came here as a bride. The village elders knew many things, but now most of them have passed away. According to my father-in-law, the willow and poplar trees were here 18-20 years ago. Ancient sacred trees have seen many people. Once in winter during a strong windstorm the tree branches were broken.

Those who mistreat the willow tree and hawthorn here, receive retaliation from the trees. One of the first guardians of this place was a man called Umar. He is blind now. In the village center, Umar's son's descendants live on the left-hand side of the street and his daughter's descendants live on the right-hand side. The healers come to this spring and initiate their healing skills. Those who pray to have children visit this place, conduct sacrifice ritual, boil the meat well, invite people from the village, separate the bones of the meat without a knife, and bury the bones near the spring. With the help of *Mazar-Bulak* many women have given birth and become mothers.

Pilgrims throw gold and silver items, as well as coins into the spring. Later children pick those things up. But one should not keep the coins because the illness that people came here to cure will be transferred to those who pick them up. My daughter took one of the coins and she got a herpes-like sore. No relief came from

1 *Dem saluu* [Kyrgyz] – healing through chanting special incantations [ed.]

2 *Umai-Ene* [Kyrgyz] – the holy foremother responsible for birth and protection of children and strengthening marriages [ed.]

PART 1 SACRED SITES IN THE SOUTH OF KYRGYZSTAN

pharmacies, hospitals, or medications. One lady (Umar's great granddaughter) saw her and said, "You should make a ritual fire near the spring and apply the ash to your daughter's face. I suppose she took some coins from the spring." I went to the spring, made everything I was told, and my daughter's sores got cured.

In the village one man's wife was blind. According to the elders, she polluted the spring while she was looking after her ducks. She took eggs from there as well. Later she became blind and could not see until the end of her life. People said this was because of the spring.

There are pilgrims from different places who make a pilgrimage here. There was a woman from the Sovet village who visited the spring. She had a terrible sore, but she recovered after visiting the spring seven times.

Clairvoyants, who visit this spring, mention a girl with loose hair who sleeps near the spring. According to many people the guardian spirits of this place are various kinds of creatures: an old man, a horse, or a snake. If a pilgrim intends to make ritual bread in the evening, the spirits tickle their feet and wake them up in the morning so the pilgrim will not forget to make the ritual bread. It is also said that young girls are also guardian spirits of the spring. Local people believe that only Umar's descendants can collect the money left at the spring.

There were three brothers in the village who started to build a house. They cut some branches from the trees near the spring. When they were sawing the branches, the hand of the elder brother was also cut and he died. The second brother was buried under the fallen trees, while the third brother died in the debris of the house. If they had performed the sacrifice ritual and recited verses from the Qur'an, then maybe they would be alive today. The power of hawthorn and willow trees is strong."

According to one of the pilgrims, a teacher by profession, Yakutkhan Toksonbaeva, "It has been 50 years since I got married. Now I am over 70 years old. As far as I remember, when I first arrived here as a bride I went to the spring within the first week of my arrival. At that time I did not know about *Mazar-Bulak*. I had gone to fetch water and as I was returning home crossing the bridge I stepped on a nail. When I looked at my foot I could not see the nail. When I came home and told my mother-in-law about it, she said that the spirit of the sacred site was assisting me and suggested that I recite verses from the Qur'an. I followed her suggestion. Later when I returned to the spring, you won't believe it, but I saw thousands of snakes there. People say that, "there is gold where there are snakes." Perhaps, the guardian spirits were there where the snakes were. Before that case, during the night, I could hear noise on the backyard of the house, but nobody was there when I went to check. I thought it was a spirit from the sacred site who appeared in the shape of a tiger or foal. There is nothing greater than *Mazar-Bulak*. We would prepare *sumolok*¹ and the number of trees around the spring increased. During the Soviet

1 *Sumolok* [Kyrgyz] – ritual food [ed.]

period we were prohibited from going to the spring and making a pilgrimage. Now, thanks to God, it is not prohibited now. This spring is also known to have curing features of 27 springs of Jalalabad province; one spring is equal to 27 springs. Its water brings abundance to people.”

In the past most pilgrims would tie pieces of cloth to the trees, but others opposed it and would untie those pieces and throw them away. Now most of the pilgrims perform *sham jaguu*¹. Many people especially with eye problems come here.

Tamchy or Kojon-Shaiyk

This sacred spring surrounded by trees is located by the side of the road on the outskirts of the Sopus-Korgon village, in Sogot square, of Alai region in Osh province.

The poplar and the birch-tree have grown together. Hot water is always dripping down from the spring. As autumn approaches the drops freeze and turn to small icicles. In springtime people can forecast how early or late spring will come and predict the weather according to the melting of those icicles. Until 1990 there lived an ethnic Tatar named Halip, who cleaned the spring and looked after the sacred site. Later he died. Since then a man named Kojon *shaiyk*² has been the guardian of this place. Today he is 80 years old.

Newlyweds visit *Tamchy* sacred site and make wishes. Those who have skin problems go there and wash their sores. Some clairvoyants can see the spirit of the sacred site. Most of them say that it is a camel.

Tash-Bulak

Tash-Bulak is located in the Sary-Bargy village in Kara-Kulja region of the Osh province. Because Sary-Bargy is a mountainous place, its springs are high in the mountains. *Tash-Bulak* is located at the edge of the village between two mountains. It is difficult to find the spring because the two mountains are vast. When one looks carefully, they will see the only path between the mountains. Not far from the top of the mountains one can see how white stones had slid down the mountain. The area of the stone slide is wet, but when one goes further up, they will see where the water comes from. The spring is surrounded by stones, but in the center there is one large white stone from which the water originates. The spring is very small – about the size of a large bowl. The water shoots up from the center. Since stones surround it, it is called *Tash-Bulak*, or “stone spring.”

According to local people, pilgrims should make a pilgrimage here without prior smoking or drinking alcohol. They should do ablution, recite verses from the Qur’an, prepare ritual bread and bring seven kinds of sweets and dried apricot.

1 *Sham jaguu* [Kyrgyz] – ritual of lighting candles [ed.]

2 *Shaiyk* [Arabic] – in Kyrgyzstan, sacred site guardian and/or custodian [ed.]

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The prepared ritual bread should not be prickled and should be unbroken. There should not be a hole, and only then will that person's wishes be granted. Upon completing the praying ritual at the spring, the bread should be cut in a proper way, and should be broken carefully.

People believe in the power of this spring and whenever they have something on their skin they visit this sacred site and wash themselves. Moreover, the water of this spring is good for stomach illnesses and also for healing internal organs.

Jyluu-Bulak

Jyluu-Bulak is located 8-12 kilometers from the Sharkyratma village of Kara- Kulja region in Osh province. It takes 1-1.5 hours by horse to reach the sacred site from Sharkyratma village. There is a single tree standing on the hill and below the tree is a spring. The sacred site is adjacent to Kalmurza's house who has passed away.

In the past, there were two trees, but a while back someone cut down one of the trees for firewood. Blood began to drip from the tree that was cut down. From that day on, the man's family began having misfortunes, livestock started dying out and peace in the family was gone. The man recognized that the tree he cut down was no ordinary tree. He gathered the whole village and went to the second tree to perform a ritual, ask for forgiveness and pray. It is said that the man was able to save his livestock and peace in his family because he conducted *bata*¹ ritual on time. It is believed that the blood poured from the tree because it had been planted by a kind and exemplary person who believed in God.

Jyluu-Bulak does not freeze even during the coldest of winters. Just as humans need salt, so animals and plants do. Locals, when recounting the legends of the spring also say that the tree required salt once a week. People could hear it saying, "Salt, salt" during the night. Therefore, locals go to the spring to recite verses from the Qur'an, give the tree some salt, and fetch water from the spring because the spring's healing properties are strong. People do not use the water from the spring for everyday use, they use it only for healing purposes. The locals demonstrate the effectiveness of the spring to heal many skin diseases. To be precise, if someone has bumpy sores on their skin, then they should apply the water three to four times per day and the sores will diminish not leaving any trace within a week.

An elderly man shared his account of how he had witnessed healing *kasiet*² of *Jyluu-Bulak*. When his eldest son named Asi (Askar) was young he developed a sore on his head. At first they tried many medical treatments and having not achieved any positive results, they turned to traditional healers. Unfortunately healers also could not offer a cure. One day Asi's grandfather arrived from another village. After seeing the sore he said, "Why did you try so many useless treatments when we already have a cure." He made ablution and went to *Julyy-Bulak*. There he

1 *Bata* [Kyrgyz] – here a ritual of receiving a blessing for a certain purpose [ed.]

2 *Kasiet* [Kyrgyz] – sacred power, capacity that a person/thing is believed to possess [ed.]

performed the appropriate rituals, recited verses from the Qur'an, and put some water in a dish with which he returned home. He asked his son to wash Asi's head with the water. After washing the sore on Asi's head for several times, the sore disappeared. But it left a scar that remains up to day.

Kichik-Suu

Kichik-Suu is located 500 meters from the paved road in the Kara-Bulak village of the Leilek region in Batken province. Its water is good for stomachaches and headaches. In general, it is prohibited to drink alcohol, wash a car, or do other bad deeds here. If someone does one of these things then something bad will happen to them.

According to the villagers, some family built a house and began living here. The owner's children became ill and his hand and feet stopped moving leaving him paralyzed. When this happened they destroyed that house and built a different house at another location. According to one villager, "When we were in Kazakhstan, some Kazakhs mentioned the *Kichik-Suu* sacred site. I wondered why some Kazakhs were familiar with our sacred site." They also said, "Nineteen of your ancestor-fathers are buried there, and it is a very powerful place. The large spring dried up because people drank alcohol there. That is why your water supply diminished. When you return, visit the spring and gather people, perform sacrifice ritual, recite verses from the Qur'an, and ask God to make the water abundant." Our water did indeed diminish at that time. Since we started to pray at that place and perform sacrifice rituals the water became more abundant."

Shuduman

Shuduman is one of the unique, beautiful and untouched by humans sacred sites. Here tender flowers grow along the cold snowdrifts. *Shuduman* hot springs are located among the mountain tops, four to five kilometers from the Zardaly village in Batken province.

The sacred site is visited only by the most dedicated pilgrims or those with urgent need. Pilgrims reach the hot springs through difficult, sometimes dangerous, mountain paths to make sacrifice rituals, recite verses from the Qur'an, pray, and make *tilek*¹. All pilgrims take a bath in the springs resembling stone-swimming pools with healing waters.

Hot springs originate about 100-150 meters above the stone spring pools. Water flows through the stone walls and steam is coming out of it as if from a *tandyr*². The water is higher than 70 degrees Celsius. Sacred site guardians say that they used to boil lungs of sacrificed sheep in these waters.

1 *Tilek* [Kyrgyz] – a wish [ed.]

2 *Tandyr* [Kyrgyz] – round clay facility for baking bread at home [ed.]

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Downstream, the water splits into dozen streams, which merge and split up before flowing into the river. Pilgrims can only bathe in the natural stone swimming pools because of the water's heat. Steam rises from the stones in a 15-meter radius from the water source. Stones demarcate this area. It is covered and called *parilka*¹. People enter, sweat, and cure their illnesses. It is said that that sea-like noise can be heard inside the *parilka*.

Curative waters exist in three other springs located on the way to *Shuduman*. Pilgrims make a pilgrimage to these three springs as well. There is also lonely tree surrounded by a stone fence, and it is believed that a body of an unknown person was buried here. Therefore, this place is called *sheyit mazary* – a place of burial of an unknown person. Here, the water channels and the stones are yellow because of the high level of sulfur in the water. Like the water of *Shuduman*, the water of these springs is believed to cure warts and sores.

The *Shuduman* hot springs and the air in that area have healing properties for many illnesses. Those who suffer from iron deficiency and asthma find cure here. Also the water heals people with venereal diseases.

According to local people, in the past, scientists from Moscow conducted experiments on the water quality and concluded that this water has unique curative properties that don't exist anywhere in the world. During the Soviet times tourist used to visit this sacred site.

Suu-Bashy

Suu-Bashy – the beginning of water, is a natural complex consisting of a big old poplar, several springs and a small pond of 10-12 meters in diameter. It is located at the mountain feet adjacent to the Kara-Bulak village of Batken province. The water at the *Suu-Bashy* sacred site is crystal-clear. It flows from a glacier through underground stones where it gets purified. The poplar is so big that even five people with joined hands would not be able to embrace it. People say that it is 500 years old.

According to the account of local elders, “In the past, the water level in *Suu-Bashy* was very high. The southern side of the lake was mountainous, on the far side of the mountain, near the origin of the Soh River there was a place called Galai-Mamyt. Traces of water on the face of the mountain show that there used to be a large lake here. The Dongmon River flowed into the Galai-Mamyt Lake and the water from the lake flowed out through a cave on the face of the mountain, which flowed like the great water, which was called the *Suu-Bashy*.” The elders would say, “Below Kara-Bulak people used to cross the water with the help of a walking stick. For proof of this one could find the traces of eight mills in an empty field.”

¹ *Parilka* [Russian] – derives from a Russian word and means “a place where one can steam” [ed.]

In another legend, the walking stick of a rich man who was resting on the shore of Galai-Mamyt fell into the lake. Later that stick was found in the *Suu-Bashy* water that flowed near Kokon. A natural phenomenon occurred where a landslide and the roots of trees blocked the river that carried the water. The water level of the lake rose so much so that the water flooded onto the shore and washed the sediment away turning into a river. The water level in *Suu-Bashy* decreased and the Batken area suffered from drought to the point where people were forced to move elsewhere. Here, one comes across many graves called *myktyñ gorloru* (graves of myk). In written history accounts, these people are called *muhs*, and some observers say that these graves belong to ancient *nuh*, or Huns. The body of a woman, excavated from one of the graves there, is now kept in the museum in the capital. The fact that many people used to live in this area is proven by the high quantity of ancient people's bones found in this region.

Sacred Rocks

Kargasha-Tash or Kabar-Tash

This stone that people consider sacred is located in the MTF village in the Alai region of the Osh province. In fact, it is not one stone, but two. The first stone is located on a cliff where there is a column of earth that is about ten meters high, and above it, is the second huge black round stone. People cannot approach the edge of the cliff, and from a distance this place is reminiscent of a woman wearing a black cauldron on her head. This sacred site is on the face of a cliff, yet is not attached to anything and stays there on its own. Under the stone there is a sacred site called *Bala-Beyit* – a child's grave.

Mamyrasul Tajiev, a resident of the Kurmanjan-Datka village in the Alai region said, "According to a legend, a mother-in-law and daughter-in-law lived together. They would fight over who would use the cauldron since there was only one cauldron between the two of them. Once, the daughter-in-law took it and refused to return it to the mother-in-law, the mother-in-law cursed her saying, "May you wear that cauldron on your head and freeze like stone!" As a result of the curse, the daughter-in-law froze and turned to stone. That is why the stone resembles a silhouette of a woman wearing a black cauldron on her head." Therefore, the stone is called *Kargasha-Tash* – a "curse stone".

Because of its sacredness the stone remains in its place throughout centuries. Many earthquakes and the effects of rain, snow, and wind do not alter its place. Clairvoyants can see camels, dragons and snakes, and other animals around the sacred stone."

In the 1960 and 1970s soldiers came across this stone. They were returning from their training. *Kargasha-Tash* caught the attention of two soldiers who shot at it. Those two soldiers fell down with white foam coming out of their mouths. The other soldiers put them in a gurney and took them to the regional hospital. One of them

died and the other barely recovered. There are people in the village who witnessed this or heard about this case.

According to other legend, this stone is not called *Kargasha-Tash*, but instead *Kabar-Tash*. Some local spiritual practitioners believe that if something is going to happen then a message will come through the stone in a form of a prophetic dream, prophesy or something else. According to Mamarasul Tajiev, a representative of the Alai school of spiritual messengers, the secret of this stone will be revealed in the 21st century and it will tell of the beginning of a golden era.

Kanybek Toroshev, the head of the Josholu village prefecture said, “There used to be a village called *Ungkur*¹ near the *Kargasha-Tash* where a tribe used to live during the Stone Age. The tribe’s leader was not a man but a wise woman. The woman punished those who disobeyed her. One woman did something wrong and as a punishment she had to collect firewood. A man from another village noticed the woman as she collected firewood and said, “How can they send you after firewood. If you join our tribe your life will be different. We will make you the leader of our village even though you are a woman, but under one condition. You must steal the only cauldron of your tribe.” At that time each tribe had only one cauldron to feed the entire tribe. Out of personal benefit, she stole the cauldron from her tribe and left for the neighboring village. Immediately someone noticed the cauldron was missing and went to the tribe’s leader. The leader calmed the boy saying, “What is done is done. There was a traitor amongst us. Do not bother trying to chase her.” She gathered her people in one house, shared her thoughts with them, and cursed the woman. Heavy, stormy rains poured the entire night. The following day it cleared. In response to those who said they saw a silhouette of a woman carrying a cauldron over her head, the leader of the tribe replied, “I was aware of this last evening.” Later the silhouette turned to stone. This is the legend of *Kargasha-Tash*.”

Ysyk-Kum

This sacred site is in the Ylai-Talaa village of Kara-Kulja region in Osh province. Some people also refer to it as the sand of Tastar-Ata, since the place is adjacent to a well-known sacred site *Tastar-Ata*² (G. Aitpaeva (Ed.), 2011). It is located between two hills that are not high in elevation. The sand of this place is white, hot, of varying consistency and does not look like ordinary sand. There is also a hearth, firewood, pot, and kettle in a ritual house there.

Pilgrims come to *Tastar-Ata* and recite verses from the Qur’an. They bring food including bread and tea and cover themselves with hot sand and lie down creating a shade over their faces. One should not lie there for too long though. Two years ago, someone named Saidyrahman, laid on the sand for too long and burnt his legs so badly that his skin and nails fell off. That is why pilgrims should shield and protect

1 *Ungkur* [Kyrgyz] – a cave [ed.]

2 This sacred site is located on a high mountain, which is far from the road in Bulolu village in the Alai region of Osh province [ed.]

themselves from the hot sun. The sand is very hot in July and August. If one lies for 15-20 minutes they will sweat. If one picks up the sand that sticks to the body one would feel an unusual sensation. When one stands up, the sand on the body will fall off by itself. After lying there, there is no need to wash off or clean oneself. Many elderly people come to this place. Those with joint pain in their hands and legs, in the process of recovering from broken limbs, or have caught a cold and infertile women make a pilgrimage to this place.

Actually, there are those who are interested to have this place as their private property. Omurbek, the son of Janysh, was a successful man. One year he came for a visit and asked the elders to advise him. He said, "I would like to build a sanatorium here." Everyone was against this and they refused to build the sanatorium stating that this sacred site belongs to all people, but not one man.

No one is allowed to remove the things that are at the sacred site. The kettles and pots have been here for a long time, and nobody has taken them. As a good deed, the residents of the Ylai-Talaa village cut the grass and look after the sacred sand.

Zulpuchach

Zulpuchach is a unique plant that looks like a girl with forty braids. It grows near the Sumbula village in Leilek region of Batken province. The plant remains the same color all year around hanging down from the mountains as if long hair. Water drips down between the three branches like tears and the water never freezes. Both, pilgrims and those who pass by, come to pray here. The flowers of the plant are used against skin burns.

Some say that several centuries ago, during the war, there lived a poor man who had a clever and beautiful daughter named Zulpu. One day there was an invasion. Zulpu gathered other girls of her age and they hid in one of the caves at the Sumbula village. If they had not done this they would have been taken captive. The invaders saw them. All the girls started to cry and wished to be turned to stone rather than be humiliated by the invaders. God heard their plea and turned the girls to stone and their hair into hanging plants. As for their tears, they turned into a spring.

Sacred Trees

Dangar-Ata and Kotoron

Dangar-Ata is a broad tree which circumference can be embraced by three people. Residents of the Kara-Bulak village believe in sacredness of this place and took it under their protection. Previously the surrounding area was used as a graveyard, but, many years ago, people stopped burying the dead here.

There is also the *Kotoron* sacred site in the western side of the Kara-Bulak village. Because the healing properties of both sacred sites are similar, when healers

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perform healing rituals they use the words, “*Kotoron* sacred site is sacred *Kok-Aziz*¹ and *Dangar-Ata* sacred site is *Boz-Aziz*.” When healers cure patients who have influenza, skin diseases, and venereal diseases, they bring them to these sacred sites. Some families who are quarreling are also brought to this sacred site by healers to request peace in their families and they perform certain rituals.

In the 1940’s, a local foreman, Nazar, ordered four or five people to cut down some tall trees at the *Dangar-Ata* sacred site for construction purposes. Since then people say, “I don’t want to cut down the trees but I am afraid of Nazar. I try to cut them down but I am afraid of the *mazar*².” When they began to saw and reached the center of the tree, dark-red and liquid-like blood flowed out, so they ceased sawing. The negative effect of this is that many local people who visited this place became handicapped. That is why people think that the power of this place is yet to be completely understood.

Talmazar-Buva

Talmazar-Buva is sacred site consisting of trees, a spring, and soil. It is located at the edge of the Golbo village in Batken province. People suffering from skin diseases, warts, earaches, and mental illnesses come to *Talmazar-Buva*. They collect soil, cleanse themselves in the water, and recover.

According to locals, there were seven brothers and all of them were holy. The word “*talma-zar*” means “poured gold” and “*buva*” comes from “*baba*” denoting “father and/or grandfather”. Some say that the place is named after the eldest of the seven brothers. The second sacred site is the *Kojo-Mati-Buva* in Kaiyngdy village of the same province.

People say that Great *Talmazar-Buva* visited this place to have a rest and really liked the place. Therefore, the place became sacred and is blessed with great healing properties. Some say that this place has a healing power because of the water and the soil is rich in minerals, which are good for health.

According to the guardian of the sacred site, Urunisa Teshebaeva, once, locals went there to cut down the poplars to build a wheat silo. But some of them were fearful of the sacred site and were against cutting down the poplars. Then an old man named Bektash said, “Cut them down, but if something bad must happen, let it happen to me.” When they were cutting down the poplars, blood began to flow from the trees as if it were pouring out of a human being. Suddenly, a splinter flew into the old man’s eyes, destroying them, and he became blind.

1 *Aziz* [Kyrgyz] – usually means snake or dragon, but here it is referred to the sacred site’s guardian [ed.]

2 *Mazar* [Arabic] – here the invisible protectors and spirits of the sacred sites [ed.]



Ai-Kol, Leilek, Batken province



Ak-Kol, Chatkal, Jalalabad province



Kuptan-Ata, Bazar-Korgon, Jalalabad province



Sary Chelek, Jalalabad province



Kok-Kol, Chatkal, Jalalabad province

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Kok-Kol, Chatkal, Jalalabad province



Dunguromo, Kara-Kulja, Osh province



Chil-Ustun, Aravan, Osh province



Gang-Kamar, Kaiydy, Batken province



Juzumduu-Ata, Leilek, Batken province



Chechme-Bulak, Kadamjai, Batken province

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Joo-Paya Suu, Jon-Aryk, Batken province



Jyluu-Bulak, Kara-Kulja, Osh province



Mazar-Bulak, Ozgon, Osh province



Shuduman, Zardaly, Batken province



Tamchy-Bulak, Alai, Osh province



Tash-Bulak, Kara-Kulja, Osh province



Urkyz Bulagy, Ozgon, Osh province



Esek-Kum, Kara-Kulja, Osh province



Kargasha-Tash, Alai, Osh province

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Zulpuchach, Leilek, Batken province



Teshik Tash, Leilek, Batken province



*Dangar-Ata, Kara-Bulak,
Batken province*



*Talmazar-Buva, Golbo,
Batken province*

Chapter 2

Traces of Manas at Sacred Sites in the South

There is a special network of sacred sites spattered all over Kyrgyzstan, and these are places connected with the name of Manas and other characters of the Kyrgyz heroic epic. One of the greatest mysteries left by the epic is the place where the main hero was buried. No one knows where Manas is buried. This became a strict secret during epic times. It is known that the Kyrgyz, as well as many other ancient peoples, had an unwritten rule to keep burial sites of their *baatyrs* – warriors, fully secret. This rule was observed in order not to allow the enemy to open a tomb and commit sacrilegious acts against the bodies of heroes placed therein. This old secret creates grounds for numerous stories about the possible burial place of Manas.

According to many practitioners committing *ziyarat* – pilgrimage to Manas-related sites – one can often hear the clatter of horses' hoofs and human voices there. Local dwellers do not live and do not even graze their livestock in these areas. They keep these places as sacred sites, protect them, commit sacrificial offerings in the name of the Almighty and pray. Those in the know tell newcomers about these sites with caution and care.

Except for possible burial places of *baatyrs*, those places where, according to locals, they were based have also gained sacredness, as well as the areas where Manas and his warriors would halt for a talk or rest or where they would tether their warhorses and test their weapons. It was not our task to verify the historical or epic validity of such places, as this could become the topic of a separate research study. We deem it extremely important that the country's sacred geography has preserved information about the ancient epic and its main heroes. At the same time, the collective memory of pilgrims, spiritual practitioners and epic chanters keeps reproducing epic stories over and over, making their content closer and more vivid.

Kyrk-Chilten

Kyrk-Chilten is a flat field that stretches on for two-three hectares and is located in Korgon village, 1,5 kilometers south to Zardaly village in Kadamjai region of Batken province. Once upon a time, this area was enclosed by *korgon*¹, hence the name of the village. There is a road from Zardaly to Korgon village, and it splits in two separate roads at the beginning of Korgon. One leads to Shuduman hot springs and the other to Kojoshkent hot springs. These are the most remote sacred sites of Batken.

Those people coming to *Kyrk-Chilten* for the first time do not recognize or consider it as a sacred site because it is a large territory of flat land resembling a regular field. However, according to locals, people have never sown wheat or even drove their livestock through the place. Therefore, village residents regularly inform travelers

¹ *Korgon* [Kyrgyz] – a fortress [ed.]

and guests about the sacred site. Those travellers, who are aware of the place, come to a halt here and perform sacrifice ritual along with chanting prayers and verses from the Qur'an. The sacred site is most visited, and, sacrifice ritual is often held, especially, by those going through a rough patch or those preparing to venture to start a new deed or important event. As for the local community, every spring they gather and jointly perform *chong kudai ashy*¹ ritual.

Village dwellers also say that they hear certain loud voices accompanied with noise and patter of hoofs that signalize impending of a peculiar natural phenomenon or some misfortune upon the community. The legend of *Kyrk-Chilten* holds that upon Manas' death, his wife Sanirabiga (Kanykei in Kyrgyz) concealed his body on a summit of a high mountain preventing it from being exposed and abused by the hero's stepbrothers and other enemies. After the burial, on the way back, she ordered to assassinate forty men involved in the burial process. Their bodies were buried at this place; therefore, it is considered both, sacred and frightful (Murzapar, 2012).

Karool-Tash

Karool-Tash is located 14-15 kilometers to the north from Koi-Tash village of Aksy region in Jalalabad province. It is impossible to reach the sacred site on a vehicle; one can reach it only on foot.

In the words of the chief-editor of Tash-Komyr town newspaper, Satybai, "There is a probability that remains of Manas are buried here, at *Karool-Tash*. His warfare went in three directions, through Karkyra and Naryn regions, through Alai region and through Talas to Chatkal by passing our village. There are number of places in our district that carry the same name as places mentioned in the epic. For example, a place called Mazar-Suu is mentioned both, in the Manas and Semetei² epics. As for the *Karool-Tash*, it is a big rock resembling a manually built tower. There were several such stones, but it is the only one that is left today.

There is another site called Kongurbai's³ place and probably it is not fortuitous that it is called as such, because Manas and Kongurbai had their battle here. During the battle Manas got severely injured, and there is a possibility that his body was buried under the *Karool-Tash*. Besides, Kanykei did not have enough strength to escape with Manas' body at that time. There is also a place named *Dyngkyldok*⁴ nearby *Karool-Tash*, the place received its name because of the loud patter of hoofs that passersby hear beside a small irrigation ditch located there."

1 *Chong kudai ashy* [Kyrgyz] – a large-scale sacrifice ritual when a whole community gets together [ed.]

2 *Semetei epic* [Kyrgyz] – the second part of the Kyrgyz epic trilogy named after its main hero, Semetei, the son of Manas [ed.]

3 *Kongurbai* [Kyrgyz] – one of the main epical characters, main warrior of the enemies and commander in chief [ed.]

4 *Dyngkuldok* [Kyrgyz] – clattering sounds [ed.]

Akkulanyn-Bulagy

Akkulanyn Bulagy is a sacred spring located in Ak-Bashat pasture in Ajike village of Kara-Kulja region in Osh province. According to local people, when Manas with his forty warriors were coming back from a battle in Alai to Kara-Kulja, they were tired and yearning for gulp of water. Not only were the warriors thirsty, but also their horses, which have not had water for considerable amount of time. Manas was looking around in search of a source of water, when suddenly his loyal warhorse, Akkula, smelled the earth and hoofed the place several times. A flow of water welled up from the earth like a fountain and thence the spring was named *Akkulanyn Bulagy* – *Akkula's* spring.

Tulpar-Kazyk

Tulpar-Kazyk is located at the edge of Togotoi village of Kara-Kulja region in Osh province. Once upon a time, there were forty mountain poplar trees growing side by side resembling forty forced wedges. According to local people, these forty poplar trees were used by the forty warriors of Manas as wedges to tie their horses, hence the name of the place – “horse wedge”. However, later these trees were cut down local people's prophesy notwithstanding, and it is believed that the trees were bleeding while being cut, and those who did it incurred the punishment of the sacred site.

Jylangach-Bugu

Toguz-Toro is an area surrounded by nine mountain ranges and is located in Jalalabad province. *Jylangach-Bugu* is located in Toguz-Toro region, to the north of Kazarman village on the summit of the highest peak of the Moldo-Too Mountain range. The altitude of the mountain is 5,000 meters.

The mountain consists of two layers, subtropical small-rocky undulating terrain, which gradually changes, and, on the reach of the summit turns into a cliff of middle-sized detritus. Vegetation is scarce there, but it remains green until late fall and sometimes early winter. The summit is a flat area, and that is where the sacred site is located. Those pilgrims who reach the mountain top can view the whole Toguz-Toro region and all the nine, if not more, mountain ranges.

There are also small stone hills erected by pilgrims, which is considered as one of the pilgrimage rituals. By collecting stones and piling them up, pilgrims chant prayers and ask for fulfilment of their wishes. There is a small storage room for dishes and food constructed from stones as well. Small sheets of paper with the names of those who reached the place and made a pilgrimage are also tucked away in the storage room. There are also wooden and iron sticks with tied ribbons – a symbol of ribbon-tying ritual at sacred sites. These ribbons also keep pilgrim's prayers and wishes.

Several years ago, Makmal Gold Mining Company constructed a sign *Manas-1000*. The summit is mostly rocky; however, there are patches of grey-sand mud areas.

People recognize these mud patches as “dough clay” and believe them to be burial places. Pilgrims taste the clay and perform certain rituals.

On the way up, when the undulating terrain changes into rocky cliff, one can see a small narrow cave. It's filled with stones of different size and forms. Local people say that it is the place where *Aikol*¹-*Manas* is buried. If to stand near the cave, one can hear the murmur of the flowing water.

Manas Akkelteni Synagan Jer

The sacred site is located in Orto-Tor pasture of Karagatty area in the Alaikuu village of Kara-Kulja region in Osh province. It is the name of a cave-like hole on a sheer cliff resembling a bullet-ridden wall. The place is nearly impossible to reach. In the words of the locals, when Manas tested his *Akkelte*², he fired at the cliff and the bullet pierced it making a cave-like hole pleasing the hero. Even today, there are hunters who make a pilgrimage and conduct rituals at this sacred site before going for a hunt.

Barakkandyn Kymbozy

Local people recognize *Barakkandyn Kymbozy* to be a well-known and revered place. It's located in mountainous Togus-Toro region of Osh province between Kazarman and Atai villages, if to be more precise, between the Atai and Kyldoo rivers. According to the locals, Barakkan was a warrior, a progeny of one of the Manas' forty warriors. Barakkan's tomb is believed to be build with goat fat in order to be durable, but time takes its course, the tomb is getting dilapidated year by year. The sacred site is visited only by those pilgrims who know the history of this place.

Ych-Ordo or Karakol

The sacred site is located in the Tegene village of Aksy region in Jalalabad province and consists of trees, a spring and a barren – place of a dried-up lake. The lake sometimes fills up itself and dries-up again. In order to reach the place, one has to pass three narrow glens, rocky hills, and one mountain ridge. The place can also be reached on a vehicle. Not many people know about this sacred site. People named it *Ych-Ordo* because it resembles a pyramid.

If to believe legends, once upon a time, this place was one of the Manas' headquarters; however, people also say that it was Kurmanbek baatyr's³ fortress, which later was conquered and destroyed by his enemies and the fortress dwellers moved to the Tegene village. According to local people, the guardian spirit of this sacred site is a

1 *Aikol* [Kyrgyz] – magnanimous [ed.]

2 *Akkelte* [Kyrgyz] – name of Manas' gun, believed to have magical power [ed.]

3 *Baatyr* [Kyrgyz] – warrior [ed.]

dragon. Later *Ych-Ordo* was renamed to *Karakol* and now locals use both of these names.

Manastyn Kymbozy

In the words of Kolchubaev Allaberdi, 85 year-old resident of the Zardaly village of Kadamjai region in Batken province, “It was during the war time, I was about 14-15 years-old boy. I was with my uncle, Tagai, a skilful hunter. We were driving our cattle from a place called Burguchak, and when we reached a place Kara-Koyun, he pointed at one hill and said, “This is where Manas was buried.” The hill looked like a tomb, and upon measuring, was about twelve of my paces. It can take one full day from Zardaly village by horse, but the road is not in a good condition, and now it is a Tadjik pasture.”

Manastyn Kairagy

*Manastyn Kairagy*¹ is located on the way from Jaz-Kechyy pasture to Kyrobos pasture in Bazar-Korgon region of Jalalabad province. According to a journalist, Sultan Abdrakhmanov, it is a big rock that is considered as sacred and which Manas used to carry on his bootleg. Those who pass by grind their knives. Not far from the stone, on the side of the cliff, there is a footprint of Manas' horse, Akkula.

Kuu Kallya or Kokotoi

This sacred site is located in the northern part of the graveyard in Chiy-Talaa village of Alai region in Osh province. It is fenced around together with other graves and is a small barrow and couple of small rocks rests on top of it. The most recognizable rock of a size of sheep's head and resembles a skull. Mamasaly Satybaldiev, spiritual practitioner from Boz-Karagay village of Alai region told the story of the rock. In either 2011 or 2012, a group of pilgrims made a pilgrimage to sacred sites of Smaller and Greater Alai. One of the group members saw this rock about 30 kilometers from Sary-Tash village in Ak-Kindik valley. There were practitioners or *ayanchyl*, who receive spiritual messages. Thus, one of the practitioners told that the found rock should be transferred to Kokotoi sacred site and a ritual of placing the rock in a new place should be made. The mirror and a comb, which rest under the rock, are attributes of the ritual.

Kokotoi is one of the leading characters of the *Manas* epic. He was Manas's relative from Sary-Nogoi clan, and he rendered material and spiritual support to Manas, when he started freeing people of the the Ala-Too Mountains. Kokotoi was one of the richest and influential people, whose livestock would occupy the entire Fergana valley while grazing. He died from worries and sorrow. He asked to bury him simply, like an old lady, but on the intersection of big roads so travelers could honor the memory of the departed. However, nobody knows the exact location of this burial site.

1 *Kairak* [Kyrgyz] – grindstone [ed.]

In 1998-1999, for the first time, a spiritual practitioner, Bubu Mariam, received a message conveying that Kokotoi's burial site is located in Chiy-Talaa village of Alai region. This message is revealed in a version of the *Manas* epic under a name *Aikol Manas*. Kokotoi, as Manas and other prominent nation leaders, has real and ritual burial sites. Thus, people make pilgrimage to ritual burial place of Kokotoi.

Some spiritual practitioners assume that Manas himself is buried here, and say that there are cases when passersby receive certain spiritual messages or signs at this place. Local people believe that the hero Manas is buried in Alai region, they emphasize that Alai and Altai are "sister regions". Therefore, Manas was born in Altai and buried in Alai.



Jylangach-Bugu, Toguz-Toro, Jalalabad province



Jylangach-Bugu, Toguz-Toro, Jalalabad province



Jylangach-Bugu, Toguz-Toro, Jalalabad province



Kuu Kallya or Kokotoi, Alai, Osh province

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Kyrk-Chilten, Zardaly, Batken province



Tulpar-Kazyk, Kara-Kulja, Osh province

Chapter 3

Historical Traces at Sacred Sites in the South

Many historical traces can be found in the names of sacred sites and stories about their emergence. Times periods and events reflected in Manas, the great heroic epic, small Kyrgyz epics and other such sources are confirmed by the names of sacred sites.

Sacred sites that are in the spotlight in this chapter are again mountains, springs, trees and rocks. Why were they grouped separately from natural sacred sites? One of the main criteria for separating such places is the presence of a pivotal item in the form of a burial site, a visible or already unnoticeable grave or mausoleum. This man-made, or human, to be precise, component is the most important item at such sites, and history of a sacred site is connected therewith.

Sacred sites in the south have also preserved modern-day historical events. A sacred site called *Sheyit or Asker Kurmandygy* (People Killed Innocently or War Victims) which is located in the mountains in the Batken region emerged at the very end of the 20th century. A memorial was erected there after the events of September 1999 when armed groups of those who are called “the bearded ones” (*sakalchandar*) by people crossed the state border of Kyrgyzstan and entered the mountainous areas around Batken. Thus, a sacred place has emerged during modern history dedicated to young soldiers and officers who fell in uneven battles. Anyone passing by the site may stop here to commemorate those who died and those familiar with religion may pronounce prayers from the Qur’an. Occasionally, people come here for worshipping rituals. Thus, year by year this place has been turning not only into a grave of fallen soldiers, but it has gained sacredness in general. People come here not only to commemorate the victims, but also to ask higher forces to fulfil their cherished wishes. At the same time, this place preserves veracious historical information which is engraved upon the monument in the form of names, events and dates. This example may serve as one of the main models based on which sacred sites would spring into existence in the past. We can find a similar example in the north of the country as well. Not far from capital city Bishkek, a memorial called *Ata Beyit* (Fathers’ Tomb) has gained sacredness in approximately the same manner.

While exploring sacred sites that have preserved the traces of the past and listening to narratives by those in the know, one becomes convinced that oral history is accumulated and preserved in such places, and this is where it acquires new colors and details and becomes diverse in the form of different versions, and this is where it is passed on from generation to generation.

Kurmanbek Baatyrdyn Kumbozu

Kurmanbek baatyrdyn kumbozu is a mausoleum and located on the right side of the road three kilometers to the west from the Kalmak-Kyrchyn village in Jalalabad

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province. The mausoleum is eight meters tall and square shaped. It was constructed during Kurmanbek Bakiev's¹ presidency.

The mausoleum consists of two levels. First level is underground as it is the burial place. Upon coming down one can see a gravestone covered with a white cloth. Here pilgrims chant verses from the Qur'an, pray and make their wishes. The sacred site is fenced, there are benches where pilgrims sit and pray or rest.

Local people believe that Kurmanbek², a Kyrgyz epic hero, who fought against Kyrgyz people's enemies around 14th-17th centuries, was buried at this sacred site.

Kengesh

This sacred site is situated at the entrance of the Kengesh village of Nookat region in Osh province along the well-known busy road Osh-Suluktu. The *Kengesh* sacred site is a graveyard. According to the local people, this sacred site was established in 1895. It witnessed many historical events, time during the Tsarist Russia, the February and October Revolutions of 1917, the civil and the World War II and the *perestroika* period.

Many well-known and respected people are buried at this place including Mr. Omurzak, who was born in this area and was a Member of Tsarist Duma (Parliament). Victims of revolutions and World War II, famous heroes of Socialistic labor, the coal miner Satybaldiev Altymysh and tobacco farmer Teshebaev Gapar were also buried here.

Since this sacred site is situated along the busy road, many people stop by and recite prayers. Local people constructed an arch and a fence on the side of the road to make the place more comfortable for pilgrims. Since the sacred site is very close to the village, a village elder, Kozubekov Joldosh who lived nearby became the guardian of the site and took care of it for more than 15 years. After he passed away, in 2004, elders of the village appointed his son, Kozubaev Asil as the guardian. These days he takes care of the sacred site by keeping it clean and planting trees. The sacred site is not fenced.

The Kengesh village is one of the nearby big villages with a population of over 2,700 residents. The sacred site plays big role in spreading the customs of funerals and of erecting monuments for the dead. The board of elders organizes meetings at this sacred site in order to discuss some important issues of the village. There are many people who try to attend these kind of gatherings and solve problems altogether.

1 Kurmanbek Bakiev – the 2nd president of the Kyrgyz Republic (2005-2010), was from Jalalabad province. He fled the country in 2010 after the what came to be known as the second Kyrgyz revolution [ed.]

2 For more information see (History of Kyrgyz, 2004) [ed.]

Sultanyum Kumbozu

Sultanyum kumbozu is located in the Ozgon city of Osh province and is very rich in historical information. Locals say that this place was once a kings' palace. In the 12th century the Karahanids settled here. At that time the ruling king was Nas-Ibn-Al and when he passed away, his son Hussein-Al-Ibn had built this tomb for him. 63 people were buried here. According to local people, the bones that were found here were taken to the museum in Saint Petersburg, Russia.

Pilgrims make a pilgrimage to *Sultanyum kumbozu* to worship, chant prayers and bring ritual bread with them.

The head of the mausoleum, Avazbek Tursunbaev, shared his experience, "In 2006, when I started working here, I wrote a project and pointed out 15 things. We repaired the road to *Sultanyum kumbozu* and planted trees and flowers. But, in the course of watering the plants, water started to soak through the tower. I invited experts from the United States for examination of the tower and its condition. They concluded that trees and plants should not have been planted and the road should not have been cemented since they prevent the soil to absorb the water.

Mostly tourists visit here, and local people make *ziyarat*¹. People with problems as infertility, unhappy personal life and bad dreams come to worship. However, people who follow Islam don't visit sacred sites, because in their belief it is *shirk*² and verses from the Qur'an should be recited in remembrance of those who passed away. However, some people come here to light a candle, chant prayers and then take handful of soil with them when they leave. Some youth come and make graffiti of their names in spite of our objection. Americans have suggested that we should not erase that graffiti, because, they say, some day this also will become a historical source and will tell about people's psychology."

Dul-Dul-At

Dul-dul-At sacred site consists of a mausoleum, *childekana*³ and a spring. The sacred site is situated in the A.Anarov village on the east side of Aravan region of Osh province. There is an arch at the entrance, and on the left side of it there are tombs and a mosque. On the left side there are trees, plants, and flowers that were planted by the guardian and a summerhouse of the guardian. This is the place where pilgrims start their pilgrimage at *Dul-dul-At*.

There is a spring on the right side of the summerhouse. The interesting thing about the spring is that from season to season it flows out from different holes. The spring dries out in October and starts to come out in June. According to pilgrims, water of the spring has healing properties. There is a cliff next to the spring with

1 *Ziyarat* [Kyrgyz] – pilgrimage to and worship at sacred sites [ed.]

2 *Shirk* [Arabic] – a heavy sin [ed.]

3 *Childekana* [Kyrgyz] – a special place for conducting rituals and worshipping [ed.]

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scarce vegetation. There is either engraved or painted image of a mare with a foal on the upper side of the cliff. Although some pilgrims assume that it is not a foal, but a unicorn. This image has been here for many years, almost a century, heavy precipitation and strong wind notwithstanding.

There is a tomb of some unknown person by the sacred site. The guardian says that he does not know who is buried in that tomb and it is not allowed to open it. In the past, people might have known, but it was prohibited to visit sacred sites during the Soviet time, thus the name has been lost to history. However, recently a brick mausoleum was constructed over the tomb.

Little bit further on the right side of the spring, there is a unique stone. But, it is located not in the territory of the sacred site, but in a private property. Locals say that dents and small deepening on the stone are the prophet's footprints, fingerprints, prints of his elbow and forehead. Pilgrims often point out that these stone prints are very similar to those prints on Babur's house in *Sulaiman-Too* sacred site in Osh city. During heavy rain the stone dents are filled with water.

There is a single pathway by this stone that leads to *childekana*. Pilgrims who go to the *childekana* light candles, which are made out of cotton and oil, and leave money there. This is part of the pilgrimage. The owner of the land built a special place for conducting a sacrifice ritual and a fireplace in front of the *childekana*. Pilgrims boil meat of a sacrificed animal and prepare ritual bread.

The guardian of the sacred site, Ergeshaly Usmanov, shares his personal story, "The reason I came to this sacred site is that I got sick and nobody could diagnose it for five years. I visited 273 sacred sites in Central Asia. One day, I came to *Dul-dul-At* and got healed. I am keeping a diary and writing down all of the events. In my experience, 148 families had babies after visiting this sacred site. Something interesting happened once. There was a guy and a fortuneteller told him that he is never going to be a father. And I told him, "You think that a fortuneteller could give you a baby? You should ask from God!" Later he got twins, a girl and a boy. They are in fifth grade right now. Sometimes, I see the guardian of this place, and when I do I start chanting, "Here comes the *Dul-dul-At*, he is there, he is here."

Those who make a pilgrimage here are mostly unmarried people, those who do not have children, have problems with their health or those preparing to leave for a long trip. The guardian of the sacred site sends those pilgrims who were not able to find cure at *Dul-dul-At* to a spring in Navoi Park in Osh city, or when the spring dries out here.

Today, pilgrims stopped tying a piece of ribbon to tree branches. The money that is donated by the visitors and pilgrims is used to fence the sacred site and maintain the plants around it. Also, local people took some money from the local village administration and built a mosque here.

As for the name of this place, the guardian Ergeshaly tells the following, "In 2nd century BCE, during the time of Great Silk Road, the famous race horses of the

Davan country were sold here. Also Chinese came to trade their horses. Later the Han Dynasty opened a war to Davan country, and their main goal was to establish their power in Silk Road. As well as the word “argymak”¹ came from Arabic, so does the word “*Dul-dul-At*”² that means a “diligent horse”. According to people, once upon a time, there was a *kaiyp*, or “invisible” horse here. Only certain people, one in a thousand, were able to hear the neigh made by the invisible horse.

Ismail-Ata

This sacred site is situated on Mashrabsai ravine, within six kilometers in the Communism village of the Kara-Suu region in Osh province.

People consider the tomb of Ismail-Ata and the house where he lived as sacred. Today, not very many village residents remember Ismail-Ata, who he was and what he was well-known for. However, throughout the span of many years, pilgrims keep visiting this place. Most of the people who come here have neurotic maladies. Often one can see here paralysed people, people with psychological disorders or those having problems with facial nerve system.

It is said that there are several apprentices of Ismail-Ata, who follow his path and help people. However, nobody knows who they are and where they are now.

According to a pilgrim, Murzatoro kyzy Elnura, “Ismail-Ata lived 103 years and he spent all his life in his house, so all his spiritual powers have been transmitted to the house. Therefore, the house is reckoned sacred. After Ismail-Ata passed away, there were some efforts to destroy the house. However, when the workers approached the house in their bulldozer and tractor, their machines stopped functioning, and they were not able to touch the house. Today, the house is still preserved in its original form.”

Burkhaniddin Kylych

The *Burkhaniddin Kylych* sacred site is a small house with a tomb inside. It is located on a hill, at the edge of the graveyard, in the Ozgon village of Ozgon region in Osh province. Both sides of the sacred site are surrounded by graves.

Little bit further, five meters away from the sacred site, there is a round object that looks like a swimming pool.

The mausoleum would look like a regular tomb if it was not covered with an iron roof. There are two flat stones near the entrance to the mausoleum. A short biography of Burkhaniddin Kylych is engraved on a bigger stone, while a quatrain dedicated to him is engraved on the smaller stone.

1 The word “argymak” has Turkish roots [ed.]

2 The Arabic word “dul”, when translated, means “to disappear”, “to fade away”. Thus, the meaning of the Kyrgyz phrase “kaiyp at” and Arabic phrase “dul-dul-at” coincide [ed.]

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The sacred site is surrounded by trees and flowers. There are benches in front of the mausoleum constructed for pilgrims and visitors. Usually, pilgrims and visitors ask permission of a guardian to enter the mausoleum. The territory of the sacred site is quite clean and tidy, as well as the mausoleum interior. The guardian and local people take good care of the place. Pilgrimage practice and worshipping rituals at *Burkhaniddin Kylych* include reading verses from the Qur'an, making wishes and seven circles by walking around the tomb.

A traditional healer, who makes pilgrimage to this sacred site, agreed to share with information that she knows. However before giving that information, she recited verses from the Qur'an, cried for ten minutes and by chanting in a fashion of *zikr*¹ told the following in Uzbek language, "When Burkhaniddin Kylych started the construction of the Ozgon city, people started coming from the Kokon city. Sultan Khan's workers started the construction work. They sent their apprentices to the waterless hills. They worked very hard and finished the construction in one day. The apprentices named the city Ozgon. During the construction, a tower was also built here, however the Sultan did not light candles and perform appropriate rituals, thus his prayers were not accepted. He used tools like sword, knife, and lance."

Other pilgrims tell a story about many-headed dragon that lived in Ozgon city. He ate one person each day. People of the city prepared one person every day for the dragon. Then, Burkaniddin Kylych asked locals to collect a lot of milk and addressed them with a following request, "When I take the dragon's heads off, there will be a lot of blood and I will be covered with blood from head to feet. Then you should pour all this milk over my body to save me." However, during the battle, when the dragon screamed, people got scared and ran away. Nobody poured milk on Burkhaniddin Kylych and he died covered with the dragon's blood. The progeny of those people now live in Samarkand."

According to the guardian of the sacred site, "This sacred site existed even before I was born. Not many people visit the sacred site because not many people know about it. Mostly elderly people visit here. They come early in the morning, recite verses from the Qur'an and make wishes. There is a madrasah by the mosque. Orphans live there and visit the sacred site often and read their books on the hill. There was another sacred site nearby, but I do not know if it still exists. I remember that one boy used to visit that place often and read books, as a result he had a very successful life when he grew up. He became a famous person."

One of the other pilgrims, Muhabat, says, "I came here for a pilgrimage from Jalalabad province. There are many different legends about *Burkhaniddin Kylych*. We came here, because my son's *pir*² is here. When my son was sick and worn out with pain, I took him to some traditional healer. She recommended that we receive a blessing from a spiritual guardian of a sacred site, and added that if we make

1 *Zikr* [Arabic] – a ritual, when the worshiper is absorbed in the rhythmic repetition of the name of God or his attributes [ed.]

2 *Pir* [Persian] – a spiritual mentor, guardian or patron [ed.]

a pilgrimage to *Burhaniddin Kylych* things will change for the better for us. We followed her recommendation and came here to make a pilgrimage and receive the blessing of the *pir*. Here, we pray, chant verses from the Qur'an, make wishes and ask the guardian spirit to protect us.”

Sogot or Tabyldy-Bulak

This sacred site is situated at Sogot square of the Sopus-Korgon village of the Alai region in Osh province. The sacred site consists of trees and a spring. There are many juniper trees nearby. Pilgrims rest in the shadow of the junipers and drink the spring water.

This sacred site was called *Tabyldy-Bulak* long ago. According to people's stories, when Er Tabyldy¹ came back from war wounded, he washed his wounds with the spring water and was healed. He built a fence around the sacred site. The ruins of the fence still remain.

In the 1970's a local person cut a juniper tree in order to make a rake. He died right after he finished making it. His family became scared and brought the rake to the place where the tree was cut. The rake still remains at the sacred site.

Tokbai-Ata

Tokbai-Ata sacred site is a mountain and a stone house located in the west of the Ajike pasture, which is in the Buiga village of Kara-Kulja region in Osh province. There are row of rocks on the mountain summit, and among them there is Kysyk-Tash, a pilgrimage site. It is an arch-shape rock that people walk through. People say that it is a challenge to walk through the stone. If one gets stuck, then they have many sins. If one does not get stuck, then it means they are not very sinful.

On the top of the mountain, there is a house with kitchen utensils. It is believed to be Tokbai-Ata's house. Only after snow melts and shepherds migrate to summer pasture people start making a pilgrimage to this sacred site. One of the villagers, Busurmankulova Kushtarkan, visits this site often, “I first came here to worship and pray to the Creator, because I was not able to have children for a long time. This place is very powerful. Through my prayers here, I gave birth to two children, but by the will of God, they passed away. But, I still kept coming here. After a year, I became pregnant again, it was 1960's. I was extremely happy that my prayers were heard and my wish fulfilled. My husband and I were so happy that we named our baby son Kubanych – joy and organized *toi*² for the village residents.

There is a legend that Tokbai-Ata was one of the six children in his family. All six of them wanted to succeed in life and went in six different directions. One of them

1 *Er Tabyldy* [Kyrgyz] – main hero of one of the small Kyrgyz epics. Events reflected in the epic date back to 15th-18th centuries, when Kyrgyz people were engaged in war against external enemies and tribal feud. For more information see (History of Kyrgyz, 2004) [ed.]

2 *Toi* [Kyrgyz] – feast and/or celebration when many people get together [ed.]

went up to the tall mountain which is now named Tokbai-Ata (after his name) and lived there. He liked merciful, kind people and he was a flawless person himself. After he passed away his body was buried on top of the mountain and his tomb still remains there.”

According to pilgrim, Tokurov Jenishbek, “Kyrgyz people had a hero named Tokbai. He built a watchtower in order to watch for enemies. There is a very steep cliff on that hill and there are three rocks that Tokbai has put there. First, he put two rocks and then put the third one on top of them. When the third rock started to slide down, he used a smaller rock to support it. If that small rock moved a little, all the rocks beneath it would fall down the cliff. However they remain in the same position even today. They endured many earthquakes and never faltered. There is a footmark of Tokbai-Ata’s horse on one of those rocks.”

Another pilgrim, Azizilla uulu Islambek, assumes, “Probably Tokbai-Ata lived in the 17th-18th century and might have fought with the Kalmak people. In Kyrgyzstan there are seven sacred sites that end with “ata”, or “father” such as Cholpon-Ata, Manjyly-Ata and etc.”

Korgon-Dobo

The *Korgon-Dobo* sacred site is considered to be a hill that is located four kilometers away from the Morgun village of Leilek region in Batken province. The hill is enlisted as one of the historical sites of the country. Local people say that the hill is powerful and sacred. On the foothill, there is a hole in the stone resembling a door large enough for a person to enter. There are dreadful and odd legends about *Korgon-Dobo* hill. However, it is a symbol of the Morgun village, where people and guests come and make a pilgrimage.

Due to different farm work and agriculture, surrounding of the hill was dug out. There were certain findings that are believed to date back to the 1st century BCE. The top of the hill is almost five acres of flat land. It could be flattened only if thousands of horses tramped it down or by people who had high agriculture technology.

There is an old legend about *Karool-Dobo*. According to that legend, the hill was a Kyrgyz warrior Shyrdakbek’s¹ fortress. The fortress was well guarded. Once, enemies tried to attack the town but failed. The enemies used a spy in order to find out the secret of how to occupy the fortress. The traitor turned out to be Shyrdakbek’s beautiful second wife. The water came to the city through old underground canal from faraway river. If the mouth of the canal would close, the life would stop in the city. The enemy did the very thing. The residents of the town opened the gate and fought with the enemies like heroes. However, they did not have as many warriors as their enemies, so they were defeated. The king of the

1 *Shyrdakbek* [Kyrgyz] – the hero of Kyrgyz folklore. According to certain data, he was a historical figure, who lived approximately in 17th-18th centuries, see (History of Kyrgyz, 2004) [ed.]

enemies' became the husband of Shyrdakbek's beautiful second wife, and one day, out of curiosity, he asked her, "Hey, young beauty, tell me how Shyrdakbek took care of you?" The woman answered, "Everyday he ordered to cook food on a bone fat of a freshly slaughtered lamb." The new husband relied, "If you betrayed that kind of person, then I cannot expect anything good from you" and ordered to drag her by her hair tied to a wild horse.

Kudayarkhan Chebi

*Kudayarkhan chebi*¹ is situated little bit further up the Khan village, under the Buchoo mountain of Batken region in Batken province. During the Kudayarkhan's reign, he ordered his soldiers to build a wall. After the wall was completed no enemy could get through and enter the city. Later, only the Russian soldiers could go over it and occupied the city.

According to a village resident, Shadybekov Saidburkhan, "The wall is almost 200 years old. When the wall was being built, there was no water nearby. Thousands of people stood in two rows and worked from Tunuk-Suu village to the wall. There are holes on the walls for weapons. It was built in order to protect the village from enemies. During the Soviet time, Busurman Hodjaev, who worked as a head of the region, asked locals, "Do you want a park here or do you want to keep the wall?" He decided to build a park and upon his order, I was sent after young plants. I brought young walnut trees from the Soh River. At that time, our village elders believed that the person who plants walnut tree dies. Consequently, nobody wanted to plant the trees, thus I had to plant them myself.

Kudayarkhan chebi was built from sand and upon entering the territory of the wall, one can see a watchtower. Even well prepared bricks fall apart but this wall still remains here.

Sheyit or Asker Kurmandygy

Sheyit or Asker kurmandygy means innocent death or war victim. The sacred site is located in a mountain gorge Taldy, 500 meters away from the Gaz village of Batken region in Batken province.

On the 19th of September, 1999, Islamic radicals came to Batken. The border guards and young soldiers did everything in their power to stop them. Three soldiers were shot here by the invaders. Their bodies were found later, except for the body of Zarlykov Erjan. Later, a shepherd found his body. His comrades recognized the body by his clothes and boots. He was a lieutenant colonel. This place is considered sacred because of their death. People put up a monument to these soldiers here. Every year parents and close relatives come to commemorate them and make prayers.

1 *Kudayarkhan Chebi* [Kyrgyz] – Fortress of Kudayarkhan, who lived in 1829-1879 and ruled the Kokand Kingdom in 1845-58, 1862-1863 and 1865-75 [ed.]

Ak-Tailak

This place is called *Ak-Tailak* or *Ak-Terek-Baba*. It is situated five kilometers from the Morgun village of Leilek region in Batken province. There are big old poplar trees that one person cannot embrace. Nobody planted these trees, they have been growing by themselves, and now, they became old, and some of them are even breaking down. The poplars are considered sacred, therefore, nobody touches them. Water runs beneath the trees and its powerful sound echoes in the gorge. A lonely person would feel frightened to walk by the site. It is said that the *Ak-Terek-Baba* sacred site is older than the *Sulaiman-Too* in Osh city¹. Therefore, elders used to say that one should first make a pilgrimage to *Ak-Terek-Baba*.

In 2004-2005, clairvoyant Momun, from Kulundu village visited the site and said, “I had an *ayan*². Descendants of Tailak-Ata should fence his burial place.” Therefore, local people built a fence around the site.

In 2010-2011, former village people who now reside in Bishkek did fundraising and built a mausoleum, ritual house and benches for pilgrims here. Pilgrims have been visiting this place for many years. It is a beautiful place of nature. In the past, at the beginning of each spring, local people would come for the first *subbotnik*³ to the *Ak-Terek-Baba* sacred site.

One of the pilgrims, Jusup Diykasirin, shared the following story, “In the 19th century Tailak-Baba was killed by infidels at this place and a poplar tree has grown here later. His children started to run when they saw the death of their father, but infidels chased them and killed them too. Hawthorn has grown at the place of his children’s death. Hawthorn is also considered sacred and no one cuts them down. It is believed that something bad will happen to those who cut them.”

Tamchy-Ata or Chong-Mazar

Tamchy-Ata or *Chong-Mazar* is a mountain with an interesting water source. The sacred site is situated seven kilometers away from the Daroot-Korgon village of Chon-Alai region in Osh province. In the past, it used to be called *Tamchy-Ata*, but now local people call it *Chong-Mazar*. In order to reach the site, one should go through the village center, wheat field and then sea-buckthorn forest. The extraordinary beauty and mystery of the place can be noticed at the entrance of the sacred site. There is a tall mountain of brown color with majestic snowy peaks. There are sublime 20-25 pyramid-shaped poplars growing at the foot of the mountain.

The worshiping place is where the drops of water fall down from that brown-colored tall mountain. Drops fall down from the middle of the mountain and make a little pool. The pool is surrounded with young green grass. According to visitors, the

1 See the chapter on Sacred sites related to Islam [ed.]

2 *Ayan* [Kyrgyz] – here the spiritual message [ed.]

3 *Subbotnik* [Russian] – unpaid community clean-up and other works on Saturdays [ed.]

grass grows one meter in height. The most astounding part is that the water drops for 40 days and on the 41st day it stops. After several days it starts dripping again and stops after 40 days. There is a mud house at the sacred site, where the guardian lives, and sometimes pilgrims stay there as well.

According to the guardian, the history of the sacred site goes back to 1804 BCE. A rich man named Akmat lived in the Min-Jar village. He could not have a son until he was 45 years old. When he turned 45 his sixth wife gave birth to a boy. Akmat's advisor told him to organize a 40-day-party at *Kuru-Bulak*, or "dry spring". It was the former name of the *Tamchy-Ata* sacred site, because the area was dry. Akmat agreed and came to *Kuru-Bulak*. He ordered to put up *boz ui*¹ and bring water in *chanach*² on camels. However, the water that they brought was not enough for all the people and they suffered very much.

At some point, one of Akmat's servants saw an old man who was climbing up the mountain. The servant informed Akmat about it, and he ordered the servant to bring that old man. When the old man came and greeted Akmat, he realized that he was not an ordinary person, and asked him, "I assume that you are a saint. Please, make water to appear here." The old man replied, "Alas, Akmat, you asked for some water but did not ask for it forever" and disappeared. Ever since that time, the water drips only for 40 days here.

After 40 days, when the water stopped dropping, Akmat took his forty warriors and went to search for that old man. When he asked people about him, he was told that he had passed away at a place called Kyr-Taka. Akmat, who could not reach his goal, brought the old man's body to *Kuru-Bulak*, buried him there and called the place *Tamchy-Ata* sacred site.

Nobody knew the old man's name and where he has come from. From that time onward, people with all kinds of diseases and those with no children make a pilgrimage here, pray and ask for fulfilment of their wishes. Pilgrims stay overnight, make ritual bread, chant prayers and drink the dripping water. They also fill their containers with this water and take it home.

Little bit further from the dripping water, there is the old man's tomb. Pilgrims and visitors go there as well, recite verses from the Qur'an and taste some mud from its wall. According to the accounts, many people find cure to their illnesses here. The guardian of the sacred site himself got healed here, and therefore, decided to stay and look after the place. In winter, he leaves to the village and comes back at the beginning of spring when it gets warm.

1 *Boz ui* [Kyrgyz] – Kyrgyz traditional house made of wood and felt [ed.]

2 *Chanach* [Kyrgyz] – handmade leather container for milk of horse and other animals, and water [ed.]

Kalyguldun Tashy

Kalyguldun tashy is situated on the Mazar square in Tegene village of Aksy region in Jalalabad province.

According to a village intellectual, Ryspaev Marat, “Once upon a time, there lived a warrior named Kalygul from *keldei* tribe. Once, the tribe was moving from the Chui area, a load on a camel’s back was constantly being warped to one side and sliding down. Kalygul took a big grinding stone and tied it to the warping side of the load. Shortly after, suddenly, the stone with a human voice addressed Kalygul, “Hey, Kalygul, you are going to strangle me with your rope.” Starting from that moment, Kalygul always carried the stone with him. When he was going for a long trip or to a war, he always asked advice from the stone. Upon Kalygul’s death the stone stopped talking. “After I die the stone will stop talking, but one day if right person finds the stone, it will start to talk again” – said Kalygul before he died.

In the past, when warriors died, their bodies used to be buried in concealed places to hide them from their enemies. Nobody knows where Kalygul was buried. Some people believe it is one of the cemeteries of the Tegene village, but nobody knows which one. After the warrior’s death, his stone was brought and placed at one of the graveyard hills in the village. Locals say that the stone at the *Kalyguldun tashy* sacred sites is that very Kalygul’s talking stone.

Imam-Ata

Imam-Ata is located at the Mazar square in the Ak-suu village of Aksy region in Jalalabad province. The sacred site is an old mausoleum and a stone adjacent to it. There is a tomb inside the mausoleum. There are some writings on the stone that look like Arabic script, but no one knows for sure whether it is Arabic or not. There are several springs and many kinds of trees and plants including grape, cherry and poplar around the sacred site. Another peculiarity of the site is a 30 meter tall poplar tree growing there. Such tall poplars are very rare in this area.

Many people visit the sacred site. According to local people, historically, this place might have been considered as a second Mecca. According to Saatkan-Apa¹, a 72 year old resident of the village, “Once upon a time, there lived a family of prophets. There were many boys and only one girl in that family. That girl later became to be known as Kara-Kyz-Ene². Her older brothers were Imam-Ata, Baba-Ata, Padysha-Ata, Kambar-Ata and Cholpon-Ata. They were prophets. Infidels came to kill them, and all of them had to run away in different directions. Imam-Ata stayed here and the place became sacred.”

Guardian of the sacred site, Jakai uulu Jumabek says, “My father used to be the guardian of this site. It has been many years since he passed away. Imam-Ata,

1 *Apa* [Kyrgyz] – mother; here its means Mother Saatkan [ed.]

2 *Ene* [Kyrgyz] – the same as “apa” [ed.]

Bua-Ata and Pacha-Ata were brothers and all of them went in different directions. There is a sacred site called Kara-Kyz, named after the prophets' sister. I saw the guardian of the sacred site when I was small. I had a classmate named Baktygul. I thought it was her, but it turned out to be the guardian spirit that I saw in her image.

People say that there was a pilgrim lady, Jypar, born in 1962, who lives in Tashkomur town. During one of her visits to *Imam-Ata*, she was able to read the text inscribed on the stone and translate it. It is said that she cried while she was reading. However, when she opened her eyes and regained her consciousness, she did not remember what she has read and translated. People say that she was the only person who was able to read the text."

Karool-Dobolor

Karool-Dobolor is situated in the Kenesh village of the Nookat region in Osh province. A member of the Ministry of Agriculture, an economist born in this village, E.Osorov, shares the following information, "There are different kinds of legends about *Karool-Dobolor*. If to believe in one of them, then these hills go back to the Gengiz Khan's era.

In 12th-13th centuries, when internal fights strengthened and neighboring tribes were constantly attacking each other, the most important thing for local people living in this area, was to foresee the enemy's attack and get prepared beforehand. Therefore, people started erecting artificial hills on the fields to be aware when enemies are approaching. These hills were of use during the Soviet period as well, when the collective farmer's wheat fields needed monitoring and protection, people used these hills.

Construction of such "watch hills" met war time requirements of that period. In 1970s, there were dozens of these kinds of hills throughout the region. But, today most of them have been flattened and turned to agricultural fields. During the Soviet time, not much attention was paid to research and document the nomadic history of the Kyrgyz people. There even were attempts to eliminate that history. Also, there were no organizations and researchers to protect and preserve such sites.

At the time when the hills were flattened and turned to agricultural fields, different kinds of dishes, golden and copper coins were found. However, since nobody paid attention, all those findings were lost. Only recently have archeologists or historians started doing some research here. There are only seven hills around the Toolos village now. If nobody pays attention to these historical monuments, in twenty years, we might lose these hills forever."

Shumkar-Ata

Shumkar-Ata sacred site is located in the Arpa-Toktu pasture on the northern side of the Tashtak village. It takes two days to get there by horse. It is a big pasture,

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where many shepherds come to graze their livestock in the summer. There are not very many pilgrims coming to this sacred site. Usually *Shumkar-Ata* is visited by those who have not find cure in other sacred sites and their intentions to improve their health or have a child have failed. Only those in dire need can endure all the hardships of a difficult road to reach this sacred site.

The sacred site is a big mountain-like rock. It looks like a house from a distance. The elder of the Tashtak village, Bekboeva Juzum, remembers the size of the rock, “It is so huge that it takes a day to make three circles around it.” A resident of the Jany-Jol village, 80-year-old Syidaliev Torobek says, “The height of the rock is more than 300-400 meters. It has very smooth surface. It is not like other rocks with bumps on it, so it is impossible to climb it up. Therefore, people who make a pilgrimage do not climb the rock; they just walk around it three times and walk through a hole-like pathway in it. This pathway is covered with a soft turf, which does not freeze or decay. It stays the same year-around. This wonderful place is created by God, indeed.”

Spiritual practitioner, Keneshbek Aitikeev, shares, “*Shumkar-Ata* is situated on top of the mountain in the pasture. I do not know how many kilometers from the village to the site, but if one leaves the village on horseback in early morning, they reach the site in the evening.

Despite the distance of the sacred site, people make a pilgrimage there and worship. There are people who find cure to their illnesses and fulfilment of their wishes at *Shumkar-Ata*.

There were women known as *bubulor*¹ when I was a child. These women used to conduct special rituals on Fridays. I do not know what was happening with them, whether they were communicating with spirits or not, but they would be in a different state of consciousness.

According to the stories I heard, spirits of great people would gather to confer at *Shumkar-Ata* on Fridays. I can give an example. Tynchtykbek Nurmanbetov, the chief-editor of children’s magazine *Kyrchyn*, remembers that when he was small, they used to spend summers in the Jalgyz-Ata pasture adjacent to *Shumkar-Ata*. His Grandmother was a *bubu*. On Fridays she used to take care of the cattle early, put children to bed and then sing, “Er Tabyldy is coming with his forty warriors.” There is a mountain called Kok-Sarai in Aksy region. It is said that Er Tabyldy had his headquarters there. On Fridays he went out with his forty warriors from there. Tynchtykbek’s grandmother used to say, “They reached this place, they are coming here, they went there, etc.” When the warriors would go through the Jalgyz-Ata pasture to *Shumkar-Ata*, dogs would start barking and follow them. However, when shepherds would go out, they were not able to see anything.

1 *Bubulor* [Kyrgyz] – plural form of *bubu*, female healers and spiritual practitioners [ed.]

According to Tynchtykbek, “When the barking would start, it seemed that the dogs were accompanying some unseen people. I was a small child back then. Other children used to get scared and fall asleep. I was so curious, so would just lie down to see what would happen next. Just about dawn, the dogs would bark again and ran downhill as if they were greeting someone coming down from *Shumkar-Ata*. It always made me wonder and be bewildered. My grandmother would sing: “Er Tabyldy is coming; Er Tabyldy is passing by, etc”. Once, I asked her, “Why on Fridays you put us to bed so early and sing about Er Tabyldy?” She replied, “On Fridays warriors get together at *Shumkar-Ata*. So, Er Tabyldy also comes with his warriors.”

Tynchtykbek assured me that what he has told me were real stories heard from his grandmother. In his words, “Since my childhood, I consider *Shumkar-Ata* as an extraordinary place. I assume that it is a center of spirits of the Kyrgyz people, a place with spiritual powers. There is a place called *Shumkar-Uya* in Talas province. I was surprised at how it resembles *Shumkar-Ata*. I never went there to worship. I had different understandings before.”

Local people gave the following interpretation for why the sacred site was called *Shumkar-Ata*. Once upon a time, many prophets went to a mosque to pray to God on Friday in Ala-Buka region. Suddenly enemies attacked them and started wounding them. At that time wings grew out on prophets’ back, and they flew away from the enemies. They flew to the big rock and said “Open-up, rock, open-up”, the rock opened and the prophets flew inside of it. After this case, sacred sites named *Shumkar-Ata*, *Bozbu-Ata*, *Baba-Ata*, *Padysha-Ata* and *Arslanbap-Ata* came into existence.

Bekboeva Juzum remembers one more story, “People say that one of the prophets used to hide in this mountain. That is why the mountain was called *Shumkar-Ata*. Long time ago, a mullah named Sharap went up to the summer pasture by *Shumkar-Ata* to spend a summer. His seven goats jumped up to the top of *Shumkar-Ata*. It is a very tall rock; even human beings cannot climb up there. So the seven goats climbed up there but could not come back down. The summer ended, fall came and people moved back to the village to spend the winter. The mullah did not know what to do with his seven goats, and came to *Shumkar-Ata* with his son and the Qur’an book. He said to his son, “You should climb up the rock”. His son got scared, “How can I climb up there? It is impossible.” Nevertheless, he started to climb up. At the same time mullah sat by the rock and started reading the Qur’an book. At one point his son said, “I cannot climb further.” The mullah replied in a stubborn voice, “Yes, you can climb further.” So, the son started trying again, and his fingernails got stuck. He held on there and pulled his legs. After that he even did not realize how he climbed up to the top. Six or seven big pots of meat were boiling on the top of the rock. Several old men with long white beard were sitting by the pots and reading the Qur’an. One of them saw the boy and invited him to sit down. The boy, who did not know how to pray before, sat down by those men and started praying. After the prayers, one of the men said to the boy, “Serve the meat to the people who are sitting here.” The boy nicely divided the meat and served the men. Then, one of them said to the others, “Help the boy to go down.” In the

meantime, the mullah was waiting for his son and sitting by the rock. He waited until evening and decided to go home and come back with blankets. So, he returned home for blankets, decided to drink tea before going back, and when he was about to leave, his son entered the house. The mullah was surprised and asked, "My son, how did you come down?" The son told his father everything he saw and did. The mullah was really happy that his son came back alive and went to sleep. When they woke up in the morning, the missing seven goats were in the yard again. Mullah sacrificed a sheep dedicating for the spirits of the place, recited verses from the Qur'an and they moved back to the village for winter. This is a real story."

Kara-Sakal

Kara-Sakal sacred site consists of very big and magnificent trees. It is located in the Jolborstu village center of Aksy region in Jalalabad province. Not so many people come to make a pilgrimage here. Majority of pilgrims are local people. According to village elders, Chinese people once resided here, and there are some Chinese who say, "There is our sacred site called *Kara-Sakal* on the land of Kyrgyz people, and we should find it." But nobody knows why it is called *Kara-Sakal*.

Ak-Terek

Ak-Terek sacred site has poplars, which are located along the road leading to the Ak-Jol village of Aksy region in Jalalabad province. There are no signs indicating the way to the sacred site, only a small river flowing nearby the trees. According to spiritual practitioner, Keneshbek Aitikeev, "There used to be tall poplar trees by the river, but they got old and fell down. There is also a spring here and village people drink its water. People come here to make a pilgrimage, pray and make wishes. Personally, I started my pilgrimage practice to sacred sites from *Ak-Terek*. It is in front of my house, on the other side of the road. I chose my life path, as well as spiritual path here. *Ak-Terek* is a very powerful place."

A local elder, Sakysh, says, "During the World War II, there was a sacred site with big poplar trees, which leaves made gentle sound touched by the wind. After the war, local government officials cut down the trees and used them for construction of a school in the village. Later, a clay factory was built in the territory of the sacred site. At that time I used to work as a bulldozer driver. When we were flattening the land for factory construction, a lot of human bones were found here. We put them in bags and buried them in a different place. When we asked the elders about those bones, they told us that the Kyrgyz people had a fight with the Kalmaks there. I had a prophetic dream about the sacred site. In my dream someone came up to me and said, "Go to Friday prayer, either to a local mosque or the one in the Alcha village." The next day I realized that there was no mosque in the Alcha village. After some investigation, I found out that a big sacred site named *Ak-Terek* used to be in the Alcha village once upon a time."

Janysh-Baiysh-Ata

Janysh-Baiysh-Ata is a mausoleum and oleaster trees that grow around it. It is located on the left side of the highway connecting Kara-Kol city with the Jazy-Bulak village, of the Toktogul region in Jalalabad province.

Long time ago, there were many wars and battles in the territory of nowadays Kyrgyzstan. During that time, there were two brothers-warrior – Janysh and Baiysh¹. These brothers died on a battlefield here. Their death is believed to be noble and the place was revered and became sacred. There are pilgrims who come here on a regular basis.

Sar-Mazar

Sar-Mazar is located in a graveyard, on the edge of Osh city. It is a burial place of well-known Uzbek people. The mausoleum here was erected in 1991 by the local government and is dedicated to Kurmanjan-Datka². There are two gates at the cemetery, on the northern and western sides. Each gate has heart-shaped figures made of marble. It is interesting to acknowledge that Kurmanjan-Datka was buried in an Uzbek cemetery.

The son of the sacred sites guardian, Mamyrgan, says, “There are many people who visit the sacred site. The cemetery is still functioning and people still get buried here. It has been hundred years since *Sar-Mazar* became sacred. In the book called *Babur-Name*, it is written that the sacred site is thousand years old. The book also holds *Sar-Mazar’s* history. According to my grandfather, Kurmanjan-Datka’s spiritual mentor is buried here as well.”

The guardian, Mahmedjan himself shares, “My father was a guardian of this place long time ago. Now, I am the guardian. According to Islam, people should not come to sacred sites. Pilgrims do not understand me when I tell them, “Do not come to the sacred site, follow the rules of shariah.” They think that I am some sort of a Wahhabi. Therefore, I cannot prohibit the pilgrimage here, so I accepted this practice. Every pilgrim comes here with personal aim or intention and, in turn, learns something new. Pilgrims say, “My father is buried here, other great people are also buried here, I will come back.” Well-known writer, Huvaiddo uulu Holmuhammad, is also buried here. Universities in Turkey teach their classes based on the books he wrote.

In the past, Kurmanjan-Datka received blessings from the Shakh Salakhidin, who is also buried here; and her last testament was, “May my body be buried near my

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- 1 *Janysh-Baiysh* [Kyrgyz] – one of the small heroic Kyrgyz epics, which narrates the story of two warrior-brothers Janysh and Baiysh. The events described in the epic date back to 14th-17th centuries, see (History of Kyrgyz, 2004) [ed.]
 - 2 *Kurmanjan-Datka* [Kyrgyz] – the female state leader of Kyrgyz people, 1811-1907, who was referred to as “The Alai princess” or “The Queen of the South”. The word “datka” means “General” and she was entitiled as “datka” twice [ed.]

mentor, the Shakh Salakhidin.” People did not forget her request and after she died they carried her from Mady village to this cemetery. When workers were reconstructing the Babur’s house at the *Sulaiman-Too* sacred site in Osh city, they asked the elders about the house’s age. Elders assumed that it is 500 years old. But, *Sar-Mazar* is older than the Babur’s house for about 500 years; consequently, this sacred site is 1,000 years old. Mostly Uzbek people are buried here, and their families and relatives come here to make sacrifice ritual and recite verses from the Qur’an. However, there are representative of 14 ethnic groups buried here, Kyrgyz, Uyghur, Tatar and Russians converted to Islam and others.”

Sheyit-Baba

Sheyit-Baba is located at the beginning of the road that leads to Too-Jailoo pasture from the Golbo village. The village itself is called Golbo, but it is divided into Suuluu-Golbo, Kuru-Golbo and Abad-Golbo.

According to the accounts of local people, the history of this sacred site dates back to 1917-18s. During the first years of the Soviet rule, *basmachys*¹ gave strong resistance to the Red Army. Local people used to refer to the Red Army as “*otryad*”² and to the *basmachys* – “*tortunchulor*”³. When these two parties would start fighting, local people would go up to the hill and watch them. Sometimes local elders would get involved and save some young local men participating in the fighting. In one of those fights, respected elder of the village, Jumabai became involved and saved some men. Deep in his heart he supported the *basmachy* troops.

The Red Army troop was on the riverbed, while the *basmachys* were on a foot of a mountain. The shooting was non-stop between them. Since the Red Army soldiers were greater in number, the *basmachylar* started to surrender and began to run up to the mountain. The ones who got injured started to fall down from the mountain. Locals who were watching the fights from the hill also started to run towards the mountains. The elder, Jumabai, was injured and rolled downhill to the place where the fight started. Later locals buried him there and marked the place.

During the Soviet time, there was no opportunity to build a tomb and openly conduct pilgrimage rituals at such places. However, people would always stop by the burial place and recite verses from the Qur’an. Later, Jumabai’s descendant, Kanybek, built a tomb there, and people started coming here for a pilgrimage. People named the site as *Sheyit-Baba* or *Mazar-Baba*.

Janybek Mazary

Janybek mazary sacred site is an old burial place located 18 kilometers away from the Darkum village or 25 kilometers from the Samarkandek village of Batken

1 *Basmachy* [Kyrgyz] – Muslim anti-Bolshevik fighters in Central Asia during 1917-26 [ed.]

2 *Otryad* [Russian] – a troop [ed.]

3 *Tortunchulor* [Kyrgyz] – literally means “forth one” [ed.]

region in Batken province. Toktogulov Erali, a teacher from Leilek region, in his book *Naimany*, wrote that in 16th-17th centuries childless couples made pilgrimage to *Janybek mazary* and prayed to have a child. Even today those who do not have children come here for a pilgrimage and solicit for a child. There are accounts of pilgrims who became happy parents after making pilgrimage to this sacred site.

In 2007, representative of the *kaltatai*, *asanali* and *tailak* clans of the *chapkynchy* tribe, built a fence around the sacred site and reconstructed the road leading to it.

Janysh-Too

Janysh-Too is a tall mountain situated on the north-west of the Kara-Jygach village in Ketmen-Tobo valley of Jalalabad province. Journalist, Akmatalliev Turdu, told the story he heard from his father and grandfather, “One of the Janysh-Baiysh epic heroes, Janysh was severely wounded during his battle with the Kalmak people. His warhorse, Toru, trying to save his master brought him to one of the caves in this mountain. The cave lead to a very narrow gorge and only one or two horsemen were able to go through it. However, further down, the gorge widens becoming able to accommodate around ten herds of horses. Janysh warrior rested at this gorge before all this wounds were healed; people say that a special herb grows there that can assuage hunger.”

Jigit-Pirim

Jigit-Pirim is located in the Bungondu village of the Kadamjai region in Batken province. According to a legend, there lived a man named Hastilla. He got married and his wife got pregnant. After a month, Hastilla was requested to go to a war. After he left, his wife gave birth to a boy. She named him Jigit-Pirim. Many years passed and the boy grew up. Upon learning that his father went to a war and never returned, he decided to go search for him. He travelled a great distance and made a halt in a place where many people were gathered together. He saw that people were wrestling there. Jigit-Pirim decided to participate in wrestling competition and wrestled with an old man. That man was his father, Hastilla. Jigit-Pirim won in the competition against his father. People applauded him and asked about his family. He answered, “I am Hastilla’s son. He went to a war and never came back. I am searching for him.” “This is your father. He has been living here for many years” – people said. Jigit-Pirim got very embarrassed that he defeated his father in wrestling. His eyes lay upon a rock nearby and he shouted, “Rock, open-up!” The rock opened, he jumped inside of it and disappeared. Ever since, the rock was considered sacred and called Jigit-Pirim, after the boy.

People believe that this sacred site is a guardian or protector of men. Therefore, many men, young or old, make a pilgrimage here. They worship the abovementioned rock and springs beside it.

Kaaba

Kaaba sacred site is a tomb located in the Kaaba village of Bazar-Korgon region in Jalalabad province. According to journalist, Akmatallyev Turdu, “Sayak uulu Kaaba lived approximately 500 years ago. He lived in Arslanbap region all his life. He was a very gifted warrior. He was born with a mane-like hair on his back, and people called him Kaaba with Mane. He had five sons, Tungatar, Kaiduulat, Shykmamat, Alakoz and Kutunai, who continued Kaaba’s lineage. Pilgrims from different regions come here to make a pilgrimage, pray and make their wishes.

Kanachuu Saima-Tash

Kanachuu Saima-Tash is a cliff with ancient writings engraved on its wall. The height of the inscriptions on the wall is ten meters, while the height of the cliff is 700-800 meters. The writings are horizontal and symmetrical to the wall. The letters resemble Old Turkic runic alphabet.

Baiysh-Bulak

Baiysh-Bulak lies on the southern bank of the Naryn River, in the territory of the Uch-Terek village of Toktogul region in Jalalabad province. The sacred site is approximately between the Toktogul and Kara-Kol towns. There is a spring and an oleaster tree, which are revered as sacred. According to the Janysh-Baiysh epic, the hero Baiysh used to rest here and have his lunch. Local people say that, during the reign of the Scythians in Central Asia, the city of Hairalam received water from this spring through water pipes. Recently, ceramic pipes were found at the *Baiysh-Bulak*. There is a ritual house that was built for pilgrims who come here for Friday prayer and conduct rituals and make wishes.

Surma-Tash

Surma-Tash is a pasture above the Karool village of Kadamjai region in Batken province. It is a very beautiful pasture. There are thick bushes and birch trees on the banks of the Isfairam River. Rue, which is considered to be a medicinal herb by Kyrgyz people, grows up to one meter in this pasture and has a pungent smell.

Some of the south’s historical secrets are hidden in the *Surma-Tash* pasture. The Great Silk Road went through this pasture. Many trade caravans passed through. In 1914-17s, the road named Karool-Daroot-Korgon connecting Alai and Fergana valleys was built by Russians. Australian military prisoners worked during the construction of that road. The amazing fact is that the road’s width is 3 meters 90 centimeters all the way through, no matter if it is on the mountain or a flat field. The quality of the road which was built with such accuracy is impressive. People do not use the road anymore though. During the World War II there was a tungsten mine here.

There is a big stone by the road on the right side of the Karool village. Austrian prisoners drew pictures and wrote their names in German on that rock.

Kuzgu Mazary

Kuzgu mazar is situated in the northern mountains of the Alysh village. There is a flat stone along the pathway. People who have eye illnesses and those searching for their lost things come to this sacred site.

According to local people, there was a stone mirror in the mountains. When people lost something, they went to the mirror and it showed the thief. One day in order to hide their crime, thieves took a camel to the mirror stone and slaughtered it. The camel's blood covered the surface of the mirror and dried out, leaving a permanent stain on its surface.

The resident of Uch-Korgon village, Karimova Bukatycha, told the following story, "According to my 96-year-old mother, when enemies of Alexander the Great tried to look at the mirror and find out his secrets, Alexander slaughtered his horse on the surface of the mirror and went away. My mother heard this story from her mother, who died at the age of 112."

Suu-Bashy

Suu-Bashy – the beginning of water is a natural complex consisting of a big old poplar, several springs and a small pond of 10-12 meters in diameter. It is located at mountain feet adjacent to Kara-Bulak village of Batken province. The water at the *Suu-Bashy* sacred site is crystal-clear. It flows from a glacier and through underground stones where it gets purified. The poplar is so big that even five people with joined hands would not be able to embrace it. People say that it is 500 years old.

According to the account of local elders, "In the past, the water level in *Suu-Bashy* was very high. The southern side of the lake was mountainous, on the far side of the mountain, near the origin of the Soh River, there was a place called Galai-Mamyt. Traces of water on the face of the mountain show that there used to be a large lake here. The Dongmon River flowed into the Galai-Mamyt Lake and the water from the lake flowed out through a cave on the face of the mountain, which flowed like great water, which was called the *Suu-Bashy*. The elders would say, "Below Kara-Bulak people used to cross the water with the help of a walking stick. For proof of this one could find the traces of eight mills in an empty field."

In another legend, the walking stick of a rich man who was resting on the shore of Galai-Mamyt fell into the lake. Later that stick was found in the *Suu-Bashy* water that flowed near Kokon. A natural disaster occurred where a landslide and the roots of trees blocked the river that carried the water. The water level of the lake rose so much that the water flooded onto the shore and washed the sediment away turning into a river. The water level in *Suu-Bashy* decreased and the Batken area suffered from drought to the point where people were forced to move elsewhere. Here, one comes across many graves called *myktyn gorloru* (graves of myk). In written histories those people were called *muhs*, and some observers say that these graves belong to ancient *nuh*, or Huns. The body of a woman, excavated from one

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of the graves there, is now kept in the museum in the capital. The fact that many people used to live in this area is proven by the high quantity of ancient people's bones found in this region.



Burkhaniddin Kylych, Ozgon, Osh province



Dul-Dul-At, Aravan, Osh province

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Dul-Dul-At, Aravan, Osh province



Sheyit-Mazar, Zardaly, Batken province



Ismail-Ata, Kara-Suu, Osh province



Kaaba, Bazar-Korgon, Jalalabad



Karool-Dobolor, Nookat, Osh province



Kengesh, Nookat, Osh province



Kudayarkhan chebi, Khan, Batken province



Kurmanbek baatyrдын kumbozu

PART 1 SACRED SITES IN THE SOUTH OF KYRGYZSTAN



Sar-Mazar, Osh City



Sheyit or Asker kurmandygy, Gaz, Batken province

PART 1 SACRED SITES IN THE SOUTH OF KYRGYZSTAN



Sogot or Tabyldy-Bulak, Alai, Osh province



Sultanyum kumbozu, Ozgon, Osh province

PART 1 SACRED SITES IN THE SOUTH OF KYRGYZSTAN



Sogot or Tabyldy-Bulak, Alai, Osh province

Chapter 4

Islamic Sacred Sites

In this chapter, readers will become familiar with sacred sites in the south of the country that are directly related to Islam.

If we pay attention to the names of sacred sites situated in Osh, Jalalabad and Batken, we can easily notice their direct links to Islam. Their names often contain such words as *ajy* (*hadji*), *paigambar* (*prophet*), *eshen* (*ishan*), *kojo* (*khoja*), *sakaba* (*Prophet Muhammad's followers*) *moldo* (*mullah*), *oluya* (*saint*), etc.

On the basis of field materials, we have systematized sacred sites related to Islam in the following way:

1. Sacred Sites Related to Paigambars, or Prophets
2. Sacred Sites Related to Azireti-Ali
3. Sacred Sites Related to Ishans
4. Sacred Sites Related to Khoja
5. Sacred Sites Related to Ata– Holy Fathers and Righteous Men
6. Sacred Sites Related to Righteous Women

Paigambars or prophets. According to written sources, the word “paigambar” is translated from Farsi as “the one who brought the news” or “messenger”. From a religious point of view, *paigambar* is someone chosen by God and sent by him to people to show them the right path in life. Put otherwise, this is a messenger who shares God’s message with the people. In the south of Kyrgyzstan, we found sacred sites connected with the names of such prophets as Sulaiman, Ydyrys, Davud, Ayub and Muhammad Ali.

Sulaiman-Too in Osh is the most famous sacred site in the south. This place is connected with the name of prophet Sulaiman. Pilgrims often tell stories according to which Osh is the “second Mecca.” In the south, stories about brother prophets Imam-Ata, Baba-Ata, Padysha-Ata, Kambar-Ata, Cholpon-Ata and Kara-Kyz-Ene, who is considered their younger sister, are also widespread. According to these stories, these prophets were hiding from infidels and as a result became settled in different places, and their tombs are deemed holy. No one can say the exact number of brothers and sisters, and usually people mention the sacred figures “7” and “9”.

The names of the prophets have undergone some phonetic changes, and as a result Idiris became Ydyrys, Ayub – Ayip and David – Dootu. Stories about these prophets are also often encountered in the oral history of sacred sites. There are cases when

more than one sacred site is connected with the name of one prophet. For instance, the name of prophet Ayub is related to such sacred sites as Ayup-Bulak, Shor-Bulak, Kyzyl-Bulak and Azireti-Ayip.

Sometimes Muslim sacred sites, as well as any other sacred places, have their own “specialization” or, as believed by pilgrims, are different from each other in terms of their miraculous properties. On the basis of our field research, we can assert that childless couples make a pilgrimage more often to the *mazar* of Prophet Ydyrys, while those who dream of becoming rich or gaining a high post go to Doot-Pirim. There are stories of people who recovered from serious maladies after making a pilgrimage to Azireti-Ayip.

Either it has to do with the impact of sacred sites or it is related to something else, but even the people telling about these places radiate some inner light. Pilgrims sharing the underlying story of each specific *mazar* with confidence and readiness thus sustain the sacredness of this site and serve as keepers of ancient traditions that are based on the interlinking of people and locations.

Sacred sites related to Azireti-Ali can be viewed as a separate group that includes such *mazars* as Shaimerden, Azireti-Ali, Kyzyl, etc. As it is well known, Azireti-Ali who was famous amongst Muslims for his braveness, profound knowledge and piety was born in 661 A.D. (Islam, 1991). It is astonishing to see how this man’s biography continues to live and to develop in oral stories of Kyrgyzstani pilgrims. Comparing written sources with narratives which still exist at *mazars* in the south of Kyrgyzstan could be a fruitful topic for a research study.

Eshens or ishans. There are especially many places in the south that are related to *ishans*, and this seems quite remarkable. Pilgrims keep saying that *eshen* is an educated person. At many *mazars* we heard similar stories about *ishans* that confirm the edifying role of these Islamic workers, “When Eshen-buva became old, his spiritual followers asked him, “Master, to whom will you pass the status of *eshen*? To which he said, “The status of *eshen* cannot be inherited. If this was so, then my children who were born from my most beloved wife would inherit it.” A network of sacred sites dedicated to *ishans* demonstrates clearly the contribution made by *ishans* to promoting Islam in the region.

Kojo or khojas. As reported by the guardian of *Sulaiman-Too* Alymbek Kultaev the word “khoja” in Kyrgyz means “toro” and is used to denote only people of noble origin (“white-bone people”), while scientists claim that “khoja” is an “honorary name and way of addressing people which existed during different time periods, in various Islamic countries and had different meanings” (Islam. 1991).¹

In the Kadamjai region of Batken province, on the border with Uzbekistan, there are places dedicated to seven brothers or seven *khojas* who, according to the collective memory of local Muslims, possessed miraculous powers. The seven *khoja* brothers

¹ For scientific opinions about *ishans*, see (Abashin, 1999), (Bartold, 1966), (Klimovich, 2003).

did not belong to local denizens, and they were religious missionaries who came from the Arabic East. On the basis of the field research, we can surmise that there are traces of six *khojas* in Kyrgyzstan. Assumedly, one of them lies in Uzbekistan. The largest sacred site of this type, Kojo-Kelen, is located in Osh province, in the Kichi-Alay Valley, at the estuary of the river Jiptik-Suu. The second largest site is called Kojo-Aziz, and it is situated in Batken province in a small town called Pata-Tash, close to the river Isfairam. The third site is Kojo-Almaty in the village of Markaz in Batken province. The next one is Kojo-Kayir which is also located in the village of Markaz. The fifth *mazar* is called Kojo-Aalam or Kichi-Mazar. It is located at the beginning of the gorge Dungurop-Dangil, not far from the Markaz village council. Kojo-Paasha or Jeti-Bulak is considered to be the sixth *khoja*. A site devoted to him is located in the village of Avval, Fergana province, Uzbekistan. Kojo-Bilal, the seventh *khoja*, is deemed to be the youngest brother. His *mazar* is located right between the northern part of the town of Kyzyl-Kiya and eastern part of the village of Uch-Korgon. It should be mentioned that stories about the brothers in general and about each of them individually vary broadly.

Ata or holy fathers and righteous men. It is not fortuitous that the word “ata” is used in the names of sacred sites. The majority of sacred sites whose names contain the word “ata” are related to ancient Kyrgyz spirituality. However, there are quite a few Islam-oriented oral stories about *ata*. Sometimes “ata” is used as a synonym of the Arabic word “Aziret.”

Righteous women. There is a small number of mazars dedicated to women who were spreading and strengthening the idea of Islam, and yet they stand out as a separate group. Places related to female healers and seers who were combining traditional healing practices and Islamic tenets are regarded as sacred. One of the well-known “female” sites in the south is called Safetbulan which is dedicated to a girl who committed an act demonstrating her devoutness to Islam.

Sacred Sites Related to Prophets

Sulaiman-Too

Sulaiman-Too is one of the largest and well-known sacred sites in the southern part of Kyrgyzstan. It is in the middle of Osh city center, in other words, this sacred mountain divides the city into two. Many Muslims call Osh city a “second Mecca”. Local Muslims believe that the trace of the prophet Sulaiman, the son of Daut, is still preserved there until today.

People revere and believe in sacredness of the mountain, its five peaks, its caves, the house of Babur, trees growing on the mountain, a stone, traces that one comes across and graves around the mountain.

The height of the mountain peaks are around 175 meters. As for the mountain itself, it is around 1,000 meters above the sea level. The length of the mountain is 1,140 meters and width – more than 500 meters. Well-known caves are: Eshen, Cheberler

and Tamchy-Tamaar. Pilgrims and visitors associate the mountain with different things. Its peaks resemble various images. Some people say that the image looks like the word “Allah” in Arabic, while others say that they resemble a lying old man. It is also said that on the top of the mountain there is a sign of the prophet Sulaiman. The mountain was named specifically after the prophet’s name.

On the foot of the mountain, from the western side, one can find the remains of Osh village belonging to the Chust culture. On the basis of these findings, the 3,000th anniversary of Osh city was determined (Zadneprovskiy, 1997) (History of the Kyrgyz USSR, 1984).

The whole mountain complex is called *Sulaiman* or *Bara Kukh*. But, each peak has its own name. Different experts have different interpretations of these names. Here, we present interpretation of one of the senior *Sulaiman-Too* guardians, Islamic worker from the Soviet times and *ajy* Kultaev Alymbek.

Buura-Too. The house of Babur is located on this peak, as well as the praying house of prophet Sulaiman. This place is also known by a different name – *kadamjai*. “Kadam”, in Kyrgyz means a “step” and “jai” – a “place”, thus it is the place where the prophet left his trace. At the very beginning, the house of Babur and the praying house were two different places adjacent to each other. However, in 1952, during the Soviet time, when the ideology of atheism was strong, the house of Babur was destroyed. After that, these two places became to be known as one place called *ojuro*¹. According to Alymbek-ajy and local people, prophet Sulaiman left different traces inside the *ojuro*. These traces include his forehead, palms and knees that he left while praying. On the backside of the *ojuro*, there is a place where the prophet used to lie down, look at the starry sky, have a rest and relax his back muscles.

Shor-Too. “Shor” in Kyrgyz means “salt”. This peak is covered with white salt. When one looks attentively the first thing that catches the eye is the white peak.

Rushan-Too or Ravshan-Too. Alymbek-ajy explains that in Arabic the word “rushan” denotes “sunny mountain” or “mountain radiating light”.

Eer-Too or Kelin-Tash-Too. The silhouette of this peak resembles a saddle and, at the same time, a woman lying on her back. Sometimes the peak is also called *Kattama-Tash* that means “layered stone”. If one looks at the northern slope, it does, indeed, look like a stone with several layers.

Kekilik-Uchaar-Too. The name of this peak denotes a “mountain where partridges fly”. Local elders used to say that partridges from this peak would fly in the direction of Kerme-Too Mountain. The Kerme-Too Mountain is not part of the *Sulaiman-Too* complex and located on the western side of Osh city.

1 *Ojuro* [Kyrgyz] – a ritual house [ed.]

Pilgrims believe that each cave in *Sulaiman-Too* has miraculous properties. For instance, there are two caves in *Burma-Too*. But the one, on the northern side, is difficult to reach; therefore it still does not have a name and has not been researched yet.

The second cave is *Chaka-tamaar*. Those in the know, talk about unique features of this cave. Upon entering, the cave seems frightening and besides, only one person can enter it at a time since it is very narrow. Inside, by the light of the candle, one can see a stone in a shape of a book. Some people say that certain verses from the Qur'an are engraved on the stone. Drops of water trickle down from the ceiling of the cave. In the spring, human skin inside the cave becomes moist very quickly. Pilgrims believe that the dripping water has beneficial properties.

In *Shor-Too*, there are *Kyzyl-Ungkur* and *Chiltekana* caves. The latter is also known as *Teshik-Tash* and has three entrances. It is said that mostly men make a pilgrimage to this cave.

There are two caves in *Rushan-Too*, *Tepe-Ungkur* and *Eshen-Ungkur*. People say that *Eshen-Ungkur* is a cave for contemplation and meditation.

The cave on top of *Kekilik-uchaar-Too* is called *Nurkyz* or *Urkyzdar* cave, which means "sunbeam girls". Those in the know believe that guarding spirits of the cave are virgin saint girls. Therefore, the cave is visited mostly by female pilgrims.

There are other sacred sites in *Sulaiman-Too* besides caves. For instance, there is *Bel-Tash*, a "back stone". It is believed to help alleviate back pains if one slides down several times. There are also such places as *Kol-Tash*, *Beshik-Tash* and etc.

In 1976, a museum was built on the slope of *Rushan-Too*. Archeological and ethnographic findings and artefacts are preserved and presented at the museum. Sometimes geography students make field trips and study the mountain vegetation.

There are many legends about the origin of *Sulaiman-Too*. In religious point of view, the prophet Sulaiman came here from Palestine and established his kingdom here, and died at the age of sixty. According to other sources, this mountain was named after a saint named Sulaiman, who came here from Ozgon region. According to Alymbek-ajy, in the Middle Ages, the mountain was called *Bara-Kuh*. In Islam the word "bar" denotes one of the 99 names of God and describes divine power to create something out of nothing.

In the past, there were four gates at *Sulaiman-Too*. Today, there are only two gates that are known, the *Suu* – "water" and *Ot* – "fire" gates. The *Suu* gate is on the eastern side of the mountain and named after a waterfall nearby. In the past, people worshipped mountain waterfalls and found cure in its water by swimming and washing their body. In 9th-10th centuries, a Russian bath was built here. The *Ot* gate is on the northern side of the mountain, near the museum.

Pilgrims believe that *Sulaiman-Too* was created by God in the same way as it is now. In the word of Alymbek-ajy, Adam and Eve came down from the Heaven to Hindistan. At night they came to the Sarandim Mountain. Alymbek-ajy explains that the word “sar” means “chief”, “an” – “region” and “din” is “throne”, thus *sarandin* denotes “chief sitting on the throne”. This is the mountain where Adam came. On the right side of the *Eshen* cave there is a big pit with a stone inside. The stone is called *Simkash*. On the lower side of the pit, there used to be a lake that was called *Simkash* as well. However, the lake has dried out. Today, there is a mosque on the place of the lake. There is a winding mountain path on the slope, on the right side of the road. From the earliest times, this path is called *Kiyamattyn kyl kopurosu* – Bridge of the Judgment Day.

Apshyr-Ata

Apshyr-Ata is a gorge among the mountains near the Kulatov village of Nookat region in Osh province. Upon entering the gorge, one can see a mesmerizing mountain waterfall. This is the pure water of *Apshyr-Ata* that lures many people with its beauty and mystery.

People come here, both to make a pilgrimage, and have a rest. Therefore, a resort and vacation houses are built here. Majority of pilgrims visiting this place are childless couples and those having a rough patch in life. *Apshyr-Ata* gorge is a complex of several sacred sites. They are *Sharkyratma*, *Syrduy-Tash*, *Shypaa-Bulak* and *Ungkur*. The *Sharkyratma* is a waterfall and the first place where pilgrims perform ablution ritual and wash their faces after a long road. Nobody was able to tell where the waterfall originates. At *Syrduy-Tash* stone people throw seven pebbles and make seven wishes. People believe that their wishes will be fulfilled. The water of *Shypaa-Bulak* spring is said to have medicinal capacities. In the *Ungkur*, or “cave” people recite verses from the Qur’an since they believe that there is a secret pathway leading to Mecca.

In people’s belief, those who lead sinful or vicious life, receive some signs or certain messages at the sacred site. According to the following story, on the day of his marriage, a young man brought his relatives to *Apshyr-Ata* as a sign of his respect. One of the bride’s sister-in-laws was a lady of promiscuous behavior. She wanted to have her picture taken by the waterfall, and was posing by the edge of it when a stone fell upon her head. She lost her balance and fell down. People say that she died there right away.

There is another story that is believed to prove the sacredness of *Apshyr-Ata*. Once, a group of six Russian tourists visited the place. They were astonished by the beauty of the place and decided that it should be developed. At first, they decided to build a cafe and blew up the cave for that matter. People say that two of them fell off the cliff and died. The other four of them understood that this place was sacred and they would not be able to build anything and decided to leave. However, according to what people say, they were not destined to reach their final destination, as they died in a traffic accident on the way.

However, there are quite a few newly built areas at *ApsHYr-Ata* today. There is a mosque as well. The beautiful nature and enigmatic nooks of *ApsHYr-Ata* attract many tourists. The number of visitors grows every day and it is becoming an annoyance among pilgrims, because it is a sacred site, not a place of recreation or entertainment. Some dedicated pilgrims of *ApsHYr-Ata* want to welcome as many pilgrims and visitors as possible, but, at the same time, they want to preserve the sacredness of the place.

Local people associate the history *ApsHYr-Ata* with the prophet Ydyrys, who came with his prophecies after Father Adam. He convened people at this gorge and urged them to worship only Allah, "I'm the messenger of God. There is no God except for Allah. Do not be mistaken by worshipping stone, fire or water." Upon hearing these words, the wealthy ones were dreaded that they might lose their property and addressed the prophet, "If you are the genuine messenger of God, then show us a miracle. May a milk river start flowing in the gorge, and then we will believe that you are the God's messenger and start worshipping him."

At that moment, Ydyrys raised his hands to the sky and appealed to God and cried for two days. Many people started mocking him, but suddenly from the eastern side of the gorge, at the height of 40-50 meters above the ground, milk started flowing out abruptly. By seeing this miracle, people started praying to God and believed that Prophet Ydyrys is his messenger and became his followers.

There was a river flowing by *ApsHYr-Ata*, but the milk did not blend with the river, and in the course of many years, pure milk flowed from the gorge. Years later, when people started treating this place with negligence, discarded its sacredness, stopped making a pilgrimage, polluted the surrounding areas and even began doing laundry – the milk turned into water. Since then, the place was called *Sut-Suu* – Milk Water. Local people also say that the sacred river at *ApsHYr-Ata* got separated from Abu-Zam-Zam and Havzi-Kavsard rivers during the Flood.

Today, the water turbulently flowing down the mountain does not merge with the river. It is said that this water will run without merging with the river until the Judgment Day. Those in the know say that the famous French oceanographer, Jacques-Yves Cousteau, found out that sea currents, in some places, are separated from one another as if by an invisible membrane. In the same fashion, the waterfall of *ApsHYr-Ata* does not merge with the river, and about 300 meters away it hits the rocks and splits into two separate streams.

The *Shypaa-Bulak* spring originates on the southern side of the place where the waterfall hits the rocks and splits into stream. Pilgrims say that the spring water is salutiferous for internal organs. The water is also helpful to cure certain skin diseases, especially scabies.

A pilgrim from the Urkuya Salieva village shared the flowing story, "in 1986-1990s, the main animal expert of our village, Bodoev Adan, was diagnosed with stomach cancer and doctors refused to treat him. On the way to and from the mountain pasture, he used to drink water of *Shypaa-Bulak* and take some home with him.

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After three-four months of drinking the spring water, his stomach cancer was completely cured.”

The sacred *Ungkur* is on the western side of the gorge. It is said that after making a pilgrimage to *Apshyr-Ata*, most people then make hajj, a pilgrimage to Mecca. Then welfare comes to their families. People also believe that those who do not have children come here and solicit for a baby, then their prayers are heard by God and they become parents. It is also said that those who come to the cave with bad intentions or deeds become short-breathed. Moreover, they might get in trouble, because the cave has destructive capacities as well. According to Takhmali Adalat Aji, a village resident, “Once we came here to make a pilgrimage and saw four women inside the cave twisting with pain. Their feet were twined around by large snakes. Then a mullah started chanting verses from the Qur’an out loud, and thanks to the power of the Qur’an verses, the snakes disappeared in the crevices among the rocks. When the women were questioned of what happened, they said that they felt as if their feet were tied to some heavy stones and they were not able to move an inch.” Some people explained that Takhmanli Adalat Aji witnessed this case and saw snakes because she had a good heart, followed all the God’s instructions, preached and shared Prophet Muhammad’s prescriptions with people, never undermined the trust of her husband and raised children who grew up as esteemed people. She had many grandchildren and great-grandchildren; she had been an honest and pure woman. Therefore, miracles happen to people like her.

One of the other miraculous features of *Apshyr-Ata* is a rock known as *Kargysh tiygen tash*, which means a “cursed rock”. It lies 200-250 meters to the north of the waterfall, in the middle of the river. Every pilgrim throws seven pebbles at the rock. The reason why people throw pebbles is explained in the following story. Once upon a time, a prophet was sitting here and praying and asking for peace and well-being for his nation. At that moment, this same rock fell upon his head from the sky. Then the prophet said, “God is my witness, I was praying for my nation, God please, grant me power and walk by my side.” By saying it he threw the rock off himself. Having heard these words and seen the miracle with the rock, people became even more god-fearing. Infidels started believing in existence of God and worshipping him. They also stopped doing bad deeds, chose a religious path and started preaching to others.

There is one more place at *Apshyr-Ata* that needs to be mentioned. After passing through a barren land, there is a large cemetery. A guardian spirit of the cemetery is believed to be a girl, who is sometimes seen by “pure” and spiritually developed people.

Today, the number of pilgrims taking care of and looking after the sacred site has increased. They reconstruct those areas destroyed by ordinary visitors and tourists, build mosques, eateries, reconstruct roads and clean the territory of the sacred site on a regular basis.

Ydyrys-Paigambar

Many sacred sites in the south of the country are connected with the name of Prophet Ydyrys. And yet the sacred site, named directly after him, is located in the western part of the Jany-Bazar village of Chatkal region in Jalalabad province. This sacred site consists of a mausoleum, rocks and ritual houses. The compound is situated near the big road upon the hills between the Jerge-Tal and Mazar-Sai Valley, exactly where the rivers Chatkal and Chandalysh meet. From the hill where Prophet Ydyrys' mausoleum is located, one can clearly see the mountain ranges of Piskem and Chatkal, a road leading to the Talas province, a mountain pass on the border with the Republic of Kazakhstan, mountain areas called Buguluu-Tor and Besh-Tor and the roads leading to Tashkent and other places.

As reported by a local dweller, Zamirbek Dosumbetov, who used to be a keeper of the compound, there are three *kumbozes* here, or buildings connected with Prophet Ydyrys. The first one is *childekana*, or a ritual house for obtaining knowledge, reading the Qur'an and conducting acts of rejoicing. Pilgrims believe that here the prophet spent 40 days in total solitude, meditating about the Almighty. The second mud house was built to commemorate soldiers, or all those who protect their motherland. For these people to have many children, a *beshtik*¹ was installed (built) inside the house. It is believed that a cradle brings good things and welfare to the house.

There have been many cases when people who were making a pilgrimage specifically to this area were asking God for children. They would then give their sons and daughters such names as Ydyrys, Chatkalbai, Muhamet, Sulaiman, Anarkan, Ryskul, Niyazgul and Niyazbek. There is some inscription on the stone close to the *beshtik*, and yet no one has been able to read it so far. The third house, or the mausoleum, is located where Prophet Ydyrys disappeared.

Then one can see a stone *supara*² and leaven for dough. In this spot the items that were used by the prophet became petrified. People say that at some point these used to be a shuttle of a sewing machine, mats for dough of the prophet's daughters, utensils for fermenting agents and baking bread, his horse, scissors and many other things. On one of the stones, one can see an imprint of the prophet's left heel. Pilgrims tie ribbons to the tree growing close to this stone for their wishes to be fulfilled.

The springs located on the territory of Prophet Ydyrys' compound are deemed to be very favourable spots. The first spring is called Obrakhman and the second one is called Obzamzam. The properties of Prophet Ydyrys' springs are different from all others. Winters in Chatkal are rigorous with normally up to two meters of snow. When the temperature drops to -40 degrees Celsius³, rivers become frozen. And yet

1 *Beshik* [Kyrgyz] – a baby cradle [ed.]

2 *Supara* [Kyrgyz] – a leather mat made from lamb or goat skin for dough [ed.]

3 Equals – 40 degrees Fahrenheit [ed.]

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these two springs do not. Their miraculous properties are come from *duba ketken suular*, or waters with a divine spell, that flow in them. For instance, if one takes water from other springs and keeps it, it will sooner or later go bad, while water from this spring can be kept for one year without losing its properties. If one uses this water to wash those parts of the body which are affected by eczema and other diseases that usually become more intense at new moon, they will be gone. People come here from Arabia, Turkey, Kazakhstan, Tajikistan and many other places.

Before setting off to the *mazar*, visitors have to conduct, on a mandatory basis, *daarat* – a ritual ablution, and pay a great deal of attention to special clothing. For instance, women have to wear white kerchiefs and long clothes, while men have to wear headgear. This is where a baby's hair can be cut for the first time, candles can be lit up, and ritual bread can be baked. Normally, ritual bread is prepared to make a pilgrimage successful, for the *mazar* to accept and bless the pilgrims and for their wishes to be fulfilled. Usually, seven pieces of ritual bread are baked, and the Kyrgyz call this ritual *kelatkan baabedin jolu*. This is where people often carry out a sacrificial offering – *tuloo* – in the name of the Almighty in the form of a sheep or some other animal. During this ritual, they ask for *bata* – blessings of other people. To commemorate the spirits of ancestors that died, people pronounce prayers from the Qur'an. They say if one pronounces prayers in memory of those who died, their spirits will rest in peace. Very many pilgrims conduct commemoration ceremonies in honor of their dead ancestors here and ask other people for blessings for their wishes to be fulfilled. Those who want to have a son or a daughter or to be cured from their diseases also come here. Different rituals and religious rites can be performed here.

Locals say that Ydyrys-paigambar is a prophet who came after Father Adam. He was the first prophet to sew clothes for humans and learned to hold a quill in his hand and to write. He was a teacher of angels. The Qur'an says that he had a pure heart and an honest soul. He was good at nature and plants. He founded such sciences as physics, mathematics and astronomy. People say that he was the first to build a town on the territory of present-day Turkey. According to some reports, he was the one to design the houses which are currently located on the hill. These mausoleums are inimitable monuments of Central Asian architecture.

A long time ago Iskender Zulkarnain – or Alexander the Great – came to this region on a vessel and crashed the stone near the spring with his sword. Nowadays, pilgrims are able to discern the inscription “Allah” on four sides around the spring Obzamzam.

A local clergyman, Yrsaaly-ajy, reported the following, “The real name of Prophet Ydyrys was Ah Nuh. He was born in the town of Misir. “Ydyrys” is an academic degree, similar to modern-day degrees of a professor or an associate professor. In Islam, those who speak Farsi and Arabic are referred to as “idiris”. “Idiris” is used to denote a *mudaris*, or a learned scholar. When he followed all of God's covenants, the Almighty gave him the name “Ydyrys”. Therefore, no matter what Ydyrys was asking thereafter, God would never refuse to fulfil it.” Other pilgrims say that

Prophet Ydyrys could understand the languages of all created beings. For instance, he could speak with water, animals, plants and all other beings around him.

Arashan

The spring where Prophet Ydyrys was carrying out his ablutions also became holy. It is called *Arashan*. This spring is located in the western part of the Aigyr-Jal village of Chatkal region in Jalalabad province, immediately at the feet of the mountains.

As a matter of fact, there are two springs spouting out from beneath the ground here. They are located at a distance of one meter from one another, and one of them is warm, and the other one is cold. There is a small house nearby. According to the legends which local people share with visitors, Prophet Ydyrys lived at the time when Adam and Eve appeared. Ydyrys is a special prophet. He is not dead, he is alive. In the book called *Kysaasulanbia* there are stories about 74 prophets. It talks nothing about the four prophets – Ydyrys, Isa, Kydyr and Il'yaz. Ydyrys ascended to heaven. And so did Isa. Probably, that is why Russians started to cross themselves. Kydyr lives among people. Il'yaz went down to the bottom of the sea.”

They say that water from these springs is very beneficial for internal organs. Local people take water from here for bathing. This is where sacrificial offerings take place. Childless women and people with all sorts of skin diseases often come here too.

Doot-Pirim or Davud-Pirim

The Kyrgyz have a word – *dootu*. It is used to denote a vehicle carrying out livestock or valuable things, and it can also mean valuables themselves. *Doot-Pirim* or *Davud-Pirim* is a sacred site where people come to ask for wealth and abundance. Batken dwellers believe that this place is connected with the name of Prophet Davud. The *Davud-Pirim mazar* is located at the very beginning of the Chauvai village of Kadamjai region in Batken province. At the side of the road there is a huge polished boulder which is testimony to the fact that Davud Pirim was able to work both with stones and metal (iron). People make a pilgrimage to this stone. Inside the stone is empty, and an average-sized person could fit in there. People put a wooden baby cradle inside the boulder. Young women who cannot conceive a child come here. They pronounce prayers expressing their wish to become pregnant, throw in coins and worship the stone. However, this place is most often frequented by those who bought a car or those who work with metal. They express a wish for their car to serve them a long time and for their things to go well. Wooden benches have been installed at the site for pilgrims, and fireplaces for cooking ritual food are also available.

According to oral folk stories, Prophet Davud's lineage looks as follows. Davud was born in 1079, before the year of *milad*¹ (*Ali-Zade*, 2007), after Prophet Musa. He lived his life in Israel and died there when he was 70 years old. Davud was the youngest out of seven children. He had a mellifluous voice and was eloquent. A book called *Zabur* was given to him by God as a gift, and he was a prophet and a ruler at the same time. Davud was guiding his contemporaries toward a righteous path. Also, he was a skillful blacksmith. When he was taking iron into his hands, it would become soft like dough, and Davud was making various items out of it. This is why Davud was called *Temirdin piri*, or the Master of Iron. After Davud left this world, his son Sulaiman, by inheritance, became a prophet and a ruler.

According to hearsay, his workshop is nestled at the foot of a small cliff in the Batken mountains. The uppermost part of the workshop is called *Moinok*. Somewhat below *Moinok*, in a cave under the cliff, Davud's second workshop was located. The prophet enclosed the place where the forge bellows, chimney and air outlet were located with stones. On the opposite side of the river, his mosque stood. The remnants of the mosque are still extant. Davud-baba had an apprentice who was always working conscientiously. Davud told his apprentice, "Don't look at me when I work. When your apprenticeship is over, I will reveal the trick of the trade to you and make you a blacksmith exactly like myself." Prophet Davud divided the workshop into two parts with a curtain, and each of them was working in his own section, not seeing each other. One day *shaitan*² appeared in front of the apprentice and started inciting him, asking, "Young lad, tell me how many years you have been working as Master Davud's apprentice. What did he teach you? How does he work with iron?" To which the young man replied, "I have not seen how the Master works yet." Then *shaitan* went on with tempting the young man, "Master Davud does not want to share his skills with you. He makes you work for him by deceiving you. If you want to see how the Master is working and learn the skill of a blacksmith, make a small hole in the curtain through which you will be able to see how he does his job and will know his secret." The apprentice succumbed to the temptation and once when he came earlier than the master he made a tiny hole in the curtain so that the Master could not notice it. Davud came in as usual and started working in his part of the workshop. When the work was in full swing the apprentice peeped into the hole and saw Davud kneading the iron paste as if it was dough. And the moment the master noticed that someone was watching him he scalded his hand. Waving his hand from one side to another, he screamed, "I burned my hand, why did you watch me working?" After pronouncing these words, Davud smote the stone with his hand and evanesced. Startled by the scene, the apprentice failed to notice in which direction the Master disappeared.

The young lad felt contrite because he had not been true to his word and reneged on his promise, having allowed *shaitan* to tempt him. He felt extremely dejected and told himself, "No matter what, I should find my Master and learn his skill." In

1 *Milad* – day of birth or Christmas. This term is used to refer to the birth of Prophet Isa by Christians which they celebrate at the end of December and beginning of January each year [ed.]

2 *Shaitan* [Kyrgyz] – devil [ed.]

his quest, the young man explored every little bush in the mountain, and yet the Teacher was nowhere to be found. Once, when he was descending the mountain, the haggard apprentice met an old man with a white turban on his head and clad in white garments. The old man asked the lad what he was looking for, and the latter told him about everything that had happened in detail. Then the old man advised the following, "You will never find him anywhere like this. There is only one way of doing so. On Fridays men congregate in the mosque for a prayer, and Davud-baba will be amongst them. You will not be able to recognize your Master among other old men. In order to recognize him, put some black coal on the path which men take when they go back home. After the prayer, when they are returning home, they will not pay attention to the coal. Only one old man will do so, and he will pick up a small piece and hide it in his turban. This man will be Davud-baba."

The young lad did everything that the old man told him, and started waiting for the men on the side of the road. Out of those returning from the mosque, one old man picked up a piece of coal from the ground and hid it in his turban. Then the young lad came up to him and started entreating him, "You are my Master, Davud-baba. I have been looking for you for a long time, and found you only today. I beg you to forgive me, please have mercy on me and teach me your trade." Then the old man expressed regret and dissatisfaction with the fact that the apprentice had reneged on his promise, uttered a curse towards *shaitan* and gave the following instruction, "You will never be able to knead iron like dough and to make magical weapons for *baatyrs* and beautiful decorations for women like me. You will not be able to take red-hot iron with bare hands. So I would suggest that you watch a dog gnawing at a bone with its front paws crossed. Make a pair of tongs out of iron that resemble the shape of the dog's crossed paws. And use these tongs to work with iron."

Having made iron tongs, the apprentice was thenceforth taking red-hot iron not with his bare hands, but with the tongs. The thumb of Master Davud's scalded hand is still imprinted on the stone which was placed in his workshop and which he started smiting when he burned himself. His other fingers were also imprinted, and they remain visible today. People call that stone *Tuunun tashy*, Flag's Stone, because those making a pilgrimage to this place hoisted a white flag there.

Sacred Sites Related to Azireti-Ali

Shaimerden

Shaimerden sacred site is revered as a place where great people used to tread. There is the mausoleum of *Azireti-Ali*. The mausoleum is a part of the sacred site complex that also consists of a mountain spring, old trees and other mausoleums.

The *Shaimerden* valley is located between two mountains, Kollector and Katyrang, which are part of the Alai mountain range. The valley is in Kadamjai region of Batken province. At the beginning of the *Shaimerden* valley, there is Kok-Suu gorge and Kol-Kutman lake and juniper trees grow on the mountain slopes.

There is a village in the middle of the valley that belongs to the Ferghana region in Uzbekistan. Muslim pilgrims from all over the world consider this site as sacred and come for a pilgrimage. They say that according to Azireti-Ali's biography, he had profound knowledge and was very brave and generous man. Pilgrims also emphasize that it was not a coincidence that Azireti-Ali was chosen as Prophet Muhammed's son-in-law. While Azireti-Abu-Bakir and Azireti-Umar were dealing with state issues related to the caliphate, Azireti-Ali was serving as wazir and dealing with issues related to religion and international affairs. At that time, when great people died, for their funeral seven coffins were made and mausoleums were established in seven places. One of such mausoleums is located in *Shaimerden* valley.

Sacred site guardians remember that during the Soviet times, nobody attached importance to the mausoleum. However, after Kyrgyzstan became independent, the mausoleum of Azireti-Ali was reconstructed. The entrance of the mausoleum is wide enough to fit one person. It is quite spacious inside the mausoleum. Those pilgrims who enter the mausoleum perform worship rituals and various ceremonies.

There is a medicinal spring at *Shaimerden*. The spring water is used to cure different illnesses. In order to reach the spring one should ascend the mountain top using artificially constructed stairs. At the spring, pilgrims perform praying rituals and recite verses from the Qur'an as well.

In the words of local researcher, Madumarova Malakhat, "Local people believe that the origin of the word "shaimerden" is a Persian word "shakhmardan". The word "shakh" means a "ruler", while "maragon" means a "snake" (Madumarova, 2012). There is a skin illness known as *ala*¹, when the person's body is covered with white patches. Once upon a time, a young man acquired this ailment. Villagers were afraid that his disease is contagious and they sent him to the mountains. Young man lived alone in the mountains. There was a spring on the mountain slope. One day, he decided to drink some water from the spring and saw that the spring was infested with snakes. There was one white snake among the others, and it started speaking a human language, "Do not be afraid of us. We will heal you." Day and night snakes were crawling upon the young man's body. Eventually, white patches on his skin faded away and he returned to the village. Ever since, this place became to be known as *Shaimerden* – a "snake ruler".

Sacred Site Azireti-Ali

Azireti-Ali mazary is believed to be a place where Prophet Muhammed's son-in-law made a halt to read namaz, while escaping from anti-islamists. Then he crossed a mountain and came to *Shaimerden*. Muslim people believe that, here, on one of the big stones, Azireti-Ali left traces of his foot. This stone is fenced around and benches are installed nearby. Judging by the size of foot prints, one can say that the person who left them was a big man. People also say that on the mountain, on the other side of the river, there are finger prints of Azireti-Ali's thumbs. It is

1 *Ala* [Kyrgyz] – acquired leukoderma [ed.]

the reason why this place was named *Kadamjai*, “kadam” – “trace” and “jai” – “place”. At the entrance of the Kadamjai city on the southern side, there are places that people worshiped from ancient times. Nowadays, neat staircases, sculptures of different animals, growing trees and number of Uzbekstyle benches are installed at the *Azireti-Ali* sacred site. It became a local tradition to visit this site by newlyweds on a wedding day.

Sacred Site Kyzyl

Kyzyl mazar is another place in Batken province that preserves people’s belief in unique capabilities of *Azireti-Ali*. The sacred site is located in an area called *Sarkanda*, ten kilometers away from the *Sur* village of *Kadamjai* region in Batken province. In the past, it used to be *Kyrgyz* people’s land. However, today *Tajik* people of the *Soh* village live there and it belongs to *Uzbekistan*.

According to a legend, a blind man used to live here. The man, at some point, borrowed three gold coins from a Jew and was not able to return his debt. Then the Jew made a condition that the man should give his daughter if he cannot pay the debt back. Sorrow whelmed the old man’s soul and he appealed to God.

Then he heard a voice from above, “Do not grieve, I will send *Sher*, he will help you.” According to those who tell this legend, *Sher* is Prophet *Azireti-Ali*. Then, Prophet *Azireti-Ali* came to the old man and said, “I will help, but you should do everything that I tell you. First of all, take me to *Barbar* city and sell me into slavery.” Upon reaching the city, the old man tied the prophet’s hand and brought him to a slave market. At that the time the city was governed by one *khokhol*¹ and his vizier saw a big strong man, the prophet, on the market. But, the vizier thought that the price of three gold coins was expensive for him. The old man was very stubborn and would not decrease the price saying that the slave is very strong and have strength of 40 men. Then the vizier told him, “Ok, here is the deal, if your slave fulfils three of my conditions, then I will pay three gold coins for him. You praise his strength; therefore he should combat the strongest man that no one was able to put to the ground before.” Prophet *Azireti-Ali* was able to put the man to ground at one blow.

Back in those days, the level of water in the *Soh* river would rise and flood the city. Once, the city governor addressed the Prophet, “You should take my 40 warriors with you and try to change the course of the river into a different direction.” Prophet *Azireti-Ali* went to study the course of the river alone. But 40 warriors followed in order to sky on him, Prophet *Azireti-Ali* took a mountain and placed in the middle of the river. The course of the river changed its direction, instead of flowing into the city it started flowing in the other direction. Then the governor gave the prophet third task, “A man named *Azireti-Ali* will arrive to the city soon. He bends everyone to his will and kills those who disobey his will. You should catch

1 *Khokhol* [Russian] – the epithet of Ukrainians used by Russians and *Kyrgyzs*. Literally means “crest” like a bird’s [ed.]

this man.” The prophet replied, “Harness 40 camels with chains”, and then 40 camels with 40 men started off to capture Azireti-Ali. After travelling some distance, the prophet told the men that he is the Azireti-Ali. Having heard this, all 40 warriors wanted to flee, but Azireti-Ali asked them to stay and promised that he will not harm anyone. He ordered warriors to tie him with chains and bring him back to the city governor. The warriors followed his order and brought him back. The city governor threw out a feast for the whole city and when he was going to hang Azireti-Ali, the prophet told him, “I fulfilled all your three conditions. Now let me go.” The governor thought that Azireti-Ali will not be able to run away anywhere and let him go. At that very moment, *Duldul*¹ appeared somewhere from the sky, then the prophet beheaded the city governor and started to kill his warriors one after another. Then people bowed their heads to Azireti-Ali and adopted Islam.

During that battle, Azireti-Ali hit his foot against a big rock, and when he pushed the rock away the stone sank into the ground with half of it protruding from the surface. People worship that visible part of the rock. Traces of his fingers are still imprinted on certain parts of the rock, and water started spouting out of those places. And then new springs emerged that exist even today.

Sacred Sites Related to Eshens

Azireti-Bua

Azireti-Bua sacred site is a tomb of a man named Azireti. The sacred site is situated approximately four kilometers to the west of the Baimak village in Batken province, and sits on the slope of the Kelinchek-Tash Mountain. The Hasan-Sai River flows adjacent to the sacred site and rises from mountainous valley Chakyr-Tor.

There is a ritual house and a hearth at the sacred site. They were constructed by local people. Those who are ill, do not have children, or those who need God’s help come here for a pilgrimage. They perform necessary rituals, slaughter a sheep, prepare ritual food and chant prayers.

There are various stories related to *ishan* Azireti. If to believe those stories, *ishan* Azireti was a righteous man and possessed miraculous power. One of the stories narrates that once righteous Azireti was subjected to a challenge. A big cauldron of pilau was prepared and a body of slaughtered dog was put on top of the food. When the cauldron with its content was served to Azireti, the slaughtered dog came to life and ran away. As it appeared, it was a rabid dog. Ever since, people who were bitten by rabid dogs make a pilgrimage to *Aizeti-Bua*. People believe that if righteous and god-fearing people make a pilgrimage, then their affairs will improve.

Long time ago, one padishah with his five warriors was upon the look for an *ishan* and found one here. When a captive was hog-tied and ready to be taken away, the

¹ *Duldul* [Arabic] – invisible horse with wings [ed.]

captive appealed to Eshen-Ata, “I have tasted your food, ate your bread and salt. Now they are taking me away to hack me to pieces.” In turn Eshen-Ata replied, “When a sword is swept upon your head, utter the word *aba*!” The padishah and his warriors hanged the captive upon a gibbet, but he uttered the word *aba* and the ropes broke; then they tried to stab him with a sword, but he uttered the word *aba* again and the sword did not strike his body. Thus, the padishah and his warriors were not able to kill the *ishan*. Then the padishah asked him, “Who is *aba*? Bring him to me!” As it appeared, Eshen-Ata was the *aba*. Then the padishah said, “I present you this horse as a sign of my respect to you.” Fearing the divine scourge, the padishah ordered to slaughter the horse. When the slaughtered horse was ready to be butchered and put inside a big cauldron, Eshen-Ata requested to put the whole carcass without butchering it. The horse meat was boiled and eaten. Eshen-Ata collected all the bones, wrapped them in a table cloth and left the bundle in a field. When he came back to the field, the bones turned into a live horse again. Thus, the *ishan* returned the horse back to padishah.

Eshen-Ata had a piece of land for sowing. One day, long before dawn, he came to the field, plough it up and sow with *andalyak*². The same day guests visited him, and Eshen-Ata told his servants, “Please go to the field, melons have already ripened, and bring some for the guests.” The servants were astonished, “You have sowed the melons just two hours ago, and how could they manage to ripen so fast?” But, Eshen-Ata persuaded them to go to the field. Upon reaching the field, the servants found ripe melons. Thus, they treated the guests with fresh melons. Some pilgrims assert that *Azireti-Bua* is the biggest pilgrimage site in Andijan, Ferghana, Kokand and Namangan regions.

Sacred Sites Related to Khoja

Kojo-Bilal-Ata

Kojo Bilal-Ata is located not far from Kyzyl-Kiya city, at the mountain side of the Ak-Bilak village of Kadamjai region in Batken province. Usually, people call this place as *Bilal-Ata* or *Kojo-Bilal*. The area is quite hilly and surrounded by barrows. There are two springs that sprout out from beneath the surface at those barrows. One of the springs is bigger than the other and carries the name *Sasyk-Bulak*, which means “fetid spring”. Its water is used to cure different skin diseases.

There are *soory*³ constructed between the trees, where pilgrims have a rest and chant prayers.

It is said that Kojo-Bilal was the youngest of seven *khojas* and that the Prophet Muhammad had a muezzin. When the muezzin was preaching Islam he was

1 *Aba* [Kyrgyz] – used to refer to a man senior in age [ed.]

2 *Andalyak* [Uzbek] – type of early small melons [ed.]

3 *Soory* [Uzbek] – trestle beds [ed.]

persecuted by infidels and while escaping, he concealed himself among rocks and disappeared without leaving a trace. If one fills up *kumgan*¹ with water and leaves it for a night here, then the *kumgan* will be empty by morning. Local people say that Bilal-Ata used to do ablution before *azan*² and before namaz; therefore, people make a pilgrimage here and chant prayers in honor of Bilal-Ata.

There is a sculpture of a breastfeeding woman on the hillside, as well as *supara*, *zuvala*³ and a cradle with two-three meter in width and 60-70 centimetres in height. Religion was suppressed during the Soviet Union and in order to eradicate people's belief in God, the sacred site was blown up. The rocks were fractured, but the sculpture preserved its contour up to day.

Oftentimes childless couples come here to pray to God and solicit for a baby. There is a tale going among local Muslims as if Arabs ask pilgrims in Mecca whether they have made a pilgrimage to *Kojo-Bilal* or not.

Kojo-Mati-Buva or Kojo-Mati-Vali

Kojo-Mati-Buva is situated at the foot of mountains, on the west side of the Kaiyndy village of Batken region in Batken province. *Kojo-Mati-Vali* is a blissful place with fertile land, rich and diverse vegetation, which constitute a gorgeous natural park. There are also a big spring and an irrigation canal flowing by the park. Ancient burial site or *mazar* lies at the foot of the mountain, little bit further up the irrigation canal. There is one main tomb surrounded by numerous smaller graves. The burial site is part of the sacred site complex and enclosed by stone fence. An apple garden lies at some distance from the burial site, *ziyaratkana* and *ochokkana*⁴ are located inside the garden. There is also a mosque constructed by the sacred site guardian, Ormon, during the Soviet Union. A smell of juniper tree is distinct and is felt immediately upon entering the mosque providing a sense of purity and pleasant aroma. Local juniper trees were used in construction of the mosque, and the most unique construction material is a 116 meter long ceiling joist made of one whole juniper tree.

Local residents explain that, in the past, their village used to be called by a Tadjik word, Rout. However, recently the name was changed into a Kyrgyz word, Kaiyndy, which means "birch". There are used to be many birch trees in the village before; and even today there are quite a few trees growing here, hence the new name of the village. Pilgrims conduct different rituals including sacrifice ritual and chant prayers for their wishes to be fulfilled. Mostly this site is visited by those having a rough patch in business or career or those starting a new business. People also make a pilgrimage before sowing season starts or when newly married couples move out from their parents' house and start a new and independent life of their own. There

1 *Kumgan* [Kyrgyz] – a metallic or plastic pitcher with a handle and spout used for ablution [ed.]

2 *Azan* [Arabic] – the Muslim call to a prayer [ed.]

3 *Zuvala* [Iranian] – a rolling pin [ed.]

4 *Ochokkana* [Kyrgyz] – hearth [ed.]

are also pilgrims with skin diseases and ear illnesses; they wash themselves with spring water and find cure to their illnesses. First of all, pilgrims recite verses from the Qur'an in honor of the Almighty and Kojo-Mati-Buva, and then other prayers are chanted and wishes are said.

Hereditary successor of his father, the sacred site guardian, Mamatisak Ormonov states that the name of the sacred site denotes "mercy". It is said that a saint named Kojo-Mati-Buva or *Vali* lived in the 15th century. He was a righteous man and after his death he was buried in the Kaiyindy village. Therefore, this particular sacred site carries his name. The walls of his tomb are made of mud and stones and the roof is from juniper trees. In the past, many people used to come here to worship the spirit of Kojo-Mati-Buva enhancing the sacredness of the place. Local people state that only those who have pure intentions and sincere desire to make a pilgrimage in honor of the Almighty are able to reach the sacred site.

From the 1960s to the 1980s, village elder Ormon was the guardian of *Kojo-Mati-Vali*. Ormon succeeded his father, who used to be the guardian of this place before. During those years, an article named *There where the ancient river Soh* flows appeared in a regional newspaper *Leninskiy Put* in Osh. A man named Petrash was the author of the article, who used to teach atheism at the Osh Teachers' Training College. As the saying goes, "was ordered to bring the hat, but he cut off the head," after the article came to light, not only the sacred site guardian, but also all the village residents suffered government's persecution. Having witnesses the sufferings of his father, Ormon, who back then used to work as head of local district committee, independently started learning the Arabic alphabet and basics of Islam. Numerous different thoughts and doubts occupied his mind and he became exposed to frequent illnesses. And one night he heard a voice, "Quit your job. The place that saints vouchsafed with their attention is now being undignified." Starting from that day, Ormon quitted his job, became the guardian of *Kojo-Mati-Vali*, regained his health and began helping other sick people who needed his help. After retirement, he dedicated his life to guarding and preserving the sacred site. Upon Ormon's death, his son, Mamatisak, succeeded his father and is the guardian of *Kojo-Mati-Vali* up to present day.

Sacred Sites Related to Ata – Holy Fathers and Righteous Men

Shamshykal-Ata

*"Father Shamshykal and Father Toskool,
Protect and guard us from trouble of Myuiyuzduu-Mazar,
If a tear shed, may it turn into a spring,
If a sweat drips, may it turn into salt."*

Pilgrims coming to the *Shamshykal-Ata* sacred site chant these verses. The sacred site is located not far from a salt ore on the altitude of 1,300 meters above the sea and 30 kilometers away from city of Toktogul in Jalalabad province. There are salt ores on the mountain top and its slopes, therefore the mountain seems

white from the distance. The most revered place at *Shamshykal-Ata* is a tomb on the mountain, where certain traditional practitioners conduct rituals. From ancient times, traditional healers have been following a tradition of “accepting” healing gift known as *aktykty moyunga aluu*. The ritual itself is conducted in different ways, but mostly it is done in the following way. Healers put a white cloth near the tomb and overstep it. Those performing this ritual believe that a person who oversteps the white cloth near the sacred tomb will become *kudaidyn adamy* or “man of God” and from that moment starts serving other people. Then the white cloth is hanged on the pole near the tomb. Sacred site guardians say that performance of this ritual is becoming rare every year.

There is a salt ore right in front of the tomb. If evil words were pronounced during mining activities or when drunk people were involved, salt wouldn't come out. And when kind-hearted workers were extracting the ore, the mine, according to hearsay, would be filled up with salt each time. Traditional healers say that when machines emerged, they started extracting ore with the help of equipment. And yet because it was done iniquitously, extraction of salt was made impossible.

There is a cave named *Chilten* on the western side of the tomb. Snakes nestle inside that cave. There are pilgrims who stay in the cave for 40 days worshipping 40 *chilten*¹ that are believed to possess wealth of various knowledge and skills. Local people are reminiscent of bringing food and water to such pilgrims.

There are different legends related to the origin of this sacred site. In the words of Akylbek, guardian of Shamshykal-Ata, “Father Shamshykal was an Arab and one of the prophet's followers. He passed away at this place while performing ablution and he was buried here. His name was Samsy. People used to call this place Samsy kaldy, which meant “Samsy stayed”. However, through time, the name changed into Shamshykaldy.

Pilgrim, Zamir Nurgaziev, states, “A man named Shamshykal lived here. He took care of his people by extracting salt. It was during the reign of Kerimbai, when Shamshykal went to Talas region to exchange extracted salt into livestock. Shamshykal exchanged his salt and clarified that two types of salt exist, spring and fall, that each type should be used in accordance with the season. However, Kerimbai interpreted it in a different way and ordered his men to sow the salt in the mountain. He thought that salt will yield harvest.”

Another pilgrim, a fisherman shared, “I did not pay much attention to the sacredness of *Shamshykal-Ata* before. There lived a mentally challenged girl in our village. Every year, in the beginning of spring, she used to run away from home in the direction of this mountain. Once, we saw her running naked and were quite bewildered. People say that she spent three full days standing by the sacred tomb the cold notwithstanding. One of her brothers went on looking for her and heard

1 *Chilten* [Kyrgyz] – benign spirits that possess miraculous capacities and are not visible to a human eye, see (Encyclopedia of Manas, 1995) [ed.]

noise like the one made by machine engine. He went in the direction of noise and saw his sister and a car besides her. Thus the girl was cured from her illness.”

One of the local traditional healers say that *Shamshykal-Ata* appeared by the will of God. Back in the day, there lived three brothers, Azireti, Arstanbap and Shamshykal. This particular sacred site is named after the third brother, Shamshykal. A good while ago, during famine years, this place saved lives of many people. There is a spring here. Being left without water and food, people would come here, lick the salt and drink water from the spring.

Today, there are many pilgrims visiting this sacred site. Majority of pilgrims come on Wednesdays. They bring ritual bread made at home. Those who do not have children solicit for a baby, pray for well-being and harmony in life. All the pilgrims make a pilgrimage to the spring, light a ritual candle and ask for fulfilment of their wishes.”

All-time pilgrims tell another unique feature of *Shamshykal-Ata*, “No matter how many people come and how much salt they take, the next morning the place refills itself with salt again. Probably this happens only here, because *Shamshykal-Ata* is a powerful place.”

According to another healer, “I have seen and known many people in my life by being a healer. I accompanied many people to *Shamshykal-Ata* and performed *tolgo*¹ ritual. Day and night people would come to my house and ask me to take them for a pilgrimage there. After their pilgrimage, I learned that many of them found happiness, peace of mind and became parents. I believe that power of *Shamshykal-Ata* helped them to realize their dreams.”

Arslanbap

The area of *Arslanbap* is different from other places with its fresh air, walnut forest and its beautiful waterfalls. There are a great number of sacred sites in this area, *Ibn Abbas*, *Arslanbap Ata*, *Juma mechit*, *Almalyk-Ata*, *Kol mazar* and others, where people come for a pilgrimage. Many people from different countries come to visit *Arslanbap*. Pilgrims make a sacrifice ritual by slaughtering a sheep or a chicken, prepare a *chosmo*² and light a ritual candle. People come to the sacred site clad in Islamic attire.

The main place of pilgrimage is an ancient tomb. It is located 16-20 kilometers from the Bazar-Korgon village of Jalalabad province. Local people believe that emergence of the largest walnut forest was manifestation of the sacredness of this place and the result of tireless efforts by *Arslanbap-Ata*. Today, walnuts serve as source of income, not only for residents of the *Arslanbap* village, but also for the residents of

1 *Tolgo* [Kyrgyz]- a ritual of foretelling and/or interpreting events by spiritual practitioners [ed.]

2 *Chosmo* [Kyrgyz southern dialect] – farinaceous dish made of liquid dough and fried in oil [ed.]

Bazar-Korgon region. Therefore, walnut is considered as one of the valuable natural wealth.

Local people do not know when *Arslanbap* was originated. There is a belief that there was a man named Arslanbap with miraculous properties. Neither an arrow shot from enemy's bow nor spear could harm him. It is said that he was married to a Russian lady. His wife's relatives stood up against him and started searching for ways to kill him. Once they forced Arslanbap's wife to tell his secret. She died after telling it.

As it appeared, the secret was that only a bullet shot during Arslanbap's prayer time could kill him. Having found this out, enemies shot Arslanbap when he was praying on his prayer stone. Arslanbap accepted approach of his death and as a final will requested his body to be carried down by the road near the praying stone and while carrying his body, the carriers were supposed to count their breaths, and bury his body at the place where they make their seventh breath. At every breath, the carriers were leaving piece of bread and at the place of their seventh breath they put the seventh piece and buried him there. Later, seven springs spouted out from those seven places and became sacred.

The praying stone lies far from the road and it always remains clean due to its miraculous feature. The fact that Arslanbap's fingerprints and stains of his blood still remain on the stone is still a mystery.

Pilgrims one after another repeat that countless number of people have cured their illnesses after visiting this sacred site. Gulumjan Akhmedov, one of the pilgrims says, "I was born in Arslanbap village and work as a construction worker. In 2007, a splinter, the size of a needle, got stuck in my leg at the construction site. I removed it immediately and thought that in several days it will heal. But the wound began to fester and started to hurt immensely. I was put into a hospital in Jalalabad city. Doctors prescribed various medications, performed two surgeries, but day by day heaviness in my leg increased and it swelled out. Medical treatment and doctors' efforts did not bring any results. One day doctors said that my leg should be amputated. But I checked out from hospital and returned to my village. There I met one clairvoyant who said that I should make a pilgrimage to the *Arslanbap-Ata* sacred site. I was doubtful whether to go there or not, but the next morning made a decision to visit the sacred site with my family. Upon arriving to the sacred site we prepared *chosmo*, chanted prayers, made a ritual candle out of a piece of cotton dipped in melted fat and lit it by praying and asking for my leg to be healed. The next morning, after coming back home, I found that half of the splinter was still stuck at my wound and took it out. After that, my wound started getting better until it completely healed. Ever since that case, I started believing in the power of sacred sites, provided I stayed at the hospital back then, now I would have only one leg. Now I make a pilgrimage to *Arslanbap-Ata* every year."

Koroz-Ata

The sacred mausoleum *Koroz-Ata* lies on the foothill of the well-known mountain Chilmairam and on the slope of Karazoo, not far from the Shin-Sai village of Nooken region in Osh province. According to local elders, this place was once a thick forest of elm trees, which used to delight the eyes of merchants and travellers of trade caravans that followed the Silk Road. They would travel by the right bank of the Naryn River, pass through Ketmen-Tobo and Kokbel regions, along the upmost edge of the Ongku-Jon Mountain, which lies by the Sary- Kamysh gorge, and reach the Shin-Sai village. Merchants used to leave all their goods in the village and go to *Koroz-Ata* to have a rest. After having some rest, merchants would further proceed in the direction of the Mailuu-Suu town.

Nowadays, pilgrims come to *Koroz-Ata* to ask God to make their children honest and conscientious; also this place is visited by those who are getting ready for a long journey and ask for protection while they travel and those who are starting a new business and ask for success on their endeavors.

Judging by local legends, a long time ago, three brothers lived in this region. They made their living by serving traders. Bektur was the eldest brother, Jabyl – middle brother and Kojobek was the youngest brother. Their father used to live in *Koroz-Ata*. He brought young elm trees with thick leaves from Andijan region and planted them in *Koroz-Ata*. Young trees grew into a dense forest of tall trees with no sunbeams passing through. The forest became a wonderful place for having rest.

The father taught each of his sons a particular skill. He taught Bektur to sing like a nightingale, crow like a rooster and scream like a golden eagle. He taught Jabyl to fill up containers the height of a human with water and assist traders to perform ablutions. He taught the youngest son, Kojobek, to feed and water traders' horses. And his last words spoken to his children immediately before he died were the following, "Never leave this place."

The brothers grew up and started arguing who should be doing what. The two younger brothers opposed the elder brother and wanted to perform his tasks. As it turned out, Bektur used to wake up traders by singing like a nightingale and crowing like a rooster. Startled, traders would invite Bektur to join them and ask him to sing and crow. Traders and travellers would tease him and call him "the little rooster", give him extra money, make different presents and treat him with affection. The other two brothers were envious because their eldest brother was earning more money than them. One night they ran away towards Namangan region secretly from their eldest brother.

Years have passed and the brothers started a family and built a house. They did farming, built big houses and employed servants. They grew older and one day decided to visit their eldest brother. The brothers filled their bags with fruits and rice and set out to their home land. They met a stranger on the way and asked about their brother. The stranger told, "Well, he is not Bektur anymore, he is our *Koroz-Ata* – our dervish and the man of wisdom." Finally, all the brothers have

met each other and forgot old offenses. The two younger brothers started asking the older brother to come live with them. But, Bektur replied, "My dear brothers, I fulfilled the last will of our father. Many years have passed since traders stopped passing through our village. I lived to see how people started worshipping trees and revering them as sacred and I have also built a good mosque. If I devote the rest of my lifetime to God and shariah, then all my dreams and wishes will be fulfilled. Our father named me Bektur, which means "be solid", and I will keep my word and will not leave the place of my father. Do not be upset, as it turned out, you live not far from me. We will keep in touch, my dear brothers." Having said this, Bektur gave his brothers two *tumar*¹ and said, "These amulets contain the soil of the land where you were born. Please always keep it with you. If it is God's will, then one day you will return to your home land."

Jabyl and Kojobek achieved success and high positions at work. They did not forget Bektur's request and built three big mosques. The third mosque was built in a different way than the other two; it was designed to accommodate Bektur provided he visits them. Years have passed and Bektur passed away. According to his last will, Bektur was buried in his garden and a tomb was erected at his burial place. This place turned into the *Koroz-Ata* sacred site. Those three mosques built by Jabyl and Kojobek still remain and are situated in an era that belongs to Ych-Korgon region in Uzbekistan, and they are still remembered by local people.

Time came and Jabyl passed away. According to his last will, he was supposed to be buried beside Bektur, his elder brother. Before his death, Jabyl saw his father in his dream, who said, "You will die soon, therefore choose the strongest of your servants and instruct them. They should take the bier with your body to Bektur's burial place. On the way the bier should not touch the ground, otherwise your body will stay there forever. Keep this in mind, my son." Upon Jabyl's death, his younger brother Kojobek ordered servants to carry the bier with his brother's body from Ych-Korgon to Shin-Sai in order to reach Bektur's burial place. They travelled day and night and by Friday evening they almost reached their destination. Kojobek was in the lead on his horse and told the servants, "We almost reached the place. Do not put the bier on the ground and go in the direction of that tree." The servants, who have never seen mountains before, marvelled at the beauty of surrounding nature. Suddenly, out of green grass, a partridge with its baby birds emerged in front of them. Servants shouted out, "Hey, look, it is a partridge!" They put the bier on the ground and started chasing after the partridge. They returned back where they left the bier and intended to lift it before Kojobek notices, but to their greatest surprise, they were not able to lift the bier from the ground. Kojobek became sad and said, "We have almost reached the place. Perhaps, he was destined to be buried here. In due time, we left out home land, now the land is rejecting us." With these words he buried his brother there. Over the years this place has turned into a big cemetery and was named Jabyl-Ata.

1 *Tumar* [Kyrgyz] – amulet [ed.]

Time passed and Kojobek became *bilerman*, a leader of Uzbek people, who named him Kojaiyn-Buba or Kojaiyt-Buba. Kojobek's testament was, "A person who once abandoned his home land will never find home there again". Kojobek was afraid that his home land will not welcome him back as it happened with his brother Jabyl. Therefore, ordered his body to be buried in Ych-Korgon region, the place where he resided. His body was one of the first to be buried here and the place is named after him, Kojaiyn or Kojaiyt-Buba.

As it appears, a Kyrgyz saying "Fulfill the last will of your father, because the curse of your father is as dangerous as a bullet" is true. Bektur fulfilled his father's will, lived his life according to shariah, had pure intentions, became Koroz-Ata and still belongs to the place where he was born. Jabyl-Ata, who once gave up on his native land, thrust out his hand to his elder brother before he died. Kojobek who became to be known as Kojaiyt-Buba, who entrusted his destiny, rests on the slope facing the great Chilmairam in Ych-Korgon. Three brothers – three sacred sites.

Nowadays the tomb of Koroz-Ata is dilapidated and the elm forest had withered back in 1980s. Provided the tomb was reconstructed, it would have become an example of spiritual purity, one's love to home land and respect of father's will.

Bant-Suusuu

*"Is there a person who ascended a great mountain?"
Is there a person who heard the voice of ular¹?
Is there a person who drank the water of the Bant River?
Is there a person who lived a life with no sorrow?"*

These lines are chanted by those who have not tasted the water from the Bant River yet. Local dwellers know quite well that there are number of people who yearn to drink the river water. It is said that people from Kyrgyzstan who make hajj to Mecca are asked whether they have drunk the water of the Bant River or not.

The *Bant suusu* sacred site lies at the mountain base where the Karool village of Kadamjai region in Batken province begins. A natural pool in the Karool village carries the name Suu-Bashy, or "beginning of water" and its left branch is called Bant. Local people say that, in the past, the mouth of the Bant River was called Kindik-Suu, which denoted "navel cord water". It was named as such because there was a spring that used to spout all year around and resembled human navel cord by its form. Back in those days, people of knowledge made use of the water for its healing qualities.

Local elders assert that the water of the Bant River has curing property, since the river is granted by God. One of the local residents explains that the word "bant" is a Persian word and means "saint or the chosen one". The spring waters of the Bant

1 *Ular* [Kyrgyz] – snowcock [ed.]

PART 1 SACRED SITES IN THE SOUTH OF KYRGYZSTAN

River are not only pure, but also cleanse the body from chemical and other wastes. The water is also rich with calcium necessary to nourish the bone cells, which makes it more valuable.

Local elders still keep in their memory several stories on why the river was named Bant. One of the stories is associated with a Muslim saint, Shaa-Marshap. Once, his father, a righteous man, Oluya-Ata, was heading to Kashgar through the Isfairam gorge, he made a halt here to drink some spring water. Having drunk the water he said to his fellow men, "I have travelled around the world, but nowhere have I tasted water like here. I cannot leave this place, because the water appeals to me." Then he ordered his fellow men to discover where the river takes its origin. After learning that the river originates from a spring, Oluya-Ata cried out, "Found it!" His fellow men were surprised and asked what he has found. "I found the source of living water" – replied the man. After several months Oluya-Ata continued his journey to Kashgar, but his son, Shaa-Marshap, remained in this area for quite a while. Ever since that time, the spring became a place of worship for residents of Ferghana valley and entire Muslim community.

According to the second story, the Angel Jabrail¹ (*Islam*, 1991) came down to earth in order to provide water to people that would make them immortal. When he hanged the vessel with living water on the tree and went to look for people, a raven came and broke the vessel. The water was soaked into the tree root, half of it evaporated and the remaining half merged with the river. But the raven managed to drink a drop of water; therefore it lives longer than everyone else. The tree that soaked the water is juniper; therefore juniper is an evergreen tree with a long life. The spring where the water dropped is the Bant River. Therefore, perhaps, residents of the Karool village drinking water from Bant live a long life.

Kok-Tondu-Ata

A sacred site called *Kok tondu-Ata* is located in the village of Salam-Alik, close to the town of Ozgon in Osh province. Around 30 to 40 years ago this place was covered by a dense impassable forest where one could be lost very easily. This place became subject to destruction during the Soviet times already. People of different faith were coming here and cutting off trees, and were using them as firewood. Fortunately, trees still grow here, even though not as densely as before.

According to hearsay, a long time ago in the past a bullet struck the chief of the Muslim army that was spreading Islam in a place called Bosh-Kapa, and he died. His warriors carried his body on a horse to this place. As they had no more energy to proceed any further, the warriors had to bury the body of Nurkojo Kozubekov here. If the body had not started to decompose, they would have taken it to Mecca. Another reason for burying the man's body here could be, as explained by local experts, the fact that back in those days it was a custom to bury warriors where they were facing their demise. The deceased army leader had a *kok ton*, or a blue

¹ The name of the closest angel to Allah, the main mediator between the Allah and prophets [ed.]

sheepskin coat, and that is why the warriors put two stones upon his grave, and wrote the words “Nurkojo Kozubekov” and “Kok tondu-Ata” in Arabic on them. Only Islamic priests could read these words.

An old man, Akmat Sagynov, 87, told us the following, “This *mazar* is sacred. Let me tell you what happened to me. When I was born, I was a sick child, and I couldn’t eat anything, as my diarrhea would not stop. Day by day, I was not becoming bigger, but rather smaller and smaller, and at some point I became so small that they could fit me in a *kalpak*¹. My mother had lost all hopes and stopped looking after me. But my grandmother was looking after me tirelessly. She took me to her home and was taking me to different doctors.”

“In the long run, she took me to this spring. The guardian of the sacred site said, “Your child will have a long life, do not lose hopes. God will help you.” The grandmother trusted his words and stayed up all night, praying and asking God to help cure her grandson, and at some point she fell asleep. She woke up all of a sudden, and saw a white creature the size of a cat that was walking around me and caressing me. On that day my illness was gone, and thank God, this year is my 87th year of life. Until today, every time when I pass by the *mazar*, I always visit it briefly, and drink water from the spring, and wash my face and hands with this water.”

The eldest sister of a man named Sovetbek Kalchaev discovered rash on her head, and she was hospitalized, and yet it did not help, so she went back home. Her parents did not know what to do, so they started taking her to different mullahs and *khojas*. Then one mullah told them, “Do not go anywhere, but rather perform a ritual to worship a spring that you have. Light up the candles, and burn juniper branches, and bake seven pieces of bread and give them out to others. Then wash the woman’s face with water from that spring.” And this is what they did. Ten days after all rash was gone from the girl’s head. At some point later she went to St. Petersburg to earn money, and this is where she met a girl named Lena. Lena’s daughter was taking too many medications, and this is why she became even more ill, and all of her body from top to toe was covered with dark stains. When she approached doctors, they told her that she had a disease called a “tortoise shell” which was incurable. Then Lena took her daughter to Kyrgyzstan where she was washing her daughter with water from this spring, and in not more than a month her daughter was absolutely healthy. They went back to St. Petersburg. Sometimes Lena and her daughter come here. The girl’s mother keeps saying that her daughter was cured due to the water from this spring. This happened in 1985.”

1 *Kalpak* [Kyrgyz] – traditional felt hat worn by men [ed.]

Sacred Sites Related to Righteous Women

Kara-Kyz-Ene or Ak-Peyil-Ene

Kara-Kyz-Ene or *Ak-Peyil-Ene* sacred site is a grave-stone, which is located to the north of the Ak-Suu village of Aksy region in Jalalabad province. If to believe local people, female saint known as Kara-Kyz is buried here. There are eight springs flowing in parallel, number of silver poplars, apples trees and grapes growing here.

According to local legends, *Kara-Kyz-Ene* or *Ak-Peyil-Ene* is related to other sacred sites in the south. There lived three prophet brothers, Padysha-Ata, Baba-Ata, Bozbu-Ata and Yiman-Ata. They also had a youngest sister, Kara-Kyz. She had black spots on her face from early childhood, therefore, she was avoiding people and she came to these areas in her attempt to hide herself. This particular sacred site was named after her, Kara-Kyz-Ene, although local people also call this place Ak-Peyil, which literally means “good temper”. The latter is related to the fact that wishes and intentions of hundreds of people are fulfilled here. Childless couples become parents; those with illnesses become healthy; those who suffer find comfort; those who regularly drink the spring water live a long life. Therefore, people named this place as “peyili kenen” or “ak peyil ene” – “blessed” or “blessed mother”.

There are numerous springs at the sacred site. The first spring stems from a cave, which lies one meter above the ground. The second spring is one meter away from the first and flows down the rocks; the third spring is also flows down and lies adjacent to the second spring. The fourth spring spouts out from the roots of a crooked tree. All of the springs flow side by side and join one irrigation ditch that flows down to ravine. The fifth spring lies two-three meters away from the fourth one. There are several other springs that flow down from above; they flow crossing the road down to the ravine. The sixth spring spouts out from a stone that lies on the side of the road (there is only one road and all the springs flow along that road). The seventh spring is half a meter away from the sixth. The eighth spring is also half a meter away from the seventh and spouts out from tree roots. On the place where the eighth spring is originated, a square-shaped cement fence was built, which gave way to formation of a small lake. Pilgrims make wishes and tie ribbons on tree branches growing by its side.

Safetbulan

Safetbulan is another sacred site in the south of Kyrgyzstan that is referred to as “the small Mecca” by local people. The sacred site is located inside of a big fortress, on a hillside in the Zarkent village of Ala-Buka region in Jalalabad province. There are several trestle-beds upon the entrance through the main gate, and usually, the first praying rituals are conducted here. If to walk further inward the fortress, one can see graves on both sides. Usually, the sacred site guardian can be found there. He chants prayers and tells stories related to graves. There are certain sacred sites, which only women are allowed to approach, and there are others, which only men are allowed to approach.

If to believe folk stories, once upon a time, this mountain was covered by juniper trees. Those Muslims who were preaching Islam were captivated by the beauty of the region and settled here. Arabs, under the leadership of Muhammad Jarir¹, began to disseminate Arabic language and Islam. There used to be a city called Kasan not far from the sacred site, and, Ikhshid, was the local governor of Kasan. The governor refused to adopt Islam and divided the city in two parts. But, city residents, after having heard that Arabs are as strong as a lion, decided to convert to Islam. Ikhshid became furious and addressed his people with a proposal to start a war against Arabs, but people refused to enter into a war. Then Ikhshid wrote a letter to Kerbenbas, the governor of the Ongor city, proposing the following plan. Kerbenbas was supposed to stop his war against Arabs and start making peace and winning their favour, while Ikhshid would assemble an army in Turkestan. But, Ikhshid played a trick and sent another letter to the Shakh Jarir and, having gathered his army, fled to the Zarkan region. When Arabs came to Kasan, city residents welcomed them with open arms. Then the Shakh Jarir in search of Ikhshid sent his ambassadors to Kerbenbas. Kerbenbas was already prepared and gave them a warm reception, and in order to win their favour, gave his daughter, Bulbula, in marriage to the commander in chief. Thus, peace between the two nations was secured for a while.

Long time has passed and the Shakh went to the Aksy region to settle some matters and left his wife, Bulbula, at her father's house. Bulbula's father gave her a cold welcome and regarded with disfavour. Tears flowed from her eyes and she complained to her mother. She sheltered Bulbula from her father and told her to leave at the dawn. However, at night, the girl woke up to loud voices. It turned out, that Kerbenbas, upon receiving a letter from Ikhshid, was gathering his army and preparing to start a war against Muslims.

Bulbula was loyal to Shakh Jarir and became a devoted Muslim after her marriage. She told about her father's plan to her husband, but the Shakh did not believe her, saying, "It cannot be true. They adopted Islam, I am his son-in-law and he is my father-in-law. How can it be true?" After a short while in one of the Fridays, when Muslims were unarmed and conducting praying ritual, Ikhshid and Kerbenbas with their warriors attacked them all of a sudden. They cut off heads of unarmed and defenceless people. The place where 2,272 people were killed began to be known as a "mosque of murder". Bulbula was waiting with 500 horses on the western side of the mosque, behind the Jarak hill. Arabs lead by Shakh Jarir managed to flee from the bloody mosque with great difficulty.

In the morning it was announced that infidels gained victory over Muslims. Bulbula went back to the place of massacre under an excuse that she left her *ajylar*² and saw 2,272 heads sank in blood. Having screamed out of horror, she washed bloody heads with her tears and buried them. The infidels did not like the fact that Bulbula being a non-muslim from birth is washing heads of the Muslims. But, Bulbula said

1 Tursunbai, N. (2004). Blessed Safetbulan (p. 24).

2 *Ajylar* [Kyrgyz] – here it denotes "religious mentor" [ed.]

PART 1 SACRED SITES IN THE SOUTH OF KYRGYZSTAN

that she adopted Islam and she had her religious mentors. Pilgrims say that the stone on which Bulbula washed 2,272 heads remains there until today.

Once upon a time, there were stones with Arabic inscriptions on them, but today they are gone. They were transferred to the tomb at *Sulaiman-Too* sacred site in Osh. The heads of 2,272 people were put into one pit. Tombstones were erected to each one. Thus, this place became sacred and, even during the Soviet Union, people were secretly making a pilgrimage here.

Bulbula had a dark complexion from birth; however, after washing the heads, her skin became light and she grew prettier. Thus she was named *Akbula*, “white bula”. The name “safet bulan” denotes “white” in Persian. Hence the place began to be known as “Ak-Kyz” or *Safetbulan*. Years have passed, the girl grew old and she passed away. She was buried with honors, because she displayed courage and performed a feat that not every man was able to perform.

Buurabiya

Buurabiya sacred site is dedicated to Azireti-Ali’s youngest sister, Buurabiya. The sacred site is located on the road from Batken city to Joo-Paya village. It stands on the side of the road leading to the mountains. The sacred site consists of a tomb, a spring and a ritual house.

Nobody knows for sure whether Buurabiya is buried here or not. Nevertheless, only those who perform ritual ablution may enter the tomb. All wonders performed by Buurabiya are enlisted on the board hanging at the entrance to the sacred site. For instance, she would lay a rug on the surface of running water and pray two times a day. There are number of pilgrims making pilgrimage to this sacred site. Those with no children come here to pray and solicit for a baby. Also many illnesses get cured here. One of the local resident’s wives hurt her spine and was tormented by pain. She started visiting the sacred site and in half a year pains were gone. Having cured her illness here, in 2010, this woman took up a mission of a custodian and guardian of the sacred site. She is planning to put up sheds in three places and build a house and a hearth for pilgrims to prepare ritual food at the sacred site.



Arashan, Chatkal, Jalalabad province



Apshyr-Ata, Nookat, Osh province



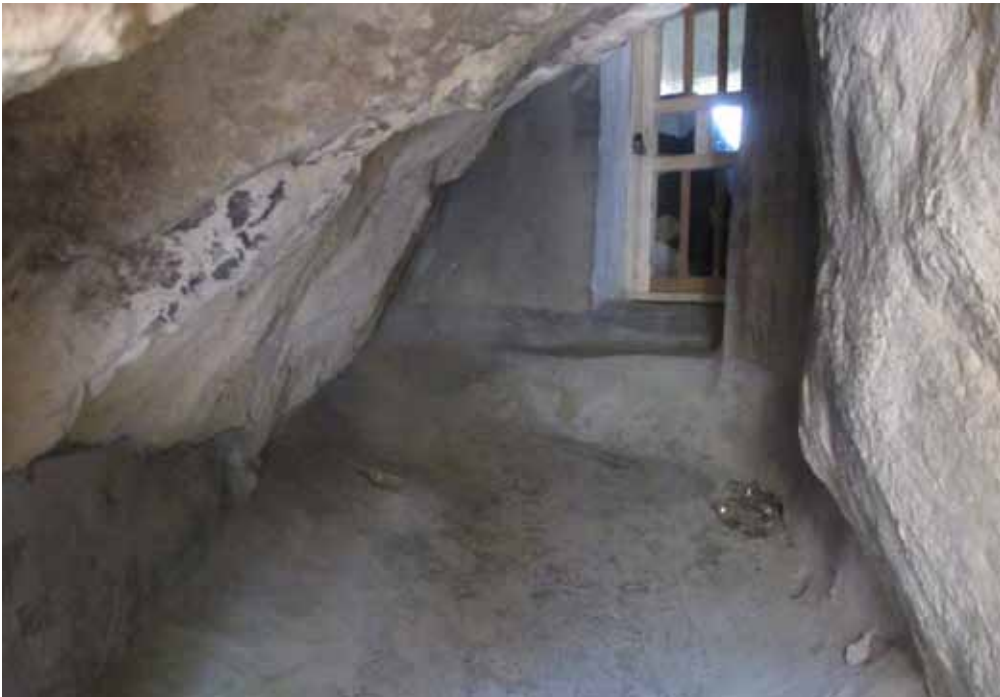
Apshyr-Ata, Nookat, Osh province



*Apshyr-Ata, Nookat,
Osh province*



*Doot-Pirim, Kadamjai,
Batken province*



Doot-Pirim, Kadamjai, Batken province



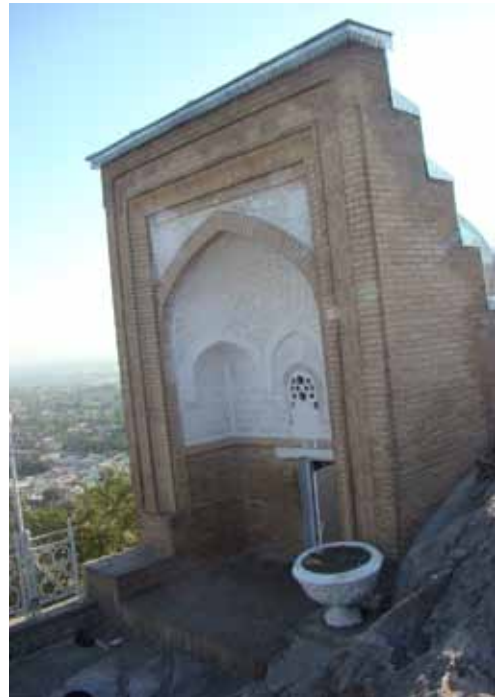
Doot-Pirim, Leilek, Batken province



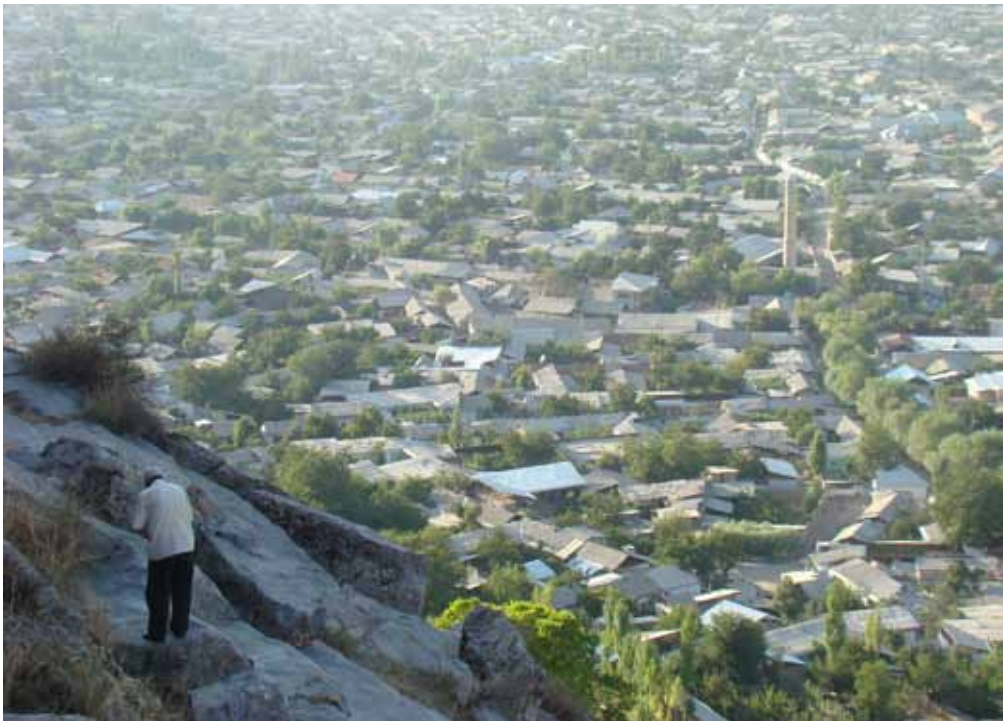
Azireti-Ali Mazary, Kadamjai, Batken province



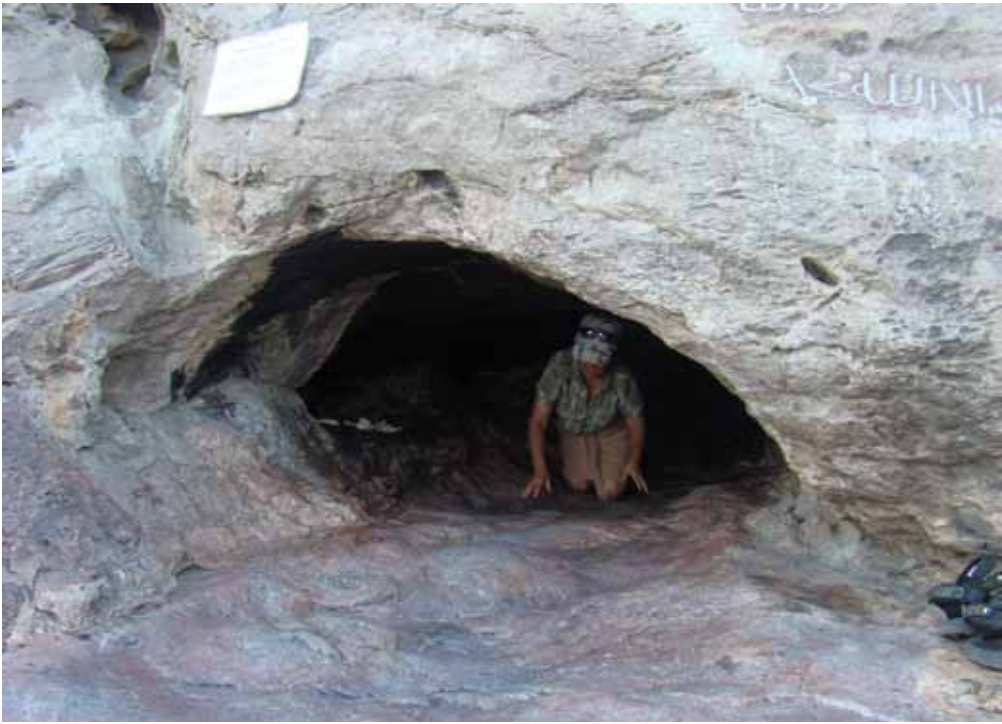
*Azireti-Ali Mazary, Kadamjai,
Batken province*



*Sulaiman-Too,
Osh City*



Sulaiman-Too, Osh City



Sulaiman-Too, Osh City

PART 1 SACRED SITES IN THE SOUTH OF KYRGYZSTAN



Sulaiman-Too, Osh City



Ydyrys Paigambar, Chatkal, Jalalabad province



Azireti-Bua, Ala-Buka, Jalalabad province



Eshen-Balhi, Kadamjai, Batken province



Eshen-Ata, Alai, Osh province



*Eshen-Ata, Alai,
Osh province*



*Buurabiya, Joo-Paya,
Batken province*



Buurabiya, Joo-Paya, Batken province



Buzeinap Bulagy, Kadamjai, Batken province



Buzeinap Mazary, Kadamjai, Batken province



Safetbulan, Ala-Buka, Jalalabad province



Safetbulan, Ala-Buka, Jalalabad province



Safetbulan, Ala-Buka, Jalalabad province



Safetbulan, Ala-Buka, Jalalabad province



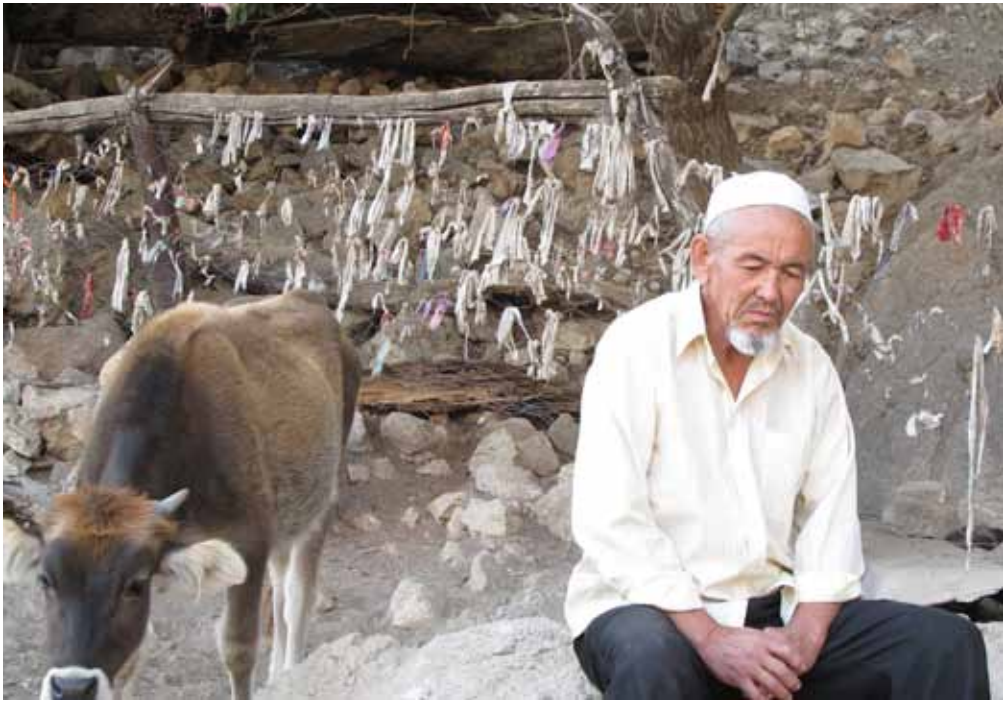
Safetbulan, Ala-Buka, Jalalabad province



Ismail-Kojo-Vali Mazary, Kadamjai, Batken province



Kojo-Bilal-Ata, Kadamjai, Batken province



Kojo-Gulistan Mazary, Suluktu, Batken province



Kojo-Murat Mazary, Zardaly, Batken province



Kojo-Maksut Mazary, Kojoshkent, Batken province



Kojo-Mati-Buva or Kojo-Mati-Vali, Kaiyndy, Batken province



Kojo-Mati-Buva or Kojo-Mati-Vali, Kaiyandy, Batken province



Kojo-Tush Mazary, Sai, Batken province



Arslanbap-Ata, Bazar-Korgon, Jalalabad province



Arslanbap-Ata, Bazar-Korgon, Jalalabad province



Bant suusu, Kadamjai, Batken province



Kok-Tondu-Ata, Ozgon, Osh province



Kok-Tondu-Ata, Ozgon, Osh province



Toktogul-Ata, Batken City



Padysha-Ata, Aksy, Jalalabad province



Shamshykal-Ata, Toktogul, Jalalabad province



Shamshykal-Ata, Toktogul, Jalalabad province

PART 2 CONTEMPORARY DIMENSIONS OF ANCIENT KYRGYZCHYLYK

The word “kyrgyzchylyk” consists of two parts – “Kyrgyz” and “chylyk”. “Kyrgyz” is the name of the titular ethnic group in the country, whereas “chylyk” or (“chilik”, “chuluk”) is a collective suffix which denotes a set of certain characteristics and qualities. For instance, “musulmanchylyk” is translated as “muslimness”, “tengirchilik” as “tengriism”, “tuuganchylyk” as “kinship”. The suffix does not have a positive or negative connotation. In the broadest sense, *kyrgyzchylyk* is a set of knowledge, traditions and modes of thinking that are intrinsic to the Kyrgyz (Aitpaeva, 2008 and Aitpaeva, 2009).

When describing their knowledge, experts and practitioners of *kyrgyzchylyk* often use such terms as “ilim” – “science” and “bilim” – “knowledge”. Sometimes these terms are used interchangeably. Joushbai Karimov, one of the carriers of traditional knowledge and a researcher as well, noted that “If we open a mysterious chest of traditional practices that were collected for centuries, and thoroughly study its content, then we will see that a valuable heritage has been preserved and passed from one generation to another. No matter how developed our society, science and technology are, we should not forget that every kind of science has a popular basis. On the contrary, due to the lack of research, we have not been able to fully appreciate the potential of traditional science. Ethnopedagogics, medicine, astronomy, folklore, agronomy, ecology and veterinary medicine – these sciences were known to the Kyrgyz in ancient times.” (Karimov, 2012) There is no doubt that these words can be said, not only about Kyrgyz people, but also other ethnic groups living in Kyrgyzstan. There is a big probability that in comparative analysis one can trace many commonalities between *uzbekchilik*, *kazakchylyk*, *dunganchylyk*, *oruschuluk*, *kyrgyzchylyk* and other “*chylyk*”.

This chapter will provide an overview of certain dimensions of *kyrgyzchylyk*, which are grouped in the following subject areas:

Chapter 1: People and Sacred Sites

Chapter 2: People, Sacred Sites and Plants

Chapter 3: People, Sacred Sites and Animals

Chapter 4: People, Spirits and Healing Practices

Chapter 5: People, Stars and Cycle of Time

Chapter 6: Traditional Nutrition

In the stories recorded from the carriers of traditional knowledge in various parts of Kyrgyzstan there are accounts of stars that help people with agricultural activities like sowing and harvesting; of animals and plants that people turn to when they are ill or experience difficulties; of a lunar calendar which helped the Kyrgyz move from one pasture to another; of traditional nutrition that ensured good health and longevity; of miraculous ways of healing; of strengthening and healing a person through connection with sacred sites. This is just a small part of the wealth of knowledge that is preserved among the people and land. The different spheres and areas of *kyrgyzchylık* are united by such general features as the presence of “OTHER” – divine, spiritual, supernatural forces in human life and organic interrelation with the natural world. These features stand out in each of the topics of this chapter, especially in healers’ stories about their spiritual experiences.

The following stories have been recorded from people who in turn heard them from their parents, mentors and other experts. In other words, we have a snapshot of traditional knowledge, which predominantly exists in oral and other forms.

Chapter 1 People and Sacred Sites

Kozubaeva Burul, born in 1967,
Bishkek

People used to come to sacred sites since ancient times

The places where saints once lived have turned into sacred sites, growing with legends about mysteries of the locale. The sacred sites have been cared for centuries and it remains the nature’s mystery as to how those who came to sacred sites in search of healing or asking for a child somehow achieved their goals. The names of sacred sites are peculiar, each has own meaning and history.

It will be appropriate to begin my story about one of the famous blacksmiths, Asti-Dobut. He was a renowned blacksmith who, in ancient times, lived in Leilek region of Batken province. He had a forging shop on the Germe-Too Mountain. According to the locals, even today one can still find the remains of the workshop. He provided the region with armor, metallic weapons and tools. According to the legend, he was so good at his work that instead of using bellows and tongs he used bare hands to make various things out of hot steel. Asti-Dobut was widely respected by others and considered as a person guarded by God. However, when the time came he passed away. He was honorably buried in the Katyran village and people began making pilgrimage to his burial place. Thus, the sacred site *Asti-Dobut* came into existence.

His apprentices have lost the secrets of forging iron once their master passed away. Gradually, they lost their skill of handling and working with iron, and then they

went to consult a sage and ask his advice on learning to work with iron again. The sage asked the following question, "How does a dog eat a bone?" The apprentices replied, "A dog crosses its legs, places the bone between them and then eats it." Then the sage advised, "To prevent your hands from burning try to make a tool that resembles crossed legs of a dog."

There is another sacred site in our region called Juzum-Ata. This sacred site is located in the Kok-Zoo Mountains adjacent to Bagbalant region. This place presents itself as nature's great mystery. Here, water drips down from a sievelike rock. People make pilgrimage there, perform ablution ceremony and tell their wishes to the dripping water. There is also a sacred spring in the Gelim-Chechme valley, at the foothill of the Kok-Zoo Mountains. This spring is most often visited by people with eye diseases; they make sacrifice ritual by slaughtering a white the rooster, recite verses from the Qur'an and pray.

There is also a sacred site called Zulpuchach, which is located along the Kozu-Baglan River in Kara-Jyngyl region. People say that one can see a silhouette of a young beautiful woman on the surface of a mountain. And it seems as if the water running down from the mountain flows down through her hair. According to legends, during frequent fights and clashes, by the will of God, those girls escaping from enemies would turn into rocks, trees and other natural phenomena. For instance, there is a sacred site called Kyz-Mazar above the Kok-Tash village in Takta-Boz region. According to the legend, three young women escaping from those who raided their village prayed for the Creator to save them from captivity. Apparently, their voices reached God, as by the time the enemies arrived, the three young women turned into three juniper trees. There is a stone monument resembling a group of young women in long dresses that hug each other on the hills above the village of Patang in Leilek region. Locals call it Kyz-Korgon. According to the legend, young women fleeing from invaders couldn't throw them off, therefore, pleaded for God's help. Thus, huddled up to one another they turned into stones.

Abdysheva Jaikal, born in 1959,
Jangy-Jol village, Jalalabad province

My abilities improved by visiting sacred sites

I have been using my God-given ability, *kasiet*, to help people. I heal people using my time-tested methods, in particular I heal children. I like visiting sacred sites and often stay overnight there. Such places simply attract me. After visiting sacred sites I feel strong and feel energized. We had a relative by the name of Kanysh-Apa who was considered a very strong healer. She quite often used to make pilgrimage to a sacred site Ak-Molo and would tell that the sacred power of the place was so strong that it helped her to realize her ability of a healer. Physicians diagnosed her husband with advanced carcinoma and said that it was impossible to treat, however she was able to cure him. She is no longer alive now, but she deeply believed that the power of Ak-Molo sacred site was helping her to be a healer.

We have an uncle named Myrzaly. His wife Shirin has spent 17 years seeing doctors as she could not bear a child. After making a pilgrimage to Ak-Molo, at the age of 37, she gave birth. It was the only child she gave birth to. Had she visited Ak-Molo in due time, now she would have more children.

Miraculous features of the Ak-Molo sacred site. Ak-Molo has another special power. In case when livestock could not give birth or when calf would born lifeless, then people used to bring their livestock to Ak-Molo and would, first make clockwise, then counter clockwise circle and only after than full circle around the place. As a result of this ritual, livestock would usually be successful in giving birth.

There is one more case that I remember. Once, my mother and I spent a night at Ak-Molo, and as soon as she woke up in the morning my mother said, “O dear God, I had a good dream. God willing, my children will be well and prosper, everyone will have a good life.” Back then we were young and did not pay any attention to those words. All my mother’s dreams came to be true.

Bazarkan, born in 1962,
Tash-Komur village, Jalalabad province

Sacredness of this place salvaged a family

One can tell about sacred sites endlessly. Let me tell a story that I witnessed. One of our daughter-in-laws could not get pregnant for several years, and people started spreading different rumors about her. Her husband’s parents began persuading him to get a divorce and marry some other woman and have children while he is young. The daughter-in-law learned about her in-laws plans. Thus, she became very upset. One day she came to my mother and asked, “*Eje*¹, can you please help me. My in-laws want my husband to leave me and marry somebody else.” My late mother went to her mother-in-law and said, “Do not rush things and do not separate your son with his wife. They are a good couple. I would suggest you to make a pilgrimage to Ak-Molo sacred site, sacrifice a lamb, spend a night there and pray for what you want. By the will of God, your wishes might come true.” After that, the family visited the sacred site and performed all the necessary rituals. In two years the couple got twin boys. When I meet her mother-in-law now, she keeps telling me, “I never believed in such rituals. Even while we were at the sacred site, I doubted if it would help. Probably God heard my children’s prayers and after visiting the sacred site they got twins. What my children could not make in five years, God made in one year. Thank you, God, for your help! I started believing in the power of sacred sites after that. Now my grandchildren will go to school soon.” After the twin’s birth, parents took them to the sacred site and performed first hair-cutting ritual there. Thus, I was a witness how childless couples became happy parents. The sanctity of this sacred site salvaged one more family from separation.

¹ *Eje* [Kyrgyz] – form an address to an elderly woman [ed.]

Kadyrmatov Nurbakas, born in 1971,
Tash-Komur town, Jalalabad province

A spring that heals

We live some 10 to 15 steps away from a sacred site called Shor-Bulak. Healing properties of this spring is strong. Its water is used to cure various skin diseases. The area we live in is rocky; there are a lot of mosquitoes, scorpions, and lizards. Summers here are scorching hot and a mosquito bite oftentimes becomes inflamed, suppurates and turns into a sore that does not heal for a long time. This happens every day here, and instead of going to a hospital every time, people come to the spring and wash their sores with its water. The sores get healed very quickly. In fact, locals do not go to hospital with skin diseases. Even in case of allergies and white leprosy, people get healed here, at the sacred spring. Sometimes when doctors are helpless in curing certain skin diseases, the water from this spring miraculously cures them. That is why women from neighboring Uzbekistan often come to the spring by buses and take with them water in bottles and other containers. They come very often. I will tell you a story that happened to me.

Once I was doing some outside work and a big yellow scorpion stung my hand. I knew that yellow scorpion was very poisonous. I wanted to rush to the hospital but it was closed since it was the weekend. I did not know what to do and started panicking. Perhaps, the day was hot or the scorpion's poison was very potent as my arm above the elbow became quickly swollen. Then I ran to the spring, stuck my arm into it and sat there for a while. Then I brought some water back home with me and kept washing my arm with it. By the evening the swelling started disappearing, but I was afraid that the poison has spread over my body. In the morning when I woke up I saw that the swelling disappeared and I was alive. In situations like this various thoughts come to one's mind, so I fell asleep while thinking that if I survive the night then I will rush to the hospital in early morning. In the morning I was very happy to be alive, so I made ritual bread, went to the spring and prayed. Otherwise we never really paid any attention to the spring. After that I started revering the spring and whenever I have time I try to clean its surroundings.

Other people who come to the spring also clean its surroundings and look after it. There is no guardian or custodian of the sacred site, because there is no condition for pilgrimage here. First of all, it is located at a rocky slope. Secondly, there are many scorpions and snakes. Thirdly, it gets hot during the day. Fourthly, since this sacred site is located in the village, local residents like me come to the spring in their free time and clean it. My nephew had a tinea pedis or a fungal infection on his knees, which was rapidly spreading. Doctors prescribed various creams, but they were ineffective. Then, my brother started bringing water from the spring and began washing the infected areas, and in some 10-15 days the infection was gone.

Konoeva Roza, born in 1955,
Kurshab village, Osh province

Reveal a spring and get cured

Some time ago, a person on a stretcher was brought to me, who used to be a guardian of a sacred site. But, I was not aware of it back then. He had a very odd look, his eyebrows were snowy white and his lower body was paralysed. When I saw him wrapped in a blanket and placed in a stretcher I became frightened and thought, “How am I going to cure him? How can I heal a person who is already at death’s door? He came to me with hope in his heart, and what am I supposed to say to him?” While these thoughts were thundering in my head, I received a clear vision from above. In my vision I saw him by a spring and there was a coiled up white snake nearby. Then I understood that it was a sign and this person should accept *kyrgyzchylık* – gift and, at the same time, a burden, bestowed from above. After he was brought in I treated him for three days, but the healing process was difficult and presented much agony. However, I kept worrying and doubting, whether it is possible to fix up a paralysed person in three days.

Then I mentioned to the man about the spring I saw in my vision. “Yes, that is right, we had a spring, but it got covered during a landslide” – he said. Then I told him to ask someone at home to clean up the spring and make a sacrifice ritual there. Thank God, the person got well in three days and went home, when the doctors said that his condition was incurable. As it turned out, his relatives heard about me from my apprentices, who knew that I heal people with severe conditions. With high hopes in their hearts his family members came to seek my help and travelled a long distance, about 400 kilometers. Some people even told the family to let him die and not to torture him, but they nevertheless brought him to me. Thank God, it has been ten years since then and he is still alive; he has rosy cheeks and even looks after his animals in the summer pasture.

Abysultanova Mavluda, born in 1958,
Kyzyl-Suu village, Osh province

A blessing of ancestors changes one’s destiny

On July 4, 2008 I received an order from my ancestor spirits to make a pilgrimage to sacred sites. I thought that I would go on a pilgrimage only within Kyrgyzstan. It turned out that I had to go to Arstanbap-Ata sacred site in Kazakhstan. I was surprised that Arstanbap-Ata sacred site exists not only in Kyrgyzstan, but also in a neighboring country. Together with a group of Kazakh people we departed to Kerben from Kordai village on a mini bus. As soon as we set off, I started feeling unwell, with a severe headache and nausea. I could not understand what the reason of my sudden sickness was. I thought that may be one of the fellow passengers had a psychological burden or some problems. I would be happy to help that person, but did not have enough courage to ask who had the problem. So, I decided to go along until we reach the destination and kept silent. During the whole journey, I kept seeing a phantom of a girl running along the bus. I looked at her intently and

thought that it was a spirit of a girl who died here. Again and again I recited verses from the Qur'an in memory of the dead, but her spirit was not calming down and disappearing. Kazakh lady sitting beside me, having noticed my anxiety, asked what is going on with me, and I told her everything. Then, all the fellow Kazakh passengers started praying and uttering a name, "Aisha-Bubu, Aisha-Bubu." But, I did not know who that person was and about whom my fellow travelers were talking about.

The next day, when we arrived to Arstanbap-Ata, I started crying and could not stop myself. I have never wept like that even during funerals of my family members. As it turned out, among spiritual practitioners, there are *Ak-Kuu*, or "swan girls", who help people receive blessings of ancestor spirits. So, they told me the following, "From now on you will serve people with your voice. You will become a bridge connecting two worlds, world of the dead and world of the living. We are giving you a new name, *Ak-Umut*, which means white hope." At that moment I had a revelation. There was a big white yurt up in the sky and there were two paths. When I asked which path I should take they told me that I should take both, first – the path of healing, the second – the path of ancestors. Following both of the paths meant executing wishes of the ancestor spirits. I was anxious not to get confused, therefore, asked the ancestor spirits to help me to make up my mind and follow a right path. Then, when I was receiving the last blessing, the spirit of Aisha-Bubu told me that next month I should return here with 17 people. I wondered how I would find those 17 people from Kyrgyzstan willing to come to Kazakhstan. However, upon my return to Kyrgyzstan, many of my apprentices expressed their desire to go to Kazakhstan. So, indeed I returned to Kazakhstan to the spirit of Aisha-Bubu with exactly 17 pilgrims. Having witnessed such miracles, I started believing in the power of spiritual gift, *kasiet*, and blessings of the ancestor spirits. By personal example I got assured that blessings have cleansing and purifying effect and change people's destiny. Many of my apprentices also received spiritual gift from above and 20 of them became *Ak-Kuu*, "white swan" practitioners. They also have their own spiritual mission and serve people carrying out duties given them from above.

On December 20, 2009 I had another *ayan* – a prophetic dream or vision. I was told that I should start a new pilgrimage starting from Sulaiman-Too sacred site that is located in Osh city of Kyrgyz Republic. The spirits told me that those with severe illnesses and sufferings will come seeking my help and I should start healing process with a pilgrimage to the Sulaiman-Too. It was also told in the dream that, the Kazakh people usually honor five forefathers and make pilgrimage to five sacred sites, whereas I was told to make pilgrimage to seven sacred sites of our ancestors, because Kyrgyz people honor seven forefathers. These seven forefathers were associated with the following seven sacred sites: Sulaiman-Ata, Bereshen-Ata, Sultan-Babur-Ata, Asof-Burkhaniy-Ata, Kurmanjan-Apa and Ryspai-Aga. The seventh was named as Madali uulu Tabali – a person, who once upon a time used to be a guardian of the Sulaiman-Too sacred site. On each indicated place we

performed a ritual of *bash kotoruu*¹ – covering a burial place with a white cloth and reciting verses in honor of the forefather. Thus, we performed our rituals and honored the spirit of our seven forefathers.

Each sacred site has specific physical force or power, and I always warn my companions about it. For instance, upon visiting Bereshen-Ata sacred site, one experiences back pains, and the pains soothe away only after putting some item, which belongs to the sacred site, on one's back. So, those pilgrims who were with me saw it to themselves. At the Kurmanjan-Apa sacred site, one has a scratchy throat. If those who have throat illnesses put something from the place on their throat and pray, then the illness fades away. At the sacred site of Asof-Burkhaniiy, pilgrims heal their eye illnesses.

I also received Kurmanjan-Datka's blessing, and the following message was told, "If you cannot reach the place of my burial with your companions, then you can visit the village where my husband, Alymbek, was born and raised. That place is my homeland as well, and there I will accept your prayers." The statue of Alymbek is placed in the center of the village; therefore, I was not able to cover the statue's head with a white cloth. Then we asked the spirits to cover the head of our forefather, Asof-Burkhaniiy, instead.

Baktygul Seyitbekova, born in 1951,
Kotormo village, Jalalabad province

*Thanks to my mother i became to know the power
and sanctity of sacred sites*

I have written much about my mother, Seydene Moldoke kyzy, one of the prominent *semeteichi*² of our time. There is much written about her, but there is still so much to tell about her. As it turned out with time, my mother was a source of inexhaustible source of information. My mother lived in a village all her life and would go outside of it only on business. She never even thought about leaving her village and living in some other place. She always said to us, her children, "Never leave the Toktogul region, this is a wonderful place." So, today my house is in Kotormo village. I travel to Russia on business matters often, but always come back home, to the village where I was born.

A land granting happiness to the unhappy ones. My mother and I used to visit Shamshykal sacred site quite often. My mother used to say about this sacred site, "This land gives strong health to the sick, children to the childless, happiness to the unhappy and protection to the lonely ones." If someone would upset or offence my mother, she would never argue and scold, but would just say, "May you be judged by the God from the world above, ancestor spirits from the world beneath and Shamshykal in this world."

1 *Bash kotoruu* [Kyrgyz] – literally means "lifting up one's head" [ed.]

2 *Semeteichi* [Kyrgyz] – reciter of the *Semetei* epic, second part of the Kyrgyz epic trilogy, *Manas*, *Semetei*, *Seitek* [ed.]

In the beginning I did not know that Shamshykal was a sacred site. There, my mother featured in a film called *Kocho*¹, where she acted as a woman with a donkey on a leash. One of the prominent Kyrgyz actresses, Baken Kydykeeva, persuaded my mom to take part in the film. There were three big acacia trees growing at the sacred site. People say that there were three big towers instead of trees before.

I collected some acacia flowers while the crew was filming my mom. But she hasn't seen it, and only on our way back home she asked me where I took the flowers. I told her that I took the flowers from the trees. She immediately took my hand and turned back towards the sacred site. My mother started crying loudly and begging for pardon as soon as we approached the site, "Please forgive my daughter, dear sacred site. She is a child and did a childish thing. She did not do it on purpose. We are brought back the flowers that belong to you." Only then I started to understand what a sacred site is.

All those who wanted to own and use the sacred site passed away. Those who wanted to exploit Shamshykal as a mine are all dead now. Today, local people and pilgrims take and use some salt from here, but people's attempts to open a mine for commercial purposes failed.

On the way to Shamshykal, one passes such sacred sites as, Muiuzduu-Mazar, Kara-Bulak, Toguz-Bulak and Kaynar-Bulak. All of them are sacred in their own way. My mother would often stop by Kaynar-Bulak. My mother gave birth to my elder brother after making a pilgrimage here. Therefore, my brother was named as Tilegen – the "desired one". Unfortunately, my brother could not bear the burden of an epic reciter that he acquired after my mother's death. Thus he passed away while reciting his version of the epic. I published his version after his death.

My mother used to say that one's wishes mostly come true during spring and fall and used to take us to the sacred site during those seasons. She did not visit sacred sites during summer and winter; therefore, we also did not go there.

My father's grave is located on the way to Shamshykal sacred site. She would take off my and her own shoes when we reached my father's grave, and further we would continue our journey barefooted. Years later, when I got married, I could not have children for a long time. Then, once my mother addressed the sacred site crying,

*"You grant a child to a dog,
And even to a flea,
But, why my dear God,
Did not you grant a child to my Baktygul?"*

I did not feel much sad about not having children but I felt sorry for my mother and cried with her. And mom said, "We will keep coming to this sacred site until

1 *Kocho* [Kyrgyz] – a street [ed.]

we receive a sign, because there should be one.” There was, indeed, a sign in 1988. We were making our usual pilgrimage to the sacred site. Suddenly, there appeared a white hare out of nowhere and lied between me and my mother. A year later I gave birth to my son, Alikhan, in 1989.

When we were at the sacred site, healers of our region used to come and ask my mother’s blessing. She was considered as *batakoi* – a person whose blessings would come true and bring happiness.

There will be a sign from above. Besides visiting Shamshykal, we used to visit the Mausoleum of *Manas* that is in Talas once a year. My mother used to say that the spirits of the warriors would not get enough and, therefore, would always take cattle for the sacrifice ritual. She would take a lot of sweets as well. We kept visiting the mausoleum together with my brother’s family after my mother’s death. Now, I go there myself each year. The *Manas-Ordo* complex was not developed and did not any conditions as it has today, when we used to go there with my mom. However, mom would always stay and spend a night there, and would tell that we should not leave until we see a certain sign from above. Thus, even today when I visit the mausoleum, I look at its window and walls in search of a sign. And only then, when I hear a peculiar sound or see something unusual, I consider that my pilgrimage was accepted. The staff members and mullahs, who work at the mausoleum, know us very well by now. My mother used to recite verses from the Qur’an in her own authentic way. And she would finish her the Qur’an with the following words, “I dedicate this the Qur’an to the last Kyrgyz warrior, Sadyr.” I still do not know who that warrior was. My mother named her grandchild, my brother’s son, in memory of the Sadyr. The most interesting thing is that, my grandmother and grandfather, used to dedicate the Qur’an verses to the same warrior, Sadyr. My mother also used to dedicate the Qur’an verses to all the sacred sites. She strongly believed in the power of sacred site and used to say, “One should feel with heart those things that are not visible to the naked eye. One should always wish for something, always have a dream. Wishes will not come true immediately, but sooner or later God will fulfil everyone’s dreams and wishes.” She also used to state that God may grant his pardon, but sometimes God may also punish.

Syidaliev Torobek, born in 1933,
Jangy-Jol village, Jalalabad province

Powerful Shumkar-Ata sacred site saved my child

In old times, when we worked as shepherds and herded livestock in summer pasture, we would always settle nearby the Shumkar-Ata sacred site. Every year we used to make a sacrifice ritual and pray at the sacred site. I have a son named Kambar, he lives in Bishkek now. But, when he was a child we took him to Kambar-Ata, spent a night and got healed him there. He was only 1,5-2 years old when he developed severe coughs that resulted in breathing difficulties. Doctors tried everything, but nothing would help. We heard that grey raven’s meat would help, but it did not help either. As a last hope, we went to the Shumkar-Ata sacred site. On our way there, my son had three severe fits of coughing and we were thinking of returning back

because condition of my son was getting worse. But we reached Iiri-Suu summer pasture and almost reached the sacred site. However, my son had another fit of coughing and his breathing stopped. We were frustrated and did not know what to do. While I was deciding whether to return back home or not, my old friend Mamat with his companions came up. Noticing our indecision he said, "You have come a long way. Sacred powers of Shumkar-Ata should help your son to get better. Do not go back, go to the sacred site." So we headed towards the Shumkar-Ata. My son had another fit of coughing, but after that his breathing stabilized and his cheeks regained color. Thus, we reached the foothill of Shumkar-Ata. There we lit ritual candles, conducted necessary ritual and recited verses from the Qur'an.

A woman named Sherbet and her son also came with us there. After the Qur'an recitation, Sherbet, wife, Zeinep and the children fell asleep. My son did not cough at night either, although before he used to cough all night long. Zeinep also had a tight sleep. In the morning we made sacrifice ritual and slaughtered two goats that we brought with us, distributed the meat to shepherds from the summer pasture and received their blessings. Thus, my son got healed completely and stopped coughing. Disease that doctors could not cure was cured by the sacred site Shumkar-Ata. Thus, the sacred site saved my son from death. Now he has a family and raising two children. Sherbet's son, the lady who went with us, was suffering from epilepsy. He also was taken to different place and doctors. But he got well only after visiting the Shumkar-Ata sacred site and now he is healthy. However, I do not know where he is now. If I'm not mistaken, he is of the same age as my son, and most probably, he also has a family by now.

Orozalieva Sonunbubu, born in 1958,
Avletim village, Jalalabad province

I have two relatives who solicited children at the Baba-Ata sacred site

Our mother-in-law took us to the Baba-Ata sacred site. My brother-in-law's wife could not have children for a long time. Having heard that pilgrimage to the Baba-Ata sacred sites helps to bear children, my mother-in-law gathered all her daughter-in-laws and took them for a pilgrimage there. My brother-in-law's wife received medical treatment several times, but all her attempts have failed. However, not long after her pilgrimage to Baba-Ata she became pregnant.

I have a sister-in-law who lives in Kerben village. She gave birth to three children but all of them died when they were three months old. She went to doctors but they said, "Your children were all born healthy but we do not understand the reason why they keep dying. Maybe you should consult traditional healers; perhaps they will be able to help you in some way." After that, her family made a pilgrimage to Baba-Ata. They sacrificed a goat, made pilgrimage and distributed goat's meat to people. They recited verses from the Qur'an and got blessings from the people at the sacred site. About three months after her pilgrimage, my sister-in-law saw a dream as if she was at the Baba-Ata sacred site. There she saw a cradle and her relative who was with her there said, "Probably one of the pilgrims, who came here to solicit for a baby, forgot her cradle here. It is very beautiful, I will take it and if

I give birth, then I will put my baby here.” Supposedly, her relative took the cradle. My sister-in-law woke up and realized that it was just a dream. She then retold her dream to her mother-in-law, who blessed her by saying, “May God give and your dream will come true, and you have a child, my dear.” After the dream, they visited Baba-Ata once more and prayed so that her dream would come true. In several months, she became pregnant. Because she gave birth with the help of pilgrimages to Baba-Ata, they named their son Babyr. She gave birth to three more children after that. All her children grew up now and go to school.

As a sign of gratitude to the sacred site, happy parents conduct a ritual called *niyaz* – parents shave the child’s hair leaving only a small lock of hair on their head. This ritual of shaving hair is conducted only a year or two years after the child was born. Parents take their child to the sacred site for the ritual.

So I witnessed life experiences of my two relatives. It is hard not to believe in Baba-Ata’s power. Even doctors know about it now.

During the Soviet Union, people did not visit sacred site so often, because those who visited were not respected and considered as old-fashioned. However, now even doctors suggest visiting such sacred places and spending a night there. Doctors not only advise, from what I know, but also make pilgrimage themselves. We are all God’s children, therefore, one needs to pray and ask. I am a deep believer that God fulfils everyone’s wishes.

One can ask every person in our village, and each of them will have something to say about this sacred place. Our mother-in-law makes pilgrimage to such places very often. Even now, if some people plan to make pilgrimage, they take my mother-in-law with them, because she is an experienced and respected elder. First of all, my mother-in-law knows much about sacred places, and secondly, she is an elderly woman and many people want to receive her blessing and to live a long life with many children and grandchildren like her. Also, my mother-in-law despite of her old age has never stayed in hospital. She also has a talent, she versifies poems. Before setting off to a sacred site, she shows us some lines and tells us, “Please memorize these lines. You should recite them upon arriving to a sacred site.” These are some of the lines that I remember:

*Dear sacred land,
Grant a child to these children of God.
Let those soliciting for a child:
Enjoy a newborn’s sweet smell,*

*Dear sacred land,
Also grant a strong health.
Make those enjoy well-being, who came longing for a
strong health.*

*Dear sacred land
Give all my people faith.*

*May our small Kyrgyz nation,
Live a faithful life.*

*You, graceful sacred place,
Give your people happiness.
May my dear Kyrgyz people,
Live a happy life.*

Soorbekov Durusbek, born in 1965,
Mukur village, Jalalabad province

My mother was born due to miraculous power of the sacred land

I know the Baba-Ata sacred place very well. There is a saying, “If you want a child, go to Baba-Ata, if you want wealth, go to Padysha-Ata.” The meaning of this proverb is significant because many childless families go there and pray, and then they become parents. I also took my mother there.

Children of my grandparents, from my mother’s side, used to die in early childhood. That is when they decided to make a pilgrimage to Baba-Ata sacred site and pray. Not long after their pilgrimage, my mother was born and she did not die. Her father, my grandfather, worked as the head of the local administration in Karavan region. When my mother turned seven, grandfather took her to Baba-Ata sacred site to pray and told her, “We have you thanks to this sacred site.”

Then, when my mother turned 55, she asked, “Please, take me to Baba-Ata sacred site,” so we took her there. For some reason she insisted on going there, although she never asked about it before. As it turned out, my mother kept seeing Baba-Ata sacred site in her dreams, therefore, she wished to visit that place. We lived not so far from the sacred site, but never went there. We found the road to the sacred site by recollections of my mother. She remembered the road although she was only 7 years-old. She was recollecting her memory by saying, “There were white birch trees and I was playing in the birchwood.” We found out that the birch trees only grew at the Baba-Ata and nowhere else. So, when we reached the sacred site, indeed, we saw birch trees growing there. So we spent a night there. We brought a lamb to the sacred site, different sweets and prepared ritual bread there. Upon arriving to the site, we sacrificed the lamb, lit ritual candles, recited verses from the Qur’an and distributed meat of the sacrificed animal to local people.

Many childless people go there to solicit for a baby and their wishes mostly come true. The spring water and soil also have powerful healing qualities and even mud has healing effects there. If those suffering from allergy will wash the allergy affected skin areas with spring water and apply mud, then the allergy goes away. The spring water and mud are also good for treating joint pains.

Ajybaev Ergeshbai, born in 1939,
Aksy village, Jalalabad province

Sacred sites, my invisible guardians and “automatic” writing

It was in 1992, when I lived in Aksy village and worked at school and lyceum. One of my sisters married a man from the Talas province and at the age of 40 she died from cancer. In 1996 her relatives from Talas came to where I lived to make a pilgrimage. But, at that time, I was not able to come close to sacred sites. Among those who came from Talas, there was a mullah. That mullah noticed my condition and said, “I will come and visit you later, you have kasiat, a God-given gift.” I did not believe him and doubted whether somebody will come here from Talas only because of me.

However, one day that mullah, indeed, came to visit me in my house. We hosted and rendered homage to him according to our traditions. At the table our guest told me, “You should stop teaching. You teach only because you think that you will not make it without a job. You will make it – so many people could use your help and get healed.” But, back then I did not take his words too seriously.

Before, I used to go to a sacred site called Pacha-Ata, but it was not a pilgrimage. However, when I went there with my guest, Toktogul, and a relative, quite a few interesting things happened. On the way, we stayed overnight at Pacha-Ata and the next morning headed on horses to Baba-Ata sacred site.

Usually, when I am going to sacred sites, my invisible guardian spirits, would make me run. My relative suggested me to ride a horse. Even though I felt bad and my heart was pounding, but I forced myself and mounted a horse. I thought I would ride slowly, but the horse started running. From Pacha-Ata to Tostu sacred site my horse was galloping, but from there on to the Baba-Ata sacred site, about seven kilometers, I ran on my own feet. My relative was following me on a horse while I was running. I did not even feel how I arrived to the sacred site. There were many pilgrims at Baba-Ata, who came from neighboring Uzbekistan and our Jalalabad province. Pilgrims were gathered around a table and were having a meal. Upon seeing frantically running man, pilgrims thought that, probably, I was a drunken man and started moving away. I came down to the mausoleum of Baba-Ata, embraced it and started crying. I felt myself as if I were in a very strange state of being. When we were leaving the sacred site, its invisible guardian spirit bid farewell to me. As a goodbye, the guardian spirit powerfully turned and twirled and then let me go. At that moment, I felt as if I just came out from a fairyland. When I told what I felt to my companions, they smiled and said, “You have not even been to the fairyland.”

Energy that gives information. At the time when I was in this strange state of being, my invisible guardian spirits ordered me, “You should write!” But, “What should I write?” I wondered. Back then, I became good friends with Keneshbek Aitikeev, and I told him about the order I received from the spirits. He urged me to write and handed a pen and a piece of paper.

Before Keneshbek made acquaintance with me, he already was making pilgrimage to sacred sites. Power of sacred sites helped him to get cured when he was ill and had only seven days to live. I wish no one experiences what he had to go through. He would take his wife and make a pilgrimage to sacred site at night. There is a sacred site in Chatkal region that he used to visit quite often, and there he revealed his gift of prophecy or clairvoyance. So, at that same place, the guardian spirit of the sacred site has shown me the appearance of Keneshbek.

I was sitting idle with a pen and a white paper in my hand. Then, the spirits started saying words and I started writing them down, "We invited you here with a purpose. From now on, you and Keneshbek have the same mission." Thus, starting from November 1999, Keneshbek and I have lived together for two years in Aksy village hotel working on one thing. I was receiving and writing down the information, while Keneshbek was making all the necessary and favorable facilities for my work.

At that time, I taught classes and also worked as a psychologist and had two bosses. But, to my great surprise, when I was being late or, sometimes, would not show up at work, they would not say a word. And my family was very understanding. Back then, authorities would scold staff members for being late for five minutes, not mentioning failing to come to work. And for missing ten classes, one would be deprived of the monthly salary. Even though I did not work for three months our accountant would bring my salary to the hotel room where I lived. They treated me like a close relative. I did not go outside for three months, I wrote day and night. I did not even read my writings, I just kept writing. Then I decided to start teaching classes again and write after work since I needed money to live. My guarding spirits appointed a certain time for work, from 12 p.m. to 4 p.m. And I also refused to get paid and told the accountant, "There is no need to bring my salary because I do not work. You work in a team and other colleagues will start criticizing you."

My writings came in both, in a form of poems and prose. The spirits made me write the entire history of the Kyrgyz people. Back then I did not read any of my writings, I was only writing. Keneshbek was cooking for me and reading everything what I would write. I wrote everything but I did not believe in what was happening. I received complete information about the history of Kyrgyz people and about all hunters' lives. Thus, I received at least 50 or even 100 books worth of information. I received all this information from some sort of an informational energy. As for myself, I was just writing automatically, and only after I learned that, what I was doing, is called "automatic writing."

Syidaliev Torobek, born in 1933,
Jangy-Jol village, Jalalabad province

Mysteries of Kara-Jygach

There are numerous sacred sites in our region, Jyluu-Bulak, Bay-Terek, Ungkur and on the way to a Shaitobo summer pastures there is a sacred site called Ak- Terek, also known as Kara-Jygach. People make pilgrimage to this place for many years,

and hold a strong belief that this place has strong miraculous power. One is not even allowed to break a tiny tree branch there. Those who were around the Shaitobo pasture around twilight were afraid to cross this sacred site. Even during the day people were passing through this place with much caution and prudence.

We had a relative by the name of Kenjebai and he used to tell travellers, “It is the time of the evening prayer, my children, please do not go through these places. It is better to stay overnight here and continue your journey in the morning.” So, he would host travellers at his house for a night. However, there were cases when people would not agree to stay for overnight, then my uncle Kenjebai would head to the sacred site and cautiously look around. At that time, he used to see guardian spirits of the sacred site lined up and performing evening prayer together. When the praying would be finished, Kenjebai would come back to the travellers and take them by a road that bypassed the sacred site. Uncle Kenjebai was a clairvoyant and he could talk to the guardian spirits of these sacred sites.

Earth blessed him and he became a powerful mullah. Before we became shepherds we used to spend our summer in that Shaitobo pasture. So, on our way to the summer pasture, we often would pass through these sacred sites. On our way, we always used to make a halt at sacred sites, make a sacrifice ritual and recite verses from the Qur’an. There lived a very powerful mullah, Aktamataaly, in our village. He often used to visit these sacred sites, stay overnight, recite verses from the Qur’an, pray and then go back in early morning. Perhaps, he was blessed by spirits of the sacred sites, because he later became a very strong and powerful mullah. He could heal illnesses that doctors were not able to deal with. He was able to help mentally ill people, or as Kyrgyz people say – those who were possessed by evil spirits, who were treated by doctors for many years and discharged as disabled people. Mullah Akmataaly would bring those sick people to these sacred sites, spend a night or more and then his patients would get healed. Those who were healed would never get sick again. Today, that mullah is no longer alive.

Punishment. Pilgrims come to these sacred sites with different wishes, intentions and requests. Those, whose wishes were to be fulfilled, would see good omen dreams. There was a man named Chykyi, and he had only daughter. He did not have any other children. And his wife, having heard of the miraculous powers of the sacred site, went there to spend a night. There she prayed and conducted necessary rituals. There was a heavy rain the next day, so the woman got soaked and cold. She became angry and said, “I made such a long journey and came here to solicit for a child. It is of no good that it rained in a clear day. I do not need any children.” The same night she had a dream and heard a voice saying, “You went to the sacred site with good intentions. The rain was intended to cleanse you from your ailments. But you did not understand it and made a mistake. Now your wish will not be fulfilled.” She was left with her only daughter, and her daughter was not able to bear children, although she was named as Koboï, which means “to increase in number”. She was given this name so she could have many children and grandchildren, but she did not have any. Later, she adopted children of her relatives, a boy and a girl. And only after adopting her children, she gave birth to her own child. Local people used to say that if Chykyi’s wife would repent of her

mistake, apologized to the sacred spirits and prayed, perhaps, she would be able to have more children. But, she decided to accept her destiny and did not make any effort to change it.

Power of the place. There are many stories like this one. Mullah Akmataaly, whom I mentioned earlier, was not visiting sacred sites in the beginning. And then a daughter of one man in our village got mental sickness. The man took his daughter to different doctors and healers, but she did not get well. Then, the man brought his daughter to Akmataaly. One day prior to their arrival, Akmataaly had a dream and he was told, “She was taken to numerous places, but not to the Kara-Jygach sacred site. Take her there, spend a night and soon she will get better.” When the man with the girl came to Akmataaly, he took them to Kara-Jygach sacred site. After three visits to the sacred sites the girl got better began communicating with people. Then her father said to Akmataaly, “Thanks to you my daughter returned to normal life again, and as a sign of my gratitude, please marry my daughter.” Thus, the girl became Akmataaly’s wife.

This land is sacred. One can hear voices during the praying time. Sometimes, lonely travellers see some spirits. Clairvoyants see spirits and communicate with them. Therefore, one should be cautious in these places and should not doubt sacredness of the spirits.

Sacredness should not be doubted and disrespected. One should not doubt and disrespect sacred sites. This means that one should not be drunk, bring alcoholic beverages to and use curse words at the sacred sites. One also should not cut down trees, bushes and litter around. Even if one just passes by the sacred sites without intending to visit it, they still should make a halt; recite verses from the Qur’an in honor of spirits. If one reveres spirits and dedicates prayers and the Qur’an verses to them, then the spirits will always support that person.

Recently, after the breakdown of the Soviet Union, the following case happened. People took a tractor there to raze the sacred site to the ground. There are lots of springs there. The tractor driver tried to level the ground but on his third attempt the earth absorbed the tractor. So the workers left the tractor and ran away. After that, they went back to the sacred site and recited verses from the Qur’an, and after some time passed, people brought two-three tractors and barely pulled out the tractor that got stuck. No one ever again made an attempt to raze that land any more. Everyone was afraid and never went back. They pulled the absorbed tractor hardly with the help of three other tractors. So the place is preserved the way it was before.

Kuluipa, born in 1942,
Jangy-Jol village, Jalalabad province

Kara-Jygach sacred site healed my son

The land of a region where we live is all sacred. There are a lot of springs here. The Mal-Kaldy – is a lake where waters of numerous springs flow in. There is also

number of springs at the edge of the lake. Our village dwellers do not use water of the Mal-Kaldy Lake; we drink water from those springs. There are number of other sacred sites for making pilgrimage to: Jyluu-Bulak, Kara-Jygach, Bai-Terek and others. And among them, Kara-Jygach, is considered as the most powerful and sacred.

Pilgrims come here to conduct sacrifice ritual and recite verses from the Qur'an. If pilgrims do not have means for animal sacrifice, they can lay the cloth; light ritual candles and recite verses from the Qur'an. There is no need for pilgrims to bring cooking utensils with them, everything is available at the sacred site. All the kitchenware hangs on tree branches, so it does not get dusty, and a big cauldron is also hidden in a clean place – it lies upside down on pile of stones. One should not break tree branches and should keep the place clean when they come for a pilgrimage.

My mother used to spend summer in Shaitobo summer pasture. Therefore, I know since childhood that on the way to the pasture, one needs, at least, to light a ritual candle and chant prayers. One also could lay a cloth, taste some food, drink some water and only then continue their journey to the pasture. But, later my mother changed her summer location to Shumkar-Ata and Karagayluu summer pastures. So, since then I did not visit Shaitobo pasture any more.

Once, my eldest son got sick and we cured him at the Kara-Jygach sacred site. Back then, he studied at the 10th grade and used to date one girl, but she died in a car accident. My son was deeply affected by her death; he could not forget her and became sick. We kept telling him, “Dear son, aren't there any other girls? Your health will deteriorate if you will not stop mourning.” He stopped talking with other people and would not go to school. He used to study well. His teachers kept on asking us, “Why are not you sending your son to school?” But, my son was not even thinking about going to school. Later he started talking to himself. We took him to doctors but all the tests came out fine. Since there was no help from doctors, we decided to cure him with the help of traditional medicine and took him to mullahs, who chanted prayers. Back then, there lived an Uzbek mullah named Kara-Sakal. And he advised us to make a pilgrimage to Kara-Jygach sacred site, make a sacrifice and recite verses from the Qur'an. We carefully followed his instructions and after our second visit to the sacred site my son stopped talking to himself and began feeling well. Gradually, his emotional and physical state improved. Therefore, I revere Kara-Jygach sacred site and consider it as sacred place with miraculous and magical powers. This place was given us by God and so many people come here. Those with no children become parents, those who are sick find cure.

One should have a strong belief when visiting a sacred site. One should belief with all their heart and ask, “May I be supported by sacred spirits and I be healed with the help of God.” This place is as sacred as Mecca, which is visited by pilgrims all over the world. In order to visit Mecca, one needs to have a lot of time and finances. But, we have numerous sacred sites in our country. We have to care for and safeguard our sacred sites and pass them on to our next generations.

Botaliev Muratbek, born in 1951,
Ak-Suu village, Jalalabad province

There are no childless women in our village

I often make a pilgrimage to Kara-Kyz-Ene sacred site. This place is also known as Ak-Peyil-Ene. Residents of Jangy-Talap village respect this sacred site. Sometimes, we visit this place without any purpose; we just come here to worship this place. This place provides the whole Jangy-Talap settlement with water. I do not know that we would do if not the water of this sacred site. As you see, there are eight springs here. The water of these eight springs supply the whole village and irrigates village's fields and gardens. There is another spring called Kotur-Bulak at the outskirts of our village. Its water is salty and is not intended for drinking.

Childless people come here and solicit for a child by praying, "Dear God, please help us to become a mother of many children just like Kara-Kyz-Ene." Their wishes come true. There are many cases when infertile women gave birth. There is no single barren woman in our village, while there are many barren women in cities. Every family, in our village, has at least five or six children. We also have families with 13 children. We believe that such fertility is due to the miraculous effects of the sacred site's spring water.

People wish many other things besides children, happiness, good business, health. Local people conduct annual ritual called *kudai tamagy* – sacrifice ritual honoring the Creator. People sacrifice an animal, prepare ritual bread and dine together at one table asking God for peace, stability, strong health, abundance and wellbeing of people.

Childless couples or those whose children die as infants also come here and prepare *toguz oimo* – nine pieces of ritual bread, then light ritual candles, cut their children's hair leaving a lock on their forehead, which is called *kokul*. This lock of untouched hair should be cut next time and only at a sacred site. Parents need to come back to the sacred site again and perform all the necessary rituals – make a sacrifice, prepare ritual bread and light ritual candles. Then, the remaining lock of hair is cut and tucked away somewhere around a tree. Performing such rituals means that this particular baby was born due to sacred power of the sacred site and that spirit of Kara-Kyz-Ene supports the child.

Tuyumkan, born in 1930,
Ak-Suu village, Jalalabad province

Visiting sacred sites is favorable to our lives

I am 80 years-old now. When I was a child, people regarded Kara-Kyz as sacred and made pilgrimage there. Due to my age, I do not have enough strength to visit sacred sites as often as before. Sometimes I see Kara-Kyz-Ene in my dreams and I think to myself, "Yes, probably the spirit of the place is waiting for me." Then I make ritual bread at home and recite verses from the Qur'an dedicating it to the

memory of Kara-Kyz's spirit. This sacred site is blessed by the power of God. One cannot doubt its sanctity. I will tell you a story.

One man took car-full of woods from Kara-Kyz sacred site and was about to leave. Having seen this, Kadyke told him, "Hey, you should not take woods from this place. Why are you doing this? This is a sacred site and its spirits may punish you." The man asked in return, "How old are you?" and Kadyke answered. Then the man said, "The spirits did not punish you for so many years, and you think that they will punish me now?" But, in a short while his car got broken and not long after that his son got severely injured when a calf butted him. Therefore, one cannot take wood here, no matter what. Only pilgrims may use the wood for cooking purposes.

Recently, my daughters came for a visit, and we went to the sacred site together. We lit ritual candles and chanted prayers. My children and grandchildren live in the city, so when they visit me, we go to the Kara-Kyz sacred site. The whole family goes there and we recite verses from the Qur'an, light ritual candles and dedicate our pilgrimage to the spirit of Kara-Kyz. We got used to go there since our childhood. If we do not visit the sacred site for a while, it seems that things are not going well and we feel not good. But, after visiting the site, we feel at ease and everything starts going well.

It is believed that God protects and supports those who remember him. The Kara-Kyz sacred site connects us to God. We dedicate our sacrifice ritual to his honor, prepare ritual food and ask God to grant us peace, kindness and well-being. As in the old saying, "I remember those who remember and protect those who ask for protection." We are all God's servants in this world; therefore, we should always worship the Creator and pray for our well-being. I think, there is a reason why people say, "The one who remembers God will not be poor." If every person will live with God in his heart, then there will be peace, stability and humanity will live healthy life without diseases.

The Creator granted its heavenly land to the Kyrgyz people. There is a legend about God distributing land to different nations. People were coming after their land and were leaving after getting their share. Having distributed everything, God asked, "Did everyone have their share? Is there any one left?" As it turned out, the Kyrgyz people failed to come and get their share of land. God was waiting and waiting, but the Kyrgyz people were not coming and no land was left. After a while, one Kyrgyz man came running. "Where were you?" – asked the God, "There is no land left for you." The Kyrgyz replied, "I overslept." God was thinking for a long time and decided to give piece of land left for himself. Therefore, our land is recognized as precious as heaven. There are many kinds of plants and animals here. And there are so many nations in the world who do not have their own territory, while we do not always value our land as we are supposed to.

Saatkan, born in 1936,
Ak-Suu village, Jalalabad province

I got healed thanks to the sanctity of Imam-Ata sacred site

I grew up here. My father graduated several universities in Bishkek. He used to hold high positions before he became a mullah. So, my father used to tell a lot about sacred sites. I will share what I heard from him.

Let me retell what my father told us. A long time ago there lived a prophet. He had several sons and a daughter. That girl was the Kara-Kyz-Ene and his elder brothers were Imam-Ata, Baba-Ata, Padysha-Ata, Kambar-Ata and Cholpon-Ata. They were all prophets. They were chased by infidels and they all ran in different directions. After that all of them stayed in different places.

Back in the old times, there lived a family of one prophet. The family had many sons and an only daughter. That daughter was our Kara-Kyz-Ene. Her older brothers were Imam-Ata, Baba-Ata, Padysha-Ata, Kambar-Ata and Cholpon-Ata. All of them became prophets. One of the days infidels attacked them and all of them ran away to different directions and each found refuge in the mountains where they remained afterwards.

These prophets came from Arabia. The following story tells us how they came to our land. Starting from Prophet Mohammed's birth he had many enemies who wanted to kill him. The enemies use to say, "Mohammad will convert all people into his religion. We should prevent him from doing so." Thus, they attacked and ousted all followers of Islam. Then, they started looking for Mohammad himself. During their search, Mohammed was crossing the Nile through a bridge. The Prophet was handsome with a turban on his head. Two of the infidels were also crossing the bridge, but from the opposite direction. They greeted the Prophet and one of them shook his hand. After a moment, he started recognizing the Prophet and asked, "Who are you? What is your name?" "I am Mohammad" – replied the Prophet. The infidels, having unexpectedly met the Prophet, got frightened, because they heard that the Prophet has magical power to convert anyone he meets into his religion. Not wanting to become his followers, the infidels threw themselves to the river. So, they swam hugging each other, but at some point they let go off each other. The one, who shook the Prophet's hand, stayed alive and miraculously swam out of the river. The other one, who did not shake the Prophet's hand, died in the water.

The one who found salvation found himself in our region at the time of bloody war. And I personally believe that there were numerous fights here, since we find a lot of human bones during reconstruction work. Some of the remains we rebury in someplace else after chanting prayers. But, most of the remains we leave there where we find them, what else can we do? So, after that war, no imams were left here. But, people were in need of an imam. Then, Mohammad made that person, who came out of the river alive, imam of our region. Thus, he was named Imam-Ata.

Our sacred site is mentioned in old books. People say that Imam-Ata was originally from Mecca, therefore one can make a pilgrimage to the sacred site named after him. There is a sacred site named Safetbulan in Ala-Buka region, which is considered a place where one can make a hajj and become a hadji. Therefore, these two places, due to their sanctity, can be called as the second Mecca. This I heard from my uncle, who lived in Mailuu-Suu town. He used to have a lot of visitors from Uzbekistan who frequently questioned him about Imam-Ata sacred site. Ones, my uncle became intrigued and asked his visitors, “Why are you questioning me about Imam-Ata?” His guests replied, “We read about this sacred site in old books. There is information in old Arabic books, where it is written that one can make a hajj here if they cannot make it to Mecca. The one who made a hajj to Imam-Ata can be considered as a hadji, and I believe in it.”

Emotional stress that led to sickness. One of my daughters and two siblings passed away one after another. And I developed a heart ache out of grief, so I went to Imam-Ata sacred site. I used to go there before too. But when I was ill, I went to the sacred site twice and both times one of my family members accompanied me. During my visit, I walked around the sacred site, looked at the ancient writings on the wall and went inside the mausoleum to pray. Actually, it is forbidden to go inside the mausoleum, but I was allowed to enter. I went in, prayed and came out. I started feeling much better and began to walk again after my visit. When I was at the sacred site, the guardian told me, “It is not allowed to light ritual candles here. God will not like it.” Therefore, I did not make a sacrifice ritual, but only prepared ritual bread.

However, there were other pilgrims from far-away Suzak or Bazar-Korgon regions, and they invited us to their table, “You are an elder, please join us and be our honored guest.” Together with them we drank some tea and ate some meat. Half of the sacrificed animal’s meat was distributed to local people. Thus, I made my pilgrimage to this sacred site.

There are many pilgrims who come from Uzbekistan. The nature round the place is placid, air is fresh, water is crystal clear and the land is sacred. If there were nice conditions and good roads, perhaps, tourists would come here. Those who visit the sacred site take some water with them because it has healing capacities. The water helps to cure skin diseases. Childless couples also come here to solicit for a child and unhappy ones to ask for happiness.

Seyitkulova Sergil, born in 1946,
Jangy-Jer village, Jalalabad province

Invisible spirits of sacred sites may punish as well

We were very young back then, still young girls. There was a sacred site called Kara-Sakal behind our house. A lot of big elm trees used to grow in that sacred site. They did not just grow but grew in form of a circle as if specifically planted like that. No other trees grew in that place except for the elm trees. But, there were some walnut trees a bit farther from those elm trees. But people used to come to

worship those elm trees. Our parents used to tell us, “Do not go there often. That is a sacred site and one is not allowed to play there. If you go and play there, spirits of the place may not like it and they might punish you for playing there.” Perhaps, elders wanted to scare us or maybe they wanted to teach us to respect sacred sites, or just wanted to keep us from some accidents. They just would not allow us to go there. Now, when I go there, I see that there is a village around that place now.

We never went there because of our parents’ warnings. Maybe because our house was near the sacred site and that is why our parents used to forbid us going there. When children would get ill in the village, people used to say, “Probably guardians of the sacred site did not like something.” And people used to pass these words around, “Somebody’s hand became paralyzed,” or “Somebody’s child became sick.” Therefore, parents used to take such sick children to the sacred site, lit candles, prepared ritual bread, recited verses from the Qur’an and prayed. Usually, after such ritual, the sick child would get well.

The territory of the sacred site was suitable for playing. It was comfortable to hide behind those elm trees. Children would quickly forget what their parents said and would go there to play again.

Let me tell you a story, our neighbor had a daughter who was a year older than me and we studied at school together. Once she was herding sheep, and she decided to have a rest and fell asleep in the shade of the big elm tree. When she woke up her mouth was paralyzed. Her parents were afraid and took her to the hospital. The doctors told them, “It is her nerves” and prescribed medicine and sent her home. At that time our village Jolbors did not have its own hospital. Therefore, we used to go to the hospital in Kichi-Ak-Jol village. That girl kept on taking prescribed medicine but it did not help. Then, her parents went to the Kara-Sakal sacred site and conducted all the necessary rituals, thus, their daughter got well. I personally witnessed this case. After that story we stopped playing around that sacred place and trees.

Raya, born in 1932,
Madamin-Ajy-Bulak sacred site, Jalalabad province

I achieved many things at this sacred site

I am the guardian of the Madamin-Ajy¹-Bulak sacred site. I have been working here since 1949. I grew up in an orphanage in the Kokand town. Five girls, including me, when we were at the age of 16, were sent to Jalalabad resort. Four of the girls left since they could not endure all the challenges. But I stayed there to work, later I got married and gave birth to ten children.

Madamin-ajy was a person who made a hajj to Mecca by foot all the way from Jalalabad. After the pilgrimage he got severely ill and found cure in the water of a

1 Ajy [Kyrgyz] – means “hadji” [ed.]

spring here. Many years later Madamin-ajy cleaned the spring and turned it into a pilgrimage site. Consequently, the sacred spring was named after him.

Majority of pilgrims who come here believe in miraculous capacities of the spring water. They come here to pray and recite verses from the Qur'an. There are few visitors in winter though. There are many people who also come to solicit for a child here, and many of them have children later. So, for the baby to live a long happy life, parents follow the tradition of leaving a lock of hair on the baby's forehead. When the baby turns 1, 3, 5 or 7, parents bring the child to the sacred site, conduct all the necessary rituals and cut off the remaining lock of hair from baby's forehead. During such rituals, we – sacred site guardians, recite verses from the Qur'an and shave the remaining lock of hair. For this service we do not ask for certain amount of money; we just take what the people offer and give our blessings to the child.

After marriage, my daughter could not have children for nine years. Her mother-in-law was angry with her and kept scolding her. Since then my daughter would get up early in the morning and kept on praying with tears to Allah and the prophet Ayub. My daughter believed in sacredness of this sacred site, therefore, for several years she swept, cleaned the territory of the sacred site without demanding a payment for her services. Sacred powers have helped my daughter and she gave birth to her children. She wanted her baby to have a strong health and long life, thus she left on her first baby's head *niyaz chach* – the lock of hair, and later shaved it by performing all the necessary rituals.

By the way, before her children were born, she had two dreams. In her first dream she saw an old man in a striped coat and turban with a cradle in his hand. My daughter asked him, "Why aren't you giving me the cradle or it is for sale?" The old man replied, "Dear daughter, I will give you the cradle for free when the time comes." After many years, she saw that old man in her dreams again and he gave her the cradle. Following the dream, my daughter gave birth to her son.

Kojonov Ulukbek, born in 1981,
Kuduk-Say village, Jalalabad province

The story of Kuduk-Sai

There is a sacred site called Namazdyk-Ata. It is in the high mountains and located 20-22 kilometers far from our Kuduk-Sai village. It is impossible to reach that site by car; one can go halfway on a car and then the other half has to be overcome on a horse or donkey. Majority of pilgrims who go there are childless couples soliciting for a child. Since it is located on the top of the mountain and the road is difficult, not many people go there. Only those who are in desperate need go there, or those farmers who prefer to use summer pastures high up in the mountains. Those farmers recite verses from the Qur'an as sign of respect to the land.

A long time ago, there lived a clairvoyant who strictly followed Kyrgyz rituals and customs. When he was in his middle ages, he had a prophetic dream, when he was told, "a black spider will be the cause of your death." In an attempt to protect himself,

the clairvoyant moved high up to the mountains where it was always cold and no black spiders were around. A year passed and one day one of his children came for a visit and brought different vegetables, fruits, nuts and many other things. They spread a tablecloth and put everything on it, and a black spider made an appearance out of grape bunch. Having seen the spider the clairvoyant accepted his fate, performed his praying ritual and put his tongue out. He was buried there after his death. In early morning, during a morning ritual time, one can hear a man's voice. Therefore, this place became to be known as Namazdyk-Ata. People say that the spirit of the man still lives there and that is why one can hear his voice.

There was a war here a very long time ago. And only those who used to perform namaz stayed alive. That person, who ran away from the spider and hid himself in the mountain, stayed alive. Even history books tell about this bloody war. Lots of people died back then. That is why our Kuduk-Say village used to be called Kop-Sook before, which meant, "a lot of bones." Even today people find remains during construction work, which we bury in some other place. Later this place was renamed to Kuduk-Sai meaning "ravine-well", because there is a well 12 kilometers above the village. Back in old days, there was no water here and people used to fill that well up with water and drank it. So, our ancestors moved closer to the well and thus this village came to existence. My father worked as a brigadier and he made people to move closer to the well. Today this is a wonderful village with about 200 households.

M., born in 1945,
Aksy village, Jalalabad province

We live our lives near a sacred site

Kotur-Bulak sacred site is not just a regular spring, but a spring that has a strong power. We are afraid of passing by the spring when it gets dark. This spring is significant not only to the residents of Jangy-Talap village but also to neighboring villages. I say it has a big significance because children play barefoot and they sometimes get their feet injured, then dirt gets in and it might turn into a painful sore. We have much flies and mosquitoes; it turns into sores when they bite. We do not have conditions to bathe every day. Therefore, for all the above mentioned sores and skin problems, the spring water is the priceless remedy. There is no need to spend money and buy various creams, one only needs to take spring water and wash the sores regularly and all the sores and wounds get healed quickly. So, this is the miracles of our spring water.

One should follow certain rules when visiting this sacred site. It is not allowed to break tree branches and mow down the grass or reeds that grow at the edge of the spring. The following case took place five-six years ago. A young man from our village cut down a tree here. The next morning, his mouth was paralyzed. Not once he had to come to the sacred site to pray after that incident. He also made a pilgrimage to the Kara-Kyz-Ene sacred site. However, that young man was able to restore his health only after a very long time. This is how we get evidence of sanctity of sacred sites. If one damages something or misbehaves at a site, then

something bad might happen to the person. But if one venerates sacred sites and their spirits and makes pilgrimages as often as possible, then one will always have the support of sacred spirits. For instance, if one washes with the spring water, not only skin sore, but foot aches will also vanish. If one uses the water to wash the entire body, then the person's health improves in general.

We have been visiting this sacred site, together with my parents, since my childhood. We pray and use the spring water. And in our everyday life we pass by the sacred site, especially when we graze our animals on the field. All the fields around the sacred site belong to local people. They cultivate their land and work every day at the field. That is how our life passes near the sacred site. We never pass by the sacred site without chanting prayers and reciting verses from the Qur'an. This place is very powerful. It is quite frightening at twilight, when the leaves on the trees start rustling.

Anarbaeva Aisha, born in 1977,
Kara-Kol town, Jalalabad province

I believe in miraculous power of sacred sites

I work as a head of Kara-Kol town's administration. There are many sacred places in our town that we are proud of. For instance, there is a sacred spring, Toguz-Bulak, located in the town park. There are also Tash-Mazar and Chong-Tash sacred sites. People make pilgrimages to all these sacred sites.

Pilgrims come to Toguz-Bulak sacred site to ask for health and well-being and conduct rituals. There is a Kyrgyz saying, "Name suits the nature", so there are nine springs at the sacred site, therefore it is named Toguz-Bulak – nine springs. It is a very beautiful place. The spring water is crystal clear and icy cold in summer. Most of the town's residents take drinking water from those springs. The water has healing properties, while the nature's beauty elevates one's mood and delights the eye.

Spring water goes through natural filter as it passes through seven layers of the earth. For example, if to look at the flowing water – it is muddy, while the spring water is crystal clear.

Generally, people bring small children here. When children are sick, parents give them the spring water, pray, recite the Qur'an verses and children get better. Children with skin problems are bathed and washed in the spring water. And after a while skin problems fade away. My sister's son got his foot cut with grass. The wound was deep and it got inflamed and no medicine was helping to get healed. On the contrary, the wound was getting worse. Then my mother said, "Do not torture the child, use the spring water for healing." We brought the spring water and washed the wound few times and it started getting better. There was another case, when my brother's son got sores on his hand. We did not take him to the hospital. Our family gathered together and went to Toguz-Bulak sacred site. There, we prepared ritual bread, recited verses from the Qur'an, lit ritual candles and threw

a coin into the spring. Then, we washed my nephew's hand with the spring water and sores on his hand started vanishing one after another.

After my family's case, I started believing in the healing power of the Toguz-Bulak. When going there, one should have a firm belief in miraculous power of sanctity then all wishes and dreams will come true. I know many cases, because this place is visited by my neighbors and other acquaintances.

One should not come to a sacred site empty-handed. It is necessary to prepare and bring seven or nine ritual breads and also take something to put on the table. Many local people go there on Wednesdays and/or Thursdays. According to folk belief, these days are considered to be the "light" days, and we believe that 60-70%, even if not 100%, of our wishes will be fulfilled.

Since there are nine springs at the sacred site, people bring nine ritual breads. The space between those springs is a green meadow surrounded by cherry trees, sea buckthorn, silverberry and many other trees. People sit there on the meadow; lay the food on cloth on the ground, recite the Qur'an verses, light candles and throw coins to water. In winter people take water from springs and bathe the children at home. In spring, mostly on *Nooruz*¹ holiday, the Kyrgyz have a tradition of making ritual feast, so during that time people go to Toguz-Bulak, sacrifice animals and pray to God. This ritual feast turned into a big holiday. All the people, young and old, participate in this event.

Kazybekov Egemberdi, born in 1958,
Kara-Alma village, Jalalabad province

Heavenly Emchek-Ungkur cave

I visited the Emchek-Ungkur, which means "breast-cave" three times. On the first visit our whole family went there. We made a sacrifice and slaughtered a goat and recited verses from the Qur'an. My son, who was a year old back then, turned twenty this year. The second time I went there with my colleagues. The third time I went with my fellow villagers in a bus. We arrived at the sacred site early morning, sacrificed a sheep, conducted all the rituals, drank some water of the sacred cave and departed in the evening.

The sacrifice ritual is dedicated to honor the sacred spirits of the region, then the Qur'an verses are chanted and rituals candles are lit. We also bring containers with us and put it under the water that drips from the cave's ceiling. When the containers are filled we drink the water and pray to be healthy. One part of the sacrificed animal's meat we eat ourselves and the other half we give to local shepherds. Pilgrims also put some money or their favorite things somewhere inside the cave

1 *Nooruz* [Persian] – Iranian and Persian New Year also celebrated in Kyrgyzstan and other Central Asian countries on March 31 [ed.]

and ask sacred spirits to help them. Women, for example, leave their earrings and/or rings hoping for support and mercy of the sacred cave's spirits.

Sacred cave has very strong healing properties. The cave has a very strong impact. First of all, all those pilgrims with health problems find cure here – it is one of its wonders. Secondly, it happens that couples want to test each other and they come here for it. People say that the entrance to the cave narrows down and the cave does not let out the person who has a sin. The person, who gets stuck in the cave, prays for and begs God, and barely gets free, and upon being released promises to conduct a sacrifice ritual. One should live up his/her promise. If there are sinful ones among pilgrims, then that person either hits his/her head upon the stones on the cave's ceiling or turn his/her ankle. One can also get some other injuries, and this is also some kind of a power of the cave.

I will share a story with you. There was our neighbor with his son during my third visit to the sacred site. His son had a habit of stealing things. So, inside the cave, his son hit his head and later turned his ankle. Then, those who were with us started questioning him, "What have you done? What has happened to you is a sign." As it turned out, he took the coins left in the cave as offerings. We made him to return stolen things and explained him that it is forbidden to take anything from the sacred site; on the contrary, one should leave a favorite belonging and ask God to show a right path. When he grew up, he used to make a pilgrimage here, and he stopped stealing things after that incident. Later he moved to Russia. It would be good if he could come and visit this sacred cave one more time, but he did not. People say that he started stealing again in Russia, and unfortunately, he died there.

I had a friend whose son could not speak, except for two words, "mother" and "father". The boy's parents took him to Emchek-Ungkur many times praying to sacred spirits of the cave. Now, the boy started to speak although inexplicitly, but if to listen very carefully the speech is comprehensive. He is still very small; perhaps, his speech improves while he grows up. This child wanted to speak very much and followed all the rituals when his parents took him to the cave. There are many hidden place in the cave where the water drips. These places are very narrow and an adult cannot reach it. The boy was tenaciously crawling through those narrow places and drinking the dripping water. Now his speech has improved a lot.

Dosanov Taalaybek uulu Manas, born in 1994,
Chauvai village, Batken province

People pray here to become as strong as iron

I live on the western side of the Doot-Piri sacred site. Therefore, I know the history of this place very well. Let me tell you a legend that I heard.

A long time ago there lived a prophet named Doot-Piri. He had twenty sons and prophet Sulaiman was born to his last wife. When Doot-Piri was praying, he used to look right at look at his children on the right, and look to the left to see his children on the left side. The legends tell that when he was praying with his sons, everything

around would stop moving – animals, birds and even insects. All of them would start moving only when the namaz was over. People say that the prophet Sulaiman could speak with animals when he was at the age of six. One day during namaz, Doot-Piri was looking at his kids as usual. At that moment he heard God's question, "Do you need all your children or you only need one son?" Then he replied, "I need my son, Sulaiman." God took away all his children except for one, Sulaiman.

One day Doot-Piri's wife told him, "Please give your throne to your son." Doot-Piri agreed and gave his throne to his son by asking God, "God, please give me some skill." God asked, "What would you like to do?" Doot-Piri replied, "I would like to be a blacksmith and become a mentor to other masters." Thus, he became a skilful blacksmith and kneaded iron like a dough. He built himself a comfortable smithy and hammered swords. God sent him a book on working with iron from heaven. But, he did not know how to use this book. I heard that, supposedly, this book was later used by foreigners.

The devil became envious of Doot-Piri's smithy and little by little started making holes on the walls in order to destroy it. When the devil entered his workshop, Doot-Piri was holding a fresh-hammered sword in his hand. Upon noticing his guest, Doot-Piri decided to show the devilry that he is not afraid of it. He dropped the sword on his hand onto the rock, and the rock broke in two parts. Having seen such power, devil quickly ran away. After that incident, Doot-Piri joined *kaiyp duino* – the world of invisible spirits. But the legend about him is told from one generation to another.

The ones who purchase a vehicle visit the Doot-Piri sacred site and pray, "May the spirit of Doot-Piri protect us. May the car, made of iron, bring prosperity into the house." Childless couples also come for a pilgrimage and pray, "God, please give a son like the son of Doot-Piri. May our future baby's spirit be as strong as iron and may the child become the protector of his people and land."

Saatkan, born in 1937,
Ak-Suu village, Jalalabad province

All our sacred sites have their own spiritual guardian

Sacred site, Kol-Bashat is a lake, which is located not far from our Ak-Suu village. The sacred site is on the other side of the village. This sacred site has a miraculous power. I will tell you story that I heard from my husband. He had good managerial skills and used to hold high positions. One day he was coming back home from work late at night. On the way back, by the sacred site, he saw dancing girls and young woman. He said that there was a real music playing and then he decided to climb up the hill. It took him a while to come to his senses after what he witnessed. When he climbed down from the hill he saw that the festivity was continuing. I did not believe in such stories before, but after my husband's words I started to believe, because he never lies. All the sacred sites, indeed, have their own guardian spirits.

Kol-Bashat is a big sacred site, but it is not recorded in old books. There are ancient tombs, traces of old graveyards and Kyrgyz people considered such places as sacred. There is a big spring further down the graveyard. Spring water flows together and forms a small lake there. By the will of God and by a miracle fish appeared at the lake. The water of this lake does not blend with other waters. Therefore, people consider fish in the lake sacred. Nobody fishes here. People say that if one fishes in here, then it will be followed by God's punishment. And, even fish by the sight of humans disappears somewhere, but nobody knows where.

I also made a pilgrimage to this sacred site once. Who, if not we will pray and respect those places? I was there once. One day, my in-laws from Maili-Sai asked me to accompany them to the Kol-Bashat sacred site. They wanted to make a pilgrimage and take some water from there. Together we laid a table there, recited verses from the Qur'an and lit ritual candles. After the pilgrimage, my in-laws took some water in containers back home.

We visit Kol-Bashat very seldom, because we have a nearby sacred site called Kara-Kyz-Ene. Dwellers of adjacent villages gather together and conduct sacrifice ritual in spring and summer. People from our village visit this sacred site to heal skin diseases or foot aches. They pray, perform necessary rituals and take water and treat themselves with it.

One of my relatives had a foot ache and we made a pilgrimage to Kara-Kyz-Ene once. After that she made another pilgrimage by herself. When she was not able to come herself, she used to ask other pilgrims to fetch some water for her. Thus, she treated her foot pain. Now, thanks God, she walk without crutches. However, she also used to see a lot of doctors, and who knows what helped her, doctors or the sacred water.

I am over 70 years now, and since my childhood, together with my parents, we used to make pilgrimage to sacred sites. Therefore, worshipping such place is deeply rooted in my heart. We grew up and aged with this feeling of reverence. If we can pass this feeling to our children, then God will support our grandchildren and great-grandchildren. Therefore, it is our duty to pass treasure of Kyrgyz people from one generation to another.

Chapter 2 People, Sacred Sites and Plants

Orozalieva Sonunbubu, born in 1958,
Avletim village, Jalalabad province

There are various herbs with miraculous effects at Shudugur-Ata sacred site

There is a big spring at Shudugur-Ata sacred site and many people make pilgrimage there. Every pilgrim brings an animal for a sacrifice ritual. Those who can afford it, bring a sheep or a goat, and those who cannot, at least bring a chicken. There are certain ritual rules at the sacred site. One should shed the animal's blood that is being sacrificed into the main spring then recite verses from the Qur'an and after light ritual candles. Pilgrims bring ready dough with them and make ritual bread, *boorsok*¹, at the sacred site, because ritual bread should be made at the site.

There are many kinds of trees and bushes that grow near the spring, for instance, cherry plum, poplar, elm, barberry, etc. There is also one hectare orchard with many varieties of apple trees, especially white apple variety. People use these apple varieties for medicinal purposes. Almost every household here has apple trees and apples are very special here, because the apple trees grow nearby the sacred site and therefore have miraculous properties. Apples are used in curing children's constipation problems and those who have high blood pressure. Dogberry infusion is given to children with cold, and tea from its stem is good for flu.

Besides, there grows a brier bush; its berries are used to treat many diseases, especially helps to strengthen and improve eyesight. There are many other herbs and plants with medicinal properties that grow in that area. For instance, there are sorrel, nettle, plantain, yellow dock, clover, mud loach, Hypericum, mint, plantain, bindweed, immortelle, wild chamomile and others. I only enlisted those herbs that we use on a daily basis.

Each herb has its own individual properties and each used to cure a certain disease. Many of these herbs grow around our houses. For instance, we heal a mosquito bite or allergic itch by washing it with boiled nettle. Also nettle roots are used to heal flu and cold, and a salad from nettle leaves is highly salubrious as it raises level of hemoglobin in blood. We use nettle roots to treat jaundice. It is also good to use its leaves in salads. We make nettle leaf tea as well. If one feeds a cow with nettle leaves then it will produce more milk.

¹ *Boorsok* [Kyrgyz] – traditional Kyrgyz bread, small square-shaped thin dough is fried in oil [ed.]

Abdullaeva Nuskaïym, born in 1951,
Toguz-Bulak sacred site, Jalalabad province

Oleaster that grows at a sacred site

Although the sacred site is called, Toguz-Bulak, which means “nine springs”, there is no single spring or a rock. People say that two famous brother-heroes Janysh and Baiysh died there and oleaster trees have grown at their place of burial. It is not fortuitous that oleaster trees grow there. In Shariah, oleaster and dates are mentioned as food of heaven. Sometimes I wonder that spirits of Janysh and Baiysh are in heaven since oleaster grows there. No one planted them they started growing with the act of God, otherwise oleaster trees do not grow in our region. Even though the oleaster fruits are somewhat small, they are very tasty. People who come here for a pilgrimage pick up some fruits to treat family members back home. People believe that if one eats oleaster fruits from this sacred site then their generation will multiply.

As I mentioned above, one will not find oleaster trees in our region, but with the act of God they grow here. People say that the only plant that grows in Arabia is the oleaster tree, and perhaps it is called the food of the heaven. There is a folk belief that by eating oleaster fruits a person does the act of benefiting. Thus, by eating oleaster fruits at the sacred site, we believe that we are benefiting spirits of Janysh and Baiysh. I usually go there when the oleaster fruit is not ripe yet or during the blossoms, therefore, I have not been able to pick some fruits. But I know people who annually pick oleaster fruits at the sacred site. These fruits are used to treat stomach aches and goiter. It is not good to throw fruit pits in a random place, since they are also considered food of heaven. Back in time, people used oleaster fruit pits to make women’s hair accessory called *chachpak*¹ that was decorated with silver. Oleaster fruit pits also served as a protection from evil eye. People would sew a fruit pit to a child’s hat on any other visible place on a cloth or make a bracelet.

In these places, I collect thyme and other medicinal herbs. Thyme is a very special herb and therefore often grows in sacred sites. It is used by those who suffer from bronchitis, heart diseases and hypertension. I heal those who come to see me with the help of thyme.

Matraïmov Abdurasul, born in 1962,
Jangy-Jer village, Batken province

Hawthorn is a beneficial plant

Hawthorn is a sacred plant that grows in mountainous areas. People believed that it helps to protect them from evil eye and curse.

1 *Chachpak* [Kyrgyz] – a traditional accessory used to decorate woman’s hair and was tied to braids [ed.]

According to stories, there lived a person, who possessed a powerful energy and piercing gaze. If he would deeply admire someone, that person would collapse. Once, he really liked a horse that was participating in a traditional game. The horse stumbled over and almost fell down. Then, that man told his companions, “Go and check, there must be three hawthorn berries tied either to the horse’s tail or main. Most probably one of the berries just broke now, but there should be two remaining. Otherwise, the horse would collapse dead.”

In old times, when building a house or planting a garden, people would tie some hawthorn branches on the entrance. It was supposed to protect the family from evil eye. Planted hawthorn tree by the house was also for protecting purposes.

People make hawthorn berry jam. Besides, hawthorn berries are good for heart aches and other diseases. But, mainly it is used as protection from the evil eye and curse.

Carpenters make beads and amulets from hawthorn. Parents hang hawthorn amulets on cradles or put on children’s wrists. These things are ecologically clean as well.

Kuluipa B., born in 1935,
Jangy-Jol village, Jalalabad province

There are plenty of herbs growing under our feet

I used to treat my children only with herbs, because it was far to get to the hospital, around an hour and half to walk. Now, my children joke, “Our doctor was always beside us.” I raised ten healthy children. Now, all of them are married, have their own families and live independently.

If children have cuts or sores, I crush bindweed, apply it on the sore, and it will be healed very soon. Bindweed also helps when one has stabbing wound. If children have allergies, I boil nettle, and bathe them in that water – itching goes away. In case children have diarrhea, I give them pomegranate skin or cherry branch infusion mixed with tea. In order to heal jaundice, one should drink barberry tea. When one has flu and cough, boiled onion in milk should be drunk. Also, tea with milk and jam is good for flu. If one does not have jam, then one can make and drink blackberry leaf infusion and lie down, warmly covered, in order to sweat. After several such procedures, the flu goes away. If children have intestinal parasites, they should be given pumpkin seeds with honey and parasites will disappear.

My mother will turn 90 soon, but she is still strong and healthy. She also used to heal us with the help of herbs. There were no doctors back then, or perhaps, we were not taken to the hospital. However, I do not remember whether I had an appointment with a doctor. If we get sick, then we use folk medicine and use animal fat and herbs. We are doctors ourselves, and with God’s help, folk medicine has never failed. In fact, all the meds are prepared from herbs. These meds grow under out feet, but many people run to the pharmacies and buy them. This is not right.

Today, one should not rely on pharmaceuticals. It is even shown on the TV how contemporary meds are produced and labeled as “fake”. Such meds do not help; on the contrary, they deteriorate one’s health.

One should know which herbs to collect, when and how to dry them. If to collect herbs in a wrong season and dry them in a wrong way, then they can harm one’s health, just like those “fake” meds. Herbs should be collected early morning, before the sun rises, while it is still fresh and no man has stepped on the ground. Herbs are dried in a shady place, and then they are crushed and preserved in bags made of fabric. Herbs can be preserved for one year, after a year they should not be taken or used. Next year, one should collect and dry herbs again. I always have some herbs in stock. Sometimes, my neighbors come and ask for some herbs, because they know that I always have some. I think that not only our land is sacred, but also our plants and animals.

Seitkulova Sergil, born in 1949,
Jangy-Jol village, Jalalabad province

We live thanks to walnut trees

There are many walnut trees where we live. There are also cherries, apples, apricots, pistachios and hawthorn trees here. The only bad thing is that two years ago people came and cut down many walnut trees. As it turned out, walnut trees have burls and these burls are very expensive. They are used to make fine furniture. There are beautiful circular patterns when the strips are sawn from the burls. First of all, furniture made from walnut trees is expensive. Secondly, walnut trees live very long, anywhere from 300 to 500 years. Therefore, walnut tree furniture will last for a long time as well. Now, those who order to cut walnut trees are all high-ranking officials. They always have what to say to people. Locals live thanks to walnut trees, they collect tons of walnuts. For instance, last year you could sell a kilo of walnuts right from the house for 38 to 42 Kyrgyz soms. The middlemen take them to Bishkek and sell for 70 Kyrgyz soms. Our people sell walnuts mostly to Uzbekistan. Sometimes Turks come and buy walnuts. Kyrgyz walnuts are known to the whole world.

The walnut tree has many medicinal properties, including its stems, leaves, nuts, and the green shells when the nuts are not ripe yet. If one extracts oil from the nuts, cook meals with that oil and feed a person who often has a cold, it will heal him or her. If one eats walnuts often then it will improve your memory. If one gives walnuts to a woman who recently gave birth, then it will help her uterus recover more quickly. Those with low hemoglobin should eat walnut with honey as it increases the level of hemoglobin. Walnut partition infused in ethanol helps to heal mastopathy in women. If one boils walnut leaves and then washes hair – hair will become silky and shiny. Walnut leaf infusion is used to get rid of foot odor. When the walnut is not ripe yet it has green shells; if one brushes their teeth with them, without touching the gums, then one’s teeth will whiten and roots strengthen. Except for all the above mentioned, walnuts are used to heal one’s digestion system, diarrhea, diabetes etc.

Tuyumkan, born in 1930,
Ak-Suu village, Jalalabad province

Every herb growing under our feet is medicinal

Previously, there were many roe deer in Jangy-Talap region. Sometimes, they would wander around our village. My children would herd their goats and used to tell, “Mother, today, there were couple of roe deer resting among our goats, but when we herded goats back home, roe deer ran away towards the mountains.” Sometimes, we would see roe deer calves, and how female rows would cry and call their calves. Roe deer’s meat has many medicinal properties because they graze on various grasses that grow in high mountains. But, their number has significantly decreased, due to medicinal properties of their meat. Previously, people did not live around this sacred site. Now, there are houses next to it. Perhaps, that is what drove roe deer away. On the other hand, people increasingly began hunting them too. Now, I hear that they are seen at some places, but as soon as they see people, they ran away.

There are also many partridges, wolves and foxes around here. They come down from the mountains during the winter.

There are many herbs here. All of the medicine grows under our feet. Since our village is located at a high altitude, the air is fresh, it is cool during the summer, and therefore, the grass grows waist-high here. Almost all of the herbs that grow here have medicinal properties. For instance, nettle – it is widely used by people. Since we have many mosquitoes in the village, if you wash your mosquito bite with nettle then it will heal fast. Nettle is also good for itching. Nettle root is good for jaundice. If crushed nettle mixed with fodder is fed to a cow, then it will produce more milk. Bindweed heals sores and cuts. One should crush it, apply to the cut or sore and bandage it. It always helps. If a person has anemia, then he/ she should eat nettle salad. Nettle is the best medicine for asthma, tuberculosis, pertussis, and gastric diseases.

There is an herb called marjoram. It is a good medicine for gastric, intestinal, hepatobiliary diseases and jaundice. People in our village also add marjoram to their meals. Also, there is Hypericum. If it is taken as tea, then it is the best medicine for headache, insomnia, radiculitis, hepatopathy. There is also an herb called clover. It has two varieties: one blooms red, another one blooms blue. The clover that blooms red is used for kidney diseases, diarrhea, anemia, and jaundice. The new leaves and stems of the clover that blooms blue are added in making *samsa*¹ or meat pies, as they have many medicinal properties. The clover also strengthens hair, makes it shine and feel like silk. If bald people regularly wash their head with clover then they will grow new hair.

1 *Samsa* [Iranian] – an oven-baked patty made with meat, but also made with greens and herbs in lack of meat [ed.]

Also, there is an herb called strawflower. It is also good for gastric, hepatobiliary, and kidney diseases. If one has angina or gingivitis, then the person should make tea with strawflower and gargle. People in our village drink strawflower infusion instead of tea, since smells well and makes tea pleasant. Basically, every herb here has medicinal properties.

Sharipa, born in 1943,
Razan-Sai village, Jalalabad province

We are people of old times

We have been using herbs from the old times and got used to that, whereas, nowadays, if young people have a tiny health issue they run to the doctor. It is possible to deal without the doctor and heal yourself. If one goes and sees a doctor with a headache, then the doctor prescribes a bunch of medicine and if one takes all of them, what is going to happen to a person's stomach? It is better to drink green tea or have a hot meal, lie down for a while and sweat, and the headache will go away. If one has a headache because of the cold or migraine, then it is good to have a massage and pains will go away. That is how our ancestors healed themselves in old times, as there were no doctors back then. Our mothers would give birth at home, in summer pastures, heal themselves there and live there. Actually, they were less sick than now and lived longer. In old times people ate clean food, consumed meat, drank clean spring water, breathed fresh air, wore sheepskin and clothes made of wool, and that is why they were less sick and lived long. One will never get cold if he/she wears a sheepskin coat. For instance, my father lived till 91 years old; my mother lived till 93 years old. There are few old people who reach that age now. My mother at her age was still nimble and worked around the house.

Since childhood we wanted to live in the city, and what we have now? When I was young, I worked at a coal mine; since it was detrimental to our health we were given milk and yogurt. We were young then and did not pay attention to our health. But, we get older faster unlike our parents. Now we are, "Sick one day, healthy on another day" – as Toktogul put it in his song. In a situation like this one gets tired of seeing a doctor every day, and they get tired of seeing the sick ones. Therefore, it is better to heal ourselves with herbs that we know, and, if we do not know something, then we ask those who know.

My mother would use snake's fat to heal cold-related diseases. A snake was put into a bottle and hanged in the sun, and then fat would come out from the snake. It is good for many things, so is the snake broth. I heard that one should apply bee oil to a bee stung. I heard that bee oil is prepared in the following way: bee is put into a jar and sunflower oil is poured on top. I also heard that if one rubs a shed snake skin onto eyes, then vision will be improved. People also tell that if a deaf person drips the blood of a field mouse into his or her ear, then he or she will start hearing again. Since I have not done it myself, I do not know whether it is true or not.

All of the domestic animals are useful except for donkeys and cats. In old times, people would say that dogs and boars are haram, but now people eat them for

medicinal purposes. But, I do not use them in healing, as I pray five times a day. I use boar fat, because it eats only berries and grass. I think that boar's, badger's and bear's fat are not haram, therefore, I use them. For instance, bear's fat is the best medicine for broken bones, it heals them quickly. And boar's fat is good for cold-related diseases and the same goes for badger's fat. To hunt a bear, one should go to the mountains and not alone, while boars and badgers live not far away. Before, they used to come to our village, but they were scared when people started shooting them, so now they cannot be found here.

Nadirbekov Aitpay, born in 1961,
Kara-Bulak village, Batken province

*Aigul*¹ flower grows only in Batken province

Batken province is one of the provinces of Kyrgyzstan with severe weather conditions. In spite of that, it made Kyrgyzstan famous to the world with its extraordinary *Aigul* flower. In 1976-77, my classmate Baktygul Kalambetova (now she works abroad in an embassy) contributed to adding *Aigul* flower to IUCN Red List for its protection. Since then, school students guard the *Aigul* flower from March till mid-May. The state does not provide any money for protecting this extraordinary flower. Only village residents, students and teachers protect the flower because of their patriotic feelings. This flower grows high in the mountains, usually on the northern slopes.

A flower grown from a seed blossoms only after seven years. I heard that *Aigul* flower has strong healing qualities for forty diseases. I do not know about healing forty diseases, but I had *Aigul* flower growing in a pot at home. One person asked to give him the flower for medicinal purposes. He had a severe disease, but after using the flower he got healed and he is healthy now. I brought the flower from that mountain together with soil and planted it in a pot at home. The root of the flower looks like a root of an onion and only one stripe grows out of it. Its bud is of a red color, like a deed-red pepper. The flower itself is of a bell shape and its seeds are like a poppy seeds. It takes seven years for a seed to grow and blossom. One local guardian told me that there are flowers with a height of 2 meters and 80 centimeters. There are about 28032 flowers on one stripe, and every year a new flower is added to the stripe. Therefore, one can calculate the age of the plant by its number of flowers.

This plant is a symbol of friendship. A writer from Batken province, Murzapar Uson, told me the following story about the *Aigul* flower. There was an old man and a woman; they had a beautiful daughter named *Aigul*. She fell in love with a warrior, Kozulan, but he did not come back from one of his battles. However, *Aigul* did not want to abandon her hopes and waited for her beloved one. Unfortunately, only his horse came back without him. Kozulan's fellow warriors gave *Aigul* his heart, and then *Aigul* understood that she lost her beloved one and fell down from

1 *Aigul* [Kyrgyz] – an endemic plant growing in Batken province and means “Moon flower” The scientific name of the flower is *Fritillaria eduardii*. The word “*Aigul*” is also a female name [ed.]

a mountain top and died. The old man and the woman used to come to the place where their daughter died and used to cry. There, among the rocks, where tears of the girl have fallen, flowers grew as if to sooth the poor parents. Thus, the flower was called after her name, Aigul. We have an idea to make a statue of Kozulan and Aigul at the mountain.

Because of the war many apricot species disappeared. Batken province is known for its apricots. There were many varieties of apricot here. When the World War II started, the government started taxing every apricot tree. That is why people cut down many apricot trees in order to be free from taxes. Nevertheless, the rest of the remaining apricot trees are still feeding the residents of Batken. The apricots are the gift given to us by God. We wish to expand the apricot variety. And I also wish that Academy of Sciences would do research on uses of the Batken apricot and spread the information among the people. Doctors recommend Batken apricots for heart diseases.

Every plant submits to nature's law. Batken rice is different from the Ozgon rice. Batken rice is a softer while Ozgon rice is solid. Batken rice grows in banks of Soh River in the village of Ak-Turpak. As it turns out, every plant submits to nature's law. The taste of rice depends on the wind and water flow. For example, apricots, they also grow in other provinces of our country, but their taste and medicinal properties are not the same as Batken apricots. Our region is dry and always sunny, because the more the plant received sun rays, the tastier it gets. There are apricots in Issyk-Kul province, but due to moist weather, the taste of apricots is totally different. Issyk-Kul apricots ripen later, therefore they do not receive much sun and thus their taste and medicinal purposes are different.

Chapter 3 People, Sacred Sites and Animals

Kolchubaev Allaberdı, born in 1927,
Zardaly village, Batken province

I healed my back with a bear skin

As majority of hunters, I used to drink roe deer's mild when I was hunting. It is not very pleasant to drink blood, but people drink it for healing purposes. Often times people order blood from hunters. Roe deer's blood does not have a smell.

It was in 1954, when I went bear hunting together with other three hunters to a summer pasture called Shekhan. From afar, we spotted two bears walking on a ridge. There also were two other bears little closer to us, right on our way. We decide to go around them and went down the ravine. Upon approaching the bears, I made the first shot at a brown bear; with a roar it started running up the hill. The

bear roared at every shot I made. When it finally died, we flayed the bear and took its skin. I was having back pains back in those years; probably I developed those pains because of lifting heavy stuff. Then, totally naked I was wrapped in the bear skin for 3-5 minutes. After several minutes my back started jerking and I could not withstand it any longer. I got dressed without washing the blood on my body, and did not bathe for another two days. I am already 80 years old and, since then, I forgot what it is to have pack pains.

Karimov Jooshbai, born in 1959,
Leilek region, Batken province

Snake venom is more precious than gold

A word “margun” means “a place full of snakes”. Indeed, there are many kinds of snakes in our Leilek region. A type of a snake that is known as *kormar* is quite popular among people. People from Bishkek, Uzbekistan and Tajikistan often order this snake from our region. Price per one such snake varied from 1,500 to 5,000 thousand Kyrgyz soms. There, probably, will be a snake farm, because one gram of snake venom is 300 times more expensive than one gram of gold.

We use snakes in a simple way. We boil the whole *kormar* until it boils down to one cup broth of an indiscrete mass. We do not add any salt while the snake meat is being boiled. One should take the prepared broth immediately, warmly bundle up and lay down. The person will start heavily sweating in a short while, which indicated that the snake broth started its effect. One should not use alcohol and should keep a diet while being treated with snake broth. People use snake-therapy against digestion problems, cold-related diseases and spine pains.

Mountains of Leilek are also abundant with herbs. There grows yellow currant and, sometimes, mummy can also be found. These things help in curing bone fracture. Baitcha tea fruits help to sooth asthmatic fit, while sage, strawflower and *Hypericum* are good for hypertension. Roseroot heals stomach ache, while figwort heals diarrhea, plantain is good for gastric ulcer.

Kamilov Kochkorbai, born in 1934,
Kan village, Batken province.

Medicinal snowcock

Ular – is a snowcock and Kyrgyz people consider its meat as medicinal. One should catch a snowcock in the mountains, keep it at home for some time and only after that slaughter it. The snowcok is boiled without removing its gizzards, and draw it only when the meat is ready. One will never have cancer if he/she eats snowcock meat prepared in this way. It is a mating season in May and snowcocks start whistling, indicating their whereabouts. It is quite cautious and timorous bird with keen sent – it can scent trail from far away.

Azimov Abdylazis, born in 1926,
Jangyryk village, Batken province

Snowcock, golden eagle and a snake

Snowcocks live high in the mountains. There used to be many snowcocks before, but now they are almost extinct. Back in old times, I hunted for snowcocks and partridges. Those who eat roe deer and snowcock meat are quite nimble. Meat of wild animals and game has miraculous properties. In the past, barren women used to be treated with roe deer gall, because our ancestors believed that roe deer's gall helps to cure infertility. It was believed that if barren woman eats the gall, she will certainly have a boy, because due to difficult live condition in the mountains, usually women gave birth to girls.

Kasymov Payazimamat, born in 1952,
Markaz village, Batken province

There is a limit to hunt

Most of the hunters in this region have hunting licenses. Experienced hunters know that one should not hunt during the mating and fawning season, because during that time they start bunching. During the mating season, male species fight for dominance in the bevy and only the strongest one wins. The one that loses is chased out from the bevy. The number of roes in the bevy reaches 15 species and the new winner becomes the bevy leader.

Roes start fawning in March. It is also the time, when hunting is not allowed, because by killing one roe results in the death of two. However, there are some hunters who kill female species on purpose; because people say that the gall of the fawn in mother's womb is salutiferous. It is used to cure diseases of the respiratory system and infertility.

Thousand's victim of a hunter gives a sign. Kyrgyz people have been consuming meat of *kiyik*¹ from ancient times. According to hunters, the thousand's victim of a hunter, who have already killed 999 animals, will land upside down, i.e. on its horns, in front of the hunter. This is the sign given to the hunter. That hunter should stop hunting cloven-hoofed animals in the mountains. Otherwise, the hunter will undergo *kaiberen's*² punishment, which may come as an accident that might happen to the hunter. The hunter may fall from the cliff or his rifle may not shoot at the right moment etc. These animals' meat is salubrious for human health, because they eat grass that grows high in the mountains – places that humans cannot reach.

If hunters want to get lucky, then they should climb up the high peaks before the dawn, before the flock comes out from its overnight stay. These God's creatures can

1 *Kiyik* [Kyrgyz] – cloven-hoofed animals that live in high mountains [ed.]

2 *Kaiberen* [Kyrgyz] – the spiritual guardian of all cloven-hoofed animals [ed.]

scent a smell within one kilometer and hear even a slightest rustle. They will not let hunters reach them if they hear or feel any danger. Usually, when the flock is grazing, two animals always stay on guard.

One should note how these animals drink water – they drink standing astride and looking around underneath their legs. They are always on the alert. If one frightens them away, then it is impossible to catch them for they are very fast animals. Mountains, rocks, cliffs – it all does not matter, they can run anywhere.

Livestock gets sick just like humans. Since we live in mountainous areas we have many hills. Therefore, usually goats and sheep graze in hilly areas, while cattle and horses prefer flatlands. Sometimes, lambs and goatlings have *tuinok*¹ that reminds a condition of a person under an evil eye. Thus, in order to heal the animal from the evil eye, people perform special ritual. One should grab the sick animal, look at its mouth while keeping pot holders in the hand and then say, “*tuinok, tuinok!*” Then, one should take the blunt side of a knife and imitate slaughtering process. The sick animal gets healed after having done this ritual. Animals, just like human beings, are cured from evil eye and curse. If a cow has difficulty in giving a birth, suffering in pain or has difficulty urinating, then one should give water extract of *tulgunai*'s² nest. If the suffering cow drinks it, then it urinates and gives birth without pain.

Tulgunai is a small bird that meticulously builds its nest, just like needlewomen who make their felt mats with great scrutiny. The nest of this bird is considered as a rare remedy. It can be beneficial for human health as well. These birds build their nests on tree branches hanging over the turbulent rivers. These trees grow by mountain rivers. It is difficult to reach out and take a nest, because it is neatly tucked away among thick branches. One can even get a hand injury attempting to take the nest. Therefore, one should wait until all young birds leave the nest and then saw down the whole branch and take the nest.

There is one more folk remedy. In case a wart appears in a cow's udder, an exuviated snakeskin should be crushed and added to a fodder and given to the cow. Usually, snakes exuviate in March. Soon, the wart or warts will vanish. This healing procedure can also be applied to humans.

Andasheva Gulmira, born in 1952,
Kyzyl-Jar village, Jalalabad province

Benefits of animal's milk, fat and blood

Mare's milk is very salubrious in early spring and is called *saamal*. It is a rare remedy, which is used to cure various diseases, improves and strengthens one's health. *Saamal* should be consumed in particular time of the year, when the grass is still fresh and soft. Usually, the best time is May, when the medicinal properties

1 *Tuinok* [Kyrgyz] – a stomach or intestinal disease [ed.]

2 *Tulgunai* [Kyrgyz] – local name for penduline tit from titmouse family [ed.]

of the milk are very strong. When the grass stiffens, mare's milk loses its potency and medicinal properties, although it still preserves its taste. *Saamal* should be drunk fresh, when it is still warm, and this is a golden rule. It is salubrious only when it is fresh. Visceral fat of a horse also has medicinal properties. If to apply the horse fat onto the stomach of a person with cold, then stomach cramps will sooth immediately. Slightly prepared animal liver is good for people with iron deficiency. Goose fat heals skin burn without trace of a scar. Dog and wild boar fat also have medicinal properties. But, we do not use their fat, because we are Muslims and consider them as haram.

I also remember, from my childhood, that our father used to tie white eagles' claw to our clothes as an amulet. It was assumed that this amulet would give the power of the bird to the person wearing it. Waistband and socks knitted from camel's wool heal chronic catarrhal diseases. Bile of a bear, which live high in the mountains, helps for speedy recovery of bone fracture. I used to hear from my mother that a fox's blood whitens teeth and preserves them from decaying, if one rinses his/her teeth with it. We had a neighbor who was a hunter. He was 70 years old, but he had strong and white teeth. So, people used to say, "This person rinsed his teeth with fox's blood, therefore, his teeth are white and did not decay." His teeth remained white and healthy until he died. Today, it is difficult to catch a fox, their number has significantly decreased.

Kadyrbek Kozubai, born in 1949,
Mailuu-Suu town, Jalalabad province

Turtle is a good medicine for tuberculosis

One of our neighbors developed tuberculosis and he was taken to a hospital in Jalalabad. It was fortunate that his disease was of non-contagious form, because we used to communicate often. Every year he would spend time in hospital and receive treatment. Then, during one of his visits, someone told him that turtle meat and its eggs are good to cure tuberculosis. Upon returning home, he started searching for turtles. He began hunting turtles in the summer time. Thus, he fully recovered from tuberculosis by eating turtle meat and turtle eggs. Later he said that the doctors were surprised by his recovery.

There are many snakes, turtles, scorpions, and other insects in Mailuu-Suu. Sometimes, snakes even creep into the house. Once, a snake got into our house and would not leave all out attempts notwithstanding. I wanted to kill it, but my wife was against it. She argued that if this snake belongs to a nest of snakes and we kill it, then the other snakes from her nest will bring misfortune to our family. Then my wife went to our neighbor to ask an advice. They told her that she should just spread flour on the floor and the snake would leave itself. She returned home, spread the flour on the floor and the snake went away. It took us half a day to do get rid of the snake. It turns out that snakes have an oath and promises to leave the house only if a person spreads something white like flour or milk. This ritual is called *ak chachuu*.

A snake, which is a member of a large snake nest, is considered sacred. That kind of a snake becomes visible to humans for a reason. Its appearance is an omen. The one, who sees such snake, will have a good luck and many children. If one unknowingly kills such snake, then that person will be cursed and misfortune will fall upon his/her head. I have a relative and he is the only son in his family. One day he was going to a summer pasture and came across a nest of snakes. Back then, he did not know about that snake nest exists. He was perplexed upon seeing coiled and intertwined snakes and thought, “Ohh, it turns out that there can be so many snakes.” He was standing there motionless, staring at the bundle of snakes, while they crawled away, as if they disappeared. He told what he saw to his mother when he came home. His mother cheered up and said, “My dear son, by the will of God, everything will be great in your life and you will have a lot of children.” Everything became true; he had eight children and a great career. He held high positions his whole life and retired when he became old. There was no single case when he was displaced from his job. Now, even his children work in government agencies and all of them live a good life. They help us as well. They became to be good people; they are not arrogant as some other people.

Chapter 4

People, spirits and healing practices

Konoeva Roza, born in 1955,
Kurshab village, Osh province

Stitches from my surgeries are inside not outside

In 1990 at the age of 30 I accepted *kyrgyzchylыk* – mission to heal people. I started having health issues as soon as I got married. Even though I had five surgeries due to sinusitis I could not get rid of it. At one moment, I even lost the ability to speak. It turns out that it was a sign from above. Later, my husband was seriously ill and doctors prepared him for a surgery on his stomach as they said it was the only way to treat him. At the same time, our son also became seriously ill. He suffered from double vision as he would return from outside and say that he “Saw two images of the same person.” When we took him to a mullah, he told us to take him to a doctor. Our son was ten back then, but now he is grown up and has two children. When we took him to a doctor he was diagnosed with purulent meningitis. His condition deteriorated day by day and soon he could no longer walk. Then, I had a prophetic dream and was told, “You should take your son to a healer.” We went to see a healer. The healer performed his healing act, chanted prayers and having finished said, “Now get up and walk.” My son got up and began walking like a toddler. Then, the healer put my son down and continued his healing acts and our son started getting better. After the last procedure, my son came back home running. Then the healer told me, “Your path is to accept *kyrgyzchylыk* – your mission is to heal people. I did not heal your son; your God-given gift healed your son. Do not take your son

to doctors.” Following his advice we did not take him to the hospital and he started feeling better.

However, if one devotes his/her life to healing, it is required that no one in the family consumes alcohol; but, doctors prescribed my husband to drink little bit of vodka in order not to die. When my husband would have a glass of vodka, his stomach ache would go away. So, my mentor made an exception and he gave his blessing to me. Thus, I was blessed to be a healer. But my mentor told me to go ahead and receive *bata*, blessing¹. Thus, I received a blessing. But, I never thought that I would start healing so soon. At the time, I was thinking of only healing myself.

It must have been the God’s will and blessing, because I began healing people after three days. I had a sick person, who was discharged from hospital. He had a stomach surgery, had morphine injections every three hours. He could not even drink water, was vomiting blood, and could no longer walk.

I healed him through my own “surgery.” In three days, the person started walking and eating again. This person came to me through my mentor, because this person’s mentor asked my mentor to help him. Since my mentor had many patients, he sent me to that severely ill person by saying, “Please see that person and make a surgery.” I was perplexed and asked, “How should I make a surgery?” And he explained me everything,

After three days of preparations, I performed the “surgery” just like my mentor told me. When I saw the patient two days later I learned that he urinated clotted blood. It was his stomach wounds being discharged with urine. In three days, the patient began to walk. This person, who was diagnosed to die, lived ten more years. He did not die a natural death though; he died in a car accident later.

A “surgery” is performed with the help of special incantations. I performed another “surgery” on a girl’s stomach. I do not know how everything happens, but I do the “surgery” with special incantations. Soon after I treated her, she was taken to a hospital. After the observations, doctors were surprised and told her, “You had a unique surgery, because there are internal stitches, but no signs of external stitches.” I performed a “surgery” on a duodenum of another patient. So that person went to Moscow, got ill again and after an endoscopy procedure the doctors wondered about the surgery that person underwent as there were stitches inside and no visible signs of external stitches. There are many stories like these.

Traditional medicine heals those diseases that conventional medicine cannot cure. Upon becoming a healer, I have seen many things. Things that some people call as fairy tales sometimes can actually be real, I have witnessed it myself. I also saw the devil’s work and people who were under a spell.

¹ *Bata* [Kyrgyz] – here a practice of initiating a person with hidden abilities into kyrgyzchylyk [ed.]

I also changed my attitude towards sacred sites. I did not pay attention to them before. Now, I know that people get healed at sacred sites. When making a pilgrimage we light ritual candles in seven places. We make candles ourselves by dipping cotton in unheated cooking oil. There is an authentic smell once these candles are burned. The ritual of candles equals to the ritual of making ritual bread.

Those people, who have a gift, often become sick if they do not accept their mission to heal people. Medicine is helpless when healing such people. If one disease is healed then there another one appears. Close relatives of that person can also become sick, father, mother or children. Doctors are not always helpful in curing diseases. For instance, such diseases as feat, curse, trauma or when something goes wrong with body functions. Believing and executing God's will, many sick people get healed.

Mullahs and healers. There are many disagreements between mullahs and healers. Their views on life are completely different from each other. I consider certain assortments of mullahs as incorrect. According to them, one should not worship spirits of the dead, or the ancestor spirits. However, it is indispensable in order to heal a very sick person, although not all the spirits can help the living. Only those spirits, who have been executing God's will in their life, praying five times a day and lived a life with no sins, may have a strong healing power. The spirits of thieves, sinners, murderers and liars are not able to help anyone, because they go to hell after death. Even reciting the Qur'an verses in their honor will not help them.

The family of the healer should not oppose, but, on the contrary should support and understand the healer's mission. If the family does not bless the healer, there will not be any use of healing people. I am grateful to my husband. He always supported me and helped in any way he could. Thanks to him I became widely respected healer. In Osh, nobody mentions that I'm from Issyk-Kul region, every one respectfully calls me *apa* – mother. When I talk about moving someplace else, my neighbors become worried, "What will we do without you?" If they become sick, they come to me immediately. Then I heal and cleanse them. Now, there are about 40 people are getting healed at my house. My husband has made all the conditions for my work. There is a praying room and a big living room for sick patients. We also provide food for the patients.

Sazhida, born in 1943,
Tash-Komur town, Jalalabad province

Spirit of my father-in-law left me his burden

Before I accepted kyrgyzchylyk and was not healing, I used to see mysterious dreams and get signs. If I tell all of them, they will turn into a tales lasting 3-4 days. Let me tell one of them. I was firm when I was young and did not pay attention numerous signs I was getting. Now, I am amazed at how brave I was back then. One day I had a very bad headache and I decided to lie down for a short while. As soon as I lay down, a lightning seemed to strike and my right cheek started to burn. I became afraid that it started raining, so I got up and looked at the window, but it was sunny outside. My head ache became worse so that I was not able to lift it up.

My parents came and took me to a mullah, and after his prayers, my head became little lighter. Some time has passed after that and one day, when I was breast-feeding my baby, the door opened and a tall man came in. The man took a seat underneath a fox case that was hanging on the wall. He looked at me and said, "Last time I hit your cheek with a lightning, but you did not understand me. Why are not you accepting and obeying kyrgyzchylyk? Now, I came myself to ask whether you will take this burden or not." I replied that I cannot take it. Having heard my answer, the man approached my son, stroked his head and left without words. I became ill at ease and different things started running in my head, although I did not feel any fear at that moment. I did not tell anyone about what has happened, but I was worried the whole on what might happen next. Thus, the day was over. Everything was fine with my son, he was sleeping. But, he passed away the next day.

There was another case. It was a summer afternoon, and children were sleeping at home. Suddenly, I heard a sound of a stopping car. I went outside to look. There was a big car parked in front of the gate, and two men got out of the car and said, "Your father-in-law left you a burden. Please take it." I looked at the car; there was a sack with something inside. Those two men took the sack and left it in the yard. I entered the house, looked at children, but they were still sleeping. I was thinking about that sack and what was inside of it. I even thought that they came to the wrong house. I felt very uncomfortable and was worried what might happen this time. So, I went outside again to check what the burden was, but the yard was empty.

After this case, I decided to obey my destiny and accept the burden. I began doing good things and healing people. Many people with different diseases started coming to see me. I started diagnosing based on person's pulse, "If you want I can heal you, or you can go to the doctor." I gave them a right to choose. I had very strong bioelectric currant and I could heal bone fracture and dislocation. God gave me this special gift, therefore, I had to heal people otherwise I would harm my relatives and close ones.

I was not accepting this gift for many years when I was young and neglecting all the signs and visions. Back then I did know what fear is. I was young and thought, "How am I supposed to heal people without medical education? What will people say? They will think that Sazhida went crazy." I did not tell anyone about my visions even my parents and husband.

Now, I remember my experience of seeing the first patient. It was after my son was born. A boy with bone dislocation was brought to me. I did not know how to treat him, because I did not have a mentor and I did not receive anyone's blessing to become a healer. Suddenly, some voice whispered in my ear, "You should massage the boy's hand." The voice was clear, but nobody was around me. My guardian spirits used to come to me before; they would make themselves visible and talk to me. I did what the voice said, massaged the boy's hand, but did not know what to do after. Then, somebody's hand took my hand and jerked it; the boy's hand was also jerked together with mine. This was followed by a crackling sound. And

I said with a calm voice, “This is it, now the bone is on its right place. The boy should not lift anything heavy for a month. You should come again in one-two days. The swelling will go away with time and so will the pains.” I was saying all these without understanding of what I was saying, and I sent the boy back home. I always remember my first-patient experience.

Umarkulova Gulkhan, born in 1956,
Sumbula village, Batken province

Grey smoke that comes from sick people

Following the advice of a *davatchy*¹ I made a pilgrimage to *Turkestan*² together with my relatives. The pilgrimage week was very rich, we slept only two hours a day, the rest of the time we were busy with going through the challenge of the sacred site. We also bathed in medicinal spring. Some people might not believe this, but if one attentively looks at sick people bathing in the spring, then a grey smoke coming out of their mouth can clearly be seen. Every pilgrim feels lighter after bathing in the spring.

There I received a sign – a message about my older son. Back then I did not understand what and how that might happen. The message was following, “A big success is waiting one of your children.” I did not even think about making a sacrifice ritual then. In September 4, 2010 my oldest son, Myktybek, died in a car crash.

A girl, who connects the dead ones with the living. I had to accept my son’s death, because everything in this life is destined. I did not ask for any explanations from God my profound grief notwithstanding. We buried my son, and then my husband became sick with diabetes. People said that there is a girl in Noo region of Tajikistan, who can connect the living with the spirit of the dead ones. So, we went to see her and I took my daughter-in-law, Sanavar with me.

The girl conducted her rituals, called my son’s name and invited his spirit. I could not get connected to the spirit directly, we were connected only through the girl. She was conveying my son’s message, “Mom is doing well, so I am not worried. I only regret that my small daughters are left alone.” Then, the girl asked us, “There is an old woman of an average height and an elder man, who are they?” That old woman was grandmother of my daughter-in-law, and the elder man was my father-in-law, Jorobai.

My daughter-in-law, in tears, was communicating with the spirits of her husband and grandmother. The spirit of my father-in-law told my daughter-in-law that he is looking after the spirit of her husband. The communication ended, and when there

1 *Davatchy* [Arabic] – a Muslim person whose main mission in life is to travel and strengthen spreading of Islam [ed.]

2 *Turkestan* – a big sacred site in Kazakhstan [ed.]

were only two of us left in the room, the girl asked me, "Who was your father-in-law? He has an unpleasant appearance." I told her, "He was a great horse rider, therefore, he has fallen off the horse many times, been hit by a whip. Therefore, his face is distorted." Based on her question, I made a conclusion that she had a very special gift of connecting the dead and the living ones.

I think that God gives power to every person, but the level of that power is different. I became assured that certain people, with the help of higher powers, can make a right diagnosis and identify right ways of treatment. In many cases, their treatment proves to be effective.

Marka uulu Niymatulla palvan, born in 1960,
Tangi-Shah village, Batken province

The genies became my grandfather's servants

I was born overdue when I was ten months old. My mother, Buuchach, gave birth to seven boys and one girl. Three of her sons have passed away. My father, Marka, would always sleep outside during winter and summer. He was a combine driver during World War II, and therefore he was not drafted. He never visited a doctor, never had an injection or taken a pill until he passed away at the age of 75. People would refer to my maternal grandfather, Kadyrbai, as a healer, and here is story behind it.

One day, my grandfather was passing by an old summer camp and saw a caramel-colored goatling. He took the goatling by tying it to his saddle. The goatling turned into a big goat, when he reached a flatland, and started talking with human voice. My grandfather did not become scared; on the contrary, he took the goat by its beard and started whipping it. There was a real fight, but grandfather was able to win over the goat. Then, the goat turned into a woman of light complexion and with tresses. My grandfather cut flock of her hair, but everything was in vain. Upon reaching a new camp, he put the lock of hair inside of the Qur'an book, and since that day, genies became enslaved by him. My grandfather made them do different house hold chores. They tended sheep since morning, while my grandfather would rest at home the whole day. The herd of sheep was tended without a shepherd, but in the evening would return back home safe and sound.

I remember a story told by my mother, Buuchach. One day my grandfather went to check on his harvest, just before the mowing. There, another village resident was also checking his harvest. So, they greeted each other and discussed some things. And that person told about his plans on hiring people for mowing. My grandfather took the responsibility for mowing his harvest. Then, that man asked about time period, and grandfather replied that he will complete the work by the will of God, so they agreed to meet the next day.

My grandfather made genies to mow the harvest, and they completed everything for one night. It would take an ordinary person about a week to do the job. The other man, with a lunch in his hand, came to the field as agreed, the next day.

Having seen his field mowed and harvest gathered, he did not believe his eyes and fell from his horse. This case became widespread in no time. People hurried to look at the miracle, and were amazed by what they saw. My grandfather became widely respected in the village after that case.

My uncle became childless having inherited the power. My grandfather had three children. People used to say that his son, Berdi, inherited the power of his father. One day, uncle Berdi was sitting at our house, when relatives of a woman having difficult childbirth, came running to our house. They asked my uncle, “Berdi, please help and save the woman. There is no time to waste, she is losing a lot of blood.” Everyone ran outside and I also went with them. My uncle went to his house, took his rifle and loaded it, then ran towards the mountains. Upon reaching the foothill, he shouted, “You, shameless, come back! Leave her spirit, leave it!” He shot for two-three times into the air. He shouted once again and made a shot. He did not want to use the last cartridge, he shouted loudly instead and ran downwards. Then he sat down and rested for a little while. Then, there came a thin whipping voice from the village, “Berdi, thanks God, she opened her eyes and remained consciousness.” This case is saved in my memory for good.

One day, when my uncle was little tipsy, I asked him about that case and he told, “You are still a kid, my nephew. You do not understand many things. It takes to experience many things in order to know as much as I know. These evil spirits take people’s lungs and take it to the river to throw it away. If I did not come on time, that woman would have died. They are afraid of only me and carry out my orders. You see, I drank a little today, because I do not have children. When I drink they stay away from me, because I am not at peace when I am sober. This is how things are.”

I do not know whether other such cases happened or not. Maternity clinic was opened in our village and women deliver their babies there. My uncle never had children, although people say that genies made an oath to my grandfather not to do any harm to his progeny up to the seventh generation.

I caught a spotted snake on its burrow. I did not differ from my age-mates at school. But I was well physically fit and massive. There is a belief that in order to become a strong man, one should catch a snake while it is creeping into its burrow. This is exactly what happened to me. I used to play on the hill with other children when I was a youngster. Suddenly, a spotted snake started crawling to its burrow with a hissing sound. I grabbed it by its tale. Then I asked other children to take my boots off, take my foot wrap and tightly wrap up my hand. They did everything I asked. The snake broke into two pieces. The tale was left in my hand, while the first part of its body went inside the burrow. Thus, I became the strongman and never lost a single competition. Perhaps, being a strongman is in our genes, because all the men in our family were strongmen and participated in wrestling competitions.

Let me tell you another interesting story. One of the years, my mom became very sick; she turned yellow and was down. She refused to see the doctors and told my father, “There is a spring with healing properties somewhere in Tajikistan. People

say that there are medicinal fish in that spring. Please go and find that spring and bring me seven fish. I will be staring at three of those fish, three I will cook and eat, while one of them I will give to a dog.” My father went and, indeed, brought seven big fish in a glass jar. Three of them were separated into another jar, and as soon as my mother stared at them, they turned yellow and rolled upside down. I still do not understand how that could have happened. I do not know whether it were fish that helped her or something else, but by mother got well in ten days.

Jumagulova Buuzainap, born in 1953,
Tangri-Shah village, Batken province

Eshen-Baba found cure to cancer

I was diagnosed with a cancer. However, I was cured thanks to a healer. I lived with a tube and a bag attached to my liver for a week after a liver surgery. Then, I approached a Tajik healer named, Eshen-Baba, who used to come to our region to collect herbs and heal people. So, he gave me medicinal herbs and explained how they should be taken. My condition deteriorated the first days of treatment, and I approached him again. He said, “This is a good sign. Do not stop the treatment, continue taking those herbs, and follow all the rules I told you.” After quite a while, an injury on my body healed without stitches. My health condition was getting better each day. Thanks God, today I have my own business. Back then, when I was at the edge of dying, many of my relatives were healthy as a horse, but now some of them have already died. That healer, Eshen-Baba, who cured me, is still alive and keeps healing other people.

First a man should be buried at a new graveyard. One of my father-in-law’s wives died when giving birth. Her name was Gulkhan. At that time, the old graveyard became full; therefore it was decided to bury her in a new graveyard, because she was considered *sheyit* – the one who died innocently. However, the consequences of this act were sorrowful. After her death, children in the village started dying one after another. The number of fresh graves at the new graveyard increased every day, and soon their number reached thirty. One man lost his whole family. He grieved desperately and wanted to burn Gulkhan’s grave. According to folk believe, a woman should not be buried first in a new graveyard. A body of a man should be buried first at a new graveyard. Then, the living ones would be at peace. People say that a woman is afraid of being alone; therefore, she wants to have other people lying beside her.

Young Alykul has resurrected. My father-in-law died one of the days, so we informed our relatives, tied his chin, straitened and tied his legs, dressed him up, covered his body and put him with this head to *kibla*¹. All the relatives, neighbors and fellow villagers gathered. We prepared everything that is needed for the funeral. Women started singing their moaning songs before the body was taken outside. At that exact moment, the deceased opened his eyes and regained his consciousness.

¹ *Kibla* [Arabic] – direction to Mecca that has to be followed during Muslim praying and other rituals [ed.]

People were perplexed and took him to the yard. Having seen all the preparations for his funeral, my father-in-law was neither surprised nor took an offence. Then he started telling what he has seen for the last days.

Group of people took him on wooden stretchers, indented for carrying the body of the dead, to an amazing place. The entrance of the place was very narrow, only a head of the person was able to fit it. But, those several men carrying him, ordered my father-in-law to enter that narrow hole. However, he was not able to enter. Then, those men put him back to the stretcher and took him to an abandoned place. After that he heard noise, cries and became frightened, and only then he remained consciousness. So, his funeral turned into a feast. Happy but amazed people returned to their homes. After that case he was coined a name, “Resurrected young Alykul.”

Gaparova Ziyada, born in 1953,
Tangri-Shah village, Batken province

Shamanistic ritual seemed like a performance

I know about traditional healers, shamans and mullahs because I was raised by my grandmother, Kuralai. I always accompanied my grandmother in her visits to mullahs and shamanistic rituals. I would sit and watch the rituals from the very beginning until the end. Especially, I liked to watch shamanistic rituals since it was like a theatre performance. Shamans usually were either Tadjiks or Uzbeks. They would come with their drums and whips and conducted their rituals. Participants of the ritual would sit in a circle leaving its center empty. The shaman would light a fire and warm his drum over its flames until it would get a high-pitch sound. Then, when everything was ready, the shaman would start a zikr. Then, at certain moment, the shaman would make everyone sitting at the circle stand up and walk bowing around the circle, while the shaman was rhythmically pronouncing “*olo-khiy*”. Periodically, the shaman would stop by a certain person and would also make him/her pronounce “*olo-khiy*”. At that time, some women, who also have the same power, would fall into a trance and express their sensibility. One would start laughing, the second one would start crying, the third one – dancing, while some others could bite each other. The shaman, by touching people with a whip, seemed to charge them with certain energy that made their body move. This ritual was conducted in order to heal one sick person. Time would pass quickly, although the ritual would last about three hours. The shaman would pause and stop the whole ritual himself/herself. After the ritual, women would say that they do not feel tired; on the contrary, they felt themselves much lighter.

My grandmother was a very religious woman and followed all the rules of the shariah. She used to first consult a mullah or a clairvoyant before venturing to start a new deed. Now, I often visit Agacha-Bulak sacred site. There, I pray to the Creator and ask his help and guidance in certain life situations.

Abdullaeva Nuskaïym, born in 1951,
Toguz-Bulak sacred site, Jalalabad province

To live near a sacred site means to live in heaven

I am a healer and a sorcerer. I was guided to this path by my mentor, whom I met while making pilgrimage to seven sacred sites. As a rule, I visit my sacred sites not less than once a year. I make the first pilgrimage for myself, and the second one for my patients. They ask me to accompany them and I agree with pleasure. I know these places quite well, because I have been there and stayed overnight a number of times. I teach how to conduct rituals, recite verses from the Qur'an and behave to all the pilgrims that I accompany and take to sacred sites.

People come to me with different requests. Those, who have not been able to recover with doctor's help, come with hope in their heart. There are also people, who cannot have children, severely ill and those suffering from mental illness. Parents bring their children, who have fallen ill, and I treat them by chanting certain prayers and, thus, break the curse or evil eye. I also treat chronic diseases and bone fractures. When a patient comes, I attentively look at his/her eyes, general state, measure the pulse and then make a diagnosis, and then prescribe a treatment. Many times my diagnoses were proven by hospital tests. There also were cases, when the person's tests did not show what was happening in the person's body. My tests, on the contrary, are always correct. I make a diagnosis quite fast. I never question patients and identify what hurts and where.

Gift inherited from the ancestors. My ancestors had the ability to diagnose and heal people. However, I did not know that I inherited that ability. I lived in a Karakol city among Russian speakers, therefore did not pay much attention to such things. Nobody in my family was a healer, clairvoyant or a shaman.

Once, I became very ill for a long time. I consulted many people, but my condition deteriorated day by day. As people say, one of my feet was in a grave, and I was labeled as a disabled person of a first group. At that time, someone suggested me, "If doctors were not able to help, then you should turn into traditional medicine." Thus, I turned to traditional medicine and underwent nine-month treatment. I conducted all the necessary rituals, recited the Qur'an verses and I was feeling better every day. Probably, I was not destined to die yet; there still was water for me to drink and days to be lived. Now, as other people, I live a full-fledged life, do good deeds and help other people. The days I live through, the water I drink, the road I travel – are all heaven for me. Thanks to God, I possess 21 features of a miraculous power. After I have accepted the burden of *kyrgyzchylık*, given me by God, I became a healer and have been healing people for the last 14-15 years.

My hopes are connected to *kyrgyzchylık*. I used to receive spirituals sign before, but did not take them close to my heart. I thought that everyone sees them. Let me tell you about one such sign.

Back then, I was not familiar with traditional practices. I was in the hospital all worn out, not even being able to walk and people were looking after me. My caretaker and, at the same time, ward-mate went somewhere. I was left alone and it was an afternoon. I was lying lost in deep thoughts when suddenly I heard a loud shouting, “Nuskaiym, you should accept *kyrgyzchylyk*.” I was surprised at where that came from. I could not see anyone and the door was closed. All the windows were tightly closed since it was winter. As it turned out, it was a certain sign. Then I thought, “How can I take such a burden? My health is getting worse, I cannot even get up.” If to tell the truth, I lost my hope to live, but another hope lighted my heart so I thought, “If doctors will not be able to help me, then I will try traditional healing.” Local doctors wanted to send me to the regional hospital in Jalalabad, because they could be diagnose me. My whole body was in pain, from head to toe. I could not even drink a spoonful of water. Doctors were cornered and did not know what to do with me. All my tests came clean and MRI scans showed that all my organs were fine. Then the doctors diagnosed me with – general disease – and labeled as a disabled person of the first group. I thought that doctors were hiding the real test and scan results and that, probably, I was dying. After a year, I found all those tests and scans inside my passport cover and, indeed, they all came out clean. In the regional hospital, doctors place me in neurology department. There I often started hearing voices that I should turn to traditional practice.

My sister-in-law lived in Kochkor-Ata town and was a healer, so I decided to consult with her. I asked my mom, “Could you please bring my sister-in-law, Jumagul. She heals people day and night. I want to ask her whether I will get well or not.” But, my mother did not like my idea, she thought that if doctors could not help, then how my sister-in-law can help. However, she did not want to make me upset and agreed. But she never brought her to me. Soon after, my brother-in-law came to visit me with his wife. I asked them to bring Jumagul to me and they brought her at 2 a.m.

My mentor communicates with spirits. The next was *Nooruz* holiday. Jumagul was a close relative and, as usual, I expected warm greetings, but she greeted me coldly and somehow was reserved. Her attitude towards me was not the same as before, so I thought that perhaps she became more reserved after becoming a healer. She measured my pulse and said, “This is the result of your relying on doctors.” Hearing her words I started crying, but she kept saying, “It is my duty to tell you this, the rest in your hands. If you keep staying at the hospital, your health will deteriorate further.” I said in desperation, “Further is only death” – and asked her to become my mentor. She agreed and I became her apprentice.

Back then my mentor was a single, 28-year old woman; now she is in her forties and has three children. It was in 1993, when she tirelessly looked after me day and night for nine months. Only God knows whether I would still be alive or not if I have not followed all her advices. I am very grateful to her. She would also help me to communicate with the spirits of the dead. Thus, nine months later when I started recovering, my mentor told me that I should undergo a *chilten*¹ ritual. Jumagul told

1 *Chilten* [Kyrgyz] – a dark place where one has to pray for forty days in order to purify his or her soul [ed.]

me that the spirits would purify my soul, but I did not know what is it and how it is done. I was placed in a dark room alone. Before that, 6-7 people were massing my body non-stop. If the message would stop for five minutes my body would become stiff. It was time for me to be placed in a dark room and I thought to myself, "What will happen to me? I will not be able to move on my own. I will be all alone in total darkness without seeing anyone. I will not be able to ask for help." But, I soothed myself thinking that everything is in God's hands, and perhaps I would get healed with his help. I had one wish before entering the dark room. I asked them to make my bed wide, so I could roll around if I had pains. The first time, I spent six days in that dark room. My daughter, who graduated high school, was bringing me some food into the room.

My patron is Aksakal-Ata. I was placed in the dark room in order to undergo a surgery performed by the spirits. So, let me tell about that. I was lying in the dark. I was weak and wanted only to lie down with my legs spread out, but I was sleepless. Suddenly, I heard some noise and saw that people in white gowns entered the room. They gathered around me and stood so close to each other that nothing would pass between them. They did not pronounce a word or single sound. I could only hear sound of cutting scissors. Then, I also heard sounds of instruments that were passed from one hand to another. I do not remember what was next, since I fell asleep. When I woke up I remained some of my consciousness. Thus, I underwent surgery by spirits for several days. There was Aksakal-Ata in one of the surgeries and he was instructing others to keep what is needed and remove what is needless. Then, someone asked about my lungs. He told them to keep the lungs intact as there was a birth mark on them from my birth. Aksakal-Ata was my guardian. I heard about such surgeries before, but did not believe it. But i had to believe after what I experienced myself. I already knew about the birth mark, because doctors told me about it when I had an X-ray in the hospital.

I came out of that dark room after a week, my mother told me, "My dear daughter, your body resembles a body of a new born baby. There is no single wrinkle left on your face." All these happened thanks to the surgeries that I underwent during those six days. Whereas previously I could not drink even a sip of water, not mentioning about eating food. I started recovering and my parents did not believe their eyes when I started eating again. They would keep asking whether I am eating for real. From that moment, I started believing in *kyrgyzchyllyk*. Thus, my mentor brought me to this path. However, I do not foresee or fortunetell, I just heal people.

Karimov Zhoosbay, born in 1959,
Leilek village, Batken province

Traditional healers

There are always people who we call fortune-tellers, clairvoyants, shamans, bonesetters and others. They were best in what they did and helped those in need; therefore, people knew them, respected and consulted when necessary.

Kenjebai from Margul village was one such traditional healer. He could make a diagnosis based on a person's pulse, therefore he was called, *tamyrchy*¹. He also was a healer. One day he was tending goats on the southern slope of a mountain, and reached a place called Koikap. There, some force affected him and he lost his consciousness. After that case, Kenjebai developed severe neurological disorder. But, when he recovered, he felt that something has changed in him. He started healing people with illnesses. We made correct diagnoses, could foresee the illness and its reasons, and also could tell whether a person recover or die. He prescribed medicine that would sooth person's sufferings. Kenjebai also had a gift of a fortuneteller and could foresee future. He was knowledgeable, not only about the disease, but knew everything about the person, who came to see him. Who the person is, what he/she does and whether he/she has sins or not. Kenjebai was a very strong *tamyrchy*. He would heal people by making them fast for 40 days of not eating salty and heavy food, drink and smoke. Thus, he was cleansing people's organism. During that time, he would treat his patients with special Kyrgyz drink, *atala*, and only after that patients were allowed to return to hot meals. Goat milk, goat and sheep meat, animal skin, medicinal herbs and roots were his main remedies.

Sometimes, doctors of the Khodjent regional hospital invited Kenjebai help them to diagnose and help to cure some of their hospital patients.

Shamanistic rituals. Kenjebai was known as a shaman as well, because he performed *korum-dhikr* – shamanic healing with dances and signing songs in honor of the Creator. In other words, Kenjebai was making people fall into trance by his rituals. He used to perform ritual in order to heal those patients, who have been severely sick for a while. For that, he would gather a lot of people and lock them up in one house. Before the ritual, an animal would be sacrificed and while the meat was boiling in a big cauldron, Kenjebai would put scrapers and other instruments under the cauldron on fire. At the height of the ritual dance, Kenjebai would take out the scorching hot skimmer and drawknife from the fire and press it against his tongue. At that moment, there was a hissing sound resembling a sound of meat dropped into hot oil. Kenjebai would keep pressing the skimmer and drawknife against his tongue again and again by saying, “sugar, sweets.” Then, he would start speaking a foreign language and lift up and spin people around in his ritual dance. Those patients, who were not able to move for many years, would also start moving. They would not only move, but also to run and jump on chairs nearby. I participated in such rituals twice, in 1965 and 1967. Sometimes, Kenjebai would say, “I am inviting from Koikap.”

Kenjebai returned from the World War II alive. People used to say that he stayed alive due to his miraculous abilities given by God.

Importance of tamyrchylyk is great. I think that the role of tamyrchy is still quite significant. There is a man named, Kalyk-usta, who lives in Katyran village. He sets dislocated joints and casts a plaster. He could “dismantle” bones and put them back

1 *Tamyrchy* [Kyrgyz] – a healer, who identifies diseases based on one's pulse [ed.]

together if a bone dislocation was set incorrectly or it became crooked. He used to gather and put together splintered bone, straighten it and cast in a plaster. If a bone starts jamming blood vessels, then he would dislocate everything and put it back again. Today, in order to get such results, doctors use radiography, ultrasound, tomography and electrocardiogram.

One of the mind-blowing features of traditional medicine is – through incantations and breathing techniques, healers are able to exterminate steppe spider's poison from person's body. Modern medicine might also be able to exterminate the poison from human body, but it might be quite difficult and take several days. Residents of Margun village, Karabai-hadji, Turkbai-*demchi*¹, and Mullah-hadji were able to exterminate poison of the most dangerous spiders. The poison extermination process was the following. If the poison is exterminated immediately after the bite, then a person might be handicapped because of sudden body emptiness. That is why one has to destroy the poison in heart area and empty the body till one's knees, and after a little while one reads prayers further and poison moved to one's feet. One feels it when poison moves in the body. The certain body part hurts severally, but since the heart is poison-free, the person does not die.

Healing with prayers. There is a legend circulating in our region. A Russian veterinary came to our village. One of the summer days, he got bitten by a steppe spider and lost his consciousness, his breathing was not stable. Local people called Turkbai-*demchi*, who was working in the field. Turkbai-*demchi* breathed in and, without taking another breath, he chanted seven prayers at once. Then, he breathed in for a second time and chanted 20 prayers periodically pronouncing the word “suff”. Soon, he was able to free the heart from poison and the vet opened his eyes. The poison came down to his knees and Turkbai started massaging the doctor's legs. After the second procedure, the poison came down to the doctor's feet. Probably, the doctor's feet hurt badly, as he shouted, “Hey, mullah, chant your “suff” staff faster.” But, the healer turned around and returned to his work. When the time came, he came back and healed Sergei (the doctor's name). Not every person, who knows prayers, can use them for healing purposes. This is a gift given only to the chosen ones.

Karabekova Maniya, born in 1929,
Ak-Bulak village, Batken province

Knowledge that I received from my father

I received this knowledge from my father and expanded it by going on pilgrimages to such sacred sites as Doot-Baba, Eshen-Baba and Akhun-Baba. I learned to heal children with traditional medicine. For instance, if a child has diarrhea and vomiting then one should take ash from a hearth of a woman, who has been married twice, and say “Bismillahir-rahmaaniir-rahiim I retreated, you retreat too”. After put the child's hand into the ash and then press it against the child's belly three times.

¹ *Demchi* [Kyrgyz] – a healer, who treats people with the help of incantations and prayers [ed.]

Then, the healer should open the child's mouth and press his/ her index finger against the child's palate for three times.

If a child is under a light spell or evil eye, he/she starts having diarrhea and vomiting. In this case, a piece of brick should be powdered and mixed with water add soot. Then, this mixture should be rubbed on the child's cheeks, forehead, belly, palms, soles and buttocks, while rubbing one should chant, "I retreated, you retreat too." After such ritual, the child should not be kissed for the next three days.

If a person suffers from diarrhea and vomits, then people usually say, *suu kvidu boluptur*, which means "became full with water". Thus, the following rituals are performed to help the person. One gets a bowl full of water and pour forty spoons of water over the person's head, then another forty spoons are poured on the belly part.

Kirene – is a light spell or curse. If a person keeps yawning and suffers from headache, this is a sign that the person is under a spell or curse. Healing from curse can be done in the following way. One should pick three stones on the crossroad of three roads, one stone from each road. Then, the body of the sick person should be rubbed with these stones from head to toe, first from the right side, then from the left side. After, one should take a juniper branch and besmoke the body of the person, also from head to toe. Then, one should slide a knife over the person's body and stick it at the entrance to the house. One should end the ritual by filling a bowl with water and circling it over the person's body, and then the sick person should spit into the bowl three times. This water is poured out at the sidewalk and the empty bowl is left upside down at the threshold. If a child has *kirene*, then one can make a cleansing ritual with paper and burn it afterwards. One should not conduct cleansing ritual with stones and a knife to children.

Uchun or *Uchundu* – is when a person's certain body part starts to swell. It is very often, that person's eyeball becomes red when he/she has *uchun*. If women have red eyes it is a sign that their breasts are in pain and swollen, which can be cured in the following way. The person is placed facing the Mecca and the healer sprinkles the person's face with cold water while chanting, "Come out, come out, come out."

Ustaeva Markhamat, born in 1938,
and *Kasimova Khurshada*, born in 1935,
Andarak village, Batken province

Healing practices used by the Tadjik and Kyrgyz people from ancient times

If a child cannot suckle, has a stuffy nose and has difficulty breathing, then a halter should be put on the baby. The ritual is performed by women healers. They take a halter and put it on the baby by chanting, "Bismillahi rahmonir rahiim. Akhun-Bova, Dauta-Bova, our ancestor spirits please heal the child with my hands." The halter should be kept for three days in a row or with intermissions. The healing will be successful if the ritual is done on a right day, on Wednesday before noon and Saturday.

There is another ritual to be performed when a child has a stuffy nose. If it is a boy, then his face is covered with a piece of white cloth and passed under a sheep from both sides. If it is a girl, then her face is also covered with a white cloth and passed under a ram from both sides. While doing this ritual, one should make this wish, "Bismillahir rahmonir rahiim, may this ritual heal to heal the baby."

If a child is underweight, then one should put the baby facing Mecca and walk or take the baby through some hole, e.g. through a tire. Then, a small cut on the child's ear should be made and the blood should be wiped over the child's face and fair. One may also put some of the sick baby's clothing on a doll and bury that doll in a place with no people. This ritual can be performed only by healers on Wednesday's before noon.

If a child has seborrhea, then one should prepare thin bread, cover the child's head with a white fabric or headscarf, and then put the bread on top of it. After, the bread should be cut, so that it would make a ring, of the size of the seborrhea, around the child's head. Among Tadjik people, this ritual is performed by a woman who has twins and has been on a boat. Among Kyrgyz people, the ritual is performed by a woman with many children. Another ritual to be performed when a child has seborrhea is the following. The child is put on a white cloth at the intersection of four roads, and as if rolling in a roller, the baby is rolled in all four directions. This ritual is performed only by healers.

If a child vomits and has diarrhea, then a child's palate should be pressed hard with an index finger. The palate gets swollen and the child suffers and cannot eat.

A child with abdominal distention is healed in the following way. One brings ash from a hearth of a woman, who has been married twice. The ash is put in rows at the edge of a dough kneading board. Then, flour brought from three different houses is put on the opposite edge of the board. Then, a healer put the sick child beside the board and, first, takes some ash and applies it to the child's belly. Then, the healer takes flour and does the same thing.

If a person has a sore on their face that resembles a human eye, then the following ritual should be performed. One takes flour from three households, ash from a hearth of a woman, who has been married twice, and flour leftovers from a mill. Then, the flour and the ash are mixed, and rubbed to the person's body. Then, the flour leftover from a mill is mixed to the first mixture and dough is made. Then, one should prepare small pieces of fried bread, called boorsok, from the dough. Then, one makes beads out of fried pieces of bread and red pepper, which is hanged at the outer side of a door. The person with a sore rubs the infected area with leftover of the oil that was used to fry the bread. This ritual is also performed during the loss of livestock, which is believed to be the result of evil eye.

A ritual of healing a frightened child or "lifting a child's heart". If a child becomes very frightened, then his/her heart sinks. In that case, flour should be brought from three households and ash from a hearth of a woman, who has been married twice, make dough out of them. Then, the person should be rubbed with the dough and

afterwards bake a bread on ember from the dough. Once, roundshaped bread is baked, it is hanged on the child's neck. If the child was, indeed, frightened then the bread will split in two parts. The bread should be kept hanging on the child's neck until it gets cold. Once it is cold, the bread should be given to a dog.

If a child or a person is having difficulty urinating, then small stones are collected on the intersection of seven roads; one stone from each road. The bladder of the person/child is rubbed with the stones. Then, a healer heats the stones and sprinkles water over the heated stones. The produced steam is directed at the person's bladder, and the steam heals it.

The ritual known as, "to pour water" is performed when somebody suffers from diarrhea and vomiting. The healing ritual is quite simple. One needs to pour 40 spoons of water on the person.

If a person hurt his/her spine, then *bertik* is applied to the spine. One should take some flour from seven households, and without saying a word should make dough, then bake bread out of it. The hot bread is applied to the spine of the person.

If a child has asthmatic fit, then he/she should be laid at the entrance of a room facing Mecca, and a woman, who has twins, should be invited. She should pronounce the following words, "May you be healed" and touched the child's throat with her tiptoes.

If a person or a child was frightened, then a healer holds the person upside by the legs. The person's legs should touch the door that faces Mecca. Then, the healer hits the person's leg with an axe by saying, "Drop down, drop down, drop down."

A person with pain in their limbs is healed by rubbing the limbs with pieces of cotton. Then, one splits that piece into four parts, and then, from these four parts – two pieces are made. Then, the two pieces are wrapped in wormwood, soaked in ash and oil, thus preparing *sham* – ritual candles. After, these candles are lit.

If a new moon is yellow and upright, then it means that people will be at peace. People usually say, "The moon itself is not calm – then people will be calm". If it is tilted, then people will be unsafe, because people say that the moon is calm and well, so people will not be at peace. There will be mud flows and other natural disasters.

After nine days of a child's birth, neighbors and relatives are invited to take part in a ritual of putting the baby in *beshik* – traditional cradle. First, a comb, mirror and wormwood are put into the cradle, and then the child is put. Bread and onion is put at the bed-head. People say that these things will safeguard the baby until it turns 6 month-old. The newborn is bathed in water with some salt and clay taken from a wall. The child is bathed in this water until he/she is forty days old.

If a child's ear hurts, then one takes three coins and stokes the sick ear. Afterwards, one should throw the coins into a spring and walk away without glancing back.

A child who has an inflamed tongue, then one should ask the child to spit on a cotton-piece soaked in oil or animal fat. Then, the cotton-piece is tied to a door facing Mecca. The tongue will get better when the cotton-piece dries up.

When a new daughter-in-law is brought to the house, well-respected elderly women are invited. They cover the hearth with a white fabric and lower the daughter-in-law's head over the hearth. Then, she takes some butter from a cauldron and smears the corners of the hearth with it. Afterwards, the daughter-in-law makes dough and other women prepare bread out of it.

Kadyrov Jorobai, born in 1926,
Kara-Suu village, Batken province

The wish of komuz¹

In 1972 I started making *komuz*. My first instruments did not turn out to be good. But, everything takes its time, and my skill developed gradually by time. I was making *komuz* from an apricot tree. The older the tree, the better the instrument. But, other trees may also be used to make *komuz*; however, these instruments do not have desired purity and power of the sound. The instrument made from an apricot tree has a great sound. Wood, which is used to make the carcass of the instrument, should be soft and light, thus, the instrument will be light. The thinner the carcass of the instrument, the louder the sound of it. If the carcass is thick, then the sound of the instrument will be low. My eyes hurt now; therefore, I do not make *komuz* any longer.

Today, fishing line is used to make *komuz* strings. In the past, we used to make them from animal's small intestine. We used to clean and scrape of the intestines inside out, and they would split in two parts: inner and outer sides. Only the outer side is used to make springs. After cleaning, one should hang them and tie to something heavy at the bottom, so they could stretch. These stretched intestines should dry well. Dried and prepared intestines are drawn to the instrument.

I heard that this string making technique comes from China. There is a belief that, in ancient China, people made strings from small intestines of dead children. But, we used to make the strings from intestines of a neutered goat.

Komuz has its cherished dream, "I wish that my carcass was made of an apricot tree, my top – from a spruce, strings – from small intestines of a neutered goat, my tuning pegs – from dry sticks, while my bridge – from a poplar. Then, if I do not sound as I should, I would not regret being shattered by hitting a rock." *Komuz* has healing properties as well; the sound of *komuz* has calming and inspiring effect.

1 *Komuz* [Kyrgyz] – three-stringed traditional music instrument [ed.]

Chapter 5 People, Stars and the Cycle of Time

Joroev Majit, born in 1947,
Kara-Bulak village, Batken province

Whenever I remember hundred warriors, feeling of patriotism arises in me

A long time ago, when the Kyrgyz were divided into tribes and lived separately in scattered settlements, enemies invaded and defeated them. Those, who became prisoners, were enslaved. One day, the king of the enemies thought, "I have defeated Kyrgyz people, but I could not exterminate all of them. One day, those who escaped to the mountains, could unite into a strong state and take revenge. Therefore, I should get prepared now." He selected hundred captive Kyrgyz boys, separated them from the rest of the prisoners and started bringing them up in a special way. The children were not told where they came from and what tribe they belonged to. Every day, they were trained to fight.

With time, those boys became strong and well trained warriors. Not knowing their ancestors or motherland, they were able to kill anyone. They knew no mercy or compassion. They became cruel warriors, who executed only the orders of the king. They trusted only in what their king would say. Wherever they went, they would exterminate the people they fought.

One day, the king learned from his scouts, who lived among Kyrgyz people, that they were getting united and building their own state again. As soon as he learned that, the king decided to attack Kyrgyz people. He put those hundred warriors ahead of his troops. No matter whom they attacked and fought, these warriors would kill everyone on their way.

Upon hearing about the attack, the Kyrgyz king thought, "How to stop the enemies? Which warriors will stand against them?" He gathered a council of elders and asked these questions. Then, one wise elder said, "If those hundred warriors are leading the enemy troops and of they are truly belong to Kyrgyz people, then Kyrgyz spirit did not die in their hearts and still remains in their blood. Notwithstanding their upbringing, as soon as they learn that they are Kyrgyz, they will refuse to attack us. Therefore it is necessary to awaken the feeling of being Kyrgyz in their souls, hearts and blood. Only the tender sound of traditional music can awaken their souls and hearts. Thus, it is necessary that our *komuz* masters performed *komuz* melody – a melody for them."

The other elders agreed with the wise old man's advice and they sent a *komuz* player to meet the enemy. The musicians chose a ravine, where the hundred warriors were supposed to pass through, and then he sat on a high rock and started playing *komuz* melodies. The hundred warriors listened carefully to the melodies. The *komuz* player kept playing mournful melodies one after another. Enigmatic mournful melodies

started taking over the warriors' hearts and deeply moved them. Mysterious melodies touched their hearts and awakened their memories. They remembered that, in their childhood, they used to hear these melodies. They also remembered the beautiful nature of their motherland Ala-Too, as well as, the images of their parents and family members. Not only the people, but also the nature seemed to freeze and listen to the melodies. Singing birds and other animals seemed to stop and listen to the music. The surroundings were very silent. Only the hands of the *komuz* player were moving lively. It seemed that *komuz* was trying to communicate its sorrows and cherished dream to the hundred warriors through its melodies. And listening to the melodies, the warriors seemed to have been carried away into their childhood. They were sitting still on the ground, as if hundred stone monuments.

For a while the *komuz* would produce mournful or joyful, lamenting or passionate melodies. The melodies would either run high as the waves, murmur as spring water, rush as a storm or shine like a sun caressing the warriors' faces. The hundred warriors became sad and lamented as they were reminiscent of being separated from their mothers, of missing the scent of mother's milk and of being orphaned so early. They were hearing the *komuz* melodies for the first time, but they seemed to be dear to their hearts. Thus, they asked the *komuz* player, "What is this wonderful musical instrument and who it belonged to?" The *komuz* player answered, "This is a three-stringed musical instrument of Kyrgyz people. You belong to these people; you are the Kyrgyz sons and belong to Kyrgyz tribes, my dear ones. Enemies attached your people, you were taken as captives and raised against your own people, my dear ones." Upon hearing this story, the warriors asked them to be introduced to Kyrgyz people. Thus, the hundred warriors learned their people and land through the melodies of *komuz*, joined their people and defeated the enemy, and remained to protect their people and land from invaders.

Karimov Jooshbai, born in 1959,
Leilek region, Batken province

Signs of weather

The basis of traditional weather forecast developed, first in the lives of nomadic people and, later in farmers' lives, when they became sedentary. People had to calculate the intervals between the seasons and predict the coming winter and the year ahead for increasing the number of livestock and do farming. Long observations formed into the following traditional omens, "If the moon is covered with hoarfrost, or if it gets chilly at night, then one may get on a horse and go for a feast, if the sun is covered with hoarfrost, or if it gets chilly during the day, then one should grab a spade and go to the corral"; "If the moon is yellow then the month will be rainy, if it is white then the month will be dry"; "If the moon is tilted then the month will be troublesome"; "If the sunset is red then the day will be hot, if the sunrise is red then the day will be humid"; "If cranes fly high then the winter will be cold, if they fly low then it will be warm."

Kyrgyz people would know about the forthcoming month and the year from the color of the new moon, the appearance of the morning star and the location of the

Pleiades and the Milky Way. By observing the behavior of ants and the way sheep stands and lies, how they change color of their fur, and how livestock gives birth – people would make predictions about the coming winter. Experts made weather forecast for 180 days by remembering the advent of fog and peculiarities of the weather on certain days. Thus, they knew the repetition of cycles could forecast the weather for year ahead. They correctly identified the shortest and the longest days of the year, the equinox, and the middle of the winter. The middle of the winter, or the exact half of 90 days, were called kangtar oodu – transition, or the turn of time, after this time it starts warming and snow melts. People say, “The time of transition came, snow is melted and the eyes of the rich man start glittering.” This means, that the winter is no longer scary, the sun keeps the sheep warm, the day grows longer and a rich farmer will not have any livestock loss. The transition day falls on the night of 12th to 13th January. In the past, January 13 was celebrated as the New Year in Tsarist Russia.

A person by the name of Murza uulu Ibraim, from Margun village, who knew the weather signs very well, used to say, “When the old year leaves and the new year arrives, the entire Universe and everything on the Earth softens and melts for a second. And if at that moment I stick my knife into a stone it goes through and gets stuck there. And I can get the knife out only the next year, at the same moment.” Traditional forecast is a fact proven by the science. And if the science does not prove, then the observation experience is used in other spheres of the household.

Chroniclers write the names of the months in Arabic language. In the south, the first month is called *amal*, and the 21 March is considered as the last day of *amal*. Everything in the surrounding awakens in this month, the earth, animals and plants. The awakening depends on the early or late arrival of the *amal*. Each day of the month has its own peculiarities, and there is a complex of days each with its name. For instance, *Suksur-shubat* – beauty, *Aburakhat* – warmth, *Nooruzkarakchy* – the winged one. Each of them consists of three days and constitute nine days in total. *Nooruz karakchy* is the messenger of the New Year. Migratory birds come back on this month, and arrival of each bird symbolizes a particular thing. For instance, arrival of a bird called *kaljurtchu* symbolizes coming of the spring for real, and this happens around March 18. Having seen the arrival of this bird, shepherd move from their winter pastures into the spring pasture.

In the past, a wealthy person instructed his children to go to the mountains and to see whether *kaljurtchu* bird has arrived. His children closely watched hilltops for the bird, but the bird could not be seen. Having lost patience, his children decided to lie to their father. They put a skull on the opposite hilltop. And then happily told the news to their father, “Father, father, please look at their, the bird has arrived.” The rejoiced father gave his permission to move to a spring pasture. However, several days later it became severely cold and those animals who survived the long winter all died. This story is told as a legend among people.

Finally, the arrival of a bird called *achakuiruk*, indicates the end of the month of *amal*, and it falls on March 21. *Nooruz* – first day of the year. At this day, there is a clean-up of nearby areas, old and unkempt grass is gathered, a bonfire is made

with a smudging ceremony and people jump over the bonfire. Departure of the old year and arrival of the New Year, people fast and wear new and clean clothes. This day is considered to be holy. It was just recently when *Nooruz* became a holiday, so drinking alcohol in this day is alien to our nation. In the past, residents of the villages of Arka, Kulundu, Aksuu, Margun and Beshkent celebrated New Year on March 7, and commemorated those who passed away by praying. It was explained by the commencement of the farming season in valleys, because these villages were located in the valley. Here, spring field works start from the second half of February.

The second month is *soor*. Everything refreshes and nature awakens. All creatures, living and non-living, need warmth of the sun and rain, and thus the fields are replenished. People say, “The *soor* came and brought us welfare.” Storms and thunder start in this month. Upon hearing the first thunder, women go outside and spray the land with some milk or yogurt, and pray for the year to be rainy and rich in harvest. If it first thunders in the mountains – it is considered to the year of mountains, thus livestock will breed and multiply. If it first thunders in the valley, then it will be year rich in harvest in the valley. In fact, all these omens are real-life-tested

The third month is *jooda*. From Arabic it means – the time when barley is ripe. As Kyrgyz people say, the spring came for those, who survived. Abundance comes with the arrival of spring.

The fourth month is *saratan*, it falls on June, and means the start of the summer heat. People say, “*Saratan* sings and the sun is scorching hot.”

The fifth month is *asat*. *Asat* means tiger, and in this context it means, “tiger of the heat”. The month is filled with the power of the heat and everything around ripens.

The sixth month is *sumbula*. During this month, the nights become chilly and water cools down. People associate this month with the arrival of partridges, because it becomes cool with their arrival.

The seventh is the month of *myizam*. We call this month *kyrgyi*, or “sparrowhawk”. In this month, according to observations of my fellow villagers, sparrowhawks arrive between August 21 and September 1. During that time, small birds like sparrows start flying in flocks as they are afraid of sparrowhawks. During these days, especially seven days from August 25 to September 1, people look at the sky and wait for rains. Even if there is a drop of rain during these days, then it is a big joy for people, because the next year will be rainy and therefore rich in harvest. I wrote this down from the words of my geography teacher, Turukbaev Abdil born in 1928, and my mother, Talieva Tadjji born in 1926. I have been making observations in order to prove these forecasts. Fall and spring wheat seeding depends on how the *kyrgyi* month goes by. People say, “The sparrowhawk is the messenger of winter.” The air already smells with winter in this month.

PART 2 CONTEMPORARY DIMENSIONS OF ANCIENT KYRGYZCHYLYK

The eighth month is *akyrap*, and it is followed by *kabys*. *Kabys* means “suitable for everyone”. This month may be both, cold and warm; it is the month between two seasons of the year. It can be as fall, spring or winter.

The tenth month is *tokson*, or “ninety” – ninety winter days of the year. *Childe* – is the coldest days from these ninety days of the winter. The word, *chil*, from Arabic means, “forty”, thus, *childe*’s duration is 40 days. This period has five days of the preceding and five days of the following months, i.e. from December 17 to February 1, or according to the Gregorian calendar, from December 25 to February 5.

The last month is *ut*, which means “the narrow light of the sun ray”. People say, “If the month will be prosperous, then the cauldron will be full of meat. If the month will be not prosperous – it will lead to the death of livestock.” Our forefathers used to say that, because if this month was warm and the spring would come, then livestock was gaining weight, giving milk and progeny and the pastures were full of lambs and goatlings. On the contrary, if the month was cold, frosty and winter lasted longer, then the livestock, weakened by the harsh winter, could die out. The month of *ut* lasted for 17 days. The following seven to nine days are called *aziz*. It comes from the Farsi word, *ajiza*, and means “powerlessness of the winter”, that the winter no longer poses any threat. However, there was severe frosting during these days sometimes. During these cold days a bird called *chandelech* arrives. Kyrgyz people call this bird as “blind old lady”, and people consider the cold days as a sign of this bird’s arrival. Severe cold weather is associated with the arrival of this bird, and therefore, people say, “One day is worth all the ninety days.” Even though these days get very cold they pass quickly, the spring orderly replaces the winter, and migrant birds arrive. The passion for life awakens with the spring. Another year comes and people continue with their lives.

Jumaev Toron, born in 1938,
Kara-Kol town, Jalalabad province

For centuries the Kyrgyz have lived according to the stars

My grandfather gave me the name of Toron. In 1937 kolkhozes were already established. My mother worked in kolkhoz and the whole days was digging an irrigation ditch, carrying a hoe; then after coming back home in the evening gave birth to me without any difficulties. My grandfather reasoned that since my mother worked bending all day long he decided to name me Torong, but later my name became Toron. Even though there are no names like Toron I have not changed my name as I respect my grandfather’s spirit. If my grandfather named me as such, then I do not need any other name.

Kyrgyz calendar. The peculiarity of the Kyrgyz calendar is that it was passed orally from father to the son, from one generation to another. My grandmother knew the Kyrgyz calendar very well. She could not pronounce these months, November, December, and January in Russian. She identified each months according to the new moon. As soon as she would see a new moon, she would say, “This is the month of *jalgan kuran*, and this is *teke*, now is *chyn kuran* or *besb sobol*.” I memorized

all her words and later compared with astronomical data. As I have verified, her observations turned out to be accurate, and her calendar was time-tested and proven.

I have learned by heart what my grandmother used to say as I had an ability to memorize everything I heard. When I turned 12, she said that it is my *bir muchol* – one life cycle of twelve years, whereas at 24 I would have *eki muchol*. She celebrated my 12th year in her own way. She gave me her blessing by saying, “Now you turned 12, by God’s will you grew up, and became a person.” Then, she made a fire in our yard and chanting, “*alas, alas*” helped me to jump over the fire. Then other children started jumping over the fire, but it turned out that only the person who reached a certain life cycle could do that. Jumping over the fire was a ritual. She took my old clothes and dressed me up in ones. Then she blessed me by saying, “Let the old things go away with the old clothes. You have reached your first life cycle and you are no longer a child. God willing, you will become a famous person among the Kyrgyz!” My grandmother’s spirit always safeguards me. I see her in my dreams very often. I saw her in my dreams just recently. That is because I am promoting my grandmother’s fame, her reputation. It is true that spirits are alive. I am being supported by the spirit of my grandmother. I feel her support, it lifts up my mood and I develop interest for my work. If the ancestor’s spirits are not pleased, then things will not get better in one’s life. We, the living ones, should respect them. I always perform the morning namaz and recite the Qur’an verses on her honor.

My grandmother’s rituals had much power. If we had a sore throat she would heal us by rubbing our throats with her hands and lifting them with her headscarf by chanting. The sore throat would go away immediately. This is just one example. A person with eye disease is called horn-eyed. One child’s eyes became inflamed; they got swollen and sunk, so he was brought to my grandmother to be healed. She used a method called *uilotuu* – a blowing method. She wide opened the child’s eyes and chanted “*tuf*” by blowing and little of spitting at each eye. This method breaks through the inflammation of the lens and the next morning the eye opens up and gets healed.

Doctors, during a medical check-up identify whether the fetus of the pregnant woman has “right position” or “wrong position”. My grandmother would easily identify the position of the fetus, and if it was positioned in a wrong way, then she would correct easily. She used to put the woman on a blanket and rolled her, and then she would fix the fetus with her hands and again rolled the woman. Thus, the fetus would get the right position. When my grandmother passed away those women cried, wondering how they would give birth without her. Pregnant women would rather see my grandmother than an obstetrician. That was one of her multiple abilities. She also was a very strong healer. It turns out that I did not really appreciate my grandmother’s abilities, when she was alive. Only when other women started weeping and lamenting her loss, I started appreciating my grandmother.

Muchol or the “12-year life cycle” is celebrated in February. One needs to burn old clothes and make a ritual called, *alas-alas* – make a fire and step over it. That

is it, nothing else should be done. It is wrong to think that *muchol* comes with one's birthday. Every person, who has *muchol*, has two important duties. First, one must mark their life cycle anniversary in February. Secondly, one should separately celebrate it on their birthday whether it is in December or in September. We start counting a person's age from his or her birth. However, religious books the year inside the womb is also added to general age calculation. For them, one cycle is 13 years, then 25 years etc. But, it is not correct. The age calculation should start from the day the baby comes to this life, then nobody will be confused or mistaken. Everything will take its rightful place.

I grew up among great individuals. From a young age I was involved in agricultural activities of the collective farm. One year, Builashev Orozbek, director of our collective farm, sow millet in the Chorocho valley. The next year, he ploughed the millet fields and sow corn, because he knew the importance of crop rotation in getting rid of weeds. You see, the old generation knew that. They would say that soil would not get rich without crop rotation. Now, millet is disappearing among the Kyrgyz. But, millet has effective healing properties and is rich in vitamins. A national drink called *bozo* is made of millet, and if one regularly drinks it – strong health is guaranteed. Village residents of our Telman village, Mamarasul, who died at the age of 92, Kochkor-Ata – died at the age of 86, Shabdan-Ata – died at the age of 87. They lived a long life, because they regularly drank *bozo*. They never went to someone's house asking for *bozo*, they would always drink it at home, made by their wives. That is the reason of their long lives. There is no *bozo* without malt. *Bozo* is one of the best medicines. It is not recommended to drink vodka with it; if these two are mixed – it is dangerous. *Bozo* is good for health when it is drunk without mixing it with other beverages.

One should know when the Pleiades fade every year. I have a garden in a place called Chong-Tash. I grow only potatoes there. The residents of Chong-Tash start planting potatoes when I start. They water it when I water, and they harvest when I start harvesting. One should not water potatoes unless the Pleiades could be seen in the sky. In the past, the Kyrgyz have carried out their activities in accordance with the Pleiades. There is a saying "Pleiades fading takes away everything." It means that one should start seeding grain crops before the Pleiades fade.

In Issyk-Kul region and other mountainous regions, people used to plant grain crops after Pleiades already faded. This determined the future yields of crops. The Pleiades fade when a month called *kulja* comes. Wheat should be seeded during this new moon. I wondered what would happen if one does not seed after the Pleiades faded. As it turned out, wheat seeded after the Pleiades fade will not ripen. Therefore wheat should be seeded before the Pleiades fade. That is the meaning of the saying, "Pleiades fading takes away everything."

One should always ask when the Pleiades fade every year. Those crops that should be planted before the Pleiades fade are called as "white", while the crops that should be seeded after the Pleiades fade are called as "black". "Black" crops are – millet, corn and rice. Human being should follow the Nature's laws. I will tell a story. In 1999, what, which was not seeded on time, did not ripen and was buried

in knee-deep snow in At-Bashy region of Naryn province. Laws of nature should not be ignored; on the contrary, one should always consult with nature. Only then nature will help. The Pleiades fade and reemerge after forty days. They always emerge in the east. The *kymyz*, fermented mare's milk, made during the forty days after the Pleiades faded is called *uuz kymyz*. *Uuz* – is a type of whey. If one drinks *uuz kymyz*, then one can improve his/her health for the entire year. The Kyrgyz even prepared their food in accordance with the Pleiades.

Kyrgyz people called March as *chyn kuran besh togool*. *Chyn kuran* means “goitered gazelle”, while *togool* means “convergence”. After five days, when the month of *chyn kuran* comes, the moon converges with the Pleiades, that is why it is called *chyn kuran besh togool*. June is called *teke 23 togool* – this month comes in 23 days after the new moon, when the constellation of Capricorn converges with the Pleiades in the morning sky. People have counted all of this. Nomads constantly were on the move, so they had strong ties nature. They named the stars, and also they named the months. Our forefathers passed that knowledge onto us.

There is a reason why Kyrgyz people named February as *jalgan kuran*, which literally means “false roebuck.” Roebucks belong to a family of horned ungulates. They resemble and considered as sacred animals. In February it is still cold usually. There is a legend I would like to share. Back in old times, hunters saw about 20 roebucks a mountain ridge. When they approached the animals little closer, the hunters saw a big roebuck, and as all the others, the big one also had no antlers. Roebuck shed their antlers just like stags and elks. Therefore, the hunters were not able to differentiate males from females. As they could not tell male deer from female they called what they saw in February as *jalgan kuran*, false roebuck. The hunters came back a month later, or thirty days after, and saw that big roebucks with antlers. They said: “Hey, that roe without antlers turned out to be the real male roebuck, look at his antlers!” And since then, March was called as *chyn kuran* – the true roebuck.

July is called *bash oona*. We know that, days grow longer for six months a year and then grow shorter during another six months. *Bash oona* denotes the time period when six months with longer days come to an end. The days start becoming short from July, so the *bash oona* indicated transition to another season of the year, towards the winter.

The stars have an effect on cattle breeding. The Kyrgyz have known that the moon plays an important role in cattle breeding. Mating should be done after the full moon. Our ancestors used to say, “The moon is not full yet, it means that it is too early to start the mating.” The moon has its special features and a strong influence on animals and plants. Whereas the sun is useful for everything, and the Pleiades are more so. People say that there is a small chunk of the sun in Pleiades.

The time of *besh togool* comes in the spring. My brother, Sapar, was a shepherd all his life. Shepherds live in accordance with stars and nature. He knew very well the early and late arrival of the *besh togool*, i.e. early or late arrival of the spring. He herded the collective farm sheep. When he would see signs of late arrival of spring,

he would disobey veterinarians' order, and would take his herd to other places. He used to say, "The spring will come late. I will rather move to the side of the Naryn River than risking to lose my livestock, as the spring comes earlier there."

Askaraaly Abdylдаev, born in 1924,
Atay village, Toguz-Toro, Jalalabad province

My destiny is as difficult as the work I do

It must be true that when the Creator creates us our destiny is written on our forehead; my whole life was connected with agriculture.

Agriculture is many-sided and it is a difficult field. My destiny turned out to be the same, as difficult as the field I worked in. When I was about four-five years old, my father was dispossessed the kulaks, his property was confiscated and he was sent to a newly formed state farm, Kuldанbas. That state farm was later renamed to Iyri-Suu and is located in the Ozgon district of Osh province. My father was a worker and my mother was a dairymaid. There we lived until 1937. I was not accepted to school as a kulak's child.

After Stalin's decree on rehabilitation of kulak, they announced that I, as a son, was not responsible for my father. So, we were allowed to return to our homeland. I started studying at the 2nd grade of the village school. I knew the alphabet since my father was an educated man, so he taught me at home. My father used to work as a teacher before, later he became a kolkhoz member. So he worked together with my mother, they sow kolkhoz fields, watered agricultural land and mowed grass. However, in 1939, my mother passed away and four of us were left orphans. As I was from a peasant family, I used to collect what has remained from harvest from childhood. I rode farming horses to plough land. I worked at every kolkhoz work while I was growing up, and in 1941 finished 5th grade. Then, there were the difficulties of the home front.

The climate is harsh in mountainous regions. There are some years, when the winter lasts for 6-7 months, while animal husbandry, the only peoples' survival source, would fail and about 30-40 percent of the animals would die. Those sheep that would stay alive, would not be able to breed. There were some years, when spring was dry and grass, as well as, crops would dry out. There were no harvest in the valleys and people saved themselves with corn, which was planted at the river bank.

Life condition was deteriorated by spread of the infectious animal diseases as Sharp's syndrome and several others. There were 40,000 sheep and 1,500 cattle in kolkhoz where I was employed. According to the rule, five people were supposed to work there, but because of the lack of people, I worked alone. I had a helper, an old man over 60 years old.

Every month about 10-15 sheep died of hoof disease from every shed. This caused much financial loss to our farm. I suggested, to the illiterate and seemingly clever

farm managers, to separate the sick animals and keep them in a separate shed, but they did not accept it. More and more animals were getting infections and there were not enough people and energy to vaccinate the animals. The healthy ones were also becoming contaminated.

Busy with thoughts on how to save the remaining animals, I did not notice how I came up to an old man Kalbai's shed. He used to breed cattle. I looked when the dogs barked, and saw a tent and five sheep were tied there, while others were grazing little farther. Then, I saw the old man, Kalbai, coming with a stick. We greeted each other and entered the tent.

The elder Kalbai gave me advice. During our conversation over the tea, I asked about those five sheep tied outside. He said, "Everything is going to be alright. I noticed how five sheep started limping in the morning, so I separated them and tied outside. I will trim their hooves and clean the wounds now." In order to show me, Kalbai took one of the sheep and put it down. Then, he showed me the bump in the groin of the sheep and said, "The bump has not burst yet, but the swell is hot, and a yellowing liquid is already coming out." He took out his knife and wanted to cut the wound, but I gave him a scalpel and pincers from my bag. He cut the bump with the scalpel without touching the groin area and took out the boil. The groin area was not bleeding, but there was a hole when the boil was taken out. Then, he put some crushed herb called *sasyk metal* and washed it with salty water, then tied the wound. Kalbai said that the wound will heal in two days. He also advised me to do the same with sick animals, and added, "If one does not do this, separate and tie the sick ones from healthy ones, then while grazing dirt and dust will get into the wounds, which later start suppurating. And there is no medicine from this disease. The herb that I use ripens at the end of June and grows under our feet." Thus, she showed the plant, *sasyk metal*, which looked like an anion of a size of an egg.

Kalbai have kept talking about other things he knew. "Our inherent indifference and laziness are destroying us. Otherwise, God granted us with mountains with lots of herbs. We have lots of herbs in our mountains. There are *arkhar otu*, aconite, strawflower, prangos and many other herbs in Ming-Jylky summer pasture. Strawflower infusion is good for cold-related diseases and for high temperature. If a person drinks this infusion, then he/she sweats a great deal and becomes as healthy as a horse. If one boils a prangos root and washes rash infected areas in the body, then people get healed. Prangos water kills all the germs, therefore one can use it to cure sheep as well. There are some other poisonous herbs, but we do not use them. Some people do not know the use of herbs, others know, but are lazy to use them. When the state does not provide with medicine, then one should remember about medicine prepared by nature, my son. In the past, not only animals, but humans were not treated, because there were no any doctors.

Our forefathers used to observe connection between the moon and the stars. They knew well the influence of the moon and stars on the land. They could foretell what the coming year would be like. People divided the year into four season, spring, summer, fall and winter from ancient times. They knew that, the day and night equals in the spring, and that days become longer and nights shorter after the

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equinox. They also knew that days grow shorter and nights longer starting from the fall. During the winter, gradually a day is added and by the spring, day and night becomes equal again.

People identified that the moon shines 15 days in a month, while the other 15 days is in the shadow. They also knew that there are 30 days in a month, and 360 in a year. They would notice that some of the months have 31 days, thus the year has 364-365 days. They knew that, difference of 11 days in a year comes every 5-6 years, therefore, taking into account all the months with 31 days, they identified that the year consist of 12 months and 363 days.

People gave names to each month and year of animals they knew well, mouse, cow, tiger, snake, rabbit, fish, horse, ram, monkey, rooster and boar¹. Six of these animals are considered pure and clean, while the other six are considered as haram.

The month from February 16 to March 15 is called *jalgan kuran* (“false roebuck”). This month falls within winter. The name of the month comes from a doubt that people had regarding the lambing of roes. They did not know whether roes, which mated earlier than due time, will give birth or not.

The month from March 16 to April 15 is called *chyn kuran* (“true roebuck”). People named it as such, because they were sure that roes will give birth in this month. Mares also give birth this month and people start making *kumys*. This is the month of vernal equinox and when the day starts becoming longer.

The month from April 16 to May 15 is called *bugu* (“elk”), because does start giving birth after nine month of pregnancy, just like cows.

The month from May 16 to June 15 is called *kulja* (“male argali”), because female argali give birth in this month. The male argali get separated from females, gain weight and start looking for shady places. The day becomes longer and reaches 13-14 hours.

The month from June 16 to July 15 is called *teke* (“mountain goat”), because female goats give birth in this month and get separated from male goats. The days become scorching hot, and goats start looking for cool caves. Duration of the day reaches 16 hours.

The month from July 16 to August 15 is called *bash oona*, and *oona* is male goitered gazelle. The name of the month tells us that gazelles also start giving birth, and makes them separated from females.

The month from August 16 to September 15 is called *ayak oona*. Male goitered gazelle get separated from the herd in this month.

¹ The informant mentioned only 11 animals [ed.]

Spring months are *chyn kuran*, *bugu*, *kulja*, while *teke*, *bash oona* and *ayak oona* are summer months. The remaining three are fall months – from September 16 to October 15 is called *toguzdun aiyi* (“the 9th month”); from October 16 to November 16 is called *jetinin aiyi* (“the 7th month”); from November 16 to December 15 is called *beshtin aiyi* (“the 5th month”).

The month from December 16 to January 15 is called *uchtun aiyi* (“the 3rd month”); from January 16 to February 15 is called *birdin aiyi* (“the 1st month”), and from February 16 to March 15 is called *jalgan kuran*. These are winter months. Kyrgyz people noted that duration of the night in winter reaches 18 hours. Our forefathers used to describe winter in the following way, “Sheep are underfed, a scoop does not dry out, sleep is less and a child does not wake up.”

Thus, Kyrgyz people named months, calculated longest and shortest months of the year. They knew that the period between the fading and rising of the Pleiades makes 40 days. Our forefathers knew that, when rising the Pleiades comes close to the moon, and named this period as *togool*. They noticed, if the Pleiades come too close to the moon, then the year will be harsh and the winter will last longer.

One year, when the Pleiades converged with the moon, there was snow on March 5. The winter prolonged and days were nasty. People were out of hay and were forced to take their shovels and collect last year’s under the snow. One local poet described that winter in his following lines:

*Angered Creator
Sent calamity in the beginning of the spring.
People became weak,
By carrying grass from a mountain range.
The poor mullah lost his last hope,
As the mud flow took away his five goats.
Poor men lost their last horse
And became unmounted.*

People carefully observed how the moon and Pleiades converge. In March, they converge in fifth day, therefore, it was called 5 *togool*, while in June it was on the third day – 3 *togool*, and in September on the ninth day – 9 *togool*. In September, if the moon and Pleiades come too close to each other, then it might become suddenly cold and freezing. If they come close in November 15, then the winter will be harsh.

One should observe the running of argali, because they always follow a movement of the moon and Pleiades. In the past, hunters would always observe the argali. If they moved in the direction of the moon and Pleiades, then it was a sign that the winter will be mild. If the argali did not start their run, then the winter was going to be harsh and people had to spare their fodder. People always would ask the hunters about the run of the argali.” And, Kalbai continued his story further.

“All the signs indicate that the year will be harsh. If the shepherd is experienced and wise, then he will be able to save 70-80% of this livestock. If the shepherd is

not experienced and lazy then, I doubt that he will be able to save his animals. All the summer converges of the moon and Pleiades were close and there were a lot of rains, too. During favorable years, the moon and Pleiades did not come so close to each other and there were not so much rains.

Animals know what kind of year awaits us. I herded sheep all of my life. If sheep graze in the daytime and peacefully lay down during the night by chewing grass, then fruitful year is ahead of us. This year sheep are not staying at the shed during the night, instead they are grazing in the pasture. That is one sign. The sheep's inner fat is not distributed evenly around its stomach, and this is a second sign. The sheep's stomach became small, as well as sheep became small and do not look good. This is the third sign. The winter will be harsh, my son.

It will be very difficult for 8-9 days in the wintering. If the shed is located close to a forest, then the shepherd can feed the animals with tree branches. It is important to endure 10 days. If one is able to hold out during that time, then he will save his livestock. Otherwise, 40-50% of the herd will die.

Remember all these, my son. During the years when Pleiades are far from the moon, then there is no danger to the livestock. But, during such years, there is a draught and all grass does not grow in the pasture, because they get burned from the heat. Then, the grass only grows on the irrigated land. During the dry season, only "black" crops grow well, like corn and millet.

By God willing you will live a long life and you will serve your people. Time comes and, perhaps, my knowledge will do you some good." Thus, the old man, Kalbai, ended his long story.

Kalbai's disappointment. In several years, in summer of 1969, I visited the old man Kalbai in his summer pasture. I wanted to spend some time with him and have a discussion. At late afternoon, when the sheep came from the pasture, I saw some wethers among three year-old lambs. So I asked jokingly, "Kalbai ake, are your wethers are lambing too?" He answered as if waiting for that question, "Yes, my son, my wethers also lamb. Probably, the livestock expert said that all sheep should breed at the same time. Can you imagine, while other hero-shepherds get 200 lambs from 100 sheep, but I get only 100 sheep out of 100 wethers. Three centuries ago, Kalygul visionary said the following,

*Our people will turn into roes
Among the fir trees.
Our people will turn into slaves,
Who will carry sacks of salt.
Our people will turn into dead bodies,
Who won't feel hits on their heads.*

We became those people described in those lines. If we were not dead, how could we agree that wethers give birth? How could 100 sheep give birth to 200 lambs? How come all the sheep will give birth without a single one staying farrow? How come

a single sheep does not have miscarriage out of five hundred? This proves that we became stupid, otherwise we would speak out against such nonsense. If your boss orders you to make the wethers lamb, you will come to me and I will make them lamb, my son.” And, thus he finished his story.

I was angry at those who sit in rayon and province administrations, and was offended that I had to endure Kalbai’s rebukes. I tried to change the conversation and asked, “Kalbai-ake, how cold this year’s winter will be? We have relatively mild winters for the past five years. Have you noticed the *togool*?” He answered, “During summer, the moon and Pleiades were very close, I do not know how the September will be. Animals know better. These wethers are grazing till the evening and they are not sleeping at night. If you cut them you will see that their stomach is not covered with fat and inside of the stomach is smooth. These are the signs that there will be a massive animal hunger and death in winter. I herded sheep all of my life, I have experienced years like this many times in my life.” Thus, he repeated the things he told me long time ago.

“Let us see then, I will pay for your wether,” I said and we cut a wether. We took its stomach to water and washed it. We saw that it was smooth. “Do you see, my son? Many animals will die this winter. 60-70% of the sheep will come if one looks after them well. One should prepare fodder and hay for winter starting from now, otherwise 50% of the herd will be lost. This year, one should not rely on the winter pasture. During the September *togool*, take a look at the Ayirtash-Kargalyk Mountain and if it rains and you see half of the mountain covered with snow, then you should be prepared for a harsh winter” – said the old man Kalbai.

I returned to the village the next day and started intensified preparations. I made people to water the clover and mow it three times in a season. We collected all the hay in Sary-Bulak. We got 600 tones of hay from 50 hectares of land. We prepared 750 tones of silo out of it, mowed straw and made 500,000 bundles of straw. We left two shed-full wethers, a shed-full sheep and six shed-full lamb and three shed-full two year old wethers were located in winter farms close to the forest.

When I looked at the Ayirtash-Kargalyk in September, I saw that the mountain was covered with snow. It snowed on the 5th of November and kept snowing until March. Sometimes it stopped snowing just for two or three days. Snow reached three meters and covered houses. The houses were not seen because of the snow. We had to clean the path all the time to get to the barns. At the beginning of the New Year, 1970, other kolkhozes started running out of fodder and hay. They kept coming to me and giving me money in order to save their animals. We distributed cows to cattle farms; horse, sheep and goat were taken to the shed in Sary-Bulak. Helicopters that were provided by the government could not fly and we could not provide winter farms with fodder and hay. In February, we sold hundred tones of clover hay for thousand wethers. We exchanged thirty horses of kolkhoz named after Lenin to thirty tones of clover hay.

One of the herdsman lost 30% of his herd, the remaining herd we took back to the village in February. But, there were not as much loss as this one in other kolkhozes.

That year Kyzyl-Jyldyz kolkhoz lost 48% of its herd, Birdik 45%, Lenin kolkhoz 31%. They had about 15-20 lambs from 100 sheep. They also got 15-20 foals and calves. They could not fulfil their yearly plan for grain and wool. But, we had only 13% losses of our sheep, 3% from horse and got 80 lambs from 100 sheep, 67 foals and 90 calves. We fulfilled the entire plan for that year.

Chapter 6 Traditional Nutrition

Eraliev Alykul, born in 1958,
Kok-Tash village, Batken province

Our ancestors were healthy due to proper nutrition

In May many people go to summer pastures in order to drink *saamal*¹, because one needs to drink it fresh-drawn as the protein in mare's milk disappears after twenty four hours. In old times, Kyrgyz people always used to drink freshly drawn milk. Today we boil milk, being afraid of different diseases, and thus we destroy all the protein in it. Grain proteins are also quite salubrious. But, today, there is no protein in the flour we use. For instance, there was famine in Kyrgyzstan in 1995- 1997. There was no flour in the stores. That is when people began to grow wheat on small pockets of land and manually harvest and mill it into flour. The bread was black since the flour was coarse. It was surprising that children born during those years were healthy and with adequate weight. As it turned out, the baby was getting enough amount of protein already being in mother's womb. Why everyone did not die during the war? Because people were collecting wheat heads left after the harvest and would eat it immediately out of hunger. By doing so they were eating raw grains, which in turn nourished their organism with native protein.

I will tell you another example. I used to know one nurse who had an oncologic disease. She has been consuming wheat sprouts for two years and was able to stop development of cancer cells.

One elder man was discharged from a hospital with a diagnosis that he has only one month to live. After coming home he started catching snakes, lizards and began eating their raw meat. He was eating everything that moved, everything that caught his eye. He is alive and healthy now, and even made hajj to Mecca. This is a true story.

Let me tell you another story. There is a man who is called a millionaire. People coined this name due to his numerous diseases. He received treatment everywhere

1 *Saamal* [Kyrgyz] – fresh mare's milk [ed.]

and in every possible way. But nothing would help. One day he met the professor he knew. They had a conversation and the “millionaire” told about his problems. Then the professor suggested, “Eat a lot of partridge meat. There is much protein in it.” Thus, he started eating a lot of partridge meat prepared in various ways. He ate 14 partridges, fried, steamed, boiled etc. He also prepared partridge shish kebabs. Thus, he was able to cure his diseases.

Kasymov Payazmamat, born in 1952,
Markaz village, Batken province

Kurut – national food

Kurut is a Kyrgyz national food. We make it with wheat flower or corn flower. After *kurut* is prepared, it is mixed with water and poured into the sizzling hot clarified butter and a hissing sound is made. One cup of this liquid *kurut* is able to sustain the person for the whole day. One may just drink some water throughout the day. *Kurut* is such a strong and nourishing food. Our ancestors passed the recipe of this food from one generation to another. There is a Kyrgyz tradition, which symbolizes deep respect to one another, when neighbors meet new-settlers with a cup of *kurut*.

Sheripov Bekmamat, born in 1931,
Atai village, Jalalabad province

Our bozo¹ is exceptional

My wife and I were having a rest in Voronsovka resort. I was reading a book, when several men came to our room. They greeted us and asked whether we are fine and where we were from. I told that we are from Toguz-Toro region. Then, one of them said, “Probably you drink *bozo* regularly since you are reading the book without glasses.” In return, I asked how he knows about our *bozo*; he replied that his supervisor was from that region.

Our *bozo*, indeed, is very exceptional. It quenches thirst, energizes and makes one drunk. Once, I was at my friend’s house in Kochkor village, and we also visited one woman in Tien-Shan. So she gave us some *bozo*. I could not drink it because it was too thick. Our *bozo* is more liquid, strong, quickly gets into head and instantly elevates one’s mood.

If one comes to a summer pasture, hosts invite the guest for a cup of tea, and certainly put salt into the table, because there is salt mine in our Besh-Kol region. Salt is crystal clear and transparent resembling ice crystals. Some people add it to their tea. Our salt was exported during the war. Several boys used to transport salt sacks on 13-15 donkeys through Iiri-Suu to Jalalabad. This salt has healing properties. Only the lazy ones buy salt in the store here. We take salt from Besh-Kol for personal use. The salt is split into cubes and added into tea.

¹ *Bozo* [Kyrgyz] – traditional alcoholic home-made millet beverage [ed.]

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Salt reservoirs lie here the entire year. There are cases when the salt is extracted in size of a sheep or a horse's head. Then these huge pieces of salt are rolled down the hill and transported in a car.

GLOSSARY

A

Adal – clean, holy and right in terms of Islam and *kyrgyzchylyk*. Everything can be *adal*, a person, food, thought, word, place or behavior, etc.

Ajy – a status of a Muslim person, who made a pilgrimage/hajj to Mecca.

Aidar chach aluu – a ritual of cutting lock/braid of hair on a baby's head that has remained after the first hair cut.

Ak chachuu – a ritual of scattering and/or pouring out products of white color: milk, dough, yogurt, etc. at a certain place. Tradition ally, this ritual is done to move snakes out of the house, garden, etc.

Aksakal – a male elder of a tribe or any other community. Generally, it is used to denote age status of a person, but in some cases, it denotes person's achievements and level of authority.

Aktykty moyunga aluu – a ritual aimed at accepting the mission to serve people through healing, spiritual channeling and others. The ritual is always distinct and may consist of several stages. It is often conducted at sacred sites.

Alas-alas or **alastoo** – a purification ritual carried out in different ways, through besmoking with juniper, sprinkling of water, jumping over the fire and others.

Apa – a form of address to a mother, grandmother, as well as other elder women.

Aram – not clean, not righteous and not right in terms of *kyrgyzchylyk* and Islam. *Aram* can be everything: a person, food, thought, word, place or behavior etc.

Aruu – is a choosing by spirits of a particular person to serve people. According to some accounts, *aruu* is the spirit itself.

Aruusu bar, aruu karmoo, aruurkoo – according to *kyrgyzchylyk*, it is a transcendental state of a person, when he/she is visited by spirits that request the person to get on a path of serving people. This state of being might be perceived as psychological disorder. Sometimes, it comes in a form of epilepsy and fit of hysteria. One can fully recover from this state by accepting the duty of becoming a healer, epic narrator and other spiritually-oriented activity. Other traditional practitioners can help the person in this state until they accepts their mission.

Ashar – a union of relatives, neighbors, friends or any other group of people that get united for a short period of time to complete certain task that will benefit the group, or help a group member to achieve a certain goal. Traditionally, *ashar* was formed for house construction of a group member, or bridge/dam construction.

Ata – a standard form of address to a father or any other relative carrying out functions of a father. It is also honorific title of a man of an older age, or a person with higher traditional or spiritual status.

Ayan – a message received by a person in a dream state or in reality. The message maybe related to private life of the person and/or other people, country and Universe. The received ayan requires further elaboration by the person, who received it.

Ayanchyl – a person, who receives messages from spirits.

Azytky – the tempter, the evil one.

B

Bakshy – a healer, sorcerer, herbs expert.

Bata – blessing given in various conditions; therefore, its themes and content is quite rich and diverse. For instance, people bless a table full of food, birth of a baby, beginning to move to summer pastures, lifting up the upper part of the yurt, going for hunting and may other actions including people participating in them. Traditionally, *bata* is given by an elder, group leader, mentors. There is also a belief that there is *bata* of the earth, water, spirits and the Creator.

Batakoï – a person, whose blessings come true and bring happiness and luck.

Baatyr – a hero; a person, who carried out great deeds for his clan, tribe, people and motherland.

Boorsok – small pieces of dough in different shapes fried in plant oil or animal fat. It is one of the main types

of traditional bread prepared for various occasions: holidays, funerals, jubilee, commemoration and others.

Bozo – an alcoholic beverage made from millet sprouts, crushed switch grass, water and sometimes flour based on traditional technology. The percentage of alcohol in bozo varies from 8-10%.

Bubu – a female healer specializes in working with kids and women. Based on some accounts, they have abilities to make prophesies and foreseeing the past and future. They also can communicate with spirits; therefore, they are knowledgeable and wise.

C

Chachpak – a traditional accessory from silver or any other metal used to decorate woman's hair and was tied to braids.

Chapan – a light outer garment.

Childe – 40 of the coldest and 40 of the hottest days of the year. There are summer and winter childe.

Childekana – a dark and locked place, where a ritual of kyrk chilten is carried out. Often times, these places are caves or righteous men's burial sites. Sometimes, it is a specifically built ritual house intended for receiving knowledge, reciting the Qur'an and conducting rejoicing.

Chilirman – a big ritual drum used by healers during their rituals.

Chilten – the kind spirits, who are able to restore a person's health and assist in one's spiritual growth.

Chozmo – a product made from liquid dough fried in plant oil. It is often prepared at sacred sites.

D

Daarat aluu – a ritual of making ablution performed before visiting a sacred site, chanting prayers, lighting up ritual candle, conducting healing procedures and a number of other rituals.

Davatchy – a Muslim person whose main activity in life is travelling in order to strengthen spread of Islam.

Demchi – a healer, who cures people through *dem saluu* or chanting prayers/spells.

Dem saluu – a traditional method of healing with the help of duba or ritual of chanting prayers and spells. The peculiarity of this ritual is giving additional energy to the person in need and aimed at annealing the person's own energy recourses.

Duba – prayers, spells, incantations used in healing and other traditional practices (giving a blessing, expressing gratitude, cursing and etc.)

J

Jailoo – a summer alpine pasture where the livestock is based during May-September.

Jeti tokoch – seven pieces of round bread, which are fried in oil and/or animal fat. These can also be seven pieces of bread baked in tandyr or any other oven. *Jeti tokoch* is usually prepared by pilgrims before visiting sacred sites to conduct some rituals so their prayers would be heard and wishes fulfilled. According to some beliefs, preparing this bread is

considered as a sacrifice ritual dedicated to invisible forces.

Jurok kotoruu – a traditional method of healing person's heart usually performed by a healer, because when a person or a child gets quite frightened, then their "heart sinks". Therefore, it is necessary to "lift it up" in order to stabilize the functioning of organs.

Jyt chygaruu – a ritual of making *boorsoks*, flat bread, pilaf and any other food made in the memory of certain spirits, or any other spirits that need to be commemorated. When the bread and pilaf is ready, the Qur'an verses are recited by mentioning the names of those spirits who are commemorated. According to people's belief, the smoke, which comes out during the food preparation is considered as food for the spirits.

H

Halal – clean, righteous and right in terms of Islam. Halal can be everything, a person, food, thought, word, place or behavior.

K

Kaiberen – the holy foremother, the guardian and patron of all *kiyiks*. According to some accounts, *Kaiberen* is the guardian of *kaiyp duino*.

Kaiyp duino – a world of invisible spirits and one of the dimensions of the objective reality. Those people who transfer from the world of the living to the world of invisible spirits are able to visit other dimensions, the world of the living and the dead.

Kamchy – a whip.

Kap – a big gnarl on the body of a walnut tree, which turn into beautiful patterns when it is bisected.

Kasiet – a gift given from above, which is inherent to earth, people, fire, animals and any other natural phenomena. Every person has *kasiet*, but not everyone is able to feel and nourish this God given ability, which is given to serve and do good for every living being. However, if the person nourishes and develops this ability, then he/she might possess powerful and even supernatural healing, artistic, scientific and other capacities.

Kasiettu jer – a site that has a special spiritual power and impact.

Kirene – a curse; main signs of being under a curse are repeated yawning, permanent migranes and general weakening of one's life force.

Kiyik – a general term for *adal* cloven-hoofed animals that live in high mountains: mountain goat, roe deer, elk, argali, moose and others.

Kokul chach – lock of hair, which is left in parietal, temporal or occipital part of the baby's head after the first hair cut. Traditionally, *kokul chach* was permanently left on the head of a long-desired child or an only son, thus marking these kids. Elders are reminiscent of warriors with *kokul chach* on their heads, they were not put on first rows during battles, and were safeguarded as much as possible.

Korum – a shamanistic ritual of healers, sorcerers and mullahs. *Korum* is usually performed as a healing ritual.

Kudai tamak, kudai tamagy or kudayi – a ritual of communal sacrifice, when street dwellers, group of pilgrims

or any other community make sacrifice ritual to *Kudai* – God, and all the participating ones taste the prepared food. Village dwellers get together in spring before the sowing season and conduct sacrifice ritual asking the Creator for good weather and rich harvest. People may also conduct the ritual in the fall as a sign of gratitude for the harvest. Usually, a goat, sheep, sometimes – a cow and a horse, are sacrificed. A family may carry out *kudai tamagy* at a sacred site in honor of a new born baby, who came to life after parents' pilgrimage to the sacred site.

Kuima kulak – a folk definition of a person who is able to memorize and for exact reproduction of everything he/she hears.

Kumgan – a pitcher with a handle and spout used for ablution. Traditionally it was made from copper, but today it is mainly made from plastic.

Kurosh – a traditional type of wrestling.

Kurut – pellets or flat bread made from drained and dried curds.

Kybla, Kybyla – a direction of Mecca. Muslims should face the direction of Mecca while praying, sleeping and burying the dead.

Kymboz – a mausoleum.

Kyrgyzchylыk – a complex of historically accumulated knowledge, traditions and thinking patterns indicative of Kyrgyz people. *Kyrgyzchylыk* related to sacred sites are pilgrimage, healing, spiritual mentorship/teaching and epic recitation practices. *Kyrgyzchylыk* also includes sacrificing, preparing ritual food, giving blessings, accepting spiritual mission and many others.

Kyrk chilten – meditation alone or in small groups during 40 days accompanied by a particular dieting or absolute fasting. *Kyrk chilten* is conducted to heal severe and longlasting diseases under supervision of healers. The main actors of the ritual are 40 kind spirits or entities working with the person.

M

Mashak – heads of wheat left on the fields after harvesting.

Mazar – a sacred site, where people make a pilgrimage. *Mazars* can be ancient buildings, grave hills, graveyards, mausoleums, trees, rocks, mountains, lakes, springs and other pilgrimage objects.

Moldo – a person, who knows the Qur'an and carries out Muslim ceremonies.

Muchol – a life cycle consisting of 12 years. First *muchol* comes at the age of 12 and then it is followed every 12 years. *Muchol* years, i.e. ages of 12, 24, 36, 48 and etc., are considered as special, when a person faces certain challenges and changes in life. Depending on the level of maturity and readiness, changes might be either positive or negative. Traditionally, *muchol* was celebrated by *alastoo* ritual, burning or giving away one's old clothes and jumping over the fire.

N

Narban – the wooden stretchers, where the body of the dead is carried from the house to the graveyard.

Navat – sugar candies or sugar quintessence acquired as the result of boiling sugar.

Niyaz chach – lock of hair, which is left on a baby's head during the first hair cut. First hair cut is conducted as a ritual at a sacred site by healers or sacred site guardians. This ritual is aimed at assuring well-being and protection of the baby.

Nooruz – the vernal equinox.

O

Ochokkana – a place for preparing food.

Osmo – a plant-based dye for hair and eye-brows.

P

Palban – a strongman participating in contests.

Pir – a guardian-angel of a person, place or an animal.

S

Saamal –steamed mare's milk.

Samsa – an oven-baked patty. They are traditionally made with meat, but also made with greens and herbs in lack of meat.

Selde – a turban from white fabric.

Shaiyk – a guardian and/or custodian of a sacred site.

Shakirt – an apprentice, follower.

Sham – a ritual candles made from dry reed stalks, cotton and clarified plant oil or animal fat based on the ancient method. There is female, male and general-type *sham*. They vary depending on the type of production and application.

Sham jaguu – a ritual of lighting up *shams*. The ritual is carried out with different goals and in different places. *Sham* is lit up with an aim to get connected with spirits to receive information from them in memory of the departed. The ritual is often conducted at sacred sites as a sign of respect to spirits and invisible guardians of a site. The ritual can also be performed at home as a way of purifying the house from negative recollections or recent grief. *Sham jaguu* is one of the main subjects of opposition between traditional and radical Islam. There is a ban on conducting this ritual at certain sacred sites related to Islam.

Sheyit – a person who did not die a natural death, but died in a tragic way– car crash, accident, in a war, etc. Women who died during childbirth were considered as *sheyit*. However, burial sites with no history or forgotten ones are also considered as *sheyit*.

Shirk – creating a confrere to Allah; worshipping sacred sites especially rocks, springs and caves.

Shypaa tabuu – getting healed, recovering one's health and fulfilment of dreams and wishes.

Sumolok – food that is prepared in a cauldron in an open air on the eve of *Nooruz*. It is especially important to prepare *sumolok* at the night of 20th to 21st of March. The basis of *sumolok* is always spring water and plant products; it is mainly wheat sprouts. Different grains and dried fruits can also be added to *sumolok*. These ingredients are purchased collectively. It is prepared for 5-6 hours and then stands another 5-7 hours. *Sumolok* is prepared collectively by group of people with pure intentions and thoughts. It needs to be mixed

nonstop while being boiled in the cauldron.

Supara – manufactured sheep or goatskin used for working with dough.

T

Tamyrchy – a healer determining a disease by person's pulse.

Tandyr – a traditional mud stove used for baking bread, patties, poultry and animal flesh.

Teskeri bata – a type of curse or literally, “backward blessing”.

Tilek kyluu – making a wish. One of the main rituals carried out at sacred sites. The ritual is conducted in various ways – silently or out loud, individually or personally, independently or under supervision of a spiritual mentor, in free form or using certain prayers or spells.

Tolgo achuu or tolgo saluu – a ritual of foretelling and/or interpreting future events by spiritual practitioners. Sometimes, the ritual is carried out using lamb shoulder, stones of various color and size, books, dreams and etc. This particular ritual is rigorously persecuted by representatives of “pure” Islam.

Toguz oimo – nine flat breads of round shape fried in oil or animal fat. These bread are made before making a pilgrimage to sacred sites as ritual food commemorating spirits and for pilgrims themselves. According to some accounts, preparing *toguz oimo* is a way of expressing gratitude to invisible forces.

Tuinok –stomach or intestinal tract disease in animals.

Tulgunai – a penduline tit, a small bird belonging to titmouse family that builds its nest on the tree branches growing at river banks.

Tuloo – a ritual of individual or collective sacrificing, which may be conducted to overcome bad luck or misfortune, as well as safeguarding happiness and well-being. Animals or poultry is sacrificed, from chicken to a horse. As a rule, *tuloo* is accompanied by the Qur'an recitation and is dedicated to a specific case.

U

Uchun or uchundu – a state of being sick, when a certain human or animal organ is being swollen.

Uilotuu – a traditional way of treating inflamed eye through blowing. The blowing is done by a healer, most often by a *bubu* and is accompanied by prayer chanting.

Ulak tartysh – a traditional game. There are two teams of horseback riders struggling for a carcass of a dead goat. It is necessary to get hold of the carcass and take it to a specially designated area.

Ulush otkoruu – food or refreshments provided collectively by certain group of people. The goal of *ulush otkoruu* is a recreation of friends and relatives, celebration of a particular event that is important for a group. Often times these activities are conducted at sacred sites.

Umai-Ene – the holy foremother responsible for birth and protection of children and strengthening marriages. She takes pregnant women and children before 7 years under her protection. In a wider context, *Umai-Ene*, is the guardian of the life itself, therefore,

people pray and ask for her help during draughts and bad-harvest year.

Y

Yiyk jer – parts of dry land and water; buildings and objects that possess features of sanctity in consciousness of local people.

Z

Zikr or zikir – a Muslim ritual singing addressed to Allah glorifying his greatness and omnipotence. *Zikr* is also used in healing practices.

Ziyaratkana – a house or a shed at a sacred site serving as a shelter for pilgrims.

Ziyarat kyluu – making a pilgrimage to sacred sites.

Zuvala – a rolling pin for dough.

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