

Some Funeral Traditions Of Kazakhs In Karakalpakstan (The Case Of Beruni District)

Kamalova Dilfuza Abdullayevna

PhD Candidate, Faculty of History, Karakalpak State University, Uzbekistan

Received: 29 July 2025; **Accepted:** 25 August 2025; **Published:** 27 September 2025

Abstract: The article explores the unique funeral traditions of the Kazakh people living in the Beruni district of Karakalpakstan, their current relevance, and their cultural significance. The study makes extensive use of historical-comparative analysis and field research.

Keywords: "joqtaw", "qonaq", "jilaw-siqhaw", "tiyebarsin", "qirq shirah", "Uch kara sahal", "kewil tamaq", "kuzet", "jirtis", "dawir aylandiriw".

Introduction: Among the various ethnic groups residing peacefully in the region of Karakalpakstan, the Kazakh people have also been living in harmony for many years. Naturally, the wedding and funeral traditions of the peoples living in this area have influenced each other. In particular, similarities and differences in funeral rites can be observed. Research shows that although Kazakhs have historically lived in mixed communities, their mass migration to the region mainly occurred during the 1930s. Field studies conducted in the Beruni district, formerly known as Shabboz, indicate that Kazakhs predominantly reside in rural areas.

Scholars such as S.N. Akatayev, A.T. Toleubayev, and J.T. Ernazarov have studied the funeral traditions of the Kazakh people in depth. Their works reveal customs carried out before death, the significance of the "yoqlaw" (lament) recited during funerals, and the rituals performed afterward. [Akatayev S.N. (1973) pp. 43–49, Toleubayev A.T. (1991) p. 214, Ernazarov J.T. (2003) p. 199]

Considering that traditions tend to transform over time, funeral customs stand out due to their resilience and continuity. Despite living alongside Uzbeks for decades, field research confirms that the Kazakhs in this region have retained many of their ancient traditions in pure form.

In Kazakh culture, there are sayings such as "Өмip баp

жерде өлiм баp" ("Where there is life, there is death") or "Тумақ болған соң өлмек парыз" ("It is a duty to die after being born"). The spiritual culture of the Kazakh people is based on Islamic worldview. However, despite this, some funeral traditions in Kazakh culture may seem to contradict Islamic practices. According to Muslim traditions, the deceased is to be buried on the same day if they pass away in the morning or after lunch. But among the Kazakhs, regardless of whether they live in Kazakhstan, our region, or countries like China and Russia, it is customary to wait for distant relatives to arrive before burial. The deceased is usually kept at home for at least one night, and sometimes up to three days. Furthermore, it is important to ensure that the person is truly deceased, and this period of waiting is sometimes referred to as the "waiting period" (kutish davri). As A.V. Konovalov points out, "on the first day, the deceased is a guest of the living; on the second day, a prisoner; and on the third day, the funeral begins." [Konovalov A.V. Kazakhi Yuzhnogo Altaya. 1986, p.149]

In Kazakh funeral customs, it is common to sacrifice a large black bull or another animal in honor of the deceased. The neighbors who attend the funeral traditionally host a "qonaq" (guest), preparing a table with food for them. While saying "tiyebarsin" (a blessing) and reciting the Quran, it is believed that the more frequently this is done, the more the deceased's

sins are forgiven. According to informants, regardless of one's ability to afford it, slaughtering an animal, especially for older individuals, plays a crucial role in the ritual. The reason for this is believed to signify that the deceased did not accumulate wealth in this world, symbolizing their humility and the absence of material greed. [Field Notes]

Among the Kazakhs, the phrases “jilaw-siqhaw” and “jo’qhaw” are said for the deceased. Although they are similar, there is a significant difference between the two. Jilaw is generally spoken for any deceased person, and it is most often shouted by the deceased’s relatives—such as the mother, sister, or wife—while crying and mourning. It involves recalling events related to the deceased or praising their actions, expressing inner emotions outwardly. This process is performed not only on the day of the funeral but also during the “qirg” (40-day) and other memorial ceremonies.

Joqhaw, on the other hand, is said for a person who was particularly beloved or influential within their tribe or clan. It is commonly recited by specific individuals chosen for this task. Compared to jilaw, joqhaw is considered a stronger and more intense expression of grief. [Dosmuhammedov, 1928, pp. 49-79]

In Kazakh traditions, phrases like

He bound his head to a place where he knew not to arrive.

Wishing for his house to be vast as well,

May your home be filled with good fortune.

May your purpose remain unbroken.

Furthermore:

The graveyard is far and distant.

May my waist remain unburdened.

May my soul be light.

When an older person passes away, it is customary for people to bring a special coat or garment to the funeral, which is then tied with string and hung in a row. This practice symbolizes respect for the deceased. It is believed that if the relatives do not recite poetry and cry loudly, it is considered shameful, and this is described in the local language as “joni achimayapdi” (the soul has not yet been touched).

In the ritual of washing the deceased’s body, it is customary for one representative from each clan or family to participate. Particularly, the role of in-laws (relatives by marriage) is significant in this process. It is worth noting that when a Kazakh “xoj” (religious

leader) passes away, only members of that particular clan will wash the body. The term “qara saql” (black beard) has ethnic, social, and historical meanings and refers to men who are not wealthy or noble but possess life experience. These individuals are often called upon for advice. It is customary to offer them special gifts during weddings or funerals.

In the process of cleansing and purifying the body, seven individuals typically participate in washing the deceased. It is believed that this act brings great spiritual reward.

According to informants, in the past, a candle was lit every day for forty days in the home of the deceased. Nowadays, however, on the night of the burial, forty candles are lit at once. The candles are prepared by wrapping cotton around reeds and pouring oil over them. The purpose of lighting the candles is to illuminate the grave, and this practice is known as “qirg shirag” (forty lights). It is believed that the souls of deceased ancestors visit the home when the candles are lit. Before the funeral prayer is performed, “topraq yalamasin” (may the earth not lick) is symbolically fulfilled by baking 10–15 shelpik (round flatbread). This is done to ensure the deceased is not hungry in the grave. The shelpik is distributed among the mourners, with some placed on the table and others consumed while saying “tiyebersin” (blessing). This practice continues until the “jeti sadaqasi” (seven memorials) and is gradually reduced in number each day.

In some areas, money or coins are scattered during the funeral, symbolizing the release of the deceased’s sins. Pregnant women usually avoid attending funerals. If a close relative passes away, they may sew the back of their dress or skirt to prevent miscarriage.

Today, when an older person passes away, qirmish (a type of bread) is baked in large quantities and offered to guests. In Beruni district, informants recall that “joqhaw” was traditionally recited in the morning, after lunch, and in the evening, and it could even be heard by people 2 km away. One reason for reciting joqhaw is that it helps guide the deceased’s soul back home. It is believed to help the spirit find its way back to the village. Elderly women sometimes sit covered in a jowliq (blanket) while reciting joqhaw, and this practice is called “shig’arib soliw” (spiritual offering).

It is also customary to ensure that the deceased is never left alone, as there is a belief that evil spirits may steal the soul. This practice is known as “kuzet” (guarding). While this custom predates Islam, it is not incompatible with Islamic teachings, as candles are lit in the room and imams or mullahs keep vigil to observe the condition of the deceased.

Jirtis is a custom that has been observed among many

Turkic peoples since ancient times, especially during the funeral rites of elderly people. In this tradition, a piece of cloth is cut into smaller parts and distributed among those who attend the funeral. This is considered a "teberik" (a blessed item), and its purpose is to symbolically divide the deceased's sins. The cloth is often used to make clothing or headwear for children, with the intention that the child will live to the same age as the deceased. In the tradition of "Jetti sadaqasi" (seven blessings), the deceased's clothes are washed, cleaned, and then distributed among the family members. People believe that if someone wears these clothes, it will help lighten the burden of the deceased's soul. In the past, the practice called "jumaliq" (which is now known as "piyenbilik") was performed, which can be considered a small transformation of the tradition.

In the Kazakh culture, there is another unique custom known as "kewil tamaq", "kewil shay", or "kewil as". In this tradition, the close family members of the deceased invite relatives to their home and prepare food for the guests. This is usually done after the "Jetti sadaqasi" and typically involves 10-15 people. Sometimes, livestock such as cattle is slaughtered to offer food to the guests.

Previously, when a close relative passed away, people would continue wearing the same clothes and headscarf until the "Jil sadaqasi" was held. When the "Jil sadaqasi" was performed, they would try to ride horses and cook a special dish called "as". Riding horses and making the horses run (dubir) were believed to make the sound reach the deceased in the afterlife. The children or relatives of the deceased would prepare the food, and it could take place at any time, even up to 40 years after the death.

The custom involves riding horses, and the first-place winners are awarded prizes such as camels, horses, or sheep. This custom is still maintained in some regions. Also, guests are often given gifts such as cloaks, caps, or prayer rugs. This tradition is similar to the "qur" in Uzbek culture, which is commonly observed during weddings, where people present gifts to each other.

As for the "Yil sadaqasi" (yearly charity), it is often accompanied by a solemn, mournful song or music, honoring the deceased. This practice is aimed at remembering and showing respect to the person who has passed away.

I waited, eating wheat bread,
Wondering if it would come.
"I wonder if it will come," I waited.
After realizing it wouldn't come,

I chewed on a black stone, and swallowed blood.

In addition, at the end of the Azan ceremony, women perform the "dawir aylantiriw" (spinning the circle) ritual. This ritual symbolizes the women's recognition of continuing life in a social context, signifying that they accept and acknowledge life as it moves forward.

REFERENCES

1. Akataev S.N. (1973). The Cult of Ancestors among the Kazakhs in the Past and Zoroastrianism. Proceedings of the Academy of Sciences of the Kazakh SSR, Social Sciences Series. Vol. 2. Pp. 43-49.
2. Toleubaev A.T. (1991). Relicts of Pre-Islamic Beliefs in the Family Rituals of Kazakhs (XIX–Early XX Century). Almaty: Science. 214 pages.
3. Eranazarov J.T. (2003). Family Rituals of Kazakhs: Symbol and Ritual. Almaty. 199 pages.
4. Konovalov A.V. Kazakhs of Southern Altai. – Almaty: Science, 1986. – 149 pages. (in Kazakh).
5. Field Notes. Baydullayeva Tursungul. 1959. Beruniy District. Qizilqala OFY. Altinsayin Street.
6. Dosmukhamedov Kh.D. (1928). Kazakh Folk Literature. Yearbook of the Kazakh Pedagogical Institute. Tashkent: Kazpedvuz. Pp. 49–79.
7. Field Notes. Ibragimova Gulnora. 1961. Beruniy District. Dostlik Street. Unnumbered house.
8. Field Notes. Qodirov Toliboy. 1947. Beruniy District. Abay OFY. Omadli Makon, house 57.
9. Field Notes. Djumanazarova Zlix. 1964. Beruniy District. Qizilqala OFY. Central Street, house 52.
10. Field Notes. Baydullayeva Tursungul. 1959. Beruniy District. Qizilqala OFY. Altinsayin Street.