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Traditional Games and Competitions, Gaieties and Holidays of Kazakhs as Cultural Phenomena in the Period of Domination by the Russian Empire

Origin of traditional festivals and games

Games and public holidays at all times had a great public importance. Their origin dates back to ancient times and in their development they underwent a number of successive forms, corresponded to the public relations and business activity of the people. There is an indisputable theory that the games and entertainments have originated from labor processes, i.e.: from practical activity of the people.¹

Often in popular entertainments such special phenomena are reflected as sports, military skills, cultic performances, magic actions, recreating “real life, sometimes existing, sometimes past, and preserved only in some kind of remnants (game-action or game-song).”² In this way, they cover many aspects of labor, spiritual and household activity. This was facilitated, to a large extent, by the fact that many of these customs originated in the nomadic environment, and “by their subject, accessories, time and place of action, by all its systems they reflect the features of world-view and material culture of nomads-farmers.”³ Over time, with the change of the society material life, the direct form and content of the games have changed.

Games and entertainment are always served the public duties as well; these are educational, military, sport, ritual, entertaining and aesthetic,

¹ N.I. Ponomarev, *The emergence and initial development of physical education*, Moscow 1970, pp. 48-52.

² V.A. Gordlevsky, *Anatolian Turks Games*, in: *idem*, Selected works, vol. IV, Moscow 1968, p. 137.

³ G.N. Simakov, *Soviet holidays and Kyrgyz national entertainment*, in: *Ethnographic aspects of the present study*, Leningrad 1980, p. 109.

communicational, *etc.*⁴ For example, through the games, amusements and skills, a young man developed both physical and mental capacity, i.e.: “in a game here, as everywhere, he learned what a modern life would require from him. The same demands were for girls.”⁵

Broader and more universal function was carried out by military sport games related to both the military way of life (war, raids and clashes) and economic activity of the society. These games were “*saiys*,” “*audaryspak*,” “*jamby atu*,” “*altyn kabak*,” “*kures*,” horse racing, *etc.*

Some of the games and amusements carried the ritual and ceremonial function as a part of the system of both funeral and burial, as well as marriage ceremonies. Many of them later lost their original essence, being developed and reborn. Examples are “*alaman*,” “*bayga*,” “*kokpar*.”

Important values (victory, prestige, empathy) reflected the social function of games.

Holidays, festivities and amusements

Folk celebrations (*meiram*, *toy*, *as*) and games are usually devoted to significant events and carried social character. “Amusement and festivities,—said N. Zeland—are mostly about weddings and other family events, although there are some Mohammedan festivals.”⁶ According to the E.S. Wolfson, “the biggest Kyrgyz [Kazakh—K.A.B.] holiday—the holiday of all holidays—considered to be the wake with horse races,” which often took the form not only as a private but also as public celebration. The same character had a Kirghiz “*as*.”⁷ It is known that the wake or *trizna* (*as*), arranged in honor of the eldest in the tribe, gathered a lot of people, reaching sometimes up to 15 000 persons, regardless of social class. They were talked about for several years in the steppe, a song was composed. One eyewitness wrote that “to drive for a good hundred miles for *toy* (to celebrate) means nothing. All (inconveniences) were rewarded by giving plentiful treats, meals and pleasures.”⁸ The celebration lasted from 3 to 7 days, depending on financial

⁴ G.N. Simakov, *Social functions of the Kyrgyz people entertainment at the end of the XIX century—beginning of XX century*, Leningrad 1984, p. 99.

⁵ R. Karutts, *Among the Kyrgyz and Turkmen in Mangyshlak*, St.-Petersburg 1910, p. 87.

⁶ N. Zeland, *Kyrgyz. Ethnological sketch*, “Proceedings of the West-Siberian department of Russian Geographical Society,” 1885, VII book, II issue, part II, p. 29.

⁷ E.S. Wolfson, *Kyrgyzy*, Moscow 1901, p. 50.

⁸ A. Evreinov, *Internal or Bukeyev, Kyrgyz-Cossack horde*, “Sovremennik,” 1851, vol. XXIX, No. 10, part 2, p. 91.

conditions of the organizers. At the same time, each day several games and contests were conducted. The closing day was completed by a grandiose horse race, which actually signified the glory of memorial services.⁹

Among the family and tribal celebrations, conductance of weddings was of no less importance, often bearing a social character. Along with village (*aul*) people, among attendees of the wedding were both familiar and unfamiliar people. The fest always started with general meal. Here one can listen to wedding songs and *aitys* of famous *akins*, watch and participate in games and comic entertainments. During the wedding *toy*, just the program of comic entertainment itself included a lot of games, where the main entertainment was racing (*bayga*), with nomination of prizes, which were often very valuable, arranged by the organizers.¹⁰

The event related to the birth of a son bore the same solemn character, which was often was beyond a pure family joy. There was the celebration organized in honor of the birth of a baby (*shildekana*), the celebration conducted regarding a child laying in to the cradle (*besyk toy*), a feast marked the fortieth day of birth (*kyrkynan shygaru*), a celebration that is associated with the Muslim ritual of circumcision of boys in age from three to ten years (*syndet toy*). The main components of the listed celebrations were also “food, drinks, horse tilt-yard” and other festivities.¹¹

One of the biggest holidays of the Middle Asian people and Kazakhstan was considered to be Nauryz (New Year), celebrated on the spring equinox, March 22. The origins and rituals of Nauryz, including traces of reverence for nature, date back to the Zoroastrian New Year, which has failed to be deleted and destroyed by the tsarist autocracy for centuries.¹² New Year celebration in the spring was typical with other people of Asia.¹³

According to the established belief, on this day, the people got rid of the winter hardships, were thankful for the preservation of wealth—cattle. On Nauryz Eve, each family in advance cooked the ritual meal (*nauryzdyk*),

⁹A. Podvarkov, *Peoples of Russia. Kyrgyzs*, St.-Petersburg, 1879, II book, pp. 50-59; E.S. Wolfson, *Kyrgyzy*, pp. 51-53.

¹⁰L.F. Kostenko, *Turkestan region*, 1 vol., St.-Petersburg 1880, p. 344; A.I. Wilkins, *Notes on the horses of Turkestan*, “Breeding,” 1872, No. 10, pp. 20-35; L. Kharusin, *Kyrgyzs of Bukeyev Horde* (Anthropological and ethnological sketch), issue 1, Moscow 1889, p. 136.

¹¹I.G. Andreev, *Description of the Middle Horde of Kyrgyz-Kaysaks with relating to this people and adjacent to the Russian border, on the part of Kolyvan and Tobolsk, fortresses and complements*, in: *New monthly essays*, 1796, part XVI, p. 30.

¹²O.K. Karataev, *Nooryz meyramy in history of Kyrgyz*, in: *History, culture and traditions of the East*, Bishkek, 2000, pp. 34-41.

¹³V. Eberhard, *Chinese holidays*, Moscow 1977, p. 104.

consisting of seven meat-dairy-plant components,¹⁴ which are traditionally used in the nutritional system of the Kazakh people. After tasting them, the Kazakhs had hoped to have them as daily meals during the whole year. Nauryz celebration lasted three days and all village (*aul*) people greeted each other, wishing happiness and prosperity. Generally, Nauryz began with *aitys* between a girl and a *dzhigit* (horseman), representing a symbolic struggle of the winter with the spring, and ended with folk games, contests, in which the adults and youth, children and women took the active part.¹⁵ Another public holiday is connected with the celebration of the spring, which enjoyed great popularity in the nomadic life of the people—the day of migration of a tribe or the whole *aul* from wintering grounds to the summer grounds in the early spring, called “*kymyzmuryndyk*”. The same was for late fall, when they returned to the previous wintering grounds. This procession, accompanied by young people, was led by the most beautiful girl holding the flag. They were followed by other people, a string of pack animals, with belongings and yurts. On a new encampment, a feast was arranged until late at night, gradually replacing of one game by another.¹⁶

As in all countries where Islam was widespread, it was customary to celebrate two annual religious holidays—the breaking or the end of the fast (*Oraza ait*) and 70 days after—Sacrifice (*Kurban ait*).¹⁷ The clergy tried every way to maintain this tradition. For example, financial and other offerings became conventional in the form of “*Khair*,” “*Saadaka*” to the mosques, holy persons and places. And during the days of “*kurban ait*,” the best cattle were sacrificed (slaughtered). Thus, according to Sharia, “for sin redemption” of one man—a sheep or a goat had to be sacrificed, of seven people—a cow or a bull, of ten people—a camel, skins of which were brought to the mosque.¹⁸ With Kazakhs, unlike other nations, ceremonial side was prevailing compared

¹⁴ According to A. Dzhikiev figure 7 was held in high esteem among the ancient Turks, and, apparently, was associated with 7 totem animals worshiped by ancient Turks (see: A. Dzhikiev, *Traditional Turkmen holidays, fun and games*, Ashgabat 1983, p. 19).

¹⁵ S. Bahti, *Celebrating the New Year by the Kyrgyzs*, “Orenburg sheet,” 1892, No. 9; B. Totenae, *Kazakh national games*, Almaty 1978, pp. 13-16.

¹⁶ A. Podvarkov, *Peoples of Russia. Kyrgyzs*, p. 42; L. Kharusin, *Kyrgyzs of Bukeyev Horde*, pp. 71-72; I. Ivanov, *Meeting the spring by the Kyrgyz*, “Turgay newspaper,” 1903, No. 20; Sh.Sh. Valikhanov, *Works*, vol. 1, Almaty 2010, p. 225.

¹⁷ I.P. Petrushevsky, *Islam in Iran in the VII–XV centuries*, Leningrad 1966, pp. 77-84; A. Masse, *Islam. Essays in the History*, Moscow 1982, p. 98; L. Vassiliev, *History of Religion East*, Moscow 1983, p. 139.

¹⁸ R.R. Mavlyutov, *Islam*, Moscow, 1974, pp. 111-114.

to the religious content. Such Holidays were celebrated less triumphantly, but ended as all the festivities with various games and entertainment¹⁹.

On all holidays and celebrations, entertainment and contests were conducted in an organized manner, regulated by customary law and ethnic attitudes, fixed in traditions and customs of the people. Therefore, all the participants were familiar with the show program intended for every feast. Upon balloting, they directly set about games. "It was common that such games themselves attracted a lot of attention from the participants. Sometimes, on the other hand, they served as a way to properly discover the lucky one, who triumphed over an adversary."²⁰

Nevertheless, the competitions often accompanied by conflicts, arguments and controversial issues. The reason for all this—the patriarchal-tribal traditions that are often brought "the spirit of tribal rivalry and hostility into the atmosphere of folk festivals, provoked intertribal clashes, which sometimes have come to armed conflicts."²¹

During the competition, tribal elite has sought to lead their contestants to victory, thereby demonstrating its might and majesty in front of the masses, on the other hand increasing its wealth due to valuable prizes, sometimes composed of whole herds of horses. Everybody knew that "the prize won for horse racing, fighting, or any other competition has never really come to the winner, but actually has been given up by the latter to the eldest in his tribe,"²² otherwise he would face a general disapproval. Usually, in horse racing that brought the prizes, the racers of the wealthiest people were involved.

Veneration of horses and love for horse games have become a tradition, preserved to this day. Such significance of horses in life of the traditional Kazakh society gains symbolic importance, in addition to purely household-economic value. Without them, it was impossible to comprehend the settlement of land, property, jural, family, legal and other disputes and litigation, which are clearly reflected in the Kazakh Law "Zhargy," including "Zhety Zhargy" of Tauke Khan.²³

¹⁹ N. Krasovsky, *The area of the Siberian Kyrgyz*, part III, St.-Petersburg 1868, pp. 58-59; A. Krugorozhin, *Kurban-bayram*, "Illustrated newspaper," 1865, pp. 47-48.

²⁰ V.A. Gordlevsky, *Anatolian Turks Games*, p.138.

²¹ G.N. Simakov, *Soviet holidays and Kyrgyz national entertainment*, p. 109.

²² M.Y. Kittary, *Kyrgyz tui*, "Journal of the Ministry of Internal Affairs," 1849, part 25, pp. 53-60.

²³ Options "Zhety Zhargy" come down to us in: *Ancient world of right of Kazakhs: Materials, documents and research*, 4 vol., Almaty 2005, pp. 476-496; Zh.O. Artykbaev, "Zhety Zhargy"—*State and legal monument (researches, sources, history)*, Astana 2006, pp. 38-41.

Traditional horse-racing and power games

Because of the nomadic lifestyle of the Kazakhs, horseman contests and various related games on horseback became the most popular, developing strength, agility and courage in people. According to A.U. Toktabay, a qualified specialist in traditional domestic horse breeding, the Kazakhs in the pre-revolutionary period have practiced up to 40 types of such games; of which about ten have survived to the day.²⁴ Some of these games are considered below.

Alaman bayga—racing on the long and extra long distance (25, 50, 100 km), is one of the oldest and most popular types of contests. It is known by that name among the Uzbeks and Kirghiz. Its origin is associated with the nomadic way of life, i.e.: the need to train horses for long passages, especially in time of war or to steal herds from enemy (*barymta*), as well as to improve horse breed. The term “*alaman*” M.T. Tanikeev interprets as a raid, robbery, committed by horseback armed force,²⁵ the same term is applied to such a raider.²⁶ *Alaman bayga* was the first and main type of program of major folk festivals, especially funerals (*as*). Competitions were held in the steppe along a straight line, abundant with natural barriers, without limiting the number and breed of horses²⁷. To prevent fraud or manipulation with racehorses, organizers arranged special posts, which monitored and provided the fair course of contests.

The tactical skill and mastery of the rider was of great importance here; it was necessary to correctly evaluate the power of the horse, to be able to manage it by adjusting the speed along all the distance. It also happens that during *Alaman bayga* “some horses could not stand such a long distance, they were dying at the goal, and some, in the middle of the race ended up lying with broken legs, together with their riders.”²⁸

In the selection of racehorses, particular attention was paid to the following features: breed, constitution (rangy developed legs, high and strong chest). For example, for *Alaman bayga* horses with the smooth and

²⁴ A.U. Toktabay, *History of Kazakh horse*, Almaty 2010, p. 31.

²⁵ M.T. Tanikeev, *History of Physical Education in Kazakhstan*, Alma-Ata 1977, p. 143.

²⁶ E.V. Sevortyan, *Etymological dictionary of Turkic languages (Common Turkic basis and vowels)*, Moscow 1974, p. 134.

²⁷ A. Podvarkov, *Peoples of Russia*. Kyrgyzs, p. 56.

²⁸ F. Nazarov, *Notes on some of the peoples and lands of the middle parts of Asia*, Moscow 1968, p. 25.

soft movements were picked, which can sustain long passages without any fatigue, while for ordinary *bayga*—tall and temperamental during the run.²⁹

On the other hand, the Kazakhs bewared of the evil eye of racers, for this “they did not show racehorses and kept them under the horse blanket, while manes and tails they weaved, fastening owl feathers and talismans against the evil eye at different parts of a horse body.”³⁰ To ease the burden for a horse, 8-14 years old boys were usually chosen as riders. Their distinctive costumes were white or another color shirt and bandanas as headdress. Sometimes, under the influence of the Russian administration, after roll-call of horses, the names of owners, riders were recorded and the serial numbers were given.³¹ To identify the riders as they approach the finish line, they were shouting tribal nicknames (*urany*), according to which the viewers recognized the winners of horse races, giving them names according to ranking: *bas baige*, *ort baiga*, *ayak baige* (first, middle, last).³²

Depending on the number of riders and material resources of the organizers, prizes were different, from 5 to 15 riders were awarded sometimes. Expensive materials, yurts, cattle, and sometimes money were presented. The biggest prize came to the winner of the race, which sometimes consisted of 100 horses, 30 camels, 30 cows, 500 sheep and red product for 100 rubles.³³ Other prizes were smaller.

Bayga was also carried out on all holidays and was available to all interested persons who wanted to participate. According to a pre-revolution witness, “there is no competition among the Kazakhs greater than *bayga*: it accompanies the birth of a baby, the wake for a deceased, as well as meeting the honorable guests.”³⁴ It was common to all peoples of Central Asia. For example, the Kirghiz called it “*chabysh*,” Uzbeks—“*poyma*.” Kazakhs’ *bayga* was arranged on a flat terrain along a straight line with a turn or in a closed circle. The competition was conducted at the following distances: from 1.2 to 2 km for horses at least three years old (*kunan bayga*); from 2.4 to 4.8 km for horses younger than four years (*donen bayga*); from 5 to 8 km for horses at

²⁹ A. Kaller, *Kyrgyz way of preparing horses for races in Inner Kyrgyz (Bukeyev) Horde*, “Breeding,” 1885, No. 1, pp. 61-62.

³⁰ I. Ibragimov, *Essays on the life of Kyrgyz*, “Old and New Russia,” 1876, vol. III, p. 60.

³¹ *Kyrgyz holiday*, “Astrakhan Journal,” 1851-1895.

³² *The Kazakh national games (1946-1948)*, in: Manuscript found of ethnographical Department of Institute of history and ethnography of Kazakhstan Republic, pp. 419-420.

³³ A. Podvarkov, *Peoples of Russia*. *Kyrgyzs*, p. 55.

³⁴ A. Shmakov, *Equine in the Kyrgyz steppes and its significance for Russia*, “Breeding,” 1872, No. 10, p. 28.

age of five or older (actually bayga).³⁵ This sequence of participation of horses in *bayga* served as preparation for showing good results in the future, in grueling race of *alaman bayga*. Racehorses preparation, awarding of winners were the same as for *alaman bayga*.

Zhorga zharys—horse ambling competition. Distance was set in a straight line naturally from 2 to 10 km. Ambling was hereditary to the natives and horses with natural soft and rhythmic gait were very valuable and expensive. Sometimes a horse had talent of ambling from childhood, so such skill was further developed. This was done by a special master (*zhorgashy*). The last two types of ambling were especially popular. For example, “*su shaykalmas zhorga*” (racing without water spilling) was carried out even with balancing with a food plate (*tabak tartu*). For the mentioned reasons, not everybody was allowed to participate in competitions. Other nomadic people in the past were familiar with similar types of horseracing.³⁶

Saiys—horsemen combat using pikes, was one of the oldest paramilitary games, arranged only during very large celebrations. It was also common for the Kirghiz. The fighters of a combat were chosen from different tribes or the neighboring nations, such as the Kazakhs and Kirghiz from the south of Kazakhstan. The participants were provided with the necessary equipment, armed with long wooden spears with blunt ends. The purpose of the fight was to knock out an opponent from the saddle or inflict him a heavy blow, so that he could not continue the combat. Death cases were often, and intensity of emotions has led to serious clashes between the tribes.³⁷

Later, this game was forbidden by tsar administration. In all likelihood, it tried to eliminate this competition, not only because of its applied relevance, but in practical terms—the military, which could contribute to the revival of past military skills of the Kazakh people.

Audaryspak—fight on horseback in order to throw an opponent from the saddle. Only mature men possessing great physical strength, agility, stamina and skilled horse handling have participated. Note that most often the victory has come to those participants, who had sufficiently trained and tall

³⁵ M.M. Gunner, *Kazakh national equestrian sport*, Alma-Ata 1957, p. 14; A. Burkitbayev, *Kazakh national kinds of equestrian sport*, Alma-Ata 1978, pp. 69-70.

³⁶ D. Omurzakov, Y. Musin, *Kyrgyz folk games*, Frunze 1973, pp. 16-18; I. Sambu, *Tuvan folk games*, Kyzyl 1978, pp. 33-34.

³⁷ N.I. Grodekov, *The Kyrgyz and Kara-Kyrgyz of the Syr-Darya's area*, 1 vol., Tashkent 1889, pp. 255-256; A. Podvarkov, *Peoples of Russia. Kyrgyzs*, pp. 54-55; S.E. Dmitriev, *Baiga at karakyrghyz on the death of manap Sh. Dzhantaev in Pishpek County*, “Proceedings of the Russian Geographical Society,” 1912, vol. XVIII, VI-X issue, pp. 54-55.

horses. Usually, such masters were nominated for the competition on behalf of a whole *aul* or a tribe.³⁸

Kokpar tartu, known in Russian as “*kozlodranie*” or goat-tearing. The origin of this game seems to have several sources: 1) the players imitate carnivorous steppe wolves preying on flocks of sheep and in this way destroying livestock; 2) it is possible that earlier on, in this way the raiders fleeing with the loot, and also, probably, have saved a wounded *batyr* from captivity 3) connected to a struggle of phratrias for a carcass of totem animal.³⁹ This game is also known to other nations of Central Asia and the East.⁴⁰

There were two versions of the game. In the first case, two riders entered the fight, in the other—two teams representing different tribes or *auls*. The goal is to bring first a goat carcass to a destination place. On a judge’s signal, everyone tried to grab the carcass, the rest rushed in pursuit, to snatch the prey. Therefore a rider, who grabbed the carcass, tried to hold it tight in the saddle, clench it between a leg and horse side or throw it over from one side to the other, keeping it from the pursuing rivals, and break away from his pursuers.⁴¹

Zhamby atu (Altyn kabak)—target practice (archery or gun-work) at full gallop. Similar competitions are common to many nations, “*zhamby atu*” in Kirghiz, “altyn kabak” in Uzbeks, “kabak” Tajiks, “kabahi” Georgians, *etc.*⁴² Its origin is connected with the military and applied art that has survived until the XVIII—beginning of XIX century. For the competition a high pole was set, at the end of which *zhamby* (silver ingot) was suspended, it served as a target. A galloping horseman using the weapon had to break the strap and thereby take *zhamby*. There were other ways of hitting the target: sitting on a horse or standing on the ground.⁴³

³⁸ A.B. Kalysh, *As of Suyeubay*, Almaty 2002, pp. 28-29.

³⁹ V. Voinov, People Kyrgyz holiday, “Modern chronicle,” 1868, No. 2, pp. 4, 48, 248; Ch. Aitmatov, *Goodbye, Gulsary*, in: *idem*, Novels and Stories, Frunze 1978, p. 243; G.N. Simakov, *Social functions of the Kyrgyz people*, p. 35.

⁴⁰ Sven Gedin, *At the heart of Asia*, St.-Petersburg 1899, vol. 1, p. 208; N.Nurdzhanov, *Entertainment and People’s Theatre of Tajiks of Karategin and Darwaz*, in: Art of the Tajik people, Dushanbe 1965, p. 114-115.

⁴¹ *The Kazakh national games (1946–1948)*, p. 58.

⁴² G.P. Snesev, *Relics of pre-Islamic beliefs and practices in Uzbeks of Khorezm*, Moscow 1969, pp. 98-99; S.M. Andreev, *Tajiks of Huf Valley*, Stalinabad 1953, pp. 139-140; K.G. Nachkueva, *Georgian folk Equestrian Games*, Tbilisi 1959, p. 16; M.N. Khangalov, *Collected Works*, vol.1, Ulan-Ude 1958, p. 278.

⁴³ M.N. Bekishov, *Wedding ceremonies of Kyrgyz of Ural region*, “News of Society of Archaeology, History and Ethnography,” 1905, vol. XXI, issue 4, p. 390.

Kymis alu or *dzhigitovka* (fancy/trick riding), one of the original national sports, which is found among the people of Central Asia, Kazakhstan, Caucasus, required from participants to have high dexterity, skilful and courageous horse management. The meaning of the game is that a rider at full gallop should pick up a coin lying on the ground, sometimes several coins set at equal distances⁴⁴. Sometimes during the competition, some performers showed their prowess, standing on their saddles or taking off each other from saddles, and the most daring quickly jumped off to the ground and jumped back in the saddle, doing brave pirouettes under the horse.⁴⁵

Kazaksha kyres. Very popular among the people used to be the fight (*kazaksha kyres*), variations of which is found with other people of Central Asia. Apparently, in the beginning, all kinds of fighting were caused by necessity to fistfight during close combat.

The described kind of fight was conducted during all the festivities between the known strong men (*paluan*) and resembled wrestling, but without weight categories. The fighters have known a variety of techniques, including leg-shows and undercuts, throws — standing and falling, rotation with jerks and hooks. A distinctive feature of *kazaksha kures* is absence of mat wrestling and it is performed only on the belts and standing.⁴⁶

Youth games and entertainment

Among the spectacular games, where communicative functions are well pronounced, a variety of youth games and entertainment should be mentioned.

Kyz kuu (catch the girl)—horse-riding game originated from ancient times, when the girls were warriors and rider. They were demanding a number of conditions to their chosen ones, including competition in the races. In case of victory, a warrior had the right to marry her, in case of defeat—the right to ask her hand.⁴⁷ Some variations of this game, conducted during wedding and other feasts, in the changed forms still exist to this day. For example, there

⁴⁴ Kittary M.Y., *Kyrgyz tui*, p. 55.

⁴⁵ S. Bronevsky, *Notes on the Kyrgyz-Kaysaks of Middle Horde*, “Notes of the Fatherland,” 1830, part 44, p. 229.

⁴⁶ M.T. Tanikeev, *World popular sport*, Almaty 1998, pp. 53-54; M. Bolgambaev, *Fighting Kazaksha kures*, Alma-Ata 1980, p. 132.

⁴⁷ M.T. Tanikeev, *World popular sport*, p. 58.

is a game between bride and groom, bridesmaids and *dzhigits*, accompanying the groom etc., dressed in traditional costumes (in their best turn-outs).⁴⁸

The game was conducted in an open field at a certain distance. At the end of the field the controlling pivotal pole or a goal was installed. According to the game rules, the girl must hit the *dzhigit* with a whip and gallop in order to first reach the goal (pivotal pole), while *dzhigit* had to catch up with her. If the horseman overtook the girl before the pivotal pole, then, as the winner, he had the right to hug and kiss the girl. Usually, easier and more often those were honored, who she liked. If the *dzhigit* did not catch up with the girl, then on the way back, instigated by spectators, she was catching up with an awkward horseman and inflicted him numerous whiplashes. Such failures laid shame to the rider, a long time was needed to forget about this mishap.⁴⁹

Alty bakan (literally “six pillar”)—Kazakh swings were made of six pillars, the ends of which were tied up with a durable rope, cross-pole was installed on top, where paired nooses were attached for legs and seating.⁵⁰ *Alty bakan* was held in the evening. In traditional Kazakh society with strictly regulated rules of etiquette between the genders, especially for the youth, this amusement served as one of the most important communication tool.

Typically, the couples of those girls and boys were teetering on the swings, who were in sympathy with each other. They had to start with some joyous songs, the rest—picked up the singing. Then the couples changed turns of each other. It could be seen as an entwining of entertaining game with elements of the spiritual culture, song-composing creativity.

Aksuyek (white bone)—entertaining game with the participation of girls and boys at the moonlit night in the steppe, often with the participation of young people of the neighboring village. The name of the game comes from the white bone used as a tool. The participants form two teams led by their leaders, and the representative of one of the teams chosen by lot throws the bone as far as possible, and everyone else at that time turned away to not to see where it went. Then, on a signal all were going to look for *ak suyek*. A

⁴⁸ Kyz-byry, *The Wolf-Girl (Equestrian Games in Kyrgyz steppe)*, “World illustration,” 1875, vol. XIV, No. 354; E.S. Wolfson, *Kyrgyz*, p. 15; A. Ivanovsky, *A trip to Kyrgyzstan at the Lake Nor-Zaisan*, “Russian statements,” 1887, No. 328; A.A. Divaev, *The ancient game of Kyrgyz youth*, “Turkestan statements,” 1907, No. 54.

⁴⁹ *In the Kyrgyz steppe*, “Pictorial Review,” 1876, No. 56; M. Ermolov, *Knight’s fun Kirghiz-kaysakov*, “Son of the Fatherland,” 1845, No. 5, pp. 26-27; V.I. Dal, *Compositions*, vol.12, pp. 315-316; M. Gunner, M. Rakhimgulov, *Digest of the Kazakh people’s national sport*, Alma-Ata 1949, pp. 79-82.

⁵⁰ *Fun and Games*, Alma-Ata 1960, pp. 127-128.

participant who found the bone first, secretly let it know others from his team, and, hiding behind them, quickly tried to get to the starting position. If he succeeded to get to the point first, the defeated team members, as the matter of compensation, should have entertained the winner team in some way, most often by singing. There are other versions of the game described.⁵¹ In our opinion, youth games, contrary to the provisions of Sharia law, facilitated intimate acquaintance, mutual understanding, friendship between girls and boys, often to the state of love.

Children's games and entertainment

Along with youth games, children's games have been widely presented. "Like all children,—said R. Karutts—Kirghiz [Kazakhs—K.A.B.] children vie in a run, wrestle and catch each other, run a spinning top, which they set in rotary motion by a finger, carry each other pickaback" *etc.*⁵²

The most favorite game was *alchiky* or *asyki* (ankle bone shooting), the name comes from painted sheep's knuckle bones. Not only youth but often adults played this game. According archaeological evidence found in every region of Kazakhstan territory. There is a large variety of this game. The most famous variations were "*alshy*," "*onka*," "*khan*," "*bes tas*," "*atbakyl*," "*zhiyrma bir*" *etc.* Alchiky, money and other prizes were put on the line. Similar game combinations are known to other nomadic people in the past.⁵³ Children also played "hide and seek" game (*zhasyrynbak*, *sokyr teke*, *sokyr siyr*), guessed riddles (*myrysh-myrysh*, *tyye-tyye*). The same nature had variations of Russian ball game "*lapta*" (*orda dop*), as well as tipcat game (*kazan orda shyldik*).⁵⁴

⁵¹ Kh. Kustanaev, *Ethnographic essays of Perovsky and Kazaly counties*, Tashkent 1894, p. 21.

⁵² R. Karutts, *Among the Kyrgyz and Turkmen in Mangyshlak*, p. 87.

⁵³ A. Dzhikiev, *Traditional Turkmen holidays, fun and games*, pp. 48-50; D. Omurzakov, Y. Musin, *Kyrgyz folk games*, pp. 124-127.

⁵⁴ A.A. Divaev, *Games of Kyrgyz children*, "Turkestan statements," 1905, No. 152; A.A. Divaev, *On the ancient games of the Kyrgyz youth*, "Turkestan statements," 1907, No. 54; N.A. Melkov, *Games of Kyrgyz*, in: *Proceedings of the Orenburg Society of the research of Kyrgyz region*, 1921, vol. 1, p. 76; A. Goryachkin, *Games of Kyrgyz children in Inner Bukeyev Horde in Astrakhan province*, "Proceedings of the Society of Archaeology, History and Ethnography," 1911, issue 4, vol. XXVII, p. 308; Gunner M., *Collection of Kazah national games and entertainment*, Alma-Ata, 1938, p. 98.

Intellectual games

Intellectual games were also common. Among them, is an ancient board game (*toguz kumalak*). A rectangular wooden board, having 18 oblong holes (*otau*) arranged in two rows of nine holes each, is used in the game. In the interval between the rows, two large round holes (*kazan*) is cut out. Each player (two of them) has 81 balls, and each oblong hole initially contained nine balls. The moves are made alternately. The winner is the one who picked up more balls from oblong holes of the opponent, collecting them in his *kazan* (bowl). The game was so popular that the players could do without the board. To do it, they dug the necessary holes right in the ground and played right there.⁵⁵ According to L. Budagov's definition, the game is called "*toguz kumalak*" (nine), because number nine, considered as a sacred number among the ancient Turks and Mongols,⁵⁶ served as the basis, e.g.: 81 (9 x 9) and 162 (2 x 9 x 9).

Conclusion

All in all, we see that the traditional Kazakh folk games and competitions have been an integral part of social, family and other celebrations and were very popular among the people. The festivities and games described in concise form, had a long tradition, reflected reality, directly connected with the nomadic or settled-agricultural economic lifestyle and environment. For example, horse-riding performances contributed to gain and reinforcement of physical, labor and other skills, especially among the younger generation, while a complex of other games additionally brought in the practical knowledge for the perception of the environment. Because of their practical and ethno-functional significance, most of them are common in Kazakhstan and nowadays many of them are parallel to other ethnic groups of the Eurasian continent.

⁵⁵ S. Amanzholov, *Toguz kumalak*, Alma-Ata 1936, pp. 3-30; A. Akshuraev, M. Nurlybaev, *Toguz kumalak*, "Science and Life," 1980, No. 1, pp. 27-29; N.N. Pantusov, *Game—toguz kumalak*, Kazan 1906, pp. 3-6.

⁵⁶ L. Budagov, *Comparative dictionary of the Turkish-Tatar languages*, St. Petersburg 1869, vol. 1, p. 750.

Traditional Games and Competitions, Gaieties and Holidays of Kazakhs as Cultural Phenomena in the Period of Domination by the Russian Empire

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A b s t r a c t

The text is presenting the traditional Kazakh folk games and competitions which have been an integral part of social, family and other celebrations and were very popular among the people. Games and public holidays at all times had a great public importance. Their origin dates back to ancient times and in their development they underwent a number of successive forms, corresponded to the public relations and business activity of the people. The festivities and games described in concise form, had a long tradition, reflected reality, directly connected with the nomadic or settled-agricultural economic lifestyle and environment.

Games and entertainment are always served the public duties as well; these are educational, military, sport, ritual, entertaining and aesthetic, communicational, etc. They supported the also national identity amongst Kazakhs.

K e y w o r d s : traditional Kazakh folk games, public holidays, national identity.