

UNDERGROUND MOSQUES OF MANGYSTAU AS THE OBJECTS OF RELIGIOUS TOURISM

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Abstract: A distinctive feature of Mangystau is a significant number of underground mosques that have existed within the region since the X-XIII centuries. The purpose of the study is to analyze and assess the current state of underground mosques and the prospects for their use as objects for the development of tourism. The study was carried out as a result of the use of complex methods: dialectical, retrospective, systemic and logical analysis, as well as general scientific methods of comparison, analysis and synthesis. Underground mosques in Mangistau region play an important role in the development of tourism in Kazakhstan. The analysis shows that the objects carved into the rock are unique underground structures that differ in the peculiarity and history of their formation. The research results can be used in theoretical and methodological research on this topic. The research materials show that in the Mangistau region it is necessary to study the religious heritage using a rich resource base and develop new tour programs that will increase the region's tourism opportunities and the development of all types of religious tourism.

Key words: religious tourism, pilgrimage, Mangystau, holy places, underground mosque

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INTRODUCTION

Religious tourism has recently been included in the list of existing types of tourism, adopted by the World Tourism Organization. The need for people to worship revered saint places prompts them to make religious (pilgrimage) trips. Therefore, every year hundreds and thousands of tourists go on pilgrimage and sightseeing trips to holy places and religious centers. This tendency, associated with profound changes in the mass consciousness and spiritual life of society, first of all, with an increasing interest in the history of national cultures, is most clearly manifested at the turn of the two millennia in countries that have passed through the era of "state atheism", which is confirmed by the increase in the construction of mosques in the country in the early 2000s (Figure 1).

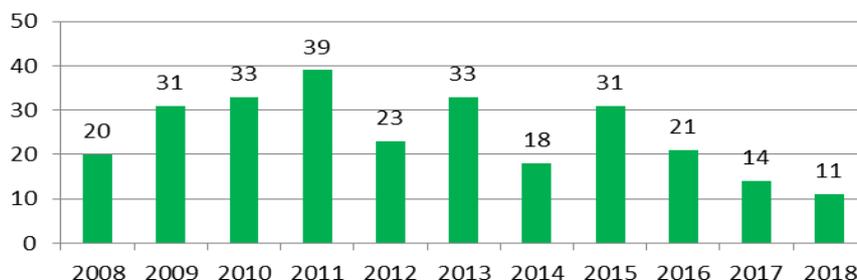


Figure 1. Construction of mosques in Kazakhstan in 2008-2018
(<https://eadaily.com/ru/news/2019/09/23/mechetey-v-kazahstane-stroyat-bolshe-chem-bolnic>)

The tradition of pilgrimage trips to saint places is reviving not only among Muslims, but also among followers of other religions. At the same time, pilgrimage travels of representatives of various religions in recent decades have become a truly massive phenomenon that affects all spheres of social life (Josan, 2009). Religious tourism is an independent type of tourism associated with the provision of services, and the satisfaction of the needs of tourists traveling to holy places and religious centers, which is caused by motivations, as states, "a persistent

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tendency, chronic inclination to certain actions and experience certain types of feelings in certain situations” (Bond et al., 2015). Religious tourism has deep historical roots; the medieval pilgrims are considered ones of the first tourists (Guzhina and Guzhin, 2016). Religious travel pursues three main goals the first is visiting iconic places for this religion; the second is spiritual healing; the third is a simple interest in iconic places (Hristov, 2003). One of the most discussed issues among researchers is the classification of religious tourism, which has not yet been fully developed (Table 1).

Table 1. Classifications of religious tourism

Authors	Types of religious tourism		
Hristov (2003)	pilgrimage tourism	excursion focused religious tourism	
Guzhina and Guzhin (2016)	pilgrimage tourism	excursion tours on religious topics	special tours
Senin (1999)	pilgrimage tourism	religious-themed tourism	special tours, which brings pilgrims and sightseers together
Yakunin (2017)	pilgrimage tourism	religious-themed tourism	scientific tourism for religious purposes
Swatos et al., (2002)	pilgrimage tourism to holy places	religious tourist attractions related to historical or cultural events,	religious festivals
Rinschede (1992)	participation in religious ceremonies and conferences	excursion tours to local, regional, national and international religious centers	

According to some statements, it is divided into two types: pilgrim tourism and excursion-oriented religious tourism also proposes two types of this tourism: tourism motivated by religious considerations and tourism as a modern spiritual journey (Collins-Kreiner, 2018). In religious tourism includes attending religious ceremonies, and conferences, and visiting local, regional, national, and international religious centers. Other researchers divide religious tourism into three forms: pilgrimage, excursion tours on religious topics, and specialized tours that bring together pilgrims and sightseers (Senin, 1999). Also consider three types of religious tourism: “pilgrimage shrines, religious tourist attractions associated with historical or cultural events and religious festivals” (Swatos et al., 2002). Other researchers propose not to confuse the concepts of “religious tourism” and “pilgrimage”, explaining that the purpose of religious tourism is to gain new knowledge, while pilgrimage is purely religious in nature (Yakunin, 2017). A pilgrim is a "religious traveler", and a tourist is simply a "vacationer" However, both groups are considered in a continuous classification that goes from pilgrimage based on faith to strictly secular tourism, although pilgrims pursue other goals - healing from diseases or solving their personal problems but still, “a religious space is a multifunctional place, in which, depending on the use and motives, you can find different forms of tourism” (Ilieş et al., 2018c; 2020, 1104).

The natural caves of Mangystau and Ustyurt were the prototype of the incredibly numerous and diverse artificial underground interiors, the creation of which has formed an unusually strong and long-lasting tradition. Like other peoples who adopted Islam, among Kazakhs Islam is closely related to ancient religious beliefs that were developed long before the appearance of Islam (the ancestors of the Kazakhs adopted Islam only in the IX century), which provides grounds for the development of religious tourism in the country. However, domestic science is in no hurry to widely and holistically study this type of tourism, as evidenced by the lack of scientific publications on this topic. The objects of religious tourism and pilgrimage have often been studied and researched mainly by historians, philosophers. Perhaps this is due to the fact that many geographers have not yet shown interest in religious tourism as an independent species, since the pilgrimage, as mentioned above, was a taboo subject, like religious education in general, since the religious issue in an atheistic state, within the USSR, it was not openly discussed. Cultural heritage, including religious artifacts, may be of interest not only to religious scholars, but also to a wider range of scientific specialties (Akhmedenov, 2020). This research is devoted to the analysis and assessment of the current state of underground mosques on the territory of the Mangystau region and the prospects for their use as objects of religious tourism. We examined 6 objects. The analysis shows that the objects of study carved in the rock are unique underground structures. The history of the formation of each object is explained. The underground structures were built at different times, but they have the same structure and the same purpose - they were used as mosques. The region has great opportunities for the development of religious tourism, for which some recommendations have been proposed.

MATERIALS AND METHODS

The main information base of our research is statistical, stock and cartographic materials, as well as materials of the Committee on Religion of the Ministry of Information and Social Development of the Republic of Kazakhstan in recent years. The authors used sources from the websites of tourist organizations, worked with materials from the Tourism Administration of the Mangystau region, used the website of the Spiritual Administration of Muslims of Kazakhstan. Part of the information about the objects of worship was collected during expeditionary research in 2012-2017 in the region.

Since religious tourism and pilgrimage in Kazakhstan is not yet fully recognized as an independent type of tourism, no scientific study of this type of tourism has been carried out, therefore, there is practically no publication in this sphere in domestic periodicals and on the Internet, except for single cases (Nurtazina, 2009; Plokhikh et al., 2019). In this regard, the work mainly used publications of researchers who studied the issues of pilgrimage and religious tourism, substantiating its importance for the popularization of the historical and cultural heritage of peoples, problems and development prospects, evaluating religious tourism as a segment of the modern tourism market (Terzidou et al., 2018; Timothy and Boyd, 2006; Scriven, 2014). The works of and others hold special interest, who viewed pilgrimage as a phenomenon of national religious culture (Cànoves et al., 2012).

In addition, the works of foreign researchers were analyzed, where the potential of religious tourism is studied (Ilieş et al., 2019). The management of religious tourism, a new research approach to religious tourism (Fernandes et al., 2012), questions development and support of religious tourism in a particular country, study of the internal environment of religious objects (Indrie et al., 2019; Ilieş et al., 2018) as well as other problems of religious tourism (Heidari et al., 2018). In this regard, this study was carried out primarily on the basis of a system analysis, where the objects of study (underground mosques) are considered as separate systems. A comparative typological method was also applied, the basic principles of which are to compare the types of underground mosques (on a slope, underground) according to the oldness of the structure (XII-XIX centuries) in time and space. Based on materials from museum and local libraries, the histories of the objects were studied. As a result of the observations of the authors and surveys of the population, statistics were obtained on the importance mosques visitors. The work was also supplemented by the use of field trip work (2012-2014, 2017) and cartographic methods.

The main purpose of this article is to assess the potential religious and cultural tourism in the Mangystau region. While we are talking exclusively about the underground mosques of the Mangystau region, visiting religious sites, events that we have added cultural to match the findings previous research that many tourists visit these places for cultural or educational reasons not strictly religious. The information for this article was collected through direct observation. Most of the the sites and purposes discussed in this study were visited at least once and at least one of the authors. We also used a number of scientific articles, websites, brochures and videos advertising local travel sites.

RESULTS DISCUSSIONS

On the territory of Kazakhstan, in particular in the South and West, there are more than 500 objects of significant confessional and cultural interest. Also, other regions of Kazakhstan have significant potential for the development of religious tourism as one of the most promising types of tourism activities, which has an important social role, both in our country and abroad. Each of them has its own special features and unique spiritual shrines, which create a unique spiritual and cultural image, which makes it possible for a variable approach to the formation of tourist routes of various territorial coverage, length, combination with other tourist resources and various accommodation facilities. Mangystau region, located in the west of Kazakhstan, is in the top 10 regions of Kazakhstan with a high potential for the development of tourist flow. In the last 5-10 years alone, the number of tourists, including foreign ones, who want to visit this territory has increased significantly. The territory of the region is the former sea bottom and the relief, composed of Cretaceous and Quaternary deposits, has unique forms, represented by drainless depressions, hollows, caves (Koshim et al., 2020).

Here is the largest number of monuments and places of worship in Kazakhstan. Mangystau is the land of 360 saints, 360 Sufis. 360 saints are the disciples of Khoja Ahmed Yassau, the founder of the Turkic branch of Sufism, who were sent to Mangyshlak to spread his philosophical teaching. Sufism in Mangystau quickly took root and until the end of their lives the messengers of Yassau glorified their teacher and subsequently each of them was buried on this land with honors, therefore Mangystau is called the "land blessed by the gods" (Kondybai, 2008, 150). During some time the names of many Sufis were forgotten, and the graves were lost in the desert expanses of Mangystau. Four "points" may have been lost or destroyed, but they are all interconnected and are a crystal, a spotter which reconstructs the position of the Earth's rotation along its axis around the Sun in 365-366 days. Light coming from one sacred place (one God - light) projects the rotation or transition of the Earth along the axis in 24 hours (day), then the Earth passes into the projection of a new light (the next holy place), etc. This is the functional predetermination of the fact that it was here, in Mangystau, that 360 disciples of the great teacher Khoja Ahmed Yassau came, who were famous for their "holy" deeds, spreading Sufi teachings, who left after their lives 366 holy places in the form of cultural and historical monuments, underground mosques, necropolises and madrassas, and formed in a natural formation the structure of an energy-information crystal that builds up the time of the Earth's passage in orbit around the Sun. This is the structure of the spatio-temporal "observatory", which works as a single mechanism, rebuilding the flow of time.

Local residents and their descendants still sacredly honor these names: Yessen ata, Shopan ata, Shakpak ata, Sultan epe, Masat ata, Karaman ata, Koshkar ata, Man ata, Temir baba, Kanga baba and the very last Beket ata. The list goes on to 360 or more. Almost every corner of the Mangystau region has its own holy place. Only the vast majority of such places do not stand out in any way, do not differ from the environment. A lonely hill, a lonely gravestone stele and a saint erected on a pole, a pile of stones practically do not attract human attention. But many of these holy places have now turned into whole cemeteries, because the Kazakhs prefer to bury the dead next to the saints (Azhigali, 2014). But some of the places where the saints lived were well preserved thanks to their amazing structure in the form of underground caves, which they used as madrassas. In our work, we do not aim to describe all the caves-mosques, we will limit ourselves only to those objects that are of the greatest interest and attract more tourists and those places that we have explored ourselves (Figure 2, Table 2).

All underground mosques were built during XII-XIX centuries and cut out in the rocks of chalk rocks, represented by limestones, marls and snow-white clays, which are widely developed throughout the territory of Mangystau. Such buildings served as protection in summer from extreme heat, in winter from strong winds and are considered especially revered places.

The name "Underground Mosques of Mangystau" first appeared in the collection "Monuments of Folk Art of Western Kazakhstan" (Mendikulov, 1987). Due to the lack of serious scientific research at that time, the name "Underground Mosques" has stuck to this day as an axiom. However, it is a mistake to call all underground structures, from single-chamber caves to multi-chamber complexes, by the same term. Scientific research shows that the fundamental feature of a mosque is the presence of a mihrab facing the Qibla. Therefore, it is suggested to include the rocky and underground structures of Shopan ata, Becket Ata, Shakpak Ata, Masat Ata as mosques. Although there is no mihrab in Sultan Epe and Karaman Ata, there is a prayer room, therefore they are referred to as mosques (Azhigali, 2002).

The most visited place by tourists is the Beket Ata mosque, but according to described rules, all pilgrims first visit the Shopan Ata mosque, which is on his way. And we, adhering to this tradition, begin the description with this mosque.

Table 2. Characteristics of underground mosques of in Mangystau (6 mosques)

Mosques	Shopan Ata	Beket Ata	Karaman Ata	Shakpak Ata	Masat Ata	Sultan Epe
Distance from Aktau (km)	180	245	60	145	130	150
Period of construction (century)	XII-XIII	XIX	XIII	XIII-XV	XIV-XV	XVI
Area size, incl. necropolis (m ²)	180	250	70	45	50	7
Number of rooms in the mosque	12	4	3	4	1	9
Room height (m).	2,0-2,3	2,5-3,5	2,5-2,7	2,5-2,8	2,5	2,0-2,3
Mihrabs	yes	yes	no	yes	yes	no
Number of pilgrims (thous./year)	200	200	70-80	150-170	50-70	100

Shopan-ata underground mosque (coordinates: N43° 32'49.86", E53° 23'35.46"), located 180 km north-east of the regional center Aktau is the most ancient cultural monument. Shopan-Ata translated from Kazakh means "shepherd". Shopan ata is the nickname of the great teacher, under which he was known and revered by supporters on the ideas of Sufism. Shopan ata was one of the 360 disciples of the leader and preacher Khoja Ahmed Yassau and therefore equated to the face of national saints of all Turkic peoples (Kamalova and Bermakhanov, 2018). The Shopan Ata underground mosque is located on the way to the Beket Ata necropolis. Near the necropolis there is a large area with about 4000 burials dating back to the X-XII centuries (Koshbaiuly and Kalmenov, 2009). Shopan-Ata was the spiritual mentor of Beket aty, a famous Kazakh religious figure and Sufist, who worshiped him until the end of his days.

The Shopan Ata Mosque was cut out in the massif of the adjacent rock with the aim of turning it into a religious center, as evidenced by 12 interconnected rooms. Each room is allocated for a specific type of activity: household needs, religious rites, educational teachings. The main room is rectangular, 7 meters long and 5 meters wide. Light enters the room through a round opening with a diameter of 1.5 meters. In the center of the room there are two wooden poles with a height of about 1.5-1.8 meters. The place where the poles stand is considered holy. The burial niche, where Shopan ata is buried, is on the left, significantly deepened into the thickness of the rock. At the western and southern walls of the main room, two spacious rooms were cut down, intended for pilgrims (Figure 3).

A well has been built at the base of the Shopan-Ata underground mosque. The second mosque is located east of the main one and was built a little later. It has a separate entrance, its prayer hall is located transversely and is oriented by the mihrab to the south. According to legend, after graduation, Khoja Akhmet gathered his disciples and announced to them that they should shoot arrows through the shanyrak and where the arrows fly, they will preach the ideas of Sufism. Shopan ata arrow, having flown to Mangyshlak, fell on a small mountain at

the foot of which, Shopan ata built an underground mosque. According to another legend, a mulberry tree grew from this arrow, which still grows and is considered sacred with healing properties, its age is about 800 years. The complex of the Shopan Ata mosque dates from the end of the XII - the beginning of the XIII century, which in 1982 was taken under protection as a historical and cultural object of regional significance and included in the list of historical and cultural monuments of republican significance.

Beket-ata underground mosque (coordinates: N43° 35 49.83", E54° 4'12.38"), located 280 km from the regional center Aktau in the northeastern direction. Beket ata was not one of the 360 messengers of Khoja Yassau, because he lived in another historical time, but he considered himself a disciple of a brilliant teacher and a follower of his teachings, and the people also consider him a disciple of Yassau, therefore his name was additionally included in the number of 366 saints. Becket Ata was born in 1750. At the age of 14, he came to venerate the ashes of Saint Shopan ata and received a blessing to attain knowledge. Having received his education in Khiva, he returned to his homeland and began to build underground mosques, where he founded a school and taught children Sufism, preached sermons.

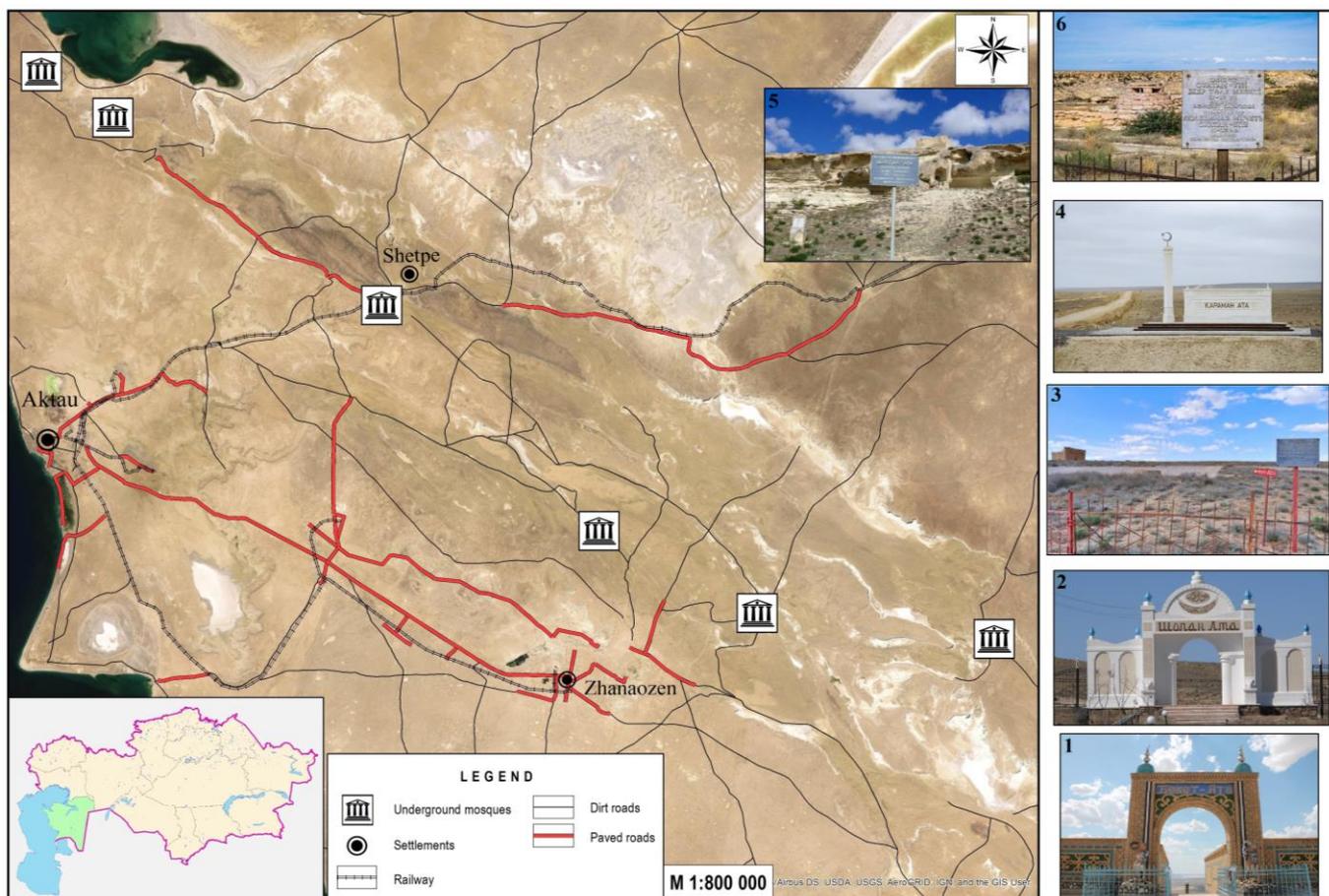


Figure 2. Sacred places of Mangystau (objects described in the document are indicated in red 1-underground mosque Beket Ata; 2- underground mosque Shopan Ata; 3- underground mosque Masat Ata; 4- underground mosque Karaman Ata; 5 underground mosque Shakpak Ata; 6- Sultan Epe)

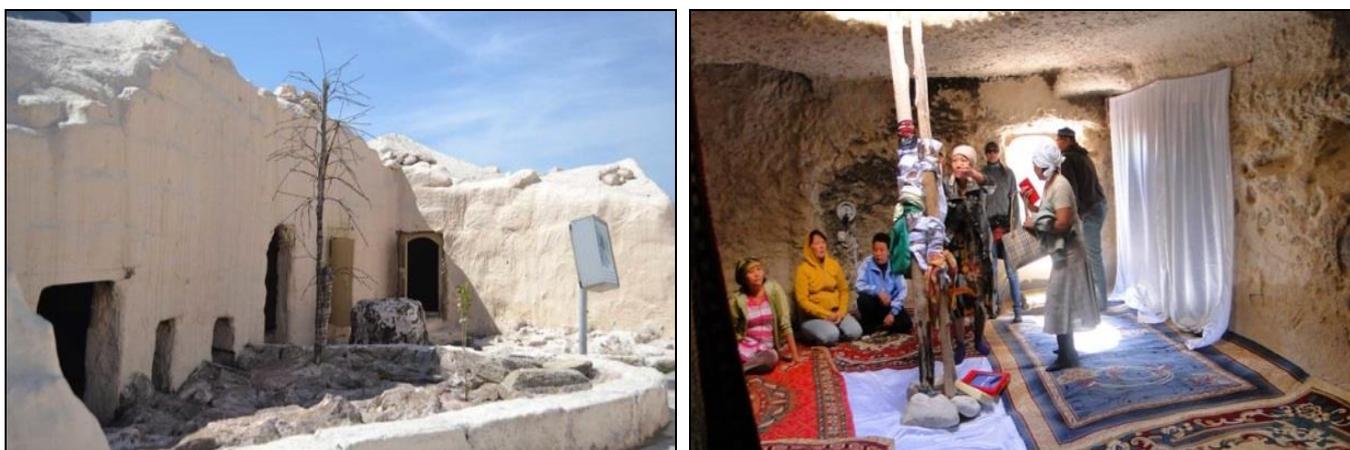


Figure 3. Underground mosque Shopan ata on the left is the entrance of the Shopan ata mosque; right inside the Shopan ata mosque

During his life, he built four mosques in places of seasonal migrations of his kind. He was buried in the last underground mosque, carved into the high rock of the Oglandy tract. This mosque is considered its largest architectural building of the XIX century (Taimagambetov and Mamirov, 2012), later, which later became a center of pilgrimage and excursions, despite its inaccessibility (Figure 4).



Figure 4. Underground mosque Beket Ata - a) Type from afar underground mosque Beket Ata
b) Types of close underground mosque Beket Ata

Currently, the Beket Ata complex consists of two buildings: a guest house and the mosque itself. The guest house is located on the very edge of the plateau, in front of the descent to the mosque. Before going down to the mosque, you need to take a bath. The way to the mosque lies through a descent into a deep ravine with a depth of 1500 meters along a path made of shell tiles. The length of the descent is about 1.5 km. Below in the gorge, surrounded by steep rocks, there is a small oasis. The mosque is located in the rocky outcrops of soft chalk rocks of the Western Chinks, rising to a height of 10 m. The original appearance of the mosque is well preserved. The mosque consists of four interconnected rooms. The main room of the mosque is round in plan, the ceiling has the shape of a flat dome, which is illuminated by a skylight pierced in the center with a diameter of 1.5 m. Through this hole a wooden staff of Beket ata is installed, which determines the degree of its holiness. In general, the interior imitates the Kazakh yurt. The area of the room is about 10 sq.m. From this room, exits lead to an oval-shaped western room measuring 5x3 m, where there is a prayer hall with a mihrab on the south wall. On the southeast side there are two rooms, in one of them Beket ata himself is buried, in the other room the ashes of Akkuash, his sister are placed, where only women are allowed to tell about their difficulties and ask for help. The height of the rooms ranges from 2.5 to 3.0-3.5 m. The walls with several flat

niches for lamps are smoothly hewn. The floors in the rooms are leveled. Taking pictures or filming videos inside the mosque is prohibited, so no photos exist about the inner architecture of the mosque. There is an unusual acoustics of the mosque, through which the amazing audibility of the prayers being recited in all rooms is transmitted. There is no draft in the rooms, even with open doors. The strengthening of the entrance part of the retaining wall and the deep laying of the premises ensured the safety of this mosque, in contrast to other underground mosques.

Karaman-ata underground mosque (N 44° 06'07.83", E 52° 06 '36.21") is located in the central part of the Mangyshlak peninsula, in the Mangystau region, 5 km west of the Kandybas tract. Karaman-Ata was one of three hundred missionaries who came to Mangyshlak to spread Sufism. Karaman - ata contains characteristic burial and cult structures: an underground mosque and a necropolis. The mosque consists of three main premises (Figure 5). This is the entrance room, the north-western wall of which collapsed and filled up the corridor, turning it into a gentle ramp, and the long room of the prayer hall, stretching from southeast to north-west (23 x 6 m), the western wall of which is slightly rounded.



Figure 5. Underground mosque Karaman ata: on the left figure is the entrance of the Karaman ata mosque; right figure inside the Karaman ata mosque

The ceiling of the prayer hall is supported by two one-piece and three man-made columns. To illuminate the room, two circular light openings have been cut through the ceiling. The rooms are connected by a long corridor. The ceiling height in all rooms is low. The floors are covered with an alluvial mass of clay and sand that got in with water through the entrances and interstratal cracks in the soil. In the northeastern part of the mosque, there is a third round-shaped room, in which, according to legend, the crypt of Karaman ata is located. The general neglected state, apparently, is explained by the remoteness of the monument from settlements. This settlement is the only underground mosque of the XIII century, completely located underground. Kazakhs and Turkmens, who lived in Mangyshlak, considered the territory of the necropolis to be sacred land. All bloodshed was prohibited here, and in the event of conflicts, peace negotiations were held and oaths of purification were taken. At present, the main part of the Karaman-ata necropolis is surrounded by a metal fence. In the southwestern part, behind the fences of the necropolis, there are tombstones dating from the VIII - IX centuries, which are also an integral part of the monument. The total area of the protected area is 7.2 hectares. The pilgrimage to the necropolis and mosque continues to this day. A house is built not far from the pilgrims' complex.

Shakpak-ata underground mosque (N44 ° 26'0.67", E51° 8'20.40") is located 90 km north of the city of Aktau. The Shakpak ata mosque appeared in the X century. Then the existing underground temple was rebuilt in accordance with the new religion: a mihrab niche and cells for hermit monks were cut down in the western wing of the cave; in the niches on both sides of the entrance portal, depressions were cut for the burial of dervishes. The mosque acquired its appearance close to the present in the XIII — XV centuries (Baypakov, 2012). The mosque is located in the northeastern part of the Tupkaragan peninsula, along the slope of the chalk mountain Ungazy. Shakpak ata means "old man-flint", he is one of 360 saints who promoted Sufism, practiced healing magic. The Shakpak ata mosque, which has the shape of a Latin cross in its plan, was carved out in the thickness of a rocky promontory formed by the channels of two ravines descending along the slope of Mount Ungazy from the south to the northwest, to the Sarytas bay of the Caspian Sea (Figure 6).



Figure 6. Underground mosque Shakpak ata: on the left figure is the entrance of the Shakpak ata mosque; right figure inside the Shakpak ata mosque

At the ends of the long branch of the cross, stretching from west to east, there are two entrances to the mosque: the western one, to which a staircase carved into the rock leads, and the eastern one, which has a service purpose. The portal niche of the main entrance has the shape of a triangular arch. Below, to the right and to the left of the entrance, there are burial niches, reinforced from below by retaining walls. Behind the doorway and the short passage behind it, there is a spacious 5 x 3 m room, the floor and ceiling of which are lowered towards the entrance. The transverse part of the cross is located closer to the western entrance of the mosque. The center of the room has a shape close to a square, the area is slightly more than 20 square meters, highlighted by a hemispherical dome and four corner columns. Between the columns there is an elliptical arch like. A skylight with a diameter of more than 1 m and a height of about 5 meters was cut down at the zenith of the dome. Outside, a square pavilion was erected above it, which served as protection from atmospheric precipitation and a minaret tower. At present, its upper part is destroyed, the height of the preserved walls is 4 meters.

The upper part of the room and the stairs leading upwards are destroyed. There are three window openings covered with arches, some parts are laid. The ends of the transverse hall are spacious rooms separated from the central room and slightly raised above the floor level of the central hall. The interior of the mosque has no decorative elements, except for the columns and arches of the main room. The Shakpak Ata Mosque is one of the most ancient underground structures, where columns and capitals were first used. In general, the columns, arch and domed vault organize the interior of the mosque into a single complex with a well-thought-out strict layout. The walls of two rooms and side rooms are aligned, which contain many inscriptions at different times, drawings of animals, open palms (a symbol of greeting), and plant patterns. Among the Sufis, the image of palms is considered a talisman that protects a sacred place and all those entering from impure forces. It is a symbol of touch, energy exchange, which is characteristic of the healing traditions in paganism. There are also Arabic hieroglyphs, which in translation are read as the names of 40 Sufi disciples buried in the vicinity of the mosque.

In Shakpak ata underground mosque there is an extraordinary acoustics in all rooms, no matter how many people are in them, everyone can hear the prayer readings alike. Places associated with the memory of Shakpak ata are surrounded by an aura of mystery and enigma. Immediately you find yourself in another dimension of time and space, life and death. The entire mosque is located in a monolith "underground", they acted more like sculptures, and not like builders. In the concept of the temple carved into the rock, the ancient idea of the complete merging of the temple-sanctuary with nature found expression. The mosque is very unique in every detail, and so far the only one discovered and explored on the territory of Kazakhstan and Central Asia (Astafiev and Petrov, 2017).

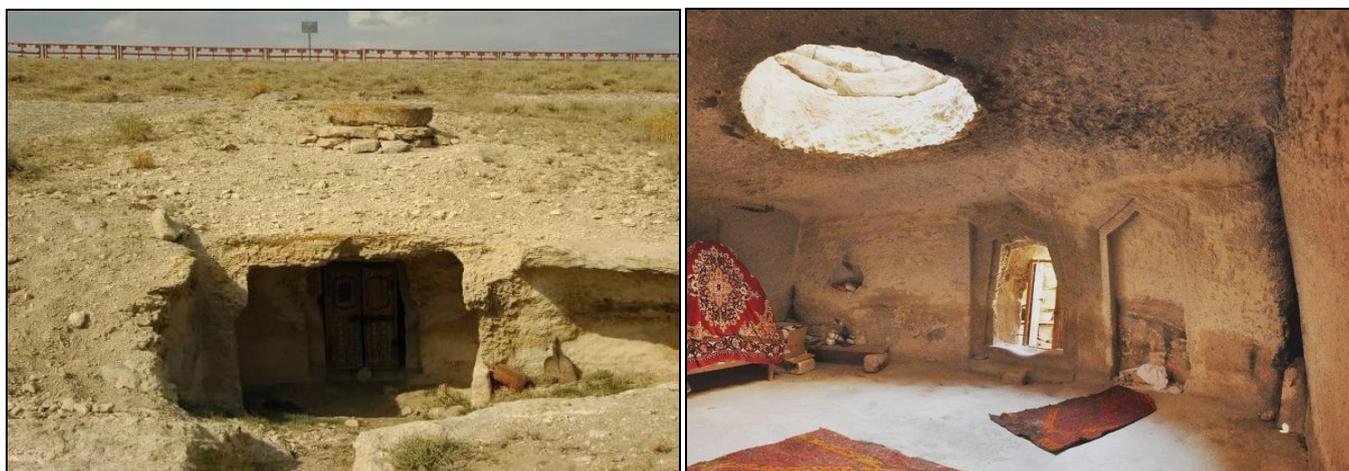


Figure 7. Underground mosque Masat Ata: on the left figure is the entrance of the Masat ata mosque (<https://ruh.kz/geo/mangystau/masatata/>); right figure inside the Masat ata mosque



Figure 8. Underground mosque Sultan Epe: on the left figure is the entrance of the Sultan Epe mosque; right figure inside the Sultan Epe mosque

Masat ata underground mosque (N 43°41' 37.58", E 52°52' 56.33") is located 130 km east of the regional center Aktau. Next to the underground mosque is the Masat aty necropolis. The necropolis contains about 1000 different ancient burials dating back to the XIV-XVII centuries (Baypakov, 2012). The mosque, in comparison with other architectural monuments, has been well preserved, its original appearance has not been destroyed (XVIII-XIX centuries). The underground mosque was carved into dense sandstone. The entrance to the cave is supported on both sides by shell bricks, apparently due to subsidence. The interior of the mosque is shaped like a yurt like other

mosques. The main room is quite spacious, 8x4 in size, 2.5-2.8 meters high. Above, in the center, there is a round light opening with a diameter of just over 2 meters, perhaps this is an unfinished building of the room, since the openings in many mosques have a diameter of no more than one meter, mainly for light penetration. The walls of the mosque are not finished, rough, in some places niches of shallow depth are carved out. From the entrance to the left in the wall, a mihrab is knocked out to the entire height of the wall in the form of an arrow, indicating the direction towards Mecca, those who wish can pray. The floor of the room is made of clay and covered with small woolen rugs - koshma. Next to the mosque, on a flat stone, there is a trail in the form of a drain, more than 10 meters long, leading to an abandoned well, the water of which may have been used for household needs (Figure 7).

There are many folk legends about Masat ata (Kondybai, 2008a.). One of the folk legends speaks of the ability of Masat ata to fly. Another tells about a legend, when Masat ata performed namaz, the enemy caught him by surprise, sneaking up and chopped off his head.

Nature, indignant at this insidious act, reacted by the fact that the earth began to melt, despite the fact that Masat ata was headless, he got up, jumped on a horse, took a few steps on the molten stones and disappeared, so the burial of Masat ata does not exist. But his footprints and the footprints of his horse were imprinted on the stone, and where they end there is an underground mosque. In this matter, we do not want to prove scientifically that these are the same traces or not, but the fact is that they still exist. But the question arises of how these traces could have remained on the stone, here we must not forget about the higher forces of nature, which are sometimes not comprehensible to the human mind. Currently, the Masat Ata monument has been protected by the state since 1982.

Sultan epe underground mosque (N 44°28' 18.97", E 51°0' 36.72") is located in the Sarytas Bay, 95 km north-east of the city of Aktau. Sultan-epe is the son of the well-known Central Asian mystic poet Hakim-ata (Suleiman Bakyrqani), a student of Ahmed Yassau and Ambar-ana. According to legend, Sultan-epe is the patron saint of people drowning in the water and fishermen. According to some sources, it is known that he lived in the XII-XIII centuries. The underground mosque was built in the XVI century by the boy Khairulla, a student of a Sufi, to whom Sultan-epe appeared in a dream and promised that on his behalf the stones would themselves fold into the building (Kondybai, 2008a). Indeed, the stones of the mosque look simply folded without mortar (Figure 8). The mosque consists of 9 rooms with stone and skylights, as well as small rooms. The entrance hall ends with a kind of steep staircase, made of raw stone slabs of various sizes. The height of the stairs is about 2 meters. The staircase descends into a small rectangular hall with a height of 3 meters, the walls of which are made of soft marly clay with a high vault and a skylight that leads to a narrow room. The complex has three skylights, two round in plan, and the third square. The floor was a dense layer of reddish clay with calcareous rubble or the surface of the next rock layer. The thickness of the layer of marly clay is 0.1 - 1 m, which determines the height of the underground galleries. Structurally, the mosque was built into the sides of the channel on the surface of the previously settled slabs, while when creating the underground part, the ends of the slabs served as the walls of the galleries. In some places, these walls were propped up to the mainland surface by masonry for resistance from further subsidence.

There is a gorge with steep rocks next to the mosque. In warm weather, it is covered with green thickets and filled with the chirping of birds. Near the cliff there is a well with a depth of 8 m, with cold and clear water. Here the Guardian of Water - the spirit of Water "dwells", therefore, when there was a shortage of water in this region, there was always water in the well. The Sultan epe underground mosque is an ancient holy place of worship for local residents. His remains rest near the Caspian Sea between the areas of Ashymury and Oira.

CONCLUSION

There are many different religions in the world, each of which has its own history and has a countless number of monuments and attractions. The underground mosques of Mangistau are phenomena that reflect the genesis of the development of art and the culture of the Kazakh people. These ancestral cult buildings served as symbols of generic unity for the transmission of the noble spirit of the clan to descendants in the future. They connected the transfer of qualities from ancestors to descendants with a single network and created conditions for the continuity of different generations. Through them life experience and knowledge are transmitted, they were and are light landmarks for those who were, are on the way, and will still travel in the future, because visiting these graves is a kind of ritual, which is accompanied by the reading of prayers and surahs from the Koran and this rite has been passed down from generation to generation for many centuries.

The authorities of the Mangistau region are working on the preparation of a dossier for nominating underground mosques to the UNESCO World Heritage List. The requirements for the selection of monuments to the World Heritage List, which already contains more than a thousand sites from 167 countries of the world, have become much stricter. Among them, the inconclusiveness of the wording and insufficient evidence of the outstanding value of the candidate objects, the lack of integrity and authenticity, the lack of an effective security and management system can be presented as a reason for rejecting the nomination or returning it for revision. Besides, these underground mosques are located far from the city, at a distance of 60 to almost 300 km and only some have infrastructure (Beket-ata and Shopan-ata).

Thus, based on the study of underground mosques in Mangystau, the following conclusions can be drawn:

- Mangystau region differs from other regions in that it has the largest number of historical sites and places of worship in Kazakhstan;
- underground mosques are monuments of religious architecture of the region, some of which are known outside the country (Beket ata);
- underground structures differ in the time of construction (from the XII to the XIX centuries), and the internal structure of the premises were used as a mosque or madrasah because of the presence of a mihrab and a prayer room;
- all underground mosques are under state protection.

For the development of religious tourism it is necessary:

- to use underground mosques with other types of tourism (with business and educational, scientific tourism) to create interest to these places;
- to create a program for the development of infrastructure (a highway, hotels, souvenir shops);
- participation and active role of local authorities in supporting religious tourism;
- attracting commercial structures, entrepreneurs and other citizens interested in the development of tourism business, not only to Beket ata and Shopan ata, but to other underground mosques that can bring income. Religious tourism does not depend on the time of year and holds a great interest among the population, as epochs change, ideologies collapse.

Left by the authorities without moral care, people turn to spirituality, which, most often, leads them to the mosque. Religion, penetrating deeply into social life, opens up new opportunities for tourist flows that "can meet the needs of both believers and other tourists".

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