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REPRESENTATION OF THE ETHNIC WORLDVIEW IN THE TOPONYMS OF THE KAZYGURT REGION

Abstract. This research is aimed at uncovering the ethnic worldview through toponyms of the Kazygurt region. The focus is on mythological, ethnocultural and Sufi aspects present in the regional toponymy and their contribution to the preservation of collective culture memory. The materials of this research consist of toponyms and microtoponyms of places related to sacred objects, holy pilgrimage roads, springs, caves, trees, and stones found across the Kazygurt territory. The applied analytical methods involve ethnolinguistic approach, semantic analysis, cognitive toponymology, and description method. In addition, field observations and oral narratives provided by local people were considered additional sources for interpretation of some place names.

The findings prove that the toponymic landscape of the region reflects the ethnocultural layers and processes that occurred in the region throughout history. Some of the names are based on ancient mythological ideas, while other toponyms have ties to local religion and religious rituals, or beliefs regarding such natural objects as water, stones and trees. A group of toponyms is characterized by links to Islamic Sufi traditions that prevailed in the region in more recent times. Moreover, there are some names that have remained part of local culture and are actively used in everyday life and pilgrimages despite not being entirely clear for young speakers.

From the point of view of theoretical value, the research is related to ethnocognitive and stratigraphical interpretation of Kazakh toponymy. Practically, the research has implications for ethnolinguistics, cultural studies, sacred geography, regional history, and teaching of Kazakh spiritual culture and ethnic worldview.

Key words. Kazygurt, toponymy, ethnic worldview, ethnotoponymy, sacred geography, mythological consciousness, sacred places, ethnocultural memory, microtoponymy.

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ҚАЗЫҒҰРТ ӨңІРІ ТОПОНИМДЕРІНДЕГІ ЭТНИКАЛЫҚ ДҮНИЕТАНЫМНЫҢ КӨРІНІСІ

Аңдатпа. Бұл зерттеу Қазығұрт өңірінің топонимдері арқылы этникалық дүниетанымды анықтауға бағытталған. Негізгі назар аймақтық топонимияда көрініс тапқан мифологиялық, этномәдени және сопылық элементтерге, сондай-ақ олардың ұжымдық мәдени жадты сақтаудағы рөліне аударылды. Зерттеу материалы Қазығұрт аумағындағы киелі нысандарға, зиярат жолдарына, бұлақтарға, үңгірлерге, ағаштарға және тасқа қатысты топонимдер мен микротопонимдерден тұрады. Зерттеу барысында этнолингвистикалық әдіс, семантикалық талдау, когнитивтік топонимика және сипаттамалық әдіс қолданылды. Сонымен қатар, жергілікті тұрғындардан жазып алынған ауызша әңгімелер мен далалық бақылау материалдары кейбір жер атауларын түсіндіруде қосымша дереккоз ретінде пайдаланылды.

Зерттеу нәтижелері аймақтың топонимиялық кеңістігі тарихи кезеңдерде қалыптасқан бірнеше этномәдени қабаттарды сақтап қалғанын көрсетті. Кейбір атаулар көне мифологиялық түсініктермен байланысты болса, басқа топонимдер жергілікті діни дәстүрлермен, ғұрыптармен және су, тас, ағаш сияқты табиғи нысандарға қатысты сенімдермен сабақтасып жатыр. Топонимдердің бір бөлігі өңірде кейінгі кезеңдерде кең тараған исламдық-сопылық дәстүрлермен байланысты. Сонымен қатар, кейбір жер атауларының бастапқы мағынасы жас буынға толық түсінікті болмағанымен, олар жергілікті мәдени ортада және зиярат тәжірибесінде әлі де белсенді қолданылады.

Зерттеудің теориялық маңызы қазақ топонимиясын этнокогнитивтік және стратиграфиялық тұрғыдан қарастыруымен байланысты. Практикалық маңызы этнолингвистика, мәдениеттану, киелі география, аймақтық тарих салаларында, сондай-ақ қазақ халқының рухани мәдениеті мен этникалық дүниетанымын оқытуға арналған оқу материалдарын дайындауда қолданылу мүмкіндігімен анықталады.

Кілт сөздер. Қазығұрт, топонимия, этникалық дүниетаным, этнотопонимия, сакралды география, мифологиялық таным, киелі орындар, этномәдени жад, микротопонимия.

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ОТРАЖЕНИЕ ЭТНИЧЕСКОГО МИРОВОЗЗРЕНИЯ В ТОПОНИМАХ КАЗЫГҰРТСКОГО РЕГИОНА

Аннотация. Данное исследование направлено на выявление этнического мировоззрения, отражённого в топонимах Казыгуртского региона. Особое внимание уделяется мифологическим, этнокультурным и суфийским элементам, сохранившимся в региональной топонимии, а также их роли в сохранении коллективной культурной памяти. Материал исследования составили топонимы и микротопонимы, связанные со священными местами, паломническими маршрутами, источниками, пещерами, деревьями и каменными объектами, расположенными на территории Казыгурта. В

работе использованы этнолингвистический подход, семантический анализ, когнитивно-топонимический анализ и описательный метод. Дополнительным источником интерпретации отдельных географических названий послужили полевые наблюдения и устные рассказы местных жителей.

Результаты исследования показали, что топонимический ландшафт региона сохраняет несколько этнокультурных слоёв, сформировавшихся в разные исторические периоды. Часть названий связана с древними мифологическими представлениями, другие отражают местные религиозные традиции, обрядовые практики и верования, связанные с водой, камнями, деревьями и сакральными природными объектами. Отдельная группа топонимов демонстрирует связь с исламско-суфийскими традициями, получившими распространение в регионе в более поздние исторические периоды. Некоторые географические названия продолжают активно функционировать в местной речи и паломнической практике, несмотря на то, что их первоначальное значение уже не всегда полностью понятно молодому поколению.

Теоретическая значимость исследования заключается в этнокогнитивной и стратиграфической интерпретации казахской топонимии. Практическая значимость связана с возможностью использования результатов исследования в области этнолингвистики, культурологии, сакральной географии, региональной истории, а также при подготовке учебных материалов, посвящённых духовной культуре и этническому мировоззрению казахского народа.

Ключевые слова. Казыгурт, топонимия, этническое мировоззрение, этнотопонимия, сакральная география, мифологическое сознание, священные места, этнокультурная память, микротопонимия.

Introduction. First of all, place names are not only geographic signs and landmarks but also keepers of collective cultural memory, beliefs, and notions about the surrounding natural world. This is especially clear from the case of the Kazygurt area since a great number of toponyms here are inseparably connected with sacred spots, mythology, pilgrim rituals, and oral traditions. Although the meaning of some toponyms can become somewhat forgotten with the course of time, they still preserve their function as cultural markers of the local population.

Kazygurt is important for the Kazakh ethnic culture since this mountain is directly connected with historical and sacred stories and memories. Usually, the members of a local community tend to explain geographical names based on local legends, religion, or symbolism. On the other hand, modern processes like urbanization, migration, or interlanguage contacts make young people perceive toponyms in a different way. Sometimes toponyms are preserved but lose their ethnocultural meaning [1].

If to consider toponymic system as an expression of cognitive phenomena in linguistics, it is possible to notice several historical layers created by different cultures. Sometimes toponyms are associated with the mythological understanding of the world, whereas other names refer to tribal organization, religions, or further political changes. Thus, toponymy seems to be stratified rather than homogenous since various layers and levels are found in Kazygurt.

The scientific novelty of the research lies in the comprehensive ethnolinguistic analysis of the toponyms and microtoponyms of the Kazygurt region as representations of the ethnic worldview of the Kazakh people. For the first time, the toponymic material of the region has been systematized and examined from an ethnocognitive perspective, taking into account mythological, ethnocultural, and Sufi components that reflect various historical and cultural layers involved in the formation of the regional toponymic landscape.

The first layer of many Kazakh toponyms is usually connected with the mythological view of the world. Mountains, springs, rivers, caves, and stones were considered as sacred objects or places in ancient times. There are toponyms in the area under consideration which have something to do with this idea although nowadays they are used as geographical names without any symbolic meaning. There are some cases of gradual semantics changes that are difficult to reconstruct.

Generally, ethnolinguistic approach views toponyms as symbols of collective knowledge and cultural experience. Critical toponymy, which has emerged recently, claims that the names of places reflect social and historical dynamics and identity of particular societies. However, in most cases of Kazakh toponymic researches, the emphasis is made on etymological and lexical analysis. The questions about ethnocultural stratification are raised less often than expected. Local field data prove this fact, too. In most cases, explanations are connected with local legends and memory[2].

Nowadays, Kazakh toponymy is perceived as a part of ethnocultural memory. Namely, toponyms express traditional perceptions of space connected with sacred geography, historical consciousness, and identity. Moreover, researchers have found that there is the presence of fragments of previous mythological and cognitive systems in some toponyms.

Contemporary cognitive toponymic approach presupposes that toponyms are expressions of ethnocultural concepts within a language. Within Kazakh perception system, numerous toponyms contain concepts referring to ancestral land, holy places, family memory, and nomadic space.

Concerning sacred geography in Kazakhstan, researchers state that sacral spaces affect the symbolic organization of cultural space in this country. Sacred mountains, springs, burials, and trees play a vital role in regional identities and oral traditions. Such observations are especially relevant for the area of Kazygurt since here we can find myths along with Islam.

There exists a special trend in Turkic toponymology related to the study of symbolism of landscapes' elements. They are connected with water, stones, trees, and colors. Many of these elements represent mythological and cosmological concepts of Turkic peoples. As a result, toponyms referring to natural landscapes can be treated as spatial symbols of ethnocultural categories [3].

It is possible to conclude that the toponyms of the Kazygurt region demonstrate close links between language, culture, memory, and sacred geography. Here, the toponymic system is influenced by myths, legends, religion, and history. Some meanings of names disappear over the years whereas others survive in pilgrimage practices and local consciousness. Thus, the toponymic system cannot be regarded as stable and homogenous.

Materials and methods of the research. The data set for the current research is represented by regional and microtoponyms found in the territory of Kazygurt, Southern Kazakhstan. Primarily, this data includes names connected with such natural phenomena and landmarks as sacred stones, springs, caves, mountains, trees, pilgrimage paths, and places associated with saints, batyrs or other historical figures important for the region. This sample was not made to cover the entire toponymic system in the region, but was focused on place names preserving mythological, religious and/or ethnocultural connections in people's consciousness.

Some part of the data was taken from regional encyclopedias, folklore collections, historical descriptions of the area and works on Kazakh onomastics. Particular toponyms were found in several written sources, whereas others became known mainly through interviews or colloquial use. Place-name explanations in some villages are based on folkloric interpretations and oral stories rather than historically-based information. Different variants of the same story were found in the same village from time to time.

Fieldwork played an important role in collecting the data. The visits to some sacred places in the Kazygurt region provided the opportunity to observe how certain names remained alive and used in pilgrimage rituals. Some people attached cloth to trees, took water from healing springs, prayed at stone sites, burials, and walked narrow passages between rocks. All this was observed and described during fieldwork without using any questionnaires.

This research does not propose a universal classification of Kazygurt toponymy. The material has been consciously chosen; there was emphasis on names referring to sacred areas, oral interpretations, pilgrimages, and old mythological motifs kept in regional practice. Some microtoponyms have also been included into the sample, although they are seldom mentioned in official maps.

Various methodologies have been used in this study. The central methodological approach is based on ethnolinguistic and cognitive-toponymic frameworks. The analysis of the place names includes consideration of these units as elements of collective memory and part of regional culture and worldview. The semantic method has also been used to find the meaning of such elements as water, stones, caves, trees, sacred space, and other natural objects referred to in regional legends.

Descriptive approach has been used in analyzing oral interpretations of particular names. Comparative interpretation has also been used in some cases when the material revealed some common symbols typical of the whole Turkic mythology and/or Islamic-Sufi traditions. Nevertheless, the comparison was done carefully as a tool for clarifying the motifs but not for classification.

In this research stratigraphic methodology has been used as well. Toponyms can be classified according to various ethnocognitive strata formed throughout different times; at times, they overlap. Mythological, Islamic and historical motifs can coexist in one place or even in one story. The borders between them are often unclear.

The empirical material of the study consists of 58 toponyms and microtoponyms collected in the Kazygurt region through field observations, local historical sources, pilgrimage route descriptions, and oral narratives obtained from local residents. The selection of the material was based on the following criteria: (1) cultural and historical significance of the geographical object; (2) presence of mythological, ethnocultural, or Sufi semantic components; (3) active use of the name in local communication and pilgrimage practices; and (4) availability of linguistic and ethnographic information allowing semantic interpretation.

To ensure representativeness, the collected material was classified according to the dominant ethnocultural component reflected in the toponymic meaning. The distribution of the analyzed units is presented in Table 1.

Table 1 - Classification of the analyzed toponyms and microtoponyms of the Kazygurt region

Toponymic category	Number of units	Examples
Mythological toponyms (stones, mountains, transformation motifs)	15	Ata tas, Ana tas, Küieu tas, Tesik tas, Qyryq qyz
Sacred tree toponyms	6	Kökterek äulie and related names
Cave toponyms	5	Zheti üngir, Qos üngir, Zhaltyr üngir
Sacred hydronyms (springs)	8	Ana bulaq, Ata bulaq, Bala bulaq, Qyz bulaq
Sufi and Islamic hagiotoponyms	14	Aqbura äulie, Ysmaiyl ata, Ysqaq ata, Ghaiyp eren – qyryq shilten

Historical and memorial toponyms	10	Names associated with saints, batyrs, and tribal leaders
Total	58	—

The classification demonstrates that mythological and Sufi-Islamic layers constitute the most productive components of the regional toponymic system. This distribution confirms the significant role of sacred geography and ethnocultural memory in shaping the toponymic landscape of Kazygurt.

It is worth mentioning that this analysis also includes consideration of social practices related to place names rather than only linguistic analysis. In some cases, it becomes apparent that ritual practices are more persistent than verbal explanation. Some respondents cannot explain the semantics of the place name in much detail anymore, but traditions related to the site have survived until our days, e.g., visits to the spring or sacred tree, sacred cave, or pilgrim sites.

The results and their discussion. The analysis of the Kazygurt regional toponymy revealed that a considerable number of place names preserve elements of mythological cognition connected with sacred landscape perception, stone symbolism, and ancient ethnocultural beliefs. Among the most recurrent motifs identified in the collected material was the transformation of humans into stone. This motif appears in several microtoponyms and hagiotoponyms, including *Ata tas*, *Ana tas*, *Küieu tas*, *Tesik tas*, and *Qyryq qyz* [4].

Table 2- Semantic and Cultural Classification of Kazygurt Toponyms

Group	Cultural/Semantic Characteristics	Examples
Mythological toponyms	Reflect myths, transformation motifs, and archaic beliefs	Ata tas, Ana tas, Küieu tas, Tesik tas, Qyryq qyz
Sacred stone toponyms	Associated with ancestor cults, sacred power, and ritual practices	Ata tas, Ana tas, Tesik tas
Sacred tree toponyms	Connected with tree worship, fertility beliefs, and pilgrimage traditions	Kökterek äulie
Cave toponyms	Related to shelters, ritual spaces, and sacred geography	Zheti üngir, Qos üngir, Zhaltyr üngir, Bir auyzdy üngir, Üsh auyzdy üngir
Sacred hydronyms	Springs believed to possess healing and spiritual properties	Ana bulaq, Ata bulaq, Bala bulaq, Qyz bulaq, Köktöbe bulağı
Sufi and Islamic hagiotoponyms	Associated with saints, pirs, and pilgrimage sites	Aqbura äulie, Ysmaiyl ata, Ysqaq ata, Ghaiyp eren–qyryq shilten
Historical-memory toponyms	Preserve information about saints, batyrs, and local historical figures	Names connected with batyrs and tribal leaders

The classification demonstrates that the toponymic landscape of Kazygurt is structured around several interconnected cultural layers, including mythological, sacred-natural, Islamic-Sufi, and historical-memory components, which together reflect the ethnocultural worldview of the local community.

Based on field research, it can be argued that these toponyms are not only geographic, but also religious-cultural signs. During informal interviews with the region's inhabitants and

guests, several respondents referred to the analyzed sites not to the historical or geographical background, but to the story passed down from generation to generation in oral form. Several narrators used explicit religious or sacralized discourse while referring to these sites, which was especially true for Qyryq qyz and Tesik tas. Thus, archaeological excavations of anthropomorphic balbal stone sculptures of people, including old men, women, children, and warriors, were discovered in the Karaganda region. According to Sabetqazy Aqatay, these finds indicate the ideas about the ancient origin of humans from stone. Food remains were found in between the teeth of several anthropomorphic sculptures that may indicate primitive totemism [5].

Furthermore, S. Aqynzhanov points out that stone sculptures are often found next to Kipchak burials. According to B. Kömekov, members of the Turkic tribes got off their horses and made respectful bows toward stone figures. Apparently, this practice reflected the respect of ancestors and early cult traditions [6].

Qyryq qyz is one of the central toponyms of the region's mythological space. In the Kazygurt area, there are two stone formation clusters related to this narrative. These places are connected with the myth about forty girls who were turned to stone during the time of enemy invasion. The fact that this myth did not disappear from the minds of modern people means that mythological perception of the landscape remains alive, and that pilgrimages and visits to these places continue.

All of this indicates that the mythologeme 'stone' has remained one of the most stable in the mythology of the region. Toponyms like Ata tas and Ana tas imply the ideas of origin, ancestors, and sanctity [7]. Many respondents do not refer to these sites using old mythological categories anymore, yet traces of their perception exist in the oral interpretation of these places.

Moreover, the mythologeme "entering through stone" seems to survive within the regional mythological space. In this case, Tesik tas is perceived by local people as a purifying, curative, and testing site. The majority of respondents emphasized that only sincere people are able to penetrate through stone.

According to S. Qondybai, ancient mythological concepts regarding stone were based on divine power, light, and sacred order. In his opinion, "Tas" ("stone") and "Ilki Tas" ("primordial stone") were the physical embodiment of the divine and a symbol of primordial existence. Therefore, attributes that were inherent to light in primordial myths were transferred to stone. Thus, stone in its mythological perception was not only a physical substance but also an original substance, with creating and life-giving properties. If primordial light was regarded as a generating beginning, then stone had a similar meaning [8].

Several main trends can be revealed during the analysis of the gathered material. First of all, mythological toponyms in Kazygurt are associated with the natural elements of the landscape, namely with stones, mountains, caves, springs, and cliffs in particular. Oral narratives related to these places are relatively stable even though village-level explanations may differ somewhat. Nevertheless, the fact that the places are considered sacred remains undisputed.

Field data demonstrate that mythological perceptions persist in names referring not only to stones or mountains but also to sacred trees, caves, springs, and pilgrimage places named after Kazakh saints. In many cases, the respondents do not remember the meaning of a particular name anymore. However, practices related to these places still exist. For example, one may observe some ritual behaviors while visiting springs or sacred trees.

Sacred trees also have their own specific place in the region's toponymy. One of the most frequently mentioned places in field interviews is Kökterek äulie [9]. According to the older people interviewed, the place is a sacred place visited by women praying for children. Some explanations include recommendations to avoid harming the branches and cutting down wood

in the vicinity. There are legends saying that the breaking of branches results in blood flowing from them. They were mostly told in a calm way as if part of the ordinary knowledge of locals.

Some traditions related to the sacred trees are still preserved. In particular, it includes tying cloths, leaving offerings, reading prayers, and spending night time close to sacred trees. It can be seen that pilgrims do not see trees as ordinary natural objects but rather objects filled with kiye or spiritual powers.

Another layer of regional toponymy refers to cave names, which include Zheti üngir, Qos üngir, Zhaltyr üngir, Bir auyzdy üngir, and Üsh auyzdy üngir. It is worth mentioning that some of these caves used to be ritual places or shelters where people could stay during hard times. However, nowadays, their sacred meaning may vary: while some of the sites are still perceived actively, others become simply names.

There is another layer of geographical names in the toponymy of the region, namely sacred trees and related older mythological concepts connected with tree symbolism. Tree mythology maintains some fragments of the ancient "world tree" cult. According to S. Qondybai, the world tree can be called a main object of mythological belief, traces of which cult are visible in various cultures, including Kazakh [10, p. 486].

This mythological concept is not only presented in folklore and narrative materials but also in ritual traditions and toponymy. When discussing the Kazakh culture, Sh. Ualikhanov says that lonely or strange trees become the objects of worship, and travelers tie cloths, leave offerings, and perform some rituals in this way [10, p. 486].

Hydronyms in the region also maintain some fragments of the ancient worldview. Springs as Köktöbe bulağı, Ana bulaq, Ata bulaq, Bala bulaq, and Qyz bulaq are believed to possess some healing power [11]. Pilgrims still try to take some water and drink it as healing. Usually, it is characterized as qasietti and emdik water. Symbolical meanings connected with sacred water seem less obvious in the direct explanation of the respondents.

The last layer in the toponymic system is connected with Sufi and Islamic religion. Pilgrimage places such as Ghaiyp eren – qyryq shilten, Aqbura äulie, Ysmaiyl ata, and Ysqaq ata attract numerous visitors [12]. In the majority of cases, these places refer to different Kazakh saints, Sufi masters, and other sacred figures. In several sacred complexes, there is a mixture of Islamic elements and much older mythological views regarding the landscape. Therefore, sacred stones, springs, caves, and narrow passages co-exist, and it is hardly possible to separate their layers in the explanations given by locals.

It is also worth mentioning that some names connected with saints and batyrs maintain some historical information about homeland, sacrifice, and spiritual power. In other words, apart from being geographical references, these names represent moral values recognized in the local community.

As follows from the analyzed material, the toponymic system of the Kazygurt region includes multiple layers reflecting different periods of Kazakh culture. First of all, the oldest layer refers to the fragments of proto-Kazakh mythological worldview and its perception of stones, caves, water, and sacred trees. Secondly, the second layer is related to the Sufi sacred geography. Finally, historical memory is represented in names dedicated to saints, batyrs, and tribal leaders.

It becomes clear that regional toponymy should not be analyzed using traditional methods focusing on etymology or geography alone. In addition, many names preserve the structure of worldview and mythological cognition of the past centuries in them. As a result, the toponymic space can be viewed as an element of cultural memory embedded in the landscape.

As follows from the analysis of collected stories, the motif of transformation connected with stones is very important for local perceptions. Unlike contemporary approaches to the description of landscape elements as dead objects, stone for locals is something else, i.e., the

transitional or sacred object. This idea also corresponds to the interpretations presented in Turkic studies.

According to S. Qondybai, mythological cognition in Kazakh culture associated stone with something connected with origin, transition, and sacred energy [13]. Names such as Ana tas and Ata tas are still important and meaningful for the local community despite some semantic opacity.

At the same time, there are some differences in respondents' approaches to these legends. While younger members often interpret them as folklore or local tourism materials, elders may discuss them using the term "kielilik" (spiritual dangers).

Tesik tas has some particular importance as a mythological element since the theme of passing through a narrow gate can be interpreted as purification or transition. Similar motives can also be found in some Turkic and broader Eurasian mythological concepts. However, in the Kazakh culture, this idea can still be traced both in legends and actual rituals.

As follows from the above-discussed stories and legends, the practice of recognizing spiritually gifted people as äulie is deeply rooted in the Kazakh culture. This tradition appeared much before Sufism became an integral part of it due to the spreading of Islam in the Kazakh steppe. Thus, Sufism incorporated many aspects of pre-Islamic faith.

As stated above, the foundations of the Kazakh Islam are based on Sufism. In particular, the spiritual path of Khoja Ahmed Yasawi and subsequent figures such as Beket Ata developed within the Sufi tradition [14, p. 147].

Z. Zhandarbek, a researcher specializing in the study of Turkic history and Nasab-nama manuscripts, finds many traces of Sufi movement in the region. In particular, he notes that Ishaq-bab, a well-known Kazakh saint, known as Bab Ata among locals. Some stories circulating among the population say that Bab Ata and Ishaq-bab are one single personality, and they confirm some of the narratives contained in Nasab-nama manuscripts [15].

The figures of local pirs and other saints become apparent in toponymic structures of the region in the form of agiotoponyms, which mostly include burial places of Sufi figures perceived as sacred. Later, these burial places become pilgrimage places, while some legends about miracles and spiritual powers start spreading among people.

A notable case of such a site in Kazygurt is Aqbura äulie, regarded as a disciple of Khoja Ahmed Yasawi. The story says that the master can visit Turkistan instantly to pray together with Yasawi, and he is buried in the proximity of springs on the slope of Mount Kazygurt. Nowadays, pilgrims come to the place to seek for blessing.

Environment transformations associated with climate change, anthropogenic activities, and other factors gradually affect the local landscape, toponymy, and spatial perception of locals. The current studies focus on these issues in particular, yet some comparative works from different cultural regions are also needed [16].

Contemporary Kazakh toponymy studies become increasingly focused on the idea of ethnocultural memory represented by place names and worldview structures [17].

The results suggest that in Kazakhstan, ethnolinguistic transformation is primarily structural and policy-driven. The restoration of Turkic-origin place names, the replacement of Soviet-era Russian names with Kazakh equivalents, and the systematic renaming of streets and administrative regions all illustrate deliberate state-led efforts to reconstruct national identity and decolonize the linguistic landscape.

To conclude, the gathered material demonstrates that the toponymy of Kazygurt remains under the influence of mythological cognition at both linguistic and cultural levels.

Conclusions. The study has demonstrated that the toponymic landscape of the Kazygurt region preserves important elements of the ethnic worldview, collective memory, and spiritual culture of the Kazakh people. The analysis of 58 toponyms and microtoponyms revealed the

coexistence of several ethnocultural layers, including mythological, sacred-natural, Sufi-Islamic, and historical-memorial components. These layers reflect different stages of cultural development and provide evidence of the continuity of traditional perceptions of landscape and sacred space.

The classification of the collected material showed that mythological toponyms (15 units) and Sufi-Islamic hagiotoponyms (14 units) constitute the most productive categories within the regional toponymic system. This finding confirms the dominant role of sacred geography and religious-cultural traditions in the formation of the Kazygurt toponymic space. At the same time, sacred hydronyms, cave names, and tree-related toponyms preserve traces of earlier mythological beliefs associated with water, stones, caves, and sacred trees.

Field observations and oral narratives revealed that many place names continue to function as active cultural symbols rather than merely geographical markers. Although younger generations often interpret sacred sites through historical, folkloric, or touristic perspectives, ritual practices connected with springs, caves, sacred trees, and pilgrimage places remain widespread. This indicates the persistence of ethnocultural memory and the continued relevance of sacred toponymy in contemporary local culture.

The study confirms that the interpretation of regional toponymy requires an interdisciplinary approach combining ethnolinguistic, cognitive, semantic, and cultural-historical methods. Such an approach makes it possible to identify not only the linguistic origins of place names but also the worldview structures and cultural meanings embedded within them.

The theoretical significance of the research lies in the ethnocognitive and stratigraphic interpretation of Kazygurt toponymy, contributing to the development of Kazakh ethnolinguistics, cognitive toponymy, and sacred geography studies. The practical value of the study is associated with the documentation and preservation of regional toponymic heritage, including oral narratives and microtoponyms that are increasingly disappearing from active use. The collected material may serve as a source for further research in toponymy, folklore, ethnography, cultural studies, and the study of pilgrimage traditions in Kazakhstan.

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