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THE PHENOMENON OF THE HERO IN NOMADIC SOCIETY: HISTORICAL EXPERIENCE AND SOCIAL FUNCTION

Abstract

This article explores the role of warriors (batyrs), the institution of batyrhood, and their place in traditional Kazakh society, including their everyday lives. Every nation's history includes unique structures that define its development. One of the key elements that shape the national identity of the Kazakh people is the batyrs. The topic is examined through the lens of notable batyrs from the 18th–19th centuries, a period significant in Kazakhstan's history. Throughout various nations and historical periods, batyrs have symbolized bravery and leadership. The formation of the Kazakh nation and its emergence on the historical stage were greatly influenced by the wisdom, skill, and courage of these warriors. Accounts of Kazakh batyrs can be found in the writings of Western European and Russian historians, travelers, and officials of the Russian imperial administration. For example, in reference to the Khan of the Junior Zhuz, Abulkhair, an English traveler mentions Janibek Batyr, Bökenbay Batyr, and Baimurat Batyr. Russian historian P.I. Rychkov, in his work, describes Argyn Janibek and Tama Yeset, highlighting their diplomatic roles. Meanwhile, Andreev's writings reveal how the Tsarist government provided monetary rewards of up to one hundred rubles to certain batyrs near fortifications to gain their support. Thus, it cannot be said that there is a lack of information about batyrs — they were widely discussed in their time due to their relevance and importance.

Key words: batyr, institution of batyrhood, nomadic society, Kazakh society, military traditions, military art, historical experience, social function, national identity, Kazakh batyrs.

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КОШПЕЛІ ҚОҒАМДАҒЫ БАТЫР ФЕНОМЕНІ: ТАРИХИ ТӘЖІРИБЕ ЖӘНЕ ӘЛЕУМЕТТІК ҚЫЗМЕТІ

Аңдатпа

Мақалада дәстүрлі қазақ қоғамындағы батырлар, батырлар институты, олардың қазақ қоғамындағы алатын орны мен күнделікті тұрмыстағы өмірі қарастырылады. Әр халықтың тарихында оның даму ерекшелігін сипаттайтын құрылымдар болады. Қазақ халқының ұлттық болмысын айқындайтын ерекшеліктерінің бірі-батырлар. Аталған тақырып XVIII-XIX ғасырлардағы Қазақстан тарихында өзіндік орны бар батырлар негізінде сараланады. Батырлар әр халықта және әр тарихи кезеңде ерлік пен елдіктің басында тұрғандығы белгілі. Қазақтың ұлт ретінде қалыптасып, тарихи сахнаға шығуы да олардың қосқан үлесі, ақылдылығы, шеберлігі арқасында. Батыс Еуропа және Ресей тарихшылары мен саяхатшыларының, ресейлік басқару жүйесі шенеуніктерінің қазақ даласына қатысты еңбектерінде қазақ батырлары жайлы мәліметтерді кездестіре аламыз. Мысалы айтсақ, Кіші жүз ханы Әбілқайыр ханға қатысты ағылшын саяхатшысы өз жазбаларында Жәнібек батыр, Бөкенбай батыр, Баймұрат батыр туралы да жазады. П.И. Рычков өзінің еңбегінде Арғын Жәнібек пен Тама Есет, олардың елшілік қызметтерін сипаттайды. Ал, Андреев жазбасында патша үкіметінің бекініс маңындағы халықтарды өз саясаттарын қолдауға пайдалану үшін кейбір батырларға жүз рубльге дейін ақшалай сыйақы беріп тұрғандығы анық көрініс тапқан. Сол себепті батырлар туралы мәлімет аз деп айта алмаймыз. Өзінің замандарында өзекті болғаннан кейін, батыр туралы көп айтылған.

Кілт сөздер: батыр, батырлар институты, көшпелі қоғам, қазақ қоғамы, әскери дәстүрлер, әскери өнер, тарихи тәжірибе, әлеуметтік қызмет, ұлттық болмыс, қазақ батырлары.

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ФЕНОМЕН БАТЫРСТВА В КОЧЕВОМ ОБЩЕСТВЕ: ИСТОРИЧЕСКИЙ ОПЫТ И СОЦИАЛЬНЫЕ ФУНКЦИИ

Аннотация

В статье рассматриваются батыры традиционного казахского общества, институт батырства, их место и роль в общественной структуре казахского народа, а также особенности их повседневной жизни. В истории каждого народа существуют социальные институты и

явления, отражающие специфику его исторического развития. Одним из важнейших элементов, определяющих национальную идентичность казахского народа, является институт батырства. Данная проблема анализируется на примере выдающихся батыров XVIII–XIX веков, сыгравших значительную роль в истории Казахстана.

Известно, что во все исторические эпохи батыры являлись воплощением мужества, воинской доблести и народного единства. Становление казахского народа как самостоятельной этнополитической общности и его выход на историческую арену во многом были обусловлены их вкладом, мудростью, военным мастерством и организаторскими способностями. Сведения о казахских батырах встречаются в трудах западноевропейских и российских историков, путешественников, а также представителей российской административной системы, исследовавших казахскую степь. Так, английский путешественник, описывая деятельность хана Младшего жуза Абулхаира, упоминает Жанибек батыра, Букенбай батыра и Баймурат батыра. П.И.Рычков в своих трудах характеризует деятельность Аргын Жанибека и Тама Есета, уделяя внимание их дипломатическим миссиям. В записках Андреева содержатся сведения о том, что царская администрация выплачивала отдельным батырам денежные вознаграждения размером до ста рублей с целью привлечения населения приграничных территорий к поддержке своей политики. Таким образом, источниковая база по истории казахских батыров является достаточно обширной. Значительная роль батыров в общественно-политической жизни своего времени обусловила широкое отражение их деятельности в письменных источниках и исторической памяти народа.

Ключевые слова: батыр, институт батырства, кочевое общество, казахское общество, военные традиции, военное искусство, исторический опыт, социальная функция, национальная идентичность, казахские батыры.

Introduction.

The image of the batyr (warrior) is a symbolic embodiment of the spiritual essence of every nation. In the centuries-old chronicles of the Kazakh people, batyrs were not merely warriors — they were also personifications of justice, courage, honor, and national spirit. Historical sources serve as the primary foundation for uncovering the true essence and contextual significance of these figures. The study of this topic is essential for shaping the historical consciousness of the present generation and strengthening national identity. During the early stages of the Kazakh Khanate, the institution of tarkhan (nobility with privileges) was not prominent, and later efforts were made to dismantle the batyr institution and replace the rule of biys (judges) with the Russian imperial court system. As a result, the traditional institutions of the Kazakh Khanate were gradually replaced by the imperial institutions of Russia. A comprehensive analysis of this process is crucial for understanding our national history and envisioning the future of our state. In recent years, there has been a revival of interest in the institutions of Kazakh biys and batyrs, along with a reassessment of the role of religion in fostering national spiritual unity. These developments are closely connected to our ancestral history. The necessity and novelty of this scientific research are grounded in these vital historical lessons.

In Kazakh society, from ancient times, warriors who defended their people and land from enemies and invaders—batyrs—were given a special and honorable role. However, the title of “batyr” implied far more than universal respect and spiritual virtue; it also entailed great responsibility. For that reason, the “code of honor” for these powerful individuals of the Kazakh Steppe encompassed numerous moral and ethical principles.

Today, the institution of batyrship in the Great Steppe can be regarded as an early form of democratic recognition. Its uniqueness lies in the fact that the title of “batyr” was not self-proclaimed or inherited but was bestowed solely by the people. Along with the title came a set of associated privileges and obligations. No individual could declare themselves a batyr—this honor could only be granted by the people, without votes or disputes, based on the widespread telling of stories about the warrior’s bravery, steadfastness, heroism, and self-sacrifice.

Just as only the descendants of Genghis Khan were entitled to rule, batyrship had no hereditary succession. Thus, regardless of their family background, any person could earn this prestigious title through personal valor and service to the people.

A batyr was a title granted after demonstrating courage by risking one's life in battle and fighting valiantly against the enemy.

Batyr not only provided physical protection but also played sacred symbolic roles. Often, the mere presence of a renowned batyr from a particular tribe was enough to deter enemies — it was said that their reputation could break the enemy's spirit even before their spears did.

In everyday life, batyrs were diverse in character — some cheerful, others somber; some silent, others talkative. However, generosity and open-heartedness were qualities shared by all of them. Great strength and bravery could not coexist with cowardice or pettiness. The very word “batyr” carried a profound sense of duty and moral expectation.

In the Kazakh Steppe, the greatest form of capital was a batyr's reputation. To preserve this honor and avoid tarnishing their name, batyrs refrained from involving themselves in dubious internal disputes and never used their strength to intimidate ordinary people. Instead, they protected widows, orphans, and the elderly.

For them, honor stood above all else — not as an abstract concept, but as a tangible moral compass by which both batyrs and other steppe warriors measured their lives and actions.

Materials and methods

According to various studies, the Kazakh word “batyr” is also related to the Turkic term “bahadur”, which literally translates as “brave,” “strong,” or “wrestler.” The Old Turkic term “baghatür” means “hero,” “brave one,” or “warrior” [1], while the Mongolian “bayatur” also translates to “strong” [2, p. 211], and the word “batu” means “powerful” [3].

The title “batyr” was an honorary designation granted among Mongol and Turkic peoples for military merit. It was also widely used in oral literature (folklore) to emphasize the exceptional status of heroic warriors [4, p. 904].

The term “batyr” began to be used from the 6th century. The prominent scholar L.N. Gumilev, in his work “Ancient Turks,” noted that the word “baghadur” entered Turkic languages from Mongolian in the 6th century [5]. Many Western researchers also support the Mongol-Turkic origin theory of the term. As a result, various historical records reflect different spellings such as bahadar, bahadyr, bahadur, batur, batyr, and bator. This term appears in Old Russian texts and can even be found in Polish, Persian, Hungarian, and other languages.

According to the History of the Sui Dynasty, the term was in use as early as the 7th century among nomadic peoples of northern and western China. The Khazars also used this term — for example, the 8th-century Khazar khagan bore the name Bagatur. Among the Bulgars and Turks, a ruler known as Kat Il-Khan Bagatur-Shad is also recorded in historical chronicles.

Furthermore, since the time of Genghis Khan, the word “baatur” was considered an honorary title bestowed by a ruler upon a distinguished individual.

From 1204 onwards, the bagaturs served as the personal guard of the Great Khans of the Mongol Empire, forming a specialized elite unit known as the guard thousand. The use of the bagatur or bahadur title continued in the successor states of the Mongol Empire.

For example, in Mirza Muhammad Haidar Dughlat's work “Tarikh-i Rashidi”, he describes a large group of bahadurs in the Chagatai ulus who, along with tribal leaders, surrounded the khan. These individuals were distinguished not only by their status but also by personal virtues and accomplishments [6]. According to him, the Russian word “bogatyр” (epic hero) originated from this very term.

The words batyr or bahadur were also used as royal titles by Mongol and Turkic Muslim dynasties. One prominent example is Abu Sa'id, the Ilkhan of the Hulaguids, who referred to himself in official documents as as-Sultan al-'Adil Abu Sa'id Bahadur Khan (“The Just Sultan Abu Sa'id, the Brave Khan”). This usage was later adopted by rulers of the Jalayirid, Timurid, Safavid, and Mughal dynasties, and especially within the Uzbek states.

In Kazakh heroic epics, legendary figures such as Alpamys, Er Targyn, Kobylandy, and Kambar are portrayed as lone warriors who rode out to face their enemies. These heroes, who repeatedly broke through fortress gates and destroyed enemy strongholds, were celebrated in Kazakh culture as true “fortress-breaking batyrs” — a title reserved for only the most fearsome and brave warriors.

Methods

The historical-genetic method makes it possible to study the origins, formation, and historical development of the batyr image. It helps determine the periods in which heroism held particular importance in nomadic society.

The historical-comparative method allows for the comparison of the batyr image across various eras and ethnic groups, identifying both similarities and differences. This includes comparing Kazakh batyrs with the heroes of other Turkic peoples.

The cultural-anthropological method reveals the batyr not only as a historical figure but also as a spiritual and cultural phenomenon within the worldview of the people.

The comparative-typological method identifies the typical features of batyr representations, which serves as a foundation for compiling patterns characteristic of nomadic civilization.

Results and discussion. If we compare the military skills of Kazakh batyrs with the warfare practices of ancient nomadic peoples, we can see that the military art of the Kazakh people before becoming part of the Russian Empire was a continuation of the general military tactics typical of nomadic civilizations. Therefore, the military traditions of Kazakh batyrs should be studied in connection with ancient times and the warfare methods of other related peoples.

In scholarly works about the military art of nomadic peoples, researchers often limit themselves to discussing only their methods of conducting attacks, battles, and military organization. However, the term “military art” is a broad and complex concept that encompasses all aspects related to warfare. Therefore, the following elements should be included within the scope of military art:

1. The structure and types of armed forces;
2. Military leadership and the system of military ranks;
3. Methods of supplying the army with weapons and provisions;
4. Military training and inspection techniques;
5. Formation of battle lines and methods of conducting combat on the battlefield;
6. War tactics;
7. Defensive strategies;
8. Systems of rewarding and conferring military titles;
9. Organization of duels (individual warrior combat);
10. Techniques for using different types of weapons;
11. Military financing, etc.

Many of these issues have not yet been discussed or studied in relation to nomadic societies, and some are viewed in an overly narrow sense. As a result, incorrect and distorted understandings of the military art of nomadic peoples have formed to this day.

When discussing the military system of nomadic peoples, it is often limited to their traditional battle formation of right wing, left wing, and center (main body), as well as the fact that their army was organized on a decimal (base-ten) structure. However, upon deeper research, it becomes clear that such understandings are narrow in scope. The military system of nomadic peoples was in fact much broader and more complex.

In the first chapter, we mentioned that nomadic societies in ancient times were structured based on mythological beliefs, and that the societal structure served as the foundation for their military organization. According to these mythological beliefs, in nomadic societies the khan was considered the symbol of the world axis (the center of the universe), and the people—composed of various clans—were divided into two parts: right wing and left wing clans. In all nomadic states, regardless of the time period, the people were always organized into these two main divisions.

If one of these two parts of the people or state became an independent state, it too would be divided into two wings internally. For example, in the Western Turkic Khaganate, the population (known as On

Ok Budun, or “Ten Arrows People”) was divided into two wings: the Five Arrows of Nushibi (left wing) and the Five Arrows of Dulu (right wing). Similarly, within the Jochi Ulus that was part of the empire of Genghis Khan—and later in the Golden Horde—this division of the population into right and left wings was preserved [6].

Each clan belonging to a wing was obligated to provide a military unit of a thousand or a *tümen* (ten thousand), and the soldiers they provided were called the right wing army and the left wing army accordingly. From these two wings, an elite royal guard (*keshig*) made up of the most distinguished warriors was selected. The Mongols called this guard *gol*. This royal guard never exceeded a thousand men. For example, Genghis Khan’s personal guard consisted of one thousand men, while among the 100,000-strong Mongol army, 38,000 belonged to the right wing and 62,000 to the left wing [7].

The sons of the commanders of this royal guard were also included, and their status was higher than that of other soldiers. Thus, if we view the military system of nomadic peoples horizontally, we can see that the armed forces were divided into two main groups: the right wing army and the left wing army. This structure corresponds to the horizontal organization of society.

The vertical organization of nomadic society—its division from bottom to top into three main social strata—was also reflected in their military structure and system. In Kazakh legends, the concept of the Three Zhuz (tribal confederations) is explained as being based on military organization. In one legend cited by M. Kopeev, the origin of the Three Zhuz is mythologically linked to a child of Kyzyl Arystan Khan who was abandoned in the steppe due to his illegitimacy. Mayky Bi sent three groups of one hundred young men to support him. “One day this child will become a khan, and you will be his people,” he said. To let others know they had become a nation, they made the boy khan and named him Alash Khan [8].

Each group of young men was named after their leading noble. The first hundred were named the Junior Zhuz (*Alshyn*), known for their fearlessness, bravery, and selflessness. They would be the first to engage the enemy directly. The second group became the Middle Zhuz (*Ak Zhol* or *Bolat Khoja*), positioned in the middle ranks, serving as defenders—like guardians of the khan. The third, who came first originally, became the Senior Zhuz (*Uisun*), responsible for the supply base and treasury, and were instructed not to charge into battle. If the front line fell back, the second line would support them, and if the second line retreated, they would fall back on the third. However, the third line was not to retreat.

Another version of the legend provides further explanation: “In the past, when khans went to war, they divided their forces into three parts: the vanguard (*kezilushi*) who rode ahead in isolation, the main force in the center, and the reserve (*salikshy*) who stayed at the rear with the pack horses”[9].

These legends reflect the vertical military structure of nomadic armies, which were divided into three main roles: combat troops, command and administrative personnel (khans, advisers, judges, religious and clerical officials), and logistical/supply units (transportation, food preparation, etc.). In warfare, the fighting force would lead the charge, the khan would stay in the center to command, and the support unit would remain in the rear, not participating directly in combat. In modern terms, this rear unit would be called the army’s logistical base, or “rear support.” The fact that this unit was called the backbone or foundation of the front line emphasizes its importance.

Thus, the tripartite military organization mirrored the vertical structure of society. Each of the three military branches drew from a corresponding social group: warriors and heroes for the combat division; priests and intellectuals for leadership; and herders, craftsmen, and merchants for logistical support.

This is the basic structure of military formation. Depending on the number and size of the army sent on a campaign or into battle, each component or unit of the army could be multiplied and expanded to form a larger front. For example, each wing could itself be divided into right and left sub-wings, or additional units could be attached to the guard groups or the Khan’s personal guard. Similarly, new military units could be placed in front of existing ones. However, in all cases, the core structure remained consistent.

Take the example of the Oghuz army formation described in the *Oguzname*. “The army of Oghuz Khan was composed of seven parts. The first part was called *bulchugar* in Mongolian and *karaul* in

Turkic, which stood at the front of the main army as a vanguard. The second group was called mangalay in Mongolian, eravul in Turkic, and maysarah in Arabic.”

Numerically, the smallest unit of the army consisted of ten men and was called a “tenth” (ondyq). Ten of these formed a “hundred” (zhuzdik), ten hundreds made a “thousand” (myngdyq), and ten thousands made a “tumen” (ten thousand soldiers). Each group—from tens to hundreds, thousands, and tumens—had its own military banners and flags. Among nomadic peoples, an army of ten tumens was referred to as a tu (standard), and military strength was measured in tumens and banners[10].

Commanders appointed to lead these groups were called onbasy (leader of ten), zhuzbasy (leader of a hundred), myngbasy (leader of a thousand), and tumenbasy (leader of ten thousand). The myngbasy and tumenbasy were also given honorary titles: bek in Turkic, noyon in Mongolian, and amir in Arabic. These leaders often held both military and administrative authority, being appointed not only to command troops but also to govern provinces and territories (uluses).

In many cases, the so-called tu (standard) referred to symbolic items such as horse, leopard, or yak tails, silk tassels, or colored ribbons attached to a wooden pole. These were often worn on a horse’s neck or tied to helmets and weapons, serving as insignia of rank. Initially, these symbolic objects were mounted on spears and carried aloft. Later, spearheads were replaced by various decorative emblems, becoming personal symbols of status and rank for rulers and military commanders.

In the Kushan Empire, founded by ancient nomads in India, such symbols appeared on coins depicting the kings. Likewise, in ancient Iranian art, the images of shahanshahs (kings of kings) were marked with similar insignia.

Thus, a bairaq (banner) was a symbolic emblem of royal authority, military rank, and heroic status—a personal insignia. These banners were raised wherever kings or commanders appeared. During battles, generals used these banners to give tactical signals and to control the course of combat. While the bairaq symbolized status and rank, the tu represented sacred warrior spirit and military identity. The colored ribbons attached to banners and standards were called asaba.

As we can see, literary sources fully align with artistic depictions of banners and standards in historical monuments. In summary, the tu was the main combat emblem of the entire army. In times of war, troops sought to protect their own tu and to topple the enemy’s standard. Folk epics glorify the bravery of warriors who captured or brought down enemy standards.

In earlier times, when there were no official military uniforms, warriors tied colored cloth to their spears or helmets during battle to distinguish friend from foe. This was known as a zhalau (flag or marker). Through these markers, commanders could monitor and identify different parts of the army.

So, the zhalau (flag or marker) served as an identifying symbol for warriors in each military unit. Over time, a symbol that distinguished one army from another evolved into something that distinguished one state from another—the national flag. Although made of colored cloth like the tu (standard), the key difference is that the zhalau primarily served as an identification mark.

Before setting off on a campaign, warriors would determine a favorable date for departure by observing the shoulder blades of sacrificed animals or by reading the stars. Then, after reciting prayers and offering sacrifices, they would ask for victory from the divine and embark on the campaign. Scouts, sentinels, and reconnaissance groups would be dispatched in various directions to gather intelligence on the enemy’s movement. Once the army reached the battlefield, it would begin preparations for battle. The commander would identify the right position for the troops, organize the military formation, and develop battle tactics. Among nomadic peoples, there was a rich tradition and a variety of effective strategies for warfare[11].

Duel of Warriors - Holding a duel between famous warriors before a major battle was a common tradition across many cultures in ancient and medieval times. This practice was shared among military castes such as European knights, Indian kshatriyas, Japanese samurai, and others, as can be seen in their epic tales and historical records. Among nomadic peoples, battles often began with one-on-one duels between heroic warriors. The heroic epics of the Turkic-Mongol nomads are filled with vivid descriptions of such duels.

The goals of these duels were to determine the outcome of the war with minimal bloodshed, to eliminate key enemy fighters, and to test the strength and bravery of the leading warriors. If one side's champion overwhelmingly defeated the other, it was not uncommon for the opposing army to retreat without continuing the battle.

Participating in these duels was considered a warrior's duty. Defeating an enemy warrior in a duel brought great honor, boosted a warrior's reputation, and elevated their status. Victorious heroes often became the rallying cry for the entire army and nation. Those who died in such combat had their names remembered, with battlefields marked in their honor, and their heroic sacrifices preserved in memory for future generations.

The tradition of holding duels between warriors before battle was preserved among the Kazakhs until the 19th century. During the time of the Aktaban Shubyrundy ("Great Retreat"), duels between Kazakh and Kalmyk warriors are described in historical epics. Similarly, during Kenesary's war against the Kyrgyz, there were also recorded one-on-one combats between Kazakh and Kyrgyz warriors.

The tradition of single combat between nomadic warriors and neighboring sedentary peoples is also documented in the literature and historical chronicles of those civilizations. For instance, the duels between Iranian and Turanian heroes are described in the Shahnameh, while the epic battles between ancient Rus' bogatyrs and Kipchak warriors—or between Russian and Golden Horde fighters—are depicted in Russian chronicles. These one-on-one battles are also represented in the visual art of the time, such as miniature paintings and historical illustrations. We can even find depictions of such duels in the petroglyphs of nomadic peoples [12].

During war, all military movements were signaled using drums or war drums. Accordingly, before the start of a duel, a war drum would be beaten to signal the beginning. The commencement of a general duel was marked by the sounding of a large army drum, while individual warriors would summon their opponents by beating their own small personal drums, often tied to the side of their saddles.

The term *nygyra* refers to a large type of war drum, while *nakar* or *nagar* are Persian terms for similar instruments.

In the past, renowned warriors used to carry a war drum (*dabyl*) in front of their saddles. As mentioned earlier, during historical periods, warriors were given drums of various sizes along with their military ranks, depending on their status. Large drums were typically kept near the commander, while smaller drums were attached to the saddles of warriors and military leaders. References to this can also be found in heroic epics.

Before engaging in single combat, warriors would ask each other's names and homelands, and introduce themselves as well. For a warrior, it was very important to know whom they had defeated or been defeated by. Later, when a hero's name was praised, the name of the opponent he had slain or defeated would also be mentioned. This information was also crucial for the side that had lost, so they would know whom to seek revenge upon for their fallen hero. Since participating in a duel required exceptional bravery, mentioning the names of the participants' nations served to bring glory not only to themselves but also to their people and to instill fear or respect in their enemies.

Because a warrior brings honor to their people, and because the outcome of the battle often depended on the success of these duels, both sides—along with the commanders of the armies—would carefully choose and prepare the warriors who would enter single combat.

In single combat, warriors usually faced opponents of equal rank. A khan would fight another khan, a commander with another commander, and a renowned warrior with an experienced one, etc. If a warrior was not matched with an equal, he had the right to refuse the duel. In single combat, as well as in general hand-to-hand fighting, there were established tactics and efficient techniques for using weapons. Heroic epics contain specific references to such methods. Warriors would often prepare thoroughly for duels, equipping themselves with all five types of weapons and wearing strong, durable armor and shields. Therefore, to counter this, they carried special arrows in their quivers known as *sauytbuzar* or *kobebuzar*—long, sharp, multi-edged projectiles forged from steel, designed specifically to pierce armor.

Among the nomadic military traditions, the practice of beheading enemies or taking their scalp (like a trophy) dates back to ancient times. Scythian warriors, for example, would scalp the enemies they had defeated and attach the skin to their horse's bridle. The greater the number of scalps, the more valor the warrior was considered to have. Scythian leaders or kings would reward those who brought the heads of enemy warriors with an additional share of the spoils [13].

Warfare Strategies of the Nomads:

Nomadic peoples had a wide range of military tactics, including full-scale battles, various forms of attacks and retreats, and specialized techniques. One common method used during invasions was to divide the army into multiple groups that would depart from different locations and reunite at a pre-determined point near the enemy's borders at a specified time. Just like small rivers flowing from different directions into one large river, these scattered army groups would converge simultaneously at the border and launch a surprise attack.

This method allowed the nomads to catch the enemy off guard, as defenders had no clear sense of where the attack was coming from or how large the invading force was. They had no time to organize a proper defense. Russian General M. I. Ivanin, who studied the military strategies of the Turkic-Mongol nomads, wrote in the 19th century that the Crimean Tatars used this same method during their raids on Russian territory. Similarly, Kazakh warriors would scatter and attack from multiple directions, only to suddenly regroup around a fortress and encircle it. As a result, the city garrison often failed to prepare in time to repel the assault.

During battle, when the enemy forces began to gain the upper hand, the nomadic army would scatter and retreat in all directions, only to regroup at a prearranged location. There, they would form a tight formation and launch a renewed attack.

The nomadic army had the ability to disperse like liquid mercury and reassemble just as swiftly, merging back into a unified force. In times of war, they could vanish from sight in an instant and just as quickly reappear, making it nearly impossible to pursue them during retreats, as they would already be prepared for a counterattack.

If they openly declared war and set out for battle, they often employed various tricks for tactical reasons—to mislead the enemy about the size of their forces, either making them appear larger or smaller. For example, during Genghis Khan's time, the Mongols dressed up spare horses with clothing and placed dummies on them to create the illusion of a larger army.

Similarly, when the nomadic Oghuz sultan Toghrul launched a campaign against Herat and Ghazni one year, he had 1,000 men drag sacks with holes filled with sand to raise large clouds of dust. At the same time, he sent messengers ahead to proclaim, "Sultan Toghrul is approaching with a great army." To further create the illusion of a massive force, the army would light numerous fires at night, making them appear even more numerous under cover of darkness [7].

When engaging in battle with their entire army on an open field against enemy forces, the nomads would begin the fight by launching long-range attacks using lightly armed archers. The goal of this initial tactic was to inflict losses on the enemy's soldiers and their horses, to disrupt their battle formation, and to make the upcoming hand-to-hand combat easier. To achieve this, they would encircle the enemy and carry out continuous shooting. Such tactics were called "tulugama" by the Mongols, and "tolgama" by the Kazakhs [14].

Once a portion of the enemy troops had been eliminated, their formation disrupted, and their ranks thinned, the main assault of the nomadic army would begin. At this stage of the battle, the attack was led by elite, heavily armed units—both the warriors and their horses clad in full iron armor and equipped with all five types of weapons. Following them, spearmen, swordsmen, axe-wielders, and mace-bearers would deliver the second and third waves of attack, crushing the remaining enemy forces. The commander would direct each unit into the battle in a deliberate and orderly manner.

Defensive tactics. The art of war is not only about forming battle lines, launching attacks, and engaging in combat—it also involves the ability to build strong defenses. In the military traditions of nomadic peoples, great attention was given to this aspect as well. Defensive methods among the nomads

developed from very early times, and their main forms continued to be used by the Kazakhs up until the 17th–18th centuries.

Fortifications built to defend against external enemies were called “qamal” or “fortress” by the Kazakhs. A qamal was a fortified structure made of stone, earth, or other materials, typically built in a circular shape for defensive purposes [15].

The words “qamau,” “qamalu,” and “qamalau” in the Kazakh language mean “to surround,” “to be surrounded,” or “to encircle.” The method of building a qamal (fortress) has its origins in ancient times. When nomads were on military campaigns or migrating and stopped in one place, they would construct a temporary fortress by connecting wagons or carts in a circular formation to defend against sudden enemy attacks. Sometimes, a trench would be dug around the outside, and inside, yurts would be arranged in a circle, with the commander’s, khan’s, or tribal leader’s yurt placed in the center. This circular arrangement provided shelter and protection from enemy strikes, making it difficult for the enemy to penetrate the camp. This defensive method was common among all nomadic peoples. The Kipchaks (Polovtsians) also built their villages and towns this way.

Since ancient times, many Kazakh warriors stood out not only for their personal bravery but also for their poetic talent. Figures such as Aiyzdan Kaztugan, Margaska, Zhiembet, and Shalkyzy were not only fearless warriors but also eloquent poets. Through epic songs, these warrior-bards lifted the spirits of their comrades before battle, praising heroic commanders and brave fighters. Thus, they served as both messengers of valor and voices of the warrior worldview.

A batyr (warrior hero) was someone who had mastered military skills and gained fame for bravery, courage, and heroism. The title batyr began to emerge more frequently when external enemies started invading the Kazakh steppe. In defending the sacred land where their ancestors were born and buried, the Kazakh people risked their lives in many fierce battles. To protect the borders of their homeland and the Kazakh Khanate, military units were formed. Commanders and even ordinary soldiers who distinguished themselves in battle were awarded the title of batyr. This title was also granted to warriors who defeated enemies in one-on-one combat.

Later, the title of batyr was extended to those who played leading roles in inter-tribal conflicts, raids (barymta), and uprisings against the oppressive rule of Tsarist Russia and the tyranny of Central Asian khanates such as Khiva and Kokand. In Kazakh society, the title batyr was not hereditary—anyone, regardless of background, could earn it. Ordinary people, judges (bi), sultans, and even khans could become batyr. For instance, in the 18th–19th centuries, khans such as Tauke, Kaip, and Ablai were recognized as batyr [16].

Batyr were not only warriors who brought peace through blood and valor, but also figures who resolved internal disputes within the community. Many were poets and wrestlers as well. Among Kazakhs, the strongest trait of a batyr was their leadership ability. In times when “a nation could not exist without disputes, and a man without enemies,” these heroic ancestors settled conflicts, rivalries, and disputes with the strength of their arms and the edge of their spears.

In the society of the Taz people, batyrs were tasked with avenging wrongs committed during raids (barymta), retrieving stolen or forcibly taken livestock, and reclaiming honor for individuals or clans. Batyrs also bore the responsibility of addressing serious issues such as insults, physical assaults, murder, bride abduction, and the kidnapping of widows—serving as both defenders and enforcers of justice in Kazakh society.

In the 18th century, a remarkable group of batyrs (warrior heroes) emerged in Kazakh society—individuals who were deeply loved and respected by the people. This development was closely linked to the Kazakh people’s struggle against the Dzungar invasions. One example is the Battle of Bulanty, which showcased the extraordinary bravery and determination of the Kazakh forces. Some of the most prominent military commanders of the time—Karakaray Kabanbai, Shakshak Zhanibek, Tama Yeset, Besentiin Malaisary, Tarakty Batyr Baigozy, and others—led troops into battle under the overall leadership of Abylai Khan and Kanjygaly Bogenbai, working in unity and coordination.

Among them, Shakshak Zhanibek played a significant role in organizing and equipping the Kazakh troops. Regarding the valor of Kazakh warriors, Russian historian Ya. Gaverdovsky wrote: “Clad in

armor, according to legends, they fought fiercely and often trampled the battlefield under their own firm footsteps.”

Every nation possesses certain structures that reflect its developmental characteristics. One of the defining features of the Kazakh national identity is the Batyr Institution. This institution emerged naturally from the needs of the nomadic Kazakh society and developed over time during the historical process. It evolved alongside the formation of the Kazakh state and underwent a complex path of transformation.

The origins and formation of the Batyr Institution trace back to ancient times. Due to the limited availability of written historical sources, the primary materials for studying this institution are the batyr epics—oral narratives that vividly portray its roots and historical evolution. Through analyzing these epics, one can observe how batyrs emerged as a distinct social group within Kazakh society.

The Batyr Institution, during its formative stages, developed alongside other social institutions typical of nomadic societies. In traditional Kazakh society, batyrs (warrior heroes) were distinguished by the fact that they often held multiple roles simultaneously—they could be judges (bi), poets (zhyrau), diplomats, and tribal leaders. For example, researcher A.I. Pershitz explained the political structure of nomadic peoples by noting that tribal leaders were primarily military commanders.

The batyrs of traditional Kazakh society also developed a distinct code of honor, warrior ethics, and traditions. They upheld bravery and virtue as sacred values. The spiritual and moral image of the batyr, along with their principal role, should be considered an integral part of the Kazakh people’s ethnocultural system.

However, beginning in the second half of the 19th century, the Batyr Institution gradually began to lose its significance and eventually disappeared. Along with it, many values unique to traditional Kazakh society began to fade. The Russian Empire began its campaign to dismantle traditional Kazakh power structures by first targeting the batyrs, as they were the defenders of the Kazakh land, national unity, and independence. As a result of the tsarist colonial policies, all social institutions inherent to Kazakh society—as well as the deeply embedded spiritual and cultural concepts tied to them—deteriorated.

Consequently, the descendants of the once-mighty nomadic warriors—who had conquered lands and impressed the world with their heroic traditions and powerful warrior spirit—gradually lost their heroic ideals and sense of martial identity.

What distinguished batyrs (warrior heroes) from others in Kazakh society was, in my opinion, their clothing. Masters of literature and history often described the bravery and attire of batyrs in their works. If we consider their appearance, here are some notable items of their armor:

- **Aq Köbe** – a type of white armor worn by batyrs, notable for its many buttons.
- **Badana** – similar to Aymauyt and Akberen, this was heavy iron armor worn by warriors.
- **Beren** – an outfit made of steel. It consisted of steel plates fixed from the inside lining, forming strong protective armor.
- **Zere** – a chest armor made in a chainmail style, designed to resist arrows.
- **Köbe** – a type of iron armor worn over outer clothing. It came in two varieties: one made of broad iron plates protecting vital areas like the heart, arms, knees, and shoulders from arrows and swords; the other resembling overlapping scales, made of bronze, copper, or iron chains, crafted like a shirt to protect the torso.
- **Kireuke** – an ancient bulletproof armor worn by batyrs. It differed from other armors by having additional protection made of iron or pottery at the chest, back, and forearms.
- **Dulyga** – a metal helmet worn by batyrs during battles.

These garments were part of the batyrs’ daily life and clearly symbolized their warrior status.

Conclusion

There is no doubt that in every nation and historical era, batyrs stood at the forefront of bravery and national spirit. In the formation of the Kazakh nation, the development of its statehood, and the preservation of its independence, the contributions and selfless actions of batyrs were of great

importance. During times of national crisis, political leadership often passed into the hands of these warriors. In crucial matters such as defending against external enemies and preserving internal unity, the role of batyrs was especially significant. They became prominent even within the structure of public relations and held influence in the society of their time.

Batyrs fulfilled functions that were unique to the socio-political context of the traditional Kazakh society. It would not be wrong to say that the concept of heroism became an enduring tradition within our culture. Every young person grew up understanding that in order to be called a batyr, one had to meet the demands of this social environment.

The history of batyrs is an eternal history — one that will live forever on the pages of records. It is a history told through the ages and preserved in written form for generations to come.

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ДЕРЕКТАНУ ЖӘНЕ ТАРИХНАМА
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THE KOSHCHI UNION OF PEROVSK UYEZD IN ARCHIVAL FUNDS:
ITS HISTORY AND LEGACY

Abstract.

This article is devoted to studying the history of the Koshchi Union established in the Perovsk Uyezd during the 1920s of the 20th century and the course of the socio-political changes and economic campaigns that took place in Kazakhstan. The authors analyze the goals and objectives of the Union's focus on the work conducted under the auspices of the Union. The research argues that during the peak of the class struggle, the Union's activities in the Perovsk Uyezd extended beyond the economic sphere into the cultural and educational spheres. The Koshchi Union was initially founded as an organization to protect the interests of the poor and landless laborers. However, it subsequently became a tool for implementing the Soviet power's policies. The political and economic campaigns underway in the country were implemented with the direct participation of the Union. That is, it played a special role in implementing Soviet reforms as one of the essential institutions of socio-economic change in the region. To support peasants engaged in crop farming, a Mutual Aid Section for peasants was established under the Union. Furthermore, the issue of "women's equality" and the struggle against customs, such as qalyng mal (bride price), polygyny and others. These customs were deemed as "domestic crimes" in the Soviet Union and were not overlooked by the Union. The work of the Union is analyzed using archival documents, and the organization's role during the period of political instability and agrarian reorganization in the country is determined.

Keywords: Perovsk Uyezd, class struggle, Soviet power, the poor, political and economic campaigns, cultural and educational work, organization, union, Koshchi Union.