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The Spring Holiday *Nauryz-Meiramy* in the Kazakh Tradition

ABSTRACT

The present article is the first attempt by the author to give a scholarly interpretation of the interesting yet under investigated phenomenon of Kazakh 'Nauryz'. The ethno-cultural traditions of 'Nauryz', lost as a result of Islamization and Sovietization of Kazakhstan, have been revived over the last 30 years.

The article reviews the basic socio-historical prerequisites of 'Nauryz' in the system of Kazakh traditional culture, taking into account the typological features of spring holiday (the idea of cyclic revival of life), as well as specific aspects of Central Asian nomadism. The author regards 'Nauryz-meiramy' as a complete calendar-ceremonial complex of high social and spiritual significance and conditionally differentiates three interconnected components of the traditional 'Nauryz-meiramy' (ritual, competitive, entertaining) and emphasizes their duplicative character.

The article devotes special attention to an examination of the musical context of 'Nauryz-meiramy'. The author argues for the existence of the currently lost song genre specific to Nauryz-meiramy (akin to carols) and based on the available data attempts to reconstruct its original model.

KEYWORDS

Nauryz
Spring holidays
New Year rites
Kazakh Folklore
Kazakh nomadism
Kazakh Folk Music
Genre model

Introduction

The traditional New Year holiday *Nauryz-meiramy* had been actively celebrated by the Kazakhs until 1926, when the Soviet power, in the context of the struggle against 'vestiges of the religious past', imposed a ban on it. Contemporary Kazakh historians point to that fact, although briefly (Omirezakov and Isljamov, 2001:20). It is reported that there was no formal decree prohibiting the holiday, but rather an implicit ban imposed by the Bolsheviks. A staff member of Zhambyl Regional Archive (town of Taraz), Mr. Makulbeck Rysdaulet shed some light on the issue (Mamashuly).

Even if the traditions of *Nauryz-meiramy* were not entirely banned, they were definitely subject to significant distortion during the process of consecutive Islamization of Kazakhs (15-19 centuries). From about the 8th century on, Islam (primarily in its Sufi form) entered the territory of contemporary Kazakhstan (Sultangalieva; Mustafina, R.M. *Everyday Islam in Kazakhstan*), and began its spread in the South and South-East of contemporary Kazakhstan, where the settled lifestyle prevailed, starting around the 10th century, and gradually spread to the local population, through the 19th century. The length of this process was due to competition from Tengrism, Nestorianism, Shamanism, Mongolian invasions, as well as the nomadic lifestyle. In the 15th century, the Kazakh khanate was formed, and by the 16th century, the Kazakh elite had adopted Islam. However, some elements of the cult of the ancestors and animism, inherent in both shamanism and Tengriism, were preserved in the Kazakh consciousness. A.T. Toleubaev points out that the "pre-Islamic beliefs of Kazakhs" are "pagan, or folk, beliefs of Kazakhs which are a conglomerate of multitemporal strata" (Toleubaev, 1991: 6). "Intertwining and interacting, pre-Islamic traditions of Kazakhs and Islam represented a syncretic religion, which for centuries hallowed in the life of Kazakh society" (*History of Kazakhstan*, 2010: 585).

The Islamic clergy systematically eroded the intrinsic vernacular character of *Nauryz-meiramy* (Omirezakov and Isljamov, 2001: 15-28). Abai, the most eminent 19th century Kazakh poet and thinker, wrote that in his time the Spring holiday was moved to the Summer time to coincide with the Moslem celebration of *Kurban ait* (ibid.) At the same time, traditions of *Nauryz-meiramy*, in one way or another, survived in the Kazakh folk culture (Mustafina, 1992: 176).

According to S. P. Snesarev,

Islam's domination in Central Asia, its rites and holidays, connected with the lunar calendar, were alien to the peoples of ancient agricultural oases, but they were adopted, and to a large extent replaced Pre-Islamic representations and ceremonies, reflecting the cult of the dying and resurgent nature that were common to the Central Asians. They could not, however, vanish completely; Central Asian ethnography preserved some traces of the cult of the dying and resurgent nature albeit scattered in different ceremonial complexes, and often redefined (Snesarev, 1969: 186).

This is the process that occurred within the Kazakh culture. The *Nauryz-meiramy* prohibition explains the almost complete loss of this cultural tradition by the Kazakhs by the middle of the 20th century, as well as the absence of a significant body of scholarly work investigating the phenomenon. Only in the late 1980s, after the ideological landscape shifted, restoration of the principal ceremonies associated with this holiday became possible. It was done on the basis of residual local manifestations of the lost tradition and the unique information preserved in the memory of the older generation. Through the efforts of enthusiasts, and thanks to the new cultural policy of the state, folk traditions began to gradually recover, and, upon Kazakhstan's declaration of independence in 1991, *Nauryz-meiramy*¹ officially became a holiday. To date, its celebration has grown wide and quite popular, and received informal recognition in all regions of Kazakhstan, which, in our opinion, is largely due to the opportunities for ethnic consolidation and cultural identification this holiday currently offers.

The present article is the first ethnomusicological interpretation of such an interesting and complex phenomenon as the Kazakh *Nauryz*, which largely defines its preliminary character, not seeking to give a broad and complete analysis of the issue. The principal goal of this work is to attempt to uncover the main historical and social background of *Nauryz-meiramy* and reveal the place this holiday occupied in

¹ Further for brevity we shall use the term *Nauryz*.

the lives of Kazakhs. An important task of this analysis is to situate *Nauryz-meiramy* within the rites system of the Kazakh traditional culture calendar.

Historical Background of *Nauryz-Meiramy*

Unique features of the time-honored domestic ways practiced by the Kazakhs up until the middle of the 20th century were determined by the nomadic type of economy and culture which clearly defined the temporal order of life of the ethnos. Seasonal association with the nomadic Kazakhs' traditional calendar is obvious, and orientation based on the change of seasons is clear. As N. E. Masanov points out, "The seasonal dynamics of natural processes have had a profound and comprehensive impact on both the system of material production of nomads and their way of life" (Masanov, 1995: 114). The calendar year was divided into two large seasonal periods associated with the cattle-breeding cycle: spring-summer/autumn-winter (*koktem-zhaz/kjuz-qys*). Kazakhs practiced pasture cattle breeding, and followed year-round maintenance of cattle at grass, changing seasonal pastures (winter, spring, summer and autumn - *qystau, koekteu, zhailau* and *kyzdeu* (Kaz.).

The harsh continental climate of the Central Asian region, the habitat of the Kazakhs, as well as the extremely rigid calendar of migrations geographically associated with the cycle of animal grazing, defined a relatively clear delineation between seasons, with the orientation on the day of the vernal equinox (March 22). By this time, most of the land allocated to the spring and summer pastures was snow-free, which allowed the nomads to leave their winter camps. It is precisely the day of March 22 that became the *Nauryz-meiramy* celebration date.

This astronomical date gained a twofold designation with the Kazakhs. First, the authentic, i.e. specifically Kazakh, concept was not a semantic copy of the concept of *Nowruz*. It had its own lexical meaning that directly corresponded to the significance of this day in the life of the whole society as the beginning of the New Year. This is the reason why this concept appears to be a historically earlier practice, in any case relating to the pre-Islamic period of the Kazakh History. There is no historical record of the specific time when this second name was introduced into Kazakh culture. Yet it is important to note that the two are not interchangeable, but rather augment one

another: the two principal concepts of the Day of Spring Equinox and the holiday associated with it come into each of their own accord, complementing each other.

The other name of the holiday, *Nauryz* (from Persian '*novruz*', new day) is common with Persian- and Turkic-speaking peoples (Lobacheva, 1986: 6-31; The Magic of Navruz, 2007; Dorzhieva, 2007: 29-36; Dzharylgasimova and Kryukov, 1998).

All ethnic nuances considered – which, regrettably, cannot be elaborated on within the framework of the current study, the semantic keynote of the *Nauryz* celebration remained: it was, and still is, a holiday marking the New Year and the Spring renewal. "*Nowruz* has been, either in fact or by intention, a celebration of early Spring, when the sun begins to regain strength and overcome Winter's cold and darkness and when there is a renewal of growth and vigour in nature" (Encyclopedia Iranica) It is precisely "the symbolism of spring that is so deeply significant for the "New Day" feast" (Encyclopedia Iranica).

As Akbar Turson points out, "Navruz is the most versatile among all famous folk festivals, both nature- and cultural archetypes- based. The universality of Navruz as a natural phenomenon is obvious: The beginning of the New Year is the moment of the first sunrise after the astronomical equinox, which is reflected in all known systems of solar chronology" (Turson, 2012).

It is appropriate to trace certain historical reasons behind the emergence of the concept of *Novruz* in the traditional Kazakh vocabulary as a marker of a New Year holiday on the day of the Spring Equinox. In this context, taking into account the fact that the Northern track of the Silk Road had been going through the territory of modern Kazakhstan for a long time (2nd millennium BC-15th century AD) is essential. It would be more appropriate to talk about the territory of modern Kazakhstan, which for many centuries (approximately from 8-7th centuries BC) was inhabited by dozens of proto-Iranian and Turcic tribes. The "Turkic footprint" in the territory of modern Kazakhstan can be traced to around the middle of the 1st millennium, as evidenced by the Chinese sources and characteristic types of burials attributed to the so-called "Turkic' (in the archeological sense) culture". (Akishev; Baipakov, 1979; Kazakhstan Archeologijasy, 2006; Altynbekov, 2014; Kljashtornyj; Sultanov,

1992). In fact, the Kazakh nation consolidated into the system of the Kazakh Khanate, dates back to the 15th century.

It is known that the peoples residing on these territories actively participated in both trade and cultural exchange (Hansen, 2012; Mamleeva, 2001; Medeu and Askarova, 2015). This process naturally resulted in mutual permeation in lexical as well as in a wider, linguistic, sense. The word *Nowruz* (*Navruz*), which transformed in the Kazakh language into *Nauryz*, is likely to be an example of this process.

The term *Nauryz* is also used by Kazakhs as the name of the first spring month; this meaning has been firmly consolidated in the Kazakh language. At the same time, it is worth mentioning that there is a discrepancy in the terminology when it comes to marking the first month of spring, which is connected with the local traditions of Kazakhs of Western Kazakhstan. Apparently, it is in this context that R.M. Mustafina indicates the following: "by some accounts, Kazakhs referred to *Nauryz* as only the first day of spring - the first day of the month of *Hamal* (Arab.)" (Mustafina, 1992: 116). The rarely used concept of *Amal* (*Hamal* – from Arabic 'Aries') has been preserved in the Kazakh language to mark the first month of the solar calendar (March 22 to April 21)², as well as a cold snap one or two weeks before the day of the vernal equinox (the 'farewell' part of winter). It is interesting that in Western Kazakhstan the tradition of celebrating the so-called *Amal meiramy* on March 14, which corresponds to the climatic pattern of the region, where winter recedes earlier, is still preserved. The main ritual component of this holiday is *Koerisu* (literally, 'come to see'), the custom of mutual visiting of friends and relatives after the long winter, with a customary blessing by seniors. *Amal Nauryz* in calendar time predates the common for all Kazakhs *Nauryz meiramy*, and today in Western Kazakhstan the two holidays are united, forming a unique cycle.

It is clear that *Nauryz* as a tradition of greeting spring at the time of the vernal equinox stands as part of a typological series of holidays tied to the rhythms of nature and associated with the cult of fertility.

² Before the Soviet period, the Kazakhs used Arabic and Turkic notations of the months of the year at the same time. In 1990s, the Kazakh calendar has been returned to the Turkic basis. The exception is the month of April: instead of the Kazakh *Kokek* - *Səyir* ('Taurus'-Arab.) is used.

What sets the Kazakh holiday apart is the synthesis of the ceremonial traditions of New Year formed in different regions of Kazakhstan and a few special characteristics defined by the dominant type of economy. Thus, the Kazakhs of the Southern, primarily agricultural region had much in common in their ways of celebrating of *Nauryz* with the neighboring peoples of Central Asia³ (Snesarev, 1969; Karmysheva, 1986.). Yet the *Nauryz* traditions in the Central, Northern, and Western regions of Kazakhstan, where nomadic cattle breeding dominated, were similar to the Mongolian New Year rites. We shall note only, among other things, the semantics of the color white, symbolizing happiness in both the rites of *Tsagaan sar* and in the Kazakh *Nauryz*. "...The color white, in the Mongolian symbolism, is associated with the idea of happiness. A nomad most often understood happiness as abundance of cattle and all that it provides: meat, milk and dairy products" (Dzharylgasinova and Kryukov, 1985: 179).

This is a question of sacramentalization of milk as an important cattle rearing product. "A respectful attitude to milk can be seen as a remnant of the pre-Islamic cattle breeding cult" (History of Kazakhstan, 2010: 263). So, the semantically significant New Year wish, "*Aq mol bolsyn!*", that is uttered by the participants of *Nauryz* throughout the celebratory cycle, literally means "Let there be an abundance of milk!" or "Let there be an abundance of prosperity (happiness)!", a cattle breeders' equivalent of a magical imperative⁴.

It is important to note that with the natural season change, the nomadic Kazakhs experienced a change in their spatial zone of habitation: migration from the winter to the summer pastures (through spring-autumn). A change of the type of dwelling took place: from the adobe huts to the modular structures specially adapted for the nomadic way of life, *yurts* (i.e. Kazakh *kiiz ui*, literally 'felt house'). This change of the space-time continuum, which had an important sacral meaning in the traditional culture, naturally called for a ritual to accompany it. Undoubtedly, this explains why such a vast celebratory cycle as *Nauryz-meiramy (Nauryz-toi)* appeared in the Kazakh culture.

³ In particular, in Southern Kazakhstan, there was a tradition of glorifying of the Red Flower (*Qyzghaldak*), similar to the traditions of *Navruz* among the peoples of Central Asia.

⁴ On the magical dialog and the appeal of calendar rituals and well wishes, see in particular: Sagalaev and Oktyabrskaya, 1990: 160.

The main point of the calendar as a regulatory mechanism of the Kazakh public life is focused on this unified and comprehensive complex which performs the principal calendar function because it is associated with the New Year celebration.

The Structure of *Nauryz-Meiramy*

Celebrating the New Year on the day of the vernal equinox as a key calendar event in the national life strikingly symbolizes the interlacing of the natural and economic rhythms of life, thus being the starting point of the annual cycle. The main idea of *Nauryz-meiramy* is essentially a universal 'New Year' idea of the renewal of life, the birth of the new; securing fertility and well-being for the future. According to M. Eliade "the mystical and religious content of the Spring Festival was the revival of nature and the renewal of life" (Eliade, 1999: 356).

Hence, the most important characteristics of this ritual and celebratory complex reflect its high social significance and clear sacral meaning.

First of all, it should be noted that all gender and social groups participated in the celebration of *Nauryz*. The mass character of the celebration within the framework of nomadism was almost exceptional, and reserved for particularly significant moments in the life of Kazakhs. "... Dispersed organization of the system of material production and lifestyle was a fundamental property of Nomadism" (Masanov, 1995: 121).

The other characteristic feature of *Nauryz* was its duration: three days of the festival itself (falling on the days of the vernal equinox, 21 to 23 March) were followed by an entire month of guest rituals, visitations, and festivities. Here is an example from the memoirs of Vazifa Majzholova (1911-2010, Eastern Kazakhstan): "Every day in *Nauryz* we went visiting. People dressed more elegantly, rocked on *altybakan*, sang songs, girls and guys arranged *kajym-aytys*..."⁵

The basic scenario of the traditional *Nauryz* is as follows:⁶

⁵ Further explanations in the text. (From personal archive, D.A.)

⁶ We generalize the data on *Nauryz* below. See: Janibekov, 1991; The magic of Navruz, 2007: 291-298; Mustafina, 1992:173; Karmysheva, 1986, etc.

- On the eve of the holiday (in any case, in advance), dwellings and adjoining territories are cleaned, plentiful food is prepared, including the ritual dish *Nauryz-kozhe*⁷.
- At night people stay up awaiting the symbolic meeting with the holy patron of *Qyzyr (Qydyr)-Ata (Qyzyr tyni – Night of Qyzyr)* – a mythical character, "the Giver of Abundance, luck, well-wisher and patron of good people, hard workers and travelers" (Karmysheva, 1986:50).
- At dawn on March 22, residents of *auyl* (village – ‘auyl’ Kaz.) gather to see the sunrise (if possible, on a nearby hill).
- After that, men leave to clean the water sources (wells, canals, springs), and women sprinkle trees with milk and prepare *dastarkhan* (the table set for a meal) in the house, getting ready to greet numerous visitors (relatives and neighbors).
- At noon, a bull is slaughtered on the outskirts of the village, and a dish made with its fresh meat is served to the men. According to the cited sources, the dish was called *Bel Koterer* (literally ‘Belt Lifting’), the meaning of which is quite obvious given the context of the spring rites⁸.
- Mutual visitations continued for three days, with New Year wishes and hugs. At mealtime, elders would pray to the ancestors and bless the feast.
- Wrestling competitions and horse races in the steppe took place afterwards.
- At last, in the evening, the swings were set up, bonfires lit, *aitys* (competitions in musical-poetic improvisation) were arranged.
- At the end of the festive day the youth lit torches from bonfires and went from house to house.

It is possible to conditionally differentiate the three interconnected components of the traditional *Nauryz-meyramy* as ritual, competitive and entertaining. Within the system of the celebratory complex, all its components are subordinated and at the

⁷ More detail further in the text.

⁸ There is an explanation that this dish was prepared for wrestlers participating in competitions.

same time contain all three of these principles. So, for example, wrestling competitions, being ritual, are aimed at an active spectator's perception, while performing an entertainment function as well⁹.

The ritual context of *Nauryz-meyramy* is saturated with sacral symbols connected to the productive magic, which, perhaps, is most strictly regulated. The main components of it (on some of which we will elaborate further) are introduced below:

- Cleansing rituals of magical character: purification of habitats, dwellings, water sources.
- Filling of all the empty containers in the house with grain, milk, spring water.
- Dressing in clean, preferably new clothes.
- Kindling of cleansing bonfires.
- The rite of slaughtering of the sacrificial animal (ram, *qoshqar* in Kazakh), associated with both the productive magic and the cult of ancestors.
- The custom of forgiveness in order to leave any resentment behind in the passing year; gift exchange and debt settlement.
- Mutual visitation (which, it is believed, had to be done seven times) with an obligatory communal feast.
- Preparation of the ritual dish *nauryz-kozhe* or *nauryzdyq* made of seven varied dairy, grain and meat ingredients. R. M. Mustafina cites versions of the dish's name in Southern Kazakhstan: "The ritual dish Nauryz-kozhe, which is also called zhyl-kozhe, uyz-kozhe, is prepared from the first milk of the cow that just gave birth" (Mustafina, 1992: 116). The dish is a kind of chowder with a base made of broth from dried horse and lamb meat that remained after winter, with the addition of wheat, barley, millet, dairy drink *airan* (buttermilk, yogurt) or dry cheese (*qurt*) diluted in water, and salt. In the South of Kazakhstan, the composition of *nauryz-kozhe* varied with the prevalence of vegetable (peas, corn, rice, etc.), in other regions - with the prevalence of meat and dairy ingredients. The dish, prepared by women in a

⁹ The latter prevails in the *Nauryz* celebration nowadays.

large cauldron (*qazan*) outside of the house, symbolized the prosperity and well-being expected in the coming year. Filling the cauldron to the very top was an important consideration. "*Nauryz-kozhe* was cooked in a large cauldron filled to the top, which had to contribute to abundance, satiety and health" (Tohtabaeva, 2007: 293). *Nauryz-kozhe* was a mandatory attribute of the festive *dastarkhan*, and the most important guests were certainly treated to it. J. H. Karmysheva points out that "in some places it was accepted to treat people inside the house, in others-to put food out in an open elevated place, on a lawn" (Karmysheva,1986: 54). It was believed that the more of this delicacy people consumed the more prosperity they would have in the New Year. As noted by V.Y. Propp, "Abundance of food on the first day of the New Year provides abundance for the whole year" (Propp, 1995: 35), and "the desire for abundant food on New Year is explained by the so-called" magic of the first day... "(Propp, 1995: 36).

- Youth games (on the Games of youth in Kazakh tradition see: Radlov, 1989: 319-320), with the participation of single young men and women (on the ceremonial eroticism of such games see: Propp, 1995: 131) with hints on possible subsequent marriage between participants and other typical elements of spring rites: pairs swinging on the swing (*Altybaqan*- the swing set on six poles, from the Kaz. *alty*, meaning 'six'). "Swinging on the swings – a widespread custom – was intended to accelerate the growth of the sown crops, increase the fertility of the Earth" (Tokarev, 1977: 340);
- A game that allowed young people to spend some time alone (*Aq Sujek* – a 'white bone', was thrown into the steppe in the dark, and a couple was sent to search for it);
- Tug of war;
- Horse racing between a *qyz* (a young girl) and a *dzhigit* (young unmarried man), *Qyz Quu*. Literally 'catch up with the girl' – a race with the following rules: if the girl wins, she whips the guy, and if the *dzhigit* wins, he gets the right to a kiss and even, as indicated by U. Janibekov, to the hand and heart of the girl (see: Janibekov, 1991: 38-39).

Youth participation in the structure of *Nauryz mejramy* stresses the idea of the procreation characteristic of a spring holiday. As to the senior generation, it was given the responsibility of a ritual blessing (*Bata beru*). However, this Kazakh ritual has no fixed connection with *Nauryz*. Various well-wishes (*bata, algys*) are widely used in general during any guest ritual, feast, or a significant family event, having situational and initially magical (motivational) meaning. According to the traditional Kazakh belief, a wish, once uttered, acquires the power of a spell.

<i>Ulysyng On bolsyn.</i>	<i>May your people be in good health.</i>
<i>Aq mol bolsyn.</i>	<i>Let there be a lot of milk.</i>
<i>Qaida Barsang Zhol bolsyn!</i>	<i>May there be a road everywhere you go!</i>
<i>Ulys Baqty bolsyn.</i>	<i>Let the earth blossom,</i>
<i>Tort tulik aqty bolsyn.</i>	<i>Let the cattle thrive.</i>
<i>Ulys Bereke bersin</i>	<i>Let the people be prosperous.</i>
<i>Bjale-zhala Jerge ensin!</i>	<i>Let all misfortune perish!</i>
<i>Zhaz kelip, koeniling zhaj bolsyn.</i>	<i>With the advent of summer, let the spirit be</i>
<i>Korgening Shattyk toi bolsyn!</i>	<i>uplifted!</i>
<i>Abzal Dosyng koep bolsyn,</i>	<i>Happy festivities!</i>
<i>Bergen Bata Sol bolsyn! Aumin!</i>	<i>May you have many noble friends,</i>
	<i>That is my blessing! Amen!</i>
	(Aq bata: 1998:19)

<i>Ulystyng uly Kuninde,</i>	<i>On the great day of the people</i>
<i>Ulyng Konsyn Ujaga,</i>	<i>May your son settle in the nest,</i>
<i>Qyzyng Qonsyn Qijaga</i>	<i>And the daughter settle nearby</i>
<i>Dauletingdi Asyrsyn,</i>	<i>And multiply your wealth,</i>
<i>Dushpanyng Basylysyn.</i>	<i>Let your enemies calm down.</i>
<i>Mening Bergen bul Batam-</i>	<i>This blessing I gave-</i>
<i>Ulys kunge saqtap zhurgen sur bata!</i>	<i>Is kept by me for the day of the people! Amen!</i>
<i>Aumin!</i>	(Aq bata: 1998:20) ¹⁰

A pronounced competitive spirit is present in the structure of *Nauryz* in general; it symbolizes the struggle of the two opposing principles: Winter and Summer (Evil and Good). This is the expression of the main idea behind the New Year holiday, its strategic task to symbolically ensure future fertility through the struggle of the old with the new, the weak with the strong. The "motive of the universal struggle between Winter and Summer", which "is simulated in the rite in the form of a symbolic struggle between two parties", is celebrated in Spring ceremonies (Tokarev, 1977: 342).

¹⁰ English translation – K. Clod-Svensson

The competitive elements, which are part of the *Nauryz* ritual-celebratory complex functionally duplicate each other at different levels. Thus, the musical-poetic competitions (*aitys*) alternate with competitions in horse riding (*baige* - racing), running, and also in force and dexterity (*kures* - wrestling, *kokpar* - a kind of game similar to polo, *baganaga ormeleu* - pole climbing, *arqan tartys* - tug of war) etc.). This duplication can be treated as a feature of the ceremonial complex excessiveness aimed at emphasizing its main idea. As noted by Baiburin, "This redundancy (plurality of expression within a single plane of content) provided the necessary level of immunity: the loss of any elements could not lead to oblivion of meaning, as these elements were duplicated and therefore could easily be restored" (Baiburin, 1993: 11).

It would be relevant to mention here an interesting parallel of *Nauryz* with the traditional meal Kazakhs arrange a year after a man's death. A very vivid and detailed description of a Kazakh feast is given by V.V. Radlov (Radlov, 1989: 316-319). If the deceased had a high social status, a memorial feast (*As* - Kaz.) was served in his honor, and it lasted from three to seven days (Taizhanova, 2004: 261-262); dozens of yurts were installed, and everyone present was treated lavishly. The completion of the mourning period at the end of the year was symbolically marked by a festival involving wrestlers' competitions (Propp, 1995: 133), *aqyn's Aitys* - competitions of the professional folk poets-improvisers who composed *zhyr* - praises in memory of the deceased¹¹, and finally, races (Taizhanova, 2004: 261-262). This clearly was a way to symbolically assert the infinity of life.

In both cases, multidimensionality with a stress on competition can be observed. The symbolism of the latter, connected with the affirmation of a new life, is evident in both cases. The mass character of both ritual structures is also worth noting.

The festive-ritual character of *Nauryz* implies a fair amount of entertainment, which, as has already been pointed out, is closely associated with the ritual and competitive nature of a traditional holiday.

¹¹ In modern conditions only the meal part of this ceremonial complex has remained.

Music within the Context of *Nauryz-Meiramy*

The atmosphere of universal joy and fun is achieved, in addition to the ceremonies and competitions mentioned above, through the use of music. According to descriptions, the fabric of the traditional New Year's festivities was saturated with music throughout: "Laughter, jokes and music were heard everywhere" (Tohtabaeva, 2007: 296).

Within the structure of the New Year celebration, the performance of lyrical songs (*Qara-oleng*¹²) accounted for a large part of Nomadic Kazakhs' non-ritual music playing. This kind of musical performance not only served an important entertainment and aesthetic purpose, but also marked free pastime as such. In addition, playing music expanded the very dense (thanks to the ritual saturation) and festive (New Year in particular) chronotope.

The loss of authentic musical context of *Nauryz* greatly complicates its study. At the same time, even the most general descriptions of such context, found in the available sources, juxtaposed with the well-known characteristics of the Kazakh traditional musical culture as a whole, allow us to reconstruct its basic model. Thus, it is possible to distinguish the three main locations of the festive music:

- the home-based feast,
- the evening *aitys*, which were held before sunset,
- the open-air youth festivities (evening-night). Janibekov points out: "The akyns competitions stopped with the sunset, when it was believed good defeated evil" (Janibekov, 1991: 38).

A. Seidimbekov, describing *Nauryz*, says the following: "... During the table meal <...> songs were performed, cheerful and noisy competitions in wit, humor, ability to improvise; *kuis*¹³ were held" (Seidimbekov, 1985:131).

In the traditional Kazakh culture, music-making has consistently been part of the festive feasts, including family/household feasts (on the occasion of wedding or

¹² The genre of literally folk lyrical song, with a melody within the interval of quinte-sixth, usually performed without instrumental accompaniment, which is based on the form of two 11-complex semi-stanzas. Widespread up to the middle of the XX century.

¹³ *Kui*–Kazakh traditional instrumental composition.

childbirth). As a rule among those present there were always singers (*aenshi*) and dombra players (*dombrashy*)¹⁴ from a circle of local talented amateurs (including family members). Lyrical folk songs (*Qara oleng*) were usually performed.

Depending on the social status of the house owner, professional musicians (singers and dombra players) could have been invited; and they were, as a rule, generously paid. V.V. Radlov, describing the grandiose feast on the occasion of the anniversary of the funeral of a Kazakh nobleman, writes: "My singer was given a wonderful reception, invitations poured on him from all sides, and he brought generous gifts back every time. He got at least a dozen robes [Chapans-D.A.]" (Radlov, 1989: 317).

Judging by the available descriptions, the same can be said about *Nauryz*. Music-making during a feast tended to have a non-ritual character and was accompanied by stories/commentaries explaining the history of creation or lyrics of a song and *kui*. The exception is *Toi Bastar* - a blessing song, opening a celebration (*toi*) and intoned by an *aqyn* (singer-improviser) in particularly formal cases: necessarily during a wedding feast and the praises of the Guest of Honor¹⁵.

The music making of the youth that gathered around the set swing *Altybaqan* (« ... at the swing, they sang and danced¹⁶, completing the holiday *Nauryz mejramy*" - Janibekov, 1991: 38) is characterized by the pairing of two genre oppositions: *Qara oleng* (lyrical song) and *Qajym-aitys* (comic competitions in song and poetic improvisation). In his time (mid-19th century), Chokhan Valikhanov defined *Qajym-aitys* as "songs <...>, consisting of questions and answers between young gentlemen and maidens, they consist of quatrains, in which the first two verses rhyme with the fourth" (as cited in: Akhmetov, 1964: 243). Usually a popular song, an eleven-syllable verse is taken as the basis. Two groups of girls and boys, improvising, in pairs exchange comical, funny lines.

¹⁴ *Dombra*- a two (rarely three) plucked chordophone of the Kazakhs.

¹⁵ In the context of the family-oriented festival, *Toi Bastar* is performed today by those present. In response, the hosts of the festivities hand a special tray (*Tabaq*), filled with gifts, which the performer shares with the guests seated nearby.

¹⁶ Probably it is a question of dance traditions of the South of Kazakhstan which were likely borrowed from the Uzbeks.

Given the original ceremonial and ritual subtext of youth song contests, it is possible to a certain extent to see an interesting and rather specific 'spring' juxtaposition between the lyrics and the rite. *Qajym-aitys* was performed during winter gatherings of unattached youth¹⁷. But this genre acquires a particular semantic emphasis in the context of *Nauryz*.

To the Question of the *Zharapazan* Songs

Considering the musical context of *Nauryz* and taking into account the typological features of the holiday itself, it is legitimate to raise the question of whether there were any song genres connected specifically to this festive/ ritual complex. Since, as previously noted, the present study is merely an initial approach of ethnomusicological understanding of the Kazakh *Nauryz-meiramy*, a thorough search for reliable data sources must be performed in the future. Regrettably, systematic and reliable records, such as audio-recordings or music notations that could serve as samples for the study, are lacking. Nevertheless, it is reasonable to assume that there must have been a local variety of New Year's ceremonial songs within the structure of *Nauryz* lost due to the holiday ban, especially since some of the sources cited by us have rare, though indirect, mention of the songs, ostensibly performed during the celebration of *Nauryz*.

For example, J. H. Karmysheva in her article "Agricultural Rites of the Kazakhs" quotes fragments of unique song lyrics published in 1925 (the year before the ban on *Nauryz*) which explicitly mentions the New Year's holiday:

<i>Ulys kuni qazan tolsa,</i>	<i>If on the day of Ulus the pots will be full,</i>
<i>Ol zhyly aq mol bolar.</i>	<i>Then that year the milk will be abundant.</i>
<i>Uly kisiden bata alsang,</i>	<i>If on the day of Ulus a blessing from an elder is received (...),</i>
<i>Sonda olzhaly zhol bolar.</i>	<i>Then the path will be gainful.</i>

(Karmysheva, 1986: 51)¹⁸

According to the yet unverified data, the lyrics of a song supposedly connected with *Nauryz*, have been preserved. The authors who published the text listed no source

¹⁷ In winter, the auyl youth gathered in the evenings in different houses, where under the light of lamps girls exchanged jokes with young men, competing in *Qajym-aitys*, sang, played dombra. (Memoirs of Vazifa Maizholova - from personal archive, D.A.)

¹⁸ English translation – K. Clod-Svensson

there was no description of the tune or performance available. It is possible that the informant only relayed the text of the song:

<i>Самалық, самалық,</i>	<i>Samalyk, samalyk,</i>
<i>Көк құс көзін ашты ма?</i>	<i>Has the blue bird open her eyes?</i>
<i>Аяғын жерге басты ма?</i>	<i>Has she stepped onto the Earth?</i>
<i>Самалық, самалық,</i>	<i>Samalyk, samalyk,</i>
<i>Самарқанның көк тасы</i>	<i>Have you seen how the blue</i>
<i>Жібіді ме, көрдің бе?</i>	<i>Stone of Samarkand melted? ¹⁹</i>
<i>Самалық, самалық,</i>	<i>Samalyk, samalyk,</i>
<i>Қап тауының көк құсы</i>	<i>Have you seen how the blue bird</i>
<i>Жүгірді ме, көрдің бе?</i>	<i>Ran away from Caucasus? ^{20 21}</i>

(Omirzakov and Isljamov, 2001: 21)

The publication's authors relayed that the song was a form of address made by the adults to the children holding snowdrops (*baisheshek*) in their hands and a rabbit in the bosom (*kozhek*) (ibid.). This text is an address in the form of an inquiry, which leads to the assumption that the song itself was a kind of a dialog, the format quite characteristic of the Kazakh comic and game songs. Brevity, or fragmentary nature of the text, combined with the inquiring form prompt us to conclude that only a part of the dialogic song lyric has been recorded. A follow-up study would certainly require a search for an analog in the Kazakh culture, as well as in the other ethnic traditions connected with *Nowruz*.

A hypothesis follows from the use of a key word in the above text. The word *samalyk* most likely is a derivative of the Kazakh word *samala*, which means 'ray' or 'light', in turn pointing to the song's connection with the Day of Equinox. The text as a whole is infused with Spring symbolism which points to *Nauryz-meiramy*.

The search for traces of the New Year ceremonial songs of the Kazakhs unexpectedly leads to another, once widespread yet presently lost genre of songs, which were called *Zharapazan*²² and performed during the Muslim fast of *Oraza* (during the

¹⁹ According to a Kazakh legend connected with *Nauryz*, the hot Sun heats up and melts the blue tiles of the Samarkand cupolas on the day of the Spring Equinox.

²⁰ The blue bird here is Blue Rock Thrush that flies to the Kazakhs lands, the region of Tian-Shan around the time of the Spring Equinox.

²¹ English translation K. Clod-Svensson

²² The genre is related to the Muslim rites, spread among the Kazakh population along with its Islamization. *Zharapazan* was banned in Soviet times, but remained in the people's

sacred ninth month of the lunar calendar, *Ramazan-Ramadan*). There was a certain order in performing *Zharapazan*: five to six days at the beginning of the thirty-day fast, three to four days in the middle and two to three days in the period of breaking the fast (Tolybaev, 2000: 90).

The genre function and the circumstances of the performance of *Zharapazan* have an obvious resemblance to the European Christmas carols: youth, children, sometimes old people (it is worth noting here the rare, in Kazakh tradition, form of group performance), visiting the *auyl* residents in the evening, after sunset, when those observing the fast were allowed to take food (period of '*Auyz Ashar*'-literally 'mouth opening'), perform songs-wishes, with the request to bestow them, and in return receive treats from each house. R. M. Mustafina notes: "The main content of ceremonial songs are Megalynarions, which reflect the traditional story situations and motives, accompanied by the wishes of well-being, abundance and other set formulas-some expressing gratitude and even threats" (Mustafina, 1992: 122-123).

But what is more essential is the fact that the meaning, form, character and even the performance aspects of the Kazakh *Zharapazan* songs coincide in many ways with the traditions of Iranian *Nowruz*! To the point: "In rural areas the *nowruz-k^vānān*, that is, minstrels consisting of boys, youths, and even adults, go around at evenings before *Nowruz* and stop before doors; they recite chants in praise of *Nowruz*, play on drums (*tonbak*) and tambourines, and receive rewards in kind or money" (Encyclopedia Iranica). Azerbaijanis had very similar *Nowruz* caroling traditions: on the last Tuesday before *Nowruz* children knock on doors, put their hats or small sacs at the threshold and hide. The house owners should give the hats back with holiday dainties» (Huseinov).

In the introduction, I already mentioned the fact that the vernacular meaning of the Spring holiday had been eroded by the Islamic clergy. This was reflected in the fact that even the Kazakh concept of *Ulystyn Uly Kjuni*, denoting New Year, was used in place of a canonical Moslem celebration-offering *Kurban-bairam* (*Qurban ait* - Kaz.), which takes place on the twelfth month of the Islamic Lunar calendar (in the

memory up to the present day. Today there is a revival of *Zharapazan* among religious youth.

Summer time) and is not historically connected with *Nauryz* (see Omirzakov and Isljamov, 2001: 20.) It is likely that functional adaptation of the Spring songs of *Nauryz-meiramy* took place in the process of this revision and eventually were replaced with the religious hymnals that are the *Zharapazans*.

The earliest example of musical notation (without lyrics) of a *Zharapazan* is present in the collection "1000 Songs of Kyrgyz (Kazakh) People" by Zataevich (Zataevich, 2004: 328). The collector recorded the *Zharapazan* in 1925, performed by Oraz Dzhandosov (1889-1937)²³. Zataevich notes that "this song accompanied O. Dzhandosov in his childhood years, when he, along with other young boys, walked from aul to aul (from one vilage to another) as a caroler during the time of the Urazy fasting" (Zataevich, 2004: 411)²⁴. Seven examples of *Zharapazan*, recorded at different times by the staff of Kazakh State Conservatory named after Kurmangazy (Almaty) are given in the collection (Baikadamova and Temirbekova, 2001).

In 1970s, during one of the field trips in Eastern Kazakhstan, a remarkable gatherer of Kazakh song folklore, Taliga Bekhozhina, recorded rare samples of the 'songs of glorifiers' which used to be quite common in Kazakh tradition. For Bekhozhina "glorifiers" are the performers of *Zharapazan* who were glorifying and thanking the owners of the house for their generous reward. Kazakhs called them *zharapazanshy* (see: Qazaq Phonetics Tusindirme sozdigi, 2008: 271).

There appears to have been a peculiar specialization of such performers. A character who is a talented *zharapazanshy* called Tolepbergen is depicted very vividly in a story by one of the founders of contemporary Kazakh literature, Ilijas Zhansugurov (1894-1938). The author shares his childhood insights, and quotes his grandmother: "This dog (hobo - D.A.) has been howling for a long time, this business he got from his grandfather; he did not get rich on Zharapazan; except the old horse, he does not have any cattle, what good is this" (translation from Kazakh - D.A.). I. Zhansugurov explains how *zharapazanshy* were paid: "Qurt (dry cheese – D.A.), butter, treats are brought outside from the house. A ring is tied in a scarf. Money is given" (Zhansugurov, 1992: 22-25).

²³ Kazakh state and community leader, purged during the Stalinist years.

²⁴ Melodic and rhythmic aspects allows to qualify this tune as *qara-oleng*.

Judging by the published samples, the style of *Zharapazan* is quite typical for the Kazakh ceremonial and domestic singing traditions, which indicates pre-Islamic origins of the genre. At the heart of the melodies there are two common compositional types:

1. The formulaic, narrow volume 7-8-syllabic recitative songs (*Zhyr*). Example 1 (Bekhozhina, 1973: 19);
2. The 11-syllabic tune - the so-called *Qara-Oleng* (literally, 'vernacular', i.e. the actual folklore version of Kazakh lyrical song, in contrast to the professionally performed popular song), with elements of chant and repeating of the second half-stanza. Example 2 (Bekhozhina, 1973:19). The sample of *Zharapazan* that has been recorded by us also belongs to this type of melodies. Example 3 (from personal archive – D.A.)

We were interested in the comments of the collector, which indicated that there was a connection between *Zharapazan* and the songs performed during *Nauryz*. T. Bekhozhina suggested that *Zharapazan* "was influenced by the songs from the New Year's Holiday *Nauryz*, during which "joyful, congratulatory songs were sung"²⁵ (Bekhozhina, 1973:19). A similar suggestion was made by R. M. Mustafina, who notes "that *Zharapazan* was influenced by the New Year ceremonial ritual greetings and well-wishes, the motive of which is closely related to the cult of fertility ascending to the ancient layers of the local Pre-Islamic tradition" (Mustafina, 1992: 122-123).

It is possible that we are dealing with an interesting case of contamination²⁶ and amazing survival of a genre within the traditional culture. It is difficult to disagree with R. M. Mustafina, who suggests that "under the influence of Islam, the heavily transformed New Year ceremonial songs have found shelter and new life within the Muslim rites" (Mustafina, 1992: 122-123). In this case, we see an example of a common blending of pre-Islamic and Islamic cultures in the Kazakh traditional culture, contributing to the preservation of the authentic tradition.

²⁵ Unfortunately, T. Bekhozhina left out the explanations given by the informants on the subject of the actual *Nauryz*, and, as she writes, 'congratulatory' songs.

²⁶ This refers to the widely observed phenomenon of folk song writing creation-interchangeability of tunes and lyrics.

The following can serve as the basis for the invariable genre model of the original Kazakh New Year's 'glorifying' songs:

- Functional and semantic similarity of *Zharapazan* and the presumed 'glorifying' songs in the context of *Nauryz* (Songs-Greetings, Greetings, wishes-blessings);
- Descriptions of the general character of songs performed during *Nauryz* (cheerful, loud);
- Structural commonality of the available lyrics of both *Zharapazan* and 'Nauryz songs', with 7-8-or 11-syllabic basis, allowing to assume their compositional and stylistic affinity (see two types of melodies *Qara-oleng* and *Zhyr* – p. 19);
- There are indications that the performance of *Zharapazan* employed popular song tunes (Islam. Entsiklopediyalyq anyqtamalyq, 2010), which allows us to consider contamination which is characteristic of the Kazakh folk song making in general (the same, with a high degree of probability, can be attributed to the New Year's "glorifying" songs);
- Presence of a wide typological number of similar phenomena elsewhere (i.e. carols).

Refinement of the parameters of the above model is a task for the future. In this article, we have merely tried to identify the prerequisites of its solution. It is still necessary to assess much of what is interesting in the Kazakh *Nauryz meiramy*, in both its historical past and the present rebirth.

Жарапазан айтылар алдындағы сөз

Сообшил Дайырбеков Тлепалды, 1971 г.

Voice



Ү - йің ү - йің үй - е - кен, Үй - дің көр - кі ши е - кен,
5 Са - ба көр - кі би(е) - е - кен. Сан - дық көр кі тү - й(е)е - кен.

Voice



Бо - са - ға - сын бор лат қан қай - сы бай дың үй - (і)е - кен?
Маң - дай ша - сын сыр - лат - қан

Example 1. Address before performing Zharapazan. Performed by Tlepaldy Dajyrbekov, recorded in Eastern Kazakhstan, in 1971.

Ujin, ujin, uj eken,
Ujdin korki shi eken,
Bosagasyn borlatqan,
Qaisy baidyn yj(i) eken?
Saba korki bi(e) eken.
Sandyq korki tuj(e) eken.
Mangdai shashyn syrlatqan
Qaisy baidyn yj(i) eken?

Your home, your home, truly your home,
The home's ornament is a floor mat, it turns out,
The doorstep is bleached,
Which house belongs to the rich man?
The kumiss's mortar's ornament is the mare,
Camel is the ornament of the trunk,
Hair above the forehead is dyed,
Which house belongs to the rich man?²⁷

²⁷ Translation K. Clod-Svensson

Жарапазан

Сообщили Сарсенбаева
Тансық и Елимсарина Зейнеп
Восточный Казахстан, 1971 год

Voice
Айт-қа-лы жа-ра-па-зан жа-ңа кел - дік, Көр-ге лі, кө ріс-ке лі сә-лем бер
8

Voice
дік Көр-ге лі кө ріс-ке лі сә-лем бер дік. Пай-ғам-бар жо-лын қу-ған
14

Voice
а - дам е - дік. — Му - хам - бет ум - бе - т(і)айт-қан
18

Voice
жа - ра - па - зан, Бір - кел - ген он - е - к(і)ай - да ра - ма - зан.

Example 2. Zharapazan. Performed by Tansyq Sarsenbajeva and Zeinep Elimsarina, Eastern Kazakhstan, recorded in Eastern Kazakhstan, in 1971.

Aitqaly zharapazan zhanga keldik,

Korgeli, koriskeli salem berdik.

Korgeli, koriskeli salem berdik.

Paigambar zholyn qugan adam edik.

Muhambet umbet(i) aitqan zharapazan,

Bir kelgen on ek(i) aida Ramazan.

We came to sing Zharapazan,

Meeting, seeing, greeting one another.

Meeting, seeing, greeting one another.

We are the people following the Prophet's path.

Zharapazan is sung by the followers of Mohammed,

Ramadan that comes once in 12 months. ²⁸

²⁸ Translation K. Clod-Svensson

Жарапазан

Сообщила Куленова Клара
Восточный Казахстан(1934г.р.)
Запись 2016 г. Нотировка наша-Д.Амирова

f Бай - мұ - ха - мед Ум - бе - ті - міз Жа - ра - па - зан! Бір - кел -
ген он - ек(i) - ай - да О - раз И - ман!

Example 3. Zharapazan. Performed by Klara Kulenova, was born in 1934 in Eastern Kazakhstan, recorded in Almaty, 2016, notated by author - D.A.

Baimukhamed Umbetimiz Zharapazan! Zharapasan of the followers of Mohammed!
Bir kelgen on ek(i) aida Oraz Iman! Ramadan coming once in twelve months! ²⁹

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²⁹ Translation K. Clod-Svensson

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List of Score Examples:

Notated songs:

1. Performed by Tlepaldy Dajyrbekov. Eastern Kazakhstan, recorded in 1971 (Bekhozhina, 1973: 19).
2. Performed by Tansyq Sarsenbayeva and Zeinep Elimsarina. Eastern Kazakhstan, recorded in 1971 (Bekhozhina, 1973: 19).
3. Performed by Klara Kulenova. Eastern Kazakhstan, recorded in 2016 (Dina Amirova: personal archive).