











## Caves As Models of Sacredness in Artistic Consciousness

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### Abstract

In primitive communal society, the cave was not just a place of dwelling but seen as a fortress gifted by Mother Nature and a sacred place for direct communication with higher, mystical forces. The main aim of this study was to examine the evolution and the development of cave studies and how this evolution gave new interpretations of the cave, extending to religion, mythology, culture and artistic creations. Using a historical and explorative research design, this study collected data from archives, religious documentation, published surveys, and artifacts. The study found that there are several religious legends about the sanctity of the cave such as a cave symbolizing a place of worship, peace and protection. The study also found that people visited sacred caves to make special pilgrimages and seek divine blessings and fulfill their wishes. This illustrates the unconscious connection to mythological understanding. As an example, the study explored the mystical nature of caves in poetic consciousness in works of art like Homer's *Odyssey* and Magzhan Zhumabayev's poem "Okzhetpestin kiyasynda" (At the Cliff of Okzhetpes), two iconic literary pieces in the ancient epic literature. This study also made evident that caves develop feelings of sacredness in human consciousness, as well as its representation in artistic works and oral literature. It

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is hoped that this study would lead to new interpretations of the cave.

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**Keywords:** Sacred Places, Artistic Models, Caves, Temple, Mythological Narratives.

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## Introduction

Caves and rock shelters represent the earliest forms of human habitation. Although humanity has eventually moved away from caves, they retained their significance as sacred and cultic sites. The reason is that if a cave is a fortress during a person's life, it is a way for the soul to reach its direct abode after death. This concept was formed by the ancient Greeks. They did not bury the deceased near the cave, but inside. Thus, the spirit of the buried in the cave did not get lost and reached its underground abode. Moreover, caves were also perceived as divine shelters given by the gods, and for every person, a home is always a sacred and safe sanctuary. Praise and rituals for all the gods were also performed near this cave. In other words, the earliest model of a temple or a place of worship was the cave. Over the time, as human consciousness evolved, larger temples were built, and the mysterious properties of caves were transferred to these new structures. However, caves retained their original sacredness and identity of being unique abodes of nature's power and the sacredness assigned to them. Thus, they became a permanent sacred object in human memory.

This narrative about caves is not only found among Turkic peoples but also in general human understanding. In ancient Greek culture, it was believed that high and spacious caves were the abodes of guardian spirits, and thus, evil forces could not enter these places. Consequently, the deceased were buried inside caves. It was believed that the spirits of those buried within caves could not be led astray by evil forces and would reach the underworld directly. Over time, the tradition of burying the dead at the entrance or outside of caves developed, and caves became sacred places of worship. Caves were also regarded as the abodes of extraordinary heroes and nymphs (Zhukovsky, 1981), adding an additional sacred value to these places.

The concept of sacredness is associated with chaos, the primordial source from which all life emerged. This chaos represents the initial point beneath the heavens and on the earth where human existence began. Following its creation, in subsequent stages, this initial chaos evolved into various manifestations or phenomena. One characteristic of chaos, perceived through the prism of a vast, boundless, and inexplicable space, later resonates as the "Navel of the earth" (hole). Life originates from the umbilical cord or enters the umbilical cord. To some extent, it has a hollow, cave-like shape. Humans, in any era, instinctively seek to perceive sacredness and to find the earth's navel. In the understanding of each person, the navel of the earth is located in the place of his birth. Eliade (2002) called the navel of the earth, where the tree of life grows, "achis mundi", and gave the name *imago mundi* (image of the world) to the sacred object that marks this center. An *imago mundi* is a sacred building or city created by a certain spirit, such as a mausoleum, mosque, church, or royal palace. Like the tree of life, these sacred objects serve as a link between heaven and earth (Eliade, 2002). Therefore, people unconsciously pay special respect to holy places and temples and perform national and religious rituals near these sites. This is because holy objects are considered to be the "house of God", a bridge connecting with the upper world, and any prayer made there is accepted. The cave is one of the attributes of a sacred place, the first dwelling of a person. On this basis, in ancient knowledge, the cave was accepted as a kind of holy place.

The current study aimed to explore the origin, evolution and the development of cave studies and use of cave as setting in ancient artistic creations. Additionally, it examines how the evolution of culture has led to new interpretations of the cave, such as its transformation into a temple-like structure as found in mythological narratives and in major religious traditions. The rationale behind choosing this subject was that the caves are significant subject in all ancient cultures, religions, mythology and artistic depictions. There are several religious legends about the sanctity of the cave such as a cave symbolizing a place of worship, peace and protection. The study found that people visited sacred caves to make special pilgrimages and seek divine blessings and fulfill their wishes. This illustrates the unconscious connection to mythological understanding. As an example, the study explored the mystical nature of caves in poetic consciousness in works of art like Homer's *Odyssey* and Magzhan Zhumabayev's poem "Okzhetpestin kiyasynda" (At the Cliff of Okzhetpes), two iconic literary pieces in the ancient epic literature.

## Literature Review

### *Historical Evolution of Caves*

Historically, caves have been known places for religious ceremonies and spiritual spaces. For many religions, caves were used for meditation and prayers, and seen as a gateway to the underworld; therefore,

often visited as pilgrimage sites. The ancient Greeks believed caves to be the gods' abode, as seen in the example of the Oracle of Delphi, the mouthpiece of the god Apollo. Buddha was believed to have meditated in caves in his quest for enlightenment. There are several significant Buddhist sites such as Ajanta and Ellora, which are cave temples and are used for meditation and worship these caves have carvings and paintings of Buddhist and Hindu deities. The Amarnath Cave is believed to be the home of Lord Shiva and a major pilgrimage site for Hindus. In Christianity caves are associated with the birth of Jesus Christ and the burial of his body. The famous Cave of the Nativity in Bethlehem, is believed to be the birthplace of Jesus, which is now a major Christian pilgrimage site. Early Christian and Muslim sages lived in caves to separating themselves from the material world and focus on their spiritual lives. In China, the Longmen Grottoes are caves carved in limestone with Buddhist statues and carvings, and were used as place for worship and meditation. In the United States, caves like the Ancestral Puebloans are cliff dwellings and underground chambers used for practicing spiritualism and meditations.

The Swedish scientist, mythologist M.P. Nilsson, in his work "The Minoan-Mycenaean religion and its survival in Greek religion" wrote that man used the cave as a house built in the Paleolithic and Neolithic eras and that caves performed everyday needs. Since the deceased were buried near the cave, this place was under the constant control of gods. There was a belief that any temple would immediately reach higher powers. However, over the time, people stepped over the caves and built houses (Nilsson, 1927). The earliest written fact in human history in the form of a sign discovered in caves where people took refuge. It is a drawing called "The Hunt" depicted on the walls of Lascaux Cave in the vicinity of the French city of Perigueux. Archaeologist Richard Klein claims that the drawings with hand and foot prints on the cave floor were drawn by a child or intended for children. The drawing doesn't just depict hunting. This suggests that forty-two thousand years ago there was a big breakthrough in human consciousness (Rivkin & M., 2019). Since the time of the first communal development, people began to understand holiness and gradually absorb the concept of "morality" into consciousness. They created the necessary means for life and shaped life. He captured on the wall of the cave those concepts that were considered sacred in his mind, leaving signs of hierotopic creativity.

### *Sacredness of the Caves*

According to Eliade (2002), every person unconsciously strives to find the navel of the earth, the center of the world. This is because the navel of the earth is a sacred place that has attracted the attention of the gods. In ancient understanding, it was the key to eternal life, and over time, it became a place where all wishes are fulfilled and one can draw closer to the God. Sacred objects are considered the gateways of this center (Lokonova, 2016). The significance of the sacredness of the cave-temples in the human mind was classified by the Russian literary critic E.L. Lokonova, who found that (1) architectural and sculptural monuments built in temples allow for the eternal preservation and transmission of important events to future generations; (2) temples are symbols of the past and the first representation of innovation; (3) sacred objects are a symbol of national culture, a temple is a traditional, symbolic form of architecture; (4) temples express the noble dreams of humanity, the power and greatness of their beliefs, the love of patriotism and freedom; (5) the proportions and architectural forms of temples evoke a sense of beauty, incorporating humanistic and poetic deep symbolism; (6) the symbol of the temple serves as an indicator of social topography, providing a geographic reference for people; and (7) the symbolism of the temple encompasses the entire city, depicted by the multitude of objects performing symbolic functions within the sacred space (Ayagan & Abiev, 2005).

Initially archaeological experts misinterpreted caves as mere places of dwelling for the primitive ancestors, primary habitations for Paleolithic ancestors, and denied their having any spiritual or cultural significance. However, gradually cave archaeology developed as a major genre and archaeologists examined caves more critically. Charles Faulkner was the first archeologist to suggest that caves were not merely used for housing but they were potentially centers for religious and spiritual activities. He discovered caves having light, twilight, and dark zones, wherein dark zones were symbols of religious spiritualism whereas light or twilight areas were signs of habitation.

### *Caves in Art and Literature*

Caves have captured the imagination of artists, painters and authors for centuries as revealed in creations of a few iconic works of literature and art. Ancient dramatists and poets described caves as setting for encounters with the underworld as well as to cite mythological and Biblical references. Caves are also represented in themes including birth, rebirth, death, and renewal. They have been used as a place of refuge, a place of initiation, and a place of transformation. Visual artists have drawn beautiful and intricate cave paintings in places like Lascaux, Altamira, Ajanta and Ellora. The sculptors and artisans used light and shadow in their rock formations and inscriptions. In modern literature, particularly in stream of consciousness novels, caves have been used to represent the unconscious mind, a place of hidden desires and fears.

Many of the Greek mythological tales have settings in caves. For example, the myth of Zeus refers to the birth of Zeus in a cave on the island of Crete, which later became a place of worship, and a temple was built there in his honor. In another myth, Hades, the god of the underworld, abducts Persephone and takes her to

a cave. The myth represents the themes of death and rebirth, as Persephone spends half the year in the underworld and the other half on earth. In Homer's *Odyssey*, caves depict several encounters between mythical characters as well as sailors and knights. The first encounter is the Cave of Polyphemus on the island of the Cyclopes, between Odysseus and Polyphemus, a one-eyed giant. When shipwrecked, Odysseus and his sailors are captured by Polyphemus, who eats two sailors, and imprisons the rest in a cave. Odysseus manages to escape with six sailors after blinding Polyphemus. To take revenge, Polyphemus prays to his father Poseidon and the latter turns Odysseus's journey home into a ten-year odyssey by stirring the sea and making it impossible for ships to sail. This epic narrates a story of survival, revenge, and moral dilemmas. The second encounter of Calypso's Cave is on the island of Ogygia, where nymph Cyclopes allures sailors and imprisons them in a cave. Calypso falls in love with Odysseus and detains him in her cave as her slave and lover. She promises him immortality if he stays with her, but Odysseus wants to return home. Calypso is forced to release Odysseus after the intervention of Olympian god Zeus. According to Hesiod's *Theogony*, Calypso and Odysseus have twin sons, Nausithous and Nausinous. This encounter is a multifaceted narrative about the themes of love, power, longing for home, and the divine interaction in the lives of the humans.

In Magzhan Zhumabayev's poem "Okzhetpestyn kiyasanda" ("At the Cliff of Okzhetpes"), the cave is depicted as a place where the hero can think and meditate in solitude. This poem describes the cave as the meeting place of the hero and a mystical character. The elder who speaks to Kenesary Khan reveals that he has been waiting for him for a long time and has called him to the cave himself because it is the dwelling place of the spirit. Prayers, wishes, and intentions made here reach the Creator quickly and directly. Thus, Kenesary has come to the mountain cave seeking answers to his inner thoughts. The cave has several significant qualities in the birth, formation, and evolutionary development of humanity. Its first quality is that it serves as a shelter, protecting from external forces and the wild environment. Secondly, it is a sacred place for communicating with the Creator. Thirdly, it is a place where goodness triumphs over evil and gives special strength to heroes. Fourthly, it is the dwelling of saints endowed with mystical qualities and, later, the residence of spirits. Fifthly, it is a place that provides healing for ailments.

## Methodology

### *Research Design*

This study adopted a comparative-historical research design with a qualitative approach. A qualitative approach suits any study on linguistics and text reproduction, as it involves an in-depth content analysis of the data. The study required separation of Models of sacred places in artistic consciousness equivalents. Such a data classification is a process of organizing data into categories to enable retrieving, sorting and storing information for future use.

### *Sampling and Instruments of The Study*

In the study of the topic, the concept of sanctuary is considered based on cognitive origins. The chaotic basis of caves, which have become important in the life of mankind as sacred objects, is summed up by the conclusions of science, folklore and written heritage of the peoples of the world, modern literature are used as materials. The contradictory characteristics of the cave, which is considered a sacred place, a place of worship, are analyzed and its essence is scientifically substantiated. As research tools, the concepts of hierophany, hierotopia are taken into account and conclusions are drawn about the meaning of sacred places in artistic cognition.

### *Data Analysis*

The data was analyzed through specific data handling practices such as dividing the words into three tiers, with each tier representing specific characteristics. Such a data classification helps to manipulate, track and analyze individual specimens in data.

## Results and Discussion

### *Ancient Beliefs About Caves*

In ancient Turkic beliefs, caves are associated with ancestral spirits. As a result, a cave motif was formed in the epic. The cave motif is characteristic of the epic creativity of Turko-Oghuz and Azerbaijani peoples. The cave of Tobekoz in the epic "Korkyt ata book", the function of the cave in the "Korogly" epic, the caves found in the fairy tales of the Azerbaijani people - show that this motif is widespread in the epic system. [Khalil \(2016\)](#) describes the role of the cave in the ancient Turkic culture in his monograph "The ritual foundations of the Oguz epic" as follows: "Archaic rituals were carried out in the cave. This is where the connection between the ancestral spirit and the cave comes from. Therefore, the initiative, which left its numerous traces in the epic, can be called an example of the "cave culture" of mankind " ([Khalil, 2016](#)). In the "Book of Korkyt Ata,"

which tells about how Bisat Tobekoz was killed, the cave is the place where the spiritual identity of the hero was formed. Bisat fought in the cave with Tobekoz, who was a scourge to the people, killed him and won. Tobekoz tries to deceive Bisat with symbols like a ring, a sword, and a dome. But the hero learns his tricks and defeats him in the end. The cave here is described as a place of spiritual rebirth and heroism. Therefore, the cave has two characteristics. Firstly, it is the place where good triumphs over evil, where the hero gains strength and is spiritually reborn after defeating the evil force. Secondly, the cave is also the dwelling where this evil force lives. Several other characteristics of the cave can be noted depending on the role it played in the legends. In the folklore works of the Turks, on the one hand, there are signs of hierophany such as a cave, a well, a forest, and on the other – a place of fear and danger. Therefore, the first characteristic of the cave is a well, the origin of life, and the second characteristic is the abode of evil forces associated with the underworld (giant snake, dragon).

Aliyev (2001) emphasizes that although the image of the dungeon in fairy tales is an additional detail, the hero's spirit plays an important role in the path to rebirth and victory (Aliyev, 2001). The death of a giant dragon at the hands of a hero also takes place in the underworld. Therefore, "underground, cave, dungeon" is the first place where the dark power is defeated and good begins. If the cave is a small part of chaos, then in myth and fairy tales the dragon (often with seven heads) inhabiting it is an anthropomorphic image of chaos. There is a lot to say about this in research. Example of one of them: "Yedi başlı ejderha mitik âlemde çok dehşetli, korkunç, büyük bir güce sahip ve insanoğluna tehlike saçan bir yaratıktır. Bazı mitoloji araştırmacılarına göre yedi başlı ejderha çok korkunç ve büyük güce sahip bir ejderhadır ve aynı zamanda yeryüzünde kaosun sembolüdür " (*in English*: "The seven-headed dragon is a very terrifying, terrifying creature in the mythical realm that has great power and poses a danger to humanity. According to some mythology researchers, the seven-headed dragon is a very terrible dragon with great power and is also a symbol of chaos on earth" (Aimukhambet, Kassen, & Kurmambayeva, 2022).

In the mythic mind, the cave is associated with the cult of Mother Umai, a symbolic representation of the archetype "Great Mother", the guardian of women and children. S. Baidili in his work "Dictionary of Turkish Mythology" called: "a cave is the equivalent of a mother's womb." The birth and growth of a human being in a cave is similar to the stage of development of a child in the mother's womb. This analogy shows that the cave has properties that can be a safe environment like the mother's womb (Beydili, 2003). In the ancient mind, the cave represented a transitional space between the underground and surface worlds. In Altai tales, the cave is described as a gate to the underworld. In general, chaos in mythology is the first image of a cave, human life began in a cave. And in world mythology, in general, life began with chaos – a cave of a magical nature. Therefore, along with the concept of a cave, concepts such as chaos, endless abyss, evil spirit, grief, and rebirth are also used. The root of goodness and evil, good and bad, which are the driving force of the beginning and development of life, the first point is a cave, that is, chaos.

### *Caves In Islamic Culture*

In Islamic culture, the cave is a symbol of peace and security, and is among the holy places as a fortress. The caves served as a model of underground mosques as places of worship. These caves have been preserved as sacred holy sites until today. The translation of the eighteenth surah al-Kahf of the Holy Quran is called "The Cave". In the Islamic worldview, it is said that the angel Gabriel delivered the first five verses of Surah Alaq to Prophet Muhammad (pbuh) in the cave of Hira. In Tahir al-Isma'il's work "Biography of the Prophet Muhammad" (translated into Kazakh by K. Spatai): it is written that Prophet Muhammad (pbuh) stayed in solitude and worshiped in this cave (Al-Isma'il, 2013). According to legend, the Quraysh prepared with utmost care in order to enmity the Prophet Muhammad (pbuh). On the night of the assassination attempt on a member of the Messenger of Allah (pbuh) Ali ibn Abu Talib said: "You lie on my bed and sleep covered in this green Hadramaut robe, and they will never do anything to you that you do not like." When the Messenger of God slept, he always covered himself with a robe. So Ali ibn Abu Talib slept in the place of Prophet Muhammad (pbuh) on the night of the planned assassination. When the Prophet Muhammad (pbuh) left his house and passed by them, he took a handful of dirt from the ground and sprinkled it on their heads. At that time, God veiled their eyes and made it so that they could not see the Prophet (pbuh). After that, the enemies did not see the messenger of Allah (pbuh) at all. At that time, the prophet himself was reading the verse: "We have put a barrier in front of them and a barrier behind them and covered them, so they cannot see." Among the thugs, there was no one left who did not sprinkle dirt on the head of the Prophet (pbuh). Then the messenger of Allah (pbuh) went to the house of Abu Bakr, and at midnight they both went out through a small door and went to hide in the cave of Saur in the direction of Yemen. The polytheists, who was knocking at the door of the Prophet Muhammad (pbuh), regretted and their plans hadn't be realized (Al-Isma'il, 2013). In national cognition, the cave is a sacred place where magical powers have reunited. In toponymic legends, holy caves are described as one of the holy places where people can find cures for their diseases and fulfill their requests from God. At the entrance of the caves, i.e., at the two thresholds, there are the stone sculptures (usually two stone sculptures at the two thresholds). This indicates the belief of the ancestors who worshiped the cave as a place of ghosts who would not devour their descendants.

With the spread of Islam in the Kazakh steppe, the first mosques began to be built. These sacred objects

were constructed in various locations depending on the nature, climate of the place, conditions, lifestyle, and customs of the local people. They were built both within cities and in outer regions, on cliffs, caves and underground. Underground mosques in Kazakhstan began to be constructed in the 9th century. The oldest sacred object is the Shakpak Ata Mosque. Over time, other mosques such as Ulken Kyluet, Kishi Kyluet, Aulie Kumshyk Ata, Shildekhana, Shamet Ishan, Sultan Upi, Shopan Ata, Beket Ata, Imam Marghuzi, and Karaman Ata were built. The term "Kyluet" referred to an underground mosque, whose remains "Kishi Kyluet", "Kumshik ata", "Shildekhana", "Shamet Ishan" mosque, "Imam Marguzi" mosque, are still preserved as "Kyluet" mosques (Isaev, Tursyn, & Baibolov, 2021). In Kazakhstan, the function of these underground mosques is similar to the characteristics of caves of early communal structures (Rahmatdildaevna Kurmanbekova et al., 2023).

Many of the underground structures in the Mangystau region are associated with the name of Beket Ata. The mosque Beket Ata built towards the end of his life is located in the Karakiya district of Mangystau region, 180 km southeast of Zhanaozen city, and 95 km northeast of Senek village. Beket Ata, who passed away at the age of the Prophet, is buried in this mosque. This mosque is located in the remote desert of Mangyshlak. During his lifetime, Beket Ata had wells dug in various parts of the desert. Thirsty caravans, private travelers, cattle and people quenched their thirst by drinking water from that well. The people revered Beket Ata for his noble qualities, often invoking his spirit with the words: "First Allah, then Pir Beket." The populace venerated him as a saint (Karimullina et al., 2022). Today, this place is known for healing the sick and providing spiritual nourishment. It is recognized as a sacred site that offers shelter, guidance, and spiritual strength to lost travelers. One of the underground mosques built by grandfather Beket is located in Ogylyny, the second is located in Beineu, the third is in Akmeshit, and the fourth is located in Bayaly on the shores of the Aral Sea. The Beket Ata underground mosque in ancient Beineu, a historical monument from the 11th to 19th centuries, is significant and sacred not only to the Kazakh people but to all Muslims.

### *The Islamic Mausoleums*

In Islamic culture, a holy site like a mosque or a cave is the house of God. Other sites which glorify the religion and have cultural and historical significance include Muslim schools, madrasahs, holy mausoleums and tombs. The Islamic mausoleums in Kazakhstan can be divided into several groups depending on the purpose of their construction and their function in the consciousness of the people. There are mausoleums dedicated to ancestors with saintly qualities such as Khozha Akhmet Yasawi mausoleum, Korqyt ata tomb, Suburgan ata mausoleum, Daruish ata mausoleum, Kambar (Zylkyshi) ata mausoleum, Bektemir Sufi mausoleum, Koten saint mausoleum, Tuktibay saint mausoleum, and Karymbay saint mausoleum. Second, mausoleums for rulers, judges, and warriors such as Zhoshi Khan mausoleum, Alashakhan mausoleum, Tekturmas mausoleum, Wali Khan mausoleum, Batyr Kiikbai Baigarauly burial place, Bogenbay bi mausoleum, Batyr Kosagaly Tolekuly mausoleum, Pang Nurmaganbet mausoleum, Niyaz bi mausoleum, and Baitulak batyr mausoleum. Additionally, there are mausoleums for Mothers and Noble Women such as Mausoleum of Mother Karashash, Mausoleum of Kos Beit, Mausoleum of Mother Gauhar, Mausoleum of Aisha-Bibi, Mausoleum of Poet Sara Tastanbekkyzy, and Mausoleum of Kuralay Sulu. All these mausoleums are cultural-historical monuments with domes built over graves, cemeteries and burial sites. The Turkic peoples also used the term "kesenes" "mausoleum" to refer to houses, residences, and roofed structures. Based on etymology, medieval Kipchaks called them "kezene," Balkars and Karachays "keshene," Kyrgyz "kasana," Kabardians "chamana," and Ingush and Chechens "kashi." Modern Turks called them luxurious private houses and palaces "kakane" (Tazhiyev, 2011).

People who visit these mausoleums with intentions or prayers often find their wishes granted. One such revered site is the mausoleum of Baba Tukti Shashti Aziz. The mausoleum of Baba Tukti Shashti Aziz is considered one of the valuable historical towers which is located near the village of Kumkent in the Suzak district, in the area known as Zhylybulak. Baba Tuktu Shashty Aziz was a holy saint whom the Kazakh people worshiped in times of trouble, who gave visions in dreams when the soul was in trouble, and chanted hymns when attacked the enemy. The dome of Baba stands on the northeastern side of the Karatau range, on the shore of Kyzylkol. The site where the saint rests has turned into a large sacred burial ground. Baba Tukti Shashti Aziz is a frequently mentioned figure in the Kazakh oral literature, depicted as both a folkloric and mythological character and a great warrior. Initially, the shamans of the Sahara, who believed in the Blue Sky God (Kök Tengri), revered him as a spirit and a patron, later considering him a saint among Muslims. In legends, Baba Tukti Shashti Aziz is often mentioned as a contemporary and close companion of Iskak Bab, who is regarded as a preacher of Islam in Central Asia and Kazakhstan. The name of Baba Tukti Shashti Aziz is often mentioned in epic poems such as "Alpamys Batyr," "Kobylandy Batyr," and "Shora Batyr" (Sarychev, 1975).

Another mausoleum of Qarashash Ana, located in Sayram, was built in the 13th century and it was repeatedly destroyed and rebuilt due to time and natural conditions. The mausoleum, constructed from rectangular burnt bricks, has stood the test of time due to the use of high-quality materials and meticulous craftsmanship despite the fact that two centuries have passed since the construction of the mausoleum. Even the wooden elements and carved wooden ornaments used in the construction have not decayed. According to

legend, Qarashash Ana's real name was Aisha-bibi, and she was the daughter of the famous Sheikh Musa from Sayram. The mother of the great scholar Khozha Akhmed Yasawi, she was one of the educated and virtuous women of her time. Mother Qarashash is honored by the whole Turkic world. She is like a symbol of motherhood. The legend says that Qarashash Ana could heal the sick and interpret dreams, which made her widely known among the people. She had a deep knowledge of the foundations of Islam and the Quran, which she shared with others. People respected Aisha because of her faith, manners, and personal behavior, and she was called "Qarashash Ana". Qarashash Ana (mother) died after sending her son Akhmet to be raised by Arystanbab, a great religious mystic and follower of the Prophet Muhammad (PBUH) in Otyrar. According to legend, a strand of her black hair was hung on the dome above her grave in Sayram, but it later disappeared.

Among the sacred sites in the Turkestan region, there are several mausoleums named after Koshkar Ata. One is located in the city of Shymkent, along the Koshkar Ata river; the second, in the Baidibek district in the village of Koshkar Ata; the third, in the Sozak district along the Koshkar Ata river in the Karatau gorge; the fourth in the Tolebi district in the Turgat village; and the fifth in the administrative area of Kemekalga in the Kazygurt district. These are all holy places described in Kazakh legends. Koshkar Ata, whose real name was Kylysh, was born in the 11th century in the Karatau region. From a young age, he was noticed by his intelligence and passion for education, and his parents sent him to study in the city of Bukhara when he was seven years old. It is said that his fourth ancestor was a famous warrior named Arkar, after whom he was given the nickname "Koshkar" (ram) because "You may not become like Arkar, but you will be like a ram!" In the legends, "Koshkar Ata" is called the person who first laid the foundation of the city of Shymkent. Well-educated in various fields of knowledge, Koshkar Ata returned to his homeland, where he built a mosque and opened a madrasa. Koshkar Ata settled near the city of Shymkent, and worked to spread the teachings of the Prophet Muhammad (PBUH) to the people, and participated in the development of literacy in the country. Later, he moved back to Bukhara, when he was invited by his great teachers to give lectures to those who were seeking knowledge. Koshkar Ata taught in Bukara for about a year (Tuyakbayev, 2009).

Mausoleums were built in honor of saintly ancestors. They possessed a unique mystical significance because saintly people were considered special creations of God. They possessed mystical powers not granted to other people. Hence, each mausoleum is regarded as the eternal resting place of a saintly spirit. In the minds of the people, it is believed that any form of worship or religious rituals performed at these sites reaches the God directly. Symbolically, these mausoleums are like centers of contact of a certain force emanating from the higher world of human faith revealing sacred features. Due to the mausoleums situated, a particular city or region acquired a sacred quality.

### *Caves in Kazakhstan*

In Kazakh legends, the cave is closely connected with people who have mystical properties. These holy caves are also seen as dwellings where sacred spirits reside eternally. [Tsyrempilov, Bigozhin, & Zhumabayev \(2022\)](#) found more than 140 caves in the Kazakh steppe, including 80 caves in the Karatau ridges, 20 in the Ogem, Talas Alatau ridges, 11 in Mangistau and Ustirt, 4 in the lowland near the North Aral Sea and the Caspian Sea, 12 in Saryarka, 5 in Altai, Tarbagatai, Kalbada, 6 in Ile Alatau, 2 in Zhetysu. More than 30 of them are in the category of holy objects. Caves in the category of holy places in the Kazakh steppe were listed in the collection "Nationwide Holy Objects of Kazakhstan".

The two caves, "Aidakhar" and "Bektau ata," are said to have been inhabited by holy ancestors, endowed with healing and mysterious powers. The "Aidakhar" cave, located in Zerendy district, Akmola region, is 35 meters high, 270 meters long, and 70 meters wide. Water drips from the holes in the roof. Pines and birches grow along this entrance, like the stone sculptures guarding the mouth of the sacred cave. Local people consider this place a holy place. The cave has a mystical property that cleanses the body and soul and gives spiritual strength. According to popular legends, a healer with special qualities lived in the "Aidakhar" cave. Any sick person who comes to him for healing will be cured of the illness. According to local residents, after the death of the healer, his energy was preserved in this cave. Therefore, people who have so far asked for healing say that they are recovering from this cave ([Sarychev, 1975](#)). The "Bektau ata," located near Lake Balkhash, is a sacred cave where two young brothers - Bektau ata and Beygazy- took refuge during the warring period when they fled from the enemy. "This cave is full of clear fresh water. The level of the water surface is always stable: it does not rise or fall" ([Daurenbekov & Tursunov, 1993](#)). Inside this cave, there is also healing water. People spend the night in the cave seeking a cure for their ailments and visit for a pilgrimage. It is their belief that the holy ancestor provides signs through various sounds and offers visions in their dreams. According to those who have experienced these visions, the holy ancestor does not reveal his face. It is understood among the people that he does not appear to just anyone because he is considered a sacred person endowed with mysterious powers by the Creator ([Yekimbaeva & Shauenova, 2019](#)).

Another cave mentioned in Kazakh legends, the Akmeshit Cave, is about the hero Yesirkep Koikelde. This cave is also among the nationally recognized sacred sites. This sacred place is particularly revered by the people as a site where prayers are answered. Researchers have identified this cave as a heritage from the Paleolithic era. In most legends, sacred caves are located at the foot of mountains and contain healing water. The Akmeshit Cave also has such healing water. The clear drop dripping from the top of the cave is called

"Tears of the Saint" by the people. These drops nourish the plants within the cave. It is believed that the intentions of those who visit such a place are fulfilled, and their wishes come true.

Among other sacred caves of the Kazakh steppe, one that has become the subject of legend is the "Konyr Aulie" cave. According to a widespread legend about the Konyr Aulie cave: "When the flood covered the earth and all animals boarded Noah's Ark, there was no room for the saints Kulan, Kyran, and Kongyr. So the saints made rafts from wood and attached them to Noah's Ark. As they floated along, the rafts of the three saints drifted apart. When the floodwaters receded and the first mountain appeared, the rafts of the saints came to rest on three different mountains. Only Kongyr Aulie's raft ended up in a cave. Thus, the cave was named Konyr Aulie" (Sarychev, 1975). There are several places of the cave of Konyr Aulie in the Kazakh territory. One is located near Semey in the Aktas mountains, and another is situated three kilometers from Zhasybai Lake in the Bayanaul mountains. The local people call this sacred place the "Aulie Tas" or "Konyr Aulie" cave. It has long been believed that this place is the blessed land of Bayan, considered the mother of humanity. The Konyr Aulie cave has been a site where people have prayed and made wishes since ancient times. Revering the Konyr Aulie cave is one of humanity's oldest rituals, dating back to the ancient layers of the Stone Age. Another thing that caused the cave of Konyr Aulie to be considered holy is a pot-shaped hole in the corner of the cave which always contains water. This water is believed to have healing properties that can cure those seeking relief from their ailments. Another version of the legend about the sacred cave tells that Konyr Aulie lived in this place during the time of the great flood. When the spirit of the people was broken and had corrupted hearts and God sent a flood on the earth, all living beings boarded Noah's Ark. However, three brothers, who did no harm to any living being, decided not to board the ark to avoid burdening it and causing any harm. Instead, they attached two planks to the ark and sat on those wooden boards. The brothers floated alongside the ark until the waters receded. Allah, seeing the brothers' considerate actions, showed mercy and, when the waters receded, guided their attached boards to the Bayanaul mountains, where they settled. One of these three brothers was Konyr Aulie. Legends say that Kongyr Aulie inhabited the mountains of the present Zhambaky area. He was considered a special person who had Allah's favor and could grant people's wishes (Sarychev, 1975). The Konyr Aulie sacred caves located in two regions of Kazakhstan have similar characteristics and serve similar purposes for people. Both caves contain holy, healing water. People visit these sites to pray for children and to seek cures for their ailments.

Another place preserved in the people's memory as a sacred site is known as the "Suly Cave" (Water Cave). This sacred site has been included in the "Regional Sacred Sites of Kazakhstan" collection, published as a result of the "Sacred Kazakhstan" project research. Located along the Sairamsu River in the Turkestan region, there is a gorge called Korgantas. About four kilometers from this gorge, there is a large boulder field situated on two slopes facing each other. The Suly Cave is located on a rocky hill, 22-25 meters high that ends at the river's edge. According to the legend, Yesim Khan's daughter, fleeing from enemies, hid alone in this cave. At that time, there was no water inside the cave. After staying there for several days and finding not a single drop of water to quench her thirst, the khan's daughter pleaded with the Creator, saying, "Give me water!" Hearing her desperate cry, the Creator first caused water to drip, then trickle, and finally gush out from between the rocks. Since then, water has been flowing continuously from the rocks. Pilgrims who come to the Suly dedicate the Koran first to the girl, then to Yesim Khan, and finally to the spirits of their ancestors. Mentioning these figures, they pray to Allah for honor, well-being, and health for themselves and their descendants. They drink water from three places: where it drips, trickles, and gushes. This is because they believe that the dripping water is the girl's (Yesim Khan's daughter's), the trickling water is the khan's (Yesim Khan's), and the gushing water is the people's (the nation's) sustenance (Astrakhan, 2014).

### *Caves in Homer's Odyssey*

This idea of caves as the dwellings of nymphs is illustrated in Homer's "Odyssey." In this epic, Homer describes the cave on Ithaca as a special creation of nature, suggesting that while anyone could approach this sacred place, only immortal beings could enter it. The role and place of the sacred cave resemble the description of a paradisiacal abode.

The aforementioned sacred place is the home of extraordinary beings and marvelous nymphs. Its gate closes at twilight, which symbolizes darkness and coolness. This gate is never allowed to be opened and is inaccessible to humans. Despite this, bees build hives in the nymphs' abode, and the sound of sacred springs can be heard trickling. It is said that there are high stone weaving looms from which the nymphs weave purple garments for the gods. The sacred cave has two more gates. The one facing north is for humans, while the gate facing south is for the gods (Losev, 1998). According to A.F. Losev's interpretation (1998), in the poem, the gate for humans is depicted as facing north, and the gate for the gods faces south. This is because, in temples, the sacred statues and entrances are oriented towards the east. When worshippers face the statue, they are looking west.

In mythic understanding, nymphs are wondrous beings in the form of women. They protect nature, ensure fertility, can help humans when needed, and can cause harm if angered. Therefore, their mysterious nature makes them both enigmatic and fearsome to people, requiring special respect and courteous behavior. The



fact that nymphs inhabit caves and that these caves' gates rarely open to mortals further emphasizes that these places belong to the immortal, creative heroes of myth.

The cave is also described in the Greek epic "Odyssey" as the home of giants - cyclops. The one-eyed giant named Polyphemus, who captures the main character with his friends and locks him in the cave where he lives, is the owner of enormous black power and cruelty. He is portrayed as a man-eating monster. The plot of the eighth poem in the "Korkyt Ata Book" and the one-eyed giant in the ancient Greek epic (which originated in mythical stories) and the cave in which it resides are seen as a great threat to mankind. Polyphemus and Tobekoz are essentially kindred characters. Polyphemus, as described in Greek mythology, is the offspring of the sea god Poseidon and the sea nymph Thoosa. Tobekoz is the daughter of a mermaid and the child of a shepherd from Aruz. The single eye on their foreheads suggests that these beings embody a singular nature, that of evil. The sea, an elemental force representing both the origin of life and chaos, acts as a connector between two worlds – this world and the otherworld. The closest terrestrial points to this mysterious element are bays, islands, and shores. Mythical narratives often place sea nymphs in caves along the coast. Polyphemus, whose mother and grandfather are anthropomorphic characters linked to the sea, also resides in a cave on an island. The amazing beauty and kindness of the nymphs and the cruelty and evil of Polyphemus are contrasted. The twofold character of the cave, which has become established in human knowledge, is seen through the beings with such two different qualities, that is, in the form of goodness and evil. Tobekoz and Bisat also reside in caves. Bisat, abandoned as a baby, is raised in a cave by a lioness and eventually returns to human society. It's said that Tobekoz's father is human, and his mother is the daughter of a sea nymph. One of Aruz's shepherds captures one of a water nymphs playing by the river (or perhaps a lake) and rapes her. She warns him that his actions will bring calamity to the entire Oghuz nation and tells him to take their child from the same place the following year. The version that talks about Tobekoz's emergence from a waterskin at the bottom of the river signifies his connection to the aquatic world. Later, he resides in a cave, posing a threat to humans. The Oghuz country must regularly supply him with food. Bisat ultimately kills Tobekoz through trick. The cave that grants Bisat extraordinary heroism is the same one where Tobekoz lives. Odysseus, who kills Polyphemus, is a cunning and resourceful man. His homeland, the island of Ithaca, is also akin to a cave-like place. Thus, both heroism and villainy are associated with caves. The characters' close ties to the aquatic world define their nature. The dual characteristics of creation and destruction, inherent to the aquatic world, are also attributed to the heroes who dwell in caves, reflecting these qualities in their struggle within the human-inhabited realm. Ultimately, good triumphs, and creativity is renewed. The poetic model of the cave is thus defined by both its creative and destructive qualities. We can understand the cave's significance as a sacred place in human memory through its mysterious nature, representing a microcosm of the world born from chaos.

#### *Caves in Zhumabayev's "Okzhetpestyn kiyasanda"*

The concept of the cave, originating from ancient times, has been reimagined in various ways in poetic consciousness. In Magzhan Zhumabayev's poem "Okzhetpestyn kiyasanda" ("At the Cliff of Okzhetpes"), the cave is portrayed as a place where the hero can think and meditate in solitude:

*Once, thoughts of Kenekem overwhelmed him,  
He wandered alone through Burabay,  
Behind Okzhetpes is a cave mountain,  
Where he spent several days living.*

Here, the spirit of Kenesary Khan's ancestor, with his white beard like a white cloud, appears and speaks:

*When the good old man said "ah,"  
There was a noise of water below.  
Then the old man moaned: "Are you well,  
Kenezhan, my country's hero!" (Eliade, 1994).*

In the poem, the cave is the meeting place of the hero and a mystical character. The elder who speaks to Kenesary Khan reveals that he has been waiting for him for a long time and has called him to the cave himself because it is the dwelling place of the spirit. Prayers, wishes, and intentions made here reach the Creator quickly and directly. Thus, Kenesary has come to the mountain cave seeking answers to his inner thoughts. The spirit guides and blesses the Khan. At the moment of farewell, he says:

*If you die without achieving your goal,  
I will turn into stone right here.  
May another hero like you be born in Alash  
I will wait like a stone on the hill"*

With these words, Khan expressed his support and then disappeared. From that moment, the top of the mountain was filled with light, and the earth and sky were bathed in holy light. Kenesary Khan gathered his heroes as if he had found an answer to the question he was looking for and took his younger brother Nauan and went on a journey to achieve his goal.

In this poem, the cave represents qualities of birth, death, formation and evolutionary development of humanity. Other qualities include that of shelter protecting from external forces and the wild environment; or the quality of a sacred place for communicating with the Creator; quality of a place where goodness triumphs over evil and gives special strength to heroes; quality of the dwelling of saints endowed with mystical qualities and later the residence of spirits; and finally, that quality of being places that provide healing for ailments (Eliade, 1994).

## Conclusion

The cave has been ingrained in human consciousness as a mysterious and sacred place. It is believed that, as the earliest shelter for humanity, the spirits of ancestors have remained and eternally inhabit these caves. In the poetic consciousness rooted in myth, caves hold a special place due to their mysterious nature. The fulfillment of the wishes and intentions of those who visit sacred caves is linked to this mysterious quality. Caves are considered the abode of the spirit, the first shelter for humanity, and the dwelling place of ancestral spirits. Therefore, prayers made in such places are believed to be fulfilled quickly. At the dawn of any civilization, after humans moved from huts, the cave was regarded as a sacred place, a dwelling of the gods, and began to be used as a site for worship. However, not all caves served as places of worship. In the early communal society, some caves were used for practical purposes, such as storage or workshops, due to their utility (Zhukovsky, 1981).

This study discussed the cultural and artistic motif in the caves as laid in artistic imagination. Caves attracted the imagination of artists, painters and authors, who created iconic works of literature and art. The Greek dramatists and poets used caves as subjects and dealt with encounters with the underworld. This study made a detailed reference to Homer's *Odyssey* and Magzhan Zhumabayev's poem "Okzhetpestyn kiyasanda" ("At the Cliff of Okzhetpes"). Both are narratives about caves as high and spacious places of abodes of guardian spirits, and thus, evil forces could not enter these places. These epic creations portrayed the concept of sacredness in human consciousness, which began in the chaos from which life originated and continued in caves. These literary pieces are symbolic of first sacred places where humans connected with the creator and higher mystical forces. The artists urge readers to recognize the cave as a sacred object through their unique artistic models.

To conclude, the primary characteristic of a cave is that it is the original temple. A temple is a sacred place built by humans with the support of the spirit. Therefore, it is believed that these places are directly connected to the higher world, the cosmos. Temples and mausoleums are places of spiritual purification. Since temples are considered to be connected to the higher world, they possess a certain sacred power. Temples are sacred places built on earth for the gods. The connection with the creator and the mystical world that started in caves transitioned to temples. As the civilization progressed, underground structures resembling caves were built according to the customs and traditions of each region. All these sacred places exemplify hierophany, representing sacred models created by nature or constructed with the support of the spirit. Sacred places and objects are all connected to the cosmos, possess certain mystical power, and have retained their sacred significance in human consciousness throughout various periods. That's why it has been preserved intact in any situation, even during war and invasions. Temples are one of the first sacred objects built in accordance with the requirements of civilization. Because religious rituals are performed in these sacred places, they serve as the axis of the world, the navel of the earth in human mind. This is because every sacred object is believed to be connected to the mystical forces and the cosmos, being the closest place to the gods. Thus, wherever a sacred object is located, it is ingrained in the human mind that there is a possibility of direct communication with the God.

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