

Semiology of Kazakh Ornaments

Shara Mazhitayeva¹, Aigerim Shugaevna Kappasova¹, Aidana Ergazykyzy Kapanova¹, Zhanbai Turarovich Kadyrov², Amanai Baiturymovich Myrzabayev¹ & Zhanar Eskazinova¹

¹ Karaganda State University named after E. A. Buketov, Kazakhstan

² North Kazakhstan State University named after Manash Kozybayev, Petropavlovsk, Kazakhstan

Correspondence: Shara Mazhitayeva, Mukanov street, 1-8, Karaganda, 100026, Kazakhstan. E-mail: S_mazhit@mail.ru; sh-mazhit@inbox.ru

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Abstract

The article is dedicated to show the importance of various national Kazakh ornaments in non-verbal communication. Kazakh national ornaments are various and each one has its own names. They have been formed on the basis of ancient art among cattle breeding tribes (saks, usuns, huns, kipchak and kingly). The ornaments of that period reflected people's artistic vision to the world.

Generally all elements of the Kazakh ornament were interpreted differently due to its historic time. Now a major part of ornaments have lost their semantic value. The article considers specific meanings of Kazakh animalistic ornamental patterns.

Keywords: semiology, ethnography, national ornaments, sorts of Kazakh national ornaments and motifs, animalistic/zoomorphic motifs

1. Introduction

Humans use material objects-signs for transferring information. It is known that signs, as a means of communication, in a language can be replaced by a definite semantic and be perceived in a definite meaning. What semiology aims at is to research a nature of signs system and their meaning. However, contemporary scholars have tried to make some researches in semiology, but it still needs a careful study such as the transferring of the hidden information by signs and ornaments. According to the experts a secret language are firstly allocated for transferring covert information, secondly for exchange of opinions between different groups of people.

That means, nowadays it is necessary to work on discovering a natural phenomenon for solving scientific problems. Therefore, guided by academic works we have tried to prove that signs are applied in relationships between people for transferring important information.

Semiology—is study of signs, which is raised in person's mind by impact of one subject to another. An American scientist Pierce has initiated comprehensive study and development of the concept “semiology”. In his work “About new list of categories” he was the first who made signs classification and provided with a scientific explanation to their types and the origin.

A Swiss linguist Ferdinand de Saussure in his book “Course in general linguistics” once has noted that language is above all a system of signs and that therefore we must have recourse to the science of signs” (F. de Saussure).

Since the early twentieth century new trends in science about semiology have emerged. For example, such scientists as R. Bahrt, J. S. Stepanov have defined semiology as “a science of objects, which have descriptive meaning” (Stepanov, 1983); E. Byuysens, L. Preto have considered semiology as the science of transferring information that meets the communication means. Y. Schreider, in his scientific work has noted: “Linguistic semiology studies natural language—the most important of sign systems operating in the culture, in terms of its commonality with other sign systems. However, a language is a standard for the system of signs (Schreider, 1974).

The Kazakh linguists since the twentieth century have also evoked a great scientific interest in signs. Kh. Zhubanov, K. Akhanov, T. Kordabaev (Mazhitaeva & Muratova, 2013).

The national ornaments that we questioned today are some kind of signs for the transmitting certain information.

National patterns are very diverse and deserve a special attention. Ornaments certainly reflect the outlook of Kazakh people.

2. Materials and Methods

Descriptive and etymological methods are used as basic research methods. The method of description and interpretation were used to describe linguistic studies. Methods of componential and comparative analyses were used to establish the semantics of Kazakh decorative patterns.

The influence of ancient nomadic tribes on Kazakh ornamental art can be found in scientific-historical files. The ornaments and patterns reflect their imaginary world of Kazakhs (Shaymerdenova & Avakova, 2004).

3. Results

Nowadays art-scientists know more than 200 types of ornaments and patterns.

Basic ornaments can be divided into cosmogonical, zoomorphic, floral and geometric. The most ancient one is cosmogonical, and the most popular of which is salty circle that symbolizes the sun. They were often portrayed in mascots, on ceramic products and architectural decors (Figure 1//www.bilu.kz).

Zoomorphic patterns are the most numerous among Kazakh ornaments. They reflect world of ancient cattlemen and tillers, also connected with ancient mythology and savage art.

The Kazakh ornaments are very beautiful and believed to have properties to repel evil prairie ghosts.

The study of Kazakh ornaments have been a subject for many scientist all over the world. Many great foreign and domestic scholars were interested in this research field such as Almasy (1907), Schneider (1927), Ryndin (1959), Margylan (1986), Kassimanov (1995), Basenov (1958), Agapov and Kadyrbayev (1979), Argynbayev (1987), Zhanpeyisov (2010) and others.

The latest scientific findings have shown the origin and development of Kazakh ornamental art. Many scholars have shared with the view that Kazakh people live in the world of diverse ornaments. We could not list all the range of ornaments; it is a craftsman who can give them names. No one knows better their history than the creator of ornamental design.

The scholars Taldybayeva and Omirbekova (2009), and Abdisadyrkyzy (2004) in their works have distinguished types of general Kazakh ornaments.

Cosmogonical ornament (or relating to the universe): 1) moon, crescent, sun, lights, rainbow, milky way, circle, eternal, tort kulakh (four curves); 2) Animal theme ornaments: ornaments illustrating the natural and fantastic images of animals: aiurtuyak (divided hoof), aterin (horse's lips), atbas (horse's head), koshkar muyiz (sheep's horn) and its variations, taituyak (yearling's hoof), tuyetaban (camel's slot), botamoyin (camel's neck), buzaytis (calf's teeth); 3) Ornaments illustrating wild animals and their body parts, footprints: arkharkar muyiz (mountain goat's horn), borikoz (wolf's eye), ittis (dog's eye), balykkoz (fish's eye), koyan kulakh (hare's ear), tulkibas (fox's head), kiik muyiz (antelope's horn); 4) buglike ornaments: alakurt (spotted beetle), zhulduz kurt (caterpillar), kobelek (butterfly), kumyrskhaiz (ant's prints), tasbakha (tortoise), ormekshi (spider), zhylyan baur (snake's skin), sulik (leech); 5) Birds illustrating ornaments: khas moyin (geese's vides), khustaban (bird's slot), khus kanat (bird's wings), khus muryn (bird's beak), karlygash (swallow), shozhebas (sparrow's head), phazan (pheasant); 6) Vegetative ornaments and relating to water and land: leaves, flower, crocus, poplar, water, windering river, cotton plant, snowdrop; 7) *Ornaments illustrating tools and weapons: aibalta, balta, ayur baldakh, karmakh*; 8) *Ornaments illustrating geometric figures: kos dongelek (double circle), tortkulak (crosspiece), suyir (sharp angled), circle, scheme, square, tumarsha (triangle)*. It may be said unreservedly that Kazakh ornaments are specified with the usage of animalistic motifs. They are mostly revealed in the image of ancient "animalistic style": sheep, horse, camel, wolf, eagle, falkon, and depicted in parts of figure: head, horns, ears, hoofs, slots, feet and etc. This led to the development of new ornamental motifs "sheep's horn"—"koshkar muyiz", "deer's horn—bygy muyiz", horse's head—"at bas". All of them are known to be primary kinds in Kazakh ornamental art (Shajmerdenova & Avakova, 2004).

A major part of national ornaments are designed in the shape of horn. The folk artists create the original and complex compositions using the "muyiz" in all sorts of variations. It is recognized as one of the most important source for Kazakh ornamental craft. As all the new patterns are based on the "muyiz" and appear with a little change in names. E.g. The *koshkhar muyiz (the sheep horn)*, *arkar muyiz (the mountain sheep horn)*, *bugy muyiz (the deer antlers)*, *kyryk muyiz (forty horns)*, *khos muyiz (double horn)*, *synar muyiz (single horn)*, *synykhmuyiz (horned)*, *orkesh muyiz (camel-hump shaped horn)*, *tortkulakh-(cross-piece)*, *tuyetaban (camel slot)*, *syngarokshe (the only heel)*, *khos alkha (double necklace, khus khanat—bird's wings)*, *khaz taban (geese's footprint)*. The

whole composition is made from the elements given above. One can meet the “muyiz” ornament in all Kazakh crafts in a variety of combinations. According to scholars it has a long history so it greatly depicts a typical life of nomadic cattle breeding.

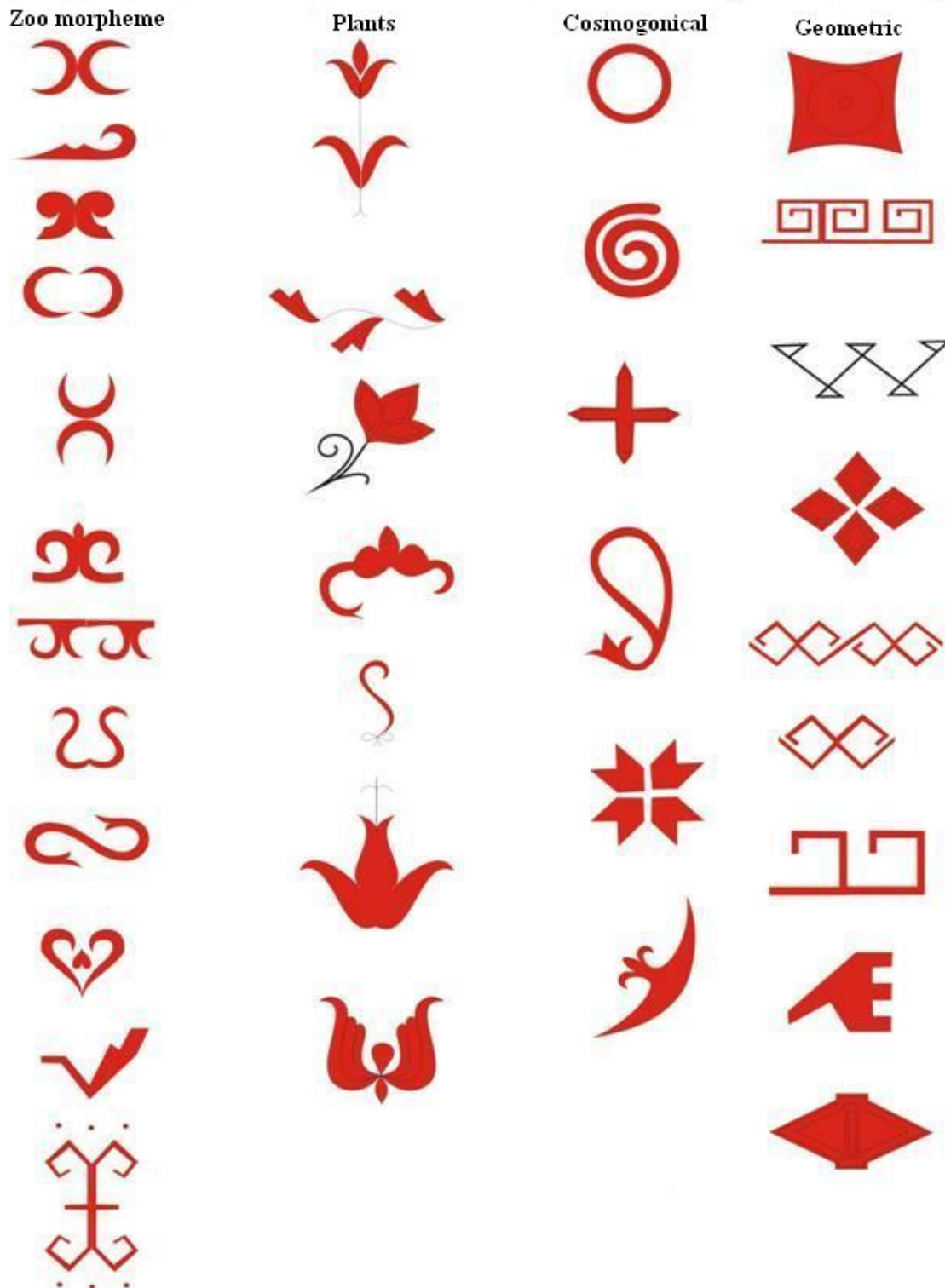


Figure 1. Kazakh ornaments

4. Discussion

There are some patterns of ornaments in the picture above. [<http://bilu.kz/ornament.php>]:

Each ornament has a symbolic interpretation, under meaning and variety of connotations. Now let's make a quick review to the meaning of some ornaments in Kazakh ornamental design:

The “muyiz” could be considered as one of the basic and ancient ornamental elements in Kazakh decorative applied art. It is dominated by the hornlike and arcuate lines. The word means a hard permanent outgrowth, often curved and pointed, found in pairs on the heads of cattle, sheep, goats, cows, etc. and consisting of a core of bone encased in keratinized skin (Explanatory dictionary, 2008) The craftsmen use different sizes of the ornament. Small ones are very popular in gentle crafts. It has many types, such as “aimuyiz”, “khosmuyiz”, “synarmuyiz”, “synykhmuyiz”, “maralmuyiz”, “koshkar muyiz”, “orkesh muyiz” and many others. The “kosmuyiz” depicts only two horns of sheep, goats, and cows and is also called “yrgakh”, “imek”. The difference between hornlike elements can be seen in the variety of twists.



Figure 2. Koshkar muyiz

Another traditional nomadic ornamental element is “koshkar muyiz”. It symbolizes wealth, fertility, benefit. Sheep in religious beliefs is known to be a gift of the God given to Ibrahim. Moreover, for many cultures horned beings are generally assumed as sacred and powerful (Akimasheva, 2004). One of the most important elements that give the novelty and originality to the National flag, is line placed in parallel with the staff consists of “koshkar-muiz” ornamental pattern.



Figure 3. Flag of Kazakhstan

In many ornamental illustrations the “koshkar muyiz” ornament symbolizes a human. But some scholars consider that it rather illustrates a tree: its rhomb for a head, double humps for leaves and the top of the tree, sharp-nose slopes for a mountain.

For Kazakh people “Bayterek’s” (Lombardy poplar) ornament stands for the symbol of great social value. It traditionally means an eternal life, myth or belief. This ornament much resembles “bird’s wings” which belongs to one of the seven treasures that connects all the supreme powers and the earth. It always associated with is a great power and fame.

For example, there is a “koshkar muyiz” ornament in the middle of the tekemet (a felt rug with the sulken indistinct pattern of pale natural colors of wool as white and brown). The outer edge of it is decorated with another ornamental elements such as “tumar” (the name of the ornament), “shrashy” (a square ornament) or ornaments illustrating water which symbolize a wish of having a rich cattle breeding tradition.

“Muyiz oyu” (horn ornament) is a horn-shaped ornament its name speaks for itself. It is often (average external center of the flower or flowers) depicted on the edge of tuskiiz. The tekemets are laid on the ground and better known as “koltyk”. It is referred as a sign of hospitality which means feel as in home.

Earlier in times there was a tradition when a lovely shawl of the young woman with images, which include a bird, a star with a shining beam, given to a young man made him happy. A Kazakh girl when was too shy to talk to a young man could express her sympathy in this way. “The ornaments could speak louder than words”.



Figure 4. Kustumsyk

“Kustumsyk” ornament is shaped to make a bird’s beak. It consists of curves and lines. The line in the middle is carved similar to a beak of the bird. Ornaments “kustumsyk” and “topsaly” with the single or double circle, the sun decorating girl’s ring has a symbolic nature that renders justice, kindness for close-knit family relationships. To show a kind attitude towards the mother of son-in-law expressed by the girl’s mother is shown by the ornament on the ring called “kudagi zhuzik”. Kazakh people had a tradition to send a shawl with “kustumsyk” or “kustanday’ornaments” to inform relatives about the birth of a child.



Figure 5. Akku

“Akku” (swan) belongs to a large group of duck birds with a long curved neck and white feather. If a person has a long neck he/she is compared by a swan. There is one more interesting fact in the northern hemisphere of the sky there is bunch of stars which is also so-called (Explanatory dictionary, 2008). In this regard, the “Swan” ornament is an ancient art which represents virginity and love.

“Uki” owl ornament was depicted on the besik (cradle, oscillating bed for a baby) and on children’s costumes as a guard for a small baby. “Owl-any of various of nocturnal birds having hooked or feathered talons, large heads with short hooked beaks.” fly only at night. Their feather is widely is used for decorating hats (Explanatory dictionary, 2008).

Also there is a tradition in Kazakh culture to hang on the owl's feather the cradle to turn away the evil eye.

“Karlygash” (swallow)—little bird with a plug-tail, black wings, which are long and sharp (Explanatory dictionary, 2008).

The word in its covert meaning is defined as a simile that shows a love to a child. As the ornament it symbolizes a family and children. The swallow is believed to be a bird that protects a family.

Moreover the “kustaban” ideogram is widely used to among craftsmen by the idea that it helps to protect a woman who is in a family way (Amanzholov, 1998).

According to the ancient concepts of Turks a bird is the symbol of heaven, fish stands for water and tree is for the earth. It involves the symbolic value of the wavy and winding water expressions which is made of straight lines or a combination of blunt fragments. Earlier these ornaments implied “a stroll along the river” (Gercuk, 1998; Abilasan, 1998; Aitova, 2005).

“Borikoz”, “borikulak” ornaments featured in the handcrafts symbolize a wolf's eyes, ear, and leaf which are better known as “borikulak” (Explanatory dictionary, 2008). “Bori” is **a wolf. There is a small constellation in the southern part of the sky so called. In some ancient works a “wolf” is stood for warriors host from Turkish Khagans** (Explanatory dictionary, 2008).

“Zhylan”, “Zhylanbas” ornaments feature in many clothing national items of children, especially in hats to turn away the evil eye and it resembles a snake's head. It is strongly believed that the image of the snake is helpful in protecting people from a bad evil energy. Snakes are a long limbless reptile which has no eyelids, a short tail, and jaws that are capable of considerable extension (Explanatory dictionary, 2008).



Figure 6. Zhylanbas

“Orkesh” (camel's hump)—a fleshy protuberance on the back of a camel (Explanatory dictionary, 2008). As it looks similar to a camel's hump it was so called. Orkesh ornament is used for wishing prosperity and reproduction. In Kazakh ornamental art double horned cattle, two humps of camels, double breast of mare can also symbolize a symmetric equilibrium.



Figure 7. Orkesh

In making the ornamental composition colours give their delicate beauty. Traditional colors have been basically used for many centuries in Kazakh decorative applied art, they are: red, blue, yellow, green, white and black. Each color has its own specific symbolic meaning. Thus, a blue-sky colour symbolizes honesty, fidelity and integrity. The blue is color of the sky, white—symbol of truth, yellow—wisdom, sorrow and morals, green—youth, spring and etc.

Today the ornamental art has become one of the primary fields in national cultural development. Cultural and outlook enrichment since the independence has been gained national craftsmen are making new creative pursuits and upgrading their skills. The ornaments have changed and improved over time, recovered a new rich content and fresh look.

New enterprises currently engaged in the manufacturing traditional ornamental crafts are well developing today (Kazakh ornaments <http://xreferat.ru/41/280-1-kazakhskiiy-ornament.html>).

5. Conclusion

Thus for symbolic meaning of Kazakh national ornamental art it is typical rendering a great deal of quite diverse connotations. It certainly needs some more careful study amid the scholars specialized in the scientific field. But there are a lot of historians and ethnographers who have greatly contributed in revealing specific features of this piece of national art. Their findings and analysis assisted in distinguishing ornamental types. Vegetative ornaments (leaf, a three leaf, twisted, flower, tree and etc.), zoo-morpheme/ animalistic ornaments (natural and fantastic images of animals, koshkhar muyiz and its various patterns: kos muyiz, kynyr muyiz (curved horn), synyk muyiz, taban, orkesh, kaz moyun and etc.); geometrical ornament (sharp angle, square, triangle, star, polygon, circles, return hook and etc.), cosmogonical ornaments (donggelek-circle, tort khulakh-crosspiece, shygyla-rainbow, shimai-spiral, bytbes-eternal).

It may be said unreservedly that Kazakh ornaments are specified with the usage of animalistic motifs. They are mostly revealed in the image of ancient “animalistic style”: sheep, horse, camel, wolf, eagle, falkon, and depicted in parts of figure: head, horns, ears, hoofs, slots, feet and etc. This led to the development of new ornamental motifs “sheep’s horn”-“khoshkar muyiz”, “deer’s horn—bygy muyiz”, “horse’s head—at bas”. All of them are known to be primary kinds in Kazakh ornamental art.

The hornlike ornaments are recognized as one of the most important source for Kazakh ornamental craft. As all the new patterns are based on the “muyiz” and appear with a little change in names. e.g. “koshkhar muyiz”, “arkhar muyiz”, “bygymuyiz”, “kyryk muyiz”, “kosmuyiz”, “synarmuyiz”, “synykhmuyiz”, “orkesh muyiz”, “tort khulakh,” “tuye taban”, “synar okshe”, “kus kanaty”, “kaz taban” and many others. The ornamental composition is made from these integral elements. Each Kazakh ornament is traditionally made from the variety of hornlike patterns. According to the scholars the origin of the “muyiz” ornament trace back to ancient times, so it generally describes nomadic cattle breeding tradition.

Kazakh national ornamental art is primarily based on hornlike elements and their variations. There is wide range of their variations and types. Hornlike decorative patterns can be recognized as the main source for craftsmen specialized in national ornamental art. It serves as the basis to each new pattern of ornamental composition.

Colors in ornaments have also a deeper meaning. They can render all the wide range of natural colors: Yellow autumn, snowy winter, summer beauty, and marvelous landscapes of the country.

Art experts have distinguished types of ornaments and been scientifically defined. It is certainly not enough for revealing their true nature. Life always goes through changes and the art tends to improve and develop in accordance with communal interest and demands in each historical milestone.

The national ornamental art with its long and rich history has turned into the spiritual and material value. Nowadays in the contemporary art we can observe an interesting trend. Many craftsmen have been developing this ancient art by adding new shades and deeper meaning. Each ornamental element with its symbolic interpretation and undermeaning must be handed over from one generation to another as the heritage.

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