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**THE EFFECT OF SACRED SITES IN KAZAKHSTAN ON SOCIETY
THEIR PLACE IN THE CONSERVATION OF NATIONAL IDENTITY**

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Abstract: In the article of Kazakhstan President Nursultan Nazarbayev, «The course towards future: spiritual renewal», six projects have been presented that lead the social mentality to the modern level. The fourth one is the geography of the sacred places of Kazakhstan ünc project. The aim of realizing this project is to increase the values of national identity and to prevent the spread of harmful ideologies. Today, scientific researches in Kazakhstan are carried out on archaeological, ethnographic and historical studies related to the sacred places of Kazakhstan. However, the shrines and sacred sites in Kazakhstan have not been systematically classified so far. In other words, the issues related to the concept of national value and holiness have not been studied in detail. In addition, the importance of sacred places and places to visit in the preservation of national identity has not been paid attention. In this research, we will present the sacred sites and places of visit of Kazakhstan, and we will focus on the social and psychological effects of these spaces on the preservation of national identity and the preservation of unity and peace.

Key Words: People's faith, faith tourism, holy place, tomb, Turkish-Islamic Period architectural structures, places to visit.

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1. Introduction

In Kazakhstan, as in many other countries, the visits to sacred sites have increased considerably. Worshipping or visiting activities in shrines and tombs are increasing every day.

Today, the act of visiting religious places or sacred sites is described as religious tourism. In this context, the types of religious tourism can be divided into the following groups: *Pilgrim tourism*, *Esoteric tourism* and *Sacral tourism*. Trips taken by various religious representatives to visit holy places are called *Pilgrim tourism*. *Esoteric tourism* includes individual journeys to increase the traditional religious beliefs of a person and understand the talismanic powers of sacred sites. *Sacral tourism*, is when people who have talismanic endeavors visit a certain sacred site to try to contact the metaphysical world. Sacral ("sacrum" in Latin, meaning sacred, strength) means ascribing a special meaning to an object, thus turning it into a mystical entity and increasing its irrational significance. Therefore, the words "holy", "sacred" and "strength" are called sacral terms as a whole in science.

The World Tourism Organization UNWTO, has stated that religious tourism is the most prestigious branch of tourism of the 21st century due to the increase in visits to the holy lands and sacred sites.

Nowadays, due to the increasing competition between countries, regions and cities, each region is able to promote its values better, for the age we live in makes this competitive atmosphere necessary. It is also necessary to be a competitive country in order to have a place among the 30 most developed countries as emphasized in the "Kazakhstan 2050" strategy. These statements support the originality of our research topic.

Kazakhstan is full of temples and other sacred sites. These places are visited for various purposes. These activities help the region to be recognized by a wider audience. The fact that social unity and solidarity is improved in the process of promoting national values must also be taken into consideration. Therefore, these places are visited not only with religious feelings but also with national feelings. In other words, religious tourism serves both purposes.

In his article titled "Directing the Future: Spiritual Renewal" that serves as a development plan for the country, Kazakhstan President Nursultan Nazarbayev says, "Spiritual regeneration cannot be achieved unless national culture is preserved. It is not possible to renew the society without understanding the national code and supporting our cultural vein." In this context, sacred sites in Kazakhstan can be considered the cornerstone of national code and spiritual culture. Therefore, it is necessary to re-examine the sacred sites in Kazakhstan today. Mircea Eliade's opinion on "the necessity of considering every religious

phenomenon not only from the perspective of history, but also discussing its meaning, purpose and message in the socio-cultural context as well" (Eliade 2005, 25), supports our conviction.

2. The concept of “Sacred Site”

Blessedness and holy places have existed since ancient times. As people's tastes and demands changed over time, different views about temples emerged in society. The interest in temples has also increased due to the influence of methods and ideas amongst fields of science since the 19th century.

In the dictionary, the concept of sacred site, (*sacer* in Latin) is defined as a unique object with special meaning. From the ontological point of view, "sacredness" is an upper level of the truth, separated from everyday life. In terms of the theory of knowledge, it is explained as the fact that the mind cannot comprehend. In terms of phenomenology, it is the world of miracles. (Stepin 2010, 91).

Mircea Eliade's definition of sacred site makes this subject more understandable. "Each kratophany (manifestation of power) and hierophany (manifestation of the sacred) transforms the space where it emerges: The site, which was not sacred until that day, becomes sacred" (Eliade 2003, 355). In fact, according to Eliade, the idea of sacred site is based on the idea of renewing the primary hierophany, which blesses a place by drawing a line around it to isolate it from the unholy place it is surrounded by (Eliade 2003, 356).

The opinion of scientists regarding blessing of space is that space is never "chosen" by human beings but, only discovered by them (Van der Leeuw 1938, 393-4); in other words, sacred sites *manifest* themselves to human beings in one way or another. The "self manifestation" of the sacred site doesn't necessarily happen through hierophanic things in nature (a space, a spring, a tree); a sacred space could also *manifest itself through a traditional technique based on a cosmological system*. Orientation is one of the methods used to reveal such spaces. The "Construction" Of the Sacred Site - All sacred sites (altars, temples) are built - in accordance with the traditional rules. In the final analysis, however, this "structure" is based on an archetype that reveals a sacred space in its own time and that is constantly renewed with every new altar, temple, etc. This kind of sacred site built according to a particular archetypal model can be seen very often (Eliade 2003, 357, 359).

Each sacred site has social, cultural, political and religious aspects. In this context, people from different walks of life may have various definitions and explanations about sacred objects according to their social position and profession. As a matter of fact, analysis and classification of qualified sacred sites in the territory of Kazakhstan on a global scale is a

very distinctive issue. There is a policy of spiritual renewal throughout the country. This study may be considered as one of the basic steps in the implementation of spiritual renewal policies.

3. Visits to the Sacred Sites in Kazakhstan and Cultural Practices

This section focuses on the visits to the sacred sites. Visit means "going to see someone, meeting, going to meet something/someone" in the dictionary, while in terms of terminology, it is used to mean visiting a Tomb, or a place for a certain purpose. The purposes of these visits are to pray to sacred entities, make wishes and hope for help in a place to which holiness is attributed (Kandemir 2013, 496-498). Visiting places have contact with divinity in all religions. On a visit of the holy places in Kazakhstan, there are mostly places such as shrines, mosques, Tombs where people such as teachers, scholars, devotees, sages, grandfather, father, martyrs, and saints who are believed to be connected with spiritual forces are buried.

Steve Brie, Jenny Dagers and David Torevell show two aspects of visiting sacred places: First, the places are considered as common places where a certain ritual has occurred. On the other hand, they are shown as the universe that creates the imagination and archetypical imagery of humanity (Steve Brie 2009, 10).

According to the findings presented in the research, sacred sites can be divided to three categories: The first type is noteworthy sacred sites built by members of various religions; the second is healing waters, mud and dolmens (signs) etc. that arise out of nature; and the third one is, holy places which are manifested by a mixture of the previous two categories. The sacred places in these categories are also common in Kazakhstan.

Within the scope of the "Cultural Heritage" state program launched in 2004 with the support of President Nursultan Nazarbayev, restoration and development activities of the historical cultural structures in the country were carried out. As a result of these activities, sacred sites and holy places valuable within the state and in the world were identified and restoration works were carried out. Among the sacred sites that are registered to the state, it is possible to list many structures (Tombs) such as the Tombs of Arystan Baba Tomb, Khoja Ahmed Yasawi, Karahan, Ayse Bibi, Dede Korkut Memorial Complex, Beket Ata.

Visits to holy places are called "religious tourism" or "sacral tourism" from a scientific point of view. The entire region of Kazakhstan is full of sacred sites and holy beings. However, the one sought after the most by the public are located in South Kazakhstan, Western Kazakhstan and East Kazakhstan regions.

The city of Turkestan is considered a small pilgrimage in the South

Kazakhstan region. Turkestan is the first capital of Kazakh Khanate and its history is very deep-rooted. In addition, it became one of the trade centers of the Great Silk Road. The old name of the city is Yessi. Today Turkestan is the sacred space of the Kazakh steppe. Visitors come to this space to increase their spirituality, to heal and to stimulate their soul.

It is possible to divide the visit of the holy places in Kazakhstan into two groups as follows:

First, the visits with religious motives

Second, the visits with national motives

3.1. Visits with Religious Motives

Some of the places visited with religious motives are: The Tombs of Arystan Baba, Khoja Ahmed Yasawi, Gevher Ana. Those who come to visit these shrines usually pray for their material or spiritual demands. Each shrine or place of visit also has a number of features. Visit to the Crib Hill for example are made by people who want children and who pray there. According to the belief, people who pay a visit there and pray, attain the joy of being parents. Likewise, visits are also made to drink water from the sacred well. According to people's belief, only the well-intentioned people can draw water from this well with a zigzag-shaped stone wall.

3.1.1. The Tomb of Arystan Baba

It is a common belief in Kazakhstan that the great man known and respected as Arystan Bab was one of the companions of prophet Muhammad and had lived a very long life. Arystan Baba was the teacher of Khoja Ahmed Yasawi, the most popular representative of Islam in the Kazakh steppe. There is a small mosque on the opposite side of the visiting area of his Tomb. There is a large courtyard between the visiting area of the Tomb and the small mosque. Outside the Tomb building there is a well with salt water. People have been using the salt water for healing purposes. According to the belief among people; in order for the wishes of the visitors to be accepted, it is necessary to go and pray at the Tomb of Ahmed Yasawi after spending a night at the Tomb of Arystan Baba, which is expressed in the following saying common in Kazakhstan: "Stay at Arystan Baba's, make wishes at Khoja Ahmed." Arystan Baba, the teacher of Khoja Ahmed Yasawi, is respected a lot and his Tomb must be visited first for wishes and prayers to be accepted. (Encyclopedia of Saints 2019) This structure, built by Emir Timur in the 14th century, is the art monument of the Otirar region. Many visitors both from within and outside the country visit this place with religious feelings.

3.1.2. The Tomb of Khoja Ahmed Yasawi

The Tomb of Khoja Ahmed Yasawi (1093-1166), the first known great Turkish sufi, is on the old caravan road in the northeast of Turkestan in Kazakhstan. It was built by Timur in 1389-1405 to replace the old small

Tomb. This shrine is one of the most famous historical buildings in Central Asia and Kazakhstan. The Tomb of Khoja Ahmed Yasawi (1093-1166), the first known great Turkish sufi, is on the old caravan road in the northeast of Turkestan in Kazakhstan. The Tomb was ordered to be built by Timur in 1389-1405 to replace the old, smaller one, but could not be completed due to the death of Timur. This magnificent structure is a work of art that was made in the old style of local and eastern Islamic architecture (Encyclopedia of Saints 2018).

Yasawi's Tomb was built by Timur in the 14th century. It has a very distinctive structure in terms of its architectural features. The Tomb, which was wanted to be demolished repeatedly during the Soviet period, is one of the rare works which has been preserved by the Kazakhs and survived until today. One of the most beautiful examples of Eastern architecture, the Tomb is a rare artifact because it is made of mudbrick and with no columns. The colorful ceramics and glazed and colored inscriptions on the outer walls and domes of the Tomb were preserved in their original state until today. All of the works on the outer walls made in likeness to geometric symbols are written. The verses inscribed on the Tomb and the names of the masters who built it have been carefully preserved by Timur. There are 22 retreats in the 40-meter high building. The two-storey building has 35 rooms. "Toy Boiler" is one of the most important works right at the entrance of the Tomb, and the other one is the starboard Timur used during war. 14. The boiler that was ordered by Timur to be made by an Azeri master weighs two tons and is about 2 meters tall. The boiler was made of a combination of metals such as iron, lead, red copper, bronze and gold and holds 3 tons of water. It was taken to Russia's city of Petersburg for repair in 1936 and was reinstated after Kazakhstan declared its independence.

The Tomb of Khoja Ahmed Yasawi was built with a harmonious plan. According to documents, Timur ordered the construction of the Tomb and contributed to the sketches of the plan. Khoja Ahmed Yasawi Tomb has monumental portals and a cubic structure as a work of art. Its width is 46,5 meters and its length is 65 meters. The building has a portal (a width of 50 meters, a stone door arch 18,2 meters and a height of 37,5 meters) and several domes. There are 35 rooms around the central space of entrance to the rooms. The Tomb of Khoja Ahmed Yasawi consists of a congregation, a cemetery, a small mosque, a library, a large Aksaray, a small Aksaray, a soup kitchen, a well and a few cell rooms. It is a complex structure providing services regarding religious-tradition, religious education and religious life (Seydimbekov 2016).

Scientific research of the Tomb started at the end of the 19th century. The first scientific research group that came to the city of Turkestan prepare the drawing of the monument, was directed by Professor N. I. Veselovsky (1905). This research group was sent from Russia specifically to study Central Asia and East Asia. Since 1922, a number of research

committees have conducted technical examinations. Detailed investigations of the structure were made between 1952-1958 (BN Zasiipkin, T. S. Karumidze, L. Yu. Mankovskaya, K. A. Shahurin) and 1970-1980 (BT Tuyakbayeva, A. N. Proskorin).

The Tomb of Khoja Ahmed Yasawi is a sacred place for Muslims of the world. The Tomb of Khoja Ahmed Yasawi is similar to Bibi Hanım mosque in Samarkand (Uzbekistan). Nowadays, there are visitors come from various parts of the world to see this old Tomb from old ages in Turkestan-Yesi.

In Kazakhstan, the saying "Muhammad in Medina, Khoja Ahmed in Turkestan," is used by the public as a sign of love for Yasawi. The spiritual effect of Ahmed Yasawi, who taught both the truth of Islam and the tradition of wisdom abiding by the tradition of Muhammad, is widespread in the entire Muslim world.

Today, newlyweds often visit the Tomb of Khoja Ahmed. The bride, the groom and the whole wedding party collectively visit the Tomb. They pray for the marriage to last long and be fertile and the wedding party prays at the Tomb. And they donate money for the destitute there. Wedding pictures are taken in the garden of the Tomb. In doing all these they believe that the marriage will be good and fertile.

3.1.3. The Tomb of Gevher Ana

Gevher Sehnaz Hatun is the elder sister of Khoja Ahmed Yasawi. A few years after Yasawi was born, his mother died. His father Sheikh Abraham Ata handled his education and spirituality as a child. When Yasawi was six years old, Sheikh Abraham Ata also passed away. Before his death, Abraham Ata trusted his son's care to his elder sister Gevher Şehnaz Hatun. A few days before his passing, he advises his daughter; "My dear girl... It is the pleasantness that comes to our heart that we are in the last days of the life that God has given us in this world. Take care of your brother Ahmed, don't leave him alone... You should know that God will grant him a big favor. My hope is that Ahmed will be one of the greatest persons of his time. There is a table at my convent. When Ahmed opens that, it will be the day of going out for him. This is my testament and advice to you." (Eraslan 1989, 161)

After the death of their precious father, Gevher Şehnaz Hatun takes her six-year-old brother Khoja Ahmed to the city of Yesi (now Turkestan) where their grandfather and Sheikh Abraham Ata's caliph Sheikh Moses established his convent and where their relatives were. Gevher Şehnaz Hatun marries Khoja Ata, one of Yesi's scholars, with the support of her relatives and friends. In later years, Hodja Ata would join his brother-in-law in the path of truth and be raised to the khalifa position on the Yasawi path. Gevher Sehnaz Hatun would tend to the matters of women in Yasawi's path. May God appreciate the secret in both of them (Koprulu 1981, 62).

The Tomb of Gevher Ana is located in Shymkent, Kazakhstan. Gevher Ana has helped many people thanks to her healer's abilities. There are wells that are believed to hold healing medicinal water around the Tomb. This Tomb is usually visited by women who do not have children. The visitors stay the night and pray at the Tomb. There is also a place for bathing in the courtyard. Women visiting the tomb shower with healing waters.

3.1.4. Beket Ata Mosque

The most important sacred site in the Mangystau region of Western Kazakhstan is the Beket Ata Mosque. This mosque is located in the district of Oglandi in the province of Mangistau. It sits at the top of a mountain. Although this region is known for its natural beauty, it is also known for Beket Ata. The saying "The honor of the space is from those have been there." is very true for the village of Oglandi, where Beket Ata has lived. Because this region owes its importance and reputation to Beket Ata. Throughout his life, Beket Ata emphasised the concepts of 'justice' to prevent harassment, 'halal' to prevent hypocrisy, 'intercession' to prevent abuse, 'pity' to prevent ruthlessness and 'mind' to prevent dishonor. He had an effect on every part of the society with the values he defended and obtained a valid identity. He has been accepted as "a hero who shields the people from the wind that blows" in his struggles against injustice. He is considered a monument of bravery who protected his people against enemies. The Muslim judge is the symbol of justice in a case. And an imam distinguishes halal and good in an unjust business (Kondibay 2008, 152).

According to sufistic legends, Beket Ata is considered to be the owner of the mountain goat. Therefore, there are statues of the mountain goats around the Beket Ata Mosque. Mountain goats are a very common sight in the Oglandi region where the mosque is located. It is also believed that Beket Ata would disguise as various birds and animals (Kamalova 2018a).

According to popular belief, Beket Ata practiced medicine. He cured the sick and helped lonely people. He has helped people who had no children to become parents. He did not only help people with health issues, but also provided permanent and important services for people regarding spiritual values and education. He guided people to walk on the right path with his counsel. By being justified, he strengthened the charity in society.

The Mangistau region is known for its 362 saints. In fact, the inhabitants of this region see the number "362" as holy. For example, when selecting an apartment, they try to get the number 362. The number "362" on an automobile number plate is very appreciated. This experience arose out of respect for the sacred sites or the spirits of the ancestors, and hoping for help from them. And Beket Ata is one of those 362 saints.

3.1.5. Copan Ata Underground Mosque

Copan Ata Mosque is located in Senek village of Mangistau Province. There are a few legends about this mosque being in the Mangistau region. According to one of these legends, Khoja Ahmed Yasawi called his students as they graduated, and said, "Now all of you will draw a bow. You will continue to sufi education and give advice to the public wherever the arrow lands." The arrow of Copan Ata fell to the area where this mosque is today. After finding his arrow, Copan Ata herded the sheep of the rich person named Bayan in this region. Mr. Bayan then realizes that Copan Ata is a smart and intelligent person and marries him to his daughter. Then they build a mosque here where it is needed. In another legend, Copan Ata is said to leave a water source anywhere he touches with his feet. So the well next to the mosque is considered sacred. Visitors believe that they will be healed and cleansed if they drink from this well. The tree in the courtyard of the mosque is believed to be the staff of Copan Ata. The tree is said to have existed for over 800 years. Also, there is a cavity in the ceiling of the mosque. The staff of Copan Ata turning into a budding tree can be seen from there. This staff is perceived as the source that brings the world together. Visitors pray by turning around this staff and try to convey their wishes to the soul of Copan Ata (Kamalova 2018b).

As in many places in Kazakhstan, such as Tomb of Yasawi, the condition for the visit to be acceptable, one must visit the mosque of Copan Ata the master, before going to the mosque of Beket Ata the student. The tradition of visiting sacred sites enhances religious tourism. Such sacred sites help popularize the region they are in. In order to increase the attractiveness of these places, the state helps the visitors to feel comfortable by setting the rules and etiquette for visitors to abide by. In other words, our state makes a lot of effort to ensure the material and spiritual peace and comfort of the visitors who visit these places.

Ulan Bigojin, an anthropologist who explores sacred sites in Kazakhstan, discusses the influence of religion in the formation of the nation in his work on the subject, based on Van der Vira's work on "Religious nationalism." In this context, Bigojin recommends that the Tombs should be considered as an organic part of traditional Islamic faith and as a means of consolidating national unity (Bigojin 2015a).

Roger W. Stump describes the relationship between religious experience and belief and a region in his book "The Geography of Religion: Faith, Place and Space" (2008). In this book, Roger W. Stump argues that the emergence of various religious perspectives, the tradition of immigration, religious practices and the establishment of sects led to the creation of sacred sites. The researcher investigated the tradition of migration of religious groups in order to determine the process of formation of sacred sites in his book called "Geography of Religion". In addition, the Kazakhstani theologian A.K.Muminov proves that the sacred places were manifested in many regions of Kazakhstan on the basis

of the tradition of khojas' immigration, in his book "Mukhtar Avezov's Pedigree" (2011).

The foundation of the religious faith of the Kazakh people is connected with the life of the past. Therefore, sacred sites constitute an important part of Kazakh religious views.

3.2. Visits made with National Motives

Such visits are usually made in order to see historical buildings, to feel the historical heritage or to examine it on site. Additionally, there are also visits of this kind made in order to listen to myths and legends about historical places, to pray at Tombs and to strengthen national feelings.

3.2.1. The Tomb of Karahan Baba

It is a common belief that this Tomb could have been built in the name of the ruler of the Karahanlı State, Shamsul Mulk Nasir bin Abraham, who ruled in the 10th or 12th century (Cezar 1977, 111). The maintenance, restoration and preservation of this Tomb is under the responsibility of the "Old Taraz structures" museum. Karahan Baba is also known as Saint Ata among the public.

Karahan Baba is also known as Saint Ata among the public. To the west of Taraz in southern Kazakhstan, this Tomb is a magnificent work of art. The old architecture was preserved up until the beginning of the 20th century. In 1906, a new Tomb was built in place of the dome. There is a crib-shaped monument in the room with a patterned wooden post on the top. In 1979, detailed restoration work was carried out at the site. (Abdimomynova 2015).

Nowadays people visit the site with national feelings.

Right next to the Tomb of Karahan Baba, there is the first Muslim mosque built with the style of Karahan architecture. This small mosque, which is currently facing demolition from lack of care, is one of the earliest examples of national unity and solidarity, just like the Tomb of Karahan Baba.

3.2.2. The Tomb of Ayse Bibi

The Tomb is located in Taraz, Kazakhstan. The Tomb of Ayse Bibi is in UNESCO'S list of cultural heritage. The external façade of the grave was specially covered. There is no construction inscription of the structure. Some researchers say that the structure belongs to the Karahan era based on architectural features and the technique of terracotta materials used for decoration (Cezar 1977, 110). There are two different views about who Ayse Bibi was. According to legends mentioned in Russian publications, Ayse Bibi was the daughter of Hakim Ata and died after getting married to the ruler of Karahan (Babur 2005, 33). In Turkish publications, it is suggested that Ayse Bibi is the daughter of Alp Arslan, the Seljuk Sultan,

and the wife of Karahan ruler Sems-ul Mulk Nasir bin Abraham (Cezar 1977, 111).

The plan of this structure is similar to the grave of Ismail Samani in Bukhara. The tomb of Ayse Bibi is a museum of rich ornamentation patterns used in the history of the people of Turkish origin living in Central Asia. Today, the patterns of this tomb are preserved only on the western wall. On the other walls there are only a few traces of the pattern. In one of the corners of the Tomb, the old inscription was preserved. The meaning of this inscription can be summed up as "fall... black cloud. The world is magnificent..." The western facade of the Tomb has survived to the present day. The other sides were restored. This Tomb is one of the most valuable buildings surviving from the Karahanli era. It is made with an epigraphic arch with 60 kinds of pattern. Tourists visiting this structure are not only interested in the architectural significance of the tomb, but also in the legends that are told about the great love between Ayse Bibi and Karahan. (Babur 2005, 29-35)

There are two shrines of love in the world. One is Taj Mahal in India and the other is the Tomb of Ayse Bibi in Taraz. Ayse Bibi is one of the leading figures who symbolize national consciousness and love in Kazakhstan. Her love and loyalty for Karahan Baba has become epic. She is believed to have died for her love for Karahan.

The legends and stories told about Karahan Baba and Ayse Bibi have survived by word of mouth until today. According to a myth, Karahan falls in love with Ayse at a young age. However, the war in the country prevents the two of them from being happy. Therefore, the two meet in secret and go to Karahan's hometown. Ayse Bibi bathes in the ravine to freshen up from her travels, and a gray snake on the edge of the river bites her while she gets dressed. As she begins to lose consciousness Karahan takes Ayse to an imam to marry them. Thus, Ayse Bibi dies here in the arms of Karahan. Karahan, builds a Tomb where his wife Ayse Bibi has died. When he dies, he wills his own grave to be made somewhere else. Because he doesn't want his tomb to overshadow Ayse Bibi's, so her sacrifice can always be kept alive and their love remembered. Today we feel much more accurately how right and fair this decision of his was. The Tomb of Ayse Bibi is still preserved today and is a symbol of love.

3.2.3. Dede Korkut

He was a wise man who played the lute, composed music, had an exceptional, superhuman mind, was a shaman and a magician. He saw the future, healed the diseases and was consulted by state leaders. He is believed to have lived in the 7th-8th centuries, by the coast of Sirderya river. Korkut Ata lived a long life; served as a grand vizier during the rule of khans Inal, Koken, and Kanlikoja; made laws appropriate for Turkish custom and applied them. (Nishanbayev 1999, 62).

The tomb of Korkut Ata is on the coast of the Sirderya, 19 km from

the town of Karmaksi (Jalagas) of the Kizilorda (Akmescid) province in the southwestern part of Kazakhstan. The original tomb is said to have collapsed as a result of the overflowing river, so a Tomb with four columns that look like lutes was built in 1980.

Dede Korkut's epic stories that went among the Turkish by word of mouth, was collected by Akkoyunlu people in a book called the Dede Korkut Book in the 15th century. In the preface of the Dede Korkut Book, the saga compiler gives the following information about him and conveys this advice from his mouth: "From the tribe of Oguz to Bayat, there lived an excellent and wise man named Dede Korkut. With God's help, his interpretations of the future would be come true. He solved the most contradictory cases in the Oguz tribe. People did not do business without consulting Korkut in important initiatives. All the people complied with his suggestions" (Bartold 1999, 355-456).

There are twelve epics in Dede Korkut's book. These epics, as well as being the best examples of Turkish language, are also the most clear documents that shed light on Turkish thought and spirit.

Dede Korkut expresses the Oguz Turks, their beliefs, lives, traditions, bravery, spirit and their sound character and morality in a pure Turkish. The rhythm of lute can be felt in the poems in his epics.

In his epic of Bamsi Boyrek, this is how Banu Cicek calls out after her lover Bey Boyrek:

„Oh, the owner of my red veil,
Oh, the hope in my head.
Oh, my valiant lord,
Brave khan...
of whose face I can't get enough.
The one I saw as I opened my eyes,
The one I love with heart,
The one I share a pillow with
The one I'd die for,
Lovely valiant man..."

The heroes of the Dede Korkut epics preach goodness and righteousness. They suggest unity, togetherness, national solidarity and becoming one to Turkish people. In short, the Dede Korkut stories that have reached us from centuries ago, present a desire for people to live in peace. They advise all nations of Turkish origin to be loyal to their word and to fight for the sake of the nation (Ergin 1958, 13).

4. Conclusion

The reason for the increasing interest in the sacred places in Kazakhstan can be explained as follows: Firstly, visiting the sacred sites in order to make small pilgrimages; secondly, the respect for the spirit of the

ancestors being important in the old Kazakh faith; and lastly, people looking for solutions to their grievances.

Some European and American scientists have a special interest in Central Asia. The process of development of Kazakhstan, which has renewed its history especially after it gained its independence, has started a comprehensive research effort in all fields of science. As described in the historical documents, nomadic settlements and settled cultures were formed in harmony on the Kazakh steppes. In these steppes, many historical events have also occurred in the spiritual sense. It is obvious that the value of spirituality in the country increases the religious legends, stories and sacred sites.

In determining the method of our study, we were inspired by the interview with the cultural anthropologist Ulan Bigojin titled "The Sacred Sites of Kazakhstan are on the Agenda" (2015b). According to Bigojin, at the end of 1990s, as the President of Kazakhstan N. A. Nazarbayev stated in his statement "Our way is the way of our tolerant traditional Islamic religion created by Khoja Ahmed Yasawi," the interest in sacred places should be increased as a means of forming national unity in Kazakhstan. In other words, sanctuaries and sacred places are not just signs of religious beliefs or personal perspectives. Temples also form the unique national identity of a state and reflect its culture.

The famous Turkish sociologist Erol Gungor said: "Wherever there is a Tomb of a saint, it is a Turkish land. If there was a martyr, or a great person they would combine the hearts of the public over their own grave. Anyway, how do the Turkish live where there is no one to protect the people with their spiritual power?" (Erol Gungor 1972, 8) reveals how important graves and Tombs are in the formation of national unity and solidarity. Therefore the places of visit, whether spiritual or national, are important aspects of the unity and togetherness in societies. There are many sacred places and sites in Kazakhstan. And this is proof that Kazakhstan will maintain its spirit of national identity and solidarity forever.

Religious tales are important in spreading the names of the sacred places to a wider audience. In addition, sacred sites were also discovered as a result of the search for healing among people or as a result of their efforts to acquire the power of hidden talismans. This research has revealed that holy places are generally visited for spiritual cleansing and purification. Likewise, the visits of some individuals who cannot have children to there these sacred sites are another category. Although it is not known as sacred among people, it is another type of visitation to go to the graves of famous people in one's own family and make a sacrifice.

The number of holy places in Turkestan province is remarkable. These places are considered to be very important from religious and spiritual aspects. Therefore, the number of visitors to this region (Turkestan, Janakorgan, Otirar region and Sirderya river) is also higher

than other regions.

There are many sacred sites in the Jezkazgan region as well. The most characteristic feature of this region is the fact that it has sites visited with national motives. The first one is the environment of Uludag. In the poems of Asan Kaygi this area is suggested to be the core of the world. The Uludag region is also known as the place where Kazakh khans meet in history books. Secondly, there are graves of many blessed persons in the Jezkazgan region. For example, the Tombs of Alasa Khan, the Cuci Khan, the Dombavil etc. are famous for their mystical and architectural features.

On the western side of the country, there are more sacred sites believed to have healing features. The most vivid indicator of this is that the people in Western Kazakhstan visit the Tomb of Beket Ata to regain their health. The ailing people who visit this site believe that they will be able to find a cure for their troubles and families without children be able to bear children. This common belief among the people and the tales in this region has intensified the conviction that sites around this area are effective on health problems and healing.

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