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TOPONYMS IN KAZAKH EPICS: HISTORICAL, TOPONYMIC AND ETHNOCULTURAL ANALYSIS (BASED ON THE POEM “KOBYLANDY BATYR”)

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Abstract. *Introduction.* The article considers the place names in the epic poem «Kobylandy batyr» as an important source of information that reveals the historical, geographical, socio-political and ethnocultural content of the epic space. *The main object* of the study is the role of Kyrly Kala, Syrly Kala, Bes Agash, Karaspan and other toponyms found in the epic in shaping the historical space. These epic toponyms are considered not only as artistic and spatial symbols, but also as evidence that preserves historical memory, concepts of ethnic territory, and political power relations. *The relevance of the study* is determined by the diversity of scientific opinions regarding the determination of the historical and geographical location of the cities of Kyrly and Syrly and their significance in explaining the historically multi-layered nature of the epic. *The purpose* of the study is to determine the function of toponyms such as the cities of Kyrly, Syrly, and Bes Agash in epic space and to conduct a comparative analysis of scientific conclusions regarding their historical localization. In accordance with this goal, the *tasks* were set to determine the connection of cities with socio-political and ethnic space, analyze the localization hypotheses of researchers, and compare them with archaeological and historical data. *Research methods:* historical-comparative, historical-toponymic, historical-geographical and spatial analysis methods were used. *Conclusion:* It is not enough to limit the cities of Kyrly and Syrly to one specific object; it is appropriate to consider them as multi-layered spatial markers preserved in the historical memory of the epic.

Keywords: poem «Koybalyndy batyr», place names, toponyms, Kyrly Kala, Syrly Kala, ethnic territory, epic space, Zangar Kala, historical memory.

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ҚАЗАҚ ЖЫРЛАРЫНДАҒЫ ЖЕР-СУ АТАУЛАРЫ: ТАРИХИ-ТОПОНИМИКАЛЫҚ ЖӘНЕ ЭТНОМӘДЕНИ ТАЛДАУ («ҚОБЫЛАНДЫ БАТЫР» ЖЫРЫ НЕГІЗІНДЕ)

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Аңдатпа. *Kipicne.* Мақалада «Қобыланды батыр» жырындағы жер-су атаулары эпикалық кеңістіктің тарихи-географиялық, әлеуметтік-саяси және этникалық шекара мазмұнын танытатын маңызды дерек көзі ретінде қарастырылады. *Зерттеудің негізгі нысаны* – эпоста кездесетін Қырлы қала, Сырлы қала, Бес ағаш, Қараспан және басқа да топонимдердің тарихи кеңістікті қалыптастырудағы қызметі. Бұл эпикалық топонимдерді тек көркемдік-кеңістік белгілер ретінде емес, тарихи жадыны, этникалық территория туралы түсініктерді және саяси билік қатынастарын сақтайтын дерек ретінде қарастырылады. *Зерттеудің өзектілігі* Қырлы және Сырлы қалаларының тарихи-географиялық орнын анықтауға қатысты ғылыми пікірлердің әртүрлі болуымен және олардың эпостың тарихи көпқабатты табиғатын түсіндірудегі маңызымен айқындалады. *Зерттеудің мақсаты* – Қырлы, Сырлы қалалары мен Бес ағаш сияқты топонимдердің эпикалық кеңістіктегі қызметін анықтап, олардың тарихи локализациясына қатысты ғылыми тұжырымдарды салыстырмалы талдау. Осы мақсатқа сәйкес қалалардың әлеуметтік-саяси және этникалық кеңістікпен байланысын айқындау, зерттеушілердің локализациялық гипотезаларын саралау және археологиялық-тарихи деректермен салыстыру *міндеттері* қойылды. Зерттеу әдістері: тарихи-салыстырмалы, тарихи-топонимикалық, тарихи-географиялық және кеңістіктік талдау әдістері қолданылды. *Қорытынды:* Қырлы және Сырлы қалаларын бір ғана нақты нысанмен шектеу жеткіліксіз; оларды эпостың тарихи жадында сақталған көпқабатты кеңістіктік маркерлер ретінде қарастыру орынды.

Түйін сөздер: «Қобыланды батыр» жыры, жер-су атаулары, топонимдер, Қырлы қала, Сырлы қала, этникалық территория, эпикалық кеңістік, тарихи жады.

Алғыс айту. Мақала Қазақстан Республикасы Ғылым және жоғары білім министрлігінің №АР23488984 «Қазақ халқының этникалық территориясының қалыптасу аспектісіндегі ортағасырлық топонимика» атты ғылыми-зерттеу жобасы аясында дайындалды

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ГЕОГРАФИЧЕСКИЕ НАЗВАНИЯ В КАЗАХСКИХ ЭПИЧЕСКИХ СКАЗАНИЯХ: ИСТОРИКО-ТОПОНИМИЧЕСКИЙ И ЭТНОКУЛЬТУРНЫЙ АНАЛИЗ (НА МАТЕРИАЛЕ ЭПОСА «КОБЫЛАНДЫ БАТЫР»)

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Аннотация. *Введение.* В статье географические названия, зафиксированные в эпосе «Кобыланды батыр», рассматриваются как значимый источник, раскрывающий историко-географическое, социально-политическое и этнотерриториальное содержание эпического пространства. *Основным объектом исследования* является роль топонимов, представленных в эпосе (Кырлы кала, Сырлы кала, Бес агаш, Караспан и др.), в конструировании исторического пространства. Данные эпические топонимы рассматриваются не только как художественно-пространственные маркеры, но и как источник, сохраняющий историческую память, представления об этнической территории и отношения политической власти. *Актуальность исследования* определяется разнообразием научных мнений относительно определения историко-географического местоположения городов Кырлы и Сырлы и их значения для объяснения исторически многослойного характера эпоса. *Цель исследования* – определить функции топонимов Кырлы кала, Сырлы кала и Бес агаш в эпическом пространстве и провести сравнительный анализ научных положений, касающихся их исторической локализации. В соответствии с указанной целью поставлены следующие *задачи*: выявить связь городов с социально-политическим и этническим пространством, дифференцировать локализационные гипотезы исследователей и сопоставить их с археологическими и историческими данными. В исследовании использовались следующие *методы*: историко-сравнительный, историко-топонимический, историко-географический и пространственный анализ. *Заключение*: недостаточно ограничивать города Кырлы и Сырлы одним конкретным объектом; более целесообразно рассматривать их как многослойные пространственные маркеры, сохранившиеся в исторической памяти эпоса.

Ключевые слова: эпос «Кобыланды батыр», географические названия, топонимы, Кырлы кала, Сырлы кала, этническая территория, эпическое пространство, историческая память.

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Introduction. In recent years, the attitude towards epic texts has changed significantly due to the development of historical toponymy and historical geography. In international historiography, folklore texts have begun to be considered as an important source for reconstructing cultural landscapes, historical memory, and ethnic space. This approach demonstrates the need for a new scientific methodological approach to the study of place names in the Kazakh epic heritage.

In this regard, in our study, we seek to consider the poem «Kobylandy Batyr» among the Kazakh heroic epics as one of the important spiritual sources that has preserved the historical memory, ethnocultural experience, socio-political concepts, and worldview of the people. In an epic text, historical events and figures are not only artistically reinterpreted, but also the features of a specific historical and geographical environment are preserved. From this perspective, the names of places, settlements, mountains, rivers, lakes, and cities can be considered not only additional elements of the epic narrative, but also an important layer of evidence that reveals the people's understanding of historical space. This nature of toponyms indicates the need to study them in conjunction with the issues of historical geography, historical toponymy, archaeology, and ethnic history.

The poem «Kobylandy Batyr» is of particular scientific interest in this regard. The epic has been preserved in oral tradition for centuries, re-sung in each historical period, and supplemented with new historical and political content. B. Abzhet's research examines the development of the poem from archaic epic to heroic epic, the features of its revival during the Deshti-Kipchak, Golden Horde, Nogai era, and the Kazakh Khanate, and shows the interweaving of events and figures from different historical periods in one epic text. The researcher associates this phenomenon with the historical integrity of the epic and the features of historical anachronism [Abzhet, 2024: 59-73].

This is the relevance of the research topic. Until now, the toponyms in the poem “Kobylandy batyr” have been considered mainly from a literary-folklore, historical-etnographic or individual toponymic perspective. However, the study of the names of cities and places in the poem in a unified system with issues of historical geography, archeology, and ethnic territory, especially the comparison of various localization hypotheses within a single methodological framework, has not yet been sufficiently developed as a full-fledged object of research. Similarly, the ability of epic toponyms to identify the historical layers of a poem also requires special analysis.

In this regard, the purpose of the study is to determine the historical, geographical and socio-political content of the names of places and cities in the poem “Kobylandy batyr”, to compare scientific opinions regarding the historical localization of the cities of Kyrly and Syrly, and to assess the documentary potential of epic toponyms in the reconstruction of historical space.

To achieve this goal, the study set several tasks: first, to identify the toponyms Kyrly Kala, Syrly Kala, Bes Agash, Karaspan, etc. in the versions of the poem and analyze their function in the text; second, to compare the main conclusions of domestic researchers regarding these names from a historical and methodological perspective; third, to determine the connection of toponyms with ethnic and socio-political space.

Thus, the study of the issue of the cities of Kyrly and Syrly in the epic “Kobylandy Batyr” is not limited to determining the location of a specific city. It allows us to explain the mechanisms of formation of historical space preserved in epic texts, the changing concepts of ethnic territory, and the peculiarities of the accumulation of historical memory of each era into a single heroic plot. Therefore, epic toponyms should not be considered passive geographical signs that represent the past space of a people, but active sources that preserve the multi-layered structure of historical memory, ethno-political relations, and cultural space.

Materials and methods. The main material of the research is several text versions of the poem “Kobylandy Batyr” published in the “Babalar sozi” series (Mergenbay Zhyrau version, Kazan version, N. Baiganin's version, E. Yeshimov and A. Divaev) (Babalar sozi 2006), domestic scientific works that considered the historical-geographical and toponymic space of the epic, as well as the results of archaeological research in the lower reaches of the Syrdarya River and the Inkaradriya region. The multivariate nature of the epic was considered an important prerequisite for the research methodology, since in different versions the composition of place names, their frequency of use, place in the text, and semantic function may vary.

Thus, the data corpus of the study is formed, on the one hand, by the texts of the poem “Kobylandy batyr” and its scientific publications, and, on the other hand, by the historical-geographical, toponymic and archaeological conclusions presented in the works of A.Kh. Margulan [Margulan, 2007], S. Zholdasbayuly [Zholdasbayuly, 1996], S. Kondybai [Kondybai, 2017], Zh. Artykbeev [Artykbayev, 2007] and M. Yeleuov [Yeleuov, 2023].

In addition, the scientific conclusion of the article “Motives common to Turkic people in Kazakh Toponym legends” by G. Tuyakbaev, S. Taiman and Zh. Botabaev, published in the journal “Milli Folklor” and indirectly corresponding to this topic, is interesting: a toponym is the only form of a historical event, even if it does not fully describe it, preserved in the collective memory of that event [Tuyakbaev, Taiman,

Botabaev, 2023]. Therefore, we believe that the specific place names described in the poem “Kobylandy batyr” under consideration are a unique work that shows what significance they had in the memory of the people who lived in that space.

The study used several complementary methods. First, the historical-comparative method was used. With its help, place names in the epic text were compared with the ethnopolitical and cultural space of different historical periods. This method made it possible to explain the reasons for the simultaneous use of toponyms related to the Kypchak, Oghuz, Nogai and later historical and political layers in the text and to determine the historical multi-layeredness of the epic. The next method, which was the main focus of the research, is the historical-toponymic method. It analyzed the semantic structure of toponyms, the geographical terms and natural features they contain, as well as their function in defining historical space. For example, the name Bes agash (5 trees) was considered from the perspective of the combination of a numerical component and the name of a natural object, and its function as a route guide in the epic text was determined. Similarly, the names Kyrly and Syrly were considered in the context of their use as a “twin city”. Third, an archaeological-comparative method was used. The structural characteristics of the cities in the epic were compared with the topography, fortification systems, and settlement areas of archaeologically studied towns. In this regard, the descriptions of the cities of Kyrly and Syrly in the poem were compared with medieval monuments along the lower reaches of the Syrdarya and the Inkardarya, and the possible correspondence of the Syrlytam and Zangarkala complexes with the epic “twin city” model was considered. The following is a method of historical-geographical and spatial analysis – location of toponyms relative to each other, connection with natural objects, river valleys, ancient channels, mountain and onus systems were taken into account. Among the important research methods, landscape-onomastic analysis, that is, analysis of landforms, water sources, hills, mountains, valleys, and other landscape features, in turn, allowed us to draw certain conclusions. In particular, when analyzing the Mangystau version proposed by S. Kondybay, the possible connection of names such as “iir tau”, “suir tau”, Kotan, Akmaya, Aiyrtuyie in the poem with local natural objects was considered based on this method.

Thus, the methodological basis of the study is based on the interdisciplinary integration of folklore studies, historical toponymy, historical geography, archeology, and spatial analysis methods. These approaches allow us to consider the names of places and bodies in the poem “Kobylandy Batyr” not only as elements of the literary text, but also as important data on the formation of historical space and its preservation in epic memory.

Discussion. The multi-layered nature of the epic also affects its spatial structure. The juxtaposition of ethnopolitical names such as Kypchak, Nogai, Kyzybas, Kalmyk, and various historical and geographical objects in the poem indicates that the epic space does not belong to a single historical period. Therefore, it is not enough to mechanically identify the toponyms in the poem “Kobylandy Batyr” with geographical features on modern maps. They must be compared, on the one hand, through the context of their use in the text and their connection with other names, and, on the other hand, with archaeological, historical and geographical data.

This problem is especially evident in the names Kyrly Kala and Syrly Kala found in the poem. In the epic text, these two cities are mentioned together with the concept of “Nogayli's land”, and acquire a political-territorial character through Kazan's capture of them and subsequent placement of power structures. In this plot, cities are seen not simply as settlements, but as structural elements of a particular ethnopolitical space.

Several directions have been developed in the scientific literature regarding the historical and geographical location of the cities of Kyrly and Syrly. A number of studies link them to the urban culture of the Oghuz-Kipchak era in the lower reaches of the Syrdarya River. In this regard, S. Zholdasbayuly's conclusions, based on comparing the characteristics of cities with the archaeological and fortification features of medieval cities along the Syr River, are important [Zholdasbayuly, 1996: 104-105].

Later, archaeological research led by M. Eleuov clarified the topography, structure, and chronology of the monuments of Syrlytam and Zangarkala, located between the northern and southern channels of the Inkardarya, and considered the possibility of comparing them with the cities of Kyrly and Syrly in the poem [Ortagasyrlyk Kyshkala, 2023]. This direction is distinguished by its ability to connect the information in the epic text with the archaeological space.

A second direction regarding the localization of cities connects the epic space along the Irtysh. From this perspective, Zh. Artykbayev suggests that the location of the city of Kyrly on the bank of a river, its defensive system, and, in particular, the description associated with Syrly City support the hypothesis that

these settlements were located along the Irtysh. As he notes, “the settlements known as Syrly City exists on the left bank of the Irtysh, while Kyrly City, according to this description, must have been one of the Oghus cities located along the great Irtysh: ‘One side of the city of Kyrly lies on the water’s edge’. It is possible that the reference is to one of the settlements situated on the right bank of the Irtysh opposite Syrly City, such as Kara City” [Artykbaev, 2017].

The third direction is reflected in the research of S. Kondybay. The scientist connects the plot and toponymic materials related to the Kyrly-Syrly cities with the historical and landscape space of Mangystau, drawing attention to the similarities between local microtoponyms, natural objects, and historical legends. Its methodological distinctiveness lies in his attempt to reconstruct the interrelationship among mountains, valleys, water bodies, and other landscape features surrounding the epic toponym, rather than considering the place-name in isolation. This approach allows us to interpret the epic space through local historical memory and landscape [Kondybay, 2022].

In addition, A. Margulan’s historical and geographical comments on the poem “Kobylandy Batyr” also expand the historiographical scope of this issue. The researcher examined the Kazakh epic heritage in connection with archaeological, historical, and geographical materials. It is impossible not to mention the researcher’s opinion that connects the mysterious city, which appears in the plot of “Kobylandy Batyr”, with the medieval Bulgars on the Volga [Margulan, 2007: 351-363].

The diversity of these scholarly opinions does not mean that the problem is unresolved. On the contrary, each of them forms its own methodological approach to reconstructing epic space. S. Kondybai on microtoponyms and landscape features, S. Zoldasbayuly on archaeological and historical-cultural comparison, M. Eleuov on field archeology and spatial data, Zh. Artykbaev on route toponyms, and A. Margulan prioritizes the broad geographical context. From this point of view, it is reasonable to consider their opinions not as “five different places” of the same toponym, but as different methodological models of epic space reconstruction.

Results. Toponyms in the poem “Kobylandy batyr” do not only form the geographical background of epic events. They serve as an important semantic tool that determines the hero’s homeland and the external space where he travels, his settlements and migration routes, the relationship between khanate power and community interests, as well as the presentation of the concepts of “own” and “foreign” in the epic model. In this sense, the study of place names in the poem from the perspective of historical toponymy should not be limited to identifying them with points on a modern map. It is necessary to simultaneously consider the social, political, and ethnic context of the toponym in the text.

This issue is directly related to the multi-variant nature of the epic “Kobylandy Batyr”. Research shows that dozens of versions of the poem have survived, and there are differences between them in terms of plot, character system, and historical layers. O. Nurmagambetova’s study “Kazakh heroic epic “Kobylandy batyr”, published in 2003, also examines various versions of the epic and their textual features [Nurmagambetova, 2003]. Therefore, the ethnic and political space in the poem should be interpreted not as a direct reflection of a single historical period, but as a space of epic memory that has been supplemented and reinterpreted in each era.

Karaspan is the main toponymic marker of “one’s” space. One of the most important spatial signs in the poem is Karaspan. Zh. Dauletbekova’s research shows that Kobylandy, having said goodbye to the dense Kypchak people who inhabited the Karaspan mountain, moved in the direction of Atasu, Manashy, Shalkarkol, Mugalzhar, Zhem and Temir [Dauletbekova, 2013: 80-83].

In this context, it is insufficient to regard the toponym Karaspan merely as a geographical point of reference. In the poem, Karaspan is seen as a place associated with the socio-ethnic community of the hero. That is, we believe that its semantic structure can be conditionally described as: Karaspan – settlement – Kypchak land – native environment – “own” space.

“My summer pasture is Kozdykol,
My winter pasture is Karaspan” [Babalar sozi, 2007: 92].

Kozdykol is the name of a lake. It is located in the Aktobe region.

Here, the social content of the toponym is special. Karaspan is not only the hero’s place of birth; it is also the homeland of the “numerous Kipchak” community he leaves behind. Therefore, the hero’s expedition is interpreted not only as a journey of an individual hero, but as an action aimed at protecting the security and interests of a certain community. In this sense, Karaspan serves as a spatial marker of ethnic identity in the

poem. The presentation of the ethnonym “Kypchak” and the toponym Karaspan in the same spatial context strengthens the connection of the ethnic community with a specific place.

A. Margulan, in his analysis of the poem “Kobylandy batyr”, expresses his opinion regarding the location of this place as follows: “The Karaspan mountain mentioned in the poem is one of the names of the Karatau mountain, which lies to the south of Shymkent. According to an old story, in poems, instead of Karatau, Karaspan mountain is often mentioned. It has long been known in history that this place, as the poem says, was once a settlement of the Kypchak people (10-16 centuries). Kobylandy also set off from Karaspan mountain to the city of Kazan, and when returning from a campaign, he returned to Karaspan mountain. Although Kobylandy is called “the hero of Tokhtamysh Khan”, the poem does not mention anything about the Horde on the Volga, as in the poem of Edyge. Judging by this, Kobylandy must have been far from the Horde, in the midst of the dense Kypchaks. This can also be seen in the poem” [Margulan 2007: 356-357].

S. Kondybay, in turn, gives a similar opinion: “When researchers consider the toponym “Karaspan” in the poem, they associate it with the toponym of the same name in the Turkestan region. ... Thus, throughout the 18th century and the first quarter of the 19th century, the historical situation when all Kazakhs were concentrated in the Karatau-Turkestan, Tashkent-Jizag, Nurata-Kermine regions is not taken into account. Here, it can be assumed that at the indicated time, the Kypchaks among the Kazakhs lived in the Karaspan region near Turkestan. Only by the middle of the 18th century did they begin to settle in the Torgai-Kostanai region. Therefore, if not in the 18th century, then in the 19th century, a “legendary fact” was formed among the Kypchaks that “they used to live in Karaspan”. The epic tradition incorporated this legendary evidence in the poem “Kobylandy”, and as a result, the concept of “Karaspan - the wintering place of Kobylandy” became an established epic convention” [Kondybay, 2022].

In the 36th volume dedicated to the poem “Kobylandy Batyr”, collected in “Babalar Sozy”, we find information related to this in the special commentary on place names: “Karaspan is a settlement in the Middle Ages. Its current location is located 2 kilometers south of the village of Obruchevka, Ordabasy district, South Kazakhstan region. The Karaspan region was specially studied by N.P. Ostroumov in 1898, and by the South Kazakhstan archaeological expedition in 1948. It was discovered in 1980 by an archaeological expedition team from the former Shymkent Pedagogical Institute”. The settlement is described as follows. And, it is said that “Karatau is a medium and low mountain range in the steppes of Eurasia inhabited by Turkic-speaking peoples. It is called so because there is no snow cover on Karatau in the summer months. The name Karatau is often found in Central Asia, the Southern Urals, etc. in the territory of Turkic-speaking countries (Turkey, Iran, the Caucasus, Crimea, etc.). In Kazakhstan, there is the Karatau Range (in the territory of South Kazakhstan, Zhambyl and Kyzylorda regions), the Karatau Mountains (in Mangystau), and the Ketpen (Uzynkora) Range” [Babalar sozi, 2006 (3): 469].

So, this is the time when Kobylandy was between the Urals and Karatau, around 1430. At this point, Kobylandy was already a seasoned and experienced warrior. Therefore, the other warriors preparing to set out for the city of Kazan come to him first. For example:

There is a country of the Kypchaks,
who live on the Karaspan mountain,
There is a man named Kobylandy.
He will settle on foot,
If he goes, let's take him with us...
He will discuss many things,
At the foot of the Karaspan mountain,
Karaman, who came and settled
With a heavy army...

“Numerous Kipchak” here represents the structure of ethnic space. That is, one of the most obvious indicators of ethnic space in the poem “Kobylandy Batyr” is the ethnonym Kipchak. The text of the Maraba version uses the phrase: “A land of many Kipchaks, a land of many people”. The later part of the poem describes Kobylandy's return to Karaspan Mountain with the spoils of Kazan and the landing of “a land of many Kipchaks, a land of many people” on Lake Azuly. [Babalar sozi, 2006 (2)].

Here, the ethnonym and toponym are interconnected, forming a certain ethno-territorial model: Kipchak – Karaspan – Azuly – settlement – country.

That is, an ethnic community is recognized not only by an abstract name, but also by specific spatial objects. This has an important scientific meaning. In the epic text, ethnic unity and territory are inseparable: the existence of a country is connected with its location in a certain space. Names such as Karaspan and Azuly in this sense become spatial markers of the “Kipchak country”. However, the concept of “Kipchak” here cannot be equated with the concept of a unified nation in the modern ethnic sense. The socio-political content of the names “Kypchak”, “Nogai”, “Kazakh” changed in each of the historical periods in which the epic was formed. Therefore, it is better to consider the ethnic names in the poem as a layering of medieval tribal, political and ethnocultural identities.

Lake Azuly in the poem describes the space of return and political and social stabilization. That is why this lake appears as a special meaningful object in the poem. After liberating the country from the enemy, Kobylandy returned to Karaspan, and many Kipchaks settled on Lake Azuly. The poem describes the reestablishment of the country, which had previously been in the hands of the enemy, and the increase in the wealth of the people [Babalar sozi, 2006(3)].

In this episode, the function of the toponym is special: Azuly – settlement – gathering of the country – social recovery – external stability. Azuly, sometimes also called Azauly. This is how the former nomadic Kipchak tribes called the Sea of Azov [Babalar sozi, 2006(1): 319].

Thus, Lake Azuly becomes a symbolic point of the restoration of ethnic space. Such a construction reflects an important law of epic space: the capture of the enemy is the loss of space, and the victory of the hero is the return of that space to the people.

Therefore, it is not enough to explain the military conflict in the poem “Kobylandy Batyr” as a war between two heroes or two khans. Its ultimate content is the protection of the homeland, social integrity, and spatial independence of the country.

To explain the socio-political function of toponyms in the poem, space can be divided into two large categories: “Own space” – the lands of Karaspan, Azuly, the Kypchaks, the settlements of the country, the hero’s birthplace; and “Foreign space” – the space related to Kazan, the city ruled by Alshagyr, settlements in enemy hands, the regions related to the “redheads” in the poem and other opposing forces.

This contrast forms the ethnic border in the poem. But the ethnic border here is not a modern state border. It is a socio-cultural border between “the space that belongs to us” and “the space occupied by an alien force”. That is, the main sign of the epic ethnic border is not an administrative line, but the concepts of common settlement, kinship, homeland, political loyalty, and security. This feature also corresponds to the spatial organization of nomadic society. In a nomadic environment, territory is defined by grazing, settlement, migration routes, and zones of political influence rather than by fixed state borders.

The scholar Sh. Ualikhanov, who paid special attention to the epic poems and devoted himself to their comprehensive study, describes them as “an encyclopedic collection of all folk tales, stories and legends, as well as concepts about geography, religion and ritual customs, grouped around the hero” [Valikhanov, 1961: 220-227]. In his research, A. Margulan, in addition to revealing some of the hidden aspects of the hero poems, emphasizes the need to view them as historical documents [Margulan, 1946: 5-81].

The epics of heroes not only mention the names and locations of ancient cities, but also provide information about the lifestyle of the people who inhabited the cities, their ability to raise armies, and the fortification system and internal structure of the cities.

For example, in the poem “Kobylandy Batyr”, the strong fortification system of the Kyrly city is described as follows:

He may seek to capture
Kazan’s city of Kyrly,
But he cannot take it.
He cannot leap over its six layers of ditches
And enter the city,
Nor can he open the city gate, – he says [Kobylandy batyr, 1986: 47], about the Syrly city:

The city known as Syrly city is “unfortified, with its exterior left completely open”, it is said [Kobylandy batyr, 1986: 28]. Therefore, the description of Syrly city in the poem as a place without a wall and open outside, and Kyrly city as a fortress protected by several layers of moats, gates, and military force, indicates the functional difference between the cities. However, based on this information provided in the poem, it is not enough to consider Kyrly city only as a military fortress. The text mentions that “atarman”, “shabarman”, “beks” gathered there, and the city was also assigned the function of political administration.

Therefore, the Kyrly city is seen in the epic space as a concentrated image of an administrative-political and influential center. Its defense system is perceived as a spatial mechanism that ensures that political function. That is, the city wall and moat are simultaneously a symbol of protection from external enemies and the preservation of the stability of the ruling power.

The fact that the city of Syrly is described as undefended does not mean that its historical significance was low. On the contrary, the fact that the cities of Kyrly and Syrly are mentioned together indicates that they were mutually complementary components of a certain territorial-administrative system. That is, while, as mentioned above, the Kyrly city appears as a concentrated center of defense and power, the Syrly city is likely to be a symbol of an open settlement, communication, or economic space.

They dug a deep trench,
Dug a wide trench,
Without covering their faces,
“Let them think it is the earth,
Go to the bottom of the trench,
Let a hero, fighting,
Loop his weapons” [Kobylandy batyr, 1986: 232].

In the poem, we see that an additional ditch was dug to protect the city, covering its surface and placing weapons at the bottom. The poem mentions that the city gate was strong and that the city was protected by guards [Eleuov 2023: 8-9].

The famous scholar A. Konyratbayev believes that there are 29 versions of the Kobylandy poem, that it originated as a tribal epic and over time turned into a folk poem, and divided the poem into five periods depending on its genre: the Oguz-Peshene, Peshene, Nogai, Kazakh-Uzbek and Dzhungar periods. The story of Kazan in the poem is said to be taken from the period of the collapse of the Peshene-Oguz and Oguz-Kipchak uluses on the Syr River in the 7th-11th centuries [Kobylandy batyr, 1986: 15].

Supporting this opinion of the scientist, according to the results of research conducted by the famous archaeologist M. Eleuov on the cities mentioned in the poem, he connects the cities of Kyrly and Syrly in the Kobylandy poem with the monuments of Syrlytam (11th-12th centuries) and Zangar Kala (10th-11th centuries), located between the northern and southern mouths of the Inkar Darya [Eleuov 2023: 9]. This idea also coincides with the conclusions of archaeologist S. Zholdasbayuly: “The cities and their building systems mentioned in the epic of the 9th-11th centuries, the first period of urban life of the Oghuz-Kipchaks along the Syr Darya, seem to coincide with archaeological research” [Zholdasbayuly 1996: 104-105]. In this regard, following S. Zholdasbayuly's assumption that it was Syrly city and Kyrly city, he conducted reconnaissance work and took aerial photographs of the cities of Syrlytam and Zangar [Eleuov 2023: 9].

In 2021, the University Archaeological Expedition of the Al-Farabi Kazakh National University (led by M. Eleuov) visited Syrlytam and conducted a re-examination. During the study, it was determined that it consisted of large, rounded (up to 250 m in diameter) settlements with a very poorly preserved area of 300*250 m, located in three adjacent latitudes in the middle. “To the west of the settlement, pottery shards and kilns, large settlements and houses, and the remains of various workshops are visible. There are traces of cultivation in the order of the rectangular fields and ridges surrounding this settlement. The city of Zangar is located three kilometers northeast of the city of Sarlytam. Its location has many features that are very similar to the descriptions given in the poem: a rectangular citadel, rounded walls of the settlement reaching 300 m of the citadel, and the location of the city adjacent to the northern wall of the citadel. Here there is a second outer wall, which encloses a large area with irrigated fields and buildings. Therefore, all parts of the Zangar city are located within the first and second fortresses,” he says, indicating that the sites of the cities of Syrly and Kyrly have been found» [Eleuov 2023: 10].

A. Margulan's research on the epic covers a wide range of historical and geographical areas. He emphasized the need to study the epic heritage of the people in conjunction with archaeological, ethnographic, and historical materials. The study of “Kobylandy Batyr” in the work “Ancient Poems and Legends” is an important part of this scientific direction. “...Kobylandy, during the reign of Tokhtamysh (beginning of the 15th century), there were three different Kazan cities, neighboring each other, upstream of the Volga. One of them was the old Bulgar city, which is called “Syrly kala” in the Kobylandy poem, the second was Old Kazan, and the third was the New Kazan city, built in 1435 by the famous khan of the Golden Horde, Ulug Muhammed. After Ulug Muhammed built the New Kazan city, the former Kazan city was called “Old Kazan”. Instead of the Bulgar city, the poem mentions Syrly kala. However, judging by the

words of the poem, it seems that the surroundings of Syrly kala were unwallled and were located on a flat land. This suggests that Old Kazan and Bulgar cities were confused [Margulan 2007: 358-359].

According to the scientist, the Syrly City mentioned in the poem “Kobylandy” is the same Bulgar city. This city has a magnificent architecture, was in contact with Baghdad, and was also subjected to several invasions. The poem “Kobylandy” suggests that the reason why the Bulgar city was called “Syrly” was probably due to its external characteristics. During the last of these invasions, the city's inhabitants fled and took refuge in the Old Kazan city. At the same time, it is claimed that there is also a village called “Bulgar Village” on the site of the present-day Syrly city. This is because the houses of this city are painted with blue and green glaze, and are marked with Arabic letters in white, black, and blue paint. “There were also several domed palaces in the Bulgar capital, painted with various glazes, for example, the Brown Palace, the White Palace, and the Small Mine. All of these were carved and decorated with Arabic script on the inside and outside” [Margulan 2007: 360].

The author expresses his opinion regarding the location of the Kyrly city, saying, “...it is located in the vicinity of the city of Old Kazan. Old Kazan is about forty kilometers from the Volga. It was located above Syrly Kazan, on the Kazan River. The poem also says that the location of this city is a convenient place for war”, and cites the poem's description of the city's surroundings, where the enemy could not move, and where six layers of ditches were dug on one side and water on the other [Margulan 2007: 360].

Zh. Artykbayev's localization approach is based on the reconstruction of epic space through the hero's movement and natural landmarks on his path. The name Bes agash is of particular importance here. This context suggests that Bes agash is not just a plant name, but a spatially orienting micro-toponym related to the city. Artykbayev associates this name with the modern landscape feature of Bes Karagai along the Irtysh. The Bes Agas mentioned in the “Kobylandy Poem” is the ancient name of a grove on the right bank of the Irtysh. The tree, which is now called “lentochnyy bora”, was called Bes Agash, Bes Karagai by the Kazakhs. Later, this name was used to refer to a settlement in the territory of Pavlodar region and a district of East Kazakhstan region. So, we can say that the location of the Oguz-Kipchak city of Syrly and the city of Kyrly is the region opposite Bes Karagai on the left bank of the Irtysh,” says the well-known historian and researcher Zh. Artykbayev in his study [Artykbayev, 2017].

His hypothesis is connected with the description in the poem about the location of the Kyrly city “on one side by the water” and with data on medieval urban culture along the Irtysh. The strength of this approach is that it considers the location of the city not as a static point, but as a route space. That is, toponyms combine the hero's movement direction, water sources, mountains and other landmarks into one system. However, although this correspondence “Bes agash – Bes karagai” is interesting from an etymological and spatial point of view, it is impossible to prove their historical continuity by a single name similarity. Therefore, we consider it as a route-geographic hypothesis.

S. Kondybay connects the issue of the “Syrly (Kyrly) City” with the historical and landscape space of Mangystau. According to him, one of the four corners of Sherkala and Airakty, located in the Iir River to the north of modern Shetpe, may be the Syrly or Kyrly in the poem. The researcher bases this assumption not only on the phonetic similarity of the names, but also by comparing local microtoponyms such as Kumira, Kotan, Akmaya, and Aiyrtyue in the Iir Oy and Akau Range with the names in the poem. At the same time, he compares the characteristics of the mountain formations found in the poem with the actual relief of Mangystau.

Kondybay's methodological peculiarity is that he does not consider the epic toponym in isolation, but rather considers it in conjunction with the entire system of the surrounding natural space. This approach allows us to identify a possible connection between microtoponyms preserved in the memory of the local population and the epic text. However, this model also has its limitations. For example, phonetic approximations such as “Sherkala – Shyrkla – Syrly Kala” do not in themselves prove the continuity of the historical name. Similarly, landscape similarity can only be additional evidence for historical identification.

So, based on the above analysis, we have presented the results (Table 1), based on the main methods followed by each researcher, the sources of data used, and the proposed spatial location.

Table 1 – Determining the location of toponyms by methods

Researcher	Main approach	Main source	Recommended space
S. Kondybai	Landscape-microtoponymic	Local names, legends, relief	Mangystau
S. Zholdasbayuly	Archaeological-	Urban planning, fortification	Lower Syrdarya

	typological		
M. Eleuov	Field archeology, spatial analysis	Topography of the settlement, chronology	Inkardarya
Zh. Artykbayev	Route-toponymic	Five trees, water, natural landmarks	Irtys
A. Margulan	Historical-geographical	Epic, historical space, urban culture	Volga-Desht-Kypchak route

Compared to the existing materials, the evidence base for the lower Syr Darya-Inkar Darya route at the present stage appears to be more systematic. The main reason for this is that this model, in addition to the similarity of names, also considers the chronology, topography, and urban structure of archaeological sites. Therefore, considering S. Zholdasbayuly's historical and archaeological direction in conjunction with M. Eleuov's research can be considered one of the most promising options.

Thus, the life of Kobylandy, which forms the basis of the epic narrative, also comes to an end the hands of a vengeful enemy. According to the narrative, he is killed by Er Kosai during the conflict between Kadirberdi and Edige, as Kosai seeks to avenge his grandfather. According to local oral tradition, the Kobylandy memorial complex (burial site) is located along the Kobda River in the present-day Aktobe region, approximately forty kilometers from the Ilel River. In addition, there is a station called "Kobylandy" on the main road from Orenburg to Mangystau. Kobylandy emerged as a historical figure during a period when the political condition of the state had seriously deteriorated and external attacks had intensified. To defend the city of Kazakh, one of the prominent cities of the Ulus, Kobylandy batyr set out from Mount Karaspan (Karatau).

Conclusion. The historical localization of the cities of Kyrly and Syrly is not a matter of identifying a single geographical point, but rather a matter of reconstructing the spatial memory of the poem "Kobylandy Batyr" re-formed in each historical period. Although the lower Syr Darya-Inkar Darya route seems to be the most plausible in terms of the set of archaeological and chronological correspondences among current data, the hypotheses of the Irtys-Bes Agash and Mangystau-Sherkala routes are also valuable models that explain other historical layers of the epic space. Therefore, it is more scientifically justified to consider the names Kyrly and Syrly not as definitively identifying them with a single city, but as multi-layered spatial markers that accumulate the historical and geographical experience of each era in the epic text. The thing to consider here is that a particular name may have historically originated in a specific place, but in the epic tradition it may have moved to another space and taken on a new historical meaning. Similarly, the poet may have incorporated geographical names of the era in which he lived into a well-known plot structure. Hence, the important issue in studying names like "Kyrly kala" and "Syrly kala" is not simply to determine where they are located, but rather to explain what historical and geographical meaning they have in epic memory.

From the issues discussed above, we can see that there are still several versions of the location of these cities. This situation is one of the white pages of history. The information provided in written sources and medieval maps should be studied in comparison with historical monuments that have survived to this day. This is because one of the issues that lags behind and is understudied in the study of toponymic names in Kazakh historiography is the insufficient use of information from folk oral literature.

However, as we can see from the study, since oral literature samples contain several layers of history, determining the exact location of even a single place name found in them poses a number of difficulties. However, there is an opportunity to find solutions to these problems through the integrated use of interdisciplinary research methods, in particular, historical-toponymic, archaeological, historical-geographical, and spatial analysis methods. Such studies not only clarify the historical location of a particular toponym, but also open the way to identifying previously unknown historical and geographical connections, and to generating new data and scientific conclusions.

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