In the nomad camps of the Kyrgyz



Place:

Issyk Kul Region, Kirgizia

Ch. Ch. Valikhanov. Diary of the journey to Issyk Kul // Valikhanov Ch.Ch. A five-book set. Volume 1. — Alma-Ata, 1984.

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On June 1 [1856] I went to the aul of Buranbai with Kazibek. According to the Kyrgyz, his aul was near Jirgalan, about 35 versts from our overnight stop. I crossed the Tup ford at its estuary and then climbed the high Tasma ridge separating the Jirgalan valley from Tup. Finally, at noon, the stream of the river and auls in the form of white dots appeared in front of us. There were a lot of them. The Kyrgyz we met told us that Buranbai migrated farther. It was a hot day, the sun was shining mercilessly; we needed to have rest and go further in the evening coolness, as the Kazaks say, in salkinchik. For this purpose, [we] turned to a close aul. Its head, a young man, came out to meet me and said that he was the son of Buranbai, his name was Kilich ("saber"). Kilich had a tent - we fit in it. As honoured guests, we were brought tea brewed with salt in a jug, like a Kalmyk zaturan [zaturan — Kalmyk tea with flour]. After that, kumis was served. The boys and Kyrgyz from the whole aul gathered around the tent, waiting to treat themselves with ram bones that would be left after the dinner. Their expectations were in vain: I exempted the host from this mission, and there was no time for dinner. It should be said that the women were afraid of us and did not leave their yurts for a long time; only at our departure a young woman in a striped Bukhara gown and a girl in a white shirt (it is used instead of a dress) and a red pointed cap with a tassel. However, they disappeared soon too. According to the Kyrgyz, they, as everybody who has ever visited the steppe knows, have quick and sharp-sighted eyes (in the literal sense); the woman was quite pretty, but very thin, and they said that a girl was quite beautiful; of course, to their taste. The beauty of a Kyrgyz woman consists in: roundness and degree of corpulence, in moon-shaped and spherical facial contours, and in red cheeks, which the poets compare with blood fallen on white snow.

We went further: we were constantly meeting auls along the road, but could not see any living creature: everyone rushed into the yurts shouting: «Urus! Urus!» («Russians, Russians»). To clear them of suspicions and attract the curiosity of the fair sex, I suggested our Kyrgyz to start a Kyrgyz song, and I dressed myself as a Kyrgyz sal (dandy). This trick, indeed, was successful: all women left their yurts in great numbers, one of them even started a funeral lamentation, addressing it to us as believers.

The wildstone Kyrgyz have a custom similar to our one: the wife must mourn the death of her husband for a year. When Muslims pass by, that is, fellows, they must sing. Having asked people, we learned that the mourner had lost her husband in the Sarybagysh case; a black flag on the yurt indicated this event, also showing the age of the deceased. If any flag is waving on the yurt, you must understand that this yurt has lost one of its inhabitants. If the flag was red, the deceased was young, if it was black - middle-aged, white — old. The husband of our ayach (wildstone women) was of middle age. We stopped and listened to the elegy of the wildstone matron. We could not hear the words; only the shouts «oh!» and «koki!» could be heard clear sometimes. One Kyrgyz who had visited this horde before told us several poems verses he had heard before, and from them, we could conclude about the nature of these songs …

The general sense of lamentation is a complaint to God, what will happen to her, and address to the deceased one with the question: who will fulfill her routine and natural needs, who will make boots, eat millet porridge with her, and so on … We had a conversation with the Kyrgyz around us. Having known that I was a Kyrgyz sultan myself and a descendant of the khans, they became more trustful, and old ayaches looked at my thin body and a pale face with sympathy and made reasonable conclusions that I, poor dear, perhaps missed my mother, and pitied that no person in such a far country can take tender care of such a boy and clean his clothes from annoying alien insects. The last naive words made me laugh. «What kind and simple-minded people!» - I thought. An old woman brought me a cup of kumis. There was so much true kindness and sympathy in [her] eyes and words that I emptied the cup at a gulp only to make her pleased.



P. М. Kosharov. Type of wildstone Kyrgyz of the tribes

Bugu and Sarabogish. 1857

In the next aul they were already waiting for us. Several men greeted me with the word «allayar» [allayar is a form of address of ordinary people to a khan], as a sultan, and announced a request that struck me at first.

"We have one unfortunate ayach," they said, "possessed by jinns (demons), and we heard that a man of white bone can drive them out."

"But how can I drive these gentlemen out?" I said.

"Very simple," the Kyrgyz declared, you need to flog the unclean house (this is how they called subjects, the body of the patient) mercilessly, and all jinns will leave it.

However much I tried to assure them that all this is nonsense, there are no demons, that she is sick and must be treated not with beating, but with peace of mind, it was just in vain. The Kyrgyz left me with displeasure as if they suspected me of cruelty: a man can drive the demons out with one beat and do not want it. It couldn't be helped. I recommended them one Kyrgyz as a sultan, my brother. The recommended batyr quickly rushed to the aul with a raised whip, assuming a Mars form. Several women were holding the unfortunate victim. The Kyrgyz lit into her with a shout and started his job with a special pleasure. The poor woman began to scream, and with great effort, she broke her free and rushed to the yurt. They grabbed her again. «Whip, whip!» — the mother shouted. «Whip!» — the crowd repeated. I could not stand it, so I drove up to the poor ayach and forbade the Kyrgyz to treat her. Comme de raison that the relatives of the patient were dissatisfied with my intervention. All of them looked at me maliciously. Only the madwoman, seeing the savior in me, rushed to embrace me, calling me various tender names: «May I be your shadow, sir, may I die before you, sir!»

When everyone calmed down, I began to look at the patient. She was apparently no more than 15 years old, although the two-string braid showed she was married. She was very, very beautiful. Large black eyes wandered in all directions with an especially painful liveliness, as if looking for someone. The face was pale and thin. All this made her very nice. She was not wearing a dress at all, except for a holed gown over her shoulders and underwear. I tried to talk to her, but she answered all my questions abruptly, with just names: «Dzhambek! Chon-father, Kara-dzhan,» etc., and then, having pointing at one young Kyrgyz fearfully, she added: «My mirror… he broke… tore the collar…» And, having said it, she hid her headscarf with particular haste, looking around so that no one could see. Upon further inquiry, [I] learned that the names she said were the names of her relatives. She was married for a year, and her husband was a young Kyrgyz, the one at whom she pointed with her finger. Then everything became clear. Her husband beat her, broke her mirror, tore her shirt. In her parents' house, she was the only daughter, therefore, her father's darling and the complete mistress of her whims. The cruelty of her husband and despotic treatment made her obsessed with her former freedom. That's why she kept saying their names.

Having assured her and her relatives that she would be healthy, we went further, having instructed the husband not to break mirrors and not to tear shirts if he wanted to see his wife healthy.

He did not find Buranbai's aul at the indicated place. We wandered for a long time, made 40 extra versts, and only in the evening, we found a shepherd who led us to the gorge, where at the very top, on the snow line [we] saw the evening lights of the Kyrgyz. They placed a yurt for us, gave us tea, and, finally, killed a ram. After some time, Buranbai himself came, and, after the usual greeting, started a began a general conversation about the Sarybagyshs: everyone talks about the things on his mind.

P. М. Kosharov. Burambai, the supreme manap of the Bugu tribe. June 02, 1857.

Aul of manap Buranbai Bekmuratov of the tribe Bugu at the tract Tulpartash.

The yurt was set up for us in an elevated place, so in the morning, we started observation from a height. Down in the hollow, the wildstone auls were scattered. There was no usual noise, barking of dogs, or activity, as it happens in Kyrgyz [-Kaysak] auls: everything was decorous and dead. Low yurts stood separately at a certain distance, forming a circle. Inside the aul, and in the middle of it, foals were tied [in a peaceful atmosphere, the leashes for foals are always located far from an aul], mares were milked, cows and rams wandered there […] Several women sat near the yurts and cooked kurt. I wanted to see the yurt of the manap himself. At first, Buranbai tried to dissuade me, saying that his yurt was small and all his property had been plundered by the Sarybagyshs, but my persistent prayer [that is, request] defeated his stubbornness. Buranbai agreed and asked for a few minutes to prepare. Finally, we were called. With great caution, I went down to the foothills and successfully reached the Buranbai horde.



P. М. Kosharov. Alma, the chief wife of manap Buranbai, and his daughter Dzuzyum. 1857

When I entered, several Kyrgyz were sitting in the yurt. «Udakob! [stand up at once]», the host shouted, and those who were sitting, stood up. I went to the place of honor of the yurt. Madame, an elderly woman with long teeth (so that her lips, with all her efforts, could not hide them), in a colored gown, was sitting on sheepskin that replaced the carpet. Her hands were dirty, and the remnants of the hair and wool she had just picked up indicated the previous job of this respectable woman: she was twisting a lasso. I said a few words of greeting to her, asked her about her precious health and the well-being of the livestock; to all this, she responded with a nod, and at each nod, she showed a full set of long teeth. The teeth, obviously, were shown against the will of the honorable ayach; she was not prone to grins at all since she was constantly raising the sleeve of her gown to her teeth to hide the inevitable show of teeth. Having noticed that my questions caused a lot of anxiety, I left the madame alone and began to examine the yurt. The yurt had no bed, as by our Kyrgyz, no chests or carpets; in short, there was nothing except for a pile of felt. To the right of the doors there was a cheegrass partition. Near the yurt walls there were no properly placed chests covered with a carpet, like by the Kyrgyz sultans. Instead of them, there was a pile of felt. Several cushions covered with nankeen were put on them as if it was for a show. There was only one carpet under me, though it was very good. The fire burnt in the yurt, and near it, there was a fireplace and two cast-iron jugs of water. Meanwhile, the hostess took two Chinese cups out of a bag similar to our sac-voyage made of calfskin, [and] poured kumis. A servant Kyrgyz took the drink, and, having drunk himself, brought one cup to me, the other to Buranbai. One of our Kyrgyz of the Great Horde took out tobacco. The hostess, having seen it, showed her gums and held her hand out. Our Kyrgyz offered her a horn very politely and shook out a big handful of tobacco on her palm.

When I came to my yurt, I ordered to saddle horses to go back; the aim of my journey, to see the wildstone Kyrgyz, was achieved.

Buranbai was especially attentive at our departure. I asked him about the clans and manaps, and he concluded that all this is done by order of the white tsar to award them. And, acting under this impression, the honorable manap offered me a horse and a piece of silk as a gift, saying that it was bad to let a guest go without a blessing. I assured him that I was blessed enough without his gift, and I would never forget his hospitality and would keep it in my heart. We parted as good friends, although two days later, some misunderstandings happened abnormal in the relationship not only of friends but of acquaintances in general.



P. М. Kosharov. A group of women and a girl of the Bugu tribe (family of manap Burambai). 1857

I left Buranbai in a very favorable mood. This mood was also supported by the fact that the inhabitants of the auls we wet treated [us] with deference, especially women - they were very friendly. There is nothing without exception - this truth is fair. Taking into account what I said about the wildstone ayach, there was one completely unsettling episode. In a fit of mania to the fair sex of the Wildstone Horde, I had the imprudence to look into the inderun [Pers. inderun (enderun) — the inner, female half of a houseа] through the top of the yurt, from where the black eyes, which, according to my guess, certainly belonged to a pretty ayach, looked at us before. I was not wrong. There really were two rather good-looking young women, but one of them, to my great horror, surprise, or joy, I don't know, was in ull her natural beauty. Comme de raison that the caught ayach was ashamed very much, but not completely. It was not in the order of things that she, having recovered from the first fright, started to scold me and scold terribly … I was to swallow stones, my eyes were to be lost, and, in addition to all disasters that should be on my head, she called me a snub-nosed Kazak («mankа kazak»)! On the one hand, although I was very sad, I felt bitterness, on the other hand, I was glad that I was able to get acquainted at once with a sophisticated vocabulary of curses, and I was ashamed that I heard all this from the fine lips of a wildstone beauty. Needless to say that we could stay there after such compliments. We went further. In the next aul, the traces of troubles from a conflict with a screamy marja were completely razed from the memory, even forgotten. The people in the aul already knew that I was a Kyrgyz sultan. The daughter of an honorable old woman was married to a Kyrgyz sultan of the Naiman clans. Since here all sultans are considered to be almost the same person, the whole aul was waiting for us impatiently to learn about the life of their relative. I considered it necessary not only to declare myself an acquaintance of this sultan, but even his relative, and I answered their questions with positive facts, showing this woman as the beloved khan's wife of this sultan. Saying this harmless and comforting lie, I had in mind a good intention to get closer to the people and gain their kindred love. My answers to some extremely difficult questions, such as: what was the name of the sultana, how many children she had, corresponded so much to the information they had that I was really surprised by my abilities of a liar. Needless to say, at first I skilfully learned everything they knew and already gave answers in accordance with the obtained information. Anyway, the yurt where I was sitting was filled with young and old women, and a confidential conversation began between us. We joked with the young ayaches, and they showed unexpected frivolity and wittiness in their answers. Actually, the wildstone women have many wonderful soul qualities, and, having lived there for several days, we could know them closer. All stories about the haughtiness of the wilstone women were exaggerated: at least three of our young interlocutors were too kind, so kind that it would be a sin to expect any refuse from them. Besides, as a test, I tried to have an affair in Buranbai's aul, but through a man (as the Kyrgyz do it), and got a positive answer. The time did not allow me to use this chance.

Ch. Ch. Valikhanov. Women of the Issyk Kul Kyrgyz. 1856

Having a complete collection of various women dresses, I started to examine them. The wildstone women, married and girls, wear a white shirt of daba [daba is a hand-made cotton fabric in various colors] without a collar, sewing red silk to the neckline. Their overclothes include a common gown of the same kind and cut that men wear. They wear colorful gowns, except for blue [color] (mourning color). The difference in the dress of a married woman and a girl consists only in the headwear and hairdo. The women wrap two white scarves around their heads, one near the cheeks, the other on the head in the form of a turban. The girls wear a pointed white fez with a small tassel. The women's hair is braided in two braids; the ends are connected into one thin strand and decorated with coins, keys, zankirs [trinklets], and other available things. The girls unbraid their hair into many thin strands, decorating them near the ears with pearl, coral, or beads, depending on how much money they have. Hair length is considered the main sign of beauty, so all women wear false braids. Ointments and other cosmetics are very popular. They say that earlier, girls wore corsets (tightening their breasts [with them]) called kokuzbek. They also wore breast collars decorated with pearls and coins. They are called alatamak. It all was in old times. In solemn cases, young women wear saukala [saukala (saukele) is the bride's wedding headdress embroidered with silk and decorated with jewelry, silver, and bronze pendants], a white headdress.

Ch. Ch. Valikhanov. Women of the Issyk Kul Kyrgyz. 1856

On June 03, we spent the night in the aul of the wildstone Kyrgyz of the clan Dzhelden, at the foot of Emen. One incident happened that had unpleasant consequences.

On June 03, in the evening, I stayed for lunch at my old friend Kilich. On June 04, in the evening, we arrived at the detachment located in a new place near the river Kudurga, following the old road through Tasma and Tup.