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*PhD, Senior Lecturer of Khoja Akhmet Yassawi International Kazakh-Turkish University
(Kazakhstan, Turkistan), e-mail: yerzhan.argynbayev@ayu.edu.kz*

“PETRIFICATION” MOTIF IN KAZAKH LEGENDS

Abstract. Kazakh culture has a rich mythological heritage, and Kazakh legends are an important source for reflecting on the history, beliefs, and values of the Kazakh people. This article focuses on the motif of petrification, which is frequently seen in Kazakh legends. Petrification is the most common type of shape-shifting motif, where a superior power turns living or inanimate elements into stone to save them from disaster or to punish them. It features examples of people, animals, houses, and other things being petrified. This can happen when individuals beg god to get them out of difficult situations, punish enemies, or help them cope with deep sadness. Being petrified is a punishment for the bad and a salvation for the good. This study examined 15 Kazakh legends and classified the motif of petrification under six types: 1) petrification due to the wrath of God; 2) petrification due to one’s wish or someone else’s prayer; 3) petrification due to a curse; 4) petrification due to Exhaustion and inability to fight; 5) petrification due to sadness; and 6) petrification of a dead animal. Furthermore, based on the motif of petrification, the legends’ underlying meaning and educational value were defined and their significance was unfolded.

Keywords: Kazakh legends, shape-shifting, petrification, toponomic legends, motif.

Е. Арғынбаев

*PhD, Қожа Ахмет Ясауи атындағы Халықаралық қазақ-түрік университетінің
аға оқытушысы (Қазақстан, Түркістан қ.), e-mail: yerzhan.argynbayev@ayu.edu.kz*

Қазақ аңыздарында «тасқа айналу» мотиві

Аңдатпа. Қазақ аңыздары мен мифологиялық мұрасы бай қазақ мәдениетінің маңызды бөлшегін құрайды. Аңыздар – қазақ халқының тарихын, наным-сенімдері мен құндылықтарын көрсететін елеулі дереккөздер. Бұл мақалада қазақ аңыздарында жиі кездесетін тасқа айналу мотиві қарастырылды. Ең жиі кездесетін құбылу мотивтерінің бірі саналатын тасқа айналу – аңыздағы жанды және жансыз элементтердің жазаға тартылуы немесе пәлекеттен құтқарылуы үшін құдіретті күш тарапынан тасқа айналдырылу процесі. Онда адамдардың, жануарлардың, үйлердің және басқа да заттардың тасқа айналу мысалдарын көруге болады. Бұл процес адамдар Құдайдан өздерін қиын жағдайдан алып шығуын, жауларын жазалауын немесе терең қайғыны жеңуге көмектесуін сұрап, тасқа айналдыруды қалағанда жүзеге асады. Тасқа айналу жақсылар үшін құтылу болса, жамандар

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үшін жазаға тартылу болып табылады. Мақалада 15 қазақ аңызы қарастырылып, аталмыш мотив тасқа айналуның себептері (тасқа айналу түрлері) бойынша: 1) Алланың қаһарымен тасқа айналу; 2) Өз еркімен немесе басқаның дұғасымен тасқа айналу; 3) Қарғыспен тасқа айналу; 4) Шаршағаннан, соғыса алмаудан тасқа айналу; 5) Қайғыдан тасқа айналу; 6) Өлген жануардың тасқа айналуы секілді алты топқа жіктеліне отырып зерттелді. Сонымен қатар, тасқа айналу мотиві негізінде аңыздардың астарлы мағынасы мен тәрбиелік мәні айқындалып, маңыздылығы көрсетілді.

Кілт сөздер: қазақ аңыздары, құбылушылық, тасқа айналу, топономикалық аңыздар, мотив.

Е. Аргынбаев

PhD, старший преподаватель Международного казахско-турецкого университета имени Ходжи Ахмеда Ясави (Казахстан, г. Туркестан), e-mail: yerzhan.argynbayev@ayu.edu.kz

Мотив “окаменения” в казахских легендах

Аннотация. Казахские легенды и мифологическое наследие являются важной частью казахской культуры. Легенды являются важными источниками, отражающими историю, верования и ценности казахского народа. В данной статье рассматривается мотив окаменения, который часто встречается в казахских легендах. Один из наиболее распространенных мотивов трансформации, окаменение – это легендарный процесс превращения одушевленных и неодушевленных элементов в камень определенной мощной силой для наказания или избавления от зла и беды. В легендах можно увидеть примеры превращения в камень людей, животных, домов и других объектов. Этот процесс происходит, когда люди хотят обратиться в камень, прося Бога вывести их из трудной ситуации, наказать своих врагов или помочь им преодолеть глубокую скорбь. Обращение в камень – спасение добром и наказание зла. В статье рассмотрены 15 казахских преданий, а причины окаменения (виды обращения в камень) следующие: 1) окаменение Божьим гневом; 2) превращение в камень по своей воле или по чужой молитве; 3) превращение в камень проклятием; 4) превращение в камень из-за усталости и неумения сражаться; 5) превращение в камень от горя; 6) процесс превращения в камень изучается в разделенных шести группах, подобно превращению мертвого животного в камень. Кроме того, на основе мотива окаменения определены основной смысл и воспитательное значение сказаний, показана их значимость.

Ключевые слова: казахская легенда, превращение, окаменение, топономические легенды, мотив.

Introduction

Legends are a type of folk narrative that can cover a wide range of subjects such as the creation of the universe, historical events and figures, supernatural beings, and religious events. They do not have a fixed style or structure and are usually told in simple language. Despite containing extraordinary elements, many legends are believed to be true. The study of legends began in the 19th century and became more popular in the first half of the 20th century. Legend, defined as “a story about a real or imaginary, specific person, event or place” and is used called by various Turkic tribes under various names such as “epsane”, “rivayet”, “mif”, “legenda”, “añyz”, “añyz-eñgime”, “ekiyet”, “aityv”, “tavruh”, “kuu-chyn”, “kep-kuuchyn”, “kip-choh”, “choh-chaah”, “toolchurgu chagaa”, toogu chugaa”, tolchurgu bolgas toogu chugaalar”, “erbek”, “kepseen”, “sehen”, “kessel”, and “bilirgi sehen” [1, p. 144; 2, pp. 1-2; 3, pp. 89-90].

The legend genre in Kazakh Soviet Folklore is called “aңыз”. It was first defined as a distinct genre by Mukhtar Awezov, who described it as “the story about people who lived in history, created by the people” in his work with Sobolev [4, p. 123]. According to Seyit Kaskabasov, a late Kazakh folklorist, “aңыз” refers to the verbal genealogy of a place, people, tribe, or event that took place in a region. Kaskabasov also coined the term “epsana-hikayat” to describe folk narratives that lie between “aңыз” and fairy tales, being more fantastic and imaginative than “aңыз” and more realistic than fairy tales [2, p. 10; 4, p. 149]. The legend genre carries traces from all literary texts based on narration principles. It combines the historicity of the epic, the extraordinariness of the tale, and the sanctity of the myth. The richness of the legend genre’s subject matter has made it difficult to define [5].

Legends often contain a prominent feature known as “shape-shifting”. This involves the transformation of living or inanimate elements into a different shape than their current form by a superior power. The purpose of this transformation is usually to punish or save them from a disaster. Shape-shifting can occur through prayer or curses and is considered a salvation for the good and a punishment for the bad. In other words, willful shape-shifting is a result of a prayer to be saved from a disaster is salvation, while a person or any being shape-shifting due to a curse or the Creator’s anger is a punishment. Legends that include this motif often explain the reason, formation, and origin of something. This is a common motif among Turkish communities, including the Kazakhs. Metin Ergun has classified legends related to shape-shifting into 12 groups based on the new form taken by the human, animal, or creature. Ergun’s work, titled “Motif of Change in the Legends of the Turkic World,” provides extensive discussion on the subject of shape change in Turkic legends.

- 1) Petrification
- 2) Shape-shifting into an animal
- 3) Shape-shifting into a plant
- 4) Shape-shifting into a mountain, hill, and soil
- 5) Shape-shifting into a sea, lake, river, and spring
- 6) Shape-shifting into a celestial object
- 7) Shape-shifting into a supernatural being
- 8) Shape-shifting into a natural event
- 9) Shape-shifting into a mine
- 10) Shape-shifting into another human
- 11) Being deformed
- 12) Incomplete explanations [2, pp. 174–175].

The shape-shifting motif commonly includes petrification, which refers to the act of turning a person, animal, plant, or object into stone. There are various reasons why someone or something may be turned into stone. It could be the result of a curse, or a punishment from God for committing sins. In some cases, individuals may even wish to be petrified to escape a difficult situation (Kınacı, 2008). The main theme in stories involving petrification is often “punishment”, but psychological states such as “fear”, “shame”, “salvation”, and “helplessness” also play a significant role. In this study, 15 Kazakh legends were examined, and the petrification motif was identified according to the following criteria: 1) petrification due to the wrath of God; 2) petrification due to one’s wish or someone else’s prayer; 3) petrification due to a curse; 4) petrification due to Exhaustion and inability to fight; 5) petrification due to sadness; and 6) petrification of a dead animal.

Research method and materials

As part of the study, fifteen legends that were identified during the literature review were analyzed, with a specific focus on the “petrification” motif. The chosen legends underwent multiple examinations, evaluations, and classifications, and were categorized based on the reasons of

petrification. The research method involved the detailed analysis, classification, and interpretation of the legends. The aim was to uncover the underlying reasons and social messages behind the petrification motif in Kazakh legends.

The primary medium in which the petrification motif is most commonly encountered is toponymic legends. Consequently, the current study utilized the volume titled “Toponymic Legends” from the “The Word of Ancestors” series, comprising one hundred volumes, as the principal source. Furthermore, additional sources, such as the “Anthology of Steppe Folklore,” “National Sacred Objects of Kazakhstan,” and “Regional Sacred Objects of Kazakhstan,” were also consulted.

Furthermore, as the petrification motif is commonly found in the legends of the Turkic World, Turkish academic articles, dissertations, and monographs on the subject were also reviewed, drawing upon the works of authors such as Ergun, Fedakar, Balaban, and Kınacı.

Results and discussion

Petrification due to the Wrath of God

In legends, one of the reasons for petrification is the wrath of god. This is caused by the lack of appreciation, ungratefulness, or great disrespect by the petrified person towards the blessings and the sacred things that God has given. In the tale of “Baybishetas pen Kelintas” (The Mother-in-law’s Stone and the Bride’s Stone), the mother-in-law and the bride, who were living a comfortable life in abundance and prosperity but constantly fighting with each other, were petrified by God. God gets angry and says “*You do not deserve the riches I gave you. Let alone a daughter-in-law with such good fortune and blessings*” [6, p. 109]. God punished them for not appreciating what they had and creating unrest despite living in abundance. It is important to note that there is no prayer or curse for petrification in this legend. The story emphasizes the conflict between the bride and her mother-in-law, a situation that is common in society and sends a message that God does not approve of such unrest and conflict.

Petrification Due to One’s Wish or Someone Else’s Prayer

In most of the Kazakh legends we examined, shape-shifting usually occurs through prayer. The oppressed, who are attacked by the enemy, whose lives are in danger, and who want to protect their lives and honor, pray to God to petrify them or their enemies. Because petrification is a salvation for the oppressed and a punishment for the oppressors.

According to one of the legends about the Akyrtas palace complex located in the Turar Ryskulov District of the Jambyl Province, the inhabitants of Akyrtas encountered great danger. The people were attacked by the enemy and suffered greatly. The enemy wanted to enslave young men and took young girls as concubines. The people of Akyrtas begged God to save them from this difficult situation and prayed: “*Oh, Creator, instead of enslaving us to these infidels, you take our lives and petrify our bodies so that no arrow can pierce and no sword can cut.*” God accepts the people’s prayers and petrifies them together with their houses and properties [7, p. 128].

A legend called “Muhambet Baydyñ Kyzy” (Rich Muhambet’s Daughter) tells of a Muslim village that was attacked by Russians. Muhambet, a rich man of the village, and his friends try to resist. Meanwhile, Muhambet’s wife escapes to the mountain with her baby and other villagers, carrying a cauldron with her and Muhambet’s daughter and her forty friends are out for a walk, see the Russians, and run away to the mountains. Muhambet and his friends are eventually defeated. Muhambet’s wife sees the enemy killing her husband and that the Russians are approaching them. She prays to the Creator, saying “*Oh God, petrify me instead of being captured by the Russians*”. Unaware of the enemy’s attack, the girls also return to the village, see the Russians, and run away to the mountains. Finally, with no place left to escape, the girls beg, “*Oh Creator, petrify us instead of letting us fall into the hands of these infidels.*” Right then thunder rumbles, a storm breaks out, snow mixed with rain and fog covers the mountain top. The legend says that the girls are petrified, and

the Russians were horrified and driven insane by the sight [8, pp. 304–305]. It is worth noting that the legend specifically mentions that the village residents are Muslim, Muhambet is a Muslim name, and the women did not want to be captured by the infidel Russians.

The “Kyryk Kyz” (Forty Girls) legend tells the story of girls attacked by enemies who were petrified after praying to God. According to the legend, a family was preparing to marry their daughter to her fiancé. The girls of the village went out to meet their brother-in-law when they heard he and the in-laws were approaching. Suddenly, they saw a cloud of dust rising into the air and heard shouts. The enemy had attacked the village, and the people preparing for the wedding were defeated before they could fight. The girls who went out to the countryside saw their villages destroyed and cried out to God, “*Oh Lord, our home was destroyed, burned, and turned into ashes. Deliver us from the tyranny of the enemy and petrify us.*” God accepted their prayers and turned the forty girls and their camels into stone. He also petrified the commander of the enemy soldiers, who attacked their homeland, into a dog-shaped stone and his soldiers into crows [9, p. 369]. This legend involves two shape-shifting motifs: turning into stone and turning into a bird. While God petrified the girls upon their prayers as a means of salvation, he turned the commander of the enemy army into a dog-shaped stone and soldiers into unpleasant and ugly crows as a punishment.

Some numbers hold a significant importance among Turkic people, particularly Kazakhs. For instance, numbers three, seven, nine, and forty have diverse meanings in folk literature texts such as myths, legends, and fairy tales. This can be seen in the petrification legends that we analyzed in this article. The number forty, in particular, is quite common. One example is the legend named “Shilter Auliye (Saint) and His Forty Friends”. According to the legend, one day Shilter Auliye and his forty friends were traveling when they decided to stop and rest at the foot of Kazygurt Mountain. After eating, drinking, and resting, they started praying. While they were praying, bandits came down from the mountain and attacked them. Despite this, Shilter Auliye and his friends did not disrupt their prayers. The Shilter Auliye prayed to Allah as follows: “O Allah, do not let us fall into the hands of the enemy. Petrify us instead of making us captive to the enemy.” Shilter Auliye’s prayer was answered, and he and his friends were petrified on the spot [10, p. 209].

There is a camel-shaped stone lying 7-8 kilometers south of Kultobe castle, which is known as “Kyzauliye” (Girl Saint) among the locals. Towards the north of the place, there is a spot named “Taskelinshek” (Stone Bride). According to the legend, Kyzauliye and her aunt were migrating when they noticed enemy soldiers approaching. They tried to escape but realized that they could not get away. To avoid being captured and tortured, the young girl suggests “*becoming a stone bride instead of being captured and tortured by the enemy.*” Her aunt turns to stone, and she along with the camels turns to stone too. In this legend, the young bride turns into stone with the prayer of her sister-in-law. This means that someone who does not want to be harmed prays to be petrified, and as a result, shape-shifting occurs [8, p. 293].

According to legends, people pray to be petrified when they’re in a humiliating situation or to escape from danger. In the legend “Karajal”, a girl runs away with her lover without her family’s consent. When she realizes that her father’s men are following them, she prays to God saying “Instead of coming back with this shame, let me be swallowed by the ground”. As they are about to be caught, the ground splits open, the two lovers are petrified and swallowed by the ground. The manes of their horses remain above the ground, hence the name of the place is Karajal (Black Mane) [10, p. 161; 8, pp. 293–294].

Petrification Due to a Curse

Curses are formulaic expressions uttered when people feel helpless, in pain, exposed to evil, or treated unfairly. The purpose of these words is to help them relax and calm down. Curses also appear in shape-shifting motifs in legends. Of fifteen legends related to the motif, three involve a curse.

In the legend called “Kelinshektau” (Bride Mountain), the girl who is about to get married is petrified due to her father’s curse. The reason is the girl’s greed, which angers her father. The rich man who marries his only daughter fills her dowry with the most beautiful and expensive items. The man prepares his daughter’s dowry and sends her off with the groom. As they travel, the daughter inspects the dowry and notices a wedding bowl made from apricot wood among the valuable items of gold, silver, and silk. She remarks “*My father acted stingily and didn’t cast the dog’s bowl from silver*” and sends the groom back to her father’s house. Upon hearing this, the father, who spent all his wealth on his only daughter’s dowry, gets angry and curses his daughter saying “You feel no pity for your father at all, you have a heart of stone, then be a stone.” As a result, the bride and her procession are petrified on the spot [10, p. 127; 8, p. 288].

In the legend of “Tuyetas” (Camel Stone), a harmful camel that bites and kills people is petrified due to the curse of the villagers. The plateau where the camel is petrified is now known as the “Tuyetas” plateau. According to the narrative, a camel appears in one of the villages out of nowhere, and it attacks and kills anything that crosses paths with it, including humans. Despite their best efforts, the villagers can’t capture the camel, which caused significant damage to their property and lives. As a result, the people in the village came together and cursed the camel, saying “*Don’t survive this night, don’t get up from where you sleep, and stones rain down on you.*” When they woke up the next morning, they discovered that the camel was petrified, thus ending their troubles [8, p. 289].

A legend called “Kogershin” (Dove) involves petrification due to a curse. The story is about a wealthy man named Tasbas, who belonged to the Karjas tribe of the Kazakhs. He has many animals. So he decides to drive out the people of the neighboring Aydabol tribe from their homeland so that his animals can graze there. However, most people object and a big fight breaks out between the two tribes. Tasbas’ sister, named Kogershin, was married to a member of the Aydabol tribe. When she hears about the fight, she decides to make peace between the two parties. Since she can’t find a horse to reach the area quickly, she set out on a camel. However, the camel moves too slowly, so she turns into a bird and flies over the fighting area. Wherever Kogershin passes, people stop fighting and start making peace. They curse Tasbas for causing such a fight, and their curse is fulfilled as he is petrified [10, p. 135].

In Kazakh legends, shapeshifting can take different forms, such as turning into an animal, plant, bird, or stone. One legend, called “Kogershin”, involves the motif of turning into a bird as well as petrification. Interestingly, Tasbas’ older sister is named Kogershin, which means Dove, a bird that symbolizes peace [11, p. 177].

In the examined legends, petrification is often associated with a prayer or a curse. In nine out of the fifteen legends, a prayer or curse is used to petrify someone, either as a way of escaping a difficult situation or to punish those who had harmed or would harm them. This belief in the power of prayers and curses in difficult situations helped to strengthen people’s faith and trust in these legends, which were often used as a means of educating society.

Petrification Due to Exhaustion and Inability to Fight

According to Kazakh legends, not only the oppressed people but also heroes and brave men are petrified into stones or mountains due to reasons such as exhaustion, weakness, and inability to fight. The legend of “Uykydagy Batyr” (Sleeping Hero) is an example. According to the legend, a seven-headed dragon comes and settles near a peaceful village, and demands from the villagers to bring seven horses, cows, sheep, and people every day, or else he will harm the village. The villagers have no other choice but to accept the dragon’s request and begin to fulfill its demands. One day, as the villagers carrying the goods the dragon demanded, they meet a brave man on the road. Hearing the incident, this brave man takes his diamond sword and sets out alone to slay the dragon. He fights the dragon for seven days, cuts off its seven heads, and falls asleep there, exhausted. With a last effort, the dragon raises its uncut head and lashes out at the sleeping warrior.

And the hero is petrified. After that, people called this stone “Uykydagy Batyr” [8, p. 304]. As can be seen, the hero fell asleep due to exhaustion after the battle, and the dragon spit fire at him, causing him to petrify. It is noteworthy that the hero’s body turns into stone rather than ash. Therefore, it is likely that the hero was petrified even before the dragon spat fire, or that he was petrified by God to prevent the dragon from harming him.

In the “Jeke Batyr” legend, there is a similar petrification motif. The story tells of a hero who lives in a poor village. He is both strong and good-hearted and is saddened by the poverty and distress his people are going through. The village is constantly being attacked by enemies, and there is no unity or solidarity among the villagers. One day, a young brave man sets out on a journey to seek luck and wealth for his people. On the road, he meets other heroes and calls on them to join forces and become an army together. He explained that it is easy for the enemy to defeat them alone, but difficult when together. However, the heroes he encountered do not listen and go their separate ways. The young hero meets the enemy first, but even with his strength, he cannot cope with the large enemy army alone. The young hero is left blind and deaf due to his injuries, and eventually, his strength gives out. He collapses where he is, and petrified into a stone mountain, falling into an eternal sleep. Legend has it that the “Jeke Batyr” mountain was formed this way [10, pp. 113–114].

In both the Uykydagy Batyr and the Jeke Batyr legends, the reason for petrification is not clear. Unlike the other examined legends, neither a prayer nor a curse causes the petrification and there is neither the wrath of God nor a wish to be petrified. In the first legend, Hero, who fell asleep after being exhausted from his battle with the dragon, turns into stone when the dragon, which is not fully dead, breathes fire on him. On the other hand, Jeke Batyr gets too tired to fight the enemy and is petrified where he stands.

Petrification due to Sadness

Sadness is a common emotion that people experience in response to negative events such as loss, disappointment, trauma, frustration, or failure. It can have profound effects on a person’s inner world and negatively affect their life. When people feel deeply saddened, they may struggle with thoughts of detaching from life to alleviate or end their pain. It is worth noting that sadness, if not addressed, can lead a person to contemplate suicide. This can be seen in the legend called “Altaytas”, where the hero is petrified due to his profound sadness. In this legend, a young man named Altay, who lost his lover and best friend, is devastated by grief and is petrified. According to the legend, Altay, a boy from a poor family, falls in love with Sulushash, a girl from a wealthy family. Despite their love for each other, Sulushash’s father arranges her marriage to a rich man. In response, Sulushash, Altay, and Altay’s friend Kaysar run away from the village. They cross a big river and take refuge in the nearby forest. One day, while the men are out hunting, Kaysar accidentally falls off a cliff and dies. At the same time, Sulushash’s fiancé and his men set fire to the forest where they are hiding. Sulushash jumps into the river to escape the flames but tragically drowns. Altay, devastated by the loss of his friend and lover, searches for Sulushash and finds her helmet in the river. Overwhelmed with sadness, Altay is petrified on the bank of the river [6, p. 111].

Petrification of a Dead Animal

There are legends in which animals, goods, houses, bridal processions, caravans, etc. are petrified together with humans. Other petrified objects and animals usually stay in the background of the narrative. That is to say, they are petrified along with the person who wishes to turn into stone. However, in some Kazakh legends, prominently animals are petrified. One of these is the “Burabay” legend. According to the legend, a white-headed male camel (bura) makes Kokshetau its home. This camel is so beautiful that it amazes everyone who sees it. One day, a brave man shoots it while hunting. The camel, which was seriously injured, escapes by going around the high mountain and then, it collapses and lays down. The sound of the camel’s cries was so painful that

no one could approach it. After the sound stops, the hunter takes his comrades with him and goes to where the camel is. They saw that it was petrified, and a small lake had formed from its tears. The people called this lake “Burabay” [10, p. 94]. There are Anatolian legends, which include the petrification of camels. However, camels are usually not the main focus of these legends. In these stories, the petrified camels are often part of a bridal procession or a merchant’s caravan. Camels are petrified along with their owners. In contrast, the Kazakh legend differs from the Anatolian one since the camel is the main character in the first one [12].

In another legend called “Jayik Özeni” (Jayik River), the buried head of a dead horse grows into a mountain over time [6, pp. 111–112]. Unlike other legends, in this story, the petrification happens gradually over time. The reason why the horse’s head is petrified is not clear. Nonetheless, it is remarkable as it differs from the others.

Conclusion

Petrification is a recurring motif in Kazakh legends. This motif can appear due to various reasons, such as prayer, curse, sadness, and exhaustion. It features examples of people, animals, objects, houses, and other things being petrified. This can happen when individuals beg god to get them out of difficult situations, punish enemies, or help them cope with deep sadness. There are also examples of heroes petrified due to exhaustion, inability to fight, or sadness.

Examination of these legends revealed clues about the values, beliefs, and social norms of the society through the petrification motif. The legends delve into topics such as how people respond to difficulties when they resort to prayer or curse, and the consequences of their actions. For instance, individuals may be petrified due to their moral shortcomings, ingratitude, jealousy, ambition, or disrespectful behavior toward supernatural beings. Whereas brides or girls choose to be petrified to protect their honor and avoid capture by enemies. This motif serves as a reminder of moral values and is often used as a form of punishment or advice. It also reflects the importance given to nature, animals, and beings in Kazakh culture. The various reasons for petrification reflect the traditional Kazakh way of thinking and living.

The petrification motif has been passed down from generation to generation, ensuring the continuation of Kazakh cultural heritage. And it served to transfer the history, beliefs, and values of the Kazakh people from generation to generation.

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