

Symbolic Meaning and Linguacultural Character of the Karakalpak Yurt Construction

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ABSTRACT

This article explores the Karakalpak yurt (QaraÚy) as a central object of linguacultural and architectural significance. Beyond its functional role as a nomadic dwelling, the yurt serves as a philosophical and symbolic representation of the Karakalpak worldview. By analyzing the primary structural components – theshańaraq (roof crown), kerege (lattice walls), and uwiq (roof poles) – the research demonstrates how these physical elements embody spiritual concepts such as family continuity, social unity, and ecological harmony. Through a linguistic analysis of idiomatic expressions and literary examples, the study reveals how terms like shańaraq and kerege have evolved from technical descriptions into multifaceted cultural concepts that reflect the moral and social values of the Karakalpak people.

Keywords: *QaraÚy, Shańaraq, Kerege*, linguaculturology, Karakalpak folklore, nomadic architecture, cultural symbolism, metaphor

INTRODUCTION

For the Karakalpak people, the yurt (*qaraúy* or *otaw*) is not merely a dwelling used for daily life, but a primary symbol of a centuries-old nomadic lifestyle, a philosophy of living in harmony with nature, and ethno-cultural identity. It is regarded as a fundamental object representing the national craftsmanship of the Karakalpak people. According to Academician S. Kamalov, the history of Karakalpak national craftsmanship is most

profoundly manifested in three objects: the Karakalpak yurt, its intricately carved door, and the traditional gate (*dárwaza*).

The circular form of the *QaraÚy* symbolizes the integrity of the world, the continuity of life cycles, and the connection between humanity and nature. Beyond their functional roles, the elements used in its construction – specifically the *kerege*, *uwiq*, and *shańaraq* – possess deep symbolic significance. This article seeks to analyze these components not just as architectural units, but as linguistic "concepts" that carry the spiritual and cultural heritage of the Karakalpak people into the modern era.

RESEARCH METHODS

This study employs linguacultural and descriptive-analytical methods to examine the link between Karakalpak material culture and language. It utilizes semantic analysis of architectural terms, contextual analysis of yurt-related terminology in folklore and literature (e.g., Sultanov, Kaipbergenov), and a comparative ethnographic review of how physical structures influence social metaphors.

RESULTS AND DISCUSSIONS

According to Academician S. Kamalov, there are three primary manifestations that provide evidence of the history of Karakalpak national craftsmanship: 1) The Karakalpak yurt; 2) The door of the yurt; 3) The gate (*dárwaza*).

The circular form of the *QaraÚy* (yurt) symbolizes the integrity of the world, the continuity of life cycles, and the connection between man and nature, as well as social unity. Beyond their functional roles, elements used in its construction – such as the *kerege* (lattice walls), *uwiq* (roof poles), and *shańaraq* (the wooden crown) – possess deep symbolic significance and embody spiritual-cultural meaning.

In particular, the *shańaraq* holds a firm place in the people's consciousness as a symbol of the succession of generations, family unity, and continuity. Furthermore, the *QaraÚy* is an environmentally friendly architectural structure adapted to the

nomadic lifestyle. Its construction from natural materials, ease of assembly, and adaptability to climate conditions demonstrate the Karakalpak people's respect for and deep understanding of nature. This makes the *QaraÚy* a significant model for the study of ecological architecture even today.

The *QaraÚy* (yurt) essentially consists of three main parts: the first is the *kerege* (lattice walls), the second is the *shańaraq* (the wooden crown), and the third is the *uwıq* (roof poles). By assembling these components, the *QaraÚy* takes its shape. Wood that has been debarked and dried is sorted and arranged according to its appearance and size; the thicker pieces are used for the *shańaraq*, while the thinner, longer pieces are used for the *uwıq* and *kerege*. These wooden pieces are soaked in water for a specific period and then placed in a specialized furnace chimney [to be shaped] (Nizanov 2020: 238).

The architectural structure of the *QaraÚy* demonstrates a harmony between traditional forms and modern engineering technologies. Its dome-like structure, circular form, and spacious interior hold practical and symbolic meanings characteristic of nomadic culture. The circular shape signifies the integrity of the world, unity, and the cycles of nature, while the central structure (the *shańaraq*) is interpreted as a symbol of life, continuity, and the succession of generations. For instance, the word *shańaraq* alone appears within several units that reflect national culture. In linguistics, the word *shańaraq* originally emerged with a literal (objective) meaning, referring to the circular piece at the top of the *QaraÚy* – a construction element of the home. However, in the collective consciousness of the people, this word has also acquired metaphorical and spiritual meanings. Thus, if we look at the primary semes (units of meaning) of the word *shańaraq*:

- **Material:** The upper part of the house; a construction element.
- **Domestic:** The home, the household, the dwelling, the living environment.
- **Spiritual:** Prosperity, unity, the continuation of the lineage, the spirit of ancestors, a sacred center, and the community of people living within a single hearth.

These three layers combine to allow us to view the word *shañaraq* as a multi-layered concept. In the Karakalpak language, the word is used in several senses. Its primary meanings are:

1. The circular wooden rim that holds the **uwiqs** (roof poles) of the *QaraÚy* together;
2. (Metaphorical) household, home, family. (Qaraqalpaqtilinińtúsindirmesózligi 1992: 506)

Furthermore, the Karakalpak people use the expression *shañaraqkóteriw* (to lift the *shañaraq*). *Shañaraqkóterdi* means they gained a home and hearth, or established a household. This signifies setting up a new *otaw* (yurt), moving out to live independently, and becoming a self-sufficient family. In A. Allamuratov's work *Máńgimiyras* (Eternal Heritage), it is noted:

The shañaraq is thicker than the kerege and uwiq. To keep its circle firm, dozens of wooden crosspieces are passed through it in a cross-like fashion. The shañaraq is the finishing and topmost part of the house. Therefore, it is imbued with deep underlying meaning. Because, in the past, a new house was built for a newly married child, "lifting the shañaraq" became synonymous with forming a new family. (Allamuratov 1993: 7)

The phrase *shañaraqkóteriw* appears in literary works and folklore in the following variations:

- *Otawkóterdi (tikti, qurdi)* – became a separate family/ household.
- *Shañaraqqurdi* – got married, established a household.
- *Úyboldi* – got married, started a family. (Pakhratdinov 2018: 156)
- *Shañaraqqurmağan* or *Shañaraqtiklemegen* – unmarried. (Pakhratdinov 2018: 156)

Example: *Maman was orphaned by his mother. His mother passed away during the year of the "Aqtabanshubirindi" (The Great Retreat). His father, OrazanBatir, spent six years in the war against the Jungars and, upon his return, could not "re-erect the shañaraq" (rebuild his family).* (Kayipbergenov 2018: 6).

In this example, the phrase "could not erect the shañaraq" is used metaphorically. It means that although OrazanBatir returned safely from the war, he could not continue his life as before or establish a new home and family.

If the *shañaraq* of a house is shaken, the house collapses. Therefore, this is seen as a sign of misfortune or disaster. This phrase is most often used in a spiritual, domestic, and social sense. This is why, when our people offer a blessing to any family, they say, *Shañaraqıñshayqalmasın* (May your shañaraq not be shaken), wishing for that household to remain firm and stable.

In summary, the single word *shañaraq* in linguistics is not merely a physical term representing a construction element of the *QaraÚy*; it has evolved into a multifaceted concept deeply intertwined with the people's life experiences, spiritual world, and cultural values. While its material meaning refers to the upper part and structural foundation of the home, its domestic layer is understood as the house, the household, the dwelling, and the living environment. On a spiritual level, *shañaraq* embodies symbolic meanings associated with unity, prosperity, national cultural heritage, and the sacred hearth.

Furthermore, the *kerege*, which is another part of the *QaraÚy*'s frame, is also considered a symbol that reflects the national values and identity of the Karakalpak people. The **kerege** is a section of the side wall of the *QaraÚy*, crafted from forest willow and slender black willow stakes (Qaraqalpaqtilinińtúsındirmesózligi 1984: 328).

The *kerege* consists of several sections (wings/lattices) that are folded during transportation and connected with woven straps (*izbe*) when being set up. When moving or storing the yurt, each "wing" of the *kerege* is light enough for one person to carry under their arm. The joints (eyes) of the *kerege* are not

fastened with fragile string that wears out quickly, but with *kök* – strips made from sturdy bullhide. The number of *kerege* sections in a home ranges from six to as many as twelve. A twelve-winged *otaw* (white yurt) served as a venue for festivals and gatherings where hundreds of people could be seated.

In our people's language, there is a proverb: *Kelinijaqsımnıkeregesialtı* (The *kerege* of a home with a good daughter-in-law is gold).

- **Literal meaning:** A "good daughter-in-law" refers to one who is well-mannered, educated, polite, and industrious. Since the *kerege* is a structural part of the home, saying it is "gold" implies the house itself is as precious and blessed as gold.
- **Metaphorical meaning:** In a deeper sense, the proverb suggests that a good daughter-in-law brings prosperity, peace, and elegance to the home. She is not just a relative but is considered the pillar and the "leaven" (the soul) of the family.

Furthermore, Karakalpaks use the blessing: *Keresikeñbolsın* (May your walls be wide).

- **Literal meaning:** The *kerege* is the main frame and wall of the house; the spaciousness and strength of the home depend on it. "May it be wide" is a wish for the house to be large, open, and comfortable.
- **Metaphorical meaning:** This goes beyond architectural width to imply spiritual breadth – prosperity in life, an open and generous table (hospitality), and a kind, magnanimous heart.

For Karakalpaks, the *QaraÚy* has historically been more than just a dwelling for those starting a new life; it is a sacred space for many traditions, holidays, and customs. Among Karakalpaks, when the children of wealthy landowners or "bays" started families, a new yurt (*otaw*) was built. The youth were gifted a snow-white yurt, and their parents and elders

would gather to wish them a happy life before the couple began their journey together. Traditionally, the husband provided the wooden frame of the house, while the bride provided the necessary textiles and fabrics as part of the *qalın mal* (the dowry/gifts provided by the bride's parents to the new couple).

In addition to its structural role, the **kerege** served a functional purpose within the home for hanging and storing everyday items. For example:

1. *Nurjamal sprang up, took the dried white scales of a large carp from the **shekiyney** (small bag) hanging from the top of the **kerege**, and tossed them onto the crackling embers.* (Sultanov 2018: 35).
2. *"Heh, has he become irritable?" said Nurjamal, reaching for the leather **shanash** (skin bag) hanging on the **kerege**.* (Sultanov 2018: 38).
3. *He approached me, intending to take the cloak off his shoulders and hang it on the **kerege** on the right side.* (Kaipbergenov 2018: 78).

Furthermore, the novel *Ajiniyaz* contains the following description:

Are you well, my dear? Your daughter has grown up just like you. May she be fortunate! As for going out – now that you are old and age has weighed you down, you are like a tethered calf. If you sit inside, you are 'eating the **kerege**.' If you go out, you get confused by the paths, wander lost among the houses, and have to beg the children for help.

In this instance, the phrase involving the *kerege* conveys the idea of sitting idly and engaging in useless or harmful behavior. The speaker is criticizing the other person for no longer being fit for socially useful work and, instead, bringing a kind of "damage" or burden to the family and household. Here, the *kerege* represents the family unit, the home, and the hearth. It carries a psychological and moral weight.

The word is used here as a metaphor: *Keregejew* (eating the lattice) provides an image rather than a literal description. Even

though the *kerege* is an inanimate object, by saying someone is "eating" it, the action transforms the subject's behavior into a vivid symbol of internal domestic decay or wasted life.

CONCLUSION

In conclusion, the Karakalpak yurt is a masterpiece of "ecological architecture" that reflects a deep-seated respect for the natural environment. However, its greatest significance lies in its transition from a physical structure to a linguacultural symbol.

The analysis reveals that the *shañaraq* is the most sacred element, representing the continuity of generations and family integrity. Linguistically, it has evolved from a simple wooden rim into a metaphor for the "hearth" and the "birth of a family." Similarly, the *kerege* serves as a symbol of the household's strength and the character of its inhabitants. Expressions like *shañaraqıñbiyikbolsın* and *kelinijaqsınıñkeregesialtıñ* demonstrate that the yurt provides the primary vocabulary for Karakalpak social ethics and blessings. Ultimately, the *QaraÚy* remains a vital model for both ecological architectural study and the preservation of Karakalpak national identity, serving as the physical and spiritual foundation upon which the people's cultural values are built.

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