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## Mislabeling Tradition: Ethnographic Knowledge Production in the Qazaq SSR and Cultural Representation

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**Ключевые слова:** этнографическая наука Казахской ССР; производство этнографических знаний; культурная репрезентация; культура питания казахов; еда и национальная идентичность; национальное блюдо; бешбармак

This paper examines the production of ethnographic knowledge on Qazaq food culture by the Ethnography Department of the Qazaq SSR Academy of Sciences during its operational years. It adopts a comprehensive approach by juxtaposing fieldnotes and other materials gathered during more than ten expeditionary fieldworks across various regions of Qazaqstan with over twenty Soviet-period scholarly publications that resulted from these ethnographic expeditions. By combining content analysis and discourse analysis, this study aims to unravel the processes and methodologies that shaped the production of ethnographic knowledge about Qazaq food culture, focusing specifically on a traditional dish. This study asserts that the representation of a significant dish in Qazaq tradition, known as “et” among the Qazaq-speaking population, varied across publications of the Ethnography Department written in Russian during the initial period of its existence. These inconsistencies resulted from an interplay of factors, including the authors’ proficiency in the Qazaq language, their ethnic or cultural backgrounds, and the influence of the institutions where they were trained. Furthermore, this paper examines the reasons for the widespread link between “beshbarmak” and Qazaq culture during the Soviet period. It argues that “beshbarmak” frequently appeared in propaganda works as a Qazaq national dish, purportedly favored by Soviet citizens of various ethnic backgrounds. This alignment with the broader ideology of socialist internationalization significantly contributed to the dissemination of “beshbarmak” in both official and popular discourse as a symbol of Qazaq national cuisine.

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## Қазақ КСР-дегі этнографиялық білім өндіру үрдісі және мәдени репрезентация

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Мақалада Қазақ КСР Ғылым академиясының Этнография бөлімінің қазақ халқының тамақтану мәдениетіне қатысты білім өндіру үрдісі қарастырылады. Бұл зерттеу атаулы Этнография бөлімінің әртүрлі аймақтарда жүргізген еларалық экспедициялар нәтижесінде жинақталған жазбаларды осы экспедициялар нәтижесінде жазылған советтік жарияланымдар мазмұнымен салыстыра отырып талдайтын кешенді тәсілді қолданады. Контент анализ және дискурс анализ әдістерін өзара үйлестіре отырып бұл зерттеу «қазақтың дәстүрлі тағамы» негізінде жалпы қазақ халқының тамақтану мәдениеті туралы этнографиялық білімді қалыптасу үдерістерін қарастыруды мақсат етеді. Мақалада қазақи танымда орны ерекше деп көрсетілген дәстүрлі тағам репрезентациясына ерекше көңіл бөлінеді. Онда бастапқы жылдары Этнография бөлімі қызметкерлерінің орыс тілінде жазылған жарияланымдарында қазақ тілділер арасында «ет» ретінде белгілі болған қазақ халқының дәстүрлі тағамының түрлі атаулармен берілгендігі айтылады. Бұл сәйкессіздіктер бірнеше кешенді факторлардың өзара әрекеттестігі нәтижесінде орын алды деп дәлелденеді. Мәселен авторлардың қазақ тілін меңгеру деңгейі, олардың этникалық немесе мәдени белгісі және білім алған

орындарының олардың кәсіби көзқарасына ықпалы. Сонымен қатар, мақала советтік кезеңде «бешбармақ» атауының қазақтың мәдениетімен байланыстыра қарастыру үрдісінің одақтық деңгейде кеңінен таралуы себебін қарастырады. Онда «бешбармақ» советтік насихат жарияланымдарында «әртүрлі этникалық топ өкілдерінен шыққан көптеген советтік азаматтардың сүйіп жейтін қазақтың ұлттық тағамы» ретінде жиі көрсетілгендігі айтылады. Осылайша, «бешбармақ» одақтық деңгейдегі социалистік интернационализм идеологиясы нысанына айналып, кең таралған ресми дискурста қазақтардың дәстүрлі дастарханының символы ретінде таралып кеткен.

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## Этнографическое знание в Казахской ССР и культурная репрезентация

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В данной статье рассматривается производство этнографических знаний о культуре питания казахов, осуществляемое Отделом этнографии Академии наук Казахской ССР в годы его деятельности. В исследовании используется комплексный подход, который сопоставляет материалы экспедиционных полевых работ, проведенных в различных регионах Казахстана, с научными публикациями, появившимися в результате этих экспедиций. Объединяя контент-анализ и дискурс-анализ, исследование стремится раскрыть процессы и методологии, повлиявшие на производство этнографических знаний о культуре питания казахов, с акцентом на конкретное традиционное блюдо. В статье основное внимание уделяется репрезентации значимого блюда казахской традиции в этнографических исследованиях Казахской ССР. Утверждается, что в русскоязычных публикациях отдела этнографии раннего периода наблюдаются несоответствия в названии традиционного казахского блюда, известного в казахоязычной среде как «ет». Автор статьи утверждает, что эти несоответствия возникли в результате взаимодействия различных факторов, таких как владение авторами казахским языком, их этническое или культурное происхождение, а также влияние учреждений, где они проходили профессиональную подготовку. В заключение статья рассматривает причину распространения термина «бешбармак» на уровне всего Союза как названия традиционного казахского блюда. В ней утверждается, что «бешбармак» часто упоминался в пропагандистских материалах в качестве казахского национального блюда, полюбившегося многим представителям других народов Советского Союза. Такое соответствие более широкой идеологии социалистической интернационализации значительно способствовало распространению слова «бешбармак» как в официальном, так и в популярном дискурсе как символа казахской национальной кухни.

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### Introduction

In a subchapter on food culture in the collective book *Kazaxu* (the Qazaqs), part of the ethnographic series *Narody i Kultury* by the Institute of Ethnology and Anthropology of the Russian Academy of Sciences, which claims to be a prominent historical-ethnographic publication of the post-Soviet space on the Qazaqs, it is stated:

*The traditional meat-based dish of the Qazaqs, which is still served on all special occasions, is “et.” Among the Russian population of Qazaqstan,<sup>1</sup> it is called Beshbarmak, and in restaurants or cafes, it is referred to as “myaso po kazhski” (meat cooked in the Qazaq style) [Ahmetova 2021: 378].*

This subchapter does not further elaborate on why or how it happened that representatives of other cultures customarily refer to the traditional dish of the Qazaqs by a completely different designation, while Qazaqs themselves use the word “et.” More importantly, such an approach to describing the traditional dish of the Qazaqs is generally accepted among academic works of the Soviet and post-Soviet periods on the historical and ethnographic aspects of the traditional

<sup>1</sup> In our opinion, it would be correct to use ‘Russian-speaking population of Qazaqstan’ instead of ‘Russian population of Qazaqstan.’

food culture of the Qazaq people written in Russian. Conversely, in Qazaq-language academic publications on this subject, the word “et” is consistently used to designate the traditional dish of the Qazaqs, with brief mentions that the practice of serving this dish has been erroneously identified by others, particularly by Russians during the colonial period, as “besbarmak” or “beshbarmak” [Qatran 2002: 43; Sandibaeva 2003: 5].

This colonial attitude persisted into the Soviet era. Soviet Russian-language printed media often published materials portraying the term “beshbarmak” with negative connotations, while simultaneously using it to refer to the traditional Qazaq dish. As pointed out by some scholarly works of that period, this can be seen as a reflection of a conflict between two elements in public culture – Russian and Qazaq, or perhaps more accurately, metropolitan and provincial [Dunn and Dunn 1967: 181]. Some prominent figures in Soviet Qazaq literature sought to articulate the irony of this situation. For instance, Mukhtar Auevov, known for his historical novel “Abai Joly,” reflects this perception in his Qazaq-language novel “Ösken Örken” (Өскен Өркен). It describes a situation during a dining event, spanning three pages, where the main character, Nil Karpov, the first secretary of a regional party committee, criticizes the use of the expression rooted in “beshbarmak”:

*It turns out that some, if they want to denounce someone or criticize at meetings, they say “this person is beshbarmachnichayet (бешбармачничайет).” Newspapers also use this expression in similar contexts. Besbarmak (бесбармақ) is the national dish of the Qazaqs. This is an inappropriate indictment of popular taste. If you denigrate the name of the national dish of other peoples in this way, by saying “plovnichayet” (пловничайет), “shashlychnichayet” (шашлычничайет), or “galushnichayet” (галушничайет), would it be correct? No, of course that’s not right! This is not vodka that spoils a person [Auevov 1962: 93].*

In this context, “beshbarmachnichayet” refers to actions that appear to contradict publicly accepted norms, specifically those that are officially sanctioned. This term can thus be used to explain the ongoing negative reaction in the modern Qazaq-language information space regarding the use of “beshbarmak.” Over the past decade, there have been continuous discussions in the media and different online platforms, where some representatives of the Qazaq-speaking population have raised the issue of using “beshbarmak” as an interchangeable designation for the traditional dish of the Qazaqs “et.” Their main argument is that there is no such word or combination of words as “besh” or “besh-barmak” in the Qazaq language that means “five fingers.”<sup>2</sup> They further argue that “beshbarmak” was a term given by outsiders, similar to the use of “Kirghiz” to refer to Qazaqs in Russian language during the colonial period,<sup>3</sup> and that the use of such a word is offensive.<sup>4</sup>

<sup>2</sup> In Qazaq, “five” is “bes” (бес), and “fingers” would be “sawsaqtar” (саусақтар). “Barmaktar” actually translates to ‘toes.’ Therefore, if referring to a dish eaten with hands by employing five fingers, ‘Bes sawsaq’ or ‘bes sawsaqtar’ would be more accurate in the Qazaq language.

<sup>3</sup> The Russian colonial period saw considerable confusion of ethnic names. To avoid confusion with the empire’s existing Cossack group names, largely for administrative convenience, the Qazaqs were referred to as Kirghiz-Kaisaks, Kirghiz-Kazakhs, or more commonly as Kirghiz (no later than the beginning of the 18<sup>th</sup> century). In turn, the true Kirghiz (Kyrgyz, кыргыз /кыргыз) were called “Kara-Kirghiz” by the Russians after their discovery. Although the self-designation of the Qazaq people, “Қазақ” (in Russian “казак”), was preserved in the Qazaq language, from the mid–1920s, in the Russian language the Qazaqs began referring to as “казак” (kazakh).

<sup>4</sup> There are numerous media publications covering this topic. One can check the following: Beysenov, E. 2011. Ey, beyqam el, namısıñdı qamşıla! In: *Abai.kz*, July 4. URL: <https://abai.kz/post/9345>; Buqarqızı, H. 2012. Beşbarmaq show – Ultñiñ ulı tamağı mazaqqa aynalmaqı tiis. In: *Ayqın*, July 19 (no.132), 19; Isaeva, B. 2012. Beşbarmaq qazaqtñ sözi emes. In: *Ana tili*, July 19–25 (no. 29). URL: <https://anatili.kazgazeta.kz/news/9964>; Erğalı, S. 2012. Beşbarmaq – emes Asata! In: *Ult times*, September 27 (№20), 11; Nurğabil, Q. 2014. Ultıq tağamdı qalay ataymız? In: *Shymkent Kelbeti*, August 7. URL: <https://www.shymkala.kz/index.php/culture/item/806-ultıyq-tagamdı-qalay-ataymız>; Larina, K. 2017. Tilimizge jat ‘Besbarmaq’. In: *InBusiness*, February 2. URL: <https://inbusiness.kz/kz/news/tilimizge-zhat-%C2%ABbesbarmak%C2%BB>; “Pisatel Markhabat Baygut schitayet, chto slovo ‘beshbarmak’ pozorit natsionalnoye blyudo” 2017. In: *Otyrar*, January 6. URL: <https://otyrar.kz/2017/01/pisatel-marxabat-bajgut-schitayet-chto-slovo-beshbarmak-pozorit-natsionalnoe-blyudo/>; “Aktıubinskiye uchenyye poschitali slovo ‘beshbarmak’ unizitelnyım”. 2017. In: *Diapazon*, January 10. URL: <https://diapazon.kz/news/70652-aktyubinskie-uchenye-poschitali-slovo-beshbarmak-unizitelnyım>;

In contrast, the Russian-speaking population of the post-Soviet area, including Qazaqstan, appears to be accustomed to referring to the traditional Qazaq dish as “beshbarmak.” When confronted with the argument that the use of this term is incorrect from a Qazaq language-based cultural perspective, most people are often confused and prefer to ignore this information. Furthermore, this tendency can be observed in some academic studies addressing the issue. For example, in a study on Russian-language Qazaq literature by Raykhan Tuksaitova, the author argues against the opinion voiced by another scholar, Ernar Orzabekov, who states that the word “beshbarmak” did not exist in the Qazaq language and its appearance should be considered in the context of the colonial past as a vulgarized name for a dish that is called “et” [Orzabekov 1990: 59]. However, Tuksaitova’s counter is limited to asserting that, in Russian-language works by Qazaq writers of the Soviet period, the use of “beshbarmak” emphasized the favorable attitude of Russian individuals toward this Qazaq dish and that this word is more familiar to Russian speakers [Tuksaitova 2007: 184–185]. Additionally, some representatives of Russian-language Qazaqstani media argue that the practice of calling the traditional Qazaq dish “beshbarmak” is historical, citing examples from historical records of the colonial period written in Russian and by representatives of the Russian Empire.<sup>5</sup>

At this juncture, it is crucial to acknowledge that such discussions can be interminable, given the numerous instances of the presence or absence of “beshbarmak” in the literature of the Soviet period and colonial-era ethnographic sources. The issue is not about denying the presence of “beshbarmak” in Russian-language sources from the colonial period, nor its presence in Soviet-era ethnographic publications. Neither is it about the fact that, during the Soviet period, it was common practice among representatives of Qazaq literature, translated into or written in the Russian language, to designate the traditional dish of the Qazaqs as “besbarmak / beshbarmak” (бесбармак / бешбармак).<sup>6</sup> Rather, the question should be why “beshbarmak” (бешбармак) began to be used as an alternative name for the traditional dish of the Qazaqs “et” in the Russian language, despite public acknowledgment of the negative context associated with it, such as “beshbarmachnichaet,” understood by both the Russian and Qazaq-speaking populations of the Qazaq SSR and the USSR.

Consequently, this discrepancy raises the question of why confusion persists around the term “beshbarmak,” which has now become the reason for ongoing controversies over its use as an interchangeable designation for “et” in Qazaqstan. On one hand, it offends the Qazaq-speaking population by triggering memories of the colonial past [Énciklopediya 2011: 483; Énciklopediya 2017: 646]. On the other hand, it evokes completely different reactions among Russian-speaking Qazaqstanis, who profoundly believe that the Qazaq traditional dish is called “beshbarmak” and

Äbişqızı, S. 2018. Beşbarmaq sözi h m Goloş ekinniň sayqımazađı. In: *Egemen Qazaqstan*, February 9, 6; Maleyeva, A. 2021. Slova «beshbarmak» ne bylo na kazakhskom yazyke. In: *Altyn-orda*, July 10. URL: <https://altyn-orda.kz/ajgerim-maleeva-slova-beshbarmak-ne-bylo-na-kazahskom-yazyke/>; Naukhanov, D. 2021. Dlya kazakhov slovo ‘beshbarmak’ chuzhoye – obzor kaz SMI. In: *365Info*, July 13. URL: <https://365info.kz/2021/07/dlya-kazahov-slovo-beshbarmak-chuzhoe-obzor-kazsmi/>; Twlesh, E. 2022. Beshbarmaq, besbarmaq, Et. Qazaqtıń ulttıq tađamı qalay atalđan? In: *Tengrinews*, January 27. URL: <https://tengrinews.kz/story/beshbarmak-besbarmak-et-kazaktyin-ulttyik-tagamyi-kalay-460242/>

<sup>5</sup> Mikhaylov, A. 2024. Beshbarmak: kogda on poyavilsya i pochemu nekotoryye schitayut yego ‘russkoy vy dumkoy’. In: *Ratel Media*, March 23. URL: [https://ratel.kz/outlook/beshbarmak\\_kogda\\_on\\_pojavilsja\\_i\\_pochemu\\_nekotorye\\_schitajut\\_ego\\_russkoj\\_vydumkoj](https://ratel.kz/outlook/beshbarmak_kogda_on_pojavilsja_i_pochemu_nekotorye_schitajut_ego_russkoj_vydumkoj)

<sup>6</sup> For example, in Anuar Alimjanov’s novel “Makhambet’s Arrow,” which is considered a significant work of Russian-language Qazaq prose from the Soviet period, the term “besbarmak” was used. In turn, the Qazaq translation of the novel, this term was translated as “et” [Alimjanov, 1969: 88; Alimjanov, 1970: 99]. Both versions were published by the Jazushy Publishing House, under the coordination of the Writers’ Union of Qazaqstan. This indicates that in Russian-language literature of the Qazaq SSR, including works by Qazaq authors, “besbarmak” was commonly used as the Russian equivalent for “Et.” This usage explains why it became common in Russian-language works of Soviet writers to refer to the traditional Qazaq dish as a five-finger dish “besbarmak” (бесбармак) or “beshbarmak” (бешбармак). This can be observed in works by authors such as: [Leonov 1927: 14; Altshuller 1967: 263; Shuhov 1987: 93; Tyurin 1994: 297; Nazarova 2009: 77; Solovyeva 2010: 103], among others.

actively promote it. As a result, the word “beshbarmak” has become widely recognized abroad as one of the associations symbolizing Qazaqstan alongside “steppe,” “Baikonur,” and “Almaty,” etc. [Tokbulatova 2019: 122; Rogovskaya 2018: 148; Derendyayeva 2022: 105; Yakushina 2007: 61; Abildinova 2011: 143].

Therefore, this study aims to examine how the understanding of food culture of the Qazaqs have been developed by ethnographers of the Academy of Sciences of the Qazaq SSR. This approach is crucial because much of the information disseminated to the public originated from academia, and the institutionalization of ethnographic knowledge on the Qazaqs began during the Soviet period.

**The chronological frame** of this study spans from the mid–1940s to the 1980s. This period marks the formation of academic knowledge on the ethnography of the Qazaqs, highlighting that significant scholarly work based on the systematic study of the Qazaqs and their culture began to take shape due to the activities of the ethnography sector of the Academy of Sciences of the Qazaq SSR. The works produced during this time are considered fundamental and remain primary references for studies on Qazaq culture to this day.

### Sources

This study draws extensively from a combination of primary and secondary sources in Qazaq and Russian. *The primary* sources include fieldnotes collected during expeditionary fieldworks conducted by the Ethnography department of the Institute of History, Archaeology, and Ethnography within the Qazaq SSR Academy of Sciences, referred to as “etnograficheskiye ekspeditsii” (ethnographic expeditions). These documents, housed in the archive of Ğylym Ordasy in Almaty, cover various regions of the republic and were gathered by ethnographers from the mid–1940s to the 1970s.<sup>7</sup> Despite differing goals, a systematic approach to data collection was ensured under a single program approved by the Academic Council of the Institute. Collection methods included interviews, observations, and the acquisition of artefacts reflecting Qazaq traditional households. This collection offers invaluable firsthand information on food production, consumption patterns, rituals, and social dynamics during the transition from traditional to Soviet culture.

Additionally, the primary sources include historical documents from the 18<sup>th</sup> to the early 20<sup>th</sup> centuries related to the history of food and foodways of the Qazaqs. These documents are sourced from the fonds of the National Library of Qazaqstan, including the rare books collection, and the holdings of the Russian State Library, which include collections of dissertation theses. A thorough review of all available literature on food culture of Qazaqs was conducted, guided by works on the historiography of ethnographic Qazaq studies from the colonial and Soviet periods, as well as reference and bibliographic publications on the history of Qazaqstan.<sup>8</sup>

<sup>7</sup> Reports from ethnographic fieldworks to different regions of the Qazaq SSR provide comprehensive descriptions of local cuisine. Fieldworks to the Zaisan, Tarbagatai, and Aqsuat raions of the East Qazaqstan oblast in 1946, as well as to the Semei oblast in 1955–1956, yield detailed insights into dishes, food preparation methods, and local culinary terminology. Similarly, fieldworks to the southeastern part of the country, covering Kegen, Jambul, Enbekshi-Qazaq, and Taldy-qorgan raions of the Almaty oblast, offer rich material for analysis. Reports from ethnographic fieldworks to the West Qazaqstan oblast in 1957 and the South Qazaqstan in 1958, the Qarağandy oblast from 1959 to 1970, and Northern Qazaqstan from the Torgai and Qostanai fieldworks in 1963 and 1969, respectively, provide further insights into regional food cultures [The archive of ‘Ğylym Ordasy,’ holding (h.) 11, register (r.) 1, file (f.) 10, folio (fol.) 1, 5; *Ibid.*, f. 10a, fol. 216; *Ibid.*, f. 134, fol. 2, 17; *Ibid.*, f. 82a, fol. 211–217; *Ibid.*, f. 106, fol. 8, 19; *Ibid.*, f. 106a, fol. 11; *Ibid.*, f. 158, fol. 1, 3, 25; *Ibid.*, f. 307, fol. 7, 8, 22; *Ibid.*, f. 537, fol. 7, 8; H. 11, r. 3, f. 35, fol. 13, 14, 106, 113].

<sup>8</sup> Masanov 1966; Zaharova 1956; Kereyeva-Kanafiyeva 1963; Titova 1970: 90–97; Kereyeva-Kanafieva 1980; Lunin 1975; Jamankulova and Kasymova 1971: 340–366; *Istoriya Kazakhstana: Bibliograficheskiy* 1988: Kniga 1–2; Galiyev and Savelyeva 1988: Kniga 1–2; *Kniga Sovetskogo Kazakhstana* 1962: 314–323; *Kniga Sovetskogo Kazakhstana* 1966: 402–406; *Kniga Sovetskogo Kazakhstana* 1970: 29–39; *Kniga Sovetskogo Kazakhstana* 1974: 303–308.



Furthermore, oral history collections conducted by members of the center of 'Aytılǵan Tarih' in various regions of Qazaqstan in the 2010s, archived in the Central State Archive, offer contemporary perspectives on Qazaq food culture.<sup>9</sup> The narratives provided by respondents regarding food and national identity served as a framework for analyzing and understanding the transformation of Qazaqstani food culture and the discourse surrounding it.

*The secondary* sources include academic studies based on or utilizing materials from the aforementioned fieldwork studies, such as dissertations and works published by the Academy of Sciences of the Qazaq SSR on ethnography from the 1940s to the 1980s.<sup>10</sup> As products of some of the earliest fundamental research on the ethnography of the Qazaqs, these works form the foundation of scholarly knowledge on the traditional culture of the Qazaqs, including its food culture.

Additionally, it is important to highlight two other groups of secondary sources. The first group consists of publications of a popular science and socio-political nature, written based on the knowledge presented in the aforementioned academic publications. These works, aimed at the general reader and covering various topics, often included information on the food culture of the Qazaqs or related subjects and referenced these academic works. This category includes publications by the Qazaq Soviet Socialist Republic (Qazaq SSR) publishing houses such as Kazakhstan (Қазақстан) and Kainar (Кайнар). These publishing houses were responsible for producing a wide range of literature, including popular science and socio-political publications. Their output included food industry guides and culinary books aimed at the general public [Mamazhanov and Korotovsky 1977: 109–111]. Given the Soviet system's centralized approach to the book publishing industry, analyzing these publications allows us to understand the nature of the disseminated knowledge of that period.

The second group includes post-Soviet academic works such as monographs, dissertations, and research papers on the food culture and history of the Qazaqs, or those related to the topic. These sources are essential references, as their analysis provides a comprehensive understanding of the influence of Soviet-era research on post-Soviet studies.

### Methodological approach

This study analyzes materials from ten expeditionary fieldworks conducted by the Ethnography Department of the Academy of Sciences of the Qazaq SSR between 1946 and 1970. These fieldworks covered thirty-one raions in eleven oblasts within Qazaqstan. By juxtaposing these field notes with over twenty subsequent scholarly publications that resulted from these fieldworks and became canonical in Soviet-era Qazaq ethnographic literature, this study aims to reveal discrepancies in the documentation and interpretation of the traditional Qazaq dish's name during the Soviet period.

An integrated approach, combining content analysis and discourse analysis, is employed. Content analysis involves categorizing works containing information on Qazaq food culture, systematically evaluating field notes, and identifying recurring themes. Discourse analysis examines the nuances of language use and context, uncovering how the naming of the dish varied due to scholars' linguistic training and cultural backgrounds. By integrating these methods, the study seeks to provide a comprehensive understanding of how the terms "beshbarmak," "besbarmak," "bishbarmak," or "et" evolved in relation to the traditional Qazaq dish.

<sup>9</sup> These oral histories cover regions such as Taraz city, five raions of the Jambyl oblast in South Qazaqstan, three raions of the Jetisu and the Almaty oblasts in Southeast Qazaqstan, and Qaraghandy city and one raion of the Qaraghandy oblast in Central Qazaqstan.

<sup>10</sup> Scholarly books published by "Izdatelstvo Akademii Nauk Kazakhskoy SSR" that later defined as "Nauka" and papers that appeared in "Soviet Etnographia," "Kratkiye soobshcheniya instituta Etnografii Akademii nauk Soyuzu SSR," "Izvestiya akademii nauk Kaz SSR," "Vestnik akademii nauk KazSSR," etc.

## The main body

### The Ethnography Department of the Qazaq SSR Academy of Sciences

The Ethnography Department, initially a sector before becoming a full department in the early 1950s,<sup>11</sup> was established in 1945 with the founding of the Institute of History, Archeology, and Ethnography. This was based in the history sector of the Qazaq branch of the USSR Academy of Sciences, which gained independent status as the Academy of Sciences of the Qazaq SSR in 1946 [Serikpa 2023: 161].

The early years of the Ethnography Department were characterized by a shortage of qualified local ethnographers from the Qazaqs. Until the 1960s, only the Institute of Geology within the Academy of Sciences of the Qazaq SSR had a program for training candidates and doctors of sciences [Movshovich 1948: 333; Voilenko and Dudarev 1957: 310–319]. Consequently, the initial cohort of scholars was predominantly comprised of individuals appointed from the central institutions or trained at the Institute of Ethnography of the USSR Academy of Sciences. This context accounts for the predominantly Russian-speaking composition of early ethnographers at the Academy of Sciences of the Qazaq SSR. Furthermore, the development and improvement of the personnel training system within the scientific institutions of the USSR were systematic and purposeful, achieved through the coordinated efforts of central and republican party organs, various Soviet structural bodies, and academic institutions [Yablokov 1990: 118, 182].

### 1946–1955. Years of Studying Kolkhozization

The first expeditionary fieldwork conducted by the Ethnographic Sector took place in the East Qazaqstan oblast, covering the Zaisan and Tarbagatai raions, in 1946 [Sabitov 1952: 89]. This was unique as it was the only fieldwork carried out exclusively by Qazaq-speaking researchers. Subsequent fieldworks were conducted by mixed groups of Russian-speaking and Qazaq-speaking ethnographers, most of whom completed their academic training at the Institute of Ethnography of the Academy of Sciences of the USSR, in Russian language. According to the report on this expeditionary fieldwork by Nygmet Sabitov, the head of the Ethnography Sector, the main goal was to study the Qazaq way of life and associated customs. Sabitov's 10-page report, written in Russian, notes in the food culture section:

*Among the population of the areas under consideration, the daily diet is mainly dairy and meat-based, similar to that of Qazaqs in other regions of Qazaqstan. However, some differences in the preparation of certain dishes can be observed.*

As an example, Nygmet Sabitov mentioned the prevalence of the dish called *qimai*, made from offal (either cow or horse) in this area. He also noted a similar dish called *shyujuq* (шұжық), common in other regions, which is prepared from mutton offal. The report highlighted that, contrary to customs in many other regions of the republic, broth is not served with meat in East Qazaqstan.<sup>12</sup>

For those familiar with Qazaq culture, it is understood that when “broth is not served with meat” is mentioned, it refers to the traditional Qazaq dish called “et.” In Qazaq, the word “et” means “meat” (e.g., “qoydyng eti” for mutton, “tauyqyng eti” for chicken, “shoshqany eti” for pork), etc. The term also denotes the traditional dish “et,” and its interpretation depends on the context (e.g., “Et zheimiz”). This dual meaning is not unique to the word “et”; for example, the word “as” means “food” and also refers to a ceremonial gathering in Qazaq tradition “as.”<sup>13</sup>

<sup>11</sup> Henceforth, in the text, the Ethnography Sector (or Department) of the Institute of History, Archeology, and Ethnography of the Academy of Sciences of the Qazaq SSR will be defined in short as ‘the ethnography sector;’ after 1950s period ‘the ethnography department.’

<sup>12</sup> Ğylym Ordasy archive, h. 11, r. 1, f. 10, fol. 1, 2, 5–6.

<sup>13</sup> As, the ceremony held significant importance in traditional Qazaq society as a gathering for honoring ancestors, discussing political and social issues, and fostering community unity. A key aspect was the sharing of food, symbolizing respect for the past and preserving cultural heritage. These rituals helped maintain a sense of identity and shared

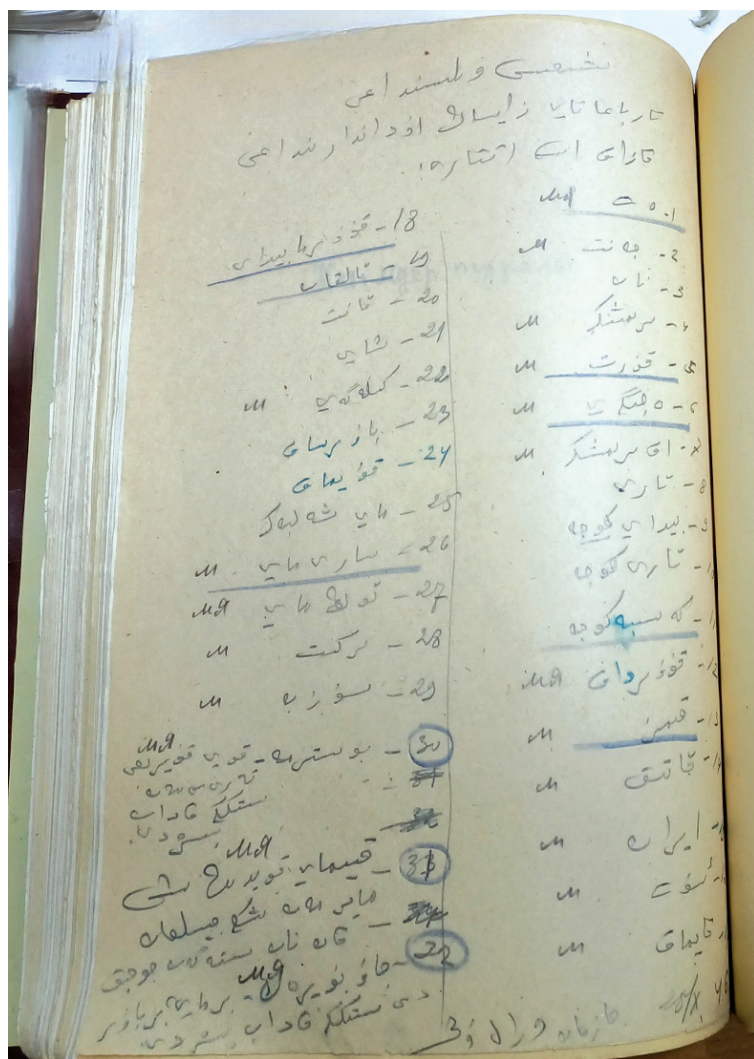


Fig. 1. Food names used by Qazaqs of the Tarbagatai and Zaisan raions of the East Qazaqstan oblast (Qazaq as attari): 1 – Et (Et); 2 – Jent (Жент); 3 – Nan (Нан); 4 – Irimshik (Ірімшік); 5 – Qyrt (Құрт); 6 – Ejigey (Ежігей); 7 – Aq irimshik (Ақ ірімшік); 8 – Tary (Тары); 9 – Bidai köje (Бидай көже); 10 – Tary köje (Тары көже); 11 – Kespe köje (Кеспе көже); 12 – Quyrdaq (Қуырдақ);

13 – Qymiz (Қымыз); 14 – Qatyq (Қатық); 15 – Airan (Айран); 15 – Syt (Сүт); 17 – Qaimaq (Қаймақ); 18 – Quyrma bidai (Қуырма бидай); 19 – Talqan (Талқан); 20 – Qant (Қант); 21 – Shai (Шәй); 22 – Kilegei (Кілегей); 23 – Balqaimaq (Бауырсақ); 24 – Quymaq (Құймақ); 25 – Mai shelpek (Май шелпек); 26 – Sari mai (Сары май); 27 – Toñ mai (Тоң май); 28 – Irkit (Іркіт); 29 – Suzbe (Сүзбе); 30 – Böstirme (Бөстірме); 31 – Qimai (Қимай); 32 – Jaubyerek (Жаубүйрек) (Ǵylym Ordasy archive, h. 11, r. 1, f. 10a, fol. 216)

1-сур. Шығыс Қазақстан облысы Тарбағатай және Жайсан аудандары қазақтарының ас аттары: 1 – Ет; 2 – Жент; 3 – Нан; 4 – Ірімшік; 5 – Құрт; 6 – Ежігей; 7 – Ақ ірімшік; 8 – Тары; 9 – Бидай көже; 10 – Тары көже; 11 – Кеспе көже; 12 – Қуырдақ; 13 – Қымыз; 14 – Қатық; 15 – Айран; 15 – Сүт; 17 – Қаймақ; 18 – Қуырма бидай); 19 – Талқан; 20 – Қант; 21 – Шәй; 22 – Кілегей; 23 – Бауырсақ; 24 – Құймақ; 25 – Май шелпек; 26 – Сары май; 27 – Тоң май; 28 – Іркіт; 29 – Сүзбе; 30 – Бөстірме; 31 – Қимай; 32 – Жаубүйрек

Рис. 1. Названия пищи у казахов Тарбағатайского и Зайсанского районов Восточно-Казахстанской области (қазақ ас аттары): 1 – Ет; 2 – Жент; 3 – Нан; 4 – Ирімшік (Ірімшік); 5 – Құрт (Құрт); 6 – Ежігей (Ежігей); 7 – Ақ ирімшік (Ақ ірімшік); 8 – Тары; 9 – Бидай көже (Бидай көже); 10 – Тары көже (Тары көже); 11 – Кеспе көже (Кеспе көже); 12 – Қуырдақ (Қуырдақ); 13 – Қымыз (Қымыз); 14 – Қатық (Қатық); 15 – Айран; 15 – Сүт (Сүт); 17 – Қаймақ (Қаймақ); 18 – Қуырма бидай (Қуырма бидай); 19 – Талқан (Талқан); 20 – Қант (Қант); 21 – Шай (Шәй); 22 – Кілегей (Кілегей); 23 – Бауырсақ (Бауырсақ); 24 – Құймақ (Құймақ); 25 – Май шелпек; 26 – Сары май; 27 – Тоң май (Тоң май); 28 – Иркіт (Іркіт); 29 – Сүзбе (Сүзбе); 30 – Бөстірме (Бөстірме); 31 – Қимай (Қимай); 32 – Жаубүйрек (Жаубүйрек)



Returning to the 1946 East Qazaqstan fieldwork, it is assumed that Nygmet Sabitov, who did not personally participate in it, wrote the report in Russian for wider accessibility. In turn, this expeditionary fieldwork participants, Mahmud Oraluly and Dusen Rahmetov, researchers from the Academy of Sciences of the Qazaq SSR, documented their observations in 448 pages of field notes using *tôte jazu*, Qazaq written in Arabic script. These materials are invaluable as they include detailed descriptions of various dishes, from ingredients and cooking instructions to customs associated with them.<sup>14</sup> Additionally, they compiled a list of food names found in the two raions, which includes “et” (see Fig. 1).

According to official reports of the Ethnography Sector, Mahmud Oraluly and Dusen Rahmetov collected ethnographic materials from 10 kolkhozy (collective farms) in the Aqsuat raion of Semey oblast in 1946, as well as from 35 kolkhozy in East Qazaqstan. In 1948, they also visited the Ayaguz and Chubartau raions of the same oblast [Sabitov 1948: 116; Sabitov 1950: 73]. Unfortunately, we were unable to find field notes from these expeditionary fieldworks. In 1947, research fellows Ayap Nurkanov, Dusen Rahmetov, Fazyl Aronov, and Malik Kabirov participated in a joint fieldwork project across four raions of Almaty oblast and two raions in the Taldyqorgan oblast. This fieldwork was part of a comprehensive anthropological and ethnographic study organized by the Ethnography Institute of the USSR Academy of Sciences in Qazaqstan [Sabitov 1949: 67–68]. The collection of materials was conducted according to a specific ethnographic study program. Ethnographers in Qazaqstan were tasked with focusing on “spiritual culture,” while ethnographers from Moscow and Leningrad, namely Elena Mahova, Irina Zaharova, and Gregory Stratanovich, concentrated on material culture [Sabitov 1952: 90]. It is important to note that Stratanovich collected materials on the Dungans, while Irina Zaharova focused on describing the Uyghurs. As for the ethnographic materials on the Qazaqs, they were collected according to a broad program with a significant emphasis on studying life in modern kolkhozy [Levin 1948: 136], marking the beginning of research on the process of kolkhozization among the Qazaqs.

From 1949, the Ethnography Sector of the Qazaq SSR Academy of Sciences was given a new course of planning: to study the process of kolkhozization, which indicated the level of Sovietization of Qazaq society during Stalin’s five-year plans [Sabitov 1949a: 211]. Hence, all expeditionary fieldwork carried out from 1949 to 1955 revolved around this thematic plan. Participants were tasked with collecting materials according to a special program for the ethnographic study of the “Qazaq kolkhoznyi aul” (Qazaq collective farm aul) compiled by the Institute of Ethnography of the USSR Academy of Sciences. The program noted that phenomena of the past should occupy a secondary place in the collected materials. Therefore, fieldwork participants were required to observe the Sovietization factor, specifically how well the kolkhoz building process was progressing. For instance, regarding food culture, ethnographers were instructed to consider only how the food consumption culture had changed compared to the pre-revolutionary period. In other words, they were to assess whether there was more plant-based food in the daily diet of Qazaq kolkhozniki (collective farmers) compared to pre-Soviet life. Additionally, according to the program’s instructions, field notes had to contain information on new dishes introduced into the menu and the most common dishes among Qazaq kolkhozniki [Korbe 1949: 37, 38, 43].

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values across generations. Politically, *As* ceremonies functioned as crucial forums for decision-making and conflict resolution, addressing matters such as leadership selection and inter-clan disputes. The influence of ancestral spirits and the importance of tradition ensured adherence to decisions made during these gatherings, promoting social cohesion and stability. The hosting clan was responsible for maintaining order and respect during the event, upholding a strong reputation within the community, and ensuring adherence to established norms and protocols. However, the significance of *As* ceremonies declined over time due to external influences such as Russian colonization and the spread of Islam. Changes in political structures and the introduction of new religious beliefs altered Qazaq society’s dynamics, diminishing the prominence of these ceremonies. Despite this decline, the cultural and historical legacy of *As* ceremonies continues to resonate, reminding Qazaq society of traditional values and practices [Smagulov 2007: 154].

<sup>14</sup> Ğylym Ordasy archive, h. 11, r. 1, f. 10a, fol. 210–217, 237–282.

The first expeditionary fieldwork on the topic of “Qazaq kolkhoznıy aul” was organized in 1949, in collaboration with the Ethnography Institute of the USSR Academy of Sciences. Institute employees Fazyl Aronov and Dyusen Rahmetov, along with aspirant Gabit Valikhanov and Moscow ethnographers Olga Korbe and Elena Mahova, collected information on collective farms in two oblasts: Jambul and Almaty [Sabitov 1952: 90]. This fieldwork also included participation from N.A. Homenko, a research fellow from the Central State Museum of the Qazaq SSR [Levin 1950: 186]. Based on the results of this fieldwork, a report article was written by the head of the Ethnography Sector, Nygmet Sabitov. In the section on food culture, it stated:

*The increase in the well-being of kolkhozniki has also led to an improvement in the quality of food. The diet has become more varied. In addition to traditional national dishes (beshbarmak, qymyz, airan, etc.), Qazaq kolkhozniki now prepare dishes from vegetables, such as potatoes. It is now uncommon to find a person in any Qazaq auyı who does not eat cucumbers and tomatoes. Such a variety of consumed products indicates the cultural growth of kolkhoz masses [Sabitov 1950a: 57].*

As observed, the report article identifies “beshbarmak” as one of the national dishes of the Qazaqs. However, it is important to note that the author of this publication, Nygmet Sabitov, did not personally participate in this expeditionary fieldwork. Consequently, it is challenging to ascertain the specific notes or reports from which he derived his information on food culture. Nevertheless, it is evident that this excerpt served as a template for his subsequent report articles. Thus, reports on the same fieldwork appear multiple times, often with different time frames, such as for the past year or the past three years. This repetition led to the circulation of identical sentences in several articles. For instance, in another article from 1952 titled *Rabota po izuchenıyu kultury i byta kazakhskogo kolkhoznogo aula*, which addresses fieldwork in the Shu raion of the Jambyl oblast, the exact phrasing was reiterated [Sabitov 1952: 93]. Consequently, the frequency of literature mentioning “beshbarmak” (бешбармак) increased due to the repetition of similar reports.

In contrast, the article based on field materials collected by Olga Korbe and Elena Mahova during the expeditionary fieldwork to the collective farms of Jambyl and Almaty oblasts does not mention the names of dishes [Korbe 1950: 68]. However, in another publication following the 1950 fieldwork in Semey and Taldyqorgan oblasts, they refer to the dish as “besbarmak” (бесбармак), rather than “beshbarmak” (бешбармак) as mentioned by Nygmet Sabitov. In their description of the food culture of Qazaq kolkhozniki in the Abai raion of Semey oblast, it is stated:

*The favorite dish is besbarmak (boiled mutton), which, unlike in areas with developed grain farming, is prepared only from meat, without dough. Besbarmak is made on holidays, during family celebrations, or when special guests are invited. People also cook quyrdaq, made from meat, or most often from liver, by frying small pieces in mutton fat or butter [Korbe and Mahova 1952: 38–39, 51].*

This passage clearly distinguishes between “besbarmak” (бесбармак) and “quyrdaq” (қуырдақ), indicating that they are two separate dishes, not synonyms, as some colonial-era authors previously suggested [Meyyer 1865: 249; Krasovskii 1868: 39; Kostenko 1870: 40; P. 1878: 63]. Furthermore, the accurate use of the term “quyrdaq” (қуырдақ, derived from the word “қуыру” meaning “to fry”) demonstrates Korbe and Mahova’s linguistically more accurate approach to the study of Qazaq food culture, contrasting with Nygmet Sabitov and his colleagues from the Ethnography Sector of the Qazaq SSR Academy of Sciences. For instance, in the ethnography volume “Trudy instituta istorii, arkheologii i etnografii,” Veniamin Vostrov and Irina Zaharova used the spelling “қауырдақ” (qaurdaq) to describe a dish prepared by frying small pieces of meat [Vostrov 1956: 31; Zaharova 1956a: 179], which is considered an incorrect spelling in the Qazaq language. If the scholars from the Ethnography Sector had a proper understanding of

the Qazaq language and food culture, they would have regarded such typographical errors as unacceptable.

Further evidence of confusion among these ethnographers regarding the names of Qazaq dishes can be seen in their other works. For example, in his dissertation based on materials from Janibek raion of West Qazaqstan oblast, Veniamin Vostrov inconsistently referred to the traditional Qazaq dish as “bishbarmak” (бишбармак) and “besbarmak” (бесбармак). In the subsection on food culture, he inconsistently described the same dish:

*Of the festive and favorite dishes of the Qazaqs, the first place still belongs to “bishbarmak” (бишбармак), the method of preparation of which has essentially remained the same. Respected guests are always treated to “bishbarmak” (бишбармак).*

A few pages later, in a section on hospitality practices among Qazaq collective farmers of the region, he wrote:

*While “bishbarmak” (бишбармак) is being cooked, people drink tea, alternating with wine or vodka. After drinking tea, the guests entertain themselves by playing cards, playing the dombra, and singing. When “besbarmak” (бесбармак) is ready, the hostess serves it in a wooden or enamel plate (tabaq). The host takes the sheep’s head lying on top, places it on a plate, and serves it to the most respected guest [Vostrov 1953: 192, 195].*

Returning to the expeditionary fieldworks by the Qazaq Academy of Sciences, in 1951 a group of ethnographers, including Irina Zaharova, Fazyl Aronov, Rukiya Hodjaeva, and painter I. Musayev, collected data on the culture and life of Qazaq kolkhozniki in the Jambul raion of Almaty oblast. The fieldwork participants divided the tasks among themselves, with Irina Zaharova<sup>15</sup> specifically focusing on observations of food culture. In these fieldnotes, spanning 312 pages, six pages were dedicated to the food culture of Qazaq kolkhozniki, where “beshbarmak” (бешбармак) was highlighted as the most common dish. The notes describe its preparation in *jailau* (summer pasture) conditions:

*A qazan (cookware) filled with water is placed in a ground oven. A piece of meat is added to the water and boiled for a long time, simmering until soft. Meanwhile, lapsha (noodles) made from unleavened dough are prepared by flattening the dough with a rolling pin and cutting it into large pieces. Once the meat is ready, it is removed, and the noodles are added to the broth. The noodles are then taken out with a kepsler and placed on a plate (usually a flat, enameled, or aluminum plate). The meat is cut into pieces and added to the noodles, and everyone eats with their hands. During or after the meal, shurpa (шурпа) is served in small bowls.<sup>16</sup>*

However, it is important to note several errors in this description: Irina Zaharova uses “shurpa” (шурпа), whereas in Qazaq, the correct word is “sorpa” (сорпа). Additionally, what she refers to as “lapsha” (noodles) is typically called “jaima” or “kamyр” in Qazaq. These inaccuracies suggest that her fieldnotes were influenced by a lack of proficiency in the Qazaq language. Nonetheless, in another publication on the material culture of Qazaq collective farmers, based on the same fieldwork “beshbarmak” (бешбармак) was corrected to “besbarmak” (бесбармак). She nearly repeats verbatim the description of preparing “beshbarmak” (бешбармак) on the *jailau* in Jambul Raion, this time using more correct spelling in Qazaq, “besbarmak”:

*It is typical for Qazaqs to prepare “besbarmak” with the addition of noodles. In the past, this dish was made with only meat. The meat is boiled in salted water in a qazan until tender, then removed. Noodles, usually cut into diamond or square shapes, are added to the broth. The cooked noodles are laid out on a flat dish using an iron skimmer (kepsler), and pieces of meat are placed on top before serving [Zaharova 1956a: 178].*

<sup>15</sup> Notably, the following year, Zaharova defended her dissertation on the material culture of the USSR Uyghurs [Zaharova 1952: 356].

<sup>16</sup> Ğylym Ordasy archive, h. 11, r. 1, f. 82a, fol. 211, 216.

Based on these observations, it can be inferred that in the early years of the Ethnography Sector, some Russian-speaking ethnographers of the Academy of Sciences of the Qazaq SSR occasionally used the term “beshbarmak” (бешбармак) when describing a traditional Qazaq dish. However, it should be noted that these were isolated instances of misspelling, as the same authors later consistently used what was accepted at the time as the correct spelling, “besbarmak” (бесбармак), in subsequent publications, especially when describing the traditional practice of serving the sheep’s head. This shift likely reflects an understanding that the term “beshbarmak” does not exist in the Qazaq language (“five” is “bes” – бес, not “besh” – беш).

This explanation can account for the presence of “beshbarmak” (бешбармак) in the aforementioned Nygmet Sabitov’s report article, as well as in the reports on the results of the expeditionary fieldwork conducted by the Ethnography Sector in the Merke raion of Jambyl oblast in 1952 [Sabitov 1953: 198].<sup>17</sup> It is noteworthy that this particular fieldwork involved only three participants: the head of the Ethnography Department, Nygmet Sabitov, research fellow Irina Zaharova, and painter-photographer N.Tretyakov [Sabitov 1953: 196].

In 1953, according to the annual work plan, the Ethnography Department conducted expeditionary fieldwork in the Kegen and Enbekshi-Qazaq raions of Almaty oblast. The stated purpose of these expeditions was to collect additional data for the study on *Kulturu i byt kolkhoznikov-kazakhov Yugo-Vostochnogo Kazakhstana* (Culture and Life of Qazaq Collective Farmers in South-Eastern Qazaqstan). A group of three people was assigned to the Kegen raion: Nygmet Sabitov, Irina Zaharova, and painter I.Maslov. However, Sabitov had to return at the beginning of this expeditionary fieldwork due to deteriorating health, leaving Zaharova to continue the fieldwork on her own. During the data collection process, they followed the program approved by the Academic Council of the Institute of History, Archaeology, and Ethnography of the Qazaq SSR Academy of Sciences. However, it seems that Irina Zaharova did not focus on gathering information about food culture:

*In 1947 and 1949, there were expeditionary fieldworks by the Institute of Ethnography of the Qazaq SSR Academy of Sciences in Kegen raion, and some of their data, namely all fieldnotes on food, clothing, and other aspects, were provided by E.I. Mahova for our work. Therefore, we focused our time on collecting materials for other tasks.*<sup>18</sup>

Meanwhile, in Enbekshi-Qazaq raion, junior research fellow Gabit Valikhanov worked independently. In the report, he provided general descriptions of food culture without mentioning specific dish names:

*The food of a Qazaq kolkhoznik consists of meat, dairy, flour, and vegetables. On holidays, honey appears on the table. A well-off, hearty meal is now accessible to former poor Qazaqs, who previously had not eaten meat for months, rarely tasted sugar, and considered bread a rare delicacy. This change reflects the significant improvement in their well-being.*<sup>19</sup>

<sup>17</sup> Here, arguments may arise regarding Nygmet Sabitov’s knowledge of the Qazaq language. Although educated in a Russian environment and raised among Qazaq community in Astrakhan, Sabitov was certainly familiar with Qazaq culture and spoke Qazaq. He also wrote a dissertation on the topic “Qazaq tilindegi arab jäne parsı sözderi” (Arabic and Persian words in the Qazaq language) [Shashaev and Begmanova 2020: 6, 23, 193]. However, he was a candidate of philological sciences, not an ethnographer. Additionally, his experience as a military censor in Moscow (in the military censorship department of the Council of People’s Commissars of the USSR for the protection of military secrets in the press) is noteworthy. Furthermore, the period of publication of these works was also challenging for him in terms of health. The Qazaq SSR Academy of Sciences’s correspondence from that time frequently mentions instances where Sabitov, due to health reasons, had to return from expeditions or postpone the planned deadlines for submitting work. Considering all these factors, we can assume that when compiling the texts of reports where “beshbarmak” was mentioned, he relied on the expertise of his colleagues — ethnographers, most of whom were either writing or had already defended their candidate dissertations at the Institute of Ethnography of the Academy of Sciences of the USSR. Therefore, it is quite possible that he included ready-made texts provided by colleagues from the Ethnography Sector (later Department) of the Qazaq SSR Academy of Sciences, who participated in these expeditionary fieldworks.

<sup>18</sup> Gylym Ordasy archive, h. 11, r. 1, f. 106, fol. 1, 3, 8, 25.

<sup>19</sup> Ibid., f. 106a, fol. 1, 3, 8, 19, 25.

However, in his dissertation on the modern life of Qazaq collective farm auyls, based on materials from Enbekshilder raion of Kokchetau oblast within the Qazaq SSR, he stated that the national dish of the Qazaqs is “besbarmak” (бесбармак) [Valikhanov 1952: 206–207].

Thus, it can be said that the expeditionary fieldworks conducted in the first decade of the Ethnography Sector’s existence, excluding the fieldwork from 1946, were focused on collecting ethnographic data to study the collective farm culture of the Qazaqs. During this period, ethnographers aimed to trace the processes of transformation in the traditional way of life and demonstrate the progression of the cultural revolution in Qazaqstan. Based on the ethnographic data gathered from these fieldworks, various scholarly papers and dissertations were produced. In these publications, the traditional dish of the Qazaqs was referred to as a five-finger dish “besbarmak.” However, despite these works being produced by members of the same institutional structure – the Ethnography Sector of the Qazaq Academy of Sciences – the dish’s name was variably spelled as “bishbarmak” (бишбармак), “beshbarmak” (бешбармак), or “besbarmak” (бесбармак).

This variation suggests an initial lack of understanding of the Qazaq language, primarily influenced by written sources from the colonial period, which commonly referred to the traditional Qazaq dish as “bishbarmak” (бишбармак). As ethnographic knowledge about the Qazaqs expanded through these expeditions, researchers increasingly recognized this as a misconception. This evolving understanding was reflected in subsequent publications, where researchers began to differentiate between “besbarmak” (бесбармак) and “et” (ет), acknowledging the latter as a distinct national or traditional dish of the Qazaqs. For example, an evolution in the understanding of Qazaq traditional dishes can be observed in the works of Veniamin Vostrov and Irina Zaharova from the late 1950s and early 1960s. Initially, they referred to “besbarmak” (sometimes “bishbarmak” or “beshbarmak”) in their descriptions of “et.” However, in the section *Kazaxu* (the Qazaqs) of the second volume of *Narody Sredney Azii i Kazakhstana*, “et” and “besbarmak” are presented as two distinct dishes. The authors wrote:

*Boiled meat (et) without seasonings has long been a delicacy for the Qazaqs. Later, at the end of the 19<sup>th</sup> – beginning of the 20<sup>th</sup> century, pieces of rolled-out dough began to be added to this meat. To prepare another dish – besbarmak – they boil mutton in a qazan, then, after removing it, add pieces or strips of thinly rolled-out dough into the qazan. From the lungs, liver, and heart of slaughtered animals, they prepare a roast (qurdaq) in mutton fat [Vostrov and Zaharova 1963: 6, 427–428].*

It is important to note that *Narody Sredney Azii i Kazakhstana*, prepared by the Institute of Ethnography of the USSR Academy of Sciences in collaboration with ethnographers from the Academies of Sciences of the Union Republics of Central Asia and Qazaqstan, was a comprehensive review of the history, culture, and art of the peoples inhabiting these republics before the colonial and during the Soviet periods. It was the first fundamental work to provide material on the key issues for understanding Qazaq culture in a historical aspect and was considered by Soviet academia to have great practical significance. The section *Kazaxu* (The Qazaqs) provided an extensive review of the history, culture, and art of the Qazaq people both before the October Revolution and during the era of socialism [Aleksandrov 1963: 188; Valitova 1964: 135, 140; Zaharova and Hodjaeva 1960: 182].

Afterwards, as a result of the Soviet agenda, the revision of existing understandings and interpretations of some aspects of the history and culture of the Qazaqs by ethnographers of the Qazaq SSR the Academy of Sciences received further impetus. After decades of research by Soviet ethnographers, which primarily focused on tracking the progress of kolkhozization / sovietization, the limitations of this approach became apparent. The resulting publications were recognized as having certain shortcomings, largely due to an overly one-sided approach to studying the culture and way of life of the people. As stated in an official course:



*Unfortunately, a number of shortcomings were revealed in these publications and works, largely due to an overly one-sided approach to studying the culture and way of life of the people.*

Furthermore, it was noted that the descriptions often overshadowed research due to the authors' insufficiently deep study of pre-revolutionary culture. As a result, the authors failed to adequately address the task of demonstrating the processes of forming the modern culture and way of life of the Qazaq people [Zaharova and Hodjaeva 1960: 180].

In response, a comprehensive study of traditional Qazaq culture was established as one of the most important tasks for ethnographers in Qazaqstan during the years 1955–1959. The goal was to lay the foundation for addressing historical problems closely related to ethnography, such as the history, culture, and art of the Qazaqs. It was asserted that only through such research could there be a genuine, correct, and profound study of the patterns of transformation in everyday life and culture during the era of socialism and the transition to communism [Vasil'eva and Jdanko 1954: 143]. Consequently, due to the emergence of significant errors and shortcomings in the works of some historians, particularly in assessing individual historical facts, events, and entire periods of historical development, as well as the disagreements on solving important historical problems, it was decided to develop a historical and ethnographic atlas of Central Asia. The Atlas was intended to assist in resolving a number of historical problems, which had been hindered by the insufficient study of factual material, especially in the areas of ethnic history and cultural history of the peoples of Central Asia and Qazaqstan. As the materials for the Atlas were prepared, the most significant gaps, resulting from the uneven study of Central Asia and Qazaqstan, were to be identified. In other words, the Atlas aimed to be a major comprehensive work, reflecting the history and culture of the peoples of Central Asia and Qazaqstan from ancient times to the October Revolution, as well as Soviet modernity [Jdanko 1955: 23, 24; Jdanko 1961: 4].

### **1955–1980. The historical and ethnographic Atlas of Central Asia and Qazaqstan**

Since 1955, the primary focus of the Ethnography Department of the Qazaq SSR Academy of Sciences has been on the new project of compiling the *Historical and Ethnographic Atlas of Central Asia and Qazaqstan* in accordance with the Program developed by the USSR Academy of Sciences.<sup>20</sup> In parallel with the accumulation of material for the main sections of the Atlas, and based on these materials, ethnographers of the Academy of Sciences of the Qazaq SSR worked on a variety of other topics. While the Atlas project was the main priority, the Ethnography Department's thematic plan included projects that addressed interconnected areas. For instance, the study of the transformation of everyday life based on communist principles, ethnic aspects of the culture of the peoples of Qazaqstan in the contemporary period, and internationalization processes. Thus, the staff of the Ethnography Department of the Qazaq SSR Academy of Sciences, within the framework of the general Soviet ethnography course, was actively engaged in research related to the history of socialist and communist construction in the USSR.

Starting in 1955, the ethnographic fieldwork conducted by the Qazaq SSR Academy of Sciences was aligned with the program developed by the ethnographers of the USSR Academy of Sciences, as part of the Atlas preparation plan [Jdanko and Shaniyazov 1975: 6]. From 1955 to 1959, materials were collected across 11 oblasts of the Qazaq SSR. The first expeditionary fieldwork in this series took place in 1955, covering Qaragandy and Semey oblasts. The team included Veniamin Vostrov, a research fellow at the Institute, postgraduate student Hael Arginbaev, two museum employees, and a painter. Given the brief duration of the fieldwork (60 days) and the large area covered, they focused on the Ayagoz and Shubartau raions in Semey oblast, and Qarqara and Chetsk raions in Qaragandy oblast [Zaharova and Hodjaeva 1960: 180; Zaharova

<sup>20</sup> The program, which included specific instructions and recommendations for the fieldwork related to the historical-ethnographic atlas, was published by the Institute of Ethnography of the USSR Academy of Sciences as a manuscript in the form of a separate brochure [Jdanko 1961: 94].

1959: 3]. In 1956, the fieldwork plan included expeditions to the southern part of Qostanai oblast (Amangeldi and Jangildin raions) and two raions in Aqtobe oblast (Temir and Yirgyz raions). Both the 1955 and 1956 expeditionary fieldworks were led by senior fellow Veniamin Vostrov, with the topics distributed among the team members. Vostrov focused on food culture in 1955, while junior fellow Gabit Valikhanov took over this aspect in 1956. Based on their field notes, Irina Zaharova compiled a summary report on the results, noting:

*To a significant extent, the seasonal nature of nutrition has been preserved to the present day due to the predominant role of livestock farming. The stability of national traditions and tastes, linked to specific economic characteristics, is reflected in the population's food culture. An interesting observation is that Russian dishes have not significantly spread among the Qazaqs in this area, with the exception of sour bread, which appeared in the post-war years and is undoubtedly associated with Russian influence.<sup>21</sup>*

During this period, Haleb Argınbaev combined this expeditionary fieldwork with writing his dissertation. In 1955–1956, he conducted solo fieldwork, revisiting Semey oblast (Ayagoz, Shubartau, Jana-Semey, and Jarminsky raions) and exploring the Ulan and Tarbagatai raions of East Qazaqstan oblast. According to his field notes, among the Cossacks of East Qazaqstan, it was customary to prepare the Qazaq dish “et” when hosting Qazaq guests:

*The Yirtysh Cossacks willingly drank qymyz from neighboring Qazaqs and ate meat, “et.” They did not cook this dish at home except on special occasions when wealthy Cossacks invited their tamyr (Qazaq friends) and treated them in the qazaq way, slaughtering sheep and serving the meat according to all qazaq customs [Argınbaev 1962: 166].*

In 1957, further expeditionary fieldworks were organized in three oblasts of the Qazaq SSR to collect materials for the historical and ethnographic Atlas, focusing on economy, material culture, and tribal mapping. Fieldwork materials were conducted in Qzyltu and Enbekshilder raions of Kokshetau oblast; Baranqyl and Qorgaljy raions of Aqmola oblast; and Shevchenko and Mangistau raions of Guryev oblast.<sup>22</sup> The main objective was to identify specific aspects of the material culture of the Qazaqs in these regions, with a focus on pre-revolutionary elements. Reports from these fieldworks included observations on national food culture, particularly the use of various wild herbs, though detailed field notes on this aspect were not found in the archival records.

In 1958, expeditionary fieldwork was conducted in the Qzyl-Orda and South Qazaqstan oblasts, followed by fieldwork in East Qazaqstan, Jambyl, and Qzyl-Orda oblasts in 1959 [Zaharova and Hodjaeva 1960: 181; Argınbaev and Zaharova 1961: 92].

Starting in 1959, the seven-year plan of the USSR Academy of Sciences introduced an additional focus for ethnographic studies in the Qazaq SSR. The agenda included studying interconnected topics such as “sblizheniya narodov” (cultural rapprochement among Soviet peoples) and the development of Virgin lands. According to this plan, expeditionary fieldworks began to examine the changes in social, everyday, and cultural structures as part of the transition from socialism to communism in the USSR. These studies targeted not only the rural population in kolkhozy (collective farms) but also those in sovkhozy (state farms) and industrial workers. The areas for expeditionary fieldwork were selected to reflect diverse geographical, economic, and ethnic conditions, allowing for the observation of changes in everyday life and culture.

The group responsible for studying Qazaqstan within this broader expedition, led by Tatyana Stanyukovich. This group focused primarily on the Russian population brought to Qazaqstan through the Virgin Land campaign, as well as on ethnic processes. According to their report, representatives of more than 28 nationalities lived in the sovkhozy at that time, with Russians, Ukrainians, and Qazaqs being the most numerous. The report noted:

<sup>21</sup> Ğylym Ordasy archive, h. 11, r. 1, f. 134, fol. 1, 2, 17, 18, 29–30.

<sup>22</sup> Ğylym Ordasy archive, h. 11, r. 1, f. 160, fol. 1, 4, 5, 8, 12–14.

*In terms of language, a mixed Russian-Ukrainian dialect was spoken in all old-type sovkhosy, and Qazaqs also spoke this dialect. Russian old-timers had a good command of the Qazaq language. In the modern life of the peoples of the USSR, many national or local features are preserved, especially in material culture (architecture, interior decoration of homes, clothing, food) [Terentyeva 1960: 153–157; Kashuba 1967: 127].*

In the first half of the 1960s, the Ethnography Department of the Institute of History, Archaeology, and Ethnography of the Qazaq SSR Academy of Sciences worked on two major projects. The first was the historical and ethnographic atlas of the peoples of Central Asia and Qazaqstan, led by Alkei Margulan, with team members Halel Argınbaev, Veniamin Vostrov, Edige Masanov, Rukiya Hodjaeva, and Marat Mukanov. The team conducted systematic expeditions to collect materials and produce interim works. For example, the Turgai fieldwork in 1963, led by Edige Masanov, contributed to this project. Rukiya Hodjaeva and Irina Zaharova co-authored the monograph *Kazakhskaya natsionalnaya odezhda* (Qazaq National Clothes), which served as a subsection of the Atlas.

The second project focused on the culture and everyday life of Qazaq kolkhoz auyls. This study aimed to examine the significant changes in Qazaq life during the Soviet years. Two kolkhozy of Almaty oblast were chosen for this study: the one named after the XXII Party Congress of the CPSU and the Jetisu in Taldyqrgan Production Department, with fieldwork conducted in 1960–61. The report from 1963 noted that Halel Argınbaev collected materials on the public economy of these kolkhozy, while Rukiya Hodjaeva gathered information on clothing and food.<sup>23</sup> The culmination of this project was the book *Kultura i byt kazahskogo kolkhoznogo aula* (Culture and Life of the Qazaq Collective Farm Auyl) and various interim articles.

In the published works resulting from both projects, the national dish of the Qazaqs is identified as “et.” The general description is as follows:

*In the past, “et” was the only dish prepared for special occasions. Traditionally, it involved boiling meat without seasonings. With agricultural development, thinly rolled unleavened dough, cut into large pieces and boiled in broth, was added. In addition to “et,” the Qazaqs also prepare a dish called “quyrdaq,” which consists of liver, lungs, and lean meat fried in mutton fat, sometimes with the addition of potatoes.<sup>24</sup>*

Work on the Atlas continued into the 1980s, with nearly all staff of the Ethnography Department involved in its preparation. The collection of ethnographic materials on the Qazaq people during the pre-revolutionary period and the Soviet era was enriched by ongoing works. For instance, in 1969, expeditionary fieldworks were organized to Qostanai and Qaragandy oblasts, followed by surveys in Qyzylorda (1971) and Aqtobe (1972) oblasts in the early 1970s.<sup>25</sup>

Although work on the *Historical and Ethnographic Atlas of Central Asia and Qazaqstan* was not completed, several collections and collective monographs were published based on materials collected in the results of this project.<sup>26</sup> These publications detailed various aspects of the history of animal husbandry and agriculture in Qazaqstan, providing ethnographic descriptions of these economic activities, as well as the beliefs and rituals associated with them [Tishkov 2013: 45]. Nevertheless, studies on the culture and history of Qazaq food received limited attention. The focus was primarily on the transformation of individual elements of the traditional material

<sup>23</sup> Ğylym Ordasy archive, h. 11, r. 1, f. 307, fol. 1, 4, 6–8; Kalysh and Kondratyev 1990: 37.

<sup>24</sup> Ğylym Ordasy archive, h. 11, r. 3, f. 356, fol. 113; Margulan and Vostrov 1967: 133–134; Argınbaev 1963: 27; Vostrov and Kauanova 1972: 228.

<sup>25</sup> Ğylym Ordasy archive, h. 11, r. 1, f. 537, fol. 2, 6, 7.

<sup>26</sup> Notable examples include “Hozyaystvo kazahov na rubezhe XIX–XX vekov” (1980), “Hozyaystvenno-kulturnyye traditsii narodov Sredney Azii i Kazahstana” (1975), “Kostyum narodov Sredney Azii,” “Traditsionnaya odezhda narodov Sredney Azii i Kazahstana,” “Zhilishche narodov Sredney Azii i Kazahstana,” “Kochevoye zhilishche narodov Sredney Azii i Kazahstana.”

culture of the Qazaqs, including food, during the years of socialist construction. While the changes in the diet of the Qazaq population during this period were detailed, specific aspects of traditional food practices were not thoroughly explored. Notably, the literature on dairy foods among the Qazaqs was relatively well-developed [Hodjaeva 1980: 115–127].

In a dissertation from 1987, dedicated to the study of traditional Qazaq food and recognized as the only work on this topic written during the Soviet period, it is noted that there was no special, comprehensive study on this subject in the existing literature. The author of this dissertation, Nurilya Shahanova, states that an analysis of the literature from the Soviet period on Qazaq ethnography reveals the presence of various materials on the traditional food of the Qazaqs. However, because this topic was not the focus of a specialized, independent study, it did not receive sufficiently comprehensive coverage. There is significantly less material on meat-based foods, with the ethnographic aspects of cooking and eating being insufficiently covered [Shahanova 1987: 6, 26].

Furthermore, Nurilya Shahanova made an effort to clarify the distinctions between “et” and “beshbarmak,” as well as “quyrdaq,” indicating these as separate dishes in the traditional Qazaq food system:

*The main method of cooking meat among Qazaqs is boiling, which is considered more prestigious than frying. There is a proverb: Et жемесек те, қуырдақ жегендей болдық (even though we haven't eaten Et, it felt like we had Quyrdaq), highlighting the higher status of boiled meat (Et). Traditionally, Et is prepared without any additives, a method still practiced among Qazaqs in the Southern Altai and northeast Qazaqstan. However, as early as the 18<sup>th</sup> century, a dish called Besbarmak – boiled meat with thinly rolled, large pieces of unleavened dough – was recorded and remains a central part of any meal. After Besbarmak, hot broth (sorpa) is always served.*

*Quyrdaq, the main fried dish among Qazaqs, consists of finely chopped organ meats (lungs, liver) with pieces of meat fried in animal fat. It is not considered an independent dish of a prestigious meal but is served as an additional dish. Quyrdaq is typically prepared on the day of slaughter immediately after the carcass is butchered and is served to the participants and family members [Shahanova 1987: 45].*

Although Nurilya Shahanova did not explicitly aim to resolve whether the terms “et” and “besbarmak” are interchangeable for the traditional Qazaq dish, her dissertation presents a somewhat confusing perspective that is difficult to interpret. On one hand, she does not claim that the traditional Qazaq dish known as “et” began to be called *Besbarmak* since the 18<sup>th</sup> century. However, she notes that no meal can pass without this dish in modern times, emphasizing its functional significance as “et.” On the other hand, she highlights that according to available data, the term “besbarmak,” referring to a dish of boiled meat and dough, has been recorded in sources since the 18<sup>th</sup> century, without suggesting that it represents a new recipe emerging from changes in Qazaq lifestyles. Furthermore, Nurilya Shahanova does not specify the exact sources where this 18<sup>th</sup> century dish of boiled meat with thinly rolled, cut pieces of unleavened dough is documented. It is generally accepted that the name “besbarmak,” or rather “bishbarmak” (биш-бармак), appeared in sources from the colonial period, initially describing a dish consisting only of meat. It was not until the 20<sup>th</sup> century that some sources began describing “besbarmak” as consisting of meat with dough, and even then, in limited quantities.<sup>27</sup>

Despite the ambiguity in Shahanova’s explanation, it is clear that she aligned with the consensus of Soviet-era Qazaqstani ethnographers, who identified “et,” “besbarmak,” and “quyrdaq” as three distinct dishes. This distinction is reinforced in her later work, where, in a section on the dictionary of terms, she clearly differentiates “besbarmak” and “et” as two separate dishes, without suggesting they could be interchangeable names for the same dish [Shahanova 1998: 170].

<sup>27</sup> See Appendix 1

## Beshbarmak as a unifying cultural element in the context of the Virgin Lands Campaign and Socialist Internationalism

Despite the decision by Qazaq SSR ethnographers to use “et” to describe the national dish, the term “beshbarmak” continued to be used at the Union level. This term frequently appeared in studies on ethnic ethnography and propaganda publications.<sup>28</sup> In particular, academic works from the late Soviet period that focused on the Virgin Lands campaign and interethnic relations often cited “beshbarmak” as a symbol of the friendship developing among different ethnic groups in the Qazaq SSR. The dish was frequently associated with progress, as exemplified by statements like, “Besbarmak is a dish made from horse meat, enjoyed by all Virgin Lands conquerors” [Fazilov 1965: 13; Danenova 2001: 95]. When discussing the processes of ethno-consolidation, beshbarmak was often highlighted as a Qazaq national dish. The practice of its consumption by other ethnic groups was presented as a symbol of the internationalization of food culture. Ethnographic studies noted that while certain ethnic features persisted in the food culture of national groups, these features became pan-regional in an international environment. The public catering system played a significant role in the internationalization of food habits, with dishes like Qazaq *beshbarmak*, Central Asian *pilaf* and *manti*, Tatar *belyashi*, Russian *shchi*, and Ukrainian *borsch* becoming staples for Qazaqstani Soviet workers of various nationalities.

In studies on specific ethnic groups, the names of the dishes varied. For instance,

*for the Russians of the Qazaq SSR, among the cuisines of other nationalities, myaso po kazahski (beshbarmak) and manti, along with Siberian pelmeni, are favorites. In turn, the Tatars, from the cuisines of other peoples, prepare myaso po kazahski (beshbarmak), Qazaq soup – koje, Central Asian pilaf and manti, Siberian pelmeni, Russian shchi, Ukrainian borsch, roast, etc. [Reshetov 1980: 77; Kauanova 1982: 145–147].*

*Among the Koreans of Qazaqstan and Central Asia, communication with neighboring peoples was reflected in the spread of dishes such as Ukrainian borsch, myaso po kazahski (beshbarmak), Central Asian pilaf and manti, etc. [Tsoy 1985: 87; Kim 1989: 41; Jarylgasinoва 1992: 81].*

*The processes of interethnic integration among Soviet Germans were primarily manifested in the area of food culture. Thus, in Qazaqstan, for example, in addition to their traditional dishes, the Germans prepare beshbarmak, dungan-style noodles, pilaf, manti, vareniki, pelmeni, and borsch [Naumova 1986: 97; Filimonova 1989: 19].*

*Among the Uzbeks and Qazaqs of Southern Qazaqstan, characteristic dishes have been preserved and are perceived by them as national (plov among the Uzbeks, beshbarmak among the Qazaqs). However, profound changes have also taken place. As a result of long-standing contacts between neighbors, traditional dishes of one people are now widely used by the other [Jilina 1989: 202].*

*At present, due to the similarity of economic activities and the strengthening of ethnocultural contacts in everyday life, there is a convergence of the food systems of the ethnic groups living together. Consequently, the variety of food available has significantly increased among the Qazaqs. Everywhere, the Qazaqs cook borsch, manti, plov, roast with potatoes, etc. These dishes are prepared both daily and on holidays. In turn, traditional Qazaq dishes are included in the menus of other ethnic groups, such as myaso po kazahski (beshbarmak) [Kalysh 1989: 58; Naumova and Cheshko 1989: 58; Naumova 1991: 98].*

The pervasive references to “beshbarmak” as a beloved Qazaq dish in these publications were not merely factual but served a specific agenda of Soviet propaganda. At the Union level, “beshbarmak” was established as a distinguished representative of Qazaq culinary culture, as seen in prominent works by Soviet scholars [Stanyukovich 1975: 248; Arutyunov 1981: 136;

<sup>28</sup> There are numerous Soviet propaganda publications that present the widespread appreciation of the Qazaq national dish, beshbarmak, among various ethnic groups in the Qazaq SSR as evidence of the successful Sovietization process. For references, see: [Zelinskiy 1957: 97; Sarsenbayev 1965: 197; Suleymenov 1976: 60; Kuznetsova 2008: 225], among others.



Bromley 1977: 255]. The ideological context of these references was clear: the popularity of the “Qazaq national dish beshbarmak” among various ethnic groups was portrayed as a testament to the successful Soviet policy of mutual cultural enrichment and the strengthening of international unity.

This portrayal led to a reluctance among scholars of the Qazaq SSR Academy of Sciences to challenge the “beshbarmak,” despite their established preference for the word “et.” Any attempt to clarify or oppose the use of “beshbarmak” carried the risk of being labeled as displaying remnants of Qazaq nationalism, which could be interpreted as a form of national egoism. In the context of Soviet political censorship, especially post–1956, nationalism was viewed as a hindrance to the cooperation of peoples and the construction of communism [Goryayeva 2000: 392, 487; Shatayev 1977: 112; Junusov 1971: 64; Suleymenov 1976: 45]. As such, opposing the established narrative could have been perceived as a contradiction to socialist interests, a situation that qazaq scholars likely sought to avoid. Thus, the consistent promotion of “beshbarmak” as a symbol of interethnic unity was aligned with the broader goals of Soviet propaganda to suppress national distinctions in favor of a unified Soviet identity.

## Conclusion

In conclusion, the production of ethnographic knowledge about Qazaq culture during the Soviet period was an intricate process deeply intertwined with the broader Soviet ideological agenda. From the initial stages of work plans to the programs of expeditionary fieldworks conducted by the Ethnography Department of the Qazaq SSR Academy of Sciences, all scholarly activities were centrally guided by the Institute of Ethnography of the USSR Academy of Sciences. This centralized control meant that the ethnographic knowledge on Qazaq culture was strongly influenced by the interconnected scholarly and political contexts.

From its inception, Qazaq Soviet ethnographic scholarship was constrained by the ideological limitations imposed by the Soviet regime. The prioritization of certain topics within Qazaq ethnographic scholarship led to a one-sided collection of data. For instance, during the first decade of its activities, the Department of Ethnography focused exclusively on studying the kolkhozization process, which was perceived as the primary indicator of cultural transformation in Qazaq auyls. This emphasis reflects the notion of “ethnographers as agents of power,” as ethnographers were more engaged in producing reports that aligned with Soviet cultural narratives rather than genuinely studying the Qazaq people. A striking example from ethnographic reports of the time includes statements such as: “Russian dishes have almost not become widespread in the diet of the Qazaqs,” and “In any Qazaq auyl, everyone includes vegetables in their diet, which is a sign of the variety of consumed products that shows the cultural growth of kolkhoz masses.”

The period from the late 1950s to the 1980s is considered the most significant for Qazaq Soviet ethnographic scholarship. During this time, foundational studies based on the first decade’s expeditionary works were published, marking the first major ethnographic contributions from the Qazaq SSR academia. This era coincides with the official recognition of the limitations of previous approaches and the initiation of a new course in Soviet ethnography regarding the region. It became widely acknowledged that to study the process of Sovietization among the Qazaqs, it was necessary to understand their pre-Soviet culture and way of life for comparative analysis. This realization led to the commencement of a large-scale project, “The historical and ethnographic Atlas of Central Asia and Qazaqstan,” which became a cornerstone for subsequent Qazaq ethnographic research. Despite the extensive work on the Atlas and other projects, the topic of Qazaq food culture did not receive the attention it deserved. While other aspects of material culture, such as national clothing and traditional housing, were explored in dissertations and monographs, food culture was often overlooked. As a result, information about Qazaq food culture was often presented in a superficial manner, particularly when influenced by Soviet

propaganda. Moreover, the colonial period's Russian-language sources and the biased approaches instilled through central training further hindered the re-examination of erroneous conclusions. A vivid example of this is the misrepresentation of a dish's name considered significant in Qazaq tradition, known as "et" among the Qazaq-speaking population. Its designation varied across publications of the Ethnography Department written in Russian during the early years of its existence. Despite these academic works being produced by members of the same institutional structure, this dish's name was variably spelled as "bishbarmak," "beshbarmak," "besbarmak," or "et." Over time, these inconsistencies were gradually addressed as Qazaq SSR ethnographers, with a deeper understanding of Qazaq culture, increasingly recognized "et" as the appropriate term for this dish in both Qazaq and Russian.

However, the widespread use of the term "beshbarmak," inaccurately defined in terms of both Qazaq language and cultural significance, became deeply ingrained at the Union level as a Qazaq national dish. This widespread use of the term "beshbarmak" was driven by the agenda of socialist internationalization, which limited Qazaq SSR ethnographers' ability to correct these inaccuracies in subsequent discourse. Therefore, the case of the naming of this traditional Qazaq dish serves as a poignant example of how the ethnographic knowledge on Qazaq culture produced by Qazaq Soviet academic inquiry was intricately tied to cultural representations shaped by broader Soviet ideological goals.

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**Appendix 1:** List of references to the dish eaten with the hands using five fingers and their descriptions in pre-Soviet and Soviet period sources<sup>29</sup>

| № | The description of the dish   |
|---|---|
| 1 | Besbarmak (бесбармак) is a dish made from boiled meat [Bardanes 2007:186]. The source dates to the mid-1770s.   |
| 2 | Bisbarmak (бисбармак), made from lamb that is completely overcooked and cut into tiny pieces [Gaverdovskiy 2007:186]. The source dates to the early 19 <sup>th</sup> century.   |
| 3 | Bish-barmak (биш-бармак, meaning "five fingers"), a dish made from lamb meat boiled in salted water [Levshin 1820: 153].  |
| 4 | Bis-barmak (бис-бармак), a "five-fingered" dish made from finely chopped meat, which is then washed down with broth, сорпа [Bolshoi 1822: 51].  |
| 5 | Bishbarmak (бишбармак) is prepared from finely chopped meat mixed with pieces of meat fat. The name of the dish accurately reflects its traditional method of consumption, which involves eating it with one's five fingers [Levshin, 1832: 39].                    |
| 6 | Bishbarmak (бишбармак), finely chopped boiled meat covered with melted mutton fat [Neizvestnyy 1840: 234]   |
| 7 | Bish-barmak (биш-бармак) is made from lamb meat, finely chopped and mixed with pieces of fat. The name means "five fingers," as it is traditionally eaten with the fingers [Grachev 1859: 51].  |
| 8 | Besbarmak (бесбармак, literally "five fingers"), lamb cut into pieces and covered with gravy, is the most common dish eaten with the hands, without the use of a spoon or fork [Zalesskiy 1991:32]. The source was originally published in the mid-1860s in French. |
| 9 | Beshbarmak (or bishbarmak) is referred to as a "five-fingered dish" made of boiled and chopped meat, usually lamb, with the addition of flour, grain [Dal 1863: 75].  |

<sup>29</sup> This appendix provides a list of the most frequently cited sources that refer to the dish known by various names such as bisbarmak, bishbarmak, beshbarmak, besbarmek, etc., in both pre-Soviet and Soviet periods. While this list does not claim to be exhaustive, it includes the most commonly referenced sources in studies that identify beshbarmak as a Qazaq dish.

|    |  |
|----|--|
| 10 | Bishbarmak (бишбармак) is a more festive dish made from pieces of meat fried in fat [Meyyer 1865: 249].  |
| 11 | Bishbarmak (бишбармак) is a dish consisting of finely chopped boiled meat mixed with fat. The name “bish-barmak” means “five fingers” [Kazancev 1867: 38].   |
| 12 | Bishbarmak or kuurdak (бишбармак или куурдак), finely chopped beef fried in fat [Krasovskii 1868: 39].   |
| 13 | Bish-barmak (биш-бармак), small pieces of meat fried in fat, the name means “five fingers” [Kostenko 1870: 40].  |
| 14 | Bish-barmak or kuurdak (биш-бармак или куурдак) – a dish where meat, fat, liver, and kidneys are finely chopped and fried in a small pot [P. 1878: 63].  |
| 15 | Bish-barmak (биш-бармак: pieces of beef mixed with fat [Narody Rossii 1879: 9].  |
| 16 | Kavardak (кавардак) is a dish made from small pieces of fried meat from various parts of the animal, including kidneys, which is very popular. When the host places this dish directly into a guest’s mouth as a gesture of hospitality, it is called <i>bish-barmak</i> (биш-бармак, meaning “five fingers”) [Zeland 1885:18].  |
| 17 | Bish barmak (биш бармак), a dish described by virtually all travelers [Krasnov 1887: 18].  |
| 18 | Bishbarmak (бишбармак) is made from finely chopped horse meat or other meats [Starikov 1890: 137].   |
| 19 | Bish-barmak (биш-бармак) is a dish consisting of finely chopped beef and salt [Chudinov 1894: 159].  |
| 20 | Besbarmak (бесбармак) is a dish of boiled mutton. The name means “five fingers,” as it is traditionally eaten with the hands [Kustanayev 1894: 19].  |
| 21 | Bishbarmak (бишбармак) is boiled mutton served with noodles [Dmitriev 1901: 21].   |
| 22 | Bish-barmak (биш-бармак) – lamb meat, cut into small pieces and fried in fat. The name “bish-barmak” means “five fingers” [Golovachev 1902: 94].   |
| 23 | Kaurdak consists of pieces of fried meat from various parts of the animal, with kidneys being especially prized for their taste. As a gesture of special attention and courtesy to a guest, the host personally places pieces of kaurdak into the guest’s mouth. This act is referred to as “bish-barmak” (“five fingers”) [Sedelnikov 1903: 212].   |
| 24 | “Kaurdak” (or kavardak), which consists of small pieces of meat from various parts of the animal, fried in fat, with kidneys being especially prized for their taste. According to a Qazaq custom, as a sign of special attention to a guest, the host places pieces of kaurdak directly into the guest’s mouth with his hand. This gesture is known as “bish-barmak,” meaning “five fingers” [Ryazanov 1925: 10]. |
| 25 | Beshbarmak (бешбармак) is boiled meat served with dough [Ėlym Ordasy archive, fond 11, opis 1, delo 82a, page 211]. Field notes from an ethnographic expedition to the collective farms of the Jambul raion of Almaty oblast, 1951.  |
| 26 | Bes-barmak (бес-бармак) is boiled mutton, which, unlike in regions with developed grain farming, is prepared here solely from meat, without the addition of dough [Korbe and Mahova 1952: 51].   |
| 27 | Bes-barmak (бес-бармак) is boiled mutton [Valikhanov 1952: 206].   |
| 28 | Besbarmak (бесбармак) is meat, well boiled in a cauldron along with fat, traditionally eaten directly with the hands and washed down with meat broth (sorpa). With the introduction of flour, pieces of rolled dough (nkal) began to be boiled together with the meat [Vostrov 1956: 31].  |
| 29 | Besbarmak (бесбармак) is now made with the addition of noodles. In the past, this dish was prepared using only meat, well boiled in a qazan [Zaharova, Irina. 1956a: 178].   |
| 30 | Besbarmak (бесбармак) – mutton is boiled in a qazan (cauldron), and after it is removed, pieces or strips of thinly rolled dough are added to the qazan [Vostrov and Zaharova 1963: 427].  |

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