

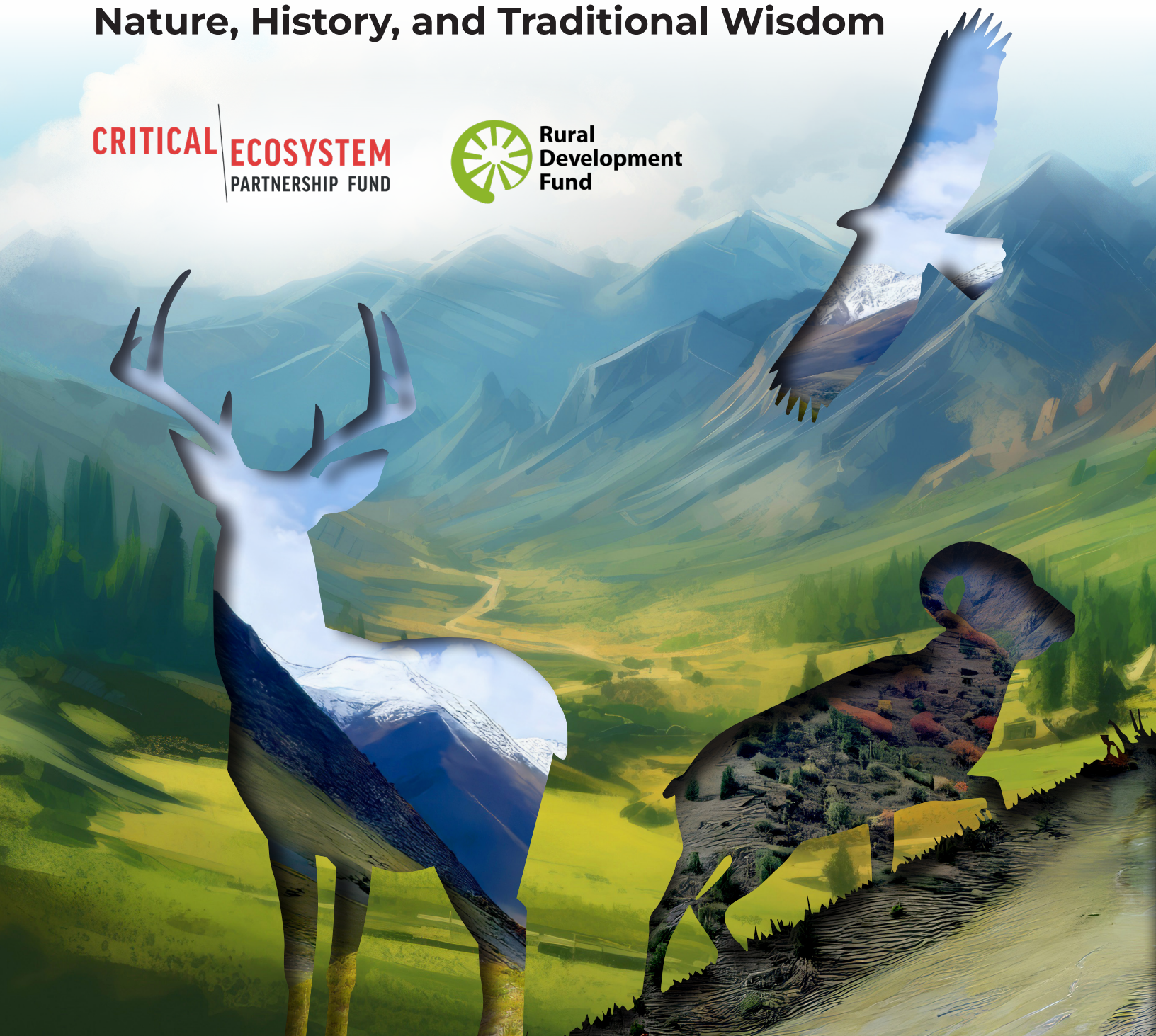
Unlocking Chychkan's Mysteries:

Nature, History, and Traditional Wisdom

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U-58 Unlocking Chychkan's Mysteries: Nature, History, and Traditional Wisdom.

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Chychkan Gorge, located in Kyrgyzstan, represents a unique area that plays a crucial role in preserving biodiversity and natural resources. It also serves as a foundation for scientific research, contributing to a deep understanding and assessment of biodiversity in the region. It is based on these criteria that Chychkan Gorge has been selected as a Key Biodiversity Area (KBA).

This book is a valuable study of the rich traditional ecological knowledge accumulated by local communities and respondents who also share stories and legends about Chychkan Gorge.

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CONTENTS

Introduction	5
Localization of Chychkan Gorge and Historical-Cultural Past	6
The Basin during the Dominance of the Russian Empire.....	10
History of Ketmen-Tyube	13
The Valley of Kings	13
Economic Activities of Contemporary Residents	13
About the Nature and Toponym Chychkan	14
The history of Chychkan Gorge	18
Tribal Composition	19
Tale of the Kachkanak Clan	22
Legends and Sacred Places	24
Legend of "Sary-Kyr"	25
We Must Preserve Nature	26
Conclusion	26



Introduction

Kyrgyzstan is a mountainous country with a total area of 199.9 thousand km². Ninety percent of the country's territory is located at an altitude of over 1500 meters above sea level, and about 40 percent of the country's land is unsuitable for human habitation, as it consists of glaciers, perpetual snow, rocks, landslides, and high-altitude deserts. However, mountain systems and various climatic zones create favorable conditions for the formation of ecosystems and biodiversity. Over an area of more than 100 thousand km², diverse natural communities are represented, including walnut, juniper, fir, deciduous forests, shrubs, high-mountain, mid-mountain, low-mountain meadows, steppes, and deserts, as well as water-marshy areas. Desert ecosystems, steppes, deciduous and coniferous forests, alpine meadows coexist within a few kilometers. All these conditions contribute to the high concentration of species diversity in Kyrgyzstan.

In total, Kyrgyzstan has 20 classes of ecosystems and 160 types of mountain and plain landscapes, inhabited by several tens of thousands of species of living organisms. The republic is home to about 2% of the world's flora species and more than 3% of the world's fauna species, indicating a high representation of flora and fauna in relation to the global level. For example, out of 22 plant kingdom divisions (including fungi), the country represents 77.2 percent of the global level, and out of 24 animal kingdom types, 41.7 percent are represented.¹

The Chychkan Gorge is designated as a Key Biodiversity Area (KBA) with potential actions for the protection and study of threatened and endemic species, involvement of local users of natural resources, and enhancement of the potential for more effective KBA functioning. This territory is part of the Western Tien Shan corridor with a total area of 34,300 km².

Being one of the picturesque gorges in the mountainous country, Chychkan is a favorite recreation spot for many people. During the warm season, people specifically come here for rest and health improvement. As our interviewee, 75-year-old Batyrkan uulu Tilek, mentioned, people come to Chychkan Gorge even from other countries, such as Uzbekistan, often bringing cauldrons, samovars, and other equipment with them. The gorge regularly hosts various cultural, educational, and sports events. As an example, seminars on agriculture and the Kyrgyz hunting dog breed, Taigan, are frequently organized.

Before the construction of the Bishkek-Osh road, the residents of the Ketmen-Tyube and Talas valleys used the Bala-Chychkan trail for travel. With the introduction of the highway, the traffic through the gorge sharply increased, leading to a significant impact on the ecology of this beautiful scenic area in our mountainous country.

¹ «Vegetation and Animal Communities of Kyrgyzstan. 2017. E.D. Shukurov, R.N. Ionov, L.P. Lebedeva, A.A. Zhusupbaeva.»

Localization of Chychkan Gorge and Historical-Cultural Past

The gorge is part of the Ketmen-Tyube basin, located northeast of the Fergana Valley and bordered by the Central Tien Shan regions. Ketmen-Tyube is surrounded by high mountain ridges, serving as natural boundaries in the basin of the middle reaches of the Naryn River and its right and left tributaries: Uzun-Ahmat, Chichkan, Torken, Toluk, Nichke, and others. Ketmen-Tyube presents an extremely picturesque landscape, where dead salt marshes alternate with blooming fields, and pine-covered gorges coexist with semi-desert plains. The region is enclosed by high ridges, with passes blocked by snowdrifts.²

The territory of the basin is depicted on a map created in Jungaria by the captured Swede Renat in 1733: it marks the camps and nomadic settlements of the Kyrgyz, against whom the Jungars carried out a devastating invasion in 1732.

Respondent Rakhatbek Mateev considers his homeland a special place. In the era of the Saka people, he says, Ketmen-Tyube was rightfully called the Valley of Kings, and according to one legend, there was a large lake here in ancient times.

The valley is home to numerous ancient, medieval, and modern monuments, the study of which has been carried out by scientists for many years. Since 1946, when the prominent archaeologist and historian A.N. Bernshtam visited Ketmen-Tyube, the exploration of the valley's history began. Archaeological expeditions under the leadership of I. Kozhombirdiyev played a significant role in this. Respondent T. Madylbay, the author-compiler of the Ketmen-Tyube encyclopedia, told us that archaeological expeditions began working here in 1958. He notes that the local population's culture has distinctive features from both the south and north of the republic, as the basin is surrounded by mountains, reflecting the influence of both regions.

In the early 1970s, field research was conducted here by a group of ethnographers led by T.J. Bayalieva. Scholars point out the richness of the basin with contemporaneous monuments of material culture, allowing the tracing of almost continuous connections between the ancient population of Ketmen-Tyube (from the Bronze Age to almost the late Middle Ages) and the inhabitants of surrounding territories, particularly the cultural influences from Middle and Central Asia, Kazakhstan and, to a certain degree of Eastern Europe regions.³ Stone tools have been discovered on the terraces of the Chychkan River, indicating that people from the Stone Age left their traces here. During archaeological research conducted in the Ketmen-Tyube basin, artifacts dating back to the Bronze Age, the Saka and Usun periods, the Great Migration of Peoples, as well as the Turkic and later periods of the valley's historical and cultural past have been found.

2 Ploskih V. Foreword // Ketmen-Tyube: Archaeology, History (Ed. V.M. Ploskih, D.F. Vinnik). - Frunze, 1977. P. 5.»

3 Yunusaliyev M.B. Paleolithic Surveys in the Ketmen-Tyube Basin // Ketmen-Tyube: Archaeology, History (Ed. V.M. Ploskih, D.F. Vinnik). - Frunze, 1977. P. 24.







The Basin during the Dominance of the Russian Empire

During Kyrgyzstan's inclusion in the Russian Empire, the territory of Ketmen-Tyube initially constituted a separate volost (administrative district) with the same name and was part of the Tokmak, and later transformed Pishpek district. From 1884, the territory was assigned to the Namangan district of the Fergana region by the decision of the Turkestan Governorate. Soon, the Ketmen-Tyube volost was divided into the Suusamyr and Kenkol-Karagyr volosts as administrative units of the Andijan district. After the suppression of the Andijan uprising in 1898, the «restless» Suusamyr volost was transferred from the Andijan district to the Namangan district on January 1, 1899. In April 1899, the Fergana military governor found it «useful» to further divide the Suusamyr volost for the «strengthening and facilitation of supervision» over its population, creating a new one — Arym volost, with the Chychkan River as its boundary.⁴ During the reign of Tsarist Russia, as part of the Stolypin agrarian reform, the best lands of the Ketmen-Tyube basin were taken for the colonization fund. The local population led a nomadic way of life for many centuries. They were engaged in livestock farming as the main economic activity, but agriculture was not foreign to them either. Arym, Chychkan, Iyri-Suu, Ortok-Too are the best pastures in the basin, where nomadic herders drove their herds along migratory routes. Part of the vast Suusamyr Valley was used as summer pastures. Here, they set up their camps alongside Kyrgyz people from the Talas and Chui valleys. They also had close economic and cultural ties with the Kazakhs who migrated here for the summer. The Ketmen-Tyube Kyrgyz had their own arable land where they cultivated grains such as wheat and millet, as evidenced by sources from the colonial period. In the second half of the 19th to the early 20th centuries, Kyrgyz from the Arym and Suusamyr volosts sold livestock at markets in the Andijan district and the Syr-Darya region, exchanging them for other food products, artisanal goods, and factory-made products.

The Ketmen-Tyube Basin during Soviet times

In the 1920s and 1930s, the residents of Ketmen-Tyube became witnesses, and some individuals became direct participants, in various conflicts between the Basmachi movement and Soviet authorities, followed by the establishment of collective farms. Certain households in the depression were subjected to eviction beyond the region and even the republic as part of the mass elimination of the kulak class. In 1924, by the decision of the Fergana Regional Committee of the Communist Party of Turkestan and the Regional Executive Committee, excess land owned by Russian kulaks in resettlement villages of Ketmen-Tyube and adjacent areas was confiscated. As a result of land reform for the common use of the Kyrgyz population, 500 desyatins of land in Ketmen-Tyube were transferred.⁵ By 1934, agricultural artels predominated here compared to joint land cultivation cooperatives. Over time, cooperative-type collective farms were organized, uniting more members.

In the late 1926, the territory of the enlarged Ketmen-Tyube volost became part of the Jalal-Abad canton, which in 1928 was transformed into a separate district. Its administrative center became the village of Akchiy. In 1931, the district had 16 village councils, with the district center in the village of Mustor. In 1936, the Ketmen-Tyube district was divided into two districts: 1) Ketmen-Tyube with the center in the village of Mustor (including settlements along the right bank of the Naryn River); 2) Uch-Terek with the center in the village of Uch-Terek, including settlements on the left bank of the Naryn River. In 1939, with the abolition of district divisions in the republic, the Ketmen-Tyube and Uch-Terek districts became part of the newly formed Jalal-Abad region. In 1940, the Ketmen-Tyube district was renamed Toktogul in honor of the prominent Kyrgyz akyn, and in 1956, the territory of the Uch-Terek district was annexed to it. In 1957, by the decree of the Presidium of the Supreme Soviet of the republic, the village of Mustor was renamed into the urban-type settlement Toktogul.

4 Galitsky V.Ya., Ploskih V.M., Antipina K.I. Historical Sketch of Ketmen-Tyube XIX – Early XX Century // Ketmen-Tyube: Archaeology, History (Ed. V.M. Ploskih, D.F. Vinnik). - Frunze, 1977. P. 170.

5 Galitsky V.Ya., Bayalieva T.D., Ploskikh V.M. Brief Historical and Economic Overview of the Toktogul District (1917-1975) // Culture and Lifestyle of the Ketmen-Tyube Kyrgyz (Ed. T.D. Bayalieva). - Frunze, 1979. P.8.



With the abolishment of the Jalal-Abad region in 1959, the Toktogul district became part of the Osh region, where it remained until 1980. In the following years, the Toktogul district was part of the Talas region (1980-1988), Osh region (1988-1990). Since 1990, it has been one of the districts in the newly created Jalal-Abad region.

With the establishment of Soviet power, along with the traditional nomadic clans (ails) among the Kyrgyz, permanent settlements called "kyshtaks" appeared. In terms of size, these were small villages with 20-30 households each. Some examples of such settlements include Balykty, Kutchu-Su, Mazar-Suu, Segem, Terek, Tatly, and Zhergetal.⁶ Over time, they expanded through the construction of housing and facilities for social and cultural purposes. Other villages were founded and developed as well. Larger settlements such as Kayyrma, Ketmen-Tyube, and Akchiy, along with the old Toktogul and Uch-Terek, fell within the flooding zone during the construction of the Toktogul Hydroelectric Power Plant.

The construction of the Toktogul hydroelectric complex had a significant impact on the further development of the region's economy. During this period, certain crops, like cotton, were excluded from cultivation in the northern areas, leading to an increase in the cultivation of grains, strengthening the feed base for livestock and resulting in a change in its structure (reducing the number of horses and increasing the number of fine-wooled and semi-fine-wooled sheep). The resettlement of agricultural centers of collective farms, state farms, and rural settlements from the flooding zone, as well as land reclamation, irrigation, and construction works in new locations and foothills, strongly influenced the change in the farming system.⁷

However, the construction of the hydroelectric complex also had negative consequences. 33,000 hectares of land were taken out of agricultural circulation, with 23,000 hectares of farmland, forests, and suburban plots remaining underwater, along with 22 populated areas.⁸

During the Soviet era, Ketmen-Tyube was among the major regions for nomadic-pastoral livestock farming. People were also involved in agriculture. In 1932, the region had 17,500 hectares of irrigated land and 5,300 hectares of arable land. In 1938, the depression saw the cultivation of wheat, oats, millet, maize, as well as vegetables and melons. Cotton cultivation became a leading industry in those years, despite unfavorable soil and climatic conditions. Later, in some parts of the depression, tobacco cultivation began. However, the primary income for the economy still came from animal husbandry, especially sheep farming.⁹ To improve the maintenance of public livestock, achieve good production results, and enhance conditions, livestock complexes, roads, and electrical lines were constructed.

6 Alymbaeva B. Settlements and Dwellings of the Ketmen-Tyube Kyrgyz // Culture and Lifestyle of the Ketmen-Tyube Kyrgyz (Ed. T.D. Bayalieva). - Frunze, 1979. P.69.

7 Galitsky V.Ya., Bayalieva T.D., Ploskikh V.M. Brief Historical and Economic Overview of the Toktogul District (1917-1975) // Culture and Lifestyle of the Ketmen-Tyube Kyrgyz (Ed. T.D. Bayalieva). - Frunze, 1979. P.21.

8 Galitsky V.Ya., Bayalieva T.D., Ploskikh V.M. Brief Historical and Economic Overview of the Toktogul District (1917-1975) // Culture and Lifestyle of the Ketmen-Tyube Kyrgyz (Ed. T.D. Bayalieva). - Frunze, 1979. P.21.

9 History of Ketmen-Tyube

History of Ketmen-Tyube

In the area of the present Toktogul district, there once existed a large city where khans and rulers lived. After many centuries, the city declined and transformed into a vast open field, leaving nothing of its former prosperity.

No one knows how much time passed until these lands were covered by a blue lake. According to local elders, this place is mentioned in the epic “Manas” as the “It ichpestin kölü” (the lake from which even a dog does not drink water). Residents believe the water was unsuitable for drinking due to its high salt content. This version is supported by the visible white salt traces on the rocks in the Toktogul district, and in some places, salt mines are still preserved.

According to legends, a mighty hero lived in these parts, unmatched by anyone. He was so enormous that when he ate, he could consume the food from 40 cauldrons and still not be satisfied. One day, during heavy rainfall causing the Naryn River to rise, he took a massive ketmen (hoe) and started damming the river. Thanks to the hero, the valley was saved from flooding, and a lake and a bridge appeared where he worked. People say that after this event, the valley was named Ketmen-Tyube (ketmen - hoe, tyube (dube) - hill).

The Valley of Kings

Archaeological excavations suggest that a city existed in the valley, and the Saka people lived there. The Saka were one of the ancient peoples inhabiting Central Asia, referred to as Scythians in Persian history. In the third century BCE, the Saka lived in the territory of present-day Kyrgyzstan and neighboring regions, and some modern tribes are said to be descendants of the Saka.

Historians claim that underwater in this area, there are houses with more than 10 rooms, and the walls have openings through which heat was conducted. It is believed that the Saka were adept at heating technology in those times. The valley of Ketmen-Tyube was called the Valley of Kings because it was believed that Saka kings lived here.

Economic Activities of Contemporary Residents

Presently, the Toktogul district, which houses the city of energy specialists, Kara-Kul, and the administrative center Toktogul, with the status of a city, is home to approximately 100,000 people. In terms of administrative divisions, residents of the Chychkan Gorge fall under the rural administrations of Torken, Zhanzhol, Sovet, and Toluk. Local residents are primarily engaged in animal husbandry, focusing on sheep, horses, and cattle. Feed for these animals is harvested in small quantities. Farmers grow alfalfa, corn, with wheat occupying minimal areas.

During the summer, a significant portion of the local population engages in collecting wild raspberries for personal use and sale. Respondent Ilyatbu Satarova mentions that many families not only earn well from raspberry picking but also from currants, barberries, and sea buckthorn. Beekeeping is well-developed, and Toktogul honey is known beyond the region.

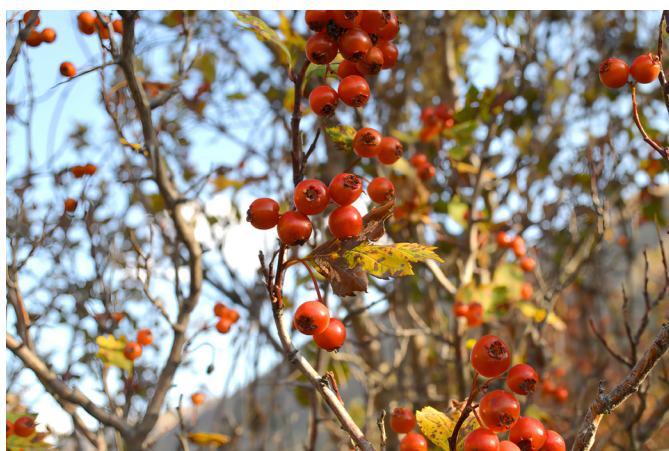
Servicing tourists from neighboring republics and distant countries has become another lucrative economic activity in recent years. While there was only one base, “Ak Ilbirs,” in Chychkan in the past, now there are increasing numbers of guesthouses catering to French, Arab, American, and visitors from other parts of the world.

About the Nature and Toponym Chychkan

The rocky Chychkan gorge is divided into two equal parts by the river of the same name, flowing from north to south. It is challenging to convey in words the beauty of the pristine nature of this area. Dozens of species of forest and shrub plants can be observed here. The southern slopes are predominantly covered with spruces and shrubs. Juniper (archa) grows on all mountain slopes. Along the riverbanks, one can find trees and shrubs such as spruce, fir, birch, tall herb, wild currant, barberry, and berry bushes like blackberry, strawberry, and raspberry. Arch (juniper) forests form the basis of the forest massif, with two types of juniper: Turkestan juniper and zharym shar symal archa (half-spherical juniper).

The length of Chychkan is approximately 50-55 km. Stations for studying hydrometeorology and landslides are located here. The Chychkan River originates from small springs on the Tush Pass, situated on the southern side of the Talas Alatau. It flows through the territories of the Talas and Toktogul districts, eventually joining the Toktogul Reservoir. The length of the river is 78 km¹⁰¹¹

The Knorrings Hawthorn (*Crataegus knorringae*) is found in the Chychkan Gorge in Kyrgyzstan. This species of hawthorn is a part of the rich flora of the region and plays a crucial role in the ecosystem of the Chychkan Gorge. Its beautiful flowers and fruits attract various species of birds and insects, making it a significant component of the local biodiversity. Knorrings Hawthorn may also hold cultural and traditional significance for the local residents and be utilized for medicinal purposes or as an ornamental plant.



One of the important natural resources in the Chychkan Gorge is marble. It is known that government buildings in Bishkek, including the Government House, are adorned with Chychkan marble, also known as Arymskaya ore.

In Chychkan, in the Shamshykal area, there are salt deposits. Mountain rivers in Chychkan used to be inhabited by fish such as mountain osman and marinka. However, according to our sources, they are now almost nonexistent due to the introduction of the Sevan trout, a predatory fish.

As part of the project, we tried to gather as many field materials as possible related to the Chychkan Gorge. We were particularly interested in understanding the meaning of the gorge's name. A resident of Aral Toktor village (born in 1949) explains that there used to be a dense forest in this place. "When we were young, we reached these places, spending the night on the road three times. Since the paths were as winding as mouse burrows, the area got the name Chychkan," he says.

The gorge is divided into two parts - Chong-Chychkan and Bala-Chychkan. The swift river Itagar splits, with one part flowing towards Talas and the other towards Chychkan. According to local residents, the river was named Itagar after a dog couldn't cross it and was carried away by the current.

In the Chychkan Gorge, there are sacred places such as Shamshy, Cholpon-Ata, Kara-Ata, and the mazar Tuu-Archa.

10. Madylbai T. Encyclopaedia of Ketmen Tyube, Bishkek, 2002. C. 211 – 213.

This area is also considered a mazar, and according to legend, there was once a battle. The remains of fallen warriors were buried here, and a flag (tuu) was raised.

According to the respondent Kanibek Toktonazarov, whose father worked as a forester, during the Great Patriotic War, they conducted logging in the area, and the logs were floated down the river to Tash-Kumyr. The forestry was established in 1947, covering an area of 72,000 hectares. The total area of the forestry now is 104,000 hectares. In 1973, to preserve and increase the population of endangered wild animals listed in the Red Book, the Chychkan State Hunting Reserve was organized here, covering an area of 36,000 hectares.¹²



12. Madylbai T. Encyclpodia of Ketmen Tyube, Bishk.ek, 2002. C. 212.





The history of Chychkan Gorge

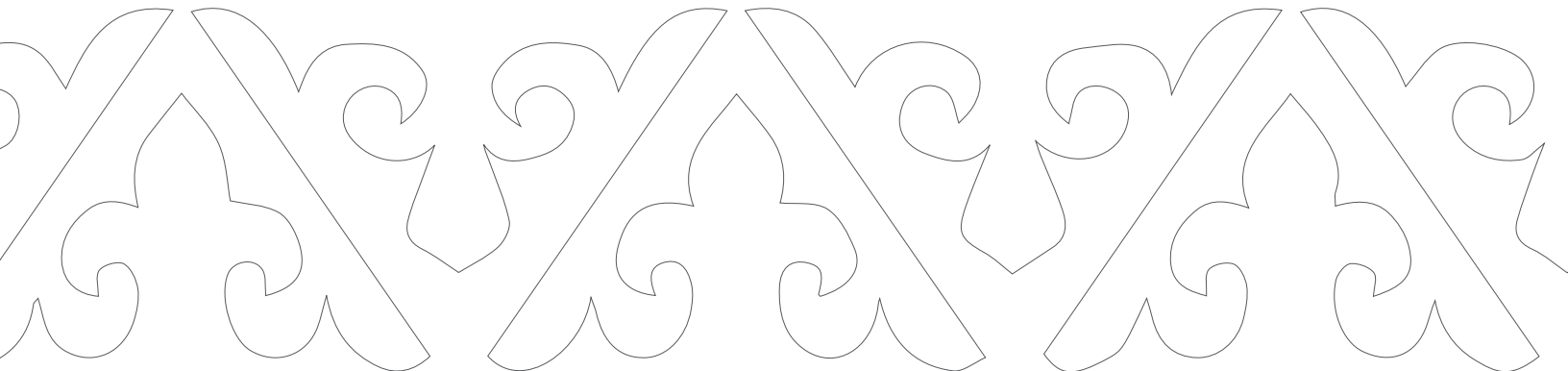
Chychkan Gorge is one of the most beautiful and picturesque places in Kyrgyzstan. Its natural world is extraordinarily diverse, featuring a magnificent waterfall, pristine mountain streams, rich flora and fauna, ranging from barberry and hawthorn to Tien Shan spruces, and inhabited by brown bears, deer, mountain goats, foxes, and various bird species.

According to the tales of the local inhabitants, in ancient times, a dense jungle-like forest grew in the gorge, so thick that not even a small mouse could crawl through it (“Chychkan ötö albagan chitirman toqoy”). Hence, the name “Chychkan” (mouse) originated from this.

Another legend suggests that the name came from the Chychka River. The river was named so because small streams flowed down from the mountain peaks, resembling mice running down the slopes.

“Chychkan” refers to a turbulent river that flows into the Toktogul Reservoir.

According to a third version explaining the origin of the gorge’s name, there are many field mice in this area. There are so many of them that one might accidentally step on them, and thus the area was named Chychkan.





Tribal Composition

In this area, representatives of the Zhediger, Kytai, Saruu, Sarybagysh, Töböy, Azyk, Sarttar, Sayak, and Kalmak tribes reside. According to one respondent, almost 98% of the population of the Ketmen-Tyube Valley are Kyrgyz people, of which 80% belong to the Sayak tribe. In the villages of Bala-Chychkan, Aral, and Kara-Suu, a significant portion of the population consists of representatives of the Kytai and Sarybagysh tribes. Another interviewee mentioned that some Kyrgyz tribes, originally inhabiting the northern part of the republic, remained in the Ketmen-Tyube depression when they returned to their ancestral lands from the south, where they had been forced to migrate under the pressure of the Jungars. In addition to those mentioned above, he also named representatives of the Bagysh, Mogol tribes living in the valley.

Respondent Turusbek Madylbay states that they belong to the Tynkatar tribe of the Sayak people. Among them, representatives of the Týntoy and Shykmatat clans are also settled.

One of our respondents, Rakhatbek Mateev, shared the following genealogical legend. When the Kalmyks invaded our lands, they also took beautiful girls and young women with them. Among such captives was a woman whom the warrior who took her away handed over to his older brother. By that time, she was pregnant. As the child grew up, during games and fights, other children often humiliated him, saying that he was not a Kalmyk but a Kyrgyz. In a conversation with his son, the mother confirms that his father is Kyrgyz, and his relatives live in Zhungal. She advises him to leave for the homeland as soon as possible, or else he will be killed. During a ten-day Kalmyk holiday, the teenager, along with his friend, sets out on a journey. For some time, they live in Talas, later arriving in Zhungal through Ketmen-Tyube. However, his relatives do not accept him, and the boys return to Ketmen-Tyube.

Respondent Toktor reminds that in the past, according to folk tradition, a younger brother could marry the widow of an older brother. Apparently, such a younger brother did not turn out to be suitable for married life, which led our grandmother to reject him. Two of her boys die, and she, with a baby named Kalygul, remains to live with her relatives (torkun) in Chychkan. "Kalygul had seven sons and one daughter, and our family originates from Kalygul," says Toktor.





Tale of the Kachkanak Clan

The Ketmen-Tyubin Valley, located in the Toktogul district, is rich in legends and sagas about clans (tribes). Various clans such as Saya, Solto, Kanteish, Bagysh, Ak-Kochkor, Kanki, Sary-bagysh, Kyta, Saruu, Kushchu, Shykमत, Tuntoy, Sokuchu inhabit this territory.

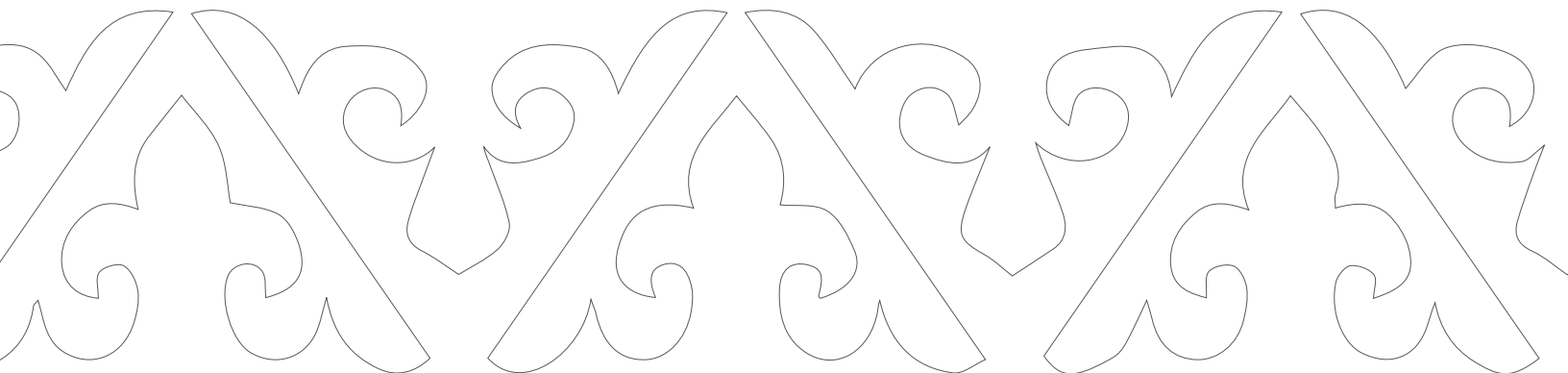
Among the inhabitants of the valley are also descendants of the Kachkanak clan, which originated from the Saya tribe. According to legend, in the Ketmen-Tyubin Valley, there once ruled a wise man named Kachkanak.

One day, a sage approached him and said, "You are a good ruler; your sons will be strong and great. You must marry." However, by that time, he already had a wife and a son named Moldo.

Kachkanak went to visit his friend in Andijan, Mamet Biy, and told him about the encounter with the sage. In response, Mamet Biy promised to find a noble bride for his friend from the families of wise men and leaders.

Kachkanak stayed in the Andijan Valley. While riding with his warriors one day, he met the daughter of a poor old man who was tending to her three sheep. He fell in love with her at first sight.

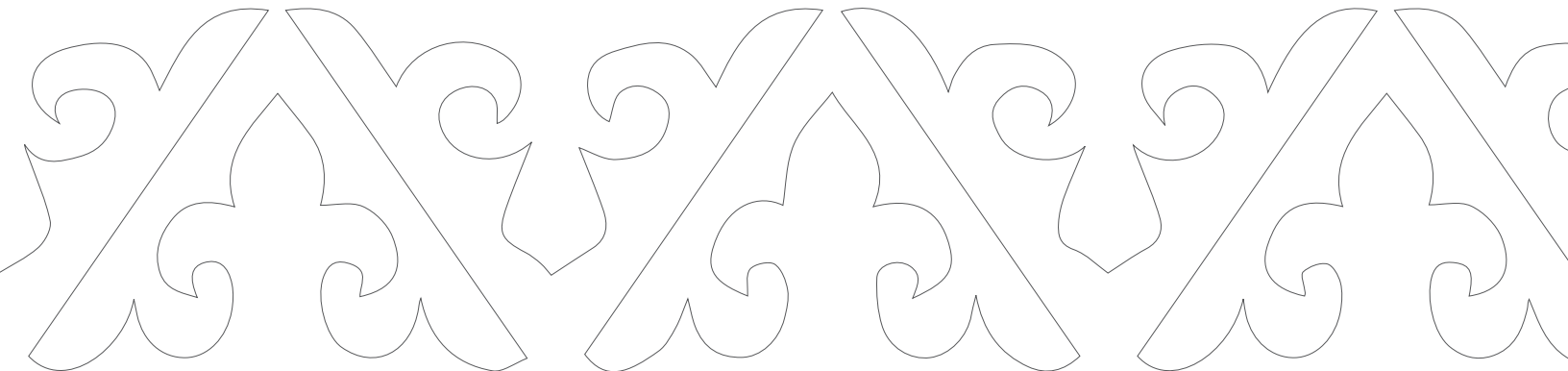
He went to Mamet Biy, told him about the encounter, and announced that he had decided to



marry the poor man's daughter, a common girl named Zuura. Mamet Biy was surprised by this choice but understood that matters of the heart cannot be dictated. They went to the poor man's house to ask for his daughter's hand in marriage. The old man agreed but requested, as dowry, three cows, three horses, three sheep, and three goats. Mamet Biy sent the old man nine of each type of animal, married his friend, and accompanied him and his new wife to Ketmen-Tobo.

Meanwhile, Kachkanak's first wife, Saada, had a prophetic dream. In the dream, she saw four birds come to their house, take Kachkanak, and place him by the lake. Seeking an explanation, she consulted the elders, who told her that Kachkanak had married again, and they would have four children. Angered by this, Saada sent messengers to Kachkanak, instructing him to stay with his second wife and live by the lake.

So, Kachkanak and his second wife settled by the lake, and as predicted, they had four sons: Arzymat, Asan, Kokumbay, and Zhoruktu. About them, Zuura sang, "Arzymat is the head, Asan is the feet, Kokumbay is the chest, Zhoruktu is the back." Indeed, among the descendants of Arzymat, many became administrators and military leaders, the Asan lineage was known for skilled agriculture, the Kokumbay descendants were hunters, and the Zhoruktu descendants were warriors.



Legends and Sacred Places

Turatbek Madylbai notes that the natural monument Salpy-Ata visually resembles a horseman. According to legend, Salpy-Ata was a seer who knew the day of his death. Sensing that death was near, he took his three sons - Jumaken, Shamsyken, Chatyken - and set out on a journey. The purpose of the trip was to distribute land among them to avoid conflicts and disputes in the future.

Father and sons traveled along the Naryn River. When they saw a beautiful valley, the father said to the eldest son, "Juma kal" (Stay, Juma), which is how the name Jumgal originated. When they reached the next beautiful place, the father instructed the second son, Shamsy, to stay. Then, the father continued the journey with the youngest son, ordering him to stay in another location, which later became known as Chatkal. The father passed away on the way, and this place came to be called Salpy-Ata.

According to another legend, in the current Toktogul Basin, there lived a giant who wanted to divert the river's flow using a large k tmen. This resulted in the formation of a hill, giving rise to the name Ketmen-Tyube.

Respondent Toktor recounts that in the Chychkan Gorge, there is a tall rock called Zhanibek. It is said that no one has climbed to its summit. According to local legends, in ancient times, a hero named Zhanibek took his bride to this rock and lived there.

There are also intriguing tales about the existence of the Mykaachy area near the Ala-Bel Pass. According to folklore, bloodthirsty people lived in underground dwellings here and engaged in robbing passing merchants.

Our interviewees also spoke of the presence of sacred places where people make pilgrimages, seeking healing from various illnesses and relief from life's problems. Kasym Oskonbaev includes Shamshykal-Ata, Cholpon-Ata, Karakash-Ata, Salpy-Ata, Kambar-Ata, and Too-Archu among such sacred places. In Shamshykal-Ata, for instance, there is a spring whose water is believed to cure skin diseases like eczema. People with mental disorders are brought here, and some of them reportedly feel significantly better after a few days of stay.

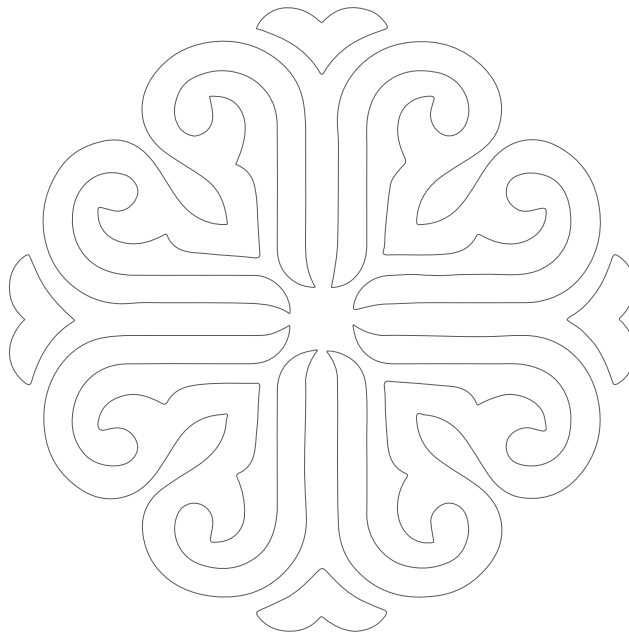
In Shamshykal, mosques have been built, and people come here to read the Quran and perform prayer rituals, known as t loo. Many pilgrims also perform sacrifices here, often slaughtering a goat or a kid. Childless individuals visit the mazar (sacred place) Korghol-Ata in Uzunakmate; they usually spend the night there, praying for the fulfillment of their wishes.



Legend of “Sary-Kyr”

In the Chychkan Gorge, there is an area called Sary-Kyr, where a cave is located. According to legend, a long time ago, there lived a poor hunter in this region. He was in love with a girl, the daughter of a biy – an influential and wealthy man. One day, the biy decided to marry his daughter to the son of a khan, but she was against it and informed the hunter. The hunter pondered for a long time on what to do. He realized that the biy would not marry his daughter to him, as he had nothing besides his horse and bow. After consulting, they decided to escape to the mountains and live there.

Upon learning that his daughter had run away with the hunter, the biy sent his men after them with orders to find and punish them. The hunter and his beloved fled through the mountains and forests, where the Chychkan Gorge is now located, and hid in a cave. No one else saw them, and nothing was heard about them afterward.



We Must Preserve Nature

The majority of our respondents are outraged by how people barbarically treat nature. They recount instances where tourists, enchanted by the beauty of nature, express regret about those who leave trash in the mountains.

Ilyatbu Satarova shares that uncontrolled hunting for pheasants and wild ungulates is taking place. "In 1986, when we came here," she says, "the land was covered with thick grass, flowers grew like a carpet. Now we don't see that anymore. Plastic bags, bottles, and dishes are scattered everywhere. Yet, our fathers and grandfathers treated nature very carefully, considering it a sacred duty."

Other interviewees also spoke about the consumerist approach to the environment, emphasizing the need to preserve the gorge in its pristine beauty with its forests, shrubs, diverse wildlife, and plants. Suyuntbek Jumaev notes that some have become wealthy, but their consciousness has not matured. The so-called hunters have multiplied. Before the construction of the road, only about ten people hunted here, but now armed individuals come here by the hundreds to exterminate wild animals.

Nevertheless, it is optimistic that almost all our interviewees understand the necessity of a careful attitude towards the environment. Their efforts aimed at developing ecological awareness among their fellow countrymen will undoubtedly yield the necessary results, and we firmly believe in this!

Conclusion

We delved into the history of the Chychkan Gorge, where the wisdom of the past and natural wealth serve as a source of inspiration and unique lessons. Truly, traditional ecological knowledge, passed down from generation to generation, holds the keys to sustainable coexistence with nature. The history and legends of Chychkan enrich our understanding of the connection between culture and the environment. The biodiversity of the gorge is a living palette of species and ecosystems that provide us with food, medicine, and many other benefits.

Preserving this wealth of nature and cultural heritage is not only our moral obligation but also a responsibility to future generations. We must cherish and pass on this legacy to young people so that they can draw inspiration from it, learn from our past, and care for nature as we do today. In this intergenerational transmission lies our hope for preserving biodiversity, rooted in history and respect for nature. This is an incredibly important investment in the sustainable future of our planet and all its inhabitants. May this book serve as a source of inspiration and understanding for all who strive for harmony between humans and nature, and who are willing to take responsibility for preserving this unique heritage for future generations.

