

SIMILARITIES AND HISTORICAL CONTINUITY IN TRADITIONAL LEATHER VESSEL PRODUCTION AMONG TURKIC PEOPLES

Meruert Amirova**, *Gulnaz Kozhakmetova*, *Zhadyra Aidarbekova

L. N. Gumilyov Eurasian National University, Astana, Kazakhstan

Akmaral Ibrayeva

National Museum of the Republic of Kazakhstan, Astana, Republic of Kazakhstan

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1. Introduction

The material culture of the Turkic peoples has long been closely linked to common practices of nomadic pastoralism. However, changes in climate and economic systems have, in many cases, distanced the common cultural affinity of these nations, while some of them, conversely, have developed economic proximity. For example, while the cultures of the sedentary Uzbek and Uyghur nations have become closer, they have distanced themselves from nomadic nations, such as the Kazakh, Kyrgyz, and Bashkir, in terms of material culture and handicrafts. The analysis of historical periods shows that Turks formed a diverse and complex culture. In this context, the stages of development and improvement of the Turkic peoples' utensils and vessels progressed at their own pace and manner in various regions. For example, while the technology for making utensils among nomadic Turks developed rapidly, among the sedentary Turks it took thousands of years; namely, the production of vessels made of leather and wood improved faster. In contrast, vessels made of ceramics and metal remained unchanged for many centuries. It is clear that the technology used for making various types of vessels was preserved and developed over a long time. The article in particular focuses on the role and place of leather vessels in the Turkic household and is considered an important factor in the formation of the Turkic worldview and identity.

2. Materials and methods

The article analyzes special literature and data regarding the leather utensils of Turkic nations, namely the Kazakhs, Kyrgyz, Bashkir and Sakha (Yakut), as well as examining exhibits from the collection of the National Museum of the Republic of Kazakhstan, specifically leather vessels of the Kazakh people. Correspondence between the materials of the museum collection and data from scientific research was analyzed, and changes in the technology of manufacturing leather vessels were examined. In addition, samples of Turkic material culture were examined and compared with the leather vessels of the Kazakh people. In the study of the types of Turkic leather utensils, historical comparative methods, ethnographic analysis, and systematization methods were used.

* Corresponding author: mamirova1403@mail.ru

3. Literature review

The study of leather vessels among Turkic peoples has been studied to varying degrees for each nation. While it has been studied more extensively among nomadic Turks, this issue has not yet been considered in the research of other Turkic peoples.

Numerous studies have been carried out on leather kitchenware used in nomadic Turkic nations such as the Kyrgyz, Bashkir and Sakha (Yakut), however, we witness an obvious lack of such works on the material of some other Turkic cultures, for instance, the Kazakh, Tatar and Turkmen. Accordingly, we have focused our research on the connections between the Kazakh, Kyrgyz, Bashkir, and Sakha (Yakut) Turks.

Nomadic animal husbandry played a major role in Kazakh lifestyle and in the economy, therefore, household items and furniture were designed to be suitable for constant migrations. In addition, the effective use of livestock products was an important factor in the livelihood system of the Kazakh people. For example, the choice of wood and leather as a material for making utensils can be explained by their availability and physical properties, such as being lightweight, water-resistant and unbreakable, which allowed them to be easily carried. The presence of leather utensils in such an economic system became a common value of nomadic culture. There are rare, special studies on the leather vessels of the Kazakh people, which cannot be compared with the number of studies on the types of ceramic vessels found in archaeological excavations and placed in museum collections. Among them, the works related to Kazakh art and crafts by A. Margulan, "Kazakh folk applied art" [1], H. Argynbayev, "Kazakh folk crafts" [2], and O. Dzhaniybekov "Zhangyryk" [3], describe the types of leather vessels, their manufacturing methods and usage. One can also find albums and studies by the master Darkembay Shokparuly on the manufacture of leather utensils [4]. The research into the types and use of Kazakh tableware and utensils is still not very common, but among others the study by M. Amirova and M. Zholdasbekov, "The History of the Study of Ceramic Vessels among the Turkic Peoples" can be mentioned [5].

Research into Kyrgyz traditional handicrafts has been more prolific. For example, K. I. Antipina's work, "Features of the Material Culture and Applied Arts of the Southern Kyrgyz", describes the technologies for making the handicrafts and utensils used by the Kyrgyz people [6]. E. I. Makhova in her research, "Material Culture of the Kyrgyz as a Source for Studying their Ethnogenesis", analyzes the ethnogenesis of the Kyrgyz people through their crafts [7]. A. S. Akmataliyev's work, "Kyrgyz Crafts", among others, describes the leather utensils of the Kyrgyz people [8]. O. E. Kapalbayev in his study, "Traditional dishes and household utensils of the Kyrgyz people", characterizes the types of utensils of the Kyrgyz people, focusing on the technology of making and using leather utensils [9]. The author also draws attention to the similarities between Kyrgyz and other Turkic nations' utensils.

Studies of Bashkir's leather vessels have not been left aside. For example, the research collection, "Handicraft: Bashkir Folk Art", analyzes the crafts of the Bashkir people and includes research on leather utensils [10]. N. S. Shitova, in her research work, "Utensils made from leather among the Bashkir," gives a description of leather vessels [11]. S. I. Rudenko presents extensive information on traditional Bashkir leather making and types of vessels in his book, "Bashkirs. Historical and ethnographic essays" [12]. The names and short description of leather vessels and their reference to Proto-Turk and Altaic eras are listed in Bagautdinova [13] and Valieva [14].

As for the leather vessels of the Siberian Turks, a research monograph titled "Food of the Yakuts before the development of agriculture (experience of a historical and ethnographic monograph)" by A. A. Savvin studies the various types of Yakut vessels [15],

while the names of Yakut leather vessels for storing *koumiss* (a traditional drink made of fermented horse milk) are discussed by E. R. Nikolaev [16].

In general, comprehensive research work on leather vessels is insufficient, an issue which can serve as a key object of study on the ethnic culture of Turkic peoples.

4. Results and discussion

4.1. The usage of leather utensils among the Kazakh

Early types of utensils can be considered one of the important parts of the material culture of the Eurasian nomadic world. For instance, the early Kazakhs made utensils mainly from leather, wood, and the bones of domestic animals, the leather vessels used, being of various shapes, capacities and purposes.

Saba

The largest of the leather vessels was a specially treated horsehide vessel for preparing *koumiss* and *shubat* (fermented camel milk), called a *saba*. In the northern regions, such a vessel to transport *koumiss* had a capacity of two buckets (appr. 20 liters) and was sewn together using the skin of a horse, or cattle in general. The width of its neck was only narrow enough for a whisk to be used to beat the liquid, and a triangular strap was attached to one side of the neck of the *saba*. A string made of thread was attached to the strap to be tied to the upper part of the *kerege* (the wall of a traditional Kazakh house made of crossed wooden planks). The *koumiss* of a well-made smoked *saba* was fragrant and very tasty.

The *saba* was made from horse and cow hides and was of different capacities depending on the needs of the users. The skins of animals slaughtered in the fall and during the slaughter period were selected for making the *saba*. After the skin was excoriated, it was scoured from the remnants of flesh, then salt was applied, and while it was still wet, it was dehaired. The hide was then stretched, and the pattern of the vessel cut out. The front, back, and bottom of the larger *sabas* were cut separately to a certain size, while the front and bottom of the smaller *sabas* were cut out together. The back was cut two spans¹ longer than the front, sharpened, and a cord attached to the end. The two sides of the *saba* were cut one span shorter than the front, and the ends rounded to a point.

When the front and back were assembled and sewn together, this pointed area formed the two ends of the *saba*. A welt was put between the faces of the *saba*, the material pressed solidly and the two sides sewn together tightly with double-stranded sinew thread. The seams were sewn from the outside with strong thread spun from camel hair; the neck was edged with a leather strip and a cord was attached to the sides to make them of equal size and easy to carry. The *sabas* were either of a pointed, rectangular shape or a pointed round shape. After sewing, the inside was filled with sand or soil, compacted, and the seams aligned to give it a beautiful shape. After it was completely dry, the sand was poured out and the *saba* was smoked. After absorbing the smoke, it was placed in a tanning solution, then washed, cleaned, and oiled to remove the smell of smoke and fire. It was thoroughly oiled both outside and inside with sheep's tail fat or horse fat and then placed in the sun for the fat to be absorbed. The *saba* was then ready for the fermentation of the *koumiss* [17]. Before using the *saba*, it was washed once more with milk. When the vessel was used for preparing the beverage, it was tied with a string, and after the process was completed, the string was loosened and the string around its neck untied. To ensure that the taste of the food inside

the *saba* was not spoiled and the *saba* did not rot, it was emptied at least once a month, the inside washed with warm water, and the vessel dried in the sun. The *saba* was widespread not only among the Kazakhs, but also among the Kyrgyz and Bashkirs.

Mes

The *mes* was a vessel made of goatskin and was used in Semirechye and western regions of Kazakhstan. It was a leather bag for pouring dairy products such as *koumiss*, *shubat*, *ayran* (fermented milk), and *irkit* (sour milk). It was often made from the skin of a goat or calf and skinned as a whole. The remnants of raw flesh and fat of the hide were carefully removed, and the fur shaved off. Then, the *mes* was smoked inside and outside, turned inside out, and the hoof part sewn together with camel wool thread. The neck of the skin became the neck of the vessel. A *mes* was not used for cooking but for transporting dairy products, as well as for carrying water in areas where water was scarce [18].

In general, the wealthy had their own *mes*, while the poor often shared it. A popular folk saying remarks: "You ask someone for a *mes*, but you don't own a sumpter to carry it" [19].

Torsyk

A *torsyk* was a kind of leather bottle made of animal skin used for pouring dairy products such as *koumiss*, *shubat*, and *irkit*. The capacity of a large *torsyk* could reach up to 10 l. There were many types of *torsyk*, such as *shimaitorsyks*, *örkeshtorsyks*, *zhantorsyks*, *muyzitorsyks*, etc. Its neck was sewn from an animal leg skin, closed with wooden stoppers, and decorated with embossed and patterned silver plates. The hide was cleaned of fat and raw flesh, the wool shaved off, and after tanning, the skin was shaped and sewn with camel wool thread. The body of a *torsyk* was round-shaped and its neck was thin and long; a wooden stopper was placed in its mouth. To prevent the stopper from getting lost, a string was passed through it and one end attached to the neck of the vessel. The most decorative of the *torsyks* were the *shimaitorsyk* and the *muyzitorsyk* which acquired their names after the traditional Kazakh ornaments; these *torsyks* were sewn from thick cattle hide.

The surface of a *muyzitorsyk* was also carved and decorated with silver fittings. Although its bottom was round, the two shoulders were shaped like a sheep's horns and decorated with a horn ornament. The use of this *torsyk* was very important during long journeys. A certain amount of the *koumiss* often remained in the *torsyk* shoulders. Firstly, it was stored as a reserve, and secondly, could be used as a fermentation agent for future *koumiss*. The only thing one needed to do was to pour fresh mare's milk into the *torsyk*, tie it to the saddle and set off on a journey. After several hours of constant shaking the milk would get fermented [19].

Another type of *torsyk* was the *örkeshtorsyk* as it was made from the skin of a camel's hump. The flat side of the skin was made into the bottom of the *torsyk* while the narrow side into its mouth. Its oval shape, therefore, resembled the shape of a hump. Since this *torsyk* was not decorated it was often filled with *ayran* or *irkit*.

Another simple type was the *zhantorsyk*, which had no external decoration. It was designed for herders and travelers to carry drinks and tie them to their saddle straps. In addition to dairy products, a *zhantorsyk* could also be used to pour drinks and soups. Compared to other types of *torsyks*, it was made of a softer hide.

A *shimaitorsyk* and a *muyzitorsyk* were also used for storing and carrying *koumiss* and were tied to a saddle. However, since these vessels were very expensive and difficult to make, they were used only during migrations or celebrations. These two types of *torsyks* were not just utensils but also considered one of the most beautiful pieces of

household items. There is a proverb that says, "If a bad horse gets fat, a torsyk would not be tied to it, and if a bad person gets a herd, he would not wish another settlement to be nearby."

Könek

A *könek* was a vessel resembling a bucket made of camel skin. Usually, it was decorated with large geometric, zoomorphic, horn, plant-like or other similar ornaments carved onto the skin surface. The skin was sewn into the necessary shape, the inside stuffed with straw, and after it dried, the straw was removed, and the item smoked in the smoke of a dung heap. A *könek* was used as a milk pail for milking mares and some types of *könek*s were also used to store the mare's milk. The reason why this mare-milking bowl was made of leather was that as the sound of the milk on the leather would be soft it would not scare the animal while it was being milked.

Suiretpe

A *suiretpe* was a vessel made of animal skin, intended for pouring dairy products. It was made of both cattle and goat skin. The rawhide and fat were removed from the skin, the hair shaved off, and it was then smoked. After the smoke had been completely absorbed, it was soaked in water and cut into a certain shape that was like a round bowl. It was sewn with a thread from the outside. Sand or dry soil was placed inside the sewn item and after it had completely taken shape and dried, the inside was cleaned, washed, and smoked again. Then the inside was cleaned once more, and the inside and outside greased with sheep's tail fat or horse fat. It served both as a *mes* and a *saba* [2].

Bulkynshak

Among the leather vessels, a *bulkynshak* also had its place and was a leather bag made of a horsehide. When a horse was slaughtered, in order to make a *bulkynshak*, the skin of its hind leg was removed wholly up to the hairline of the ankle. Then, the skin was cleaned of the flesh and fat, and the thigh sewn together with a piece of cloth using a thread made of horsehair. The seam was made at the bottom of the bag; a wooden plug was made to fit the narrow part of the skin that was at the ankle. Then the inside was filled with ash, sealed, and dried in the shade. When the completely dried skin hardened, the ash was poured out and the bag smoked. Afterward, it was washed with tea; then sour milk that had been fermented for several days was poured into it. This was called "removing the raw taste". Then, soot from the furnace was collected and soaked in water, and the skin was placed in it for a while; this process being called "sooting". The bag was then rinsed with boiling liquid oil and was ready for use. The *bulkynshak* was traditionally hung from a rope on the upper part of the *kerege*. When riding a horse, it was hung on the front of the saddle or tied to the saddle straps, while a dismounted person carried it on his shoulder. This leather bag was very convenient for the herder community to pour *ayran*, *shalap* (sour milk mixed with water), and *koyirtpak* (*koumiss* or sour milk mixed with fresh) on hot days [18].

Tulyp

Carrying water in a waterskin was an important factor in nomadic life. A *tulyp* was a leather container or bag used for pouring drinks, storing and transporting food, such as flour, millet or meat and was also suitable for carrying water. A *tulyp* was often made of goat skin, as well as roe deer, calf, and donkey skin.

Goat skin *tulyps* were called red *tulyps* and white *tulyps*. The red ones were used to store and carry water and the white ones were filled with curd. The animal was slaughtered so that the skin was not damaged, then it was salted and the fur removed

while the hide was still wet. The neck and two front legs were tightly wrapped, blown and dried, ensuring that the skin remained intact, then smoked and put in a tanning solution; the neck and two front legs were then cut, a string placed between them, and sewn together with a thread. A string and a mouthpiece were tied to the *tulyp's* mouth. The fur was not removed from the skins of deer, calves, and foals, and they were processed without tanning.

Kawga

Among the utensils for drawing water from wells and keeping liquids, the *kawga* was an indispensable vessel. A *kawga* was a leather bucket used for milking horses, camels, and cows. It could be used to draw water from wells and could be attached to a swipe. To make a *kawga*, camel or cow hides were stretched, the bottom and sides cut to size, the prepared circle frame placed on the bottom, and the sides sewn together. Ears were sewn on both sides to attach the strap; the mouth was made slightly wider than the bottom.

Dungirshak

During the processing of dairy products, the function of a vessel called a *dungirshak* was important in everyday life. A *dungirshak* was a vessel used to collect daily cream from milk, to pump it and churn butter. The method used to make it was similar to that of the *kawga*, however a special iron ring was utilized for the *kawga*, while for the *dungirshak* the ring was made of thick metal wire or meadowsweet wood and installed at its mouth. The leather was sewn on both sides and an eyelet was made for attaching a strap. The lid was made of wood. It was convenient to carry unwhipped cream in a *dungirshak* during migration because at the end of the journey it would get churned.

Along with leather vessels, leather sacks also had a functional purpose. Among them, the *kap-dagar* – a sack for transporting grain, can be mentioned. It was made of dehaired horse and goat skin and was sewn with sinew or camel wool thread.

A *korjin* was a simple bag that a traveler used to carry clothes and other items while traveling or moving. It was sometimes made of cloth and of leather to be waterproof against snow and rain. Leather *korjins* were made from the skins of deer, goats, lambs, and horses. After the hide was kneaded, processed, and dyed, it was cut according to the size of the bag and sewn. The two upper surfaces of the bag and the lid were decorated, and the inside was lined. A patterned leather bag was considered one of the most beautiful accessories nomads could have.

Sacks were also made of leather and included one type called a *kesene*, which was a bag used to carry meat in for long journeys. A *kesene* was made of the same kind of skins as *sabas* and *torsyks* and made into a regular bag with two sides and a lid, suitable for wearing around the waist.

In addition, there was a bag called a *baspak*, which was used by blacksmiths, craftsmen, and jewelers in Kazakh society. A *baspak* was a small leather bag, designed for the needs of nomadic life, in which tools such as a hammer, awl, drill, auger, chisel, etc. were stored. It was made of horsehide, most often from the scalp of a horse. The fur was not removed but turned outward, and a board was placed on both sides of the mouth; a hole was made in it, and a strap passed through the hole. To decorate the bag, a stone was placed in the eye socket and mane attached to the bag. Such bags were often seen hung on the walls of Kazakh houses for decorative purposes [20].

A *kapshyk* was a pouch used for migration, herding, hunting, and during long journeys. Men often tied it to their waists. It was made of coarse black leather, with a sharp iron tip that created a spark when rubbed hard against a flint, and a hole or nipple made

of silver-plated iron or brass at the mouth. When closed, the two pieces fitted together to form a tight seal.

Another object was a bread mat or *sypyra* which was a kind of tablecloth that was spread out when kneading traditional dough for a meal. To make it, sheepskin was cut into a rectangular shape, sewn with a rare stitch, folded and tied with a string; it hung on a headboard or on a pole for everyday use. Such a mat was durable, lightweight and easy to clean.

Among other vessels, was a *samar* used for serving or storing food for a short period of time. A *samar* was a large oval-shaped vessel for pouring *koumiss* or cooked meat. Similarly, a *talys* also had a special place and was a vessel or a bag made of horse scalp for storing various things [18]. In connection with this item, the following saying of a famous sage poet Bukhar Zhyrau is well-known: "*Men argyn degen aryspyn, azwy kere karyspyn. Sen buzau terisi shonshiksin, Men ogiz terisi talyspyn*" (I am a lion from the Argyn tribe, I am a raven with a fang. You are a calf-skin bag, I am an ox-skin bag) [21].

4.2. Traditional skin processing among the Kazakh

To make leather utensils, animals were skinned in a special way. For example, manufacturing certain types of vessels required slaughtered animals to be skinned as a whole. When it was necessary to wrap a person into a skin (a method used in traditional folk medicine), sheep skins were cut in this way. In addition, the skins of wild animals such as foxes and marmots were also taken wholly [3].

A special technology was applied for sewing leather pieces together. For example, using a welt, a string made of leather, lining, or thread, was placed between the seams when sewing leather together to prevent water from seeping through. Sinew threads (*taramys*) were widely used by the Kazakh people. When slaughtering cattle, they would remove the sinew from the legs, apply plant ash to it, and dry it in the shade. Then, the hard part of the sinew was cut off and twisted into thin, medium, or thick strands as needed. This craft of twisting the sinew was a prerogative of Kazakh women in the past. Another widely used sewing material was *shuda* yarn made from the long hair taken from the neck and knees of a camel. This yarn is second in durability after the sinew thread.

The Kazakhs, like the Bashkir and Kyrgyz, smoked their leather utensils in a smokehouse. The building of a smokehouse involved digging a special pit in the ground to place the leather vessels for smoking, with a chimney on one side that let out the smoke and a hearth on the other. When smoking a skin, the wood from young trees such as juniper, pine, birch branches, hawthorn, apple, and apricot were burned without producing a flame, and the smoke passed through the chimney. The hearth was built about 3-4 meters away from the chimney, and the flue and chimney were tightly covered so that the smoke could not escape.

The vessels that came out of the smokehouse were then tanned to further strengthen them. A tanning solution called *kyzyl* (red), because of its reddish-brown colour, was used. To prepare it, water was boiled with pine and birch bark and mixed with crushed cotoneaster branches and the leather vessels thoroughly soaked in the solution. Once the tanning solution was absorbed, the vessels became firmer and more durable.

4.3. Artifacts kept in the National Museum of the Republic of Kazakhstan

Nowadays, Kazakh leather utensils have almost completely fallen into disuse, as the classical nomadic form of animal husbandry has not been preserved. Despite the

fact they are no longer utilized in everyday life, such leather products are kept in museum collections and displayed at exhibitions. The relics of this ancient nomadic culture are now being revived and presented as souvenirs. Among them, decorated types of *torsyk* are sold in shops selling ethnic articles. They are presented as gifts and are highly treasured. In traditional ethnic villages, these types of leather vessels are being revived and exhibited for tourists.



Figure 1. *Torsyk*. From the collection of the National Museum of the Republic of Kazakhstan, 20th century.



Figure 2. *Könek*. From the collection of the National Museum of the Republic of Kazakhstan, 20th century.

The main types of leather vessels are preserved in museum collections. For example, the National Museum of the Republic of Kazakhstan has 25 units of leather vessels in its collection, including *sabas*, *torsyks*, *köneks*, etc. One of the prominent items stored under the number 8208 is a *torsyk* made by the craftsman Darkembay Shokparuly in 1997. It is a small leather vessel for pouring drinks made of yellow-brown leather with a round wooden stopper at the mouth and a strap for hanging made of leather. The *torsyk* is round-shaped with a plant-like ornament with two shoulders in the shape of a ram's horn, and a metal ring installed on both sides of the linear neck (RKNM MF - 8208). The *torsyk* was made using traditional leather processing methods, using molding, sewing, embossing and engraving (Figure 1).

The National Museum of the Republic of Kazakhstan has two types of *köneks*. The first one belongs to the Kazakhs of the Karaganda region and was exploited for milking mares. The *könek* is sewn from the neck of a camel and a piece of horse-skin. The processed skin is shaped into a cylinder without a spout and smoked with juniper. The item, sewn from yellow skin, has a pattern of ram horns all over its outside. The strap and tassels are also made of leather (RKNM MF - 8193) (Figure 2).

The second *könek* in the museum collection belongs to the samples of the material culture of the Semirechye Kazakhs. This is a unique leather vessel dating back to the 19th century. It also has peculiar features in its external appearance and manufacturing technology. For example, this vessel is sewn from yellow-brown leather, has a spout facing downwards, and the attached handle is made of braided leather. The sides are embossed with ornaments. Its dimensions are: diameter – 19 cm, depth – 27 cm (RKNM MF - 8389). In general, this type of *könek* is not very

common in traditional Kazakh crafts as it is rare for *köneks* to have an additional spout. Also, the main collection of the National Museum preserves a type of *saba* made in the 20th century (Figure 3). The *saba* is made with a wide base and a narrow neck. The bulbous lower part where the *koumiss* is shaken is called a *bulkyn* (a shaker), and the mouth for pouring *koumiss*, which can be tied, is called an *emizdyk* (a nipple). The leather *saba* is sewn in the shape of a pear. The outer side is plain and smooth. This *saba* belongs to the Kokshetau Kazakhs. Its dimensions are 50x106x34 cm. This item is not a large one compared to other items used in Kazakh households and was evidently used in everyday life (RKNM MF - 8448).



Figure 3. *Saba*, from the collection of the National Museum of the Republic of Kazakhstan, 20th century.

The types and characteristics of each leather vessel were formed depending on their household application. For instance, the wide use of the *torsyk* gave rise to developing a variety of different types. Similarly, the use of the *köneks* for milking mares indicates that *köneks* with an additional spout began to be made.

The transformation of vessels can be seen not only in the material or form of their manufacture, but also in the change of effective materials used to make a vessel. For example, in the Museum collection, among the *qumgans* (jugs) usually made of metal, one can find a *qumgan* made of leather. This jug, preserved in the main collection under number 8032, is a leather vessel for pouring water or milk (Figure 4). It was sewn from the neck of a camel to minimize seams. The finished skin was shaped into a cylinder, and a spout was then attached to the side. The jug is sewn from black leather, has a spout and a strap to carry it.



Figure 4. *Qumgan*, from the collection of the National Museum of the Republic of Kazakhstan, 20th century.

The mouth, neck, and sides are decorated with convoluted patterns (RKNM MF - 8032). Although this jug is classified as a *qumgan* in terms of its shape, it can also be classified as a *köneks* for storing water in terms of its function and the lack of a fixed handle.

4.4. The usage of leather utensils among the Kyrgyz

Since livestock farming played a leading role among the Kyrgyz, as among all nomadic nations, great importance was attached to the processing of skins and their use in the manufacture of various products, including household items and utensils. For these purposes, raw materials from domestic and wild animals (horses, cows, camels, donkeys, sheep, goats, foxes, chickens, onagers, mountain goats, roe deer) were utilized. The Kyrgyz used leather and skin products in quite a similar way to the Kazakhs, Bashkir, and Altaian. The main material for making household vessels was goatskin. Also, various smaller bags and pouches were made of whole skins of calves, lambs, and goatlings. Sacks for storing wooden bowls and spoons were made from the skins of calves. The Kyrgyz also made leather table- mats for cutting dough [6]. In the daily life of the Kyrgyz people, sheep and goat skins were most widely used to make vessels, as sheep and goat farming had a leading role in their economy. In the conditions of nomadic and semi-nomadic farming, household utensils made of leather enjoyed prolific development. For example, containers made of whole goat skins were used for various household needs, for example, for storing liquids (*koumiss*, *ayran*), and various solid foods (bread, meat, dried cheese, flour, oats, etc.).

The Kyrgyz people manufactured different leather utensils for a wide scope of application. For example, the Kyrgyz-Kipchaks of the Batken region sewed up the legs and tail part of an animal's skin after processing it, leaving the neck open [6]. In this way, they made containers for storing and transporting *koumiss*, *ayran* and water. Such vessels, called *tors*, were convenient to use during migration, and in the *yurt* (a traditional house) it always occupied a certain place: it usually stood next to the auxiliary yurt, where the *koumiss* was kept. The bags for storing solid food were called *chanaches* and were made a little differently, namely, sewn from the skin of the legs and neck of animals. In a yurt, they were always hung on the *kerege* [6]. Over time, the *sabaa* vessel (similar to the Kazakh *saba*), characteristic of the life of the nomadic Kyrgyz, was replaced by leather bags (called a *tor* in the southwestern Kyrgyz, a *chanach* in the east). Previously, when the southern Kyrgyz led a nomadic life, they used utensils for *koumiss* made of camel skin (mostly taken from a camel's hump). For example, a *köökor* – a travel vessel for keeping *koumiss* in the form of a flat flask with a neck and a *torsuk*, which denoted a vessel similar to the Kazakh *torsyk* which was tied to the saddle straps. There were buckets of various sizes: a small-size bucket with a capacity of 3-4 l called a *könoçok*, and a larger bucket with a spout – a *könök*, which was used as a milk pail [8].

However, in the southern regions of Kyrgyzstan, in addition to *tors*, sometimes large clay jars (*khums*) made in Uzbekistan were used to store *koumiss* [6]. But in transhumance farming, everything that was available from raw animal materials was used, both for manufacturing and storage purposes. For instance, dairy products and butter were stored in carefully cleaned livestock stomachs.

4.5. Traditional skin processing among the Kyrgyz

The processing of animal raw materials and their preparation for making various items was carried out by both men and women. However, duties were strictly assigned: men always did the skinning, the further processing of large animals' hides and made the bulk of the leather utensils, while women dealt with the skin processing of smaller-size animals and the manufacturing of items, such as shopping bags, sacks and containers [7]. The processing of raw skins depended on the purpose of the item. A minimum of labor was spent

on dehairing the skin as sometimes it was simply soaked in running water for several days, after which the fur was easily cleaned with a knife. Another way to remove the fur was to sprinkle salt on the skin and wrap it for several days [6]. To prepare leather, the dehaired skin was treated with sour kefir and left for at least 8-10 days. In addition, barley flour was mixed with water and applied to the skin during tanning. In general, to obtain good soft leather (*bulgaars*) required even more time and effort [7].

Sheep and goat skins were tanned with a solution of salted kefir or flour, which was carefully applied to the inside of the skins for 5-6 days, while the cattle and camel skins required a longer period. This process removed the fat and flesh residues from the animal skin. Leather vessels for storing dairy products, as well as various leather bags were also pre-smoked in specially built smokehouses. Typically, several families used one smokehouse, and in small villages, there was a public one. The depth of the smoke pit (called a *mor* by the Kazakhs) did not exceed 1 meter. The diameter of the channel through which the smoke from the fire passed was 50–60 cm, and the length was 1.5-2 m [5]. During the summer pastures, simpler smokehouses were made by every family and the average time for keeping an item in a smokehouse was 24 hours [8].

The leather vessels of the Kyrgyz people were decorated with various ornaments, and the methods used to make them shared with other nomadic Turkic peoples. The pattern on the leather was created by drawing and embossing. To draw and emboss a pattern on a leather vessel, the inside of the vessel was filled with sand and its outside was moistened. Then, using a pointed stick, the desired pattern was applied to the leather surface [7]. Over time, the pattern on the leather was applied using special wooden stamps. For this, a wooden stamp was pressed onto the wet leather and as a result, the desired pattern was imprinted on the leather surface.

4.6. The usage and production of leather utensils among the Bashkir people

Leatherworking and manufacturing various leather utensils was a special art among the traditional crafts of the Bashkir people. The Bashkir used the methods of early nomads in processing leather, such as the use of fermented milk to soak the leather and smoking the ready products in a special pit. The place where they smoked bowls was called *ystyk* (a hothouse) [12]. After making the leather vessels, the Bashkir craftsmen filled them with ash to give them the desired shape. Then the ash was poured out, the item was dried in the wind, heated, and only then stitched with horsehair.

The surface of leather products was decorated with carved ornaments. The skins of domestic animals: horses, sheep, camels, calves and goats served as the source of the raw material; among them, horse skins were the most used. Horsehair was also the primary material for making threads. Animal skins were carefully excoriated including the scalp and neck parts without causing any damage to them. Small livestock hides were used for making leather vessels for transporting liquids or storing dried food. From the whole horse skin large *sabas* (*khabas*) were made which could hold 6-12 buckets of *koumiss* (appr. 60-120 liters) [12]. The horse scalp skin was used for the production of milking buckets called *başkunâks* or *başkapsyks* (literally 'head' and 'bucket') and other vessels – *korägä*. The skin of a horse's hind leg served as a material for manufacturing *koumiss*-transporting vessels – a *tursuk*, which held 2-3 buckets (20-30 liters), and various other buckets – a *botlok*, a *dömbäy*, a *kaşyn*. The word *könäk* is used in Bashkir dialects to denote several types of utensils: a leather vessel, a winebag, a milk pail and even a wooden or metal vessel. According to M. R. Valieva, this type of vessel dates back to the Altaic era [14].

The skin of a horse's front leg was used for a vessel called a *kuldau* or *kullyk* (from the word *kul* 'arm') [10, 13] Also, Bashkir craftsmen made a variety of pack sacks and saddle bags, travel flasks, churning vessels, called *artmaq*, *qalta*, *qarylta* [12].

4.7. The usage and production of leather utensils among the Sakha (Yakut) people

Leather vessels and utensils were widespread not only among the Turkic nomadic nations of Central Asia, but also among the Turks of Eastern Siberia, for example the Sakha (Yakut). The Yakut used leather vessels mainly for the production and storage of *koumiss*. The production technology of leather processing largely resembled that of other nomadic Turkic nations. The most available material was cattle hides, highly valued for their waterproof and durable qualities. Specially treated waterproof bull leather was called *siri*, which was also the name given to the vessels made of this material. Sinew taken from cattle hind legs was used as thread.

A *siri ihit* (*siri khollagos*) was a large vessel (up to 360 liters) resembling a barrel which was used to store *koumiss*. To ensure the stability of the *siri*, it was reinforced along the upper edge with a hoop and metal rings and tied to the beam of the yurt or to the festive poles during the *Isiakh* holiday celebration. *Siri ihits* were decorated with white horsehair and metal pendants. A *köguör simiir* and *köguör ihit*, which had a capacity of 25-50 liters, was also utilized for fermenting and storing *koumiss*. They had the shape of a large leather bottle (vessel) with a wide base and a narrow neck. A *simiir ihit* was another similar type of vessel for storing *koumiss* and other liquids, which had a funnel, a clamp (two wooden sticks that clamped its two sides) and a wooden whisk to beat the *koumiss* [15]. A *simiir* also served as a sacred vessel or receptacle for the ritual drinking of *koumiss* and was decorated in a special way. The Yakut people widely manufactured small-sized leather bottles called *simiirçekhs* [16].

A *köguör simiir*, like almost all Yakut vessels for storing *koumiss*, was decorated with horsehair. In the summer, smaller *simiirs* (up to 50 liters) to transport *koumiss* and other dairy products were utilized. Usually, when traveling on horseback, two vessels were tied together and hung on the two sides of the saddle. Other vessels were also sewn from leather, for example, bags for storing and transporting food: *kha*, *sylgy kha*, *khaahakh*, etc. [15].

Comparing the variety of leather utensils made by the four Turkic-speaking nations we can conclude that there are more similarities than discrepancies in the production technology, form and function of these vessels. The common features include the methods used for the leather processing, such as using sour milk and wheat flour solutions as tanning agents, building special hearths for smoking the hides, using animal sinew as a material for making threads.

The choice of preferred raw material – domestic and wild animal skin – varies among the given peoples depending on the availability and proliferation of the livestock types. For instance, the Kazakhs and Bashkir often used camel, horse, cow and sheep skins, while the Kyrgyz mostly utilized goat, sheep and wild animal hides. The Yakuts widely processed cattle and horse leather. Several vessels were found to have similar names, a fact which demonstrates their common early origin. Among them, the *saba/saba* (*khaba*)/*sabaa*, *torsyk/torsuk/tursuk* and *könek/başkunäk/könök* vessels, which were present among the Kazakhs, Bashkir and Kyrgyz. It should be noted that the common Turkic root-word *saba* can be traced to the Yakut *sabarai* ‘a flat large-capacity vessel, for storing koumiss or meat, made of birch bark’ [16]. The *köökör/köguör* found among the Kyrgyz and Yakuts is believed to be the result of a close interrelation of Turkic sedentary and Mongol nomadic cattle-breeding cultures because the word is present in a number of languages of the Siberian nations; however, its origin is vague [16]. The economic transformations of the Kyrgyz and Bashkir in later times indicate that different types of these vessels appeared and their names also changed. In general, Turkic leather vessels can be divided into two typological types. The first type

was intended for liquid beverages, while the second type consisted of various bags and pouches for storing solid food and utensils.

At present, leather utensils have almost fallen out of everyday domestic usage among the Turkic peoples of Central Asia and Siberia due to the complete change in their way of life. Traditional leather vessels have thus acquired a symbolic and souvenir meaning.

Usually, smaller-sized vessels, such as *torsyks*, are made as souvenirs, to be given as gifts or to be used for room decoration. The traditional centuries-long manufacturing methods have been replaced with new equipment and technology. In light of these innovations, the leather is sewn on a professional sewing machine, and the ornaments are printed using special printing machines. In traditional production the leg part of the hide was preferably used for making *torsyks*, now the entire hide of an animal is utilized. This demonstrates innovation in leatherworking techniques, but also the decline of traditional leatherworking methods.

The main reason why traditional leatherworking methods are starting to fall out of favor in modern times is their time-consuming nature due to the long processes involved. The advent of new leatherworking machines and equipment has led to a transformation of these crafts.

The number of craftspeople who possess the knowledge of the traditional art of leatherworking handicraft is decreasing, so the state implements measures to support them with the purpose of preserving this cultural heritage. Thus, in Kazakhstan, the Concept for the Development of Handicrafts in the Republic of Kazakhstan has been implemented [22]. As a result, craft centers, such as the *Alatau Creative Hub*, are being established in major cities in Kazakhstan. Among other activities, these centers are developing and promoting leather and wool products to the public [23]. In Kyrgyzstan, measures for the revival and development of such crafts, and promotion of craft products from Kyrgyzstan and Central Asia to the regional and international markets, are taken by the Ministry of Culture, Information and Youth Policy [24]. The Russian Federation also takes a number of state- and business-supported measures for the preservation of its traditional crafts. For example, the Federal Law "On Folk Art and Crafts" has been amended to create more supportive measures for traditional craftsmen [25]. Speaking about the Sakha region, the Gallery of Folk Arts and Crafts has been opened where craftsmen can create and sell their handcrafted products that reflect the traditions of the region [26].

5. Conclusion

In conclusion, the article has examined the technology used for making leather vessels of the Turkic peoples and their scope of application. The similarities in the technology of making leather vessels common to the Turkic peoples have been analyzed, demonstrating that they interacted culturally with each other. For example, the methods of leather processing of the Kazakhs, Bashkir and Kyrgyz were found to be similar, while the Yakuts' technology was found to have its own peculiarities. However, there are significant differences in the choice of raw materials. Several types of leather vessels were found to possess a similar name, form and function, which proves their common origin, such as milking buckets and milk-storing vessels.

In addition, the research revealed that the function and methods of production of almost each leather vessel was common to the Turkic peoples. For example, the Kazakhs effectively used smokehouses to smoke leather vessels, and similar methods

were also used by the Kyrgyz and Bashkir peoples. In general, the similarity and historical continuity in the domain of the crafts, and leatherworking profession particularly, of the Turkic peoples, can be considered a manifestation of a common Turkic cultural identity.

Currently, the vast number of leather vessels is preserved in special research and museum collections. It is surprising that many types of leather vessels are not utilized in present-day households. This indicates that these types of vessels possessed a wide scope of application in traditional nomadic societies and fell out of active use in the later period of transition to a sedentary way of life. Nowadays, leather vessels can be seen as special souvenirs, prepared for exhibitions, and displayed in ethno-villages. However, the technology used for their production has changed, and new devices and appliances are employed. The settlement and advancement of the Turkic peoples in their economic system have put an end to the use of traditional leather vessels. Instead, they have been replaced by porcelain, glass, and most often, plastic vessels.

Notes

¹ 1 span = appr. 10 cm

Abbreviations

- RKNM MF - 8208: National Museum of the Republic of Kazakhstan, Main Fund 8208.
- RKNM MF - 8193: National Museum of the Republic of Kazakhstan, Main Fund 8193.
- RKNM MF - 8389: National Museum of the Republic of Kazakhstan, Main Fund 8389.
- RKNM MF - 8448: National Museum of the Republic of Kazakhstan, Main Fund 8448.
- RKNM MF - 8232: National Museum of the Republic of Kazakhstan, Main Fund 8232.

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Biographical notes

Meruert Amirova is a PhD candidate, Department of Turkology, at L. N. Gumilyov Eurasian National University, Astana, Republic of Kazakhstan. Her research topic is "The meaning and function of material culture in the history of Turkic peoples (based on tableware utensils)". She is interested in preserving the ancient heritage of the material culture of the Turkic peoples, introducing them into scientific circulation, and promoting them to a global audience.

Akmaral Ibrayeva is the Deputy Director for Research at the National Museum of the Republic of Kazakhstan. She holds a Doctor of Historical Sciences degree and is a Professor. Her research interests include theoretical and methodological issues in museology, the study of historical and cultural heritage, local history, pressing issues in the history of Kazakhstan, and biographical studies.

Gulnaz Kozhakmetova is a Candidate of Historical Sciences, an associate professor of the Department of Archeology and Ethnology of L.N. Gumilyov Eurasian National University, Astana, Republic of Kazakhstan. Her interests cover theoretical and methodological issues of ethnology and current problems of ethnography.

Zhadyra Aidarbekova is the Head of the Department of Turkology, Faculty of International Relations at L. N. Gumilyov Eurasian National University. Her research interests include theoretical and methodological issues of Turkology and cognitive linguistics; the study of ancient Turkic heritage; comparative historical grammar of Turkic languages.

Summary

The article examines the production and use of leather utensils within the material culture of four Turkic peoples: Kazakhs, Kyrgyz, Bashkirs, and Yakuts. The aims of the study are to identify the common features in the traditions of manufacturing and using leather vessels among these Turkic groups and to reveal their intercultural interactions associated with this craft.

The study considers the types of leather utensils traditionally crafted by Kazakh, Kyrgyz, Bashkir, and Yakut artisans, highlighting their shared features, manufacturing techniques, areas of application, and domestic functions. The similarities in the material culture of these peoples reflect their ethnocultural proximity, shaped by a common historical background and similar living conditions. Moreover, the advanced development of leatherworking craftsmanship suggests that the primary economic activities, customs, and traditions of the nomadic Turks were closely tied to pastoralism.

Nevertheless, certain groups leading sedentary or semi-sedentary lifestyles exhibited cultural trends distinct from those of fully nomadic societies. It was established that peoples engaged in nomadic livestock herding made more frequent use of leather vessels, which can be attributed to their practicality during migrations. Additionally, many leather items underwent transformations in form and function as a result of expanding cultural contacts with other peoples in the 19th century. Subsequently, during the process of sedentarization – for instance, when the Yakuts transitioned to a more settled way of life – the diversity and functional scope of leather vessels diminished, and they were replaced by containers made from metal, wood, ceramics, porcelain, and other materials.

Riassunto

L'articolo analizza la produzione e l'uso dei recipienti in pelle all'interno della cultura materiale di quattro popolazioni turche: Kazaki, Kirghisi, Baschiri e Jakuti. L'obiettivo dello studio è individuare i tratti comuni nelle tradizioni di fabbricazione e di utilizzo dei contenitori in pelle presso questi gruppi, nonché mettere in luce le interazioni interculturali connesse a tale ambito artigianale. La ricerca prende in esame le tipologie di utensili in pelle tradizionalmente realizzate dagli artigiani delle popolazioni sopracitate, evidenziandone le caratteristiche condivise, le tecniche di produzione, gli ambiti di impiego e le funzioni domestiche. Le affinità riscontrabili nella cultura materiale di queste popolazioni riflettono una prossimità etnoculturale, determinata da un comune retroterra storico e da condizioni di vita analoghe. Inoltre, l'elevato livello di sviluppo dell'artigianato conciario suggerisce come le principali attività economiche, consuetudini e tradizioni dei popoli turchi nomadi fossero strettamente connesse alla pastorizia. Tuttavia, alcuni gruppi caratterizzati da stili di vita sedentari o semi sedentari manifestavano tendenze culturali differenti rispetto alle società nomadi. È stato rilevato che le popolazioni dedite alla pastorizia nomade facevano un uso più frequente dei recipienti in pelle, in virtù della loro praticità durante gli spostamenti. Inoltre, nel corso del XIX secolo, numerosi manufatti in pelle subirono trasformazioni formali e funzionali a seguito dell'intensificarsi dei contatti culturali con altri popoli. Successivamente, con il processo di sedentarizzazione – come nel caso dei Jakuti, che adottarono modalità di vita più stabili – la varietà e l'estensione funzionale dei recipienti in pelle si ridussero progressivamente, venendo sostituite da contenitori realizzati in metallo, legno, ceramica, porcellana e altri materiali.