



## ОЛЖАС СУЛЕЙМЕНОВ: ЗНАК ИНТЕГРАЛА

## OLZHAS SULEIMENOV: INTEGRAL SIGN

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### I Seek the Heart of Every Word: for the Presentation of O. Suleimenov's Book 'I Know'

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### Я ищу сердце каждого слова: к презентации книги О. Сулейменова «Я знаю»

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*The Romans said:  
'ex oriente lux' — 'light is from the East' ...<sup>1</sup>*

This expression, of course, refers to the Sun rising in the East, but it also reminds us of the fundamental role of Eastern civilisations in world history.

<sup>1</sup> Paraphrase of the Gospel account of Jesus' birth.



And just recently, two years ago, while preparing for a film about the Sumerians and rereading ‘AZ i IA’, I was surprised to find that I had overlooked the second part of the book ‘Sumer Name’, even though I had read it as a continuation of ‘The Clay Book’. It turned out that the first scandalous part had obscured the second, equally promising part from me.

But even then, the author had already outlined his future research, discovering that

**| *Language and hieroglyphic writing were created simultaneously!***

And he finds fertile ground for linguistic constructions in ancient rituals.

Describing the tradition of burial with a metal bowl and beads, which began in Sumer and continued in Central Asia (Issyk, 5th century BC) and Altai, he practically reveals the ancient, forgotten purpose of the Kazakh ritual of ‘shashu’, namely the belief in rebirth. I quote:

*‘Only the Turks and Mongols continue to carry through the swords of new militant religions the first naive dream of infant humanity, the holy belief in bodily resurrection’.*

As is well known, the wedding ritual, like others that mark a person's transition from one status to another, included the symbolic death of the bride and groom – the loss of their current status in order to gain a new one, namely, to be reborn in a new capacity — as wife and husband. In the same vein, the stages of a baby's transition from lying down to walking, then in the saddle, and further... on the throne. And further still — participation in military campaigns, inevitable death in battle, and... a funeral ceremony to send them on their long journey. I quote:

*‘They dressed the deceased in shiny clothes, and, handing him a metal vessel, filled the crypt with round pebbles (stars), erected a mound, placed a statue of the goddess of resurrection on it and placed an exact copy of that vessel in her hands, poured kumis on the fresh earth and prayed:*

*‘Glorious one! If you are reborn, be reborn on our land.’*

*I know of only one literary monument that describes the form of the Tengrian rite, which involves a bowl of fiery wine (‘blue wine’), the dome of the night (‘black papoloma’) and stars (‘large pearls’). This is ‘The Tale of Igor’s Campaign’.*

*Not yet aware of his brother Igor’s defeat, the Grand Prince of Kiev, Svyatoslav Vsevolodovich, has a ‘muddled dream’ in which pearls are poured onto his chest, he is covered with papoloma (cover), and fiery wine is poured for him.*

And here is another interpretation of what is practically a funeral rite in the pictorial writing of Ancient Egypt, symbolising not death, but the future rebirth of Osiris, the god of plants and agriculture.

The poet's bold insight, inherent to him, is astonishing, as is his striking ability to move rapidly through time, as if it were so close — the Sumerians, Egypt and the Kazakhs, the Steppe. This is the highest inspiration to penetrate the theme far and wide, from the height of an eagle, from the height of a horseman and a mouse in a burrow.

As was once said, 'with a mind like a tree', i.e., a squirrel, vertically from the lower world to the upper, he travels like a Kazakh baksy (shaman).

Studying the pictorial language of Ancient Egyptian **hieroglyphics** from the 3rd millennium BC, he penetrates the meaning of the depicted word, namely the sprouting of straight plant shoots through the body of the pharaoh lying on his back, deified as the god of rebirth.

While studying the traditions and rituals of Turkic-speaking peoples, I once attended a Nowruz celebration in Turkey. And I argued with a Turkish expert: which came first — greeting the first rays of the sun, climbing a hill in the steppe, spending the night in vigil by boiling cauldrons with sacrificial food, or how they, the Turks, copying all the actions of nomads in the bosom of nature, practically repeat all the actions, but artificially — in an urban environment.

Two weeks before Nauryz, they plant seeds so that they have time to sprout and decorate the table with green shoots. They add painted eggs to them, then light bonfires, jump over them, and strike iron with a hammer. What does this mean? The bonfire is the Sun warming the snow-covered earth, the hammer blows imitate the rumblings of spring thunder, and jumping over the fire is a purification from the old in order to be renewed along with the earth, which has been revived.

The bright signs of rebirth, Green Grass and Blue Sky, are the ancestors of the Turkic people. It is surprising, but perhaps natural, that blue sky and green grass are called by the same word in all Turkic languages: **kök**.

This word denoted not only colour, but mainly sacred essence: **kök kымbez** (sacred dome) or chosenness: **kökmoınaq** (a special breed of horses); it expressed a high degree of admiration: **kökke көтерildi** (he rose!), **kökke құлаш ұрды** (strive for the sublime).

And the sacred animals of the Turks — *the Wolf* and *the Bull* — **kök бәри**, **kök өгіз** — are translated as heavenly, divine. The word **kök** expressed *the very beauty, usefulness, value* of something: **kök балауса** — grass in its prime, **kök мойын** — beautiful neck, **kök möldir** — transparent, clear (spring), **kök naıza** — strong spear, **kök sengir** — high peak.

And how down-to-earth and at the same time sublime the shepherd's dream sounds:

*Maldyng auyzy shopke, zhannyng auyzy kokke zhetse — arman-ay!*

*'Oh, if only the sheep and horses could taste the first grass,  
may my soul taste the high sky!'*

Olzhas is a seer, all-seeing what is in the air, but cannot be grounded in our minds.

There has been much talk about amazing coincidences, for example, the calendar of our ancestors with the 60-year calendar of the Egyptians, the cult of Poplar-Baiterek — a symbol of the ideal vertical — the axis of the three worlds, but it is Olzhas who discovers the law that does not originate in Europe and ancient culture, in the wake of which humanity grew, in an atmosphere of glorification of European culture, but in Egypt, remote not only physically, but also seemingly beyond our conception of the ruined heritage of the great Turks.

We all still live with the awareness that the epicentre of culture originated in Greece and Rome, and we study history according to Plutarch and Tacitus, and philosophy according to Aristotle, Plato and ... any scientific work necessarily begins with an overview of the basics of European culture, with recognised authorities, with quotations from their works.

Let us imagine that we, like our European-educated counterparts, are not surprised that algebra is *al-jabr*, developed by the mathematician al-Khwarizmi... that the first university, the oldest in the world, was the Muslim Al-Karouine in Morocco...

There are plenty of examples of enlightened Asia, or rather the East...

Olzhas Suleimenov reveals to many Russian speaking people that a significant part of Russian words come from the Turkic language, and even coined the term “Turkisms.”

All this has long become common knowledge, but nevertheless, Europe is still the centre of the world, and its ignorant part looks down on Asians with colonial contempt, as if they were barbarians.

I recently read an interesting book about how, from ancient times until almost the 20th century, the Chinese considered everyone who lived beyond the Great Wall of China to be barbarians, even other Chinese people who lived beyond it.

For official China, barbarians are those whom they cannot tax, because they are not citizens of the Celestial Empire. They are elusive in the steppes, like the Kazakh nomads, and most importantly, they cannot be conscripted into the army or forced to serve. How reminiscent this is of our own time, when young people who have evaded military service are considered outsiders, i.e. those same notorious barbarians.

In the 1970s, under Soviet rule, a young poet wonders why the oldest chronicle in the Slavic world contains words that are understandable to Kazakhs but not to all Russian transcribers of this poem, who inevitably become false translators, false patriots of the ancient Russian language, impossible without the heritage passed down to them from close, often warlike relations — as dictated by the era and geopolitics, which still dominate today’s disputes over who is the true owner of the land and, therefore, of its riches — energy resources.

Fifty years have passed since then, during which many states have changed their names and political weight and acquired new names and borders. There were no such peoples as the English, French or Germans before, just as there were no Kazakhs. All of these are collective peoples, a fusion of tribes, and Olzhas's appeal to the language that alone has remained true to its roots and represents Ariadne's thread (you see how deeply Eurocentrism is ingrained in us, that we always have to rely on the terms and canons of European culture when making any assertions).

Well, here I am, raised on Eurocentrism, drawing your attention to comparisons and images known from ancient Greek mythology, although, of course, I could find analogies in Sufism, Zen and the Vedas, but that's how we were raised. And I express the meaning of Olzhas' discovery in the words of Shakespeare from Hamlet:

*The thread that binds the days has broken.  
How shall I join the fragments?*

Olzhas' Asia takes on new meaning, for it has earned the right to be called the ancient and modern Hippocrene, a source of inspiration for the revival of the ancient cradle of culture on the globe.

Olzhas's appeal to Sumerian culture, to the spiritual roots of ancient Mesopotamia, is a statement of a fact of global significance — the fact of beginning the history of culture as it should be studied. Yes, there were textbooks and seminars on the ancient East, but they were treated as backwaters of the ancient world, as footnotes, acknowledging that yes, there were cultural centres in the East, but *'all roads lead to Rome'*.

This is what still remains in our minds, and we still move contrary to the Sun, not from dawn to dusk, but from west to east. I am reminded of something symbolic: the dreams of Russians since the time of Peter, who opened a window to Europe, to become true Europeans, renouncing Asianism in every way. Hence the failures in studying “The Tale of Igor's Campaign” and everything that constitutes true knowledge of the native language and folklore.

At one time, I was surprised that the famous collector of Russian fairy tales, Afanasyev, did not know how to classify Balda, who easily dealt with devils, into the pantheon of gods headed by Thor, not recognising in his name the instrument — a hammer, an axe. This was because he did not know any Turkic languages.

No Asianism, no Eurocentrism — that is what I saw in Olzhas' joyful epiphany, which revealed direct confirmation of the wisdom that has survived from the ancient times of the Egyptian Empire to the modern Kazakh language.

It is such a great bridge, built by the Kazakh poet over centuries of reverence for Europe (the greatness of which should in no way be diminished), revealing to us the values of the East buried under the sands of time. Olzhas lifts us above all this centuries-old heritage, pointing out that, yes, all this is wonderful, but the light

of culture — our true heritage — begins in Great Asia, at the other pole, where it is high time to shift the centre of gravity and attraction.

*Young, blossoming Europe wrinkled its nose as it looked out of the train window at lame, stooped old Asia. It was difficult for a young, selfish person to believe that the wrinkled Baba Yaga was once an energetic, daring beauty. And the heavy jewels she had brought to the train to sell once adorned her supple neck and sparkled on her high chest. Ancient Greece and the elders of Egypt listened to her melodious speech.*

Chekhov once said: ‘When Tolstoy is in literature, it is easy and pleasant to be a writer; even knowing that you have done nothing and are doing nothing is not so scary, because Tolstoy does it for everyone’.

I would apply these words today to Olzhas, to the fact that we have him. And that is important.

According to his method of etymology — searching for the heart of each word — let us pay attention to his first and last names and remember:

***Ol jas*** — he is young.

***Suleiman*** — Solomon — knows the language of birds.

His poetry is always young and wise. He is true to his principles:

*I will not harm an owl, a crow, or a swan...*

*To exalt the steppe without humiliating the mountains...*

*There is no East and no West,*

*There is only one great word — Earth!*

Olzhas is still young, for he remains true to his talent for marvelling at the invisible and surprising us with his bold insight.

*Poets do not need protection,*

*God has given them a pen-spear,*

*The files of their destinies are bound for eternity,*

*And their craft is shrouded in mystery.*

*The invisible deck is shuffled,*

*How the cards will fall is unknown to them, alas,*

*But gazing into the eyes of the sky,*

*They trustingly take up the reins*

*And rule with speech, admiring and loving,*

*Bathing in the womb of great Memory...*

*A poet is always a newborn child,*

*Yes, defenceless —*

*Conquering the whole world with his smile.<sup>2</sup>*

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<sup>2</sup> “Poets do not need protection” is a poem by Bakhyt Kairbekov. Editorial note.

Olzhas does not need protection in the form of laudatory articles and superlative epithets. He should be read more often, like a spell, a prayer, a talisman. This is the best glory for a man who works hard so that his labours awaken us not to be lazy and to work together with him!

He constantly calls on us to revive our spirit!

So we must be reborn, grow, nurture others, and thus revive in ourselves the tradition of cultivation, growth — the ascent to the sky of Tengri.

He calls on behalf of the ancient Egyptian god — *os, osir, osiris* болсын! — in his native Kazakh language!

*Fifty years ago, he turned me towards our history.*

*Today, he turned me towards my native language.*

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