

## Shopan-Ata necropolis

Necropolis and underground mosque Shopan-Ata is one of the largest and oldest burial and religious complexes in Kazakhstan.

Necropolis Shopan-Ata is a monument of architecture of IX-early XX century. It is located in 25 km to the north-east from the village Senek of Mangystau region. It is divided into two parts: Kazakh (Adai) and Turkmen.

Necropolis and underground mosque Shopan-Ata, carved on the rock on the old caravan route to Khorezm has been known for a long time in Western Kazakhstan. There is one legend connected with the necropolis. A legend about occurrence of the underground mosque is popularly known. According to the legend, Shopan -ata was a learner of the legendary Sufi Ahmed Yasai. Once the mentor gathered all his disciples and gave them a task to go to preach Islam in different parts of the world. Destination had to be determined with the flying arrow of the learners. Where the arrow falls, there has the preacher to go. The arrow of Shopan - Ata flew to Mangystau and fell in the realm of the rich cattleman Bayan. Shopan ata got the job from the bai, but Bayan soon realized the true purpose of his visit. As a result, the cattleman gave Shopan - ata his daughter in marriage. Many years later, at the foot of the cliff where the arrow fell, Shopan ata built an underground mosque.



The cult center Shopan-Ata is a mosque consisting of several service rooms, carved out in calcareous rock in a circle. The entrance to the necropolis is located on the east side; there is an ancient well with a stone waterfall tub and late tombstones of silicate bricks. There are ancient tombs in the south-west part of underground mosque Shopan-Ata, probably built by Oguz-Kipchak tribes who lived here in X-XIV centuries.

The burial chamber, where according to the legend buried Shopan-Ata, is located in a cavity in the rock-a small vaulted building. According to the legend, the grave of his daughter is in the second chamber, in the north-west corner of the mosque complex. The central hall was cut down into two large spaces by all width of the southern and western walls for visitors-pilgrims.

Necropolis Shopan-Ata was searched out in 1952 by an architectural expedition under the direction of Malbagar Mendikulov, in 1977-1978 –expedition of Ministry of Culture of Kazakh SSR and 1982 an expedition of the Republican society for protection of history and culture.

Since 1982, the Shopan-Ata necropolis is protected by the state.

*List of used sources:*

- 1) <http://silkadv.com/ru/node/1544>
- 2) <http://culturemap.kz/en/object/podzemnaya-mechet-shopan-ata>