

**YAŞAM DÖNGÜSÜ RİTÜELLERİ: İSLAMI DEĞERLERİN ULUSAL
GELENEKLERLE ENTEGRASYONU**
LIFE CYCLE RITUALS: INTEGRATION OF ISLAMIC VALUES WITH NATIONAL
TRADITIONS

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Özet

Bu makale, İslamî değerler ile yerli geleneklerin etkileşimi sonucu Orta Asya'da yaşam döngüsü ritüellerinin dönüşümünü incelemektedir. Bölgedeki İslam'ın tarihî yayılımı ele alınarak, Maverannahr'ın Araplar tarafından fethedilmesi sürecinde karşılaşılan zorluklar ve dinin yayılması için kullanılan yöntemler, özellikle İslam hukukunun (fıkıh) yerel geleneklere entegrasyonu vurgulanmaktadır. Bu süreç, nüfusun kademeli şekilde İslamlaşmasına yol açarken, bölgeye özgü kültürel özelliklerin korunmasını sağlamıştır. Tartışmada, eşitlik ve hoşgörü gibi İslam'ın evrensel ilkeleri vurgulanarak, farklı etnik gruplar arasında toplumsal uyumun teşvik edildiği belirtilmiştir. Ayrıca, yerel âlimlerin İslamî değerleri mevcut geleneklere uyarlamadaki kritik rolü de ele alınmakta; evlilik ve yas ritüelleri gibi uygulamaların dinî normlarla yerel pratikleri nasıl harmanladığı açıklanmaktadır. Makale ayrıca, bu değişimlerin sosyo-politik ve kültürel etkilerini değerlendirerek, İslam'ın Orta Asya halklarının ulusal zihniyeti ve kimliği üzerindeki kalıcı etkisini ortaya koymaktadır. İslam bayramlarının bölgesel festivallerle örtüşmesi ve Zerdüşti uygulamaların İslamî bir bakış açısıyla yeniden yorumlanması gibi örnekler sunulmaktadır. Çalışmanın sonucunda, yaşam döngüsü ritüellerinin kültürel dönüşümlere sürekli uyum sağlayan dinamik sosyal yapılar olduğu sonucuna varılmaktadır. Bu etkileşim, evrensel İslam ilkeleri ile bölgesel özellikler arasında denge kuran özgün bir "Orta Asya İslamı"nın oluşmasına katkıda bulunmuştur. Makalede, Narşahî, Birunî ve Barthold gibi tarihî kaynakların incelenmesi yoluyla İslam'ın Orta Asya'da yayılımı ve entegrasyonu ele alınmakta; ritüellerin, geleneklerin ve dönüşümlerinin analiziyle İslamî değerler ile yerel geleneklerin sentezi anlaşılmaya çalışılmaktadır.

Anahtar Kelimeler: yaşam döngüsü ritüelleri, İslam, yerli gelenekler, kültürel değişim, kimlik inşası, toplumsal dayanışma

Abstract

The article explores the transformation of life-cycle rituals in Central Asia, shaped by the interaction between Islamic values and indigenous traditions. It examines the historical spread of Islam in the region, emphasizing the challenges faced during the Arab conquest of Maverannahr and the methods used to propagate the religion, such as the integration of Islamic jurisprudence (fiqh) into local customs. This led to the gradual Islamization of the population while retaining distinctive cultural features. The discussion highlights Islam's universal principles, such as equality and tolerance, which fostered social cohesion among diverse ethnic groups. It also underscores the pivotal role of local scholars in adapting Islamic values to pre-existing traditions, ensuring that customs like marriage and mourning rituals blended religious norms with regional practices. Furthermore, the article examines the socio-political and cultural implications of these changes, noting the enduring influence of Islam on the national mentality and identity of Central Asian peoples. Examples include the alignment of Islamic holidays with regional festivities and the reinterpretation of Zoroastrian practices through an Islamic lens. The study concludes that life-cycle rituals are dynamic social constructs, continually adapting to cultural transformations. This interaction has resulted in a distinct form of "Central Asian Islam," which balances universal Islamic tenets with regional characteristics. The article uses historical analysis and sociocultural observation methods, examining historical sources that trace the spread and integration of Islam in Central Asia,

including the writings of Narshahi, Beruni, and Barthold, and analyzes rituals, traditions, and their transformations to understand the synthesis of Islamic values and indigenous customs.

Keywords: life cycle rites, Islam, indigenous traditions, cultural change, identity construction, social solidarity

1. Introduction

Life-cycle rituals are an essential aspect of any society, offering profound insights into its values, beliefs, and social structures. These rituals serve as markers of major life transitions, such as birth, marriage, and death, and reflect the underlying worldview and cultural identity of a community. In Central Asia, life-cycle rituals have undergone significant transformations over centuries, influenced by the interaction between indigenous traditions and the values introduced by Islam. This dynamic relationship has shaped a unique cultural synthesis that continues to define the region's identity today.

Islam was introduced to Central Asia during the Arab conquest of Maverannahr, a region rich in diverse cultural and spiritual traditions. The religion brought with it a comprehensive worldview encompassing religious, moral, social, and political dimensions. However, the process of integrating Islamic values into the established traditions of Central Asia was neither immediate nor uniform. Instead, it evolved through a gradual interplay of adaptation and mutual influence. This convergence created a distinct synthesis, blending universal Islamic principles with local practices, a phenomenon that continues to be reflected in life-cycle rituals.

One of the key features of Islam's impact on Central Asia was the introduction of universal principles such as equality, social justice, and moral discipline. These values resonated deeply with local populations and provided a framework for reinterpreting existing customs. At the same time, pre-Islamic traditions, such as those rooted in Zoroastrianism, persisted and adapted to align with Islamic norms. For example, the Zoroastrian practice of fire sanctity left its imprint on Islamic rituals, seen in wedding ceremonies where symbolic acts involving fire are still performed. Similarly, Navruz, a pre-Islamic celebration of the spring equinox, was recontextualized within an Islamic framework, demonstrating the adaptability and coexistence of these cultural systems.

In the contemporary era, globalization and cultural pluralism have introduced new dimensions to these rituals. While modern influences challenge the traditional forms of life-cycle practices, the core values they embody - community, identity, and spirituality - remain preserved. This ongoing evolution highlights the resilience of Central Asian societies in maintaining their cultural identity amid social and religious changes. By examining these transformations, scholars can better understand how rituals serve as dynamic social constructs that adapt to changing times while retaining their cultural significance.

This article explores the transformation of life-cycle rituals in Central Asia using historical analysis and sociocultural observation. It sheds light on how these practices have shaped identity, fostered social cohesion, and contributed to the development of a unique form of Islam in the region.

2. Materials and Methods

This study employed a qualitative research methodology, focusing on historical analysis and sociocultural observation techniques. Primary and secondary historical sources were critically examined to trace the spread and integration of Islam into the cultural landscape of Central Asia. Key historical works by authors such as Narshahi, Beruni, and Barthold were utilized to provide foundational insights into the religious and social dynamics of the region.

Historical analysis involved a critical evaluation of texts documenting the Arab conquest of Maverannahr, the subsequent Islamization process, and the adaptation of Islamic practices to local traditions. The writings of Islamic jurists and theologians were also analyzed to understand the role of fiqh in the regulation and transformation of indigenous customs.

Sociocultural observation was applied to study how life-cycle rituals, such as birth, marriage, and funeral ceremonies, evolved by merging Islamic norms with pre-existing cultural traditions. Special attention was given to the survival and adaptation of Zoroastrian practices within Islamic frameworks, as well as to the reinterpretation of local festivities, such as Navruz, within an Islamic context.

In addition, contemporary academic literature on the sociology of religion, cultural anthropology, and Islamic studies was reviewed to support the findings. This multi-source and interdisciplinary approach enabled a comprehensive understanding of the synthesis between Islamic values and indigenous traditions, highlighting the dynamic nature of cultural transformation in Central Asia.

3. Discussion

3.1. The Spread of Islam to Central Asia

The Arab conquest of Maverannahr, corresponding to most of modern Central Asia, marked a significant turning point in the religious and cultural history of the region. Prior to the arrival of Islam, Central Asia was home to a rich mosaic of cultural traditions and religious practices, including Zoroastrianism, Buddhism, Nestorian Christianity, and a variety of indigenous animistic beliefs. The Arab expansion into the region began in earnest in the early eighth century, particularly under the leadership of the Umayyad general Qutayba ibn Muslim al-Bahili (circa 704-715 CE), who launched a series of military campaigns into the territories beyond the Oxus River (Amu Darya).

The introduction of Islam into Maverannahr was neither swift nor uncontested. The Arab invaders encountered strong resistance from local populations who were deeply rooted in their existing cultural and spiritual traditions. Unlike previous conquests, where military victory often led to immediate religious conversion, the Islamization of Central Asia required a prolonged and multifaceted strategy that extended beyond mere force. Resistance was fueled by both political autonomy and religious attachment, necessitating the development of more sophisticated methods to promote the acceptance of Islam.

To facilitate the spread of the new faith, the Arabs employed a combination of incentives, coercion, and cultural integration. One of the most significant strategies was the exemption from taxes (such as the *jizya*) for those who embraced Islam, providing a strong material incentive for conversion. According to the historian Narshakhi, the process was sometimes coercive; for instance, inhabitants under Qutayba's command were reportedly forced to cede half of their homes to Arab Muslim settlers, who then lived alongside them to teach the tenets of Islam and ensure the proper observance of Islamic rituals. These Muslim warriors acted as living examples and enforcers of Islamic practice within the local households.

In addition to these social measures, Qutayba initiated a program of religious and cultural transformation by constructing mosques and systematically eliminating symbols of previous religious traditions. As Sayfunov (2024) notes, the invaders actively sought to dismantle the rich cultural heritage that was perceived as incompatible with Islamic monotheism, often by destroying temples and idols associated with earlier faiths. Beruni (as

cited in Sayfunov, 2024) records that Qutayba ordered the destruction of those knowledgeable in the Khorezmian script and lore, recognizing the power of cultural memory in maintaining resistance to Islamization.

The Islamization of Central Asia was thus not merely a religious endeavor but also an ideological and political struggle. It involved the imposition of new religious norms, the reorganization of social structures, and the redefinition of cultural identity. Over time, the initial resistance gradually gave way to acceptance and internalization, facilitated by the adaptability of Islamic principles to local contexts. Islam's universalist message of social equality, moral justice, and spiritual unity resonated with various segments of the Central Asian population, particularly among the lower social strata who found in Islam a promise of dignity and community solidarity.

Crucially, the process of Islamization did not completely erase pre-existing traditions; instead, it often resulted in a synthesis of Islamic teachings with indigenous cultural elements. Islamic missionaries and scholars (da'is) adapted their methods to local customs, allowing for a degree of continuity that eased the transition. For instance, many Zoroastrian rituals were reinterpreted through an Islamic lens rather than being entirely suppressed. This syncretic approach enabled Islam to take root deeply within the social and cultural fabric of Central Asian societies.

Moreover, the role of Islamic jurisprudence (fiqh) in the gradual integration of Islam into daily life cannot be overstated. Local jurists, educated in the Hanafi school of law, played a decisive role in mediating between Islamic ideals and customary practices. Through the issuance of fatwas (legal opinions), they provided religious justification for the continued observance of certain local traditions, re-framing them within an Islamic normative structure. This pragmatic approach facilitated widespread acceptance and ensured that Islam became not only a religious identity but also a central organizing principle of social and political life in Central Asia.

The establishment of Islamic institutions further entrenched the religion's influence. Mosques, madrasas (Islamic schools), and Sufi lodges (khanqahs) became centers of education, socialization, and cultural transmission. They served as focal points for the dissemination of Islamic knowledge and values, fostering a shared religious identity that transcended ethnic and tribal divisions.

In conclusion, the spread of Islam in Maverannahr was a complex and gradual process that involved military conquest, strategic social policies, cultural adaptation, and legal integration. It was not simply the result of force but of a nuanced interplay between coercion, accommodation, and genuine spiritual appeal. Over centuries, Islam evolved from an external imposition into an intrinsic component of Central Asian identity, shaping the region's religious, cultural, and political trajectories in profound and lasting ways.

3.2. Islam's Role in Society and Culture

Islam played an important role in the history of the peoples of Central Asia, in the formation of its culture and civilization. Unlike other religions, it was not only doctrine and ideology, but also politics and lifestyle. This universality of Islam lies in the fact that it covers all areas of Muslim spirituality. The Koran is strictly defined and regulated by the Shariah and hadiths concerning the social, political, moral, legal, every day and other activities of every Muslim. The study of the Koran and hadiths of the Prophet Muhammad, in which the main

place was occupied by the ideas of equality of Muslims, their equality, regardless of skin color and nationality, inspired the local population to adopt this religion. In contrast to the pre-Islamic beliefs, which had a racial, caste, and class nature, Islam declared all its followers equal and brothers, regardless of racial, ethnic, and linguistic affiliation, called for the protection of the rights of the disadvantaged, women and slaves. It can be argued that from the first days of its emergence, Islam had an international, tolerant and universal character, this is what created the preconditions for the spread of Islam among the population of the region. This will improve relations between people and, as far as possible, eliminate the contradictions between wealth and poverty, wisdom and ignorance.

Thanks to this very tolerance and the absence of fanaticism between different peoples in the Islamic world, the spirit of mutual assistance and understanding necessary for the development of civilization was formed, which ensured the peaceful coexistence of heterogeneous ethnic components in the region. In other words, to replace the pagan attitude in the region to a clear differentiation of tribes and clans into "ours" and "aliens", in which the moral customs protecting the clan, prohibitions related only to "ours", and "alien" was perceived as an enemy, with Islam the installation to evaluate people belonging to the same human race about them to a particular faith.

In the VIII-IX centuries in Central Asia Islam became widespread, gradually penetrating the flesh and blood of the peoples of Central Asia. The process of mutual influence was most pronounced in the sphere of religion. Major theologians and preachers of Islam appeared among the clergy of the region.

Fiqh (Muslim jurisprudence) played a major role in this process. According to the main idea of Islam, there is one world, which must live according to the sacred religious law sent down by God in the Koran, embodied in the sunnah of the prophet and interpreted in fiqh (a set of sciences about the principles and rules of life of a Muslim family and community) (Piatrovsky, 1984: 176).

Consequently, only a faqih (Muslim lawyer) - an expert on sacred religious law - could judge the conformity of local customs and traditions with the ideals and norms of Islam. It was the local fuqaha who were destined to play a decisive role in the adaptation of Islam to the conditions of Maverannahr.

Fakih's were usually from the middle urban strata and lived among these people. The inhabitants of the area addressed to the faqih, who enjoyed authority in his area, with various questions of life, work, personal and social life. The Fakih, relying on his knowledge, made a decision, which was formalized in the form of a fatwa. When making decisions, the fuqaha were independent of the official authorities, which often led to their persecution by the latter. But this further increased the authority of the fuqaha among the population.

Fatah's' fatwas were effective. At the same time, the fuqaha tried to keep up with life. The provisions of the Hanafi madhhab made it possible to change outdated decisions depending on changes in people's living conditions. Sometimes the fuqaha had to close their eyes to some violations of the norms of Islam.

The Maverannahr faqih of the Karakhanid period deserve the credit for fixing local customs, traditions, and legal ideas within the framework of the Hanafi madhhab. As a result of the activities of the representatives of this school, many customs, traditions, and legal ideas of the peoples of Maverannahr entered Islam, became «their own», «Muslim», which contributed to even deeper penetration of Islam into the consciousness of people (Muminov, 1990: 38-42).

3.3. The Synthesis of Islamic and Local Traditions

The existence of local scientific traditions in theology in Maverannahr was noted by academician VV Bartold: «... If representatives of exact sciences were invited from Persia, then the Muslim theological school was entirely based on local traditions» (Bartold, 1977: 532-533), «In which, in addition to features characteristic of the entire Muslim world, local features were also manifested» (Bartold, 1963: 224).

Islam quickly spread to Central Asia and began to have a profound impact on all spheres of people's lives. The growing number of believers and the growing interest in the study of Islam contributed to the construction of mosques and madrassas here.

The penetration and spread of Islam in Central Asia is directly related to the Arab conquests and the establishment of centuries-old Arab rule. Although the Arab invasions of Central Asia began around 643-644, only the Arab general Qutaiba ibn Muslim al-Bahili (704-715) managed to conquer the country after a long struggle. As a result of the emergence of a new political force in the region, Central Asia was divided into two parts:

- 1) Mavaraunnahr («Between two rivers») and
- 2) Arodi at-Türk («Lands of the Turks», that is, the land of rulers who did not obey the Arabs). The process of Islamization in these two regions began in different ways.

Islamic culture developed in separate societies, taken separately, and as a result took on certain regional forms. As a result of centuries of development, Islam in Central Asia has also become closely associated with the national culture. As a result, a complete, self-sufficient, comprehensively rich form of Islam emerged in the Central Asian civilization. It has both regional national characteristics and pan-Islamic elements. For centuries, highly qualified local scientists have been the custodians of this treasure trove of theoretical and practical knowledge, and they have also adapted it to changing times. This environment of scholars is an important part of regional Islam. Over the past two centuries, the chronic weakening of this environment has led to an influx of foreign scholars from other parts of the Islamic world, representing their national interests. The conditions for national revival and development require the formation of a normal state of religious life.

The relationship between tradition and morality plays an important role in the development of human society. Traditions and customs, including weddings, mourning, and circumcision ceremonies, play an important role in a person's daily life. Therefore, it is important for everyone to know how important these traditions are for development, to understand how these traditions correspond to the requirements of modern times, and to understand how traditions differ from the customs of other peoples, the reasons for the survival of old traditions.

With its arrival in Central Asia, Islam introduced various religious rites. He tried to introduce Islamic rituals following pre-Islamic Zoroastrian traditions. For example, the Chinese investor tried to destroy the temples of fire worshipers, which were considered sacred in Zoroastrianism. But the peoples of Central Asia have not lost the tradition of consecrated fire. Therefore, to this day, at weddings, the custom has been preserved to rotate the bride and groom around the fire and light candles in the graves.

Islam was able to forcibly introduce into Central Asia not only religious ideology but also very positive traditions. For example, he forbade women to go to the battlefield with men. There is the discipline in the markets. The sellers who cheated on the scales were punished. The thieves were brought before a religious court. Measures were taken against usury.

Islam plays a very important role in shaping the national mentality of the peoples of Central Asia. During the popular Islamic holiday's Eid al-Adha and Eid al-Fitr, Islam played an important role in introducing into our traditions such rituals as organizing a holiday for people, helping the needy and widows during Ramadan, financially supporting and organizing iftar for orphans and needy people.

We emphasize that Islam has played an important role in shaping the national mentality. But if we look at them separately, we see that Islam has thus improved its traits. For example, the holidays on the days of Eid al-Adha are the same as the holidays on the days of Navruz, but if this day is explained by the performance of the Eid al-Adha prayer, which is a religious prayer, then Navruz is explained by the onset of the new year.

True, in the original culture of other peoples living in Central Asia (Aryans, Sogdians, etc.), who converted to Islam, many ideas and postulates of Islam have already taken place, but in a different form and content. For example, the idea of a posthumous reward or punishment. When the death judgment is carried out on the soul, all the good thoughts, words, and deeds of the deceased are weighed on the scales held by the deity of order and justice. But for such ideas to arise, it was required to introduce into the culture the idea of the otherworldly existence and moral judgment when entering another world. Another example: Zoroastrians, that is, sun worshipers, went to the desert and made many sacrifices to ask Ahuramazda to ease any difficulties. In Islam, men would take young children to the fields to pray for rain, and they would not stop praying until it started raining. This is the Islamic version of the Zoroastrian ritual.

Islam has played an important role in the socio-political and cultural-civilizational development of Central Asia. «Whatever period we recall from our ancient history, religion has always been a guide for every person, family, community, region, in a word, for the whole nation», said the First President of the Republic I.A. Karimov in his speech at the first meeting of the Oliy Majlis.

The religious systems of the East have formed not only an ecological culture but also a unique culture of work and consumption. They preferred to be content with the necessities of life, rather than an extravagance. The way of life and philosophy of the Eastern peoples was formed and developed mainly within the framework of religious systems. In the end, religion has had a decisive influence on the historical fate of every nation, its culture, way of life, national psychology, and philosophy.

Nevertheless, the traditions in Islam in Central Asia are traditions and cultures of a synthetic type, combining the introduced elements of Muslim cult, law, Muslim political organization, and elements of the local tradition itself. It is no coincidence that many researchers write about "Central Asian Islam." Unlike Christianity, which in most countries of the East, including the region under study, remained rather a religion of the privileged elite, Islam was gradually perceived in this region as a local and even traditional religion.

Further mass appeal to Islamic values and institutions more and more acting as a socio-psychological reaction of ordinary strata of the population to the crisis of traditional culture and, at the same time, the cultivation of new Islamic knowledge and their development.

Conclusion

The conducted research on the transformation of life-cycle rituals in the context of the interaction between Islamic values and national traditions has revealed several significant trends. Firstly, it was established that the process of integrating Islamic beliefs and practices

into existing cultural codes is a lengthy and ambiguous one. Secondly, it was shown that social, economic, and political factors have a significant impact on the nature of changes in rituals. Thirdly, it was found that rituals play a crucial role in strengthening identity and social cohesion, especially in conditions of cultural transformations. The obtained results indicate that rituals are dynamic social constructs that constantly adapt to changing conditions.

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