

The Importance of Shrines in The Spiritual Life and Mentality of Uzbek People

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Abstract: *This article focuses on the issue of shrines and pilgrimage ceremonies as one of the most topical issues today and analyzes the history of the study of shrines and holy places in Uzbekistan, as well as the rituals of pilgrimage.*

Keywords: *shrine, mentality, national values, Islam, holy shrine, Zangi ota, patriotism, culture, ritual, nature.*

I. INTRODUCTION

Uzbekistan is famous for its rich history, unique shrines and holy sites, like other historical and ethnographic regions in Central Asia. Being one of the centers of ancient civilization, Uzbekistan is the birthplace of the first monotheistic religion Zoroastrianism. It is the place where Buddhism flourished in ancient times, the intersection where secular religions such as Christianity and Islam, and different cultures cross, and “The Gate of the East”, which connected the East with the Mediterranean through the Great Silk Road. The first sources of the traditions of sedentary agriculture and statehood were formed in this region.

The Uzbek population stands out among the peoples of the world with its rich cultural heritage, values, unique customs and traditions.

The material and spiritual wealth of Uzbek people, formed and polished over the centuries, is a great achievement of human intellect and thinking. Man receives spiritual nourishment, strength, and relies on the priceless spiritual riches left by his descendants throughout his life. In particular, it is safe to say that holy shrines and sacred sites have become an integral part of the Uzbek mentality. Shrines are a unique spiritual nourishment for people who come from far and wide to visit, as well as a meeting place for different people and cultures, and play an important role in shaping human feelings in the upbringing of the younger generation. At the same time, research on sacred sites helps to shed light on the historical foundations, ways of development and values of the traditional culture of the Uzbek people

II. MATERIALS AND METHODS

The article is based on the principles of generally accepted conventional methods - historical, comparative and logical analysis, consistency, and objectivity.

Pilgrimage is a unique ancient form of religious culture and is one of the religious ceremonies that has been preserved in all religions for centuries. For example, Christians visit holy sites in Palestine, Muslim pilgrims visit Mecca, and Buddhists visit the high-altitude Lhasa. Holy sites and shrines are widespread throughout the world, and although their appearance dates back to ancient times, they have not lost their significance in the life of mankind and society today. Initially, people worshiped the cult of nature (water, fire, caves, springs, stones, trees) due to their weakness in the face of the forces of nature, but later man-made shrines (tombs, mausoleums) began to spread.

Sources on the history of the shrines can be divided into several groups: traveler's diaries, archeological research, and descriptive publications. It should be noted that there are very few manuscript sources on the history of shrines and the social life in Uzbekistan before the Arab conquest. The reason for this is explained in Abu Rayhan Beruni's "Monuments of Ancient Peoples" as follows: “By special order of Ibn Qutaybah, the viceroy of the Arab Caliphate for

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the eastern provinces, the rich written heritage and works of art of the natives were gathered in the market square of each city and burned”.

The first information about the shrines located on the territory of Uzbekistan began to be recorded in the works of Muslim historians from the 10th century. In particular, the work "History of Bukhara" by Abu Jafar Narshahi, written in 944, is a work that provides extensive coverage of ethnographic materials on the socio-political life, religious beliefs and ceremonies of the local population.

In studying the history of the shrines, the works written by such scientists as Karmyshcheva, E.V. Rtvladze, Z.A. Khakimov, M.E. Masson, Y.V. Knozorov, B.N. Kastolskiy, B.Veymarn, V.V.Bartold, M.S.Andreev, S.P.Tolstov, O.A.Suxareva, P.P.Ivanov, A.Ranovich, L.Yu.Mankovskaya, G.P.Snesarev, V.N.Basilov, V.A.Arshavskaya, S. Mirxasilov, Dj.X. are of great importance, as they contain scientific information about the cult of saints, the architectural design and epigraphy of shrines, and archeological monuments.

It should be noted that in the early twentieth century, the study of the history of Central Asia by Western, especially Russian orientalists, was based on political, ideological and socio-economic principles. Scholars such as V.V. Bartold and A.N. Samoylivich researched the basis of socio-economic principles, while true Marxist-historians such as M. Pokrovsky conducted research on the basis of political and ideological principles [2]. As a result, the history of the peoples of Central Asia has been falsified, and their national values and traditions have been assessed as obsolete. In particular, under the Soviet ideological pressure, articles such as "Sacred places in Khorezm and the secrets of their formation", "Why we gave up religion" by A.Rahmonov and S. Yusupov, "Worshipping saints and its harms", "Miracle prophecy and scientific evidence" by T. Davlatbaev, "Truth about the cemetery" by S.Abdulazizov, "Islam in Tsarist Russia", "Islam" by A.Klimovich, "The emergence and harms of the "Holy" and "Shrines"" by N.Akhmedov, and "Harmful habits" by I. Fozilov sharply criticized shrines and holy places as a tool of religious exploitation, and attempts were made to artificially create a negative attitude among people. After the dissolution of the former USSR, there emerged a change in attitudes towards shrines and research has been conducted that is approached in terms of a new spirit of national and traditional values the Uzbek nation. As a result, literature containing generalized information about shrines and holy sites from the historical-architectural, archeological, ethnological and religious perspectives was created. Sources in Persian and Arabic, which were not previously available, were translated and a terminological base was formed. In addition, various classifications of shrines have been developed. A number of literature, monographs and scientific articles were published by scholars I. Jabborov, H. Karomatov, B. Ahmedov, A. Ashirov, T. Qilichev, A. Malikov, M. Sattor, A. Abdurasulov, G. Khodjiniyazov, C. Esberganova, X. Xakimniyazov, I. Ostanauq, N.U. Abdulakhatov and orientalist K. Muminov [3]. Today, shrines are being studied not only by local scholars but also by foreign researchers. For example, extensive research has been conducted by Jürgen Paul (Germany), Joe-Ann Gross (USA), Terry Zarkon, Habiba Fathi (France), and Yayoi Kawahara (Japan).

III. EXPERIMENTAL RESULTS

The term "Pilgrimage", which is common among our people, is an Arabic word meaning "to go somewhere or to a person."

Pilgrimage means performing certain rituals and going to tombs, shrines, and places sanctified in the religion in Islam.

In the Islam religion, visiting graves is interpreted as a reward. According to the hadiths, the Prophet Muhammad (peace and blessings of Allah be upon him) said, "Visit the graveyards, for it is a reminder of the Hereafter." [5] Remembering the Hereafter, on the other hand, keeps one away from evil and brings one closer to goodness. The pilgrimage ritual usually consists of reciting certain surahs of the Holy Qur'an (especially Surat al-Fatihah) at the grave and praying for the deceased, as well as giving alms. According to Islam, when visiting the tombs of saints, it is not permissible to ask from their spirits for help such as to satisfy their needs, to cure their ailments, or to give them

children. This is because it is up to Allah alone to carry out such actions. Whether the one being visited is a prophet, saint, or a sheikh, it is appropriate to devote the rewards of charities to their souls and pray for them instead of asking for help. In Islam, the worship of the individual is shirk (a sin of idolatry and polytheism).

Pilgrimage is an integral part of the daily life and mentality of the Uzbek people, and over the centuries a unique etiquette of pilgrimage has been formed. For example:

Pilgrimage is performed with the intention of making a pilgrimage to Allah, the Exalted, and being purified spiritually and physically.

According to local custom, one enters the graveyard greeting the people of the grave and recites Qur'an in a special seat or in a place where graves are not trampled.

Men and women must enter the shrine in a separate order. It is advisable for women to wear simple clothes that do not attract the attention of others, and a headscarf.

Kissing tombstones during the pilgrimage, stroking them, rubbing them face to face, circumambulating the tomb, lighting candles, intentionally tying rags to trees or shrubs around the shrine, writing various inscriptions or words of intention on the walls of mausoleums, tombs and architectural structures are strictly prohibited. Such actions are shirk (a sin of polytheism or idolatry) and sinful acts. Allah does not forgive polytheism.

It is not permissible to take pictures near graves in the shrine, to press graves, to sit on them, to speak loudly in these places, to laugh, to make noise, or to do any undue act which may have a negative effect on others.

The shrine should be kept clean. It is strictly forbidden to cook, eat, listen to music, sleep, drink alcohol and smoke tobacco around the mausoleum or tombs.

It is a great sin and polytheism to ask for help or salvation from one of the servants of Allah and to pay homage to him. Such actions take away the expected rewards of visiting. An animal is slaughtered in the name of Allah and the reward is given to the dead as well as to the saints buried in the cemetery.

It is not permissible to throw money on the grave. Donations and charity money are required to be thrown in special charity boxes.

After completing the pilgrimage, the shrine is left in a quiet and calm state. No bowing to the grave at the time of departure is allowed.

It is not permissible to break trees, plants, pollute springs, kill insects and animals in shrines [6].

The establishment of Islam in Movarounnahr in the VIII century brought about significant political and social changes. The advent of Islam brought with it a new ideology. As a result, the existing religious views and traditions among the population got mixed with the new Islamic customs. In particular, the belief in saints arose as a result of pre-Islamic religious views, such as the worship of ancestral spirits and the intermingling of the new Islam. For this reason, tombs associated with Muslim saints appeared in place of pre-Islamic shrines and holy sites. Not only in Uzbekistan, but also in Central Asia, the holy places and shrines are associated with the Companions of the Prophet Muhammad, famous people in the Muslim world, such as Hazrat Uthman ibn Affan, Ali ibn Abu Talib, Sa'd ibn Abu Waqqas, Akkosha, Ma'az ibn Jabal, Hazrat Bilal, Abdurrahman ibn A'w, Uwais Qarani, Qusam ibn Abbas, and Ja'far ibn Husayn Sayyid Battal Ghazi. However, although it is not true that they were in the territory of Uzbekistan, the names of these people have been widely used by Islamic propagandists in the struggle against local religious views. For example, we can find shrines associated with the name of Hazrat Ali in different regions of the country. According to researcher V.L. Ogudin, there are 18 shrines associated with Hazrat Ali in the Fergana Valley.

In the Middle Ages, the process of Islamization of ancient shrines was completed, and they were turned into tombs of Muslim saints or "dargahs" where sacred steps were made. It was believed that where the saints came, huge trees grew, springs appeared where their hands or sticks touched, and hand and footprints remained where they prayed. The customs in these places have been adapted to Muslim norms, and symbolic tombs, cells, and chillahanas (places to be

alone for forty days and pray to Allah) have been built. We can see this in the case of the Machit Ali shrine in the Tashkent region. The shrine of Masjid Ali is named after Hazrat Ali, the son-in-law of the Prophet Muhammad (saas). It is known that Hazrat Ali is the descendant of the "Sayyids", who have been glorified as "Ahl al-Bayt" for the Muslim community after the Noble Messenger. According to popular belief, Hazrat Ali came here on his horse Duldul. When he rested under a tree and could not find water for ablution, he prayed to Allah and asked for water. By the grace of Allah, a spring appeared. For this reason, the local people called the spring Auliya-spring. Hazrat Ali watered the legendary Duldul horse with spring water. Today, the shrine is famous for its 750-800-year-old giant maple tree and medicinal "sacred spring," which is a cure for various skin ailments due to the presence of silver elements in the spring water. Pilgrims pray for Hazrat Ali and offer sacrifices they bring. They used to tie a piece of cloth to the maple tree (it is prohibited at this time and considered shirk).

The holy sites (graves) are one of the main elements of local Islam, and local saints are portrayed as possessing divine power, which is enriched with Qur'anic and Sufi imaginations as well as popular views.

The word saint is derived from the Arabic word "Wali", which means "friend of Allah, a person close to God." According to the teachings of Sufism, a saint is one who knows the nature and attributes of Allah well, who does what He commands, who abstains from sinful deeds, and who renounces the blessings and pleasures of this world. In the Islamic tradition, saints are people who are close to Allah because of some deed or virtue, and whose prayers are answered. Saints stand after the level of prophets. In popular view, saints are portrayed as miracle workers, patrons of various professions, farming and animal husbandry (piri), possessing infinite power that affects human life. In particular, prophet Noah was considered a piri of carpenters, prophet Daniel was a piri of soapmakers and weavers, Hazrat Hizr was a piri of farming and a benefactor. The Uzbek people's belief in saints is explained as follows: "A saint is not a god, he is not devoid of God." It is known that the popularity of sacred tombs is determined by the karamat (a supernatural wonder performed by a saint) of the saints buried in it. If the saint had many karamats during his life, it meant that his tomb was also crowded with pilgrims. This is because the remembrance of those who are honored as friends of Allah, that is, the saints, and visiting their graves has long been considered a good deed. When people passed by shrines, they greeted and if they were on horseback, they dismounted and visited the shrine, and continued on their way. Destruction of shrines and sacred tombs was considered a sin and was believed to harm the person who harmed the shrine.

The pilgrims mainly prayed for the spirit of the saint, asked for help in solving their problems, offered sacrifices and donated to the shrine. Generally speaking, shrines were places for people to show respect and trust to saints, and manifest people's wishes. Traditionally, rituals such as turning around the tomb of a saint seven times, facing the tombstones, lighting a lamp in honor of the saint's spirit, tying a cloth to the trees with intention, and throwing coins into the spring water were performed at the holy steps and shrines. Childless people asked for children, sick people asked for cure, farmers and herdsmen mostly asked for blessings. Mostly pilgrimages were visited in spring (April and May) and autumn seasons (September, October), on Wednesdays, Saturdays, and Sundays.

For the first time, in 1969, the Soviet ethnographer G.P. Snesev divided the shrines in Central Asia into four groups according to the myths and legends associated with the saints:

Shrines associated with "Saints whose image, place of birth and name are not fully known";

Pilgrimages associated with the "Biblical and Qur'anic divine figures, saints" and "pre-Islamic saints";

"Saints of Medieval Sufism", shrines associated with local and well-known representatives of Sufism;

"The glorification of local authorities at the level of saints", the mausoleums built after their death [7].

In 1996, the Islamic scholar A. Muminov proposed to classify shrines according to two characteristics - "level of popularity" and "content", which are based on the objects around the shrine. Based on the features of the shrine:

- Famous in Central Asia;

- popular only in a region or in a particular region;
- known to only one limited local area.
- Based on the components of the shrine:
 - single part (only a sacred place — a source of water, a tree, a stone with a miraculous shape and feature);
 - two-part (with a symbolic or real tomb);
 - complex (with mausoleum);
 - with a room;
 - mausoleum and cemetery;
 - with a mausoleum and a mosque;
- The mausoleum with a mosque and a madrasa with a foundation [8].

As he studies the cult of saints in his works, an Uzbek ethnographer I. Jabborov notes that: "Many sacred places and saints were created as a result of the worship of ghosts of the past, their remembrance, and worship of the forces of nature" [9].

Systematization of shrines on a geographical basis was carried out in 1991 by historian T.S.Saksanov. Based on the data collected, the researcher identified 343 shrines in the territory of Uzbekistan, 60% of which were sacred shrines and shrines associated with the cult of nature [10].

Scientific research according to the formation of shrines is divided into 2 types:

- Naturally existing shrines.
- Anthropogenic shrines, sacred places created by human labor.

No matter where you visit in Uzbekistan, you can see unique shrines and sacred places. As the famous scholar Ghaybullas-Salam said, "Our country is such a sacred place that you must be careful wherever you walk, because every stone or piece can be the dust of a great person!" Each of the dargahs and shrines plays an important role in the life and of the local people living in a particular district, village and street, and considered to be a place to express their religious views. The shrines located in Uzbekistan, the "holy" places in Islam and the worship of their graves can be divided into the following historical and social groups:

Tombs of saints from the pre-Islamic period of fire-worship and paganism and their graves, adapted by Islam to the interests of certain clergy;

Sanctification of some representatives of Sufism and their graves;

Mausoleums built in the tombs of some rulers and their officials, who were elevated to the level of saints;

Graves of people who were engaged in handicrafts and then rose to the level of "saints";

The history of the ascension of those who fought against the political and religious rule of the rulers to the level of saints by the working people and their graves [11].

Historically, not all religious views and traditions were implemented to real life due to ideological pressures in the former Soviet Union: the Bolsheviks, who had strengthened their position politically and militarily, launched a comprehensive attack on religion. For example, the Soviet government called the Shohimardon shrine in Fergana a "nest of reactionary believers and oppressors," and in 1921 sent Bolshevik troops to the shrine to carry out looting operations. It is estimated that in the early twentieth century, more than 15,000 pilgrims visited Shahimardon every year in July and August alone. Due to the large number of pilgrims, 80-100,000 sums were collected annually under the auspices of the sheikhs of Hazrat Ali's tomb. This required the Soviet government to pay special attention to Shahimardon. In late December 1921, during a battle between the Red Army and Normat Mahsum, a tomb and a mosque were set on fire. The magnificent mosque, a unique architectural monument of the time, burned to the ground and its roof collapsed. The rare 19th-century monument in the Fergana Valley was destroyed in this way.

In the 1930s, the foundations of religious institutions (mausoleums, shrines, madrassas, mosques, and schools) were completely dismantled, and they themselves were completely closed. Numerous Muslim scholars were shot, exiled to Siberia or other regions of the former Soviet Union. The buildings were converted into residences, warehouses, workshops and so on. As a result of viewing shrines and mausoleums as weapons of religious exploitation and superstition, they became unattended, lost their historical-architectural appearance, and some of them disappeared altogether. Just one example: the Chokardiza cemetery in Samarkand, where famous saints were buried, was almost completely preserved until the 1940s. However, in 1946-1955, the cemetery was demolished and given to build a house. A similar tragedy can be seen in the way the Gulobod (Kolobod) cemetery in Bukhara was treated. [13] The Zangiota shrine, one of the most important religious centers in Central Asia, was closed in the 1930s under the influence of former Soviet ideology, and religious figures were persecuted. Within the architectural complex, local production workshops were established, and madrassa rooms were allocated as living quarters for workers. As a result of the activities of the production shops, the unique architectural monument was gradually eroded. Due to the fact that the necessary restoration work was not carried out at all, the posters of Zangi ota mausoleum and the mosque become unrecoverable. Although the mosque was officially opened in 1945, it was closed in 1946 and turned into an atheistic museum. By the summer of 1957, the Committee on Religious Affairs under the Council of Ministers had issued a formal decision to close all places of pilgrimage, calling the popularization of pilgrimage traditions a "dangerous sign of the emergence of religion" and an "informal gathering of believers." The office had always had to comply with all the special decisions of the party and government bodies to combat traditional rituals (remnants of the past). The office was instructed to issue a series of fatwas on the abolition of Hajj and the worship of saints, Mawlid (Mawlid an-Nabi) and other traditional rituals. Thus, a number of fatwas and instructions were issued by the imams of the mosque to declare the above-mentioned and other ceremonies, especially those performed in congregation, as "unprofessional" and "un-Islamic." [14] We can cite many such examples in history. The policy of forced secularization of the Soviet government did not completely destroy the religious psyche of the Uzbek people. In traditional families, the older generation tried to introduce their offspring to the basics of religious beliefs, Sharia law, and Islamic morality. Going to shrines, pilgrimage ceremonies became a family tradition. In 1989, at the request of Muslims, the Zangiota Mosque and shrine were reopened.



Figure 1. Zangiota complex (1925) Figure 2. Zangiota complex (2019)

In the mentality of the Uzbek people, many of the most important events in human life have long been recognized as the result of visiting holy places, and beliefs related to personal problems in everyday life have been formed over the centuries and other important aspects of the mental image, including love for the motherland and ancestors. In particular, the cult of saints in shrines and dargahs plays an important role in educating young people in the spirit of purity, faith and diligence. The great thinker Alisher Navoi, in his works, interprets the saints and prophets, that is, the guardians after the prophets, as perfect human beings, and dwells on the qualities of the saints, such as repentance, eating honest food, keeping the teachings of the sect, humility, gentleness, generosity and patience. He realizes that the guardian is engaged in a profession and earns a living by his own labor. Indeed, it is known from history that the great representatives of mysticism, the guardians, were engaged in a certain profession. In particular, Navoi states that "among the mashayiks, Khoja Abdullah Ansari was a shoemaker, Sheikh Muhammad Sakkok was a knife maker, Sheikh Abu Hafz Haddod was a blacksmith, Sheikh Abulabbas Omili was a butcher, Sheikh Abulhasan was a muezzin, Sheikh Banon was a porter, and Bahovuddin Naqshband was a cloth embroiderer." It is a historical fact that the saints lived with the view that "worldly wealth is superfluous, and that it is good for everyone to work and earn according to his labor." For example, Zangi ota made a living by herding livestock. For this reason, to this day, he is considered and revered as a piri of those who deal with livestock.

Sheikh Najmiddin Kubro and others, who gave their lives to protect their homeland from enemies in the formation of the spirit of love, patriotism and courage, are a bright symbol of devotion and courage. Sahibkiran Amir Temur,



Picture 3. Tomb of Amir Temur.(Samarkand)



Figure 4. Islam Karimov tomb (Samarkand)

fought against the Mongol rule and laid the foundation of our national statehood. Also, the life and activity of the First President of the Republic of Uzbekistan I.A. Karimov, who ensured 26 years of independent development of Uzbekistan, plays an important role in the formation of such qualities as patriotism and loyal service to the people. In the center of Samarkand, not far from the mausoleum of the Timurids, in the entrance to the mausoleum built in 2018 in honor of I. Karimov in the mosque of Hazrati Hizr, it is written that "This sacred place is the eternal rest of Islam Karimov, the first President of the Republic of Uzbekistan, the great statesman and politician, dear son of the Uzbek people". These words, written in Uzbek, Russian and English, evoke in the heart of any Uzbek child a feeling of boundless respect and reverence.

Places associated with natural cults have also been preserved for centuries as an integral part of the Uzbek people's way of life.

Pilgrimages (springs, caves, healing soils, unique forests) that occur in natural conditions without human intervention, in addition to being healing places, play an important role in instilling in young people a love of nature, its beauty, aesthetic pleasure, love and respect for nature.

Due to the development of medicine, today such shrines function mainly as recreation areas. We can see the example of such shrines as Kirkkiz Bulak in Tashkent region, Machit Ali shrine, Parpi ota, Obishukur spring, and Baliklikul in Namangan, Avliyota and Parpi ota in Jizzakh region. These shrines are a place that balances nature and man, and are of great importance today in an age of environmental problems.

The ecosystem in these places is well preserved as it is not possible to harm the plants and animals in the shrines according to the etiquette of pilgrimage. Such shrines glorify ancient trees, and legends about the transformation of trees into human beings or the beginning of life from a tree can be found not only in the oral tradition of the Uzbek people, but also in the folklore of the peoples of the world. Such beliefs have become so ingrained in the lives of the people that the tradition of sanctifying certain trees and turning them into objects of worship, which was thought to be the basis for the beginning of life, has emerged. Therefore, places associated with trees such as slate, willow and poplar have been sanctified by people turned into shrines.

Figure 3. An 800-850- year-old maple tree at the Chinarata shrine (Tashkent region).

In particular, shrines such as "The tree poplars", "White poplar" (Kyrgyzstan), "Tut ota", "Sulaymon ota"



(Surkhandarya), and "Chinorbuva" (Tashkent) have been formed on the basis of tradition to glorify centuries-old trees.

Pilgrims performed rituals around the ancient tree, donated money, and tied rags to the tree branches. Tying a piece of cloth to the trees in the holy places used to be a symbol of the symbolic connection between the pilgrim and the holy place, through which each pilgrim expressed their wishes and desires. G. Snesev described the situation as "the establishment of a magical connection between the sanctuary and the pilgrim."

In addition to trees, springs are also important in shrines. The healing waters, which differ in their structure, have long been considered sacred by the locals and turned into shrines. There are various legends and views among the people on the origin of these springs. For example, the origin of springs in the shrine "Qadamjoy" in Tashkent region is associated with the name of the prophet Idris. The origin of the Kyrgyzbulak spring, located on the border of Piskent and Almalyk, dates back to ancient times. According to a popular folk, forty beautiful girls rested on the shores of the lake there one day when malicious people attacked them. Girls threw themselves into the water to escape [16]. Then water rises from forty places on the ground and the girls turn into springs. Surprisingly, the chemical composition of

the water of each spring is different, and each is a cure for individual diseases. Mostly women visit the Kyrgyz spring, and brides go to the water to wish to have children.

The Uzbek people have long believed that spring fish in the shrine are precious, and that anyone who looks at them gets rid of diseases. For example, it is believed that people with hepatitis can be cured if they look at the fish in the famous Sadkak ota cemetery in the Fergana Valley and Hazra Ali cemetery in Sokh. Pilgrimages associated with the deification of fish can be found in other regions of the country as well. In particular, at the Mavlonu Buva Shrine in Chust, Namangan Province, the Baliklikul Shrine in Chartak District, and the Avliyota Shrine in Jizzakh Province, locals reported that anyone who caught or ate fish at the shrines contracted or died of leprosy.

IV. CONCLUSION

In short, visiting holy sites, which are one of the most important features of the Uzbek people's way of life and national mentality, is in fact associated with pre-Islamic religious beliefs - animism and fetishism. Under the influence of Islam, this ancient custom was transformed, and the shrines were associated with the names of Islamic figures and enriched with Islamic traditions. In this way, advocates of Islam tried to eradicate the previous religious views and establish a new religion of Islam. Today, visiting to these shrines and pilgrimage ceremonies reflect the optimistic intentions of Uzbek people such as favoring the souls of the deceased, and hoping for the manifestation of their noble goals and intentions.

From the first days of independence, Uzbekistan has done a lot to improve the sacred places and shrines, to study the life, activities and spiritual heritage of great people. In particular, the International Charitable Fund "Golden Heritage" was established in 1996 at the initiative of the First President of the Republic of Uzbekistan I.A. Karimov in order to study the invaluable sources of our national culture - historical monuments, shrines, manuscripts, lithographs and pass them on to future generations. The Fund was established as a public organization and currently operates in the Republic of Karakalpakstan, 12 regions and 47 districts of Uzbekistan. To date, the shrines in the country are being reconstructed, creating all the conditions for the visit not only of the local population, but also of foreign pilgrims, and all the opportunities for the performance of pilgrimage ceremonies are present. The holy shrines of our people, such as Hakim at-Termizi, Ismail Somoni, Chor Bakr, Chashmai Ayub, Shahizinda, Ruqabad, Imam Al-Bukhari, Bahauddin Naqshband, Gori Amir, Khoja Ahror, Pahlavon Mahmud, Hazrati Imam, Zangi Ota, and Sultan Saodat are known and popular not only in Central Asia but all over the world. There are such shrines and holy sites in the territory of Uzbekistan, which are equated in Islam with the "Little Hajj". This, in turn, will be the basis for the development of pilgrimage tourism in Uzbekistan. Our country can compete with other countries of the world in terms of pilgrimage tourism with its cities such as Samarkand, Bukhara, Khiva, Tashkent, Shakhrisabz, Kokand and Margilan.

Pilgrimages and related traditions, which have a special place in the national spiritual heritage and mentality of the Uzbek people, are also one of the important components of human culture. Today, when the process of globalization is accelerating and environmental problems are intensifying, shrines and dargahs serve as a reserve for our national traditions, as well as for natural ecosystem. This, in turn, leads to the need to carry out archeological, ethnological, hagiographic, linguistic, historical, documentary, Islamic and archival research on shrine.

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