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An Ethnographic Analysis Of The Religious And Mystical Healing Functions Of Traditional Household Objects Of Khorezm

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ABSTRACT

This article examines the religious-mystical healing practices associated with household items in the Khorezm region. Earthenware and glass vessels inscribed with Qur'anic verses, combined with colors and materials, were used to treat illnesses, protect against spirits, and strengthen spiritual well-being.

Keywords:

Religious-mystical, healing, Khorezm, earthenware, Qur'an

Introduction. In the traditional culture of Khorezm, household items functioned not only as practical tools to meet daily needs but also as significant cultural objects with religious-mystical and healing properties. According to ethnographic sources and museum collections, earthenware and glass vessels, trays, containers of various sizes, and other household items were inscribed with Qur'anic verses and supplications. These objects were decorated using special colored inks—black, red, and green—through which practices aimed at healing illnesses, protecting against the evil eye and malevolent spirits, as well as strengthening spiritual and physical well-being, were carried out.

This study examines the religious-mystical and healing elements in household items and their practical applications, taking as examples the ancient “Kavsar” vessels numbered AX 24, AX 29, and AX 31 from the Arda Khiva Museum collection. Furthermore, it highlights the religious-mystical therapeutic methods implemented through the writing of verses

inside the vessels, their use with water, and the selection of colors and materials.

Literature Review. The study by G.D. Djanabaeva [1, pp. 59–70] is significant, as it examines the emergence and subsequent development of the folk decorative-handicraft arts, investigating industrial and artisanal occupations while demonstrating the historical continuity of the cultures and national traditions of the peoples of Central Asia. D.A. Fakhretdinova [2], in her works, discusses the ancient traditions of jewelry and coppersmithing, noting that artisans transmitted their skills from generation to generation, employing techniques such as melting, engraving, blackening, and enameling. S. Bulatov [3] focuses on issues of decorative theory. Additionally, the manuscripts of ceremonial specialists [4] and the collections of the Khiva Ichan-Qala Museum [5] as well as the Arda Khiva Museum [6] materials played an important role in our research.

Methodology. In analyzing this article, several scientific research methods were employed. Specifically, the historical-comparative and interpretative methods were used to study the

cultural, religious-mystical, and healing functions of traditional household items and vessels in Khorezm, as well as to analyze museum collections and ethnographic sources. The textual analysis method was applied to examine the Qur'anic verses, prayer passages, and magical inscriptions written on the vessels and objects to determine their content and intended use. Semiotic analysis was employed to study the symbolic and therapeutic properties of items through their colors (red, green, black), shapes, geometric patterns, and inscriptions. The historical-descriptive method provided general information about the historical context of the objects, their period of use, and their role in Khorezm's religious-mystical practices. Finally, an interdisciplinary approach, combining ethnography, history, religious-mystical studies, anthropology, and art history, was used to explain the multifunctional role of household items.

Discussion. In the religious culture of the Khorezm population, the oldest roots of spiritual practices have been preserved, and traces of religious-mystical healing are also evident in household items. Many foreign researchers have collected vessels belonging to Central Asian peoples as art objects. Currently, numerous Uzbek lagans, obdastals, and kumghons are preserved in the British Museum, the Hermitage, and the State Museum of the History of Religion in Russia. Among them, many examples are decorated with Arabic calligraphy. Similarly, ethnographic museums in Khiva also preserve such household items.

For instance, in the Khiva Ichan-Qala Museum collection, inventory number KP 1158/265 corresponds to a copper teapot whose exterior is inscribed seven times with the Arabic phrase "Bismillah." Additionally, in the recently opened Arda Khiva Museum [6], the ancient Khorezm "Kavsar" vessels, numbered AX 24, AX 29, and AX 31 [7], are exhibited. Inside these vessels, Qur'anic verses are written in a circular format. According to U. Joraqulov, a traditional healing practice involves writing Surahs such as Al-Fatiha, Yasin, Ikhlas, and Al-Mulk inside wide ceramic lagans using black ink made from saffron. After the ink dries, water is poured into the vessel and left for one, three, seven, or forty days, after which it is administered to the

patient. This method is still encountered today. The main purpose of these practices is to imbue water with healing and positive energy, thereby treating ailments of the body, correcting moral or spiritual weakness, and alleviating unbalanced states of mind [8].

Ancient legends include the belief that devils and spirits could enter the body through ingestion. Ritual specialists recommended inscribing verse 267 of Surah 2 on ceramic vessels or other materials and sealing the vessel to prevent intrusion. This practice is referred to as "capturing demons" or "protecting the household from spirits" by informants [9]. Furthermore, verses 122–124 of Surah 3 were written on old vessels or leather containers to quench thirst and secure victory over enemies [6].

In religious-mystical healing practices, inscriptions inside glass vessels played a significant role. In particular, the letters "Bi, Sin, Mim, Alif, Lam, He, Alif, Lam, Ra, Ha, Ya, Mim" were inscribed 40 times inside a vessel; when the water from this vessel was administered to a patient, it was believed to cure any illness. Similarly, if the letters were inscribed 10 times and given to a woman experiencing labor pains, it was thought to quickly relieve her from childbirth complications [4]. Such practices are documented in works on religious-mystical medicine.

One of the fol (divination) manuscripts records a protective and curative prayer written on a pestle or its mortar to identify and remove illness [10]: "Is she not a woman? Spirit of Pharaoh. Spirit strike Korun. Spirit strike Korun. Shaddad Namrud. Two-eyed snake. Ten months. Yemen Abu Jahl and Qayunus. Curse Korun. May Allah curse them in this world and the Hereafter."

This curse prayer incorporates narratives from Qur'anic verses 21:78–81; 34:12–14; 38:36–40; 27:15–45, stories about Adam (2:33–34; 36; 7:19–25; 20:115–122), and the story of Moses (7:103–110; 26:22–35; 20:17–23; 27:10–12; 28:30–32). Collections such as Khalili's contain many such vessels, and Rezvan has attempted to reveal their uses in his works. Structurally, these curse inscriptions resemble ancient Babylonian vessel writings. Several of these vessels are preserved in the British Museum.

In Khorezm, a group of religious scholars, known as a'zayimkhon, recommended writing the 6th verse of Surah 6 on glass or paper, washing it with spring or rainwater, and consuming it. Additionally, they prepared a mixture of bright red oil and yellow goat's milk for three days, then boiled it until it turned black. Such liquids were given to caravans embarking on long journeys and were consumed each morning to quench thirst.

Another interesting practice documented by ritual specialists involved painting images of undesirable animals on broken pieces of earthenware to expel harmful creatures from the household. The associated Qur'anic verses for this purpose were 6:101–102.

These examples illustrate the multifunctional role of household items in Khorezm, serving not only as everyday objects but also as tools for spiritual protection, healing, and ritual practice.

In religious-mystical healing practices, colors played a crucial role in writing magical formulas, incantations, and prayers. Instead of traditional ink, substances such as musk, saffron, rosewater, apple or grape juice, and even the blood of a hoopoe bird were used. These inscriptions were primarily executed in black, red, and green inks.

According to manuscripts of Khorezm ritual specialists, red ink was predominantly employed in removing spells or treating patients affected by magic. This red ink was made from saffron, applied to bowls, and then washed with Zamzam or rainwater before being administered to the patient. Saffron, which grows in Afghanistan and Iran, was brewed like tea and consumed. The inscriptions in red ink often contained verses intended to counteract spirits or magic. Occasionally, blood was used instead of red ink.

Green ink, in contrast, was applied for writing prayers intended to defeat enemies. Red ink was also used for writing formulas to expel malevolent or intrusive spirits.

These practices demonstrate how color was not merely decorative but served as an integral part of the therapeutic and protective efficacy in Khorezm's religious-mystical medicine. **Conclusion:** In Khorezm, household items served not only practical purposes but also played a significant role in religious-

mystical healing. Earthenware and glass vessels, Qur'anic verses, prayers, and colored inks were employed to promote both physical and spiritual health.

Through the use of color, material, liquid, and inscriptions, these practices aimed to cure illnesses and ward off spirits. This demonstrates the complex and integrated nature of religious-mystical healing within Khorezm's traditional culture.

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9. Kavsar – a large, deep, plate-like bowl. Until the mid-20th century, it was the main serving dish in the households of Khorezm. It could accommodate at least eight people. These dishes were used not only for serving food but also for holding ayran (fermented milk) and stewed apricot pits submerged in water, fulfilling both culinary and practical purposes.

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