

**ETNOLOGIYA. ETNOGRAFIYA. ANTROPOLOGIYA  
ETNOLOGY. ETHNOGRAPHY. ANTHROPOLOGY**

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## **Mythological Views about Water of the Fergana Valley**

### **Abstract**

In this article, the mythological views about water, in particular, the ancient views of the Turkic peoples and other peoples of the world related to water are analyzed. In addition, the history of various water-related customs and traditions, including the practice of sacrificing to water bodies, particularly, to the river Syrdarya, which runs through Fergana Valley and various countries of Central Asia is analyzed. Beliefs related to the cult of water as well as local folk knowledge about the frog, the patron saint of moisture are also described.

The author analyzes the historical basis of mythological views related to water and the cult of Hizr, mermaids on the basis of historical-ethnographic, folklore sources. He also tries to show the historical basis of traditional folk views about water in the Central Asian region on the example of the Uzbeks of the Fergana Valley, the essence of their origin, content and local features.

**Key words:** tradition, concept, customs, images, water, cult.

## **Farg'ona vodiysida suv bilan bog'liq mifologik qarashlar**

### **Abstrakt**

Mazkur maqolada suv haqidagi mifologik qarashlar, xususan, turkiy xalqlar va jahon xalqlarining suv bilan bog'liq qadimiy qarashlari tahlil qilingan. Qolaversa, suv bilan bog'liq turli urf-odat va an'analar, jumladan, Farg'ona vodiysida va Markaziy Osiyo mintaqasining turli mintaqalarida keng tarqalgan suv havzalari, xususan, daryo (Sirdaryo)ga qurbonlik qilish odati tahlil qilingan. Shuningdek, suv kulti bilan bog'liq e'tiqodiy qarashlar hamda namgarchilik homiysi bo'lgan qurbaqa bilan bog'liq mahalliy xalq

bilimlari ham bayon qilingan.

Muallif tarixiy-etnografik, folklorshunoslikka oid manbalar asosida suv va Xizr kulti, suv parilari bilan bog'liq mifologik qarashlarni tarixiy asoslarni tahlil qilgan. Shuningdek, Farg'ona vodiysi o'zbeklari misolida Markaziy Osiyo mintaqasida suv bilan bog'liq an'anaviy xalq qarashlarining tarixiy asoslari, ularning asl mazmun-mohiyati va lokal xususiyatlarini ko'rsatib berishga harakat qilgan.

**Kalit so'zlar:** an'analar, tushunchalar, urf-odatlar, rasm-rusumlar, suv, ibodat.

### **Introduction**

Water is not only a source of life but also the greatest miracle of life. Therefore, human beings have always valued, honored water and worshiped it. In the world nations with different mythological views and beliefs concerning water are widespread [Watson 1980, 27].

The habit of cleaning with water is specific to all religious beliefs and cultures. According to archaic-cosmogonic imaginations, the earth appeared from the first waters or an egg was formed in the chaos of the ocean, later it was divided into two parts (the sky and the earth). In this way, water is considered to be the base of everything.

### **Ancient Myths and Thoughts about Water**

In most folk legends it is interpreted that, at first, there was only water in the whole universe, the rest: fire, earth, people were borne out of it and spread. That's why the Flood of Doomsday is the performance of the idea of the universe returning to its origin, the first state. The representation of this conception in the thoughts of different nations is explained in the book "Folklore in the old Testament" by D.Frieser [Фрэзер 1980, 67-162].

If we have a look at the views about world religions, we can see that there are traditions related to water in all religions and religious views and thoughts. Particularly, according to the ancient Egyptians' thoughts, there is a lifegiving feature in water, the sky waters water the earth and enable the life to develop on it. In ancient Greece Poseidon was the God of the Sea; he was one of the great gods. Special temples were built for Poseidon and many magnificent religious ceremonies were held [Myths of the nations of the world 1980, 323-324].

In the system of religious thoughts of the people of the East

many considerable thoughts and views about the miracle of nature, water can be met too. In particular, there is Noon (the first god of water who turned into “The Father of Gods”) in the cosmogonical myths of ancient Egypt, Ansu (whirlpool of water) in Mesopotamia, Tiamet (“Sea” the beast of the sea, personification of world chaos) in Babylon. While the water was valued in India as a life protector going around the world in the form of rain, plant juice, and blood, Chinese considered water to be the source of all life [Мингбоева 2007, 41]. In ancient China, the gods of rain and the goddess of rainy clouds were imagined as a snake. Also, the snake was the legendary owner of the water reservoirs on the earth [Файзиева 2010, 15].

In the system of mythological views, the tradition of putting the images of snake and water in opposition goes back to the interpretation of the myths about the “Life tree”. The lower part of the “Life Tree” that’s roots feed on water. Therefore this tree was thought to be the forever living plant. The snake under the “Life tree” was at the same time considered to be the guard of the lifegiving water. Gradually there appeared the mythological beliefs about the connection of snake with water [Файзиева 2010, 15]. In myths snake was imagined as an image connected with water, in people’s minds, it was embodied in the function of a life-giving symbolic personage.

According to the ancient farmers’ imagination, snakes were compared to the drops of rain. It was believed that the snake could be an intermediary between the earth and the sky, it could crawl up the sky and could make rain any time. It was said that it sucked from the breast of mother Sky and made rain [Андрианов 1979, 66].

In most nations of the world, water was the transformer of the willings of gods, an intermediary in the communication with the sky, announcer of fate. Therefore in different fortune-telling systems interpreting the symbols appearing in the water was widespread. The fortune-tellers were believed to be able to see the future and the past by looking at the surface of water. This ancient state proves that the shamans used crystal balls, that’s magic crystals. Fortune telling through water and the practice of informing about future was widespread in Europe, Northern Afrika, Near East, Eastern, and Northern Asia and Polinesia, in Scandinavian nations water honored as a symbol of fate [Халмуратов 2010, 129].

### **Water in the Mythology of Turkic Nations**

Turkic nations strongly believed in saving the divine power

of water. They thought that water could protect the human from any kinds of misfortune, and even from death too. In Turkic people's point of view, water was the symbol of life, spirit and eternity, everlasting life. The ancient Turkic people called this world "Ekin ara" – əkin ara "between the two – between the sky and the earth". Together with the head god of the middle world Sacred Earth-Water his seventeen assistants (spirits), the powerful Iokan, the spirits of water, forest, mountain, and human lived in this world [Жўрақўзиев 2019, 13].

In the legends of the Turkic people living on the mountainous the Altay, the primary source for the foundation of the universe was water. The mythological hero floating in the Ocean, Ulgen yuz created the earth with the advice of his mother Ok Ena. For the first piece of the earth not to sink into the water, he put it on the three big fish called Kerbaliq. The mythological thought about the origin of the world was comprised of water was one of the common interpretations of the heavenly legends in the folklore of the world nations [Жўраев 1995, 11–12]. In the Uzbek legend created under the influence of Islamic mythology the initial stage of the beginning – the pearl created by God had melted, the water formation process found its artistic expression [Жўраев 1995, 12].

The Altay shamans considered water to be one of the elements that were the foundation for the creation of the world [Потапов 1991, 72]. As the ethnographer T.Bayalieva wrote, there were thoughts about the water spirits among the Kyrgyz people in the old times, for example, the Tian-shan Kyrgyzs used to make sacrifices every year in honor of water spirits. The sacrificial animal was cluttered on the bank of the water and its blood was mixed with the water. By this ceremony, people tried to calm down the nymphs and water spirits who were angry with the people. They thought that if they didn't do that something unpleasant might happen during the year [Баялиева 1967, 126]. In Turkmen "Kurkut bobo" was worshipped as the patron of rain and in honor of him different ceremonies were held and different legends and stories were widespread [Басилов 1963, 15-18].

In Mahmud Koshgariy's book "Devoni lughotit Turk" it was noted that there was a tradition named "kovuch-kovuch" in the state of Ughuz in the X-XI centuries. This tradition was held to drive away evil spirits from among the people. if anybody was caught by evil spirits, the people took cold water and sprayed it on his/her face. It was called "qoch-qoch" (go away), mainly, used for frightening different spirits [Кошғарий 150]. Besides, in this historical source,

it was mentioned by the name of “tutug” the illness of epilepsy. Yusuf Khos Hojib paid special attention to “qom” people’s curing activities among their functions [Юсуф Хос Ҳожиб 1971, 210].

### **Sacrificing to River**

In the traditional farming culture of Ferghana valley, before the spring planting works began and an animal was sacrificed, the ceremony called hudoyi (a feast served as a charity on the festival of the sacrifice or sacrifices made for the memory of the deceased or deliverance from an affliction) was held. In the ceremony, an animal (a sheep or a bull) was sacrificed and worshipped God asking not to have floods and droughts and to have plenty of water as well in the year starting. In spring when the big rivers like the Sirdarya, changed their color and overflowed because of the downpours or flash floods, they were thought to be “thirsty for blood”. Therefore “charity money” was gathered from people, a sheep was bought for the gathered money and sacrificed on the bank of the river and its blood flowed into the river. Before its body was also thrown to the river and worshipped God asking to accept the sacrifice and save from different natural disasters and afflictions [Шониёзов 2001, 189]. According to the information of the archeologists, sacrificing in the ceremonies related to water started from the paleolithic era.

As was mentioned above, in dry times when there was a lack of water sheep were also sacrificed. After the sheep were bought for the gathered money, the men of the village gathered and went to the top of the canal. They slaughtered the sheep there and cooked soup from its meat. The soup was distributed to the people of the neighborhood and other passersby. At the end of the ceremony, the mullah of the village made prayeys (duo) and asked God to provide rain so that the rivers and canals ran with full of water.

In the Sukh district of Fergana valley at the starting point of the Sukh river there is a shrine of “Yigit Ali pirim”, the local people held sacrificing ceremonies there. As the ethnographer R.Y. Rassudove wrote, this shrine is connected with the name of Hazrat Ali, people took the water flowing out of it and sprayed at their sons wishing them to be as brave as Ali [Рассудова 1985, 97]. Besides, the scholar also noted that several of these shrines were connected with the irrigating systems and emphasized that they were important for studying the history of irrigated farming [Рассудова 1985, 96-104]. It was noted in the sources that there was such kind of worshipping the cults of moisture and precipitation in other nations of the world

[Басилов 1970, 26-27].

As it was true about many regions of Uzbekistan the main canals and streams were cleaned in early spring in Ferghana valley [Шониёзов 2003, 100-101]. Local people gathered money, wheat, and food products for this ceremony too, and bought an animal (calf, light-colored horse, white foal, sheep, or goat) for sacrificing [Снесаров, 238-239; Шониёзов 2003, 189-190].

In Khorezm when a new canal was dug and connected to the Amudarya, according to the khan's order, 8-10 cows and bulls were sacrificed and thrown into the water wishing that this canal always be full of water, then the farmers took the slaughtered animals out of the water and cooked different foods and ate there [Потапова 23]. Also, when the head part of the Toshsaqo canal was reconstructed and filled with water, the khan of Khiva Ollokulikhan sacrificed a bull [Фуломов 1957, 250]. So, we can see that the historical foundations of sacrificing bulls to the rivers are connected with the cult of water.

In Karakalpak people living in the Kolgandarya village of the Mingbulok district of Namangan region the old women came to the Sirdarya river when the river was flooding in spring and stirred the water of the river saying "I am going back and you also go back".

In Dam and Kaklikurgon Uzbeks habituated on the two banks of Sumsorsoy on the foothills of Chotkol mountain chains of Ferghana valley the sacrificing ceremony as in the above was held while bringing water to the canals of the village. A sheep (ram) was sacrificed to the devotion of Buvoyi Dehkon, the patron of farmers, and made wishes for plenty of water during the year. At the shrine called "Tosmozor buva" situated on this canal the sacrificing was held every year in spring. If the village people didn't sacrifice in any year, the water would overflow the canal into the village and would break its channel. Because the canal runs 5-6 meters higher than the village it was difficult for the people to restore it. That's why the population of the village bought a sheep for the gathered money and sacrificed it in that graveyard. Those who didn't participate in the collective work were not given water later for irrigating their plants. That's why all people in the village tried to participate in collective work. In Andijan, if it didn't rain continuously, a cow was sacrificed in the graveyard of the village, and in the sacred shrines in the Sukh oasis, a goat was sacrificed for the water to flow full [Рассудова 98].

### **Sacrificing a Human to Water**

Before in the valley tripods were built in the rivers to resist

the floods, the bushes of trees, corn stalks, and other things like these were put in front of these tripods and a stone was put on it. Of course, the force of the water came to this barrier was resisted a little and the power of the disaster decreased. The bushes and stalks of plants put in front of the tripods are still called “Dead” in the public language. Why? Because, when human is weak in front of the wild forces of nature they make sacrifices. The basics of these ceremonies were not cows and sheep as it is at present, it was a man in ancient times. The people with the name Tukhtasin, Tukhtavoy, Kurbonali were put as a barrier in front of the water flowing with a rush (as if the rush of the disaster would slow down realizing the meaning of these names), later, the bushes put into the water were called “dead” as if to cheat the element of nature. It is obvious, sacrificing life meant “Let it take it and calm it down instead” and it was understood as live trade. In the most immense disasters, the best sacrifice was human.

### **Frog and the Cult of Water**

Among the nations of Central Asia, especially, among Uzbek people when talking about different animals related to water, fish, and frog is often mentioned as the symbol of water. Even the frog is mentioned in the folk proverbs too as a symbol of water. In this proverb, we can see that the frog is noted as a symbol of water, and its life is, mainly, tightly connected with water. In this case, there is a question: Why exactly the frog was a symbol of water? Is it connected with the religion of Islam? Or was it connected with the mythological worldview before Islam? Or is it the trace of alien-ethnic cult that was borrowed from another nation as a result of mutual relationships?

Before answering these questions, the customs and traditions related to the frog in the Ferghana valley should be focused on. For example, in the Ferghana district of Ferghana valley, the farmers brought frogs to their planting lands and hung them there, because they believed that the frog would call for rain. Still, there is a belief in the valley that “It will rain in the wedding of those who killed the frog”. We can see that the frog is the patron of moisture to some degree in this regard.

During the archeological excavations informing about the ancient history of Central Asia, the frog-shaped clay sculptures and different trinkets were found. Particularly, in Sopollitepa monument in Surkhandarya region the stone sculpture of a frog was found, and in the ancient temple of the V century a fragment of a bead in the form of a frog was found in the surface of Tuprokkala in Khorezm



oasis [Пахмонов 1977, 24].

The famous archeologist and the scholar of art L.I.Rempel confirmed that the frog was the symbol of moisture in Central Asia and wrote: "In the art of the nations of Central Asia the image of a frog was used as a symbol of persepation and rain, happiness and luck and an amulet as well" [Rempel 1978, 37].

In the imagination of the ancient people the legendary image of frog-related to the blessings of nature such as water, the rain gradually turned into the symbol of fertility, good fortune, and blessings. The folklore scientist M.Juraev writes that the thoughts about the relationship of the frog with the cult of rain and water can be found in the Uzbek folklore, especially, in the folk tales too [Жўраев 1995, 226]. The frog was the symbol of rain and moisture to some degree. In most nations of the world, there are different interpretations that it is related to precipitation.

In the Sukh district of Ferghana valley, there was a special ceremony called "Tarishkunok" to call rain. According to it, if there was no rain for a long time, the men of the village went out half-naked and poured water on each other and threw anybody (more often the imam or mullah of the village) into the canal. On this day the men of the village visited any house they wanted as a guest and they ate meals cooked only in this ceremony.

### **Hizr and the Cult of Water**

In Urganjibogh village of Kokand city in Ferghana valley, the farmers visit the shrine of Hizrbuva in Rishtan with their families before the beginning of works in the fields. The visitors take some crops (wheat or barley), some yeast, rope, lead, wild rue, money, water, and a safety pin with themselves and put them for a while in front of the grave. They bring these things to the shrine with the good intentions like "May our lands be risen as the yeast in this year, may this year be full of goodness and blessings, may our house be full of flour and livestock, may Hazrati Hizr alayhissalam support our families to be strong as the lead". First of all, it can be witnessed here that Hazrati Hizr has the feature of giving blessings and people believe in him. Therefore, V.V.Bartold, Y.E.Bertels, and M.I.Afzalov gave the opinion that the image of Hizr was created before Islam and he was the result of people's creative investigations during the long period [Пахмонов 2003, 61-65; 2004, 51-54].

Thus, the image of Hizr has no connection with Islam, he came up much earlier than Islam. The genetic bases of the image of



Hizr were tightly connected with the cults of farming and fertility. Furthermore, from the example above we can see the communicative magic, that's magical ways of achieving good fertility by these things in the following year.

There are many legends about Hazrati Hizr in the valley, in one legend his name was interpreted to have been connected with Alexander the Great (Alexandros ho Megas/Alexander of Macedon). According to this legend, after Alexander the Great conquered Afrasiyab, he heard from the people of Samarkand that there was a spring of eternity in the mountains around the city. One of his best friends' names was Hizr and he asked him to find the spring and bring him the water of eternity. Hizr found the miraculous spring and he drank the water himself enough first, then filled the jug with water and started the journey. But on the way, the jug was broken and the water was spilled out. That's why the king Alexander couldn't get the water of eternity and Hizr lived forever.

According to some researchers, the image of Hizr was connected with the ancient Greek god Poseidon, he was a god of water forces too. According to the ancient religious thoughts, the features of cleaning, quietness, giving blessings and charm, growing directly belonged to Poseidon and Hizr.

Hizr was the prophet who drank the water of eternity, people might see him in different appearances three times. But he was always met in connection with water and gave blessings to people. For example, the scholar Nigora Korieva told one of such stories. Nigora heard this story from her father Anvarjon Kosimov and he also heard it from his father Mirzakozim Hamro ugli [Recorded by N.Qorieva, 2020].

According to the story, "One unlucky person worshipped Allah every day while praying asked to meet Hizr at least once. Allah heard his worships and pleadings and encountered him with Hizr. One day that man was going to his house from the mosque after the prayer, he met a drunk man in dirty clothes in the street. The unlucky man disgusted him and went across the other side of the road. Then that beggar came to him and asked him for water, but the unlucky man insulted him and told him to go away.

Another day the unlucky man met a prostitute on his way. That woman told him that her husband had died and she had children, now she gave up prostituting and was regretting, she asked him for only a gulp of water. The unlucky man insulted her too and made her go away.

That man came across another beggar again on his way. The beggar stopped the unlucky man and told him that he was a robber before and now he gave up robbing, but his life was hard. He complained that there was a lack of water in the city where he lived, only the rich owned water because the water was sold for money, he had no water. The beggar asked the unlucky man for water. For the third time, that man didn't give him water saying "I have no water to give the man who earned by robbing".

The next day that man dreamt. In his dream, an old man in white clothes came to him and said: "Your disapproval of God is not worthy, I came to you 3 times. You didn't notice these signs. Whereas, your soul is dirty. You are an arrogant man. Even you see me in your dream, luck has gone from you. I am displeased and upset with you".

### **Water Nymphs**

There are still thoughts about water nymphs among the people in the Ferghana valley. As the informers mentioned, water nymphs were in the waves of water and they shimmered the water. They attracted a person and often saved innocent people from drowning. They may be seen only by the drowned people. The water nymphs are very beautiful, they may have the power of attracting people by their beauty [Халмуратов 2010, 131]. That's why swimming in the water, especially in the Sirdarya river is not allowed for anyone in the evening.

So, we can see from the examples above that there are thoughts about water nymphs among the people of the valley too. But several questions such as what is there at the beginning of the thoughts about water nymphs? What kind of personages are they? How important are they in the life of modern people, may appear.

First of all, it should be mentioned that the symbol of water nymph is one of the ancient images of the people of the valley related to dualism. The beliefs related to this cult are connected with some personages similar to water nymphs in the mythology of Turkic people, especially, with the religious views about the legendary creatures living in the water and genetically they have common bases too. In particular, in the mythology of Kazan Tatars and Moghul-Tatars living in the western part of Siberia, the water nymphs were called "Suv anasi" (Mother of water) or "Su iyase" (The owner of water). "Suv anasi" is a legendary human-like creature, she lives in water reservoirs. Her husband "Su babasi" (Father of water) and their children are called "Su iyase", that's the owner of water. The

Tatars thought that “Suv anasi” was an evil spirit, she might cause droughts, diseases and drown people into the water. Therefore when a new bride goes to bring water, she throws a coin into the water for the sake of “Suv anasi” [Коблов 1910, 113-114]. The Tatars of Tobol province call such creatures living in the water as “sou pyare”, that’s water nymphs [Tatars of Central Volga and Urals 1957, 360]. The same as the Tatars of western Siberia the Kumiks call the water nymphs as “Suv anasi” too. They also think that the permanent place for the water nymphs to live is the under-water world [Гаджиев 1961, 324].

### Conclusion

The information given above encouraged us to conclude that water in Ferghana Valley was considered sacred, as well as all the other elements. Water was not used only to quench one’s thirst, but also, according to traditions passed from generation to generation, it was considered a cure.

From the 80ies of the XX century due to the sharp shrunk of the water of the Sirdarya river, many mythological thoughts about the river and water began to be forgotten among the local people. Now the ceremonies of sacrificing in honor of the gods of rivers and water are almost not held. Therefore, the thoughts about the gods of water remained in the memory of the elderly people mainly.

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**Iqtibos uchun:** Ashirov, A. A. 2020. “Farg'ona vodiysida suv bilan bog'liq mifologik qarashlar”. *O'zbekiston: til va madaniyat* 1: 92–104.

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**For citation:** Ashirov, A. A. 2020. “Mythological Views about Water of the Fergana Valley”. *Uzbekistan: Language and Culture* 1: 92–104.