



BELIEFS AND RELIGIOUS VIEWS OF THE POPULATION IN ANCIENT KHOREZM

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ABSTRACT

This article provides information about the first religious beliefs and their customs that emerged among the population in ancient times of Khorezm.

KEY WORDS: *Khorezm, Central Asia, Neolithic, Bronze Age, Porushasp, Vishtasp, Arjatasp, Siyovush.*

INTRODUCTION

There hasn't been created any special research on the scientific subject matter of the religious views of the population of Khorezm oasis during the Bronze and Iron Age yet. The problem is merely acknowledged in some chapters of various monographs. As it's known, human's labor activity has been a source of his knowledge. There appeared an opportunity to observe, compare and summarize the causes of various events by the collection of knowledge and practical experience in the labor process. A person didn't separate himself from the atmosphere surrounding him. From ancient times, he had realized the common unity with natural environment, flora and fauna his dependence on them. Many natural phenomena, which were difficult to understand, affected the views and worship of members of communities [1].

MATERIALS AND METHODS

The archeological materials of the Bronze Age in Khorezm oasis, peculiar to the theme, are insufficient to reveal the essence and significance of the people's beliefs. It is important to note the development of the habit of worshipping for fire in the oasis during the Neolithic and Bronze Age. In Central Asia, fire worships have ancient roots and originally emerged as a home-hearth belief. The Bronze Age ceramic monuments of horses and dogs found in Khorezm oasis are the evidence of the development of the beliefs such as totemic and fertility [2].

As a result of studying the funeral ceremonies of the Saks in the Aral Sea region, some aspects of the religious views of livestock breeder tribes can be described. They are connected with the tradition of valuing died people and worshipping the spirit of ancestors [3].

The dead were buried in specially equipped cellars and graves like hovel-shaped houses. The graves were filled with tools, jewelry, household goods and horse items. Various information is the evidence of the belief in worshipping for fire (rituals of burial or strewing ash on bodies). The burning customs of the dead originated from the beliefs of the Sun [4].

It is possible to recall the words of Herodotus concerning the religious views of the Massagets: “The only God, the Most Merciful among the Massagets, is the Sun, so they sacrificed horses to the sun, because they thought that they should sacrifice the fastest living creature in the world”. There were found bones of sacrificed horses in the cemetery strongholds of Sakarchaga and there are also horse items.

It is likely that the burial customs was based on the idea that the soul of a dead person flies to the Sun with the help of fire. The symbol of the Sun was expressed in thin, round, small objects made of bronze and clay. In religious views, the horse was valued as being associated with the Sun. The horse was described as a means of transport that takes the lives of the deceased to the world of ancestors.

The analysis of the personal names mentioned in the first sources indicates that in many cases their origin was associated with domestic



animals – horses, camels, bulls and cows. For example, there is the word “ushtra” – “camel” in the composition of the name Zardusht-Zaratushtra, as well as the names in “Avesto”, such as Porushasp, Vishtasp, Arjatasp are connected with “asp”, i.e. “horse”. The name of Zaratushtran’s mother, Dugdhave, is translated as “cow’s daughter” [5]. The legendary name Siyovush means black horse.

The emergence of such names has ancient origins and was derived from the fact that different groups of kin were closely related to certain animal, their belief in kinship, i.e. from totemism. Totem was not worshiped for and it was considered as “a father”, “an ancestor” who would help kin members and brings them benefit.

At the stage of the abolishment of the primitive society, individuals who were connected with the fulfillment of their religious beliefs were separated. These people were considered as having wonderful qualities and secret knowledge. They became professional servants, fulfilling religious ceremonies i.e. priests.

There were found various utensils connected with sacrificial ceremonies in the graves of priests and woman priests in the cemetery strongholds of the Saks, including yorghuchoks were put beside dead woman bodies. The yorghuchoks were a symbol of fertility and the female priests were considered as the hearth of home and sponsors of fire.

In the art of the Saks, the image of wild animals (deer, pigs, leopard) was reflected. Jewelry and amulets were made from horns of deer and teeth of pigs. It is possible to assume that magic played an important role in the practice of beliefs of kin system. According to historical and ethnographic data, proficiency of magician was developed in connection with mastering and production economy. Rain and wind were called with the help of ways and methods of inevitable movements, words and wizard dance and a successful hunt was prepared for.

The theme of the emergence of the religion Zoroastrism and funeral ceremonies in Central Asia, including Khorezm oasis, is one of the most actual topics in the subject history. Khorezm and Zoroastrism were widely covered in the monograph of D.Sh. Kurbanova [6]. It is therefore expedient to briefly outline some aspects of the problem.

There are no graves found belonging to Kuzalikir culture. Also, there was not found any graves in Bactria, Marghiana and Sogdiana peculiar to the periods during the transition from the Bronze Age to the Early Iron Age and the Early Iron Age itself. The attention was paid in scientific literatures to the fact that this remained as one of the most actual problems in the history of Central Asia [7].

It was identified that bodies of the dead were buried in settlements (houses, pits under the level of rooms) and in special cemeteries around them during the Bronze Age in Marghiana and Bactria [8]. The

absence of the early Iron Age graves in the southern regions of Central Asia was the basis for the ideas on the spread of funeral orders of Zoroastrism in Marghiana, Bactria and Sogdiana.

In the 70-80s of the 20th century, in the memorials discovered in Surkhon and Kaskadarya oasis peculiar to the 10th-8th centuries BC and 7th-4th centuries BC, there were found parts of human skulls and pieces of human skeletal bones. These data are explained by the spread of funeral ceremonies close to Zoroastrism in the southern parts of Central Asia [9].

Also, the pieces of human skeleton bones, found in the pits belonging to the 10th-8th centuries BC, in Jarkutan memorial of Sherabad oasis in recent years, are also remarkable. Besides, skeleton pieces of eight people were defined in a separate pit. The bottom and sides of pits were covered with fragments of broken stone and earthenware dishes [10]. These findings once more confirm the ideas about the spread of habits close to funeral orders of Zoroastrism in Bactria.

The skeleton bones were found in Khumuztepa [11] and a human skull in Kuzalikir either [12]. In the graveyard surrounding Dingilja, there were found skulls of three dogs set on corner condition to one another and fragments of human skeleton in the coffin made of ganch (a kind alabaster). According to the writings of M.G. Vorobeva, the funeral ceremony of Zoroastrism was reflected in the grave [13].

The offered data show that by the end of the 7th century BC, population groups, who moved from the south to Khorezm, implemented the traditions of pottery wheel, construction techniques, architecture of wattle and daub walls and raw bricks in the Lower Amu Darya region and laid the foundation for the spread of new religious views and funeral ceremonies peculiar to Zoroastrian customs.

This ceremony was not related to special dishes for bones such as “dahna” and “ossuary” belonging to the latest Zoroastrism. The bodies of deceased were taken out of their residence place and set on high hills and sand-stones. After birds and wild animals cleaned the bones, clean bones, which were washed in rain and snow and dried in the Sun, were stored in special places. Strabon’s following idea wasn’t without sense: “Bactrian surroundings were full of human bones. Macedonian Alexander liquidated this ceremony”.

The habit of non-polluting the clean elements with dead bodies and ceremonies of putting bones of deceased in sand-stone places not far from residences in order to clean them appeared long before the invasions of Macedonian Alexander the Great. However, at the time of the first Zoroastrianism, it was not known that human bones were buried in specially constructed buildings – nous and ossuary – dishes for bones. In this connection, it



was suggested that ossuary in Central Asia belonged to the traditions of Zoroastrianism before the antique period and Islam [14].

The traditions of fire worship in Khorezm oasis go back to ancient times. The large hearth found in the hovel Jonbos 4 of the Neolithic Age, central hearths in the cellars of Tozaboghyob culture and the otashkada (a type of fire-place) having raw brick foundation identified in Kuzalikir were striking examples of that. There was found fire room in Dingilja house-stronghold covering the surface of 77 sq.m. and in the center of the room, there was situated a large hearth made of raw brick.

As a result of the study of the Early Iron Age memorials, the evidences of the value of the house fire-places were found in various parts of Central Asia. A sacred hearth was found in Kuchuktepa in Surkhan oasis [15]. The people of the ancient oasis took care of the furnace burns and poured the ashes into the special pits. The traces of the same tradition were found in Kuzalikir.

S.P. Tolstov described Khorezm oasis as a homeland of Zoroastrianism [16]. A.A. Askarov reviewed the issues raised by S.P. Tolstov and commented on them [17]. According to A.A. Askarov, it is not expedient to interpret Khorezm as a home land of Zoroastrianism. It was assumed by A.A. Askarov and T. Sh. Shirinov that the education of Zoroastrianism, originally created as a fire worshiping, is peculiar to the middle of the 2nd millennium BC on the basis of the study of Jarkutan – the temple of fire. In a special article dedicated to this issue, T.Sh. Shirinov wrote about the fire, water and haoma worship performed at Jarkutan before Zoroastrianism [18].

The Bronze Age fire temples were explored in the memorials in northern Afghanistan and in the Lower Murghab oasis. In the writings of V.I. Sarianidi, in the temple Tughalok, there was prepared a type of drinking - haoma (mixture of milk and juice of plants with needle leaves) [19]. Haoma was used in religious ceremonies of Zoroastrianism.

According to A.A. Askarov's view point, the convictions closely related to Zoroastrianism, originally formed in Marghiana, Bactria and Sogdiana. According to the confirmation of V.I. Sarianidi, the motherland of Zardusht and Zoroastrianism was situated in Dranghiana (East Iran), Bactria, Marghiana and Belujiston.

According to A.S. Sagdullayev's conclusion on the issue, it is true that the heritage of fire worship of various ethnic groups in Central Asia is common. As noted in Bactrian memorials, the tradition of fire worship can not be connected only with Zoroastrianism or to the religion of Ahamanides. Truly, worshiping for fire existed before the emergence of these religions and have more ancient habits emerged on the basis of valuing and worshiping for home hearth at first.

In our opinion, the religious views and customs of the people living in different regions of Central Asia did not always suit one another. Historical data show that Central Asia has distinctive features of religious beliefs and ceremonies of farmer and nomadic livestock populations.

In the art samples of the culture of Kuzalikir, there are observed influences of various descriptive traditions. These traditions were reflected in gold jewelry with bird-head, a golden dome with deer head, a snake wound around a ring of a seal, a lion on a seal made of haliedon stone, and in the image of a shooter on a bronze ring-seal. The images of this literal art were worked out peculiar to the methods of "Scythian-Syberian" and "Frontier Asia" and they are the most perfect expressions of the human views, mythological layers and eternal struggle of noble and evil forces. In the descriptive art of the Saks, the descriptions of leopards and tigers hurting and torturing deer were widespread [20].

Ancient hymns calling for respect for the natural forces, worshiping the sun and the fire are the components of Avesto and performed by the priests in the ceremonial celebrations. The imaginations formed during the era without writing and included in the book "Avesto" have centuries-old historical progress and they were preserved in oral folklore [21]. In particular, they were reflected in the folklore of Khorezm oasis at different levels.

H. Abdullayev wrote that various interpretations were preserved in lots of myths created in the oasis, in the epic poems about Anahita – Ardvisura – the sponsor of nature, water and fertility, in a number of myths about Siyovush riding black horses, in the call for protection of the Amu Darya from the evil forces and spirits. Also archaeological materials of the Early Iron Age prove the existence of worshiping traditions of natural forces and fire in Khorezm oasis.

It should be noted that there occurred certain changes as a result of the spread of cultural news and the development of socio-political conditions in the process of the development religious imaginations of the population in Khorezm in the 9th-8th centuries BC (Amirabad culture, the last stage of the primitive society), the 7th-6th centuries BC (Saks, Kuyisay culture, Kuzalikir culture, the Early Iron Age), the last quarter of the 6th century BC – the 5th century BC (Khorezm's becoming a part of Ahamanides state). The funeral ceremonies of the southern Aral Sea were connected with burying and burning bodies of the deceased, their religious views with worshiping for the spirits of ancestors, however, there were no graves of Kuzalikir culture found and the absence of them can be explained by the spread of funeral ceremonies of Zoroastrianism in Khorezm oasis. Various views were offered on the history of the religion Zoroastrianism, as well as, Khorezm is considered one of the oldest centers Zoroastrianism.



The emergence of the Zoroastrianism education, the motherland of the founder of this education Spitama Zaratushtra (Zorastrian) and the period of his life have been reasons for the discussions going on for several years, because the date and the area, where Zaratushtra appeared, were not discovered. In this regard, many types of assumptions are worth attention.

In many cases, Zariastratushtran's homeland was associated with Aryonam Vayjo – "Fertile lands of Ariys". It is likely that Zaratushtra, at first, began his activity as a priest of Ariys. In Avesto (Yasna), he was called "zaotar" – priest [22]. So, Zaratushtra was educated in the spirit of traditions of ancient religion and propagandized them. During this time, his clan was cattle breeder and the shepherds of steppes worshiped water and fire and sacrificed their cattle to the natural forces [23]. According to legends, Zaratushtra, when aged 30, was met by Ahuramazda – the great god and reported that he had been chosen to propagate Ahuramazda's knowledge and good deeds. However, the teachings of Zaratushtra, new religious advice were not adopted by his own tribal family members. Zaratushtra had to escape from his homeland.

D.Sh. Kurbanova wrote that Zardusht, who abandoned his country, mastered many of the beliefs in Bactria and Marghiana and enriched his teachings and carried out religious reform. The above-mentioned conclusions correspond to reality in condition of taking into consideration the historical tradition about the fact that the king of Bactria Kavi Vishtasp had been the sponsor of Zardusht and he had been the first follower of Zoroastrianism education. So, some kinds of Zoroastrianism habits have ancient roots in Bactria-Marghiana.

According to archaeological information, there were no temples in Khorezm oasis during the Bronze Age. Therefore, it is possible to suppose that religious rituals were carried out in open air, near fireplaces. Fire was important for residents of steppe (the source of hot and light, meat – one of the main meals of livestock breeders fried by fire). Fire was respected, people were always trying to keep the furnace burned and burning embers were moved from one place to another in the pot. In this way, belief connected with the holy and eternal fire came to being.

In the process of mastering the atmosphere surrounding, the first religious views appeared due to the idea of the unity of mankind with the nature, flora and fauna. It is not difficult to imagine that the ancient hunters, cattle-breeders and farmers appealed to invisible forces, asking for help, lucky hunting, bags, feeding for cattle and high harvest for themselves.

In the southern Aral Sea regions, fishing and hunting developed during the Neolithic Age and in the Bronze Age, beliefs related to livestock breeding

and farming (water, fire and Sun worships) developed.

In the 9th-7th centuries BC, the tribes of Southern and Eastern Aral Sea were engaged in breeding cows, horses, camels and small cattle. Important aspects of economic relations were linked to livestock, which had become the main wealth of society. In the oldest parts of Avesto, various information about the importance of livestock has been preserved: "livestock is the source of life", "We call for provide livestock with feed peacefully". The heroes of "Avesto", "having a lot of herds" and "having lots of horses" slaughtered horses, bulls and sheep in fresh and open air in the foot hills [24]. This ceremony was dedicated to divine powers. Thus, the cattle were also valued. The belief "the God is a horseman" came from the fact that Khorezmians – the Saks and Massagets worshiped horses.

CONCLUSIONS

Thus, the formation of religious views and beliefs in Khorezm oasis were the oasis of the reasons and factors peculiar to society's history and they were developed on new basis as a result of changes in historical processes, socio-economic relationships and spiritual culture.

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