THE PLACE OF THE PLANT WORLD IN THE WORLDVIEW SYSTEM OF TRANSOXIANA

SUFISM IN 16TH CENTURY

DOI: https://doi.org/10.24115/S2446-6220206Extra-A574p.157-161

ABSTRACT

The article considers the topic of the Plant World in the Sufi writings of the 16th century Transoxiana, based on the material of manakibs, i.e. the so-called Lives of the Saints. The significance and relevance of the topic is due to the need to study the issues of semantic interpretation of the concept of plant and plant world in Sufi writings. Hence, the purpose of this article is to disclose the diverse meanings of the concept of the “World of Plants” contained in the 16th-century Transoxiana manakibs of such authors as Abdurakhman Jami, Abu-I Baka b. Khodzha Bakha-ud-din, Khusein Serakhshi. The main method in the study of this issue is the historical and comparative method, and the method of literary analysis, which allows you to create a holistic understanding of the symbolism of the Plant World in Sufi writings of Transoxiana of the 16th century.

Keywords: Sufism. Flora. Tree. Spring ceremonies and holidays. Fertility.

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O LUGAR DO MUNDO VEGETAL NO SISTEMA DE COSMOVISÃO DO SUFISMO TRANSOXIANA NO SÉCULO 16

RESUMO

O artigo considera o tema do mundo das plantas nos escritos sufís dos Transoxiana do século XVI, a partir do material dos manakibs, ou seja, as chamadas Vidas dos Santos. A importância e a relevância do tema se devem à necessidade de estudar as questões da interpretação semântica do conceito de planta e mundo vegetal nos escritos sufís. Assim, o objetivo deste artigo é divulgar os diversos significados do conceito de “Mundo das Plantas” contidos nos manakibs Transoxiana do século XVI de autores como Abdurakhman Jami, Abu-I Baka b. Khodzha Bakha-ud-din, Khusein Serakhshi. O método principal no estudo desta questão é o método histórico e comparativo, e o método de análise literária, que permite criar uma compreensão holística do simbolismo do Mundo das Plantas nos escritos sufís da Transoxiana do século XVI.


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RESUMEN

El artículo considera el tema del Mundo Vegetal en los escritos sufís de la Transoxiana del siglo XVI, basado en el material de los manakibs, es decir, las llamadas Vidas de los Santos. La importancia y relevancia del tema se debe a la necesidad de estudiar las cuestiones de interpretación semántica del concepto de planta y mundo vegetal en los escritos sufís. Por lo tanto, el propósito de este artículo es revelar los diversos significados del concepto del “Mundo de las Plantas” contenido en los manakibs de Transoxiana del siglo XVI de autores como Abdurakhman Jami, Abu-I Baka b. Khodzha Bakha-ud-din, Khusein Serakhshi. El método principal en el estudio de este tema es el método histórico y comparativo, y el método de análisis literario, que le permite crear una comprensión holística del simbolismo del Mundo Vegetal en los escritos sufís deTransoxiana del siglo XVI.


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INTRODUCTION

Some aspects of flora and fauna play a special role in the Sufi belief system. A strong connection between Sufism and the plant world is observed in the active participation of Transoxiana Sufis in agricultural festivals such as Navruz (Iranian New Year), Guli Surkh (spring festival of red flowers) and other holidays. Plants such as willow, cypress, tulips occupy a special place in the Sufi worldview. For example, a willow tree is seen as a tree of life and knowledge in accordance with the Sufi tradition. The close connection of the Sufis with the plant world meant the unity of man and nature. This study draws on the existing Persian texts of Transoxiana written during the period under review. Texts depicted this topic quite often. This study shows the connection between Sufism, Sufi society, and such an important flora element as a tree.

The authors examine the significance of trees in the life of Sufis; the connection between human death and the destruction of the garden and the drying of the tree; and the role of the tree in the unique Sufi knowledge system.

METHODS

Some aspects of flora and fauna play a special role in the Sufi belief system. A strong connection between Sufism and the Plant World is observed in the active participation of Transoxiana Sufis in agricultural festivals such as Navruz (Iranian New Year), Guli Surkh (spring festival of red flowers) and other holidays. Plants such as willow, cypress, tulips occupy a special place in the Sufi worldview. For example, a willow tree is seen as a tree of life and knowledge in accordance with the Sufi tradition. The close connection of the Sufis with the plant world meant the unity of man and nature. This study draws on the existing Persian texts of Transoxiana written during the period under review. Texts depicted this topic quite often. This study shows the connection between Sufism, Sufi society, and such an important flora element as a tree (PREDISLOVIE; AFSAKHZODA, 1987).

Manakib authors consider the importance of trees in the life of Sufis; the connection between human death and the destruction of the garden and the drying of the tree; and the role of the tree in the unique Sufi knowledge system.

The practical significance of the results is not in doubt, since the study is interesting to historians, philologists, and philosophers studying certain aspects of the cultural life of the 16th-century Transoxiana peoples. In the course of the study, a historical and comparative methods of studying the source were used. This approach requires consideration of manakibs in their relationship, considering the historical situation, in addition, general scientific methods of analysis and synthesis, a systematic approach, and a descriptive method were used (BAKALOV, KUROPATKINA, 2008; BASILOV, 1983).

The purpose of this article is to disclose the diverse meanings of the concept of the “World of Plants” contained in the 16th-century Transoxiana manakibs of such authors as Abdurakhman Jarnii in his essay “Baharistan” (Spring Garden) (PREDISLOVIE, 1987), Abu-Baka b. Khodzha Bakhkh-ud-din, and his “Jama’ul-makamat”, Khusein Serakhisi, and his “Sa’adiya”.

In the course of the study, we relied on the works of domestic and foreign scientists who studied the topic of plant world in Sufi poetry, in particular, the works dedicated to trees in different cultures such as Kruglikova V.P. (KRUGLIKova, 2010), Rakhimov R.R. (RAKHIMOV, 2012), Bakalov A. S., Kuropatkinska I. I. (2008); the works on Islamic mythology by Baslov V.N. (1983), Guseinova Zh. (2010), Samarina T. S. (2017); the works dedicated to Tajik Culture by Terletskii N. S. (2004), Sukhareva O. A. (1986) and others. The claimed research topic is interesting to historians studying Medieval Transoxiana History, philologists studying Persian-Tajik Literature, philosophers studying the philosophy of Muslim peoples in Central Asia and others.

RESULTS AND DISCUSSION

In the thematic structure of the genre of Muslim hagiographic composition (manakib) of the 16th century Transoxiana, along with other topics, such as the relationship of the Sufi sheikh with representatives of the animal world (fauna), description of the wonders of Muslim saints, dreams, fortune telling, etc., the theme of the relationship of Sufism with plant world (flora). This topic is present in almost all of the studied manakibs of the 16th century, in various variations and manifestations, emphasizing its importance.

In the hagiographic essay “Jama’ul-makamat” (Container of degrees of spiritual perfection) [2], dedicated to the biography of the famous Transoxiana leader of the Naqshbandi brotherhood, Khaojagi Ahmad Kosoni (died in
one life’s episodes tells about a strange illness of the sheikh. The author of the essay writes that once during a period of illness, at the insistent request of the patient, he was taken to his own hand-grown garden and laid under a large willow tree (darah-i bed), which formerly served as alcove. And in that difficult spiritual moment, the willow tree became a symbol of the memory of the past.

It is possible that in this episode, the perception of willow symbolism is largely due to its well-known natural properties and appearance. This opinion is confirmed by the research of N. S. Terletsky (TERLETSKI, 2004. p. 211-239). It is important to note that the consecrated image of a willow tree is also present in the gazelles of the Persian poet Hafiz (he died in 1387). It is also worth comparing the image of the paradise tree of tubo with the image of willow in the garden.

Further, the author of the Life of the Saints says that in the old days in her garden, Sheikh Ahmad Kosoni talked with murids (disciples) and taught them. Before his death, the sheikh told his murids that he had absolutely nothing in this world except this garden, which, due to the carelessness of the Sufi brothers (fuqarā), was burned, neglected, (ba chihat-i on, ki fuqaro shafe’ nestand, hamin bog niz suhta digar hech chiz namond).

In this part of the story, the Sufi sheikh acts as a gardener who has nurtured a garden, under the shadow of which people rest. Actually in the Persian poetic tradition, the image of the gardener had a special place. For example, in the essay “Baharistān” (Spring Garden), the Persian poet Abd al-Rahman Jami (died in 1492), the role of the gardener is described in a special way: please the gardener with praise, which was doused with blood to grow these gardens, and was separated from life to care for them (PREDISLOVIE, 1987. p. 6).

From the foregoing, it can be seen that in parallel with the destruction of the garden, the biological life cycle of the Sufi sheikh ends. It is known that death in the cultural traditions of human society occupies a special place. It is an event more significant than Birth. Death is a change in the form of existence. The death of a Sufi sheikh is a transfer from one state to another, a transition to a higher spiritual existence. In our context, when describing his death, an interesting motive is observed that occurs in folklore subjects, namely, the soul that dwells in plants. In them, the life of the plant is associated with human life so closely that death immediately follows the withering of the plant. Here, the researcher observes an interesting fact of the Sufi worldview kaleidoscope: human life is connected with the plant world.

If the birth of a person represents the birth of everything around him, then his death means the death of everything around him. The connection between the deceased Saints and earthly fertility is extremely important. This fact testifies to the mysterious connection of Sufism with agrarian ceremonies and elements, because it is known that the saints protected the harvest from the invasion of locusts, from drought and other disasters. In this context, the celebration of Navruz (New Year) by the Transoxiana Sufis deserves special attention. It is a vivid manifestation of agrarian rituals. After all, the revival of plant power affects the revival of human society.

In the story of the death of Sheikh Ahmad Kosoni, the question is posed in a different perspective, and here the death of the Sheikh is associated with the complete desolation of his garden. The statement that the owner dies with the death of the garden is also found in the studies of other authors (BASILOV, 1983 p. 118-152). The story of the relationship of human life with a tree, or rather, the ideological content of the plot, is more like a religious parable about the Tree of Life, a special tree planted by God in the middle of the Garden of Eden, intended for God’s main creation, a Man. According to T.S. Samarina, the symbolism of the tree is widespread in Islam. God is perceived as a tree. Trees form a garden of Eden, so the graves of rulers and saints turned into large gardens (SAMARINA, 2017. p. 93). The Gardens of Eden, the Gardens of Eternity, and their fruits are mentioned many times in the Qur’an: “The image of the garden promised to the God-fearing: there are rivers of non-perishable water and rivers of milk ...” (QURAN, 47:16).

Probably, the mythological images of trees, which are given in the Qur’an and in the comments to it, received a new ideological and symbolic rethinking from the mystics. As R. R. Rakhimov notes, the Tree of Life (nhol-i urm) is at the same time the Tree of Death. It reflects the well-known religious view of the cycle of life in all its forms, from birth to death. According to the texts of the Life of the Saints, a tree in its change goes through several stages: birth, development and drying out. True, its drying out is directly related to the death of a Saint (RAKHMOV, 2012, p. 143-145).

Trees are a symbol of immortality, they mean the inexhaustibility of life. Perhaps because of such a spiritual tradition, the cult of veneration of old trees has been preserved among the inhabitants of modern Central Asia (SUKHAREVA, 1986. p. 31-37).
According to the information of the aforementioned manakib in the garden of Sheikh Ahmad Kosoni, in addition to the willow tree, another tree grows, cypress (saran), known for its natural qualities, and in Persian Sufi literature is known as a standard of beauty. Then from the densely planted cypress trees everything was green. The author of manakib believes that the mention of cypress in the literature on the Lives of the Saints implies the letter alif, which means the fact of the uniqueness (ahad) of God.

Life episodes associated with the plant world abound on the pages of other manakibs. In them, the Sufi sheikh acts as the lord of the Plant World. A similar episode about the relationship of the Plant World with the life of a Sufi is also found on the pages of another hagiographic composition, “Sa’adiya” (Dedication to Khoja Sa’ad Juybari). This work is written by Hussein Serakh. It was written in 1573, and also includes a biography of the famous Bukhara Naqshbandi sheikh Khoja Islam Juibari, who died in 1563.

The life episode tells that one day the Juybar Sheikh Yahya Khoja (Khoja’s grandfather Islam Islam Juybari) found a dry branch (in the text of “otashkov,” poker) of willow, planted it near the pond and told his students: “If this dry branch turns green, I will be consecrated into a divine secret” (gar in otashkov sabz garbad, man az asori iloh-i habador meshavam). Here the author of the manakib uses the image of a dry branch to indicate the birth of something new. When spring came, everyone noticed that the dry branch came to life. A few years later she turned into a large, lush willow. Yahya Khoja spent the best moments of his life under this willow, under it he raised his students, gave them a bay’at (a kind of Sufi agreement). When Yahya Khoja died, the tree also died out. After some time, the dervishes chopped down a tree and uprooted the roots and suddenly a ray of light shone from the depths. This ray was the soul (qalb) of Yahya Khoja. The well-known story of a dry branch and how it became green due to the deeds of a righteous man is found in almost all the manakibs of the 16th century, as well as in hagiographic writings of previous centuries. The saints become that tree under whose refreshing shadow people will find rest and tranquility. The righteous man is a fragrant plant planted in the earth by the Most High God.

The tree planting theme is the symbol of the man-made immortality of the human race. The tree acts as a symbol of memory of the past and hope for the future. Although the Plant World is considered the lowest form of life, it is in the life of plants that the initial regularity of being is reflected (3, p. 85-86). In the studied hagiographic text, the planted tree of Khoja Yahya acts as the Tree of Life and Knowledge. In this context, as V. P. Kruglikova, the image of a tree, as one of the central archival primitives in world culture, is known as the Tree of Life (the bearer of vital energy, physical health and well-being) and the Tree of Knowledge (bearer of knowledge, source of spiritual development) (KRUGLIKOVÁ, 2010, p. 208-215).

In general, an analysis of the 16th century Transoxiana hagiographic writings points to an internal relationship between Sufism and the surrounding plant world. This was not a new phenomenon in Sufism, but a continuation of its past traditions. Such a relationship in the spiritual and practical aspects is especially found in the description of spring agrarian ceremonies and spring holidays (Navruz holiday, Gul-I Lola holiday), the construction of gardens and more. According to J.O. Huseynova, the fundamental Islamic principle of tawhid (unity, monotheism) means the unity of everything: the unity of man with Nature; thanks to God, everything in the world is in unity. Sufis looked at Nature as a living being. They felt natural harmony in relationships with her and considered themselves part of it (GUSEINOVA, 2010, p.15).

Thus, among the elements creating and defining a peculiar Sufi identity, the image of a tree played a large role, which was the most important element that allows Sufis to systematize the surrounding space and identify with it. In the context of our study, some of these plants, such as willow, cypress, rose, tulip, served as a source of inspiration and symbolic associations for Sufis.

**Recommendations**

The introduction of research results in the educational process is aimed at forming a comprehensive idea of the history and traditions of the Medieval Transoxiana, materials from manakibs with information from medieval official historiography confirm their scientific reliability, thereby proving their historical significance. This topic is also of great interest for philology, since studying the development of the theme of the Plant World makes it possible to reconstruct the insufficiently studied process of the evolution of the system of genres in the poetry of Muslim peoples in general, in Persian-Tajik poetry in particular.

The stated problems are of theoretical and practical importance for the continuation of the research of historical sources over the period of the 16th century related to Transoxiana, the development of the content of historical,
source study, literary and linguistic disciplines.

ACKNOWLEDGEMENTS
The work is performed according to the Russian Government Program of Competitive Growth of Kazan Federal University.

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Received: 20 Oct.2020
Approved: 01 Dec.2020