

**THE SYSTEM OF MYTHOLOGICAL PATRONAGE IN UZBEK SHAMANIC
RITUALS AND ITS SYMBOLIC MEANING**

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Abstract: This article explores the system of mythological patronage as a significant structural and symbolic component of Uzbek shamanic rituals. Drawing on folkloric and ethnographic sources, the study analyzes the functions of mythological patrons—such as saints, ancestral spirits, fairies, and other supernatural beings—invoked in shamanic incantations. Particular attention is paid to the ritual and symbolic roles of these figures in enhancing the shaman’s spiritual authority and reinforcing the sacred efficacy of ritual practices. The article also examines the semantic transformations of certain mythological images within the framework of Turkic dualistic worldview, highlighting the dynamic interaction between benevolent and malevolent forces in shamanic belief systems.

Keywords: Uzbek shamanism, mythological patronage, shamanic incantations, ancestral spirits, Turkic mythology, symbolic imagery, sacred ritual, dualistic worldview.

Introduction

It is well known that shamanism is one of the most ancient and continuously existing belief systems among peoples with deep historical roots. Shamans have practiced their activities in various forms throughout different historical periods. Ethnographic literature indicates that the earliest shamans among Turkic tribes were predominantly men, while in later stages of social development shamanism became a profession largely practiced by women [1]. According to folklorist O. Qayumov, in contemporary Turkic communities shamanic practices are most often performed by women. These practitioners are known among the people by names such as bakhshi, qushnoch, qora qushnoch, alaschi, and kochiriqchi.

In the folklore of shamanic rituals performed by Uzbek qushnoqs, shamanic invocations occupy a special place. The primary magical aspects of the ritual are carried out through the summoning of mythological patrons, followed by subsequent ritual actions. In shamanic invocations, the dominant motif is the calling of spiritual patrons—pirs—who are imagined as protective spirits capable of expelling evil entities believed to have entered the patient’s body. According to folklorist E. S. Novik, “The summoning of spirits constitutes the core component of shamanic magical rituals. Observations of ritual incantations show that the act of calling spirits is a consistently recurring element in the textual structure” [2]. This conclusion, derived from studies of Siberian shamanic materials, is directly applicable to Uzbek shamanic invocations as well.

Ethnographer V. N. Basilov notes that Uzbek, Kazakh, and Uyghur shamans perform spirit-invoking chants accompanied by the childirma (frame drum), whereas Karakalpak shamans use the qobiz. In both cases, invocations are performed with the aim of expelling evil

spirits from the patient's body through the assistance of mythological patrons. Folklorist E. S. Novik, in his article "The Semiotic Functions of Voice in the Folklore and Beliefs of Siberian Peoples," rightly observes that the performer of shamanic invocations simultaneously functions as both an epic hero and an author [3]. However, alongside the central shaman figure as the primary agent of action, the invocation text also features mythological patron figures, which play a crucial role in the semantic structure of shamanic invocations. These mythological patrons are depicted as sacred beings who assist the shaman and possess the power to expel evil spirits from the patient's body, thereby enhancing the divine efficacy of the ritual.

In incantations recorded in 1957 by Muzayana Alaviya from the Kochiriq ritual performed by the bakhshi Ashiroy Ro'ziyeva in the Chiroqchi district of Qashqadaryo region [4], God and revered saints are explicitly invoked:

In the name of God, in the name of God,

In the name of God, in the name of God,

First, I remember God,

Second, I remember the pirs,

I remember the holy saints,

I remember those who have passed on.

In shamanism, remembrance serves the purpose of activating divine forces. Following this part of the kochiriq chant, the shaman names well-known saints in whom she deeply believes and expresses devotion to them:

Ko'ktosh Ota, holy saint,

I have sought refuge in you.

Chiroqchi Ota, holy saint,

I have sought refuge in you.

Ko'kto'nli Ota, holy saint,

I have sought refuge in you.

It is evident that through ritual praise (alqash), the shaman attempts to invite the spirits of saintly ancestors into herself. In most shamanic invocations, shamans do not directly command their mythological patrons to "come," but rather attract them by expressing reverence and devotion.

A similar pattern can be observed in the qushnoch chant performed during the "Suq chiqarish" ritual, recorded by folklorist O. Qayumov in 2007 in the Nurobod district of Samarqand region:

The hand of the one who gives strength,

The path of the one who shows the way.

My mother's hand,

My Eshon grandfather's hand.

At the beginning of the invocation, the shaman evokes the spirits of her spiritual mentors—Eshon bobo and her mother, who passed down the shamanic tradition—by invoking their hands as sources of power.

In the name of Allah, the Most Merciful, the Most Compassionate,

The hand seasoned by experience,

The hand of my seven generations.

By invoking “the hand of my seven generations,” the shaman emphasizes that shamanic practice has been transmitted through seven ancestral generations, highlighting the breadth of her mythological patronage. Typically, shamanic apprentices draw not only upon their own spiritual patrons but also upon those of their teachers. Thus, the invocation includes ancestral figures and their respective pirs:

May Elchi Momo show the way,

May Jo'lchi Momo show the way.

My grandmother who walked among the people,

Suqchi Momo, Oq Momo.

Sariqiz Momo, Gulqiz Momo,

Sulaymon by the water, Chingiz bobo.

May the saints be helpers,

May the pirs offer their support!

In this invocation, Elchi Momo and Jo'lchi Momo are acknowledged as renowned figures in shamanic belief who traveled among the people. Suqchi Momo, Oq Momo, Sariqiz Momo, Gulqiz Momo, Sulaymon of the waters, and Chingiz bobo are all depicted as mythological patrons of the shaman.

Shamanic mythological patrons typically consist of historically revered individuals, shamans, and saints. In shamanic mythology, fairies (paris), considered beings of the otherworld, also occupy a central place among mythological patrons. The phrase “Sulaymon by the water” refers specifically to the fairy Sulaymon. In world mythology, Sulaymon fairies are often associated with water elements. According to shamanic belief, water is a purifying force and a dwelling place of fairies. Across many religious traditions, water is considered sacred and capable of purification. This sacred quality leads to the belief that both benevolent and malevolent spirits inhabit water. Consequently, sacrificial offerings to water-dwelling mythological patrons are also present in shamanic traditions. The myth of Prophet Solomon's ring, which was believed to command fairies, jinn, and demons, contributed to the emergence of the fairy Sulaymon in shamanic mythology and to the formation of the Sulaymon image in shamanic folklore.

Sariqiz Momo, mentioned in the invocation, is portrayed as a mythological patron of the shaman. In Turkic mythology, Sariqiz is traditionally considered a malevolent, demonological figure that brings harm to people. However, in the shamanic practice of the qushnoch Khursan Momo, Sariqiz functions as a benevolent mythological patron. This transformation can be explained by the dualistic worldview of ancient ancestors, in which a single mythological character could embody both benevolent and malevolent forces. As a result of shifts in artistic and religious perception, Sariqiz—once solely demonological—came to be reinterpreted as a benevolent spirit in later shamanic traditions.

In conclusion, the primary mythological patrons in Uzbek shamanic invocations are represented by fairies and the spirits of the deceased. Their function as mythological patrons is rooted in their belonging to the otherworld. While fairies inhabit spaces beyond human settlements, the spirits of the deceased are associated with the underworld. Therefore, within shamanic belief, both fairies and ancestral spirits are regarded as sources of spiritual assistance to the shaman. This belief is reflected in the shaman's appeals to mythological patrons, their ritual summoning, remembrance, and praise. Mythological patrons are depicted as powerful helpers who assist shamans in overcoming difficulties and expelling evil spirits.

References:

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