

The History and Historiography of Pilgrimage Sites in the Kashkadarya Oasis and the Legal Framework for Tourism Development

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Annotation: *This article explores the historical and historiographical aspects of pilgrimage sites located in the Kashkadarya oasis. It highlights the cultural and religious significance of these sacred places, which have attracted pilgrims and travelers for centuries. Additionally, the article examines the modern legal framework for tourism development in Uzbekistan, focusing on how policies and initiatives have been implemented to promote pilgrimage tourism. Emphasis is placed on preserving the historical and spiritual heritage of the region while fostering sustainable tourism growth. The study draws on historical sources, archival materials, and contemporary legislation to provide a comprehensive analysis.*

Keywords: *Kashkadarya oasis, pilgrimage sites, tourism development, historiography, cultural heritage, religious tourism, Uzbekistan laws.*

In illuminating historical processes, sources not only reflect the events of the period but also serve as tools to study various aspects of society's past and find answers to contemporary questions. Through these sources, the customs, traditions, language, material culture, and written monuments of peoples are identified. Sources are fundamental to any historical research and are crucial for studying the history of society's development from a scientific perspective, both in form and content. The famous Australian historian E. Bernheim regarded sources as the most important material for reconstructing history [1].

When historians examine the nature of sources, they develop methods to critically assess and interpret the different kinds of social information they collect. In this regard, it is observed that at various historical periods, there have been different attitudes towards the issue of pilgrimage sites and their significance in the social and spiritual life of the peoples of Central Asia. Generally, historical sources are a collection of documents and objects of material culture that complement each other, embodying historical processes, specific facts, and events. These sources form the basis for shaping our understanding of a historical era and for advancing scientific hypotheses about the causes and consequences of various historical events. Therefore, determining the authenticity and reliability of a source is the most important condition for its critical study [8].

Scholars have classified archaeological and written sources according to their function, with particular emphasis on graves, temples, caves, petroglyphs (rock drawings), and unique findings related to the daily life of the population.

Specifically, information regarding pilgrimage sites is mostly found in Islamic sources. It should be noted that in the Middle Ages [5], information about the history of Kashkadarya often included details about the region's toponymy, geography, the way of life of its inhabitants, and the names of places. For example, early information was provided by the Arab traveler Ibn Hawqal [], who visited Kesh (old name of Shakhrisabz) in the 10th century. He described Kesh as consisting of a citadel (ko'xandiz), a fortress (xisna), and a suburb (rabot), noting that the city of Madina was connected with the rabot [6]. The inner city and the citadel were in ruins, and all the buildings of the city were made of clay and wood.

Information about the inhabitants of the villages in the city of Kesh is also found in the works of another Arab traveler, Muqaddasi (10th century), as well as in the writings of Tabari (839-923) and Istakhri (died around 957). Abdulkarim as-Samani, who visited Bukhara, Samarkand, Khorezm, Nasaf, Kesh, and Termez in the mid-12th century, studied the cities and villages of the Qarshi? (Nasaf) oasis, meeting and conversing with scholars and intellectuals of the area. In his valuable work "Nasafnama" ("al-Ansab"), 90 scholars from Samarkand, Nasaf, and Kesh are mentioned. Among them, he provides information about the scholars from the current village of Qovchin (formerly the village of Ibsan) in the Qarshi district. According to Abdulkarim as-Samani, in 834, Shaykh Abu Abid ar-Rahman Mu'az ibn Ya'qub Kosoni first built a congregational mosque [2], a nearby rabat for Sufis, a well, and places for ablution in Nasaf. Such information is considered part of historiographical and source studies.

It is known that the Sufi sheikhs, who contributed to the development of Islam, held great prestige among rulers. They were highly respected by Islamic scholars, who considered them their spiritual guides (pirs), and this practice flourished in the pir-murid (master-disciple) relationship [7]. As a result, the graves of saints remained significant pilgrimage sites even after their death [1]. Their reputation among the people, along with their miracles, elevated the status of these pilgrimage sites. Ambassadors and travelers from other countries would also visit these tombs to pay homage to figures revered in the Islamic world. It can be said that Islamic sources provide insight in the concept of pilgrimage, its essence, and the origins and development of this form of worship in religious law. On the other hand, the works of Islamic scholars who lived and worked in the southern regions of Uzbekistan assess historical processes, offering the opportunity to explore the ethical and educational aspects of the social and spiritual significance of pilgrimage in the lives of the people.

Studying the history of pilgrimage sites and sacred places, which are part of Uzbekistan's religious, national, and spiritual values, and researching their impact on shaping the thinking of our people, allow for the revelation of the historical roots of the national mentality and identity of the Uzbek people. The study of the history of sacred sites and their transformation into pilgrimage objects, considering the historical processes of that period, the mentality of the population, and the psychological and emotional state of the people [3], is of great importance. From this perspective, studying the role of traditional values and customs, which have formed and evolved over time in Uzbekistan, in the social, political, and economic relations of society holds special significance. Although various literature and research have been composed on this topic, the question of pilgrimage sites and their origins, as well as the attitudes of the population, has been mainly studied through the examples of Fergana, Kokand, Khorezm, and Bukhara pilgrimage sites in relation to the daily life of the peoples of Central Asia.

The relevance of this topic means that, apart from a few small scientific articles, pilgrimage sites and sacred places in the southern regions of Uzbekistan have not been studied as a separate field of research. During the periods of the Russian Empire (1867-1917) the Soviet Union (1917-1991), and the years of independence [2], the southern regions of Uzbekistan in later years, the activities of Muslim clergy were severely persecuted, and visiting cemeteries and graves was considered a sign of backwardness and ignorance. It is also worth emphasizing that all literature produced in the second half of the 20th century was influenced by the political changes in society and the ideological impact of the Communist Party, presenting religious elements as negative and explaining them within this context. The main objective of research was to study the history of Islam and its ceremonies, and authors such as T. Saidbayev, O. Sukhareva, M. Jalolov, A. Akhmedov, and R. Mavlyutov [2] critically analyzed and evaluated the history of Islam and its associated rituals in their works. For instance, in his booklet "Islam", R. Mavlyutov expressed his thoughts on the phenomenon of pilgrimage in the life of the local population. He noted that Muslims followed the religious traditions inherited from their ancestors, venerating ancient structures, graves, cemeteries, trees, stones, and other objects as sacred places (mazars). These mazars were often sanctified with legends, and it is recorded that the practice of visiting Muslim cemeteries in Uzbekistan first appeared in the 5th-8th centuries [7].

It should also be mentioned that the tradition of pilgrimage and its associated rituals have not only been preserved among the Uzbek people but also among representatives of various other ethnic groups living in the region. In Soviet-era literature, certain aspects of this issue were explored, and scholars such as S. Abramzon provided comparative analyses of the religious elements in the lifestyles of Kazakh, Kyrgyz, and Karakalpak peoples [1], linking the origins of their religious practices to ancient historical processes. In O. Murodov's research, the origin of the cult in the Zarafshan Tajiks is linked to the roots of shamanistic religion.

In L. Tolstov's research, the basis for the distribution of religious practices among the Turkic-speaking population of the Khwarezm region is associated with folk folklore, tracing its historical background to the Massaget tribe. S. Abramzon analyzed the cult in religious practices through a comparative study of religious elements in the lifestyles of Kazakh, Kyrgyz, and Karakalpak peoples, demonstrating that its foundations are directly related to the remnants of ancient historical religious beliefs [4].

The works of Qashqadarya Sufi school founders such as Abu Turab Narshakhi, the thinker and poet Sufi Olloyor, and Hazrat Sultan Said Ahmad Bashir, among others, were rooted in Islamic sciences, and their writings were composed in the spirit of Islam. It can be said that the thoughts and views presented in their works contributed to the growth of the local people's intellectual development and the education of youth in the values of morality. In studying the importance of pilgrimages in the spiritual life of the local population and revealing the content of religious and cultural history, theories developed by Ch. Glock and R. Stark [5], focusing on the significance of religion in society and the relationship between religious worship and social changes, were found to be applicable. Based on the classification of pilgrimage sites in Central Asia, the pilgrimage sites in the Qashqadaryo region were organized into distinct categories.

In recent years, in the context of a postmodern society, the importance of religion in lifestyle of the people has been examined in relation to changes in the status of religion and the spread of religious practices. In this regard, the theories of scholars such as A. Koryaeva, T.A. Bazhan, N.A. Voroshilova, and M. Shtrin play a significant role. Additionally, views on the conceptual foundations of the study of religious processes (L.N. Mitrokhin, I.G. Balagushkin) emphasize the phenomenon of religion in human life, the synthesis of theoretical concepts [3], and the analysis of empirical research.

In conclusion, the history and historiography of pilgrimage sites in the Kashkadarya oasis underscore the region's rich cultural and spiritual heritage, which has been a focal point for religious and cultural tourism for centuries. These sacred sites not only reflect the spiritual beliefs and practices of various eras but also serve as testaments to the region's architectural and artistic achievements. In modern times, the importance of preserving these historical and religious landmarks has been recognized as a vital component of Uzbekistan's cultural identity. The legal framework for tourism development has played a significant role in promoting the Kashkadarya oasis as a hub for pilgrimage tourism. Initiatives aimed at restoring, protecting, and showcasing these sites have enhanced their accessibility and appeal to both domestic and international visitors. As Uzbekistan continues to develop its tourism sector, the integration of sustainable practices and adherence to preservation standards will be essential. By balancing cultural heritage conservation with tourism growth, the Kashkadarya oasis can continue to serve as a beacon of history, spirituality, and cultural pride for future generations.

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