

# Zoroastrian Rituals in Wedding Ceremonies of Bukhara Oasis

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## Abstract

**Introduction:** This article analyzes, from a historical and ethnographic perspective, wedding customs in the Bukhara oasis that have survived to the present day and are linked to Zoroastrianism. The study includes an examination of customs related to the fire cult, belts, and incense, along with information from scholarly literature.

**Materials & Methods:** The article makes use of ethnographic research techniques, particularly participant observation, material culture collection and analysis, and structured, semi-structured, and unstructured interviews. It is founded on the study of fire culture's history and symbols, research conducted by anthropologists and ethnologists worldwide, including Zoroastrian customs, and the reverence for fire in Bukhara oasis wedding ceremonies.

**Results:** The findings indicate that researchers have looked into the fire cult's intricate and ancient meanings. The religious and psychological significance of fire was examined by Tylor and Bachelard. Wedding rituals in Central Asia, especially in the oasis of Bukhara, have preserved remnants of the fire cult. Ancient agricultural cultures were known to practice Zoroastrian customs like tying belts, lighting fires, and circling fire around the bride and groom. Additionally, it has been observed that the oases of Khorezm and Zarafshan have fire-related customs.

**Conclusions:** It is emphasised in the conclusion that national customs that have been formed and evolved over the ages constitute a priceless legacy that ties nations' past, present, and future together. Zoroastrian customs have also been maintained in wedding ceremonies at the Bukhara oasis. One of the most pressing issues is researching the origins of these antiquated practices.

**Keywords:** Zoroastrian; Rituals; Wedding; Ceremonies; Bukhara Oasis

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## Introduction

The material and spiritual heritage of a nation plays a crucial role in its formation and development. The unique aspects and origins—the genesis—of customs, rituals, and holidays that have significantly contributed

to the spiritual wealth of the world's peoples are worthy of study. Bukhara's wedding ceremonies developed and evolved within the context of the oasis's ancient mythological concepts and diverse religious and belief systems. Their performance constitutes a unified system and holds a special place in the social life of the population. These ceremonies reflect the spiritual and mental world and unique customs of a specific ethno-territory. The influence of our ancestors' mythological worldview on the formation of these ceremonies is clearly perceptible. Even today, we can observe traces of various forms of belief and even remnants of ancient religions in the wedding ceremonies of the Bukhara oasis. For example, in wedding ceremonies, there are customs related to the fire cult, totemism (walnut cult, pomegranate cult), animism (burning incense to honor the spirits of ancestors), and fetishism (customs related to the walnut and pomegranate cults, bread, dumplings, eggs, white milk, scattering money and sweets, and color cults), superstitions, magic, and belief systems.

When studying the experiences of our people in raising children, and their family and marriage relations, we turn to the Avesta, the sacred book of Zoroastrianism. This is because the Avesta is the most ancient source for studying the history, past, culture, and pedagogy of Central Asia. The Avesta, the sacred source of Zoroastrianism, which was the main form of belief of our people for thousands of years, is a valuable source that reveals the secrets of our ancient history. Many researchers associate customs related to the fire cult in wedding ceremonies with Zoroastrianism. In particular, researchers have written in their dissertations about the existence of such customs in the Khorezm oasis [1] and other regions.

### **Materials & Methods**

Ethnological studies, as a branch of anthropology focused on comparing and contrasting the cultures of different peoples, relies on a variety of qualitative and quantitative methods to gather and analyze data. In this article, methods, such as participant observation, collection and analysis of material culture, interviews (structured, semi-structured, unstructured) are used effectively in order to get information.

Because the fire cult is a complex and multifaceted phenomenon that has existed in various cultures since ancient times, the literature devoted to it is also very diverse. There are numerous studies by world anthropologists and ethnologists dedicated to the origin of the fire cult and its symbolism. For example, George Frazer, an English anthropologist and religious scholar, extensively discusses the fire cult and its rituals in various cultures in his book "The Golden Bough" [2]. He wrote, in particular, about the belief that fire possesses magical powers and its role in purification.

In addition, Eduard Burnett Tylor, an English anthropologist, provides information about fire worship, animism, and fire-related ceremonies in his book "Primitive Culture" [3]. He described fire as an object of worship that satisfies people's beliefs and needs. Also, Gaston Bachelard, a French philosopher and literary critic, analyzes the symbolic meaning of fire, its impact on the human mind, and unconscious passions for fire in his book "Psychoanalysis of Fire" [4].

Many scholars who have conducted research in Central Asia have studied the widespread presence of the fire cult in the past and its traces. For example, information on this topic can be found in the works of N.P. Lobacheva [5], Karim Shoniyozov [6], Edvard Rtveldze [7], A. Ashirov [8], and other scholars [9].

Some customs in the wedding ceremonies of the Bukhara oasis can be linked to the Zoroastrian religion. For example, in the "padar oshi" ceremony in the oasis, after the groom is dressed in a robe, his waist is tied by elderly men. [10] A. Ashirov interpreted the customs related to putting on a robe and tying a belt among our people as a transformed form of the Zoroastrian "sidraposhlik" custom [11]. According to the scholar, the symbolic meaning of the Zoroastrian belt-tying has been formed over centuries, and tying it three times signified the three-creed ethics of the Zoroastrians. Among Uzbeks, it is also a widespread custom to put a robe and skullcap on guests from other countries, and to tie a belt on the groom in the bride's house during the wedding. This custom, on the one hand, shows respect and honor to the guest and the groom, and on the other hand, signifies the symbolic acceptance of that guest into our people's ranks or the groom becoming a new member of the bride's family [11; 8]. In addition, in his work "Ceremonies Inherited from the Avesta," A. Ashirov noted that the "barsman" plant used in Zoroastrian religious customs is the plant that we call "isiriq"

today, that every religious person had barsman in their hands (especially during sacrificial ceremonies), and that our people call "isiriq" "kharzorispan" and "ispand." [12]

Although the fire cult in the wedding ceremonies of the Bukhara oasis has not been scientifically analyzed as a separate study to date, the scholar R. Rahimov, who has scientifically studied the fire cult in Tajik culture, its symbolic meanings, and folk views, analyzes the genesis of the Tajik custom of "olovgardon" (Uzbek: "circling around the fire") in his monograph. [13] In some views related to the fire cult among the Tajiks, we can see common aspects similar to the views of the inhabitants of the Bukhara oasis. In particular, the scholar noted that circling the bride or both newlyweds around a ceremonial fire is characteristic mainly of the ancient settled agricultural regions of Central Asia. [17;5] In addition, in this monograph, the scholar interprets the lighting of candles or circling the bride around a fire, which are present in Tajik wedding ceremonies, as "family fire" ("огонь семьи"). [13;285]

The scholar R. Rahimov, who scientifically studied the cult of fire in Tajik culture, its symbolic meanings, and folk beliefs, analyzes the genesis of the Tajik custom of "olavgardon" (Uzbek: "circling around the fire") in his monograph. [13;387] The scholar noted that circling the bride or both newlyweds around a ceremonial fire is characteristic mainly of the ancient settled agricultural regions of Central Asia. [13;387]

Today, even in the Bukhara oasis, the majority of the population considers this tradition to be a "sarqit" left over from the Zoroastrian religion, stemming from the belief in the four elements of Zoroastrianism (fire, water, air, soil). Researchers have noted the existence of this custom in the wedding ceremonies of the Upper Zerafshan [18] and Khorezm [1;170] oases. In particular, in Khorezm, the bride Bonfires were lit on both sides of the road, and the "wedding carriage" in which the bride was seated passed through the flames and headed towards the groom's house. [1;53]

In addition, in the Upper Zarafshan oasis, the bride and groom used the above magical primis so that their houses would be bright and they would always be warm to each other like fire. Belief in the magical power of fire was also practiced in the following tradition: after the bride and groom were brought into the censer, the young men would surround the bride and groom with fire in the fire of the censer. The symbolic meaning of this tradition is also their wish related to the magical religious ideas that they would be warm to each other like fire. [14;100]

## Results

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## Conclusions

In conclusion, traditions are formed and develop over the centuries. Each era, socio-political environment can have a positive or negative impact on the age-old customs and rituals of the people, but humane traditions are powerless to destroy them. National traditions are noble values that firmly connect the past, present and future of the people. In the Bukhara oasis, Zoroastrian traditions are still preserved in wedding ceremonies. For example, on the day of the wedding, when the bride is brought to the groom's house, a bonfire is lit in front of the door, and the groom carries the bride on his shoulders and circles the bonfire three times. In this ceremony, some manifestations of the Zoroastrian religion, namely the burning of the bride and groom in fire, are manifested as a symbol of protection from evil forces and cleansing from misfortunes. Today, we have witnessed the similarity of some of the customs included in the system of wedding ceremonies of the Bukhara oasis with the customs performed in the Zoroastrian religion, their transformed form. Studying the history of the origin of these traditions, their importance in social life, and passing them on to future generations is one of the urgent tasks facing historians and ethnologists.

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