

CULINARY “CODES” IN THE WEDDING CEREMONY OF UZBEKS AND KARAKALPAKS

The article is devoted to the study of the role of culinary “codes” in Uzbek and Karakalpak wedding ceremonies. The authors note that the wedding traditions of these peoples represent a unique combination of ancient beliefs, cultural values, and social norms. An important element of these traditions is the various dishes and culinary practices that carry deep symbolic meaning. The article analyzes how these culinary “codes” reflect worldviews, beliefs, and rituals associated with one of life’s most significant events — a wedding. The authors detail the features of wedding rituals among the Uzbeks and Karakalpaks, focusing on matchmaking rituals, cooking and presenting food, and bread-related rituals. Special attention is paid to the symbolic function of food practices, which serve as a means of nonverbal communication that unites the relatives of the bride and groom and perform magical functions aimed at ensuring the well-being of the newlyweds. The authors conclude that food symbols play a key role in wedding ceremonies among these peoples and that Uzbek and Karakalpak weddings are complex rituals filled with symbolic actions and culinary “codes.” These ritual practices express wishes for love, happiness, and a large family and serve as informational signals that mark the various stages of the wedding cycle.

Keywords: *culinary code, wedding ceremony, Uzbeks, Karakalpaks*

Authors Info: **Zununova, Gulchehra** — Doctor of History, Leading Researcher, National Center of Archaeology of the Academy of Sciences of the Republic of Uzbekistan (Tashkent, Uzbekistan). E-mail: zunnunova@yahoo.com ORCID ID: <https://orcid.org/0000-0002-9278-4740>

Kurbanova, Zemfira — Doctor of History, Senior Researcher, Karakalpak Scientific Research Institute of Humanities of the Karakalpak Branch of the Academy of Sciences of the Republic of Uzbekistan (Nukus, Karakalpakstan, Uzbekistan). E-mail: sapphire.ethno@gmail.com ORCID ID: <https://orcid.org/0000-0002-3478-2042>

For citation: Zununova, G., and Z. Kurbanova. 2025. Culinary “Codes” in the Wedding Ceremony of Uzbeks and Karakalpaks. *Herald of Anthropology (Vestnik Antropologii)* 4: 253–265.

Funding: The study was conducted as part of the Turkic Academy’s TA-RP/P-2024-10 project “Rituals and Ceremonies Related to the Food Traditions of the Peoples of Central Asia (Based on the Karakalpaks, Uzbeks, Kazakhs, and Kyrgyz)”.

References

- Abashin, S. N. 2001. Chay v Sredney Azii: istoriia napitka v 18–19 vekakh [Tea in Central Asia: The History of the Drink in the 18th–19th Centuries]. In *Traditsionnaia pisha kak vyrazhenie etnicheskogo samosoznaniia* [Traditional Food as Expression of Ethnic Identity], ed. by S. A. Arutiunov, T. A. Voronina. Moscow: Nauka. 204–230.
- Ay-yymbetov, Q. 1988. *Halq danalig ‘i. Øtken kunlerden yelesler* [Folk Wisdom. Memories of the Past]. Nukus: Qaraqalpaqstan.

- Bekmuratova, A. 1980. Pishcha [Food]. In *Etnografiia karakalpakov 19 — nachalo 20 v. (materiali i issledovaniia)* [Ethnography of the Karakalpaks of the 19th — Early 20th Centuries (Materials and Research)], ed. by T. A. Zhdanko, S. K. Kamalov. Tashkent: FAN. 112–143.
- Esbergenov, Kh., and T. Atamuratov. 1975. *Traditsii i ikh preobrazovanie v gorodskom bytu karakalpakov* [Traditions and Their Transformation in Urban Life of the Karakalpaks]. Nukus: Karakalpakstan. 211 p.
- Fayzullayeva, M. 2021. *O'zbek milliy taomlari va tanovul madaniyati (Surxon vohasi misolida)* [National Cuisine and Food Culture of Uzbekistan (Based on the Example of the Surkhan Oasis)]. Tashkent: Tafakkur avlodi. 360 p.
- Frazer, J. G. 1980. *Zolotaya vetv': issledovanie magii i religii* [The Golden Bough: A Study in Magic and Religion]. Moscow: Politizdat. 831 p.
- Gennep, Arnold van. 1999. *Obriady perekhoda* [The Rites of Passage]. Moscow: Vostochnaia literatura. 198 p.
- Tokarev, S. A. (ed.). 1983. *Kalendarnyye obychai i obryady v stranakh zarubezhnoi Evropy. Istoricheskie korni i razvitie obychev* [Calendar Customs and Rites in Europe Outside the USSR]. Vol. 4. Moscow: Nauka. 222 p.
- Karazin, N. N. 1875. V nizov'akh Amu [In the Lower Reaches of the Amu River]. *Vestnik Evropy* 3: 186–229.
- Khanykov, N. 1843. *Opisanye Bukharskogo khanstva* [Description of the Bukhara Khanate]. Saint Petersburg: Tipografiia Imperatorskoi Akademii nauk. 279 p.
- Lévi-Strauss, Claude. 1999. *Mifologiki. Syroe i prigotovlennoe* [Mythologiques: The Raw and the Cooked]. Vol. 1. Moscow, Saint Petersburg: Universitetskaya kniga. 406 p.
- Makhmudov, K. 1960. *Uzbekskie blyuda* [Uzbek Dishes]. Tashkent: Uzbekistan. 301 p.
- Morozova, A. S. 1954. *Kul'tura domashnego byta karakalpakov nachala 20 veka (k voprosu etnogeneza)* [Household Culture of the Early 20th-Century Karakalpaks (on the Issue of Ethnogenesis)]. Ph.D. diss, Tashkent. 255 p.
- Nebolsin, P. I. 1856. *Ocherki torgovli Rossii so stranami Srednei Azii, Khivoi, Bukharoi i Kokandom (so storony Orenburgskoi linii)* [Essays on Russia's Trade Relations with the Countries of Central Asia, Khiva, Bukhara, and Kokand (via the Orenburg Line)]. Saint Petersburg. 370 p.
- Pisarchik, A. K. 1962. Pishcha. Uzbeki [Food. Uzbeks]. In *Narody Sredney Azii i Kazakhstana (etnograficheskie ocherki)* [Peoples of Central Asia and Kazakhstan (Ethnographic Essays)], ed. by S. P. Tolstov et al. Vol. 1. Moscow: Akademia nauk SSSR. 304–314.
- Shaniyazov, K. Sh. 1964. *Uzbeki — karluki: istoriko-etnograficheskii ocherk* [Karluk Uzbeks: A Historical and Ethnographic Essay], ed. by L. P. Potapov. Tashkent: Fan. 195 p.
- Shishkina, T. M. 2015. Dar i poleznost': ekonomicheskaya antropologiya retsiproknogo obmena [Gift and Usefulness: Economic Anthropology of Reciprocal Exchange]. *Problemy sovremennoi ekonomiki* 3 (55): 106–109.
- Shishov, A. 1904. Sarty [Sarts]. In *Sbornik materialov dlia statistiki Syrdar'inskoj oblasti* [Collection of Materials for Statistics of the Syrdarya Region]. Vol. 11. Tashkent: Tipo-litografiia V. M. Il'ina. 43–48.
- Snesarev, G. P. 1969. *Relikty domusul'manskikh verovanii i obriadov u uzbekov Khorezma* [Relics of Pre-Islamic Beliefs and Rites Among the Uzbeks of Khorezm]. Moscow: Nauka. 336 p.
- Tokarev, S. A. 1990. *Sushchnost' i proiskhozhdenie magii. Tipy magii* [The Essence and Origin of Magic. Types of Magic]. Moscow: Politizdat. 622 p.
- Turner, V. 1983. *Simvol i ritual* [Symbols and Ritual]. Moscow: Nauka. 277 p.
- Zanka, Russell. 2007. Fat and All That: Good Eating the Uzbek Way. In *Everyday Life in Central Asia: Past and Present*, ed. by J. Sahadeo and R. Zanka. Bloomington: Indiana University Press. 178–197.
- Zhdanko, T. A. 1952. *Karakalpaki Khorezmskogo oazisa* [Karakalpaks of the Khorezm Oasis]. In *Trudy khorezmskoi arkheologo-etnograficheskoi ekspeditsii* [Works of the Khorezm Archaeological-Ethnographic Expedition]. Vol. 1. Moscow: Akademiia nauk SSSR. 461–647.
- Zununova, G. Sh. 2013. *Material'naya kul'tura uzbekov Tashkenta: transformatsiia traditsii* [Material Culture of the Uzbeks of Tashkent: Transformation of Traditions], ed. by Z. Kh. Arifkhanov, D. A. Alimova. Tashkent: Ekstremum-Press.