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A COMPARATIVE ANALYSIS OF RITES OF PASSAGE IN UZBEK FOLK CULTURE WITH A SPECIAL FOCUS ON KAHRAMANMARAŞ FOLK CULTURE

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Abstract

This article provides a comparative analysis of the rites of passage (birth, marriage, and death) in Kahramanmaraş, one of Anatolia's deep-rooted cultural centers, and in Uzbekistan, the heart of the Silk Road. The study is grounded in Arnold van Gennep's theory of rites of passage and Bronislaw Malinowski's functionalist theoretical approaches. Both regions share a common historical foundation where pre-Islamic ancient Turkic-Shamanic beliefs are syncretically blended with Islamic practices. The study reveals striking similarities in both cultures regarding the legitimation of the individual's new status, the strengthening of social solidarity networks, and the management of crisis moments. However, significant differences were also identified in the physical and symbolic expressions of these rituals, shaped by geographical conditions, regional adaptations, and varying levels of modernization.

Keywords: Rites of Passage, Kahramanmaraş Folk Culture, Uzbek Culture, Cultural Memory, Comparative Folklore.

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O‘ZBEK XALQ MADANIYATIDAGI O‘TISH MAROSIMLARINING QAHRAMONMARASH XALQ MADANIYATI MISOLIDA QIYOSIY TAHLILI

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Annotatsiya

Ushbu maqolada Anado‘lining qadimiy madaniy markazlaridan biri bo‘lgan Qahramonmarash hamda Ipak yo‘lining yuragi bo‘lmish O‘zbekiston xalqlari madaniyatidagi o‘tish davri (tug‘ilish, nikoh va o‘lim) marosimlari qiyosiy tahlil qilinadi. Tadqiqot Arnold van Gennepning o‘tish marosimlari nazariyasi hamda Bronislav Malinovskiyning funksionalistik nazariy yondashuvlariga asoslanadi. Ikkala mintaqa ham islomdan oldingi qadimiy turkiy-shomon e‘tiqodlari va islomiy amaliyotlar sinkretik (birlashgan) tuzilmada uyg‘unlashgan umumiy tarixiy zaminga ega. Tadqiqotda har ikki madaniyatda ham shaxsning yangi maqomini qonuniylashtirish, ijtimoiy birdamlik tarmoqlarini mustahkamlash va inqirozli holatlarni boshqarish kontekstida hayratlanarli o‘xshashliklar mavjudligi aniqlandi. Shu bilan birga, geografik sharoitlar, mintaqaviy moslashuvlar va modernizatsiyaning turli darajalari ta‘sirida shakllangan ushbu marosimlarning jismoniy va ramziy ifodalarida ham sezilarli farqlar borligi kuzatildi.

Kalit so‘zlar: O‘tish marosimlari, Qahramonmarash xalq madaniyati, O‘zbek madaniyati, Madaniy xotira, Qiyosiy folklor.

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1. INTRODUCTION:

THEORETICAL FRAMEWORK AND CULTURAL BACKGROUND

Transitions between certain stages of human life are not left to chance by the social structure but are organized as a set of structured actions (Kudratkhodja et al., 2026). Arnold van Gennep's "Rites of Passage" theory examines the change in an individual's status across three stages: separation, liminality, and aggregation (Rites of Passage, 2026). The birth, marriage, and death practices in the cultures of Kahramanmaraş and Uzbekistan align perfectly with this three-stage crisis management theory.

From a historical perspective, both cultures are societies that have successfully blended pre-Islamic beliefs of Central Asian origin (Shamanism, Animism, Tengrism) with the rules of Islamic civilization. Due to its strategic location, Uzbekistan is the homeland of this synthesis; meanwhile, Kahramanmaraş is a conservative center that carried these beliefs from Central Asia to Anatolia and preserved them through its neighborhood culture (Mansurov, 2025). In light of Malinowski's functionalist approach, these ancient practices in both regions are not merely nostalgic elements but are sociological mechanisms that continue to fulfill the society's needs for belonging, validation, and security (Kudratkhodja et al., 2026).

2. COMPARISON OF BIRTH AND CHILDHOOD RITUALS

The birth process serves as an ontological threshold in both cultures where a new social actor is legitimized (Ubaydullaeva, 2021).

2.1. Common Aspects: The Liminal Phase (Forty Days) and Purification

In both societies, the first forty-day period following the mother's delivery is considered a critical "liminal" phase vulnerable to metaphysical dangers. This period is referred to as "Chilla" in Uzbek culture (Ubaydullaeva, 2021) and "Lohusalık" or "Kırk Gün" (Forty Days) in Kahramanmaraş. During this phase,

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both the mother and the baby are isolated from the outside world and subjected to protective practices (Türkmen, 2022).

Furthermore, naming—the ritual that confers the child's status and Islamic identity—is certified in both cultures by a wise/older adult or a cleric reciting the adhan (call to prayer) into the baby's ear (Social Practices, Rituals and Festive Events, n.d.). The belief in the purifying and blessing power of water and precious metals is also common; tossing silver coins or gold into the water during the "kırklama" (fortieth-day purification) rituals in Kahramanmaraş, and adorning the baby during the Uzbek "Beshik-toyi" ceremony, represent purification and blessing wishes operating on a similar logic (Peopletravel, n.d.).

2.2. Divergent Aspects: Salting, Beshik-Toyi, and Bodily Shaping

In Kahramanmaraş culture, physical health protection and character building are attempted through empirical actions. The practice of "salting" (tuzlama) to prevent the baby from developing body odor and to ensure a strong character, along with the practice of "hanging the baby upside down" based on the belief that it will yield an imposing physical stature, are distinct rituals specific to Maraş.

Conversely, in Uzbek culture, birth is celebrated with Beshik-toyi (cradle wedding), a large-scale, symbolic festival centered around the woman (Khabibullayeva, 2025; Peopletravel, n.d.). In this ceremony, directed by a wise woman known as "Kayvoni ayol," Shamanistic elements of Central Asian origin—such as burning peganum harmala (isiriq) to ward off evil spirits—are much more prominent. Additionally, while equestrian sports (Ko'pkari) accompanied by Uzbek pilaf are organized during the circumcision weddings of boys in Uzbekistan, the institution of "kirvelik" (a traditional godfather-like sponsorship) is more prominent in Maraş (Kudratkhodja et al., 2026; Ubaydullaeva, 2021).

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3. MARRIAGE AND WEDDING CUSTOMS: SOCIAL ALLIANCE AND THE THRESHOLD

Marriage in both Kahramanmaraş and Uzbek societies is an alliance structured at the social and economic level by lineages, rather than solely by individuals (Santur, n.d.; Kudratkhodja et al., 2026).

3.1. Common Aspects: Matchmaking and Engagement Practices

The marriage proposal process in both cultures begins with matchmaking rituals ("Sovchilik" in Uzbekistan or "Kız Görme" in Kahramanmaraş) based on the inquiries of matchmakers or family elders (Kudratkhodja et al., 2026). The finalization of the marriage decision is announced through engagement ceremonies (Fotiha and Şerbet/Söz Kesme) that secure the families' collective consensus (Khabibullayeva, 2025; Santur, n.d.). Economic obligations take the form of "Ağırlık" (wealth transfer) via gold (twisted bracelets, etc.) in Maraş. In contrast, in Uzbekistan, they are negotiated as "kalın puli" (bride price) and "sut puli" (milk right) (Kudratkhodja et al., 2026).

3.2. Divergent Aspects: Henna, Threshold Rituals, and Chimildiq

In Kahramanmaraş, wedding rituals center around the "Henna Night" (Kına Gecesi), which lyrically symbolizes the bride's departure from her father's house. Rituals such as the bride striking the henna in her palm against a wall and breaking a wooden spoon serve as sharp symbols of separation (Santur, n.d.).

In Uzbek marriages, the reflections of pre-Islamic beliefs are more pronounced. Practices such as the bride and groom circling a fire (olov etrafida oylanish) and sewing a white thread on the groom's shoulder as a wish charm are widespread in Uzbekistan. However, they are absent in Maraş (Kudratkhodja et al., 2026). The most fundamental wedding symbol for Uzbeks is the special enclosed space called "Chimildiq" (nuptial curtain), which certifies the bride's transition into her new life (Kudratkhodja et al., 2026). Following the wedding, a special ceremony

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unique to the Uzbek bride called "Kelin-Salom" (bride's greeting) is performed, during which the bride, with her face veiled, greets all relatives in a bowing posture resembling a ruku (Kudratkhodja et al., 2026; Khabibullayeva, 2025).

4. DEATH AND MOURNING (TAZIYE) RITUALS: COLLECTIVE MEMORY AND CATHARSIS

Death in both societies triggers crisis management, in which pain is collectivized, and the individual is consoled (Çakır, 2023; Alsan, 2022).

4.1. Common Aspects: Lamentation, the Yugh Tradition, and Social Solidarity

The "Yoğ/Yuğ" (funeral feast) ceremonies of ancient Turkic culture continue to exist in both societies, having assumed an Islamic form (Alsan, 2022). The serving of funeral food or distribution of halva on the 7th and 40th days in Kahramanmaraş, and the distribution of pilaf in large cauldrons under the name "Maraka" on the 3rd, 7th, 20th, and 40th days of passing in Uzbekistan, stem from the same origin (Çakır, 2023; Khabibullayeva, 2025). The role of women in the house of mourning is also shared. The tradition of "ağıt yakma" (lamenting) performed by women in Kahramanmaraş provides a lyrical catharsis by praising the generosity of the deceased; in Uzbek culture, the exact counterparts—the "Yig'i/Yo'qlov" and "Marsiya" practices—are similar expressions where weeping is mandatory, and wailing is glorified (Alsan, 2022; Ananaviy O'zbek Musiqasi Asoslari, n.d.).

4.2. Divergent Aspects: House of Mourning Rules and the Sadr Tradition

In Kahramanmaraş, post-death mourning (taziye) is bound by strict, silent spatial rules: the entire neighborhood attends, mirra (bitter coffee) is served to guests, but greetings such as "welcome" are omitted, and shoes are intentionally not arranged in pairs (Çakır, 2023).

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In Uzbek culture, however, women (and sometimes men) perform a rhythmic dance called "Sadr" (Sadr Tepish) before the burial. This archaic Shamanistic ritual, which involves circling the coffin while beating one's chest, rhythmically stomping the ground, and raising cries/wails, indicates that the Uzbek mourning process is physically much more reactive and rhythmic.

5. CONCLUSION

The birth, marriage, and death rituals in the cultures of Kahramanmaraş and Uzbekistan are mechanisms that weave the sociological, psychological, and spiritual safety nets required by individuals and society, effectively validating the theories of Malinowski and Van Gennep (Kudratkhodja et al., 2026; Malinowski, 2000). Ancient Turkic beliefs carried from Central Asia have been melded in the crucible of Islam, yet have produced regional differences within their respective geographical and socio-economic contexts (Bosáková, 2014; CultureGrams, 2023).

While Uzbek rituals are more expressive, with Shamanistic codes nearer to the surface and possessing a musical and theatrical character (Beshik-toyi, Sadr, Chimildiq), Kahramanmaraş rituals have merged with Anatolian conservatism, transforming into more implicit, disciplined, and symbolic codes of obedience/loyalty (Salting, Breaking the threshold, Mourning rules) (Çakır, 2023; Kudratkhodja et al., 2026). Both represent immense archives of cultural memory that keep social memory alive despite urbanization, globalization, and modernization (Lepeshkina, 2013).

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