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The Ritual-Mythological Semantics of the Azerbaijan Khidir Nabi Holiday

Abstract: After Novruz holiday the most important holiday according to the ritual-mythological bases and ethno-cultural semantics of Azerbaijani folk holidays is Khidir Nabi holiday. In fact, the holidays of Novruz and Khidir Nabi are not separated from each other as part of the national calendar: these holidays belong to the different stages of the folk calendar and are united according to the ethno-cultural essence and concept. They are the components of the unified mythical system of thinking of people about time, as independent holidays, which do not replace each other and are not alternative. However, it should be noted that Novruz is more widespread due to the ethno-cultural geography than the holiday Khidir Nabi.

The main purpose of the research is to investigate the ritual-mythological semantics of the Azerbaijani Khidir Nabi holiday.

The research presented in this paper is mainly based on the historical-comparative and ritual-mythological approach methods.

Keywords: holiday, Khidir Nabi, Khidir Ilyas, ritual, myth, semantics

Introduction

After Novruz holiday the most important holiday according to the ritual-mythological bases and ethno-cultural semantics of Azerbaijani folk holidays is Khidir Nabi holiday. In the great geography from the Middle East to Central Asia, from the Balkans to the Caucasus the beliefs about Khizir are spread widely (Chinar, 2020, 62). The holiday is celebrated in many Muslim and Christian communities (Oghuz, 2020, 41; Andrews, Temel & Temel, 2010, 298).

In fact, the holidays of Novruz and Khidir Nabi are not separated from each other as part of the national calendar. "With the arrival of spring Novruz and Hidirellez ceremonies are observed almost everywhere where the Turks live" (Uja, 2007, 114). In this sense, the semantics of creation which is characteristic of Novruz (Behzadi, 2016, 399) is also observed in the holiday of Khidir Nabi. Belonging to the different stages of the folk calendar, these holidays are united

according to the ethno-cultural essence and concept. They are the components of the unified mythical system of thinking of people about time, as independent holidays, which do not replace each other and are not alternative. However, it should be noted that Novruz is a more widespread holiday due to the ethno-cultural geography than the holiday Khidir Nabi.

Though Khidir Nabi is a very ancient holiday and is associated with the deepest layers of mythical thought of Azerbaijan, it is not celebrated in every part of the historical Azerbaijan. There are regions in which the holiday of Khidir Nabi is not generally known. For example, this holiday is not celebrated in the southern regions of Northern Azerbaijan and in the lowland area of Shirvan region, and no tradition is found among the people.

G. Yologlu writes that "In the areas where Novruz was celebrated with great enthusiasm, Khidir Nabi was not held, or it was celebrated very poorly. When Khidir Nabi holiday was celebrated with great enthusiasm and pleasure, the holiday Novruz was not celebrated importantly" (Yologlu, 2009, 113-114). In this view, the holiday Novruz and Khidir Nabi are presented as alternative holidays. But the author's opinion based on ethnographic observations is also true. Of course, Khidir Nabi and Novruz are not the same (functional) holidays and that is why they cannot be alternative to each other. On the contrary, they form different levels of the folk calendar connected with each other. According to the calendar the holiday Khidir Nabi comes before Novruz holiday.

In general, there is a lot of literature about Khidir Nabi. However, the same cannot be said about the holiday of Azerbaijan Khidir Nabi. In this regard, first of all, the monographic book by the Turkish scientist A.Y. Ojag attracts attention. The author has studied the cult Khizir or Khizir-Ilyas in the context of Islamic-Turkic beliefs (Ojak, 1985). The investigations by another Turkish scientist P.N. Boratav are also important due to the description and analysis of materials about the cult of Khidir Ilyas (Boratav 2018).

The Azerbaijani scientist Kh. Babayeva has investigated the image of Khidir Nabi (Ilyas) in the monographic context (Babayeva 2013). In the activities of some scientists such as B. Abdulla, G. Panah, and A. Khurramgizi the structure of the ceremony Khidir Nabi is described as the ritual process (Abdulla 2005; Khurramgizi 2002; Panah 21). In addition, S. Garayev's article investigating the image of Khidr in the psychoanalytic context forms a special direction in the study of the image (Garayev 2019).

The ceremony "Khidir Nabi" is a seasonal ceremony held in honor of the mythical existence of Khidir Nabi, a cult of greenery and water associated with the coming of spring. The ceremony is held in the first decade of March. Khidir Nabi is the image of a protector riding a gray horse. People singing songs in honor of Khidir Nabi in this ceremony ask him to hasten the spring and the heat, to bless the fields, meadows, crops and gardens.

In the ceremony “Khir Nabi” the people prepare a meal called “govut” from ground wheat flour roasted on the fire. They paint boiled eggs in green and red as a symbol of the Sun and spring.

The most symbolic act of the ceremony “Khir Nabi” is the night of “Khir Nabi”. Because that night Khir Nabi distributes blessings. The day before the ceremony the children break the apple sticks in the garden and bring them home, wrapping them in cotton wool and lubricating them. Each stick expresses an intention: improvement, health, abundance of crops, growth of cattle and so on.

When the Sun sets in the evening in a room where there is no one, they use the sticks like candles and light them. No one should approach and touch the roasted wheat until the Sun rises. Because during the first night Khir Nabi, who distributed blessings to the houses, has to come on his gray horse, touch it with his whip and then take his share. People come to that room early in the morning looking carefully at the roast for a trace of Khir Nabi’s whip. If they see this trace, they become very happy. It means that Khir Nabi has come to that house at midnight and touched the roasted wheat with his whip.

There are two meanings of the touching of roasted wheat with Khir Nabi’s whip:

- 1) Khir Nabi has come to that house and has taken his share of that roasted wheat;
- 2) Khir Nabi fermented the roast wheat with his whip and blessed that house.

Family members share that roasted wheat among themselves and eat it. Thus, the blessings come to all. In the night of “Khir Nabi” children walk in the village in groups, singing songs, and gather a lot of shares in the name of Khir Nabi. Along with delicious meals the watermelon, symbolizing the coming of spring, is also served on the tables that evening (Abdulla, Babayev, 200, p. 101-103).

Discussion

The fact that Khir Nabi holiday is not as widespread as Novruz and does not have such wide functionality in the ethno-cultural system (ethno-cultural space) means that celebrating that holiday is not coincidental with a single period of time. Emphasizing diversity regarding the time of celebration of this holiday known as Khir Ilyas, the scientist A. Khurramgizi writes: “There are different thoughts about the days of Khir Ilyas holiday in the sources... Ahli-man Akhundov mentions in his book that “every year in the tenth day of “twenty cold days during winter season” (Akhundov, 1994, 251), but Aziza Jafarzade wrote in her book that during the last three days of winter – during 25th-28th of February (Jafarzade, 2001, 162) those days were celebrated. Bahlul Abdulla mentioned in his book that the day of the holiday was celebrated on the tenth

day of twenty cold days (Abdullayev, 1979, 84). Among Persians the holiday of Khoja Khizr is celebrated the last Friday of the year (Sadek, 1958, 317). All preparatory work of this holiday is carried out by the women. In general, the holiday “Khidir zinde” is considered a woman’s holiday” (Alekberv, 1960, 165; Khurramgizi, 2002, 147-148).

These important facts that A. Khurramgizi drew attention to during the celebration of the holiday Khidir Nabi (Khidir Ilyas) allow us to come to the following conclusions:

a) Although the holiday coincides with different days, those different days (the tenth day of “twenty cold days during winter season”, last three days of winter) appear during ten cold days of winter. It means that Khidir Nabi in all cases refers to the period during the end of winter and the last month of the year “Boz”. In the folk calendar the month “Boz” is the last month of the old year and the transition from the old year to the New Year.

Four Tuesdays, which ensure the awakening of a new space-time (nature, universe), are also in this month. It is clear from this that according to the folk calendar Khidir Nabi holiday also reflects the rhythm of replacing winter-spring like Novruz. However, though Novruz holiday has the exact dates in the calendar, the holiday Khidir Nabi has no exact date. But it raises questions such as “Why is it so? What are the reasons?”

The main reason is that Novruz has been included in the history of the official calendar named Jalaliyya calendar since the 11th century (Erdem, 2009, 4).

The holiday Khidir Nabi was not included in the official calendar and continued to live as a tradition related to the folk calendar. The reason of the holiday Khidir Nabi not being included in the official calendar is that it did not have such a huge ethno-cultural geography as Novruz holiday.

b) In the information given by A. Khurramgizi it is said that celebrating Khidir Nabi holiday as a women’s holiday is an indication of the inability of this holiday to reach the level of Novruz in terms of ethno-cultural functionality.

Novruz holiday in Agbaba, a historical region of Azerbaijan (now the Republic of Armenia) began after a number of ceremonies 30-40 days before Novruz.

Those ceremonies were named “Khidirellez”, “Kurdoglugun gayada galmasi”, “chille chikharmag”, “first intention”, “salty cake”, “to prepare plav” and so on. Khidirellez storm used to begin from the 10th of February. The storm continued for ten days. In the villages of Aghbaba the women usually ground the wheat in the mill and roasted it. Then it was put on a big plate (butter, sugar and water were added to the roasted wheat) and taken to a secret room in front of the window. Next day early in the morning it was looked at attentively in order to find the sign of Khidirellez’s knout (Ismayilov, Gurbanov, 2003, 28). As it is known “the bludgeon and the knout go back to the distant past as important

attributes of Khazir-Ilyas. The bludgeon and the knout are ritual tools for banishing evil forces" (Sayfullova, 2020, 320).

The given information allows us to come to the following conclusions:

- 1) "Khadirellez" is the telling form of the name Khazir-Ilyas among the people. As will be explained later, Khazir and Ilyas are both "nabi", it means the Prophet. They are often imagined together in the folk tradition (Panjaroglu, 2004, 158).
- 2) Khazir Nabi belongs to the Novruz ceremony complex, i.e. it is one of the pre-Novruz rituals. As Novruz is a calendar ceremony, Khazir Nabi is also a ceremony of the same calendar as Novruz. Each of these holidays has its own meaning, function, place and role in the process of year change. In this regard, Novruz and Khazir Nabi are not alternative holidays to each other, but rather systematic ceremonies covering the period of year change of a single calendar.
- 3) The connection of the beginning of Khazir Nabi (Khadirellaz) in the form of a storm since the 10th of February in Aghbaba region with Kichik Chille ("Period of twenty days of winter") is affirmed once more. Winter is 60 days in the folk calendar and consists of two stages: a period of forty cold days of winter from the beginning – "Boyuk Chille", a period of twenty days of winter – "Kichik Chille". The fact that Khazir Nabi holiday (ceremony) is in "Kichik Chille" in all cases makes it clear that it symbolizes the end of winter.
- 4) The ceremony "govut" held at Khazir Nabi holiday shows that Khazir Nabi was imagined as an anthropomorphic creature that visited the houses on the night of the holiday. People look for a sign of Khazir Nabi's knout in the morning on the roast on the plate they put to find out if he visited that house on the night of the holiday. Of course, if there is a sign of a knout on the roast, it means that Khazir came to that house (room) at night and touched the roast with his knout.
- 5) Having a sign of the knout on the roast shows that Khazir accepted the share given to him. And according to the belief it means the coming blessing. As it is said in one of the belief texts: "On the night of Khazir, from which door the prophet would take his share of wheat, that house will be rich during that year and it will be blessed" (Osmanova, 2014, 44).
- 6) The knout, as can be seen from the name, is the name of the object used to whip the saddle animal. So, Khazir comes on the horse during the holiday night. The word combination "Khazir on a gray horse" also affirms it.

B. Abdulla and T. Babayev showed that the image of Khazir Nabi directly represented winter: "The period, which lasts twenty days from the beginning of February, is considered a sharp change of winter... The first ten days of February called "Khazir Nabi", in general, are considered to be the most severe, blizzardy, freezing period of winter and even for these characteristics it is called "the period of the wolf"... When the period of Khazir begins, the season of winter starts, when the period of Khazir ends, winter ends" (Abdulla, Babayev, 200, p. 12).

E. Galiboglu considers the image of Khazir Nabi as a mythical character directly related to the winter season. He writes: "In Azerbaijani legends the folk

calendar preserved the images associated with time. Among them images such as “Kechal” and “Kosa” representing the Old year and winter, the image “Gari” (“an old wise woman”) representing the year, her great son “Boyuk Chille” representing the 40-day period of winter, her little son “Kichik Chille” representing the 20-day period of winter, Khidir Nabi, etc. can be shown” (Galiboglu, 2020, 156).

R. Allahverdi writes about the mythological nature of the time modeled as an image of Khidir Nabi: “The period “Kichik Chille” has also been considered to be the coldest period in winter and modeled as an irascible boy in folk thinking. The symbol of winter’s most severe snowstorm and freezing time is the Khidir Nabi anthropomorphic model. It is known from our national mythic-poetic texts that the anthropomorphic model of the period “Kichik Chille” combines chaotic functions as destructive, fatal due to the semantics... The anthropomorphic period model “Kichik Chille” marks timelessness, inaccuracy, irrelevancy, in short, Chaos, which gathers all these semantic layers in itself” (Allahverdi, 2013, 45-46).

From R. Allahverdi’s thoughts one can come to the following conclusions:

- 1) “Kichik Chille”, as the image representing winter, stimulates the destructive, fatal chaos.
- 2) Khidir Nabi - “The symbol of winter’s most severe snowstorm and freezing period” also represents the destructive power of chaos as “Kichik Chille”.

However, it seems to us that though Khidir Nabi is connected with “Kichik Chille”, which is the most severe period of winter, it represents not a harsh, destructive and deadly chaos, but rather a life-creating space. We base this opinion on the following factors:

Firstly, with the arrival of Khidir Nabi the last period of winter “Kichik Chille” ends.

Secondly, if Khidir Nabi represented the winter which people wished would go away and disappear, then people would not celebrate Khidir Nabi’s arrival as a holiday.

Third, the arrival of Khidir Nabi symbolizes the coming of the pre-spring month – “Boz ay” (the Grey month), in other words, New Year’s Eve.

The period of “Boz ay” (the Grey month) is the last month of the Old year when people want to protect their lives and are tired of winter’s hardships. The period of Khidir Nabi brings the last stage with its arrival.

Fourth, as can be seen in the texts gathered from the Agbaba region, people check Khidir Nabi’s arrival with a special ritual: they put some helping for him and they wish him to leave a sign on it with his whip. Let us look through other texts. In the text called “Khidir” collected from Nakhchivan region it is said:

“During the period of Khidir about five-ten children gathered together, jumping from the roofs of the houses and walking on the other roofs, throwing bags from the chimney and singing:

Khidir-Khidir Elyazi,
Men Khidirin pishiyiyem,
Damda durub ushuyurem,
Her kes payimi vermese,
Bu bajadan dushurem.

(Translation: I am Khidir’s cat, I am on the roof and it is cold, if no one gives me a present/helping, then I’ll go in through the smoke-duct)

The host would put some presents or helping into the bag” (Jafarli, Safarov, Babayev, 2007, p. 66).

Let us analyze the epic information described in the text at the level of meaningful elements:

- a) Here it is said about the ceremony called “Khidir - collecting helping” held by children. We know that similar traditions of children’s “collecting helping” are observed on Novruz holiday and at the “Sayachi” ceremony.
- b) This ceremony held by children is an integral part of Khidir Nabi holiday performed by children.
- c) The song begins with the salutation “Khidir-Khidir Elyazi”. Here the word “Elyazi”, no doubt, is the name of the Prophet Ilyas. In Azerbaijan the name Ilyas is often encountered in the form of Elyas.
- d) Singing the song the child calls himself “I am a cat of Khidir”. This expression is remarkable. The word “cat” can also have the word effect which is used here to build rhyme at first sight. In the text of the song it is said that if the cat is not given a share, then the cat can fall down from the chimney. As it is known, cats walk on the roof and chimney, they can enter the house from any hole they can pass through, including the chimney. But we think that the image of a cat preserved in an ancient song about Khidir Nabi cannot be accidental. This is the result of Khidir Nabi’s relation with the cat in any way. In any case, the phrase “I am Khidir’s cat” means that the child who presents himself as a cat speaks on behalf of Khidir Nabi.
- e) Asking for a share from the owners of the house by singing children, we remember the share of “govut” (roasted wheat ground to flour) laid for Khizir Nabi in a dark room on the night of the holiday. It is clear from this that the children’s asking for a share on behalf of Khidir Nabi on the holiday symbolizes the share put aside for Khidir Nabi. It means the children imitate Khidir Nabi. Analyzing the symbolic semantics of this imitation S. Garayev writes: “It is about imitation of Khidir/Khizir that children who throw caps on holidays have privileges that they do not have on ordinary days. The arrival of Khidir (or Khizir) has a phallic fertilizing nature. It shows that both Khidir’s secret arrival and the hiding and throwing of caps and bags by boys have a phallic content” (Garayev 2019, 84). S. Garayev explains the phallic content of children’s cap throwing in the context of the holiday semantics about creation. He mentions that the fertilizing nature

of Khizir, which belongs to the male beginning, is carried out on the eve of the holiday on the basis of the ritual behavior of boys. Thus, in a symbolic plan, the cap expresses the phallic power. During Khidir Nabi holiday the boys secretly carry out the phallic fertilizing power of Khidir by throwing caps toward the doors of the houses in the dark. Thus it carries the semantics of creation in itself. It should be noted that throwing caps secretly by the boys in the dark period of the day coincides with the beliefs of the people about Khizir's giving abundance secretly at night. It means that both carry out the phallic behavior about the creation secretly (Garayev 2019, p. 78-82)

B. Abdulla and T. Babayev write about the children's share of Khidir Nabi collected on behalf of Khidir thus: "It is not without reason that children come to take a share not at a separate time, but when it is the dark time of the day, if it is not clear, when it is impossible to recognize them. According to the belief he is among them. Therefore, each house without hesitation presents its share in the image of children as if it is given to Khidir" (Abdulla, Babayev, 2008, 102).

Let us pay attention to the same ceremony in the region of Ganja:

"At Khidir Nabi holiday children used to sing with a chorus putting their bags to the houses:

Khidir Nabi, Khidir Ellaz,
Bitdi chichek, oldu yaz.
Men Khidirin guluyam,
Boz atinin chuluyam.

(Translation: Khidir Nabi, Khidir Ellaz, Spring came and flowers appeared. I am Khidir's slave, I am his grey horse's cover.)

Khidir geldi hayinan,
Bir garaja dayinan.
Gara day palchiga batdi,
Khidir yaninda yatdi.

(Translation: Khidir came noisily with a black foal. The black foal got stuck in the mud, Khidir slept near it.)

Chatma-chatmaya,
Chatma yere batmaya.
Kim Khidir payin vermese,
Eri yaninda yatmaya" (Ismayilov, Quliyeva, 2004, 63)

(Translation: String and rope, they don't stick in the mud. She who won't give Khidir's present, she won't sleep together with her husband.)

This song gives us very valuable information about the structure of the ceremony of Khidir Nabi holiday. Looking through the information together with

the information we get from the above texts, our ideas about the space-time semantics of the Khir Nabi ceremony are expanded. The song can be analyzed as follows:

1) The beginning of the song with the names of Khir and Ilyas in Ganja as in Nakhchivan (Khir Nabi, Khir Ellaz) indicates that the share was collected by children for those prophets. Of course, here the opposite can be argued, i.e. that the children themselves eat the share that they collect and there is no indication at the ceremony that children give something to Khir or Ilyas from the collected share. Of course, we can agree with the other part of this argument that there is no sign in the text that children don't give anything to Khir from the collected food. However, the absence of this sign in the modern text does not mean that it should not be in the past either. During the ceremonies held in honor of the ods (worshiped, cult images) in the peoples of the world the worshiped cult was symbolically "fed" from the collected shares. Otherwise, the god would not be pleased. Because people imagined the gods they worshiped and asked for help as living beings, and performed the ritual of feeding the Gods in order to please them, to gain their mercy and compassion. In fact, a trace of this was clearly preserved at a ceremony held by children. In the song singing in Nakhchivan the children call themselves "Khir's cat". In this song the children call themselves "Khir's slave" and "the cover of the Grey horse". It means those who collect the share in the example of children are Khir's cat, slave and horse (the horse's cover marks the horse itself metonymically). In this case, eating the collected portions by children symbolically means eating of the cat, the slave and the horse.

2) At the beginning of the song connecting Khir Nabi and Khir Ellaz (Ilyas) with spring ("Spring came and flowers appeared") shows that they represent the Cosmos, not Chaos as an image, that is, that they are cosmic-creating forces, not chaotic (world-destroying) forces.

3) Khir's coming "noisily" literally means noise, that is, it comes with a noise. We think it has two meanings:

Firstly, Khir's noisy arrival is a sign that his arrival is in "Kichik Chille". "Kichik Chille" is the worst time of winter: snow, frost, wind, blizzard, storm, etc.

Secondly, this noise is a sign of the sound of the horse's hooves as he rides.

4) In the song Khir's horse is called "a black foal". In our opinion, naming Khir's horse as "a foal" is also connected with the myth of time. As Khir's arrival symbolizes New Year's Eve, so his horse also symbolizes the time. The smallness of the horse indicates the infancy of the New Year, that it has not yet been born, that it is a child and has not matured. This is a situation of "uterus" from the psychoanalytic point of view. New Year as a child is still in the uterus of the Old Year.

The horse's getting stuck in the mud, in our opinion, is a condition that symbolizes time. The fact that the horse sank in the mud shows its inexistence and sluggishness. We assume that the delay of Khidir's horse shows that the spring that Khidir wants to bring will be delayed for a while. Because there is still the month "Boz" ahead of Kichik Chilla. The month "Boz" belongs to the Old Year. It means that even if Khidir arrives in Kichik Chille, he must be delayed on the way. Because there is a period of a month until the coming of spring. It is no coincidence that Khidir falls asleep next to his horse which got stuck in the mud ("The black foal got stuck in the mud, // Khidir slept near it).

5) At the end of the song the children threaten with bad prayers the women who don't give presents ("She who won't give Khidir's present, // She won't sleep together with her husband") and it sheds light on the semantics of the cult Khidir. The fact that the husband will not be sleeping with his wife is a sign that she will be childless. It is clear from this that the giving of shares by women to children who want a share on behalf of Khidir Nabi is a ritual-mythological exchange: the women give a share to Khidir Nabi, who also gives them a child. Our conclusion is confirmed by S. Garayev's studies.

6) Safa Garayev analyzing the distribution of abundance by Khizir//Khidir during the holiday night in the psychoanalytic context concluded that the distribution of abundance is the expression of the function of Khidir "fertilizing with phallic power". The author points out that on the holiday nights *"for the actualization of the fertilizing nature (for the arrival of a blessing in the house) the doors are set open. From the semantic point of view putting the doors open carries out semantics to create conditions for the sacral image (Khizir) to demonstrate its sexual power"* (Garayev, 2019, 83). It is no coincidence that Khizir is associated with the fertility Gods in many studies (Walker 1973, 289). His ability to distribute blessings must be understood as part of his ability to have phallic power. It is no coincidence that today in Turkey "The hostess of the house kneads unleavened dough, sprinkles rose petals on it and making a wish puts it in a corner of the house. If the dough overflows, it becomes clear that Khizir has passed and it is believed that the wish will be accepted. In addition, a pot of milk without fermentation is placed on the balcony, if the milk is sour clotted milk, it is believed that Khizir has passed through here and the wish will be accepted". S. Garayev writes about this fact so: "...turning milk into sour clotted milk is accepted as a sign of showing its phallic power" (Garayev, 2019, 82).

The song in the Ganja region is more widely found in the text belonging to Zangazur region. At the end of the song it is said:

"Chatma chatmiya,

Chatma yere batmiya.
Her kes Khidira leyakhli pay vermesə,
Muradina chatmiya” (Nabioglu, Kazimoglu, Asgar, 2005, 92).

(Translation: String and rope, they don’t stick in the mud. She who won’t give Khidir a lovely present, she won’t reach her wish)

Two main conclusions can be drawn from the text:

- a) A woman who does not give a share to Khidir “does not reach her goal”. Goal has the meaning of wish, desire. Of course, human desires are endless. If we remember the song from the Ganja region, then we can assume that here, the women’s desires are also related to the child.
- b) The fact that the one who did not give a share to Khidir did not achieve his goal shows that the one who did not give a share was punished by Khidir. Because the mechanism “share-share” works here: He who gives a share to Khidir receives his reward and he who does not give it receives a punishment. It is based on faith. According to the belief: “Khidir Nabi both brings blessings and takes them back” (Rustamzade, 2006, 72).
- c) Unlike the region Agbaba, in Zangazur Khidir does not touch the meal “khashil” with a whip, he puts his hand into it. Thus, the options are expanding: touch the share with a whip or put a hand into it. Both mean leaving their signs. The sign of Khidir Nabi on the food shows that he accepted his share. This also means the activation of a ritual mechanism (mutual exchange among people and Khidir Nabi), which we can call the mechanism “share-share”. When people put the share for Khidir Nabi, they have desires in their hearts. If Khidir accepts the share, it means that Khidir will also give a share to the hostess, and what this share consists of depends on the wishes of the hostess.

Children also singing songs collected shares or presents on the holiday of Khidir Nabi in Daralayaz, a region of historical Azerbaijan that is now in the Republic of Armenia. However, as these songs (Mirzayev, Ismayilov, Alakbarli, 2006, 43-44) are the same as the ones we presented above, there is no need to analyze them separately.

Mursal Hakimov collected very interesting Khidir Nabi songs in the Gazakh region. These songs give valuable information about the ritual-mythological semantics of Khidir Nabi holiday, as well as its connection with Novruz holiday and so on. In the text of the song Khidir Nabi is called “grandfather”. This is due to his immortality as a prophet. All over Azerbaijan the saints are called “grandfathers”. The observations show that those who died were called grandfathers and they were known as saints during their lifetime, and people believed that their saintly grandfathers helped them even after their death and they asked their grandfathers for help when they were in trouble. In the song sung in the Gazakh region Khidir has the same attitude as a grandfather. People believed that he was immortal, as if he brought spring and blessings to the people and country.

M. Hakimov writes that on Wednesdays during Khidir Nabi periods the people give one another a share of roasting and chaff, sprinkle pure water on their faces, heads and breasts. Dancing together they sing the following song:

Khidir-Khidir sag gozum,
 Khidir baba sag sozum.
 Khidir baba, ele var getir,
 Khidir baba, bag-bagchaya bar getir.
 Khidir baba – gar baba,
 Yagilara kor baba.
 Khidir baba, hay baba.
 Yagilara vay baba.

(Translation: Khidir-Khidir is my right eye, Khidir grandfather is my right word. Hey, Khidir grandfather, bring blessings to our country and gardens. Be merciless towards our enemies).

As it is known, people call Khidir Nabi their “right eye” and “right word”. Although these expressions may seem like interesting rhymes at first glance, they have deep ritual-mythological semantics. On the basis of these expressions there is a model of right-left evaluation of mythological thought. In the mythological world model the right side means life, light, happiness, warmth, spring, sweetness, in short, space, but the left side means death, darkness, misfortune, cold, winter, hunger, in a word – chaos.

From this point of view, naming Khidir as the right eye and right word in the text of the song is an expression of people’s view of him as a symbol of life, happiness, light, warmth, spring and abundance.

People call for grandfather Khidir to bring them wealth and happiness, and abundance to their gardens. It directly confirms that Khidir Nabi is a God of blessings. He hears the call of good people and blesses them, but he does not give anything to evil people, to those who are enemies of humanity. In this regard, the phrase “Be blind to the enemies” attracts particular attention. “Be blind to the enemies” means that Khidir Nabi was blind to the enemies, that is, he did not attach any importance to their calls and did not look towards them. However, this expression also has mythological semantics and we think that there is a connection between the expressions “Be blind to the enemies” and “Khidir-Khidir right eye”. It means that Khidir’s right eye can see, but his left eye is blind. Remembering that the right eye means space while the left eye means chaos, it is clear that Khidir looks at the well-wisher people with his right eye and gives them blessings and wealth, but at the same time he looks at the evil-wisher people with his left eye and brings them misfortune and unhappiness.

“Hay baba” (“Respond grandfather”) – the expression means in the literal sense hearing people’s cries, “respond to their call”. As it is known, the word “vay” (“grief”, “mourning”, “misfortune”) has two meanings in relation to a bad situation:

- 1) The cry of “woe”, “alas”, “oh” that people involuntarily say in any frightening or bad situation;
- 2) In the meaning of “mourning”, “grief”. For example, “There is mourning in somebody’s house”.

Thus, Khidir looks at good people with his right eye and “responds” to their calls and looks at bad people with his left eye - blind eye and gives them “woe”.

In the text of the song it is said:
Kim Khidira pay verer,
Khidir ona pay verer.

(Translation: Who gives presents to Khidir, Khidir gives him presents, too)

This knowledge reveals the functional structure of the relations among people and Khidir through the ritual (Khidir Nabi ceremony).

From here the following things are understood:

The relationship between people and Khidir is realized through a special mechanism. This mechanism is the ceremony of “Khidir Nabi”. The ceremony consists of standard behavioral formulas.

The ceremony “Khidir Nabi” serves the realization of a concrete idea. The idea is that people call Khidir Nabi and ask him to bring spring, heat and abundance. This desire of people, to be more precise, is based on a functional “mutual exchange” in Society-Khidir relations: “Kim Khidira pay verer, // Khidir ona pay verer” (“Who gives presents to Khidir, // Khidir gives him presents, too”). It means that this ceremony is “share exchange”, “exchange of presents”, “share-share” from the point of view of functional actions: In order to receive a share from Khidir, it is necessary to give it to him first. Giving share to Khidir is realized in two age groups and accordingly in the form of two shares:

First, the share of food left by the elders for Khidir Nabi in a dark room where no one was present on the night of the holiday Khidir Nabi.

Second, the share gathered by the children on behalf of Khidir Nabi.

In the text of the song they sing people consider themselves the generation of Khidir Nabi:

Khidir benim boyumdu,
Khidir benim soyumdu.

(Translation: Khidir is my ancestor, Khidir is my generation.)

This information shows two functions about the mythological semantics of the image of Khidir Nabi:

First, in our opinion, the fact that people consider Khidir as their family (tribes, clans) and generations (descendants) is a remnant of the ancient ancestral cult. This is the mythical information that shows Khidir Nabi's participation in the process of ethno-genesis as Oghuz Kagan in the distant mythological past.

Second, everything becomes clear when the information "Khidir benim boyumdu, // Khidir benim soyumdu" (Khidir is my ancestor, Khidir is my generation) is combined with the song sung by the children in the Ganja region "Kim Khidir payin vermese, // Eri yaninda yatmaya" (She who won't give Khidir his present, she won't sleep together with her husband). That is, the person who doesn't give Khidir Nabi's share becomes a widow//childless//barren.

This is the expression of the thought mentioned above by S. Garayev – the function of Khidir's "fertilizing with phallic power" (Garayev, 2019, 83). In this sense, Khidir is the ancestor of the people who consider him as their "grandfather" as the bearer of the male cult.

In the text of the song it is said:

Khidir baba, yaz getir,
Var, Khidira saz getir.
Khizira Khidir deyerler,
Yoluna chirag goyarlar.
Khizira pay vermeyenin
Gozlerini oyarlar.
Khizira geldik hayinan,
Bir bogcha shirin payinan.
Khidirin payi demdedi,
Yamanin ureyi gemdedi.
Khidir baba sag gozum,
Khidir baba sag sozum.

(Translation: Khidir grandfather, bring spring to our country. Khidir is called Khizir in our country. He who loves him, he gives a share for him, but he who doesn't love him, his eyes are carved. We came to Khidir's place with pleasure and with a lot of share, Khidir grandfather is my right eye, Khidir grandfather is my right word.)

The fact that people want Khidir to bring them the season of spring reveals the cosmological function of this image. It is clear from it that the cosmological function of Khidir was to bring spring. People perform ceremonies and rituals in honor of Khidir in order to bring warmth, good life and blessings of the New Year: they light his ways and give shares for Khidir.

The phrase "Khizir is called Khidir" in the text of the song seems to us to shed light on the debate in the world of science "Khizir or Khidir must be". That is, Khidir and Khizir are the same being. It should also be taken into account that R // Z substitution is a common case in both Azerbaijani and other Turkic languages: for example, buRushmek//buZushmek, almaZsan//almaRsan, etc.

The text of the song also tells about Khidir's meeting with a man:

Khidir babami gordum,
Bash eyib salam verdim.
Khidir babam gonag gelende
Khidir babama pay verdim.
Goy atli babam khosh geldi,
El obaya nur-yagish geldi.
Khidir yagishi bol behredi,
Bar agajlari pohredi.
Yagish yazda bol oldu,
Agajlar zog-zog oldu.
Khidirin gulu chirttadi.

(Translation: I saw my grandfather Khidir, I bowed before him and greeted him, when he came to our house, I gave presents to him. Welcome, my grandfather with the grey horse, he brought rain and light to our country. His rain is very productive, the trees became very green and roses blossomed.)

When a person meets Khidir, he bows and greets him. It becomes clear that the man doesn't meet Khidir by chance: Khidir visits the man. The man greets Khidir politely and gives him a share. Khidir comes to the village on a blue/grey horse. His arrival brings to the village the light-abundance. With the abundant rain brought by Khidir the trees put out shoots, sprout, bloom and people consider it Khidir's flower.

It is clear from the following verses of the song that Khidir is in the same ritual system with other characters such as "Kosa", "Fati gari", "Kechel" in connection with Novruz holiday:

Fati gari mirttadi.
Garini verdim kosaya,
Kosa gordan khorttadi.
Khidir babam sag olsun,
El-obada uzu ag olsun.
Khidir baba, el-obaya bar getir,
Khidir baba, el-obaya var getir.
Khidir geldi hay-haray ile,
Kosa batdi palchiga vay ile.
Kosani zigdan dartdilar,
Garanlig zagaya atdilar.
Kosa getdi hayinan,
Bir gulancha dayinan.
Kosa ziga batdi,
Khidir onu oynatdi.
Khidir baba, zor baba,
Yagilara gor baba.

(Translation: The old woman Fati muttered to herself, I gave that old woman to Kosa. Kosa rose from the grave. Let my grandfather Khidir be alive, let him become happy every time. Khidir, bring spring to our country, please, bring rain, too. Khidir came to the country noisily, but Kosa got stuck in the mud. Kosa was pulled out of the mud, Khidir helped and played with him. Khidir is a good grandfather, he can be grave for enemies.)

Then the text of the song says:

Men Khidir babanin guluyam,

Goy atinin chluyam.

Goy-boz at bozara geldi,

Khidir babam bazara geldi.

Khidir babama aldim sazi,

Khidir babam getirsin yazi.

Ay Khidir babam, Ilyas babam,

Oymagimiza getir yaz, babam.

Khidir babam geldi yaz oldu,

Soy-sanimda toy-saz oldu.

Khidir babam, ay babam,

Yagilara vay babam.

Sen gelende yaz olur,

Soyumda xosh avaz olur (Hakimov, 2012, 99-102).

(Translation: I'm grandfather Khidir's slave, I am his horse's cover. His grey horse came and Khidir went to the bazaar. Let Khidir bring spring. Hey, Khidir-Ilyas, bring spring to our country. When Khidir came, the spring began; everyone in our generation became happy.)

The singers of songs about Khidir call themselves "Khidir's slave" and "the cover of his horse" as in the songs of other regions. From the text of the song it is known that Khidir goes to the bazaar, too. The bazaar is a unit of space in the history of Azerbaijani culture where people gather and meet in public. For example, in our language there are such expressions: "In order to be aware of everything one must go to a bazaar or to the center of the region"; "Because of my shame, I can't go out in public, to the bazaars or markets". It is clear from this thinking that the arrival of Khidir Nabi at the bazaar means his mass meeting with the people.

The verses in the text of the song such as "I bought the instrument for Khidir, // Let Khidir bring spring" also attract attention. The instrument "saz" was not just a musical instrument in the history of Azerbaijani culture, in ancient times it was considered a tool with magical powers. It is also known from the history of our culture that ashiks were called for patients and they tried to treat patients by playing the instrument "saz". The roots of it, no doubt, go back to shamanism. It is clear from the text of the song that people buy the instrument "saz" for Khidir Nabi so that playing and singing he can bring spring. It means that Khidir Nabi brings spring with the help of magic music and song, that is, by playing and singing.

It seems to us that some actions such as Khrir Nabi's coming as a guest on a blue/grey horse, greeting the host, Khrir's coming to the bazaar later, playing a musical instrument there and bringing spring are descriptions of a specific ceremony. That is, talking about the ceremonies of Khrir Nabi, we usually celebrate the ceremony of children's collecting shares. However, in the text of the song from the Gazakh region it is shown that there was a ceremony of greeting Khrir among the adults. At this ceremony, the "actor" who played the role of Khrir sang songs on behalf of Khrir, which ensured the arrival of spring. Unfortunately, we do not know anything about the content of those songs. Because that ceremony was performed in the past, the only information about the existence of that ceremony remained in the text of the song collected by M. Hakimov.

The fact that calling Khrir "Ilyas" in the text of the song ("Ay Khrir babam, Ilyas babam") shows the joining of these images in the folk thought, it means they perform almost the same function (bringing spring).

Conclusion

Thus, the analysis of the reviewed materials about Khrir Nabi has shown that:

- a) Khrir Nabi holiday is closely connected with the ceremony complex of Novruz holiday. Both holidays are successive stages of the unified national calendar.
- b) The image of Khrir Nabi represents the cult of Khrir//Khrir. Khrir Nabi was considered an immortal saint among the people (Duman, 2012, 197) and the ceremonies were performed in his honor by both adults and children.
- c) According to the cosmological nature Khrir Nabi is a cosmological creator, it means the image of world-creator. His arrival symbolizes the coming of a new space-time (spring, a new year) that will give people new life.
- d) Khrir Nabi brings blessings to people. People ask him to bless their homes and possessions. However, the image of Khrir is also connected with the cult of ancestors. The signs of his giving children to women are also preserved in the songs. With his arrival Khrir also brings a "pleasant voice" to humanity, that is, the voice of a baby, signifying birth, growth and fertility.

Thus, the function of Khrir Nabi as a bearer of the cult of fertility, patron and prosperity is completed. The essence of all the ceremonies about Khrir Nabi is to receive blessings from Khrir Nabi through the mechanism "share-share". As has been seen, the shares that children collect from the houses in the name of Khrir Nabi are blessed by the energy given by Khrir Nabi and then return to the people.

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The Ritual-Mythological Semantics of the Azerbaijan Khidir Nabi Holiday

After Novruz holiday the most important holiday according to the ritual-mythological bases and ethno-cultural semantics of Azerbaijani folk holidays is Khidir Nabi holiday. In fact, the holidays of Novruz and Khidir Nabi are not separated from each other as part of the national calendar: these holidays belong to the different stages of the folk calendar and are united according to the ethno-cultural essence and concept. They are the components of the unified mythical system of thinking of people about time, as independent holidays, which do not replace each other and are not alternative. However, it should be noted that Novruz is more widespread due to the ethno-cultural geography than the holiday Khidir Nabi.

The main purpose of the research is to investigate the ritual-mythological semantics of the Azerbaijani Khidir Nabi holiday.

The research presented in this paper is mainly based on the historical-comparative and ritual-mythological approach methods.

Keywords: holiday, Khidir Nabi, Khidir Ilyas, ritual, myth, semantics

*Sémantique rituelle mythologique
de la fête Khidir Nabi en Azerbaïdjan*

Après la fête de Novruz, la fête la plus importante, selon les bases rituelles mythologiques et la sémantique ethnoculturelle des fêtes populaires azéri, est la fête de Khidir Nabi. En fait, les fêtes de Novruz et Khidir Nabi ne sont pas séparées l'une de l'autre dans le cadre du calendrier national : ces fêtes appartiennent aux différents niveaux du calendrier populaire et sont unies selon l'essence et le concept ethnoculturels. Elles représentent les composantes du système de pensée mythique unifié des gens sur le temps comme des fêtes indépendantes qui ne se remplacent pas et ne sont pas alternatives. Pourtant, il convient de noter que Novruz est plus répandu en raison de la géographie ethnoculturelle que la fête de Khidir Nabi. L'objectif principal de cette étude est de rechercher la sémantique rituelle-mythologique de la fête azéri Khidir Nabi. La recherche présentée dans cet article s'appuie principalement sur les méthodes d'approche historico-comparative et rituelle-mythologique.

Mots-clés : fête, Khidir Nabi, Khidir Ilyas, rite, mythe, sémantique

Primljeno / Received: 12. 07. 2022.

Prihvaćeno / Accepted for publication: 12. 08. 2022.