JIZZAKH OASIS CATTLE BREEDING AND ITS NATURE-RELATED TRADITIONS

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Abstract. *Cattle breeding in the Jizzakh oasis, one of the most ancient forms of traditional economic activity and one of the main types of labor determining the source of livelihood, along with the customs and traditions associated with it, has been studied to a certain extent by researchers on the basis of written sources and ethnographic materials. This article analyzes the nature-related customs and traditions in the cattle breeding of the Jizzakh oasis population and their ethnolocal characteristics. It also discusses how the traditional calendars of the oasis herders emerged as a result of many years of observing the state and movement of celestial bodies, and how these calendars continue to be used in everyday life. Seasonal labor, the need for water, and the livestock-based lifestyle have historically shaped specific customs in the oasis population's relationship with nature. This process is revealed by the author using a number of sources and field research materials.*

Keywords: *oasis, Ustrushana, Jizzakh, herder, livestock, calendar, folk calendars, tradition, custom, shrine, cosmogonic views, beliefs*.

Introduction. The Jizzakh oasis has long been distinguished by its lifestyle closely connected with nature, rich cattle-breeding traditions, and unique ethnocultural heritage. Seasonal labor processes, the need for water, and the lifestyle associated with livestock breeding have created distinctive customs in the oasis population's relationship with nature since ancient times. The folk festivals, rituals, and customs that emerged in this way have served to honor nature and ensure harmony between humans and the environment.

This article analyzes the nature-related customs and traditions in the cattle breeding practices of the Jizzakh oasis population and their ethnolocal characteristics. It also examines how the traditional calendars of the oasis herders were formed as a result of long-term observations of the state and movement of celestial bodies, and how they continue to be used up to the present day. This process is disclosed by the author on the basis of several scientific sources and field studies.

Discussion. Cattle breeding is one of the most ancient forms of traditional economic activity and one of the main types of labor determining the source of livelihood. The customs and traditions associated with it have been studied to a certain extent on the basis of written sources and ethnographic materials [1:336]. It should be noted that the southern and western parts of the Jizzakh oasis consist of mountainous and foothill areas,

which created favorable conditions for the life of hunting and herding populations. In particular, dozens of mountain valleys belonging to the Morguzar ridge, the foothills of the Nurata mountains, and the lowlands adjacent to the Mirzachul steppe have long been famous for their rich pastures [2]. In addition to the desert and steppe zones of the oasis, the high mountainous areas adjacent to the Turkestan mountains provided all the necessary conditions for the development of livestock farming [3: 46-50].

Darveshona (Beginning of the Year). One of the ancient nature-related festivals in the oasis, Darveshona is closely connected with the population's beliefs in water, land, and fertility. It embodies such values as purifying nature, wishing for abundance, calling for rain, and faith in prosperity. The Darveshona festival can be considered a harmonious product of the people's ancient cosmogonic ideas, irrational beliefs, and practical life experience.

Cattle Herding Contract Ceremony (Poda Qo'shish Marosimi). This ceremony is mainly characteristic of the mountainous areas of Zomin, Forish, Baxmal, and Sharof Rashidov districts of the oasis and is held annually during the first and second decades of March. During the ceremony, kinship groups living in the village take turns sacrificing a sheep (the turn comes to each kinship group once every few years). Respected elders, one from each household, participate in this ceremony, during which agreements are reached on who will serve as the herder for the year, the amount of payment (in money or in kind — wheat, barley, or livestock) for each head of cattle (separately for horses, cattle, sheep, and goats), and the requirements to be placed on the herders.

The ceremony is held at shrines. There are several reasons for this: first, taking into account the social status of the shrine and the belief that the saint at the shrine protects the livestock from disease and ensures their abundance; second, the promise or agreement made at a sacred place is concluded orally, and its reliability depends on the conscience of the parties. Therefore, among the population, there is a belief that the magical properties of shrines and the religious rule of not lying there are a spiritual duty of the parties [4]. In general, shrines are considered the most sacred places for the local population in the life of Central Asian peoples, and it is widely believed that any action or ritual performed there acquires a special character and has a positive spiritual significance for people.

The beginning of the year for shepherds in the oasis was calculated separately and began one week or ten days earlier than Navruz, the traditional beginning of the year for farmers. According to researcher Manzura Pirmatova, "According to the Uzbek folk calendar, the 'Livestock Reckoning' comes 10 days earlier than that of the farmers" [5:46]. Abdulatip Sarimsakov suggests that the shepherd's year begins on March 16 [6:127].

When Hamal (the zodiac sign Aries) arrived, the land warmed up sufficiently, and as soon as the grass began to sprout, the livestock were driven to the pastures. According

to information provided by the experienced shepherd of the oasis, Qoldibek Kistauboev, from early spring the herders began planning their migration to the summer pastures on auspicious and favorable days [7]. Thus, the herders' "livestock reckoning" was established earlier than the "farmers' reckoning," and the annual season began earlier compared to other occupations.

Before starting the season, herders made decisions based on the position and movement of certain stars when driving livestock to pasture in spring ("kóklarda chorvani yaylovga haydash"), breaking the winter pen ("qóton buzish"), migrating to new pastures, introducing rams, setting off on journeys, moving to a new house, holding weddings, and performing other rituals [5:28]. In particular, the herders of the oasis could predict what kind of year it would be by observing the star Ulkar (the Pleiades). Among the star observers, the saying "After Ulkar leans, what else can summer do but come" has been preserved. This is because the shifting of Ulkar toward the eastern part of the sky dome signaled the change of seasons — the arrival of spring replacing winter [5:30].

According to ethnologist A. Sarimsakov, the views related to this calendar system have also been preserved in proverbs. For example: "When Ulkar rises, the morning becomes cold", "When Ulkar rises, shurva becomes osh", "Ulkar has set — the plow has rested", "After nine tuğals, no snow remains even on a felt mat", "After seven tuğals, a tired horse will be full", "After five tuğals, a baby in the cradle will not die from cold", "After three tuğals, a three-legged horse will be full", "After one tuğal, wheat ripens", "The earth will not warm until Ulkar touches the ground", and others [6:54]. It should be noted that among the ancient herders of Ustrushana, calendar calculations such as "tuğal" (tuğol) and "tuğish" (collision) were widely used [8:57]. In particular, the "tuğal reckoning", which embodied the astrological views of the ancient herders, is one of the priceless treasures within the calendar knowledge of the Uzbek people and holds a worthy place in ethnocultural development.

Another calendar long used by the Uzbek people is the twelve-year "Muchal calendar", which begins after the spring equinox [6:49]. The widespread use of this twelve-year animal cycle calendar, still practiced today by both herders and the sedentary population of the oasis, testifies to the great importance of cattle breeding in human history [9].

The "Livestock Reckoning" calendar was also created mainly as a result of observing changes occurring in nature and held great importance in the economy of herders [6:54]. Thus, our ancestors used the movement of celestial bodies and natural phenomena as the basis for creating calendars. The ancient calendars of our people are a collection of continuous observation of natural phenomena, vast life experience, and practical skills [10:63]. Experienced and elderly herders of the oasis, through many years of observation, could predict what kind of year was coming and whether it would resemble previous years.

Each season brought its own concerns for herders, and each served as a specific test. One of the most responsible periods was bringing the livestock safely through winter, which required hard work and great experience from the herder. Because winter was the season when livestock multiplied and animals had to be fed by hand. Herders considered "Qantar og'di" as the end of the severe winter cold and began preparing to drive the herd to pasture. After the winter chill ended and the ground warmed, the livestock were grazed around the pens and nearby pastures. After "Qantar og'di", the snow melted quickly, and the shepherds knew that the harshness of winter had passed. In folk speech, proverbs such as "When Qantar leans, snow does not stay on the stake" and "Qantar leaned and trembled, the rich man's eye sparkled" [11] emerged and have been passed down for centuries.

When speaking about cattle breeding in the oasis, it is worth noting that the "master-apprentice" tradition was strong among shepherds. In particular, when a shepherd passed on his profession and shepherd's staff to his apprentice, a special ceremony was held. During the ceremony, the best cattle or sheep was slaughtered and distributed to the people as charity. According to our informants, the shepherd's staff was usually made from jujube, red willow, or willow trees [12]. In the ceremony, the shepherd announced that he was dedicating the staff to his apprentice and gave him a white blessing (oq fotixa) [13].

Regarding nature-related customs in the oasis cattle breeding, shepherds did not keep the flock in one place for too long while grazing sheep. The more the sheep moved, the higher the probability of them giving birth to twins [14]. If a newborn in a herder's family fell ill and had difficulty recovering or gaining weight, the baby was placed on one side of a scale and cattle dung on the other, and weighed on three Wednesdays [15]. Or, if a cow about to give birth fell seriously ill and was on the verge of death, the fetus was removed and fed to a recently delivered woman (if she had persistent diarrhea) [16].

To make cattle as strong as iron, iron amulets were hung around their necks, and threads were tied to their horns to protect them from the evil eye [11]. Herders tried their best to preserve the meat of slaughtered sheep, goats, or cattle with good quality. The meat was first salted and hung on a wooden pole in a cool place at night. During the day, it was covered with a basin to protect it from the sun and insects, allowing the meat to be stored for a long time. Stones were mainly used as building material for constructing houses. In particular, in some villages of Forish district, families slaughtered cattle before moving into a new house, smeared the blood of the sacrificed animal on the walls, and distributed the meat to the villagers as charity [17].

Field research revealed that specific customs and rituals related to the increase, illness, treatment, and death of livestock are practiced among the population. In particular, the first milk of a newly calved cow is called "qaqanoq", and the next is called "kelagay". White soup (oq osh) is made from the subsequent milk and distributed to neighbors. From the first butter, "cho'zma" is prepared and distributed as charity

while remembering Zangiota [18]. During the first milking of a newly calved cow, cotton was tied to both edges of the bucket and then removed. When giving charity from the first butter, the cotton was burned [14]. When drinking the colostrum (uvuz) of a calving cow, people would blow on it before drinking; otherwise, according to popular belief, the calf would become a “yalmoğiz” — a creature that eats rags and cloth [19].

Herders stored yogurt and dairy products in special containers made from gourds. In households that owned cattle, several gourd plants were necessarily grown [20]. Butter obtained from cattle was stored in a leather bag made from a goat’s stomach, and the butter kept well in this container throughout the year. Because the share of stomach butter allocated to sisters-in-law and daughters-in-law was high, they could take as much as they wanted to their new homes. When stomach butter was eaten after being placed in water in which juniper branches had been washed, it acquired an even more pleasant taste [21]. In winter, qurt (dried curd) made from cow’s milk was prepared as qurtoba by chopping onions into it, and melted yellow butter was poured on top [20].

In herders’ households, if a cow gave birth to twins, one of the calves was always dedicated to Zangiota. If a newly born calf died and the mother cow refused to be milked, the herders would stuff the skin of the dead calf with straw and place it in front of the cow; only then would the cow allow milking [22]. If a cow’s udder became red and swollen (khob disease), a woman who had given birth to twins would stroke the udder with the glove used when washing the deceased. At that moment, an ewer (obdasta) was struck on the ground three times, and the cow would be cured of the disease. If cattle suffered from bloating, they were given white butter to drink, and a stick was inserted into their mouth and rotated [23].

When the herding population observed that cattle were falling ill and dying, they would make nine lamps and dedicate one animal to the cemetery. They would walk the animal around the graveyard seven times and then distribute it as a sacrifice to the people in order to protect the livestock from various diseases [24]. If a tick attached itself to cattle, one tick was removed, cut open, and its blood was smeared on the throat of a newborn baby girl. When that girl grew up, if she took water in her mouth and sprayed it on a tick, the tick would fall off. Such a girl was also called “Kanagul” [12].

If a cow suffered from urinary retention (qabuz), a shepherd’s staff made of willow was passed under its belly, and the words “Let this be its side and tail” were spoken. When the animal’s tongue was covered with sores, salt was rubbed on it; if it had white sores (oqsil), its leg was inserted into hot coals; if it had anthrax (qorasun), an awl or knife was inserted into its thigh and the impure blood was drained. If its eyes were watering, salt water was sprayed into the eyes for three days, followed by sugar water for another three days. If the animal did not conceive, red carrots were fed to it. In case of stomach bloating, a decoction of the baqayong‘oq plant was given to drink [25]. If cattle suffered from jaundice, they were given whey from ayran to drink. To combat white sores (oqsil), the animal’s legs were dipped in salty water; if the tongue was

swollen, it was treated with salt; if a calf had diarrhea, a red thread was tied to its tail [26]. If an animal contracted anthrax, it was washed with solar oil; animals suffering from white sores were given less water to drink [27].

In the treatment of goiter (bo‘qoq), the animal’s throat was cut open and a mixture of salt and chakka was inserted into it. In the case of white sores, a half-moon shape was drawn on both sides of the cow’s belly using chakka [28]. In the Zomin district of the oasis, if cattle contracted white sores, porridge was prepared from it and smeared on the animal’s back in the shape of a moon [29]. It should be noted that the oasis population used purebred rams to obtain high-quality offspring from their livestock. Before adding a ram to the herd, they would strike the ram’s head with a watermelon full of seeds, expressing the wish: “May the ram be as fertile as the seeds of the watermelon” [11]. In particular, in the Gallarol district, before mating sheep with the ram, they would strike the sheep’s head with a watermelon and sprinkle wheat on the ram’s head [30].

If a ewe refused to nurse her lamb after giving birth, a dog was tied in front of her so that the frightened mother would allow the lamb to suckle. In some places, to restrict the ewe’s movement, a pit was dug and both the mother and lamb were placed inside it; unable to move freely, the ewe was forced to nurse her lamb [31]. If a sheep suffered from “gul” disease (sores appearing on its body), a wolf’s hide was placed inside the sheep or the animal was led around a fire. The fear caused the sores to heal. In addition, herders also attempted to eliminate diseases by sacrificing animals.

CONCLUSION In conclusion, the population of the oasis developed their views and knowledge related to nature over the centuries based on the region’s natural-geographical location, climatic conditions, and types of economic activities. This is clearly confirmed by the analysis of nature-related customs and traditions in the cattle breeding practices of the Jizzakh oasis population and their ethnolocal characteristics. It should also be emphasized that, as a result of many years of observing the state and movement of celestial bodies, the herders of the oasis developed traditional calendars, which continue to be used up to the present day. These processes were observed through several examples of the views of the oasis population concerning cattle-breeding economic traditions.

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