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YASAWI STUDIES

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1- бөлім

ЯСАУИТАНУ: ДІНТАНУ ЖӘНЕ ТЕОЛОГИЯ

Section 1

**YASAWI STUDIES: RELIGIOUS STUDIES AND
THEOLOGY**

Раздел 1

**ЯСАВИЕВЕДЕНИЕ: РЕЛИГИОВЕДЕНИЕ И
ТЕОЛОГИЯ**

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THE TRANSFORMATION OF PILGRIMAGE TRADITIONS AND SPIRITUAL TOURISM IN THE ERA OF GLOBALIZATION

Аңдатпа. Мақалада ХХІ ғасырдағы мәдени жаһандану жағдайында рухани туризм адамның ішкі рухани хәлі мен ұлттың мәдени жады, тарихи сабақтастығын сақтауға ықпал ететін маңызды әлеуметтік-мәдени құбылыс ретінде сипатталады. Рухани туризм мен зиярат дәстүрінің қазіргі әлемдік және ұлттық контекстегі дамуы кешенді түрде қарастырылады. Рухани туризмнің Қазақстан қоғамындағы рөлі, оның ұлттық бірегейлікті қалыптастырудағы және мәдени мұраны сақтаудағы орны айқындалады.

Кілт сөздер: зиярат дәстүрі, рухани туризм, жаһандану дәуірі, өркениет, мәдени жады, феномен

Аннотация. В статье духовный туризм рассматривается как важное социально-культурное явление, которое в условиях культурной глобализации ХХІ века способствует сохранению внутреннего духовного состояния человека, культурной памяти и исторической преемственности народа. Комплексно анализируются современное развитие духовного туризма и паломнической традиции в мировом и

Abstract. The article describes spiritual tourism in the context of 21st-century cultural globalization as a significant socio-cultural phenomenon that contributes to preserving both the individual's inner spiritual state and the nation's cultural memory and historical continuity. The development of spiritual tourism and pilgrimage traditions in contemporary global and national contexts is comprehensively examined. The article highlights the role of spiritual tourism in Kazakh society, its importance in shaping national identity, and its function in safeguarding cultural heritage.

Keywords: pilgrimage tradition, spiritual tourism, globalization era, civilization, cultural memory, phenomenon

национальном контекстах. Определяется роль духовного туризма в казахстанском обществе, его значение в формировании национальной идентичности и сохранении культурного наследия.

Ключевые слова: паломническая традиция, духовный туризм, эпоха глобализации, цивилизация, культурная память, феномен.

The 21st century marks an era of spiritual quest and cultural globalization in the history of human civilization. The advancement of digitalization, artificial intelligence, and consumer culture has prompted humanity to seek its spiritual roots and strive for inner harmony and meaning. Within this context, spiritual tourism and pilgrimage traditions have been developing widely across many countries as significant social, cultural, and economic phenomena. This practice not only fulfills human spiritual needs but also contributes to preserving cultural memory and maintaining historical continuity within society.

Spiritual tourism is not merely a religious journey - it represents a space where culture, history, faith, cognition, and morality intersect. Such journeys enrich a person's spiritual world and enable a renewed understanding of cultural heritage and religious values. Meanwhile, the tradition of pilgrimage - visiting sacred sites - has been among the most enduring spiritual and cultural practices in human history. Alongside religious devotion, it has become an integral part of ethnocultural identity and the spiritual code of a nation.

In Kazakh worldview, the tradition of visiting sacred sites has existed since ancient times. It represents reverence toward ancestors, the establishment of a spiritual connection, and the maintenance of a relationship with sacred space. Such pilgrimages aim for spiritual purification and inner renewal, and over time, in academic literature, they have come to be described through the concepts of *hajj*, *ziyarah*, and *religious tourism*.

The aim of this study is to identify the socio-cultural transformation of pilgrimage traditions in the era of globalization and to determine the role of spiritual tourism at both national and civilizational levels, emphasizing its function in preserving cultural memory and national identity.

The research methodology is based on descriptive, historical-comparative, and cultural-anthropological approaches. In analyzing the data, methods such as content analysis of historical sources, comparative cultural analysis, and qualitative ethnographic approaches were employed. The theoretical framework draws upon core concepts from cultural anthropology, the sociology of religion, and theories of spiritual tourism, as discussed in the works of M. Smith, V. Hopkins, J. Eller, A. Alibekova, and R. Mamyrbayeva among others.

Typology of Tourism. Religious tourism refers to travel directed toward sacred and holy sites, religious centers, and spiritual places. Its purpose is to strengthen faith, fulfill spiritual needs, and revive one's connection with cultural heritage.

Pilgrimage tourism involves journeys by believers to sacred centers to perform religious duties, engage in worship, and seek repentance - for example, Muslims pilgrimage to Mecca or Christians pilgrimage to Jerusalem.

Esoteric tourism focuses on understanding the mystical essence of sacred sites and experiencing spiritual spaces. Here, inner intuition and spiritual experience take precedence over ritual practice.

Sacral tourism seeks to renew the individual's connection with historical and cultural roots, fostering self-discovery on a spiritual level. Such journeys reinforce collective memory and national identity.

All forms of tourism embody the human pursuit of spirituality, self-knowledge, and perfection. Beyond religious ritual, tourism functions as a broad phenomenon of cultural and social significance (Bakirov, 2016).

Civilizational Foundations of Pilgrimage Traditions. The pilgrimage tradition is a universal phenomenon that defines the spiritual continuity of human culture. From ancient civilizations to the modern era, this practice has been directed toward purifying the inner spiritual world, searching for the meaning of life, and establishing a connection with sacred space. From this perspective, the pilgrimage phenomenon represents not merely a religious experience but also a distinctive manifestation of a people's cultural memory and spiritual civilization.

The tradition of pilgrimage appears in all world religions. It has evolved not only as a religious practice but also as a cultural and civilizational experience. Although its forms have varied across ages and religions, its core meaning remains rooted in the idea of spiritual purification, repentance, and establishing a connection with the divine or sacred power (Jesensky, 2024).

In ancient Greece, pilgrimage rituals had healing and spiritual dimensions. For instance, the temples of Asclepius especially in Epidaurus - were sacred places for restoring physical and mental health. People would meditate at night and participate in dream rituals to receive visions from the god Asclepius. Visitors to the Oracle of Apollo in Delphi, on the other hand, sought spiritual guidance and knowledge of their destiny. These practices symbolized submission to divine will and the human quest for truth.

In Egyptian civilization, the veneration of the spirit was expressed through the concepts of *ka* (life force) and *ba* (the manifestation of the soul). Egyptians visited temples and the tombs of pharaohs to establish contact with the spirits of the deceased and affirm their belief in eternal life. Temples in cities such as Abydos, Thebes, and Memphis were revered not only as religious centers but also as spaces for spiritual purification and divine empowerment.

In Christian tradition, pilgrimage represents a unique form of piety and repentance. Sacred centers such as Jerusalem, Bethlehem, Rome, and Santiago de Compostela have played vital roles in Christian spiritual life. During the Middle Ages, pilgrims undertook long journeys seeking forgiveness for their sins - these travels were regarded as «tests of faith» symbolizing spiritual rebirth. The pilgrim's emblems, such as the scallop shell or the cross, signified their sacred mission.

In Buddhism, the concept of pilgrimage is directly connected to the path of enlightenment. The four main sacred sites of Buddha's life - Lumbini (birthplace), Bodhi Gaya (place of enlightenment), Sarnath (site of the first sermon), and Kushinagar (place of nirvana) - represent a symbolic route to spiritual perfection. Such pilgrimages are intended to purify the soul and cultivate patience and wisdom (Smith, 2009).

In Islam, the highest form of pilgrimage is the Hajj to Mecca, one of the Five Pillars of Islam, symbolizing spiritual responsibility and human equality. In addition, pilgrimages to the Prophet's Mosque in Medina and to the tombs of saints and scholars are widespread practices. Such journeys are regarded as acts of repentance, gratitude, and spiritual closeness to God.

In Islamic civilization, the Arabic term *ziyarah* literally means «visiting, venerating, or showing respect» It denotes a way of drawing nearer to God and recognizing the spiritual legacy of saints and scholars. In the Muslim world, visits to sacred centers such as Mecca, Medina, and Jerusalem embody the human aspiration for purification and spiritual perfection. In Sufi tradition, *ziyarah* also expresses reverence for one's spiritual master, the continuity of spiritual lineage, and the process of *tazkiyah* (purification). Among Turkic peoples, venerating saints and visiting sacred sites became a form of spiritual renewal (Alibekova, 2021).

Contemporary Trends in Spiritual Tourism. Spiritual tourism is a cultural-religious phenomenon that revitalizes the spiritual interaction between individuals and society. Its distinctive feature lies in fostering both inner transformation and collective cultural unity. Through such journeys, individuals attain spiritual peace while strengthening mutual understanding and tolerance among nations and cultures.

The practice of visiting sacred sites has evolved beyond a religious ritual into a means of reviving historical memory and preserving cultural continuity. The growth of spiritual tourism contributes to the development of regional economies, infrastructure, and small businesses while fostering local cultural brands. Many pilgrims perceive such journeys as a path toward spiritual and emotional stability [Bakirov, 2016].

According to the United Nations World Tourism Organization (UNWTO), over the past decade, spiritual and cultural tourism have become among the fastest-growing sectors of global tourism. Research indicates that more than 300 million people worldwide undertake religious or spiritual journeys each year. The key factors driving the rise of spiritual tourism include:

- the processes of globalization and cultural information exchange;
- the desire to discover the spiritual wealth of other cultures;
- the crisis of faith in the postmodern era and the search for spiritual grounding;
- the strengthening of cultural diplomacy and national branding policies (notably in Turkey, Iran, India, and Saudi Arabia) (UNWTO, 2024).

Scientific and Social Significance. Spiritual tourism strengthens a nation's spiritual identity and contributes to the revitalization of cultural heritage. Economically, it also plays an essential role by fostering regional development and increasing employment. On an international level, it enhances the country's cultural prestige and serves as an effective instrument of cultural diplomacy.

Among the most influential studies in this field, M. Smith and V. Hopkins examine the social functions of religious travel, while J. Eller and J. Morrison conceptualize spiritual tourism as a cultural phenomenon that broadens human spiritual experience. In Kazakhstan, scholars such as A. Muminov, D. Kenzhetai, Z. Zhandarbek, and M. Kozha have extensively analyzed its role within Islamic and Turkic traditions.

In the era of globalization and urbanization, the culture of pilgrimage has acquired new dimensions. Sacred sites are now visited not only by the devout but also by individuals seeking spiritual peace, cultural scholars, tourists, and young people. This trend has transformed pilgrimage into an inclusive spiritual experience.

In modern Kazakhstan, the culture of pilgrimage is closely interconnected with the national tourism strategy. By restoring Turkistan's status as a «spiritual center» international pilgrimage routes have been developed, and new mechanisms of cultural diplomacy have emerged. These efforts have created a scientifically grounded model of spiritual tourism, establishing Kazakhstan as one of the leading spiritual destinations in Central Asia.

Before the Soviet era, pilgrimage was an organic part of Kazakh social life. In the years of independence, the tradition has taken on new meaning, becoming a cornerstone of national renewal and cultural policy.

Since the 1990s, Kazakhstan has undertaken active measures to restore and preserve sacred sites. In 2003, the inclusion of the Mausoleum of Khoja Ahmed Yasawi in Turkistan on the UNESCO World Heritage List marked a historic milestone in the country's spiritual tourism development.

The state programs «Cultural Heritage» (2004) and «Rukhani Zhangyru» (2017), as well as the «Sacred Geography of Kazakhstan» project, have become the key institutional mechanisms for advancing this field (Mamyrbayeva, 2022).

Historical and Social Foundations of Pilgrimage Culture in Kazakhstan. For Kazakhstan, spiritual tourism represents a strategic direction that ensures national cultural continuity, historical succession, and spiritual renewal. A sacred site transcends geographical boundaries - it is a sacral space. As Mircea Eliade observed, the distinction between the sacred and the profane is revealed in the structure of space: a sacred place serves as a point of contact between human beings and the divine or spiritual essence. Such sacred spaces acquire meaning through cultural codes and become deeply embedded in collective memory and historical consciousness (Khodjayev, 2015).

Kazakhstan's sacred geography has formed a unified spiritual map. Sites such as Beket Ata (Mangystau), Arystan Bab (Turkistan), Karakhan Baba (Taraz), Domalak Ana (Southern Kazakhstan), and Edige (Western Kazakhstan) symbolize the nation's spiritual continuity and historical integrity. Today, this tradition has been systematically documented and incorporated into the «Sacred Geography of Kazakhstan» project as a key component of cultural policy. More than 600 sacred sites have been identified, and pilgrimage routes have been organized within this initiative, revitalizing national memory and stimulating new forms of domestic and international tourism.

Archaeological research around cities such as Turkistan, Taraz, and Otrar has revealed numerous pilgrimage sites dating from the 11th to the 14th centuries. Clay mausoleums, tombs, khanaqahs (Sufi community centers), rabats, and cemeteries vividly reflect the religious and cultural structures of that period (Baipakov, 2005).

In the Turkistan region, the Mausoleum of Arystan Bab (12th c.) is considered the spiritual origin of the Yasawiyya Sufi order. Likewise, the mausoleums of Ibrahim Ata (11-12th c.) and Karashash Ana (11-12th c.) represent the historical continuity of the veneration of saints. Other notable sacred sites include Karabura, Baba Tukti Shashty Aziz, Baidibek Bi, Domalak Ana, Ukash Ata (9-10th c), and the architectural complex of Ismail Ata (11-19th c).

Mangystau, in turn, is distinguished by its religious and Sufi centers. Its underground mosques and necropolises - such as those of Beket Ata (18th c), Shopan Ata (10-19th c), Karaman Ata (13-

19th c), Masat Ata (10-19th c), Shakpak Ata (9-10th c), Sultan-Epe (10-19th c), and Sisem Ata (13-19th c) - became regional hubs of Islamic spirituality.

In Central and Western Kazakhstan, monuments such as the Abat-Baytak Mausoleum (14-15th c.), the tombs of Alasha Khan, Zhoshy Khan, Dombaul, and the «Ekidin» structures of the Sarytorgai region bear witness to early statehood and Turkic memorial culture.

In Northern and Eastern Kazakhstan, sacred sites such as the Mausoleum of Kozy Korpesh and Bayan Sulu, the Mausoleum of Mashkhur Zhusip Kopeuly, Okshi Ata, Korasan Ata, the Tolegetai-Kylyshy Ata complex (11-12th c.), and the Tekturmas complex (14th c.) reflect the fusion of popular legends and religious beliefs.

In the Zhetysay and Southern Kazakhstan regions, the Karakhan Mausoleum (12th c.), the Mausoleums of Aisha Bibi and Babazha Khatun (11-12th c.), and the Tower of Begim Ana (10-11th c.) stand out as exceptional architectural monuments. The Korkyt Ata Memorial Complex, Ushkan Ata necropolis, Akmeshit necropolis, and the tombs of Bukhar Zhyrau and Yrgyzbay Ata represent distinctive symbols of national spirituality.

Among Kazakhstan's places of worship are both Islamic and Christian architectural monuments, such as the Ascension Cathedral, the Zharkent Mosque architectural-art complex, the Kunabay Mosque, and the Church of Christ the Savior (19th c.).

Collectively, these sites form the spatial system of spiritual tourism and pilgrimage culture, reflecting Kazakhstan's multilayered religious and cultural history [*Sacred Geography of Kazakhstan*, 2018].

Sufism and Turkic Spiritual Syncretism. In Turkic culture, veneration of saints (awliya) is not merely a form of worship but a symbol of spiritual connection and moral code. The mausoleums of saints and scholars are regarded as sources of baraka (divine blessing), and in the collective consciousness, they are perceived as blessed places or sacred soil. This tradition reinforces the moral foundations of community ethics, kindness, and unity.

The practice of pilgrimage is closely intertwined with Sufi philosophy. The Turkistan region and its neighboring territories have long been among the spiritual centers of Turkic-Islamic civilization. As archaeologists M. E. Masson and K. Baipakov have noted, khanaqah-type structures built in medieval Yassi (Turkistan) functioned not only as places of worship but also as centers of Sufi teaching and spiritual education. In the 14th century, these khanaqahs served as spiritual academies frequented by disciples (murids), scholars, and travelers from Central Asia, Kashgar, and Khorasan.

The traditional route of pilgrims traveling to Turkistan begins at the Mausoleum of Arystan Bab and continues only thereafter to the tomb of Khoja Ahmed Yasawi. This is a symbolic manifestation of the spiritual hierarchy between master and disciple. (Kenzhetai, 2017).

The specific rites of pilgrimage (performing taharat [ablution], offering sacrifice, reciting the Qur'an, practicing dhikr, making supplication, staying overnight, etc.) signify spiritual purification and communion with sacred space. These practices are regarded, in accordance with Islamic tradition, as mubāḥ (permissible) forms of spiritual experience.

Through the development of Sufi orders - especially the Yasawiya, Naqshbandiyya, and Kubrawiyya - the pilgrimage tradition was systematized and became an integral component of society's spiritual structure. In the Yasawiya path, ziyarah expresses the murid's reverence for the pir and the continuity of the spiritual lineage. Such journeys were considered part of disciplining the nafs (tazkiyah) and purifying the spirit (taṣfiyah) (Tuyakbayev, 2023).

Trends in Turkistan's Contemporary Development. Today, Turkistan is evolving not only as a religious center but also as an international cultural and tourist hub. The city's designation in 2018 as a regional capital accelerated its infrastructural and cultural growth: a new airport was opened, information centers for pilgrims were established, and networks of ethno-villages and museums were created.

On the spiritual level, the mausoleums of Arystan Bab, Yasawi, Gauhar Ana, and Rabia Sultan Begim form the core pilgrimage routes; on the cultural level, the «Azret Sultan» Museum-Reserve is introducing contemporary museological methods; and at the international level, Turkistan has been

granted the status of cultural capital within the framework of TURKSOY and the Organization of Turkic States (Abdigaliuly, 2018).

According to 2024 data from the United Nations World Tourism Organization (UNWTO), Turkistan is among the most dynamically developing centers of spiritual tourism in Central Asia. In 2024, more than 1.7 million pilgrims and cultural tourists visited the region, and by 2025 this figure is expected to double. At present, the digitalization of pilgrimage routes, electronic registration systems, and the creation of high-quality infrastructure define a new stage in spiritual tourism (Tourism Sector Report, 2024).

In recent years, comprehensive programs aimed at developing spiritual tourism, cultural heritage, and urban infrastructure have been implemented in Turkistan. A modern international airport – «Hazret Sultan» (HSA) - has opened, with regular domestic and international flights. In addition, the «Keruen-Saray» tourist complex, new hotels, ethno-villages, and cultural recreation areas have been built.

Turkistan's development has advanced not only in architecture and construction but also socio-economically. New jobs have been created, small and medium-sized businesses are flourishing, service quality in the tourism sector has improved, and information centers and electronic registration systems for visitors have been introduced.

At the international level, Turkistan has assumed the status of cultural capital of the Organization of Turkic States and regularly hosts various cultural and scientific events. Thus, the city has emerged as a spiritual center of the new era, harmonizing historical heritage with modern infrastructure.

In recent years, the fields of science and education in Turkistan have also risen to a new level. Projects aimed at integrating spiritual heritage with contemporary scholarship are being implemented, demonstrating that Turkistan is becoming not only a cultural and tourist center but also a scientific-intellectual hub.

In Turkistan, the scientific departments of the «Azret Sultan» National historical and cultural museum-reserve, archaeological and ethnographic research groups, and the The Yasawi Research Center established in 2025 are actively operating. International-level research is being conducted in theology, history, cultural studies, archaeology, tourism, philology, and regional studies, introducing new data into academic circulation on the evolution of spiritual tourism and pilgrimage culture in the region.

The Khoja Ahmed Yasawi International Kazakh-Turkish University is the region's principal center of science and education, serving as a platform that unites scholars from Eurasia and the Turkic world. Since 2021, annual international scientific conferences have been organized in the city, and programs for young scholars and researchers have been launched. Academic exchange programs and scientific expeditions between Turkistan and other Turkic states are also actively developing.

Overall, the development of science and education in Turkistan is closely linked to the idea of spiritual renewal. Educational and research activities serve not only professional objectives but also the mission of honoring spiritual values, cultural heritage, and historical continuity. In this way, Turkistan is becoming a nexus where spiritual heritage and modern knowledge intersect.

Spiritual Experience in the Digital Space. In the contemporary era, digital technologies have shaped new forms of spiritual tourism. Virtual pilgrimage, online Hajj experiences, and 3D modeling have popularized the remote exploration of sacred sites. This trend accelerated during the COVID-19 pandemic: online tours of Mecca and the Vatican, as well as the virtual exhibition of the Mausoleum of Khoja Ahmed Yasawi in Turkistan, exemplify this innovative direction.

Digital formats enable people to obtain spiritual experiences beyond geographical limitations and have increased youth engagement. Through social networks and blogging platforms, the sharing of pilgrimage experiences has become a cultural phenomenon. Thus, spiritual tourism has converged with modern media culture, generating new forms of transboundary spiritual communication [Gabdullina, 2023].

In conclusion, spiritual tourism and pilgrimage are not merely religious practices; they embody the spiritual renewal of individuals and society and the harmony between cultural continuity and

globalization. In the era of globalization, Kazakhstan has been shaping its own historical, cultural, and civilizational model in this domain. Consequently, this topic remains highly relevant for the contemporary humanities as well as for the practice of spiritual pilgrimage and cultural tourism.

The principal task in developing spiritual tourism is to deepen its spiritual content rather than focusing solely on material infrastructure - that is, to present pilgrimage as a school of cultural understanding and moral education. In this study, the interrelation between pilgrimage traditions and spiritual tourism is comprehensively analyzed within the context of globalization; the concepts of sacred geography in Kazakhstan and the phenomenon of spiritual tourism are systematized from the perspective of cultural policy; using Turkistan as an example, the historical continuity and contemporary transformation of spiritual tourism are identified on a scholarly basis; and the new forms of spiritual tourism in the digital space are examined as subjects of cultural-spiritual analysis.

Under current conditions of globalization, pilgrimage traditions and spiritual tourism are acquiring new meaning as a living system of national culture. This phenomenon advances the idea of spiritual renewal and becomes an effective mechanism for maintaining cultural stability and identity. Spiritual tourism and pilgrimage culture constitute an important sphere of national ideology and cultural diplomacy - an enduring and ever-relevant subject for further in-depth study.

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