

**OPEN ACCESS**

SUBMITTED 28 March 2025

ACCEPTED 24 April 2025

PUBLISHED 30 May 2025

VOLUME Vol.05 Issue 05 2025

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Folklorist Mamatkul Jo'rayev And Uzbek Mythology

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Abstract: Studying the historical foundations of oral folk art, which represents a valuable legacy of our ancestors' intellectual heritage, remains a relevant and significant task. In particular, the study of myths and the discipline that examines them—mythology—allows for a deeper understanding of ancient perceptions and the roots of the people's worldview. This article highlights the research of folklorist Mamatkul Jo'rayev on the formation and evolutionary development of Uzbek mythology.

Keywords: Myth, mythology, folklore, folklorist, Mamatkul Jo'rayev, scholar, cult.

Introduction: Mythology holds a significant place in the intellectual history of humankind. Without it, it is impossible to explore any ethnic stratum or the primordial relationship between humans and the universe. As we know, a myth represents the earliest system of perceptions and concepts formed by our ancient ancestors about the world surrounding them. As a discipline that studies the body of such myths, mythology plays a vital role not only in understanding a nation's worldview, values, and spiritual heritage, but also in examining the patterns of ethnic and cultural development.

Myths—and mythology as a whole—being a syncretic phenomenon, reflect both the universal worldview of primitive humans and the specific mythical outlook of each individual nation. This alone illustrates the complex and multifaceted nature of mythology. Substantial work has been carried out in the field of global folkloristics to determine the place of mythology in the history of artistic thought. Similarly, in Uzbek folkloristics, the field of mythological studies has taken shape, and significant achievements have been made in the scholarly investigation of mythology.

In Uzbek folkloristics, the relationship between mythology and epic genres in Uzbek folklore was first studied by the folklorist G'. Akramov. The scholar investigated the essence of the ancient religious beliefs and mythological perceptions of the Uzbek people, as well as their role in folklore. In 1980, he defended his candidate's dissertation on the topic "Mythology in Uzbek Folklore." Akramov examined the interrelations between mythology, myth, and folklore; the emergence and development of ancient Turkic mythology; its influence on folklore texts, rituals, customs, and cultural monuments; and the use of mythologisms in literary works. He provided a theoretical and scientific foundation for the idea that the survival of mythological elements in fairy tales and epics is connected to both the antiquity of these genres and the persistent presence of mythological thinking in the public consciousness. Furthermore, he deeply explored interpretations of totemistic, animistic, and manistic mythologies in Uzbek folklore [1].

Folklorist B. Sarimsoqov studied the evolutionary process of mythology and the diffusion of epic genres. He proposed a three-stage classification of myths in the study of Uzbek mythology—namely, archaic, classical, and medieval myths [2]. Other folklorists, including T. Haydarov, J. Eshonqulov, B. Jumaniyozov, T. Rahmonov, O. Qayumov, A. Tilavov, D. Fayziyeva, F. Nurmonov, and M. Rizoyeva, have produced research focusing on the distinctive features of mythology, the historical foundations of mythological images, their aesthetics, and the genesis of oral prose genres [3]. In addition, researchers such as N. Mallayev, M. Saidov, T. Khojayev, M. Narzikulova, and S. Hamdamova have analyzed the impact of mythological plots and images on written literature [4].

In the development of Uzbek mythological studies, the folklorist Mamatqul Jo'rayev holds a distinctive place. The scholar has explored the formation of mythology, its evolutionary stages, and its relationship with folkloric texts. As he notes in his research: "Mythology is a syncretic phenomenon that reflects the worldview of primitive humans. Therefore, it has served as a foundation for the formation of folklore, written literature, art, and spiritual values" [5]. In his scholarly investigations, Jo'rayev not only contextualized mythology within Uzbek folklore but also integrated its connections with other disciplines such as written literature, ethnography, ethnology, and art studies. He thoroughly examined the role of mythology across different historical periods, highlighting its significance in both social and cultural life.

Jo'rayev has also conducted extensive comparative research on Uzbek mythology, analyzing it within broader mythological traditions to better understand

its unique and shared characteristics across cultures.

As a leading expert in Uzbek mythology, Mamatqul Jo'rayev has contributed extensively to the National Encyclopedia of Uzbekistan, providing encyclopedic entries on myths, their classifications, mythological images, and various topics related to mythology [6]. In his comprehensive studies on the formation and development of Uzbek mythology, he emphasizes the relevance of a range of factors: from early human perceptions and belief systems (such as totemism, animism, dualistic and magical beliefs) to symbolic-ritual practices, cults, Islamic teachings and traditions, as well as the influences of Iranian, Greek, Indian, and Chinese mythologies. Based on these components, Jo'rayev categorizes the evolution of myths into four major groups:

1. Mythological perceptions of Ural-Altaic tribes
2. Mythology of ancient Turkic peoples
3. Mythological concepts linked to Zoroastrianism
4. Traditions of Arab-Islamic mythology

Jo'rayev supports each category with concrete historical and textual evidence, demonstrating the diachronic development of ancient mythologies over centuries [6]. In analyzing the earliest beliefs of our ancestors, he classifies myths into eleven categories, including: etiological myths about the creation of the world; celestial (cosmogonic) myths about heavenly bodies and natural phenomena; anthropogenic myths about human origins and supernatural figures; cult myths; totemistic myths; calendar myths; myths about dying and reviving nature cults; animistic myths; manistic myths about ancestral spirits; dualistic myths; and eschatological myths concerning the end of the world.

These eleven categories are thoroughly examined based on scientific literature, folklore texts, seasonal and family-ritual practices, and the author's own field recordings. In addition, Jo'rayev conducts deep investigations into petroglyphs where mythological motifs are depicted. He interprets these rock carvings as reflections of the worldview, lifestyle, customs, rituals, and early aesthetic thinking of ancient populations in Uzbekistan. According to him, these sources represent the earliest expressions of cultural values created by our ancestors. He also discusses the multi-stage historical evolution of petroglyph creation. Most petroglyphs are dated to the Stone Age and reflect the mythical beliefs and metaphorical worldview of that era. Their artistic analysis not only helps decode early aesthetic consciousness but also clarifies the genesis of poetic images and motifs in epic works.

Through this approach, Jo'rayev has enriched the theoretical scope of Uzbek folkloristics by linking

petroglyphs with Uzbek mythological traditions.

Jo'rayev has also made significant contributions in interpreting the mythology of the ancient written source Avesta and its reflections in Uzbek folklore [6]. He emphasizes in his research that traces of this invaluable spiritual heritage have been preserved in Uzbek folklore to the present day, demonstrating that the mythological layer at the core of Avesta stems from a system of ancient beliefs that took shape within our territory.

The folklorist analyzes various elements of Avesta mythology in Uzbek folklore, focusing on distinctive features and representations of mythological figures such as Gavomard, Hubbi, Haydar, and Ajdar, which originate in Zoroastrian mythology. His research identifies numerous mythological characters in Uzbek oral tradition whose roots trace back to Avesta, including: Dev, Pari, Ajdar, Semurg', Aranglar, Eranlar, Jo'mard (as the patron of butchers), Hubbi (as a water cult figure), Aranglar and Aranja bobo (linked to the Amu Darya River cult), Orolcha Avliyo, Ashshadarozi and Bavoris bobo (as mytho-poetic symbols of the spring festival Navruz), Haydar or Mirhaydar (viewed as the "spirit of the wind"), Sust xotin (connected to rain rituals), and Ambar ona (symbolizing fertility).

As a result of Jo'rayev's extensive research, Uzbek folkloristics has been enriched with theoretical insights on a wide range of topics, including ancient Turkic mythology, the influence of mythology on written literature, mythological imagery in Uzbek folklore, cosmogonic myths, the mythological foundations of the folk calendar, relationships between myth and epic, mythical perceptions of wind and thunder, and astromythology [6].

Jo'rayev's foundational contributions to Uzbek mythology are presented in numerous books and monographs, including:

- Uzbek Folk Calendar and Mythological Legends (1994)
- Legends of the Silk Road (1993)
- Celestial Legends of the Uzbek People (1995)
- Uzbek Mythology and Arab Folklore (2001, co-author)
- Seasonal Ritual Folklore of the Uzbeks (2008)
- Myth, Ritual, and Tale (2014, co-author)
- History of Uzbek Folklore, Vol. 1 (2015)
- Astromythology of the Silk Road Peoples (2017)
- Uzbek Mythology (2020, co-author)

Each of these works warrants independent scholarly

attention. Academician T. Mirzayev and folklorist Sh. Turdimov have noted the magnitude of Jo'rayev's theoretical contributions, stating that "the comprehensive study of Uzbek mythology and seasonal ritual folklore in such breadth was undertaken for the first time in the history of Uzbek folkloristics."

In examining the productive scholarly work of the insightful researcher Mamatqul Jo'rayev in the field of Uzbek mythology, one can unequivocally state that he holds a distinguished place as a mythologist who has significantly contributed to the advancement of Uzbek mythological studies. His research is notable for its deep exploration of the genetic foundations and poetic transformations of ancient mythological concepts. Through his work, the role of the Uzbek people's artistic imagination within the broader context of Central Asian civilization has been extensively and meaningfully illuminated.

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