



The History and the Epigraphy of the Memorial Complex of Sultan Uvays–Baba

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Abstract

Memorial monument of the XVII–XIX centuries Sultan Uvays–baba is located on the territory of the current Beruni region (Uzbekistan). The name of the complex, according to local tradition, is associated with the name of Uwais al–Karani, who, according to legend, was one of the followers of the Prophet and lived during the reign of the fourth caliph (successor) Ali ibn Abu Talib. His full name is Uwais ibn Omir ibn Juz ibn Malik ibi Amr al–Muradi al–Qarani. According to legend, he lived in the village of Karain in Yemen. Hence his second name–Uwais al–Karani. He was born in 625, died in the battle of Siffin, fighting in the ranks of the troops of Caliph Ali against the troops of Muawiya ibn Yazid. He was buried in the village of Siffa in Syria. His burial at the complex described here is obviously symbolic. Based on the sources, the history and epigraphy of the “Sultan Uvays–Baba” complex has been studied. Judging by the significant number of pilgrims, it is one of the most revered places in the lower reaches of the Amu Darya. The modest way of life of Sultan Uwais–baba as an example to follow and their role in spreading the qualities of devotion, mercy and kindness are analyzed. In addition, information is provided on the history and epigraphy of the mausoleum and other cultural structures of the memorial complex “Sultan Uvays–Baba” and their role in the Islamic culture of Central Asia.

Keywords: *Prophet; Tabiyin; Sultan Uwais–Baba; Al–Karani; Chinor Bobo; Yemen; Murad; Beruni District; Republic of Karakalpakstan; Mausoleum; Pond (House); Mercy; Kindness*

Introduction

Each nation over the millennia of its development has accumulated its unique religious experience, its invaluable spiritual heritage, which ensure the continuity of generations, the socialization of the younger generation, the crystallization of national values. Uzbekistan is no exception, on whose land various religions and confessions have peacefully coexisted since ancient times, Zoroastrians and Buddhists, Hindus and Jews, Muslims and Christians lived in a good neighborhood, paying tribute to faith and beliefs, customs and traditions.

Since ancient times, along with the Islamic religion, other religions and cultures have developed on the land of Uzbekistan, which have made and still make a certain contribution to spiritual development [Nematullo Mukhamedov, Nurulloh Turambetov, 2021. – p. 69].

The geographical location of Uzbekistan at the crossroads of important trade routes, economic and cultural cooperation with many states had a great impact on the religious and cultural life of local peoples. Such feelings as reverence for a person and respect for others, respect for elders, regardless of the nationality of religious views, have become the highest qualities of the peoples of Central Asia [Mukhamedov Nematullo, 2020. – p. 137]. It is these factors that form not only the spiritual and educational, but also the spiritual foundations of the tolerance of the people of the region.

Historical sights reflect the history and customs, religious tolerance, national mentality, spiritual values of our people. At the same time, these monuments are an important source in the study of the socio-economic, cultural and political processes of the peoples of our country [Mukhamedov Nematullo, 2019. – p. 7].

According to the ideas of believers, the mausoleums of prominent personalities are a place of honor and respect, spiritual purification and improvement. There are many legends among the people about visiting the mausoleums and burial places of saints, which describe the order of pilgrimage to such places. In the local written tradition, the following hadith from the Prophet, peace and blessings be upon him, is often quoted: “I had prohibited you from visiting graves, but you may visit them now. Verily, they will weaken your attachment to the world and remind you of the Hereafter”.

Main part

The historical complex of Sultan Uvays–baba is one of the religious centers in Central Asia. Memorial monument of the 17th–19th centuries. Sultan Uvays–baba complex is located on the territory of the current Beruni region of the Republic of Karakalpakstan. The name of the complex, according to local tradition, is associated with the name of Uwais al–Qarani who, according to legend, was one of the followers of the Prophet, peace and blessings be upon him and lived during the reign of the fourth caliph (successor) Ali ibn Abu Talib. His full name is Uwais ibn Omir ibn Zhuz ibn Malik ibn Amr al–Muradi al–Karani [F. Abdukhalikov, E. Rtveladze, N. Mukhamedov et al., 2015. – p. 156–157; Khodzhaniazov G., Yusupov O. 1994. – p. 26].

Uwais from the Karan clan of the Murad tribe (Uwais al–Karani) belonged to the Tabi‘un – those who followed Muhammad. Uwais al–Qarani is a Yemenite righteous man, a simple man, a hermit who deliberately lived away from people, looked after his elderly mother, herded camels for the sake of modest earnings for daily bread and never saw the Prophet. At the same time, Uwais al–Karani was very close to Muhammad on the Spiritual level. He had such a pure heart and sincere faith that Muhammad called him his friend and the best in the generation of followers [Mukhamedov N., Turambetov N., 2020. – p. 798].

According to the legends set forth mainly in Sufi sources, al–Karani did not see the Prophet, but he once appeared to him in a dream and set him on the path of Truth. Since then, in fact, the tradition of “admonition of the Prophet” or other authoritative person in a dream is called by the name of al–Qarani: uwaisi. The famous eponym of the Naqshbandiyya brotherhood Baha ad–Din Naqshband was also considered an uwaisi, since he received edification in visions from the very founder of the brotherhood, Abd al–Khalik al–Gijduvani.

There was a Sufi brotherhood Uwaysiya. Apparently, this complex is associated with the name of one of the leaders of this brotherhood and later became identified with the name of Uwais al–Qarani himself.

Regarding Sultan Uvays al–Karani, there is enough information in hagiographic works and other literature [F. Abdukhalikov, E. Rtveladze, N. Mukhamedov et al., 2015. – p. 157; Khodzhaniazov G., Yusupov O. 1994. – p. 27].

Several prophetic hadiths are dedicated to Uwais al-Qarani, in Mukhtasar “Sahih” Muslim: Book 51 “On the virtues of the companions of the prophet” includes a separate chapter 68 “Mentioning the dignity of Uwais al-Qarani from among the followers”:

1766. It is reported that Umar ibn al-Khattab, may Allah be pleased with him, said: “Indeed, I heard the Messenger of Allah, peace and blessings of Allah be upon him”, say: “Verily, the best of the followers (tabi’una) there will be a man named Uwais, who will have a mother and whose [skin] used to be covered with whiteness, tell him to ask Allah to forgive you” [Mukhamedov N., Turambetov N., 2020. – p. 799. <http://life-on-earth.ru/tsentralnaya-aziya/sultan-uvajs-bobo>].

According to legends told primarily by Sufi sources, al-Karani had not seen the Prophet in person; however, the latter visited the former in night dream and exhorted him into the path of Truth. Ever since, the very tradition of “exhortation of the Prophet” or other prominent person in the night dream is referred by the name of al-Karani, specifically, Uvaisi. That is to say, reception of spiritual admonition directly from the Prophet or Islamic authorities without a direct contact with the primal mentors themselves. For example, the famous eponym of the Naqshbandiyya brotherhood Bahauddin Naqshband was also considered an uwaysi, since he received edification in visions from the very founder of the brotherhood, Abd al-Khalik al-Gjduvani. There was a Sufi brotherhood Uwaysiya. Apparently, this complex is associated with the name of one of the leaders of this brotherhood and later became identified with the name of Uvays al-Karani himself [F. Abdukhalikov, E. Rtveladze, N. Mukhamedov et al., 2015. – p. 157. Khodzhaniazov G., Yusupov O. 1988. – p. 4].

Regarding Sultan Uvais al-Karani, there is enough information in hagiographic writings. In particular, Uwais al-Karani, may Allah have mercy on him and may Allah be pleased with him, was born in Yemen, in a place called Murad al-Karani. He converted to Islam during the lifetime of the Prophet, but he could not go to holy Medina because he had to take care of his sick mother. He took care of her throughout her illness. The Prophet often mentioned him, especially singling him out, and said to his companions: “Whoever sees him among you, let him ask to make dua”.

The companions were surprised: “How did this person reach such a high level that he was honored with a mention by the Prophet (peace and blessings be upon him)?” He achieved this by serving his mother with full devotion, forbearing in adversity and trials, forbearing in response to the evils of people, and withdrawing from all worldly things in the best and most beautiful way.

The Prophet (peace and blessings be upon him) bequeathed to Umar ibn Khattab, Ali ibn Abu Talib and other associates, if Uwais al-Qarani arrives, ask him to make dua istigfar. And indeed, when Uwais arrived, they began to demand from him to pray to Allah for the forgiveness of their sins.

Despite the fact that Uwais converted to Islam during the lifetime of the Prophet, he never managed to see him. Therefore, he is considered not a companion, but one of the great tabiins (followers of the Prophet Muhammad (peace and blessings of Allah be upon him), who did not directly communicate with him).

Uwais al-Karani occupies a special place among the Sufis, for Ali (may Allah be pleased with him) gave him a Sufi khirka (an old fabric cape of an ascetic wanderer –one of the symbolic attributes of Sufis – Muslim mystics, philosophers and ascetics), which he himself received from the Messenger Allah.

It should be noted that Uwais al-Qarani is a guiding star for the ascetics of the community of Muhammad and for the spiritual people of his ummah. Uwais al-Qarani is a model of a faithful ascetic and a vivid example for everyone who loves the Prophet, having believed in him, although he could not see him in this life [Mukhamedov N., Turambetov N., 2020. – p. 799. <http://life-on-earth.ru/tsentralnaya-aziya/sultan-uvajs-bobo>].

It is hard to say at what time his present symbolic grave appeared. This large cult complex, parts of which are located in and around the vast old cemetery, includes:

Mazar (mausoleum, tomb) Sultan Uwais Bobo (Sultan Vais Bobo, Wais al-Karani); sacred spring (bulak), located next to the mazar Sultan Uwais Bobo, according to legend, flowing from the feet of the buried saint; sacred hauz (artificial reservoir), fed by a spring, with sacred fish living there; the dried-up riverbed that once emanated from the source and hauz; mazar (mausoleum) Chinor Bobo (ustaz, muezzin or sartarash Sultan Uwais); a mountain with an obo (a ritual cone-shaped structure made of stones), on which, according to local legend, Sultan Uwais-Baba knelt for 40 days, begging forgiveness from the Almighty for all Muslims, and on which he knocked out all his teeth out of solidarity with the Prophet Muhammad, who lost a tooth (according to another version—two teeth) in the battle of Uhud (Ohud); as well as premises intended for receiving a large number of pilgrims, in particular, a kitchen (oshkhona) for preparing sacrificial animals [Mukhamedov N., Turambetov N., 2020. – p. 799. <http://life-on-earth.ru/tsentralnaya-aziya/sultan-uvajs-bobo>].

According to the ethnologist G. Snesev, the history of this cult complex began long before the arrival of Islam in these parts, and the association of this place in the folk tradition with the name of such an outstanding Muslim saint as Uwais al-Karani probably speaks of the special reverence in pre-Islamic times for the following objects:

The only source (bulag) of drinking water in these desert mountains, emanating from the ground and cutting through the rock, the bed of a small stream, which is lost somewhere downstream under the ground. This spring was the object of a fertility cult in this area, where water is the main source of life and prosperity for both farmers and pastoralists. The veneration of fish living in the waters of springs (Bulag (Uzb.), Chashma (Taj.) is practiced in many similar places in the south of Uzbekistan and the north of Tajikistan (Chor Chinor, Chiluchor Chashma). However, in Chor Chinor and Chiluchor Chashma, the springs form streams that flow into complete rivers.

Therefore, fish live near these sources natural inhabitants of the Central Asian mountain rivers (in the case of the mentioned places – marinka), which got there on their own, attracted by constant feeding from pilgrims. The stream formed by the source of Sultan Uwais-baba does not reach the only permanent river of the Amu Darya in these parts, although it is directed towards it. Therefore, the fish (carp, white carp) living in the hauz (pool) were brought there by fishermen from the Amu Darya. If the fish dies, it is buried according to a special rite, described below, and after a while a replacement is brought to it from the Amu Darya. It is difficult to say whether the practice of keeping sacred fish in the hauz was adopted from the southern regions of Uzbekistan – the northern regions of Tajikistan, or whether the stream was once more full-flowing and had a more or less constant connection with the Amu Darya, from where the fish rose there. However, the tradition of burying dead fish in other places known to us is not practiced. Obviously, such a careful attitude to fish in the Sultan Uwais-Baba tract is due to the fact that they were always there “for recalculation”.

The spirit-owner of this area, whose habitat was probably considered a mountain, and to whom, according to ancient tradition, cone-shaped structures made of stones.

Some large tree (or trees, oasis), probably growing (or growing in the form of an oasis) in ancient times near the source, from where, apparently, the veneration of a certain saint without any biographical data named Chinar Bobo (chinar – plane tree; plane trees are distinguished by a long life span (more than 1000 years) and are revered in many similar places in the south of Uzbekistan and north of Tajikistan (Chor Chinor, Chiluchor Chashma). There is no direct indication of their veneration in the form of a longevity cult, but this version is quite probable [Mukhamedov N., Turambetov N., 2020. – p. 799. <http://life-on-earth.ru/tsentralnaya-aziya/sultan-uvajs-bobo>, 5. – p. 80–100].

There is an opinion that the first building was built here during the time of Sultan Muhammad Khorezmshah (943–953), but it was destroyed during the invasions of Genghis Khan's troops. In 1806, the Khan of Khiva Iltuzar built a new building on the complex. The last construction (of the tomb mausoleum) is attributed to the reign of Khiva Khan Allakuli (1820–1846).

Results of studies in 1985, 1989, 1990 showed that the first construction really dates back to the 12th–13th centuries, as evidenced by traces of construction, as well as ceramic objects on the northeastern side of the mausoleum, some of which are stored in a museum in the city of Khiva. Of great interest among them is a teapot made of Karatau talc, on the wall of which a galloping gazelle is depicted [F. Abdukhalikov, E. Rtveldze, N. Mukhamedov et al., 2015. – p. 157; Khodzhaniazov G., Yusupov O. 1989. – p. 15–17]. During the reign of Allakuli Khan, small hujras appeared around the complex, and an outer wall was built.

The reconstruction works were launched in the 1980s and completed in 1991 [F. Abdukhalikov, E. Rtveldze, N. Mukhamedov et al., 2015. – p. 157; Khodzhaniazov G., Yusupov O. 1988. – p. 4].

In terms of architectural design, the complex is rectangular in form (21.5 to 53 meters), and is built south-bound from the north. The mausoleum of Sultan Uvais–baba is in the northern part of the complex. The southern half houses a mosque with an ayvan, a range of hujras, and a lounge. The entrance to the complex is from the western side. The mausoleum of Sultan Uvais–baba is erected in the traditions of Khorezm architectural style from burnt brick.

Today, the Sultan Uvais–baba graveyard constitutes an entire complex with a rather well developed infrastructure: a mosque, a services complex, a “holy pool”, shopping centers, meal stations, a hotel and so forth. Judging by the considerable inflow of pilgrims, it is one of the most revered shrines in the lower reaches of the Amudarya. Here are represented the inscription on the frieze of ziyaratkhana.



In the name of Allah, the Most Beneficent, the Most Merciful!

Sultan Uvais al-Karani wished to say: “I exhort you to adhere to the prescriptions of the Koran and not divert from the path of the devout. Hold on to and strengthen your lies to the Truth [Allah] since the best of the delights is to be with Him.

From a city in Yemen has this man originated, In rags and tatters of the Prophet has this man dressed up This is the cathedral mosque of Sultan Uvais,

This abode is visited [only] by those with pure soul he showed good diligence for the sake of Allah [and] was.

I have desired greatness, but I have found it in obedience and humility. I have found reverence in admonitions to the people, magnanimity in the truth, pride in humility and the fear of Allah, glory in the contentment with what I have, delight in abstinence, and calm in the confidence in Allah”.

This building completed. When one thousand four hundred and twenty-seven years (2006) passed from the hijra [of the Prophet]

[Written by] the master Muhammad Muhiyiddin...Asamidin

Some sentences which belong to Uvais Karani are written in old Uzbek on a blue background in while ganch on the frieze of the Sultan Uvais–baba ziyaratkhana. The text is divided into major and minor cartouches. The text from white letters is written on a blue background.

The script used is the amateur naskh in imitation of the nastahliq style. The craftsman who left his name at the end of the inscription did not apparently have a skill in monumental epigraphy and was likely semi-literate: hence the errors and unclear contours of letters in the text.

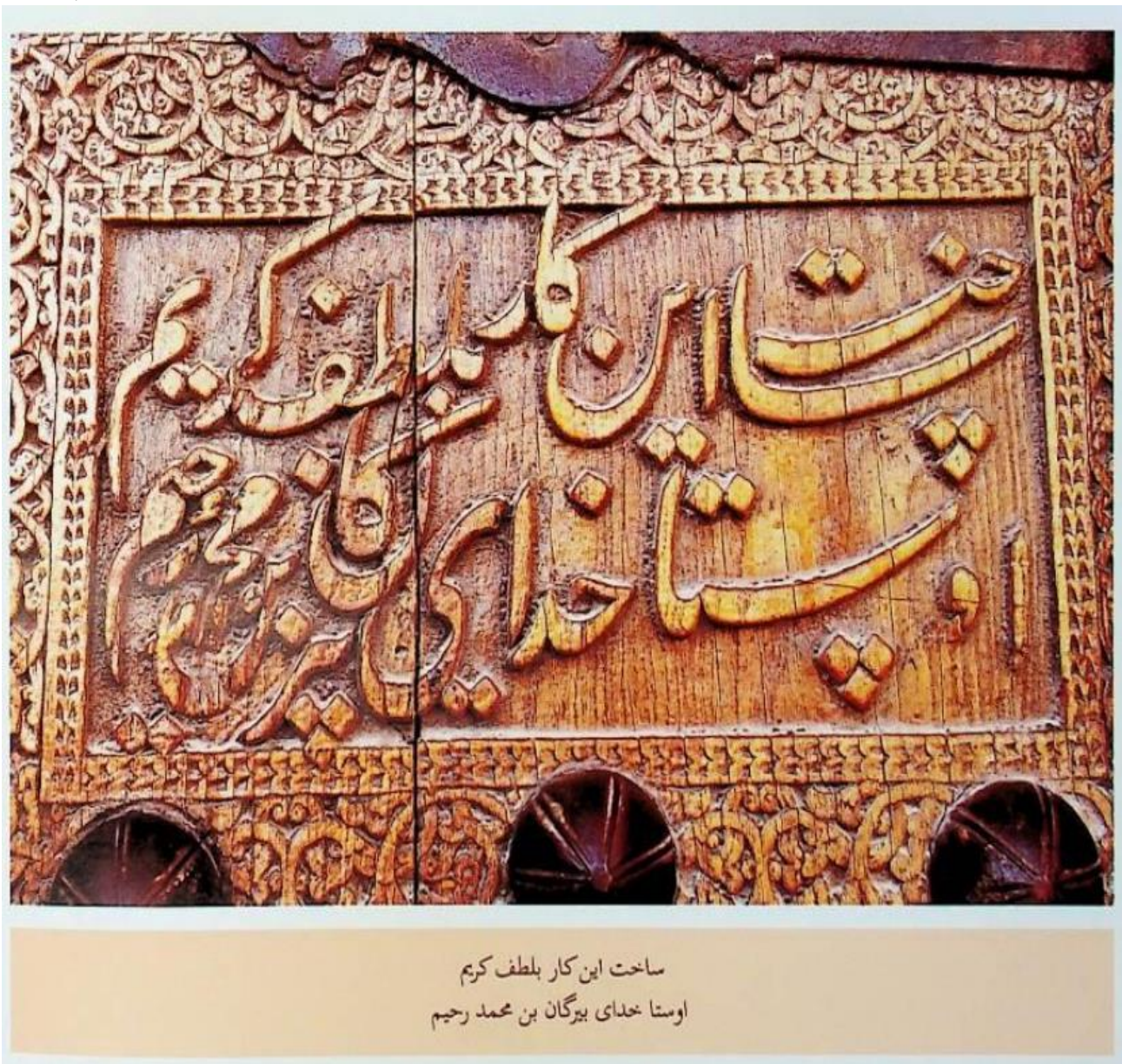


قال الله تعالى: كُلُّ نَفْسٍ ذَائِقَةُ الْمَوْتِ ثُمَّ إِلَيْنَا تُرْجَعُونَ

The octahedron of the north–eastern wall has a figure cartouche that contains an inscription in the form of an epigraphic ornament. The message is inscribed in that same technique as the aforementioned one and constitutes a passage from the Holy Koran [29:57] in the thuluth script. Allah the Almighty said: “Everyone shall taste the death. Then unto Us you shall be returned”



The door is double–winged and adorned with carved ornaments in the style of the late–medieval Khorezm school of wood carving. The right wing of the entrance door has a distich engraved in the nastaliq script in Persian.



This work has been performed by the grace of the Great [Allah]
By the master Khudaibergan, the son of Muhammad Rakhim.



The left wing of that same door has two distichs in Uzbek engraved in the same nastaliq script.
 The servant of this holy door has served (the shrine)
 With completion of this work on time, the date
 When from the Prophet's hijra
 Passed one thousand two–hundred and sixty–four [years]

Conclusion

In conclusion, each of the places of pilgrimage in Central Asia was of great importance in the spiritual life of the population of the region. It is no coincidence that the holy places of pilgrimage were located on the banks of rivers, near ditches, near springs, mines, in areas of handicrafts, agriculture, animal husbandry, horticulture, on lands where medicinal herbs grew. Of course, history shows that the Sultan Uvays–Baba complex was and remains one of the holy revered places in the Central Asian region.

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