



## A SACRED-SEMANTIC INTERPRETATION OF THE CONCEPT OF “GUEST” IN UZBEK LEGENDS

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**Abstract.** The article examines the sacral-semantic interpretation of the concept of “guest” in Uzbek folk legends and its testing function from a linguocultural perspective. The guest image is analyzed within the sacred–profane opposition as a bearer of blessing and moral trial. Particular attention is paid to representations associated with the figure of Xizr, which reveal the interconnection of the guest concept with the microconcepts of blessing, patronage, and trial. The findings clarify the axiological and semantic features of this concept in the Uzbek linguistic worldview.

**Keywords:** guest concept, sacrality, testing function, blessing, Khidr figure, linguoculturology, axiology.

**Аннотация.** В статье рассматривается сакрально-семантическая интерпретация концепта «гость» в узбекских народных преданиях и его функция испытания с позиций лингвокультурологического анализа. Образ гостя интерпретируется в рамках оппозиции сакрального и профанного как носитель благодати и нравственного испытания. Особое внимание уделяется представлениям, связанным с образом Xizr, что позволяет выявить связь концепта «гость» с микроконцептами благодати, покровительства и испытания. Результаты исследования уточняют аксиологические и семантические характеристики данного концепта в узбекской языковой картине мира.

**Ключевые слова:** концепт «гость», сакральность, функция испытания, благодать, образ Хызра, лингвокультурология, аксиология.

Hospitality has evolved as a universal social and moral value in human culture. In many societies, it is interpreted not only as a form of social interaction but also as a phenomenon endowed with sacred significance. In ancient Greek culture, the socio-cultural norm of *xenia* defined the relationship between guest and host as a moral obligation under divine supervision. Guests were considered to be under the protection of Zeus Xenios, and it was believed that accepting or rejecting them could entail specific moral and religious consequences. This model demonstrates that the image of the guest may acquire a sacred status rather than functioning merely as an ordinary social role.

Anthropological studies likewise associate the concept of the guest with the archetype of the “sacred visitor.” In particular, the Japanese folkloric concept of *marebito* (稀人／客人) is closely connected with ancient religious and mythological beliefs and denotes a “rare visitor” or a “sacred guest arriving from afar.” This concept was first systematically introduced into scholarly discourse by the Japanese folklorist Kunio Yanagita. *Marebito* is generally interpreted as a supernatural being arriving from another realm—across the sea, from the mountains, or from an unknown place. Externally, such a figure may appear as an ordinary traveler, a wandering ascetic, an unknown passerby, or a stranger visiting a village. Its arrival is not

accidental; rather, it serves a specific social and moral purpose, such as testing the community, bestowing blessings, or reinforcing ethical values. This perspective demonstrates that the phenomenon of the guest is semantically multilayered and carries a significant axiological dimension.

Within the framework of linguoculturology, a concept is interpreted as a semantic model of cultural experience expressed through language. Concepts are manifested in linguistic units, texts, and cultural stereotypes, reflecting the axiological values and worldview of a particular people. From this perspective, the concept of guest in Uzbek folklore appears not merely as a social role but as a semantic construct endowed with moral and sacred significance.

The notion of sacrality is commonly explained in scholarly literature through the opposition between the sacred and the profane (secular). Mircea Eliade interprets the distinction between the sacred and the profane as one of the fundamental structural principles of cultural thought. According to him, sacred phenomena occupy a special semantic status within human experience, being associated with divinity, supernatural power, and normative authority. Likewise, Émile Durkheim emphasizes that the categories of the sacred and the profane constitute fundamental concepts shaping social consciousness. These theoretical approaches provide a scholarly basis for explaining how the image of the guest may attain a sacred status in certain cultures.

In Uzbek folk legends, the guest frequently performs a testing function. The guest is portrayed as a figure who examines people's generosity, honesty, and moral virtues. The unexpected arrival of the guest, his extraordinary characteristics, or the eventual revelation of his true nature serves as a narrative device leading to a moral conclusion. In some legends, the guest figure is associated with the image of Khidr (Khizr), which further reinforces his sacred-semantic status. This phenomenon demonstrates the elevation of the guest concept from a profane level to a sacred one.

In the traditional worldview of the Uzbek people, a guest is not merely a visitor but is portrayed as a divine messenger sent by the Creator to test individuals, bestow blessings, and embody goodness. Folk legends frequently employ expressions such as "*An angel enters the house where a guest sets foot*" and "*Sustenance enters with the guest.*" In some narratives, the image of the guest is associated with the figure of Khidr (Khizr), which further reinforces its sacred-semantic status. This phenomenon illustrates the elevation of the guest concept from the profane to the sacred sphere.

The sacred nature of the guest concept is particularly evident in folk legends concerning the Prophet Khidr. The figure of Khidr is commonly depicted as "*a white-bearded man*" or "*a radiant old man with a white beard and a light-colored robe.*" At times he appears as a dervish, at other times as a traveler, and in some cases as a prophet-like guest visiting people's homes. In these narratives, he tests the patience of the poor and the generosity of the wealthy. According to folk tradition, households that warmly welcome Khidr and show him proper respect are rewarded with inexhaustible wealth, prosperity, and divine blessings.

The analysis of these legends demonstrates that the concept of *guest* is closely connected with the micro-concepts of *trial* and *blessing*. Through the figure of Khidr, the guest is interpreted not only as a participant in social interaction but also as a moral and normative criterion. At this point, the opposition between generosity and stinginess becomes particularly apparent. Generous and hospitable individuals successfully pass Khidr's test and receive divine



favor, whereas stingy people who disregard guests are deprived of blessings and, in some legends, even subjected to punishment.

A linguocultural analysis of these narratives indicates that mythopoetic representations associated with Khidr have left a stable semantic imprint on the phraseological layer of the Uzbek language. A number of idioms and proverbs shaped by oral folk tradition embody the semes of blessing, supernatural patronage, salvation, and trial associated with the image of Khidr.

For instance, phraseological units commonly used in everyday speech, such as *"Khidr's hand touched him"* (*Xizr qo'li tegdi*) and *"Khidr struck him"* (*Xizr urdi*), express the sudden appearance of good fortune, prosperity, and blessings. In these expressions, Khidr is conceptualized as a source of sacred blessing, and a positive axiological evaluation predominates. Likewise, blessing formulas such as *"May Khidr cast his gaze upon you"* (*Xizr nazar solsin*) and *"May Khidr accompany you"* (*Xizr yo'ldosh bo'lsin*) verbalize the people's need for divine protection through language. In these expressions, Khidr functions as an archetype of a protector and guide.

Within the phraseological system, the expression *"He arrived like Khidr"* (*Xizrdek yetib keldi*) is used to describe a person who unexpectedly comes to help in a difficult situation. In this phrase, the seme of salvation is dominant and is semantically linked to the guest's sacred mediating function. Another widely used saying, *"Consider every guest as Khidr"* (*Har kelgan mehmonni Xizr bil*), is a moral and normative formula emphasizing the necessity of respecting guests. This proverb directly reflects the process of sacralizing the guest concept, reinforcing the ancient belief that every visitor may embody a hidden divine test or bring sacred blessings.

Overall, phraseological units associated with the figure of Khidr form a set of intersecting micro-concepts within the conceptual system of the Uzbek language that overlap with the concept of "guest," including blessing, trial, salvation, guardianship, and sacrality. Thus, mythological representations embedded in folk narratives are consolidated in the lexical-phraseological layer of the language, preserving the axiological values of the people in verbal form. This phenomenon provides linguistic evidence for the sacred-semantic evolution of the concept of "guest."

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