RELIGIOUS TOPONYMS AND THE FACTORS BEHIND THEIR EMERGENCE

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Annotation: This article explores the classification, semantic, and cultural aspects of religious toponyms in Uzbekistan. It examines the emergence of religious place names, analyzing the factors influencing their origin, development, and modification in the context of historical, cultural, and linguistic changes. The study provides insights into the role of religion in shaping geographical terminology and reflects the ongoing influence of religious practices in the cultural landscape.

Keywords: Religious toponyms, geographic names, cultural influence, linguistic analysis, Uzbekistan, place names, historical context.

DINIY TOPONIMLAR VA ULARNING YUZAGA KELISH OMILLARI

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Annotatsiya: Ushbu maqola Oʻzbekistondagi diniy toponimlarning tasnifi, semantik va madaniy jihatlarini oʻrganadi. Diniy joy nomlarining paydo bo'lishi, ularning kelib chiqishi, rivojlanishi va oʻzgarishi, tarixiy, madaniy va lingvistik oʻzgarishlar kontekstida tahlil qilinadi. Tadqiqot, diniy amaliyotlarning geografik terminologiyani shakllantirishdagi rolini ko'rsatadi va madaniy landshaftdagi diniy ta'sirni aks ettiradi.

Kalit so'zlar: Diniy toponimlar, geografik nomlar, madaniy ta'sir, lingvistik tahlil, Oʻzbekiston, joy nomlari, tarixiy kontekst.

РЕЛИГИОЗНЫЕ ТОПОНИМЫ И ФАКТОРЫ ИХ ВОЗНИКНОВЕНИЯ

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Аннотация: Статья посвящена классификации, семантическим и культурным аспектам религиозных топонимов Узбекистана. Рассматриваются факторы, влияющие на происхождение, развитие и изменение религиозных географических названий в контексте исторических, культурных и лингвистических изменений. Исследование дает представление о роли религии в формировании географической терминологии и отражает влияние религиозных практик на культурный ландшафт.

Ключевые слова: Религиозные топонимы, географические названия, культурное влияние, лингвистический анализ, Узбекистан, топонимы, исторический контекст.

INTRODUCTION

The article examines the origins, semantic features, cultural foundations, and functional significance of religious toponyms found in Uzbekistan. The aim of the study is to identify the linguocultural characteristics of religious toponyms and to analyze their role as religious-cultural landmarks in the collective consciousness. The object of the study comprises religious toponyms existing in Uzbekistan, while its subject encompasses their semantic and morphological structure, cultural connotations, and formation factors. "Toponyms are an integral part of our language and are considered by linguists not only as names reflecting geographical or geological features but also as elements of the linguistic worldview or linguocultural components" [4;134].

METHODOLOGY

This study investigates the origins, semantic characteristics, and cultural-historical foundations of religious toponyms found in the territory of Uzbekistan through a linguocultural and historical-geographic approach. Microtoponyms reflect methods of perceiving and classifying the surrounding environment and are essential in establishing the connection between language, thought, and culture [5, p. 153]. Descriptive and classificatory-analytical methods served as the primary methodological frameworks in this research.

Initially, religious toponyms encountered within the Republic of Uzbekistan were collected from open-access sources, academic literature, toponymic dictionaries, and historical reference works. These toponyms were subsequently categorized based on semantic criteria. In the analysis, particular attention was given to the origins of these names, their religious

foundations, phonetic and morphological structures, and their associative roles in popular consciousness.

The methodological approach involved the following step-by-step procedure:

1. **Data Collection**: Religious toponyms were compiled from written sources such as scholarly articles, historical records, and folklore narratives preserved in oral traditions.

2. **Semantic Classification**: The toponyms were grouped into seven main semantic categories:
   - Names of religious figures,
   - Religious architectural monuments,
   - Sacred places and legends,
   - Religious groups and ethnic communities,
   - Natural-religious symbols,
   - Political-administrative influences,
   - Names derived from religious ceremonies and rituals.

3. **Lexical and Morphological Analysis**: The internal structure of the toponyms was analyzed, including affixes (e.g., *-on*, *-ota*, *-bobo*, *-obod*) and phonetic variations (e.g., *Hizr → Xidir*).

4. **Contextual Cultural Analysis**: Each toponym was interpreted within its socio-cultural context, focusing on how it is associated with religious or spiritual concepts in popular consciousness—especially in relation to pilgrimage traditions, legends, and historical events.

5. **Geographical Distribution Analysis**: The spatial distribution of religious toponyms across the regions of Uzbekistan was mapped, and their significance in the religious history of these areas was examined.

This methodological approach allowed for the analysis of toponyms not only as linguistic units but also as markers of cultural memory, religious belief, and historical heritage. As a result, it was determined that the formation of religious toponyms in Uzbekistan is deeply rooted in the religious worldview of the population, the influence of historical events, the veneration of sacred figures, and religious architectural traditions.

The study examined a corpus of over 100 historical and contemporary religious toponyms in Uzbekistan. Methodologically, it relied on the toponymic research frameworks of scholars such as R. A. Budagov, V. N. Toporov, S. Qorayev, and Z. Madrahimov. It employed descriptive, semantic-classificatory, and contextual-linguocultural approaches. Some place

names were sourced from Zohid Madrahimov's book *Historical Toponymy* (2017). Additionally, data were refined and enriched using the *Explanatory Dictionary of the Uzbek Language*, various internet sources, and geographic platforms such as Google Maps.

RESULTS

During the research by analyzing religious toponyms of Uzbekistan, it was found out that the place names can be classified into several groups according to their functions, as by its source of origin. The table below shows its classifications, examples and brief definitions:

Classifications of religious toponyms in Uzbekistan

Factor type	Influence	Examples
Represantatives of religion and the shrine places	The holy people as (sheikhs, saints) that turned into place names.	Sheyxantahur (Tashkent), Hazrati Imom, Zangiota, Shoh imom, Ulug' Hazrat bobo, Sadkak ota
Religious architectural monuments	Areas where there was a temple has been called by its name.	Kanesayi Kassobho (Samarkand), Pokrovskiy church (Tashkent), Mir Arab (madrasah), Xoja Ahror Valiy (pilgrimage), Katta Langar
Holy places and stories	Based on religious legends and parables are considered as holy destinations, and they turned into place names.	Nurota, Chashma (Nurota)
Religious and ethnic groups	Areas where certain religious or ethnic groups lived are called by their name.	Mahallayi Yahudiyon (Samarqand), Nikolaevka
Nature and religious symbols	Names have emerged based on natural objects considered sacred in religious belief.	Sangardak
Political and administrative factors.	Under the influence of religious movements or political policy	Shayxontohur (during the soviet period shrunk)

	toponyms are registered or changed	originally the name was Shayx Hovand Tohur
Religious holidays or ceremonies	The places named after the religious events or holidays.	Navro'zbog' Qurbon ota, Ramazon mahallasi

The results of this research shows there are plenty of religious place names in Uzbekistan related to the different religions and their origin was contributed by different factors. Place names related to the religious people or believers (for example, Zangiota, Shoh imom) are formed in connection with the saints and sheikhs who serve as a spiritual foundation for the people.

Morphological and phonetic phenomena also play a significant role in place names. For instance, the suffix "-on" is a Tajik affix which, in the context of Uzbekistan, forms many toponyms and indicates belonging to a particular social group. In particular, it signifies affiliation with religious belief: Mug'on, Mug'iyon (Zoroastrians), Hinduyon (Hindus), and so on [2;9–10]. Another example has significant role in substitution and relationship between certain sounds—specifically, z, d, j, t, and y—which also have great significance in toponymy. For instance, the legendary prophet's name Hizr is pronounced as Khidir in several dialects. Village names such as Khidirota, Khidireli, and Khidirsho are all derived from this word [2;56].

Nur is a great place. There is a congregational mosque. It has many workshops. People from Bukhara and other places go there every year for pilgrimage. The people of Bukhara greatly exaggerate this matter; they say that a person who goes on pilgrimage to Nur attains the virtue of one who has performed Hajj; when they return from the pilgrimage, they decorate the city with fanfare because they have come from a blessed place. This Nur is called Nuri Bukhara in other provinces. Many Tabi'in (those who saw the companions of Prophet Muhammad) are buried there. This village corresponds to the current city of Nurota. [2;30]

It should also be noted that the terms "bobo" and "ota" are used to refer to the sacred sites of saints. [2;69] Nureta is a mountain located in the Navoi region. Some toponymists say that Nurota is derived from the words "nur" (light) and "ota" (a suffix added to the names of pilgrimage sites). H. Hasanov writes that the name derived from Nur, and it was called Nurota to honor it. The sunlight first appears on the peak of this mountain. [2;70]

According to the assumption of historian M. Ishaqov, the term **"Khozarasp"** is derived from **"Aturaspend"**, meaning *"the abode of sacred fire"* or *"place of fire-*

worshippers." There are also legends and myths associated with the toponymy of Khozarasp. [2;96]

Dahyakota. The toponym Dahyakota is derived from "dahyak," which means "one-tenth," referring to a tax paid as one-tenth of income. Additionally, the scholarship paid annually to some madrasa students and teachers was also called dahyak. Dahyakota, on the other hand, refers to a prominent sheikh or religious scholar who received a salary (dahyak) from the khan's treasury. Furthermore, Dahyak is interpreted as "eleven fathers," and in turn, Dahyaota signifies a living, present person who is, in essence, still alive. [2;102]

Considering Chortoq as a place name could be assumed as, "temple of the Zoroastrians also called chortoq". [2;104]

Oqterak. According to available data, the village emerged approximately 220 years ago. Its name is associated with a saint named Oqterakota. There is also a cemetery in the village bearing the same name—Oqterakota [2;106]

According to the renowned orientalist V. V. Bartold, during the Middle Ages in Turkestan, individuals who made significant contributions to the spread of Islam were often referred to by adding the word *"bob"* to the end of their names. For instance, in Abdurahman Jami's *"Nafahāt al-Uns"* and Alisher Navoi's *"Nasāyim al-Muhabbat"*, there is information about Hazrati Bob Farghoni, stating that his name was Umar. It is also noted that in the Fergana Valley region, prominent sheikhs and saints were referred to as *"bob."* Hazrati Bob Farghoni (10th century) was buried in Pop. [2;109–110]

Parda Tursun. An ancient name of the village was Mozor. According to the legends, during battles against non-believers in the 8th century, Zaynobiddin (Imom Ota) was buried in this location. A shrine named after Imom Ota exists within the territory of the village [2;111].

Khoja 2. *his.* This is an honorary title used by Muslims who consider themselves descendants of the four righteous caliphs (*choryor*). The Khojas traditionally held certain privileges. According to the *National Encyclopedia of Uzbekistan* [3;4/435], the term *Khojayli* emerged in the late XVIIIth to early XIXth centuries. Based on data from the Russian scholar A. L. Kun, who traveled through Central Asia in the 1870s, the Khojayli fortress was constructed by an Eshon Alamin Khoja, who had migrated from the city of Turkistan.

Additionally, among local people the legends claiming that the town was founded by Sufi Khojas affiliated with the Yassawiyya order is also popular hypothesis [2;94]. **Khojaobod.** According to the legends , in the 14th–15th centuries, two brothers from Khojakent, Khonkhoja and Toshkhoja, setteled to fertile lands along the Syrdarya and established orchards and

gardens. Subsequently, several families from the Kokand region settled there as well. Over time, the newly formed settlement came to be known as *Khojaobod*, which translated as "the place made prosperous by the Khojas" [2;112].

In Uzbekistan, there are approximately 50 churches, some of which have been preserved as museums. Among Christian sites of interest to tourists there are the Church of St. John the Baptist in Samarkand, the Sacred Heart of Jesus Cathedral and the Cathedral in Tashkent, and the Church of St. Alexander Nevsky in Termez, and etc [6].

Discussion

The analysis of religious toponyms of the territory of Uzbekistan reveals that their formation has primarily been influenced by the people's religious beliefs, historical memory, and cultural worldview. The research has shown that toponyms associated with religious figures, sacred places, religious ceremonies, ethno-religious groups, and religious-educational centers are widespread. Particularly, toponyms based on religious and honorific titles such as *"bobo"* (grandfather, saintly elder), *"ota"* (father), *"hazrat"* (honored), and *"khoja"* (master, literate man) reflect, to the popular perception, the sanctity of these places and the strength of pilgrimage and devotional traditions linked to them.

The semantic and morphological analysis of these toponyms demonstrates that, alongside linguistic regularities, religious-cultural traditions, legends, and historical narratives have played a significant role in their formation. For instance, place names such as *"Khidirota"*, *"Sadkak Ota"*, *"Nurota"*, and *"Oqterakota"* are directly connected with religious figures or pilgrimage sites and are perceived among the people as sources of blessing, protection, and spiritual intercession.

In addition, phonetic and morphological transformations—such as sound alternations (e.g., *"Hizr"* becoming *"Khidir"*) or affixations borrowed from the Tajik language like *"-on"*, *"-iyon"* (e.g., *"Mughiyon"*, *"Hinduyon"*)—have played an important role in the structural evolution of religious toponyms. This phenomenon demonstrates that interethnic and interreligious cultural interactions are also reflected in the toponymic system of Uzbekistan.

Moreover, the functional roles of religious toponyms extend beyond merely identifying locations; they serve as instruments of cultural memory, as custodians of religious heritage, and as reminders of historical events. Toponyms such as *"Shohi Zinda"*, *"Mir Arab"*, *"Hazrati Imom"*, and *"Khoja Ahror"* function not only as place names but also as religious-spiritual centers. This necessitates analyzing religious toponyms not just as linguistic units, but also as socio-cultural phenomena.

The findings of this study indicate that religious toponyms are not only historical or geographical facts but also linguistic manifestations of the people's beliefs, values, and cultural genetics. Therefore, the study of such toponyms offers insights not only into language but also into the inner worldview and cultural memory of a people.

Conclusion

The widespread occurrence of religious toponyms in Uzbekistan is perceived as an expression of the people's religious-cultural memory, values, and historical consciousness. According to the results of this study, toponyms rooted in saint cults, communities surrounding places of worship, ceremonial locations, and legend-based place names are prevalent. Additionally, phonetic transformations, affixation, and contextual explanations have been shown to play a key role in their semantic and morphological structuring. Religious toponyms constitute one of the essential layers of the people's historical-cultural genetic memory.

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