Ancient Beliefs, Rites and Religions of the Peoples of Daghestan

Radzhabov O. R
Lobacheva Z. N
Mamayeva M. A
Magomedova U. G
Merimova, A. A
Bagliyeva Z. Z
Bigayeva Z. S.

Abstract

Modern achievements of historical science made it possible for the composite author of the article to see into the ancient customs and beliefs of the peoples of Daghestan and reflect an objective picture of the multiform process and the issues of continuity of cultural-historical development. The study of beliefs and rites on the basis of ethnographical materials of Daghestan where paganism had held sway over the mountain dwellers’ world outlook for a long time elucidates the history of the early primitive forms of religions - totemism, fetishism, animism, magic, the processes of forming syncretic beliefs and the original modes of life, spiritual culture and social and ethnic life of the peoples of Daghestan. The analysis and interpretation of the extant beliefs, rites and customs allow revealing the reasons of their coexisting with conceptions of later religions. Islam that has been practised widely in Daghestan since the seventh century comprises a variety of ancient beliefs. But its strengthening as an official religion was much later when it had gained the upper hand over prevailing paganism and Christianity. Islam in Daghestan became a fusion of premonotheistical beliefs and Islamic norms, ideas and rites. It is in effect a belief in two different religions where since olden times the native elements of culture, that is, paganism, have had the role of cementing the spiritual life of the peoples of Daghestan.

The paper makes an attempt at covering a variety of problems of ancient culture of Daghestan, turning away from stereotypes while studying the religious beliefs and finding new approach to understanding of the specific character of the archaic stratum of beliefs, as along with Islam, they were ideological basis in making up and development of the peoples of Daghestan.

Keywords: Ancient beliefs, Islam, vestige, the peoples of Daghestan, paganism, rites, cult, deity, totem, fetish, Zoroastrism, animism, magic, nature worshipping, sepulchre, feasts, customs, Christianity, Judaism.
1. Introduction

Traditions, rites and beliefs play a significant role in the theory and history of culture not just because they are interpreted in all the spheres of social life but because they are inherent in all ethno-cultural complexes and are sociocultural way of keeping, passing on and assimilating people’s cultural heritage.

The problem of continuity of cultural heritage of the past of the Daghestani peoples gains special currency in a transformation situation of the Daghestani society, reappraisal of value orientations. The North-Caucasian region stretching from the Caucasian Sea to the Black Sea, mediating between different cultures and civilizations, being at the major crossing of international transport and communication lines, connecting the West with the East, the North with the South, is the historic region [1].

Chapter 1. Multietnic Specificity of Daghestan

The Caucasus is initially one of the ancient regions of the first settlement of the territory of our country by primitive man, accordingly, it is observed here high density of cultural-historical sites. It is explained not so much by natural and geographical conditions, as the vicinity of the Caucasus with first Asian old-Paleolithic world. In the Caucasus the ancient people discovered mass and diversity of raw materials required for making stone tool (flint, obsidian, etc.), and above all, favourable natural and geographical conditions. Ancient sites in rocky coverts (caves) are the main source of our knowledge about the oldest population of the Caucasus and its culture.

Formation of modern culture of the peoples of Daghestan is a difficult and contradictory process of development for many centuries.

Under the conditions of accelerated development and globalization of contemporary society the danger of estrangement of the Daghestani society from its historical roots became real. Daghestan is a unique republic in its own way, where there is no “state forming” nation. Among the Daghestani peoples are: the Avars, the Dargins, the Laks, the Tabasarans, the Chechens, the Nogais, the Rutulians, the Aghuls, the Tsakhurs, the Tati, the Azerbaijani. The peoples of Daghestan speak the languages that belong to three language groups: Iberian-Caucasian (Avars, Lezghins, the Darqwa people, the Tabasarans, the Rutulians, the Aghul people, the Tsakhur people, the Chechens); Turkic (the Kumyks, the Nogais, the Azerbaijani); Indo-European (Russians, Tati, the latter speak the language belonging to the Iranian group). There are three religions that are traditionally professed in Daghestan: Islam, Christianity and Judaism. In Daghestan there are more independent linguistic ethnics. The Avarian nationality comprise fourteen more ethnics living compactly in upland mountains: the Andians, the Archin people, the Akhvaks, the Bguans, the Bezhta, the Botlikh people, the Hinukh people, the Godoberi people, the Gunzipts, the Didoi, the Karata people, the Tiptons, the Kvarshi people and the Chamalal people. Two more linguistically independent and compactly living ethnic groups are referred to the Dargin people: the Cubachi people and the Kajtak people [2]. Hence, multilingual Daghestan is a unique place of cross-cultural influence and succession where there are represented different cultural, religious and social forms of life organization: traditions, customs, rites, etc.

The roots of modern Daghestani culture go back to the distant past. Archaeological, ethnographical, folkloric sources are indicative of it. For many centuries material and spiritual culture of the peoples of Daghestan has achieved a high level, interactively developing with the cultures of the neighbouring countries of the Caucasus, the East and Asia [3]. It is well known the peoples of Daghestan to have been engaged in heathen practices till penetration and propagation
here of monotheistic religions (Islam, Judaism and Christianity). The evidence of it is not only the written sources and literature, but also vestiges of extant beliefs that have totemic, fetishistic, magic conceptions at their core.

Chapter 2. Early Forms of Beliefs and their Manifestation in the Culture of the Daghestani Peoples

The ancestors of the peoples of Daghestan, as of many peoples of the world, tried to explain away the world around without knowing the laws of nature and social phenomena. The most ancient monuments of the late Stone Age have been preserved in the sanctuary of Chariton in the mountains of Daghestan. On the wall of the hard-to-reach grotto here is the goddess of fertility with the whole group of Domestic and Wild animals painted in red colour. The figulines of the goddesses of fertility have been found in the settlements of Velikent, Jemikent, in Derbent. There appear the dedicated sacred places in the territory of the settlements or thereout (Galgalalı 1).

The prevalence of the phallic cult embodying the cult of machismo on the monuments is connected with the adoption of patriarchal structure and predominating position of males.

All the nature seemed to be filled with countless spirits. Good spirits ostensibly helped people, evil spirits did damage. People tending to explain abstruse phenomena created some superstitious, inaccurate impressions and the rites that were intended for propitiation of deities and spirits. The latter were the part of pagan beliefs that had held sway over consciousnesses and modes of lives of the peoples of Daghestan until monotheistic religions and the most widely practised Islam in particular.

In the second millennium B. C. the Daghestani tribes used to have the pagan beliefs of the afterlife, the evidence of which are the data of numerous burial place. The religious beliefs of the inhabitants of Serir (Avaria) are reflected in the burial rite described by the Arabian geographer ibn Rosteh “All the dwellers of the fortress are the Christians, and the entire people of the country - the Gentiles... They all worship the wizened head. When one of them dies, they put him on the stretcher (janaza) and carry him out to the open place (maidan), where he is left on the stretcher for three days. Then the inhabitants mount their horses and array themselves in armour and chain mail. They ride to the edge of that place and rush with their horses from there to the dead body lying on the stretcher. They make circles round the stretcher, directing his horse onto the body but not piercing it” [4]. In some sepulchres there were discovered a multitudinous and varied implements. Imagery of horses and carts has been preserved on the wall of stone box of the Berikeysk sepulchre and among rock carvings near the town of Buynaksk [6]. In the sepulchral vaults, stone boxes or group pits of early medieval burial grounds of Dagestan there were found out apparent signs of the non-Muslim and non-Christian burial rite: the skeleton being directed to the north-south, accompanying equipment, the presence of the vessel with the meal for the repose of soul. Pagan burial ceremonies recorded in the crypts the Gapshimin sepulchre (Akushinsk district, VIII century), upper Karanay (Buynaksk district, V-VII centuries), near the village of Shadroda (Botlikh district. VI-VIII centuries), the Kulinsk sepulchre (Kulinsk district, XI-XIII centuries), etc.

Some beliefs were originated from the established settled way of life. Among there is a cult of the hearth, the existence of which can be judged from the findings of various offerings around the furnaces inside homes; it was also common practice to bury large vessels or the skulls of bulls nearby the thresholds or hearth. At the same time there was a custom of offering up construction sacrifice, when before the start of building or at the angle or the wall of a built premise there was laid the head of a sacrificial animal.

“Pir” means saint, Suleyman is a proper name that comes from Bible king Solomon but in Arabic pronunciation. The Pir of Suleyman is a line of columns covered with domes. Like mount Shalbuzdag, the religious place was on Mount Zuberhi, near Gergebel. In the southern Daghestan, there are many so-called “pirs” – the places of the buried saints. There are two of such monuments
on Mount Shalbuzdag. They are called the Pir Suleiman. “Pir” means holy, Suleyman is a proper name that comes from the biblical Solomon in the Arab pronunciation of the name. The pir of Suleyman is a line of columns, covered with domes. Like Mount Shalbuzdag, the place of religious worship was on Mount Zuberhi near Gergebel.

Undoubtedly, the mountain dwellers had also a very old cult of stones and rocks. Being upland inhabitants, in the vicinity of the boulders, the mountain dwellers saw in some of them, which were different from the usual stones in colour, shape or size, the appearance of unknown formidable forces. There had been boulders in the fields of the settlement of Tabakhlu roadside to Kumukh until recently, as well as in Tsovkrints in the road to the Dargins. The local residents who had had one of their dearest wishes fulfilled, smeared that boulder with fat [5].

Faith in the afterlife, the deification of the forces of nature, the heavenly bodies, etc. were in the minds of a large segment of the population. Echoes of these beliefs can be considered an expression like “may a star strike you!” preserved in the Daghestani language.

The mountain dwellers used to keep vestige of the belief in the “brownie”, “granary spirit”. According to the Laks, “Kini” is a good spirit of the house, but a passive one which makes the house better just by its presence. “Kini” was believed to behave calmly, only occasionally catching people's eyes, in a happy home which is destined to wellbeing. But if “Kini” let out some sounds, that it was thought to be going to leave the house, and the house would be defenseless without it. The sounds of crickets were taken as the noise produced by “Kini”. Thus, it was believed that there was an urgent need to cook halva, as the smell was very pleasant and “Kini” was likely to change its mind and stay in the house. The travelers who visited Dagestan in early twentieth century observe the persistence of these beliefs in some peoples: “We have heard about brownies only in Kazikumukh and Avar districts; they call them Su-lu-Hasu”[5]. According to the name, it is the spirit of the corn bins and protects them. The people’s notion of “suluhasu” characterizes the spirit as evil not only in relation to other people, but also to the inhabitants of the house in which it occasionally attacks and strangles them. The nature of “suluhasu” to strangle the human, especially the sick one, brings him to the Kumyk “bastryk” and Dargin “chibilkhvan”. The faith in the spirit of the house and bins is a vestige of very ancient beliefs of the people associated with that period of history, when people being helpless before natural phenomena were in deep-rooted fear and believed in good and evil spirits which helped or destroyed them [5].

The cult of ancestors to be thought the home patron was of particular importance for the whole of the Caucasus as well. This was associated with the notion of ancestral spirits, being supposedly able to affect the lives and well-being of their posterity. Many believe in the immortality of the soul, in its transformation, in the existence of evil and good spirits, having, in their view, the power over people and nature. It is a continuation of the good indisputable, respect and respect for elders, especially of elders, the peoples of the Caucasus.

Totemism is the religion of more developed tribal system. It was spread once among the ancestors of the peoples of Dagestan. People imagined that animals of a particular species were their relatives, ancestors - progenitors. On that ground, the peoples were usually called by the name of a totemic animal, the latter were thought to be his patrons and helpers.

Ancient vestiges of the peoples of Dagestan are also the traces of the veneration of some animals and birds. Almost all the mountain dwellers who worked on the land in the main preserved the worship of the bull. Among the burial items of Mugergansk burial ground there has been found the skull of a bull that is indicative of revering the animal as one of the symbols of fertility. The legend of Kubachins tells of bull as a totem-patron. At the spring and summer folk festivals the Kubachins used to play the comic scenes with masks resembling beast-like animals, and Rutuls Tsakhurs used to dress up in bears’ and wild goats’ skins and staged hunting.
The mountain dwellers treated certain types of birds with reverence and some superstitious fear. Dove was considered sacred. Kumyks showed their superstitious attitude to owl. If an owl flew close to the house, the mistress of the house, concealing her fear, addressed the owl with affectionate greetings and best wishes. Swallow was especially revered by the peoples of Dagestan. Swallow’s arrival was always greeted cordially. She could make a nest anywhere in the house. Kumyks used affable expressions of addressing to swallow. From poultry, the peoples of Dagestan endowed cock and chicken with sacred properties. Meat of black chicken and rooster was used as a healing remedy. The cock’s screech, horse’s roaring, dog’s howling at an inopportune time were considered by superstitious people as a warning of impending disaster. Chicken egg and eggshell played a significant role in popular superstitions among the religious Avars, Kumyks, Tats and the others and served as amulets [4]. Today, in Gumbet villages in the courtyards, gardens and apiaries there one can see the skulls of animals and eggshells as the signs that are to take away misfortune and “the evil eye”. In ancient times the Tats used to have a chicken’s egg as a protective means - talisman. When the messenger came to the marriageable girl from the bridegroom before their wedding, an egg was cracked onto his horse’s forehead – it was believed to ward off “the evil eye” from the upcoming wedding ceremony.

The peoples of Dagestan have been using the names and nicknames of good and evil spirits so far. Kumyks are the most tenacious of “albasty klatyn”, “bastryk”; Tats have “numnegir”, “ver-ovl”, “dedey-ol”. These spirits are known as detrimental. They were believed to cause disaster, illness and death, particularly to woman in childbirth and newborn. They believed in the existence of evil forces. And today there are tenacious ideas of the existence of various devils, house spirits to bring harm to people. Some retrograde people believe in the power of the “evil eye”, “putting hex”, “evil curse”, retain various superstitions and prejudices [4].

The mountain dwellers also believed in the supernatural power of animals. The Daghhestani folklore and legends very often alluded the supernatural power of bear, lion, wolf, aurochs, dogs, and so on. The Daghhestani peoples used to give their children names in name of the animal and plant kingdom: Aslan, Galbats, Goplan, Benevsha, Gul’. Of interest are double names occurring and ever: Piumar, Galbatstmagoma, Batsmagoma and so on. The custom of giving such names was apparently connected with a desire to impart the power and beauty of the animal and vegetable world to children. In the Avar aul of Machado in the old days there they used to hang up the wolf skins as a mascot in the bee-gardens. They hung a wolf tooth strung on a thread upon the neck of the child for “luck”. The Didoi used to hang the bear's paw in the barns and stables to have cattle better breeding.

Until now, in the minds of the Daghhestani believers there is a fear of elemental forces of nature: earthquake, eclipse of the Sun and the Moon, flood, drought. Laks worshiped the god of the Sun. In the pantheon of the gods, he was presented as a handsome youth, illuminating and warming the whole world. The eclipse of the sun was considered to be a misfortune and explained by the fact that God angered with people flattened the sun and the moon with forceps, trying to extinguish them. When the eclipse of the moon occurred, in the Lak auls there they hit copper ware, fired guns. In the night time of the eclipse women pierced silver coins and sewed them over the backs of their children for them to be happy. Thunder, lightning, rainbow have been arousing superstitious fear in majority of the mountain dwellers so far.

The cult of Zoroastrianism has left a deep trace in the customs, the legends and beliefs of the peoples of Dagestan. Like any other religion, Zoroastrianism has acquired local features in Dagestan.

The ancestors of the peoples of Dagestan, as well as the ancestors of the peoples of the Caucasus have a very developed cult of fire veneration. In many ways, if not completely, it was associated with Zoroastrianism. This multi-layered, contradictory and amorphous ethical and philosophical system “Avesta” had a significant impact on the worldview of many peoples of
Daghestan. Dagestan historians see this effect in the rite of the Kubachins. According to the Arab geographer of XII century Abu Hamid Andalusia, when a human died, Zirehgerants (Kubachins) separated the meat from the bone and gave it to be eaten by crows. Apparently, there was a view to preclude disease. It is well known that Zoroastrianism forbids burial and burning of corpses, believing that it could desecrate the earth and fire. It enjoins to throw the body out on the high mountains to be eaten by predatory animals and birds.

The fire is especially revered. Supernatural and purgatorial power is attributed to it. Not coincidentally, perhaps, the Daghestani people kept up the fire in the hearth, in front of him they took oaths before it, associated well-being with it. They expressed their desire with words: “Let the fire protects you”. Among them, there still exists a wish “Let the fire never goes out in your house”. The bride was escorted by fire, and on entering the groom's house, she had to bow before the fire and throw a piece of fat into it. That is why fire was considered an attribute of the family and ancestral worship. According to the legend of the Daghestani, particularly Azerbaijanis, Lezgins and mountain Jews, fire was a curative and purgatorial power. The dark forces of evil were “fought back” with its help, thick men were carried over it, the livestock was led through it. The superstitions of the Lezgins did not allow to get the fire “defiled” in any way. And the name of the chief god of ancient beliefs of the Lezghins was identical to the name of the god of water in Zoroastrianism. The Lezgins called him Alpanom and the zoroastrists - Apam. The Rutuls and the Tsakhurs also consider the fire sacred. The Rutuls call the highest mountain peak “Tsaylakhan” a place of fire. They have the god of fire naming him Gynysh [8].

Our explorers find the traces of the Zoroastrian beliefs in the neighbours of the Lezgins – the mountain Hebrews – the Tats. They have been swearing by fire so far. They have spring called “Vasal”, and the making a fire in honour of the feast of spring “Shagli Vasal”, which means “candlelight of spring”. Большое значение могли иметь в тех условиях его моральные возререния и нормы, в особенностях связанные с понятиями добра и зла. These facts are rather convincing of the fact that Zoroastrianism in Daghestan is widespread and has played a significant role in the expansion of the concepts of a number of peoples about the Universe, Earthly life and in the development of their philosophical, cosmological and social and moral beliefs [7]. We cannot agree with those who do not see the positive ideas of concepts and notions in Zoroastrianism. The people’s moral beliefs and standards, in particular those related to the concepts of good and evil might be of vital importance in the circumstances.

Many of the mountain dwellers still believe in the divine and purgatorial power of fire and water. The veneration of earth, fire and water was rested upon real properties as the sources of vital goods. But fire appeared much more often in the beliefs of the peoples of Daghestan. They blessed by fire, they cursed by fire. Today the bride’s seeing off to the house of the groom with torches, lamps, candles is also associated with fire. The most terrible swearing was considered the curses: “May the fire goes out in your home”, “never collect the ashes from the hearth”. Fire, hearth were considered sacred in the house. Healing and protective powers against evil spirits and diseases were attributed to fire. A blessing by fire was believed to be kind regards: “May there always be a fire in your hearth”. Fire appeared as a deity in some Daghestani peoples’ beliefs. It appeared as pagan deity “Gutsar”, “Alpan” in Lezghins, in the Rutuls beliefs “Ganysh” is associated with fire. In the night time of the spring equinox the mountaineers kindled great fires, the aim of which was to help spring ward off the winter and come into its own. A mighty healing power was ascribed to fire. Small wonder that every year in the night time of the spring equinox all mountaineers up to the sick and elderly people considered it their duty to jump over the fire [10].

Widespread in the ancient Daghestan were the cults of dying and reviving nature. In the aul of Bashli the youth performed the rites being reminiscent of ancient oriental cults of the dying and reviving god of vegetation to celebrate the coming of spring. The boys pricked out a rooted young tree, decorated it with greenery and ribbons. The worshipers with the tree went from house to
house greeting people with spring set in. And in the aul of Zaza the childless mothers went to see the sacred tree. They tied beautiful rags to the tree and begged for a happy event.

One of the oldest traditions in Daghestan was the custom of hospitality. “May not such day arrive that a guest may not arrive!” the highland proverb says. Also, there was a custom of kunachestvo when the guest and the host became sworn brothers. The most ancient custom was holding the older generation in high esteem. “The people who do not respect old age have no future”, the mountaineers said. There were also the other customs: fosterage (adoption), sworn brotherhood, blood feud, etc. [2].

Various magical ideas bulked large in ancient religious beliefs of the peoples of Daghestan. They commonly resorted to magic practices by rainmaking to have land fertile and high cattle yield. The archaeological and ethnographic research, the analysis of the relics show that the ancestors of the peoples of Daghestan widely resorted to the practices of protective, malicious and love magic. They believed in possibility of affecting the supernatural powers in the direction desirable for man, i.e., protecting man from evil spirits or destroying him. Many techniques have continued to be practised by the mountaineers to this day. So, the hair of the newborn child from the first haircut were not thrown out, but usually sewn into the child’s headdress. The lost teeth were not thrown anywhere, but only to a certain place: the slot in which the rod holding the gate rotates. Magical views of the unity of the whole and the part take place in all these cases – one could perpetrate an evil to a person through the cuttings of his hair, nails, and so on.

There were also magical rituals in annual spring farm celebrations. A common ground is labour. According to the ancient custom, the first spring furrow was assigned to the most hardworking farmer who held an established reputation of a man “bringing luck”, whose initiatives of all kinds succeeded. An Avar peasant was a farmer who made the ritual furrow went unshaven, dressed in a fur coat turned inside out with wool out. That was done with the purpose of magic in order the fields were shaggy like the coat and plowman’s hair. During plowing people used to throw clods of earth on the plowman, pour him with water, to cast sweets onto furrow and so on. On festive occasion they baked special ritual bread, pies, organized sporting events in horse racing, shooting, throwing stones, wrestling, sang songs and danced. The peasants through the symbolic magic actions expressed a desire for reaping an abundant harvest in a new crop year. Horse racing and running competitions held on the day of the first furrow originally had also a magical meaning. There was implemented the principle of imitative magic: the plowman’s coat turned out was meant to bring about the thickness of sowing, and running and racing - the rapid growth of vegetation. Similarly, people did not wash the dishes on the first night of spring, believing that if to dish up, the sown would not grow well.

The peoples of Daghestan have a magical rite of obstetrics widespread. In Rutul there was a magical rite which cared of women to reproduce power of child bearing and giving birth. For that purpose woman had to step over the live wolf. The ritual was usually performed in winter. The Rutuls trapped the live wolves and brought to the village. The barren women gathered immediately and overstepped the wolf. According to the beliefs of the Laks, in case of difficult labor it was very helpful undoing the knots, releasing all items from the cases, and so on.

The deities of fertility and rain were brighter in the beliefs of those nations whose farm was mainly agriculture. Interestingly, the ancient agricultural ritual ceremony of “rainmaking” to fight the drought was performed in those mountain villages of Daghestan where the basis of the farm was cattle breeding. So, in remote Avar villages in times of drought, one of the hard-working sheep breeders collected milk from each farm, then he climbed to the house top and poured it down the chute. Thus, land-holders begged the deity of fertility for water. On the places of massive sacrifices and religious rituals there have been found rock solar calendars by M. I. Israpilov on Kegersk highland of the Gunibsk district [8]. He notes that all three solar calendars were known as the places of mass prayers during a summer drought, and the rock calendar as a place of living.
spirits to be offered a variety of sacrifices. Mass prayers in calendars were the elements of long ritual of the Keger people and the Kudali which lasted several days. It was accompanied by heavy sacrifices and ended with swimming of young men in clothes and throwing a frog dressed in brocade into a rural pond. And only a girl who was the daughter of three living mothers (mother, grandmother, great-grandmother) had a right to throw a frog. Although while laying the pebbles in the old pits of the calendar, the old men were reading Islamic prayers. Here the magical rite of rainmaking appears on the background of the worship of the cult of sun. The swimming boys and the frog dressed in brocade in the pond had to draw attention of the Sun and take its pity so that if it did not rain any longer, the water would dry up, and they all would die.

Magical rites took place not only in economic life but also in the family life of the peoples of Daghestan. Some of them such as: seeing the bride to the groom's house with lighted lamps, candles, showering her with sweets, grains, giving a dollop of honey, boy’s sitting on her knees and others have been kept today. Fire of home hearth was supposed to preserve the girl on the way to the groom's house, and the fire brought to her new home was protecting for a time.

A curative magic also played a significant role for the peoples of Dagestan. It is the whole system of healing techniques, spells the aim of which is to “cure” a man from illnesses.

Echoes of the ancient beliefs of the peoples of Daghestan were various superstitions. The world for a superstitious mountaineer was inhabited with the spirits of “jinn” which took actions mainly at night. Human distraction was usually attributed to the scheme of the jinn, so where it happened, people drove a nail from the horseshoe and broke an egg. Iron was here as a talisman: a nail hammered into the ground made the place safe for other people [6].

The werewolf mythological and religious beliefs were widely spread among the ancestors of the peoples of Dagestan. They appeared in the very nature of the primitive world view according to which the properties of animate nature, i. e., human, were spreading over inanimate nature. Therefore, the Sun, the Moon, wind, and other natural phenomena were presented to be living beings [10]. It seems to us that belief in werewolf is an inevitable result of primitive naïve outlook which is based on the functional unity of living and inanimate nature. Misunderstanding of qualitative differences of the latter led to accepting the possibility of their instant inter conversion. The legend of the transformation of people to the will of supernatural forces into the stone stuck in the folk’s mind.

Chapter 3. The Features of Formation of World Religions in Daghestan

Along with the ancient beliefs in V-X centuries in Daghestan there was promulgated Christianity. Christianity had been penetrating into Daghestan through Armenia and Georgia since about IV century [7]. The discovered monuments of Christianity bears evidence of the fact that the religion became widely known in Dagestan, and there were close cultural ties of the population of Daghestan with the peoples of the Caucasus. On many monuments of Christianity in Daghestan there have been found out inscriptions in the Georgian language. The researchers pay attention to the Daghestani peoples, particularly the Avars to have stable Christian traditions [9]. A form of the frontal interior side of the Kazikumukh cathedral mosque can also be an evidence of the existence of Christianity here. Disparity in terms of development between the frontal part as a corner of the Christian church and all the rest construction built in the traditional style of oriental mosques catches the eye at the entrance to the mosque.

Along with Christianity in Daghestan there became also widespread Judaism associated with the resettlement of Jews in the coastal areas of Daghestan at various times and for different reasons.
The spread of Christianity was suspended and later ousted by a new religion - Islam, which was being inculcated in the process of the Islamic conquests, and later - the Mongolian and Turkish invasions, and missionary activity. The conversion from the ancient pagan beliefs and Christianity to Islam was not easy [7].

Almost all Muslim historians say that Islam in Daghestan has been introduced in Kumukh. And the first mosque was built by the very Abu Muslim in 777 P. E. Perhaps the Kumukhs had converted to Islam earlier than their nearest neighbours. According to the facts, the Kumukhs had accepted Islam, but the neighbouring auls adhered to their old belief. For example, at a distance less than one kilometer from Kumukh there is located the aul of Ubra. At a time when Kumukhs were considered to be Muslims, Ubrints remained Christians.

Islam was first to have strengthened its positions in southern Daghestan. It had covered Derbent, a part of Tabasaran and Lakza (the Lezghins) by X century. In the mountainous regions of the central and north-west of Daghestan the Muslim religion became firmly established much later. In the territory of Tuman (Laks), it penetrated in XI-XII centuries. At the end of the XIV century the dwellers of the mountainous Dargin areas were non-Muslims. The inhabitants of Kubachi adopted Islam at the beginning of the XIV century. The process of Islamization of DagHestan was ended in XV century. Islam became established in all the feudal estates and communities, became an official religion [7]. The above material gives evidence that the peoples of Daghestan had various religious beliefs. It took about nine centuries for the peoples of Daghestan to substitute the local religious beliefs for a new religion - Islam.

**Summary**

One of the features that characterize the cultural life of the multinational Daghestan is its ancient religious beliefs and representations. Ancient beliefs and practices reflected the dependence of people on the surrounding natural environment, indivisibility of man and nature; religious trying to find the sense of the causes of birth and death of man; belief in spirits on the will of which luck in hunting depended; veneration of the elemental forces of nature; belief in the magical power of stones, words, etc. The disintegration of the tribal relations, the union of tribes and the contacts with neighbouring cultures had created conditions in which religion offered the ideas of the spiritual world and the salvation of man through the possibilities of achieving perfection. Zoroastrianism had become such religion which left a deep trace in the customs, legends and beliefs of the peoples of Dagestan.

Significant changes associated with the formation of state institutions in the territory of Dagestan led to changes in the spiritual life of the society. The Christianization of the population of seaside Dagestan by the Albanian and Armenian missionaries contributed to the spread of Christianity in the territory of Dagestan.

Along with Christianity, in Dagestan there became widespread the Jewish religion among the settlers of Jews in the seaside regions of Dagestan.

The practice of Christianity was suspended and later expelled by a new religion - Islam, which was being implanted during the Islamic conquests, and later - the Mongol invasions, and the missionary activity.

**Conclusion**

Peaceful coexistence of Judaism, Christianity, Islam and paganism is probably the reason for the approval of regional traditional religious tolerance in spite of the social and ethnic diversity of the peoples of Daghestan.
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