THE COMMON TRADİTİONS AND VALUES OF TURKİC PEOPLES: FOLK CALENDAR (BASED ON THE MATERİALS OF CRİMEAN TURKS)

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ABSTRACT
Throughout history, humans have sought to create systems to structure time in order to understand their past, present, and future, as well as to comprehend the world around them. Observing the movements of the moon and the sun, they developed their own calendars. Naturally, every culture ties the beginning of its calendar to a particular origin story, often passed down from generation to generation. In the cultural heritage of Turkic peoples, continuity and tradition are deeply rooted and consistently observed. This is supported by research in historical archaeology and cultural anthropology. Many customs found in intangible cultural heritage today serve as indicators of shared values among Turkic communities, even those living in different geographic regions. Although these communities have historically been subject to various ethnogenetic processes, traces of unity can still be seen in collective memory and customary law. In this regard, folk calendars and festivals play an important role and remain relevant subjects of study. The folk calendar is a system of timekeeping based on orally transmitted traditions and practical experience, passed down as cultural heritage by ethnocultural communities. It differs significantly from official calendars, dividing the year, months, and days according to unique logic and terminology. Natural phenomena and agricultural activities—especially those related to farming—often determined the structure of this time system. The Turkic calendar, widely based on the solstices, reflects this logic. Among ancient Turks, a lunar calendar was initially used, while the Gokturks introduced a solar calendar known as the "Twelve Animal Calendar." Overall, the folk calendar is a valuable source for learning about ancient Turkic societies. Contrary to the modern concept of the calendar, the first day of the year for Turkic peoples was the first day of March, coinciding with the celebration of Nowruz. The calendar festivals of the Crimean Turks show a strong resemblance to those of other Turkic groups, including Azerbaijanis. This resemblance is evident not only in the dates and rituals but also in the names of the celebrations. Interestingly, many of these traditions, including those originating from pre-Islamic beliefs, have survived and affirm the genetic and cultural kinship among Turkic peoples.
Keywords: custom, Turkic peoples, Crimean population, calendar, festivals, cultural heritage

INTRODUCTİON

While the culture of every nation is shaped by its millennia-old lifestyle and the natural-geographical conditions of its region, it is also undeniably connected to and influenced by the broader trajectory of world cultural development. In this context, the spiritual culture of the Turkic peoples of Crimea forms both a distinct branch and a foundational part of general Turkic and global cultural history. Crimea—often referred to as the "Pearl of Europe"—has long served as a meeting point for various civilizations and religions. Despite this multicultural landscape, the spiritual culture of the Crimean Turks has remained tightly connected to the broader Turkic tradition.

This article explores the essence of the folk calendar, examining festivals related to agriculture and religion, as well as issues connected to customary law. It presents beliefs and rituals associated with seasonal changes and the division of the year. Special emphasis is placed on spring festivals that mark the beginning of agricultural activities and are intended to ensure a bountiful harvest. Remarkably, these festivals are not exclusive to the Crimean Turks but reflect a pan-Turkic character.

Religious holidays also occupy a significant place in the folk calendar and are particularly emphasized in this study. These holidays, celebrated in accordance with common Turkic-Muslim traditions, were rooted in mutual aid and solidarity among the people.

Another important aspect addressed in the article is the wedding and mourning customs governed by customary law and based on particular stages of life. Most of these rituals have been preserved in the collective memory and passed on to younger generations. These traditions, which promote unity, respect for elders, and social justice within the community, bear the hallmarks of a shared Turkic heritage.

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The main goal of this study is to demonstrate the continuity of cultural traditions among Turkic peoples despite geographic dispersion. The customs related to the folk calendar of the Crimean Turks are analyzed comparatively, revealing similarities with the preserved traditions and festivals of other Turkic populations.

1.Main Section of the Article

The calendar systems used by most of the populations inhabiting the Crimean steppes were heavily influenced by the traditions and beliefs of Turkic peoples, whereas the calendars of the mountainous and coastal Tatars reflected the impact of Greek agricultural practices and the cultures of other local communities. Among these culturally unified populations, the traditional calendar year was historically divided into two major seasons—winter and summer—each of which was further segmented into smaller time periods. For instance, winter was subdivided into four unequal parts:

From mid-December to January 8 (according to the old calendar) – the period of "casting blessings upon the earth";

January 8 to February 18 – the time of strong winds and severe frosts;

February 18 to March 11 – an intense and variable period;

March 11 to March 17 – the time of strong winds again (Kurtametova, 1991, pp. 96–98). This system, shaped over many years through observation, enabled the population to plan in advance both food storage and preparatory activities for the next season.

Although by the early 19th century the Gregorian calendar with four seasons and twelve months became commonly accepted, March continued to be regarded as the beginning of the year in the folk calendar, and the New Year was celebrated on the spring equinox, March 20–21. The autumn equinox was likewise observed on September 23. Religious authorities, however, adhered exclusively to Islamic chronology and the lunar calendar (Kurtiev, 1994, pp. 89–90).

In daily life, especially in household matters, people preferred to follow the twelve-year cycle based on animal names, which was tied to weather forecasting. Additionally, common weather sayings adopted by various cultures were used to predict weather conditions and agricultural yields. For example, a red sunset was believed to indicate good weather the next day, and fog in spring was taken as a sign of a fruitful grain harvest. The division of the year according to animal names reflected a widespread tradition in Eastern folk calendars (Kozlov & Chizhova, 2003, p. 113). It was believed that the animal associated with a particular year symbolized the events and economic conditions expected for that year. Thus, to avoid angering the year's guardian spirit, people would sacrifice the corresponding animal before the new year began.

Alongside the deep-rooted teachings of Islam, pre-Islamic beliefs and associated rituals continued to exist among the local people. Among the nomadic populations of the steppe, a prominent example of such beliefs was the worship of multiple spirits. Though not considered central to the dominant religious worldview, these beliefs were gradually incorporated into Islam as a natural extension. It was commonly believed that jinn, taking the form of humans or animals, caused illness and misfortune. Consequently, an entire system of healing rituals developed, carried out primarily by a particular category of mullahs (Kessel′brenner, 1994, p. 67). Prayers were recited for the sick, and protective texts were written for amulets. This syncretized Islamic culture was widely reflected in oral traditions and folk creativity.

Among the Tatars living in the mountainous and coastal regions of Crimea, the spring season lasted 60 days, from April 13 to June 22. During the festival of Boz Karau (also known as Boz Ozatu), which symbolized spring's first victory over winter and the melting of ice, young people would gather by the riverside, sing songs, burn straw effigies, and throw them into the river—believing that this would hasten the arrival of warmth and ensure an abundant harvest. This period was followed by a 40-day "long summer," lasting until August 1. From August 1 to August 25, the "Aqostos" (August) period was observed, followed by a 60-day autumn season that lasted until October 26. The next 36 days marked a transitional phase from autumn to winter. Beginning on December 1, the calendar entered a 66-day "Great Winter," ending on February 4. The subsequent 24 days, lasting until April 1, were known as Küçük ("the little ones")—marking the transitional period from winter to spring. The period from April 1 to April 23 was referred to as "Mart" (March), and it was itself divided into three segments (Rebi & Lombrozo, 2001, pp. 46–49).

Among the Crimean Tatars, the Council of Elders played a central role in determining the dates of major celebrations, often based on empirical observation. The most significant calendar festivals were closely tied to livestock breeding or agriculture, depending on the region. Among these, the most prominent were Navruz, Hıdrellez, Derviza, and Yil Gedjesi. Additionally, festivals such as Sanbatuy, Narduqan, and Ciyen were also widely celebrated by the Tatars. The earliest of these, Narınkırt, marked the beginning of the agricultural season. The festival cycle began with the New Year celebration Navruz, held on the spring equinox (March 20–21) (Kurtiev,1994, p. 99). It was believed that the roots of this celebration traced back to ancient times, symbolizing the awakening of nature in spring. The celebration consisted of three phases: bidding farewell to the old year, welcoming the new year, and preparing for spring fieldwork (first furrow ceremony).

Preparations would begin a week in advance. Women would clean and whitewash homes, and prepare symbolic dishes such as boiled eggs (representing new life), baked kobete pastries, and sweet cookies. On the eve of the festival, bonfires were lit to burn old belongings, followed by sprinkling water on one another and jumping over the flames—rituals symbolizing purification by fire and water. After sunset, groups of boys would dress in symbolic masks, one of which would always depict a goat, symbolizing one of the 12 years in the traditional animal calendar cycle. Children holding flowers and branches would knock on doors singing songs, and women would come out and offer them sweets (Studenetskaia, 2014, pp. 158–159). Notably, similar customs are still practiced in Azerbaijan during Novruz.

On the day of Navruz, it was customary to visit cemeteries after communal prayer, recite remembrance prayers, and ask the Creator for a fruitful harvest. The holiday table included boiled eggs, halva, kobete pie, and homemade noodle soup with seasoned chicken. It was believed that if the noodles “escaped” (i.e., overcooked) during preparation, the year would be prosperous. Boys and girls, dressed in red garments, would again go door to door collecting food and singing songs. In the evening, girls would gather for divination rituals. One widespread form of divination involved placing personal jewelry in a jug, drawing water from the river, and secretly burying the jug beneath a rose bush. This was done days or even weeks before the festival. On New Year’s Eve, the jug was unearthed, and a young girl (or sometimes a boy) would draw out the items one by one. A fortune-teller would then open a book, considered a “book of fate,” and interpret what the year held for each participant (Zaatov, 2009, p. 5).

The New Year gathering concluded with the first furrow ritual. Men would prepare tools and seeds in advance and clean the stables. The most respected elder of the community would recite a prayer in the fields, then make the first furrow and cast a handful of seeds onto the earth, symbolizing the hope for a bountiful harvest (Kurtiev, 1996, pp. 24–34).

On May 6 (April 23, Old Style), the Hıdrellez (Khidr Elias) festival was celebrated, marking the start of the agricultural year. From this day onward, all fieldwork would begin. After Hıdrellez, Crimean shepherds would take their herds to mountain pastures. In preparation, housewives would perform thorough cleaning and bake round bread called gelekek. In the evening, the entire village—men and women—would gather for a community celebration. A fire would be lit near the mosque after evening prayer (symbolic purification by fire). The most respected villager would light the fire, and young people would jump over it while chanting magical formulas. At night, children would rub garlic on their heads, mouths, and feet as a talisman against evil forces. Housewives would sprinkle a handful of wheat on the windowsill and burn a small fire, then let its smoke pass over livestock brought from the stables, believing this would protect them from the evil eye. On the morning of the festival, the lady of the house would milk the cows and sprinkle the milk at the stable entrance as a symbol of abundance. Afterwards, families would go on pilgrimages and offer sacrifices, typically rams (Studenetskaia, 2014, pp. 163–164).

One particularly interesting custom was associated with matchmaking. During the celebration, the communal dance known as Khoran was performed, with participants forming a circle. Boys would build swings for girls, and these interactions often led to marriages, with the consent of the families (Kurtiev, 1996, pp. 34–36). The festival called Gendjez Mayram was a widely recognized calendar event among pastoralists. Held at the beginning of summer, it coincided with the shepherds’ return to the pastures. Traditional competitions such as archery, as well as folk dances and songs, were performed.

On the autumn equinox (typically September 22), the Derviza festival marked the beginning of fall and the completion of the harvest. In some regions, the festival was known as Kürkekend. By this time, all agricultural work would be finalized, and the sowing of autumn grains completed. Shepherds would return from the mountains, accounts would be settled, and wedding season would begin. On the eve of the celebration, following thorough cleaning, women would bake kobete bread. On the morning of the holiday, boys would clean the stables, burn the waste, and cleanse the area with smoke, while well-dressed girls would scatter the ashes across the fields. Residents of several neighboring villages would gather in a designated festive area. The celebration would begin with prayers and sacrificial offerings (Kurtiev, 1994, pp. 98–100).

The Role of Young Girls in Announcing the Holiday and the Beginning of Winter Celebrations. In Crimean Tatar tradition, it was young girls aged between 10 and 12 who would herald the beginning of the holiday. They would wear sheepskins, perform traditional music, and symbolically declare the approach of winter. These celebrations featured public fairs, contests among singers, poets, and dancers, and were concluded with the "Khoran" dance, much like in the Hidrellez festivities.

Winter Solstice and "Yıl Gedjesi" (New Year's Eve)

The winter solstice marked the celebration of the onset of winter and culminated in the holiday known as Yıl Gedjesi, which signified the closing of the annual festive calendar. This was considered a family-oriented holiday, known under different names across regions—for instance, along the southern coast it was called Kalenda. For Kalenda, housewives prepared a special dish made of chicken and boiled rice, topped with a boiled egg when served. Halva was a mandatory dish for the festive table. Before sitting at the table, the family would secretly mark one another's faces with soot taken from beneath the cooking pot, initiating the festive amusement.

Boys dressed in fur coats and paraded through neighbors' courtyards chanting "Kalenda, Kalenda!" in unison, receiving sweets in return. Girls sang traditional songs, and during the evening, young men would often secretly visit the girls they loved to seek their consent for marriage. If the girl agreed, the boy would present her with a piece of coal—a symbolic gesture that she was to become the mistress of his future household (Bonch-Osmolovskii, 2005, pp. 54–56).

Marriage Customs Among Crimean Turks

Marriage ceremonies among Crimean Turks involved a series of well-structured traditions: engagement, gift-giving by the groom, evening dress-cutting for the bride, the bath ritual and her preparation, the bridal farewell night, the groom's ceremonial bath visit with friends, horse races, drafting the marriage contract, dressing the groom, the wedding proper, the "shir" night, and the gift-giving evening. The organization of these events was entrusted to an experienced figure—çırakçı (master of ceremonies), often from a modest social background. (Beym, 2011, p.pp. 72–76).

Prior to the wedding, the marriage contract (shetar) was prepared in accordance with tradition. With the presence of honored guests and witnesses, the shetar was drawn up—a form that remained unchanged for centuries. All dowry items were inventoried, and the contract was compiled in two categories. Jewelry (gold, silver, diamonds, and other precious stones) was appraised and included in the contract, making the husband accountable for them. Other items such as clothing were listed without appraisal. The marriage contract was considered a mutual agreement between the bride and groom regarding their property and ethical rights and responsibilities (Polkanov, 2004, p. 35).

The contract consisted of a prologue and three main parts. The prologue referenced various verses from the Holy Scriptures. The first and central section addressed the wedding ceremony and mutual obligations: witnesses (şoşbinler), guarantors (community elders), location, time, names of the bride and groom, and reigning sovereigns of the country. This portion of the text remained largely unchanged over time.

The second part, şetar-kettubin, involved the detailed inventory of the bride's dowry and her rights within the new household. Dowries typically included silk, gold, luxurious fabrics, and jewelry. The literary form of şetar corresponded to the material richness of the Karaim community and offered a valuable source on their material culture: garments, ornaments, household items, and lifestyle (Kurtametova, 2014, pp. 39–40).

The third part featured the signatures of witnesses and community elders, offering insights into the village's social hierarchy. The manuscript was ornamentally framed and handwritten by clergy (qazzan or shamash) and their assistants (Beym, 2011, p. 77). These early şetars emulated sacred texts and Eastern ornamentation in style. Before the wedding, the bride's brother would read the contract aloud, and it would be signed by the groom and 12 witnesses. The şetar was then sealed in a container, into which a symbolic gold or silver coin was placed. The contract was only to be opened in case of divorce or the death of one of the spouses. It was believed that opening it without valid reason would bring misfortune. The şetar was given to the bride for safekeeping, thereby granting her the right to protect her own and her future children's interests.

During the ceremony, the couple stood on white felt or leather, symbolizing happiness and health. They were showered with coins, almonds, sugar, and grain. At the end, ash was sprinkled on the groom's head to symbolize the transience of earthly life. Clearly, the marriage and wedding were public celebrations.

Engagement and Related Customs

The engagement was the first formal step. Once the couple reached marriageable age, the parents would announce the engagement date. On the appointed evening, married relatives, friends, and elders would gather at the groom's home. The groom, through the qazzan, would declare his intent to be engaged to the girl, and engagement tokens—rings, bracelets, or other gold items—were presented to the bride's father, in return for which the groom's guests received embroidered handkerchiefs (Kurtametova, 2014, pp. 33–42).

Following the engagement, the bride was forbidden to pronounce the groom's name, a prohibition believed to protect her from misfortune. This restriction remained in effect even if years passed before the wedding (Polkanov, 2004, pp. 18–19).

The engagement agreement, made with the consent of the bride, her family, and relatives, was recorded in an engagement register. Although it did not place financial obligations on the groom, it prohibited the fiancée from marrying someone else unless divorced. Dissolving an engagement was easier than ending a marriage and could occur at the request of either party or by mutual agreement, but it had to be sanctioned by the Karaim Spiritual Council, which issued a formal document.

Pre-Wedding Rituals and "Khoncha" Tradition

Weeks before the wedding, the groom's relatives, friends, and acquaintances sent gifts—khoncha (literally "gift" or "dowry")—to the bride. These included fabrics, toiletries, and household items. The çırakçı, accompanied by musicians, delivered these gifts along with sweets to the bride's home. The items were added to her dowry and used for sewing her wedding dress. The bride's mother would present the çırakçı with a handkerchief and money. Simultaneously, the groom received a reciprocal khoncha avza ("echo gift").

Thereafter, the bride's garments were cut in a ceremonial evening. Women gathered, and garments were cut to music. Poor women and girls were invited to sew the dresses for payment. On the wedding day, the groom sent the bride a bowl of jam and a sweet pink drink called tatly-rakı (literally "sweet vodka"), accompanied by music. Two şoşbin (witnesses) from the groom's party were selected to accompany him throughout the entire ceremony.

The official wedding, lasting several days, began in the evening. Initially, rituals were conducted separately at the homes of the bride and groom. The first day began with the bridal farewell gathering and concluded at the groom's home (Kurtametova, 2014, pp. 37–38).

"Gyzlar Gedzhesi" (Girls' Night) and Rituals of Marriage among the Crimean Karaites

The "Gyzlar Gedzhesi" or "Girls' Night" was considered the bridal night among the Karaite community. On this occasion, specific traditional garments were worn. Girls adorned themselves in velvet dresses embroidered with gold and pearls, sleeveless jackets, ornate caps, and coin necklaces, with their hair styled in multiple thin braids. While the unmarried girls danced to music, the bride would sit quietly in a corner of the room, covered with a valuable shawl. Around midnight, *chiragchis* (ceremonial guides) and *cholchus* (male elders) arrived with their wives to join the celebration. The *chiragchi* would traditionally carry a tray on his head, into which the girls would drop money intended

for the poor. The groom's family would deliver a new veil (*tuvukh*) for the bride, symbolizing her protection from misfortune and evil eyes until the end of the wedding festivities.

Simultaneously, the groom held his bachelor's night (*subay gychesi*), which excluded married men and the bride's brothers. The young men would wander the streets until morning. On the following day, the groom, accompanied by a large group of male friends, would visit a bathhouse reserved for the entire day. Notably, the groom would ride to the bathhouse accompanied by numerous horsemen, with horses hired for all accompanying guests—a procession that could include up to 100 participants.

Upon leaving the bathhouse, all mounted their horses again. The groom was placed at the center of the cavalcade, and as the group approached the bride's home, several riders would break away and race ahead to announce his arrival. The first rider to reach the house was awarded a silk handkerchief, the second a paper one, and the third an onion.

The next day marked the bride's purification ritual, called *gelin-yuvmak* (bride-washing). Female relatives and friends gathered at the bride's home to bathe her. Her hair and nails were dyed with henna, and her hair was braided. By evening, amidst melancholic songs and laments, the bride was dressed and adorned. These songs often reflected on the sorrowful fate and hardships of married women.

On the seventh day of the wedding festivities, the *Bakhshysh Night*—an evening of gift-giving—was held, during which relatives offered presents to the newlyweds. The groom would kneel and kiss the hand and robe of his mother, seated among the women, and gift her a fur coat in a ritual called *ton-yapmak* ("covering with fur"). Those present would throw money onto the coat, which was later gifted to the wedding attendants.

Seven weeks after the wedding, on a Saturday, the young bride would attend the *kenasa* (Karaite temple) for the first time to perform her prayers. Over time, the lifestyle of the Crimean Turks changed, resulting in the simplification of wedding rituals. However, the essential structure of engagement, initial gifts by the groom, the drafting of the marriage contract, the groom's dressing, the wedding ceremony, and festive celebrations remained intact, preserving the spirit of folk tradition.

Birth and Naming Ceremonies

The birth of a child and the naming ceremony also constituted important calendrical rites. The arrival of a newborn was celebrated with joy. On the eighth day following the birth of a male child, a circumcision feast was held. If the child was unwell, the ceremony would be postponed until full recovery. Relatives, friends, neighbors, the *qazzan* (religious official), and the community leader would attend the event. The ritual was usually performed by the *qazzan* or a trained circumciser (surgeon).

During the ceremony, the *qazzan* would recite a prayer beginning with the phrase: "Oghlum dogdy, byanch biz-ge" ("My son is born, this is our joy"). After the circumcision, the symbolic godfather (*kirve*) would carry the crying child out of the room and hand him over to the symbolic godmother, who would pass him to his biological mother. The mother would then take the child to a separate room, feed him, and—according to tradition—weep with him.

Sometimes, birth certificates listed two names for a child. Among Turkic-speaking peoples, nearly any word could become a name—often reflecting the child's character traits (e.g., *Shunuk* – cheerful, *Bürçe* – jealous, *Oynak* – playful, *Qanukey* – stern), physical features (*Alyanok* – rosy-cheeked, *Karamon* – strong man, hero, *Aibeta* – moon-faced), or the circumstances of birth (*Arzu* – longed-for, *Tansyk* – accidental). If parents no longer desired more children, they might name their final son *Toxtamış* ("enough") or daughter *Toxtarı* with similar intent. Identical names for both boys and girls also expressed a desire for a son when given to a girl (Sariban & Shamash, 2011, p. 23).

Parents generally attempted to bestow names that forecasted good health, happiness, or prosperity: *Altın* (gold), *Kumuş* (silver), *Biana* (beloved), *Bice* (princess), *Babai* (father), *Parlak* (bright), *Lamcheri* (shining). Girls' names frequently derived from jewelry: *Göhər* (jewel), *Elmaz* (diamond), *Oynak* (thimble), while boys' names often referenced tools or weapons: *Balta* (axe), *Temir* (iron), *Çöklü* (trap) (Sariban & Shamash, 2011, p. 25).

There was a belief that a child's name could protect them from evil spirits. To deceive malicious spirits, parents sometimes chose intentionally unattractive names such as *Tizek* (manure),

Çekeley (spit), or *Sonuk* (blunt). In certain cases, a sick child would be "sold" symbolically to a relative or another person for a nominal token, and if the child recovered, they would be returned to their family with a new name. Those who "bought" the child assumed the role of second parents, caring for the child's upbringing, education, and general welfare throughout their life (Sariban & Shamash, 2011, p. 26).

Likewise, healthy children from large families were sometimes given to childless relatives upon the advice of community elders. This practice, known as *atalyq* (fosterage), was also common among Caucasian peoples and aimed at strengthening communal unity, mitigating inequality, and fostering reciprocal aid across social strata.

Crimean Tatars also celebrated the initiation of craftsmanship with the *Revan* festival—marking acceptance into a workshop and the beginning of an independent artisan's path. This tradition was believed to date back to the time of Prophet Muhammad and was primarily celebrated in Bakhchisarai, Karasubazar, and Yevpatoria (Bulatov, 1990, pp. 37–39). The festival, held on the outskirts of the city, was attended by nearly the entire population. The space was decorated with carpets, and a central seat was reserved for the *naq* (a religious leader) (Bulatov, 1990, pp. 46–47).

Among calendar-based holidays, religious ones held special significance. For every Muslim, Friday was considered a weekly holy day. From the mid-15th century, every aspect of Crimean Tatar life became deeply entwined with Islamic doctrine. The flourishing of science, art, literature, and education was closely linked to the strengthening of Islam in Crimea. During the Crimean Khanate (1443–1783), the supreme spiritual authority of Crimean Muslims—the *mufti*—was appointed and dismissed exclusively by the Ottoman Sultan. The *mufti* was an indispensable member of the Khan's *divan* (council), regarded as the interpreter of both the Quran and secular laws (Boitsova, 2009, pp. 26–27). He was selected from one of four prominent families known as *shaykhs*. The mufti and his subordinates were responsible for ensuring adherence to Islamic rules, overseeing religious education, and managing schools. Imams (khātibs) in Friday mosques and local village clerics (mullahs) were subordinate to him. The lowest-ranking position in this hierarchy was the *muezzin*, whose duty was to call the faithful to prayer (Zaatov, 2009, p. 93).

Thursday was traditionally reserved for household cleaning, bathing, and changing clothes. At the end of Ramadan, Crimean Tatars celebrated the *Oraza Bayram* (also known as *Uraza* or the Lesser Eid). Beginning on the first day of the 10th lunar month, the festival lasted three to four days. Prior to the celebration, new clothes were bought for children, sweets were prepared, and ancestral graves were tidied. Family members collectively cleaned their homes, bathed, and put on fresh linen. Women dyed their hair and fingernails with henna in preparation for the *Night of Destiny*, believed to determine one's fate for the coming year (Zaatov, 2009, pp. 57–59).

Strict observance of fasting was considered one of the most important Islamic duties. Fasting was not limited to abstaining from food but extended to refraining from worldly desires and actions. Clerics emphasized reciting the Quran during this time. The primary fast was observed during Ramadan, the ninth month of the lunar calendar. High-ranking religious figures in Crimea were responsible for announcing the start of Ramadan, relaying the news to all regions through messengers. During the Crimean Khanate, several devout individuals were appointed to monitor the moon's phases, confirm the start of fasting, and inform all villages. These individuals were honored and exempted from taxes. For 28 days, eating, drinking, and smoking were forbidden from sunrise to sunset, and people prioritized mosque visits.

In addition to prayers, charitable acts and offerings were expected. According to Islamic teachings, there were several forms of alms. Among Crimean Tatars, donating food or fruit from one's harvest—known as *isçura*—was common. Originally meant to support clerics, widows, and orphans, *isçura* later became a state tax during the Russian occupation. From the late 18th century, only wealthy Crimean Tatars were obligated to pay it, with the proceeds often going toward schools and seminaries.

Other traditional Islamic forms of charity also existed. The *zakat* (obligatory almsgiving) required donating 10% of livestock, crops, or wealth to the poor. *Pitir* alms were given on Eid al-Fitr, while *Qurban* alms supported communal feasts during Eid al-Adha. Zakat was considered a religious tax intended exclusively for the needy and was typically levied on the affluent (Zaatov, 2009, pp. 47–51).

Religious and Funeral Customs among the Crimean Tatars

During the fasting period, it was believed that God would fulfill all wishes, thus prayers were recited at night. On the day of the Eid or after the Eid prayer, Crimean Tatars distributed alms to the poor, orphans, and lonely elders in the mosque. On the first day of the holiday, they visited cemeteries and recited prayers at the graves of their loved ones. Upon returning home, they congratulated each other and asked for forgiveness. Children kissed the hands of elders in exchange for sweets and gifts, and there was a customary exchange of sweets among neighbors and relatives.

Every Crimean Tatar was expected to perform the Hajj pilgrimage to Mecca at least once in their lifetime. If someone was unable to undertake the journey, they would send a representative, thereby fulfilling the rite through what was believed to be a valid substitute, or *bedel*. During the Crimean Khanate period, such pilgrimages required considerable financial resources. Preparations for the pilgrimage began several weeks before Eid al-Adha. Each pilgrim publicly announced their intention to undertake the Hajj through town criers and requested that anyone with unsettled accounts approach them. Farewells were exchanged with relatives, including those living far away. Before departure, a communal feast (*ehsan*) was held, inviting even residents of neighboring villages (Boitsova, 2009, p. 33). After receiving blessings and saying farewell, the pilgrim would set out on a journey lasting up to a year and a half. Those who died in Mecca were considered chosen by God, and monuments were erected for them near mosque walls in Crimea. Returnees were honored with the title *hacı* (pilgrim); the entire village would greet them, kiss their hands or hems, and regard them as "signs of God."

Hospitality, caring for the sick, and organizing funerals for the poor were considered religious duties. Greeting passersby was an established norm, as it was believed to express reverence toward God (Gankevich, 2005, pp. 241–242). Respect for elders was obligatory and considered part of customary law. Crimean Tatars adhered strictly to all moral principles, especially during Ramadan (*Uraza*), inviting strangers and travelers for dinner and to stay overnight. In earlier times, special houses for the sick, supported by the collective efforts of villagers, were common. All deceased were treated with equal honor, as it was believed that wealth and poverty only distinguished people in life, and no one knew who would be more honored in the afterlife (Gankevich, 2005, p. 244). It was also believed that tombstones should not differ based on social status.

Among the Crimean Turks, funerals were marked by special customs. When a member of the Karaim community died, a friend or specially appointed rider would deliver the sad news to each family. Entering the house, the messenger would say "Başın sağ bolsun" ("May you be consoled"), and receive the reply "Dostlar sağ bolsun" ("May friends be consoled") (Khafuz, 2011, pp. 18–19). All funeral rites were performed by *kabaras*—special individuals—since it was forbidden for relatives to touch the body. Usually, two men or two women conducted the burial. According to tradition, only members of specific tribes could serve as *kabaras*, although by the early 20th century, they were often recruited from among the poorest. Once death was confirmed, a shroud was placed over the body, and the next day, a wooden coffin was brought. The bed was washed and sanitized, and if the person died from an infectious disease, it was destroyed (Kurtametova, 1995, p. 46).

Mourners refrained from eating meat for seven days. On the seventh day, close relatives visited the graveyard, and before sunset, a memorial ceremony was held. The *qazzan* (clergy) conducted a ritual over a black felt or leather cloth to indicate the end of deep mourning (*ai-aktan çıkmak*) and the lifting of certain taboos. Afterward, everyone returned to the deceased's house for the *et-ashı* ("meat meal"). Following the clergy's prayer, a communal meal was served, usually featuring lamb, black mourning halva, *kubete*, boiled meat pastries, and bean sauces. Alms in the form of cloth and money were also distributed to the poor. A 40th-day memorial ceremony followed, where light halva, known as "Khazar halva" or *halva consolation*, was offered in place of the dark mourning halva. It was typically prepared with abundant honey (Studenetskaia, 2014, pp. 163–164).

Eid al-Adha (*Qurban Bayramı*) began on the 10th day of the 12th lunar month, 62 days after *Uraza Bayramı*. Until the mid-19th century, the festival lasted four consecutive days. Traditionally, each family head was obliged to sacrifice an animal, and wealthy individuals could offer several. A *mullah* blessed the animal and later received its head and hide. Sacrifices began in the morning after the Eid prayer. Once the rites were fulfilled, the meat was distributed to the needy. While sheep were typically sacrificed, bulls, cows, or camels were also accepted (Rebi & Lombrozo, 2001, pp. 38–39).

The chosen animal had to be one-year-old and without defects. Its eyes were blindfolded with a cloth, henna was placed on its head, and sweets were put in its mouth. The animal was laid on its left side, its legs tied, and then it was slaughtered. The meat was not washed, but finely chopped, cleaned of wool and bones, and boiled. One-third of the meat was consumed by the family and neighbors, while the remaining two-thirds were given to the poor who could not perform the ritual themselves (Boitsova, 2009, p. 28). Visiting relatives' graves and sacred sites was customary during this time.

In Crimea, the *Aşır-Künyü* (*Ashura Day*) commemorated the martyrdom of Prophet Muhammad's grandson, Husayn. It fell on the 10th of Muharram, the first lunar month, which varied annually and was not tied to Nowruz. On this day, candles were lit, prayers were recited, and a ritual dish of seven required ingredients was prepared. It is known that Azerbaijanis also cooked *hedik* on Ashura. According to legend, Tatars, surrounded by infidels and out of food, found seven different types of ingredients in their pockets, boiled them together, and escaped the siege (Boitsova, 2009, pp. 31–32). These ingredients included corn, processed wheat, chickpeas, beans, dried fruits, nuts, and sweet molasses. Each item was cooked separately, then a pinch of salt was added and everything was mixed quickly before consumption. The dish was also offered to neighbors as *ehsan*. On the holiday, students from the *madrasa* visited homes, sang sacred hymns, and received gifts and food.

CONCLUSİON

As demonstrated, since the early stages of human worldview and the formation of primitive thinking, calendar-related customs, celebrations, and special rituals have consistently existed. As with other Turkic peoples, among the Crimean Turks the folk calendar symbolized the transition from winter to summer, from chaos to order—each marked by specific ceremonial practices. Although some of these calendar festivals were later replaced by religious holidays, they have survived in the collective national memory as traditional celebrations up to the modern day. These festivals not only bear a pan-Turkic character but are still observed among many Turkic communities, including Azerbaijanis.

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