

Economic Lifestyle and Material Culture of the Population of Mirzachul Oasis at the End of the 20th - Early 21st Centuries

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Abstract: This article explores certain aspects of the economic lifestyle and material culture of the population living in the Mirzachul oasis during the late 20th and early 21st centuries. In particular, it examines traditional dough-based dishes, dwelling culture, horse equipment, and customs related to meat consumption. Despite being composed of migrants from various regions, the inhabitants of Mirzachul have preserved culinary traditions that reflect ancient Turkic and Uzbek cultural heritage. The article draws on historical sources such as Mahmud al-Kashgari and Alisher Navoi to analyze the continuity of traditional dish names and preparation methods that have survived into the present day. Furthermore, the study highlights the presence of traditional dwelling terms (e.g., yurts) and equestrian terminology among the local population, demonstrating their cultural and linguistic ties with other Central Asian Turkic peoples.

Keywords: Mirzachul oasis, material culture, dough-based dishes, dwelling culture, yurt, horse equipment, ugra, yupqa, qatlama, Mahmud al-Kashgari, Alisher Navoi, ethnoculture.



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Introduction. The Mirzachul Oasis, situated in the northern part of Uzbekistan, is distinguished by its distinctive natural and geographical characteristics, as well as its unique climatic conditions and ethnographic composition. Historically, the region was sparsely populated due to its arid climate and steppe-like landscape. However, since the second half of the 20th century, large-scale internal migration from various regions of Uzbekistan—especially from the Fergana Valley, Samarkand, Kashkadarya, and Surkhandarya—has significantly transformed the demographic and cultural profile of the area. This influx of diverse populations has contributed to the creation of a culturally rich and multi-layered social environment within the oasis.

One of the most significant aspects of this transformation is the way in which traditional lifestyles and material culture have been preserved, adapted, and transmitted across generations. In particular, elements such as culinary practices (especially dough-based dishes), types of domestic architecture, and customs related to pastoralism and animal husbandry serve as key indicators of cultural continuity and adaptation. These aspects of daily life not only reflect the environmental and economic conditions of the region but also offer insight into the broader ethnocultural identity of its inhabitants.

This article undertakes a detailed analysis of the material culture of the Mirzachul population, focusing on traditional dough-based foods (such as *ugra*, *tutmoch*, and *yupqa*), equestrian equipment, nomadic dwelling types (like *o'tov* and *chayla*), and associated customs. Special attention is given to the way these cultural elements align with historical descriptions found in the works of classical scholars such as Mahmud al-Kashgari and Alisher Navoi. The study demonstrates that many of the traditions described by these historical figures are still actively practiced today, thereby underscoring the enduring nature of Turkic cultural heritage in the region.

Research Methods. This study utilizes a multidisciplinary methodological framework that incorporates historical-comparative analysis, ethnographic observation, field research, and source-based textual analysis. The historical-comparative method is employed to trace cultural continuities between the present-day material culture of the Mirzachul oasis and historical accounts, particularly those documented in classical sources such as Mahmud al-Kashgari's *Dīwān Lughāt al-Turk* and the works of Alisher Navoi. These sources provide valuable insight into the cultural expressions of Turkic peoples in earlier periods, allowing for a diachronic comparison with contemporary practices.

Ethnographic observation plays a critical role in the investigation, focusing on lived cultural expressions such as traditional food preparation techniques, vernacular architecture, equestrian gear, and their functional roles in everyday life. These observations provide direct evidence of how traditions have been maintained, adapted, or hybridized across generations.

Field research was conducted primarily in selected districts of the Sirdaryo region, where qualitative interviews were held with local inhabitants, including elders and culture bearers. Through these interviews, oral histories and experiential knowledge related to foodways, domestic life, and pastoral practices were collected and documented, enriching the empirical basis of the study.

Moreover, an in-depth review of relevant academic literature and lexicographic sources was undertaken to examine the etymology, semantic shifts, and regional variations of key terms and concepts referenced throughout the article. This multi-pronged methodological approach ensures a holistic understanding of the material culture of the Mirzachul oasis, revealing its historical roots and contemporary significance.

RESULTS. The findings of the research underscore the distinctiveness and richness of the material culture maintained by the inhabitants of the Mirzachul oasis. The convergence of diverse cultural traditions—brought by migrants from different regions of Uzbekistan—has facilitated the retention and revitalization of ancient customs that are deeply embedded in the shared Turkic cultural legacy. This dynamic synthesis has given rise to a living heritage in which traditional practices continue to thrive within a modern social context. Notably, the study highlights three key domains in which cultural continuity is most vividly observed:

- **Traditional Dough-Based Cuisine:** Staple foods such as *ugra*, *tutmoch*, *yupqa*, *qatlama*, *chalpak*, *umoch*, and *g'ilindi* are still widely prepared and consumed in the region. These dishes, characterized by their simple ingredients and distinctive preparation methods, bear linguistic and culinary similarities to those found among other Turkic ethnic groups across Central Asia. Their survival attests to the enduring significance of food as a vessel of cultural identity;
- **Dwelling Culture:** Terminology related to traditional nomadic housing—such as *yurt* (*o'tov*), *chayla*, and *kapa*—remains in active use among the local population. These structures, often associated with pastoral lifeways, are not only functional elements of rural existence but also serve as cultural symbols linking contemporary life to ancestral modes of habitation rooted in Turkic heritage;

- Equestrian Equipment and Pastoral Practices: Various items associated with horsemanship—saddles, bridles, reins, and their associated vocabulary—continue to form part of everyday rural life among Uzbeks, Kazakhs, and Kyrgyz communities in the oasis. Their sustained relevance points to the lasting imprint of nomadic pastoralism and the esteemed cultural role of the horse in Turkic societies.

Furthermore, the combined analysis of historical texts and oral narratives illustrates how elements of material culture have been consciously preserved and transmitted from generation to generation. This continuity not only reinforces a collective sense of national memory but also serves as a vital thread connecting present-day practices to the broader tapestry of Turkic cultural heritage.

DISCUSSION. The exploration of the socio-cultural dynamics of the Mirzachul oasis reveals that the region is home to a deeply stratified and multifaceted system of material culture. What makes this oasis particularly unique is the composition of its population—families who migrated from various parts of Uzbekistan during the 20th century and beyond—bringing with them diverse cultural practices, worldviews, and traditions. Despite the challenges of environmental adaptation and cultural integration, these communities have not only preserved their ancestral heritage but have also contributed to the emergence of a vibrant and syncretic cultural landscape. The blending of these diverse cultural layers has transformed the oasis into more than just a multiethnic settlement; it has become a living cultural archive where elements of the past and present coexist in tangible and meaningful ways.

Central to this material culture are several prominent elements, most notably traditional dough-based dishes, vernacular dwelling types, and horse-related tools and practices. These elements do more than serve practical functions—they embody the historical consciousness of the people, reaffirm generational continuity, and reflect deeply rooted cultural connections among Turkic-speaking populations. The persistent use of names and preparation methods for dishes such as *ugra*, *tutmoch*, and *yupqa*, which appear in medieval Turkic texts, highlights the role of culinary tradition as a living expression of identity and memory.

In addition, terminologies such as *yurt* (*o'tov*) and *chayla*, which describe traditional nomadic dwellings, are not mere linguistic remnants from the past. They remain actively used in contemporary vernacular and, in some cases, in actual practice—particularly in rural areas—demonstrating their enduring functional and symbolic significance. Similarly, the shared terminology and practices surrounding equestrian life—such as saddlery and harness-making—underscore the long-standing historical ties between different ethnic communities in the region and speak to the common nomadic heritage that shaped much of Central Asia's social and economic life.

Overall, the research confirms that the material culture of the Mirzachul oasis is not a static remnant of the past but a dynamic, evolving body of practices that continues to flourish. These cultural expressions are passed down through generations, not just as tradition, but as a mode of cultural resilience and identity preservation. As such, the Mirzachul oasis emerges as a vital subject for academic inquiry, particularly in the context of safeguarding and promoting Uzbekistan's broader national cultural heritage.

CONCLUSION. The study of the material culture of the Mirzachul oasis population illustrates that this region is distinguished not only by its distinct geographical and ecological features but also by the richness and depth of its cultural heritage. The confluence of traditions brought by migrants from various parts of Uzbekistan over the past century has fostered a dynamic cultural synthesis. This process has not led to the erosion of traditional values; rather, it has served to reinforce and revitalize a shared Turkic cultural legacy within a modern, pluralistic context.

Of particular importance are elements such as traditional dough-based dishes (e.g., *ugra*, *tutmoch*, *yupqa*), nomadic dwelling types like the *yurt* (*o'tov*) and *chayla*, and horse-related tools and practices. These features are not merely functional components of everyday life—they represent tangible expressions of historical memory, intergenerational continuity, and collective identity among the oasis's inhabitants. Their persistent presence in local customs and vocabulary highlights the enduring strength of cultural traditions even amid social and economic transformation.

Furthermore, the material culture observed in the region, as evidenced through historical texts and preserved in oral traditions, demonstrates remarkable continuity. These cultural forms have been carefully transmitted from generation to generation, maintaining both their relevance and authenticity. This transmission reflects a deep-seated communal respect for ancestral heritage and a conscious effort to uphold national values in the face of globalization and modernization.

Consequently, the material culture of the Mirzachul oasis is of considerable importance not only from an ethnographic or historical perspective but also as a cornerstone in the shaping and affirmation of national identity. Research in this field contributes meaningfully to the documentation, preservation, and dissemination of Uzbekistan's intangible cultural heritage, ensuring that the knowledge and values embedded in these traditions are effectively passed on to future generations.

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