

E. Rezvan, M. Rezvan

THE QUR'ĀN, WOMAN AND HER CLOTHING IN THE MAGIC SPHERE OF CENTRAL ASIA*

Over many centuries, the average European mind was inclined to see sorcery and magic as significant components of Islamic civilisation. It has long been noted that the "image of the neighbour" really does accumulate significant elements of its culture. This image of Islam was formed among Europeans under the influence of the significant scientific and technical superiority of the Muslim world in the Middle Ages, which determined the effect of Muslim philosophy and the natural sciences on medieval European philosophy and science. This image strengthened significantly in the Age of Enlightenment after the astounding success of the "Thousand and One Nights" published by Antoine Galland (1646—1715), which caused a heightened interest in eastern exoticism. The beginning of the colonial era, Napoleon's march to Egypt, and the work of European descriptive scholars in Egypt, Persia, North Africa and Turkey, strengthened the idea of the principle of magic which played an important role in the culture of Islam. Especially as Muslim civilisation in the period of decline provided Europeans with an enormous amount of material connected with the occult.

In Central Asia, like everywhere in the Muslim East, women's traditional clothing was always filled with numerous magic elements, the meaning of which was preserved from antiquity (*fig. 1*). In different situations, certain types of clothing had ritual significance, which frequently changed over time. For understandable reasons, the largest amount of information on this type of customs and traditions dates from the 19th—beginning of the 20th century. At the same time, it is clear that, while they changed in their frequency and specific manifestations, ideas of this type were preserved over many centuries, in the absolute majority of cases going back to the pre-Islamic past of the peoples of this enormous region [1]. Many magic elements were reconsidered in such a way that they served as a constant reminder of the important events of the history of Islam, and important rituals.

The Russian-speaking ethnographic literature makes it possible to gain a certain idea of magic elements in

traditional women's clothing and its ritual use [2]. An entire set of magic ideas was linked with clothes and dresses which touched a person closely and over a long time, and thus "absorbed" certain "energy".

When she went out on the street, along with the veil (*paranja*, from corrupted Arabic *faranjīyya*) woman put on a *chāchwān* (corrupted Persian *chashm band*) woven of horse hair, which covered the face and went down to her hips, knees or waist. This element of clothing accumulated important, often polar magic and ritual meanings. A black *chāchwān* was considered dangerous. Women preferred to cover their face with muslin. After the wedding the *chāchwān* was usually bought by the husbands' father. At the same time, the *chāchwān* also played the role of protection: evil spirits run away from black horsehair. A newborn baby was covered with the mother's *chāchwān*. In the ritual of placing the baby in the cradle for the first time, the cradle was hit with the *chāchwān*, purifying it from evil spirits. The same thing was done when the baby was put in a different cradle or one that had not been used for a long time.

It was not customary to take or to give each other clothing. Above all this concerned the *chāchwān* and footwear. It was believed that another person's sweat or breath could carry unhappiness or sickness. A number of "black magic" rituals were connected with these beliefs [3]. Items belonging to infertile women or women whose children died could be given to another woman, trying to pass on the illnesses and unhappiness with them.

Special rituals accompanied the moment of putting on new clothing. In the collection of the Tāshkent Bīrūnī Institute of Oriental Studies, a work is preserved about determining the day which is suitable for putting on new clothing [4].

The introduction and consolidation of Islam as the leading ideological system in this enormous region could not but affect the magic practices of the most varied kind. The Qur'ānic texts occupied a leading place in protective amulets and on weapons. They were used to decorate luxurious fabrics and worn on clothing. For

* Article is prepared with the support of the "Russian Science Support Foundation".