



## Traces of Trust in Agricultural Saints in the Central Asian Folklore.

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(Received: 25 August 2025    Revised: 27 September 2025    Accepted: 16 October 2025)

### KEYWORDS

Zoroastrianism, "Avesta," agricultural reform, history, ethnology, cultural studies, folklore, literary studies, "Works and Days," "Georgics," "Gardens," "The Village or French Georgics."

### ABSTRACT:

In the Central Asian region, interest in oral literature related to the formation of agricultural professions and their connection with ancient traditions has existed since the 6th–5th millennia BCE. Agriculture, being one of the ancient professions, has long fascinated researchers around the world. Therefore, the subject of agriculture is being studied in depth in the context of history, ethnology, cultural studies, folklore, and literary studies.

It is known that in the Neolithic and Eneolithic periods, certain types of crops such as wheat, barley, millet, and fruits like apricot, apple, and pomegranate were cultivated. Agricultural practices reflected humanity's relationship with nature, and were associated with strength, abundance, and wisdom. Alongside this, specific terms, rituals, and traditional activities emerged. In this context, the agricultural professions of the peoples of Central Asia are being studied based on oral traditions, beliefs, customs, and unique views of life.

### Introduction.

Agriculture has a special place in the cultural life of the world's peoples. It is honored as one of the most ancient professions. That's why research on the topic of agriculture is approached with special attention in global studies related to history, ethnology, cultural studies, folklore, and literary studies.

**Main Part:** The profession of agriculture is believed to have formed in the lands of Central Asia between the 6th and 5th millennia BCE, with its primitive roots dating back to the Neolithic era. Irrigated farming, a more advanced form of agriculture, was established in the early 2nd millennium BCE in the region of ancient Bactria. During the Neolithic and Eneolithic periods, certain varieties of grains such as wheat, barley, and millet, as well as fruits like apricots, apples, and pears, were domesticated.

Agriculture reflects humanity's creative and constructive engagement with nature—through cultivating the land, people bring forth sustenance and abundance by harnessing their physical effort, intelligence, and determination. This intrinsic

connection between man and soil is not only economic but also deeply spiritual and cultural.

The sacred scripture of Zoroastrianism—the Avesta—provides detailed guidance on cultivation practices in its "Vendidad" and "Visperad" sections. Notably, in the third Fargard, verse 4 of the "Vendidad", a profound dialogue takes place between Zoroaster and Ahura Mazda. Zoroaster asks, "Which is the third most blissful place on Earth?" To which Ahura Mazda replies, "It is the land where an Ashavan (righteous one) sows the most wheat, oil crops, and fruit-bearing trees; where men draw water to arid lands and till fertile soil."

The Vendidad describes uncultivated and unplowed land as unfortunate—a land that yearns for the plow. It likens such soil to a beautiful maiden in her prime, longing for union, just as a family desires to marry off their daughter. In this metaphor, the untouched earth awaits a ploughman.

The Avesta also proclaims, "Whoever sows wheat, sows Asha (truth). He strengthens the Mazdaean faith, magnifying it more powerfully than with a hundred praises, thousands of offerings, or tens of thousands of



sacrifices.” This indicates that, during the era when the Avesta emerged, grain cultivation and agriculture were already highly developed, and elements of that ancient agrarian culture have endured to the present day.

Agricultural knowledge and symbolism have been artistically reflected in both the oral and written traditions of many nations. Among the examples passed down through generations are folk expressions that emphasize agrarian themes and the portrayal of the farmer’s character. These traditions are often intertwined with seasonal ceremonies and folk calendars, and they reflect the spiritual beliefs and agrarian cults associated with those who work the land.

It is noteworthy that concepts related to agriculture are also found in a song included in Mahmud al-Kashgari’s *Dīwān Lughāt al-Turk*:

"Yigitlarig ishlatu,  
Yig'ach-yemish irg'atu.  
Qulan-kiyik avlatu,  
Bazram qilib aznalib."

This verse reflects how the idea and significance of agriculture had been acknowledged in various ways since ancient times. From such evidence, we can trace the historical and folkloric development of the agricultural theme and the image of the farmer within that context.

It is a scientifically well-established fact that many nations around the world share common literary genres. However, it would be incorrect to assume that all aspects of these genres have been fully recognized or studied—particularly when it comes to folk songs that depict the lives and labors of farmers. This can be explained by the similarity in human lifestyles across cultures. Naturally, such parallels not only reflect long-standing cultural and economic exchanges among peoples but also point to the shared trajectory of human historical development and the universal patterns underpinning it.

What is especially remarkable is that among Uzbek labor songs, there exist ancient types whose thematic and poetic elements closely resemble those found in the folk traditions of other nations beyond Central Asia. A striking example of this is the genre known as the “Georgica.” The term *Georgica* (from the Greek

*georgos*, meaning “farmer” or “tiller of the land”) refers to didactic literature focused on themes of agriculture and rural life. Such works were prolific in ancient poetry.

Notable examples include:

Hesiod’s *Works and Days* (8th–7th century BCE),

Virgil’s *Georgics*,

Delille’s *The Gardens*, and the so-called French *Georgics* of the 17th–18th centuries.

Later literary works within this genre increasingly emphasized a contrast between rural and urban life, celebrated a deep love for nature, and vividly depicted the cheerful and peaceful existence of the countryside.

In Uzbek folklore studies, the theme of agriculture has been explored within the framework of the following genres:

1. Agricultural songs
2. Agricultural ceremonial songs

The well-known figure of “*Dehqon Bobo*” or “*Bobodehqon*” emerged relatively late in historical memory. The term *dehqon*, meaning someone who tills the land and harvests its fruits, only came to bear this specific meaning after the Arab conquest. Prior to that, the word referred to members of the feudal aristocracy.

Tilling the land, preparing it for planting, sowing seeds, irrigation, and reaping the harvest were considered righteous deeds, and agriculture was regarded as one of the most esteemed professions. These values are also emphasized in Islamic legends, which feature characters such as Adam, Satan, and other figures mentioned in the *Qur’an*. However, the origins of agriculture should not be sought within Islam alone, but rather in the longstanding settled lifestyle and economic structures of Central Asia’s ancient inhabitants, and even earlier in Zoroastrian religious traditions.

The origins of agriculture are often linked to the figure of Adam in folk legends. According to one such tale, Adam and Eve had two sons—Qain and Havel (Cain and Abel). One was a farmer, and the other a shepherd. One day, Qain presented fruits of the earth to God, while Havel offered the fat of his sheep. God accepted Havel’s offering but rejected Qain’s, which sparked



jealousy and resentment in Qain's heart. Eventually, Qain killed Havel in the wilderness.

This story illustrates how agriculture gradually began to displace pastoralism as a dominant way of life.

According to folklore, after Adam was expelled from Paradise and found himself in a state of hunger and hardship, the angel Jibril (Gabriel) appeared before him with a divine command to give Adam the tools necessary for agriculture. Jibril brought from Paradise a handful of wheat, a red ox, a black ox, a plow, and a yoke. He taught Adam how to yoke the oxen, plow the land, and plant wheat. Hence, Adam came to be revered as the first farmer—the spiritual patriarch of all farmers, known as Bobo Dehqon.

However, when Adam tried to yoke the oxen, they would not move. This was because Satan had whispered to them: “Will you obey a human instead of the divine command?” To counter this, God gave Adam a staff made from the Tuba tree of Paradise. Since that time, farmers have used a staff known as gavron to control the oxen while plowing.

When Adam struck the oxen with the gavron, they began to move, but tears fell from their eyes due to the pain. Witnessing this, the angel Jibril stroked the backs of the oxen to ease their suffering. That is why it is believed that even when plowmen strike oxen today, the force of the

blows does not hurt them -Jibril's blessed hands are said to shield them.

This folk narrative, which explains the divine origin of plowing and agricultural labor, is widespread among the peoples of Central Asia.

The origins of wheat cultivation and agriculture in these legends are also associated with Khizr—a figure symbolizing abundance, eternal greenery, and the water of life. As a result, invocations of Khizr frequently appear in agricultural blessings. Moreover, invocations directed at Bobo Dehqon, the spiritual patron of farming, are particularly prominent in rituals tied to agriculture.

"For instance, both the 'Qo'sh Ceremony' and the 'Horn Oiling' ritual are accompanied by specific invocations, wherein the farmer, as a representative voice, appeals to the spiritual patrons of agriculture, seeking abundance and a prosperous harvest:

Amen, may our land be fertile,

May what we sow turn to gold,

May our wheat be plentiful,

May our meals be abundant,

May our surroundings flourish like gardens,

May our sustenance be as vast as mountains.

May Bobo Dehqon grant us prosperity,

And may he bestow blessings upon our harvest!

This Uzbek folk blessing is poetic in form, whereas the following is in prose, distinguished by its rhymed cadence (saj‘):

“Oh my patron, Dehqon Father! May you support us, send down the rains, make the grass sprout, and provide sustenance for our children! May Dehqon Father grant healing and endless blessing. Whatever is left for the worms and insects and the living creatures is not mine! I offer it all for the good of the people, in the name of Dehqon Father, amen.”

Before sowing the first seeds into the soil, such a prayer was usually recited, and the elder farmer would blow on the seeds in his hand three times before casting them into the earth. When sowing the first seeds, it was customary for farmers to dedicate some to the worms and insects.

The beliefs surrounding the figure of the farmer among the people laid the groundwork for the creation of many legends. In the folklore of every nation, there are various legends about agricultural patrons. Through these legends related to farming, one can gain insights into ancient agrarian cults.

It is said that one day, while walking along the road, Bobo Dehqon fell asleep at a certain spot and saw a dream. In his dream, a luminous old man with a long white beard that reached his chest handed him a single grain of wheat and said:

“Take this heavenly gift and take care of it; it will provide sustenance for you and your children. Till the land carefully and sow this seed, may its blessing be abundant!”

When Bobo Dehqon awoke, there was no one around—everything had been a dream. But he felt something in



his hand, and when he opened it, there was a single grain of wheat! He picked up the grain and set off toward home.

On the way, he came across a spring. Feeling thirsty, he bent down and drank handfuls of water from the spring. After washing his face and hands, he remembered the grain. But when he opened his hand, it was gone.

“It’s a shame I lost the gift that Xizr Father gave me. I hope the grain won’t be trampled and wasted,” he thought. So he built a small wall around the spring to protect the area. He also left a small hole at the base of the wall so the water could still flow.

After that, Bobo Dehqon returned to his village. Some time later, on a summer day, he happened to pass by the spring again. As he crossed the hill, he noticed something shining like gold inside the enclosure he had built. When he approached, he saw that a sprout had grown from the very grain given by Xizr Father. It had flourished and ripened, with its full, heavy heads of wheat bowed down under their own weight. Overjoyed, Bobo Dehqon collected the grains, returned to his village, and sowed them in his own fields.

It is said that this is how wheat cultivation and farming first began.

Early perceptions of agriculture were interpreted in relation to the benevolent and malevolent forces of nature. In particular, seeking help from benevolent spirits was considered a priority. This process of seeking assistance was organized in the form of rituals. The gradual development of such rituals is also reflected in the agrarian cults found in the mythology of Central Asian peoples.

Since farmers often used the strength of oxen for plowing and threshing grain, they revered the ox as a sacred animal, a protector, and a helper, and developed a spiritual relationship with it. As a result, beliefs connected with the ox cult emerged among the people.

Ancient humans believed that the human soul resided in plants. Based on these ideas and perceptions, spiritual beliefs about nature, agrarian practices, and fertility cults developed. Specifically, rituals established as a result of belief in and worship of agrarian cults led to the formation and traditionalization of agricultural ceremonies. Consequently, agriculture developed its

own unique centuries-old traditions. The customs and ceremonies associated with it are the result of humanity’s spiritual thinking.

Uzbek folklorist A. Musakulov says: “The significance of fertility cults in human history lies in the fact that all ancient beliefs, religions, rituals, and customs are in one way or another connected to these cults. These cults have also left their traces in Turkic mythology.” The scholar identifies fire, water, and plants as the main objects of fertility cults. The plant cult is one of the manifestations of ancient beliefs. It originated from primitive humans’ perception of plants as living and conscious beings. Primitive people even linked their ancestry to plant totems. Naturally, belief in the plant cult was based on the natural characteristics of plants. For instance, the sprouting (birth), withering (death), and fruiting (reproduction) of plants led people to regard them as living organisms. Especially, the fact that some plants had healing properties, while others could pose a danger to human life or be deadly due to their poison, gave rise to the belief that plants had spirits of their own. Thus, beliefs associated with the plant cult became widespread. Therefore, plant and fertility cults are genetically connected to totemism.

Farmers’ helplessness in the face of nature’s unpredictability led to the worship of natural forces. This worship manifested in various agrarian-magical rituals. At the core of such rituals was the ancient belief in spirits (animism). Farmers sought help and protection from the agrarian cults they envisioned. They wished to reap a bountiful harvest in exchange for their hard labor and prayed for protection from natural disasters. These agrarian rituals connected with belief in spirits were formed before the advent of Islam and involved the deification of natural phenomena and worship of sky and earth deities. Specifically, astral beliefs also played a role in agricultural practices. For example, sunlight and brightness were believed to assist in the germination and ripening of crops. Therefore, the sun cult played an important role as one of the astromythological foundations in the creation of the agricultural calendar. The moon had similar significance. Farmers believed that if the new moon appeared upright like a sickle, the weather would be favorable and would say, “My upright moon is my peaceful moon.” If the crescent lay horizontally, it was



seen as a sign of unfavorable weather and people would say, “My lying moon is my declining moon.”

Among the peoples living in Central Asia, there is still a tradition of revering Adam, Bobo Dehqon, and Khizr as patron saints of agriculture. Especially during ceremonies related to agriculture, prayers and praises are offered in their honor.

In the Uzbek treatise “The Treatise on Agriculture”, it is stated:

“From the time of the noble Prophet Adam (peace be upon him) to the blessed era of the Messenger of God, the Prophet Muhammad (peace and blessings be upon him), 7,777 farmers have passed. All of them were wise, insightful, and masters of the plough, following the precepts of divine guidance and endowed with the power of prayer... Among them, eighteen were known as the ‘Noble Farmers’ (Dehqoni Ashraf). Moreover, 313 of the divinely commissioned prophets also engaged in agriculture.”

The eminent spiritual guides in the history of agriculture are listed as follows:

The first: Abdurahmon.

The second: Abdulqahhor.

The third: Abduljabbor.

The fourth: Abdulaziz.

That is, the first refers to Adam (Safiyullah), the second to Abraham (Khalilullah), the third to Noah (Nabiyullah), and the fourth to Muhammad (Mustafa, peace and blessings be upon him).

The names of the eighteen Noble Farmers (Dehqoni Ashraf) are honorably listed as:

1. Abduljalil Mashriqiy
2. Abdurahmon Shimoliy
3. Abdulkarim Maghribiy
4. Abdulaziz Janubiy
5. Nuriddin Samarqandiy
6. Zaynuddin Sarakhsiy
7. Fazluddin Kulobiy
8. Yormuhammad Hurmuzi

9. Ne’matullah Qunduzi
10. Abdullah Qashghariy
11. Ubaydullah Bukhariy
12. Abdullah Hisariy
13. Abdullah Hamadoni
14. Muhammad Tashkandiy
15. Sultan Khoja Ahmad Yassawi (of Turkistan)
16. Shamsuddin Tabriziy
17. Ali Muhammad Khurasaniy
18. Abdulwahid Baghdadiy

All of these individuals are described as being of noble lineage and endowed with the power of prayer (sahibi nasab wa sahibi du‘ā).

In the agricultural traditions, customs, and rituals of the peoples of Central Asia, the figure of Khidr occupies a prominent place. He is especially considered one who wanders the fields of crops. Farmers have imagined Khidr as a mythical guardian spirit of fertility and abundance—one who ensures bountiful harvests and a prosperous agricultural year. Because Khidr is associated with fertility and the green world, he is envisioned in folklore as a luminous elder, dressed in green robes with a white beard. He is believed to bless the fields as he roams them.

As noted by Uzbek folklorist M. Jurayev, flourishing fields are often described as those “touched by Khidr’s gaze,” or as having had “Khidr’s hem brush over them.” During wheat harvests, if a reaper comes upon a double-headed ear of wheat, it is said that “Khidr has cast his gaze upon them.” According to belief, when Khidr’s blessed hand touches a stalk, it matures into a double-headed grain. Whoever finds such a stalk sees themselves as especially fortunate and hangs it in a prominent place at home, believing that Khidr’s blessing will bring prosperity to the household for the rest of the year.

The idea of linking Khidr to the abundance of harvests is found among all Central Asian peoples. The perception of Khidr as a symbol of greenery, meadows, and plants reflects ancient mythological traditions. In the Qissas al-Anbiya (Stories of the Prophets) by



Rabghuzi, there is a line that says: “Wherever Khidr sat, that place turned green.”

In short, Khidr holds a vital role in the traditional agricultural culture, customs, and ceremonial system of Central Asian peoples. Fields of crops are especially regarded as places he frequents.

A study of folk beliefs and legends enables us to identify a group of symbols among Central Asian saints that relate to deities from pre-Islamic religions. One such figure is Siyavush, who in folklore embodies characteristics of nature gods that die and are reborn, reflecting the agricultural cycle.

Some remnants of agricultural cults persist in the seasonal festivals and rituals observed by the Tajik and Uzbek peoples to mark natural changes and the beginning or end of the labor season. Belief in agrarian cults has also left traces in the veneration of Central Asian saints.

Other traces of local agrarian cults have been preserved in the respect for these saints. Studying them provides new insights into ancient agricultural practices and helps assess the extent to which they were transformed under the influence of Islam. For instance, fieldwork and farming are widely associated across Central Asia with the patron of agriculture—Saint Boboi Dehqon. Among Uzbeks and Tajiks, he is known as Bobodehqon; among Karakalpaks, as Diyxon Bobo; and among Turkmens, as Bobo Dakhqon. This patron saint is linked to pre-Islamic ancestral worship, represented by manistic myths expressing belief in ancestral cults.

Among the peoples of Central Asia (particularly Uzbeks, Tajiks, and Turkmens), it was believed that swinging on a cradle swing during the year would wash away accumulated sins and bring plentiful harvests. Swinging was considered to have magical significance for fertility. In European countries, it was believed that the higher girls and boys swung during spring ceremonies, the more abundant the year’s harvest would be. However, in some places, the original connection between this ritual and spring agricultural festivals has been lost. Among Turkmens, for example, this ritual came to be observed during the Muslim festival of sacrifice (Eid al-Adha). Yet, its primordial link to the agricultural New

Year—Navruz—has not entirely disappeared and continues to survive.

In several regions, among both Uzbeks and Tajiks, it is customary during agricultural rituals for an elder—considered a living embodiment of the patron of farming—to open the first furrows or lead the plow. This practice, rooted in ancient traditions, is particularly noteworthy when the elder, during the sowing ceremony, proclaims: “This is not my hand, but the hand of Bobo Dehqon (Father Farmer).” Such expressions reflect deep-seated ancestral beliefs and mythological worldviews.

Since ancient times, people have anthropomorphized the legendary spirit of nature in agriculture and revered him as their mythological protector. In this spirit, a symbolic “guardian” figure representing Bobo Dehqon was sometimes placed in the middle of the field to safeguard the crops.

Ancient peoples also believed that the saints had power over weather and could influence or even command it. In Uzbek tradition, such abilities are attributed to a figure known as Burkh (also Burkut). He was regarded as the “keyholder of the weather.” During floods or droughts, a bull would be sacrificed in his name to restore balance. Burkh was considered the sovereign of rain, believed to possess the ability to summon or withhold it.

Among Turkmens, Burkut-Devana (also called Burkut-Bobo) is known as the spiritual master and ruler of rain. He is described as a dark-skinned man who was granted divine authority by God to govern rainfall. It is said that he drives and strikes the clouds, causing them to scream and moan as they pour rain where it is most needed.

In one legend, Burkh is said to have encountered the Prophet Moses, who witnessed him summoning rain with his own eyes. But Burkh, growing arrogant with this divine gift, once challenged God, claiming: “Just as I bring rain, I can make the grass grow green.” God then asked him to prove his claim. For an entire year, Burkh made the rain fall continuously, yet no grass grew. But in the following year, when no rain fell, lush grass sprouted in the sand regardless—because God had raised the underground water level. Ashamed and humbled, Burkh repented and declared: “I submit to Your will.”



Agricultural patron figures often had diverse roles, once revered not only in farming but across other domains. Similarly, among Uzbeks and Tajiks, Burkh is also known as the patron of weaving.

Among the Tajiks living in the Sokh District of the Fergana Valley, a special rain-invoking ritual known as tarishkunok was once practiced during prolonged droughts. During the ceremony, village men would go out half-naked into the streets, pour water on each other, and throw someone—often the village imam or a mullah—into a stream. On these days, men were allowed to enter any household of their choosing, where they would be served a type of flatbread called kashki chavari, prepared only for this ritual.

As mentioned earlier, in Central Asia, agricultural rituals are most frequently associated with the figure of Saint Khidr (also known as Khizr or Khwaja Khidr). To attract his gaze or divine touch upon the harvested grain, a piece of wood or a clod of soil would be placed atop a sheaf. It was believed that this would increase the yield and bring blessings upon the harvest.

Agrarian rituals offer insight into the relationships between Burkh (Burkut), Bobo Dehqon, and Khizr, and help us understand their integration into agricultural culture. Bobo Dehqon is not a cult of ancestors, but rather a product of fertility cults—a transformation of the earliest female guardian from the matriarchal era into a male figure in the patriarchal age. According to ethnographer G. P. Snesarev, in the beliefs of the peoples of Central Asia, the image of Bobo Dehqon emerged through the contamination (i.e., blending) of ancestor cults with other belief systems. The scholar writes that during plowing, sowing, harvesting, and threshing, as well as when eating the first bread made from the new crop, farmers would invoke Bobo

Dehqon's name. The first bo'g'irsoq (a type of traditional fried bread) was also considered his rightful share. During autumn harvest time, symbolic offerings from the threshing floor were set aside for him.

In our view, the image of Bobo Dehqon as a patron of agriculture was gradually supplanted by the figure of Khizr, the revered prophet of all Muslims. It is widely believed that Khizr, though invisible on earth, roams among the people and fulfills their wishes.

Clearly, our ancestors' beliefs in plant spirits and fertility cults played a significant role in shaping both agricultural rituals and farming culture. Based on these beliefs, various traditions, ceremonies, and work-related folklore emerged. Studying them in depth remains an important task today. Most of these practices are associated with grain cultivation. Ceremonies, superstitions, and customs connected with grain and bread fully support this claim.

Agricultural rituals form a specific category, the majority of which are rooted in pre-Islamic beliefs. In terms of their content, the core of this category lies in fertility beliefs. The fundamental principle behind them is to develop agricultural culture and ensure abundant harvests by any means.

In conclusion, many archaic forms and magical actions have been preserved in the Uzbek people's traditional agricultural ceremonies and customs. Moreover, traces of the cult of nature—centered on death and rebirth—have survived, even if in residual forms, and are often practiced in a syncretic manner with Islamic beliefs. The primary aim of these ancient religious and mythological farming rituals and customs has always been to secure a bountiful, prosperous harvest and to gather it without loss.