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Comparative Analysis of the Sacralization of Female Images in Kazakhstan and Other Cultures

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Abstract. The article studies the sacralization of female images in various cultures, emphasizing Kazakh culture, Indian culture, and Christian tradition. The main purpose of the article is to undertake a comparative analysis of the ways of sacralizing female images in these cultures and identify key elements and symbols associated with female figures. The article examines such sacred images as Umai in Kazakh culture, Durga in Indian culture, and the Virgin Mary in Christian culture.

A comprehensive analysis is conducted to explore the multifaceted roles of these figures within religious and mythological contexts, as well as their contributions to social and cultural dynamics. The symbolic significance of these figures is also examined, providing a nuanced understanding of their cultural and historical impact. A particular focus is placed on the impact of these images on the development of gender roles and societal expectations. The study also looks at how the meaning of these images has changed over time, especially under the influence of globalization and modern cultural shifts. The article offers a deep and comprehensive analysis of the phenomenon of the sacralization of female images, which allows for a better understanding of its cultural and social significance in various parts of the world.

This study also highlights how sacred images of women continue to evolve in response to modern social and cultural changes, contributing to a rethinking of gender roles and identities.

Key words: sacralization; female images; Kazakh culture; Indian culture; Christianity; gender roles; globalization; modernization.

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Introduction

The sacralization of female imagery forms a foundational element in the cultural identity of many nations. The origins of this phenomenon can be traced back to pagan times, when humans viewed themselves as part of nature, which they believed was governed by divine forces. The continuous cycle of births of fellow tribespeople, animals (both wild and domestic), trees, and plants was seen as an expression of divine will, embodied in the Great Feminine principle.

Sacred representations of women appear throughout history and across nearly all religious traditions – from early animistic beliefs to polytheistic systems and even monotheistic religions. These representations are found among ancestral figures, cultural heroes, spirits, and deities. Scholars suggest that the worship of female deities saw a significant rise following the Neolithic Revolution (approximately 10,000 years ago) (Vasil'eva, 2018: 10). Before this shift, subsistence was based primarily on hunting and gathering; afterward, societies moved toward animal husbandry and agriculture. While female gatherers may not have held the same status as male hunters in pre-agricultural societies, women came to occupy a central role in agrarian cultures. Indeed, they are frequently recognized as the inventors of agriculture itself (Smith, 2019: 5).

One of the most prominent features of agricultural societies is the symbolic parallel between soil fertility and female fertility. Woman is regarded as a manifestation – or hypostasis – of the Earth, the universal Mother. M. Eliade emphasizes that concepts such as fertility, feminine mythology, the Earth, and the Moon are central to the religious consciousness of agricultural societies (Pivovarov, 2019: 20).

The results of archaeological surveys conducted across the Eurasian continent in the post-war years were both unexpected and remarkable. British archaeologist James Mellaart, during his excavations in Anatolia, uncovered a previously unknown early Neolithic culture. The people of this culture built temples dedicated to great goddesses, adorned them with elaborate murals and ritual objects, and demonstrated a complex symbolic system representing the worldview of these ancient settled communities (Nikolaeva, 2010: 98).

French researcher André Leroi-Gourhan, who studied Paleolithic art using a pioneering method of topographically mapping cave images, was also surprised to find that female figures and symbols were typically located in the central sacred zones of cave sanctuaries. These findings, along with later research, provided strong support for the theory that the worship of female deities originated in prehistoric times (Schaub, 1999: 207).

Further studies have shown that the geographical spread of the Neolithic "goddess religion" is much broader than previously assumed. It extended far beyond the Fertile Crescent and surrounding regions traditionally linked to the cult of the Great Goddess (Nikolaeva, 2016: 33).

Despite considerable progress in recent years in studying the origins and development of the worship of female deities, many aspects remain contested and require further investigation. For example, there is no scholarly consensus regarding the universal nature of the "feminine" sacred symbols found in various Paleolithic cultures. It remains unclear whether these symbols reflect a localized cultural phenomenon that spread through migration or whether they are the result of shared cognitive patterns in the human brain that produce similar responses to certain stimuli (Mironova, 2017: 224).

What are the fundamental causes behind the sacralization of the female image? How are they connected to the social status and economic role of women in early human societies? Is the biological function of women the primary basis for the emergence of the concept of a female deity?

Answering these and other theoretical and specialized questions requires an interdisciplinary approach. Researchers must consider cultural continuity within specific historical and geographic contexts, particularly those in which evidence of goddess worship in antiquity is present. It is also essential to examine cultural elements preserved among modern communities that have retained traces of this ancient legacy.

Kazakhstan, located at the crossroads of Europe and Asia, offers a vivid example of such continuity. Its rich cultural heritage has been shaped by diverse ethnic and religious influences. In Kazakh culture, sacred female imagery is closely tied to Turkic traditions and Islamic beliefs. One notable example is Bopai Kham, the wife of Abylai Khan, a revered figure regarded as a symbol of wisdom and statehood (Mukhatova, 2010: 31).

Similar examples of the sacralization of female figures can be found in many other cultures. In Indian tradition, the goddesses Durga and Lakshmi are venerated as embodiments of power and prosperity, respectively. In Christianity, the Virgin Mary holds a central role as a symbol of motherhood and purity. In Japan's Shinto tradition, the sun goddess Amaterasu is worshipped as a divine force of light and life (Sysoev, 2023: 320).

A comparative analysis of the sacralization of female imagery reveals both universal patterns and culturally specific features. In ancient Mesopotamian and Egyptian civilizations, for instance, female deities were closely linked to fertility and agriculture, domains that were vital to the survival and stability of early societies. Conversely, in cultures with dominant patriarchal structures, the sacralization of female figures often served to reinforce traditional gender roles, framing women's power within narrowly defined symbolic boundaries.

Over time, and particularly under the influence of globalization and modernization, the perception of sacralized female figures has undergone significant transformation. Contemporary cultural movements, especially feminist discourses, are actively reinterpreting and re-evaluating the roles of women in religious and cultural contexts. These efforts offer alternative understandings of traditional symbols and challenge established narratives.

The study of the sacralization of female imagery in Kazakhstan, alongside similar phenomena in other cultures, provides valuable insight into how both differences and commonalities in this practice reflect broader cultural, social, and religious structures. Such analysis deepens our understanding of how representations of women shape and reflect the values and worldviews of different societies and how these representations continue to evolve in response to global cultural shifts.

The purpose of this article is to explore and compare the sacralization of female imagery in Kazakhstan and other cultural contexts. The analysis will focus on identifying key elements and symbols associated with female figures, as well as examining their roles and meanings within various religious and cultural frameworks.

This study aims to explore several key questions that are essential for a comprehensive understanding of the sacralization of female imagery across cultures. Which female figures are

most sacralized in Kazakh culture, and what historical and religious foundations underlie their revered status? What are the primary similarities and differences between the sacralization of female images in Kazakhstan and those in other cultural and religious contexts, such as Indian, Christian, or Islamic traditions?

Further, what cultural, social, and religious factors influence the process of sacralization in different societies? How does the veneration of female figures reflect – and simultaneously shape – gender roles and societal expectations? Additionally, how have perceptions of sacred female imagery evolved over time, particularly in response to globalization, modernization, and the rise of feminist thought?

Addressing these questions enables a deeper and more nuanced analysis of the phenomenon of sacralized female imagery. Such an approach not only reveals the symbolic and spiritual importance of these figures but also highlights their role in shaping cultural identity, social structures, and gender norms in various parts of the world.

A literary review

According to N.K. Danilova, the idea of a connection between women and the Earth, particularly the cult of the Mother Goddess, has existed since ancient times. Early peoples embodied the fertility and life-giving power of Mother Earth in the form of ritual female figurines made of stone, bone, clay, or wood. These figures, often referred to by scholars as "Venus figurines," were frequently found near dwellings. This is no coincidence: in archaic worldviews, the concepts of woman, earth, and fire formed a symbolic triad with overlapping meanings (Danilova, 2019: 13).

P. Thao, in their study, provides an overview of contemporary manifestations of the Mother Goddess cult in various regions of Vietnam. The author notes that belief in the Mother Goddess reflects the people's aspirations for abundance, well-being, and protection. The work emphasizes that, despite historical transformations, the cult continues to evolve and adapt to modern contexts, including tourism and state cultural policies. Thao examines both the positive effects, such as the strengthening of cultural identity and the aesthetic richness of ritual practices, and the challenges, including the commercialization of sacred traditions and the erosion of their original spiritual meaning (Thao, 2023: 16).

N. Yurchenkova's article focuses on female deities in the mythology of the Finno-Ugric peoples. Particular attention is given to the Earth Mother cult, characterized as fertile, life-giving, and all-absorbing. In some cultures, such as those of the Mordvins and the Mansi, the goddess assumes not only an agrarian but also a cosmogonic role. Yurchenkova highlights the dual nature of the goddess, as both a source of life and a force governing death, thus expanding the traditional understanding of the Mother Goddess beyond her association with fertility alone (Yurchenkova, 2011: 47).

Roche Cárcel J. A. argues that the image of the Mother Goddess in archaic cultures unites opposing forces: life and death, light and darkness, peace and war. Her essence is revealed through the duality of creation and destruction, symbolizing the eternal cycle and the rhythmic return of existence. The Mother Goddess thus represents the fundamental balance and continuity of the universe (Roche Cárcel, 2020: 614).

Turning to the pagan beliefs and mythology of the ancient Slavs, one can observe a strong link between femininity and the worship of maternal deities. B.A. Rybakov, one of the leading researchers of Slavic and Russian mythology, identified three stages in the development of pagan beliefs, all centered around the female cult.

The first stage featured two dominant groups of supernatural beings: the Ghoul and the Beregini. The Beregini – female figures, sometimes associated with mermaids – were believed to protect the edges of fields, water sources, and households. They symbolized the Earth and its nurturing qualities.

In the second stage, Slavs began to venerate family deities and Rozhanitsy. The term Rozhanitsy (literally "those who give birth") was closely linked to the female domain, symbolizing fertility, childbirth, and the fate of newborns. During this period, there was no stark division between male and female spiritual roles; both were seen as essential to social and religious life.

In the third stage, female deities were associated more specifically with the household and fertility. The goddess Mokosh personified the ancient archetype of a fertility and prosperity deity, while Rada, the goddess of marriage, symbolized the reproductive forces of nature (Rogoza, 2010: 165).

According to J. Dynda, the study of rusalki – female water spirits in Slavic folklore – suggests that figures such as beregini may have served as their predecessors or regional variants. These entities embodied a dual symbolism, representing both fertility and death, and were actively involved in cyclical rituals aligned with the agrarian and liturgical calendar. Their presence was closely associated with liminal spaces and transitional phases, marking the boundaries between worlds, and between life and death (Dynda, 2020: 83).

Researchers studying the traditional cultures of Turkey, Mongolia, and Buryatia have also explored the worship of female deities, focusing on both their functional roles and mythological origins. Several meanings of one such deity – often referred to as Umai – have been identified:

- a) a female deity;
- b) a protective goddess of children, the Turkic people, and warriors;
- c) a term that can also refer to the placenta or the mother's womb;
- d) spiritual beliefs associated with the soul, the placenta, and the umbilical cord;
- e) a connection between Umai and the fire god, whose symbolic attributes include the bow and arrow (Nikolaeva, 2010: 123).

In Kazakh culture, the word "ana" (mother) is used to denote legendary women, saints, and elder women of noble lineage who held high social status. These revered figures are often memorialized by ancient structures built over their graves. In some cases, detailed oral legends about their lives have been preserved; in others, only the name and the burial site remain as testament to their significance.

Another prominent figure in Kazakh history is Bopai Khanim, the wife of Kazakh ruler Abylai Khan. She is regarded as a symbol of wisdom, political authority, and female leadership. Her image embodies the ideals of an intelligent, resolute woman capable of managing state affairs and making critical decisions. Oral traditions about Bopai Khanim highlight her diplomatic skills and her role in strengthening the state, making her a significant cultural and historical figure in Kazakhstan (Ualieva, 2023: 188).

In ancient Turkic societies, women played vital roles not only in family life but also in public and political spheres. They could participate in councils, influence key decisions, and exert considerable impact on both political and social developments. The sacralization of female figures in Turkic culture reflects a deep respect for women's wisdom, leadership, and capacity for governance (Khusainova, 2024: 25).

Other cultures also offer numerous examples of the sacralization of female figures, each playing important roles in the religious and cultural life of their societies.

In Indian tradition, goddesses such as Durga, Lakshmi, and Saraswati occupy central positions in the Hindu pantheon. Durga, revered for her strength and ability to vanquish evil, symbolizes power and protection. Lakshmi, the goddess of wealth and prosperity, is worshipped as the source of abundance and well-being. Saraswati, associated with wisdom, learning, and the arts, represents knowledge and creativity. Each of these deities embodies distinct aspects of feminine power and is honored for her unique attributes (Prokof'eva, 2019: 88).

According to S. Stych, the goddess Durga embodies Shakti – divine feminine power – along with independence and warrior strength. She defeats demons and symbolizes the preservation of cosmic order, liberation from evil, and the restoration of universal balance. In several texts, Durga is portrayed as a sovereign entity, independent of male deities, representing the principle of *svātantrya* – complete autonomy or “freedom from all”. She unites beauty, fury, and compassion, making her a powerful symbol of strength and self-sufficiency for women, particularly in patriarchal societies (Stych, 2011).

C. David highlights the goddess Lakshmi as a deity associated with prosperity, fortune, and feminine virtue. She occupies a central role in domestic worship and often represents the ideal wife and homemaker. Lakshmi's significance goes beyond material abundance; she also embodies spiritual purity and ethical harmony within the family and broader society (David, 2023: 19).

E.M. Rohlman argues that Saraswati is the goddess of learning, speech, and the arts. Her mythological roots trace back to the Vedic period, where she was initially linked to both a sacred river and to *Vāc* (speech). Over time, she came to represent wisdom and intellectual refinement. Saraswati symbolizes discipline, inner harmony, spiritual clarity, and creative inspiration. Her “elusive” nature – being omnipresent yet difficult to fully grasp – reflects the nuanced cultural understanding of knowledge as both essential and transcendent (Rohlman, 2018: 98).

In the Christian tradition, the Virgin Mary holds a central place as a symbol of motherhood, purity, and humility. As the mother of Jesus Christ, she plays a significant role in Christian theology and spiritual life. Her image embodies ideals of maternal love, compassion, and mercy, making her one of the most venerated figures in Christianity (Habekirova, 2019: 298).

In his article, G.A. Knight encourages Protestants to reconsider their traditionally cautious stance toward the Virgin Mary, proposing that her theological significance can be reinterpreted beyond the historical polemics against Roman Catholicism. Knight argues that Mary should not be seen merely as a cultural symbol or as the subject of Catholic dogma, but as a figure firmly rooted in Scripture and early Church tradition. He centers his analysis on a key question: Can Mary hold theological relevance within Reformation theology, even apart from Catholic doctrines such as the Immaculate Conception, the Assumption, or her role as Mediatrix? Knight

answers in the affirmative, contending that Protestants, especially those committed to a full biblical faith, should not "surrender" Mary to Catholicism alone (Knight, 1966: 55).

In Japanese Shinto belief, the sun goddess Amaterasu is a key figure, symbolizing light, vitality, and divine authority. She is considered the mythological ancestor of the imperial family and occupies a foundational role in Japanese cosmology. Her image is central to rituals and festivals dedicated to the sun, embodying the spiritual essence of life and renewal (Nagumanova, 2023: 88).

The study by D. Vasić explores how the figure of Amaterasu has been instrumental in shaping the image of the Japanese emperor as a "divine descendant" and a symbol of cosmic order. Some early sources suggest that the original solar deity may have been male; however, over time, the feminine form prevailed, possibly reflecting a deeper cultural association between rulership and the role of the shamaness. Amaterasu is also linked to weaving and the agricultural cycle, underscoring her role in sustaining both the material and ritual foundations of society (Vasić, 2024: 59).

A. Rots notes that in the context of contemporary Shinto, Amaterasu serves not only as a symbol of imperial legitimacy but also as an emblem of ecological consciousness. In 2014, the Ise Grand Shrine – Amaterasu's primary place of worship – hosted an interfaith event in which she was invoked as a spiritual figure guiding the pursuit of environmental sustainability (Rots, 2015: 205).

Research methods

The methodology of this study on the sacralization of female images across cultures involves several stages and interdisciplinary approaches, with the aim of conducting a comparative analysis of this phenomenon in Kazakh culture – using Umai as the central figure – and in two other cultural contexts: Indian culture (represented by the goddess Durga) and Christian tradition (represented by the Virgin Mary).

The first stage consists of an extensive review of relevant literature, including scholarly articles, monographs, and research studies focused on the sacralization of female figures. Particular attention is given to archaeological findings, mythological texts, and religious rituals associated with each female figure. This stage establishes a foundational understanding of each case and helps identify the key elements of their symbolic and religious significance.

The second stage is the comparative analysis itself. This involves examining the roles these female figures play within their respective religious and mythological frameworks, highlighting both commonalities and differences. The analysis focuses on the symbolic, spiritual, and societal roles of Durga, the Virgin Mary, and Umai. Ethnographic data on contemporary practices, such as worship, rituals, and cultural representations, are also considered to support the comparison.

A historical approach is integrated into the research to trace the development of these figures over time, from antiquity to the present day. This includes identifying how historical events and socio-political shifts have shaped changing perceptions of these female icons and influenced the evolution of religious and cultural traditions.

The study also applies cultural analysis methodologies, which help explore the symbolic meanings attached to female representations across societies. This perspective is key to

understanding how these sacred images have contributed to the formation of cultural identity and how they reflect or reinforce gender norms and expectations.

The research is structured in three phases: preliminary, primary, and concluding.

In the preliminary phase, core elements of sacralization in each selected culture are identified, and relevant literature and materials are collected and reviewed.

The primary phase involves the comparative analysis of Durga, Umai, and the Virgin Mary, alongside the anthropological examination of contemporary and historical data.

In the concluding phase, the findings are synthesized, conclusions are drawn, and the final report is written.

This study aims to reveal both shared and unique aspects of how female images are sacralized in different cultural and religious systems. Ultimately, it seeks to enhance understanding of the cultural and social functions of sacred female figures and their impact on shaping gender roles and societal expectations.

Results and discussion

Kazakhstan, with its rich and diverse cultural heritage, has preserved numerous myths and legends in which female figures play a central role. Among them, Umai –the goddess of childbirth and fertility – stands out as one of the most revered sacred female deities in Kazakh and broader Turkic tradition. Umai is venerated as the protector of women and children, and her image reflects the high cultural value placed on motherhood and family preservation in Turkic societies.

In ancient Turkic mythology, Umai is frequently depicted as a benevolent goddess who cares for infants and safeguards mothers during childbirth. Her connection to the land and the natural world reinforces her association with fertility and life-giving forces. Beyond her maternal attributes, Umai also symbolizes feminine wisdom and spiritual strength, making her a key figure in the cosmology and ritual practices of the Turkic peoples.

Umai played an essential role in traditional childbirth and child-rearing customs. Women would offer prayers and perform rituals addressed to Umai, seeking protection and health for both mother and child. These practices reflect a deep belief in her guardianship over the earliest and most vulnerable stages of life.

A.M. Sagalaev, analyzing the image of Umai in Turkic cultures, notes: “Among the Altaians, the mother bird is often associated with Umai and appears in cosmic imagery and shamanic poetry. The mother goddess shares both functional and symbolic parallels with traditions in the Altai and Ural regions” (Kotov, 2010: 111).

Special attention within the context of the sacralization of female figures in the Turkic tradition should be given to a unique landscape complex directly associated with the image of the goddess Umai, one of the central sacred female deities in Turkic mythology. This site is known as "Umai Mountain" and includes an adjacent tower-shaped rock formation located on the right bank of the Yenisei River, where it emerges from the canyon of the Western Sayan Mountains in present-day Khakassia. As S. Skobelev notes, the distinctiveness of this location lies in the fact that it is not merely a geological formation but a sacralized landscape – a rare and

spatially embodied manifestation of Umai, the goddess of fertility and guardian of kinship in the pre-Islamic Turkic belief system (Skobelev, 2022: 143).

Returning to the focus of this study, it is important to note that the name Umai appears in inscriptions written in Old Turkic runes, including those found on the Kültegin monument. The earliest translation of these inscriptions was conducted by Wilhelm Radloff, who identified Umai in his glossary as a “female deity.” In the text known as *Shorets*, Umai is cited as a guardian spirit associated with children, specifically one who accompanies the soul of the deceased.

Interestingly, in the Yenisei inscriptions, the name Umai also appears as a masculine personal name. Radloff interpreted this dual usage by suggesting that Umai functioned both as the name of a deity and as a male name in later stages of Old Turkic epigraphy. One notable example is found in the translation of a line from the Kültegin monument: “umai-Tag-Oga Katun kutyna inim Kül Tegin at boldu.” According to P.M. Melioransky, the phrase can be interpreted as “for the happiness (kut) of my mother.” Melioransky further observed that the figure of Umai continues to be revered by Altai shamans as a prominent deity (Potapov, 1972: 265).

Umai is thus recognized as a highly venerated terrestrial female deity – patroness of childbirth and protector of children – and is also identified in some traditions as a benevolent spirit figure, known by the term *bayana*.

In traditional Turkic beliefs, Umai is thought to reside near the entrance on the left side of the yurt, a space that is considered sacred and pure. There, she serves as a spiritual guardian, protecting the laboring mother and newborn child during the process of childbirth. The name Umai is associated with the maternal womb, the uterus, and even the severed umbilical cord, symbolizing the embodiment of the feminine life force.

As part of domestic ritual practice, a doll made of blue fabric is often hung in the front corner of the yurt in Umai’s honor, accompanied by other symbolic representations. If a child becomes ill, the doll may be ritually “fed” with porridge as a form of symbolic healing. Infants and young children, particularly those still being soothed by lullabies, are believed to be under the special protection of Umai. She is said to cradle the child until the age of six, when the child is able to stand independently. Umai is considered the child’s spiritual lifeline and protector from harmful spirits; the child’s health and well-being are seen as closely tied to her presence.

In the Khakass tradition, Umai (also rendered as Ymai) is referred to as the child’s soul, from the moment of birth until the child learns to walk, underscoring her deep connection to early life and development.

Umai’s actions are traditionally associated with certain childhood conditions and behaviors. For example, when a child smiles during sleep, it is believed that Umai is communicating with the child. In contrast, if the child cries, it is thought that evil spirits are frightening them and that Umai has temporarily withdrawn. Illness in a young child is sometimes interpreted as a sign of spiritual vulnerability or disturbance. In such cases, families would turn to a shaman, who, through ritual practices, would determine whether the child’s soul had been taken or disturbed by a malevolent spirit.

Building on this understanding, P.M. Melioransky drew parallels between the ancient Turkic deity Umai and the similarly named female spirit worshipped among Altai shamanists. In another work, Melioransky argued that Umai continued to be venerated along the Altai region

as a spiritual protector of children, symbolizing a form of cultural and emotional identity linked to childhood.

This interpretation was later supported by N.P. Dyrenkova, who noted that reverence for Umai – or “Umayyad” in this ethnographic context—had spread beyond shamanic communities to include certain Muslim villages in the Sayano-Altai region. Ethnographic data suggests that the worship of Umai was widespread during the ancient Turkic period. Remarkably, despite centuries of geographic, religious, and cultural transformation, this cult has survived in recognizable forms among modern Turkic-speaking populations of Central Asia and the Sayano-Altai region. Although references to Umai have largely disappeared from Turkic inscriptions, her name and associated imagery remain vivid in cultural memory across the region.

A comparative examination of how female images are sacralized

The study's findings highlight the complex and diverse nature of the sacralization of female imagery, which is deeply embedded in the religious, social, and cultural contexts of different societies. Through the analysis of religious rituals, mythological narratives, and archaeological materials associated with female figures, both commonalities and distinctive features have been identified in the sacralization of Durga in Indian culture, the Virgin Mary in Christian tradition, and Umai in Kazakh culture.

Archaeological evidence plays a crucial role in confirming the antiquity and significance of female deity worship across cultures. In the case of Umai, material artifacts – including figurines, symbolic motifs, and ritual objects – indicate her central role in fertility and motherhood rites in ancient Turkic societies. These findings reinforce her status as a protector of women and children and suggest that her cult was integrated into daily life, particularly in connection with childbirth and the safeguarding of early life stages.

Umai is frequently depicted as a benevolent goddess who nurtures infants and protects women during childbirth. Her association with the earth and natural elements underscores her role as a patroness of femininity, fertility, and maternal care within Kazakh and broader Turkic traditions.

In Indian culture, the goddess Durga embodies power and protection. In mythological texts such as the Puranas, she is portrayed as a fierce warrior who vanquishes demons and restores cosmic order. Rituals dedicated to her include the widely celebrated festival of Durga Puja, which symbolizes the triumph of good over evil and emphasizes the strength and resilience of the feminine divine.

In Christian tradition, the Virgin Mary is venerated as a central figure symbolizing humility, motherhood, and purity. Her significance is reflected in both theological doctrine and material culture. Archaeological evidence, including iconography and statuary from the Early Christian and Byzantine periods, affirms her elevated role in the Christian imagination. She is often depicted as Theotokos – the Mother of God – cradling the infant Jesus, a representation that reinforces her identity as both nurturer and intercessor (Bogatyreva, 2011: 70).

Although Mary's image is primarily rooted in New Testament writings and Church theology, her sacralization is also powerfully expressed in material and visual culture. Archaeological findings – such as frescoes, mosaics, and architectural elements from early Christian sanctuaries – provide crucial insight into how her role evolved as protector, Queen of Heaven, and a symbol of divine grace in both private devotion and public liturgy.

The earliest known depictions of the Virgin Mary, dated to the 3rd–4th centuries, are found in frescoes within the Roman catacombs, where she is shown holding the infant Christ on her lap – a representation that would later be canonized in the “Orans” iconographic type. These visual testimonies reveal that the concept of Mary as the Mother of God was already well established, even before its formal theological definition. In Ravenna, mosaics from the 6th century in the Basilica of Sant'Apollinare Nuovo portray Mary surrounded by angels, signaling the development of her image as a celestial intercessor.

Even more significant archaeological evidence for the sacralization of Mary lies in Marian churches constructed during the Early Christian and Byzantine periods – for example, the Church of St. Mary in Ephesus, traditionally considered the place of her residence and Dormition. Excavations in this region confirm the presence of Marian veneration as early as the 4th–5th centuries, making her cult not only a theological construct but also one that was firmly anchored in physical and spatial expressions of sacredness.

Similarities and variances were found when the religious and mythical roles of female figures in various cultures were compared. A woman's image is linked to maternity, fertility, and protection in all three civilizations. However, the qualities of these representations vary depending on the culture. For instance, Durga in Indian culture stands for power and victory over evil, Umai in Kazakh culture signifies fertility and infant protection, and the Virgin Mary in Christian culture represents motherhood and purity. According to ethnographic data, various societies continue to place a high value on the modern practice of worshiping female figures. In Kazakhstan, prayers for children's safety and well-being are part of the umai rites.

Millions of worshippers flock to India for the annual Durga Puja event, when they honor the goddess as a symbol of patriotism and protection. Numerous feasts honoring the Virgin Mary and petitions asking for her assistance and consolation are examples of how the Virgin Mary is worshipped in Christian nations.

Cultural study reveals that the establishment of cultural and social norms is significantly influenced by the sacrament of women's image. The sacrament of women's image has a significant part in perpetuating gender roles and expectations surrounding femininity, parenting, and caregiving in all of the cultures under study. These pictures have a significant role in the dissemination of cultural norms and values as well as the development of women's identities and self-awareness in the community.

Table 1 – Comparative analysis

	Umai	Durga	Mother of God, Mary
culture	Kazakh	Indian	Christian
Description	The fertility and motherhood goddess Umai is revered greatly in traditional Kazakh society. It represents mother care, child safety, and fertility. The Umai image's	One of the most important goddesses in Indian mythology, Durga represents power, safety, and triumph over evil. She is portrayed as a warrior who can	One of the most venerated people in Christianity is Our Lady Mary, the mother of Jesus Christ. It represents humility, purity, and motherhood. As the

	relationship to the land and environment, which echoes the agrarian lifestyle of the prehistoric Turkic peoples, is one of its key features. As the patroness of women and children, Umai is highly respected in Kazakh society, underscoring the value of motherhood and family stability.	vanquish monsters and save the planet. In India, she is highly revered, particularly during the Durga Puja celebration, which marks the victory of good over evil.	Mother of God, Mary is highly esteemed and plays a significant role in Christians' religious and spiritual lives.
Social and cultural roles	The sacrosanctification of Umai serves to uphold women's guardianship of the home and family values in Kazakh society. In order to promote fertility and safeguard offspring, Umai customs involve sacrifices and prayers. These customs support the upholding and dissemination of traditional gender roles, in which women are viewed as crucial players in securing the welfare of the clan and the family.	Durga symbolizes feminine strength and independence, which influences the perception of a female role in Indian society. The worship of Durga emphasizes the importance of female power and the ability to cope with difficulties. This helps to maintain respect for women and recognition of their importance in social and spiritual life.	adoration for God's Mother. In Christian communities, Mary is crucial in upholding the ideals of motherhood and the family. Religious rites, like Mary-focused liturgies and prayers, support the preservation of family customs and motherhood while also fostering respect for women.
Symbolic meaning	Umai represents maternal protection and care, which is a reflection of Kazakh culture's veneration and regard for women. Her image is also linked to the idea of fertility, which highlights the significance of farming and farming methods. Umai is frequently shown as a bird, signifying its affinity for heaven and the afterlife.	Durga is a symbol of both spiritual and physical prowess. Her several hands, each gripping a different weapon, represent her capacity to stand up for and pursue justice and the truth. Being the patroness of mothers and the guardian of children, Durga is also connected to motherhood.	Maria is the epitome of mercy, humility, and maternal love. Her status as the Mother of God is emphasized by the frequent depiction of her holding a baby Jesus. Mary is a significant figure for spiritual guidance and inspiration because she represents purity and spiritual perfection.

The creation and upkeep of social and cultural standards are significantly influenced by the sacralization of female representations in diverse cultures. The goals and virtues connected to motherhood, defense, and spiritual fortitude are reflected in the representations of Umai, Durga, and Our Lady Mary. These pictures support the perpetuation of cultural traditions and gender norms, as well as the development of women's identities and self-perceptions in a variety of countries. Understanding how cultural and religious practices impact social structures and gender relations around the globe is made easier by analyzing the sacralization of female imagery.

Comparabilities:

- Reproduction and motherhood
- Safeguarding and assisting

Disparities: ● Strength and militant elements. Umai is not portrayed as a warrior figure in Kazakh tradition; instead, her functions include reproduction and protection. In Indian mythology, Durga represents aggressive combat, the ability to vanquish evil, and the protection of the planet. Within Christian tradition, the Virgin Mary represents modesty and innocence, devoid of any aggressive characteristics.

Symbols and visual representations: Umai is frequently portrayed as a bird, signifying the interconnection of the land, the sky, and the spiritual realm. With numerous hands holding weapons, Durga is portrayed as having great power and defensive prowess. The image of the Virgin Mary cradling the infant Jesus in her arms emphasizes the motherly function of the figure and represents purity.

A distinctive and universal aspect of the sacrament that influences cultural and social perceptions of women's roles in society is formed by the interaction of various factors, including historical traditions, art, gender roles, social norms, and religious texts. These factors determine the process of the sacrament of the image of women in different cultures.

The sacrament of women's representation in various cultures shares characteristics with one another, such as the connection between protection and maternity, and also contains distinctive elements that are exclusive to certain social, religious, and cultural situations. These pictures have a significant impact on how people perceive gender roles and expectations in society, as well as how cultural and social norms are created and upheld.

Conclusion

The phenomenon known as the sacrament of the feminine image is intricate and multidimensional, with strong roots in the social, religious, and cultural contexts of various countries. According to the study, the image of Umai is significant in rituals related to birthing and raising in Kazakh culture, where it represents childbirth, motherhood, and protection. In Indian tradition, the goddess Durga, who represents strength, protection, and triumph over evil, highlights the value of female independence and authority. In Christian culture, the Virgin Mary symbolizes motherhood, purity, and humility, contributing to the strengthening of family values and religious rituals.

Comparative analysis of the religious and mythological functions of the female figure revealed similarities and differences. In all 3 cultures, the image of a woman is associated with

motherhood, fertility, and protection, but each culture gives these images its own meaning. Ethnographic evidence shows that modern practices of the worship of the image of women contribute to the strengthening of traditional gender roles and social norms and play an important role in different cultures.

Over time, under the influence of globalization and modernization, the perception of the image of a sanctified woman has changed. Contemporary cultural trends and feminist movements are actively reinterpreting and re-evaluating the role of women in religious and cultural contexts, offering new interpretations and approaches to traditional images.

The study of the sacrament of the image of women in Kazakhstan and other cultures is an important step in understanding how the differences and similarities of this phenomenon reflect a broader cultural and social process.

Authors' contributions

Uxukbayeva M.T. – a significant contribution to the conception and design of the study; carrying out the analysis and interpretation of the data obtained; writing the text of the article and critically revising its content; approving the final version of the article for publication; responsibility for adhering to scientific standards and collecting bibliographic material.

Haci Akhmet Shimshek – conceptual contribution to the research with a focus on global and historical analysis; contributing to the writing of key theoretical sections of the article; providing peer review.

Sarkulova M.S. – organisation of data and management of the research process; preparation and design of the text of the article; coordination of collaborative work between authors, analysis of the results of the work.

Conflict of interest

The authors declare no relevant conflict of interest.

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Қазақстандағы және басқа да мәдениеттердегі әйелдер бейнелерін сакрализациялауды салыстырмалы талдау

Андатпа. Мақала қазақ мәдениетіне, Үнді мәдениетіне және христиан дәстүріне баса назар аударып, әртүрлі мәдениеттердегі әйел бейнелерін сакрализациялауды зерттеуге арналған. Мақаланың негізгі мақсаты-осы мәдениеттердегі әйел бейнелерін сакрализациялау тәсілдерін салыстырмалы талдау және әйел бейнелерімен байланысты негізгі элементтер мен белгілерді анықтау. Мақалада Қазақ мәдениетіндегі Умай, үнді мәдениетіндегі Дурга және христиан мәдениетіндегі Мария ана сияқты қасиетті бейнелер қарастырылады. Олардың діни және мифологиялық функциялары, әлеуметтік және мәдени рөлдері, сондай-ақ символдық мәні талданады. Бұл бейнелердің қоғамдағы гендерлік рөлдер мен үміттердің қалыптасуына әсеріне ерекше назар аударылады. Сондай-ақ, әйелдердің қасиетті бейнелерін қабылдау уақыт өте келе және жаһандану мен модернизацияның әсерінен қалай өзгергені қарастырылады. Мақалада әйелдердің бейнелерін сакрализациялау құбылысына терең және жан-жақты талдау ұсынылады, бұл оның әлемнің әр түкпіріндегі мәдени және әлеуметтік маңыздылығын жақсы түсінуге мүмкіндік береді. Бұл зерттеу сонымен қатар әйелдердің киелі бейнелері гендерлік рөлдер мен сәйкестіктерді қайта қарастыруға ықпал ететін заманауи әлеуметтік және мәдени өзгерістерге жауап ретінде қалай дамитынын көрсетеді. Қазақстандағы және басқа мәдениеттердегі әйел бейнесін сакрализациялауды зерттеу осы құбылыстағы айырмашылықтар мен ұқсастықтардың кеңірек мәдени, әлеуметтік және діни тұрғыда түсінуге бағытталған маңызды қадам болып табылады.

Түйін сөздер: сакрализация; әйел бейнелері; қазақ мәдениеті; үнді мәдениеті; христиандық; гендерлік рөлдер; жаһандану; жаңғыру.

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Сравнительный анализ сакрализации женских образов в Казахстане и других культурах

Аннотация. Статья посвящена исследованию сакрализации женских образов в различных культурах с акцентом на казахскую культуру, индийскую культуру и христианскую традицию. Основная цель статьи заключается в сравнительном анализе способов сакрализации женских образов в этих культурах и выявлении ключевых элементов и символов, связанных с женскими фигурами. В статье рассматриваются такие сакральные образы, как Умай в казахской культуре, Дурга в индийской культуре и Богоматерь Мария в христианской культуре. Анализируются их религиозные и мифологические функции, социальные и культурные роли, а также символическое значение. Особое внимание уделено влиянию этих образов на формирование гендерных ролей и ожиданий в обществе. Также рассматривается, как восприятие сакрализованных женских образов изменялось с течением времени и под влиянием глобализации и модернизации. Статья предлагает глубокий и всесторонний анализ феномена сакрализации женских образов, что позволяет лучше понять его культурное и социальное значение в различных частях мира. Это исследование также освещает, как сакральные образы женщин продолжают эволюционировать в ответ на современные социальные и культурные изменения, способствуя переосмыслению гендерных ролей и идентичностей.

Ключевые слова: сакрализация, женские образы, казахская культура, индийская культура, христианство, гендерные роли, глобализация, модернизация.

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