

DOI: 10.7596/taksad.v6i5.1275

Citation: Fattakhova, A., Melnikova, M., & Gromova, N. (2017). Rites of Treatment in Eastern Africa and Rite Vocabulary According to Literary Sources. *Journal of History Culture and Art Research*, 6(5), 207-214. doi:<http://dx.doi.org/10.7596/taksad.v6i5.1275>

Rites of Treatment in Eastern Africa and Rite Vocabulary According to Literary Sources

Aida R. Fattakhova¹, Maria D. Melnikova², Nelli V. Gromova³

Abstract

Rites as the reflection of religious ideas and everyday traditions are of great importance to understand the national picture of the world among the representatives of different peoples. The article examines the rites of the East African society aimed at healing; the ritual vocabulary, saturated with national and cultural information is analyzed and the translation decisions in the transfer of cultural-labeled units reflecting the realities of the Swahili culture carriers are demonstrated. Taking into account the nature of the presented material, the methods widely used in historical and ethnographic and philological research were used during the present study: descriptive, systemic, and semantic one. Nowadays, traditional medicine and conventional medicine go hand in hand in Eastern Africa countries, particularly in Tanzania, complementing each other in the treatment and the prevention of diseases, the preservation and the strengthening of human health. In the case when modern medicine is powerless, doctors recommend that patients turn to herbalists. At the same time, it is impossible to confuse healers who use grasses and other natural resources in their work, passing their experience from generation to generation, with sorcerers and the sorcerers not engaged in treatment. The conclusions formulated in the process of research are of practical importance and can be used by the experts of ethnography, ethnology, translation studies, linguistics, cultural studies and historical science, as well as during the lectures on the study of lexicology in Swahili.

Keywords: Linguistics, Literature, Rite, Ritual vocabulary, Swahili, Robert Shaaban, Eastern Africa, Translation.

¹ Kazan Federal University, Institute of International Relations, History and Oriental Studies, Kazan, Russian Federation. E-mail: gaidaf@mail.ru

² Kazan Federal University, Institute of International Relations, History and Oriental Studies, Kazan, Russian Federation.

³ Institute of Asian and African Studies, Lomonosov Moscow State University.

Introduction

Rituals as the reflection of religious beliefs and everyday traditions of a particular people are of great interest for ethnography, ethnology, linguistic culture, culturology and psycholinguistics. The analysis of ceremonies allows to reveal the ethnic and confessional features of people, its ideals, the ideas about the surrounding world, spiritual and material values.

The theme of rituals in Africa was studied by foreign researchers at different times, touching only some aspects of ritual actions. In 1933, based on the results of field research in Africa, Elisah Werner's book "Myths of the Peoples of Africa" (2007) was published, which touches on the rituals in the context of these myths understanding in addition to the mythological picture description of many peoples of the Black Continent.

In 2011, the German anthropologist L. Mackenrodt published the results of a long-term study in his book "Swahili Spirit Possession and Islamic Healing in Contemporary Tanzania" in which she collected unique information about the healers of the Tanzanian coastal town of Tanga. It was established that the existence of spirits for the inhabitants of Tanzania coast is as indisputable as the existence of people, wildlife and the world around them. The informants with whom the anthropologist worked claimed that spirits are not the product of their imagination, but belong to the material side of any person's life. In most cases, spirits are the cause of the diseases that spread into a person. They control him, and the only way to get rid of a person from obsession is to turn to the respected healers, whom the locals call waganga.

Ritual vocabulary as the direct attribute of ritual activity refers to the sphere of the so-called "cultural vocabulary". This valuable material, representing the names of ritual objects, the ritual participants in connection with their ritual functions, the rituals themselves, has a special semantic complexity, conditioned by the increased degree of "symbolism", sometimes a kind of cipher. A researcher-ethnographer fixing this terminology most often by chance and partially, has only an auxiliary meaning as the means of functionally relevant elements of ritual and belief identification and fixation. In its turn, a linguist who studies dialect vocabulary is also unable to ensure the completeness and necessary systematic reproduction of cultural terminology because of insufficient knowledge of ethnographic material ... Neither an ethnographer nor a linguist are interested in the nature of relation between a term and a reality, between a system (a series) of terms and a system (a series) of ethnographic elements (Tolstaya, 1989).

In this article, an attempt is made to study the rituals of Eastern Africa inhabitants, in particular the rituals of healing according to various sources. During the identification and the analysis of healing rituals, we relied on the experience of researchers who studied the rites (A. Werner, 2007; L. Mackenrodt, 2011; L. Giles, 1995), as well as on the work of the famous Tanzanian writer Shaaban Robert "Kufikirika" (1972), which describes the ritual culture of East Africans in detail by the description of fictional characters.

Methodological framework

Taking into account the nature of the presented material, the methods widely used in historical and ethnographic and philological research were used during the present study: descriptive, systemic, and semantic one.

Results and Discussion

The study of rituals is touched upon in the works of ethnographic, cultural, historical, philosophical and philological nature, for example, in the studies by A. Gennep (1999), A.K. Baiburin (1993), L.Yu. Lepeshkina

(2011), O.A. Sedakov (2004), Yu.A. Smirnov (1990), V. Turner (1983), S.A. Tokarev (1983), V.N. Toporov (2005) and others.

Speaking about the relevance of the topic, it should be noted that unlike the study of rituals and rites of Europeans and Slavs, the problem of rituals of African society, in particular, of Eastern Africa population, was not covered fully in the scientific literature.

Robert Shaaban, by describing the rituals in his work, gives us valuable cultural information about the inhabitants of Eastern Africa as we see in the following examples;

1. The work of the famous Tanzanian writer Shaaban Robert (1909-1962) "Kufikirika" (1972) is devoted to the theme of a rite and its role in East African society. Tanzanian literary critic Naye Senkoro notes the following in his research on the creativity of the first writer of East Africa: "In the novel "Kufikirika" we find an incredible range of issues affecting the culture of the African people. Shaaban looks to me as a man resisting ancient beliefs in spirits that have long outlived themselves, yet at the same time he treats the heritage of their ancestors carefully" (Senkoro, 1976).

Shaaban is rightfully considered as the founder of modern prose in Swahili. For many years, working in various institutions of the colonial administration, he combined the work of an employee with literary activity, the collection and the study of Sahi-Islamic literature monuments. His works are philosophical parables, bearing a certain moral teaching.

In philosophical and allegorical works Shaaban "Kufikirika" (literally, "be imagined / invented"), written during 1946 in Swahili, he criticized the backwardness and the injustice prevailing in the fictional country, but serving as a clear prototype of a real state. The royal couple, ruling the country Kufikirika, is sick with infertility and therefore it does not have an heir. The king decides to convene a meeting of many Kufikirika healers, promising everyone who will try to cure him and his wife to bestow untold riches. The King's request was responded with joy and "healers" start "healing". Describing the methods of healer treatment, the author describes the accompanying rituals, using the lexical units with significant national and cultural semantics, in this case, the ritual vocabulary.

2. Shaaban Robert divides people, who commit ritual rites of healing, into six groups: waganga wa mizizi (herbalists), waganga wa makafara (priests), waganga wa mazinguo (priests), waganga wa hirizi (the manufacturers of amulets), waganga wa mashetani (sorcerers) and waganga wa utabiri (fortunetellers). Each of these representatives of traditional healers has its own specific features of a ritual performance.

Herbalists, which the author calls waganga wa mizizi, are engaged in the treatment of diseases by medicinal plants (miti shamba - literally "the trees of the field"). The generalized name "trees" refers to the roots (mizizi), bark (magome) and leaves (majani). The ritual of medicine preparation is described in detail by the work: the roots are boiled, and each plant species has its own cooking time. The water in which the roots were boiled, as well as the mixture of water and vegetable juice (utomvu) were also used as a medicine. The herbalists made flour from the bark and leaves of the trees, which they used to make the ointment. Charcoal (makaa ya miti) was used for a tattoo (kuchanja chale) application to the royal couple. Local residents trust the work of herbalists, because they are convinced that animals that eat forest plants have an excellent health.

In order to denote the second group, the author uses the phrase waganga wa makafara, which literally means "the sorcerers of sacrifice". We translated this phrase by the lexeme "priests". The priests sacrificed eggs (mayai), pigeons (njiwa) and poultry (ndege wa mfugo).

A certain difficulty was caused by the translation of the name for the third group of healers - waganga wa mazinguo. The Swahili-Russian dictionary gives the following meanings of the lexical unit mazinguo: 1)

mus. The reading of Quran to somebody with the plea for the deliverance from a misfortune (an illness); 2) getting rid of harmful effects; 3) healing; 4) etn. Expulsion of evil spirits, exorcism (Gromova, 2012: 716). The Swahili dictionary "Kamusi ya Kiswahili Sanifu" (2014) leaves only the first meaning: *kisomo cha kumwomba mtu ili Mwenyezi Mungu amwepushe na balaa au madhara*. In Russian language, this rite was called "chastening", and those who conduct this rite were called "chastening performers" (Dahl, 1881). In modern Russian language - "chastening" and "exorcism", which free a person not only from demons, but also from spoilage, an evil eye, the diseases of incomprehensible etiology, etc. In English, this Catholic rite is called exorcism, and the people who conduct it are exorcists. You can carry it out by reading, and using different subjects (a cross, water), and also cereals in Africa.

In the story, this group of "healers" was distinguished by the ability to treat with crops such as maize (mahindi), sorghum/millet (mtama) and wheat/rye (ngano). Thus, taking into account the nature of the ritual, this group can be defined as the healers - "exorcists".

The group of amulet manufacturers (*waganga wa hirizi*) was engaged in the treatment by ayats from the Koran. They were real professionals in the painting of a vessel inner walls and cutlery utensils by the Koran phrases using a special saffron paint solution. Such a drug, called *kombe* - a drug or a solution of paint, which is used to write the sayings from the Koran on the inner walls of a vessel. The names of jinns (*majini*) were applied inside the plates and saucers. Shaaban Robert gives the names of the jinns which were required for the application: Kitimiri (Kitmir), Gilani, Kinani, Makusuri, Ruhani, Shamhariri. The article by N.A. Dobronravin gives the explanation of the individual jinn names. For example, Kitmir-jinn is named after the legendary dog of the "the cave inhabitants". In the Islamic tradition, the name of this dog was used as a written amulet. Perhaps Kitmir - the genie and Kitmir - the dog of the "the cave inhabitants" were one and the same being among the spirits from a prayer author's point of view (2004).

Before a magical record drying up, an aromatic liquid was poured into a vessel and water was poured in order to make a patient drink the drug. Such kind of amulets were also written on skin, paper, following a certain hierarchy of genies. The size and weight of these amulets were different. Patients were recommended to wear amulets around their neck, shoulders, hands and feet and wait for improvement. You can also put a magic inscription on paper or skin in any vessel with water and then drink the resulting infusion.

The fact that in 1966 on the island of Zanzibar the Russian ethnographer-Africanist N.M. Girenko discovered manuscripts belonging to one of the local residents of Zanzibar, who were killed during the revolution is of interest. These manuscripts included 6 talismans-charms "chirizi" on separate sheets of paper, folded or with the traces of bending. One side of the sheet in all mascots was left blank. Everything written was hidden from view. It is assumed that the "chirizi" were not intended to be read at all (Dobronravin, 2004). The texts of talismans are various. So, in one case the basmala is repeated in the talisman - the phrase from which the surahs of the Qur'an begin - "In the name of Allah, the Compassionate". In another case, the talisman contains the quotation from the 59th Surah "Assembly" in which "the beautiful names of Allah" are mentioned, and the full text of the 112th Surah (Purification of Faith: Say: "He is Allah the One, Allah is Self-sufficient". He did not give birth and was not born, and there is no one equal to Him") (Kuliev, 2007).

Thus, the rite of making amulets, described by Robert Shaaban in a fictitious country, is also confirmed by the results of field research of scientists.

The fifth group of healers described in the story is *waganga wa mashetani*, where the lexeme of Arabic origin *mashetani* denotes *Shaytaan*, a devil, a demon. We defined this group as sorcerers, operating with the ritual performed by them at the junction of sorcery and magic. Sorcerers were treated with great

respect for their ability to understand the language of evil spirits. Their "healing" included the use of animal blood, rings and a special piece of tissue (kilemba).

The last group - waganga wa utabiri (the group of fortunetellers) is represented by prophets (watabiri), astronomers (wanajimu) and fortune-tellers (mastadi ya ramli - lit. "the masters of divination"). They were educated people in their field who could easily predict (kubashiri) events, expected through the ages. As true prophets (manabii) they could see with their own eyes both the events of the future and the events of the past. The group of fortunetellers was revered as the most respected group in Kufikirik.

3. The rituals described by the Tanzanian writer Shaaban Robert are quite diverse. Being the part of the Bantu-speaking people culture, they reflect their national color. Despite the changes that the East African society has undergone: the obtaining of freedom from the colonialists, the performance of democratic reforms, the reforms in various areas of people's lives, the modernization of education and medicine, practically nothing has changed since the publication of the work we analyzed.

Since December 1995, the so-called CHAWATIATA - chama cha waganga na wakunga wa tiba asilia Tanzania (organization of healers and midwives of Tanzania) has been operating in Tanzania. This non-governmental organization exercises control over the activities of all officially registered medicine men of Tanzania specializing in the treatment by herbs (in Shaaban's work they are represented by the group of folk healers - waganga wa mizizi, "herbalists"), and its motto is the capacious phrase that characterizes the contradictory but rather strong position of local healers at the present stage: "We use the knowledge of ancestors for the benefit of everyone" (Chawatiata, 2016).

In 1971, ten years after Tanzania gained independence, the healers first announced about themselves by uniting and setting up the first African organization of local doctors, PROMETRA, in the capital city of Senegal, Dakar. The purpose of this organization was the recognition and the protection of healers who passed a special examination testing their skills. In 2003, CHAWATIATA had 626 members, two thirds of whom were men, while Muslims prevailed over Christians (the number of the latter was less than 100) (Mackenrodt, 2011). Of the total number of doctors - 420 people are herbalists, the ones that Robert Shaaban calls waganga wa mizizi in his novel.

Anthropologist L. Giles points to the data of his field study in his work, during which it was possible to find out that the majority of Tanzanians turned to folk healers at least once. Others avoid even eye contact with healers, considering them suspicious. Anyway, L. Giles draws the line, concluding: "Quite a few individuals avoid contact with healers or are critical or suspicious towards them for a variety of reasons. Yet even those people usually acknowledge the power of both the healers and the spirits, and their avoidance of the rituals actually proves the latter, for they fear of becoming possessed in such an atmosphere" (Giles, 1995).

The scientist L. Mackendrod out of all existing rites singles out one, the most widespread on the coast of East Africa - the rite of exorcism: "I found all social categories in the cult, including those from highly respected, well-educated or economically well-off families. I also found representatives from various racial and ethnic backgrounds, running the full continuum from "Arab" to "African", as well as from various age groups (including several young people who had travelled and studied in Europe). This was true at both the level of waganga and that of regular cult members" (Mackenrodt, 2011).

At the same time, it should be noted that the ritual described by L. Mackendroth is nothing else than the symbiosis of rituals, which are conducted by a group of casters of demons (waganga wa mazinguo) and compilers of amulets (waganga wa hirizi) in the work by Shaaban. In the complex hierarchy of Swahili spirits, which, as we mentioned above, are the part of the life of tribes living in Tanzania, Ruhani occupies the highest level, being the most powerful and revered one (Mackenrodt, 2011). Shaaban mentions the

name of Ruhani among the names of other jinns, although L. Mackendrod does not give in his work the data on which one can conclude that other genies are also found in ritual practices at the moment.

Another interesting source that makes it possible to shed light on the mystified world of folk healers is the Swahili textbook published by the Institute of African Studies at the University of Georgia (2006). It was noteworthy for us that one of the sections devoted to public health begins with the topic "Traditional medicine" (Swah. *Uganga wa jadi*), which emphasizes the extraordinary role of healers in the life of Tanzanians. "Patients are used to rely on folk healers. Three factors contributed to this. From time immemorial, villagers turn to folk medicine. This is happening now, when modern medical services came to the village. But, despite the apparent availability of public medicine, many of the residents still live too far from the god of civilization. The result is the following one: some citizens trust more in the methods of traditional medicine, while healers advise to go to polyclinics and hospitals" (22).

In 2013, the BBC correspondent, Sasja van Vechgel, visited Tanzania, made a photo report and had a chat with one of the healers in the south of Tanzania. In his article entitled "Treatment or play with human life?" on the BBC portal, he described in detail what he saw with his own eyes during the trip. The main hero of his article were *waganga* from Kital, a small village in the south of Tanzania, where, despite the prohibition on the part of the authorities, the residents are still consult with folk healers. The author of the article sees two reasons for this. One of them is a well-established belief in the power and the knowledge of healers, the second one is the unfortunate experience of treatment at hospitals. Modern medicines proved to be less effective than herbs and herbalists' infusions. A healer in this village is a man of any gender who has reached the age of 40 (Kiko, 2016).

One of the rituals described in the article by Vechgel coincides exactly with the rituals of the *waganga wa mizizi* group in the novel "Kufikirika". The healer heals from rheumatic illness using the leaves and the bark of medicinal trees, which he pre-mixes. Then he applies the obtained ointment on a sore spot. In the same way, the herbalists treated the royal couple in the novel we analyzed (*waganga wa mizizi*). In the same article, we find the answer to the question, why physicians do not offer their services in the media through advertising. One of the interviewed healers said that often, people visit hospitals without results: injections and medications do not heal them. Then they turn to local healers. After a successful treatment such patients invariably tell their family and friends about the healer's skill. Thus, it turns out that if a real and an experienced healer lives in a village, everyone knows about him, so he does not need advertising.

4. Drawing parallels between the work by S. Robert "Kufikirika" and the rituals of healing in modern society, described by foreign researchers, one can see that after more than half a century the situation has not changed almost. Physicians traditionally continue to treat patients, recommending at the same time to seek medical help first of all. The role of healers remains important in the modern society of Eastern Africa.

Conclusion

Rite as one of the most specific ethnic characteristics fixes the world order, formalizing being in the form of stable verbal, effective, objective codes. At that, any rite can be presented as a specific text, as a certain sequence of actions, ritual manipulation with objects - symbols. In one form or another rite, rooted in the culture of a particular people, plays an important role in human life.

The work of Tanzanian writer Shaaban "Kufikirika" is the only work of art in which the ritual culture of healing described in detail echoes with the real state of affairs on the territory of Eastern Africa. The work written in 1946 remains relevant to this day. Despite the acquisition of independence by African

countries, the problem of familiarizing with the modern methods of medicine and education by the inhabitants of these countries is urgent like no other and faces the leadership of every African country.

The close attention in the work by Sh. Robert to the activity of traditional healers is connected with the author's desire to draw a reader's attention to the inconsistency of individual magical rituals, their destructive impact on the environment, society, and, as a result, on the state as a whole. Thanks to the allegory and the use of metaphors in the description of folk healer work, the author achieves the greatest brightness in the narrative, which enhances the tragedy of the plot and helps to understand the problems on which Robert Shaaban accentuates his attention better. At the same time, describing the rituals in his work, the author gives us valuable cultural information about the inhabitants of Eastern Africa, which allows researchers to come in contact with the centuries-old traditions, the spiritual values of African society in the context of general cultural experience.

Nowadays, traditional medicine and conventional medicine go hand in hand in Eastern Africa countries, particularly in Tanzania, complementing each other in the treatment and the prevention of diseases, the preservation and the strengthening of human health. In the case when modern medicine is powerless, doctors recommend that patients turn to herbalists. At the same time, it is impossible to confuse healers who use grasses and other natural resources in their work, passing their experience from generation to generation, with sorcerers and the sorcerers not engaged in treatment.

Acknowledgments

The work is performed according to the Russian Government Program of Competitive Growth of Kazan Federal University.

References

- Baiburin, A. K. (1993). *Ritual in traditional culture: structural and semantic analysis of the Eastern Slavic rites*. St. Petersburg: Science.
- Dal, V. I. (1881). *Explanatory dictionary of the living Great Russian language, Volume 2*. Moscow.
- Dobronravin, N. A. (2004). Zanzibar Magical Literature (from the collection by N.M. Girenko). *Bulletin of St. Petersburg State University. Philology, Oriental studies, Journalism Series*, 9(3-4), 115-120.
- Genep, A. (1999). *Rites of passage. Systematic study of rituals*. Moscow: Eastern Literature Publishing.
- Giles, L. (1995). Sociocultural Change and Spirit Possession on the Swahili Coast of East Africa. *Anthropological Quarterly*, 36, 89-106.
- Gromova, N. V.; Myachina, E. N. & Petrenko, N. T. (2012). *Swahili-Russian dictionary: 30000 entries*. Moscow State University named after M.V. Lomonosov, Institute of Asian and African countries. Moscow: Klyuch.
- Kamusi ya Kiswahili Sanifu (2014). Nairobi: Oxford University Press.

- Lepeshkina, L. Yu. (2011). Traditional rituals and the rituals of the life cycle in the everyday culture of peoples of the Middle Volga region: 19th - 20th centuries. Thesis from the candidate of historical sciences: 24.00.01. Place of defense: Sarat State Technical University. Togliatti.
- Mackenrodt, L. (2011). Swahili Spirit Possession and Islamic Healing in Contemporary Tanzania: The Jinn Fly on Friday. Hamburg: Verlag.
- Sedakova, O. (2004). Poetics of the rite: Funeral rites of the Eastern and Southern Slavs. Moscow.
- Senkoro, N. (1976). Utamaduni katika Riwaya za Kiswahili. Kiswahili TUKI, 3, 74-80.
- Shaaban, R. (1972). Kufikirika. Nairobi: Oxford University Press.
- Smirnov, Yu. A. (1990). Morphology of the burial: The experience of a basic model creation. The studies in the field of the Baltic-Slavic spiritual culture: Funeral rite, (pp. 216-224). Moscow.
- Kulieva, E. R. (2007). Koran: Translation of meanings (6th ed.). Umma publishing house.
- Tokarev, S. A. (1983). Calendar customs and ceremonies in the countries of foreign Europe: Historical roots and the development of customs. Moscow, 1983.
- Tolstaya, S. M. (1989). Terminology of rites and beliefs as the source of ancient spiritual culture reconstruction. Slavic and Balkan folklore. Reconstruction of ancient Slavic spiritual culture: Sources and methods, (pp. 215-229). Moscow.
- Toporov, V. N. (2005). Studies on etymology and semantics: Theory and some of its particular applications. Moscow: Languages of Slavic Culture.
- Turner, V. (1983). Symbol and ritual. Moscow.
- Werner, E. (2007). Myths of the Peoples of Africa. Moscow: Tsetropoligrafr.
- CHAWATIATA (2016). Web page, accessed on 17.10.2016, <http://chawatiata-tanga.tripod.com/>
- KIKO (2016). Web page, accessed on 19.11.2016, <http://www.africa.uga.edu>