

A Traditional House in the Pamir Culture (Based on Ishkashim language)

The traditional Pamir house has a unique architecture.

In the old days people used to build small houses due to severe winter frosts. Many things have changed since then. Now the Pamir people build very large houses (up to 72 sq. m.) with large windows. In such a house there are 6-7 rooms located under one roof.

The houses are very strong and earthquake-resistant. One house is designed for 6-7 generations. One can still find houses built 200-300 years ago. The old houses are being renovated from time to time, but the old roof stays untouched. According to a building expert a house is built with help of 54 beams, two-bearing beams and five columns.

There are few old houses in Ishkashim, one could say that all Ishkashim people take their origin from there. These houses still exist, they are called *kata xon-ən* 'big house' (old house), or *bobo-yi xon-ən* 'grandparents house'.

There is no big difference between the structure of an Ishkashim house and a traditional house of other Pamiri groups.

In one house there are normally 6-7 rooms under one roof.

1. room at the entrance - an entrance hall (*var-čəpošt*); It is a small space, which looks like a small corridor. It is separated from the main part of the house by its walls and columns. *var-čəpošt* starts from the front door and runs up to the columns with horizontal bar on them. My consultants say that this place is separated from the rest of the house on purpose. Traditionally people did not knock on the door. During the time the newcomer opened the door and reached the main part of the house, its inhabitants had an opportunity to get ready or maybe get dressed.

2. alcove (sort of a terrace inside the room) - a place for rest and sleep work (*rež-o*);

3. the fireplace: a place for the conversations (*čalək-sar*); in older days there used to be a small fireplace. One used to light the fire in the morning, men used to sit around it, warm their hands and boil tea. Men used to have dinner here and spend the time here before going to bed. This is a place for men's gatherings.

4. the kitchen (*digdon-sar*). In the Pamirs men are not supposed to go upstairs to the kitchen, a man should not interfere in the kitchen. It's a warm place, where women and children spend time in the winter before going to sleep, with their legs close to the fireplace (*digdon*). *Digdon-bən* - a narrow passage to the two sides of the fireplace, leading to another room. In older days it used to be lower than the plank-beds (depth 0.5 m). Now it is usually done at the same level with plank-beds *digdon-sar* and *digdo(n)lav*.

5. the area for dancing, etc. (*poga*); (traditionally this part of the house used to be covered with flagstone. Stone was more practical for sweeping than the earth. In case people had to sit there, animal's skin were used to make it warmer.

6. the basement grain storage (*γiiv*); there used to be a grain storage underneath these plank-beds

7. the ash-pit - a deepening near the hearth (*damaxa*). During the day it was used to dry the firewood.

The inner space of the house divided by height in four levels: I - the lowest level - floor (*poga*), II level - place in front of the fireplace (*čalbk-sar*), III level plank-beds (*rež--o*), IV - the highest level - the fireplace (*digdon-sar*).

čorxona in the center of the room in the ceiling there is a terraced skyline window with hole for light and smoke. It used to be a tube (*dudkaš*). Each level is a symbol for an element. The first level symbolizes the "House of Earth", the second level - "House of Waters", the third level - "House of Wind "and the fourth, the top level represents the "House of Fire. "

Andreev M. S. notes that he had seen a similar ceiling in one old house in the village Sudzhina close to Panjakent. The photos of such ceilings were published by A. Stein, the famous researcher of East Turkestan from the north-east of Chitral (Stein, 1912; fig. 20, 59). Apparently, this photo was made in a very rich house, one can see beautiful carvings on the columns, the ceiling is made out of overlapping octagons, and not squares. A similar ceiling was found in the Strzhigovsk cave in East Turkistan (Le Coq, 1925). There are two types of similar ceiling in the Caucasus (Georgia and Armenia), called the ceiling: one is formed from overlapping squares (Fig. 61, left), and the other from overlapping octagons (Fig. 61, right). There are some similarities in the ancient monuments of Bamiyan (Baumhauer 1928; Lisician 1926).

Andreev notes: "summing up, I would like to note the striking similarities in the form of ceiling type in the Caucasus, Bactria, in the monuments of Bamiyan, in the upper Panj, Chitral and the Eastern Turkestan. This striking similarity, of course, points to a common ancient culture. I do not see yet sufficient data to make assumptions about the possible origin of the ceiling" (Andreev, 1958; 267-273).

Customs and rituals associated with the house

The traditional house has three alcoves. This is where all the rituals are performed. On these alcoves there are columns, symbolizing five saints - the prophet Muhammad Murtuzo- Ali, Fatima, Hasan and Husayn (*panj tani pok*).

1. The main alcove (*sartakya*) has two important columns attached to it. One column (*šo(h)-sutun*) symbolizes the prophet Muhammad, and the other column – Murtuzo- Ali. They are the most important columns in the house. This is a place for the elders of the house and for important guests, the body of the deceased is also put here (the deceased is an honored guest). Elders and guests might sleep on this bunk-bed. Women do not sleep here.

Many important ceremonies take place on this alcove: lightning of fire (*čəroy pədinuk / čəroyravšan*), wedding ceremony (*nikoh*) and grooms head shaving while dressing up for the wedding (*sartərošon*). During New Year celebration (*Šogun*) greeting branches are placed on this alcove.

2. bottom alcove (*past-rež*) is a bunk-bed for women. Women sit here during weddings. No rituals take place here. In front of this these bunk there are two columns with horizontal bar on them, symbolizing grandsons of the Prophet Muhammad and Murtuzo-Ali: Hassan and Hussein.

3. The small alcove (*čəṭ-rež*) is used to dress up the bride. After the wedding ceremony *niko (h)* the groom and the bride stay there, during the seven days of the wedding celebration, they sit behind the curtain (*taxt* 'throne'). The column symbolizes Bibi-Fotima-Zahra, the daughter of the Prophet Muhammad and the wife of Murtuzo-Ali.

In older houses, apart from the three main sleeping alcoves, there is also a place (*taxtabandi*) between the upper and lower bunks-beds, called *kənj*. Unmarried men used to sleep there. In the new houses this low wooden partition is removed, and the upper alcove (*sartakya*) is prolonged.

The sacred place in the house - two little deepening in front of the fireplace, called *langar* 'sanctuary'. This sacred place is used to perform traditional rites. During spring holiday (New Year), religious holidays, incense (*buy*) are being burnt here, before going for a hunt or a longer journey one would bow to this place and pray to God and the saints (Nazarova 2004, 71).

There are remnants of the fire worship in wedding ceremonies. When the bride is being taken away from the house to her parents in-laws' house, before leaving the house she takes a handful of ashes from the hearth, and puts it into her boot, with the right hand she touches the *langar*, and holds the hand to her face and kisses it. This tradition is observed in other cultures as well (Rosenfeld, 1975, 214, Kazakeevich, 2004).

Inside the main horizontal beam people place the umbilical cord of a newborn child, the greeting brunches for the New Year are also placed there.

In the recent years, when houses are being modernized, partitions are being removed and replaced with low wooden cupboards. In the modern houses there are usually one or two cupboards. Normally they are placed next to the bunk-beds, which separates the lower from the upper room, from the kitchen. Some houses are build without any partitions to win more space.

This type of house can be also found by the Pamir people living in China, (Xinjiang Uygur Autonomous Region), Pakistan (Gilgit, Hunza) and Afghanistan (Badakhshan Province).

There are many customs and rituals associated with the house and its parts. The legends say, the house should be built in a good location. It is forbidden build a house near the cemeteries, holy places, etc. These places are considered heavy. (Mukhiddinov, 1975, 24-25).

When a new house was founded a *mullah* or a *khalifa* defined a happy day and hour to begin the work. On this day people burn incense on the place assigned for the house to chase away the evil spirits. The day and the hour of should be

happy, otherwise the inhabitation will suffer from misfortune. There is a saying: *besoat-xon*: prefix *be* 'no' + *soat* 'time' + *xon* 'house' (house (built) in an unlucky hour). Building materials for the house should be purchased in an honest way. The saying is: *i zoda-t awloda-bo alol nāst šad* 'His descendants were not lucky'.

The legend says that the future prosperity of the house depends on how the owner will reward the construction specialist. The specialist is supposed to receive so-called *aqi usto* 'share of the master'. It is believed that if the specialist is happy (*xi menat baxšbš kənu* '(master) can forgive his work'), the house will be happy (*šoguni*).

Many customs are connected with the doorstep:

When the bride comes to the groom's house, people meet her on the doorstep (*pərnič*) and slaughter a sheep (sacrifice).

In the past there was an interesting custom to hammer a nail into the doorstep when somebody from the house dies. The number of nails can show how many people had left the house forever;

At the birth of a child (a boy) people fired into the air at the doorstep of the house. This was supposed to chase away evil spirits.

The doorstep of the house is also associated with many prohibitions: there is a saying that if one will sit on the doorstep, the father of this man will be in debt: *pə pərnič niduk – šak, to qarzdor šū* 'Sit on the doorstep - bad, (and) the father will be in debt'; It is not allowed to shake hand over the doorstep when meeting. It is believed that these people will become enemies.

There is a concept of 'living in old houses', the phraseology is: *did nəvarūk* 'make smoke': *kata-xon did na-nəvarūk - šak* 'not to like the smoke of an old house - a bad omen' (abandoned house). A bad omen is to leave the old house uninhabited: *xon-i kata var šūx kənūk – bebarakati* 'Close the door to the old house - (loss) of grace'. This belief is also reflected in the following examples: the worst curse is the expression *ti xon-var šūx šū!* '(Let) the door of your house be closed '(all people die).

The word *bənyod* in Ishkashim language means 'the basement (of a house) ', in a figurative meaning - 'off spring :

illo (h)i ti bənyod savz šū! 'God forbid that your basement becomes green! (A wish to have a large family). "Opposite meaning of this formula - the curse: *ti bənyod kanu!* (Let) your basement break! (For details see Nazarova, 2007, 56).

Many phrases and expressions related to home (*xona*) can be divided into the following semantic groups: the blessing, happiness and misery, the ruin of families, destruction of family, Grace House, etc.

blessing: Wishing prosperity and blessings connected with the house. At the end of the blessing is pronounced three times - *xonaobod* (*xona* 'House' + *obod* 'wellbeing').

happiness and unhappiness: In the Pamir languages the fortune and misfortune of the family are related to the house. A house whose inhabitants live until old age, in good health and well-being, is called *šoguni xon* 'happy home'. If several people die young in the house, this home is *bexosyat -xon* 'unhappy home' or *xonai odamxər* 'home, devouring people.

the destruction of the family: The ruin of the family is expressed in the phrase *mə xon-ət pə mə dam kûl* 'You ruined me (my house is made on my back)'. There is also a number of Tajik borrowed phrases: *xona xarob-ət mak kûl* /*xona bar duš-t mak kûl* 'You ruined me', (you ruined me a house). The idiom *xon pə dam kənûk* 'to have a house made on the back' is also used to express the loss of a loved one, especially the owner of the house. The same meaning has a saying: *xon sawûk* 'burning house'.

the destruction of the family: a wife talks about separation from her husband: *xon weron kənûk* '(you) destroyed the house (happiness), *bexona kənûk* 'deprive the house' or *xonaweroni kənûk* (*xona* 'house' + *weron* 'destruction' + suffix-*i*) The opposite of this saying is - *xonaobod* 'a well- established house.

the grace of the house: There is a belief, that every house has its angel who sheds his grace on it: *nošəkri nakən za, xon-barakat naarazu* 'do not show ungratitude, or the grace will leave you'; *bəland-gap nade, za xon-fərəšta/ xabes nabəparon-i* 'do not talk loudly, don't scare the angel

Pamir House plays the crucial role in the life and spiritual culture of Pamiri people. All rituals and ceremonies (wedding, funeral religious) which take place within the traditional Pamir houses, reflect both ancient Iranian (the rite of sacrifice, lamp ignition, etc.) and and Shiite Islamic beliefs.

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