

**THE ROLE AND IMPORTANCE OF FOLK MEDICINE IN THE FERGANA VALLEY AT
THE END OF THE 19TH AND THE BEGINNING OF THE 20TH CENTURY****Patkhiddinov Rukhiddin Khusniddinovich**

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E-mail: ruxiddinpatxiddinov@gmail.com**ABSTRACT**

This article examines the role and significance of folk medicine in the lives of the local population of the Fergana Valley at the turn of the 19th and 20th centuries. It analyzes the main forms and methods of traditional healing, the functions of tabibs (folk healers), and the medicines they employed. Particular attention is given to the colonial policies of the Russian Empire, which did not directly restrict traditional medicine but promoted Western medical institutions in the region. Drawing on archival materials, periodicals, and scholarly works, the study argues that folk medicine continued to play a crucial role in the daily lives of the rural population despite the gradual introduction of Russian medical practices.

Keywords: folk medicine, tabib, Greco-Arabic medicine, mystical medicine, Russian Empire, colonialism, Fergana Valley

INTRODUCTION

By the mid-19th century, the khanates of Central Asia were in a state of deep socio-economic crisis caused by internal wars, weak central authority, and stagnating institutions. These conditions facilitated the southward expansion of the Russian Empire. Between 1864 and 1895, Turkestan was colonized by Russia: the Emirate of Bukhara and the Khanate of Khiva lost large territories and became vassal states, while the Kokand Khanate was entirely abolished.

Results and discussion

In 1867, the Turkestan General-Governorate and the Turkestan Military District were established. Konstantin von Kaufman, the first governor-general, pursued a policy of “non-interference” in local customs and traditions. His successors largely adhered to this approach. As a result, traditional medicine was neither directly suppressed nor actively developed. Folk healers (tabibs) continued their work as before, using knowledge rooted in Greco-Arabic medical traditions, local practices, and mystical elements.

Forms of Folk Medicine in the Fergana Valley**Greco-Arabic Medical Traditions**

The intellectual foundation of medical practice in Turkestan derived from the works of Hippocrates, Galen, and Avicenna (Ibn Sina). Tabibs used herbal remedies, dietary treatments, and methods based on the theory of humors. Medical manuscripts in Persian and Arabic were circulated among healers, and many practitioners relied on centuries-old pharmacopoeias.

Mystical and Religious Healing

Alongside rational methods, mystical practices such as amulets, incantations, and Qur’anic healing verses were widespread. Certain illnesses were believed to be caused by supernatural forces, and only ritual-based treatment was considered effective. This duality—rational and mystical—was a distinctive feature of local medicine.

Practical Experience of Tabibs

Most tabibs were not formally trained in institutions but learned through apprenticeship and family traditions. Their authority rested on experience, reputation, and successful treatment outcomes. Remedies included herbal infusions, oils, mineral substances, cauterization, massage, and bone-setting techniques.

Russian Colonial Policy and Medicine

The Russian authorities did not forbid folk medicine but sought to gradually introduce European-style hospitals and dispensaries. District hospitals (uchastka hospitals) were established in the Fergana region, though they were few in number and primarily served Russian officials and soldiers.

According to the *Statistical Survey of Fergana Province for 1908*, the region had a small number of medical facilities compared to its population. Villagers in remote areas continued to rely almost exclusively on tabibs. Newspapers such as *Turkestanskije Vedomosti* published reports emphasizing both the benefits of European medicine and the persistence of traditional healing among the native population.

The coexistence of these two systems created a hybrid medical landscape: official Russian medicine for administrative and military needs, and folk medicine for the majority of local inhabitants.

The Social Role of Folk Medicine

Folk medicine was not only a means of treatment but also part of cultural identity. Tabibs often served as community leaders, mediators, and spiritual guides. Their accessibility and familiarity made them indispensable, especially in rural Fergana villages.

Even with the establishment of Russian medical institutions, local people often sought tabibs first, turning to Russian doctors only in cases of severe illness. This choice reflected not only limited access to official medicine but also a deep trust in traditional methods.

Conclusion

At the end of the 19th and the beginning of the 20th century, folk medicine remained central to the lives of the inhabitants of the Fergana Valley. Despite the introduction of Russian medical institutions, tabibs continued to play a crucial role in health care. Their practice combined rational Greco-Arabic medicine with mystical elements, reflecting the synthesis of scientific and spiritual approaches.

The colonial policy of the Russian Empire neither fully suppressed nor significantly supported folk medicine, which allowed traditional healing to persist well into the Soviet period. The study of this historical process highlights the resilience of local knowledge systems and their importance in understanding the medical history of Uzbekistan.

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