

Article

Interpretation of M. Eliade's Religious Concepts in Modern Society

Durmuş Arık ¹ , Tolen Barakbayeva ^{2, *} , Botakoz Abdrakhmanova ³

¹ Ankara University, Ankara, Turkey

² Egyptian University of Islamic Culture Nur-Mubarak, Almaty, Kazakhstan

³ Yessenov University, Aktau, Kazakhstan

*Corresponding author's email: tolenbarakbaeva@gmail.com

Abstract

This article analyzes the interpretation of religious concepts developed by the historian of religions Mircea Eliade within the field of religious studies. As a historian of religions, he conducted extensive research into the history of religions and was able to formulate religious concepts. As a result, he was able to analyze and present to the reader the significance of his concepts in the religious analysis he conducted as a historian of religions. Analyzing the significance of religious concepts, Eliade wrote such works as “Patterns in Comparative Religion”, “The Myth of the Eternal Return”, “Shamanism: Archaic Techniques of Ecstasy”, “Images and Symbols: Studies in Religious Symbolism”, “Yoga: Immortality and Freedom”, and “The Sacred and the Profane”. The relevance of this article lies in its emphasis on the fact that the concepts under study are an important indicator in the contemporary field of religious studies. Mircea Eliade's religious concepts provide a profound scientific methodology for understanding the essence and history of religion, its role in human existence, and its functioning in society. The article presents the main directions and ideas of this concept in detail, with examples. The concepts of the sacred and the profane, hierophany, archaism, myth, symbol, religious universalism, and time encompass important topics in the field of religious studies. They can also be an important part of the structure of other humanities specialties.

Keywords: symbol; concept; history of religion; hierophany; sacred; archaic; profane.

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М. Элиаденің діни концепцияларының қазіргі қоғамдағы түсіндірмелері

Аңдатпа

Мақалада діндер тарихшысы Мирча Элиаденің дінтану саласында өз авторлығымен қалыптастырған діни концепцияларының түсіндірмесі талқыланады. Ол дін тарихшысы ретінде діндер тарихына ауқымды зерттеулер жасап, діни концепцияларды құрастыра білді. Нәтижесінде дін тарихшысы ретінде жасаған діни талдаулардағы концепцияларының маңыздылығын талдап оқырманға ұсына алды. Діни концепцияларының маңыздылығын талдау барысында Элиаде: «Діндер тарихы туралы трактат», «Мәңгілік қайта оралу туралы миф», «Шаманизм: экстаздың архаикалық әдістері», «Символдар мен бейнелер», «Йога: ажалсыздықжәнееркіндік», «Қасиеттілікжәнедүниелік» сияқты еңбектерін жазды. Мақаланың өзектілігі зерттелген концепциялар қазіргі дінтану саласында маңызды көрсеткіш екеніне назар аударту. Мирча Элиаденің дінтанулық концепциялары діннің мәнін және тарихын, оның адам болмысындағы рөлі мен қоғамдағы функциясын түсіну үшін терең ғылыми әдіснаманы ұсынады. Концепцияның негізгі бағыттары мен идеяларының түсіндірмесі мақалада мысалдармен жан – жақты ашылды. Қасиетті (сакралды) мен профандық (жерлік), иерофания, архаикалық, миф, символ, діни универсализм, уақыт концепциялары дінтану саласындағы маңызды тақырыптарды қамтиды. Сонымен қатар басқада гуманитарлық мамандықтарында құрылымдарының маңызды бөлігі болып табыла алады.

Түйін сөздер: символ; концепция; дін тарихы; иерофания; қасиетті; архаикалық; профан.

Интерпретация религиозных концепций М. Элиаде в современном обществе

Аннотация

В статье рассматривается интерпретация религиозных концепций, разработанных историком религий Мирчей Элиаде в области религиоведения, автором которой он является. Как историк религий, он провел обширные исследования истории религий и смог сформулировать религиозные концепции. В результате он смог проанализировать и представить читателю значение своих концепций в религиозном анализе, проведенном им как историком религий. Анализируя значение религиозных концепций, Элиаде написал такие работы, как: «Трактат по истории религий», «Миф о вечном возвращении», «Шаманизм: архаичные методы экстаза», «Образы и символы», «Йога: бессмертие и свобода», «Священное и мирское». Актуальность статьи заключается в том, чтобы привлечь внимание к тому факту, что изучаемые концепции являются важным показателем в современной области религиоведения. Религиозные концепции Мирчи Элиаде предоставляют глубокую научную методологию для понимания сущности и истории религии, ее роли в человеческом существовании и функционирования в обществе. Основные направления и идеи концепции подробно изложены в статье с примерами. Понятия священного и профанного, иерофании, архаизма, мифа, символа, религиозного универсализма, времени охватывают важные темы в области религиоведения. Они также могут быть важной частью структуры других гуманитарных специальностей.

Ключевые слова: символ; концепция; история религии; иерофания; священный; архаичный; профанный.

Introduction

Mircea Eliade is a prominent figure in religious studies, whose work formed the foundation of modern religious studies and religious philosophy. He deeply explored the cultural and psychological aspects of religion, seeking to understand its role in human existence. He presents the concepts of religious analysis he developed as a historian of religion, analyzing them in his own unique way. He also criticizes the analytical and interpretive work of other academic fields on the history of religions, arguing that the history of religions has a different methodology. He argues that, although they study the topic of religion, they do not elucidate religious concepts. He studied at the University of Bucharest from 1925 to 1928 and later studied Sanskrit and Indian philosophy at the University of Calcutta. His first works were published in Romanian in the 1930s. Later, his works began to appear in French. During these periods, he tirelessly pursued research, drawing inspiration from the depths of religious history. Mircea Eliade is the author of such works as “Patterns in Comparative Religion” (Eliade, 1958), “The Myth of the Eternal Return” (Eliade, 1954), “Shamanism: Archaic Techniques of Ecstasy” (Eliade, 1964), “Images and Symbols: Studies in Religious Symbolism” (Eliade, 1961), “Yoga: Immortality and Freedom” (Eliade, 1958), and “The Sacred and the Profane” (Eliade, 1959). In 1987, the 16-volume encyclopedia “History of Religions” was published under his leadership (Barakbaeva et al., 2024, p. 67). As these works were widely disseminated and translated into many languages, Eliade’s religious concepts have become widely recognized as unique in the history of religions.

Eliade’s religious concepts represent a unique approach in the phenomenology of religion compared to those of other religious scholars, forming a new approach, distinct from the phenomenology of E. Husserl. Raised in the Judeo-Christian tradition, Eliade sought in his works to demonstrate the connection between the mystical worldview and the archaic beliefs of Eastern and Western civilizations. Through his ongoing research, he developed the concept of the “history of religions”. In Eliade’s concepts, the transformation of human civilization and cataclysms in society, leading to various spiritual and political changes, were always accompanied by the development of apocalyptic, esoteric, and other religious-mystical teachings (Qu, 2023). This is explained by the fact that Eliade’s phenomenology of religion arose from the concepts and ideas of the history of religions. This article analyzes Eliade’s concepts of religious studies and his main ideas, as well as the place of these concepts in modern religious studies.

Materials and Methods

This article examines the methodological foundations aimed at explaining religious conceptual issues in the field of religious studies. These foundations are based on the scientific method of universal cognition. The development of religious concepts and views is analyzed from an experimental-historical perspective using hypothetical and functional methods. Religious conceptual content, collected using formal logical methods, is used for in-depth research in accordance with the established rules of modern scientific research. The key concepts and conclusions contained in classical algorithmic sources were comprehensively studied using the method of hermeneutic analysis. Epistemological analysis methods were also employed in writing this research article. Systematizing legislative and practical aspects is important in studying the modern history of religions. The comparative method used in this article allows us to evaluate the effectiveness of scholarly knowledge by comparing domestic research with international experience. In addition, the theoretical basis of the study was provided by legislative acts, regulatory documents, materials from scientific conferences, and abstracts of reports from specialists in this field.

Results and Discussion

The difference between the concepts of sacred and profane

Eliade defines the distinction between the “sacred” and the “profane” as a fundamental characteristic of religion. He sees the sacred as the highest essence of human existence, man’s

connection with God or a higher spiritual being. The sacred is a transcendent aspect of the world, transcending human existence. The sacred is an interpretation of the idea of “god”. The earthly world, he argues, is part of everyday life, the human home. Eliade interprets these differences as a struggle between life and death, the sacred and the mundane.

It's difficult to separate the abstract theory of the sacred from Eliade's work. Unlike other traditional thinkers, Eliade, when studying and describing the sacred, uses his own terms, such as kratophany, cryptoreligion, and reversibility, and also examines and explains specific examples of sacred manifestations from various religious traditions around the world. Thus, he unifies the diversity of all religious phenomena and describes them all using the element of “sacred”. He makes the category of the sacred a common basis for comparing religions. Using this sacred element, Eliade compares the historical forms of all religions with the concept of hierophany.

Hierophany and the structure of the world

Another important concept in Eliade's concept of religion is the concept of “hierophany”. Hierophany (translation from Greek ιερός “sacred” + φαίνω “light, radiance”) – the appearance of the sacred. Essentially, the term “hierophany” is an expanded interpretation of the Christian term “theophany”. Hierophany is the revelation of a divine being in the world, its manifestation. Eliade believes that the highest meaning of religion lies in the manifestation of “ownership” in the world, in time and space. The manifestation of hierophany can take various forms: in sacred places, sacred books, religious holidays, rituals, myths, symbols, or other elements of religion. The essence of hierophany lies in the connection between human life and religion, that is, in the unity of man with his own nature. The act of hierophany always involves a meeting of transcendent reality and the desire to discover the uniqueness of the human soul. Eliade calls a person of this quality homoreligiosus; such people “reproduce” the world order, bring order to chaos, and illuminate their own living space. These actions reflect his desire to return to his original state, imbued with cosmic sanctity and pure origin, as if from the hand of the Creator. Thus, through the concept of hierophany, Eliade defines man's place on the threshold of the transcendental world. It is also worth noting that the forms of hierophany, in general, are recognized differently in various cultural contexts. Throughout history, various cultures have ascribed hierophanies to all aspects of economic, spiritual, and social life. If we were to study any specific culture, it would be difficult to find an object, creature, or activity that was not a hierophany. This is because everything was created based on the same meaning. For example, a religious person may perceive everything they see as a hierophany. This could include musical instruments, architectural forms, vehicles, and so on. These may be revered as sacred images by different peoples. Therefore, under certain circumstances, any material object can become a hierophany (Eliade, 1987).

Archaic concept

Eliade, studying the history of religions, explains the concept of archaism in detail. He argues that past eras hold enormous significance in human life and that this past time must be revived. Eliade believes that many religious rituals and myths reflect an archaic process. Man, resisting the passage of time, strives to restore his “primordial”, “original” being. This process, in his view, demonstrates the important role of religion in culture. The concept of archaism and archetypes occupies a special place in his works. Eliade's understanding of the concept of “archaism” applies primarily to the most ancient forms of culture, religion, and mythology.

Archaic culture (or archaic culture) is the preservation of cultural and religious views and structures from past eras, from ancient times, to the present day, as well as their discovery, study, and revival. Eliade used this concept to explain the evolution of culture and religion. According to Eliade, archaism is not only the preservation of elements of antiquity, but also the revival of human

sacred experience and its integration into modern life (Meletinsky, 1976). Eliade explains archaism as a view of modern man and his spiritual world as a means of connection with his past, with antiquity.

According to Eliade, archaism is seen as a return to primitive religions and mythological concepts. He describes people's desire for an archaic world through myths and religions, even in the modern era. Myths and rituals form the foundation of archaism. Eliade considered mythology to be the most ancient and important component of cultures. He viewed myths as teachings explaining the profound meaning of human life, defining the place and role of humans in the world. Eliade's research shows that myths and rituals can be forgotten over time as cultures evolve, but they continue to reappear as archaic phenomena in religious and cultural phenomena.

Eliade viewed archaism not only as a concept of the past but also as a concept of eternal return and renewal. For him, archetypes and mythology are the highest structures of culture and society, constantly renewed over the centuries. In this sense, archaism is said to be continually reborn in forms similar to culture, including religions and social traditions.

The connection between archaic and modern society: Eliade also spoke of a revival of the concept of archaism in modern society. He predicted that archetypes, ancient religions, and mythology could be revived in the modern human world. He said this process would lead to a revival of "cults" and "spiritual quests" and would influence the human inner world and consciousness. He believed that these actions would lead to a rediscovery of ancient traditions and a reconnection with their original spirit (Revunenova, 1979, p. 243).

For Eliade, the archaic is the revival of past culture and religion in the present, a reflection of people's inner need for this. This concept earned Eliade recognition as a scholar who deeply explored the historical and cultural depth of humanity and the relevance of ancient concepts in the present.

The concept of myth and symbols

In his scholarly work "Aspects of Myth", Eliade described and explained in detail the concepts he understood. He distinguished himself from his colleagues, who held mythological views. For example, let's consider the views of other scholars studying myth. O.M. Freudenberg's research suggests that myth is not limited to mythological concepts but is sometimes found in superstitions. Another mythologist, B. Raglan, views myths as ritual texts. E. Cassirer studied myth as a symbolic form of culture. J. Campbell, a representative of the Jungian school, considered myth a source of inspiration in human history. F. Nietzsche said, "Without myth, any culture loses its nature, its creative character". According to C.G. Jung, myth is the oldest form of human thought, and therefore archetypes, mythological images, and experiences were shaped by the most ancient ethnic groups. Thus, the scholar C.G. Jung concludes that it is impossible to control humanity unconsciously; instead, a conscious model of control shapes the fate of nations and individuals. Taking these considerations into account, Eliade came to the following conclusions about myths and symbols.

The role of myths and symbols in human development throughout the ages has been unique. He considers myths to be the foundation of humanity's spiritual quest. Myths are a symbolic language that helps us understand the meaning and purpose of human life. Eliade notes that myths are not only a reflection of the past but also a tool of spiritual guidance for people in the present. Given that the history of myths is the unique worldview of each people, formed since ancient times. The place of myths in the development of each people is crucial. His understanding of mythology encompasses a wide range of philosophical and religious views. Eliade considered myths an important component of human life and culture, as well as landmarks expressing humanity's deep cultural and spiritual needs, reflecting the relationship between man and nature in his understanding of the world.

The following examines Eliade's main concepts related to mythology:

- According to Eliade, myths are a system of narratives that explain the origin and structure of the world, describing the relationship between humans and the surrounding environment. Myths explain how the world came to be, the origins of humans, and their place in society.
- Eliade presented myths not simply as stories or events, but as images of sacred experiences. Myths helped people understand the structure of the world and its meaning.
- Eliade studied mythology as a unique way of understanding time. He described the “cosmological” structure of myths, that is, the way they understand and organize time. Myths echo the eternal structure of the world, as there is a distinction between mythological time and historical time.
- Mythological time is based on the concepts of “beginning” and “rebirth”. The “cosmological” meaning of myth, that is, a return to the original formation of the world, directs humanity toward a process of spiritual renewal and rebirth. Consequently, the repetition of myths signifies the beginning of a new life for humanity.
- Eliade believed that myths and archetypes are closely linked. Archetypes are primordial images and structures that recur throughout human history. Through myths, archetypes are revived and satisfy people’s spiritual and psychological needs.
- Archetypes appear as specific characters and events described in myths. These symbols and images represent the fundamental foundations of human cultural, spiritual, and psychological development (Eliade, 1994).

Eliade noted the close connection between mythology and religion. For him, myths reflect the fundamental structures and ideas of religion. Mythology and religious beliefs are in harmony with each other, shaping a person’s worldview. He considered myths to be the “practical” foundation of religious experience, meaning they reveal the essence of cosmic existence and the human spiritual quest. Myths, he argued, are the foundation for forming religion, an essential tool for understanding and guiding religious life.

Mircea Eliade was a scholar who paid particular attention to the role of symbols in culture and religion. He viewed symbols not only as cultural or religious phenomena but also as the basis for human understanding of the world around us in spiritual and psychological terms. He studied symbols as the deepest layers of worldview, seeking to understand their special significance and meaning for the human mind. His understanding of symbols is closely linked to his views on mythology and religion.

Eliade often associates symbols with the sacred world. Symbols are interpreted as a universal aesthetic category representing and illustrating the phenomenon, nature, and quality of a particular thing. In his view, symbols are tools or images that help people establish a connection with the “sacred” world. That is, through symbols, people strive to attain spiritual meaning, higher truth, and the sacred world.

As mentioned, the division between the sacred and the profane is expressed through symbols. Symbols represent not only the mundane or earthly world, but also the “sacred” world. People use various symbols to understand and perceive them from the very beginning. Symbols express deeper meanings. Symbols are considered deeply meaningful signs that people use to understand themselves and their place in the world. Symbols express broad and multifaceted thoughts, concepts, and ideas through individual elements. For people, a symbol is more than just a superficial representation of something; it is a tool that reflects deep thoughts and concepts in the human mind. For example, many mythological symbols throughout human history – earth, water, wood, fire, sun – symbolize man’s connection with the world and his close relationship with nature. Eliade closely links symbols and archetypes. Archetypes are images and structures that exist in the human collective unconscious,

recurring and found across all cultures. Symbols have been used to represent archetypes throughout the history of myths and religions. He views archetypes as real signs and images arising from humanity's historical and cultural experience. Consequently, symbols are a way of reflecting these archetypes and applying them to life. For Eliade, symbols are also linked to a special concept of time. He explains mythological time through symbols. Within myths themselves, each symbol reflects its own time and preserves it in the consciousness of humanity through eternal repetition. Symbolic actions, carried out through myths and rituals, represent the renewal and reconstruction of not only time but also the entire world. These symbols represent the "cosmological" or structure of the world, allowing us to return to the initial period of the world's formation.

The role of symbols in culture and religion is crucial. Eliade believed that symbols are fundamental to the formation of the human spiritual world. Mythical or religious symbols are ways of understanding the world, systematizing it, and imbuing it with profound meaning. Symbols play a special role in religious rituals and cults, as they connect people with the sacred world and help them feel part of it. Therefore, the meaning of symbols is multifaceted.

According to Eliade, the meaning of symbols can exist on several levels. Symbols can have different meanings in different cultures, but their common characteristic is that they represent fundamental concepts in human consciousness.

Symbols can have different meanings and interpretations, taking into account a person's personal experience and historical context, but their main purpose is to help a person understand themselves and the world around them.

For Mircea Eliade, myth is more than just a story describing the past or recounting historical events. It is the foundation of humanity's spiritual life, an important way of understanding the world, and a profound phenomenon that defines a person's inner world and values. Myths connect people with the world beyond time, allowing them to understand their place and meaning in it. In the modern era, the concept of myth has become an important part of religious studies. Symbols are also viewed as cultural tools that explain deeper layers of myth and religion, as well as important indicators of people's spiritual and psychological worlds. Therefore, today, symbols serve as a means of connecting people with the sacred world, imbuing it with deep meaning and purpose.

The concept of the universality of religion

Eliade views religion as a universal phenomenon. His ideas on religious universalism aim to understand the common roots, shared structures, and unique qualities of all the world's religions. He focuses on the common foundations of religions across cultures and peoples. He argues that all religions, despite their distinctive features, contain similar elements concerning the structure of the world and the human psyche. This concept brought Eliade fame as a religious scholar in the field of phenomenology, as he studied the common elements of different religions and tried to understand them through common laws and structures. According to him, although each religion is unique in its own way, they all share common elements and concepts. All religions share common themes, such as gods, sacred places, rituals, ideas about the meaning of life and death, and the connection between humanity and the world. For example, he noted that temples, sacred sites, and sanctuaries occupy an important place in different cultures. Each religion uses different symbols and rituals to convey its sanctity to the world, but its essence and purpose remain the same. Since all religions preach and strive to get closer to God, find peace of mind, and achieve happiness (Eliade, 1957, p. 86).

He argues that all religions, using common myths and symbols, view time as a cyclical phenomenon, that is, the structure and order of the world are reflected in the repeating cycles of nature. This idea is found in all religions; for example, a comparison of empirical texts such as Creation and Resurrection in Christianity, rebirth and karma in Hinduism, or the renewal of the gods in ancient Egyptian religions

shows that their ultimate meaning and purpose are the same. Eliade's religious universalism seeks to demonstrate the interconnectedness, uniqueness, and commonalities of religions and cultures. His theory recognizes religious diversity, each of which allows for understanding important aspects of the human experience.

The concept of time and illud tempus

Eliade also explored the unique nature of time. He spoke of "illud tempus" – primordial, primordial time and its unique nature. According to this concept, humans strive to return to sacred time and recreate their spiritual primordiality. The cyclical nature of mythological time and history allows us to evaluate important periods of human life from a new perspective. Researchers claim that while studying people from the era of religious believers, they discovered individuals who walked upright. This leads to the conclusion that religious believers consciously walked upright (Eliade, 1978, p. 180). This means that people who walk upright are conscious and cannot be unconscious. It is said that people who walk with a hunched posture learned to walk upright over time thanks to the development of assistive devices. As a result, humans developed the ability to rotate around a central axis, lean back, and turn left and right depending on the time zone. Their actions, in turn, adjusted their posture relative to a specific "center", which explains the semantic aspects of their cosmogonic, symbolic, and paradigmatic divisions. The concepts of "time" and "illud tempus" reveal Mircea Eliade's understanding of time and the world. He explained the difference between historical and mythological time, deeply exploring their interconnectedness and significance in religions and mythologies. Illud tempus is a symbol of sacred time, the human desire to recreate one's historical life in a mythological context.

As a result, Mircea Eliade established himself as a scholar who studied not only the historical and cultural aspects of religious studies but also the role of religion in human psychology and social structures. His ideas on the place of religion in culture and society have had a profound influence on modern religious studies. Eliade acknowledges the uniqueness of various religions while simultaneously reflecting on the universal nature of religion. He studied them based on general principles and structures. His concepts are important not only from a theoretical but also from a practical perspective, as they allowed us to understand the laws of religious development.

Eliade's research reflects his interest in the phenomenological approach to religion, which views religion as a universal phenomenon that manifests itself uniquely in different cultures and traditions. His phenomenology of religion explicitly focuses on the study of the forms, symbols, and rituals of human expression in religion.

Conclusion

Mircea Eliade's concept of religion offers a broad range of perspectives on the significance of religion in human life, its cultural and psychological aspects, through an in-depth study. His works have received widespread recognition in modern religious studies and have laid the foundation for many other studies. Thanks to Eliade's ideas, we can understand not only the theoretical aspects of religion but also its impact on humanity's spiritual world and social structures.

Mircea Eliade's concepts of religion offer a profound scientific methodology for understanding the essence of religion, its role in human existence, and its function in society. Eliade studied religion not only from a cultural or historical point of view, but also from a psychological and philosophical one, striving to reveal the deep meaning and functional role of religion in human life. He offered new insights into the distinction between the sacred and the profane, the meaning of hierophany, the revival of archaism, and the role of myths and symbols.

Eliade's theories on the division of the "sacred" and the "profane", the manifestation of hierophany, and the relationship between archaism and mythology demonstrate the universal and eternal nature

of religion. His ideas on myths and symbols, such as the revival of the archaic era in modern society, have had a significant influence not only on religious studies but also on the humanities in general.

Mircea Eliade's concepts are widely used in modern religious studies, cultural studies, and philosophy. His reflections on religion allow us to explore the universal principles of religions and their common structures across cultures. Furthermore, Eliade's research contributes to a deeper understanding of mythology and symbols as the foundation of human spiritual experience, which plays a vital role in shaping humanity's understanding of its place in the world. Eliade's religious concepts remain relevant today, as they lay the foundation for a deeper understanding of the structure and functioning of religions, as well as for new studies of the spiritual life of cultures.

Authors' contributions

First author – writing the article text, technical formatting.

Second author – writing the article text, correspondence, submission of the article.

Third author – writing the article text, literature review, editing the text.

Conflict of interests

The authors declare that there is no conflict of interest.

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Information about authors

Durmuş Arık – Professor, PhD, Ankara University, Ankara, Turkey, <https://orcid.org/0000-0002-8544-0608>, darik@ankara.edu.tr

Tolen Barakbayeva – PhD candidate, Egyptian University of Islamic Culture Nur-Mubarak, Almaty, Kazakhstan, <https://orcid.org/0000-0002-9420-5167>, tolenbarakbaeva@gmail.com

Botakoz Abdrakhmanova – M.A., Yessenov University, Aktau, Kazakhstan, <https://orcid.org/0000-0001-7160-6294>, botakoz.abdrakhmanova@yu.edu.kz

Авторлар туралы мәлімет

Дурмуш Арык – Профессор, PhD, Анкара университеті, Анкара, Түркия, <https://orcid.org/0000-0002-8544-0608>, darik@ankara.edu.tr

Төлен Барақбаева – PhD докторант, Нұр-Мұбарак Египет ислам мәдениеті университеті, Алматы, Қазақстан, <https://orcid.org/0000-0002-9420-5167>, tolenbarakbaeva@gmail.com

Ботакоз Абдрахманова – Магистр, Yessenov University, Ақтау, Қазақстан, <https://orcid.org/0000-0001-7160-6294>, botakoz.abdrakhmanova@yu.edu.kz

Сведения об авторах

Дурмуш Арык – Профессор, PhD, Университет Анкара, Анкара, Турция, <https://orcid.org/0000-0002-8544-0608>, darik@ankara.edu.tr

Төлен Барақбаева – PhD докторант, Египетский университет исламской культуры Нур-Мубарак, Алматы, Казахстан, <https://orcid.org/0000-0002-9420-5167>, tolenbarakbaeva@gmail.com

Ботакоз Абдрахманова – Магистр, Yessenov University, Ақтау, Казахстан, <https://orcid.org/0000-0001-7160-6294>, botakoz.abdrakhmanova@yu.edu.kz