

The Epic “Shahryar” And Karakalpak Folk Tales Similar Features of the Character System

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Abstract

Resume. The article analyses the similarities of the image system of epics and fairy tales. In particular, common aspects in the images of Karakalpak folk tales and "Shahryar" epic are studied. Several folklorists attempt to illustrate with examples the preservation of historical events from different periods within the epic's plot and the inclusion of the names of individuals who lived in the past. Several folklorists attempt to illustrate with examples the preservation of historical events from different periods within the epic's plot and the inclusion of the names of individuals who lived in the past. The life-related events depicted in the composition and plot of the epic seem to be overshadowed by mythical and fairy-tale elements. Therefore, we conclude that it is appropriate to classify the Karakalpak folk epic "Sharyar" in terms of genre within the group of "epics with mythological fairy tale plots," which reflect social and everyday issues.

Keywords: *Epic, Fairy Tale, Motive, Plot, System of Images*

Introduction

Although epics with fairy-tale-type plots mainly reflect social and everyday issues, their classification as works of a mythological fairy-tale type can be theoretically substantiated by the presence of ancient archaic motifs, such as the supernatural birth of heroes and their maturation with the support of divine forces, as well as by the depiction of mythological views and beliefs intertwined with realistic portrayals of daily life. These features can be clearly observed in the system of characters of epics with fairy-tale-type plots.

Review of Related Literature

It is difficult to determine precisely in which century or year the epic “Sharyar” originated and to establish its exact genesis. However, Karakalpak scholars such as Q. Ayimbetov, Q. Maksetov, and I. Sagitov associate the events of the epic “Sharyar” with ancient times and long historical periods. Professor Kh. Abdullaev, who studied the interrelations of Uzbek and Karakalpak folklore through epic traditions, concludes that the plot of this epic emerged “on the basis of everyday folk tales of Turkic peoples”. In general, the genesis of the epic dates back to very early periods, when it existed in oral form as myth and fairy-tale narratives. This is because mythological consciousness represents one of the earliest forms of human thinking, and as a product of such consciousness, the epic “Sharyar,” shaped in a mythological and fairy-tale form, is considered “a heritage of the Karakalpaks preserved from ancient times”. Literary scholars Q. Bayniyazov and T.

Bayniyazova, who likewise associate the origins of the epic with ancient periods, also support these views. Their distinctive contribution, compared to other scholars, lies in their efforts to demonstrate through examples that the plot of the epic preserves historical events from different periods and even includes the names of individuals who lived in the past.

Objectives

This study aims to analyze epics with fairy-tale-type plots, focusing on their mythological motifs such as supernatural births, divine intervention, and archaic beliefs. The objective is to show how these elements intertwine with realistic depictions of daily life, shaping the system of characters and justifying their classification as mythological fairy-tale narratives.

Methodology

This study employs a qualitative, descriptive approach, analyzing primary texts from Mahmud Kashgari's *Divanu Lughat-it-Turk*, Karakalpak folklore, and epic narratives. Cognitive-discursive and comparative textual analyses were conducted to identify mythological and fairy-tale motifs, character systems, and historical-cultural continuity, ensuring contextual interpretation of archaic motifs within the narrative structure.

Findings and Discussion

In epics, special magical power is often embodied in the image of a bird. In this context, there are elements of archaic myth, such as belief in the magical power of words (for example, when Sharyar recites a spell to the bird Bulbilgoya, makes a mistake in the words, and is defeated). A noteworthy feature of the epic is that all living beings and even inanimate objects are endowed with speech and act like humans. For instance, the speaking of a horse, a bird, a mountain, a lake, a desert, the sky, and the earth, as well as clouds providing shade for humans, are connected with the mythological worldview of ancient people. This reflects their perception of both animate and inanimate objects as objects of cult. In the epic, the image of the bird Bulbilgoya is endowed with magical properties: it can move a city from one place to another, exercise power over both the underworld and the surface of the earth, kill a person with its song, and revive them. The image of Bulbilgoya enters in the middle of the plot and develops into an independent character, increasing the compositional complexity of the epic and serving an artistic function in resolving and concluding all events. After being defeated by the spell, the bird Bulbilgoya becomes the guardian of Sharyar's royal domain, protecting the city by singing in various melodies. The prominent place of the bird image within the epic's plot likely reflects the mythological concepts embedded in the thinking and worldview of people since ancient times. This is also confirmed by archaeological findings discovered in certain ancient fortresses. For example, even without referring to findings from other regions, scholars who conducted research at the Akshakhan-kala archaeological site, located in the territory of the "Azat" collective farm in the present-day Beruniy district of Karakalpakstan, write as follows: "...the defensive walls of the temple-palace turned out to be a gallery decorated with three rows of coloured images along their entire length. In the lower, first row of the gallery, images of ceremonial equestrians in four or five colors have been preserved. In the upper rows, portraits framed by double black lines are depicted. Among these portraits are noble figures wearing remarkable garments, with crowns adorned with bird images and necklaces resembling mythical creatures (dragons). The birds depicted on the crowns resemble the 'bird of fortune' known in the fairy tales

and legends of Eastern peoples, according to which ‘if the bird of fortune lands on someone’s head, that person becomes a king, and if it lands on the shoulder, he becomes a vizier.’ This idea seems to be confirmed by the inscription ‘king’ preserved beneath one of the portraits. Radiocarbon analyses conducted in laboratories in Oxford (United Kingdom), Sydney (Australia), and New Zealand have determined that the Akshakhan-kala portraits date back to the 2nd–1st centuries BCE”. In epics and fairy tales, the motif of selecting a ruler with the help of birds, regarded as a “bird of fortune,” is widely preserved. For example, in the epic “Edige,” Satemir Khan releases the bird of fortune, and it lands on Tokhtamysh’s head, upon which the ruler understands that fortune is with him. A similar episode is also found in the epic “Sharyar.” In the epic, Khizir, who appears in the form of a dervish, comes from the unseen and releases the bird Bulbilgoya. Even when the bird is released three times, the “bird of fortune” lands on Sharyar’s head each time. Thus, Sharyar ascends the throne of Suleiman. In this way, within the plot of the epic “Sharyar,” the image of the bird Bulbilgoya occupies a central place both in the initiation of events and in resolving the conflicts that arise among the main characters. This suggests that ancient people’s perception of birds and the depiction of bird imagery had already formed as early as the 2nd–1st centuries BCE. The portrayal of Bulbilgoya in the epic “Sharyar” as a miraculous and magical bird reflects the ancient worldview and attitudes of people toward birds. Throughout the content of the epic, imaginary events, strong fantastical elements, and mythological features characteristic of ancient times are depicted from beginning to end. This view is supported by the opinion of Professor I. Sagitov, who states: “Whereas in epics such as ‘Alpamis’ and ‘Qiriq qiz’ heroes defeat their enemies through their own bravery and heroic strength, in ‘Sharyar’ the heroes overcome their enemies through the power of spells. In this epic, mythological (fantastical) elements such as dragons, giants, fairies, Bulbilgoya, and the ring of Suleiman occupy a significant place”. Because of our research, we have observed that in the poetic structure of the epic “Sharyar,” mythological and fairy-tale motifs predominate over other genre-forming features. As noted above, in the course of achieving their goals, the heroes of the epic experience imaginary and fantastical events that go beyond human logic and rational understanding.

Conclusion

In general, the events related to everyday life that are depicted in the composition and plot of the epic seem to be overshadowed by mythological and fairy-tale elements. Therefore, we conclude that the Karakalpak folk epic “Sharyar” can appropriately be classified, in terms of genre, among “mythological fairy-tale-type epics” that reflect social and everyday issues. In terms of both content and form, epics with plots similar to “Sharyar” have long been referred to in Uzbek, Kazakh, and Tatar folklore studies by terms such as “fairy-tale-type epics” (G.M. Egamberdieva) and “fairy-tale epics” (A. Konyratbayev), which are already well established in scholarly practice.

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