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Article

The Function and Role of Mythological Images in Fairy Tales

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Abstract: This article investigates the structural typology and narrative functions of mythological images in Karakalpak magical folk fairy tales. Drawing upon Vladimir Propp's structural methodology, the study classifies these mythological entities into three functional roles based on their relationship with the protagonist: patrons, antagonists, and helpers. Through a comparative analysis of specific textual plots, the paper elucidates the socio-cultural, zoomorphic, and anthropomorphic attributes of prominent figures like the *dáw* (giant). The findings demonstrate that when a traditional patron figure is absent, its narrative functions are systematically transferred to helper characters, driving the plot advancement and shaping the protagonist's heroic destiny.

Keywords: Karakalpak Folklore, Magical Fairy Tales, Mythological Images, Structural Typology, Narrative Functions, Antagonist Characters, Helper-*dáw*

1. Introduction

Every mythological image within a fairy tale possesses a specific role, from which its function in the tale's plot originates. The function it performs exerts a certain influence on the protagonist's life, serving as an impetus for the alteration or continuation of the tale's plot [1]. Therefore, the role and function of mythological images can be determined based on their relationship with the protagonist. As noted, "The concepts of a character's function and role are interrelated but not identical. Function represents the character's action, whereas role is a compilation of actions. In the initial part of a fairy tale (the introductory section, where the word 'initial' stems from the Latin 'initium' meaning 'beginning' – G.K.), the character appears in the role of a young man or son, fulfilling a filial function by carrying out his father's testament. In the medial part (the central section, where the word 'medial' stems from the Latin 'medius' meaning 'middle', 'central', or 'intermediate' – G.K.), the young man's period of journey and trial begins, during which he transitions into the role of a hero. In this heroic role, the young man executes several crucial functions [2-4]."

2. Materials and Methods

Drawing upon this viewpoint, mythological images in magical fairy tales can be classified into three distinct roles based on their relationship with the protagonist:

1. Patron mythological images;
2. Opposing (antagonist) mythological images;
3. Helper mythological images.

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A patron mythological image is a character encountered by the protagonist along the journey or one who, after testing the hero, provides sound advice, offers assistance, and indicates the path to escape impending perils [5]. In folklore studies, scholars from various nations designate characters performing this role with different terms. The Russian scholar V.Ya. Propp utilizes the term "donor" (*дарителъ*), E.M. Meletinsky uses "magical helpers," Kazakh scholars Zh. Askerbekkyzy and A. Myrzakhmedov apply "advisor" (*aqılshı*) and "sage" (*danıshpan*) respectively, while Uzbek scholars Zh. Eshonqul, J. Asqarova, and S. Akhmedova employ the terms "helper hero" (*kómekshi qaharman*), "patron" (*homiy*), and "epic helper" (*epik kómekshi*). Regarding the patron image, V. Propp writes the following: "A new character enters the tale, who can be termed a donor, or more precisely, a provider. He is usually encountered suddenly in the forest or along the road. The hero, as a seeker or a victim of injustice, receives from him several tools (primarily magical ones) that bring an end to all misfortunes." In Karakalpak magical fairy tales, patron images do not always appear unexpectedly as described by V.Ya. Propp; however, the hero most frequently encounters them along the way or intentionally sets out to find them [6].

J. Asqarova, on the other hand, provides the following definition: "A patron (referred to as *homiy* by J. Asqarova – G.K.) in magical fairy tales manifests in zoomorphic and anthropomorphic forms, possessing two distinct functions: testing and rewarding. Characters such as Qyzyl (Khidr), the old man, the magical old woman, and the peri represent anthropomorphic patrons, whereas the horse, the wolf, and the monkey are zoomorphic patrons. Regardless of how characters in zoomorphic and anthropomorphic forms are depicted, they always possess human-like consciousness and intellect; even when undergoing significant transformations, their mythological root remains preserved. The zoomorphic nature of a patron image testifies to its antiquity. At the early stages of poetic consciousness, the patron image, which initially appeared in zoomorphic forms (wolf, monkey), began to manifest as a female figure (magical old woman) during the matriarchal era, and subsequently as a male figure (old man, Qyzyl)."

In Karakalpak magical folk fairy tales, patron images also manifest in both zoomorphic and anthropomorphic forms and possess human-like consciousness and intellect. Concurrently, as noted by V.Ya. Propp, there are also patron characters who bestow magical objects upon the protagonist [7]. Therefore, drawing upon these perspectives, we deemed it appropriate to adopt the term "patron" (*qáwender*) for such characters in fairy tales. In the Explanatory Dictionary of the Karakalpak Language, the word *qáwender* is defined as: "PATRON n. Caring, benevolent, or charitable."

3. Results and Discussion

Patron images assist the protagonist in return for kindness or provide them with sound advice. When mythological characters participating in fairy tales appear in the role of a patron, they perform various functions. For instance, in Karakalpak magical folk fairy tales, the characters of the snake, the fish, the flock of birds (White Bird, Blue Bird, Black Bird, sparrow, dove), the tiger, the lion, the jackal, and the fox can be classified as mythological images performing the role of a patron [8].

Patron images that reward the protagonist for their assistance by plucking out a hair (or feather) and promising help in times of distress usually appear as a triad of zoomorphic characters. Within the plots of these fairy tales, they undergo certain structural variations. Below is the distribution of the triadic patron images across specific fairy tales:

- "**Shopan bala**" (Vol. 1:9) — tiger, black eagle (*qaraqus*), ant;
- "**Xansayat**" (Vol. 28:100) — tiger, falcon, ant;
- "**Aqqus**" (Vol. 13:53) — tiger, jackal, White Bird (*Aqqus*);
- "**Altın kese**" (Vol. 12:79) — tiger, wolf, fox.

In the first two fairy tales, the zoomorphic patron images give a single hair or feather to the protagonist as an act of gratitude for the assistance rendered, thereby establishing a

binding connection with him [9]. The primary function of the zoomorphic patron images in these tales is to guide the protagonist through the trials encountered on his path to attaining his beloved. In the latter two fairy tales, the zoomorphic characters establish kinship ties with the hero, acting as the protagonist's brothers-in-law (*jezde*). They are capable of manifesting both in animal and human forms. In both tales, the youngest brothers-in-law — the White Bird and the fox — serve as the primary patron images; they assist the protagonist and, when necessary, deliver him from perilous situations through the use of spells and magic. Their structural role in these fairy tales is to point out the path for the protagonist to find his lost beloved and to rescue him from death [10].

Opposing (antagonist) characters are figures that actively participate in magical fairy tales. It is well known that the focal point of every fairy tale revolves around the age-old struggle between good and evil. Consequently, we categorize characters into two groups: positive and negative. While positive characters align with the forces of good, negative characters stand on the opposing side. Investigating the adversarial characters in Karakalpak folk fairy tales, the scholar P. Oteniyazov writes: "As is well known, in folklore, including fairy tales, there are dark forces that oppose the positive hero; they are depicted as negative personas and possess supernatural powers [11]. Among them, anti-hero images such as the *mástán kempir* (witch), the *dáw* (giant/ogre), and the *áydarhá* (dragon) occupy a special place." Furthermore, the researcher dedicates specific attention to each antagonist image in his article, providing a comprehensive artistic and scientific analysis of the fairy tales in which they appear [12].

In Karakalpak magical folk fairy tales, the figures of the *dáw*, *mástán kempir*, and *áydarhá*, which are considered demonological mythological characters, act as the most prominent antagonist mythological images. For instance, the mythological figure of the *dáw* appears as an anti-hero, acting in direct opposition to the protagonist and consistently inflicting harm, in fairy tales such as "Qıran" (Vol. 2:19), "Sharqıpálekli bala" (Vol. 5:39), "Altın kese" (Vol. 12:79), "Arıq mergen" (Vol. 15:102), "Qulamergen" (Vol. 25:162), "Duzaqshı ǵarrı" (Vol. 14:100), "Qorqınıshtı jeńgen adam" (Vol. 22:155), "Genje bala" (Vol. 10:43), "Aqqus" (Vol. 13:53), "Jigit hám dáw" (Vol. 20:70), "Ǵarrınıń hiylesi" (Vol. 33:133), "Ǵarrı menen dáwler" (Vol. 40:167), "Taskeser" (Vol. 45:181), "Úsh bala" (Vol. 39:160), "Batır bala" (Vol. 6:49), "Jaman kúyew" (Vol. 2:14), and "Ata hám qanalas balalar" (Vol. 55:216). Although the functions performed by the *dáw* characters vary across these tales, they fundamentally serve the underlying motif of the protagonist overcoming malevolent forces to attain his ultimate goal. Every mythological image acting in an opposing role serves to create a trial for the hero, thereby enhancing the narrative appeal of the fairy tale's plot [13].

Another category of characters operating alongside the heroes within the narrative structure of fairy tales comprises those acting as helpers. Mythological figures in Karakalpak magical folk fairy tales can also perform this helper role. These include demonological characters such as the *dáw* and *mástán kempir*, the anthropomorphic figure of the *peri*, the *Qıran* (eagle), and zoomorphic figures like the fish, the *Suymurıq* (Simurgh), the cat, the puppy, and the wolf.

In terms of their narrative function, helper characters closely resemble patron characters. The primary objective of both types is to assist the hero in enduring severe trials and achieving his goals. Nevertheless, certain distinctions exist between them. Regarding this, J. Asqarova notes: "Although the protagonist remains the central figure in fairy tales, he cannot attain his ultimate goal without the surrounding helpers (J. Asqarova employs the term *kómekshi* – G.K.). For this reason, the presence of helpers is vital. The helper character is directly subordinate to the hero; hence, a sense of dependency is visible in their actions. This subordination is born out of the assistance, kindness, and compassion that the protagonist had previously shown toward them."

In magical fairy tales, the primary characteristics of the helper manifest in the following aspects:

- The helper is not related by kinship to the protagonist;
- Each helper possesses a unique, specific function;
- Their function is invariably positive [14].

Unlike patrons, helpers do not cross paths with the protagonist unexpectedly along the journey; rather, they enter the plot as a direct result of a particular action. Furthermore, they do not point out the path or give directions like a patron; instead, they act alongside the hero. Drawing upon these perspectives, it can be stated additionally that another distinction between the helper and patron characters in Karakalpak magical folk fairy tales is that helpers do not bestow magical objects upon the hero. Below, we examine the helper characters and their respective narrative functions.

In Karakalpak magical folk fairy tales, when the mythological figure of the *dáw* (giant/ogre) participates in the role of a helper, it executes the following functions:

1. Subordination to the protagonist or his beloved, performing specific tasks upon their command. Fairy tales of this type include "Aqquwbay patsha" (Vol. 3:27), "Jansap" (Vol. 16:106), "Máliyka hám jetim bala" (Vol. 9:42), "Bir patsha qızınıń bay balası menen qashıwǵa wádesi" (Vol. 18:64), "Xansayat" (Vol. 28:100), and "Qonaq shımshıq hám kútilmegen sıylıq" (Vol. 44:180).

In the fairy tale "Aqquwbay patsha," the *dáw-peris* (supernatural giants) subordinate to a young woman construct a bridge in a single day so that the young protagonist can accomplish his task. In "Máliyka hám jetim bala," upon the command of the protagonist's wife, they not only build a house but also fight against the king on their behalf. In "Bir patsha qızınıń bay balası menen qashıwǵa wádesi," the hero, who marries the daughter of the giant Toymas *dáw*, is rescued from death by that very giant's wife. Similarly, in the tale "Xansayat," upon the command of the protagonist's wife, the *dáw* relocates the giant plane tree (*bayshınar*) and their houses to the young man's native village overnight. A distinctive feature inherent in these mentioned fairy tales is that the *dáw* characters operate in subordination to female characters rather than the young male heroes; nevertheless, in all instances, the male protagonist attains happiness and prosperity through the services of these giants. Conversely, in the tale "Qonaq shımshıq hám kútilmegen sıylıq," two *dáw* emerge from a magical stick gifted by a sparrow to assist a peasant, and they retrieve the peasant's lost staff. As observed, the *dáw* characters in these tales assist the heroes not of their own free will, but out of a state of dependency and subordination. The fairy tale "Jansap" can also be included in this category; however, in this specific tale, the *dáw* characters transport Jansap to his destination not by his or his wife's command, but in subordination to the decree of the Khan of the *Suymurıq* (Simurgh) [15].

2. Accompanying the protagonist as companions throughout the tale and assisting him in fulfilling arduous conditions is the second function of the helper-*dáw* characters. Fairy tales such as "Tórt Abdulla" (Vol. 18:124), "Arpamadiyan" (Vol. 11:76), and "Ayıwlı Alpan" (Vol. 26:167) can be included in this category. A common characteristic inherent in all these tales is that the protagonist encounters his companions while traveling along the road; in the fairy tales "Arpamadiyan" and "Ayıwlı Alpan," the companions are already intentionally searching for Arpamadiyan and Ayıwlı Alpan to challenge them to a wrestling match.

In the fairy tale "Tórt Abdulla," two of the three companions encountered by Abdulla are depicted as *dáws* (giants). Their names happen to be Abdulla as well. One of these giants possesses extraordinary physical strength, while the second is named Abdulla the Water-Drinker (*suwxor*), who is capable of swallowing an entire river. When Abdulla sets out by the tyrannical decree of the king to bring back the daughter of the King of Egypt, these *dáws* assist him in fulfilling the severe tasks. The helper characters in the Kazakh folk

fairy tale "Mástan kempir" structurally resemble those in "Tórt Abdulla." In this Kazakh tale, Usharxan, having been in love with a certain girl for thirty years but unable to find her, marries another woman and fathers a son named Zhandibatyr. Upon reaching the age of fifteen, Zhandibatyr sees the portrait of that girl in his father's treasuries, falls in love with her, and departs to search for her. Along the way, he confronts three *dáws* who were searching for him, and subsequently becomes their companion. During the journey, Zhandibatyr rescues three villages from enemies, and his three companions are appointed as kings in those three locations. After enduring numerous hardships, he finds the girl, marries her, and while they are living together, another king falls in love with his wife. A *mástán kempir* (witch) is dispatched to abduct her; she deceives the wife and murders Zhandibatyr. However, his giant friends rescue him from death: one who can foresee who has died by looking at the stars, one who reveals secrets by opening a book, and one who can withstand staying underwater. They save him, rescue his wife, and assist him in attaining his ultimate goal. Although the actions of the *dáws* in assisting the hero in this tale are close to those in "Tórt Abdulla," they do not perform tasks on behalf of a third party; instead, they rescue the protagonist from death. In this aspect of rescue, the helper-*dáw* characters closely resemble the figures of the *Qıran* (eagle) in the Karakalpak folk tale "Qıran" and the wolf in "Altın tawıq."

In the fairy tale "Arpamadiyan," the protagonist similarly encounters two *dáws* along the road who are searching for him, and they become companions. However, within the narrative, these giants provide no practical assistance to Arpamadiyan and perform no tasks. On the contrary, instead of being depicted as heroes like Arpamadiyan, they are portrayed as weak and cowardly. Nonetheless, when Arpamadiyan descends into the underworld, they do not abandon him but remain above to wait for his return. Consequently, the question arises: what is their narrative function in the tale? Their function in the fairy tale is to move alongside Arpamadiyan and to demonstrate to the reader his heroism, valor, and the fact that he is physically superior even to giants. For this reason, we chose to analyze them within the role of helpers.

Similarly, in the fairy tale "Ayıwlı Alpan," akin to "Tórt Abdulla," Ayıwlı Alpan encounters a man capable of running on water along with "Tawdı Talqan" (The Mountain-Crusher) and "Suwlı Surxan" (The Water-Swallower). The first two of these figures are *dáws* who assist Ayıwlı Alpan in fulfilling the king's conditions. As a result, Ayıwlı Alpan, much like Abdulla, defeats the king's challenges and marries the king's daughter. No patron character appears in these specific fairy tales. Furthermore, within the plot structure of these tales — with the exception of "Arpamadiyan" — the protagonist's own actions are not characteristically active. Regarding this phenomenon, V.Ya. Propp writes: “If there is no donor in the fairy tale, its function is transferred to the next persona — the helper.” Since no patron is present in the aforementioned tales, the helper character serves as the primary driving force of the narrative action.

4. Conclusion

In conclusion, the function and role performed by the mythological images encountered in Karakalpak magical folk fairy tales occupy a distinct place in the artistic-aesthetic depiction of the core plot, the composition, and the positive and negative impacts shaping the destinies of the characters.

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