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### **Totem Beliefs in Karachay-Balkar Folklore and Literature**

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#### **Abstract**

The paper considers a set of the totemic beliefs as archaic views spread among ancient Turkic peoples, in particular the Karachays and Balkars. We have studied ways and forms of pagan manifestation in the ethnic traditions, cultural consciousness and Balkar literature. In the course of the study, we have touched upon issues concerning the mythoepic tradition and symbolic generalizations. We have used folklore to trace the continuity of artistic thought-tide in understanding and interpreting symbols (tree, stone, etc.). We have also identified mythologems (mother goddess) through zoomorphic images (deer, she-wolf).

One can still find mythology and folklore samples in other nations' literature presenting ancient legends of totem ancestors. They synthesized the rudimentary forms of religion. The characters of the stories were endowed with both zoomorphic and anthropomorphic traits.

In addition to the traditional animal cult worshiped by the Turkic peoples there were the cult of ancestors, obeisance to the spirits of the dead. The ritual to distribute the meat portions of a sacrificial animal between members of the same clan also considered as a symbolic act.

**Keywords:** Totem, Ritual, Mythoepic thinking, Symbolic image, Folklore, Karachay-Balkar literature.

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## 1. Introduction

Myths and legends are an important and necessary aspect in the spiritual life of the individual and society. Shamanism, totemism, and paganism underlie the deeper layers of myth consciousness. Totemism as a set of archaic beliefs in a certain social community is based on the symbolic thinking. In this sense, the Turkic peoples' mythologies are an integral system of symbolic images. We can say that totems presents symbolic essence of the mythological thinking in ethnos originated historically from generic symbols. One of such symbols rooted in the North Caucasian traditional culture is *tamga*, the emblem of a particular tribe, clan or family. In feudal Balkar society, *tamga* was indispensable attribute symbol of sovereign authority, a distinctive sign for the upper class. In the Caucasus, apart from the *tamga* the details of clothing, the color of horses, the horse tie, etc. associated with certain clans or families.

"Clothing in the North Caucasian Nart saga is a kind of amulet or totem. Such is, for example the leader Yuryuzmek's wolf skin, which he constantly had on to keep the evil eye and evil spirit away." (Gucheva, Guliyeva (Zanukoeva), 2016, p. 77).

## Materials and Methods

An integrated approach is used in the given paper. It combines elements of a comparative typological, system-holistic, and historical-literary analysis. Structural-analytical, synchronous-comparative and system methods were used in the work.

## 5. Discussion and Conclusion

In addition to the traditional animal cult worshiped by the Turkic peoples there were the cult of ancestors, obeisance to the spirits of the dead. The ritual to distribute the meat portions of a sacrificial animal between members of the same clan also considered as a symbolic act. The killed animal parts were allocated with respect to hierarchy, i.e. the clan member ranking, their social status in the community. The "animalistic" style was also widely used in the art and architecture in the North Caucasus. This tradition mainly performed a protective function, safeguarding the family against interference with family privacy. Ancient people were ruled by superstitious fear of otherworldly forces that affected, in some way, their lives.

The concept of totemism incorporates several aspects. For primitive tribes, it was important to survive, evolve, as a species, protect themselves from external threats. Therefore, they needed an all-mighty patron saint who could protect against disasters and heal illnesses. They found him in the symbolic images of animals, for instance, *an eagle, a crow, a fish, a bear*. The zoomorphic ancestor (of a tribe or clan) considered as a forefather, a divine protector. Imagining himself a *doe, a tour, a lynx, a bear, a horse, a tiger, a snake, a wolf, an eagle*, a man projected upon himself their courage, physical and spiritual power. Apart from being a protecting charm, the totem amulet was thought to bring good luck to its holder.

One can still find mythology and folklore samples in other nations' literature presenting ancient legends of totem ancestors. They synthesized the rudimentary forms of religion. The characters of the stories were endowed with both zoomorphic and anthropomorphic traits. Thus, the Balkars revered *a horse, a tour, an eagle, a lynx, a wolf, and a snow leopard* thinking them the guardian totems. The peoples of Siberia revered, in that sense, *a fish and a crow*, and the ancient Mongols identified themselves with *a wolf*. Fetishism was also a frequent occurrence among Turkic peoples. Wearing skin of the beast, fangs, claws, tails, or feathers amulets of a dead animal considered as a protection against poor luck, other-worldly influences. Fetishism and totemism are symbolic representations for similar processes that should be attributed to the same phenomenon. In the Karachay-Balkar folklore the badger and lynx nails amulet helped old men and sick persons to easily, painlessly leave the world (KBIHR Archives). In ancient times, the Balkars used to put needles and hedgehog skins into a cradle to protect a baby from the evil eye (Ibid. 2 folder, 41 passport, Recorded by B. Berberov). Back then, the Balkars decorated their houses with a wolf-skin, and the baby

cradle with a wolf's tooth or some other parts of the skull as a talisman. It is necessary to point out how the word "wolf" ("beryu") was used. The names of certain animals are considered taboo and a "wolf" was one of them. Balkar people replaced the word "wolf" by the euphemism "kurt". Similarly, the word "fox", was replaced by the suggestive epithet "kuyruklu" (tailed). Thus, they encoded totem images.

One of the Turk clan, Mamashev family, was believed to possess a tuft of *magic wool* (Mammash bale) that allowed the owner to easily grow rich and live comfortably (Kerimova, 2018, p. 20). In addition, "in the past, the Balkars and Karachays revered a black crow – "kara karg'a", a white deer – "ak maral", a black fox – "kara tyulkyu", a ram, and a bull" (Anthology of folk music of Balkars and Karachais, 2015, p. 207).

It is well known, in ancient cultures snakes were worshiped greatly. In the Karachay-Balkar folklore there is a big variety of serpentine spells that totem heritage had left. Black snakes and crows were thought to be harbingers of bad luck while the white ones were the harbingers of good fortune. In fiction, these images are most often presented in the form of symbolic allegory. In Z. Tolgurov's novel "The Great Bear" the main character sees a snake in his dream dancing around a fire. In the same book, several images of an eagle are served as a totemic images. Eagles occupy a special place in the pantheon of the revered totemic animals. "The epic of Narts" tells legends of the Sosuruk hero who managed to escape from the underworld by throwing an eagle's skin over himself ("kush kap").

In the North Caucasus, the tradition of honoring a horse is also widespread. "The horse cult in the Karachay-Balkar mythology and fairy-tales display the binary nature of two archaic cultures: The Caucasian substrate and the Turkic-Mongolian, in which this animal was worshiped not only as a totem, but also as a creature of cosmic origin" (Malkonduev, 2014, pp. 99-116). The symbolic meaning of horse is most clearly shown in Z. Tolgurov's novel "The Blue Tipchak". There are also symbolic images of other totem animals in the novel. Our attention was arrested by the image of a wolf. The dog and wolf cult is considered of the Turkic-Mongolian origin and the Turkic peoples even believed they were descendants of wolves. The Huns, Pechenegs, Khazars, Polovtses and other nomadic tribes venerated these animals. Those totemic images were employed in the best literature samples (the novel "The Scaffold" by the world famous writer Chyngyz Aitmatov).

Myths and legends had been a part of Karachay-Balkar culture and folklore in the past. "As far back as the 19th century, Balkar women used to embroider a head of a wolf on the wedding banners, and sometimes they added another seven or nine (sacred numbers) images of the animal around the banner edges. The ancient Turks for various festival celebrations invented this tradition.

The bearers of the pagan worshiping steeped all traditions into a mysterious symbolic meaning. The totemic symbols later evolved into many Karachays and Balkars family names, such as Küchüklary - Kuchukovs (puppies), Boynakylary – Boynakovs (wolfhound), Itilary-Itiyevs (dog breeder), Burukalary-Boruka (wolf) and etc. (Malkonduev, 2018, pp. 77-78). Here we highlight the Khoubolov family name. It has been argued that this surname is derived from the word "khoubol" (meaning, "bear"). Among the members of this family, there were men of a larger stature. In "As-Takh" novel by the Balkar author A. Teppeev, the bear is a defender. In traditional folklore, pagan deities used to turn into *a deer, a snake, a bear, a bird*, and other totem animals creating together with the text and its structure a symbolic code. Such is, for example the image of *a deer* in "The Scarlet Grass" story by Z. Tolgurov, *a fallow deer* in the novels "As-Takh" and "The Golden Hardar" by A. Teppeev. In the novel of Z. Tolgurov "The White Dress", a man transforms into a bird. In Ch. Aitmatov's "The White Steamship" the Mother Goddess is a horned *female deer* and in "The Spotted Dog Running at the Edge of the Sea" of the same author, we encounter another zoomorphic image - *a fish-woman*. Among other images, "a deer showing the way" is no less popular (Karaketov, 2014, p. 399). In a slightly modified form (the showing the way fallow deer is a female), we find this image in the novel "As-Takh".

The black fox (karah tulky), "...the Karachay and Balkar peoples associated with abundance and wealth in the community, family and clan well-being. For this reason, people has treasured the skin of a black fox through generations" (Karachay-Balkar folklore, 1996, p. 101). To illustrate this let us apply to the novel "New talisman" by B. Gurtuev, where "the description of a fox chasing... reveals the ethnopsychology of the ancient people, shows their certain worldview, based in general on the mythopoetic idea of the universe... The skin of a black fox is interpreted as a mythical source of happiness" (Guziyeva (Sarbasheva), 2018, p. 54-55). In the epic Caucasian Narts saga, Satanei mother transforms into a black fox.

Totemic relics refers to various objects, either natural or artificial. "In Karachay and Balkar areas, usually a stone or a tree was endowed with supernatural power and worshiped as a deity or a spirit..." (Karaketov, 2014, p. 396). Stones Sanctuary stand out among them. In this regard, we may refer to the God Thunderer Stone (Choppany Tashla), Virgin Mary's stone (Bairim Tashla), and of course, stones that symbolize epic heroes Sosurk and Karchy (Karcharchy tashly, Sosurkany tashly).

Specifically, a cult of the tree was widespread. Thus, "the sacred and iconic trees Raubazy in Balkaria and Dzhangyz Terek (Lonely Tree) in Karachay area had universal functions that are clearly shown in conspiratorial rites, hymn songs "(Uzdenova, 2016, p.37). The Karachays and Balkars believed that those trees possessed amazing magical power and visited them with begging and offerings. They continued a custom of tying rags onto sacred tree branches in the hope for wishes to fulfil. Animistic representations related to the totem-tree survived in the works of the Karachay-Balkar diaspora in Turkey ("The Tale of a pine tree and a pear" by Ayla Korkmaz) (Bittirova, 2018, p. 75).

Researchers point out "the importance of the vegetation code, which is absolutely represented in a tree" (Sagalaev, Oktyabrskaya, 2018, p. 37). The trunk and roots of the tree are interpreted as a symbol of support. In fiction, a man cut off from his native land is compared to a tree devoid of roots (Z. Tolgurov's "Blue Tipchak" novel). Turkic-speaking peoples in their mythopoetic consciousness "correlated directly trees with the anatomical code" (Sagalaev, Oktyabrskaya, 2018, p. 37).

Living in the Altai area Turkic-speaking peoples, also revered the sacred trees. The Khakas, for example, worshiped the sacred birch, the symbol of life on earth. The Buryats worshiped larch. Some family names in the meaning contain the name of the tree such as *a poplar, a cedar, a pine*.

The internal hierarchical classification was implemented in the generic communities. This process continued within Balkar territory until the October Revolution (the Raubazy tree was the totem symbol of the Ulbashevs family).

Symbolic meanings were assigned to the Nature objects that used to become the clan totems. One of the totemic images is the World Tree rooted in the myth and epic consciousness as a link between sky (upper-world), earth (middle-world) and underground (under-world). Archaic ideas of the Nature objects are embodied in Z. Tolgurov's novel "Blue Tipchak", in A. Teppeyev's "Sirat Bridge" where "the duality and rebirth concepts found their simultaneous realization". The image of a tree presented... a symbol of hope and spirituality in a man, a metaphor of eternal life and finding peace of mind after death takes on a similar meaning ("Nature grows up a tree for each of us", "Everyone cuts down his own tree") "(Bolatova (Atabieva), 2015, p. 192). The ancient Balkar people developed the tree image into a mythologeme, a transition line from one world to another. When Khamzat, a hero of one of the novels, realized his intention to cut down a century-old pine tree, he found himself transported into another world. Describing the tragic deportation of the entire people, the author connected this drama with the ancestors' pagan ideas.

The paper presents the study of the totemistic beliefs among Turkic-speaking peoples manifested in various forms and types in different contexts. Functional relevance of these beliefs in the ethnic and cultural awareness have been revealed.

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