

PAPER

MYTHOLOGICAL LEGENDS IN THE CONTEXT OF MYTH: GENRE BOUNDARIES AND CULTURAL FUNCTIONS

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Abstract

This paper explores mythological legends and examines their relationship with myths within the system of folklore genres. The study aims to identify the main similarities and differences between myths and mythological legends by analyzing their narrative structure, themes, characters, and social functions. Myths are generally regarded as sacred narratives explaining the origin of the world, natural phenomena, and divine beings, while mythological legends combine supernatural elements with more localized, semi-historical settings and human-centered plots.

The research highlights their shared mythopoetic foundations and symbolic imagery, which reflect collective folk consciousness and oral tradition. At the same time, important distinctions are revealed in terms of sacred status, degree of belief, narrative purpose, and connection to historical reality. The findings demonstrate that mythological legends function as an intermediate genre, preserving archaic mythic motifs while adapting them to evolving cultural and social contexts. This comparative approach contributes to a clearer understanding of genre classification and the development of traditional narrative forms.

Key words: mythological legends, myth, plot, folklore, motifs, magic, beliefs, rituals, time and space.

Introduction

At present, in the context of the revival of national values, a methodological principle has emerged that calls for the thorough investigation of traditional archaic images. These images preserve

the influence of mythological, animistic, totemistic, fetishistic, shamanic, and magical worldviews associated with the earliest stages in the formation of poetic consciousness, as well as with the everyday perceptions and modes of life characteristic of our ancient ancestors. Such research possesses

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considerable practical significance for the broad dissemination of the noble ideas embodied in Uzbek folk art through their analysis as forms of artistic expression, and for fostering in the younger generation a respect for the spiritual heritage of our great forebears. Indeed, in our country, “extensive efforts have been undertaken and are being systematically continued to restore the ancient history and rich culture of our people, to comprehensively study and popularize the scientific, religious, and spiritual legacy of our eminent scholars and saints, to develop their sacred sites, and to educate the younger generation in the spirit of their noble traditions.” In the present period, when it has become possible to conduct comprehensive, objective, and wide-ranging research into the national values created and preserved by our people over centuries, the examination of the system of factual materials—namely, the specification, classification, genesis, and poetics of mythological legends, which have thus far remained outside the focused attention of folklorists—contributes to clarifying the historical trajectory and developmental stages of our people’s artistic thought.

Methodology

Mythological legends within Uzbek folklore were first subjected to scholarly description by Professor K. Imomov, who advanced substantial academic perspectives aimed at clarifying the distinctive characteristics of this genre[1;6-10]. Folklorist M. Juraev, who was the first to systematize mythological legends through classification, articulated his views on their interpretation in connection with the mythology of the “Avesta,” ancient Turkic mythology, celestial (cosmogonic) mythology, and the folk calendar in his research.

Mythological legends have likewise been examined in a monographic study devoted to the comparative analysis of Arab–Uzbek mythology and to the influence of the “Avesta” on Uzbek folklore. Doctor of Philology U. Jumanazarov also investigated examples of mythological prose in his monograph focusing on ancient cults and their representation in fairy-tale texts. In recent years, research by M. Rakhmanova on the poetics of Uzbek folk tales, as well as scholarly works dedicated to

the study of Karakalpak tales, has been produced.

This brief overview demonstrates that Uzbek folk mythological legends have not yet been comprehensively collected, published, or examined as an integrated artistic system. Consequently, there remains a need for a monographic study aimed at identifying the defining features of mythological legends, elucidating their historical foundations, establishing a complete classification, and analyzing their plot structures, motifs, and system of images.

According to Doctors of Philological Sciences, Professors M. Juraev and Sh. Shomusarov, “myth constitutes one of the forms through which ancient human beings articulated their beliefs, reflections, religious conceptions, and initial creative inquiries by means of language. Myth emerged in response to specific demands of the spiritual life of primitive humanity, namely, the necessity to express a worldview. The system of mythological images formed in antiquity, as the foundation of the artistic perception of reality, served as the basis for the development of plot progression and the composition of images in the epic genres of folklore[2;10-11]”.

In our view, the image system of Uzbek mythology—particularly representations of culture heroes, demiurges, and heroic titans—played a significant role in shaping the figures of epic protagonists and heroes in folk epics during the evolution of artistic consciousness.

Results

The genre of the legend likewise derived its functional model of epic narration directly from myth; in this sense, it is intrinsically connected with mythological tradition. As myth represents a body of primordial conceptions through which ancient humanity interpreted the surrounding world, its principal function consisted in transmitting specific knowledge and in providing explanations for the causes of particular phenomena in reality. This functional characteristic was subsequently inherited in full by the genre of the fairy tale, when myth-making declined and yielded to the tradition of artistic and epic modes of thought.

Legends, perceived by both narrator and audience as accounts of actual events—as

expressions of truth—are oriented toward communicating information about particular facts to the listener. In our view, the myths that constituted the foundation of primitive culture continued their existence in the form of “mythological fairy tales,” regarded as a distinct cycle within the fairy-tale genre. Mythological legends narrating the creation of the universe, the struggle between chaos and cosmos, the origin of the plant and animal realms, the heavenly luminaries, and the emergence of natural phenomena represent examples of myths once produced by primitive consciousness and preserved in folk oral artistic creativity through an aesthetic code.

The transformation of myth into a folklore genre—its “re-functioning” as mythological legend—was conditioned by several factors: the gradual loss of the sacral character inherent in archaic myths; the disruption of the organic unity between myth and ritual (since ancient myths possessed ritual significance as integral components of primitive ceremonial practice, and the severance of this bond undermined mythology’s status as a ritual text); and the establishment of a tradition of conscious artistic perception of reality in place of its earlier unconscious apprehension, that is, the emergence of the “imagined fiction” that forms the foundation of epic genres.

Discussion. Mythological legends are not exact repetitions of ancient myths, there are also a number of differences between these two phenomena, characteristic of different stages in the history of human worldview and thought. In our opinion, these distinguishing features are as follows:

Myths and legends also differ depending on when the reality being described took place, that is, according to the temporal sign of the epic text. In ancient myths, “the creation of the world is explained as the beginning of time and space.” That is, according to the archaic myth of the creation of the world, the time when the universe came into being is considered the starting point of world life, while space is explained as the foundation of the cosmos (being) from chaos (non-existence). The time described in mythological legends, however, is characterized by its orientation towards the past,

that is, its “retrospectiveness rather than being a precise expression of the time in which the narrator and listener live.

Myths provide information about the primary causes that led to the emergence of objects, events, plants, and animals, that is, the state of the universe at the beginning, the creation. The interpretation of the process of transformation from “non-existence” to “existence” constitutes the essence of myth. Ancient people perceived the images described in myths not as “imaginary fiction”, but as a manifestation of the truth, the existing state of being. The fact that a spot on the moon is a tree and a ram tied to it, that tulips sprouted from the mutilated body of a deity, that Hasan-Husan’s bow and arrow appeared as a rainbow, and that a girl washing her hair by a ditch turned into a willow bush were considered truths for ancient people. In mythological legends, the causes of these events are described as “perceived truth”, that is, on the basis of an imaginary fiction.

The difference between legends and myths is also evident in their system of images, their scope in time and space. While the series of images in myths consists of gods, deities, creative heroes (демиурges), deities, supernatural characters, saints, patrons, totems, celestial beings belonging to other worlds, fetishes, spirits of ancestors, etc., in legends, the depiction of human images is mainly observed. Although epic texts belonging to the legend genre also include saints, patrons, totem-ancestors, unusual characters in zoomorphic and anthropomorphic forms, the tradition of describing human activity through imaginary fiction prevails in this genre.

Conclusion

Myths and legends emerged in the course of the historical evolution of popular thought as means of representing reality through imaginative fiction and fantastic interpretation. They are regarded as works of folklore by virtue of their oral composition and transmission, their circulation among the people in multiple variants, the absence of an identifiable individual author, their collective creation by broad segments of the populace, and their articulation of particular ideas in epic form through language.

Texts belonging to the myth genre are distinguished by their fictional character and by their construction upon fantastic interpretations of imagined narratives. The temporal dimension of the events depicted is oriented toward the distant past, and the external epic position of the narrator predominates—that is, the performer does not function as a direct participant in the narrated events. At the same time, such texts maintain a historical and genetic connection with mythological tradition.

Myth thus embodies the belief system of ancient peoples and represents a verbalized form of imagination that arose from the human aspiration to comprehend and explain the origins of the world. The protagonists of myths are gods, divine beings, creator figures (demiurges), whose actions unfold within a celestial or cosmic temporal and spatial framework. Since any myth is, in one sense or another, linked to the act of creation, it assumes an etiological character. Through myth, ancient humanity sought to grasp the essence of the material reality surrounding it—to understand the structure of the world, to identify the causes of natural phenomena, and to explain the emergence of flora and fauna. From this perspective, myth may be regarded as one of the most ancient modes of understanding and interpreting the world through a system of symbolic language. That is why it is not correct to consider myth and legend as one thing; they are examples of folklore that complement each other and are the products of different historical periods in terms of their creation and popularization.

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