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**ZOOMORPHIC IMAGES IN THE MYTHOLOGY OF THE NORTHERN
ALTAI: THE ISSUE OF ETHNIC AND CULTURAL CONTACTS OF
SIBERIAN PEOPLES**

ABSTRACT. The present article dwells on the results of structural and typological analysis of certain structural and semantic folklore elements of the northern Altai. The subject of the study were images of a dog, a bear and waterfowl. The studied motifs are not typical of southern Altai folklore, but can be traced back to the oral tradition of neighboring nations. The study of the folklore of the neighboring nations shows that similar ideas are present in Selkups, Khanty and Mansi traditions to a certain extent. Modern studies of historical anthropology and genetics show a link between the northern Altai people and the peoples of Samoyed origin. Similar works are carried out within folklore studies. The data presented indicates that in northern Altai epics, the motifs associated with the dog take a peripheral position, accounting for mythological implications. The image of the bear in the folklore of the northern Altai is rather ambiguous. It correlates to both the upper and the lower worlds. The bear stands for the creator in Selkup mythology, whereas in some myths of the northern Altai the bear is considered to be a creation of Kudaya (a god). In ritual actions, the bear is associated with the lower world. The analysis of waterfowl images creates the most vivid picture. In the folklore of many peoples of Siberia (including the northern Altai), birds were given the role of earth's creators. The study of the folklore of the northern Altai compared to Ural (Finno-Ugric) mythology allows us to distinguish invariant codes that, together with the ethnographic and anthropological data, can be attributed to the «Samoyed cluster».

KEY WORDS. The Altai Republic, the northern Altai, the Tubalars, the Kumandins, the Tchelkans.

In scientific literature, the folklore of the northern Altai people has been studied by V.I. Verbitsky, V.V. Radloff, G.N. Potanin, A. Anokhin, N.A. Baskakov, E.P. Kandarakovoy, etc. The active collection of folklore began after the foundation of the Scientific Research Institute of History, Language and Literature in Gorno-Altai. A special merit in preserving cultural heritage belongs to S.S. Surazakov. He recorded and collected unique pieces of epic works of the northern Altai people — «Malchy Mergen», «Akh-Teuchy», «Khuway khylyshu khatkhy Mergen», «Khuway khylyshu Khuway-Koos», etc. («Малчи Мерген», «Ак-Тойчи», «Кувай кылышту каткы Мерген», «Кувай кылышту Кувай-Коос»). The accumulation of material allowed a comparative research with the use of various techniques. The works based on structural and typological analysis are of greatest interest here. This type of analysis helps to reveal a variety of structural and semantic elements and the mechanisms of plot realisation

due to which it is possible to achieve certain results of a diachronic character. Folklore science has helped to reveal the presence of common images and motifs in Turkic and Uralic (Finno-Ugric and Samoyed) mythologies. Needless to say, a definite link between the northern Altai people and peoples of Samoyed origin is revealed at the level of modern studies of historical anthropology and genetics [1; 153].

The field of folklore evokes an active research in the same direction. Thus, summarizing the article by V.G. Kotov, Sh.V. Nafikov provides the reader with the motifs and a connection to the mythology of the Southern Urals folklore and the neighboring peoples [2; 122].

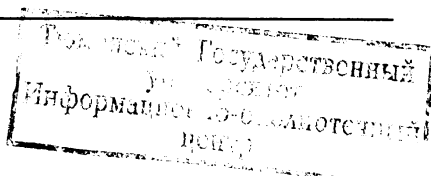
The current paper is the study of some folklore characters of the northern Altai, which are not found in the folklore of the southern Altai (or are not typical of the southern Altai folklore), but have direct analogues with the images of Selkup folklore. From this point of view, great attention is focused on the images of dogs, bears, waterfowl, and related motifs. The sources of the research were the myths and legends of the northern Altai.

One of the most frequently employed characters is a hero whom we have called “a man with a dog’s head”. This character appears in the legend recorded by Evdokia Konstantinovna Tashtamysheva (1881-1968) [3].

In the introduction it is reported that “there lived Akh-Khaan, who had two sons”. The next block of the story dwells on the birth of his third son “with a dog’s head and a fish torso”, accompanied by snowfall (up to the treetops) and the death of cattle. Another legend with a “dog” motif is also recorded in the northern Altai. This legend is entitled “Six-eyed Kharagys” was published by E.P. Khandarakhova in the book of Altai folklore. In the initial part of this story, a childless Akh-Khaan arranges a sacrifice with the help of the shaman Tyelvis and sacrifices a yellow stallion; as a result, his seven sons are born. This motif is doubled: this time Khaan addresses shaman Alash, asking him to beg the gods for a daughter. The shaman tells him to sacrifice a yellow mare. Yet Khaan, instead of sacrificing a horse sacrifices a red dog [4; 48]. Although the legend does not state it directly, obviously as the result of the ritual violation (sacrificing a dog instead of a horse) a six-eyed (non-human) child is born.

Identified motifs of a person in the form of a dog are extremely rare for the Altai folklore in general. It is striking that both recorded folklore motifs belong to the northern Altai. The most typical motif presents a hero with a yellow puppy (of a dog or a wolf), which later becomes a wonderful wife. But in this case we are talking about a man with a dog’s head and a fish tail. The story of man-dogs is found in the Buryat folklore [5].

The analysis of the sources revealed that folklore texts about dogs recorded among the peoples of Central Asia are very diverse [6]. Researchers have observed that in the southern Altai there is an ambivalent attitude to dogs. On the one hand, they have recorded numerous myths, according to which these animals should be treated “with love”. On the other hand, special love for dogs is not observed in those myths. So, dogs are not allowed into a human dwelling place. In a conversation with us, an Altaian



claimed that dogs, like cats, are not animals worth attention and love. They do not bury or sacrifice dogs. A dead dog can only be buried for ecological reasons. The northern Altaians have some superstitions associated with dogs [7; 168]. In Tuva, if a dog jumped up a roof of a yurt it was considered a particularly bad omen [8].

Comparative data on the folklore of neighboring peoples show that to a certain extent similar ideas are present in Selkup, Khanty and Mansi myths. In the Selkup mythology a dog is termed *khan / khanakh*. It is associated with the loss of immortality (as well as in the mythology of the peoples of Central Asia in general). *Pari-Num*, the supreme god of Selkups, transformed his son into a dog [9; 40]. In the mythology of the Ob-Ugric peoples there are some myths about the former dog's residence in heaven [10; 132]. The traditional worldview of the Finno-Ugric peoples is dominated by a positive assessment of dogs [11; 57]. For the Mansi, for instance, it is customary "to help" old dogs to move to "the other world", for which they suffocate them with a special slipknot without touching the animal with hands [10; 133].

The next image found in the folklore of northern Altai is the image of waterfowl. In the Altai heroic epics "Khan Delbekey", the heroic motif of matchmaking is consistently associated with a goose. The scene unit is classified as "a wife is a swan / a goose". Indirectly, here we can talk about exogamous dualism. A marriage to a female goose is preferred over a marriage to a woman from the underworld, i.e. with the development of the epics the social significance of this code is emphasized. The modeling role of waterfowl in the cosmogonic myths cannot be doubted. In the epics a swan, as well as geese, play the role of messengers, mediators, delivering "Khan's letters", "God's letters". In the tale "Alyp-Manash" performed by Natalia Pavlova Chernoeva, the role of the birds as messengers is quite clear [12]. Noteworthy is the fact that in the mythology of some peoples of Siberia and the Far East, a swan is regarded as the creator of the world. For instance, V.V. Radlov recorded a myth of the northern Altai (*chelkan*) about the creation of the world [13; 211]. In Nanai myths a swan created the Nanai land. According to Komi mythology, the world was created by a throated diver, which brought the land from under the water (the same in the Nenets', Kets', Ob-Ugric peoples', Evenkis', etc. folklore) [14; 368]. In the legends a swan and a goose are positive characters. So, the heroic tale "Malchy-Mergen", written after the folk storyteller Nicholas Ulagashev, contains an eulogy song about a gray goose [15]. In the folklore of a number of Turkic peoples a crane and a swan are considered to be sacred birds who cannot be killed.

Now let us consider the following folklore character of the northern Altai — the image of the bear. In the Altai mythology the bear is the creation of Ehrlich. It should also be noted that Ehrlich and the bear have the same taboo name — *aby*. It should be mentioned that the bear cult in the northern Altai (compared with the southern) is developed to a great extent. Thus, in one of the myths it is stated that a bear used to be a man. In particular, the legend claims that a bear originated from a man [16]. According to another legend of the northern Altai, a bear used to be a true son of God, a strong hero. A similar legend can be found in Khanty and Mansi folklore. According to the tradition of old people, a bear came to this world through the conversion or

modification of a human hero [17; 79]. In the book of V.A. Muytueva there is a text in which hunters make appropriate ceremonies, adhere to restrictions not to be punished for killing a bear in heaven [18; 136]. The Selkups hold a bear festival after the murder of a bear ogre (Khunema). It is a celebration of the liberation of the human soul from the bear body [9; 56].

Thus, we have examined the images of the animal world — the images of a dog, a bear and waterfowl in the folklore of the northern Altai, and their functions in the spatial and ideological aspects, in comparison with Uralic (Finno-Ugric and Samoyed) mythology, where each of the animals is strictly placed in accordance with their functional characteristics.

In conclusion it is worth noting that some images in the mythology of the northern Altai are not typical of the southern Altai. However, the folklore of northern Altai has managed to preserve unique structural elements and motives that allow to distinguish invariant codes that, together with the materials of ethnography and anthropology can be attributed to the «Samoyed cluster».

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