

WHAT TREE IS “BAYTEREK” IN WORLD FOLKLORE?

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This article deals with the mythological concept cult of the tree “Bayterek”. Including the comparative study of the views and opinions of world scientists of the tree “Bayterek” as the concept of “Tree of Life”. As a result, it is determined that the understanding, perception of the “Bayterek” tree as a thing that embodied a strong life potential, considered sacred as an object with supernatural qualities, led to its interpretation at the level of a cult.

Key words: “bayterek”, cult, mythology, “Tree of Life”, “Tree of the Universe”, epic, tale.

When we look at world science, we see that the issues of folk views, concepts, mythological ideas related to darakits (trees), as well as the artistic interpretation of the image of the darakit (tree) in folklore are widely studied in world folklore and ethnology. What do you think this means? This is due to the fact that our ancestors considered trees sacred, as well as the worship of them, their unnatural quality, as well as their widespread use in their national traditions. According to the well-known scholar J.J.Fraser’s interpretation the natural forest as a sacred place associated with spirits, gods, divinity and deities by ancient people gave rise to the notion of the cult of the darakit (tree).¹ The scientist-ethnographer E.Taylor emphasizes that there are two main aspects in the mythology of the darakit (tree), which are as follows: a) first the fact that each plant, darakit (tree), is considered to be alive, gave rise to the tradition of worshipping darakits (trees); б) the body of the tree can serve as a material shell for the soul of the deceased.² If we compare the opinions expressed in the scientific data on the mythological properties of this darakit (tree), they support the

¹ Fraser D. The Golden Branch. - M.: Politizdat, 1986. - p.110

² Tylor E. Myth and Ritual in Primitive Culture. – Smolensk: Rusich, 2000. – p.186

doctrine of the animistic mythology of flora and fauna, connect the historical bases of the cult of the tree with the mythical notion that plants, in this case, darakits (trees) are also considered alive. According to them, the content of natural objects clarifies the emergence of the notion that darakits (trees) retain their divine, supernatural qualities not only during growth, but also after felling.

Thus, one of the such trees is bayterek, which is considered sacred in world folklore. In this article, we also focus on the discussions and opinions expressed in world folklore about this “bayterek” and its mythological concepts, and aim to make a comparative study of them.

According to the Kazakh folklore, the folklore of the ancient times is associated not only with the folklore of the Kazakh people, but also with the folklore of other Turkic peoples, they note the existence of a “mykan tree”, which has become a motif of legends and is considered a symbol. The symbol of the “mykan tree” (“bayterek”) in Kazakh legends is time, eternal life. For the Kazakh people, the boundary mark of this world and that world is a “gudasta tree”. Er Tostik, Kendebay which is Kerkula and Tazsha Bala came to the bottom of the “bayterek” and came to this world. They lived in a space other than the one we were living in. It is noted that the golden tree in “Kunikei Girl under the Sun” has the same power and the “mykan tree” (“bayterek”) is a symbol of eternal time. In Kazakh folklore, the “bayterek” tree, which connects the Earth and the Sky, is called the “mykan tree”.¹

The same information is quoted in the Kazakhstan Internet Wikipedia as “bayterek - according to ancient legends, is a tree with mysterious properties”. According to the ancient central notion, “bayterek” is a giant tree that grows in the center of the earth and is considered to be the abode of the human world, holding the earth with its roots, and propping up the sky with its crown. This type of tree is traditionally called “mykan tree”, “myrzaterek”, “saint tree”, “seter willow”, and is

¹ Sarbasov B.S., Kdyralieva J.B. The Image of a Tree in Ancient Literary Heritage. Kazakh National Women's Pedagogical University, Almaty, Kazakhstan. Bulletin of KazNPU named after Abay, Series “Philology”, No. 4 (74), 2020. – p.312

called differently depending on the shape and meaning. “Bayterek” is an ancient Turkic word, the word “bay” means “big”, it is phonetically modified form of the word “bay” (baybishe, baysheshek) which means “big” and “terek” (in Persian is a tree) means “tree”. Thus, “bayterek” is a combination of two words, meaning “big tree”.¹

In the essay of Doctor of Philology T.A.Agapkina entitled “Trees in the Slavic folk tradition”², it is stated that in the traditional culture of the Slavic peoples, in addition to aspen (*Populus tremula*), other species of the botanical genus *Populus*, first of all, *Populus alba*, white poplar or a tree of silver color are considered to be symbolic signs which are used in customs and traditions. Legends explain the reason for the shaking of its leaves as the individual characteristics of the tree. The scientist explains that “transferring” of the properties of such trees into legends is more common in the Southern Slavic traditions, and that the Bulgarians, Serbs and Khovatas call them “terek”.

In Turkish folklore, it is noted that there are reasons why the events that took place from the past to the present are identified with trees, why they are given myths and meanings of various kinds and why each tree is considered sacred. People saw the trees as means of salvation, helper, linker or deity, depending on the territory and traditions. Some prayed under a tree, while others tied a rope around a tree and prayed. Those who saw the tree as a deity or accepted it as a means of attaining the ten gods, called it the “Tree of Life” (“bayterek of life”) and gave the meaning of “the center of the world”. In Turkish folklore, the reasons for the sacredness of trees in legends and myths have been passed down from generation to generation and have survived to the present day. The importance of poplars in them was connected with its appearance. Trees, like humans, grow upwards and try to bear fruit. The “Tree of

¹ <https://kk.wikipedia.org/> The traditional system of Kazakh ethnographic categories, concepts and names. Encyclopedia. - Almaty: DPS, 2011. - ISBN 978-601-7026-17-2

² Agapkina T.A. Trees in the Slavic Folk Tradition: Essays. M.: Indrik, 2019. 274 p.

Life”, which is considered sacred to humans, is associated with producing. Scientists point out that the creation of man is related to this tree.

According to the Turkish folklorist Ergun, the “Tree of Life” has existed since the creation of the world. According to the beliefs, the “Tree of Life” extends from the earth to the seven heavens, and is considered to be the owner of the sacred life, providing its relationship between the earth and the sky and descending to the underworld. Regardless of faith and religion, the importance of worshiping the “Tree of Life” in all nations means the power of the tree to unite people. The tree of life is the tree of eternal youth and immortality. The “Tree of Life” includes all the trees which are evergreen, always in blossom, always full of fruits which make people immortal if they eat them. “The tree of life is a symbol of truth, divinity and life, often illuminated in a mysterious tree, which is located in a place difficult to reach or in a place where only the chosen can gather.”¹

According to Turkish folklorist Erbek, “A person who has not been immortal on earth can find a solution in the belief that he will be resurrected after death or that the tribe will not die. The motive of the tree of life was also used to illuminate these feelings.”²

According to the sources, the “Cosmic Tree”, the “Tree of the World”, the “Tree of the Universe” and the “Tree of Life” represent the same tree. These notions have been passed down from generation to generation with different interpretations. However, these trees are of the same species, and the reason for the differences in their use can be seen in the fact that the different mythological properties of these trees come to the first place in different societies. Both the “Tree of Life” and the “Tree of the World” ensure the cosmological order, that is, the continuity of life, its continuation of events, order, and its constant renewal. From this point of view, the

¹ Salih IŞIK. Hayat Ağacı ve Kutsal Ağaçlar: Türk ve Çin Mitolojisi Üzerine Bir Karşılaştırma. International journal of humanities and education (IJHE), Volume 5, ISSUE 11, P. 546 – 566. // Ergun, 2004, -B.155.// <https://dergipark.org.tr/>

² Salih IŞIK. Hayat Ağacı ve Kutsal Ağaçlar: Türk ve Çin Mitolojisi Üzerine Bir Karşılaştırma. International journal of humanities and education (IJHE), Volume 5, ISSUE 11, P. 546 – 566. // Ergun, 2004, -B.155.

“Tree of the Universe”, the “Tree of the World” and the “Tree of Peace” correspond to each other and are closely related to each other. The “Tree of the World” embodies the divinity, grandeur and permanence of the world, nature, truth and life, immortality. (Bell, 1982).

In Turkish folklore, it is said that the poplar unites the three worlds from the ground to the sky. “Bayterek” is a symbol of God. The tree is a symbol of death and resurrection. (Ergun, 2004, p.216).

Such mythological notions about the tree are preserved in Chinese folklore. In Chinese mythology, the concept of the “Tree of Life” usually means eternity. Several trees are given this description. The concept of the “Tree of Life” is a tree that embodies people’s dreams and aspirations. The Chinese people are also more interested in this issue. Therefore, the “Tree of Life” was known in the minds of people as the guarantor of eternal life. According to the folklorist M.Eliade, “In Chinese mythology, the mysterious tree grows in the center of the world, it is understood that the center of the state is here.”¹

M.Eliade also believes that the following factors contributed to the origin of the tree cult. They include:

- 1) The complex of concepts “stone-tree-sacred place” is understood as a real microcosm;
- 2) the tree is thought of as an image of space;
- 3) tree - a combination of productivity, fertility and prosperity as a sign of life energy (a symbol of productivity, fertility and childbirth is associated with the image of the Holy Mother and the cult of water;
- 4) the tree is understood as a source of eternal life, survival);

¹ Eliade M., Treatise on the History of Religion. V.2. - St. Petersburg: Publishing House “Aletheia”, 1999. – p.297.

5) that the tree is an “Arrow of the Universe” or a tool to maintain the cosmic equilibrium;

6) the existence of a magical connection between trees and people (thinking that trees are the abode of ancestral spirits; that trees have a symbolic significance in the competition - initiation festivals and rituals (traditions));

7) the tree is considered to be a symbol of the resurrection of nature, a symbol of spring and the renewal of the year.¹

Reflections on the content of such a tree cult can be found in the research of I.M.Makovsky:

1) its semantic structure includes the semantics of “different world”, “other world”;

2) understanding as “Arrow of the World”, “Tree of Life”, “Center of the World”;

3) interconnecting cosmic unity and serving as a tool to maintain the balance of celestial order;

4) is characterized by the expression of “supernatural”, “magical”, “wonderful” attributes;

5) due to the fact that the tree is considered as a symbol of growth, it is associated with the idea of “birth”, “creation”.²

“In English folklore, the Green Man (Jack-in-the-Green) is considered a symbol of nature. It is believed that this mythological image first appeared in Celtic folklore. It is illuminated only in the male form. It is made of leaves and is called Green Man because of its green color. This image is common in medieval architecture and painting, as well as in English creativity. One of the most famous poems in English

¹ Eliade M., Treatise on the History of Religion. V.2. - St. Petersburg: Publishing House “Aletheia”, 1999. – pp.234-235.

² Makovsky M.M. Comparative dictionary of mythological symbolism in the Indo-European languages. The image of the world and the worlds of images. – M.: Vlastos, 1996. – pp.134-141

literature “Sir Hawen and the Green Knight” depicts the Green Man as a protagonist.¹

G. Sherbekova, a researcher of Bukhara State University in her article “Some Comments on the Image of the “Tree of Life” in Myths and Legends” wrote about the study of the interpretation of mythology in the manuscripts of material culture by V.V. Evsyukov that “Tree of Life” was the first on the continent among the boundless waters of the first ocean, the fact that the first ancestors of mankind took their first steps under this tree, and also myths and legends about the origin of human beings from a married man under this tree are widespread.² At the same time, the researcher G. Sherbekova supports the scientist’s opinion on the myths about the mighty islands and that this tree growing in the middle of paradise, distinguishes good and evil, and spreads good or bad odors. In her article the researcher also expresses her opinion that the cult of the tree is considered sacred in Uzbek folklore.

Such notion of the magical power of the tree in the life of a person is also preserved in Karakalpak folklore. For example, the epics “Alpamys”, “Shiirin-Sheker”, fairy tales as “Talas”, “Kishkinejan kishkine” are examples of this.

In general, when comparing the ideas of the “bayterek tree” in the world folklore, the “bayterek tree” is considered to be a living thing that combines the potential of a very strong life, it can be seen that the tradition of considering it sacred as an object of intellectual and supernatural feature has led to its discussion at the cult level.

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² Sherbekova G. Some Comments on the Image of the “Tree of Life” in Myths and Legends. Scientific Progress. Volume 3 | ISSUE 2 | 2022. – p. 244. // Evsyukov V.V. Myths about the Universe. - Novosibirsk: Science, 1988. – 177 p. – p.45. <http://www.scientificprogress.uz/>

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