

Animals in the literature and culture of the Ismaili peoples of Tajik Badakhshan

Animals of all kinds appear in the culture of Tajik Badakhshan. Nevertheless, the available research into animal representations in cultural artifacts created by the inhabitants of the region is surprisingly sparse. The dissertation seeks to partially fill this research gap by providing a comprehensive description of the cultural representations of the three most common animal species in folklore texts: snake, dog and mountain goat (*Capra sibirica*). The texts included in the research were collected among the Pamiris, Iranian ethnic groups adhering to Ismailism living in Badakhshan. The dissertation has two objectives: first, the reconstruction of cultural worldviews of animals perpetuated in the Pamiri folklore texts; and second, an attempt to determine the extent of the systemic character of individual animals' representations, i.e., to what extent the representations which form the cultural worldview are conventionalized and stabilized in the process of social transmission. In view of this, the dissertation focuses on answering the following questions: what features (external and internal) of animals, their locations, behaviors, the relationship of animals with other elements of texts, as well as the axiological content and utilitarian uses of these animals are perpetuated by Pamiri folklore texts? Are the animal representations detected in the course of the analysis reproducible in the research material? Are there analogous representations in other areas of symbolic culture, including Iranian mythology, system of beliefs, rituals and art, which could indicate the permanence and stability of these representations, i.e., their systemic nature?

The theoretical foundation of the dissertation is formed by semiotics of culture, from which the understanding of key concepts for the research is drawn, the concept of linguistic (linguistic-cultural) worldview, as well as concepts which attempt to explain the dynamics of folklore, such as Petr Bogatyrev's and Roman Jakobson's considerations on the applicability of the *langue/parole* distinction in the analysis of folklore, or concepts that explain the heterogeneity of folklore texts,¹ just to mention Juri Lotman's concept of 'polysystematicity'² or consideration of Polish ethnolinguists on the coexistence of three interpretative frameworks of reality in folklore texts.³

The research material consists of 135 folklore texts, and among them: literary works (fables, legends, legends, memorates, nostalgic songs), proverbs, idiomatic phrases, as well as accounts of the Ismaili residents of Tajik Badakhshan on local beliefs and individual experiences

1 Bogatyrev, P. and Jakobson, R. (2021) "Folklore as a special form of creativity," in: *The Prague School*, Austin: University of Texas Press, pp. 32-46.

2 Lotman, J. (1970) *Struktura xudożestvennogo teksta*, Moskva: Iskusstvo.

3 Bartmińska, I., Bartmiński, J., Paclawska, E. and Żuk, M. (2012) „Świat,” in: Bartmiński, J. (ed.) *Słownik stereotypów i symboli ludowych*, vol. I, fasc. 4, Lublin: Wydawnictwo Uniwersytetu Marii Curie-Skłodowskiej, pp. 11-76.

related to animals, accounts on the use of animals in healing and magical practices, and stories about dreams. Due to the fact that literary texts constitute the majority of the research material, literature, which is one of the elements of symbolic culture, was highlighted in the title of the dissertation. The research material was partly collected during field research in Tajik Badakhshan, and partly came from the existing collections of Pamiri folklore. The texts were transcribed in various languages (Pamiri languages, Tajik and Russian). For the purposes of the dissertation, they were translated into Polish. Polish translations of all the analyzed texts can be found in the appendix. The text analysis was based on the following categories: animal characteristics (external and internal), locations, animal activities, animal as an object of action, prohibitions associated with the animal, its transformations, animal as a prophecy, collections (co-occurrence on the basis of performing a common function), equivalences (substitutability), oppositions, use of the animal or its parts. The method of categorical analysis was borrowed from *Słownik stereotypów i symboli ludowych* [Dictionary of folk stereotypes and symbols]⁴, which aims to reconstruct the traditional worldview fixed in Polish language and culture. The meaning and repetition of the analytically emerged representations of animals were sought in a broader cultural context, i.e., in other sign systems (religion, myth, ritual, art, etc.), as well as in the everyday experience of the inhabitants of Tajik Badakhshan.

The applied research method provided means for the reconstruction of cultural images of the snake, dog and mountain goat, as well as for the development of an inventory of the formal and semantic structures from which texts featuring these animals are constructed. The visions of the snake and the dog are highly varied, mainly in the sphere of features attributed to these animals and value judgments, reflecting the attitude of the Badakhshan people toward these animals. The results show that the snake is vicious, vindictive, dangerous, and at the same time graceful, caring and good. Most of snake's actions were classified as either harmful or beneficial to humans. In addition, the snake constitutes a negative element in all the distinguished binary oppositions, and transformations of the snake indicate a negative image of this animal. At the same time, the results indicate the stability of such positive images as the snake-guardian of the house or water source, the snake's association with healing or the snake-donor. Similar diversity characterizes the reconstructed vision of the dog. The Pamiri texts attribute a number of negative and positive traits to this animal, just to mention impurity (ritual and physical) and quarrelsomeness, and at the same time, faithfulness and vigilance. Strongly exposed is both the vision of the dog as an animal living in hardship and despised by man, and the protective function of the dog. Above all, the dog protects homes and people from all kinds of demons. The least degree of variation characterizes the vision

4 Bartmiński, J. (1996) „O «Słowniku stereotypów i symboli ludowych»,” in: Bartmiński, J. (ed.) *Słownik stereotypów i symboli ludowych*. vol. 1, fasc. 1., Lublin: Wydawnictwo Uniwersytetu Marii Curie-Skłodowskiej, pp. 9-34.

of the mountain goat, which is most likely due to the fact that the cultural role of this animal as a sacred and pure is clearly defined in Badakhshan. The purity of the goat is contrasted with the impurity of humans, the human environment and domesticated animals, which can be interpreted as the realization of binary oppositions: pure – impure and sacred – profane. Definite positive properties are also attributed to the various parts of the mountain goat: it is believed that after eating its meat, human body is purified in the physical and spiritual sense, while horns are attributed apotropaic properties and are therefore placed in local places of worship.

The research gave rise to hypotheses about the systemic nature of some of the representations. Among the representations that recur most often, and therefore can be said with high probability to be systemic in the culture of Tajik Badakhshan, are: white snake as a guardian of the home, gratitude of the snake, healing properties of snake venom, dog as a guardian protecting against demons, quarrelsome nature of the dog, dog as an animal living in hardship, noble and pure mountain goat, belief in purifying properties of mountain goat meat and magical function of its horns.

The meanings and motivations of some of the representations were decoded by referring to Iranian mythology and archaic beliefs, to Islam and to sensory experience. In this sense, the results are consistent with the thesis of the coexistence of three interpretative frameworks in the traditional worldview and the hypothesis of Eleazar Meletinskii on the polistadiality of folklore.⁵ For example, according to the suggested interpretations, the stereotype of the dangerous snake may have its origins in the observation this animal's behavior or in archaic Iranian beliefs in which snake represents the forces of chaos and destruction. The apotropaic function of the dog most likely derives from Zoroastrian beliefs related to this animal's role in funeral rituals. In contrast, the belief in the dog's impurity may originate in Islam. In the Pamiri folklore, mountain goats are linked to *pari*, which are supernatural beings derived from Iranian mythology, and at the same time, to important Islamic figures like Abraham and Fatima. The results therefore indicate the co-occurrence of different codes within folklore, with which they confirm the thesis of Juri Lotman and Roland Barthes on the 'polysystemicity' of some semiotic systems.⁶

The dissertation expands scholarly understanding of how the Ismaili population of Tajik Badakhshan perceives the snake, dog and goat and how these perceptions are reflected in the cultural texts they create. They also point to culturally significant motifs that can permeate diachronic layers of culture and cross geographical boundaries. This, in turn, opens up new directions of research in both Iranian and comparative studies.

5 Meletinskii, E.M. (1974) *Strukturnaya tipologiya i fol'klor'*, *Kontekst – 1973*, pp. 329-346.

6 Barthes, R. (1985) *L'Aventure sémiologique*, Paris: Éditions du Seuil.