

Ornithological imagery in the epics “Ural-Batyr” and “Koblandy-Batyr”

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ABSTRACT

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This article presents a comparative study of ornithological imagery in the Bashkir "Ural-Batyr" and the Kazakh "Koblandy-Batyr" epics. From the perspectives of mythopoetics and textual criticism, the study examines the systematic interplay of the mythological, symbolic, semantic, and poetic functions of bird imagery. The research is based on classical versions of the texts of both epics. Despite the well-developed nature of the Turkic epic as a subject, ornithological imagery within its structure remains under-researched. Most studies are limited to analyzing individual works and neglect the comparative aspect. While preparing the article, the authors relied on relevant historical sources, ethnographic data, and fundamental works on the folklore and literary studies. The study's methodological framework is an integrated approach combining textual, semantic-symbolic, comparative-typological, and mythopoetic analyses. This approach allows for a deeper interpretation of the structural and semantic content of the texts, revealing the archetypal foundations of the worldview reflected in the Bashkir and Kazakh epic traditions. The research results confirm the significant role of ornithological imagery in both epics while also highlighting their divergent semantic and functional characteristics. In the Bashkir epic "Ural-Batyr", ornithological imagery appears as independent mythological characters inextricably linked to cosmogonic and sacred meanings. Examples of this imagery include Samrau, Humay (swan), and Aykhulu (duck), which represent the upper world and embody the symbolism of the sky, sun, and moon. These birds also perform a mediatory function between the earthly and celestial realms. Endowed with anthropomorphic traits, birds play a fundamental role

in structuring the tripartite model of the universe. They function as totemic or cult symbols and as active mythological agents with the capacity for verbal communication and reversible metamorphosis. In the "Koblandy-Batyr" epic, bird imagery is interpreted differently. The falcon, golden eagle, and hawk are realized through a system of fixed epithets, similes, and metaphorical constructions characteristic of heroic epic poetics. These constructions emphasize the exceptional nature of the protagonist. The article substantiates the universalization of the falcon image, extending it to female characters as well (Karlyga, Kurtka). Deconstructing traditional folkloric patterns involving swallows, swans, nightingales, and peacocks in favor of predatory symbolism foregrounds the female warrior archetype. Furthermore, a binary parallelism between zoomorphic (tulpar) and ornithomorphic (falcon) motifs is evident in the epic's artistic structure. In both epics, the image of the raven is present and characterized by ambivalence: in the archaic layer of "Ural-Batyr", it functions as a demiurge and primordial ancestor (as reflected in the raven's monologue and its depiction on Katil's flag), whereas in the narrative context of "Koblandy-Batyr", it appears as a harbinger of tragedy, symbolizing threat and death. A comprehensive analysis of ornithological imagery deepens our understanding of the semiotics of Turkic epics and opens new avenues for comparative research.

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«Орал батыр» және «Қобыланды батыр» эпостарындағы орнитологиялық бейнелер

Аннотация. Мақала башқұрттың «Орал батыр» және қазақтың «Қобыланды батыр» эпостарындағы орнитологиялық бейнелерді мифопоэтика және мәтінтану тұрғы-

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сынан салыстыра қарастырып, олардың мифологиялық, рәміздік, семантикалық және поэтикалық функцияларын өзара сабақтастықта зерделеуге арналған. Зерттеу нысаны ретінде екі батырлық эпостың классикалық нұсқаларының мәтіндеріне талдау жасалған. Түркі эпосы бойынша ізденістердің көптігіне қарамастан, оның құрылымындағы орнитологиялық бейнелер әлі жете зерттелмеген және еңбектердің көбінде жекелеген шығармалар ғана талданып, компаративтік көзқарас қамтылмаған. Мақаланы әзірлеу барысында авторлар тақырыпқа қатысты тарихи дереккөздерге, этнографиялық мәліметтерге, сондай-ақ фольклортану мен әдебиеттану саласындағы іргелі ғылыми еңбектерге жүгінген. Зерттеудің әдіснамалық негізін мәтінтанулық, семантикалық-символдық, салыстырмалы-типологиялық және мифтік-поэтикалық талдау әдістерін ұштастыратын кешенді тәсіл құрап, бұл мәтіндік материалдардың құрылымдық-мазмұндық мәнін ашуға, башқұрт және қазақ эпикалық дәстүрлеріндегі дүниетанымның архетиптік негіздерін анықтауға мүмкіндік берді. Зерттеу нәтижелері бойынша екі эпостың да поэтикалық құрылымында құстардың маңызды орын алатыны, бірақ олардың семантикалық және функционалдық сипаттарында айтарлықтай айырмашылықтар бар екені айқындалды. «Орал батыр» құбайырында орнитоморфтық бейнелер космогониялық және сакралды түсініктермен тығыз байланысты дербес мифологиялық кейіпкерлер түрінде көрініс тапқан. Самрау, Номай (аққу), Айхылу (үйрек) секілді құс бейнелері «аспан әлемінің» өкілдері ретінде Көк, Күн, Ай символикасын танытып, жер мен көк арасында медиаторлық қызмет атқарады. Антропоморфтық тұрпатта көрінетін бұл бейнелер ғаламның үшқабатты моделін (жоғарғы, ортаңғы, төменгі әлемдер) құрылымдауда жетекші рөлге ие. Эпоста құстар тек тотемдік немесе культтік символдар ғана емес, сонымен бірге сөйлеу және кейпін өзгерту қабілеті бар, мифтік оқиғалардың белсенді қатысушысы ретінде бой көрсетеді. «Қобыланды батыр» жырында құс бейнелері өзгеше сипатталып, сұңқар, бүркіт пен қаршыға батырлық эпос поэтикасына тән тұрақты эпитеттер, теңеулер мен метафоралық қолданыстар арқылы қаһарманның дара болмысын асқақтатуға қызмет етеді. Мақалада сұңқар бейнесінің әмбебаптығы дәлелденіп, оның әйел кейіпкерлерге (Қарлыға, Құртқа) де қатысты қолданылғандығы көрсетіледі. Дәстүрлі фольклорлық шаблондардың (қарлығаш, аққу, сандуғаш, тоты) «жыртқыш құс» символикасына ауысуы ер адамдарға ғана тән нышандар шеңберінен шығып, жауынгер әйел архетипін жандандырады. Сондай-ақ, эпостың көркемдік өрімінде зооморфты (тұлпар) және орнитоморфты (сұңқар) кодтардың бинарлы параллелизмі байқалады. Қос эпоста да қарға/құзғын бейнесі кездесіп, амбивалентті сипатта көрінеді: архаикалық қабатта («Орал батыр») ол демиург және ілкі баба (қарғаның монологы, Катилдің туындағы бейне) ретінде сипатталса, оқиғалық контексте («Қобыланды батыр») қауіп-қатер мен өлімді ишаралайтын қайғылы жағдайдың хабаршысы боп суреттеледі. Осылайша, орнитологиялық бейнелерді кешенді талдау түркі эпосының семиотикасын тереңірек түсінуге септігін тигізеді және осы бағыттағы болашақ зерттеулерге негіз болады.

Кілт сөздер: эпос, түркі халықтары, башқұрт, қазақ, орнитология, бейне, Самрау, Номай, сұңқар, мифопоэтика, мәтінтану.

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Орнитологические образы в эпосах «Урал-батыр» и «Кобланды-батыр»

Аннотация. Статья посвящена сравнительному изучению орнитологических образов в башкирском («Урал-батыр») и казахском («Кобланды-батыр») эпосах. С позиций мифопоэтики и текстологии исследуется системная взаимосвязь мифологических, символических, семантических и поэтических функций образов птиц. Объектом исследования послужили классические версии текстов обоих героических сказаний. Несмотря на разработанность темы тюркского эпоса, орнитологические образы в его структуре остаются малоисследованными и большинство работ ограничивается анализом отдельных произведений, минуя компаративный аспект. При подготовке статьи авторы опирались на релевантные исторические источники, этнографические данные и фундаментальные труды в области фольклористики и литературоведения. Методологическую основу исследования составил комплексный подход, интегрирующий текстологический, семантико-символический, сравнительно-типологический и мифопоэтический анализы для глубокой интерпретации структурно-смыслового содержания текстов и выявления архетипических основ мировоззрения в башкирской и казахской эпических традициях. Результаты исследования подтверждают доминантную роль орнитологических образов в обоих эпосах при существенной дивергенции (расхождении) их семантических и функциональных характеристик. В кубаиыре «Урал-батыр» орнитологические образы выступают в качестве самостоятельных мифологических персонажей, неразрывно связанных с космогоническим и сакральным содержанием. Образы птиц, таких, как Самрау, Хумай (лебедь), Айхылу (утка), являясь репрезентантами «высшего мира», воплощают символику Неба, Солнца и Луны, выполняя при этом медиативную функцию между земной и небесной сферами. Они, наделяясь антропоморфными чертами, играют фундаментальную роль в структурировании трехчастной модели мироздания. Птицы предстают не только как

тотемные или культовые символы, но и как активные субъекты мифа, обладающие способностью в вербальной коммуникации и реверсивной метаморфозе. Иную интерпретацию образы птиц получают в эпосе «Кобланды батыр», где сокол, беркут и ястреб реализуются через систему устойчивых эпитетов, сравнений и метафорических конструкций, характерных для поэтики героического эпоса и возвеличивают исключительную сущность протагониста. В статье обоснована универсализация образа сокола, который экстраполируется и на женские персонажи (Карлыга, Куртка). Деконструкция традиционных фольклорных шаблонов (ласточка, лебедь, соловей, павлин) в пользу «хищной» символики актуализирует архетип женщины-воительницы. Также, в художественной ткани эпоса наблюдается бинарный параллелизм зооморфного (тулпар) и орнитоморфного (сокол) кодов. В обоих эпосах встречается образ ворона, который характеризуется амбивалентностью: в архаичном слое («Урал-батыр») он выступает как демиург и первопредок (монолог ворона, изображение на флаге Катилы), тогда как в событийном контексте («Кобланды-батыр») – как предвестник трагической ситуации, символизирующий угрозу и смерть. Таким образом, комплексный анализ орнитологических образов способствует глубокому пониманию семиотики тюркского эпоса и инициирует дальнейшие сравнительные исследования в этом направлении.

Ключевые слова: эпос, народы, башкиры, казахи, орнитология, образ, Самрау, Хумай, сокол, мифопоэтика, текстология.

Introduction

In the traditional worldview of the Turkic peoples, ornithological imagery is closely linked to mythological beliefs, totemic concepts and archaic models of the relationship between humans and nature. The analysis of epic works shows that birds function not only as poetic imagery but also fulfil various functions: they serve as messengers, the hero's helpers, symbols of heavenly power, or embodiments of the reborn soul. Despite the existence of a substantial body of research devoted to the poetics of the Turkic epic, the role and significance of ornithological imagery within its system have not yet been sufficiently explored. Despite the considerable body of research devoted to the poetics of the Turkic epic, the role and significance of ornithological imagery within its framework have not yet been sufficiently explored. Moreover, studies have generally focused solely on the bird imagery in individual epic works, while their comparative analysis within a cross-folkloric context has been largely overlooked. In this regard, a comparative analysis of the Bashkir epic “*Ural-Batyr*” and the Kazakh epic “*Kobylandy-Batyr*” from the perspective of the mythological, symbolic, semantic and poetic functions of ornithological imagery can be regarded as one of the first steps in this direction and constitutes the scientific novelty of this study. The objectives of this study include identifying ornithological imagery in both epics, analyzing their semantics and functions, identifying common features and specific characteristics, and examining their connection to the worldviews of the Kazakh and Bashkir peoples. The analysis of these epic works from a textual perspective, as well as an assessment of the mythopoetic and symbolic significance of the bird imagery found within them, further underscore the relevance of this study. Overall, the study of ornithological imagery contributes to a clearer understanding of

both the common motifs and the distinctive features of the epic traditions of the Kazakh and Bashkir peoples.

Materials and methods

Various versions of the Bashkir epic “Ural-Batyr” and the Kazakh epic “*Kobylandy-Batyr*” were considered as the research material for this study. This study is based on two classical versions of the kubair “*Ural-Batyr*”, performed by the storytellers Gabit Argybayev and Khamit Almukhametov and recorded by the folklorist M. Borangulov. It is known that the epic “*Kobylandy-Batyr*” exists in two versions. The first includes more than ten variants, performed by Koshelek Elamanov, Nurpeis Baiganin, Aisa Baitabynova, Muryn Sengirbekov, Nurseit Bitileuyov, Suyinshali Zhanbyrshina, and Erezhep Tileumagambetuly. The second comprises variants by Marabay, Mergenbay, Dauletshe, Birzhan and Kulzak. Ornithological imagery found in the selected texts of both epics was systematically selected, analyzed and classified according to its functions. The method of textual analysis enabled the comparison of different versions of the epics, as well as the verification of their manuscript and printed forms in terms of reliability and authenticity. Semantic-symbolic analysis facilitated the identification of the underlying meanings of bird imagery and the revelation of their functions within the epic structure. The comparative method enabled the identification of common and specific ornithological imagery in the Kazakh and Bashkir epic traditions. The application of mythopoetic analysis allowed for the establishment of the archetypal nature of bird imagery and their ancient worldview foundations. It should be noted that during the research, the aforementioned methods were applied comprehensively and in an integrated and complementary manner. The theoretical and methodological framework of the study is grounded in foundational works in textual studies, folklore studies, and mythopoetics, enabling a comprehensive examination of the worldview and artistic nature of ornithological imagery in these epics.

Research background

The origins, typology and poetics of the epic heritage of the Turkic peoples have long been the subject of academic inquiry. These studies date back to the works of V.V. Radlov (1866; 1870; 1885) and Ch. Valikhanov (1995). Subsequently, various aspects of the Turkic epic were explored in the works of M. Auezov (1927), V.M. Zhirmunsky (1974), I.V. Pukhov (1962), Korogly (1976), A. Margulan (1985), R. Berdibay (1995), T. Mirzayev (2009), K. Reichl (2008), Sh. Ybyrayev (1993) and other researchers. In the context of the present study particular attention should be given to the monograph by O. Nurmagambetova devoted to the epic “*Kobylandy Batyr*” (2003). The issues related to the Bashkir epic, including the kubair “*Ural-Batyr*”, have been addressed in the works of researchers such as V.G. Kotov (2019), M. M. Sagitov (2009), Z.G. Aminev (2013), S. Galin (2009), and R.A. Sultangareeva (2023). In recent years, the number of studies in Turkology focusing on the comparative analysis of epic texts has increased. However, specialized works devoted to the artistic functions of ornithological imagery and their mythopoetic semantics in the epic are extremely limited. Although individual publications have examined the image of Humay (Kumay) in the epic

“Ural-Batyr”, comparative analysis with analogous imagery in the epics of other Turkic peoples, including the Kazakh tradition, has not yet been undertaken. Similarly, ornithological imagery in “Kobylandy-Batyr” has primarily been analyzed at the level of individual episodes, while its broader mythopoetic and textual significance remains insufficiently explored. In this regard, the present study is distinguished by its comprehensive examination of ornithological imagery in Kazakh and Bashkir epics, its identification of functional roles within the poetic system, and its comparative analysis of the two epic traditions.

Analysis

As an integral part of the mythological system, birds fulfil a multifaceted role. They appear in the guise of divine figures, totemic ancestors, messengers or spiritual intermediaries. Within the mythopoetic framework, bird imagery is closely associated with the heavenly realm, as well as with the symbolism of the Sun and the spirit. As a rule, a bird placed at the top of the “world tree”, which embodies the tripartite structure of the universe, is regarded as the ruler of the upper world. Such imagery is most commonly represented by the eagle or in its generalised symbolic form (Stebleva, 2002: 31). The diversity of bird species is reflected in the richness of ornithonyms within the linguistic worldview. This is because a significant number of names associated with birds correlate with the important role of ornithological imagery in the folklore and mythological traditions of the Turkic peoples (Safina, 2025: 352). In the worldview of the ancient Kazakhs, as in Turkic and many other mythological systems of the world in general, the concept of a tripartite universe is firmly established: the upper world (heaven), the middle world (the earth’s surface) and the lower world (the underworld). This triadic model underlies shamanic, totemic and epic traditions. Within this framework, birds play a special role. Their ability to fly and to move freely between heaven and earth allow them to be interpreted as mediators linking the upper and middle worlds (Kondybay, 2018: 408).

The bird imagery in the epic works “Ural-Batyr” and “Kobylandy-Batyr” constitutes an important component of the mythological system. M. Eliade noted that feathers and ornithomorphic elements in shamanic attire transform the wearer into “a spirit” capable of leaving the body and taking flight, while “magical ascension” symbolises the soul’s ability to move between cosmic realms, that is, from the earthly world to the heavenly one (Eliade, 1964: 181-205). In this sense, the bird imagery symbolises the connection between the upper and middle worlds. From this perspective, Humay, who appears in the form of a swan in the epic “Ural-Batyr”, is not only the daughter of Samrau and the Sun, but also a symbol of solar radiance, serving as a classic example of a sacred mediator. The application of morphological method proposed by V. Ya. Propp’s to the Turkic epic allows sacred objects and natural elements to be interpreted not merely as symbolic categories, but also as functional components of the plot structure (Propp, 2001: 19, 21). The bird imagery is widely used as a literary device to express heroism, freedom, and nobility. Thus, in the epic “Kobylandy-Batyr”, the metaphorical expressions attributed to the enemies – “Kobylandy is an eagle, we are crows”, “He is a white falcon, we are crows” emphasise their weakness and the hero’s superiority. In his works on mythopoetics, E. Meletinsky demonstrated that mythological imagery in epic texts, including bird imagery, represent not only aesthetic but also deeply

semantically charged archetypal units that fulfil a variety of functions, such as symbolizing freedom, rebirth, the cycle of life and death, and spiritual guidance (Meletinsky, 2000: 166). In the kubair “*Ural-Batyr*”, Humay, in the guise of a swan, symbolises renewal and the eternal creative principle, whereas in the epic “*Kobylandy-Batyr*”, the ornithological metaphor serves as a means of portraying the character’s heroic nature and courage. In both epic works, ornithological imagery assumes multiple forms, reflecting the distinctive worldviews that underpin each work. In the Kazakh epic, the bird imagery primarily operates within the framework of literary and stylistic devices – similes, epithets, and metaphors, enhancing the emotional expressiveness and vividly conveying the hero’s extraordinary qualities and deeds. By contrast, in the Bashkir epic, birds are directly integrated into the narrative as mythological characters endowed with sacred and miraculous properties. According to the concept of the Spanish thinker Kh.E. Cirlot, the symbolism of the bird expresses the aspiration of the spirit and soul, the flight of thought and imagination, as well as a mediating function between heaven and earth (Cirlot, 2001: 35). In this context, the bird imagery in the mythological worldview and folkloric consciousness of the Turkic peoples is understood as a symbol of freedom, elevation, and transcendence.

In Turkic mythopoeics, the association of the birds with the heights is not limited to a purely spatial dimension but reflects a deeper understanding of its sacred significance. Accordingly, the bird functions as one of the most ancient symbolic models for establishing a connection with the heavens, receiving messages from higher powers, and communicating with Tengri. This determines the bird’s distinctive position within the tripartite structure of the cosmos: it is not merely a representative of the lower or even the middle world, by virtue of its inherent proximity to the upper world, it is perceived as a bearer of cosmic order.

The Bashkir epic tradition is distinguished by its depth of content, genre diversity and heroic-epic orientation (Bashkort Khalik Izhady, 1998: 448). In the epic “*Ural-Batyr*”, ornithomorphic imagery occupies a special place. Bird imagery vividly reveals the interconnection between the miraculous and the real worlds. In this context, birds function not only as artistic devices but also as structural elements that shape the ethical and cosmogonic dimensions of the work, as well as its system of characters. They establish a link between the hero and the sacred realm, acting as spiritual guides. In this epic, birds are presented not only as totemic or sacred images but also as active participants in mythological events. They are endowed with the ability to speak, to transform their appearance, and to maintain a connection with the heavenly world. The primary forms of existence for the heroines in the epic include the bird imagery, various zoomorphic creatures and mythological animals (Dautova, 2025: 201). In the epic “*Ural-Batyr*”, Humay appears as an active “bird-woman” figure. In essence, she acts as the ruler of the avian realm and opposes the forces of evil. Thus, she throws Shulgen and Zarkum into a pit that splits the earth’s surface; when they attempt to escape, the pit is filled with water at her command. These actions demonstrate her ability to control the earthly elements and cause floods of cosmic scale. At the same time, her power serves to benefit humanity while inflicting harm on hostile forces. Furthermore, Humay is a trusted companion of Ural-Batyr: she bestows upon him the heavenly horse Akbozat and a magical steel sword. As the hero’s faithful wife, Humay actively contributes to the consolidation of the Bashkir people (Ilimbetova, 2023: 65). As the daughter of Samrau, the king of birds, Humay embodies a classic ornithomorphic figure. Initially, when Ural and his family capture her, she takes the form of a swan. In her address to batyrs, she describes herself as follows:

“...Samraý tıgán batshanyń
 homai tıgán kyzymyn;
 Altyn sásem tarkaham,
 Nýrğa ilde kúmámen:
 Kóndóz ergá nýr hıbám,
 Kisen aıǵa nýr bıram.
 Ebáregez hez mine,
 Ilemá min kaitaym;
 Iánshushmáneń hyý ılyyn hezgá áıtep kıtáiem...”
 (Bashkir Folk Epics. Ural-Batyr, 2017: 27).

Translation: “...I am the daughter of a king named Samrau / My name is Kumay / When I let down my golden hair, / I light up the whole world: / By day I bestow radiance upon the earth, / By night, I illuminate the moon. / Let me go, / Let me return to my people; / I shall show you the way to the source of living water...”

This passage indicates that Humay originates from the Sun and the Sky, and highlights her eternal and imperishable nature. Endowed with these qualities, she transcends the world of mortal beings, subject to the inevitability of death. Thus, Humay, appearing in the form of a swan, is perceived as a symbol of a divine woman of heavenly origin, a bearer of eternal life and a sacred spirit who knows the path to the living water. After Ural-Batyr shows her mercy and refrains from harming her, Humay flaps her wings and leaves behind magical feathers:

“...(Shýlarzy) hynǵan kanatynan sukkan kanǵa býıap, ergá tashlaǵan ıkán, ós akkosh kilep, kyzzy kútárep alyp kítkándár...” (Bashkir Folk Epics. Ural-Batyr, 2017: 27). Translation: “...(She) stained them with blood flowing from her broken wing and threw them to the ground; then three swans flew in and carried the girl away...”

This scene alludes to shamanic beliefs associated with feathers. According to these beliefs, a feather functions as a material symbol of the spirit, a magical substance connecting the spirit world with the inner world of a human being. The image of the three swans conveys the idea of rebirth through blood and spirit, and symbolizes the sacred triad (life – death – rebirth).

Furthermore, in the concluding part of the epic, a totemic prohibition against killing a swan emerges, thereby reinforcing its sacred status:

“... Myny bary belgán, tı,
 Oral tokomo koshtar, tıp,
 Ber týǵandai kúreshep,
 Aý aýlaýzan tyıyshyp,
 Akkosh totop eımáçká,
 Tıp, hár kemgá áıteshep,
 Akkosh úrsep kítkán, tı;
 Akkosh ite keshegá
 Shýǵa haram iken, tı...”

(Bashkir Folk Epics. Ural-Batyr, 2017: 121).

Translation: “...Everyone knew this, / The descendants of Ural are birds/Considering them kin, /They gave up hunting birds, / Agreed not to eat swan meat; / And since then, swans have multiplied; / Swan meat for humans/ Has become forbidden...”

Archaic elements of bird worship are deeply rooted in traditional worldview of the Bashkirs. Over time, Totemic prohibitions have been transformed into established ethical norms of society. In Bashkir belief, birds such as the swan, eagle, crane, crow, magpie, dove and cuckoo were regarded as sacred; it was strictly forbidden to destroy their nests or break their eggs. Actions that harmed birds, including throwing stones at them and shedding their blood, were also deemed unacceptable. Their habitats were protected from external interference, and the trees on which they nested were under special protection. Such prohibitions attest to the preservation of ancient mythological beliefs, in which birds were perceived not only as creatures of nature, but also as mediators between the sacred realm and humans (Rakhmatullina, 2000: 181). These beliefs are interpreted as relics of ancient totemism and serve to express reverence for the heavenly origin of the Humay. Thus, the swan acquires the status of a sacred bird through which the veneration of ancestral spirits is enacted.

The semantics and functions of zoomorphic imagery in the epic *“Ural-Batyr”* date back to the most ancient beliefs of the people and are rooted in the earliest layers of cultural traditions (Bukharova, 2008: 257). In this context, particular attention should be paid to the episode featuring the raven’s monologue. In the archaic Bashkir worldview, the image of the raven (qodghon) possesses a dual nature. On the one hand, it is believed to foretell a person’s fate and is perceived as a harbinger of death. On the other hand, in Bashkir tradition, the raven is a sacred totemic bird with significant symbolic meaning. Thus, the raven is depicted on King Katil’s banner. In its honour, special ritual ceremonies were held annually, and sacrificial offerings were performed:

“... Batshanyñ tuu bızage
Kara kozgon kosho bar,
Shýl koshtarzy ıyl haiyn
hyılay torǵan kónó bar...”

(Bashkir Folk Epics. *Ural-Batyr*, 2017: 34).

Translation: “...The king’s flag is adorned / by a black bird – the raven, /And every year / there is a day dedicated to honouring these birds...”

The Bashkirs have a traditional festival known as *“Karǵa býtkahy”* (Raven’s Porridge) or *“Karǵa tıyı”* (Raven Festival), which takes place from late April to mid-June. It is attended primarily by women, and in some regions only by children; as part of the ritual, offerings are made in honour of the spirits of ancestors, and various forms of communal entertainment are organised. This festival can be traced back to archaic beliefs. In the Bashkir worldview, ravens and rooks are regarded as ominous birds, as reflected in the surviving belief: *“Kozǵon/karǵa karǵyldaha máiet syǵa”* (“If a raven or vulture caws, it portends a death”). Generally speaking, in the mythological systems of many peoples, the raven is regarded as a totemic bird. Thus, among the Sakha (Yakuts), it serves not only as the totem of clan and tribal groups, but also appears as the deity *Khara Suorun* (Black Raven). The reference in the epic *“Ural-Batyr”* to the ritual of sacrificing maidens along the path of the Black Crow attests to the widespread prevalence of the raven (or rook) cult among the Bashkirs and suggests that the names of ancient Bashkir clans may have been associated with their totemic birds (Suleimenova, 2005: 93–99).

The symbolism of birds in the epic *“Ural-Batyr”* is also vividly evident in the scene depicting Shulgen’s entry into the primordial, pure and harmonious world of nature. This

episode presents an idealized realm in which all living beings – birds, predatory and non-predatory animals, as well as domestic and wild creatures coexist in harmony. In the epic, this is described as follows:

“...Oıraq, aqqosh, kыr казу
Iozop ıorıı – shundaı kup.
Talda hairap utyrған
handygasty kusharlap,
Abersendar tezelgen;
Iagylbai za karshyga,
Tagy turgai kurengan...”.

(Bashkir Folk Epics. Ural-Batyr, 2017: 59).

Translation: “...Ducks, swans, wild geese/ They swim in great numbers. / On the branches, singing, nightingales / Have gathered alongside the turtle doves; / And lapwings can be seen in the distance, / And sparrows flit about...”.

This episode depicts a form of “golden age” of nature, when even the age-old antagonists among living beings exist in a state of harmony and peaceful coexistence. From a mythological perspective, this scene reflects the primordial state of the universe, the era of the establishment of sacred cosmic order. Against this backdrop, the image of the nightingale particularly prominent, as in Eastern tradition it symbolises beauty, inspiration and harmony. By entering this orderly and harmonious space, Shulgen seeks to disrupt the balance of the universe. He attempts to realize his destructive intentions through acts, such as the felling of trees and hunting. In this way, the epic constructs a symbolic opposition that reflects the confrontation between good and evil. This episode thus embodies a myth of lost harmony and serves as a literary device that conveys the rupture of the spiritual bond between man and nature.

In the epic “Kobylandy-Batyr”, by contrast, the bird imagery is primarily used to characterise the hero’s qualities, reflecting key values rooted in the traditional Kazakh worldview. Birds such as the falcon, the baloban and the hawk metaphorically reinforce the hero’s high status, his spiritual authority and his exceptional position. One of the most prominent avian image in the epic is the falcon. In the traditional Turkic worldview, it is regarded as the swiftest and most decisive birds of prey and serves as a distinctive ethical benchmark. The falcon is endowed with qualities such as nobility, independence, fearlessness and selectivity (in particular, it does not feed on carrion and is not afraid of traps), which transform it into a symbol of supreme valour, loftiness and spiritual strength. For this reason, that in the Kazakh epic tradition, the falcon motif performs an important mythopoetic function, imparting dynamism to the hero’s image and elevating him spiritually.

Kobylandy’s actions and appearance at the moment of attacking the enemy in the epic are described as follows:

“...Sharige jaqyn kelgende
Aq sunqar qustaı shuıllıp,
Qabagy tastaı tuıllıp,
Arystan tugan Qobylandy...”
(Babalar sozi, 2006: 147).

Translation: “...As he drew near to the city, / Like a white falcon, he rushed headlong, / His brow furrowed, / Kobylandy, is born of a lion...”. This comparison conveys not only the

hero's physical actions but also his metaphysical strength, the triumph of the spirit, and his immense energy. The comparison with a falcon emphasises Kobylandy's majestic ferocity on the battlefield and his unyielding fighting spirit. Furthermore, it suggests that the hero of the epic is not merely a human being, but a figure endowed with supernatural strength, endowed with a mythological dimension.

It should be noted that the image of the falcon in the poem applies not only to Kobylandy, but also to the female characters – Karlyga and Kurtka. For example:

“Qarlyga bul sozdi aıtqasyn
 Taiburylga minedi,
 Qaryna semser iledi,
 Beline bailap bolatty,
Aq sunqar qustai qanatty...»
 (Babalar sozi, 2006: 114).
 «...Taiburyldyn dausyndai
 Qurtqa anyq biledi.
 Dausyn tanyp tulpardyn,
 Kelgenin bilip sunqardyn,
Aqsunqar qustai tuledi...»
 (Babalar sozi, 2006: 129).

Translation: “As soon as Karlyga had spoken these words, / She boldly mounted Taiburyl, / Slung her sword across her chest, / Tightened her belt / And spread her wings like a white falcon! / “She recognises Taiburyl's voice without fail, / The horse's voice is no stranger to her, / Hearing the falcon's arrival, / She soars aloft like a white falcon, / Free and strong, like the wing of the wind!”. The comparison with the white falcon suggests that, at a critical moment, an inner strength is awakened in Karlyga and Kurtka; their entire being is filled with energy, and they assume a resolute and courageous stance. As a rule, in Kazakh folklore, the female image according to the established poetic conventions, is depicted through bird imagery as a symbol of beauty, purity, fidelity and sensitivity: these include a white swan (“Like a white swan gliding across the lake...”), a parrot (“Like a parrot in full plumage...”), a swallow (“A curved eyebrow – like a swallow's wing...”), a nightingale (“When she speaks – like a nightingale...”). In the epic “*Kobylandy-Batyr*”, the emphasis shifts from feminine fragility, but on a female nobility, bravery and wisdom; the hero's wives and sisters are portrayed as his equals. Such an ornithomorphic metaphor in the Kazakh epic challenges established stereotypes, offering a gender-renewed archetype of a woman who can ride a horse, wield weapons and defend the honour of her land and people. Furthermore, the image of the falcon here confirms the universality of avian symbolism in the Kazakh epic tradition.

In the poem “*Kobylandy-Batyr*”, there is also a joint depiction of zoomorphic (horse) and ornithomorphic (falcon) imagery, emphasising their symbolic and functional interconnection:

«...Jylqyda tulpar sen edin,
 Jigitte *sunqar* men edim...»
 (Babalar sozi, 2006: 54).

Translation: “...Among horses, you were a racehorse, / And among young men, I was a falcon...”. In this example, vertical space (falcon) and horizontal space (horse) are artistically integrated through binary parallelism, uniting earthly grounding and heavenly freedom

within the hero's idealized character. The falcon serves as a metaphor for the hero's exalted spirit, while the horse is portrayed as a faithful companion and reliable ally. E.M. Meletinsky noted that in the Turkic epic tradition, the horse is not merely a means of transport, but a sacred companion of the hero; its mythological nature was manifested in its ability to ascend to the heavens, foresee the future, interact with gods and spirits, and travel between the upper, middle and lower worlds. In the archaic layers of the epic, the horse and the hero form a mystical unity: the horse becomes an expression of the hero's vital force, his wise counsellor and fateful companion (Meletinsky, 1963: 238-239).

In the episode depicting the wounding of Kobylandy's horse – Buryl (Taiburyl) other avian figures are also described in the epic, such as the crow and the vulture:

“...Jan serigi Buryldyn
Jaman batty janyna.
Qarga, quzgyn toiyndy
Sanynan aqqan qanyna...”
(Babalar sozi, 2006: 54)

Translation: “...It pierced his soul deeply / The suffering of his faithful friend Buryl. / Crows and black vultures / Feasted on the blood flowing from his wounds...”. Here, the raven and the vulture serve as symbols of death and disaster. These blood-soaked birds of prey personify the severe ordeal that has befallen the hero. In archaic myths, the raven is often regarded as the creator figure of the world (demiurge), yet in later epic traditions it acquires negative connotation. For example, in the mythology of the Altai peoples and Olonkho people of Sakha, the raven is associated with the underworld and appears as an assistant to monstrous beings. The black colour of its feathers and its carrion-feeding habits renders it a direct antithesis of the sacred birds of the heavens – the eagle and the falcon (Sagalayev, 1992: 36). Moreover, in Turkic heroic epics, the raven frequently appears as a harbinger of ill tidings (Zhirmunsky, 1974: 332). It not only signals the hero's approach to the forces of evil but also participates in their intrigues, displaying traits of insatiability and treachery (Pukhov, 1962: 148).

The epic significance of the bird imagery resonates with sacred concepts embedded in the Kazakh worldview. From a mythological perspective, the Kazakhs regarded birds as a link between heaven and earth, meditating communication between different realms. In the Kazakh heroic epic, ornithological imagery is one of the primary literary devices through which the hero's character, social relations, and philosophical ideas are revealed. In the epic “Kobylandy-Batyr”, the bird imagery symbolises the heroic ideal, nobility, freedom and the loftiness of spirit, whereas in the Bashkir epic “Ural-Batyr”, it is characterised by a profoundly mythological and cosmogonic features. In the Kazakh epic traditions, birds more often serve as a literary device emphasising the hero's actions, while in the Bashkir epic they appear as direct and active participants in events, sacred figures that shape the structure of the world and the laws of creation.

A comparative analysis of the semantics and symbolism of bird imagery in the epics “Kobylandy-Batyr” and “Ural-Batyr” reveals a number of shared features. In both epics, birds function as a universal symbol that articulate the spiritual connection between man and nature, the cyclical processes of life and death, and the ideals of freedom and heroism. However, the functional orientation of ornithological imagery differs significantly. In “Ural

- *Batyr*”, birds are presented as sacred mediators between worlds and as totemic beings. In “Kobylandy-Batyr”, they primarily function as literary devices that construct and reinforce the heroic ideal.

Results

This study has comprehensively examined the role and functions of ornithological imagery within the mythopoetic system of the epics “Kobylandy-Batyr” and “Ural-Batyr”. The analysis revealed that bird imagery in both works carries a significant semantic weight; however, their functions and literary applications differ. In the epic “Ural-Batyr”, ornithological imagery appears as independent mythological characters and is closely associated with cosmogonic and sacred meanings. Birds such as Samrau, Humay, and the swan represent the higher world, symbolising the Sky, the Sun, and the Moon, and function as mediators between earth and the heavens. This imagery plays a key role in structuring the three-tiered model of the universe (the upper, middle and lower worlds). In the epic “Kobylandy-Batyr”, ornithological imagery is realized through a system of fixed epithets and similes characteristic of the heroic epic poetics, as well as through metaphorical devices. The images of the falcon, eagle and hawk are used as literary devices to depict the hero’s courage and nobility, thereby emphasizing his heroic nature. At the same time, the image of the raven or vulture is associated with motifs of death, destruction and disaster. Thus, in “Ural-Batyr”, the bird imagery functions at the level of mythological archetypes, whereas in “Kobylandy-Batyr”, it serves as a poetic device aimed at the literary construction of the heroic ideal. These differences clearly reflect the worldview and mythopoetic characteristics of each tradition.

Conclusion

To summarize, the comparative mythopoetic analysis conducted in this study demonstrates that ornithological imagery in the heroic epics of the Turkic peoples represents not merely literary elements, but a complex semiotic system endowed with worldview, symbolic and sacred significance.

In the Bashkir epic “Ural-Batyr”, birds appear as independent mythological characters and establish a direct link with the higher world. Through the imagery of Samrau and Humay, cosmogonic concepts, the boundaries between life and death, and the idea of rebirth are conveyed. The totemic and sacred functions of birds are particularly evident.

In the epic “Kobylandy-Batyr”, the falcon motif (alongside the eagle and the golden eagle) reflects the hero’s valour and nobility, while the image of the raven or vulture carries mythopoetic meanings consistent with the epic tradition — a harbinger of death and sorrow and as a messenger. Here, ornithological imagery does not appear as independent mythological characters, but performs primarily literary and stylistic function.

Thus, the results of the study confirm that ornithological symbolism in the two epic traditions is based on a shared archetypal foundation, yet the forms of its poetic realisation differ. These differences reflect the specific cultural and historical characteristics of each tradition and their respective worldview priorities. A comprehensive analysis of ornithological imagery deepens understanding of the semiotic space of the Turkic epic and may serve as a theoretical

basis for future comparative studies of other epic traditions, opening new perspectives for exploring the interaction between symbolic and mythological elements in epic texts.

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А. Шәріп мақала тақырыбына қатысты ғылыми әдебиетті зерделеді, дереккөз материалдарының шынайылығын тексерді, қолжазбаға соңғы редакциялық түзетулер мен толықтырулар енгізді.

А. Токторбаева мақаланың тұжырымдамасын жасады, оның теориялық-әдіснамалық негіздерін айқындады, эмпирикалық мәліметтерді сұрыптады, мақаланың құрылымын түзді және бастапқы нұсқасын жазды.

Author's contributions:

A. Taşağıl participated in the interpretation of historical and ethnographic materials, the synthesis of findings, and the formulation of the study's conclusions.

A. Sharip conducted the literature review, verified the accuracy of the source materials, and performed the final revision and edition of the manuscript.

A. Toktorbayeva developed the research concept and its theoretical and methodological framework, processed the empirical data, defined the structure, and prepared the original draft of the manuscript.

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Conflict of Interest.

There is no conflict of interest related to this article.

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