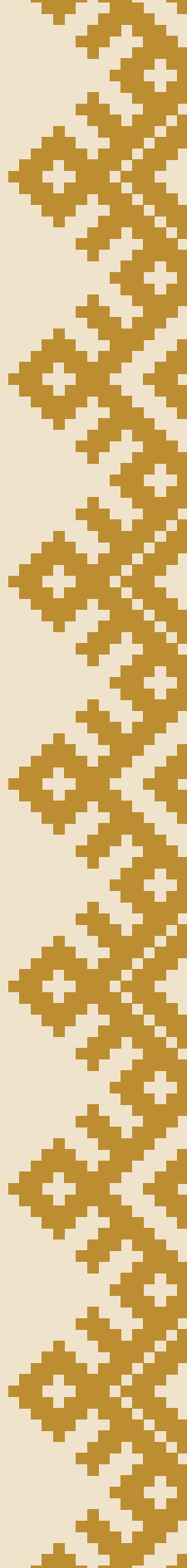




Folklore

Electronic Journal of Folklore 98



Folk Belief and Media Group of the Estonian Literary Museum
Estonian Institute of Folklore

Folklore

Electronic Journal of Folklore Vol. 98

<http://www.folklore.ee/folklore>

Editor-in-chief
Mare Kõiva

ELM Scholarly Press
Tartu 2026

Editor-in-chief: Mare Kõiva

Copy editor: Tiina Kirss

News and reviews: Mare Kõiva

Web editor and designer: Ilona Kolossova

Design: Matis Karu

Layout: Diana Kahre

Editorial board 2021–2026: Anthony Bak Buccitelli (Pennsylvania State University, USA), Jenny Butler (Cork University College, Ireland), Władysław Chłopicki (Jagiellonian University, Poland), Chas Clifton (Colorado State University Pueblo, USA), Larisa Fialkova (University of Haifa, Israel), Jurij Fikfak (Institute of Slovenian Ethnology), Lina Gergova (Institute of Ethnology and Folklore Studies with Ethnographic Museum BAS, Bulgaria), Diane Goldstein (Indiana University, USA), Terry Gunnell (University of Iceland), Reet Hiiemäe (Estonian Literary Museum, Estonia), Toms Kencis (University of Latvia), Frank Korom (School for Advanced Research, USA), Kazuo Matsumura (Wako University, Japan), Wolfgang Mieder (University of Vermont, USA), Ajibade George Olusola (Obafemi Awolowo University, Nigeria), Irina Sedakova (Russian Academy of Sciences), Ülo Valk (University of Tartu, Estonia), Piret Voolaid (Estonian Literary Museum, Estonia)

The journal is supported by the research grant of the Estonian Literary Museum EKM 8-2/20/3, and ELM Scholarly Press.

| | | | | | | Estonian Literary Museum



Indexed in EBSCO Publishing Humanities International Complete, Clarivate Analytics Web of Science (Arts & Humanities Citation Index), MLA International Bibliography, Ulrich's Periodicals Directory, Internationale Volkskundliche Bibliographie / International Folklore Bibliography / Bibliographie Internationale d'Ethnologie, Open Folklore, C.E.E.O.L., Scopus

Editorial address:

Folklore: Electronic Journal of Folklore
Vanemuise 42–235, 51003 Tartu, Estonia
phone: +372 737 7740, fax: + 372 737 7706
e-mail: folklore@folklore.ee
home page: <https://www.folklore.ee/folklore>

All rights reserved

© Estonian Literary Museum

© Estonian Institute of Folklore

© Authors

© Design Matis Karu

© 2026. This journal is licensed under CC BY 4.0. To view a copy of this license, visit <https://creativecommons.org/licenses/by/4.0/>

ISSN 1406-0957 (print)

ISSN 1406-0949 (web)

DOI: 10.7592/FEJF2026.98

Contents

Spectral Partisans: Secret History, (Re)enchantment, and Counter-Mythopoiesis in Dungeon Synth	5
Athanasios Barmpalexis	
Myths, Maps and Vernacular Perception: A Theoretical Framework for Analyzing the Spatial Representations of Environmental Health Crises in Mythological Narratives	31
Reet Hiemäe, Mare Kalda, Masood Masoodian, Andrus Tins	
Overall Picture of Shirak's Folklore Collection from the Mid-19th up to the Beginning of the 21st Century	49
Ester Khemchyan, Marine Khemchyan, Lusine Ghrejyan, Hasmik Matikyan	
Mythological Texts and Contexts in the Ritual Dialogues of the Russian Wedding Ceremony (Based on Materials of the 19th – Early 20th Century)	65
Yulia Krashennnikova	
Analysis of Certain Aspects of Albanian Musical Folklore	85
Arsim Kelmendi, Hysen Nimani	
Development of Skills for Quality Sound Extraction on the Erhu within the Educational Process under the Influence of Resonant Sound Development	103
Jia Lun Li	
Pottery Triangle on the Eastern Border of the Lake District in Turkey: Doğanhisar, Hüyük, Şarkikaraağaç	117
Serap Ünal	
Latvian Hillfort Folklore: Historical and Contemporary Insights	161
Rūta Muktupāvela, Ieva Vītola	

Evaluation of the Concept of Milk among Tuvans and Tatars in an Ethnolinguistic Context Based on Cultural Memory	177

Buket Baran, Gamze Çimen

Donkey Metaphors in the Oral Culture of Cyprus	209

Fatih Yaliner, Mihrican Aylanç

Cultural Adaptation of Kazakh Oral Traditions in Diaspora: A Comparative Analysis Across Mongolia, Uzbekistan, Kyrgyzstan and China	249

Nassikhat Nabiolla, Yerkhan Karbozov, Zufar Seytzhanov, Gulnaz Dautova

The Cave as a Ritualistic Place in Turkish Culture	271

Zeynep İrem Deger

Digital Technologies in Folk Art Museums: Virtual Tours Management	297

Han He

Folklore, Authenticity and the Tourist Gaze in Touring Chinese Cultural Heritage	313

Rachel Suet Kay Chan

IN MEMORIAM

Dong Xiaoping	337

Haozhen Li

BOOK REVIEWS

Sweet Reading: An Exciting, Thought-provoking Book about an Extraordinary Encounter with the Fairy Folk	340

Mare Kõiva

Publication of Khakas Heroic Epics	343

Dmitry Funk

Submission Guidelines	347

Spectral Partisans: Secret History, (Re)enchantment, and Counter-Mythopoiesis in Dungeon Synth

ATHANASIOS BARMPALEXIS

Academy of Athens

abarmpalexis@academyofathens.gr

Abstract: This article examines Hunt on the Nazi Necromancer, a dungeon synth project by Serbian artist Dungeon Guerrilla, as an instance of counter-mythopoiesis within post-Yugoslav cultural production. Combining digitally mediated ethnography with cultural-theoretical analysis, it explores how the project reworks esoteric Nazi mythologies, South Slavic epic poetics, and partisan memory into a form of historical fantasy that reinterprets existing symbolic repertoires. The study situates the album within broader debates on re-enchantment, counter-memory, and the contested legacies of underground music, illustrating how fantasy and sound function as media through which contemporary artists negotiate ideological histories and cultural imaginaries.

Keywords: dungeon synth, post-socialist memory, counter-mythopoiesis, alternative secret history, re-enchantment, underground music cultures, esoterica

INTRODUCTION

This article examines how musicians within contemporary underground black metal and its ambient offshoot, dungeon synth, employ historical fantasy to negotiate the genres' fraught relationship with far-right appropriations.

Focusing on *Hunt on the Nazi Necromancer*, a 2021 dungeon synth project by the Serbian artist Dungeon Guerrilla, the article argues that this negation can also be articulated through the construction of alternative interpretive frameworks based on occultism, folklore and speculative history, while simultaneously grounding these frameworks in counter-memory, re-enchantment, and plural political imaginaries.

Methodologically, the study adopts an interpretive cultural-analytical approach that combines digitally mediated ethnography – specifically, an hour-long online interview with the artist – with cultural-theoretical analysis. It draws on close readings of *Hunt on the Nazi Necromancer*, the artist's reflections, related textual and paratextual materials, insights from Slavic studies scholars and relevant secondary scholarship. The analysis engages with research on Nazi occultism, post-socialist enchantment, South Slavic epic poetry, ideological formations in and after socialist Yugoslavia and the contemporary phenomenon of *Yugonostalgia*, while also building on prior work on folkloric reappropriations in underground music – particularly the Mysterias black metal project (Barmpalexis 2022). Moreover, the analysis prioritises the album's narrative and mythic dimensions, treating its soundscape as a supporting medium rather than the primary object of study. Accordingly, rather than offering ethnographic immersion in a subcultural scene, the study foregrounds symbolic forms, genre conventions and discursive constructions across cultural contexts.

Given the sensitive nature of the material, especially where it concerns extremist ideologies, the study approaches it analytically rather than normatively. It does not evaluate ideological claims but examines how mythic, esoteric and historical motifs are mobilised within specific cultural formations, focusing on representational strategies, aesthetic structures and memory politics in relation to broader debates on cultural memory and ideological symbolism.

Hunt on the Nazi Necromancer can be read through the lens of “secret history”, in which supernatural (or hidden) dimensions operate alongside documented historical events while remaining unknown to historical actors (Stableford 2009). In this framework, fantasy overlays rather than replaces history. Building on this logic, the album exemplifies “historical fantasy” (Clute & Grant 1997; Stableford 2009: 199–200; Shanoes 2012; Shroud 2023: 221), preserving the chronology of the Second World War – specifically the Partisan Struggle – while selectively introducing necromancy, spectral intermediaries and enchanted landscapes. The importance of fantasy here lies not primarily in its setting but in its narrative structure – in the ways such imaginative systems organise meaning (Schlobin 2000). Through this narrative architecture, the Partisan Struggle is reframed in mythic and supernatural terms.

Musically situated, as already noted, within dungeon synth – the keyboard-driven outgrowth of black metal – the project under discussion performs a form of *counter-mythopoiesis*: the reworking of esoteric imagery

historically associated with diverse political actors. The project's central narrative of "partisans versus necromancer" exemplifies an emergent form of digital folk esotericism – a re-mythologisation of history through sound and narrative practice. In response to far-right appropriations of symbolic vocabularies long circulating within the two underground subgenres under discussion, the project develops alternative references grounded in different historical orientations.

To clarify this dynamic, I introduce the concept of *counter-alternative enchantment*, whereby artists redirect mythic and occult registers – traditionally associated with Nazi esoteric traditions and certain underground subcultures – to craft alternative historical imaginaries. In these narratives, supernatural agency is re-embedded within the same historical events, aligned with antifascist resistance and reimagined as sites of mythic and ethical significance. Together, these approaches position *Hunt on the Nazi Necromancer* as both an imaginative re-narrativisation of history and a form of re-mythologisation, transforming esoteric mythmaking to foreground antifascist struggle as a locus of supernatural agency with contemporary cultural resonance.

The argument unfolds in four movements. It begins by examining the postwar reconfiguration of Nazi-aligned mythic and esoteric narratives and their transnational circulation after 1945. It then turns to black metal – particularly strands historically entangled with neo-Nazi ideology – and its counterpart, dungeon synth, as sites where Eurocentric medievalist and "a-historical" motifs with ideological resonance have been preserved, contested and transformed. Finally, the article analyses *Hunt on the Nazi Necromancer* as a contemporary instance of counter-re-enchantment oriented toward antifascist memory, situating it within South Slavic epic traditions surrounding the Partisan Struggle and in relation to Yugonostalgia as a cultural response to emergent far-right movements in post-Yugoslav contexts.

Our analysis begins thus with the postwar transformation of esoteric National Socialist mythologies. The following section traces how these ideological and symbolic frameworks circulated, adapted and resurfaced in modern (sub)cultures, providing the historical and conceptual backdrop for understanding their appropriation, contestation and re-mythologisation in underground music.

ESOTERIC NATIONAL SOCIALIST MYTHOLOGIES AND THEIR TRANSFORMATION IN MODERN CULTURE

The symbolic grammar associated with later forms of mythic-esoteric politics, including those that influenced aspects of National Socialist ideology, emerged from the Romantic reinterpretation of Gothic and chivalric traditions, which combined medieval romance with a darker literary imagination. This development took shape in German fantasy literature – from *Parzifal* to

the *Schauerroman* and *Kunstmärchen* – where Gothic motifs were blended with the fantastic, as seen in Johann August Apel's *Der Freischütz* (1810) and E.T.A. Hoffmann's *Der Sandmann* (1816). Building on this cultural and literary base, Romantic nationalism – which emphasised shared culture and folklore in the writings of thinkers such as Herder, Fichte, and the Brothers Grimm – was later adapted by racial theorists, including H. S. Chamberlain, and informed the ethno-nationalist “völkisch” cultural movement (Biddiss 1997). Scholarship has also shown that folklore studies themselves were drawn into these ideological projects: folkloristic research in Nazi Germany was systematically mobilised to legitimise racialised and mythicised narratives of national identity (Dow & Lixfeld 1994). Within this ideological milieu, the *Blut und Boden* (“blood and soil”) framework – a racialised connection of land and people – reinterpreted Romantic concepts in terms of ethnic identity, cultural continuity and cyclical narratives of decline and renewal (Camus & Lebourg 2017: 16–18).

Drawing on these cultural foundations and late-nineteenth-century occult currents, figures such as Guido von List and Jörg Lanz von Liebenfels integrated runic symbolism, theosophy, astrology and pseudo-scientific notions of spiritual lineage into doctrines known as Ariosophy, which conceived of race as a metaphysical category (Badger & Purkiss 2017: 127). These ideas were subsequently explored by the *Thule Society*, a post-First World War occultist and völkisch group, which integrated themes of Aryan mysticism, anti-Semitism and anti-communism with an idealised vision of a lost golden age. In doing so, the society contributed to the intellectual environment that influenced early National Socialist figures such as Rudolf Hess and Dietrich Eckart (Kershaw 1999: 138–139).

This broader lineage – encompassing Romantic Gothic fantasy, völkisch thought, Ariosophical occultism, pseudo-archaeology, folk traditions and secret societies – formed part of the conceptual background of what is now known as “Nazi esotericism”. By the early twentieth century, these elements had been systematised by influential figures such as Heinrich Himmler¹ and Alfred Rosenberg, who developed a top-down mythic framework uniting nationalism, occult motifs and racial pseudoscience. Concurrently, grassroots cultural movements such as *Lebensreform* and *Wandervogel* offered ritualistic and communal practices that were later adapted by the Nazi state (Goodrick-Clarke 2004: vi–vii, 203).

After 1945, these mythic and esoteric components did not disappear; instead, they spread into new settings, shaping transnational countercultures that continued to influence certain far-right and occult movements. In particular, a blend of racial mythology, UFO conspiracy theories and neo-pagan revivalism emerged around the mystique of earlier Nazi esoteric narratives (Gardell 2003). This synthesis generated hybrid spiritual and political identities referencing imagined mythic pasts and speculative apocalyptic futures, with influence extending beyond Europe. For example, the Chilean diplomat

and occult writer Miguel Serrano (1984) integrated “Thulean” motifs with a form of mystical Nazism, depicting Hitler as a divine figure engaged in a cosmic conflict alongside extraterrestrial Aryan ancestors. Similarly, during her time in India, the writer Savitri Devi merged Hindu cosmology with Nazi-related mythic narratives, portraying Hitler as a metaphysical agent of cosmic order (Versluis 2013). However, while such esoteric reconfigurations circulated transnationally in the postwar decades, socialist Yugoslavia – the geographical focus of this article – did not permit the open development of comparable neo-Nazi subcultures, which would only emerge in a variety of socio-cultural forms after the state’s dissolution.

The continuation of Nazi esoteric themes after the war has also influenced broader cultural spheres, including popular culture. The *SS Ahnenerbe* Nazi research institute, for instance, inspired postwar myths concerning secret technologies, polar bases, and extraterrestrial lineages. Austrian writers such as Norbert Jürgen-Ratthofer and Ralf Ettl merged UFO narratives with Thulean and Ariosophical traditions, while Wilhelm Landig and publisher Ernst Zündel extended these motifs into accounts of concealed technologies, polar redoubts and cosmic destinies.² In addition, certain neo-pagan and spiritual nationalist movements have selectively incorporated ideologies from the Nazi period, developing identities based on mythic histories and disseminating these narratives through online platforms as putative “esoteric knowledge” (Goodrick-Clarke 2002: 279–302). As Goodrick-Clarke (2002: 303–306) notes, this blending of occult language with political discourse has enabled the persistence of these worldviews and facilitated their transmission within contemporary cultural contexts.

These esoteric Nazi mythologies have also become woven into modern popular storytelling, where Nazi occultism frequently appears as a narrative device. Popular culture texts and media – such as *Hellboy*, *Wolfenstein*, *First Squad*, and *The Devil’s Rock* – depict Nazi characters as wielders of supernatural or forbidden knowledge: Rasputin in *Hellboy* uses Nazi resources to summon apocalyptic entities; Baron von Wolff in *First Squad* is revived through necromancy; and Richard Wirth in *Blood Creek* employs rune-based rituals to invoke evil. Even in superhero narratives, such as *Captain America: The First Avenger*, the fictional fascist organisation HYDRA draws on cosmic arcane forces, echoing motifs of transcending human constraints. Whether presented seriously or in parodic form, these portrayals continue the cultural association of Nazi actors with mystical or supernatural themes and illustrate how the postwar esoteric afterlife of Nazism continues to influence contemporary media.

Therefore, since 1945, while explicit forms of fascism lost political legitimacy in public sphere, elements of these ideologies persisted in new cultural contexts, adapting and finding expression in subcultural milieus such as media, conspiracy theories, occultism and spiritualism and artistic experimentation. This shift was particularly visible in underground music scenes, where artists

incorporated symbols and narratives associated with far-right ideologies into countercultural frameworks, expressing them primarily through sound, style and mythic storytelling rather than formal politics. This countercultural engagement manifested in two prominent waves of extreme music, each tied to a specific underground scene: White Noise and black metal.

COUNTER-ALTERNATIVE SOUNDSCAPES: FROM REACTIONARY TO REIMAGINED

The first wave – the White Noise movement – emerged in the 1970s and 1980s within the punk/skinhead scenes. It was openly political in orientation, with far-right organisations such as the UK’s “National Front” attempting to use subcultural networks for recruitment and messaging. Central to this was “Blood & Honour” (a music and Neo-Nazi propaganda network founded in 1987 by Ian Stuart Donaldson of the band Skrewdriver), which organised events and publications linking music with reactionary aims. The network expanded trans-nationally, supported by entities such as Canada’s *Resistance Records* – connected to the U.S. “National Alliance” network – which framed fascist identity through distinctive musical and visual styles (Lowles & Silver 1998; Forbes & Stampton: 2015).

The second wave arose in the early 1990s within Norway’s black metal scene.³ Unlike White Noise, which sought political engagement, this scene articulated its themes predominantly through symbolism, mythic narratives and transgressive performance. The infamous “Helvete” circle, organised around a record shop in Oslo founded in 1991 by Mayhem guitarist Euronymous, was a central hub for the scene, bringing together members of Mayhem, Burzum, Emperor and Thorns. Violence, extreme aesthetics and anti-Christian imagery carried out by the circle were often interpreted as expressions of rebellion against perceived aspects of modernity (Moynihan & Söderlind 2003). In particular, circle member Varg Vikernes of Mayhem and Burzum,⁴ an avowed Nazi supporter who was also involved in developing *Odalism* – a variant of Odinist pagan revivalism shaped by racial and metaphysical concepts (Goodrick-Clarke 2002: 204–205; Gardell 2003: 307) – reframed these actions within a narrative of cultural restoration. Within this aesthetic system, church burnings and other controversial acts were presented as symbolic gestures, while practices such as corpse paint, fire rituals and runic imagery produced a theatrical, ritualised atmosphere that amplified the mythic dimensions of the members’ performances (Olson 2008; Von Helden 2017: 35, 179).

As black metal gradually shifted from overt, performance-based transgression toward more introspective forms – largely influenced by Vikernes, who, during his imprisonment for the arsons and the murder of Euronymous, focused on creating atmospheric, minimalist and hypnotic ambient works – some musicians internalised its mythic and symbolic tendencies, crafting

private or imagined worlds through instrumental soundscapes. This transition facilitated the emergence of *dungeon synth* in the mid-1990s as pioneered by artists such as Vikernes and Mortiis (formerly of Emperor).

Drawing on electronic and ambient innovators such as Tangerine Dream, Klaus Schulze, Dead Can Dance, and Enigma, dungeon synth serves as a dark, atmospheric counterpart to black metal. It typically relies on layered synthesiser textures, slow harmonic movement and minimalist structures to create immersive instrumental environments, largely avoiding lyrical content (Dima & Pilo 2023). Beyond its sonic features, the subgenre is also characterised by a distinctive visual and symbolic repertoire. Extending the medievalist and mythic vocabulary cultivated within black metal, album artwork, project names and track titles frequently reference castles, ruins, forests, ancient kingdoms, runic scripts and chivalric iconography. Rather than reconstructing specific historical periods, these elements assemble a stylised pre-modern imaginary in which chronology is blurred and space appears mythically condensed. Through this aesthetic strategy, the genre produces a deliberately “timeless” atmosphere, using its imagery primarily as symbolic texture rather than accurate historicity.

Although dungeon synth emerged from the broader black metal milieu – sharing, at least initially, musicians, production networks and elements of its aesthetic vocabulary – the presence of reactionary and esoteric strands within that milieu has not defined it as a whole, nor have such currents entirely defined black metal itself, despite its perceived and well-grounded notoriety. While National Socialist Black Metal (NSBM), though marginal, continues to occupy a visible and contested position within the scene, generating internal debate and critical counter-movements, the black metal scene has also developed through multiple regional formations and stylistic trajectories, including historically rooted folk traditions, environmental awareness and avant-garde developments. Dungeon synth inherited this heterogeneous cultural landscape, remaining structurally open to diverse reinterpretations.

Artists within both subgenres have sought to reinterpret or reclaim mythic and medieval “a-historical” imagery from earlier far-right usages, developing counter-narratives that foreground alternative political or cultural perspectives. In black metal, this trend appears in initiatives such as “Red and Anarchist Black Metal” (RABM), where musicians employ the genre’s sonic extremity to articulate critiques of authoritarianism, environmental exploitation and ethnonationalist ideology.⁵ Dungeon synth, operating primarily through ambient world-building, exhibits parallel tendencies that emphasise introspection, ecological awareness and imaginative freedom rather than hierarchical or racial narratives. These developments illustrate that symbolic motifs associated at times with reactionary subcultures do not belong inherently to fixed ideological positions but remain open to reinterpretation, contestation and reconfiguration within evolving cultural contexts.

A noteworthy example of such reinterpretation within dungeon synth is the work of Dungeon Guerrilla (henceforth, DG). DG's album *Hunt on the Nazi Necromancer*⁶ explicitly engages these dynamics, reworking existing esoteric and historical motifs within a critical, oppositional framework.

DG AND THE HUNT ON THE NAZI NECROMANCER

In early May 2025, I conducted an in-depth online interview with DG. Contacted initially via email, he expressed keen interest in sharing his creative process and conceptual framework, dedicating over an hour to a live conversation, followed by additional correspondence for further clarification(s). This ethnographic engagement provided a valuable opportunity to examine both the sonic and narrative dimensions of his work and the personal, cultural and ideological factors that informed it.

DG shared that his path into dungeon synth was unconventional: Unlike most artists in the scene, he did not emerge from black metal; instead, he discovered it by accident and was drawn to it due to its “storytelling potential” and capacity to function as a “sonic portal” or “soundtrack to one’s imagination”, as he framed it in our discussion. His background as a professional pianist and a lifelong history aficionado informed his compositional approach, while his experience as a war games player/designer also allowed him to construct elaborate “parallel” or “secondary” worlds (Stableford 2009: 364–366; Shroud 2023: 395), in which musical structure and narrative were deeply intertwined. In this sense, DG’s artistic practice exemplifies the ways dungeon synth functions: as a combination of narrative, fantasy and elaborate soundscapes.

Hunt on the Nazi Necromancer can be read as both a work of historical fantasy and secret history in Shroud’s sense (2023: 396–397): It envisions an occult stratum of events occurring parallel to the established historical record of World War II, while preserving its chronological sequence. The narrative emerged from the artist’s dual fascination with Yugoslav partisan history and a documentary he saw on the Nazi Thule Society and Nazi esoterica; it combines local folklore, the Partisan Struggle and elements of fantastical horror, using a supernatural register to reinterpret the historical actions of the partisans. By embedding supernatural conflict within authentic historical settings, the narrative re-enchants the past – extending esoteric agency to the partisans alongside documented occult practices within the Third Reich – and, in doing so, symbolically reframes ideological struggle through a fictionalised, yet historical, lens.

In this “sideways” engagement with history (Stableford 2009: 364; Shroud 2023: 395), the reimagined narrative of *Hunt on the Nazi Necromancer* is set in the forests of Jastrebac, Central Serbia, near DG’s hometown of Trstenik. The album comprises seven original ambient compositions: *Through the Forest and Over the Hills*, *The Hunt Begins*, *Jastrebac*, *The Weeping Fresco*, *The Monk’s Shadow*

Story, *The Lair*, and *The New Dawn of the Old Sun*. In the story, a high-ranking SS officer named Klaus Krämer⁷ – referred to in the album as the “Nazi Necromancer” – is tasked by Himmler with awakening a legendary dragon said to inhabit the mountains,⁸ as part of a broader arcane plan for global domination. The Serbian intelligence services uncover Himmler’s plan, prompting Tito himself to intervene to counter the Reich’s machinations. DG contextualises the project’s plot in the album description on Bandcamp as follows:

The year is 1943. Deep in the forests of the Balkans, a lone company of Yugoslav partisans received a radio message:

“Based on intelligence, we suspect that a special detachment led by Count Klaus Krämer, better known as the Nazi Necromancer, arrived in the capital by train three days ago. We also know that the convoy, which we assume is under the Count’s command, left Belgrade yesterday and that he set out through the Morava valley to the south. We do not know the further intentions or the destination of the enemy. Your task is to find and destroy this threat, but approach the execution of the task with extreme caution. To our knowledge, the Count is a high-ranking Abenerbe [note: Ahnenerbe] officer and a black magician of great power, and by all accounts, he will be the most serious adversary your unit has ever encountered. The General Staff wishes to emphasise once again that the battles on your front are as significant as the battles of our heroic brigades and divisions. We wish you a lot of success. Death to fascism freedom to the people! Comrade Tito”⁹

When discussing the plot, DG indicated that the choice of the Balkan forests as the setting – highlighting their mist-shrouded landscapes, rolling hills and cold, foggy ambience – was particularly well suited to both the story and its soundscape. He also noted that two tracks, *The Hunt Begins* and *Jastrebac*, are largely self-explanatory, while he deemed it necessary to provide further explanation for the remaining five. For example, he explained that *The Weeping Fresco* evokes a vacant monastery on Jastrebac, where an icon of the Holy Mother is depicted as weeping in response to the presence of impeccable evil.

Asked about the incorporation of Christian motifs in a project principally concerned with the Partisan movement, DG noted that, according to both his reading and the local narrative, communism and Christianity were not inherently in conflict in the former Yugoslavia. This remark illustrates how secular political frameworks did not necessarily eliminate the “enchanted” dimensions of social and religious life, thereby underscoring the distinction between secularisation and disenchantment emphasised by Charles Taylor: Whereas secularisation refers to the decline of religious authority and institutions, disenchantment denotes the dissolution of a world perceived as imbued

with spirits, magic, and mysterious causal forces (Taylor 2007: 553). In modern contexts, secular regimes may have reduced institutional religiosity, yet vernacular enchanted views, religious practices, alternative spiritualities and forms of magical thinking have persisted, embedded in everyday life and cultural memory (Radulović & Đorđević Belić 2021: 19–20). In this sense, DG's sonic world can be perceived as a re-enchanting effort that revives sacred symbolism, interacting with both mythic narratives associated with Nazi esotericism and the rationalising, secularising tendencies of communist regimes and postmodernity.

Historically, the Partisan movement during World War II – including in neighbouring countries such as Greece (Chimbos 1999: 256–257) – brought together participants from diverse religious and social backgrounds under a shared cause: among them Christian socialists, practicing Muslims and religious peasants. Some lower clergy also joined the resistance, distinguishing themselves from institutional church hierarchies that, in some cases, remained neutral or collaborated with occupying forces (Kirn 2020: 109–110). This historical context highlights the persistence of folk religiosity, both communal and individual, within broader institutional frameworks – a continuity that provides fertile ground for the project's fictional and fantastical reimagining of historical events.

Returning to the project's songs, “The Monk's Shadow Story” centers on a deceased monk whose shadow reappears when the partisans tasked with confronting the Nazi Necromancer enter the monastery, a motif that continues the project's broader narrative linking mysticism, Orthodox traditions and the Partisan Struggle in other songs. The monk's spectral presence informs the partisans that the Necromancer has annihilated all of the monastery's residents. In the song “The Lair”, the composition sonically traces the Necromancer's journey through a labyrinthine cave system in search of the dragon, only for the partisans to intercept and eliminate him using their own supernatural powers before he can awaken the creature. The narrative culminates in “The New Dawn of the Old Sun”, which sonically portrays the partisans' triumph at first light, marking the resolution of the story and the restoration of order.

Hunt on the Nazi Necromancer operates within the mode of “intrusive fantasy”, in which the fantastic disrupts an otherwise ordinary world (Mendlesohn 2002: 170–171). It also aligns with Tymn et al.'s (1979: 5) conception of “low fantasy”, in which the familiar primary world – here, the historical landscape of World War II – becomes the stage for supernatural eruption (Zahorski & Boyer 1982: 56). Within this framework, occult forces break into an otherwise historical and realist setting, bringing disruption and transformation. Yet, unlike the typically chaotic function of intrusion in Mendlesohn's model, DG's use of the fantastic is constructive rather than destabilising, reshaping the narrative to produce an alternative mythic framework of antifascist resistance as a reimagined, enchanted and stabilising act.

Mendlesohn (2002: 170) emphasises the significant role of language in shaping “the internal structures of the fantastic.” In *Hunt on the Nazi Necromancer*, it is metanarrative – the artist’s conceptual and narrative framework – that functions as this structuring “language.” Since dungeon synth is largely instrumental, this meta-language is conveyed through compositional design, track sequencing, thematic motifs, sonic atmosphere and the artist’s foreword. Together, these elements guide the listener’s imaginative engagement, transforming the music into both storytelling and ideological discourse – an interpretation of fantasy oriented toward resistance, re-enchantment and cultural reinterpretation.

The counter-mythopoietic approach employed by the artist also positions the project as a form of cultural response – comparable to Panopticon’s 2012 *Kentucky* or Mystras’s 2020 *Castles Conquered and Reclaimed* – engaging with narrative and symbolic language historically associated with fascist mythmaking within segments of contemporary counterculture. The album functions as a counter-story, crafting a supernatural and mythic narrative that challenges black metal’s and its counterpart, dungeon synth’s links with Eurocentrism or far-right occultism: It presents the Yugoslav partisans – figures historically associated with resistance – as protagonists endowed with supernatural abilities within a dark, mystical setting, thereby redirecting the genre’s aesthetic toward a different ideological and emotional orientation. In this context, anti-fascist dungeon synth appears as a sonic *counter-alternative* gesture: a mode of re-imagination that reintroduces historical fantasy into left-wing political discourse while employing mythmaking strategies similar to those historically used by far-right groups to construct WWII-inspired occult narratives within underground subcultures. In doing so, it mobilises *counter-memory* (Foucault 1977) as both an interpretive and creative mode through soundscapes, functioning simultaneously as critique and reinterpretation – revisiting history and ideological conflict from a different perspective and recasting them into supernatural or occult narratives previously associated with the opposing ideological spectrum (Assmann 2008).

The discussion around DG’s project also opened new avenues for understanding the interplay between folk memory,¹⁰ historical imagination and, consequently, contemporary reception. In our conversation, the artist highlighted two observations that inform the cognitive and receptive frameworks of *Hunt on the Nazi Necromancer*. First, although he was not personally familiar with specific partisan supernatural stories, he acknowledged their existence – a point that prompts further research into this aspect of folk memory. Second, he noted the project’s wide resonance beyond Serbia, particularly among audiences in other former Yugoslav regions, such as Slovenia and Croatia, where neo-Nazi currents, as in Serbia, remain highly visible. He interprets this reception as indicative of a broader cultural phenomenon: on one hand, the idealisation of the partisan movement among younger generations with little direct

experience of communist governance – including himself – and, on the other, shifting political tendencies across the former Yugoslav regions.

Together, these two insights demonstrate how *Hunt on the Nazi Necromancer* operates at the intersection of memory, myth and political imagination, prompting scholarly engagement with two significant factors that warrant further investigation: first, the existence – or absence – of supernatural partisan narratives; and second, the renewed interest in the Partisan Struggle and its contemporary cultural significance as part of the broader phenomenon of *Yugonostalgia*, the sentimental longing for former Yugoslavia's past. To address the first line of inquiry, it is imperative to consider the historical narrative traditions that shaped representations of heroism and resistance in the South Slavic context. The following section therefore turns to epic poetics and the cultural memory of the Partisan Struggle, highlighting the symbolic structures subsequently reactivated in contemporary reinterpretations.

EPIC POETICS, COUNTER-RE-ENCHANTMENT, AND YUGONOSTALGIA

Whether Yugoslav partisans were remembered as possessing supernatural qualities¹¹ offers a compelling lens into folk memory and the cultural imagination of war. Central to this inquiry is whether their “extraordinary” status reflected literal supernatural abilities or symbolically expressed endurance, collective heroism and moral steadfastness. I approached this issue through a small-scale literature review and ongoing correspondence with local scholars of folk literature, ethnology and post-socialist memory. These scholars served not only as academic experts but also as ethnographic interlocutors, providing emic insight into regional understandings of Partisan mythmaking. Combined with an analysis of wartime folk songs and contemporary reflections on the symbolic “magic” of the Partisans and Tito, these perspectives offer a preliminary view of how heroism was represented, remembered and occasionally imagined as extending beyond ordinary human bounds.

Building on these insights, the discussion draws on the regional scholars' observations to explore the presence – or absence – of supernatural elements in partisan folklore. Ethnologist Sanja Lazarević Radak highlighted the challenges of this research: much material was destroyed or repurposed during the post-socialist era (see Kirn 2020: 211–214), leaving surviving sources scattered across archives, flea markets, and institutions such as the Institute for Musicology and the Archives of Yugoslavia.¹² Despite these obstacles, her firsthand observations offered valuable insight into local memory; she, for example, indicated that partisans are typically attributed extraordinary qualities – bravery, intelligence and resilience in combat – but usually in symbolic rather than literal terms. In contrast, she noted that Tito was sometimes imagined as possessing near-supernatural attributes. This suggests that while most partisan

heroism is symbolically framed, exceptional figures like Tito can occupy an elevated, almost mythic place in popular recollection.

To contextualise these scholarly observations within broader cultural reflections, it is helpful to turn to contemporary analyses of how “magic” and endurance appear in local folk memory: The mythic elevation of Tito, for instance, is particularly reflected in Iva Jelušić’s essay *Neretva & Sutjeska in Horror and Magic of Individual Remembrances*,¹³ where the “magic” associated with the partisans and Tito is interpreted not as literal supernaturalism but as an expression of human endurance and cultural resilience. The “extraordinary magic” manifests in acts of hope and creativity – prisoners braiding hair and singing, partisans staging performances amid battle – where ordinary gestures take on heightened significance within a symbolic register. Tito’s mythic or symbolic “magic” occupies a distinct place in the narrative: his charisma and survival skills, particularly after the Battle of Sutjeska, were remembered in ways that attributed to him a special kind of endurance, providing a sense of continuity for the partisan cause. Drawing on Ernst Kantorowicz’s concept of “the king’s two bodies” (1957), Jelušić argues that Tito’s human body came to signify the collective “body politic” of Yugoslavia. His survival reassured fighters that their struggle and the nation’s future persisted, making Tito both a singular highly significant historical figure and a symbolic embodiment of collective resolve. Despotović (2018) likewise observes that the Tito-era political culture developed a myth-making structure in which leadership roles could acquire elevated or quasi-sacralised attributes, as discussed later in this section.

Heading back to collective representations in song and narrative, the scarcity of explicitly supernatural partisan folklore was confirmed by another local scholar of folk literature.¹⁴ In our correspondence, he noted that partisan songs rarely incorporate literal supernatural motifs. While wartime folklore with supernatural elements existed – particularly urban legends and prophetic rumors circulating during the German occupation of Belgrade – partisan compositions per se largely avoided them. This is particularly visible in Yugoslav “mass songs”, performed by and for the public, and often intended to shape collective sentiment and foster unity, primarily disseminated through schools and cultural centers (Atanasovski 2017).

These dynamics become visible at the level of individual songs as well. Examples such as the folk song “Na Kordunu, grob do groba” (“On Kordun, countless graves”) reveal how older narrative structures were adapted to wartime circumstances, simultaneously sustaining and reshaping the symbolic universe inherited from earlier song traditions.

Rooted in nineteenth-century local insurrectionary and Orthodox lament traditions (Bošković-Stulli 1978: 125–132), “Na Kordunu, grob do groba” was later taken up during the National Liberation Struggle by the partisan poet Desanka Ćuić Kačar (Bošković-Stulli & Kačar 1982), symbolising the

large-scale violence experienced by Serb civilians in Croatia during WWII. It ultimately became emblematic of collective perseverance, with the refrain *grob do groba* transforming grief into remembrance. The song contains seemingly supernatural motifs – such as a son speaking from the grave – yet these function emotionally and symbolically rather than as literal depictions. As Maja Bošković-Stulli (1986) observes, such imagery sacralises sacrifice without departing from human reality. In this sense, the extraordinary emerges not from supernatural feats but from moral or symbolic amplification – endurance, solidarity and sustained action – rendering human experience itself remarkable and illustrating a recurring pattern in folk-song dynamics: supernatural motifs persist, but in an adapted symbolic form.

These interpretive tensions surrounding song also point to a broader inquiry into folk song, particularly the ways in which socialist-era compositions engaged with the legacy of earlier South Slavic epic traditions.

In her discussion of the song, Bošković-Stulli (1986: 363–365) highlights the broader shift in the folk-song tradition from the supernatural-infused heroism of South Slavic epics toward forms of collective, human-centered valor. This view has been nuanced by other scholars as well such as Maja Brkljačić (2006), who argues that epic poetry played a key role in shaping the symbolic framework of the Partisan Struggle and its later cultural reception. Addressing the question of the legacy of earlier traditions in socialist song therefore requires a brief overview of the epic tradition in the South Slavic regions and how it influenced partisan-era symbolism.

South Slavic oral epics – typically performed by specialist singers, the *guslars*, on the single-stringed *gusle* – emerged as early as the thirteenth century and flourished from the fifteenth century onward. Primarily rooted in rural, patriarchal communities of Bosnia, Herzegovina and Montenegro, these performances were demanding, requiring considerable technical skill, memorisation, improvisation and vocal endurance, and relied on flexible thematic units that allowed the epics to evolve continuously over time (Pirkova-Jakobson 1968: xix; Murko 1990). Focused on heroic deeds and border struggles – especially against the Ottomans – the songs preserved historical memory, ideals of heroism and communal identity while mediating the transition from orality to modernity (Holton & Mihailovich 1997). Their motifs, rich in supernatural figures such as fairies, dragons and humans with special abilities,¹⁵ resonate across cultures and informed Milman Parry and Albert Lord's *oral-formulaic theory*, situating South Slavic epic within a broader Eurasian narrative tradition (Foley 1991; Parry & Parry 1971; Lord & Bartók, 1954; Lord & Bynum 1975).

Oral epic poetry retained significant social and cultural influence in the South Slavic regions well into the twentieth century. In pre-WWII rural society, *guslars* performed in *zadrugas* (communal households), keeping folk songs central to community life and shaping popular consciousness through entertainment, moral instruction, historical memory and social commentary

(Brkljačić 2006: 184–188; Murko 1951: 367–378). These deep-rooted aesthetic forms help explain why the socialist state neither ignored nor fully suppressed epic poetry, eventually seeking to redirect rather than eliminate its symbolic force. Recognising the persuasive power of epic forms during WWII, the Communist Party enlisted schoolteachers familiar with folk-poetic traditions to encourage enlistment and secure provisions from peasants (Žanić 1998: 313). Collections of Partisan songs – some blending collective heroism with supernatural imagery such as voices from graves or resurrecting princes aiding the struggle (Brkljačić 2006: 190) – were actively circulated even when they appeared at odds with certain aspects of official ideology (Brkljačić 2006: 193–196). Moreover, key Partisan figures, such as Milovan Djilas, drew on the 1847 epic *The Mountain Wreath* (“*Gorski vijenac*”) by Montenegrin prince-bishop Petar II Petrović-Njegoš¹⁶ in speeches to inspire resolve and social cohesion (Wachtel 2006), using the epic as a bridge between widely shared cultural memory and wartime mobilisation (Brkljačić 2006: 190).

Once in power, the Party – despite often characterising folklore as “primitive” and intending to marginalise it in favour of modernising Yugoslav society (Rihtman-Auguštin 1970: 33–34; Brkljačić 2006: 190–191) – could not fully eliminate folk cultural practices or their enduring importance within local communities. Folklore not only persisted but was also incorporated into state cultural strategies and political myth-making, drawing in particular on “the popularity and prestige enjoyed by heroes of the older epic poetry in order to create its own symbolic image” (Brkljačić 2006: 190). As R. Jenkins (2000: 14) argues,

even within the most efficiently rationalised of bureaucracies, “irrational” dimensions of social life – symbolism and myth, notions of fate or luck, sexuality, religious or other ideologies, ethnic sentiment, etc. – continue[d] to shape organisational behaviour.

Consequently, as Jenkins (2000: 12–14) maintains, secular systems remain far from fully disenchanted, as political mythologies – including those developed under Tito’s regime – can function as forms of re-enchantment comparable to the quasi-religious dimensions of ideology described by Lehmann (2008). In this context, political re-enchantment emerges through folklore motifs and narratives – ranging from stories about leaders to accounts of pivotal events – which contribute to the symbolic framing of political systems (Krikmann 2009).

Epic poetry was particularly significant in the Party’s cultural and ideological repertoire. Already resilient, it remained influential in peasant collectives, workers’ unions and public performances (Žanić 1998: 65). By the early 1960s, guslars had gained official recognition, performing on radio broadcasts and touring widely, sometimes addressing socially sensitive topics previously

considered inappropriate for public performance (Brkljačić 2006: 191). The continued public resonance of epic poetry enabled the Party to draw on it in constructing ideological continuity and articulating a narrative of revolutionary heritage. Within this political and cultural framework, an examination of how supernatural motifs were reinterpreted in Yugoslav epic songs of the Partisan Struggle becomes especially relevant.

In such songs, symbolic supernatural motifs conveyed the perceived extraordinary nature of wartime events. Natural forces – wind, darkness, rivers – often act as obstacles or agents of fate, echoing older folk traditions, while human adversaries are depicted through metaphysical metaphors:¹⁷ Hitler, for example, appears in the song “Čvrsto gnijezdo – naša domovina” (“Firm Nest – Our Homeland”) as a “three-headed dragon” wreaking havoc.¹⁸ Moreover, symbolically and historically charged resistance landscapes, such as Mount Romanija in eastern Bosnia and Herzegovina,¹⁹ become settings in which time, space and supernatural imagery test bravery (Žanić 1998: 204–225), with white swans representing the partisans and a grey falcon symbolising Tito, collectively flying over the country and protecting it against the evil dragon (Brkljačić 2006: 193).²⁰

Particularly relevant to DG’s concept is the way Yugoslav song tradition elevated certain Partisan heroes – such as Ratko Pavlović, commander of the Second Southern Morava Partisan Detachment fighting Bulgarian occupation forces – to legendary status comparable to Njegoš or as “children of [the folk hero and ‘dragon-son’] Miloš Obilić”, reflecting a broader socialist-era tendency to liken Partisan fighters to earlier epic champions such as Kraljević Marko and Vuk Grgurević (Zmaj Ognjeni Vuk / “Vuk the Fiery Dragon”) (Brkljačić 2006: 194).²¹ In South Slavic folklore, such figures frequently appear as *zmajeviti junaci* (“dragon-like heroes”), portrayed as dragon-born or raised by vile (woodland spirits) and endowed with exceptional strength to defend their communities during periods of threat (Brkljačić 2006: 194; Pócs 1989: 18, 33; Perić 2008; Čajkanović 1973; Blagojević 1993). During such times, these figures tend to emerge as emblems when communities seek renewed sources of strength – what Gavrilović (2003: 725–727) characterises as “the cult of heroic patriotism” – a pattern also reflected in representations of the Partisan resistance. In this way, earlier mythic frameworks were combined with contemporary Partisan heroism in the symbolic language of the new epic Yugoslav songs, emphasising moral courage, destiny and the narrative transformation of ordinary individuals into legendary figures.

The symbolism of folk epic was also adapted to shape the public image of Tito and his leadership in post-Partisan Yugoslavia. For instance, Montenegrin epic poet Milorad P. Mandić composed a lengthy verse biography celebrating Tito (1965), spanning twenty-seven songs over forty-three pages, from his birth to the year of publication – illustrating how the regime drew on folklore to construct a mythic representation of its leader (Brkljačić 2006: 180–181).

These examples demonstrate how narrative frameworks continued to influence collective memory, even within the structures of a centrally organised political system. By transforming demons, prophetic voices and heroes and their extraordinary feats into expressions of collective endurance rather than literal miracles, these motifs provided an enduring imaginative lens through which Partisan heroism was conceptualised in local culture. In Bourdieu's terms (1977), such epic-inspired representations functioned as a form of cultural habitus: stable dispositions, symbolic patterns and interpretive structures guiding how communities perceived, remembered and valued extraordinary acts across generations. Since collective memory tends to be topocentric and relatively detached from strict historical chronology (Funkenstein 1989; Brkljačić 2006: 199), folk epic images of courage retain cultural significance well beyond their original social and historical contexts.

Situating *Hunt on the Nazi Necromancer* within the evolving afterlives of Partisan and Yugoslav memory illuminates the project's cultural function. However, understanding this function requires examining how these epic repertoires intersect with post-socialist nostalgia in processes of counter-re-enchantment, while simultaneously responding to the rise of far-right countercultures in contemporary post-Yugoslav societies.

HUNT ON THE NAZI NECROMANCER AND THE COUNTER-RE-ENCHANTMENT OF PARTISAN MEMORY

The limited yet persistent heroic structures and epic motifs rooted in local narrative traditions that influenced representations of the Partisan Struggle did not disappear with the end of socialist rule. Instead, they remained part of a culturally resonant repertoire available for reinterpretation in contemporary artistic practices, contributing to broader processes of re-traditionalisation (Radulović & Belić 2021: 19). DG's project draws from this diverse palette of inherited patterns, combining historical reference points with epic fantasy to explore themes of heroism, resistance and moral agency in the cultural imaginary. By invoking longstanding epic and folk motifs of supernatural heroism – dragon-lore, spectral guides, wizardry and enchanted landscapes – and applying them to partisan figures, DG foregrounds human agency within a mythic framework and illustrates how collective and individual memory continue to shape understandings of moral and political courage.

In this context, *Hunt on the Nazi Necromancer* can be interpreted as a form of *counter-re-enchantment*. Whereas post-WWII Nazi-aligned esotericism historically mobilised myth, occultism and pseudo-sacred symbolism to re-enchant ideological narratives, DG repositions the mythopoetic register within the same narrative frame, but as explicitly antifascist. As already noted, political and ideological re-enchantment is never neutral: it may also operate subversively and can “participate in the disenchantment of the re-enchant-

or in the rejection of the acceptance of [...] a re-enchanted world” (Radulović & Belić 2021: 19). DG’s project exemplifies such a symbolically oppositional dynamic, redirecting mythic forms toward the exploration of resistance. By drawing on pre-Yugoslav folk epic patterns, the project reactivates a symbolically potent but largely recontextualised aspect of Yugoslav cultural history to address contemporary uses of esoteric or mythic imagery in underground music. Rather than functioning as a simple act of re-enchancement, it operates as a politically and culturally oppositional mythic counter-vision that channels the affective power of myth toward themes of solidarity, ethical agency and counter-memory. This is also closely tied to DG’s second observation: that the project resonates across the former Yugoslavia, with audiences engaging with its reimagining of Partisan heroism amid post-Yugoslav far-right currents in politics, subcultures and online spaces. The following section of the article thus examines these emergent tendencies and their cultural significance.

Nostalgia and Opposition: Yugoslav Memory Amid Post-Yugoslav Extremism

Across former Yugoslav countries, far-right currents are clearly visible; however, they persist primarily as minority or subcultural trends rather than as dominant political movements. For instance, far-right politics in Serbia, rooted in nationalist and religious ideologies, gained visibility during the 1990s, immediately after the Republic’s dissolution in 1991–1992, and continue to appear in peripheral political groups and certain cultural milieus (Bakić 2013; Dzombic 2014). Comparable currents surface elsewhere in the former Yugoslavia, particularly in music scenes and football fandoms,²² where nationalist or Ustaša-derived (the WWII Croatian ultranationalist movement) symbolism and chants have occasionally been reported, as well as instances of Holocaust revisionism around the concentration camp of Jasenovac (Milekić 2000). Neo-Nazi iconography has also appeared in Serbian football contexts, while local “Blood & Honour” networks emerged in the underground music scene in the early 1990s in Serbia, later spreading to Slovenia and Croatia as well, maintaining transnational ties with the other network chapters (Tomić 2013).

DG’s project operates against this backdrop, encouraging audiences to reinterpret the Partisan resistance as a source of socio-cultural transformation, offering a historical model for confronting fascist currents in the present. This impulse aligns with broader forms of nostalgia for the socialist past, often expressing a longing for social security or justice amid the perceived shortcomings of post-socialist democracy and economic reform (Ghodsee 2011). In the Yugoslav case, this takes the form of *Yugonostalgia*, shaped not only by memories of late-socialist life but also, as Bošković (2013) notes, by the violence and ethnic fragmentation following socialism’s collapse. Unlike “Ostalgie”, which reflects life in East Germany, or Soviet nostalgia, Yugonostalgia looks back on the former Yugoslavia as a transnational, culturally integrative

space, emphasising shared identities, everyday practices and multicultural coexistence. Circulating through music, media and retro aesthetics, it operates as a reflective – rather than restorative – mode of memory that maintains a critical distance from both the socialist past and contemporary nationalism. As the contributions in the edited book *Remembering Utopia* (2010) demonstrate, Yugonostalgia offers counter-narratives to dominant national histories while also providing critical reflections on post-socialist transition, using recollections of everyday sociability to imagine alternatives to the political and social structures shaping the present.

The collective memory of the Partisans in post-Yugoslavia has also evolved (Vasiljević & Štiks 2024). During socialist Yugoslavia, the antifascist struggle was institutionalised as a central element of the state's foundational narrative, expressed through monumental architecture, the arts and official commemorations that emphasized heroism, sacrifice and socialist progress. By the 1980s – particularly following Tito's death – this collective memory came under pressure from writers and artists who explored repressed traumas and interethnic violence (Denich 1994), employing literature to challenge the official narrative of brotherhood and unity and to advance alternative interpretations of the war (Wachtel 1998; Dragović-Soso 2002). In the post-Yugoslav era, the Partisan legacy remains contested (Zakošek 2007); yet it has re-emerged in some contexts as a form of counter-memory. Younger generations and leftist groups revive it through cultural practices, such as the resurgence of Partisan songs, aiming to revalorise elements of the antifascist resistance and offer alternatives to the emergent nationalist narratives (Vasiljević & Štiks 2024). This dynamic is evident in DG's project, whose reception underscores the enduring cultural significance of the Partisan legacy in articulating what Petrović (2013) terms a "politics of the future". The trajectory – from state-sponsored narratives to literary dissent and contemporary musical revival – demonstrates how successive eras reshape Partisan memory to reflect evolving social and cultural priorities.

In sum, *Hunt on the Nazi Necromancer* exemplifies the convergence of Yugonostalgia, epic poetic traditions, and counter-re-enchantment in contemporary cultural practice. By drawing on epic motifs intertwined with Partisan lore, DG's project transforms historical reality into morally resonant historical fantasy. Through immersive storytelling, the album engages with forms of esoteric imagination that appear in contemporary far-right discourse through folklore and historical reinterpretation, offering a re-enchantment of the past that also functions as a cultural intervention in the present. In doing so, it highlights the continued relevance of folk and collective memories, showing that nostalgia for the Partisan Struggle can operate not only as a sentimental reflection but as a creatively engaged revival of epic heroism and historical (re)imagination.

CONCLUSION

Hunt on the Nazi Necromancer illustrates how contemporary underground musicians employ fantasy, myth and occult symbolism to engage with the legacy of the antifascist heroism. Drawing on South Slavic epic poetics, wartime folklore, post-socialist memory and the atmospheric conventions of dungeon synth, DG constructs a narrative that reimagines and reframes key elements of both the pre-Yugoslav and Yugoslav pasts. As this study indicates, the album can be understood as an instance of counter-alternative enchantment and a form of engagement with alternative historical imaginaries, repurposing mythic registers that have previously been associated with far-right esoteric traditions.

DG's project also reflects broader tendencies among underground music artists who respond to the presence of reactionary ideologies within their scene, addressing the continued visibility of far-right aesthetics in black metal, dungeon synth and related subcultures. By reworking mythopoetic forms previously used in different political contexts, the project offers a distinct imaginative framework that interrogates such narratives through their own aesthetic strategies.

In this respect, *Hunt on the Nazi Necromancer* functions not only as a creative engagement with interpretations of the Partisan past but also as a contribution to discussions about cultural memory and ideological trajectories in post-Yugoslav cultural production, both underground and mainstream. Through sound, fantasy and alternative mythmaking, the project demonstrates how the atmospheric dimensions of music can participate in shaping – and reconsidering – understandings of moral and political possibilities in post-socialist contexts. Taken together, these elements underscore the role of underground music as a site where historical interpretation, aesthetic experimentation and ideological negotiation are continually explored and reworked.

NOTES

- 1 Himmler's SS represented the apex of top-down Nazi mythmaking, merging administrative rationality with utopian fantasy. Influenced by SS occultist Karl Maria Wiligut, Himmler refashioned the SS as a revived Aryan priesthood, its black uniforms and runic symbols marking a sacred rebirth (Goodrick-Clarke 2004: 177–191). This bureaucratic mysticism was institutionalised through the *Ahnenerbe*, founded in 1935 to pursue pseudoscientific research and expeditions supporting an invented Germanic-Aryan past (Pringle 2006). Related projects, such as the Hexenkartothek – an SS effort to catalogue global witch trials and reinterpret them as a genocide of Germanic priestesses – likewise sought to resurrect mythic histories for ideological purposes (Badger & Purkiss 2017).
- 2 Wilhelm Landig, an Austrian writer and former SS member, was central to carrying Nazi mysticism into postwar esoteric culture. His Thule trilogy (1971–1991) fused Aryan racial myth with occult motifs – Vril energy, occult technologies, Hyperborea, and the “Last Battalion” – recasting Nazi lore as adventures in Tolkien-style “secondary worlds”. These narratives helped shape later esoteric systems, from Aldebaran mythologies to UFO conspiracism, reinforcing the afterlife of Nazi esoterica in global occult and far-right networks (Goodrick-Clarke 2002: 128–150).

- 3 Also known as the “second wave” of black metal (Skadiang 2017: 15), the bands associated with the subgenre radically transformed the genre’s sound and visual aesthetics. They introduced extremely distorted guitars, lo-fi production, tremolo picking, shrieked vocals, blast beats and deliberately cacophonous soundscapes. Visually, they popularised “corpse paint” – a stark black-and-white makeup style designed to render the performers corpse-like (Freeborn 2010: 82; Olson 2008: 9).
- 4 Varg Vikernes became a central – and highly controversial – figure in early Norwegian black metal through his role in church burnings, violent assaults, and the murder of Øystein “Euronymous” Aarseth, tying the genre to criminal notoriety and extremist ideology. He later emerged as a symbolic figure in neo-fascist subcultures, while Burzum’s imagery circulated beyond metal, appearing even in polarising mainstream contexts such as the work of Kanye West. Building on this legacy, bands like Absurd, Graveland, and Peste Noire advanced similar themes, while National Socialist Black Metal (NSBM) formed in the mid-1990s. Developing within white-power networks, NSBM redirected black metal’s anti-Christian, anti-modern and mythic motifs toward explicit racialised nationalism (Barratt-Peacock & Hagen 2019). It remains a fringe yet ideologically driven subgenre within a global scene still grappling with Eurocentrism and controversial viewpoints over race, politics and identity (Beckwith 2002).
- 5 American black metal bands such as *Wolves in the Throne Room* and *Panopticon* exemplify the genre’s ongoing anti-reactionary reorientation. *Wolves in the Throne Room* reconfigure black metal’s transcendental aesthetics into eco-spiritual and anti-capital meditations on nature, explicitly rejecting the Eurocentric and nationalist iconography that marked its early canon. Similarly, *Panopticon’s Kentucky* (2012) fuses bluegrass instrumentation with black metal ferocity, drawing on American folk protest traditions and labor history to commemorate the early twentieth-century miners’ strikes in Harlan County, Kentucky. Extending this reclamation process beyond the U.S. context, Greek underground artist Ayloss – through his medieval black metal side-project *Mystras* (2020 & 2021) – sought to wrest the medieval imaginary from reactionary reinterpretation. Through original compositions and reworkings of pan-European peasant songs, Ayloss transformed folklore into a vehicle of resistance, celebrating medieval uprisings and reimagining the Middle Ages as a locus of pluralism, dissent and popular defiance (Barmplexis 2022). In this framework, folklore functions as a form of counter-memory, centering the medieval underclass as the true agent of rebellion and cultural vitality.
- 6 <https://dungeonguerrilla.bandcamp.com/album/hunt-on-the-nazi-necromancer>, last accessed on 7 November 2025.
- 7 The name *Klaus Krämer* for the Necromancer is fictional. DG. drew inspiration for it from a contemporary pianist and Klaus Schulze, the German electronic music pioneer, composer and member of the Krautrock band Tangerine Dream.
- 8 Local lore and epic poetry embed Jastrebac within Serbian myth, especially through the legend of the “Jastrebac Dragon”, a powerful magical being said to dwell on the mountain. Broader Slavic traditions portray such peaks as “mountains of dragons” that symbolically “gave birth” to historical and legendary figures (Čajkanović 1994: 182, 185), including – within Jastrebac lore – Miloš Obilić and Despot Stefan Lazarević (1377–1427), a founding member of the Order of the Dragon. This connection fostered the belief that Lazarević’s lineage derived not from Knez Lazar but from the local dragon, who allegedly seduced Knežinja Milica – a story preserved in the folk song *Carica Milica i Zmaj od Jastrepcu* (“Tsarina Milica and the Dragon of Jastrebac”) (Petrovitch 1914: 129–131). These supernatural motifs will be explored further in the text.
- 9 <https://dungeonguerrilla.bandcamp.com/album/hunt-on-the-nazi-necromancer>, last accessed on 9 November 2025.
- 10 In this article, “folk memory” refers to the vernacular transmission and (re)interpretation of historical events through folkloric forms such as songs, narratives and local storytelling traditions. While related to the broader concept of collective memory (Halbwachs 1992), the term emphasises its articulation within folkloric genres rather than institutional or historiographical frameworks. It also differs from oral history, which generally denotes the systematic recording of individual testimonies. Expressions such as partisan folklore, wartime folk songs and new epic

Yugoslav songs are therefore treated here as specific media through which memories of the Partisan struggle circulated and were culturally reworked.

- 11 The terms “extraordinary” and “supernatural” are used variably in the text in both symbolic and literal registers. For the purposes of the discussion, the two terms will shift between symbolic, mythic and literal usage as appropriate, while this distinction will be signaled to prevent confusion.
- 12 Email communication, 22 October 2025.
- 13 Iva Jelusic, *Neretva & Sutjeska in Horror and Magic of Individual Remembrances – research notes and late-night thoughts*. <https://publicanthropologist.cmi.no/2023/02/01/neretva-sutjeska-in-horror-and-magic-of-individual-remembrances-research-notes-and-late-night-thoughts/>, last accessed on 3 December 2025.
- 14 Email communication, 28 October 2025.
- 15 The “hero with supernatural powers” motif is particularly relevant to the present study and is examined in greater detail later in the text.
- 16 *The Mountain Wreath* is a seminal 19th-century epic-dramatic poem written by Petrović-Njegoš, blending history, legend and philosophical reflection in its portrayal of Montenegro’s struggle to preserve its identity and freedom. Njegoš (1813–1851), a poet, philosopher, and reforming statesman, modernised Montenegro while also creating works that became cornerstones of South Slavic literature. For a translated version of the epic, see Njegoš 1986.
- 17 In the song “Crni Đurđevdan” (“Black Saint George’s Day”) it reads: “Listen to both brothers and men / What is the history of the whims/ When the wind blows on the ground, the wind blows / When a beast without law judges / It was forty first/ The black earth was inhabited by the plague / Over Kord’s sun has died / Everything into the night darkness turned. Everywhere the wretched wolves are / And the guns are to the devil’s hand / The devil chooses to begin / Well, he chose Velion to be proud” (Opačić-Čanica 1971: 268–276).
- 18 “And within it, a three-headed dragon / That wants to swallow the people / With unhappiness, comes luck, too” (Orahovac 1971: 99).
- 19 Mount Romanija, also known as *Hajdučka Gora* (“Bandit Mountain”), is closely associated with Serb hajduk Starina Novak and his brigands during the Ottoman occupation.
- 20 “There was a hard nest in the world / In which white swans were hatched / Among them, a grey bird falcon / That spreads his wings all over the country / Underneath the wings, he scatters his feathers / From which white swans will arise / And with them grey falcons / All together to smash the dragon with force”, in the song “Čvrsto gnijezdo – naša domovina” (“Firm nest – our homeland”) (Orahovac 1971: 99–100).
- 21 In the songs “Pjesma partizanske omladine” (“Song of the Partisan Youth”) (Orahovac 1971: 188) and “Ratko Pavlović-Čičko” (Vukanović 1966: 82–83).
- 22 See, for example, “Croatia to receive penalty for ‘human swastika’”, Associated Press, 18 August 2006. <https://web.archive.org/web/20110427085842/http://fr.jpost.com/servlet/Satellite?cid=1154525901351&pagename=JPost%2FJPArticle%2FShowFull>, last accessed on 5 December 2025; “Croatia govt lashed over ‘disgraceful neo-fascist Woodstock’”, *France 24*, 7 July 2025. <https://www.france24.com/en/live-news/20250707-croatia-govt-lashed-over-disgraceful-neo-fascist-woodstock>, last accessed on 5 December 2025.

REFERENCES

- Assmann, Jan 2008. Communicative and Cultural Memory. In: Astrid Erll & Ansgar Nünning (eds.) *Cultural Memory Studies: An International and Interdisciplinary Handbook*. Berlin: Walter de Gruyter, pp. 109–118.
- Atanasovski, Srđan 2017. Socialism or Art: Yugoslav Mass Song and Its Institutionalizations. *AM Journal of Art and Media Studies*, Vol. 13, pp. 31–42.

- Badger, William & Purkiss, Diane 2017. English Witches and SS Academics: Evaluating Sources for the English Witch Trials in Himmler's Hexenkartothek, *Preternature: Critical and Historical Studies on the Preternatural*, Vol. 6, No. 1, pp. 125–153.
- Bakić, Jovo 2013. *Right-Wing Extremism in Serbia*. Friedrich Ebert Foundation. Available at <https://library.fes.de/pdf-files/id-moe/09659.pdf>, last accessed on 16 November 2025.
- Barmapalexis, Athanasios 2022. "Medieval Traditions Reconquered and Reclaimed": Folklore and Folk-song as Ideological Tools against Ethnocentrism and Alt-Right Ideologies in Black Metal, *Ethnologia on line*, Vol. 12, pp. 37–61.
- Barratt-Peacock, Ruth & Hagen, Ross (eds.) 2019. *Medievalism And Metal Music Studies: Throwing Down the Gauntlet*. United Kingdom: Emerald Publishing.
- Beckwith, Karl 2002. Black Metal is for White People: Constructs of Color and Identity Within the Extreme Metal Scene. *M/C Journal*, Vol. 5, No. 3, pp. 137–143 <https://doi.org/10.5204/mcj.1962>.
- Biddiss, Michael 1997. History as Destiny: Gobineau, H. S. Chamberlain and Spengler. *Transactions of the Royal Historical Society*, Vol. 7. Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, pp. 73–100.
- Blagojević, Miloš 1993. *O nacionalnom identitetu Srba u srednjem veku*. [On the National Identity of Serbs in the Middle Ages.] In: Samardžić, Davidov, Protić, Đurić et al. (eds.) *Srbi u evropskoj civilizaciji* [Serbs in European Civilization.] Belgrade: Nova, pp. 20–31.
- Bošković, Aleksandar 2013. Yugonostalgia and Yugoslav cultural memory: Lexicon of Yu mythology. *Slavic Review*, Vol. 72, No. 1, pp. 54–78.
- Bošković-Stulli, Maja 1978. Usmena književnost [Oral Literature.] In: Maja Bošković-Stulli & Divna Zečević (eds.) *Usmena i pučka književnost. Povijest hrvatske književnosti*, Zagreb: Liber, Mladost.
- Bošković-Stulli, Maja 1986. Izvori i preobrazbe jedne narodne pjesme ('Na Kordunu grob do groba'). [Sources and Transformations of a Folk Song ('From Grave to Grave in Kordun').] *Rad Jugoslavenske akademije znanosti i umjetnosti, Razred za suvremenu književnost*, Vol. 21, No. 419, pp. 355–369.
- Bošković-Stulli, Maja & Kačar, Desanka 1982. *Kazivanja Desanke Kačar o postanku pjesama "Na Kordunu grob do groba" i "Pjesma o smrti Marka Oreškovića"*. [Desanka Kačar's Accounts on the Origin of the Songs 'From Grave to Grave in Kordun' and 'The Song of the Death of Marko Orešković'.] In: *Pjesme iz NOB-e; Čujić-Krčevina, Lika, 1942–1981*. Zagreb.
- Bourdieu, P. 1977. *Outline of a Theory of Practice*. Transl. Richard Nice. Cambridge: Cambridge University Press.
- Brkljačić, Maja 2006. Popular Culture and Communist Ideology: Folk Epics in Tito's Yugoslavia. In: John Lampe & Mark Mazower (eds.) *Ideologies and National Identities. The Case of Twentieth-Century Southeastern Europe*. Budapest & New York: CEU Press, pp. 180–210.
- Camus, Jean-Yves & Lebourg, Nicolas 2017. *Far-Right Politics in Europe*. Transl. J. M. Todd. Cambridge & London: Harvard University Press.
- Čajkanović, Veselin 1973. *Mit i religija u Srba. Izabrane studije*. [Myth and Religion in Serbs: Selected Studies.] Belgrade: Srpska književna zadruga.
- Čajkanović, Veselin 1994. *Sabrana dela iz srpske religije i mitologije, 1910–1924. Knjiga prva*. [Collected Works from Serbian Religion and Mythology, 1910–1924. Book 1.] Belgrade: Publishers Group.
- Chimbos, Peter 1999. Greek Resistance 1941–45: Organization, Achievements and Contributions to Allied War Efforts Against the Axis Powers. *International Journal of Comparative Sociology*, Vol. 40, No. 2, pp. 251–269.
- Clute, John & Grant, John (eds.) 1997. *The Encyclopedia of Fantasy*. First UK edition. Orbit Books.
- Denich, Bette 1994. Dismembering Yugoslavia: Nationalist Ideologies and the Symbolic Revival of Genocide. *American Ethnologist*, Vol. 21, No. 2, pp. 367–390.
- Despotović, Ljubisha 2018. Tito – između političkog mita i surove stvarnosti. [Tito – Between Political Myth and Harsh Reality.] In: *Kulturni centar Novog Sada*. Available at <https://www.kcns.org.rs/agora/tito-izmedju-politickog-mita-i-surove-stvarnosti/>, last accessed on 13 November 2025.
- Dima, Iulia & Pilo, Baptiste 2023. Dungeons & Synthesizers: Dungeon Synth, The Rise of a Musical Genre on Youtube and Bandcamp. *Volume!*, Vol. 20, No. 2, pp. 141–163.

- Dow, James & Lixfeld, Hannjost (eds.) 1994. *The Nazification of an Academic Discipline: Folklore in the Third Reich*. Bloomington: Indiana University Press.
- Dragović-Soso, Jasna 2002. *Saviours of the Nation. Serbia's Intellectual Opposition and the Revival of Nationalism*. Montreal: Hurst & Company.
- Dzombic, Jelena 2014. Rightwing Extremism in Serbia. *Race & Class*, Vol. 55, No. 4, pp. 106–110.
- Foley, John Miles 1991. *Immanent Art: From Structure to Meaning in Traditional Oral Epic*. Indiana: Indiana University Press.
- Forbes, Robert & Stampton, Eddie 2015. *The White Nationalist Skinhead Movement, UK & USA, 1979–1993*. Port Townsend, WA: Feral House.
- Foucault, Michel 1977. *Language, Counter-Memory, Practice: Selected Essays and Interviews*. Ed. with an introduction by Donald F. Bouchard. Transl. Donald F. Bouchard & Sherry Simon. Ithaca, NY: Cornell University Press.
- Freeborn, Robert 2010. A Selective Discography of Scandinavian Heavy Metal Music. *Notes*, Vol. 66, No. 4, pp. 840–850.
- Funkenstein, Amos 1989. Collective Memory and Historical Consciousness. *History and Memory*, Vol. 1, No. 1, pp. 5–26.
- Gardell, Mattias 2003. *Gods of the Blood: The Pagan Revival and White Separatism*. Durham & London: Duke University Press.
- Gavrilović, Danijela 2003. Elements of the Ethnic Identification of the Serbs. *Facta Universitatis*, Vol. 2, No. 10, pp. 717–730.
- Ghodsee, Kristen 2011. *Lost in Transition: Ethnographies of Everyday Life after Communism*. Durham & London: Duke University Press.
- Goodrick-Clarke, Nicholas 1985. *The Occult Roots of Nazism: The Ariosophists of Austria and Germany, 1890–1935*. Wellingborough: Aquarian Press.
- Goodrick-Clarke, Nicholas 2002. *Black Sun: Aryan Cults, Esoteric Nazism and the Politics of Identity*. New York: New York University Press.
- Goodrick-Clarke, Nicholas 2004. *The Occult Roots Of Nazism. Secret Aryan Cults and their Influence on Nazi Ideology*. London & New York: Tauris Parke.
- Halbwachs, Maurice 1992. *On Collective Memory*. Edited, translated, and introduced by Lewis A. Coser. Chicago: University of Chicago Press.
- Holton, Milne & Mihailovich, Vasa (eds.) 1997. *Songs of the Serbian People: From the Collections of Vuk Karadžić*. Pittsburgh: University of Pittsburgh Press.
- Jenkins, Richard 2000. Disenchantment, Enchantment and Re-Enchantment: Max Weber at the Millennium. *Max Weber Studies*, Vol. 1, No. 1, pp. 11–32.
- Kantorowicz, Ernst 1957. *The King's Two Bodies: A Study in Medieval Political Theology*. Princeton: Princeton University Press.
- Kershaw, Ian 1999. *Hitler 1889–1936: Hubris*. London: Penguin.
- Kirn, Gal 2020. *The Partisan Counter-Archive. Retracing the Ruptures of Art and Memory in the Yugoslav People's Liberation Struggle*. Media and Cultural Memory 27, Berlin: Walter De Gruyter.
- Krikmann, Arvo 2009. Jokes in Soviet Estonia. *Folklore: Electronic Journal of Folklore*, Vol. 43, pp. 43–66. <https://doi.org/10.7592/FEJF2009.43.krikmann>.
- Lehmann, Hartmut 2008. Max Weber and the Dialectics of Disenchantment and Reenchantment in Modern History. In: Frank Adloff & Manuel Borutta (eds.) *Max Weber in the 21st Century: Transdisciplinarity Within the Social Sciences*. EUI MWP, pp. 73–80.
- Lord, Albert & Bartók, Béla (eds.) 1954. *Serbo-Croatian Heroic Songs*, Vols. 1 & 2. Cambridge, MA: Harvard University Press.
- Lord, Albert & Bynum, David (eds.) 1974–1975 [1960]. *The Singer of Tales*. Cambridge, MA: Harvard University Press.

- Lowles, Nick & Silver, Steve (eds.) 1998. *White Noise: Inside the International Nazi Skinhead Scene*. London: Searchlight.
- Luthar, Breda & Pusnik, Marusa (eds.) 2010. *Remembering Utopia: The Culture of Everyday Life in Socialist Yugoslavia*. Washington, D.C.: New Academia Publishing.
- Mandić, Milorad 1965. *Pjesme o životnom putu druga Tita: U čast sedamdesetogodišnjice*. [Songs about the Life Journey of Comrade Tito: In Honor of His Seventieth Birthday.] Bački Petrovac: Novinsko-izdavačko preduzeće.
- Mendlesohn, Farah 2002. Toward a Taxonomy of Fantasy. *Journal of the Fantastic in the Arts*, Vol. 13, No. 2, pp. 169–183.
- Milekić, Sven 2000. "Of Course We Don't Deny the Holocaust": Holocaust Distortion in Contemporary Croatia. *Prism: An Interdisciplinary Journal For Holocaust Educators*, Vol. 12, pp. 60–65.
- Moynihan, M. & Söderlind, D. 2003. *Lords of Chaos: The Bloody Rise of the Satanic Metal Underground*. Port Townsend, WA: Feral House.
- Murko, Matija 1951. *Tragom srpsko-hrvatske narodne epike, Putovanja u godinama 1930–1932*. [In the Footsteps of Serbian-Croatian Folk Epic: Travels in the Years 1930–1932.] Zagreb: Jugoslavenska akademija znanosti i umjetnosti.
- Murko, Matija 1990. The Singers and their Epic Songs. *Oral Tradition*, Vol. 5, No. 1, pp. 107–130.
- Njegoš, P. P. 1986. *The Mountain Wreath*. Ed. and transl. by Vasa D. Mihailovich. Irvine, California: Charles Schlacks Publisher.
- Olson, Benjamin 2008. *I am the Black Wizards: Multiplicity, Mysticism and Identity in Black Metal Music and Culture*. Diss. (Unpublished MA Thesis), Bowling Green State University. Available at http://rave.ohiolink.edu/etdc/view?acc_num=bgosu1206132032, last accessed on 3 December 2025.
- Opačić-Ćanica, Stanko (ed.) 1971. *Narodne pjesme Korduna*. [Folk Songs of Kordun.] Zagreb: Prosvjeta.
- Orahovac, Sait (ed.) 1971. *Narodne pjesme bunta i otpora: Motivi iz revolucije, borbe i obnove*. [Folk Songs of Rebellion and Resistance: Motifs from Revolution, Struggle, and Renewal.] Sarajevo: Svjetlost.
- Parry, Adam & Parry, Milman (eds.) 1971. *The Making of Homeric Verse: The Collected Papers of Milman Parry*. Oxford: Oxford University Press.
- Perić, Dragoljub 2008. Šamanska borba zoomorfnih junaka u slovenskoj epici. [The Shamanic Struggle of Zoomorphic Heroes in Slavic Epic.] *Slavistika*, Vol. 12, pp. 174–182.
- Petrović, Tanja 2013. The Past that Binds Us: Yugonostalgia as the Politics of the Future. In: Srđa Pavlović & Marko Živković (eds.) *Transcending Fratricide: Political Mythologies, Reconciliations, and the Uncertain Future in the Former Yugoslavia*. Baden Baden: Nomos, pp. 129–148.
- Petrovitch, Woislav 1914. *Hero Tales and Legends of the Serbians*. London: George G. Harrap.
- Pirkova-Jakobson, Svatava 1968. Introduction. In: Vladimir Propp, *Morphology of the Folktale*. Transl. Laurence Scott. Second edition. Austin: University of Texas Press, pp. xi–xviii.
- Pócs, Éva 1989. *Fairies and Witches at the Boundary of South-Eastern and Central Europe*. FF Communications, Vol. CV 1, No. 243. Helsinki: Academia Scientiarum Fennica, pp. 1–95.
- Pringle, Heather 2006. *The Master Plan: Himmler's Scholars and the Holocaust*. New York: Hyperion.
- Radulović, Nemanja & Đorđević Belić, Smiljana 2021. An Introduction. In: Nemanja Radulović & Smiljana Đorđević Belić (eds.) *Disenchantment, Re-enchantment and Folklore Genres*. Belgrade: Institute for Literature and Arts, pp. 7–28.
- Rihtman-Auguštin, Dunja 1970. Tradicionalna kultura i suvremene vrijednosti. [Traditional Culture and Contemporary Values.] *Kulturni radnik*, Vol. 23, No. 3, pp. 26–45.
- Schlobin, Roger 2000. "Rituals' Footprints Ankle-deep in Stone": The Irrelevancy of Setting in the Fantastic. *Journal of the Fantastic in the Arts*, Vol. 11, No. 2, pp. 154–163.
- Shanoes, Veronica 2012. "20: Historical Fantasy". In: Edward James & Farah Mendlesohn (eds.) *The Cambridge Companion to Fantasy Literature*. Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, p. 236.
- Shroud, Allen 2023. *Historical Dictionary of Fantasy Literature*. Second edition. USA: Rowman & Littlefield.

Skadiang, Joel 2017. *True Black Metal: Authenticity, Nostalgia, and Transgression in the Black Metal Scene*. Diss. (Unpublished Honours Thesis), Department of Gender and Cultural Studies, The University of Sydney. Available at <https://ses.library.usyd.edu.au/handle/2123/18233>, last accessed on 3 December 2025.

Stableford, Brian 2009. *The A to Z of Fantasy Literature*. Lanham, MD: Scarecrow Press.

Taylor, Charles 2007. *A Secular Age*. Cambridge, MA: The Belknap Press of Harvard University Press.

Tomić, Đorđe 2013. On the “Right” Side? The Radical Right in the Post-Yugoslav Area and the Serbian Case. *Fascism*, Vol. 2, No. 1, pp. 94–114.

Tymn, Marshall & Zahorski, Kenneth, & Boyer, Robert 1979. *Fantasy: A Core Collection and Reference Guide*. New York & London: Bowker.

Vasiljević, Jelena & Štiks, Igor 2024. How we (used to) remember the Partisans. Culture of memory and art form during and after Yugoslavia. *Canadian Slavonic Papers*, Vol. 66, Nos. 1–2, pp. 49–65.

Versluis, Arthur 2013. Savitri Devi, Miguel Serrano and the Global Phenomenon of Esoteric Hitlerism. In: Henrik Bogdan & Gordan Djurdjevic (eds.) *Occultism in Global Perspective*. London: Acumen, pp. 121–133.

Von Helden, Imke 2017. *Norwegian Native Art: Cultural Identity in Norwegian Metal Music*. Freiburg: LIT.

Vukanović, Tatomir 1966. *Srpske narodne partizanske pesme*. [Serbian Folk Partisan Songs.] Vranje: Narodni muzej.

Wachtel, Andrew 1998. *Making a Nation, Breaking a Nation: Literature and Cultural Politics in Yugoslavia*. Stanford, CA: Stanford University Press.

Wachtel, Andrew 2006. How to Use a Classic: Petar Petrović Njegoš in the Twentieth Century. In: John Lampe & Mark Mazower (eds.) *Ideologies and National Identities. The Case of Twentieth-Century Southeastern Europe*. Budapest & New York: CEU Press, pp. 131–153.

Zahorski, Kenneth & Boyer, Robert 1982. The Secondary Worlds of Fantasy. In: Roger Schlobin (ed.) *The Aesthetics of Fantasy Literature and Art*. Notre Dame, Indiana: University of Notre Dame Press, pp. 56–81.

Zakošek, Nenad 2007. The Heavy Burden of History: Political Uses of the Past in the Yugoslav Successor States. *Politička misao*, Vol. 44, No. 5, pp. 29–43.

Žanić, Ivo 1998. *Prevarena povijest. Guslarska estrada, kult hajduka i rat u Hrvatskoj i Bosni i Hercegovini*. [Deceived History: The Guslar Stage, the Cult of the Hajduk, and the War in Croatia and Bosnia and Herzegovina.] Zagreb: Durieux.

Athanasios Barmpalexis is an Associate Researcher at the Hellenic Folklore Research Centre of the Academy of Athens. He holds a Ph.D. in Ethnology and Folklore from the Elphinstone Institute at the University of Aberdeen, where his doctoral research examined ‘western’ folk healers employing neo-shamanistic approaches in North-East Scotland. He also serves as an Honorary Research Fellow and Visiting Lecturer at the Elphinstone Institute, University of Aberdeen. His research interests include Celtic myths and legends, oral traditions of resistance, folk medicine and folk religion, vernacular healing practices, and traditional witchcraft.

abarmpalexis@academyofathens.gr

Myths, Maps and Vernacular Perception: A Theoretical Framework for Analyzing the Spatial Representations of Environmental Health Crises in Mythological Narratives

REET HIEMÄE¹

Senior Researcher, Department of Folkloristics, Estonian Literary Museum, Estonia
reet.hiemaee@folklore.ee

MARE KALDA

Senior Researcher, Department of Folkloristics, Estonian Literary Museum, Estonia
mare.kalda@folklore.ee

MASOOD MASOODIAN

School of Arts, Design and Architecture, Aalto University, Finland
masood.masoodian@aalto.fi

ANDRUS TINS

PhD Student–Junior Researcher, Department of Folkloristics, Estonian Literary Museum, Estonia
andrus.tins@folklore.ee

Abstract: Environmental Health Crises (EHC), often manifesting as interconnected polycrises (e.g. combining environmental, medical or military aspects), have surged in frequency, intensity and geographic spread in recent decades. Public understanding of such crises plays a crucial role in taking proper action to mitigate their consequences. Thus, finding innovative communication models that would address and mediate the complex nature of EHC is of utmost importance to serve the societal needs for clarity, safety, hope and physical survival. While mythological and scientific approaches have conventionally been conceptualized as opposites, this article's objective is to delineate their points of convergence and to argue that awareness of patterns in mythological narratives can offer analytically significant insights for contemporary crisis communication. By reviewing existing map-based health risk communication tools and frameworks, and relying on multiple sources of mythological narratives related to various EHC (e.g., epidemics, environmental hazards and disruptions), the authors will propose an empirically and theoretically grounded framework for analyzing the spatial representations of environmental health crises in mythological narratives to highlight how mental mapping becomes a critical component of vernacular spatial problem-solving activity. While highlighting consistencies in spatial crisis responses in mythological narratives and comparing them to modern EHC-narrating patterns, the proposed framework aims to function as a pathway for bridging the gap between scientific crisis mapping and the vernacular lived, multisensory, mythology-informed representations of EHC. By theorizing the integration of such dynamic and agentic perspectives into public communication, the study seeks to advance more effective and empathetic engagement with EHC-related risks.

Keywords: environmental health crises, mapping, mythological narratives, crisis communication, coping

INTRODUCTION

Environmental Health Crises (EHC) have since ancient times been actively accompanied and shaped by a mythological dimension, transmitted through respective recurring imaginations and narratives with certain spatial logic and culturally resonant mappings of danger, agency and environmental transformation. In recent decades, EHC have intensified in both scale and complexity, and the pivotal role of narratives – which often diverge from official discourses and contain elements known from mythology – in shaping societal understandings of epidemics and other crises has by no means diminished. Thus, even today, as recent crises – such as outbreaks of the African swine flu or incidents of air and water pollution – have demonstrated, trajectories of an EHC are shaped by multiple factors spanning the medical-biological sciences (e.g., pathogens), engineering and geosciences (e.g., urban planning, civil protection) as well as the social sciences and the humanities (e.g., information flows, narratives, religion, culture, or human behaviour viewed through the lens of human geography). All of these can influence both routes by which a threat is transmitted and its global or population-level presentation (cf., similar thought by Hebert-Dufresne et al. 2025). In the context of narrative response, many authors have drawn attention to the concept of infodemics – the overabundant spread of information that impacts the actual spread of certain crises (e.g.,

Hebert-Dufresne et al. 2025, or a review by Abuhaloob et al. 2024). In relation to COVID-19, for example, the emphasis in respective research was mainly on mis-, dis-, and mal-information circulating in vernacular but also official channels and its adverse effects on society (for more on this topic, see Borges do Nascimento et al. 2022). However, we postulate that certain EHC-related myths, culturally and religiously informed understandings and related mental mapping patterns can be at least partly useful, providing ready-made clues for orientation in a crisis situation and thereby reducing fear and mitigating the consequences of crisis outbreaks. Therefore, it seems worthwhile to dig deeper into the historical spatial vernacular knowledge systems while looking for their role as cultural tools through which communities have interpreted, mapped and responded to unfolding threats. Thus, the starting point of this article is the question: *How do mythological narratives represent EHC spatially, and what recurring patterns can be identified across different cultural traditions?*

Several authors (e.g. Kropej 2022; Hiimäe et al. 2021; O'Shea 2025) have shown how the motifs of mythological plague legends, hurricane or flood myths have resurfaced in the collective memory in the face of contemporary experiences comparable to those endured by humanity centuries ago. A folkloristic view uniquely helps to recognize the embodied, sensory and spatial meaning-making patterns of contemporary narratives, placing them within the longer arc of legend history (cf. Kitta & Brodie 2020: 1). However, little has been investigated in terms of whether they also have to do with crisis communication.² We argue that crises of trust caused by failed public communication are part of the negative impact of infodemics, as trust, rather than information alone, drives public health decision making (cf. Dwyer et al. 2025). Thus, we take a rather unusual approach, trying to generalise the patterns of mythological folklore that have arisen as a reaction to EHC through history to provide a conceptual bridge to contemporary efforts, while asking our second, forward-looking research question: *How can insights derived from the spatial structures of mythological narratives inform the development of more effective, empathetic, and culturally resonant crisis communication frameworks?* By pointing out the dynamic agentic and experiential spatial representations found in mythological narratives, we hope to highlight the reasoning behind the consistencies that are still present today – in constructive as well as less constructive forms. We propose that considering them while designing public communication on the complex realities of EHC can help avoid “health and communicative inequities” (Briggs & Mantini-Briggs 2016) and increase societal understanding.

MATERIAL AND METHODS

By reviewing some existing map-based health risk communication tools (cf. Stieb et al. 2019) and frameworks (e.g. Augustin et al. 2023), mythology

compendiums and mythology-based empirical research (e.g. Parker 2012; Hiimäe 2024), studies in narrative spatial theory (e.g., Tally 2013) and theories of dynamic and context-dependent agency (Emirbayer & Mische 1998; Bandura 2001), this study employed a multilayered methodological design integrating approaches from folklore studies, risk communication research, mapping, memory and agency theories to propose an empirically and theoretically grounded framework for analysing mythological narratives through the lens of spatial crisis coping. Our primary dataset consisted of traditional mythological narratives – spanning from classical mythology interpreting origins, creation, cosmology and gods to mythological folklore elaborating on similar topics – that were included based on the following criteria: (1) representation of threats through EHC (including illnesses and epidemics, ecological imbalance, famine as well as hybrid crises incorporating military or ecological dimensions); (2) identifiable spatial elements (e.g., boundaries, movement patterns, containment zones, safe/unsafe places); (3) narrative structures describing societal, communal, or individual responses, related to various environmental health crises and their spatial conceptualisations. Our main sources were curated collections of plague and ague legends (Hiimäe 1997; Paal 2014) and CHRYSES project's³ extensive myth database for crosscultural coverage, consisting of mythological material from published text collections and online databases from various European regions.

As a follow-on step, using qualitative content analysis (in line with Schreier 2012), narratives were coded targeting the following key elements: (1) roles of human and non-human actors / agency related to spatial navigation of danger, (2) narrative functions (e.g., warning, explanation, causality, transformation), and (3) emotional and affective modalities. Further, attention was paid to: (1) locational markers (mountains, borders, water bodies, villages); (2) movement patterns (escape and hiding, avoidance, pilgrimage for stopping crisis); (3) symbolic geographies (sacred/protected zones, danger areas, liminal spaces), and (4) environmental cues (changes in weather, landscape transformations, e.g. lakes flying to another place). As a comparison, the results of the CHRYSES project's mental mapping workshop held in Estonia that compared spatial trajectories of crises in mythological legends and on participants' mental maps were considered (see more about the workshop results in Hiimäe & Kalda 2025).

TRAJECTORIES OF MEMORY AND SURVIVAL

In the context of scientific mapping, Gregory and Ell have pointed to the paradox that geographical maps used in scientific or historical research are effective as illustrative tools but poor at telling stories or enabling narrative interpretation (2007: 90). In mythological narratives, on the contrary, the spatial trajectories of danger are usually embedded into mutually conditioned narratives of

explanation and spatial coping as well as causality chains. For instance, Greek mythology provides a common mythological schema – best seen in Sophocles’ *Oedipus the King* –, where moral as well as physical pollution causes plague, crop failure, infertility of women and of animals (Parker 2012). Our analysis highlights common structural and narrative patterns, though they can be nested into local landscape types and religious views and adjusted to specific region-bound EHC.

In the viewed mythological narratives depicting risk and danger related to EHC, the main emphasis is nevertheless on **survival**. However, coping strategies also show regional variation to some extent. For example, in Estonian mythological legends on various EHC (especially epidemics) the emphasis is on multiple ways of active coping (such as fleeing or fighting) whereas in the material from some Slavic or Western European regions the crisis can be also portrayed as willed by the omnipotent god and thus related to more passive forms of coping (such as praying for mercy). Nevertheless, in most of the reviewed material the spatial means for survival in the form of certain types of agency are somehow articulated. The issue of survival may also have been treated from a negative aspect: such narratives depict the destructive force of the crisis (for instance, exemplified by its personified form), but also contain the statement, how the malady could have been avoided or overcome. The corresponding binary oppositions also occur in the following Estonian legend texts – one about an epidemic and the second about sudden flooding – which list both the behaviour that brought along death as well as means that granted or would have granted survival:

The plague came to the house threshold as a goat, sometimes as a bird, sometimes was known to look like a magpie. Whoever mentioned its name – fell down and that was it. Who did not utter a word – survived. (Hiimäe 1997: 158)

In Kolga parish, there is lake Kahala. People talk about how it came into being as follows: Once in the summer when some men were ploughing on the field, a big cloud came and in front of the cloud a bird was flying who shouted: “Flee, folk! Flee, folk!” Those who fled, were saved. Those who couldn’t flee, are on the bottom of the lake until today. (ERA II 222, 538 (3) < Kuusalu, Estonia 1939)

When seeking to situate the argument within the framework of classical theorists, Claude Lévi-Strauss (1955: 443) asserts that handling oppositions is a fundamental characteristic of myth, noting that “mythical thought always works from the awareness of oppositions towards their progressive mediation”. Similar reliance on oppositional narrative structures has been observed in folk tales and other folklore genres (Olrik 1965), and some scholars have

argued that it is inherent to human cognition even more broadly (Dundes 1997: 46–47) or that the base of society as a whole is myth and narrative (Hart 2005: 19). However, these authors only fleetingly refer that such narrated oppositions may also include a geographical dimension.

It should yet be added that in the face of severe crises, the binary of death and survival is not merely a narrative device but reflects the fundamental real-life alternatives from a human perspective – although the symbolic language for narrating these can differ somewhat across folklore genres. Nevertheless, some crises prompt communities to reconfigure both their physical environments and their internal “maps” of danger and safety but also to evoke “memory booms” (Fridman & Gensburger 2023) and cycles, being vividly represented in narrative tradition for centuries afterward (as is the case with plague lore). Others fade from narrative attention as soon as the immediate threat subsides (a tendency observed, for example, with COVID-19, which often functions merely as a temporary anchor in retrospective narrations, situating events as before or after the pandemic, cf. also about its distorted remembering in Sprengholz et al. 2023).

The persistence of certain crises as more vivid memory events with respective narrative patterns comes close to Jan Assmann’s (2011) concept of cultural memory which can be used as a theoretical bridge between ancient mythological crisis narratives and their modern counterparts. Assmann (2011: 36) distinguishes between communicative memory, which is short-term and based on lived experience, and long-term cultural memory, which is transmitted through interpretive symbolic forms such as rituals, narratives or mythic structures. It seems that longer remembered are crisis narratives that carry within them both the memory of harsh historical realities and the symbolic lessons – or at least the ideal or potential – of survival, thus acquiring ritualized and narrative codification, embedding them in cultural memory as identity-shaping experiences. They are canonized through storytelling, commemorative practices, enduring frameworks of moral and meaning, ensuring their transmission or reactivation in renewed forms across generations. By contrast, crises like COVID-19, despite their global scale, often lack this deep symbolic anchoring and when new epidemics arise, comparisons tend to be made with earlier epidemics, such as historical plague.

BUILDING BLOCKS OF FRAMEWORK

Certain ways of narrating EHC seem to be constantly recycled. What appears “modern” in, for instance, pandemic dashboards, climate infographics, or media maps (e.g. on water pollution) is thus structured by deep memory, where mythic logics supply ready-made interpretive frames that guide perception and action across time. In Assmann’s (2011: 23) terms, such narratives function as “figures of memory” organizing the present by projecting culturally

authorized patterns of crisis and restoration into current experience. Lévi-Strauss even goes so far as to postulate connections between epochs and modes of thought, by noting: “We may be able to show that the same logical processes are put to use in myth as in science, and that man has always been thinking equally well; the improvement lies, not in an alleged progress of man’s conscience, but in the discovery of new things to which it may apply its unchangeable abilities” (Lévi-Strauss 1955: 443). In this context, it is noteworthy how frequently crises are visualized using spatial-cartographic imagery in scientific discourse and in media reports that reinterpret scientific findings through their own narrative lenses, with many crisis narratives privileging places over people. For instance, during the COVID-19 pandemic, media coverage often reduced victims or unvaccinated persons to percentages on geographic maps, foregrounding regional and territorial trends instead of individual lives. Only a few people (e.g. some survivors or medical staff) were still portrayed as distinct heroic examples of coping and resilience. Maps disseminated in newspapers as well as research publications typically featured large-scale units, such as entire counties, provinces or the whole world, rather than the individual agency level or local specifics (cf. for example Beleche et al. 2021).

The past mythological crisis narratives also display a place-centred logic and can be generalized as being grounded in three pillars of threat definition – two of which are spatial in nature – often presented via narrated mental maps:

- i. **Personification:** giving the danger a clear agentic shape, often combined with the notion of deliberate intent,
- ii. **Localisation:** confining the danger to a particular location,
- iii. **Directional framing:** assigning the danger a trajectory (cf. a similar observation in the context of plague lore Hiimäe 2004: 67).

Based on this initial triad, a further narrative layering model can be proposed, consisting of:

- i. **Actor-based mythic surface layer:** what supernatural actors (e.g., demons, deities, spirits, monsters) control which domains (e.g., water, forest, disease, weather) and by which means (e.g., punishment, imbalance) in relation to an EHC.
- ii. **Socio-historical layer** resonating with spatial memory of past crises, i.e., recurrent and/or concurrent historic key dangers (e.g., epidemics, such as plague, cholera, smallpox, crop failures, climatic anomalies, such as droughts, floods, water contamination, famine, warfare and demographic shocks bound to certain places or place types).
- iii. **Spatial-symbolic layer** of depicting danger: mythologically explained hazard zones, boundaries of safe and unsafe, movement paths of danger.
- iv. **Temporal layer:** Although a sudden onset is a defining feature of a crisis, certain signs of impending danger are often hinted at (often presented through seeing omens, hearing a warning voice or sound), and

the **perceived proximity of crisis – both in space and time** – can significantly shape the intensity of response.

- v. **Agentic layer:** polarised depiction of proper behaviour that grants coping, and wrong behaviour that leads to perishing, often dynamically related to the above layers (i) to (iv).

In the context of EHC, layers (i) to (iv) can be represented through a variety of narrative motifs, such as a plague maiden seen walking through a valley or village in spatial resonance with historic epidemic routes; an infertile field guarded by a spirit memorializing historic crop failures in the area; or a cliff with a “devouring beast” preserving memory of devastating landslides. As a result, a danger becomes mappable as being described through clear paths and roads, zones and boundaries. In a similar manner, certain spatial borders can be related to layer (v), outlining agency that grants survival, for instance crossing a watercourse or a crossroad ensures safety from supernatural harm-doers (spirits of epidemics, angry forest spirits or ghosts, the devil) in a vast amount of Indo-European mythology.

In several cases there is even no specific spirit entity to represent a crisis, but an affected natural resource may be depicted as thinking and acting in a human-like manner. For instance, in several European regions the mythological notion exists that the land can become ill or certain spots on the landscape can make people ill, unless they take specific environmental precautions – i.e. exhibit proper behaviour. In Irish mythology, for instance, a well just “goes away” when a butcher repeatedly cleans parts of animal carcasses in it. In the following Estonian example, two related environmental health crises are thematized: a cattle epidemic and a subsequent water pollution. According to the legend, humans carry the carcasses of dead animals into the lake, which disrupts the environmental balance and causes the lake to “go away”. Consequently, the moral of the unacceptable behaviour is exemplified through pointing out that in addition to having lost their cattle and losing a water source, humans also lose their fish stocks:

In Malla there was a big lake in the old days. Once the large herd of the manor house died and the dead animals were carried into the lake. Then the lake rose from its old place and went to Uljaste. Most of the fish that lived in the lake disappeared along the way. On the road, a big black bull walked in front of the lake roaring, and where the bull laid down, the lake landed, too. (H II 9, 66 (2) < Viru-Nigula, Estonia, 1889)

The following Austrian sample text presents two spatial scales of different sizes – the region of Lower Austria and the village Au – threatened by epidemic danger and illustrates the interrelationship between these two. The clever

behaviour of the young man described helps preserve the smaller scale unit – and as usual in mythological material, the safety on this scale is described in an absolute manner:

When the plague ravaged Lower Austria, a young man from Hof was walking on a dark autumn evening to visit his sweetheart in Au. Near the border between the two villages, he heard strange sounds and saw a slender, blackclad woman who begged him tearfully to carry her across the boundary into Au, as she could go no farther. Cheerfully, the strong young man lifted her onto his back. She asked if he knew whom he was carrying; when he said no, she revealed that she was the Plague and could only reach Au with his help. As a reward, she told him to go into the village and place stones on the windows of his relatives and acquaintances – those houses she would spare. The clever man placed stones on every window he could find. The Plague angrily confronted him, asking whether everyone in the village was really his relative. He boldly answered yes. In the end, no one in Au died. (shortened version of the legend text from Austria; full version is published in Petzoldt 1994: 101–102)

To bring a parallel to the spatiality frameworks that are related to modern health crises, the study of Augustin et al. (2023) deserves attention, as they introduce three spatial scales as foundational elements in their conceptual framework linking determinants of health to spatial context. They further define these scales as follows:

- (i) **Macro-scale:** Global and international levels (e.g., continents), encompassing large-scale forces such as climate change, global pandemics and international governance.
- (ii) **Meso-scale:** Intermediate or regional levels (e.g., nations, provinces, council areas), including policy, governance systems, healthcare infrastructure and socioeconomic conditions.
- (iii) **Micro-scale:** Local or neighborhood levels (e.g., communities, urban blocks), focusing on living environments such as green spaces, accessibility to healthy food, healthcare services and local infrastructure.

They argue that threats and health determinants should be examined across these nested spatial scales, emphasizing how global driving forces, governance structures and community-level conditions interact to shape health outcomes. Their framework highlights the importance of spatial embedding in health analysis, suggesting that understanding crisis narratives – and the definition of danger – requires attention to how risks are mapped and articulated at each spatial level.

However, it is important to note that in both mythological and modern narratives in our material (including the results of our CHRYSES project's mental mapping workshop held in Estonia in 2025), active spatial framing operates at the **meso** (regional) and **micro** (community) scales, reflecting the persistence of spatially significant thresholds and zones. By contrast, the **macro** level appears in mythological material only sporadically and superficially – and is often limited to a loosely defined “country” level – but there is significant focus on the **individual** (personal and family) level instead. This absence of a macro level can be partly explained historically because mythological narratives emerged in pre-modern societies where perception of administrative units was localised – or even cosmological – rather than national, making the household and community the primary loci of meaning and security.

The most important difference, however, concerns **agency** in the form of context-related proper behaviour based on the same scales. While some scientific crisis maps leave humans and their agency out altogether, concentrating only on the crisis (cf. findings related to cholera maps in Al Dalal'a et al. 2026), mythological material depicts active agency mainly at the named three levels: **individual**, **micro**, and **meso**. Agency here is understood in line with Emirbayer and Mische's (1998: 962) relational theory on multi-scalar agency that views agency as a temporally embedded and non-static process of engagement that integrates three dimensions: iterational (drawing on past routines), projective (imagining possible futures), and practical-evaluative (making judgments in the present).

Mythological crisis narratives often emphasize distributed agency across individuals, households and communities, where ritual and collective practices enact coping. Modern official crisis discourses, by contrast, often centralize agency at the governance level, privileging policy and institutional actors – a practical-evaluative stance focused on systemic control and homogenized safety orders. Yet, as our mental mapping workshop findings (Hiimäe & Kalda 2025) also demonstrated, individual and family scales remain crucial in contemporary vernacular imaginaries, revealing a projective dimension where personal spaces (especially the home) are envisioned as the primary locus of resilience. Paradoxically, during COVID-19, the locus of home gained importance even in centralised guidelines, as people in crowded apartment blocks and remote farmyards alike were ordered to passively stay home, prompting many to seek a greater sense of agency (e.g. through mutual aid networks described in Ramkissoon 2020, or outright rebellious behaviour). This finding also resonates with the study of Albert Bandura (2001), who reframed social cognitive theory around the concept of agency, arguing that people should be viewed as active agents who intentionally influence their own functioning and life circumstances, operating within a system of reciprocal causation among personal factors (cognition, affect, biology), behavior and environmental influences. Bandura's notion of agency includes moral dimensions and is strongly linked to self-efficacy – belief in one's ability to exert control over events.

We found the same components of agency in mythological narratives, whereby agency could involve mapping processes to adjust agency to safe and dangerous areas. Similarly, participants in our Estonian mental mapping workshop actively considered possible spatial scenarios for crisis coping (e.g., for a military or epidemic crisis), adjusting them to a possible gradual evolution of the crisis and touching upon a historical dimension while making references such as “As already my grandma pointed out” or making comparisons with folk narratives. As a generalization, the grassroots approaches reflected in mythological material and our recent mental mapping findings can be presented as shown in Figure 1.

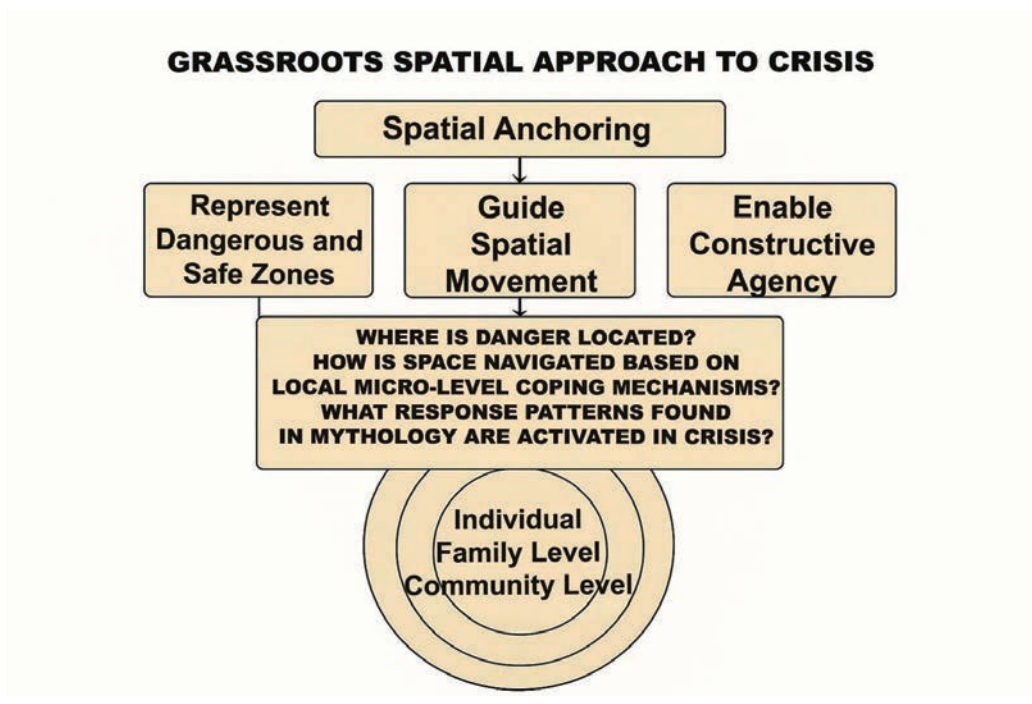


Figure 1.

To exemplify the intertwined aspect of various layers, the following traditional folk narrative presents both the role of the human intermediary in the spatial course of the disease and the community-led mythological ritual of destruction by fire, which, according to legend, brings about the complete end of the epidemic. Thus, the narrative expresses real-life experience as well as a mythical layer, both passed down through family lines and each playing a role in making sense of the crisis and moving toward a solution:

Grandma told that the sudden death (meaning plague or some other epidemic) was neither an animal nor a human being and traveled

in Pajpis from farm to farm, killing people. He would not be able to travel between farms unless he was allowed to ride. Once, a man named Matte came riding past the farm the sudden death happened to be at. Matte drove quickly but the sudden death still jumped on and got to the other place where he jumped off. There, at that place, they trapped him in a box and threw into a heated oven, and then the sudden death would have ended. (shortened version of the legend text from Swedish-speaking Finland, published in 1879 and retrieved from https://sagenkartan.isof.se/#/records/sls00904/search/pest/search_field/record/nordic/true)

Thus, we find that modern crisis communication should also focus more on individual agency, but for completeness of information, all the above-mentioned scales – **macro**, **meso**, **micro** and **individual** – need to be targeted. Their functions, however, are different: the macro and meso levels have general informative function, but smaller levels can be related to effective local landscape-bound agency based on how communities conceptualize environmental danger locally (cf. a case study that emphasizes considering family and community level in hurricane relief in Jacob et al. 2008). The narrative level, in turn, with its recurring elements, shows how stress and uncertainty translate into symbolic forms (such as sacredness or pollution) but also how mythic or otherwise traditional structures encode adaptive knowledge. Briggs & Mantini-Briggs (2016) have demonstrated convincingly in a non-European setting how communicative monopolies leaving out grassroots narrative and belief layers can lead to a one-sided centralised “bio-mediatisation” that can distort and delay effective action. Yet in Western societies, the need for inclusive crisis communication that engages with vernacular narratives is no less significant.

In the following table (Table 1), we present the general tendencies identified through our framework for analysing the spatial representations of EHC in mythological narratives and compare them with established contemporary crisis communication practices (deriving partly from the findings in O’Neil et al. 2013: 6 ff.), to highlight the areas that require attention for designing more effective communication strategies.

Table 1

Grassroots mental /narrated mappings of EHC	Official mappings of EHC
Polarization of safe, dangerous and threatened spaces with clear beginnings and ends – related to personifications and scapegoats	Polarization of safe, dangerous and threatened spaces with clear beginnings and ends – related to one-sided personified representations (e.g. no illness spirits but “dangerous” animals or humans as illness spreaders)

Suggest certain limited spatial actions / non-actions with focus on individual or community-based agency.	Suggest certain limited spatial actions / non-actions with individual or community-based passivity (rather don't-s than do-s).
Maps of causality sequences in crisis explanation (based on a variety of reasonings)	Maps of causality sequences in crisis explanation (framed with current scientific reasoning)
Sacred spaces as markers , sacred can be considered safe because sacred	No sacred spaces as markers (but frequent occurrence of quasi-sacralised expert figures)
Community-level help navigation maps (who helps and how) according to religious beliefs and local landscape peculiarities	Broad official help navigation ; community-level help navigation only in a generalised manner
Coping maps fluid and experiential, blending spatial information from myths/memory, belief, intuition, emotion, in modern cases elements from scientific maps but also critics of them	No blending ; focus on scientific reasoning and maps
Focus on individual and micro-level, context-based	Focus on larger levels, median values
Focus on survival	Focus on death (e.g., maps with statistics of victims), threat, danger
Retrospective axis of coping	Future apocalyptic scenarios

Based on this comparison, it emerges that although clearly linking danger to certain places seems to be a timeless practice, in the case of threats that can spread in any direction via human mobility (such as epidemics), linking them to a single location or a one-dimensional trajectory on a map or spatial scale can be misleading. Similarly, it should be stressed that in mythology, moral lessons hold symbolic importance: therefore, crisis narratives often speak of divine wrath and scapegoats as spatially detectable personifications – figures who can represent the danger and then be either destroyed or driven away from human settlements to protect people. Although similar practices continue in modern discourses (see a case study of animals as danger representations in Hiimäe et al. 2026) where crises are often associated with deliberate intent or other demonised personifications, in crisis communication, it would be far more effective to place less emphasis on finding a clear singular culprit (for instance, a patient zero or a factor “most” responsible for an environmental hazard) in a complex crisis. Crisis preparation should focus more on empowering individual and community-level experiential agency, being prepared that it can still contain features related to past mental sacrality and mythical memory maps. Mass media discourses frequently emphasize apocalyptic future scenarios, employing crisis tropes such as the inevitability of Russia attacking EU countries, coastal areas globally being submerged by water from melting glaciers, or the resurgence of new pandemics. For the sake of a healthy balance, it would be reasonable to counter this with retrospective perspectives characteristic of mythological narratives, highlighting past strategies of agentic coping and resilience.

DISCUSSION AND CONCLUSIONS

To build a meaningful link between traditional insights and modern prevention measures, we looked at mythological narratives to detect patterns of local-level spatial meaning-making and agency. Nevertheless, we do not try to idealistically claim that responses found in mythology always automatically support resilience toward and recovery from EHC. Besides, sometimes, the effect can even be relational, e.g., some myth-bound spatial agency can support psychological coping positively but impact physical safety negatively (cf. examples in O'Shea 2025: 190). We just want to emphasise that such patterns exist and need to be considered in crisis communication mediated for instance by the news media, crisis intervention authorities and systems, such as mobile crisis alert apps, to avoid obstacles to coping. By translating dynamic directional and landscape-related cues embedded in these narratives into digital real-time mapping features, collaborative crisis apps could help communities visualize hidden environmental health risks and adopt constructive location-tailored responses. As a future perspective, integration of crisis narratives, medical geography and human dynamics data with environmental risk models can be envisioned, enabling a sharper understanding of who is exposed to what hazards in what ways and why. Promising in the context of EHC are the ideas of Rossetto, who points out post-representational cartography which considers maps not as truthful or otherwise power-led representations but as embodied entities, open-ended processes and relational events involving complex networks of human and non-human entities (Rossetto 2024: 90); in addition, animated geovisuals that capture spatial EHC data dynamically could serve for better crisis information mediation (Slavik & Fish & Peters 2024). Ideally, these technologies should be capable of signaling cues for individualized agency within specific locations, such as GIS-based mobile tools that overlay risk maps and realtime alerts to guide users toward safe zones and behaviours based on their precise position. However, most existing mobile crisis management applications seem not to have yet matured to this level of spatially aware, individualized functionality and may prove useless anyway when a crisis is accompanied by power cuts that disable their usage.

Thus, hope should not be placed in technology alone; the multisensory, narrative-based approach given by real human interpretation remains essential for understanding crises and guiding responses as it derives from actual human reality. Narratives continue to order the world in crisis by picking from the vast inventory of events and bringing them together in a syntagmatic chain (cf. similar thought by Manovich 1999: 89), arranging events in a causal, often tradition-bound sequence, where each preceding element conditions the next and the narrative as well as the crisis that it depicts has a clear beginning and end. As indicated by our dataset, individual and community-level agency was one of the key elements in mythological narratives and continues to be so in

modern reasoning. Yet when such a need for agency conflicts with official discourse as the latter focuses primarily on threat and risk without hinting at options of individual agency, there is potential for increased fear and passivity (cf. similar findings in Qian et al. 2025) or the emergence of alternative forms of agency that challenge institutional narratives and power relations or are just impractical. We bring just one recent example to illustrate how even a wording conveying agency may not function properly without micro-level localisation. A message: “Aerial danger! Take cover!” was sent by the Estonian Emergency Alert System as an SMS and app message after a war drone coming from Russian territory mistakenly landed in Estonia on 25 March 2026. Instead of helping to ensure safety, the alert caused panic in many because it did not specify which and where the danger was and where people should take cover (see a media reflection on the case Ots 2026). However, the following day a representative of the Estonian Rescue Services Agency already acknowledged useful lessons having been learnt from the case, for instance that the message should have been distributed in a more location-specific way.

Although crisis narratives and related public communication actively participate in the production of the crisis as well as coping, there is still limited research on recipient feedback to spatial messages and the use of danger maps within communication related to EHC. However, there are yet some useful studies that have explored crisis communication and the actual coping patterns that emerge from it (Hannawa et al. 2024) or have proposed interactive context-bound risk and hazard maps for the public, specifically addressing the known unique challenges of risk communication (Dransch & Rotzoll & Poser 2010). Therefore, it is essential to further develop and empirically test participatory mental mapping and visual storytelling workshops, along with feedback sessions that explore the intersections of historical crisis narratives, contemporary vernacular crisis mappings and public crisis communication for better knowledge integration and greater trust.

ACKNOWLEDGEMENT

Project CHRYSES is supported by CHANSE and HERA and funded by the Research Council of Finland under Grant Agreement 369388, Research Ireland under Grant Agreement RI4046, UKRI/AHRC under Grant Agreement UKRI463, and the Estonian Research Council under Grant Agreement 4-8/25/14. The article is also related to the ELM project 8-2/20/3 and project TK215 (financed by Estonian Ministry of Education and Research).

NOTES

- 1 Reet Hiimäe was the lead author responsible for the main research design and manuscript preparation.
- 2 Under ‘crisis communication’ we understand (in line with CDC 2018) effectively informing the public by the news media and other communication services as well as state and local agencies responsible for crisis management while delivering situation- and location-specific messages with appropriate content, format and timing, as well as ensuring that communication is culturally accurate and responsive to the needs of the community in preparation for, during and after a crisis.

3 More information on the project can be found on the project webpage: chryses.aalto.fi.

MANUSCRIPT SOURCES

ERA – the folklore collection of the Estonian Folklore Archives

H – Jakob Hurt's folklore collection in the Estonian Folklore Archives

REFERENCES

Abuhaloob, L & Purnat, Tina D. & Tabche, Celine & Atwan, Zeenah & Dubois, Elizabeth & Rawaf, Salman 2024. Management of infodemics in outbreaks or health crises: a systematic review. *Frontiers in Public Health*, Vol. 12, p. 1343902. <https://doi.org/10.3389/fpubh.2024.1343902>.

Al-Dalal'a, Jakleen et al. 2026 [unpublished manuscript]. *Rethinking Crisis Mapping: Maps-as-Usual and the Possibility of Pluriversal Cartographies*.

Assmann, Jan 2011. *Cultural memory and early civilization: writing, remembrance, and political imagination*. München: C. H. Beck.

Augustin, Jobst & Andrees, Valerie & Walsh, David & Reintjes, Ralf & Koller, Daniela 2023. Spatial Aspects of Health – Developing a Conceptual Framework. *International Journal of Environmental Research and Public Health*, Vol. 20, No. 3, p. 1817. <https://doi.org/10.3390/ijerph20031817>.

Bandura, Albert 2001. Social cognitive theory: An agentic perspective. *Annual Review of Psychology*, Vol. 52, pp. 1–26.

Beleche, Trini & Kolbe, Allison & Bush, Laina & Sommers, Benjamin 2021. *Unvaccinated for COVID19 but willing: Demographic factors, geographic patterns, and changes over time (Issue Brief)*. Washington, DC: Office of the Assistant Secretary for Planning and Evaluation, U.S. Department of Health and Human Services. Available at <https://aspe.hhs.gov/reports/unvaccinated-willing-ib>, last accessed on 31 January 2025.

Borges do Nascimento, Israel Júnior & Pizarro, Ana Beatriz & Almeida, Jussara M. & Azzopardi-Muscat, Natasha & Gonçalves, Marcos André & Björklund, Maria & Novillo-Ortiz, David 2022. Infodemics and health misinformation: a systematic review of reviews. *Bulletin of World Health Organization*, Vol. 100, No. 9, pp. 544–561. <https://doi.org/10.2471/BLT.21.287654>.

Briggs, Charles L. & Mantini-Briggs, Clara 2016. *Tell Me Why My Children Died. Rabies, Indigenous Knowledge, and Communicative Justice*. Durham: Duke University Press.

CDC 2018. *United States Centers for Disease Control and Prevention. Crisis & emergency risk communication (CERC) manual*. Atlanta, GA: CDC. Available at https://www.cdc.gov/cerc/media/pdfs/CERC_Introduction.pdf, last accessed on 25 March 2026.

Dransch, Doris & Rotzoll, Henry & Poser, Kathrin 2010. The contribution of maps to the challenges of risk communication to the public. *International Journal of Digital Earth*, Vol. 3, No. 3, pp. 292–311. <https://doi.org/10.1080/17538941003774668>.

Dundes, Alan 1997. Binary Opposition in Myth: The Propp/Lévi-Strauss Debate in Retrospect. *Western Folklore*, Vol. 56, No. 1, pp. 39–50.

Dwyer, Harriet & Enria, Luisa & Beckmann, Nadine & Leask, Julie 2025. Trust and the infodemic: Reframing information threats in the realm of public health. *Critical Public Health*, Vol. 35, No. 1. <https://doi.org/10.1080/09581596.2025.2535084>.

Emirbayer, Mustafa & Mische, Ann 1998. What is agency? *American Journal of Sociology*, Vol. 103, No. 4, pp. 962–1023.

Fridman, Orly & Gensburger, Sarah 2023. *The COVID-19 Pandemic and Memory. Remembrance, commemoration, and archiving in crisis*. Palgrave Macmillan Memory Studies series. London: Palgrave Macmillan.

Gregory, Ian N. & Ell, Paul S. 2007. *Historical GIS: technologies, methodologies and scholarship*. Cambridge Studies in Historical Geography No. 39. Cambridge: Cambridge University Press.

Hannawa, Annegret F. & Spitzberg, Brian H. & Bhusal, Aneel & Harriman, Abbie & Little, Todd 2024. Pandemic Palliatives and COVID-19 Coping: Toward the Development of a "Coping with Crisis Communications" (COCCO) Scale. *Health Communication*, Vol. 40, No. 9, pp. 1585–1602.

Hart, Jonathan 2005. *Northrop Frye: The Theoretical Imagination*. Critics of the Twentieth Century Series. London: Routledge.

Hebert-Dufresne, Laurent & Ahn, Yong-Yeol & Allard, Antoine & Crothers, Jessica W. & Dodds, Peter Sheridan & Galesic, Mirta & Ghanbarnejad, Fakhteh & Gravel, Dominique & Hammond, Ross A. & Lerman, Kristina & Lovato, Juniper & Openshaw, John J. & Redner, S. & Scarpino, Samuel V. & St-Onge, Guillaume & Tangherlini, Timothy R. & Young, Jean-Gabriel 2025. One pathogen does not an epidemic make: A review of interacting contagions, diseases, beliefs, and stories. *npj Complex*, Vol. 2, article 26. <https://doi.org/10.1038/s44260-025-00050-2>.

Hiiemäe, Reet 1997. *Eesti katkupärimus*. [Estonian Plague Lore.] Eesti muistendid. Mütoloogilised haigused [Mythological Illnesses], Vol. I. Tartu: Department of Folkloristics, Estonian Literary Museum.

Hiiemäe, Reet 2004. Handling Collective Fear in Folklore. *Folklore: Electronic Journal of Folklore*, Vol. 26, pp. 65–80. <https://doi.org/10.7592/FEJF2004.26.hiiemae>.

Hiiemäe, Reet & Kalda, Mare & Kõiva, Mare & Voolaid, Piret 2021. Vernacular reactions to Covid-19 in Estonia: Crisis Folklore and Coping. *Folklore: Electronic Journal of Folklore*, Vol. 82, pp. 21–52. <https://doi.org/10.7592/FEJF2021.82.estonia>.

Hiiemäe, Reet 2024. Environmental folklore as a vernacular code of sustainability: The case of Estonian lakes. *Journal of Environmental Studies and Sciences*, Vol. 15, No. 3, pp. 636–647. <https://doi.org/10.1007/s13412-024-00974-6>.

Hiiemäe, Reet & Kalda, Mare 2025. Bridging Mythology and Science: Lessons from a Mental Mapping Workshop on the Perception of Environmental Health Crises. *Yearbook of Balkan and Baltic Studies*, Vol. 8, No. 2, pp. 135–157. <https://doi.org/10.7592/YBBS8.2.07>.

Hiiemäe, Reet & Filho, Saturnino Luz & Skarlatidou, Artemis & Massoodian, Masood & Butler, Jenny & Bogdanova, Victorija & Al-Dalal'a, Jakleen 2026 [in press]. From plague goats to Covid-19 bats: vernacular mapping of epidemics through animal representations. *Zoophilologica*, Vol. 19, No. 1.

Jacob, Binu & Mawson, Anthony R. & Payton, Marinelle & Guignard, John C. 2008. Disaster mythology and fact: Hurricane Katrina and social attachment. *Public Health Reports*, Vol. 123, No. 5, pp. 555–566.

Kitta, Andrea & Brodie, Ian 2020. Precedented: COVID-19 and Vernacular Response. Editors' Introduction. *Contemporary Legend Series 3*, Vol. 10, pp. 1–16.

Kropej Telban, Monika 2022. Emotions of Fear in Narratives about the Plague and the Contemporary Pandemic. *Studia Mythologica Slavica*, Vol. 25, pp. 7–25. <https://doi.org/10.3986/SMS20222501>.

Lévi-Strauss, Claude 1955. The Structural Study of Myth. *Journal of American Folklore*, Vol. 68, No. 270, pp. 428–444.

Manovich, Lev 1999. Database as Symbolic Form. *Convergence: The International Journal of Research into New Media Technologies*, Vol. 5, No. 2, pp. 80–99.

O'Neil, Moira & Simon, Adam & Haydon, Abigail & Kendall-Taylor, Nat 2013. *The Media Narrative of Environmental Health*. FrameWorks Institute. Available at https://www.frameworksinstitute.org/app/uploads/2020/03/Media_Narratives_Environmental_Health.pdf, last accessed on 30 December 2025.

O'Shea, Thomas Evan 2025. Myths Related to Disaster Response. In: Bimal Kanti Paul & Luke Juran (eds.) *The Routledge Handbook of Disaster Response and Recovery*. Oxfordshire: Routledge, pp. 188–201. <https://doi.org/10.4324/9781003414834>.

Olrik, Axel 1965. Epic Law of Folk Narrative. In: Alan Dundes (ed.) *The Study of Folklore*. Englewood Cliffs: Prentice-Hall, pp. 129–141.

Ots, Mait 2026. Venemaalt lennanud droon tabas Auvere korstent. [A Drone Flying from Russia Struck the Auvere Smokestack.] Estonian National News Portal ERR.ee. Available at <https://www.err.ee/1609976868/venemaalt-lennanud-droon-tabas-auvere-jaama-korstent>, last accessed on 25 March 2026.

Paal, Piret 2014. *Halltõbi*. [Ague.] Eesti muistendid. Mütoloogilised haigused. [Mythological Illnesses]. Vol. II. Tartu: ELM Scholarly Press.

Parker, Robert Christopher Towneley 2012. Pollution, the Greek concept of. *The Oxford Classical Dictionary*. Fourth edition. Oxford: Oxford University Press.

Petzoldt, Leander (ed.) 1994. *Sagen aus dem Burgenland*. München: Diederichs.

Qian, Sijia & Chen, Kaiping & Meng, Jingbo & Shen, Cuihua & Chen, Anfan & Zhang, Jingwen 2025. Fear in Media Headlines Increases Public Risk Perceptions but Decreases Preventive Behaviors: A Multi-Country Study During the COVID-19 Pandemic. *Journal of Health Communication*, Vol. 30, No. 1–3, pp. 29–39. <https://doi.org/10.1080/10810730.2024.2439468>.

Ramkissoon, Haywantee 2020. COVID19 place confinement, prosocial, proenvironmental behaviors, and residents' wellbeing: A new conceptual framework. *Frontiers in Psychology*, Vol. 11, p. 2248. <https://doi.org/10.3389/fpsyg.2020.02248>.

Rossetto, Tania 2024. From the Cartographic Fringes: Map Mobilizations and the Urban. In: Patricia García & Anna-Leena Toivanen (eds.) *Urban Mobilities in Literature and Art Activism*. Literary Urban Studies. Cham: Palgrave Macmillan, pp. 89–109.

Schreier, Margrit 2012. *Qualitative content analysis in practice*. Thousand Oaks: SAGE Publications.

Slavik, Catherine E. & Fish, Carolyn & Peters, Ellen 2024. Using geovisualizations to educate the public about environmental health hazards: What works and why. *Current Environmental Health Reports*, Vol. 11, No. 4, pp. 453–467. <https://doi.org/10.1007/s40572-024-00461-8>.

Sprengholz, Philipp & Henkel, Luca & Böhm, Robert & Betsch, Cornelia 2023. Historical narratives about the COVID-19 pandemic are motivationally biased. *Nature*, Vol. 623, pp. 588–593.

Stieb, David M. & Huang, Anne & Hocking, Robyn & Crouse, Daniel L. & Osornio-Vargas, Alvaro R. & Villeneuve, Paul J. 2019. Using maps to communicate environmental exposures and health risks: Review and best-practice recommendations. *Environmental Research*, Vol. 176, p. 108518. <https://doi.org/10.1016/j.envres.2019.05.049>.

Tally, Robert T. Jr. 2013. *Spatiality*. London: Routledge.

Reet Hiimäe is a Senior Researcher at the Department of Folkloristics, Estonian Literary Museum. Her main research subjects are belief narratives, protective rituals, spatial depiction of environmental health crises, contemporary folklore and the psychological coping aspect of folklore and religion.

reet.hiimae@folklore.ee

Mare Kalda is a Senior Researcher of the Department of Folkloristics, Estonian Literary Museum. Her research areas are treasure legends, geocaching, memes and contemporary folklore.

mare.kalda@folklore.ee

Masood Masoodian is Professor of Visual Communication Design in the School of Arts, Design and Architecture at Aalto University. His research interests focus mainly on investigating the role of visual design and visualizations in addressing a wide range of societal challenges such as environmental crises, ageing populations, public health and well-being.

masood.masoodian@aalto.fi

Andrus Tins is a Junior Researcher at the Department of Folkloristics, Estonian Literary Museum and a PhD student in folkloristics at the University of Tartu. His research focuses mainly on the dynamics of vernacular technology narratives.

andrus.tins@folklore.ee

Overall Picture of Shirak's Folklore Collection from the Mid-19th up to the Beginning of the 21st Century

ESTER KHEMCHYAN

PhD in Philology, Senior Researcher, Institute of Archaeology and Ethnography NAS RA
ekhemchyan@yandex.ru

MARINE KHEMCHYAN

PhD in Philology, Senior Researcher, Institute of Archaeology and Ethnography NAS RA
mkhemchyan@yandex.ru

LUSINE GHREJYAN

PhD in Philology, Researcher, Institute of Archaeology and Ethnography NAS RA,
Gavar State University
lgrejyan@yandex.ru

HASMIK MATIKYAN

PhD in Philology, Researcher, Shirak Center for Armenological Studies of NAS RA,
Shirak State University
hasvrej@mail.ru

Abstract: The article explores the collecting of folklore intangible heritage of the Shirak region. The authors have studied the historical processes of traditionality, mutual influences, formation and application of orally transmitted folklore genres among the present-day population of Shirak. According to Alan Dundes's approach of viewing folklore as a mirror of culture, the folkloric materials from Shirak are not only artistic expressions but also symbols of cultural identity (Dundes & Bronner 2007). Over the course of more than a century, diverse folklore materials have been recorded, published and studied in the Shirak region, with a significant portion of the original works being preserved in the archives of the Institute of Archaeology and Ethnography of NAS RA. The folklore heritage of Shirak encompasses the centuries-old history of the region, the movements of the local population, traditional practices, original ideas and accumulated knowledge. It reflects the process of formation of human society, and within this folklore heritage one can find remnants of forgotten fragments of mythology, customs and beliefs, providing an opportunity to observe the historical and cultural journey of the present-day population of the Shirak region, along with their spiritual and material achievements and losses in various expressions of the epic folklore.

The analysis of the study was primarily carried out by historical-comparative, historical-geographical, and anthropological methods.

Keywords: Shirak, folklore, folklore heritage, archive, recording of folklore materials, Armenian dialect, fieldwork, cultural preservation, ethnic diversity in folklore, epic, lyrical and paremiological genres

INTRODUCTION

The present-day Shirak region encompasses the northwestern part of the Republic of Armenia, which includes the Akhuryan, Artik, Ani, Amasia and Ashotsk districts (Hakobyan et al. IV 1998: 132–133). According to Anania Shirakatsi's "Geography" (Ashkharatsuyts), Shirak Province, known as Shirak Gavar, was part of the thirteenth district of Greater Armenia i.e. Airarat (Anania Shirakatsi 1979: 296). The name "Shirak" has its roots in tribal origins (Ghanalanyan 2022: 47), dating back centuries. Historian Movses Khorenatsi, while recounting the history of Armenia and citing his primary source Mar Abbas Katina, provides an account of the origin of the Armenian nation and the journey of Hayk the Patriarch and his descendants in Greater Armenia. According to the legend presented by Khorenatsi, Shara, who was the son of Aramayis and the grandson of Hayk's son Aramanyak, was sent to settle in the fertile and prosperous region beyond Mount Aragats, which became known as Shirak in his honor (Movses Khorenatsi 1913: 39, 40). Thus, the name of the region is derived from the ancestor Shirak. Foreign sources, including Xenophon, Ptolemy, Strabo, Herodotus and others, mention the Siracene region and the Sarmatian tribes known as the Siracs, who settled in this area after the invasion of the Sarmatian tribes. According to Armenian historian, philologist and source scholar Hakob Manandyan, their invasion was not aimed at conquest

but rather at gaining control over international trade routes (Manandyan 1984: 281).

According to Strabo's account, members of the tribe known as Shirak or Sirak were engaged in trade. They received goods from India and Babylon through the Armenians and Medes, transporting them northwards via caravans (Manandyan 1984: 281).

The hypothesis linking the toponym "Shirak" to the name of the Sarmatian tribe "Shirak" (Shar-mat) was first demonstrated by Kerovbe Patkanyan (Patkanov 1881: 112).

The ancient manifestation of the name "Shirak" in the form of a proverb was used by Movses Khorenatsi to add authenticity to his narrative, emphasizing the pivotal role of the bread-producing Shirak plain in feeding both the gluttonous Shara and his nephew.

Aramayis sent his other son Shara, who was a glutton, to a place reported as being very fertile and plentiful, and named this place Shirak after him. The saying "you may have Shara's gluttony and greed, but we do not possess the barns of Shirak" became proverbial (Movses Khorenatsi 1913: 40).

In his examination of the origins of Armenian proverbs, Aram Ghanalanyan, emphasizes the importance of unraveling the allegorical nature of proverbs and delving into their deeper meaning. He argues that toponyms and names of historical figures can assist in determining the approximate time and historical context in which a proverb or saying was created (Ghanalanyan 1960: XIV, XV). In this regard, the analysis of the proverb about Shara leads the researcher to the period of the formation of the Armenian nation and the resettlement of Sarmatian tribes, which occurred during the 4th to the 3rd centuries BC.

The historical authenticity of the aforementioned proverb about Shirak and Shara is further supported by the legend surrounding the Bandzerel caves located north of the village of Bash-Shorgyal in Shirak. According to this legend, the caves served as granaries for the gluttonous Shara (Ghanalanyan 2022: 39; Buniatov 1891: 141).

The history of the Shirak region is not only documented in the accounts of Armenian and foreign historians, chronicles and archaeological excavations, but it is also preserved within the rich collection of multi-genre folklore materials. These materials encompass traditions, conversations, myths and proverbial genres that have been passed down through oral transmission, providing intriguing insights into the centuries-long history of the indigenous population of the Shirak region.

A BRIEF OVERVIEW OF THE SHIRAK REGION'S HISTORY

The archaeological studies indicate that Shirak corresponds to the ethnic region known as Eriakh within the Ararat kingdom (Urartu) (Katvalyan 1982: 512; Dan 2020: 39, 40). For a significant period, Shirak served as the royal estate of the Armenian kings, which was later granted to the Kamsarakans by the Arshakunis. In 783, Shirak was sold to the Bagratunis. During the Bagratuni rule, Shirak witnessed an economic and cultural flourishing. In 1199, the Zakaryans took control of Shirak, but their reign was interrupted by the Tatar-Mongol invasions during the 13th and 14th centuries.

During the 15th to 17th centuries, Shirak faced frequent attacks from Turkmen tribes, Persians and Turks. In 1813, as per the Gulistan Treaty, and later in 1828, under the Turkmenchay Treaty, Shirak became part of Russia. In the 19th century, Shirak experienced a new economic and cultural revival, with Alexandropol (Gyumri) emerging as its center (Katvalyan 1982: 512–514). From May 1918, Shirak Province became a part of the Republic of Armenia. Since 1920, it has been incorporated into Soviet Armenia.

THE PROCESS OF FOLKLORE COLLECTION, PUBLICATION AND STUDY IN SHIRAK (LATE 19TH CENTURY – 20TH CENTURY)

This research encompasses the living traditions, circulation, collection and publication of folklore materials from the 19th century to the present day, providing insights into the manifestation and representation of the region's folklore heritage.

The Shirak dialect serves as the communication language of the indigenous population of the region. The Shirak dialect has not only maintained its vitality but also, because of undergoing demographic shifts, interactions and intermingling, it has evolved, acquiring new qualities over time that continue to be present in oral speech and within the context of folklore materials.

The collective memory of the population was also maintained by means of folklore heritage handed down from the depths of the centuries, to which were added the folklore values of the Western Armenian provinces handed down by the memory of the Western Armenian emigration. Historical memory has played an important role in the transmission and preservation of the cultural values of peoples around the world. This issue has also been examined within the framework of Irish folklore by Hilary Joyce Bishop (Bishop 2018: 22), whose theory shares common features with similar expressions found among other cultures.

The recording of Shirak's folklore history began in the late 19th century, during a time when the appreciation and collection of the spiritual heritage of the Armenian people had already become an integral part of Armenian history. Given its historical and ethnographic significance and the unique blend of

intra-ethnic layers resulting from the influx of immigrants from various settlements in Armenia, the Shirak region with its rich traditions, eloquence and ingenuity could not go unnoticed by collectors.

Throughout different historical periods, the preservation of oral traditions has been constantly under threat. Some aspects of daily life have been lost, leading to the fading of accompanying oral expressions.

For instance, we can consider work songs³ that accompanied agricultural practices and household tasks such as horovel⁴, sandi⁵, songs of pulley⁶, khnotsi⁷, and others which have been forgotten. Recognizing the detrimental consequences of such losses, it became crucial to document folklore materials in a timely manner and in appropriate settings.

The collection of folklore materials in the Shirak region can be broadly divided into three stages, each marked by the contributions of different collectors and institutions.

The first stage spans from the 1850s to the 1920s, and it includes collectors such as Agheksandr Mkhitaryants, Agheksandr Aprikyan, Kajberuni, Tigran Navasardyan, Yervand Lalayan, Hovhannes Kostanyan and others.

The second stage coincides with the period of the Second Republic of Armenia and is further divided into two subphases:

- a) The first subphase covers the 1920s to the 1960s, with collectors like Gegham Tarverdyan, Mnatsakan Tamrazyan, Khayat (Sukias Zahriyan), Nikolhos Nikolhasyan, Hambardzum Ter-Vardanyan, Vard Bdoyan.
- b) The second subphase extends from the 1960s to the 1990s and is primarily associated with the prolific works of the folklore department of the Institute of Archeology and Ethnography of the National Academy of Sciences of the Republic of Armenia. Collectors and researchers from the institute, including Artashes Nazinyan, Sargis Harutyunyan, Arusyak Sahakyan, Araz Karapetyan, as well as a group of intellectuals such as Barkhudar Ghaziyan, Paruyr Barseghyan, Hrach Mkrtchyan, Hrach Ohanyan, Stepan Khachatryan, Yeghishe Khachatryan and others played significant roles in the collection efforts during this period.

The third stage encompasses the 1990s to the present day and is primarily associated with the Shirak Armenological Research Center of the National Academy of Sciences of the Republic of Armenia. Collectors such as Karine Sahakyan, Hasmik Matikyan and others have contributed to the collection of folklore materials during this period.

The Collection of the Intangible Heritage of the Shirak Region from the 1850s to the 1920s

Motivated by national awakening, a desire to reconnect with their national roots, and inspired by the Russian and European experiences and achievements, the Armenian intelligentsia actively engaged in the collection of diverse demographic materials. In the late 19th century, there was still no clear distinction between ethnographic and folkloric materials, and collectors would record materials based on their personal preferences and interests (Vardanyan 1991: 29). The collection of folklore materials in Shirak Province, as well as its geographical distribution, were influenced by the travel opportunities available to these collectors.

For instance, Kajberuni (1837–1920)², during his extensive journeys and service trips to various provinces of Armenia including Shirak, Kars, and Basen, diligently observed and documented the lifestyle, customs, folk holidays and accompanying rituals of the local people. His original and multi-genre materials were published in books VII–VIII and IX of the *Ethnographic Journal* (Kajberuni 1901; Kajberuni 1902) under the title “Armenian customs”. Kajberuni’s collecting work was not merely for its own sake; it aimed to highlight the changing nature of Armenian customs over time.

...imperceptibly already forgotten, some are gradually forgotten under the influence of the new current of life, so only literature can preserve the forgotten. (Kajberuni 1901: 114)

Motivated by a deep desire to study and preserve national traditions, customs and songs, Kajberuni diligently recorded and published his collected materials and travel experiences. He took an independent approach to the materials he gathered, comparing versions of similar materials from different provinces, analyzing their similarities and differences and highlighting regional characteristics. While Kajberuni’s collection activities encompassed a wide range of pan-Armenian demographic materials, other folk collectors who worked specifically in the Shirak region focused solely on recording and studying the local folklore values.

As early as the 1880s, Agheksandr Afrikyan⁹ from Alexandropol (Gyumri) observed during his collection work that the population of Shirak was not homogeneous, with a significant portion consisting of Western Armenian refugees who had fled Turkish repressions and the Russian–Turkish wars. These refugees settled in villages of Shirak and, through their interactions with the local population, adopted local behaviors and customs, while also contributing their own habits, lifestyles, languages and spiritual culture from various regions such as Vaspurakan, Mush, Karin, Alashkert and others. This fusion of cultures resulted in the emergence of a new quality in the overall demographic

image of Shirak. The newcomers also enriched the Shirak dialect with their own linguistic styles and vocabulary.

When recording fairy tales, Afrikyan pays attention to the fact that:

... Each storyteller among us has his own speech styles and endings.
(Mkhitareants 1901: IX)

He observed that the folk colloquial language of the Shirak region can be characterized as a “multilingual language” due to the incorporation of foreign words, particularly from Persian and Turkish, which have found their rightful place within it. This linguistic phenomenon is particularly evident when examining the language used in fairy tales. Based on his observations, he came to the following conclusion.

To expel, to drive out foreign words from our folk tales, means to completely drain the folk spirit from them, to erase the folk pattern from them. (Mkhitareants 1901: IX)

Based on these observations, a method for recording folklore materials was created which aimed to faithfully preserve every word spoken by the native speakers. This method involved providing etymological explanations for unclear words on the spot and staying true to the original narrative without deviating from it. It was also crucial to investigate the linguistic roots, including the ancestral origins of the speakers, and to trace the sources and transmission methods of the material in order to study its evolution over time. It is evident that earlier folklorists intuitively perceived folklore as a form of artistic communication within small groups of society, a concept that received its theoretical formulation in the 20th century (Ben-Amos 1971).

During the 1870s and 1880s, Agheksandr Mkhitaryants (1846–1916)¹⁰, a resident of Alexandropol, diligently collected a wide range of folklore and ethnographic materials in the settlements of Shirak and Vanand¹¹, alongside his teaching and publishing activities. By 1887, his collection was ready for publication, but due to a lack of funds, it remained unpublished for 14 years.

Finally in 1901, Agheksandr Mkhitaryanc’s collection, entitled “Debris from Shirak’s barns”, was finally published in Volume A of the Eminian ethnographic collection (Mkhitaryants 1901). This publication marked the culmination of his efforts and contained a wealth of materials from the diverse folklore and ethnography of Shirak province, particularly Alexandropol. It was the first comprehensive attempt to collect, study and publish the demography of the region. In the same vein, in 1900, Mkhitaryants published the materials of Shirak’s lyrical folklore under the title “Songs and Games”. During this period, there was a growing emphasis on the collection and publication of folklore as valuable “raw material” for scientific study.

In 1899, Mkrtich Isahakyan (1870–1921)¹², another collector and educator, published his collection “Folk songs of Shirak” in Book E of the ethnographic magazine (Isahakean 1899: 200–212). Isahakyan recorded these songs from the residents of Gyumri and the surrounding villages. His collection included love songs, dances and popular local troupe songs, offering a glimpse into the lyrical folklore of the late 19th century in the Shirak region.

These publications by Mkhitaryants and Isahakyan played a significant role in preserving and documenting the rich folklore heritage of Shirak and contributed to the growing body of knowledge about the region’s cultural traditions.

Arshak Brutyan (1864–1936)¹³, a renowned musicologist and philologist from Alexandropol, made significant contributions to the collection, recording and study of Shirak’s lyrical folklore in the late 19th century; his folk songbook entitled “Farmer’s whispers” was so popular that it was published 4 times throughout 9 years (1895, 1898, 1901, 1904). Although he had recorded numerous songs, he only published the texts for various reasons. Unfortunately, during his lifetime, he was unable to publish the complete recorded version of his collection, which was ready for publication in 1898.

However, in 1985, Arshak Brutyan’s granddaughter, Margarit Brutyan, fulfilled his dream and presented the valuable collection titled “Ramkakan mrmunjner” (meaning “Folk Songs”) to readers. This collection contains folklore texts, musical notations and annotations of significant value, and it was published in two languages, Armenian and Russian (Brutyan 1985).

Indeed, Hovhannes Kostanyants also played a significant role in collecting and studying Shirak’s novelistic folklore and diverse demographic materials. In 1896, he presented his unique approach to folk materials and their processing in the book entitled “From the Legends and Folk Life of Shirak” (Kostanyants 1896).

The interest in folklore and ethnography, as well as collecting work, continued in Shirak Province at the beginning of the 20th century. In 1911, the ethnographer-philologist Yervand Lalayan conducted research and wrote materials in the villages of Shirak. Lalayan’s collection of tales from Shirak was included in Volume IV of the series “Armenian Folk Tales”, which presented tales from Shirak and the surrounding regions (HjH IV 1963: 15–194).

The collections and publications of folk collectors, including Agheksandr Mkhitaryants, Mkrtich Isahakyan, Arshak Brutyan, Hovhannes Kostanyants and Yervand Lalayan and the materials published in press provide a comprehensive picture of Shirak’s epic folklore from the late 19th to the early 20th centuries.

Folklore Collecting in the Shirak Region from the 1920s to the 1990s

As has already been mentioned, the second stage of Shirak’s collection of folklore materials coincides with the years of existence of Soviet Armenia. Shirak,

as a repository of multi-genre folklore materials, has always been the center of attention of field workers. After Sovietization, great changes took place in the life of the people, and the traditional way of life, habits, and even more so, beliefs were pushed into the background. Many things were forced out of life; the youth was guided by new ideas, new ways of living, and the traditional remained in the memory of the older generation.

Observing the folklore materials recorded in the first sub-phase of the first stage, we notice that in 1925–34, special attention was paid to the new manifestations of lyrical folklore. Field worker Gegham Tarverdyan traveled all over Armenia (including Shirak) and recorded new songs based on the needs of the time, the themes of which are mainly about the everyday life of the Soviet country, party leaders (Lenin, Stalin), collective farm life (“Tractor’s Song”, “Kolkhoz Game”) and about individuals and events of local significance (“The Haykino Fire of Leninakan”) (Tarverdyan FFI: 2349–3802). In this sub-phase, Mnatsakan Tamrazyan, ashugh⁸ Khayat (Sukias Zahriyan), Nikoghos Nikoghosyan, Hambardzum Ter-Vardanyan and Vard Bdoyan recorded multi-genre folklore materials from Shirak’s Amasia, Ghukasyan, Akhuryan, Leninakan and Pemzashen settlements; some of their manuscript collections are kept in the IAE archive. In the 1920s and 1930s, Herik Hartenyan recorded fairy tales from his father Ashugh Tsaghkaly (Melikset Hartenyan), biblical traditions, jokes, songs, samples of folk medicine, etc., which are atypical and are stored in the archive of the National Academy of Sciences of the Republic of Armenia (NAS RA).

Among the collections of this sub-phase, the works dedicated to the activities of Shirak’s ashughs stand out. The roots of ashugh traditions in Shirak go back centuries and ashugh song art is one of the characteristic features of this historical-ethnographic period. Field worker Mnatsakan Tamrazyan presented an original memorial-study about the ashughs who lived and created in Aleksandropol-Leninakan in the period 1830–1930, which is a valuable source for those who study this field.

The second sub-phase of the field work process (1960–1990) highlights the intensive collecting, research and publishing activities of the departments of folklore and documentation of folklore sources of the Institute of Archaeology and Ethnography, which also includes the folklore culture of Shirak region. In the 1960s, expedition groups (folklore-based) worked in the Shirak region (Sargis Harutyunyan, Artashes Nazinyan, Arusyak Sahakyan, Zhenya Khachatryan, Araz Karapetyan) who recorded multi-genre folklore materials both by hand and with a tape recorder, mainly from the older generation who had memorized the materials during their childhood. The collections of researchers were supplemented by the collections of amateur and volunteer collectors. Amateur field workers, mostly retired intellectuals, teachers, actors, journalists, state-party workers, within the scope of their interests in the villages of Shirak and the city of Leninakan, recorded multi-genre folklore materials, which are

included in the archives of IAE RA and present the traditional folklore materials preserved and still living in the region from the 1950s–1990s.

Each of the collections of amateur field workers is distinguished by the genres it covers, which represent the image of the region's epic folklore within 100 years. Born and raised in Alexandropol, Paruyr Barseghyan (who received his higher education in Moscow), presented the original face of the city of Alexandropol–Gyumri–Leninakan in his collections.

... it was the indispensable urban environment that with unique traditions, characteristics, lifestyle and psychology (that is, dialect, patriotism, religiosity, sloppiness, wit, humor, the ability to touch a person, unabashed love of song and music, a tendency to winged words, illegal with catchphrases and curses) was giving birth and food to jokes. (Barseghyan 1969: FFVI: 6638)

Paruyr Barseghyan presented the entertainers of this original city (Poloz Mukuch, Jgher, Tsitro, Kuzhik and others), famous ancient Gyumri dwellers, with their many stories and 1400 nicknames of people, each of which has an interesting story hidden under them, realizing and paraphrasing fairy tales, conversations, lyrical folklore and the whole Shiraki coloring of rhetoric.

The paremiological material of Shirak is the main core of the collections of field workers Anushavan Gevorgyan, Ashot Gevorgyan, Hrach Mkrtchyan, Hrach Ohanyan and others: thousands of proverbs and sayings, blessings and curses, tongue twisters, riddles, oaths and diminutive words.

The field workers have maintained the dialectal features and attached explanatory notes and glossaries of dialect words to their collections.

Folklore Collecting in the Shirak Region from the 1990s to the 2020s

The third stage of field work collections in Shirak coincides with the years of the Third Republic of Armenia (the 1990s – beginning of the 21st century) and is mainly related to the activities carried out by the Shirak Center for Armenological Studies of NAS RA. One of the goals of the Center's researchers is to collect and write down the currently living folklore materials and, through their research, to reveal and raise the issue of preservation, changes and genre manifestations of traditional folklore material.

The history of Shirak's field work shows that from the 19th century until today, a rich material of traditional folklore heritage has been accumulated; much more has been collected than studied or published, the publication and study of which is not equivalent to the collecting works. In the Soviet and post-Soviet years, the Shiraki volume of the series of Armenian folk tales was published by an academic publication (HJhH IV 1963: 15–194) and Shirak's traditional materials were included in collections dedicated to separate folklore

genres (Ghanalanyan 1960; Ghanalanyan 2022; Harutyunyan 1965; Harutyunyan 2006). During this period, individual amateur collectors, according to their preferences, recorded and published satirical conversations, witticisms, funny stories, jokes of folk art, etc. For this period H. Ikilikyan's "Gyumri, Poloz Mukuch and Satirical Paintings" (Ikilikyan 1989), H. Gevorgyan's "Leninakian Funny Conversations and Wits" (Gevorgyan 1989) and M. Hovhannisyan's books on "History, Ethnography, Folklore of the Village of Voskehask (Molla-Musa)" (Hovhannisyan 2005) are worth mentioning.

There have also been no separate scientific studies dedicated to Shirak's folklore heritage. However, at the end of the 20th century and the beginning of the 21st century, many reports dedicated to various issues of folklore were delivered at conferences organized by the Shirak Center for Armenian Studies of NAS RA, which were then published in the form of articles in the scientific research collections of the SSC (Sargis Petrosyan, Karine Sahakyan, Hasmik Harutyunyan, Ester Khemchyan, Marine Khemchyan, Lusine Ghrejyan, Hasmik Galstyan, Hasmik Matikyan, Raisa Khachatryan and others).

Multi-genre and rich folklore materials available in archives and separate collections are the basis of the foundation of the book "Shirak: The Folklore Tradition of Armenians", published in 2024 (Khemchyan et al. 2024). It will complete Shirak's folklore heritage of the 20th century in all its forms (epic, lyrical, paremiological), by mirroring the exceptional materials and providing prerequisites for future research. The collection will have an extensive preface, an explanatory dictionary of dialect words, notes, lists of personal names and place names, biographies of field workers and narrators, photos and a map. It is envisaged to present the foreword and some folklore samples typical of the region in English.

The modern studies of the Shiraki folklore culture assume the comparative and quantitative analysis of the written materials of the 19th and the 20th century, features of the life and reproduction of the folklore repertoire and genres, the historical necessity of the manifestations of novelties and modern value systems in the folklore texts and their analysis, responses to archaeologies and forgotten or obscured phenomena and their interpretation using modern scientific methods.

CONCLUSION

The Shirak region of the Republic of Armenia was named in ancient times and has passed through a long way, preserving its unique customs, beliefs, household features and rich folklore, which is reproduced in the Shirak subbranch of the Karno dialect.

The folklore fragments preserved in the pages of historiography and chronicles were filled in and the image of the folklore heritage of the historical region

was completed thanks to the efforts of field work that began in the mid-19th century and continues to this day.

Observations of folklore materials have shown that changes in the environment (wars, forced migrations, massive demographic shifts, coups, change of authorities, etc.) have affected the traditional folklore repertoire, as a result of which a number of folklore genres (myths, songs devoted to horovels, mortars, pulley and churn, etc.) have been pushed out of everyday life and a number of new and self-created ones have been put into circulation, folkloric works corresponding to the time.

From the combination and examination of written folklore materials of the 19th and 20th centuries, it turns out that traditional folklore genres were still preserved in the 19th century, the records of which provide an opportunity to study the part of Shirak's folklore heritage that has completely disappeared in the modern period, and the fragments preserved by inertia are not understandable to today's narrators.

It is obvious that the field workers have included as many settlements of the region as possible and aimed to save all manifestations of oral speech from loss for later publication and study. According to observations, the ethnic population of the Shirak region is not pure, which has left its stamp on the folklore heritage. The deportees from different provinces of Western Armenia enriched the folklore heritage of Shirak with their dialects, customs and folklore stories of their regions.

Shirak's folklore heritage includes the epic (prose-narrative: fairy tales, legends, narrative tales, memorates, jokes, etc.), lyrical (work songs, patriotic songs, love songs and dance songs, etc) and paremiological (proverbs and sayings, blessings, oaths, curses, prayers, riddles, etc) genres which are distinguished from pan-Armenian folklore materials by their local specificities, everyday life features, customs and vocabulary.

ACKNOWLEDGEMENTS

This work was supported by the Science Committee of the Republic of Armenia, in the framework of research project number 25RG-6B114 "The Folklore Heritage of Kars-Shirak Region".

NOTES

- 1 Archival materials have not been published yet. Some of the materials are to be published.
- 2 Kajberuni, also known as Gabriel Ter-Hovhannisyan, completed his education in 1858 when he graduated from Tiflis Nersisian School. The following year, in 1859, he was accepted to Moscow University and successfully completed his medical studies in 1864. For the next fifty years, he dedicated his career to serving as a provincial doctor. In addition to his medical profession, Kajberuni actively pursued interests in literature, Armenian studies, and ethnography.
- 3 Work songs are those folk songs that were primarily performed collectively during various work processes.

- 4 "Horovel" is an Armenian folk work song. It was performed by a group of men plowing the soil with oxen during the work process. "Horovel" is an ancient ritual song that, according to belief, ensures the future harvest.
- 5 "Sandi" songs were performed during the threshing of wheat on the threshing floor. The songs that were performed were called "sandi" songs.
- 6 "Khnotsu" songs accompanied the process of obtaining butter by churning the churn.
- 7 "Chakharaki" songs were performed by women who turned wool into thread by means of a spinning wheel.
- 8 The ashugh is a folk professional poet-singer-musician who composes a melody for his own poetry, personally sings, and accompanies himself with stringed musical instruments (e.g., saz, kamancha, etc.).
- 9 Agheksandr Afrikyan, a native of Alexandropol, had a close friendship with the renowned Armenologist Grigor Khalatyan. In 1880, Gr. Khalatyan included four tales written by Afrikyan in his collection titled "Pshrank Shirak's Ambars" (EAZA).
- 10 Agheksandr Mkhitaryants received his education in Alexandropol and later graduated from the Nersisian School in Tiflis. He was involved in pedagogy, book publishing and the collection of music.
- 11 Vanand province, located in the Akhuryan river valley, was part of the Ayrarat region of Greater Armenia. During the period under study, it was situated within the Kars region (Hakobyan et al. 1998: 753).
- 12 Mkrtich Isahakyan was born, lived and worked in Alexandropol. He was the brother of the poet Avetik Isahakyan. For many years, he dedicated himself to teaching and collecting materials.
- 13 Arshak Brutyan's entire creative, pedagogical and collecting life was connected to the city of Alexandropol-Leninak-Gyumri and the Shirak region.

ARCHIVAL SOURCES

Barseghyan, Paruyr 1966. Shiraki jhoghovrdakan banahyusut'yunic, dzeragir havak'atsn [From the Folklore of Shirak, Manuscript Collection.] Folklore Archive of the Institute of Archaeology and Ethnography of the National Academy of Sciences of the Republic of Armenia (FAIAE NAS RA) FAIAE FFVI: 6638 (In Armenian).

Tarverdyan, Gegham, FAIAE FFI: 2349-3802 (In Armenian).

REFERENCES

- Anania, Shirakatsi 1979. *Matenagrutyun (Hay matenagirner)*. [Chronicle (Armenian Chroniclers).] Yerevan: Sovetakan grogh. In Armenian. <https://archive.org/details/AnaniaShirakatsi1979/page/n1/mode/2up>, last accessed on 9 February 2026.
- Ben-Amos, Dan 1971. Toward a Definition of Folklore in Context. *The Journal of American Folklore*, Vol. 84, No. 331, pp. 3–18. Available at <https://www.jstor.org/stable/539729>, last accessed on 9 February 2026.
- Bishop, Hilary Joyce 2018. Memory and Legend: Recollections of Penal Times in Irish. *Folklore*, Vol. 129, No. 1, pp. 18–38. <https://doi.org/10.1080/0015587X.2017.1388006>.
- Brutyan, Arshak 1985. *Ramkakan mrmunjner*. [Peasant Songs.] Yerevan: Sovetakan grogh. In Armenian.
- Buniatov, Gr. 1891. *Pamyatniki drevnosti v okrestnostyakh seleniq Bash-Shuragel, Sbornik materialow dlya opisanya mestnost'ej i plemen Kavkaza*. Wipusk 13, 1 otdel. [Monuments of Antiquity in the Vicinity of the Village of Bash-Shuragel, Collection of Materials for the Description of the Localities and Tribes of the Caucasus, Issue 13, Section 1.] In Russian. Available at <https://cloud.mail.ru/public/4HiN/4usi4Ry1K>, last accessed on 9 February 2026.

- Dan, Roberto A. 2020. *Study of the Toponyms of the Kingdom of Bia/Urartu with a contribution by Marie-Claude Tremouille*. Roma: Scienze e Lettere.
- Dundes, Alan & Bronner, Samuel J. 2007. *The Meaning of Folklore: The Analytical Essays of Alan Dundes*. Logan: Utah State University Press.
- Ghanalanyan, Aram 1960. *Aratsani*. [Armenian Proverbs.] Yerevan: Publishing House of the Academy of Sciences of the Armenian Soviet Socialist Republic. In Armenian. Available at <https://www.mediafire.com/download/ca37x0v9glamzhu/Ghanalanyan-Aratsani.pdf>, last accessed on 9 February 2026.
- Ghanalanyan, Aram 2022. *Avandapatum, erkrord hratarakutyun*. [Armenian Traditional Narration.] Yerevan: Hayagitak. In Armenian. Available at https://ia601209.us.archive.org/13/items/GhanalanyanAvandapatum/Ghanalanyan_Avandapatum.pdf, last accessed on 9 February 2026.
- Gevorgyan, Henrik 1989. *Leninakanian zvarchali zruyts'ner ev sramtutyunner*. [Leninakan's Jokes and Funny Stories.] Yerevan: Hayastan Publishing House. In Armenian.
- Hakobyan, Tadevos & Melik-Bakhshyan, Stepan & Barseghyan, Hovhannes 1998. *Hayastani ev harakic shrjanneri texanwunneri bararan*. [Dictionary of Toponymy of Armenia and Adjacent Region.] Vol. 4. Ed. St. T. Melik-Bakhshyan. Yerevan: Yerevan University Press. In Armenian. Available at <http://www.nayiri.com/imagedictionaryBrowser.jsp?dictionaryId=61&pageNumber=3077> last accessed on 9 February 2026.
- Harutyunyan, Sargis 1965. *Hay jhoghovrdakan hanelukner*. [Armenian Folk Riddles.] Yerevan: Publishing House of the Academy of Sciences of the Armenian SSR. In Armenian. Available at <https://haygirk.nla.am/opactmpl/prog/images/Hay%20joxoxvrdakan%20hanelukner.pdf>, last accessed on 9 February 2026.
- Harutyunyan, Sargis 2006. *Hay hmayakan ev jhoghovrdakan aghot'k'ner*. [Armenian Incantations and Folk Prayers.] Yerevan: Publishing House of Yerevan University. In Armenian. Available at <https://haygirk.nla.am/opac-tmpl/prog/images/Hay%20hmayak.%20ev%20jox.%20heq.pdf>, last accessed on 9 February 2026.
- Hay jhoghovrdakan hek'iatner (HJhH) [Armenian Folk Tales] 1963. *Shirak*. Vol. IV. Yerevan: Publishing House of the Academy of Sciences of the Armenian SSR. In Armenian. Available at http://serials.flib.sci.am/openreader/jox_heqiatner_4/book/content.html, last accessed on 9 February 2026.
- Hovhannisyan, Marusia 2005. *Voskehask (Molla-Musa) gyughi patmutyunə, azgagrutynə ev banahyusutynə*. [History, Ethnography, Folklore of village Voskehask (Molla-Musa).] Yerevan: Areg Publishing House. In Armenian.
- Ikilikyan, Hrachia 1989. *Gyumrin, Polz Mukuchə ev ergitsakan manrapatumner*. [Gyumri, Poloz Mukuch and satirical miniatures.] Yerevan: Hayastan Publishing House. In Armenian.
- Isahakyan, Mkrtich 1899. *Shiraki joghovrdakan erger, Azgagrakan handes, girk E*. [Folk Songs of Shirak, Ethnographic journal, Book IX.] Tiflis: Martirosyantsi Printing House, pp. 200–212. In Armenian. Available at <https://arar.sci.am/dlibra/publication/116271/edition/106044/content>, last accessed on 9 February 2026.
- Kajberuni, Gabriel 1901. *Hajkakan sovorutyunner*. [Armenian customs.] *Azgagrakan handes*. [Ethnographic journal.] Books VII–VIII. Tiflis: Martirosyantsi Printing House, pp. 113–204. In Armenian. Available at <https://www.flib.sci.am/journal/ethno/1901-7-8.html>, last accessed on 9 February 2026.
- Kajberuni, Gabriel 1902. *Hajkakan sovorutyunner*. [Armenian customs.] *Azgagrakan handes*. [Ethnographic journal.] Book IX. Tiflis: Martirosyantsi Printing House, pp. 83–116. In Armenian. Available at <https://www.flib.sci.am/journal/ethno/1902-9.html> last accessed on 9 February 2026.
- Katvalyan, A. 1982. *Shirak. Hajkakan Sovetakan Hanragitaran* [Soviet Armenian Encyclopedia], Vol. VIII Yerevan: Armenian Encyclopedia Publishing House, pp. 512–514. In Armenian. Available at [https://hy.wikisource.org/wiki/%D4%BB%D5%B6%D5%A4%D5%A5%D6%84%D5%BD:%D5%80%D5%A1%D5%B5%D5%AF%D5%A1%D5%AF%D5%A1%D5%B6_%D5%8D%D5%B8%D5%BE%D5%A5%D5%BF%D5%A1%D5%AF%D5%A1%D5%B6_%D5%80%D5%A1%D5%B6%D6%80%D5%A1%D5%A3%D5%AB%D5%BF%D5%A1%D6%80%D5%A1%D5%B6_\(Soviet_Armenian_Encyclopedia\)_8.djvu](https://hy.wikisource.org/wiki/%D4%BB%D5%B6%D5%A4%D5%A5%D6%84%D5%BD:%D5%80%D5%A1%D5%B5%D5%AF%D5%A1%D5%AF%D5%A1%D5%B6_%D5%8D%D5%B8%D5%BE%D5%A5%D5%BF%D5%A1%D5%AF%D5%A1%D5%B6_%D5%80%D5%A1%D5%B6%D6%80%D5%A1%D5%A3%D5%AB%D5%BF%D5%A1%D6%80%D5%A1%D5%B6_(Soviet_Armenian_Encyclopedia)_8.djvu), last accessed on 9 February 2026.

Khemchyan, Marine H. & Khemchyan, Ester H. & Ghrejyan, Lusine Kh. & Matikyan, Hasmik H. 2024. *Shirak. Hajots banahjusakan mshakujty*. [Shirak. The Folklore Tradition of Armenians.] Ed. Ester H. Khemchyan. Yerevan: IAE Publishing House. In Armenian.

Kostaneants, Hovhannes 1896. *Shiraki lelgendanerits ev jhoxovrdakan kyanqits*. [From the Shirak Legends and People's Life.] Alexandropol: Malkasheants Publishing House. In Armenian.

Manandyan, Hagop 1984. *Yerker, hator E. Hin Hajastani ev Andrkovkasi patmutian mi qani problemneri masin*. [Works, Volume E. About Some Problems of the History of Ancient Armenia and Transcaucasia.] Yerevan: Publishing House of the Academy of Sciences of the Armenian SSR. In Armenian. Available at <http://serials.flib.sci.am/Founders/H.Manandyan%20h.5/book/index.html#page/8/mode/2up>, last accessed on 9 February 2026.

Mkhitareants, Agheksandr 1901. *P'shranq Shiraki ambarneric, Eminian azgagrakan handes*. [Debris from the Shirak Ambars, Eminian ethnographic collection.] Vol. A. Moscow & Alexandropol: Lazarian Seminary Oriental Languages Press. In Armenian. Available at <https://www.flib.sci.am/journal/eminian/1901-A.html>, last accessed on 9 February 2026.

Movses Khorenatsi 1913. *Patmutiun Hayots, ashkhata sirutiamb M. Abeghyani ev S. Harutiunyan*. [Armenian History by M. Abeghyani and S. Harutiunyan.] Tiflis: Martirosyantsi Printing House. In Armenian. Available at <https://digitale-sammlungen.ulb.uni-bonn.de/content/pageview/3345283>, last accessed on 9 February 2026.

Patkanov, Kerovbe 1881. *Vanskie nadpisi i znachenie ikh dlya istorii Perednej Azii*. [Van inscriptions and their meanings for Asia Minor.] Sankt-Peterburg: V. S. Balashev Printing House. In Russian.

Vardanyan, S. A. 1991. *Vklad Tigrana Navasardiyana v armyanskuyu folkloristiku*. [Tigran Navasardyan's Contribution to Armenian Folklore.] *Hay azgagrutyun ev banahjusutyun*, Vol. XVIII, pp. 5–58. In Russian. Available at http://serials.flib.sci.am/openreader/azgagrutyun_18/book/content.html, last accessed on 9 February 2026.

Ester Khemchyan, PhD in Philology, Senior Researcher, Institute of Archaeology and Ethnography, National Academy of Sciences of the Republic of Armenia. She conducts her research in the fields of the Armenian folklore epic genres, Armenian folk tales' stable formulas and epic portrayals of famous Eastern historical figures (Alexander the Great, Solomon the Wise, Dananda Bahlul, Khikar the Wise, Tamerlan, Shah Abbas, etc.). She is the author of more than 50 publications, one monograph and seven collections of folklore materials.

<http://orcid.org/0000-0002-3638-7855>
ekhemchyan@yandex.ru

Marine Khemchyan, PhD in Philology, Senior Researcher, Institute of Archaeology and Ethnography, National Academy of Sciences of the Republic of Armenia. Her research interests are epic folklore, specifically Armenian traditional fairy tales. She is the author of more than 30 publications, one monograph and three collections of folklore materials.

<http://orcid.org/0000-0003-4764-0876>
mkhemchyan@yandex.ru

Lusine Ghrejyan, PhD in Philology, Researcher, Institute of Archaeology and Ethnography, National Academy of Sciences of the Republic of Armenia, Gavar State University. Her research interest is Armenian paremiology. She is the author of more than 30 publications, one monograph and two collections of folklore materials.

<http://orcid.org/0000-0001-8755-3967>
lgrejyan@yandex.ru

Hasmik Matikyan, PhD in Philology, Researcher, Shirak Center for Armenological Studies of the National Academy of Sciences of the Republic of Armenia, Shirak State University. Her research interest is linguo-folkloristic study of English and Armenian lullabies. She is the author of more than 40 publications, one monograph and one collection of folklore materials.

<http://orcid.org/0000-0003-0032-5123>

hasvrej@mail.ru

Mythological Texts and Contexts in the Ritual Dialogues of the Russian Wedding Ceremony (Based on Materials of the 19th – Early 20th Century)

YULIA KRASHENINNIKOVA

Leading Research Fellow

Department of Folklore, Institute of Language, Literature, and History
Federal research center Komi Science Centre, Russian Academy of Sciences, Russia
krasheninnikova@rambler.ru

Abstract: The author considers the episode of the Russian wedding ritual “Groomsman opens the closed doors of the bride’s house” and analyses dialogues which are pronounced at this ritual stage. The ritual of opening the closed doors of the bride’s house is accompanied by a large number of riddles and questions with the cosmological motifs of gathering and structuring the Cosmos, texts on Christian mythology and folk mythological beliefs. The use of these dialogues can be explained by the specificity of the wedding situation itself: their utterance was intended to have a productive effect on the common space formation for both clans; the appeal to Christian mythology through saints’ lives and apocryphal literature allows us to evaluate the valuable and cultural qualities of the groom and his entourage. The correct answers to all questions and the fulfilment of the formulated tasks indicate the readiness (mental and physical) of the groom to

change his social status. The publications and archival materials recorded in the 19th – early 20th century in different local traditions and regions of Russia, also the texts recorded in some Komi traditions and in the territory of contact residence of the Russian and Komi populations, are analysed in the present article.

Keywords: Russian wedding ritual, dialogues, riddle, question-answer construction, mythological beliefs, cosmology

INTRODUCTION

Many ritual acts of the Russian wedding ceremony are accompanied by dialogues, as indicated in publications, archival and expeditionary materials of the 19th–20th centuries. Texts are recorded in many local traditions of Russia. Representatives of the bridegroom's family (groomsman, father or godfather of the groom, matchmaker, etc.) and the bride's family (brother, bride's father, bridesmaids, etc.), present guests and uninvited spectators participated in the dialogues at different points of the ritual.

In this article, we will focus on the ritual act of opening the closed doors of the bride's house as performed by the groom's party, from the perspective of the groom and members of the wedding procession. This rite was accompanied by dialogues with the motifs of the "werewolf", "the young prince overcoming obstacles on the way to the bride", "the groom obtaining keys lost or deliberately thrown into the sea by a girl"¹, as well as guessing riddles and question-answer constructions which are "riddling"² dialogues³.

The main participant in the majority of dialogues from the groom's party was a groomsman⁴, while different people (bride, father or brother of the bride, girlfriends, etc.) could act from the bride's side. In dialogues, the bride's family representative is assigned the role of "verifier", and the representative of the groom (the best man) plays the role of "verifiable". The process itself, as noted by Elli Köngas-Maranda, "is closer to academic testing than to creative problem-solving" (Köngas-Maranda 1978: 256), since it implies that the groomsman knows one correct answer to a question or riddle. That fact is emphasized by collectors and correspondents. The following collectors' comments on the question-answer dialogues recorded in different local traditions (italics ours – Yu. K.) are illustrative: "The groomsman was *usually asked* such questions, and that way he *had to answer them*"⁵; "[on the wedding day] they – [groomsman, groom and members of the wedding procession – Yu. K.] are still not allowed to enter the house at once, but are detained a bit in the hallway: there from the bride's house a few *obligatory questions* are offered to the groomsman. *Here they are these questions and answers...*"⁶

The inclusion of riddles in the wedding ritual is noted by many researchers. One of the first to have demonstrated the presence of riddles in the repertoire

of wedding participants and the frequency of guessing in the ritual was Aleksandr N. Veselovsky, who noted that the matchmaker's conversation with the bride's parents is conducted "exclusively in the form of riddles" (Veselovsky 1989: 182), and "the motif of competition with riddles and resourceful answers goes through all further episodes of the wedding" (Ibid.). Dmitrij K. Zelenin describes the riddle as a kind of residual phenomenon: the researcher explains the appearance of riddles in the repertoire of wedding groomsmen as a result of hostility, the bickering of two families, which took place in the past; according to Zelenin, the initial meaning of the propounding was forgotten, the riddles – in a modern wedding⁷ – transformed into simple jokes and witticisms, becoming the source of the "buffoonish element" of wedding speeches (Zelenin 1904: 179–180). The inclusion of the riddle in the structure of the wedding ritual as a "special ritual action" (Baiburin 1988: 134) and its use in the "culmination points of the ritual" is noted by Albert K. Baiburin (Ibid.). In the wedding, the riddle is a "means of ritual communication and a way of the opposition" between the parties of the groom and the bride (Ibid.: 135). Many valuable and detailed observations related to the conceptual status of the riddle, its origin and functions are presented in Vladimir N. Toporov's articles (Toporov 1994; 1999; 2010), to which we will refer in this article.

The ritual dialogue during the redemption of the "princely place" (a place for the groom near the bride in her house before the crown) was the subject of analysis made by Vladimir N. Toporov. The text was recorded in the Poshekhonsky district of Yaroslavl' governorate and published by Savva Derunov.⁸ According to the researcher, this "'riddling' dialogue consists of two kinds – verbal with subjects and purely verbal, the border between which is determined by the end of the collection of objects needed for the wedding ceremony. The first type of 'riddling' dialogue is a kind of a test for a groomsman to examine his 'practical' intelligence, the ability to make 'substantive' identification by its indirect metaphorical description. The second type of dialogue tests a groomsman for his ability not only to identify an object by its description but also to name it in a word, to find the name of the required object, corresponding to the metaphor contained in the question" (Toporov 1994: 24).

The existence of the border between two types of "riddling" dialogue is intuitively indicated by Pavel Shein in Savva Derunov's reprinted materials in 1900: "After that, when everything asked was given to a groomsman, riddles between the salesman and groomsman begin. These riddles are very diverse in local knowledge, mentality and customs, and depend on the knowledge of the salesman and groomsman" (Shein 1900: 655). (In Savva Derunov's publication we have not noted this observation.) According to Vladimir N. Toporov, dialogue from the Poshekhonsky district consists of "riddles-identifications" (Toporov 1994: 26), combining a verbally formulated question part and a "material" or a "practical" answer (Toporov 1994: 25), and riddles in which both parts were only formulated verbally.

"RIDDLING" DIALOGUES AT THE CLOSED DOORS OF THE BRIDE'S HOUSE: TOPICS, SEMANTICS, TEXT FUNCTIONS.

The basis for our analysis were two archival records made in the 1920s in the Nizhnyaya Vychegda basin, in the Ust'-Vymsky district of the Vologda governorate (now: Ust'-Vymsky district of the Komi Republic), presumably from the Komi-Zyryans. With respect to the logic of the dialogue composition, these two records were analysed earlier (Krashennnikova 2003); however, the finding of new records from different local traditions of Russia made it possible to pay attention to this theme once again and make typological observations.

Dialogues which are pronounced in front of the closed doors of the bride's house consist of attributive questions; riddles and questions related to mythological representations; questions related to cosmological and biblical themes; riddles with a formulated task; jokes-riddles, charades-riddles and texts built on wordplay.

Attributive Questions

The introductory part of the dialogue is represented by questions from which the representative of the bride's family obtains the necessary information about the groomsman and bridegroom (who is coming, who is sent and why, confession, territorial and national belonging of the arrivals), and the content of the answers may vary from concrete to abstract. In a number of records, the groomsman gives his data (surname, first name, patronymic) and the place where he came from (region, district, settlement), the name of the bride, the tsar who rules the country at present. In other texts, the groomsman does not call the participants of the rite by their own names, replacing them with household names such as messenger, prince, princess.

- *Who is going?*
- *Messenger (Ystöm mort⁹).*
- *From whom?*
- *From the young prince.*
- *What for?*
- *I am bringing a gift.*
- *What faith are you?*
- *Orthodox.*
- *Which kingdom are you from?*
- *From Moscow.*
- *Which state are you from?*
- *From St. Petersburg¹⁰.*

A few answers contain references to historical events, personalities, etc. For example, a dialogue noted from Russians from the late 19th century in Ust'-Tsil'ma (now: Komi Republic) preserved the fact of using this text by Old Believers and indirect indication of the time of creation of the text (after 1870¹¹): "... - *What is the tsar's name?* – Alexander Alexandrovich Romanov. – [His] Children? – Nikolay, Georgiy, Ksenia, Michail, Olga. – *What is the capital?* – Petersburg. – *What is your belief?* – The most real, Orthodox. – *New one?* – No, old one" (Maksimov 1890: 444).

A variant of the attributive riddle was written down in the Vologda territory. The representative of the bride, being behind closed doors inside the house, asked a groomsman standing on the porch:

- *Who is squeaking: a mosquito or a fly?*
 - *I'm neither a mosquito nor a fly,*
[I am] from the Holy Spirit.
After that, the doors are being opened and members of the wedding
*procession enter the house*¹².

The representative of the bride compares the groomsman with a mosquito and a fly. In folk belief, these insects are unclean, showing a kinship with amphibians; their ambivalence is emphasized by association with the underworld and the earth world¹³. The groomsman's negative answer, the use of the demonstrative pronoun "the same" (that is, "the same as you") translates the idea of belonging to the human, Orthodox world, the "identity" of people standing on both sides of a closed door.

In the record from the Novgorod governorate the bride's representative asks arrivals about their intentions: "*How have you arrived: with cunning or just like that?* (Kak prihal: s hitrost'yu ili sprosta?)". After that the groomsman gives the answers "*just like that*" (sprósta, in other words: with an open heart)¹⁴. The words "with cunning; for a reason / just like that" = "nesprósta / sprosta" are part of the ritual dialogue that accompanied any gratuitous or paid transaction (seeds, food, household items, pets). In the local traditions of the Russian North, there is a belief that a thing transferred for a reason (*nesprósta*) can be damaged; it can bring misfortune, illness, or ruin to the new owner. Giving the animal for a reason (*nesprósta*) the seller could "hold on to" such qualities of the animal as fertility, milk production, health, etc. (Krasheninnikova 2009: 35). The following utterance of the bride's representative, "To hammer three nails into your rear end, to hammer, wall you up, and send you back" ("zabit' tebe v zh..u tri gvozdy, zabit', zamuravit' i nazad tebya otpravit'")¹⁵ refers to the spell-incantational texts against the sorcerer, in which an iron nail is mentioned as a means of protection against deleterious effect¹⁶.

Riddles and Questions on Cosmological Topics

The ritual of opening the closed doors of the bride's house is accompanied by a large number of riddles and questions with motifs of the "gathering" and structuring of the Cosmos. The guessing of such riddles has a productive inspiration on the formation of the common space for both clans. The situation for pronunciation of texts on a cosmological topic, as Vladimir Toporov wrote, consists of the presence of a "certain 'threshold' marginal state and the main task is to overcome it (the world disintegrated into Chaos, from which the new Cosmos must be integrated) ..." (Toporov 1999: 54). Through these questions, representatives of the clans successfully clarify cultural values and the beliefs of the groomsman/groom (the "examinee") and the degree of their correlation with the views of the bride's family (the "verifiers"). This part of the dialogue allows both clans' representatives to verify the integrity and indivisibility of the world, information about which is owned by the bride's side, i.e. inside, and the groom's side, i.e. outside.

The questions about the "first occurrences" and "first people" refer to the mythical time – the time of the creation; this is probably why they are found first in the list of cosmological texts. In one of the dialogues, the groomsman is asked the names of the "first man" and "first woman"; in the pronunciation of these questions and answers, echoes of magic aimed at connecting the young are seen:

- *What is the name of the first man?*
- *Adam-headman.*
- *What is the name of the first woman?*
- *Eva-mother¹⁷.*

In dialogue recorded in the Nizhnyaya Vychegda basin, questions about the "first tsar" are followed by texts that are constructed as a "tautological-multiplicative game" (term by Vladimir Toporov, Toporov 1994: 51). In content and composition, they are close to the spiritual verse in *Golubinaya kniga* (Pigeon Book), containing information about the structure of the world and its "basic natural and social objects with the clarification of the first elements in each class of these objects" (Toporov 2010: 131):

- *What mountain [is] the mountain over the mountains?*
- *Favour mountain.*
- *What water [is] the water over waters?*
- *Jordan water.*
- *What stone [is] the stone over stones?*
- *A flint (bia iz¹⁸).*
- *What animal [is] the animal over animals?*
- *A bear.*

- *What bird [is] the bird over birds?*
- *A falcon-vulture (kan' vary'sh'¹⁹)²⁰.*

The content of the last three questions and answers refers to the Komi-Zyryan beliefs, in which flint and bear are endowed with a special degree of sacralization through their belonging to a higher deity. According to the Komi-Zyryan mythological version, flint was created by the supreme god Yen for people as a tamed fire (Konakov 1999a: 88). The bear was one of the most revered animals in the mythological representations of the Komi and was considered the son of the supreme deity, subsequently deprived of the right to live in the sky (Konakov 1999b: 269–271). Curiously, some answers to these questions are presented in two languages, which implicitly reflect the particular nature of the communicative situation.

In several parts of the Novgorod governorate the dialogues with the beginning line “what are you standing on?” and a chain-like type of text construction have spread. Thus, the questions and answers follow each other in a sequence in which the answer to each question prompts a new question:

- *What are you standing on?*
- *On the legs.*
- *Feet on what?*
- *On stockings.*
- *Stockings on what?*
- *On insoles.*
- *Insoles on what?*
- *On soles.*
- *Soles on what?*
- *On outsoles.*
- *Outsoles on what?*
- *On nails.*
- *Nails on what?*
- *On the floor.*
- *Floor on what?*
- *On the crossbeams.*
- *Crossbeams on what?*
- *On the pillars.*
- *Pillars on what?*
- *On stones.*
- *Stones on what?*
- *On the ground/earth.*
- *The ground/earth on what?*
- *On the water.*
- *Water on what?*

- *On fire.*
- *Fire on what?*
- *On a slab.*
- *A slab on what?*
- *On a fish whale.*
- *Fish whale on what?*
- *On three Amens*²¹.

The first questions and answers are devoted to the everyday life event and household themes. They are replaced with texts in the content of which an archaic mythological concept of the existence of the universe is presented: land on water, water on a fire, fire on a slab, slab on a whale, whale on three Amens (variants: the land is on the slab, the slab is on the water, the water is on the whale, the whale is on God's Amen (Sokolovs 1915: 352–353), the earth is on water, the water is on prayer²², etc.). In these texts, the world is described through “a certain alphabet, the units of which are the basic elements of the Cosmos” (Toporov 2010: 146).

In one of the variants of the dialogue with the beginning line “what are you standing on?” the list of questions and answers concludes with an imperative final statement, announcing the purpose of the arrival:

- [...] - *And the pillars on what?*
- *On the ground.*
- *And the ground on what?*
- *On fire.*
- *And the fire on what?*
- *On the beast.*
- *And the beast on what?*
- *And I am a beast myself, I have come to the bride*²³.

“Replicas” of mythological riddles are noted in the descriptions of the wedding ceremony of some local Komi traditions. For instance, at the wedding of the Komi living in village Shury'shkary' (Yamalo-Nenets Autonomous Okrug) a groomsman is asked: “How many grains of sand are on the seashore? [...] What is there more of in the forest: standing or lying trees?” (Plesovsky 1968: 60). At the wedding ceremony of the Komi-Izhmas living on the river Usa (Komi Republic) one finds that the riddles “On what is it softest to sleep? (On a hand), what has the best taste? (Dream), how many stars are there in the sky? (How many grains of sand on the earth, are there also so many stars in the sky)”²⁴ are registered.

The same texts are found in fairy tales about clever answers, for example, the plots “Seven-year-old (Wise girl): the seven-year-old answers questions-riddles of the king (master), performs difficult tasks, confirming her wisdom” (CIP 875); “Carefree monastery”: “the king asks whether it is high to

the sky, how many stars are in the sky, how deep is the earth , etc.” (CIP 922; AT 922). V. N. Toporov notes that this “kind of riddle question is constructed as a questionnaire of the main differential features in which the elements of the Cosmos are described with: What is the fastest? What is the thickest? What is the strongest? [...] These questions usually involve two kinds of answers – relatively speaking, ‘cosmological’ and ‘household’, one of which is considered false, most often ‘household’, and the other true – usually ‘cosmological’” (Toporov 2010: 127).

Bible-Related Questions

The next group of questions and answers allows determining the level of knowledge of Christian history, the plots of the Old and New Testaments, saints’ lives, i.e. to learn about the belonging to the Christian world of those who came for the bride:

- *Who after death was not buried?*
- *God’s mother.*
- *Who was taken up to heaven alive?*
- *Prophet Ilya.*
- *Who named Christ by Jesus?*
- *An angel named Gavril²⁵.*
- *Who was born and not dead?*
- *The human race.*
- *Who was not born, but has died?*
- *Adam.*
- *Who was born one time and died twice?*
- *Lazarus.*
- *How long from the birth of Christ to baptism?*
The correct answer “30 years”.
- *Who was born, was not baptized, and wore a God on himself?*
- *Donkey on Palm Sunday²⁶.*

Each question-answer pair refers to a specific biblical plot of the Old or New Testaments, representing the quintessence of this plot²⁷. The answer to the question “Who was taken up to heaven alive?” refers to the Old Testament character of St. Prophet Elijah, who, according to biblical tradition, was taken to heaven alive. According to the Gospel of Luke, the Archangel Gabriel announced good news about the birth of Jesus Christ to the Virgin Mary (“...you will conceive in the womb, and you will give birth to the Son, and you will name him Jesus”, Luke 1:28–33). A question about Saint Lazare refers to a story from the Gospel of John dedicated to the events of the resurrection of Lazarus (John 11:1–53). The correct answer – 30 years – to the question “How much time from the birth of Christ to Baptism?” (“Skol’ko vremeni ot rozhdestva Hristova do

Kreshheniya?”) is consistent with the Gospel of Luke, according to which Jesus Christ, at the age of 30, was baptized by John the Baptist (Luke 3:23). The question about a donkey, which carried God on its back, refers to the Christian holiday of the Lord’s Entrance to Jerusalem on the sixth Sunday of Lent: according to the Gospel of Matthew, Jesus enters Jerusalem riding a donkey (Matthew 21:1–9). The questions and answers “Who was taken up to heaven alive?” (Prophet Elijah) and “Who was not born, but has died?” (Adam) are close in verbal manifestation to a fragment of the Apocrypha, the “Conversation of the Three Saints”, cf: “Who was not born, but died; born and not dead; died, but not decayed?” “Adam was not born, but died, but Elijah the prophet born and not dead, was taken to heaven alive...” (Golubinaya kniga 2008: 193–194).

Motif of Overcoming Symbolic Obstacles

In the records from a few local traditions the motif of overcoming symbolic obstacles is actualized. In some question–answer pairs from Vologda governorate a bear sitting on the doorstep of the bride’s house and a wide river act as obstacles between bride and groom.

- *A bear is sitting on the doorstep of our bride. You will not pass.*
- *Our groom has a German gun. We will shoot. The bear will run away.*
- *Our bride has a very wide river, you will not cross.*
- *Our groom has a self-propelled boat; we will go over it²⁸.*

In the dialogical opposition “the river is wide – let’s cross the river”, the motif of “overcoming the water barrier” symbolizing the marriage (Plotnikova 2009: 13) is identified; ideas about the water crossing as a sign of gaining a new status are embodied²⁹. The bear’s image may have reflected ideas about it as a “guardian spirit” of the family or clan (Ivanov & Toporov 1992: 128); the bear has matrimonial symbolism (Gura 2004a: 212; Uspensky 1986: 102). The groom is portrayed as the owner of special items: possession of a German (var.: Turkish) gun or a self-propelled boat is a sign of his exclusiveness.

In the records of the Novgorod, Yaroslavl, Pskov and Vologda governorates, symbolic obstacles to the groom’s journey include “a huge garden with a high fence”, “a large birch in the yard”, “a gate overgrown with forest and thicket”, “a wall from earth to the sky”. For example:

- *There is a huge garden with a high fence in our courtyard and there is no way to her [the bride].*
- *We have taken a lot of people and tools: we will break your fence and certainly see the young princess (Arsenyev 1879: 39);*
- *A birch has grown in the middle of the yard, – neither horse can pass nor foot can go.*

- *We have both a saw and an ax. We will cut off your birch and tumble into a heap* (Ushakov 1907: 57–58).

These symbolic obstacles represent the bride's means of protection, and the verbal manifestation of them indicates an incantational formula of the iron fence (*zheleznyj ty'n*) (in charms: "iron fence from the earth to the sky", "stonewall, damask fence"³⁰). The image of the *garden* is a collective term-symbol for a group of garden plants, symbolizing, particularly, in Russian song-and-game folklore, *girlhood*, *girlish status* and its properties such as *beauty*, *purity*, *dignity* and *virginity* (Bernshtam 1991: 237–238, 252); the *birch* is the main symbol of the girl's will in Russian folklore (Ibid.: 246). In his answers the groomsman describes the actions taken to remove obstacles ("cut the birch", "break the fence"), i.e. through the metaphor of a broken, felled tree, the idea of a girl's initiation is expressed.

Motif of Performing a Difficult Task

In the texts with a formulated task, the motif "bridegroom searches and gets keys to the bride's house" is manifested (var.: egg, in which the keys are). The method of "inserting", which is widespread in the Slavic mythological tradition and reflected in texts of a mythological character (Baiburin 2005: 53) is realised in the texts recorded in the Nizhnaya Vy'chegda and Novgorod governorate:

- *Our bride sits behind twelve doors, behind twelve locks, all locks are closed and the key is thrown into the sea.*
 - *I walked through the forest, through midwood. [I] came to the sea. The island is on the sea. On the island is a birch, I hacked it away. A box is under a birch. I broke the box. There was a duck. The duck lost the egg. There was a key in the egg, it is in a pocket*³¹.

- *Your betrothed is far away: in the sea-ocean there is a large slab, under the slab is a box, in a box is a hare, in the hare is a duck, in the duck is an egg, in the egg is your intended [bride], you cannot get her.*
 - *When we were traveling across the ocean, a storm caught us, we lowered the anchor into the sea, unscrewed the slab and pulled out a large box, broke the box – a hare jumped out. Our dogs tore the hare. A duckling flew out of the hare – we shot this duckling and got an egg from it; broke an egg, but we have not found your intended [bride]. She is here*³².

Substantially, in the first text the best man's utterances discover an affinity with the plot of the fairy tale "Death of Kashchei in the egg" (CIP 302₁) in the part where the main hero, with the help of assistants (grateful animals),

obtains an egg in which lies the death of the bride's kidnapper and then sets his bride free. The difficulty of obtaining a key, like eggs in a fairy tale, is associated with a dangerous road, duels of animals and solving a wonderful task. Unlike the fairy tale narrative, the answer of the groomsman is devoid of conflict; the description in it is concise, but at the same time concentrated and mobile due to a large number of verb forms (walked, came, jumped, chopped down, smashed) and the sequential listing of spatial objects (forest, thicket, sea, island). Such an enumeration is characteristic of mythological texts in which the direction of the hero's movement to the mythological center is specified. The groomsman's utterance depicts in detail the situation of searching for an island with a birch, thereby playing out one of the main plot topics of the wedding speeches, "the long road to reach the bride – the road to another world"; again the image of the felled birch appears – the bride's metaphor (the image of a tree on an island in the middle of the sea refers to the myth of the world tree). The groomsman solves the task of finding keys like a fairy-tale hero: in a fairy tale, the hero, having found an egg³³, kills the enemy; in a wedding text, receiving a key is interpreted as receiving a bride. In the second text recorded in the Novgorod governorate, the response utterance is more dramatic and expressive: a storm begins, a hare jumps out of a raised box, a duckling flies out of a hare torn by dogs, and an egg is taken from the duckling.

In a text from the Nizhnyaya Vychegda basin, the topic of receiving keys thrown into the sea is extended by an additional storyline: together with the key, the groomsman should bring the head of a pike cut in a special way, which is an essential condition for getting the bride. Thus, the proof of the solution to the problem is not only the key, but the head of the pike:

- *She [tsarevna, i.e. bride] is absent; she lives on the island, in the castle. This castle is locked tightly. The key is thrown into the sea and it was swallowed by a pike-fish. Catch her, rip her belly, take her head, take the key and come here. Then you will see the tsarevna.*

- *I went by sea, I went by land, swam under a sail. I caught a pike with a long lance. I found a key, brought the head of a pike. My God, bless [me]. Open!*³⁴

We presuppose that the appearance in the text of the image of the pike is associated with Komi-Zyryan beliefs since in the representations of the Komi, the pike occupies a special place among other representatives of the ichthyo-fauna. Numerous signs and beliefs of the Komi-Zyryans are associated with the head of the pike: in particular, the jaw of the pike was considered "one of the most effective amulets to protect from witching charms" and was mounted above the door or near the doorframe to protect against evil spirits; the teeth were "the best means of facilitating childbirth" (Konakov 1999c: 341)³⁵.

Jokes-Riddles, Charades-Riddles

The groomsman's and the bride's representative's question-answer dialogues include texts that are based on a wordplay and rhyme:

- *Pitchfork or rake?*
- *Lord Jesus Christ is our Son of God, bless us! Not a pitchfork, not a rake – our horses are brave.*
- *A fox is under the porch.*
- *Lord Jesus Christ is our Son of God, bless us! We have a shaft-bow with a bell.*
- *A bear sits in front of the porch.*
- *Jesus Christ is the Son of God, bless us, our prince has all the harness in the set³⁶.*

Jokes or riddles designed for quick guessing are noted:

- *When building a house, where is the first nail hammered?*
- *In a hat³⁷.*
- *How many door handles are there on the bride's doors?*
- *Two times more than the doors.*
- *From what kind of kitchenware is the bridal couple forbidden to drink?*
- *From empty ones³⁸.*

Grigorij L. Permyakov classifies such questions as comic, noting their proximity to fables and one-step anecdotes (Permyakov 1970: 119). Dmitry N. Sadovnikov qualifies them as “questions designed for the unsteady”, “built on a wordplay”, “questions of a playful nature” (Sadovnikov 1959: 248, 249, 331–332).

A Few Words about a Modern City Wedding³⁹

In the dialogues recorded at the city wedding, the bride's clan representative is assigned the role of “formulating the task”, and the representative of the groom (witness) or the bridegroom is mainly “performing the task”. These dialogues are constructed to a greater degree as verbal-action exchanges: the task is formulated verbally; those arriving for the bride fulfill it through action. The improvisational component of this ritual act is considerably more extensive, especially on the part of the groom, since the dialogues are directly related to testing the practical skills of the groom and his witness (singing, dancing, drawing, playing, etc.). Tricky assignments are also included⁴⁰. References to cosmological topics or biblical literature are minimal. Dialogues in a modern wedding, as opposed to the traditional one, are closer to “creative search”; this is the verbal-action communication of the two parties' representatives. The

dialogue participants' repertoire includes questions on the identification of arrivals (who arrived, why), jokes-riddles, charades-riddles constructed on a play of words, designed for quick wit; questions with a formulated task that is not solved verbally but with the help of actions, i.e. by doing. In modern records, the actualization of the numerical code is fixed, in particular, on the number 7 ("the path to the bride lies through 7 locks, 7 obstacles"; respectively, the bridegroom is asked to solve 7 tasks); the number 3 (young people are invited to choose one of three glasses containing sour, bitter/salty and sweet drink – predictive function, etc.)⁴¹.

CONCLUSION

The ritual of opening the closed doors of the bride's house is accompanied by a large number of riddles and questions; the ritual dialogues in the records from the 19th – beginning of the 20th century consist of attributive questions; riddles and questions related to mythological representations; questions on cosmological or biblical themes; riddles with a formulated task in which the task and the answer are formulated by words. In records from the end of the 20th – beginning of the 21st centuries the episode "Open closed doors" also includes jokes-riddles and charades-riddles based on word play, as well as dialogues in which a question (task) is formulated in words, and the answer is in the form of words or real actions.

The functions of these texts are to identify people who come for the bride; to form a common space for both clans (Toporov 1999: 54); to clarify the value orientations of arrivals; to test the ability of the groomsman's representative (read: the groom himself) to overcome symbolic obstacles on the way to the bride. The ritual of opening the closed doors of the bride's house is accompanied by a large number of riddles and questions with the motifs of gathering and structuring the Cosmos, which is due to the wedding situation itself: *the utterance of such texts must have an effect on the common space formation for both clans, to affirm a shared understanding of the world's integrity – knowledge held both by the bride's party inside and by the groom's party outside. Appeals to Christian mythology through saints' lives, apocryphal literature and spiritual verses allow us to evaluate the valuable and cultural qualities of the groom and his entourage.*

In question-answer pairs, stories related to testing wisdom, performing a difficult task, a hero's readiness to change status, overcoming difficulties and obstacles on the way to the bride are implemented. The correct answers to all questions and the fulfilment of the formulated tasks indicate the readiness (mental and physical) of the groom to change his social status.

A further observation concerns qualitative differences in the subject matter of questions and answers. If records from the 19th to the beginning of the 20th centuries are characterized by the presence of a large number of texts on

cosmological topics, actualising folk mythological beliefs, using plots of the-ological literature, then in later records there are practically no references to topics related to cosmogony, and the questions and riddles involving improvisation and the performance of tasks predominate.

ACKNOWLEDGEMENTS

The article was written within the research topic (No. 126020216214-3).

NOTES

- 1 Motifs noted by A. K. Moreeva (Moreeva 1927: 118–119).
- 2 I.e. dialogue consisting of riddles. Term of V. N. Toporov (Toporov 1994: 24).
- 3 When analysing texts, we use such categories as riddle, question, guess, answer, question-answer, although we do not set a task of distinguishing genres. In particular, V.N. Toporov, when discussing the question of the origin of the riddle, notes that “it is not always possible to clearly separate the ‘riddling’ from the ‘question-answer’ and ‘dialogical’ [...] the origin of the riddle is in principle inconceivable without a history of forming question-answer structures and dialogical constructions...” (Toporov 1994: 99).
- 4 A groomsman is the main rank on the groom’s side; in the wedding ceremony he performs the functions of a representative of the groom, an intermediary between the bride and the groom, the master of ceremonies or manager of the wedding, sorcerer, jester (D. K. Zelenin was the first one who designated functions of the groomsman, see: Zelenin 1904: 174–176). D. K. Zelenin considers the name of a groomsman’s rank as “friend (of a groom), the other me” and explains this by the fact that “in the era of ‘kidnapping’ brides, such an assistant-friend was especially needed for the groom” (Ibid.: 174).
- 5 SA Komi SC: F. 1. Op. 11. D. 217. L. 271. Recorded by I. Razmanov in the Nizhnyaya Vy’ chegda basin, 1920.
- 6 RME. F. 7. Op. 1. D. 696. L. 38. Recorded by E. Ivanov in Belozersky district Novgorod governorate, 1898. Meanwhile, dialogue pronounced at closed doors demonstrates a great openness and ability to improvise. Correspondents of the 20th century and researchers commenting on the episode “a groomsman stands at the door of the bride’s house”, notes the unpredictability of the verbal “duelling” of the groomsman and the bride’s representative. In particular, F. V. Plesovsky, referring to materials recorded in the Komi Republic in the second third of the 20th century, notes that the person on the bride’s side, knowing “both prayers and the new law”, except the traditional questions related to the naming, clarifying the faith and purpose of the visit, asks the groomsman questions that allow to check “involvement” in the everyday life of the village society: “who rules the country now, who is the elder [in the village – Yu. K.]. Some people even ask how many windows are there in a bakery shop” (Plesovsky 1968: 60).
- 7 In D. K. Zelenin’s article, materials of the last third of the 19th – beginning of the 20th centuries are discussed.
- 8 V. N. Toporov cites in his article a fragment of the text recorded in Poshekhonsky district of Yaroslavl’ governorate from the publication of Pavel V. Shein (Shein 1900: 655–656), who, in turn, reprinted the essay by Savva Derunov (Derunov 1869: 122–124).
- 9 Sic! Ystöm mort – verbal translation from Komi: sent person, exiled person; in the Komi-Russian Dictionary – exiled (Beznosikova & Aibabina & Kosnyreva 2000: 764).
- 10 SA Komi SC: F. 1. Op. 11. D. 217. L. 271. Recorded by I. Razmanov in the Nizhnyaya Vy’ chegda basin, 1920.
- 11 Alexander III, Russian emperor, reigned 1881 – 1894. The list of children’s names of the Russian emperor does not include the name of his son Alexander, who, as is known, died in infancy in 1870 (1869–1870).

- 12 RAS. F. 104. Op. 1. D. 89. L. 89. Recorded by N. Ivaniczkiy in Ustyug district, Vologda governorate, 1891; variant of last line: "The same person is from the Holy Spirit" (Ordin 1896: 90).
- 13 In many local traditions, beliefs about the ability of flies and mosquitoes to transfer the souls of the dead to the next world are known. In Western Slavic faiths, flies are the devil's creation ("flies are the bees of the devil"); the devil and the witch can turn into flies (Gura 1999: 579–580; Gura 2004b: 340–343). In Russian beliefs, if a fly appears in the role of death harbinger, the appearance of flies in a house in the wintertime portends the death of a family member (Dal' 1995: v. 2, 362).
- 14 RME. F. 7. Op. 1. D. 796. L. 6. Recorded by V. Antipov in the Cherepovets district, Novgorod governorate, 1898.
- 15 Ibid.
- 16 Compare: "To put an iron nail through the ears of the sorcerer and the witch forever and ever. Amen, Amen, Amen" (Koldun' e da koldunu skvoz' ushi chtoby' proshel zhelezny' j gvozd' náveki-náveki. Amin', amin', amin') (recorded by Yu. Krasheninnikova in the village Loyma, Priluzsky district, Komi Republic in August 2006 from V. P. Shekhonina, born in 1932).
- 17 NM RK. KP-12498. L.132. Recorded by G. Starcev in village Gortshor, Ust'-Vymsky district, Vologda governorate, 1920.
- 18 Sic! *Bia iz* – verbal translation from Komi: firestone, in the Komi-Russian Dictionary – flint (Beznosikova & Aibabina & Kosnyreva 2000: 239).
- 19 Sic! *Kan' varysh* – verbal translation from Komi: cat hawk, kite. In the Dictionary of Dialects of the Komi Language – small buzzard, sarych (Beznosikova & Aibabina & Zaboeva & Kosnyreva 2012: 635).
- 20 - Kakaya gora nad gorami gora?
 - Gora Favor.
 - Kakaya voda nad vodami voda?
 - Iordan voda.
 - Kako j kamen` nad kamnyami kamen`?
 - Kremen` (bia iz).
 - Kako j zver` nad zveryami zver`?
 - Medved`.
 - Kakaya pticza nad pticzami pticza?
 - Sokol-stervyatnik (kan` vary` sh) (SA Komi SC: F. 1. Op. 11. D. 217. L. 271. Recorded by I. Razmanov in Nizhnaya Vy`chegda basin, 1920).
- 21 "– Na chem stoish`? – Na nogax. – Nogi na chem? – Na chulkax. – Chulki na chem? – Na stel`kax. – Stel`ki na chem? – Na podoshvax. – Podoshvy` na chem? – Na podmetkax. – Podmetki na chem? – Na gvozdyax. – Gvozdi na chem? – Na polu. – Pol na chem? – Na perevodinax. – Perevodiny` na chem? – Na stolbax. – Stolby` na chem? – Na kamnyax. – Kamni na chem? – Na zemle. – Zemlya na chem? – Na vode. – Voda na chem? – Na ogne. – Ogon` na chem? – Na plite. – Plita na chem? – Na ry`be–kite. – Ry`ba-kit na chem? – Na trex aminax" (RME. F. 7. Op. 1. D. 701. L. 12. Recorded by K. Cheremxin in Belozersky district. Novgorod governorate, 1898).
- 22 RME. F. 7. Op. 1. D. 704. L. 19. Recorded in Belozersky district, Novgorod governorate, 1898.
- 23 VSM. F. 155. Op. 10. D. 8. L. 90. Recorded by A. Supinsky in the village Seshkovo, Kirillovsky district of the Vologda region, 1946–1948. Compare: a groomsman at the entrance to the bride's house says about himself, "a shaggy beast going to a rich courtyard" (Krivoschapkin 1865: 105); "a shaggy beast, [goes] to a wide courtyard..." (Suslov 1901: 2). The expression "shaggy beast" in a wedding is associated with a bear, which is due to its role as the patron of weddings (Uspensky 1986: 102).
- 24 SyktSU: 2548–26. Recorded in village Abez', Inta district of the Komi Republic, 2000.
- 25 SA Komi SC: F. 1. Op. 11. D. 217. L. 271. Recorded by I. Razmanov in Nizhnaya Vy`chegda basin, 1920.
- 26 SAAR. F. 1222. Op.1. D. 14. L. 20–20ob. Recorded by N. Evfimova(?) in the village Vasukovo, Gryazovets district, Vologda governorate, 1926.

- 27 T. V. Tsiv`yan speaks about folklore and mythological plots, compressed into a riddle to the size of the formula (Tsiv`yan 1994: 189).
- 28 SA Komi SC: F. 1. Op. 11. D. 217. L. 271. Recorded by I. Razmanov in Nizhnyaya Vy`chegda basin, 1920; var.: RAS. F. 104. Op. 1. D. 89. L. 88ob.-89. Recorded by N. Ivaniczkiy in Ustyug district, Vologda governorate, 1891.
- 29 "... All types of water crossing point to a single area of origin: they come from ideas about the way of the deceased to the next world ..." (Propp 1986: 286).
- 30 About the formula of the *iron fence* (*zhelezny`j ty`n*) (Poznansky 1917: 245–253).
- 31 SA Komi SC: F. 1. Op. 11. D. 217. L. 271. Recorded by I. Razmanov in the Nizhnyaya Vy`chegda basin, 1920.
- 32 RME. F. 7. Op. 1. D. 701. L. 15-16. Recorded by K. Cheremxin in Belozersky district, Novgorod governorate, 1898.
- 33 The connection of an egg with the cult of the dead, fertility and rebirth in rites is shown in: Toporov 1967; Uspensky 1982: 73–75.
- 34 NM RK. KP-12498. L.132. Recorded by G. Starcev in village Gortshor, Ust`-Vymsky district, Vologda governorate, 1920.
- 35 The pike that the groom must bring to the bride's house (the motif of completing a difficult task in getting a girl) appears in Karelo–Finnish epic songs about matchmaking. Thus, the epic hero Kojo gets the task to catch and bring "a large pike with golden scales and golden stripes" (Karelian Epic Songs 1950: 55). In several versions of the epic song with the plot "Ilmoilline woos", recorded in the Vedlozersky district of Karelia, the blacksmith Ilmoilline must bring "a white-gray pike to the wedding table" (Ibid.: 328), "a gray pike from the bottom of the sea" (Ibid.: 331), "a pike from the river" (Ibid.: 335), "a gray pike for the wedding table" (Ibid.: 342).
- 36 - Vily` ili grabli?
 - Gospodi Iisuse Hriste, Sy` ne Bozhij nash i pomiluj nas! Ne vily`, ne grabli – u nas koni xrabry`.
 - Lisicza pod kry`l` czom.
 - Gospodi Iisuse Hriste, Sy` ne Bozhij nash i pomiluj nas, u nas duga s kolokol` czom.
 - Medved` na zapore.
 - Iisuse Hriste, Sy` ne Bozhe nash i pomiluj nas, u nashego knyazya sbruya vsya v nabore (SAVR. F. 4389. Op. 1. D. 401. L. 4. Recorded by Yu. Razsoxin in Vologda governorate, beg. 20th century). This kind of text was recorded in expeditionary records at the end of the 20th century:
 - *Pitchfork or rake?*
 - *It is not a pitchfork, it is not a rake, we have the brave horses* (SyktSU: 2345-37. Recorded in village Strigino, Podosinovsky district of Kirov region, 1993).
 - *Plow or harrow?*
 - *It is not a plow, it is not a harrow, and we have black horses* (SyktSU: 2326-9. Recorded in village Pleso, Podosinovsky district of Kirov region, 1993).
- 37 - Dom stroyat, kuda pervy`j gvozd` kolotyat?
 - V shlyapku (SyktSU: 2345-45. Recorded in village Strigino, Podosinovsky district of Kirov region, 1993; variant: "When Moscow was built, where was the first nail hammered? – Into a hat" ("Moskvu stroili, v chego gvozd` pervy`j kolotili? – V shlyapku", MSU: 16-3882. Recorded in village Lodejnoe, Podosinovsky district of Kirov region, 1988).
- 38 - Skol` ko ruchek na dveryax u nevesty`? [Otvet]: Bol` she, chem dverej, v dva raza.
 - Iz kakoj posudy` nel`zya pit` molody`m? [Otvet]: Iz pustoj (Recorded by Yu. Krashenninnikova in the Uchta of Komi Republic in January 1998 (AA)).
- 39 We use the expedition records from the end of the 20th-beginning of the 21st centuries, made in the territory of the Russian North and several recordings of the modern city wedding, the scenarios of which were devised by non-professionals.

- 40 For example, to pass in such a way as not to tear the stretched thread, while it is impossible to cut, jump, crawl under it. The task of drawing a bride allows checking the inventiveness of a groom who cannot draw well: for example, one groom painted a flower, explaining that this was the bride ("his precious flower") (Recorded by Yu. Krasheninnikova in the Syktyvkar of Komi Republic in April 1996 (AA)).
- 41 V. N. Toporov speaks of an obvious markedness, the sacred character of the numbers 3, 7, 9 and their derivatives which is confirmed by their predominant use in mythologically ritual contexts (Toporov 1980: 30).

ARCHIVAL SOURCES

AA – author's Archive

MSU – folklore archive of Moscow State University named in honor of M. Lomonosov (Moscow)

NM RK – folklore collection of the National Museum of the Komi Republic (Syktyvkar)

RAS – archive of the Russian Academy of Sciences (St. Petersburg Department, Sankt-Petersburg)

RME – archive of the Russian Museum of Ethnography (Sankt-Petersburg)

SA Komi SC – scientific archive of the Federal Research Center "Komi Scientific Center of the Ural Branch of the Russian Academy of Sciences" (Syktyvkar)

SAAR – State Archive of the Arkhangelsk Region (Arkhangelsk)

SAVR – State Archive of the Vologda Region (Vologda)

SyktSU – folklore archive of Syktyvkar State University named in honor of Pitirim Sorokin (Syktyvkar)

VSM – archive of the Vologda State Museum-Preserve of History, Architecture and Decorative Arts (Vologda)

REFERENCES

Arsen'ev, Flegont 1879. *Krest'yanskije igry i svad'by v Yangosare Vologodskogo uezda*. [Peasant Games and Weddings in Yangosar of Vologda District.] Vologda.

AT = Aarne, Antti 1961. *The types of folktales*. Translated and enlarged by Stith Thompson. Helsinki.

Baiburin, Al'bert 1988. Zagadka i ritual. [Riddle and Ritual.] In: *E'tnolingvistika teksta. Semiotika maly'h form fol'klora. T. 1. Tezisy i predvaritel'ny'e materialy k simpoziumu*. Moscow, pp. 133–135.

Baiburin, Al'bert 2005. *Zhilishhe v obryadah i predstavleniyah vostochny'h slavyan*. [House in Rites and Representations of Eastern Slavs.] Moscow: Yazy'ki slavyanskoj kul'tury'.

Bernshtam, Tat'jana 1991. Sovershennoletie devushki v metaforah igrovogo fol'klora (tradicionny'j aspekt russkoj kul'tury'). [A Girl's Coming of Age in Metaphors of Game Folklore (Traditional Aspect of Russian Culture).] In: A. Baiburin & I. Kon (ed.) *E'tnicheskie stereotipy' muzhskogo i zhenskogo posedeniya*. Sankt-Petersburg, pp. 234–257.

Beznosikova, Lucia & Aibabina, Evgenia & Kosnyreva, Raisa 2000. *Komi-Russkij slovar'*. [Komi-Russian Dictionary.] Approx. 31000 words. Editor-in-chief L. M. Beznosikova. Sykty'vkar: Komi knizhnoe izdatel'stvo.

Beznosikova, Lucia & Aibabina, Evgenia & Zaboeva, Nadezhda & Kosnyreva, Raisa 2012. *Slovar' dialektov komi yazy'ka: v 2-h tomah. T. 1: A – O* [Dictionary of Dialects of the Komi Language: In 2 Volumes. Vol. 1: A – O.] Ed. by L. M. Beznosikova. Sykty'vkar: izdatel'stvo "Kola".

CIP = *Sravnitel'ny'j ukazatel' syuzhetov: Vostochnoslavyanskaya skazka* [Comparative Index of Plots: East Slavic Fairy Tale] 1979. Contributors: L. G. Barag, I. P. Berezovsky, K. P. Kabashnikov, N. V. Novikov. Leningrad: Nauka.

Dal', Vladimir 1995. *Tolkovy'j slovar' zhivogo velikoruskogo yazy'ka: v 4 t.* [Explanatory Dictionary of the Living Great Russian Language: In 4 Volumes.] Moscow: "TERRA".

- Derunov, Savva 1869. Krest'yanskaya svad'ba v Poshehonskom uезде. [Peasant Wedding in Poshekhon District.] In: *Trudy' Yaroslavskogo gubernskogo statisticheskogo komiteta*. Edition V. Yaroslavl', pp. 103–133.
- Golubinaya kniga 2008 = *Golubinaya kniga. Slavyanskaya kosmogoniya* [Pigeon Book. Slavic Cosmogony.] Compiled, translated and commented by D. Dudko. Moscow: E'ksmo.
- Gura, Alexandr 1999. Komar. [Mosquito.] In: N. Tolstoj (ed.) *Slavyanskije drevnosti. E'tnolingvisticheskij slovar'*. [Slavic Antiquities. Ethnolinguistic Dictionary.] Vol. 2. Moscow: Mezhdunarodny'e otnosheniya, pp. 579–580.
- Gura, Alexandr 2004a. Medved'. [Bear.] In: N. Tolstoj (ed.) *Slavyanskije drevnosti. E'tnolingvisticheskij slovar'*. [Slavic Antiquities. Ethnolinguistic Dictionary.] Vol. 3. Moscow: Mezhdunarodny'e otnosheniya, pp. 211–215.
- Gura, Alexandr 2004b. Muha. [Fly.] In: N. Tolstoj (ed.) *Slavyanskije drevnosti. E'tnolingvisticheskij slovar'*. [Slavic Antiquities. Ethnolinguistic Dictionary.] Vol. 3. Moscow: Mezhdunarodny'e otnosheniya, pp. 340–343.
- Ivanov, Vyacheslav & Toporov, Vladimir 1992. Medved'. [Bear.] In: S. Tokarev (ed.) *Mify' narodov mira. E'nciklopediya*. In two volumes. Vol. 2. Moscow, p. 128.
- Karelian epic songs 1950 = *Karel'skie e'picheskie pesni* [Karelian Epic Songs.] Preface, Text Preparation and Comments by Viktor Ya. Evseev. Moscow-Leningrad: Publishing house of the Academy of Sciences.
- Köngas-Maranda, E'lli 1978. Logika zagadok [Logic of Riddles.] In: G. Permyakov (ed.) *Paremiologicheskij sbornik. Poslovicza, zagadka (struktura, smysl, tekst)*. Moscow: Nauka, pp. 249–282.
- Konakov, Nikolaj 1999a. Bi, ogon'. [Fire.] In: V. Napol'skikh (ed.) *Mifologiya komi*. Vol. 1. Moscow; Sy'kty'vkar: DIK, p. 88.
- Konakov, Nikolaj 1999b. Osh, medved'. [Bear.] In: V. Napol'skikh (ed.) *Mifologiya komi*. Vol. 1. Moscow; Sy'kty'vkar: DIK, pp. 269–271.
- Konakov, Nikolaj 1999c. Sir I, shhuka. [Pike.] In: V. Napol'skikh (ed.) *Mifologiya komi*. Vol. 1. Moscow; Sy'kty'vkar: DIK, p. 341.
- Krashennikova, Yulia 2003. Svadebny'j dialog [u zakry'ty'h dvorej]: logika postroeniya teksta (na primere nizhnevychegodskih zapisej). [Wedding Dialogue [at Closed Doors]: The Logic of Text Construction (on the Example of Records from Nizhnyaya Vy'chegda).] In: *Ryabininskije chteniya – 2003: materialy' IV Mezhdunarodnoj nauchnoj konferencii*. Petrozavodsk, pp. 54–57.
- Krashennikova, Yulia 2009. Charms and Incantational Magic of the Northern Russians (In Records of the Early Twenty-first Century). *Folklorica*, Vol. XIV, pp. 27–56.
- Maksimov, Sergej 1890. *God na Severe* [Year in the North.] Edition 4. Moscow: Izdanie P. K. Pryanishnikova.
- Moreeva, Angelina 1927. Tradicionny'e formuly' prigovora družhki. [Traditional Formulas of Groomsman's Speeches.] In: *Hudozhestvenny'j fol'klor*. Second-Third Edition. Moscow, pp. 112–129.
- Ordin, Nikolaj 1896. Svad'ba v podgorodnih volostyah Sol'vy'chegodskogo uезда. [Wedding in the Neighboring Volosts of Solvychevodsk District.] *Zhivaya starina*, No. 1, pp. 51–121.
- Permyakov, Grigorij 1970. *Ot pogovorki do skazki (zametki po obshhej teorii klishe)*. [From Sayings to Fairy Tales (Notes on General Cliché Theory).] Moscow: Nauka.
- Plesovskij, Fedor 1968. *Svad'ba naroda komi*. [Wedding of the Komi People.] Sy'kty'vkar: Komi knizhnoe izdatel'stvo.
- Plotnikova, Anna 2009. Pereprava cherez vodu. [Crossing Through Water.] In: N. Tolstoj (ed.) *Slavyanskije drevnosti. E'tnolingvisticheskij slovar'*. Vol. 4. Moscow: Mezhdunarodny'e otnosheniya, pp. 11–13.
- Poznanskij, Nikolaj 1917. *Zagovory': Opy't issledovaniya proishozhdeniya i razvitiya zagovorny'h formul*. [Incantations: Experience of Research on the Origin and Development of Incantation Formulas.] Petrograd: Tipografija D. V. Orlova.
- Propp, Vladimir 1986. *Istoricheskie korni volshebnoj skazki*. [Historical Roots of the Magic Tale.] Leningrad.

Sadovnikov 1959 = *Zagadki russkogo naroda. Sbornik zagadok, voprosov, pritch i zadach. Sostavil Dmitry N. Sadovnikov.* [Riddles of the Russian People. A collection of riddles, Questions, Paroemias and Tasks. Compiled by Dmitry N. Sadovnikov.] Moscow: Izdatel'stvo Moskovskogo universiteta.

Shein 1900 = *Velikoruss v svoih pesnyah, obryadah, oby'chayah, verovaniyah, skazkah, legendah i t. p. / Materialy, sobranny'e i privedenny'e v poryadok P. V. Sheinom.* [Velikoruss in His Songs, Rites, Customs, Beliefs, Fairy Tales, Legends, etc. Compiled and Arranged by Pavel V. Shein.] Vol 1. Second edition. Sankt-Petersburg: Tip. Imperatorskoj AN.

Sokolovy' 1915 = *Skazki i pesni Belozerskogo kraja: s vvodny'mi stat'yami, fotograficheskimi snimkami i geograficheskoy kartoj. Zapisali Boris M. i Yuri M. Sokolovy'.* [Fairy Tales and Songs of Belozersky Territory: With Introductory Articles, Photographic Pictures and Geographical Map. Recorded by Boris M. and Yuri M. Sokolov.] Moscow: Pechatnya A.I. Snegirevoj.

Toporov, Vladimir 1967. K rekonstrukcii mifa o mirovom yajce (Na materiale russkih skazok). [Toward the Reconstruction of the Myth of the World Egg (Based on the Material of Russian Fairy Tales).] In: *Trudy' po znakovy'm sistemam.* Tartu: Izdatel'stvo Tartuskogo universiteta.

Toporov, Vladimir 1980. O chislov'yh modelyah v arhaicheskikh tekstah. [About Numerical Models in Archaic Texts.] In: T. Tsv'y'an (ed.) *Struktura teksta.* Moscow: Nauka, pp. 3–58.

Toporov, Vladimir 1994. Iz nablyudenij nad zagadkoj. [From Observations on the Riddle.] In: T. Nikolaeva (ed.) *Issledovaniya v oblasti balto-slavyanskoj duhovnoj kul'tury: Zagadka kak tekst.* Vol. 1. Moscow: Indrik, pp. 10–118.

Toporov, Vladimir 1999. K rekonstrukcii "zagadochnogo" prototeksta (o yazy'ke zagadki). [Toward the Reconstruction of the "Riddle" Prototext (about the Language of the Riddle).] In: T. Nikolaeva (ed.) *Issledovaniya v oblasti balto-slavyanskoj duhovnoj kul'tury: Zagadka kak tekst. 2.* Moscow: Indrik, pp. 54–68.

Toporov, Vladimir 2010. O strukture nekotory'h arhaicheskikh tekstov, sootnosimy'h s koncepciej "mirovogo dereva". [About the Structure of Some Archaic Texts Related to the Concept of the "World Tree".] In: *Mirovoe derevo: Universal'ny'e znakovye kompleksy.* Vol. 1. Moscow: Rukopisnye pamyatniki Drevnej Rusi, pp. 107–161.

Tsv'y'an, Tat'yana 1994. Otgadka v zagadke: razgadka zagadki? [The Guess of the Riddle: The Key to the Riddle?] In: T. Nikolaeva (ed.) *Issledovaniya v oblasti balto-slavyanskoj duhovnoj kul'tury: Zagadka kak tekst. 1.* Moscow: Indrik, pp. 178–195.

Ushakov 1907 = *Krest'yanskaya svad'ba koncza XIX veka v Stariczkom uезде Tverskoj gubernii (svadebny'e obryady, gadaniya, prigovory, prichitaniya i pesni). Sobral A. D. Ushakov.* [Peasant Wedding of the End of 19th Century in the Stariczkiy District Tver' Province (Wedding Rites, Guesses, Speeches, Lamentations and Songs). Collected by A. D. Ushakov.] Tver'.

Uspenskij, Boris 1982. *Filologicheskie razyskaniya v oblasti slavyanskih drevnostej.* [Philological Explorations in the field of Slavic Antiquities.] Moscow: Izdatel'stvo Moskovskogo universiteta.

Veselovskij, Alexandr 1989. *Istoricheskaya poe'tika.* [Historical Poetics.] Moscow: Vysshaya shkola.

Zelenin, Dmitrij 1904. *Svadebny'e prigovory Vyatskoj gubernii.* [Wedding Speeches of Vyatka Province.] *Pamyatnaya knizhka Vyatskoj gubernii i kalendar' na 1904 god.* Vyatka, pp. 173–208.

Yulia Krasheninnikova is Head of the Folklore Department at the Institute of Language, Literature, and History, Federal Research Centre "Komi Scientific Centre of the Ural Branch of the Russian Academy of Sciences". A leading researcher, she specialises in the folklore culture of the Russian population of the European North of Russia, the textual study of folklore and the poetics of genres of the Russian wedding ritual. Her publications include more than 160 articles and reviews, as well as 5 books (3 co-authored).

<https://orcid.org/0000-0002-2045-4486>
krasheninnikova@rambler.ru

Analysis of Certain Aspects of Albanian Musical Folklore

ARSIM KELMENDI

Haxhi Zeka University, Kosovo
kelmendiarsim139@gmail.com

HYSEN NIMANI

Haxhi Zeka University, Kosovo
hysennimani3@hotmail.com

Abstract: The relevance of the key aspects of the musical culture of ethnic groups of Albania in the present period arises due to the intensification of globalisation processes and the resulting tendency towards cultural and everyday unification in the world. The study seeks to uncover the distinct features of Rugova's traditional music and other aspects of its folklore, including dances, games and attire. In the process of studying aspects of folklore, the following were examined: features of song creation; folk choreographic art; theatre performances and sports games; and the arts and crafts heritage of the region. Key categories of each branch of the folklore fund of the Kosovo Highlanders were established. The study identified unique characteristics of Rugova's vocal music, including monophonic texture, pentatonic scale with microtonal elements and traditional instruments such as *lahuta*, *çiftelia*, and *kavall*. It also noted the practicality and distinctiveness of local national costumes suited to harsh climates. The innovation of the research lies in viewing Rugova's oral traditions as a comprehensive system with various key components. Its findings can aid in understanding other ethnic folklore and are valuable for experts in musicology, cultural studies, folklore, history and ethnography.

Keywords: Kosovo Highlanders, folk art, ethnic traditions, costume ornamentation

INTRODUCTION

The problem of studying the unique and multifaceted folklore of Kosovo is relevant in the present period, since the era of globalisation, causing the effect of artistic unification of almost all regions of the planet, encourages scholars to cover the cultures of different ethnic groups in a deep and versatile way (Doszhan 2023). This effort is essential for both the preservation of their heritage and its promotion in the world. The study of this topic helps to reveal the uniqueness of the content of the folk art of the inhabitants of Rugova (the region in Kosovo, located northwest of its fourth largest city, Peja), as well as to reveal its local flavour, consisting of its inherent oral, particularly musical traditions. This favours the preservation of the brightness and diversity of the global panorama of national musical art and the possibility of its transmission to subsequent generations.

Specialists from different countries devoted their studies to the musical folklore of the Kosovo Highlanders. Thus, Nevrije Ismaili and Nerxhivane Krasniqi (2022) focused on the peculiarities of its song branch. The researchers note the peculiarity of the poetics of their songs, resurrecting the images of the ancient national epic, as well as the originality of vocalisation and means of musical expression (abundance of farshlags, glissando, free metre without marking the beat size).

Merxan Avdyli and Kyezio Veli (2022) devoted their study to the folk vocal genre of Albania, where the exploits of its warriors are sung (on the example of the “Song dedicated to the Battle of Chanakkale”). Jahja Drançolli (2014) gives a broader picture of the sources dedicated to the different spheres of the cultural heritage of the peoples who have inhabited Kosovo since ancient times.

Maryana Stamova (2022) emphasises the collisions of the political struggle of the Albanian population of Yugoslavia, in particular Kosovo, for the independence of the ethnos in various aspects: linguistic and cultural; territorial and economic. The historical path of this nation testifies to its realisation of the value of spiritual and material sources of the progress and prosperity of every nation on Earth.

Elsa Vula (2022) studied the concept of intercultural interethnic dialogue (UK, USA and Albania) in the context of globalisation. On the example of comprehension of the problem of artistic translation of texts from Albanian into English, the scholar reveals the importance of preserving and transmitting the unique qualities of the creative heritage of Albania in the context of foreign artistic traditions that are gaining global significance. Denis Bizhga (2020) highlights the fact of spreading folklore sources in all spheres of modern art of the Albanians: music; choreography; acting. The scholar emphasises its ancient origin, uniqueness, versatility and breadth.

The aforementioned studies are relevant for revealing aspects of the folklore of the inhabitants of Rugova, one of the regions of Kosovo. However, they aimed to highlight only certain aspects of the vast complex problem related to the folklore of the Kosovo Highlanders. The research aims to reveal the peculiarities of the national musical creativity and other folklore (dances, games and costumes) of Rugova. It is based on the study of original materials: manuscripts of songs, video recordings of dances, as well as game performances and costumes of the region. One of the tasks of this publication was to identify the characteristic features of the vocal branch of the national art of the Kosovo Highlanders' oral tradition. Another task here was to analyse the peculiarities of the choreography of the inhabitants of Rugova in modern times.

MATERIALS AND METHODS

The study focused on the Rugova region's folklore, analysing dance videos of Albanian ensembles and song manuscripts highlighting heroic to political themes. These sources provided insight into the distinctiveness of Kosovo Highlanders' folk art through their music's harmonic and rhythmic patterns, dance choreography, costume designs and gameplay. The research applied both theoretical and empirical methods to dissect the musical folklore of Rugova. Analysis was performed on both the manuscripts and the videos showcasing the regional choreography and costumes of all ages, establishing a modern database to widely share the traditional art of the Kosovo Highlanders. This enabled a comprehensive examination of Rugova's ethnic culture, including dress styles, dance plots, movements and the musical framework. Systematization was employed to navigate the diversity found in online resources regarding the genre and narrative slants of Kosovo's musical folklore. This process was instrumental in delineating the region's unique artistic expressions for further scholarly exploration. Thanks to the method noted above, examples of the folk vocal (Figures 1–3) and choreographic heritage of the Kosovo Highlanders (Noli – Vallja e Rugoves 2012; Shota Ensemble Kosovo 2014; Rugova [Ansambli] – Valle 2018; Albanske igre iz... 2022) were presented separately from each other (hereinafter – analysed). In the context of studying this problem, the method of analysis was implemented.



Figure 1. “There was confusion in Kosovo’s field”

Source: Albanske igre iz... 2022.



Figure 2. “What are these tears that the wind is making?”

Source: Albanske igre iz... 2022.

♩ = 75 8.2 sec. (3.2 sec.)
 (o) O po fjal' - o për tel - ih

♩ = 70 11 sec. (5 sec.)
 e ja po thuj - je Gja - ko - ve-es-o-u

9.2 sec. (4.1 sec.)
 (o) e aj tha çou e - de - el

10 sec. (4 sec.)
 e ja po thu - je - e - e Gja - ko - u

11 sec.
 e o e tha çou - jo - ou e - de - e - el - ou.

1. ndonjë këshu
 e -

Fin. o

Figure 3. "O po fjal' o për tel ih" (It is about the wire, eh)

Source: Albanske igre iz... 2022.

The need for analysis was caused by the necessity to identify the artistic features of the Kosovo Highlanders' folk art, which are inherent only to it and determine its uniqueness. Analysis was used to reveal the peculiarities of the ethnic style of the inhabitants of Rugova, depicted in clothing, music, choreography and theatrical play art. Through the method of synthesis, it was possible to achieve the unification of key elements of Kosovo folklore. The role of the method of synthesis was to provide a large-scale detailed and complete picture (panorama) of the cultural, artistic and spiritual traditions of one of the brightest autochthonous ethnic groups in the Balkans. The synthesis achieved the result of broadcasting a holistic picture of the unique folklore heritage of Rugova, as a centre of preservation of ancient traditions and a basis for their popularisation in the modern world.

RESULTS

Song and Musical Folk Art of the Kosovo Highlanders

The folklore of Rugova was found to be unique, vivid, inimitable and characterised by the presence of a whole range of branches. The samples of folk art of the indigenous population of Rugova, in the process of its historical, spiritual, political and cultural journey, are divided into several volume groups, each of which includes many varieties of genre direction, which has in its context a leading importance.

Central to Rugova folklore cultural heritage are four main components:

- songs: these represent the vocal traditions, melodies and narratives passed down through generations;
- dances: choreographed movements and rituals that often accompany the songs and depict stories or traditions;
- games: traditional games that might be recreational, ritualistic or symbolic, often integrated into festivals or communal gatherings;
- arts and crafts (costumes): this encompasses the tangible artifacts, especially the traditional costumes, reflecting the region's history, identity and craftsmanship.

Each of these components offers a unique window into the cultural and artistic fabric of Rugova.

One of the extensive branches of the musical art of the oral tradition in Rugova is represented by songs. Central to this tradition are four key facets:

- execution principle: this pertains to the manner or method in which the songs are performed or presented;
- rhythm basis: this aspect focuses on the foundational rhythmic patterns, beats and tempo that characterize the songs;
- genre orientation and its peculiarities: this highlights the different song genres within the oral tradition and their distinct features or nuances;
- specificity of interpretation and its representatives: this sheds light on the unique ways the songs are interpreted and the notable figures or representatives who are recognized for their interpretations.

Collectively, these elements provide a comprehensive understanding of the intricacies involved in oral tradition songwriting.

The peculiarity of the performance of Kosovo songs in the context of oral tradition is monody, as a principle of transmission of the main musical material, which is characteristic of many ethnic cultures around the world (Obukhova 2019). There is also an ensemble variety of vocal creativity. In this case, the singer is accompanied by one of the instruments that have become widespread in the region in question. These are localised varieties of stringed instruments (lute, *çiftelia* (Figure 4)) as well as wind instruments (*kavalli* (Figure 5)).

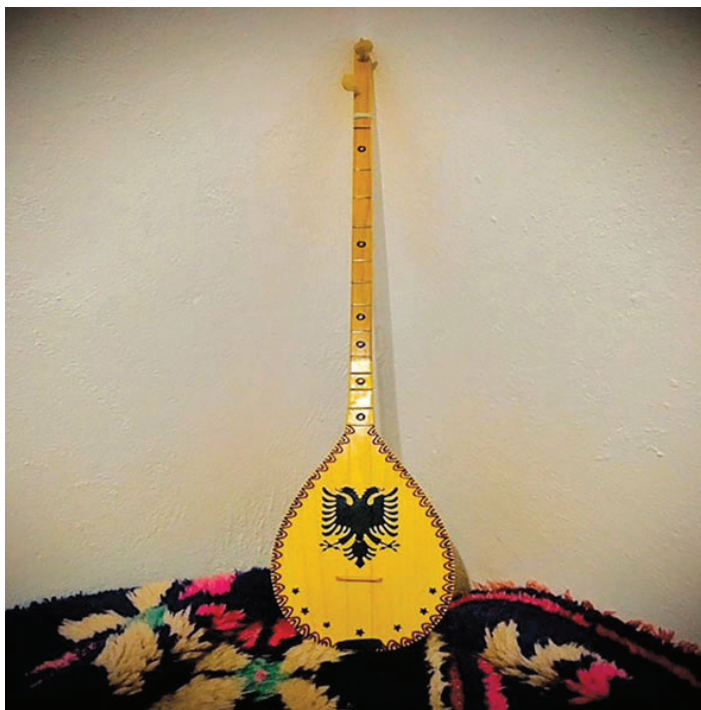


Figure 4. String and plucked instrument (*çiftelia*) of the Rugova folk instrumentalists.



Figure 5. Traditional wind musical instrument of the inhabitants of Kosovo (Rugova): *kavall*.

The *çiftelia* (chiftelia) has two strings (one of them performing the function of melodic transmission, the other – the accompanying background) and is characterised by a matte, slightly muffled sound, which becomes more resonant when the necessary playing techniques are used to achieve such an effect. Thus, the *çiftelia* is related to the string and plucked saz popular in Transcaucasia (Azerbaijan) and the tanbur in Central Asia (Uzbekistan, Afghanistan).

The *lahuta* (Figure 6), a string and bowed instrument that is a prototype of the single-string violin, is also highly revered among the inhabitants of Rugova. Craftsmen who make it often decorate the body of the *lahuta* with carvings in the form of figures of mythological characters from ancient times (Zymer 2018). The *kavall* (a type of flute with a chromatic, twelve-step structure within an octave) also gives a special flavour to the sound of folk instrumental and vocal-instrumental music of the Rugova region. This instrumentation, representing several local variants of string and wind families adopted in different countries, is characterised by its timbre uniqueness, which emphasises the uniqueness and originality of the folklore of the Kosovo Highlanders (inhabitants of Rugova).



Figure 6. Traditional single-stringed musical instrument: *lahuta*.

The harmonic basis of the folk songs of Rugova is pentatonic (no semitone sound order), with both major and minor inclinations (Rexhep 1987). One of the characteristic features of the intonational structure of vocal samples from this region of Kosovo is the presence of some elements of the microtonal (intervals, less than a semitone) system. It is most often found in those turns of melody where melismas and glissandos are used.

Among the most common genres of vocal creativity of the Kosovo highlanders of Rugova are epic songs (there are more than fifty of them): “Zhuq Selmani”; “Dem Isufi and Regjë Avdin”; “Meta i balit Zog Asllani”; “Muja e Halili”; “Kush po del për qaf t’qakorrit”.

Genres of women’s lyrical songs (lullabies, love songs) and labour songs (timed to hay harvesting), as well as ritual songs (meal preparation), are no less known. Female vocal performances (lyrics, etc.) were popular songs: “I jeoooo uoooo” (I jeoooo uoooo); “Në der të t’banit kush po kjan” (At the door of the house, who is crying); “Bajram Curri” (Bajram Curri); “Këngë për Skenderbeun” (Song for Skanderbeg); “Boll e mirë si po mbledh sane” (So good how she is gathering the hay); “Na u pre dhia na u pre capi” (The goat was slaughtered, the ram was slaughtered). The song folklore of Rugova is characterised by artistic samples sung by both male and female voices. These are songs—feelings of men and women towards each other, and songs—love games, which also depict a deeply heartfelt, tender perception of Kosovo’s native nature and attitude towards it (Nikçi 2018).

The specificity of the performance of Rugova folk songs conveys the temperament, the character of ethnic mentality formed by climatic conditions and historical and political events. It is captured in the stylistic varieties of interpretation of the vocal text. Among them, authors should name the tunes associated with a certain arrangement of hands (elements of plasticity): “*majekrahu*” (the top of the arm); “*permbi krahu*” (for over arm); “*perkrye krahu*”; “*paskrahu*”; “*gishtin pas veshit*” (with finger behind the ear). The “*termalçe*”; “*piskë*”; “*përperjetë*” (uphill); “*asqerqe*” are also known (Tole 1999). As performers of the epic genre of Rugova folk songs, history has preserved the names of singer and lute player Hysen Selman Husaj (1791–1876); Bajram Nikqi; Hysen Nikqi. Singers and lute players: Halil Fazli Nikqi; Shaban Groshi; Isa Elez Muriqi; Hysen Kurti; Sadik Abazi; Asllan Rame Kastrati (Mathieu 2007). Women performers of song folklore of Kosovo (Rugova): Lulavere Shabani; Zoje Malesorja; Shpresa Lajqi; Lake Hagjia (Mother Lake) (Muriqi 1997).

The present study analysed several songs of the Kosovo Highlanders. One of them is called “N’Fush’ t’Kosov’s u mledh’ telalli” (In the Field of Kosovo gathered Shout). Its melody has a narrative character. In its structure, it resembles improvisation, where no specific metre and size are prescribed. The rhythmic feature of the song is a figure of two durations: sixteenth and eighth with a dot. It is also characterised by an abundance of fills and ascending glissando (usually in the volume of a pure quarta). The harmonic basis of the song is the

playing of the alternating major and minor tones of the same name (the main tone falls on the note “fa” of the first octave, passing the functions of support for some time to the tones “do” of the second octave and “sol” of the first octave). These components of musical expression and structure reflect the idea of the piece: a stern, courageous beginning and unshakeable faith in victory. The first verse of the song contains the words: “Oh, the messengers have gathered on the field of Kosova. Oh, they are waiting for me to come to tell them”; “Oh, we are doing a great thing”; “Oh, I am on my way to them to say”; “Oh, we are doing a great deed”. The content of the second verse is more compact and more concise. Here the concept of the song is concretised: “Oh, the messengers have gathered on the field of Kosova. They speak among themselves of victory” (this phrase is heard twice). The exclamation “Oh” (“Oh”) is a characteristic feature of the style of songs and dances of the Kosovars, symbolising the call, and attention to what will next be said (or conveyed through movements).

Another song, “Ç’jan’ k’to gjám qi po i bjen era?” (What are these echoes coming along with the wind?) is an imitation of the echo in the highlands of Kosovo. The development of the melody’s thematic material is centred around one of its highest tones (D-flat of the second octave). In the beginning, there is a rapid ascent to it utilizing a glissando from the “G-flat” sound of the first octave. After conquering it as the apex, a repetition of the same tone is given, after which it receives its apex through a descending move of a semitone followed by a return to the mainstay (“D-flat”). The first line ends with a mirror-image repetition of the motif that opened the song: a decisive glissandoing descent from “D-flat” to “G-flat”. The intonation of the next line is a “stay at the peak of the source” (the above-mentioned D-flat of the second octave), its “two-sided operation” (using the tones of E-flat and C), and the subsequent return (using glissando technique) to the G-flat of the first octave. The third line (echoing the material of the first but presenting a more compact, compressed version of it) conveys an imitation of an echo. The B-flat sound of the first octave acts here as a short-term support for the melody. It appears even more frequently in the fourth line, and its concluding tone is the G note of the first octave. The final line of both the first and second couplets is enriched with a more extended melodic formula (a descending progression followed by a leap) in the volume of a minor tertia (“B-flat” – “D-flat”), mordents, and a rapid descending movement to the new supporting tone “G” of the first octave (the end of the second couplet). The harmony basis of the song is notable for the fact that elements of the Lydian harmony (G-flat major with an elevated fourth step in the first, second and, partly, third lines) and the natural minor harmony with the tonics B-flat (the second half of the third line) and G (the second half of the fourth and fifth lines) are presented here in an inseparable synthesis. This creates a complex system of inclinations in the volume of the sexta (“G-flat” – “E-flat”), in the centre of which one can also feel the special colour of the sound of the diminished quinta (tritone): “G-flat – Re-flat”.

The rhythmic pattern of the song reflects its improvised structure, expressed in the absence of a fixed metre and size, as well as in the importance of a single tone (one of the highest in the melody), which is repeated or has a duration much longer than other sounds. In general, the character of this folklore sample expressively, deeply and in detail conveys the content of the text of the first one: “What are these echoing sounds? Oh, they are carried by the wind. Oh, it is war, oh, oh. Oh, Rugova and Peja are fighting”; and the second couplet: “Oh, what are these echoing sounds, carried past us by the wind? Gyakova and Peja are fighting”.

Even more complex is the harmony and intonation structure of the song “O po fjalo për tel ih” (It is about the wire, eh) (Telegram words). Here you play a game of alternating sustains that are a semitone apart (the “A” and “A-flat” sounds of the first octave). Throughout the first line of the song, they alternate continuously. The “A” tone is more stable: its duration is longer, and it opens and ends the first line. Then there is a descending progression with the introduction of new time supports (“G” in the second and fourth lines; “F-sharp” in the third line; “F” in the final turn of the song). Thus, the contours of the F-minor tonality complicated by chromatic steps (F-diez; A-becar; B-becar) are outlined here. The similarity of the harmony and intonation structure of this song with the sound orders adopted in the oral professional music of Transcaucasia (Azerbaijan) can be observed. Thus, the lower tetrachord of F-minor (F; G; A-flat; B-flat) coincides in its structure and, accordingly, in the character of sound and semantic orientation, with the tetrachord that forms the basis of the Azerbaijani Shur harmony. This harmony personifies a decisive manly beginning. In general, by its structure, this song is an improvisation of the vocalist, who emphasises its tones by making them sound longer, as well as with the help of short melodic figures that sing them. Such performance techniques help to accurately convey the essence of the text and reveal its content, which is concentrated in the following leitfrazas: Through the whole message, the words addressed to Gjakove – “Get up and come out!” are heard. It should be noted that at the end of each line, there is an ascending glissando in the volume of a pure quinta (“la-mi” in the first; “sol-re” in the second, fourth, and fifth; “fa-do” in the third). This looks like an imitation of a call to revolt.

Dance Art of the Kosovo Highlanders

Folk dances of Rugova include, as well as songs of this region of Kosovo, different variants of the performing composition. The most popular are collective choreographic compositions, where female and male groups of dancers perform together, as well as alternately. The subjects of the performance may differ in their orientation, genre and style. Thus, the epic-heroic dance “Dance of Rugova” (“the dance with the sword”; “the war for the girl”) is characterised by the originality and freshness of its rhythmic basis. Its framework, according to the results of the video experiment (the second task), consists of

episodes according to which male soloists perform one by one (imitating a battle between themselves with sabres, swords or firearms), and then the whole cast of performers joins them, and its leading characters are eventually reconciled (there is a choreographic version according to which the final episode is performed by a boy and a girl) (Lend'el-Syarkevych & Puyova & Senyna 2018).

The group of dancers, following the soloists, repeats the contours of their movements (the hands of each man are fixed on the shoulders of his neighbours on both sides) and forms an unbreakable chain. The plastic drawing (periodically) depicts the men in a half-bent position (the women, meanwhile, keep their torsos straight), symbolising the movement of the local population of Rugova across the difficult terrain with great care. One of the large-scale dances of Kosovo presents first the couples (man and woman), then, sequentially, the male group, the solo episode of an elderly man (sage, tribal elder), the female group and the collective (in pairs, later in groups); the final episode is also very popular among Albanians. The scarf plays an important role as one of the attributes of the national dance costume and an element of choreography. It is used by both women and men. Women cover their heads with light-coloured headscarves.

The folk dance “Rugova”, performed by children, is also known. This example of the national choreographic art of Rugova demonstrates mobility, lightness and feminine gracefulness, fluidity of movements. Plastic figures (or a figure) with a shawl as a significant element of the dance play one of the leading roles here. Its performer, despite her young age, professionally reflected the marked range of plastic elements in the dance.

Games of Kosovo Highlanders. National Costumes

Traditional Rugova games have a centuries-old history. Their content is characterised by a variety of techniques for performing certain exercises. Obligatory for the games of Kosovo are movement on a rope with the help of hands and feet; tug of war; throwing a ball; throwing stones; the original style of wrestling adopted by men of this region of Kosovo. The games that are very popular among today's youth are of two types: open-air activities and indoor activities (held in winter). The second type includes the games among which the following game has gained fame: “loja e kapuqave” (“The game of hoods”). They demonstrate the agility, endurance, courage and resourcefulness of the indigenous inhabitants of Rugova, whose natural and climatic conditions and landscape are characterised by their complexity.

The ethnic costumes of the Rugova population have specific characteristics. Women's clothes are light-coloured dresses, usually white. They are accompanied by a dark (black) coloured waistcoat (*kracë*) and an apron decorated with ornaments of overlays of bright colours, as well as a long necklace and a small (black) decorative bag (*pështjellaku*) with a belt (*shoka*). A narrow skirt (*pështjells apo pshtjeci*), blouse and waistcoat are common among young

girls. The men's costume consists of light-coloured woollen trousers tapering towards the shins (*tirq*); a shirt and waistcoat of similar colours with a few black lines forming a special pattern; a large white armband and a scarf covering the neck from the cold and strong winds typical of this region of the Balkans.

Thus, with the help of this study, it was revealed that the folklore of the highlanders, in particular, the inhabitants of one of the regions of Kosovo (Rugova), as well as settlements in the Albanian Alps and Montenegro, is characterised by uniqueness due to the intonation structure of its song and dance melodies, the originality of the content and plastic contours of choreography, as well as games developed in the culture of the ethnos (Krasniqi 2017). One of the origins of the folk art of Kosovo is the heroic epic (Kreshnik), reflected in the literary, musical, theatrical-play and ritual and ceremonial directions of national folklore. It absorbed and also passed on to subsequent generations the unique qualities of the worldview of the highlanders, their character (courage and strength of spirit), everyday traditions and a special flavour of art (literature, poetry, music, arts and crafts).

At the same time, the creativity of the indigenous inhabitants of Rugova, along with heroism, celebrates the joy of life, and the richness of its manifestations in nature and in everything that surrounds a person from birth (Zalano-vs'ka 2015). This is reflected in the songs, dances and game shows that celebrate the love for the native land, between loved ones, as well as in the entertaining creative and sporting events organised in winter in the homes of the hospitable mountain people of Kosovo. The time free from agricultural work creates favourable conditions for organising and holding large family festivals and competitions for agility, endurance and resourcefulness among young people, where songs about the heroism of Rugova warriors, about love, as well as collective dances and popular games, are performed (Bronner 2009; Sokoli 2020; Cherepovska 2021). To preserve the original and unique folklore heritage of one of the unique regions of Kosovo, the folklore ensemble "Rugova" was established in 1947. For more than seventy-five years, it has been transmitting to the world (in competitions, festivals, as well as shows) samples of the spiritual and artistic culture of the Kosovo Highlanders. Its repertoire is aimed at preserving the authenticity of the folk art of Kosovo's autochthonous ethnic group, and, at the same time, it is open to updating the technological artistic sphere of its broadcasts during the performance of the artists. Here, with the use of modern stage engineering and technical equipment, dialogue with the audience becomes more important.

Despite its geographical inaccessibility and isolation from the global civilisation, as well as the domination of the Ottoman Empire and Serbia, the folk art of Rugova in all its manifestations and orientation has concentrated and preserved the best traditions of the everyday life, cultural and spiritual life of the highlanders of Kosovo. The autochthonous population, in this context, preserved such fundamental categories of national identity as language (the

dialect of the inhabitants of Rugova is the clearest variant of the Albanian dialect) and unique traditions in the material and spiritual spheres. This, in turn, has contributed to it becoming a heritage in the world artistic space of the past and the present. Rugova's cultural and sporting figures have contributed to the international educational system and politics, literature and music of the present period.

DISCUSSION

The study addresses the musical folklore of the Kosovo Highlanders, highlighting aspects such as history, political events, population and culture preservation. Ermelinda Kashahu and Edlira Dhima (2013) discuss the embodiment of folklore in Albanian literary creativity. Scholars from various countries have studied the musical folklore of the Kosovo Highlanders, focusing on its history, political influences, population state, cultural preservation and national independence aspirations. Ermelinda Kashahu and Edlira Dhima (2013) examined the incorporation of folklore into Albania's literary works, citing notable examples such as the epic "Cikli i Kreshnikeve" (The Cycle of the Heroes) and the ballad "Kënga e Halil Garri" (The Song of Halil Garri). Arbnora A. Dushi (2020) emphasized the sociopolitical impact on Albanian folklore, with the living conditions of the highlanders influencing the content of their folk art, often heroic in nature. Robert Elsie (2019) worked on popularizing Albanian spiritual culture and folklore on the global stage. Majlinda Bregasi (2021) analysed the effects of changing socio-economic conditions on the cultural identity of the Kosovo Highlanders, including migration patterns to European countries such as Italy. Majlinda Bregasi also highlighted the importance of the Albanian national language in ethnic identity. Bernd Fischer and Oliver Schmitt (2022) discussed the integration of the Kosovo highlanders in pan-European history, focusing on the national language as a foundation for folklore. Myrteza Sharra (2021) studied the 20th-century history of Kosovo, detailing the political and military events influencing the Albanian people's fight for independence. Dardan Lajçi et al. (2022) proposed cultural tourism in Rugova, emphasizing the indigenous folklore ensemble "Rugova" as a vital cultural preserver. Internet resources play a crucial role in preserving and modernizing world creativity. Tin-yang Van (2023a) highlighted the transition of modern folklore into digital communications, mentioning platforms like Twitter and Telegram as modern carriers. Dan Ben-Amos (2023) explored the distinctions between "folklore" and "intangible heritage", emphasizing the importance of preserving national traditions. Ikbal Maulana et al. (2023) discussed the manifestation of ethnic identity through folklore. Rolf Lidskog (2017) pointed out the importance of national musical art for immigrant ethnic groups. Lin Li (2023) emphasized cultural intelligence in a globalized world, while Ruxanda Nikoleta Popescu (2023) related cultural intelligence to effective interethnic communication.

Tin-yang Van (2023b) introduced the concept of “online folklore”, which has become prevalent due to the COVID-19 pandemic, utilizing internet platforms for folklore dissemination.

All the abovementioned studies are of great value in the context of revealing the problem of mastering the leading aspects of the musical folklore of the highlanders in the Balkans. They contribute to its perception as a voluminous historical, spiritual, cultural, as well as material phenomenon of modern civilisation. At the same time, each of them is focused on one particular sphere. This publication attempts to present the folk art of the inhabitants of one of the regions of Kosovo (Rugova) as a single complex integrated system, including aspects whose functional role and significance are key to deciphering and preserving its uniqueness in the era of globalisation.

CONCLUSIONS

In the process of researching aspects of musical folklore of the population of one of the regions of Kosovo (Rugova), facts such as the uniqueness of content and style of all its branches were revealed: song art; folk choreographic art; theatre performances and sports games; arts and crafts heritage (costumes and elements decorating them).

The key categories of each branch of the Kosovo Highlanders' folklore fund were established. The ethnos's songwriting includes the principles of vocal music performance; its harmony basis; genre orientation; and the specifics of interpretation. The features peculiar to the vocal music of the Rugova have been identified. These are a monodic (one-voice) texture and singing principle; a pluto-less sound-row system (pentatonic), including elements of microchromatics (glissando, *forschlag*); instrumentation (*lahuta*, *çiftelia* (chiftelia), *kavall*). Specific names of song folklore samples (heroic-epic as well as everyday and lyrical) of the Kosovo ethnic group were established. The sphere of the heroic-epic vocal heritage of the inhabitants of Rugova includes: “Zhuj Selmani”; “Dem Isufi and Regjë Avdin”; “Meta i balit Zog Asllani”; “Muja e Halili”; “Kush po del për qaf t'qakorrit”. In the field of women's singing, fame has been gained: “I jeoooo uoooo”; “Në der të t'banit kush po kjan”; “Bajram Curri”; “Këngë për Skenderbeun”; “Boll e mirë si po mbledh sane”; “Na u pre dhia na u pre capi”.

The elements of Kosovo dance creativity were revealed: the plot basis of individual dances, figures and movements typical of choreographic samples. Ethnic games aimed at preserving, transmitting and popularising the centuries-old traditions of the inhabitants of Rugova were also highlighted. Both in terms of dances and games, the names of the most popular examples from the noted branches of the Kosovo highlanders' folklore were given. Thus, “Dance of Rugova” was widely disseminated, and among the games, “loja e kapuqave”. Attention was also drawn to the specificity of national costumes, which

contribute to the comfort, convenience and health protection of the autochthonous population in a difficult climate and landscape and are characterised by the originality and beauty of their designs.

The scientific novelty of the research is determined by its concept, according to which the oral traditional creativity of Rugova inhabitants acts as a voluminous integral system, including several key components. The practical significance of the study is determined by the demand for its materials in the spheres of musicology; cultural studies; organology; folk performance; music pedagogy. Prospects for further study of the problem lie in extending the research activities of ethnographers to the countries where ethnic groups of Albanian highlanders live and preserve the traditions of their ancestors in their everyday life.

REFERENCES

- Albanske igre iz istočne crne gore -Centar za očuvanje i razvoj kulture manjina. [Albanian Games from Eastern Montenegro – Center for the Preservation and Development of Minority Culture.] (CEKUM). 2022. Available at <https://youtu.be/2629uoQqRZo>, last accessed on 13 February 2026.
- Avdyli, Merxan & Veli, Kyezio 2022. Historical, cultural and musical analysis of folk songs about the Çanakkale battle in Albanian music folklore: Albanian teachers' opinions. *Rast Musicology Journal*, Vol. 10, No. 2, pp. 289–309.
- Ben-Amos, Dan 2023. Between intangible cultural heritage and folklore. *Uluslararası Kibris Üniversitesi Fen-Edebiyat Fakültesi*, Vol. 29, No. 114, pp. 347–387.
- Bizhga, Denis 2020. The influence of folklore on the cultivated Albanian music of the XX century. *European Journal of Multidisciplinary Studies*, Vol. 5, No. 3, pp. 47–55.
- Bregasi, Majlinda 2020. The socioeconomic role in linguistic and cultural identity preservation – the Albanian case in Italy. *Palaver*, Vol. 9, No. 1, pp. 221–249.
- Bregasi, Majlinda 2021. Angela Cirrincione – una vita dedicata all'Albanologia [Angela Cirrincione – A Life Dedicated to Albanology.] *Palaver*, Vol. 10, No. 1, pp. 163–174.
- Bronner, Simon 2009. Digitizing and virtualizing folklore. In: Trevor J. Blank (ed.) *Folklore and the Internet: Vernacular Expression in a Digital World*. Denver: University Press of Colorado, pp. 22–66.
- Cherepovska, Nataliia. 2021. Media psychological features of youth patriotism in the information age. *Scientific Studios on Social and Political Psychology*, Vol. 27, No. 2, pp. 188–200.
- Doszhan, Raikhan 2023. Multi-vector cultural connection in the conditions of modern globalisation. *Interdisciplinary Cultural and Humanities Review*, Vol. 2, No. 1, pp. 27–32.
- Drançolli, Jahja 2014. Kosova: Archaeological heritage. In: Claire Smith (ed.) *Encyclopedia of Global Archaeology*. New York: Springer, pp. 6300–6328.
- Dushi, Arbnora 2020. Approaches of the Albanian folkloristic in Kosovo: Background, researches, publications. *Traditiones*, Vol. 48, No. 3, pp. 73–91.
- Elsie, Robert 2019. *The Albanian Bektashi: History and culture of a dervish order in the Balkans*. London: Bloomsbury Publishing.
- Fischer, Bernd J. & Schmitt, Oliver Jens 2022. The space and time of Albanian history. In: Bernd J. Fischer & Oliver Jens Schmitt (eds.) *A Concise History of Albania*. Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, pp. 3–22.
- Ismaili, Nevrije & Krasniqi, Nerxhivane 2022. An ethnomusical analysis: Albanian highland songs. *Rast Musicology Journal*, Vol. 10, No. 2, pp. 257–271.
- Kashahu, Ermelinda & Dhima, Edlira 2013. Impact of Albanian folklore in literature. *Academic Journal of Interdisciplinary Studies*, Vol. 2, No. 1, pp. 253–256.

- Krasniqi, Mark. 2017. *Rugova-Ethnographic monograph*. Prishtinë: Akademia e Shkencave dhe e Arteve të Kosovës (Seksioni i Shkencave Shoqërore).
- Lajçi, Dardan & Kuqi, Bekë & Fetahaj, Armend & Osmanollaj, Shaban 2022. The values of cultural heritage in the Rugova region in promoting the development of tourism in Kosovo. *Geojournal of Tourism and Geosites*, Vol. 41, No. 2, pp. 502–508.
- Lend'el-Syarkevych, Antonina & Puyova, Valentina & Senyna, Olexander. 2018. Pedagogical traditions of choreographic art: historical context. *Scientific Bulletin of Mukachevo State University. Series "Pedagogy and Psychology"*, Vol. 2, No. 8, pp. 30–33.
- Li, Lin 2023. Ethnic self-awareness and cross-cultural communication of international students in the People's Republic of China. *Culture and Education*, Vol. 35, No. 1, pp. 155–187.
- Lidskog, Rolf 2017. The role of music in ethnic identity formation in diaspora: a research review. *International Social Science Journal*, Vol. 66, No. 219–220, pp. 23–38.
- Mathieu, Aref 2007. *Albania, the incredible odyssey of a pre-Hellenic people*. Tiranë: Plejad.
- Maulana, Ikbali & Windarsih, Ana & Rastati, Ranny & Widyawati, Nina 2023. The transformation of the ethnic pop music industry and the negotiation of cultural identity. In: *Handbook of Research on Deconstructing Culture and Communication in the Global South*. London: IGI Global, pp. 158–173.
- Muriqi, Fazil 1997. *Qëndresa Rugova and Sak Fazlija, the flag bearer of Rugova*. Available at https://books.google.com/books/about/Q%C3%ABndresa_rugovase_dhe_sak_faslia.html?id=30iioAEACAAJ&redir_esc=y, last accessed on 13 February 2026.
- Nikçi, Valon 2018. *Popular erotic song*. Prishtinë: Albas.
- Noli – Vallja e Rugoves 2012. Available at <https://youtu.be/SqebZM1eDtI>, last accessed on 13 February 2026.
- Obukhova, Natalia 2019. Emotional awareness of the subjects of audio media culture with different styles of interpersonal interaction. *Scientific Studios on Social and Political Psychology*, Vol. 25, No. 2, pp. 135–142.
- Popescu, Ruxanda Nikoleta 2023. The impact of intercultural communication on cultural intelligence. *Management and Economics Review*, Vol. 8, No. 2, pp. 220–236.
- Rexhep, Munishi 1987. *Albanian mountain song*. Prishtinë: Instituti Albanologjik Prishtinë.
- Rugova (Ansambli) – Valle. 2018. Available at <https://youtu.be/Vz8ZmZHAv7s>, last accessed on 13 February 2026.
- Sharra, Myrteza 2021. Mbi administrimin e Tokave të Liruar. *Albanon*, Vol. 1, No. 4, pp. 43–49.
- Shota Ensemble Kosovo, *Art of Living, World Culture Festival, Berlin 2011*. 2014. Available at <https://youtu.be/AMXTwT0TOWE>, last accessed on 13 February 2026.
- Sokoli, Ramadan 2020. *Albanian musical folklore – morphology*. Tirana: PEGI.
- Stamova, Maryana 2022. The Albanians in the Balkans during World War II. *Historical Views*, Vol. 8, pp. 152–164.
- Tole, Vaso 1999. *Musical folklore - Albanian monody*. Tirana: Dukagjini.
- Van, Tin-yang 2023a. Folklore in social networks (Using the example of Twitter and Telegram). *Philology: Scientific Research*, Vol. 2, pp. 10–16.
- Van, Tin-yang 2023b. The development of Internet memes as a form of online folklore in the era of the pandemic. *Litera*, Vol. 5, pp. 97–106.
- Vula, Elsa 2022. Empirical research of translating Albanian literary text into English by Albanian EFL students. *Journal of Educational and Social Research*, Vol. 12, No. 2, pp. 346–366.
- Zalanov'ska, Lesya 2015. Analysis of the research of interdisciplinary tolerance components in the training process. *Scientific Bulletin of Mukachevo State University. Series "Pedagogy and Psychology"*, Vol. 1, No. 1, pp. 41–48.
- Zymer, U. Neziri 2018. *Lahuta, the epic of Kreshniks and UNESCO today*. Available at <https://www.radiokosovaelire.com/zymer-u-neziri-lahuta-eposi-i-kreshnikeve-dhe-unesco-sot/>, last accessed on 13 February 2026.

Arsim Kelmendi is a Professor at the Department of Music, Haxhi Zeka University. His scientific interests focus on the study of Balkan and Albanian folk music, with an emphasis on the vocal traditions, instrumental heritage, and cultural practices of ethnic groups in the region.

kelmendiarsim139@gmail.com

Hysen Nimani is an Associate Professor at the Department of Music, Dean of the Faculty of Arts, Haxhi Zeka University. His research interests are centered around cultural anthropology, with a specific focus on the folklore of Kosovo, including traditional performing arts, crafts, and the social functions of music and dance in local communities.

hysennimani3@hotmail.com

Development of Skills for Quality Sound Extraction on the Erhu within the Educational Process under the Influence of Resonant Sound Development

JIA LUN LI

Department of Ethnic Instrumental Music Education, Shenyang Conservatory of Music
334813557@qq.com

Abstract: The paper's primary purpose is to study the special aspects of playing erhu as part of the learning process. The author used the testing method, which helped to determine the elements required for the development of the academic program. The testing specified that 37% of the students were willing to use erhu and 28% were willing to use pipa in the learning process. Despite the fact that both musical instruments pass down the traditions, the students preferred the erhu because this instrument allows them to play subtle sounds. The testing method also showed that 38% of the students had no knowledge of playing erhu and only 23% of the students had roughly average skills in playing erhu. 10% of students believe that Western learning systems would positively impact the erhu learning process, but the bulk of students (46%) prefer blended learning systems.

Keywords: Chinese culture, dynamic sounds, erhu, musical instrument range, resonant sound

INTRODUCTION

The most ancient Chinese musical instruments include string instruments, which are an important element in various traditional ceremonies (Yi 2017). According to Chinese tradition, the sounds played by musical instruments are directly related to the sounds of natural phenomena. String playing has many techniques that evolved over a long period (Ouyang 2020; Yang & Rajab & Chew 2017). Chinese string instruments include a variety of violins – erhu, zhonghu, jinghu, morin khuur, which have a special sound, timbre and expressiveness. Erhu is one of the more striking representatives of Chinese musical culture, resembling a violin with two metal strings (see Figure 1).



Figure 1. Erhu appearance: 1 – Wooden resonator covered in snakeskin; 2 – Neck; 3 – Tuning pegs; 4 – Strings; 5 – Bow.

Resource: Xu (2021).

Erhu became the most common musical instrument during the Tang (618–907) and Song (960–1279) dynasties. Erhu can be used in both solo and ensemble performances (Gibbs 2021). Erhu has significant differences from the violin due to the instrument's position while playing, as well as the lack of a board, so erhu is played by holding the strings, by touching them directly (Han & Leung 2017; Oliveira et al. 2021).

Erhu may produce above-average range sounds, and the combination of a variety of techniques helps to convey the national contexts of ancient Chinese music (Clark 2012; Xu 2021). Erhu affects piano music as well since some erhu music can also be played with the piano (Leong 2010). The timbre playing of the erhu is described by warmth and has similar features to the falsetto. The most significant techniques of playing the string instrument are represented by hua yin (portamento) and lien zou (legato).

Erhu includes a 6-sided or cylindrical cavity resonator with a snakeskin membrane. The instrument's strings are raised above the neck, which is 81 cm

long, and connected by a metal brace. When playing folk music, erhu generates vivid dynamic sounds filled with emotions (Wu et al. 2008). The change in pitch while playing the erhu depends on the musician (Martynenko 2020). Erhu range can include three octaves. The sound is quite long and sharp, marked by arpeggios and passages, which complicates the technique of playing the instrument (Kong 2021).

Erhu playing is unique, based on traditional elements, which combine European traditions and national musical features.

Literature Review

The author reviewed various papers focusing on learning to play the erhu and the peculiarities of its sound. Erhu may be popularized as part of learning innovations. Various digital technologies simplify learning to play the erhu. An effective identification model helps to optimize the required data and makes learning easier. This is associated with the presence of specific tracking mechanisms that analyze the quality of playing. With the help of digital technologies, it is possible to master various techniques of playing the erhu that enhance the quality of sound (Zhang & Alijla 2019).

Kikukawa & Soga & Taki (2014a) explored approaches to creating a supportive environment for teaching erhu to aspiring musicians. The developed system focuses on determining finger placement and bowing using special magnetic sensors, capable of detecting errors by showing the correct finger position using VR tools. The system's effectiveness is about helping to recognize inaccuracies in playing erhu and showing the correct operation principles.

Learning to play the erhu is of great importance in Chinese culture, as it is used during opera performances. The author Fu (2023) believes that mastery of playing the erhu can be achieved at a high level by conveying the mood of compositions and eliminating stiffness. The use of the erhu in opera performances allows for the transmission of soft tones and poignant sounds.

Gorniak et al. (2019) studied the effects of music training on the musicians' bodies and the playing itself. The paper explored approaches to the assessment of fine motor skills among musicians playing string instruments. Musicians had reduced physical strength. These data are valuable for the development of a training program while playing string instruments, taking into account the hands' motor skills.

F. Y. Loo & F. C. Loo & Xi (2016) analyze Qin and Jiangnan Pai schools specializing in erhu playing, which have unique performance styles. They studied the students' and instructors' attitudes toward different styles of performance, which helped to identify various parameters and determine their effectiveness.

Chao & Karin (2020) studied the disadvantages and difficulties of teaching Erhu in Guizhou Province. These authors outlined that the technique of playing erhu is quite diverse and based on cultural traditions, which depend on the region and ethnic groups. This fact is not sufficiently adapted to the education

system because the use of traditional learning systems does not address scoring based on national identity. Thus, the development of erhu playing contributes to stricter learning requirements, promoting innovative programs.

Internet technology has contributed to a change in approaches and ways of learning to play erhu. The Changshu Institute of Technology presents a three-dimensional blended learning system, as well as remote hands-on training. The multimedia platform facilitates personalized learning (Yang 2018). The use of Internet technology in the learning process was also discussed by Hwang et al. (2015). Video tutorials on various websites can affect the cognitive load among students of different ages.

Erhu's learning approaches using the flipped classroom are discussed in Hwang & Chen & Sung (2019). The flipped classroom promotes more personalized learning, and at the same time builds the autonomy of other students. However, this system has some shortcomings, so feedback through video and online technology contributes to the progress of learning. The drawbacks of implementing the flipped classroom approach are associated with the direct assimilation of new material at home, followed by completing assignments in the classroom. Risks are linked to the lack of a sufficient level of understanding of the study material by students or a lack of in-depth exploration. Additionally, the disadvantages of the flipped classroom may involve additional work during the transition period, requiring educators to prepare appropriate educational programs.

Yang & Rajab & Chew (2017) discuss an improved approach to detect vibrato in musical signals using the filter diagonalization method. The findings suggested significant positive aspects in the development of erhu playing and sheet music recognition skills.

Zhang et al. (2015) present a digital erhu playing system using a Kinect camera that facilitates hand gesture recognition. The Markov model helps to provide a three-dimensional gesture-fitting method for recognizing left and right-hand movements. A review of available studies suggested that the focus is primarily on identifying a variety of learning approaches that do not address recognizing unique sounds but rather concentrate on correct posture and gestures.

Problem Statement

Chinese traditional instruments have been developed over a long period. Therefore, they are based on the transmission of a specific timbre, which depends, among other things, on the instrument's specific design. Although there is a symbiosis between the interaction of different approaches to playing musical instruments in China, traditional instruments have their particular ways of playing. Playing the erhu is no exception, as the instrument has a unique sound and approaches to playing which are rooted in ancient Chinese traditions. Traditional instruments help to fill the tunes with various bright and unique

features. The paper's primary purpose is to study the special aspects of playing erhu as part of the learning process.

The author had the following tasks:

- to identify the type of string instrument preferred by students during their studies;
- to determine the students' theoretical knowledge and skills pertaining to playing the erhu;
- to develop guidelines for the learning process, as well as determine the most effective ways to improve them in order to obtain the required knowledge;
- to determine the students' expectations after taking an erhu course.

MATERIALS AND METHODS

The study of the special aspects and specific features of playing the erhu was conducted among 160 first-year students who had studied a variety of musical instruments in Beijing. The research was based on the testing method, with the terms and conditions of which all participants of the study were made aware of beforehand. A total of 180 first-year students were supposed to participate in the testing and learning process, but 20 students did not provide timely confirmation regarding their involvement in the experiment and were therefore excluded from the study. The erhu class was elective, so it was not required that all students in the same group be enrolled in the training program.

The testing method was chosen for the study because it promotes objective data from a particular study group (Gubanova & Kolosova 2013). The testing method involved selecting possible answers, which further allowed for a ranking percentage. Testing determined the degree of manifestation of the designated objects' specific properties. All test questions and answers were compiled directly by the author. Testing took place remotely, using developed chatbots. This not only automated data retrieval but also allowed for anonymous data retrieval. Questions were sent to students after class, allowing them to focus on answers and provide data within 3 hours.

The testing method identified the following indicators among students:

- string instrument that students prefer to learn, including pipa, banhu, erhu, and zhu, among others;
- students' perception of the erhu, the responses were as follows: available theoretical knowledge, strong skills, medium skills, lack of knowledge about playing the erhu;
- students' preferred approaches to learning, where responses suggested the use of technology, the use of standard learning systems, the use of Western learning systems, and the use of blended learning systems.

Initially, it was planned to choose which musical instrument students prefer. This information is necessary for understanding which musical instrument to focus on during their studies, taking into account students' opinions to foster their interest in learning. To specify the new academic program, students were tested to determine which string instrument students preferred (Table 1).

Table 1. The string instrument preferred by students

Instrument type	Percentage
Erhu	37%
Pipa	28%
Banhu	23%
Zhu	12%

The author chose four traditional instruments that have the greatest importance in the development of Chinese culture. 28% of students preferred the pipa because the instrument is the most recognizable in China, and its emergence in ancient times helped to pass down the traditions. Fewer preferences were given to banhu (23%) because the instrument is used more often in Chinese opera, and playing in high and low registers involves the use of different instruments related to the specific features of sound generated by banhu. Zhu was preferred by only 12% of the students because the instrument is hardly used in today's society and is not popular among musicians. The students gave the greatest preference to playing the erhu (37%) because it is a unique bowed ancient instrument and plays sounds directly.

These data contributed to the development of the main principles of playing erhu, which have been grouped as follows:

- improved theoretical background of the training program;
- learning the specifics of playing erhu, emphasizing each of the elements;
- application of practical skills and theoretical knowledge at improvised concerts.

Implementing education became possible due to the availability of the erhu musical instrument and the specialized digital Udacity program. The digital application allowed for the visualization of educational materials, influencing a higher level of retention by students. The application contributes to both visual perception of materials and audio listening. Existing sessions are characterized by an advanced level, allowing for a deeper development of theoretical skills in playing the erhu. The advantages of this online platform are also associated with the continuous review of materials, promoting their relevance. This criterion, in particular, influenced the choice of Udacity for studying theoretical material. Initially, 15 applications were selected for analysis by the

author; however, the others were not user-friendly, required additional paid access to the extended version and lacked systematic material updates.

The testing method further helped to determine students' expectations for playing erhu after taking the course during the 2020–2021 academic year. The responses were distributed into positive and negative values.

Since the testing method involved collecting a huge amount of numerical data separately for each question, the author used Gnumeric software. This program facilitates entering and saving data, which helps, using the entered formulas, to make calculations and build various charts. Gnumeric transforms and saves data in different formats.

While working on the paper, the author followed ethical guidelines for student involvement and the use of third-party sources. The paper provides a detailed description of the respondents and the sources used to identify the data cited (Forskningsetikk 2022).

RESULTS

The testing method and playing the erhu make it possible to determine the students' skills and awareness of the instrument (Table 2).

Table 2. Students' perceptions of erhu

Required Indicator	Percentage
Lack of knowledge about playing the erhu	38%
Theoretical knowledge	32%
Medium practical skills	23%
Strong practical skills	7%

Testing and endorsement of playing skills (if students chose the appropriate answer) suggested that 38% of students at this point lack both theoretical knowledge and practical skills for playing erhu. 32% of the students possess theoretical knowledge, but some of them are familiar with the specific features of playing, while other students have general ideas about the string instrument, which was also included in this category. Also, 7% of students possess strong practical skills because they previously studied playing the erhu in music school.

The testing also determined approaches to learning preferred by students. The findings are presented in Table 3.

Table 3. Students’ preferred approaches to learning

Approaches to learning	Percentage
Using blended learning systems	46%
Reliance on technology	27%
Use of standard learning systems	17%
Applying western learning systems	10%

The tests made it clear that 46% of students preferred blended learning systems because they are based on innovative approaches and improvements of previously developed systems. Accordingly, 27% believe that introducing technology systems into the traditional education system without changing approaches to the study of theoretical information will improve the quality of learning. Only 10% of students preferred Western learning systems because such systems are not effective enough to learn to play erhu. Western approaches to learning were not designed to preserve traditional Chinese elements, and the violin is fundamentally different.

The elements revealed through testing contributed to the development of a series of guidelines for erhu learners, which help to preserve special sounds produced by the musical instrument:

- I. Learning theory during lectures with students’ proactive involvement. To this end, Udacity has been used in the learning process. This online platform facilitates the presentation of information in a concise form and the application of such information in and out of the classroom. During the training, the entire theoretical background was presented in a concise form, thus contributing to better memorization of the information.
- II. The specific features of playing the erhu were studied in detail under the instructor’s direct supervision. Erhu resembles a double-sided violin with metal strings.

The specific nature of playing erhu is that the bow, which is fastened between two strings, is pulled by the right-hand fingers. To make it easier to play and increase the friction, the instrument’s bow was rubbed with rosin, which helps to play a subtle and delicate melody. To play the sounds correctly, the erhu must be in an upright position with the bow in the musician’s right hand and the fingers of the other hand touching the strings in order. While learning, the author suggested the vertical vibrato technique, which consists of pressing the strings down, periodic modulation of frequency and amplitude, and contributes to a change in the instrument’s sound. Particular attention during play was paid to the tuning of the pegs, which are at the end of the neck, on which the erhu’s

pitch depends. To produce a resonant sound, playing the erhu involved plucking one of the open strings. The erhu range has three octaves, which change naturally. To this end, an example of setting the erhu range was offered during training (Figure 2).

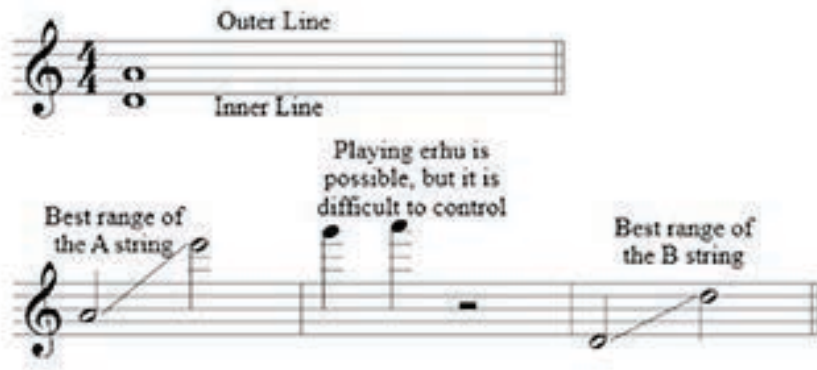


Figure 2. Example for setting the erhu range.

Resource: Developed by the author.

The erhu strings are tuned to come out in a perfect fifth (D1 and A1). D1 is commonly referred to as the inner string, which is closer to the performer. A1 is the outer string.

Playing with a strained hand contributes to the low timbre that is unique to the instrument.

To improve the musical technique of playing the erhu, each lesson began with the correct technical positioning of the instrument. Then the high-pitched and low-pitched sounds were tuned using the pegs.

III. The next element of the academic program involved the direct application of practical skills and theoretical knowledge. Improvised concerts were created between students to practice specific elements, which not only had aesthetic value but also highlighted deficiencies in the student's knowledge. Video footage of concerts was used to correct errors. This element is effective, making it possible to get an outsider's look at one's own playing and the playing of other musicians.

A testing method was used to confirm students' expectations about playing erhu after taking the course. The results are presented in Table 4.

Table 4. Did the students live up to their expectations after taking the erhu course?

Students' expectation	Percentage
Students lived up to their expectations	91%
Students lived up only to a part of their expectations	8%
Students did not live up to their expectations	1%

The test showed that 91% of the students had positive attitudes toward playing erhu and were willing to continue learning. This is because the learning approaches were based on learning all the specific elements while playing the erhu. Strong performance was also influenced by the possible use of erhu in both traditional and contemporary arrangements. For 8% of the students, playing erhu partially met the students' expectations because it is complex and specific enough that it requires much more effort, including independent effort. 1% of students believe that they should have chosen a different musical instrument to learn because erhu involves a different approach to playing as compared to the violin.

DISCUSSION

Traditional ways of playing musical instruments do not contribute to monitoring all the necessary elements in the learning process. For example, they do not check whether the student has the right posture whenever necessary. Computer-aided learning with cameras can act as teachers' eyes and monitor students' proper posture. To track the motion pattern, the adopted level and the deviation therefrom need to be adopted. CNN technology has significant advantages in identifying moving objects and can detect multiple points at once. For example, it can track both the movements of the erhu bow and the movements of the right hand. The assessment of experienced musicians who played erhu revealed inaccuracies in the performance of music (Lu & Dow & Peng 2020). Kikukawa & Soga & Taki (2014b) determined (using magnetic sensors) errors during playing erhu. The system is designed in such a way that it can track the correctness of the bow strokes. To evaluate the proposed system of training, the author used a Likert scale, suggesting that finding one's own mistakes improves playing erhu in the future. However, this paper directly emphasizes the interaction between the instructor and the student, as well as the systematic repetition of elements, which contributes to the technically correct production.

Zhu et al. (2014) discuss the ways to regulate erhu sound, which affects timbre perception. The tuning involves changing the volume between tones, using a multidimensional model. Wang et al. (2021) got an insight into the

peculiarities of the timbre's influence on the perception of playing Chinese musical instruments. 48 musical passages played with erhu, dizi, pipa, violin, flute, and guitar were used for the study. The findings suggested that musicians more accurately perceived changes in timbre while listening to songs than did respondents who had no musical skills. Yet, there is a similar perception of acoustic characteristics when playing similar musical instruments. This paper addresses the specific aspects of sound based on proper playing technique, as well as the use of the vertical vibrato technique, which involves downward pressure on the strings.

Yessetova et al. (2020) outlined that music education is based on national musical traditions and is directly related to social and musical phenomena. Interpretation of ethnic texts contributes to the calculation of sign language, which contributes to artistic communication. The author concluded that regardless of the musical instrument, learning to play it requires harmonizing the musical language, which includes the synergy of words and musical gestures. Qi et al. (2020) got an insight into approaches to the definition of sheet music played with string, plucked string, wind, and percussion instruments. The pitch was found to depend in part on the instrument's colour and smoothness. The research findings are valuable in learning, as they help to determine the sound production features, which affect the performance and perception of the musical compositions. This paper provided recommendations for adjusting the erhu range.

The importance of the Internet in the learning process has been studied by Kong & Saidon & Saidin (2017). Less than 50% of instructors want to participate in online courses that promote professional development. The calculated standard deviation helped to determine the improvements in the learning quality through various online technologies. This paper discussed the use of the Udacity online platform to facilitate the learning process, contributing to concise presentations.

Approaches to learning Chinese folk music are discussed by Han & Leung (2017). Promotion of Chinese music involves strong teacher competence. The allocation of classes in equal proportions between Western classical music and Chinese folk music contributes to students' multicultural perspectives.

The reviewed writings emphasize online learning to play string instruments based on detecting the sound level. In this paper, students' preferences were studied before starting to develop guidelines for instruction, which influenced the choice of musical instruments and the learning system. The author discussed improved teaching approaches that affected the continuation of erhu teaching.

CONCLUSIONS

The study explored the intricacies of playing the musical instrument erhu, which possesses one of the most expressive sounds among string instruments. The selection of the erhu for instruction was made directly by students during testing, aimed at cultivating initial interest in learning. Thirty-seven per cent of students expressed a preference for learning the erhu.

The test results contributed to the development of the guidelines for learning to play the erhu. The propositions are divided into three blocks and revolve around the instruction of theoretical material realized through the application of active lecture formats engaging students. Additionally, the learning process involved ensuring the study of the specifics of playing the erhu, with an emphasis on the systematic repetition of basic elements of playing the musical instrument. The instruction also entailed the practical reinforcement of the covered material through improvised concerts. These elements are important because playing erhu requires serious effort, especially on the part of students who previously studied violin. The paper suggests that playing the violin has significant differences as compared to playing erhu.

The concluding stage of the research determined student expectations after taking the course in the 2020–2021 academic year. Thus, 91% of students playing erhu lived up to their expectations and were willing to continue the elective class. Only 1% of students would prefer another musical instrument after one year of study. The findings hold significance for educators in educational institutions who are involved in shaping the foundational programs for learning traditional Chinese string instruments.

REFERENCES

- Chao, Zhang & Karin, Khomkrich 2020. Karin Analysis of the innovative ideas of erhu teaching in Chinese universities. *Oxidation Communications*, Vol. 43, No. 1, pp. 162–166.
- Clark, Jocelyn Collette 2012. Searching for a niche without a genre: The case of the multi-national East Asian traditional new music ensemble IIIZ+. *World of Music*, Vol. 1, No. 1, pp. 103–119.
- Forskningsetikk 2022. Guidelines for Research Ethics in Science and Technology. The Norwegian Research Ethics Committee. Available at <https://www.forskningsetikk.no/en/guidelines/science-and-technology/guidelines-for-research-ethics-in-science-and-technology/>, last accessed on 12 December 2022.
- Fu, Qin Yu 2023. The role of the violin and its elements in Chinese opera. *Musica Hodie*, Vol. 23, art no. e72254. <https://doi.org/10.5216/mh.v23.72254>.
- Gibbs, Levi S. 2021. Going beyond the western pass: Chinese folk models of danger and abandonment in songs of separation. *Modern China*, Vol. 47, No. 2, pp. 178–207. <https://doi.org/10.1177/0097700419860417>.
- Gorniak, Stacey L. & Collins, Evan D. & Staines, Kimberly Goldie & Brooks, Forrest A. & Young, Ricardo V. 2019. The impact of musical training on hand biomechanics in string musicians. *Hand*, Vol. 14, No. 6, pp. 823–829. <https://doi.org/10.1177/1558944718772388>.
- Gubanova, Alexandra Y. & Kolosova, Elena A. 2013. The study of library users: A sociological approach. In: *Drawing up a questionnaire. Interviewing*, 1–7. Moscow: Russian State Children's Library.

- Han, Ruochen & Leung, Bo Wah 2017. A survey on weifang teachers' attitudes toward teaching Chinese folk music. *International Journal of Music Education*, Vol. 35, No. 2, pp. 202–215. <https://doi.org/10.1177/0255761415620521>.
- Hwang, Gwo-Haur & Chen, Beyin & Sung, Chia-Wen & Kuo, T. 2015. To explore the effect of age on cognitive load when using social websites to conduct flipped classrooms on musical instrument performance teaching - taking amateur erhu learners as an example. In: *Workshop Proceedings of the 23rd International Conference on Computers in Education*. Leeds: ICCE, pp. 1–8.
- Hwang, Gwo-Haur & Chen, Beyin & Sung, Chia-Wen 2019. Impacts of flipped classrooms with peer assessment on students' effectiveness of playing musical instruments – taking amateur erhu learners as an example. *Interactive Learning Environments*, Vol. 27, No. 8, pp. 1047–1061. <https://doi.org/10.1080/10494820.2018.1481105>.
- Kikukawa, Fumitaka & Soga, Masato & Taki, Hirokazu 2014a. Development of a gesture learning environment for novices' erhu bow strokes. *Procedia Computer Science*, Vol. 35, No. C, pp. 1323–1332. <https://doi.org/10.1016/j.procs.2014.08.17>.
- Kikukawa, Fumitaka & Soga, Masato & Taki, Hirokazu 2014b. Development of a learning environment for novices' erhu playing. In: *Workshop Proceedings of the 22nd International Conference on Computers in Education*, pp. 814–819. Leeds: ICCE.
- Kong, Ling-di & Saidon, Mohd Kasri B. & Saidin, Khaliza binti 2017. Teachers' perception of online professional development: A case of Chinese high school teachers in Ningxia. *Journal of Social Sciences Research*, Vol. 3, No. 5, pp. 48–51.
- Kong, Siu Hang 2021. A study of students' perceptions of parental influence on students' musical instrument learning in Beijing, China. *Music Education Research*, Vol. 23, No. 3, pp. 287–299. <https://doi.org/10.1080/14613808.2020.1832978>.
- Leong, Samuel 2010. Creativity and assessment in Chinese arts education: Perspectives of Hong Kong students. *Research Studies in Music Education*, Vol. 32, No. 1, pp. 75–92. <https://doi.org/10.1177/1321103X10370086>.
- Loo, Fung Ying & Loo, Fung Chiat & Xi, Chen 2016. Students' and teachers' perception on the learning of Qin and Jiangnan school erhu performance styles. *Turkish Online Journal of Educational Technology*, Vol. 2016, pp. 576–580.
- Lu, Bonnie & Dow, Chyi-Ren & Peng, Chang-Jan 2020. Bowing detection for erhu learners using yolo deep learning techniques. In *Communications in Computer and Information Science*. HCI International 2020 – Posters, pp. 193–198.
- Martynenko, Nikolay P. 2020. Understanding of 'music' in early Confucianism according to Yue Ji – records of music. *Voprosy Filosofii*, Vol. 7, pp. 171–175. <https://doi.org/10.21146/0042-8744-2020-7-171-175>.
- Oliveira, António & Ribeiro, Fabiana Silva & Ribeiro, Luisa Mota & McPherson, Gary & Oliveira-Silva, Patricia 2021. Disentangling motivation within instrumental music learning: A systematic review. *Music Education Research*, Vol. 23, No. 1, pp. 105–122. <https://doi.org/10.1080/14613808.2020.1866517>.
- Ouyang, Lei 2020. Musics of East Asia I: China and Taiwan. In: *Excursions in World Music*. Eighth edition. London: Routledge, pp. 94–129. <https://doi.org/10.4324/9780429433757-4>.
- Qi, Yuxuan & Huang, Fuxing & Li, Zeyan & Wan, Xiaoang 2020. Crossmodal correspondences in the sounds of Chinese instruments. *Perception*, Vol. 49, No. 1, pp. 81–97. <https://doi.org/10.1177/0301006619888992>.
- Wang, Xin & Wei, Yujia & Heng, Lena & McAdams, Stephen 2021. A cross-cultural analysis of the influence of timbre on affect perception in western classical music and Chinese music traditions. *Frontiers in Psychology*, Vol. 12, No. 732865. <https://doi.org/10.3389/fpsyg.2021.732865>.
- Wu, Shuo Xian & Zhao, Yuezhe & Qiu, Jianzhen & Huang, Hong & Wu, Liling 2008. Sound power level measurement of the Erhu (Chinese violin). *Acta Acustica United with Acustica*, Vol. 94, No. 1, pp. 164–167. <https://doi.org/10.3813/AAA.918019>.
- Xu, Ke 2021. Recognition and classification model of music genres and Chinese traditional musical instruments based on deep neural networks. *Scientific Programming*, Vol. 2021, No. 2348494, pp. 1–8. <https://doi.org/10.1155/2021/2348494>.

- Yang, Li 2018. Practice and reform measures of erhu teaching in Changshu Institute of Technology. *Educational Science Theory and Practice*, Vol. 18, No. 6, pp. 3072–3078. <https://doi.org/10.12738/estp.2018.6.208>.
- Yang, Luwei & Rajab, Khalid Z. & Chew, Elaine 2017. The filter diagonalisation method for music signal analysis: Frame-wise vibrato detection and estimation. *Journal of Mathematics and Music*, Vol. 11, No. 1, pp. 42–60. <https://doi.org/10.1080/17459737.2016.1263897>.
- Yessetova, Ainur & Atembayeva, Gulnara & Mashimbayeva, Ainur & Usenbayev, Erbol & Absatarova, Gulsara & Janseitova, Svetlana 2020. Semiotic signs and kui performing interpretation in the paradigm of the national concepts of Kazakh music pedagogy. *Universal Journal of Educational Research*, Vol. 8, No. 11B, pp. 6192–6199. <https://doi.org/10.13189/ujer.2020.082257>.
- Yi, Xiaoming 2017. Understanding curriculum based on the study of Chinese 'gu qin'. *International Journal of Music Education*, Vol. 35, No. 3, pp. 403–413. <https://doi.org/10.1177/0255761416667468>.
- Zhang, Shicheng & Chen, Genfang & Zhang, Mingmin & Zhao, Peitao & Pan, Zhigeng. 2015. Kinect-based virtual performance system of national bowed string instruments. *Ruan Jian Xue Bao/Journal of Software*, Vol. 26, pp. 198–207.
- Zhang, Xiaojuan & Alijla, Basem 2019. Research on inheritance and innovation mode of erhu art development based on intelligent algorithm. *Journal of Intelligent and Fuzzy Systems*, Vol. 37, No. 3, pp. 3327–3334. <https://doi.org/10.3233/JIFS-179135>.
- Zhu, Siyu & Ji, Peifeng & Kuang, Wei & Yang, Jun 2014. Loudness effect of the different tones on the timbre subjective perception experiment of erhu. In: *21st International Congress on Sound and Vibration 2014*, pp. 4776–4782.

Jia Lun Li has a PhD degree, and he is Associate Professor at the Department of Ethnic Instrumental Music Education, Shenyang Conservatory of Music (Shenyang, China). Research interests: ethnomusicology and digital heritage preservation, acoustics of traditional Chinese instruments, performance practice and pedagogy in ethnic instrumental music and technology-enhanced music education.

334813557@qq.com

Pottery Triangle on the Eastern Border of the Lake District in Turkey: Dođanhisar, Hüyük, Şarkikaraağaç

SERAP ÜNAL

Associate Professor (PhD), Head of Ceramics and Glass Department,
Faculty of Fine Arts, Suleyman Demirel University, Isparta, Turkey
<http://orcid.org/0000-0003-2407-1789>
serapunal2011@gmail.com

Abstract: Pottery, which is an image and a description of a culture of thousands of years that continues today as well as has the capacity to create data even with the smallest shard finds for cultural fields and sciences such as archaeology, anthropology, art etc., is a very important cultural heritage.

The traditional features, methods and stages of rural pottery production in the pottery centers that are the subject of the study have been examined by field research and evaluated within the scope of “Intangible Cultural Heritage” with the aim of providing data for archaeological and anthropological studies. On the other hand, this research aims to contribute to the comparison of raw materials, methods, forms, etc. of ceramic finds that may be found in Neolithic, Chalcolithic and other period research to be conducted in the region. In addition, it has been attempted to explain the necessity of the sustainability of this cultural phenomenon.

Keywords: Turkey, Anatolia, Lake region, pottery, intangible cultural heritage

INTRODUCTION

Pottery, which is an image and depiction of a culture of thousands of years that continues today, is also called the philology of unwritten times, in the statements of archaeologists. This timeless craft and even art, which can create data even with the smallest fragment finds for cultural fields and sciences such as archaeology, anthropology, art etc., is a very important cultural heritage as well. Much of the major academic work on ceramics is dispersed across various other disciplines, notably archaeology, history, economics, gender studies, anthropology, history of technology, material culture studies and geography (Greenhalgh 2020: 112). British historian, author, museum curator and curator of art and design Greenhalgh (2020) states that ceramics are one of the most powerful indicators of the quality lifestyle material culture has ever produced; it claims to be a living phenomenon, not just a piece of evidence that provides evidence of past lives. He says that whether this claim is accepted or not depends not only on how ceramics are viewed but also on how civilization should be understood.

Considering the areas where rural pottery is made (including the terminated centers) within the scope of cultural ware production, it is striking that pottery has continued in the areas that have been lived in during almost all periods, especially since the Neolithic Period. This cultural continuity can also lead to research on areas that are accepted as postulates with Neolithic findings but without detailed field studies.

In Turkey's archaeology-rich geography, the "Göller Bölgesi" (Lake District) is an intense and typical area of this richness of Anatolia. Pottery craft came to an end in Şarkikaraağaç (Isparta), which is located on the eastern border of the region, within the provinces of Isparta and Konya and adjacent to each other at the same distances, while this culture is on the way to extinction in Doğanhisar (Konya) and Hüyük (Konya) districts.

In the research on the archaeological backgrounds of these three centers the positions of which resemble an equilateral triangle, and their surroundings, the Bronze Age and the following period have been focused on more; the Neolithic and Chalcolithic Period research, on the other hand, has not been developed enough, although it attracted attention in the 1900s.

However, this area is a typical geography located at the intersection of the "Isparta Ovası" (Isparta Plain) and "Konya Ovası" (Konya Plain) cultural basins. Considering the fertile clay beds suitable for ceramic production in this area, together with other pottery centers in the "Göller Bölgesi", it can be predicted that uninterrupted earthenware production has been made for thousands of years, except for the interruptions due to adverse ecological conditions (if any).

METHOD

As a result of a two-year superficial examination in the Anatolian geography, where archaeological sites are quite common, and in the Lakes Region, where all known times are accepted, it was decided to conduct research on pottery production in the districts of Hüyük, Şarkikaraağaç and Doğanhisar, where two different plain cultures intersect and form a triangular area.

Based on the reasons mentioned above, field studies on rural pottery were conducted in different years and times in Şarkikaraağaç district of Isparta Province and in Doğanhisar and Hüyük districts within the borders of Konya Province. Before the field work, the archaeological history, recent past, and geological structure of the region were examined. Field studies were conducted face-to-face and actively with the participation of district governors, mayors and local potters conducting activities. In field studies conducted at regular intervals, the ceramic culture of the region was examined within a methodological systematic framework, including the raw materials of the produced ceramic objects, production tools, the potter's wheel, the firing process, workshop organization and economic returns.

Despite the presence of numerous significant Neolithic settlements in the Göller (Lakes) Region, not enough studies on the Neolithic and Chalcolithic periods have been conducted in the area where the pottery triangle in question is located; therefore, the desired results have not been directly obtained from the archaeological studies conducted in this region. Another aim of the study is to attract the attention of archaeological studies to this area with an interdisciplinary perspective (Figure 1).

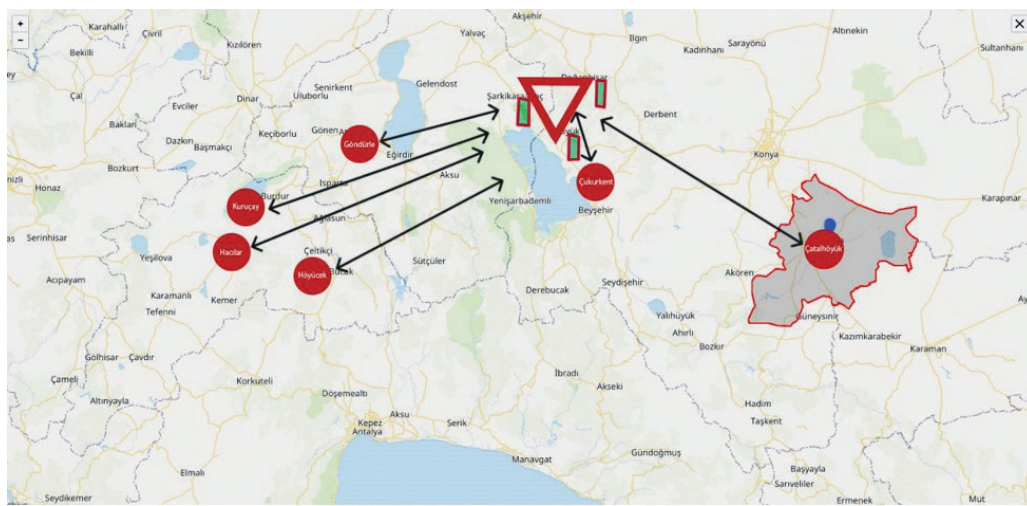


Figure 1. Prominent Neolithic and Chalcolithic settlements in the Lakes Region.

POTTERY FROM A PROCESSUAL PERSPECTIVE

The approach of processual archaeology, pioneered by scientists like anthropologist Dean Arnold and archaeologists Ian Hodder, Lewis Binford, Cathy Lynne Costin, focuses on connecting contemporary crafts with the past. Ceramics play a crucial role in this connection, providing valuable information about ancient cultures. Understanding the relationship between ceramics, the environment and culture is fundamental for archaeologists. Despite their importance, ceramics and most crafts have been disregarded by cultural anthropologists as irrelevant. Craft specialization is not only important in the development of civilization, but craft products also provide archaeologists with the majority of data about ancient cultures in the form of pottery, stone, metals and textiles. Although significant to archaeologists, ceramics, like most crafts, have been largely ignored by most cultural anthropologists as apparently irrelevant and uninteresting (Arnold 1985: 2–3). It is important to acknowledge that the meaning will undergo considerable transformations over such a large period of time while studying how the distant past created the present (Hodder & Hutson 2017: 42). Studying ethnographic crafts provides valuable insights, but it is important to consider that the meaning can transform significantly over time. Craft specialization plays a crucial role in the development of civilization and provides archaeologists with valuable data about ancient cultures. The enduring nature of rural pottery in Anatolia and other regions spanning thousands of years makes it a compelling subject for examination.

PREHISTORIC POTTERY

The auxiliary tools required within the scope of the first steps of the hierarchy of needs in man's struggle for existence were created with his intelligence along with his existence. First of all, humans developed and produced the tools and equipment they needed to feed and shelter themselves, for their survival throughout the ages.

Stone vessels, advanced stone tools, and planned stone housing examples, which are the finds of the end of the Paleolithic Period (Epi-Paleolithic / Mesolithic), especially in the samples of Hallan Çemi and Çayönü (Figure 2) indicate a different, more developed social order and the arrival of a new age (Neolithic Age) (Ünal 2023: 9).

In the scope of Anatolia and the Near East, the Neolithic Period, spreading over a long period, is examined in two main phases depending on the pottery technology in Anatolia and the Near East. The Pre-Pottery Neolithic Period (PPN) of Anatolia lasts from 9600 to 7000 BC, and divides into sub-periods based on the change in bedding and archaeological findings, which are Pre-Pottery Neolithic A – PPNA), Pre-Pottery Neolithic B (PPNB) and Pottery Neolithic C (PPNC). The Pottery Neolithic – PN, (Ceramic Period) which came

after PPN, was divided into two sub-periods as “first” and “last” (Sagona & Zimansky 2009:34).



Figure 2. Çayönü. The first clay pot attempts, a simple pot sample made from adobe soil in the Çayönü (Anatolia) settlement.

Özdoğan 2002: 88.

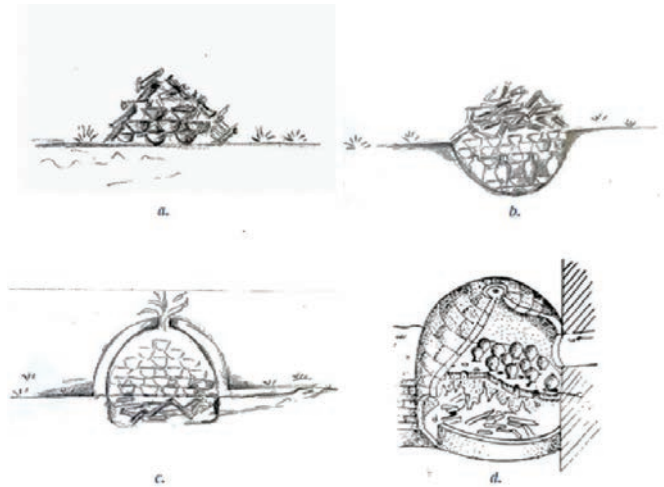


Figure 3. a. Surface or Bonfire firing b. Pit Kiln Firing c. Semi-closed firing d. Dome-type Kiln (Updraught kiln and Downdraught kiln).

Drawing by Serap Ünal.

The Neolithic Period (9600–7000 BC) is divided into two phases by the introduction of pottery, which represents the direct and conscious incorporation of terracotta into human life. Ceramic production with pyrotechnology (Figure 3) began at the Ceramic Neolithic Period, which is the second phase of the Neolithic Period; it is considered to be the first revolution of humanity and is identified with agriculture and settlement culture.

In the Neolithic village, there was a division of labor in which men were engaged in raising animals and women were engaged in raising plants. However, considering that women are also engaged in work such as making pottery vessels, knitting and weaving, apart from grinding, cooking and intensive agricultural seasons, which are extensions of grain production and animal breeding within the home economy; we can say that in the villages, the neolithic economy was based mostly on the work of women (Şenel 1982: 159). Dean Arnold's perception of "the beginning of pottery as an economic process" suggests that women in hunter-gatherer societies are closely related to the household. Arnold classified pottery among "pregnancy, babysitting, cooking, and other household chores". Dean Arnold's interpretation of the beginnings of pottery as an economic process suggests that pottery production was closely related to household activities in early societies. He associates pottery making with domestic responsibilities such as childcare, cooking and other household tasks, noting that pottery production could easily be carried out at home and continued despite interruptions.

From the Bronze Age (approximately 3500 BC, Uruk) when wheeled pottery began, which is also considered to be the first industrial production, pottery-making has been relatively more male-dominated, perhaps due to the increase in the economic return of pottery production on the wheel and the need for a little more physical power. However, as in all periods, women have always existed in pottery-making up till the rural pottery living today. Ceramic production was a purely female profession from the beginning of pottery to wheel pottery in the Neolithic Period; interestingly, in the regions where 1st and 2nd types of pottery (Figure 4) are made in Anatolia (Uslu, Dölek, Sorkun, Gökeyüp), it is still carried out by women. In these rural districts, cultural heritage related to this art is transmitted from mother to daughter (Ünal 2023: 57). Another method that attracts attention in these centers where the first type of pottery was made is firing techniques. Just as in prehistory, open firing is practiced in these centres (Figures 3, 5).

Viewing the first potteries of the Neolithic, Chalcolithic and Bronze Age periods from the forms and stages of pottery production, we can see the continuity of the production methods and style of rural pottery living in our age, uninterrupted and unchanged for thousands of years (about 9000 years).

One of the most remarkable facts is that the disks (Figure 6) found in the Woolley excavations (Woolley, 1922–1936 / Uruk 3500 BC), which are claimed to be the first potter's wheels (Rieth 1960: 21), are used with the same technique today.



Figure 4. Gökeyüp (Anatolia) ceramic production.

<https://kulasalihligeopark.com/gokeyup-comlekciligi/>, last accessed on 8 April 2024.



Figure 5. Gökeyüp (Anatolia) bonfire firing.

<https://kulasalihligeopark.com/gokeyup-comlekciligi/>, last accessed on 8 April 2024.

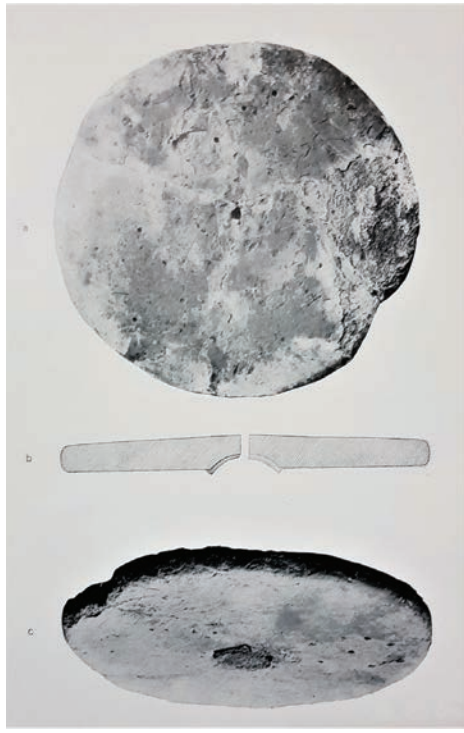


Figure 6a. Ur Disc, around 3500 BC.

Rieth 1960:22.

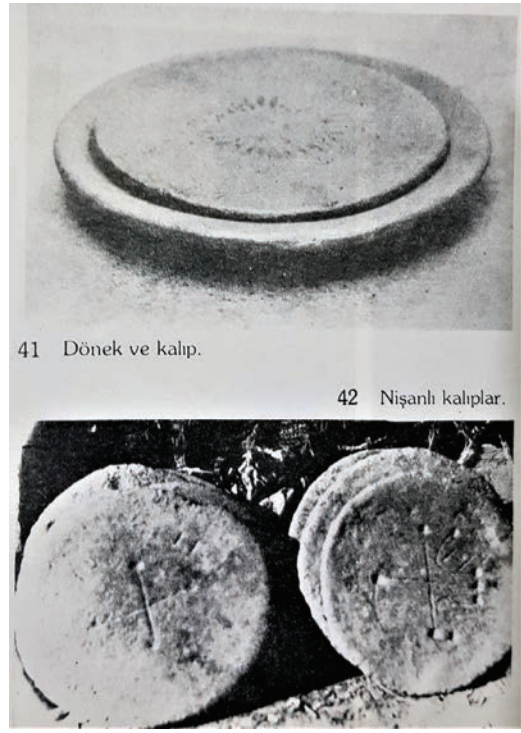


Figure 6b. Gokeyup Disk, today.

Güner 1988: 33.

TERRACOTTA CULTURE OF THE LAKE DISTRICT (GÖLLER BÖLGESİ)

The region is, geographically, an area which spreads over the lands of Afyon-karahisar, Isparta, Burdur, Antalya, Konya and Denizli provinces (Figure 7).

The “Göller Bölgesi” (Lake District) is also considered a geography where neolithic cultures are intensely experienced in terms of the excavated areas. As in all developments, the beginning of pottery making in this period caused social behaviours to change and these social behaviours began to focus more on the house and oven, which are the cornerstones of human life (Sagona & Zimansky 2009: 77).

The “Göller Bölgesi” is located in a geography rich in archaeological data, which has lived through almost all periods since the Paleolithic period, in terms of the settlements that were opened and the areas which have been studied. The richness of the region in this context, of course, has brought many cultures along in time travel. The cultural heritage left by this flow has undoubtedly produced important values. Among these values, the ceramic culture, which is an indispensable data source for archaeology and many disciplines, and the fact that this culture has survived in the process of sustainability, gives this

culture a meaning in the cultural values index in the geography of lakes, as in all Anatolia.

The terracotta culture, which is assumed to have continued uninterruptedly from the Neolithic Period to the present day, has existed ethnographically in many rural centers, especially in the “Göller Bölgesi”, until recent history/histories, and today there are a few living centers left.

In the cultural basin of the region, centers where pottery is made, albeit with difficulty, are: Serinhisar, a district of Denizli province, in the west of the region; Isparta, which is considered the center of the region; Çanaklı on the threshold of Sagalassos in Burdur; and Doğanhisar and Hüyük, which are districts of Konya, in the east.



Figure 7. Lake District Map.

Map editing: Uygar Hasekioğlu.

REGIONAL GEOGRAPHY AND GEOLOGICAL STRUCTURE

The “Göller Bölgesi” includes large and small lakes such as Beyşehir, Eğirdir, Akşehir, Burdur, Eber, Acıgöl, Suğla, Ilgın, Işıklı, Salda and Kovada. The boundaries of the “Göller Bölgesi”, where lakes with different characteristics are located by the accumulation of salty, brackish and fresh waters in the pits

formed as a result of tectonic and volcanic movements, are Beyşehir Lake in the east, Salda Lake and Acıgöl in the west, Eber Lake in the north, Köprülü and Güllük Passages in the south.

Considering the clay structure, which is the main raw material of ceramics, it can be said that the “Göller Bölgesi” has valuable clay deposits. Perhaps one of the important factors in the production of ceramics from the soil of this region for centuries is these fertile clay beds. Accepting Isparta as the center, the suitability of clay to ceramics was also certified in the geological surveys in both Isparta and its surroundings, which were made to represent the region in general.

When the clay deposits in Isparta and its surroundings are examined in two groups, in terms of their formation form, as lacustrine and fluvial basin clays deposited in the Neogene and Quaternary, Neogene basins, which are generally distributed in Yalvaç and Şarkikaraağaç regions, are mostly filled with lacustrine sediments and their total sediment thickness varies between 500–1000 m. The clay levels within the Neogene sedimentary fill are 10 to 20 meters thick and are divided by coal layers. The clays in this region are predominantly greenish, yellowish, locally regular laminated and charred plant residues. Fluvial clays, which were mostly formed in the Quaternary, were deposited in stream beds, plains and karst formations (e.g., poljes) originating from mountains containing different geological units and are mostly distributed in Isparta and its surroundings.

Eleman (%)	K-1	K-2	K-5	K-7	K-9	K-10
SiO ₂	52.95	31.84	47.46	21.15	45.42	53.03
Al ₂ O ₃	18.93	9.68	13.19	5.34	22.36	15.72
Fe ₂ O ₃	7.70	4.42	6.56	2.97	9.18	8.63
CaO	3.39	22.40	11.64	24.04	5.98	5.32
MgO	1.83	1.68	3.74	6.23	1.09	3.31
Na ₂ O	0.15	0.03	0.42	0.08	0.34	0.34
K ₂ O	3.40	1.47	2.07	0.92	2.47	1.25
A.K.	5.97	21.65	11.27	35.66	9.62	9.63

Figure 8. Chemical analysis results of clay samples from “Göller Bölgesi” (Lake District).

Deniz 1999: 78.

As a result of chemical and mineralogical analyses carried out on fluvial clay samples (K1, K5, K9, K10) taken from different regions (Yalvaç–Yukarıkaşı–kara, Sütçüler–Alakilise, Ağlasun Kibriovası) in Isparta and its surroundings, it was found that the ratios of SiO_2 , Al_2O_3 , Fe_2O_3 and K_2O were quite high (Figure 8). These clay samples are therefore considered suitable for ceramic production, as their mineralogical composition indicates the presence of minerals such as quartz, potassium feldspar, mica and illite.

These clays are derived mainly from the rocks located in the eastern part of the region and from the metamorphic rocks of the Sultan Mountains in the northeast of Yalvaç. It has been observed that the clays used in all pottery centers of the Lakes Region, including the clay sample (K–1), are suitable for shaping on the potter’s wheel and for artistic ceramic works in traditional ceramic production (Deniz et al. 1999: 74). In line with the data obtained from the ceramic tests (K–1, K–5, K–9 and K–10), the clays were determined to be suitable for the production of chamotte clay and wheel-thrown clay in ceramic manufacturing.

REGIONAL ARCHAEOLOGY

While examining the terracotta culture of the Lake District (Lake Region), the region was discussed in general through some prominent centers, taking into account the archaeology of the Neolithic and Chalcolithic Periods (Figure 9).

First of all, it is noteworthy that pottery, which lives as a folk culture, mostly overlaps culturally with these periods. Therefore, one of the aims of archaeological studies should be to reveal the correlation that this uninterrupted culture reflects to our day. However, archaeological studies should be carried out especially in the Neolithic mounds that have been excavated in order to determine the place, importance and relations of the neolithic pottery found in the settlements within the specified regions in the neolithic pottery tradition in Anatolia (Baysal 1995: 4).

Among the finds in “Hacılar”, terracotta figurines as well as Hacılar vessels are interesting. Hacılar figurines are closely related to Kuruçay finds. For example, leaving aside the figurines found in the Q area of floor VI in Hacılar, which were depicted in very different positions, there is generally no difference between the figurines of Hacılar IX–I floors and those found in Kuruçay (Duru 1994: 61). The most distinctive feature of the Early Chalcolithic Age settlement, which was established without cultural interruption after the destruction of the Late Neolithic Age Hacılar, is the extremely skillfully decorated pottery with geometric and fantastic motifs. The pottery of this phase includes painted and monochrome vessels in equal proportions repeating the same forms (Sevin 1994: 29).

Pottery making was probably known and widely used in the Burdur Region from the earliest periods of Neolithic life. Since advanced pottery was found in the lowest levels of the Early Settlement Period accumulation in Höyücek,

which is even earlier than the earliest settlements of the Hacilar mentioned, the history of pottery in the Burdur Region can be traced back even further, perhaps to BC. It would not be speculation to say that it goes back to 7200/7300. (Duru 1996: 8).

The studies carried out by R. Duru in the region at the end of the 1970s revealed that Hacilar was not alone, and there were other contemporary settlements in the Lake District (Duru 2011: 57). These cultures in the region are very colourful, and this region seems to have been home to various cultures at a more developed level compared to other parts of Anatolia (Figure 10).

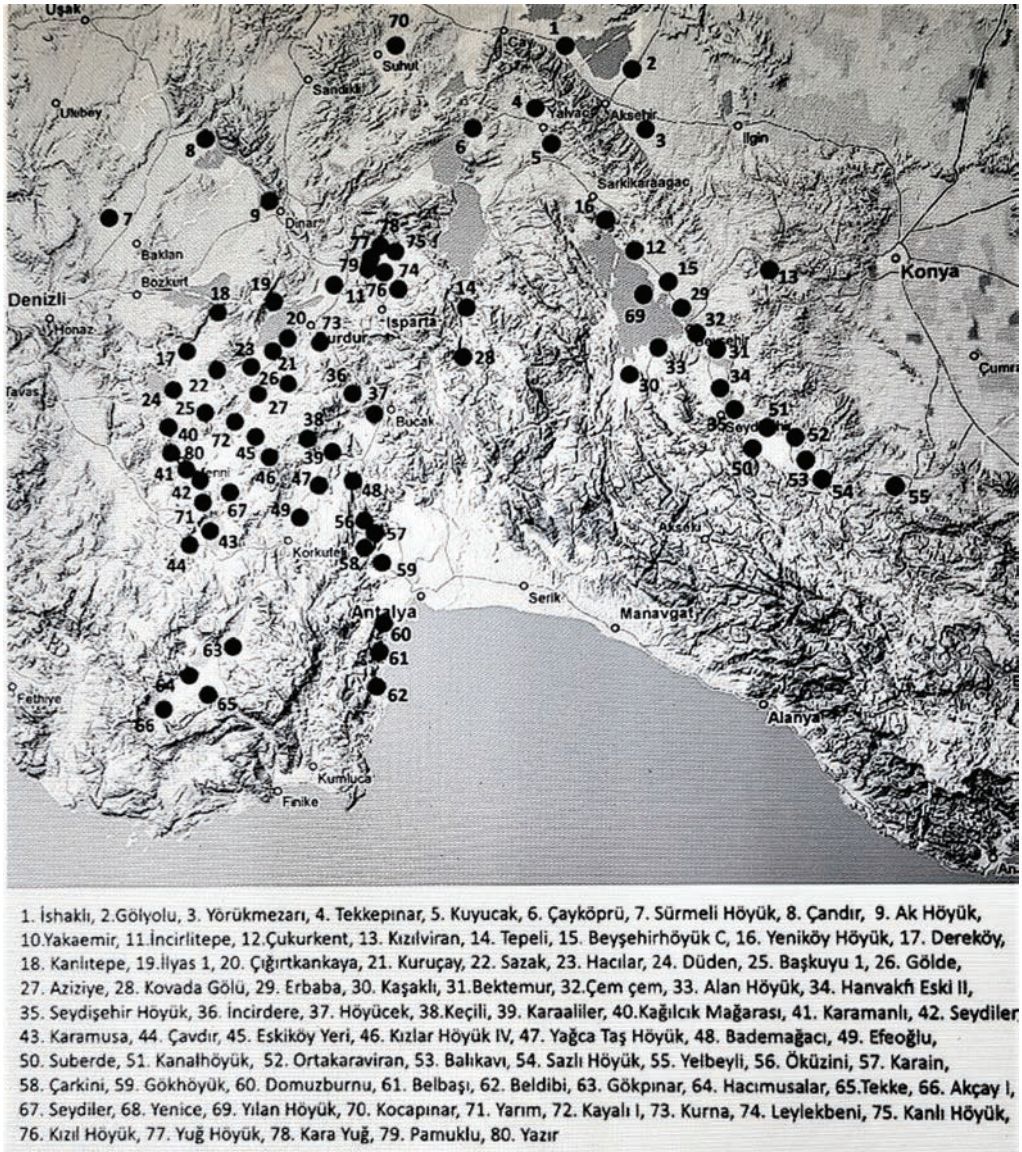


Figure 9. Neolithic and Early Chalcolithic settlements of the Lake District.

Duru 2011: 169.

The excavations, which started in 1957 under the direction of J. Mellaart, continued for four seasons until 1960. In Hacılar, there is culture specific to Anatolia, which lasted for at least 2500 years, from the earliest (aceramic) period of the Neolithic, when human beings started to settle continuously and started farming and animal husbandry, to the late Neolithic (Late Neolithic Age – LNA) and from that stage to the Early Chalcolithic Age (ECA) without interruption. And for the adventure of mankind on our planet, a unique example of these earliest periods of Anatolia was emerging with all its brilliance, in a way that could not be predicted before (Duru 2010: 1) (Figure 11).



Figure 10. Neolithic-Chalcolithic settlements in and around the Lakes Region.

ArkeoAtlas 2002: 99.

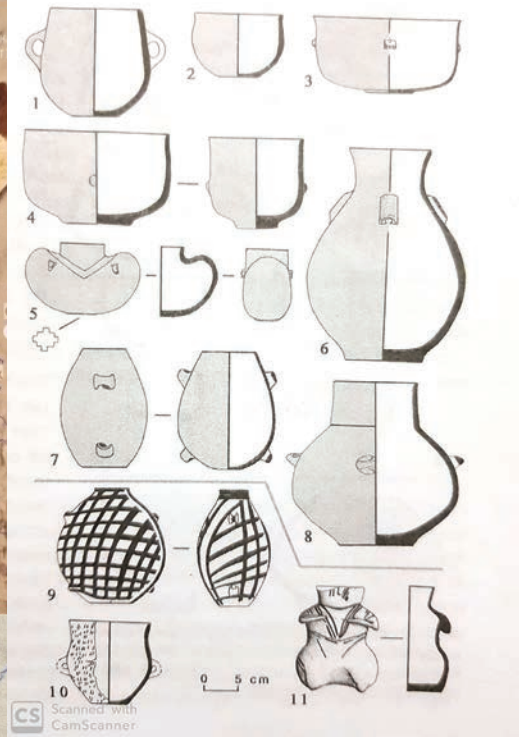


Figure 11. Neolithic Vessels. 1, 2, 10: Höyük; 3, 7: Hacılar; 5, 6: Höyük; 4, 8: Kuyucak; 11: Hacilar; 10: Ulucak.

Sagona 2009: 10.

In Isparta Plain prehistory research, which started with Ormerod, scientists such as K. Bittel, J. Mellaart, Ş. A. Kansu, K. Kökten, T. Özgüç, M. Şenyürek in the 1900s, continue from where it left off with Mehmet Özsaıt. The main archaeological sites of Neolithic and Early Chalcolithic finds, including the Isparta

and Burdur cultural basins, which are currently opened, surveyed and envisaged are: in Isparta, İncirli-tepe-Keçiborlu, Çayköprü-Yalvaç, Kovada Lake, Yeniköy-Şarkikaraağaç, Tekne-pınar-Yalvaç, Findos Höyük-Büyükgökçeli, Aliköy-Center, Beyköy-Şarkikaraağaç, Gelendost, İncirli-pınar-Baradız, Geneli-Hoyran, Kanlı Höyük-Center, Karakaya-Şarkikaraağaç, Karayuş-Center, Kayadibi-Yalvaç, Kırkbağlar-Senirkent, Kızıl Höyük-Center, Yuğ-Bozanönü, Yarikkaya-Yalvaç, Yakaemir-Şarkikaraağaç. Another important archaeological site studied by Özsait in Isparta is Gündürle (Harmanönü), which belongs to the Early Bronze Age.

Apart from the ruins, which are located in the center of the Lake District (Göller Bölgesi) and cover the provinces of Isparta and Burdur, where the early period archaeological research is most intense, there are also very important areas in this region belonging to the late periods, especially the Hellenistic and Roman periods. The Pisidia Region, which covers the whole of today's Isparta province, overflows some of the neighbouring provinces and is used by archaeologists instead of the Lakes Region, who have created two centers, Sagalassos (Ağlasun-Burdur) in the west and Antiokheia (Yalvaç-Isparta) in the east. In terms of ceramics, Sagalassos terrasigillatas gave the best examples of their period.

POTTERY IN THE EAST OF THE LAKE DISTRICT (GÖLLER BÖLGESİ)

Today, Anatolian pottery continues to live as a traditional folk culture despite all kinds of negative conditions. The presence of this craft can be seen in the western part of the "Lakes Region", from Serinhisar and Karacasu to Çanaklı in Burdur (Ağlasun), in Yalvaç and Eğirdir in Isparta a long time ago, in Şarkikaraağaç in the eastern part of the region, in Hüyük in Konya province, both in Doğanhisar and just beyond it in Sille.

Yalvaç district, which is within the borders of Isparta province, 25 km from Şarkikaraağaç, is a center where pottery was discontinued recently. Yalvaç does not produce pottery today, but it would not be an exaggeration to argue that uninterrupted pottery had been made in this settlement, which is the center of East Pisidia, from all periods until the recent past. The only remaining evidence of Yalvaç pottery today is the unused derelict pottery kiln. H. Z. Koşay, in his article "Anadolu'da İptidai Çömlekçilik" (Primary Pottery in Anatolia) in the Turkish Ethnography Journal, stated:

In Eğirdir and Yalvaç, those whose courtyards are available build a kiln in one of their corners. Generally, the kiln is made of adobe in a conical shape. The middle of it is divided by a grid consisting of holes, and wood or bush flames burning in the lower part cook the pottery stacked in the upper part through these holes. A medium-sized kiln is 3–4 meters in width and 4 meters high. It has two doors, one on the upper part and one on the lower part. In this area, it is possible to

fit 150 to 200 bundles and pots into the kiln. The kiln is first heated gradually and then heavily, thus the cooking time is about 48 hours (Koşay 1962: 92).

In this description, Koşay provides detailed information about the pottery production in Eğirdir and Yalvaç, particularly regarding the structure and operation of the kilns.

What is striking here is that the kiln type and the burning method are still similar today. Despite being adjacent to each other, the cultural spreads and especially the ceramic culture of Isparta Plain and Konya Plain, which are accepted as two separate and different cultural basins, show similar characteristics in the Şarkikaraağaç, Hüyük and Doğanhisar settlements, which we call the intersection of these two cultural basins. Although the land between the two plains is quite mountainous, it is quite natural that the Isparta Plain will engage in cultural relations with the Konya Plain over the Eğirdir and Beyşehir lakes (Özgüç 1944: 407).

POTTERY IN ŞARKIKARAAĞAÇ

For the time being, two important archaeological sites have been identified but not continued in Şarkikaraağaç. One of them is “Yeniköy Höyüğü” (Yeniköy Mound), 9 km south of the district. It was discovered by D. H. French in 1960. It is included in the registered archaeological site list prepared by the Ministry of Culture and Tourism.

In the mound, the finds of which have not been published, Hacilar Late Neolithic type monochromatic and burnished shards were found on the hill. Mellaart shows the “Yeniköy Höyüğü” (Yeniköy Mound) on the map that gives the Neolithic Age settlements. It can be said that it is the last Neolithic Age settlement.

Another archaeological site is “Yakaemir Höyüğü” (Yakaemir Mound) which is located in the northeast of Isparta city center, and 10 km west of Şarkikaraağaç. This place was discovered during the survey conducted by M. Özsait in the Şarkikaraağaç region in 1987. Özsait has reported that similar Late Neolithic–Late Chalcolithic Age pottery, which he knew from the Burdur region, was also found here. Apart from this, there are also EBA 1 (Early Bronze Age) and EBA 2 pottery. The settlement has been destroyed due to agricultural activities. It is fully cultivated and its southwestern piedmont has been cleared (Harmankaya 2021).

Although Şarkikaraağaç, one of the districts of Isparta, was an intense pottery center together with its adjacent neighbours Hüyük and Doğanhisar districts until recently; today there is a vague pottery production. All the methods used for pottery production in Şarkikaraağaç are almost the same as in the vicinity of Isparta, Hüyük, and Doğanhisar. The kiln type, firing methods,

wheels and forms are similar to the pottery of the immediate surroundings. However, there is a slight difference in the lined ornaments (Figures 12, 13, 14).



Figure 12. Şarkikaraağaç single handle pots.

Photograph by Serap Ünal.



Figure 13. Şarkikaraağaç Jugs.

Photograph by Serap Ünal.



Figure 14. Şarkikaraağaç Pottery Kiln.

Photograph by Serap Ünal.

DOĞANHISAR POTTERY

Doğanhisar district of Konya Province is also one of the centers where intense pottery was experienced until recently but is still resisting with a few remaining workshops and craftsmen. However, it is more fortunate than the nearby pottery-producing districts such as Hüyük and Şarkikaraağaç. This is because the living pottery masters are exerting efforts to keep the Doğanhisar pottery alive, even if symbolically, in very few workshops.

Geographical Situation

Doğanhisar district, spread over the geographical area of the Lakes Basin, is 122 km away from the province of Konya, to which it is connected, and is adjacent to Ilgın district in the east, Hüyük district in the south, which is a pottery settlement like itself, and Akşehir district in the north.

While it was a sub-district of the Akşehir district, it became a district of Konya province in 1957. In Doğanhisar, located in the transition corridor of the Central Anatolia and Mediterranean climate zone, precipitation lasts for 2–3 months in spring and autumn (Mevlana Kalkınma Projesi 2012: 2). The summers are dry and hot, the winters are cold and rainy, and the continental climate is dominant in general. In Central Western Anatolia, the metamorphic mass, which forms a mountain range of approximately 105 km in length and 25 km in width, extending in the northwest-southeast direction between the towns of Çay, Sultandağları, Akşehir and Doğanhisar in the north, Yalvaç, Şarkikaraağaç and Hüyük in the south, is known as the “Sultan Dağları Masifi” (Sultan Mountains Massif) in the Turkish geological literature (Aksoy & Bozdağ 2008: 2).

Findings from Prehistoric Periods

Since the archaeological excavations and surface research studies of the early periods with prehistoric ceramics have not been carried out sufficiently, we do not have complete information about the Neolithic Period. Considering that there are important neolithic centers with pottery in nearby centers (such as Çatalhöyük, Hacılar and Kuruçay) in the same region, the probability of finding neolithic settlements with pottery is quite strong. The closest neolithic settlement to Doğanhisar is Çukurkent Village, which is 30 km away from the district. Archaeological studies in Çukurkent, which started with H. A. Ormerod in 1910, continued later on, but enlightening results could not be reached completely.

Standing out with its figurines, Çukurkent is a settlement connected to the Hüyük District to the west of Konya and is located close to the intersection of the Beyşehir-Isparta and Hüyük-Doğanhisar main roads. Due to its location, Çukurkent has been visited by many local and foreign scientists since the beginning of the 20th century. As a result of the survey of the place where the female figurines were purchased from the villagers, a hillside settlement dating to the late Neolithic Period was discovered and Çukurkent became known in the archaeological world for its figurines. According to Mellaart, who conducted extensive surface surveys in Konya and the Lakes District, Çukurkent is a settlement belonging to the Neolithic and Chalcolithic ages (Özkan & Erdalkıran 2014: 27).

This settlement, which is claimed to have a rich area belonging to the Neolithic Period, is covered with agricultural lands today and no studies are being carried out. The finds in the archaeological studies in the region mostly belong to the Chalcolithic Period and later. Çebişli Höyük II, Karahöyük and Kızıllık are important settlements belonging to the Chalcolithic Period.



Figure 15. Konaklı, Doğanhisar Tokluoğlu Mining LTD industrial clay pits.

Photograph by Serap Ünal.

Geological Structure

Allochthonous soil is especially dominant in the Doğanhisar region. The soil is largely of alluvial origin (Biricik 1997). Ferrous clays containing hematite and limonite, which are peculiar to Neogene and mostly Pliocene, range in a wide area in the skirts of the Sultan Mountains and Doğanhisar region (Biricik 2018: 18). The industrial clay pits of the region are located in Konakkale, 20 km from the district center (Figure 15).

Clay extracted by licensed enterprises located in this area is sent to the important ceramic factories in Turkey. During the on-site examinations and interviews, it was stated that the clay extracted from the pit is the clay with the highest plastic value in the region. Chemical analysis results of “industrial clays” given from laboratories operating in the region are: SiO₂: 66%, Al₂O₃: 22–25%, TiO₂: 1,21%, Fe₂O₃: 0,90%, CaO: 0,15%, MgO: 0,32%, Na₂O: 0,75%, K₂O: 2,70%, SO₃: 0,25%.

Potter's Soil

The clay used in Doğanhisar pottery workshops is obtained from the slopes called “Asmalidere mevki” adjacent to the district center. The clay pit at the first level of the slopes with bi-level clay beds is considered to be lower in quality by the local potters. Therefore, the clay is taken from the clay beds on the upper slopes (Figure 16).

Clay is taken from this pit 40 cm below the surface and transported to the workshops by horse carts and tractors. Being in a sedimentary lithological structure different from the soil, “silt”, the grain size of which varies between 1/256 and 1/16, also called “ince kum” (fine sand) in the region, is found in potter's clay (silty clay) variably at a rate of 10–50%.



Figure 16. Clay beds in Asmalı locality, used by local potters.

Photograph by Serap Ünal.

Generally, the clay used by Doğanhisar potters is 90% clay and 10% silt. Pots prepared with the use of clay in these proportions do not crack or break during the drying process, and the water jugs cooked in this way ensure that the water is kept cooler (Biricik 2018: 20). The chemical structure of clays used by Doğanhisar potters is: SiO₂: 56,0801%, Al₂O₃: 20,7134%, TiO₂: 1,1157%, Fe₂O₃: 10,5788%, CaO: 0,3573%, MgO: 0,9569%, Na₂O: 0,5984%, K₂O: 3,0513%, SO₃: 0,0351%.

Pottery Workshops

Doğanhisar pottery workshops are structures integrated with houses, which are living centers. Today, only three active pottery workshops have remained in Doğanhisar. However, in the late 1950s, there were more than 100 pottery workshops. These workshops were centered around “Ezze Dersi” (Ezze Brook). Today, the pottery soil brought to the existing workshops is still taken from the Asmalıdere area of the Kuzyaka neighbourhood. Pottery workshops in Doğanhisar are called “kârhâne”, meaning the place where commercial profit is obtained. The workshops are rectangular-shaped adobe structures, spread over an area of approximately 100 m², with high ceilings, built on earth ground, and constructed with wooden columns and beams (Figure 17).

The walls are plastered with a kind of lime called “ak siva”. Wooden shelves were placed on the interior walls. These shelves are mostly used for drying before baking. The finished pots are stacked on top of each other in a suitable place in the workshop. Starting from the entrance of the workshop, on the left side of it, there is the earthen ground where the soil is piled up, the technological tools such as “vals” (rollers) and the workbench/benches with the potter’s wheel. These workbenches are always located in the bright areas of the workshop. The back of the workshop opens with a wide door to a garden

called “arka hayat”, which can be considered as a continuation of the workshop in which the kiln is located. Almost all operations are done in the workshop. Doğanhisar pottery workshops give a homogeneous appearance.

Pottery Masters: According to district annuals and local narratives, it is said that 80% of the people were engaged in pottery in the 1950s. This ratio and the number of masters, which have decreased over the years, have brought Doğanhisar pottery very close to extinction level. According to the research of Ali Selçuk Biricik; although there is no definite data, “Alaybeyi İsmail Usta”, who completed his military service in Yemen in 1835, is accepted as the first known pioneer master. There are four generations of pottery masters that can be identified in Doğanhisar. Starting from the first generation i.e Memiş Kütükçü, who lived between 1881–1965 and trained many pottery masters, there were fifty-two masters in the second generation between 1945–1955, led by Hoca Halil Efendi, who was also a scholar. The number of major masters who started the pottery profession between the years 1950–1960, continuing in a decreasing course, is nineteen. Of the four extant masters from the last generation, two working masters have remained.

There was also a sectoral structuring in pottery, which was once the main occupation of Doğanhisar residents. In so much that, each workshop, when they were active, consisted of at least 10 employees, including a Chief Master, Chief Head Assistant, Foreman, Apprentices, Earthmen, “Toprakçı” (those who brought the clay/soil), Kündeciler (those who prepare the clay soil/ball before throwing in the wheel), “Tezyinatçılar” (Decorators), “Oduncular” (those who fired the kiln) and Sales Persons (Biricik 2018: 21). This rural business organization in pottery workshops shows us a workshop business structure that has not been encountered in pottery workshops in Anatolia.



Figure 17. Doğanhisar Pottery workshop, general view.

Photograph by Serap Ünal.



Figure 18. Pottery master Mehmet Sever.

Photograph by M. Zafer Ünal.

Today, there are only two workshops and two pottery masters from the last generation who are actively engaged in production in Doğanhisar. Mehmet Sever (Figure 18), one of the important masters of the district, who continued production until a few years ago, has closed his workshop and does not produce pottery.

Among the active workshops, Mustafa Eyidoğan, nicknamed Demirağa, and Hüseyin Yardımcı continue to produce pottery in their workshops. The personal efforts of Eyidogan and Yardimci do not fully meet their economic needs and the market areas of the goods they produce are narrowing day by day with the widespread use of plastic and other industrial equipment.

Potter's Wheel (Kick Wheel)

The tradition of wheeled pottery of about 5000 years, which is considered the first industrial production in Anatolia, has survived to the present day with its operational features almost intact. For this reason, just as an archaeological object that is thousands of years old emerges as a find today, it is also very valuable to bring an operational phenomenon (wheel pottery) to the present as an archaeological value without interruption.

In Anatolia, generally, hand lathes made of stone, wood, clay and metal that can rotate around their own axis, foot lathes, pedal and electric lathes are used. The primitive potter's wheels in Doğanhisar are long shaft and bed lathes, which are commonly seen in Anatolian pottery. As in many pottery centers, in this region, instead of using the foot to move the wheel, technology is followed and an electric motor is used. However, there are also pedestal lathes that preserve their originality. In the workshop, the potter's wheel is usually placed on the sides of doors and windows that receive good light.

A longboard on which the master will sit is turned into a rectangular seat by being disassembled or mounted on wooden legs called "boyunduruk" (yoke) on the opposite stall board. In this way, ergonomic integrity is achieved with the production mechanism.

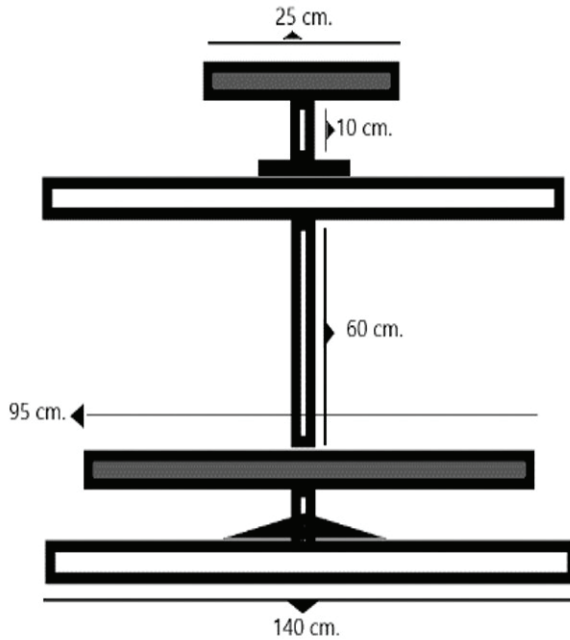


Figure 19. Approximate Dimensions of Doğanhisar Pottery Wheel.

Drawing by Serap Ünal.



Figure 20. Doğanhisar Pottery wheels.

Photograph by Serap Ünal.

The wheel, which is placed just inside the rectangular-shaped bench, remains on the left side of the master. The master sits on the right side of the wheel. In the region, the upper tray on which the clay is placed is called the “Çark Kafası” (Wheel Head), and the wooden wide table that is turned with a foot or motor at the bottom is called the “Çark Eteği” (Wheel Skirt). The top table dimensions can be changed according to the size of the form to be moulded. The standard diameter of the upper table is 25 cm. The diameter of the bottom table is 95 cm and the bar-shaft length between the two tables is 60 cm (Figures 19, 20).

Clay Preparation and Production Techniques

In addition to the red soil with high iron oxide rate (this soil is also called the sieving soil in the region) taken from Asmalı Region, which is used in making pottery in Doğanhisar, the light-coloured and sticky” *çorak toprak*” (barren soil), which is also called “fat soil or plastic soil”, obtained from the slopes of the mountains surrounding the district is brought to the workshops by various vehicles. Barren soil is poured into the clay ponds prepared in 1 x 2 m dimensions and soaked, and then, to the soil rested in this way for a day, sieved Asmalı Dere (Asmalı Brook) soil (red soil) is added in approximately equal proportions.

The resulting mixture is made homogeneous in two ways. The first method is as follows: the mixed clay, which was previously trodden for at least a day in the pool in the workshop, is taken from the pool with a shovel and trodden again (locally called “*çamur tepme*,” mud treading). Alternatively, the second method is a technological process, in which the clay is passed through crushing machines called “*vals*” (rollers), formed by two cylinders rotating in opposite directions. After this process, the clay, which is rested for a while, is placed on the clay board next to the wheel in the form of main lumps called “*Kesek*” (clods). The clay block (s) prepared in the form of main lumps are divided into pieces called “*künde*” (clay balls) again according to the size of the form to be processed on the bench.

From here, it is placed on the upper plate of the wheel to originate the form. These clay lumps are called “*künthe*” or “*künde*” in this region, the same as the name used in Anatolian pottery.

The process of placing “*künde*” (clay lumps) on the upper plate of the wheel by the master to shape them is locally referred to as “*tezgaha künde vurma*” (throwing clay lumps / *künde* on the bench). The clay is moistened by watering the clay lump. This process is locally called “*çivdırma*”(deflection). Then the lower plate of the wheel is rotated with the help of a foot and the “*künde*” (lump/ball of clay) is brought to the center. The top of the clay brought to the center is drilled. The clay lump (*künde*) brought to the center, is opened with one hand inside and one outside, and the process of raising and shaping is started (Figure 21).

As the main grinding tools in shaping, tools made of two different sizes of wood, locally called “*sahtiyan*”, are used. According to the shape of the jug form to be made, the one used in the neck part is called “*boğaz sahtiyanı*”, and the larger one used on the body is called “*karın sahtiyanı*”. After the shaping process is completed, the form is cut and removed from the upper table with the help of steel wire. Approximately one hour later, a handle is attached (*kulp vurma*) to the form that reaches leather hardness. A master can take an average of 100–150 pottery jug forms per day at the wheel.

Before the jugs are put into the kiln, the diluted primer called white plaster (white lime solution), brought from Argitan town (Ilgın district, Konya), is used for decoration. This spiral-shaped decoration made on the surface of the

jug with a brush made of a donkey mane and feathers of poultry is locally called “çiçekleme” (blooming).

Although pure functionality is dominant in contemporary Doğanhisar unglazed forms, in peak periods of pottery, the vessels were glazed and decorated with a glaze called “sırça” (glass) in the region, depending on the purpose of use and aesthetics of appearance (Ünal 2021a: 77–91).

The preparation of glaze is also specific to the region. Diluted copper sulphate ($\text{Cu SO}_4 - 5\text{H}_2\text{O}$), which is also known as “Göztaşı” (blue stone) among the public, a chemical particularly used in medicine and agriculture, is the basic colouring agent of Doğanhisar ceramic glazes that can vary according to the elements in it. Lead, which is a highly dense element, is melted in a concave sheet at a certain temperature and made fluid. The horn of a goat is dipped into the molten lead with an interesting method, which is completely local. Thus, it helps the force (cohesion force) binding the lead element to disappear and turn into powder. The goat horn application used here is very interesting, because this process cannot be performed with the horns of other animals. The glaze is obtained by mixing lead, bluestone, goat horn and some water and melting them in the same pot in certain proportions according to the experience of the master potter. This mixture is then poured into a very large terracotta bowl called “dağar”, which is also a local form. Small-sized pots are glazed with the dip-

piping method, and large-sized pots are glazed by pouring the liquid glaze mixture onto the forming surface with a dipper from outside. After the first firing, the pots that are glazed are put into the kiln for the second glazed firing after 1–1.5 hours of drying time (Biricik 2018: 46).



Figure 21. Metal and wood throwing tools.

Photograph by Serap Ünal.

Kiln Type and Firing Characteristics

In Doğanhisar, dome-type adobe kilns are used. This type of kiln is defined as the “egg type” in the region. The kilns are also called “hurun” in the region. The mudbrick blocks used in the construction of the kilns are formed by pressing a mixture of soil and straw into wooden moulds of 30 x 10 cm dimensions and after drying thoroughly for at least one week, the construction of the kiln is started with them. While two rows of mudbrick blocks are used in the fire-box part of the kiln, single rows of adobe blocks are used in the upper section where the works are placed. After the walling process with adobe blocks is completed, the built kiln is left to dry. After the drying process is completed, plaster formed by mixing straw and red soil in certain proportions is applied to the inner and outer walls of the kiln. Then, to strengthen the kiln, the widest part of the belly is surrounded by a metal ring, and the kiln construction is completed (Figure 22).



Figure 22. Doğanhisar pottery kiln, “Ateşlik” (fire box) on the left, the mouth of the product filling on the right.

Photograph by Serap Ünal.

It is recorded that there were 155 kilns in Doğanhisar in the 1960s. Traditional Doğanhisar kilns also consist of two main parts, in accordance with the general structure, as the firebox and the section “testilik” where the works are placed. There are approximately 60 holes in the perforated separator that separates these two sections from each other. The 3 x 3–3.5 m sized kiln’s 3 x 1.5 m sized jug part, where the works are placed, takes approximately 400 jugs.

The works are started to be placed into the kiln directly above the separator and through a window opened on the side of the kiln. When the jugs placed from here reach a certain height, the kiln is filled by carefully adding/placing the other jugs from the top (from the chimney mouth) to the bottom jugs, and the top is covered with shards. The firing process starts with the burning of wood from the mouth of the kiln early at 06.00 in the morning. The firing process continues in a controlled manner by pushing the firewood that later turned into embers into the interior of the kiln. Otherwise, uncontrolled sudden heat changes can cause cracking or shattering of the products. After 12 hours, temperature continuity is maintained by adding sawdust through the mouth of the kiln. When viewed from the chimney, if the work in the kiln has turned into glowing, the firing is ended. The firing temperature of the kiln is between 750–850 °C. The average firing time of 14–16 hours, which varies according to summer and winter seasons. During this time, 700–800 kg. wood is burned. After these processes, the kiln is left to cool down according to the seasonal conditions and the kiln is opened 1.5–2 days later, and the works are removed (Ünal 2021a: 85).

Forms with Ongoing Production

The main forms in Doğanhisar are pithos (large storage jars) and jugs sized and shaped according to their functional purpose. Like Anatolian jugs in general, Doğanhisar jugs are forms for water use made of earthenware with round profiles, handles, wide bodies, and narrow rims (Figure 23).

Testi (Jug)

This is a water jug with single handle, wide body and narrow neck. Standard sizes; height: 45 cm; belly diameter: 20 cm; rim (mouth): 5 cm; neck: 6 cm; wall: 0.5 cm. Jugs can be produced in different sizes. According to the size of the jugs in the region, names such as “eldesti”, “yatık”, “boduç”, “nimete” are given. The jugs with a spout are also called “ülüklü”.

Bardak (Cup)

This is a wide-bodied, narrow-long-necked water jug with a handle like a big jug. The difference from the jug is that the cup is smaller. A cup is accepted as half of a jug, it is called “two in one jug”. Height: 35 cm; belly diameter: 18 cm; rim: 3,5 cm; neck: 6 cm; wall: 0.5 cm.

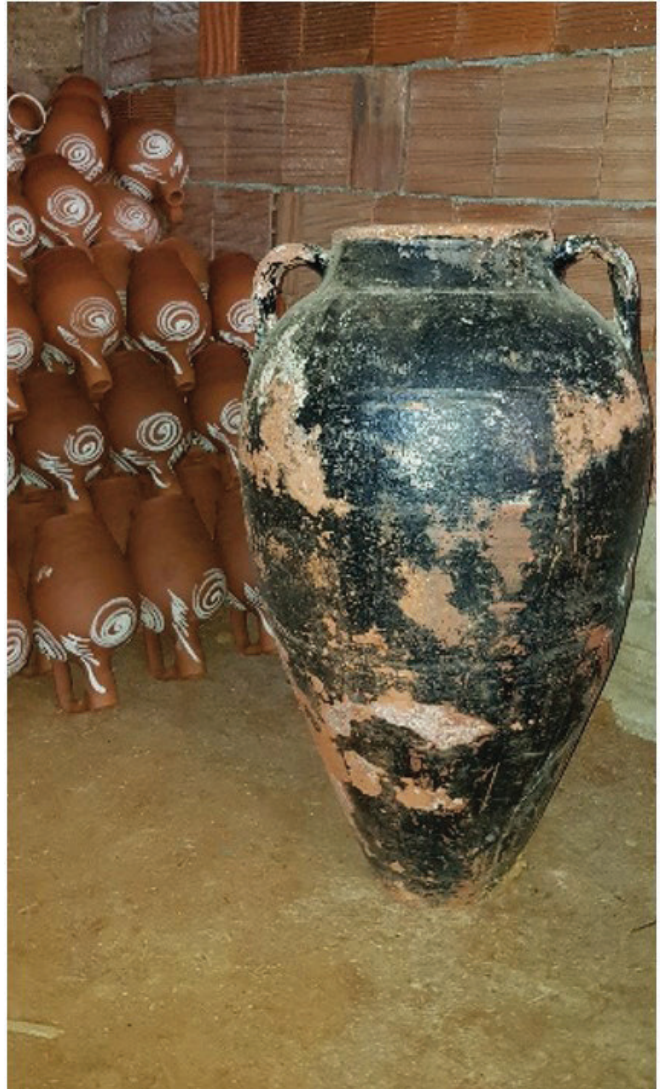


Figure 23. Doğanhisar pottery, which is still in production, the finished *pithos* (storage jar), on the right.

Photograph by Serap Ünal.

Çocuk işi (Child's Work)

Considered a scaled down version of the 1/4 jug. For this reason, it is also called “four in one jug”. Height: 25 cm; belly diameter: 15 cm; rim: 3 cm; neck: 7 cm; wall: 0.5 cm.

Herse Çömleği (Herse Pot)

Double-handled container in which cheese and molasses are put, and also local dishes are made.

Sapsız Sürahi (Handleless Water Bottle)

As the name suggests, this is a wide-bodied, long-necked water container without a handle. The rim is concave and ends with a thickened round lip. Height: 30 cm; belly diameter: 18 cm; rim: 4 cm; neck: 10 cm; wall: 0.5 cm.

Gili

It is the smallest jug form and is intended to be a child's toy rather than intended for use. Height: 15 cm; rim: 3.5 cm; neck: 5 cm; wall: 0.5 cm.

Yaprak Taşı (Leaf Stone)

This is an earthenware utensil with a top handle, about 2 cm in thickness and 20 cm in diameter, which is placed in the casserole before the lid, in order to be well cooked, applying pressure to the meals such as stuffed grape leaves (yaprak dolması), wrapped vine leaves (sarma), etc. while cooking.

Güveç (Casserole)

These are clay pots that are similar in size to each other and function as pots used for cooking. Average dimensions; Height: 17 cm; rim: 20–25 cm; wall: 1 cm.

Gılgıla

A form used for ornamental purposes only.

In Doğanhisar, besides the traditional forms mentioned above, there are also forms for gifts and daily use such as sugar bowls, ash trays, flower vases and flowerpots. These forms are sold outside the district, to nearby centers such as Şarkikaraağaç, Yalvaç, Beyşehir, and Seydişehir. Apart from their functional purposes, they can also be marketed to some centers for touristic purposes.

Old Forms That Are Not Currently Produced

Ambar Küp (Warehouse Storage Jar / Pithos):

As the name suggests, this is the largest jar form that was produced in the past and used for food storage. Height 1–2.5 m; belly width 2–5 m; wall thickness (cidar) 9–12 cm.

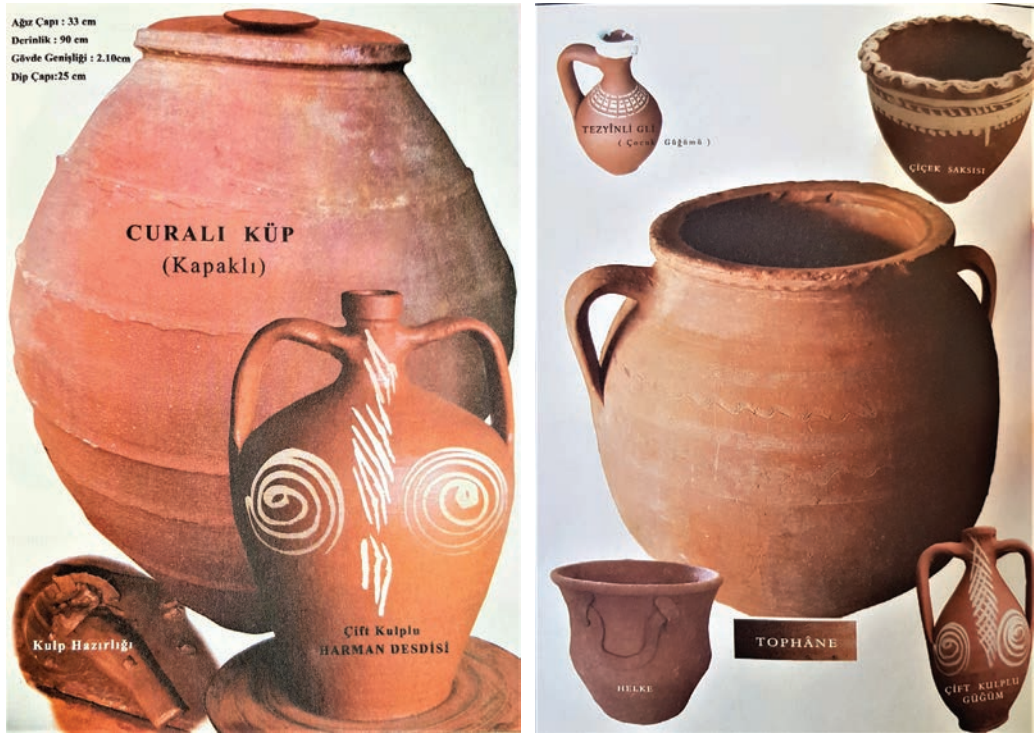


Figure 24. Traditional forms that are not produced in Doğanhisar today.

Biricik 2018: 68–86.

Büyük Küp (Large Storage Jar / Large Pithos)

Large, wide-bellied, narrow-bottomed, thick-walled, handleless vessels for storing liquid foods such as water, molasses, oil or solid foods such as flour and wheat. Height: 80 cm; belly diameter: 45 cm; rim: 30 cm; wall: 0.7–1 cm. In addition to dry foods, the pithos are also used to store acidic foods such as pickles by heating and pitching them. Small pithos are called “Küpecik”.

Curalı Küp (Curalı Storage Jar / Pithos)

This is a lidded form from a group of big jars. It was generally produced to store dry food. Height 90–100 cm; rim (mouth) width 33 cm; belly width 1–1.5 m; wall 5–9 cm. It has a volume of about 200 litres.

Buçuklu Küp (Buçuklu Storage Jar / Pithos)

These are large-bodied food storage pithos with 71 cm height and 13–20 cm rim diameter.

Tophane

These are the pithos group containers that vary between 0.5–0.65 m in height and 1–1.5 m width.

Dağar

These are very wide-mouthed, not too high containers. They are used for milk, cheese and yoghurt as well as for the preparation of ceramic glaze. The mouth diameter is 50–70 cm and the height is 25–30 cm.

Tufran

These are glazed or unglazed earthenware vessels with an internal volume of approximately 15–20 litres, with double handles close to each other, and serving as a “yayık” (churn) for obtaining perforated oil.

Çay demliği (Teapot)

This is a tea infuser pot made of earthenware.

Kahvelik-Şekerlik (Coffee-Sugar Bowl)

A glazed vessel with two adjacent chambers and double handles.

Süt süzgeci (Milk Strainer)

This is a double-handled, 25 cm diameter, glazed strainer with holes at the bottom to filter milk. It is a ceramic form with an open bottom, reverse and truncated conical shape, which is used in the function of transferring milk to a clean container by cleansing it from foreign substances with the help of a cloth attached to the bottom.

With its archaeological and ethnographic extensions, Doğanhisar is perhaps one of the countless examples of traditional Anatolian pottery. Since in the area where the district is located, especially the Neolithic Period has not been studied sufficiently, there is not much information about pottery in this period. However, we know very well that the geography that includes Doğanhisar, namely the Lakes Region, is a very important archaeological site in Anatolia, in which the signs of the Neolithic Age can be seen intensely. Considering that the ceramic phase of the Anatolian Neolithic began in this region in 6500 BC, we can say that the region can produce much more important cultural values.

HÜYÜK POTTERY

Like its neighbour Doğanhisar, the Hüyük district of Konya, located on the eastern border of the Lakes Region, is a pottery settlement that kept the tradition of pottery alive until its recent past. It is undoubtedly an advantage for Hüyük pottery that it shares the same geography, historical background and fertile clay beds with Doğanhisar. Despite this favourable position, the changing sociological and economic conditions brought the pottery tradition to an end in Hüyük. After the last master, İsmail Arıkan passed away, the only remaining pottery workshop continues to produce with the efforts of his children, and

besides traditional forms, construction ceramics, the production of ceramic objects for tourism purposes and traditional forms for export it offers some hope for the district's pottery.

History and Geographical Position of the District

Hüyük district of Konya province is located in the Lakes Region of the Mediterranean region. Hüyük, located 90 km west of Konya, is surrounded by Doğanhisar and Şarkikaraağaç in the north, and Beyşehir in the south. The area of the district is 549 km² and the average elevation from sea level is 1,245 meters. The north and east of the district are surrounded by mountains with an average height of 1500–2000 m, which are the extension of the Sultan Mountains. While there is undulating land in the west, it consists of plains up to Beyşehir Lake in the south and southwest. In the southeast part of the Sultandağları Massif, between Doğanhisar and Hüyük, under the Miocene–Pliocene aged cover, old Paleozoic metamorphics of the massif are located (Aksoy & Bozdağ 2008: 37). Geological studies have revealed that the clay structure of the region is suitable for ceramic production.

The region, whose geological structure is suitable for ceramic production, is in an environment suitable for pottery and industrial ceramic production today as it was in the flow of ages. This is because there are brick and tile factories engaged in industrial production in the region where Hüyük and Doğanhisar districts are located. Although Hüyük and its surroundings are dated back to 2000 BC in clear historical official documents, Neolithic finds extend the history of the region to 7000 BC.

Archaeological research in the area of Çukurkent village, a neighbourhood of Hüyük district of Konya province, reveals that the history of the region dates back to the Neolithic Age. Archaeological studies started with H. A. Ormerod, and then J. Mellaart carried out extensive surveys in Konya and the Lakes Region, explored this area in 1951–1952, and suggested, with the help of the findings he obtained, that Çukurkent was a settlement belonging to the Neolithic and Chalcolithic ages. Likewise, I. Todd introduces Çukurkent as a Neolithic settlement by comparing the ceramics found with the samples from levels 3–4 of Çatalhöyük. H. Bahar, who was conducting archaeological surveys in Konya, also visited Çukurkent and dated the settlement to the Neolithic and Chalcolithic ages, based on the material found on the surface (Özkan & Erdalkıran 2014: 25).

After the first research carried out years ago that will shed light on the Neolithic Period studies in the region, no systematic study could be made in this direction. The fact that the areas where field work will be done are also fertile agricultural soils significantly hinders the research to be conducted.

Pottery Making in Hüyük

While pottery was an important source of income for the people of Hüyük in the past, the number of workshops decreased with the spread of the plastic industry and functional industrial materials. According to the “Mevlana Kalkınma Ajansı” (MEVKA 2019) (Mevlana Development Agency) Hüyük District Report, in 2019, there were three ceramic workshops in the district center, and besides pots for daily use, for Istanbul province, flowerpots for flower greenhouses and chimney pipes for the construction sector were manufactured (Mevlana Kalkınma Projesi 2019: 10). After the death of its last master, İsmail Arıkan (Figure 25), Hüyük pottery came to a standstill. However, the efforts of İsmail master’s son Koray Arıkan to return to his father’s business and revive his workshop again, has given Hüyük Pottery, which once went through a period of stagnation a new source of hope.

In an interview Hüyük’s last pottery master İsmail Arıkan gave to Anadolu Agency in 2018 when he was alive, he expressed the importance of pottery, as well as the extinction process of a tradition within the scope of cultural heritage by saying;

Pottery was one of the most popular professions for many years. The food cooked in an earthen pot was transported to the field or another house in earthen pots. Yogurt was made in a clay pot. Pickles were placed in earthen pithos. Tarhana, flour, honey, oil, bulgur and wheat were stored in earthen jars. In Istanbul and many cities, city water was distributed in earthen pipes. Pottery was an indispensable profession in the past, but now it is about to disappear. Earthen pithos were the refrigerator of the time. Earthenware bowls, jugs, pots, casseroles, vases, flowerpots, and jars were once essential products in every house. The majority of the dowry of the girls (çeyiz) who were going to get married in the years when white goods were not yet available (Akman 2018).



Figure 25.
Pottery master
İsmail Arıkan.

Photograph by
Serap Ünal.

Even if materials such as plastic, glass etc. have replaced earthenware products, the dependence of Anatolian people on their habits, the fact that the younger generation partly looks at the issue in terms of aesthetics and the use of healthy soil products as well as the awareness of cultural heritage becoming more visible, are the factors that give hope for the continuation of pottery.

Wheel

Hüyük pottery wheels are foot-turned, long spindle and bed lathes that are widely used throughout Anatolia. Hüyük pottery masters mounted the electric motor on the workbench instead of the feet that provide movement by following the technology in the wheel as in other stages. There is no deformation on the wheel except the electric motor. There is a longboard, where the master sits on the edge of the table-shaped bench, and a wheel on the front. The master sits on the right side of the wheel. The top tray can be changed according to the size of the form to be moulded. Forms such as ashtrays and vases are placed on the small top tray (8–10 cm in diameter), and large forms such as casseroles, jugs, jars, etc. are made on the large top tray (diameter 25 cm). The potter's wheel (*tezgâh*) is usually placed near the windows to benefit from daylight.

Workshop Features

Although the Hüyük pottery workshops were traditionally at the entrances of the houses, called “Hayatlık”, they are now located in separate spaces. The workshops, locally called “Kapçı Ocağı”, are not in standard sizes, but built with mud mortar, with earthen roofs and wooden beam ceilings (Figures 26, 27).

The courtyards and roofs of the workshops are also important areas for production. Clay preparation, drying and packaging processes are carried out in these areas. While the number of workshops and masters was 40–50 until about 1980, today there is only one master and workshop that continue the tradition.



Figure 26. Hüyük Pottery workshop, outside view.

Photograph by Serap Ünal.



Figure 27. Inside view of the workshop.

Photograph by Serap Ünal.

Throwing Tools and Construction Techniques

The clay mass, which is taken with a wooden shovel from the clay pile kept in the resting pool, is kneaded on the wooden bench and its air is removed. In addition, this process is also carried out in machines consisting of two rollers (vals) rotating in opposite directions with respect to each other. After the kneading process is finished, the pottery clay is divided into pieces according to the size of the form to be thrown. These pieces are placed on the upper table of the wheel by the master to be shaped. Then, the lower plate of the wheel is rotated with the help of the foot, and the clay is brought to the center. The clay piece brought to the center is opened with one hand inside and one hand outside, and the process of raising and shaping the clay is started. The local name “satyan”, which is a throwing tool made of metal and wood, is used to shape and straighten the belly of the form.

Metal “satyan” is used for fine works and wood “satyan” are used for much more rough works (Figure 28).

Kiln Type and Firing Features

There are two types of primitive kilns in Hüyük, dome type and cylinder-type kilns. The walls of these kilns are stone mesh and plastered with mud from inside and outside (Figure 29).



Figure 28. Throwing tools used in Hüyük pottery. These auxiliary tools are generally similar to the tools used in the region.

Photograph by Serap Ünal.



Figure 29. Kiln mouth.

Photograph by Serap Ünal.



Figure 30. Traditional Hüyük pithos and pots.

Photograph by Serap Ünal.

In accordance with general use, Hüyük kilns consist of two main parts, the firing box (ateşlik) and the chamber where works are placed. The surface separating these two sections has 30–35 holes with a diameter of approximately 8–9 cm on it. In cylinder-type kilns, the works are carefully placed on the perforated pan from the chimney mouth on the top, and the top is covered with shards. In dome-type kilns, on the other hand, works are placed in the part where the work is placed from a cavity opened from the side. This space where the works are placed is called “Kayma ağzı” in the region. In both types of kilns, the firing box is under the ground floor. The intake part of the firing is called “Ateş ağzı” or “Yanma ağzı” in the region. In the dome-type kiln, the height of the firing box is 1.6 m and the height of the second chamber where the works are placed is 2.2 m. The diameter of the kiln is 1.5 m. The wall thickness is 25–30 cm.

The dimensions of the cylinder-type kilns are close to the dome-type kilns. Kiln filling capacities take approximately 400–500 vessels as jug forms. The firing process starts with the burning of the kindling wood (pine) as an igniter at the mouth of the kiln. Then, the burning process continues in a controlled manner by pushing the wood that becomes embers to the inside of the kiln. The firing time is 9–10 hours in summer and 12–13 hours in winter. During these periods, the kiln temperature reaches approximately 650–800 °C. During this time, 1–1.5 steres of wood are burned. In order to understand whether the kiln

has reached the temperature or not, the incandescent state must be noticed by the master when viewed from the top (from the chimney mouth). When this heat level is detected, it means that the kiln has reached a sufficient temperature. After these processes, the kiln is left to cool for one day.

Forms

Hüyük pots, as they are commonly known in Anatolia, are forms with a single or double handle, a round profile, a wide body, a slightly narrower rim than the body, and a short neck made of clay to store solid or liquid foods. Hüyük pottery takes the following names according to their intended use and dimensions (Figure 30).

Large Pot

This is a single-handled, wide-bodied, short-necked form. Dimensions: Height: 30 cm; belly diameter: 18 cm; neck: 7 cm; rim (mouth): 10 cm; wall thickness: 1 cm.

Middle Pot

This is a form with a single handle, a wide body and a short neck. Dimensions: Height: 26 cm; belly diameter: 17 cm; neck: 7 cm; mouth: 9 cm; wall thickness: 1 cm.

Small Pot

This is a proportionally reduced form with the same features as the large and medium pots. Dimensions: Height 24 cm; belly diameter: 14 cm; neck: 7 cm; mouth: 9 cm; wall: 1 cm. The small pot is made smaller and used as a mug called “maşrapa” (a small water bowl).

Large Jug

This is a single-handled, convex, broad-shouldered, thin-necked water jug containing the main lines of the general Anatolian jugs. The most important feature of the Hüyük jugs is that, unlike other Anatolian jugs, they are close to pithos in size. Dimensions: Height: 60 cm; belly diameter: 26 cm; mouth: 5.5 cm; neck: 12 cm; wall: 1 cm.

Medium Jug

This is the form of the large jug, which is kept in the same form and brought to the average dimensions that can be considered as standard. Dimensions: Height: 40 cm; belly diameter: 25 cm; neck: 7 cm; mouth: 4.5 cm; wall: 0.7 cm. In addition, there are also smaller jug forms made in the same way and for the same purpose.

Küp (Pithos / Storage Jar)

Hüyük pithos are large, wide-bellied, wide-mouthed, narrow-bottomed, thick-walled vessels used to store liquids such as water, molasses, oil, or solid foods such as flour, wheat, and tarhana (a traditional Turkish fermented mixture of yogurt, flour, vegetables, and spices, dried and ground). Two types of pithos are observed in Hüyük. One of them is without a handle, with a wider belly and mouth, and the other with a double handle, the mouth part is narrower, mostly made for storing liquid foods. Dimensions: Height: 87 cm; belly diameter: 64 cm; mouth: 30 cm; wall: 2 cm.

Cheese Pot

This is a double-handled form with a glazed rim to store cheese. This form is also used as a vinegar and pickle container by pitching the inside. Dimensions: Height: 37 cm; belly diameter: 21 cm; neck: 3 cm; mouth: 16 cm; wall: 1 cm. In the forms used for the storage of pickle-like acidic foodstuffs, the mouth and inner parts are glazed with a green glaze (borax + copper powder).



Figure 31. Water Pipes and Flowerpots.

Photograph by Serap Ünal.

Apart from the traditional forms, different current forms such as building materials, flowerpots, etc., which are functional and will respond to the commercial market demand, as well as forms produced to be used in different areas for decorative purposes are also of interest (Ünal 2021b: 678–689) (Figure 31).

Hüyük pottery can be sold in local markets outside the district, as well as exported to European countries such as Bulgaria and England, especially for garden landscaping and home decoration¹.

RESULTS AND DISCUSSION

The survival of traditional pottery in the Lake District (Lake Region) is just a glimpse of the numerous traditional Anatolian examples that have tried to endure. Rural pottery production has remained fairly consistent from an archaeological perspective, making it a dynamic remnant that has survived for thousands of years. It is fascinating to see the pottery in the Lake District as a contemporary extension of a 9000-year-old production tradition. Unfortunately, this long-standing process is now facing extinction due to changing kitchen utensil usage, the rise of plastic and glass industries, escalating energy costs, refrigeration and other economic and socio-cultural reasons. Additionally, there is a lack of cultural awareness among the younger generation, leading them to pursue more lucrative and less demanding professions. The decline is evident in pottery centers such as Şarkıkaraağaç, which have ceased rural pottery production, while others like Hüyük and Doğanhisar have resisted the extinction process. These three centers share many similarities in vessel forms and methods due to their geographical proximity. The preservation of rural pottery as intangible cultural heritage and its contribution to archaeological studies are important goals. Despite intensive research on past cultures in the western Lake Region, there has been a delay in studying the region's rich archaeology, especially in the area where the Konya Plain Cultures intersect with Isparta. Pottery acts as an invaluable material for cultural sciences, as it can endure for thousands of years, providing insights into ancient cultures. Interpretation of ancient works of art does not exist in the objects themselves; Rather, it relies on the interpreter's understanding of the relationships between artifacts and behavior. These relationships may be latent in the archaeologist's mind and come from archaeological traditions and experiences, but they may also arise from ethnoarchaeology, ethnography, and archaeological theory. In any case, interpretation is based on implicit or explicit relationships between artifacts and culture, whether archaeologists realize it or not (Arnold 2011: 63). The study of rural pottery and its production stages will undoubtedly make significant contributions to disciplines like archaeology and anthropology. Furthermore, the preservation of cultural basins with deep-rooted histories will have positive impacts on tourism. Lastly, pottery remains the foundation of

traditional pottery, contemporary ceramic art, and the ceramic industry, which has contributed to cultural sustainability since the Neolithic period.

CONCLUSION

This research is a field study aimed at contributing to interdisciplinary material culture studies, including comparative analyses of the materials and practices observed. Objects made of terracotta, which is a very important material of archaeology and anthropology, undoubtedly carry data from approximately 9000 years ago to the present day. Nowadays, in geographies with early settlements, rural pottery, in addition to its ethnographic cultural values, is likely to convey the information of the distant past to the present day, as it has not undergone much change. But such research should not be in the scope of only archaeologists and anthropologists; an interdisciplinary approach, including ethnography, geology, geography and ceramic art, may provide more comprehensive information.

There is a need for such study on a certain region; in particular, the region (Lakes Region) has settlements from all periods, starting from the Paleolithic Period. Although there are many important settlements from the Neolithic and Chalcolithic Periods in the region (see Figure 9) serious prehistoric research has not been carried out in and around the triangular area formed by Şarkikaraağaç, Hüyük and Doğanhisar. Just the existence of qualified clay deposits suitable for ceramic production in the region may indicate the existence of pottery in the distant past of this area.

Clay is the material and ceramics is the culture that emerges from the process of producing the material in a particular way. It is the discourse resulting from the ongoing production and consumption of pottery, figurines and tiles across time and space. In short, ceramics is a discipline or genre (Greenhalgh 2020: 112).

Interpretation of ancient works of art does not exist in the objects themselves; rather, it is based on the interpreter's understanding of the relationships between artifacts and behavior. These relationships may be implicit in the archaeologist's mind and come from archaeological traditions and experiences, but they may also be rooted in ethnoarchaeology, ethnography, and archaeological theory. In any case, interpretation is based on implicit or explicit relationships between artifacts and culture, whether archaeologists realize it or not (Arnold 2011: 63).

The three district centers where field research was conducted are also known as pottery centers in the ethnographic process. This is also an important cultural value that should be kept alive. The sustainability of this culture must be ensured. This sustainability, which will be reflected in tourism revenues within the scope of "Intangible Cultural Heritage", will also provide economic returns to the region.

NOTE

- 1 Field studies of the pottery areas in the Lakes Region were carried out by the author (Serap Ünal) on site, and some centers were published exclusively. Additional information and observations gained after these studies are also evaluated in this article. The aim of this article is to re-evaluate the extinct pottery centers in the east of the region with the participation of cultural sciences such as anthropology, archaeology, etc. within the scope of cultural heritage and to motivate incomplete prehistoric archaeological studies.

REFERENCES

- Akman, Muhammed Ali 2018. *Yeni Nesil Toprak Ürünleri Bilmiyor*. [The New Generation Doesn't Know Terracotta Products.] Available at <https://www.aa.com.tr/tr/yasam/yeni-nesil-toprak-urunleri-bilmiyor/1241600>, last accessed on 21 March 2024.
- Aksoy, R. & Bozdağ, A. 2008. Doğanhisar-Hüyük (Konya) arasında Sultandağları Masifinin yapısal özellikleri. [Structural Characteristics of the Sultandağları Massif between Doğanhisar and Hüyük, Konya.] *Selçuk Üniversitesi Mühendislik-Mimarlık Fakültesi Dergisi*, Vol. 23, pp. 2–37.
- Arnold, Dean. E. 1985. *Ceramic Theory and Cultural Process*. Cambridge: Cambridge University Press.
- Arnold, Dean. E. 2011. Ceramic Theory and Cultural Process after 25 years. *Ethnoarchaeology*, Vol. 3, No. 1, pp. 63–98.
- Baysal, Adnan 1995. Güney Anadolu'da Neolitik Dönem Çömlekçiliği. [Neolithic Period Pottery in Southern Anatolia.] Diss. (MA Thesis). Supervised by Refik Duru, Department of Protohistory and Near Eastern Archaeology, Graduate School of Social Sciences, Istanbul University, Turkey, p. 4.
- Biricik, Ali Selçuk 2018. Doğanhisar'ın Fiziki ve Beşeri Potansiyeli. [Physical and Human Potential of Doğanhisar.] İstanbul: Nadir Kitap Publications, pp. 18–46.
- Biricik, N. Selçuk 1997. Doğanhisar Yöresinin Coğrafi Etüdü. [Geographical Survey of Doğanhisar Region.] Diss. (MA Thesis). Marmara University, Graduate School of Social Sciences, Istanbul, Turkey, İstanbul.
- Budja, Mihael 2016. Ceramics among Eurasian Hunter-Gatherers: 32 000 Years of Ceramic Technology Use and the Perception of Containment. *Documenta Praehistorica*, Vol. 43, pp 61–86.
- Deniz, Vedat & Ünal, Serap & Yağmurlu, Fuzuli 1999. *Isparta Yöresi Kil Yataklarının Seramiğe Uygunluğunun Araştırılması*. [Investigation of the Suitability of Isparta Region Clay Deposits for Ceramics.] 3d Industrial Raw Materials Symposium, Dokuz Eylül University, October 14–15, İzmir, Turkey, p. 74.
- Duru, Güneş 2011. Göller Bölgesi Neolitik Yerleşmeleri Üzerine Bir Deneme. [An Essay on the Neolithic Settlements of the Lake District.] *Adalya*. Antalya: Suna & İnan Kıraç Mediterranean Civilizations Research Institute, p. 157.
- Duru, Refik 1994. *Kuruçay Höyük I*. Publications of the Turkish Historical Society, Series V, No. 44. Ankara.
- Duru, Refik 1996. Burdur Bölgesi Neolitik Çağ Mimarlığı. [Burdur Region Neolithic Age Architecture.] *Adalya*. Antalya.
- Duru, Refik 2010. *Elli Yıllık Bir Arkeoloji Öyküsü Hacılar*. [A Fifty-Year-Old Archeology Story Hacılar.] Antalya: Vehbi Koç Foundation, Suna & İnan Kıraç Mediterranean Civilizations Research Institute Yayınları.
- Güner, Güngör 1988. Anadolu'da Yaşamakta Olan İlk Çömlekçilik. [Primitive Pottery Living in Anatolia.] *Culture Series*, Vol. 16, No. 5. İstanbul: Ak Publishing.
- Greenhalgh, Paul 2020. *Ceramic, Art and Civilisation*. London: Bloomsbury Publishing.
- Harmankaya, Savaş 2021. Yakaemir Höyüğü. [Yakaemir Mound.] *The Archaeological Settlements of Turkey*. Available at www.tayproject.org, last accessed on 18 January 2024.
- Hodder, Ian & Hutson, Scott 2017. *Geçmiş Okumak: Arkeolojiyi Yorumlamada Güncel Yaklaşımlar*. [Reading the Past: Current Approaches to Interpretation.] Ankara: Phoenix Yayınevi.

- Koşay, H. Zübeyr 1962. Anadolu'da İptidai Çömlekçilik. [Primary Pottery in Anatolia.] *Türk Etnografya Dergisi*, No. V. Publication of the General Directorate of Antiquities and Museums, Ministry of Culture and Tourism, p. 92.
- Mevlana Kalkınma Projesi 2012. *Doğanhisar İlçesi'nin Kil Başta Olmak Üzere Maden Türünden Yeraltı Kaynaklarının Potansiyellerinin Tespiti*. [Determination of the Potential of Mineral Type Underground Resources, Especially Clay, of Doğanhisar District.] Project TR52 11TD01/118, Konya, p. 2.
- Mevlana Kalkınma Projesi 2019. *Hüyük İlçe Raporu*. [Hüyük District Report.] Project TR52, Konya, p. 10.
- Özdoğan, Mehmet 2002. Çanak Çömlek Teknolojisi [Pottery Technology.] *ArkeoAtlas: Journal of the Living Past*, Vol. 1, İstanbul.
- Özgüç, Tahsin 1944. Öntarihte Isparta Ovası Kültürü Ve Yeni Buluntuları. [Culture of Isparta Plain in Prehistory and Its New Findings.] *Ankara Üniversitesi Dil ve Tarih-Coğrafya Fakültesi Dergisi*, Vol. 2, No. 3, pp. 407–418.
- Özkan, Süleyman & Erdalkıran, Mücella 2014. Yeni Buluntuların Işığında Çukurkent Neolitik Yerleşimi. [Çukurkent Neolithic Settlement in the Light of New Finds.] *The Annual of the Suna & İnan Kiraç Research Institute on Mediterranean Civilizations, Adalya, Antalya*, pp. 25–27.
- Rieth, Adolf 1960. *5000 Jahre Töpferscheibe*. Konstanz: Jan Thorbeck Verlag.
- Sagona, Antonio & Zimansky, Paul 2009. *Arkeolojik Veriler Işığında Türkiye'nin En Eski Kültürleri*. [Turkey's Oldest Cultures in the Light of Archaeological Data.] Başgelen et al. (eds.). İstanbul: Archaeology and Art Publications p. 77.
- Sevin, Veli 1994. *Anadolu Arkeolojisinin ABC si*. [ABC of Anatolian Archeology.] İstanbul: Simav Yayınları, p. 29.
- Şenel, Alaeddin 1982. İlkel Toplumdan Uygur Topluma. [From Primitive Community to Civilized Society.] *Ankara University Faculty of Political Sciences Publications*, Vol. 504. Ankara, pp. 159–160.
- Ünal, Serap 2021a. Ceramic Production from Neolithic Doğanhisar Pottery Culture: Intangible Heritage of Technology Transfer from Past to Present. *Scientific Culture*, Vol. 7, No. 3, pp. 77–91.
- Ünal, Serap 2021b. Son Ustasının Ardından Hüyük Çömlekçiliği [Hüyük Pottery After Its Last Master.] *Motif Akademi Halkbilimi Dergisi*, Vol. 14, No. 34, pp. 678–689.
- Ünal, Serap 2023. *Anadolu Pişmiş Toprak Kültüründe Göller Bölgesi*. [Lakes Region in Anatolian Terra-cotta Culture.] İstanbul: Arkeoloji ve Sanat Yayınları.

Prof. Dr. Serap Ünal is the Head of the Department of Ceramics and Glass, and Chair of both the Ceramics and Glass Main Art Program and the Interdisciplinary Archaeo-Ceramics Main Art Program at the Faculty of Fine Arts, Süleyman Demirel University, Isparta, Turkey. She is also the Director of the Ceramic Research and Application Center. Her research spans art, archaeology, cultural studies, interdisciplinary social sciences, museology, applied arts and traditional Turkish crafts. Prof. Ünal has authored 155 publications, led 38 research projects, holds seven intellectual property rights and has participated in over 300 individual and collaborative artistic events.

<http://orcid.org/0000-0003-2407-1789>
serapunal2011@gmail.com

Latvian Hillfort Folklore: Historical and Contemporary Insights

RŪTA MUKTUPĀVELA

Latvian Academy of Culture, Rīga, Latvia
ruta.muktupavela@lka.edu.lv

IEVA VĪTOLA

Latvian Academy of Culture, Rīga, Latvia
ieva.vitola@lka.edu.lv

Abstract: The article examines Latvian hillfort folklore using an interdisciplinary approach that combines data from archaeology, folkloristics and ethnological research. Particular attention is paid to the functional aspects of hillfort folklore in the archaeological discovery process, as well as to the thematic continuity of hillfort folklore from archival records of the 1920s to fieldwork data from 2023.

Interest in hillforts as historical objects became relevant in the second half of the 19th century, when studies started and collected data were systematically supplemented with folklore – legends, stories and toponyms. Interest in hillforts also continued in interwar Latvia, and, although less intense, also remained after World War II. In recent years, with the development of technologies and the use of Light Detection and Ranging (LIDAR) capabilities, more than 70 new hillforts have been discovered; nevertheless, researchers are still using folklore for site identification.

With regard to Latvian hillfort folklore, three basic functions can be distinguished: it serves as a verification tool for the site of the hillforts, affects the content dimension of the place identity narrative and provides an opportunity for local communities to creatively communicate the value of their place of residence in a wider sociocultural context.

While analysing the tradition of Latvian hillfort folklore, five thematic groups can be distinguished in legends and stories: 1) a sunken castle/church on a hill, 2) a mountain covered with the corners of hats/coats, 3) treasure hidden in a mountain, 4) cosmogonic actions of God and/or the Devil, and giants on a hill, 5) hillforts are given significant names.

Hillfort folklore continues to be relevant nowadays. A case study of three hillforts in Baltnava parish, northeastern Latvia (Alotāji, Puncuļova, and Svātiune / Bell Hill) demonstrates, on the one hand, the thematic continuity of hillfort folklore and, on the other, reflections of contemporary realities related to entertainment, everyday life and even esoteric practices.

Keywords: Latvian hillfort folklore, archaeology, interdisciplinarity, qualitative case study

INTRODUCTION

The article focuses on the historical aspects, functions and dynamics of Latvian hillfort folklore. The premises of the theoretical analysis of the empirical material are based on an interdisciplinary approach, basically from two disciplines – archaeology and folklore studies – which is mainly used in the field of cultural heritage studies to localise archaeological sites (Urtāns 2006a; Vaitkevičius 2006; Carlton & Roberts 2014). However, fieldwork data reveal the adaptive nature of folklore itself (Oring 2021; Dundes 2005; Bronner 2011). Folklore of historical sites nowadays also performs other, no less important functions – such as education, tourism, promotion of place belonging, etc., thus allowing us to interpret the folklore of prehistoric sites not only to understand their original significance in prehistory, but also to provide the opportunity to study the meanings of cultural heritage in the present (Gazin-Schwartz & Holtorf 2005: 13).

The purpose of the article is to provide insights into the historical and also some modern aspects of Latvian hillfort folklore, to argue for the usefulness of the mutual interaction between archaeology and folklore studies and to illustrate the adaptability of hillfort folklore as it becomes layered with some modern realities.

The data for the research on the historical aspects were obtained from the Latvian Folklore Archives, periodicals and other publications. To exemplify the modern dimension of hillfort folklore, empirical data were obtained using a qualitative case study methodology in Baltinava parish, northeastern Latvia. This combined archival materials, published sources and ethnographic fieldwork, including participant observation and semi-structured, in-depth interviews.

Regarding the limitation of the study, it should be mentioned that it focuses on the phenomenon and folklore of Latvian hillforts without considering a broader comparative context, including the regional one.

RESEARCH ON LATVIAN HILLFORTS FROM THE INTERDISCIPLINARY PERSPECTIVE OF ARCHAEOLOGY AND FOLKLORE STUDIES

Hillforts constitute an important category of cultural heritage monuments; they are considered one of the largest groups of protected archaeological monuments in Latvia (Vasks & Urtāns 2025: 155). Despite the diversity in types and also in form and size that makes it difficult to define, the hillfort could be characterised as an enclosed place constructed in a visible location to serve as a focus for communal activity (Cunliffe 2014: 152). As fortified residences of ancient, organised societies located on hills or mounds, hillforts date back to the 1st century BCE in Latvia and were used until the 14th century (Vasks & Urtāns 2025: 155). Latvian hillforts are characterised by four main features:

an artificially levelled surface or plateau, levelled or terraced slopes, an artificially created system of ramparts and ditches, and a cultural layer that has formed as a result of the long-term occupation of the site (Urtāns 2013: 3).

According to historians' research, hillforts as special places appeared in the public perception as early as the 16th century (Vasks & Urtāns 2025: 155). However, interest in them as significant cultural and historical objects in the territory of Latvia became relevant in the second half of the 19th century. One of the first discoverers of hillforts is considered to be August Bielenstein – a Lutheran pastor, researcher of the Latvian language, ethnography and folklore, and one of the first to introduce the science of archaeology in Latvia (Ose 2007: 69). Bielenstein used historical sources and chronicles to identify and localise hillforts, but he also understood the importance of oral history and folklore data. In his first appeal to residents to provide information about hillforts in their residential areas, he asked them to give a precise description of the hillfort and its location and the names of nearby objects – rivers, manors, forests and other objects (Bielenstein 1883; Broka-Lāce 2022). At the same time, he called for reports on folklore:

What tales do old people tell about that hillfort, notwithstanding how insignificant they are. Nothing is wrong. These are not nonsense. In those simple stories, memories and remnants of old times are scattered. It should also be mentioned whether any old war weapons or other things have been found, discovered, or dug up there (Bielenstein 1866: 63).

Bielenstein was one of those who used to do fieldwork himself, because he liked “wandering through a small piece of my beloved homeland and digging up the remains of its pagan era in the forest and swamp” (Bielenstein 1869: 12). As a result, in 1869, a voluminous article, “Die altlettischen Burgberge Kurlands”, was published, which gave identification data for the hillforts – appearance, relief, nearby objects, etc. The collected data were systematically supplemented with ‘Sagen’ – legends or stories which, as the author himself emphasised, “almost without exception were written down on the spot from the mouths of the people” (Bielenstein 1869: 15).

Interest in hillforts also continued in interwar Latvia, in the 1920s–1930s. Their identification was carried out by the Latvian Society of Antiquities and the War Museum, where a separate department was established for research (Urtāns 1989). A key person whose contribution should be particularly highlighted is Ernests Brastiņš – an employee of the War Museum at that time, an artist, publicist, researcher of folklore and mythology and the founder of a new Latvian religion – Dievturība (Misāne 2000; Ozoliņš 2013; Urtāns 1989). Ernests Brastiņš organised several expeditions from 1922 to 1927, during which he visited hillforts in various regions of Latvia. He developed a system for conducting

descriptions, mapping, photo documentation and measurements, thereby significantly increasing the quality of hillfort documentation and “converting the romance of hillforts into definite scientific data” (Urtāns 1989). In the materials of Ernests Brastiņš’ expeditions, the folklore of the hillforts is given significant importance. Almost every third description of hillforts contains a remark about legends or stories mentioning them, or local people telling something about them. Thus E. Brastiņš’ hillfort books provide insight into how hillfort folklore functioned in the 1920s (Urtāns 2011: 185). The results of Ernests Brastiņš’ fieldwork were compiled in several books (Brastiņš 1923, 1926, 1928, 1930), which still serve as a valuable source for both Latvian archaeologists and folklore researchers, historians and history enthusiasts.

Interest in hillforts, although less intense, also remained after World War II (Urtāns 1994; Urtāns & Asaris 1998). Latvian hillforts have been studied from an interdisciplinary perspective by archaeologist Ritvars Ritums, who, upon graduating from the Faculty of History and Philosophy of the University of Latvia, defended his diploma thesis, “Legends about Latvian Hillforts as a Source of History” (Ritums 1991). He concluded that the most frequently mentioned hillforts in legends were those that were significant economic and administrative centres with a large population, as well as those whose fortifications were more complex and the silhouette more expressive. Ritums’ research revealed not only the value of folklore data as sufficiently reliable historical sources but also a peculiar correlation between the cultural layers of hillforts and legends about hillforts, namely, the thicker the cultural layer of a hillfort, the more legends there are about it (Ritums 1999; Ritums et al. 2006).

Juris Urtāns is the most prominent contemporary researcher of Latvian hillforts who consistently uses folklore data. His interests include mainly ancient cult sites and hillforts, which are identified and studied not only with traditional but also with innovative – including aerial and hydroarchaeological – methods. In his research, Urtāns emphasises the benefits of the interaction of the two sciences – folklore studies and archaeology. In his opinion, this usefulness is so pronounced that there is reason to talk about the creation of a new science – archaeofolkloristics (Urtāns 2006a: 8). Among fourteen monographs by this author, a significant number are dedicated specifically to hillforts (Urtāns 1991, 1994, 2006c, 2013, 2022; Urtāns et al. 2009).

In recent years, with the development of technologies and the use of Light Detection and Ranging (LIDAR) capabilities, more than 70 new hillforts have been discovered; nevertheless, researchers are still using folklore for site identification.

Currently, at least 500 hillforts are known in Latvia which are still significant in terms of historical, symbolic and landscape aspects. They provide interesting and valuable data on the ethnogenesis of Balts and on vivid events of ancient history (Urtāns 2013; Šnē 2002). In the context of the ideology of national identity and statehood, the symbolic image of a hillfort is used

in works of literature, art and music (Urtāns 2016; Vitkūnas & Zabiela 2017), creating a reference to romanticised ideas about the ancient Baltic way of life and strengthening the so-called primordial understanding of ethnic identity (Geertz 1973: 259). A characteristic feature of the Latvian landscape is plains, which is why hillforts visually stand out in the landscape, becoming popular sightseeing attractions, serving as gathering places where festivals are celebrated or events, concerts, outdoor dance parties, etc. are held. In this way, they perform the function of constructing local identity and branding the place (Muktupāvela & Ozoliņa & Vītola 2023). It must be admitted that even today, public interest in hillforts has not diminished, as evidenced by the attitude and attention of both the public media and the tourism industry, as well as archaeologists, historians, ethnologists and folklorists.

FUNCTIONAL ASPECTS OF HILLFORT FOLKLORE

The interdisciplinary approach of archaeology and folklore (Gazin-Schwartz & Holtorf 2005; Urtāns 2006b; Vaitkevičius 2006; Vītola 2006; Carlton & Roberts 2014; Paphitis 2014, 2020) allows us to observe how local communities identify, absorb and transmit the meanings of archaeological objects and how they are included in their daily practices and in the construction of their local belonging. Thus, rather than treating the folklore about prehistoric sites only as a key to their original role in prehistory, it can also be used to explore how these sites are perceived in the present (Gazin-Schwartz & Holtorf 2005: 13).

Hillforts as significant cultural and historical objects find their place in oral history. Their specificity is revealed in toponyms, legends and stories, which create a separate category of so-called hillfort folklore.

With regard to Latvian hillfort folklore, three basic functions can be distinguished: it serves as a verification tool for the site of the hillforts, affects the content dimension of the place identity narrative, and provides an opportunity for local communities to creatively communicate the value of their place of residence in a wider sociocultural context.

As mentioned above, hillforts are an important phenomenon of cultural history, shrouded in legends and stories. Folklore, as a form of social memory, despite the presence of metaphors, codes, mythologisation and exaggeration, often reflects collective experience and historical realities. Therefore, not only chronicles and archival data but also oral tradition is used to verify the location of historical objects. The folklore of a particular place – toponyms, legends and beliefs – often serves not only as an alternative but also as a primary source of knowledge about a meaningful landscape as well as cultural and historical objects (Vaitkevičius 2006: 85). Currently, when discovering new hillforts in Latvia, complex fieldwork by archaeologists, ethnologists and folklore researchers has become a common practice, paying attention to whether legends, stories, characteristic toponyms, etc. have still been preserved in the

memory of the inhabitants of the surveyed place (Urtāns et al. 2008; Muktupāvela & Ozoliņa & Vītola 2023).

Hillfort folklore impacts the process of cognitive anchoring of a specific place, serving as a basis for the continuity of traditions of daily practices, enriching language and knowledge of national and local history, ensuring socialisation, as well as creating a positive attitude towards one's habitual environment.

This aspect is confirmed by the observations obtained in the fieldwork regarding the newly discovered hillforts. For example, the oral tradition of a newly discovered hillfort is formed with the moment of its discovery – first naming it, then recording local narratives about the hillfort itself and its immediate surroundings and stories of personal experience, and after that, informing the public about the newly discovered historical site. This usually happens either through communication with researchers during the hillfort survey or through publications in the local press. This process creates a dialogue, arouses the interest of local residents, promotes positive attitudes, and becomes the basis for oral testimonies and content, under the influence of which cultural heritage communities are formed: “The experience of being part of a group, in the landscape, listening to stories and to archaeological and historical information can create a sense of shared culture and community” (Brown & Bowen 2005: 260).

Hillfort folklore allows local communities to creatively communicate the value of their place of residence. Tangible and intangible cultural heritage, of which hillfort folklore is also a part, symbolically tells the story of local belonging, “giving a voice” to local communities, attracting the interest of researchers, artists, educators, media, culture and tourism policymakers and professionals, as well as helping to more successfully attract the resources necessary for infrastructure development (Paphitis 2014; Porter 2016; Muktupāvela & Ozoliņa & Vītola 2023). During the research, it was observed that identity and place belonging are often constructed and strengthened with the help of archaeological sites and folklore about them, because residents are proud of these places, calling them “our heritage” (Voss 1987: 85).

CHARACTERISTICS OF LATVIAN HILLFORT FOLKLORE

While analysing the tradition of Latvian hillfort folklore, five thematic groups can be distinguished in legends and stories: 1) a sunken castle/church on a hill, 2) a mountain covered with the corners of hats/coats, 3) treasure hidden in a mountain, 4) cosmogonic actions of God and/or the Devil, and giants on a hill, 5) hillforts are given significant names (Urtāns et al. 2008: 6–7; Urtāns 2024).

The most characteristic and common legend plot is about a castle or a church sunk into a hill. According to legends, after the castle has sunk, a hole, a well or a chimney appears on the top of the hill, into which a waterbird, usually a duck, is let in, and it swims out in a water basin next to the hill. Sometimes a person is

lowered into a deep pit using a rope, but he does not return, and a stone, log or bundle of straw tied to the end of the rope is pulled out instead of him. It is possible that the mentioned pit at the top of the mound reflects vague memories of a well or water reservoir that once existed (LFK¹ 220, 962; LFK 1276, 6469; LFK 1507, 9; LFK 861, 93; Ancelāne 1988: 38).

According to legends, after the castle sinks, treasures are found inside the hill, and there are people still living under the hill. The inhabitants of the sunken castle can sometimes be met near the hillfort. It is possible to meet them when walking alone along the hillfort; this often happens late in the evening or at midnight. Legends tell that if you want the sunken castle to rise again, you must guess its name or pronounce a specific verbal formula. In some legends, the motif of a sunken castle or church is used to explain the visual appearance of the hill in the landscape (LFK 1754, 136; LFK 13, 1049; LFK 302, 4573).

A less common motif is that the hill is built by bringing soil with hats or coat corners, usually done by soldiers, local farmers and servants. Perhaps the legends of this thematic group reflect memories of the construction of the fortification system of the hillfort, as, for instance, regarding the Arona hillfort near Madona, in central Latvia. Legends tell that it was built by soldiers carrying soil in their hats (LFK 1985, 877; LFK 935, 12699).

In folk belief, hillforts are often considered places of hidden treasure. According to some superstitions, money buried or sunk there often appears in human form, for example, as a “woman in white”, who asks the person she meets to touch her or help her. If this is not done, the money disappears in the blink of an eye (LFK 1207, 8649; LFK 230, 2529; LFK 739, 418; Ancelāne 1998:30; Šmits 1937).

There is a small group of legends that tell of the cosmogonic actions of God and/or the Devil and giants on a hill. For example, people say that there was a giant’s bed at the Ķodere hillfort (Vidzeme region), which was called ‘the Big Man’ (LFK 1018, 36).

The phenomenon of hillforts can also be reflected in toponyms. Some characteristic names of hillforts are Pilskalns (‘hillfort’), Baznīckalns (‘church hill’), Gorodoks/Gorodišče (‘hillfort’, a Russian loanword), and Zamoks/Zamečka (‘castle’, a Slavic loanword). Moreover, names such as Melnais kalns (‘the black hill’), Šokolādes kalns (‘the chocolate hill’), and Krāsnaugšas kalns (‘the oven-top hill’) could be related to the characteristic features of hillforts from the archaeologists’ viewpoint, namely, considering the dark-coloured cultural layer, which has been formed as a result of human activities – crafts, ritual sites and dwellings (Urtāns 2022; Muktupāvela & Ozoliņa & Vītola 2023).

HILLFORT FOLKLORE NOWADAYS: A CASE STUDY OF BALTINAVA (NORTHEASTERN LATVIA)

To better understand how hillfort folklore persists or changes, how it functions in different contexts today, and given the lack of comprehensive research on the topic in Latvia, a qualitative case study approach was chosen. It examines contemporary hillfort folklore in Baltnava parish, focusing on three hillforts (Alotāji hill, Puncuļova hillfort, and Svātiune/Bell hill). The data characterise the continuity and adaptability of perceptions of hillfort traditions, revealing how this folklore reflects broader sociocultural processes and is incorporated into contemporary realities such as tourism, education, everyday life and even esoteric practices.

Several folklore texts in archives, periodicals and Ernests Brastiņš' descriptions are documented in relation to these three hillforts, displaying different thematic groups, which will be described below.

Sunken castle:

[Alotāji hill] *In ancient times, when the farmers of Latgale lived in large villages, one Midsummer evening, the shepherds lost their cows. As dusk fell, several men from the village went to look for the lost cattle. They passed by the hillfort. This ancient hillfort [Puncuļova hillfort] rises in the bend of the small Puncuļi river, on the southern side. As they passed by, they suddenly saw that a door had opened in the hill and a bright fire was burning inside. A black dog was lying on the threshold. The men were surprised and were afraid to approach. When they returned, everything had disappeared again (Ločmelis 1933b).*

Treasure hidden in the mountain:

[Puncuļova hillfort] *There is an 'iron gate' to the west of the hillfort, which is used to scare people. Sometimes a pig would lie in the gate. When a person approached, a red man would chase it away. Another time, a woman was seen with a baby in her arms. She would call, but no one would come. It was said that it was a ghost that was there. Once a man was going home. While walking past the hillfort, he saw that a luxurious gate had been opened on the side of the hill. A woman stood at the gate, inviting people to come in. A passerby approached closer and saw that there were barrels with golden coins on the hill, but two black dogs were guarding them. The woman said that the dogs would not do any harm, but the passerby still got scared and ran to the village to tell what he had seen. Some people went to visit, but the gate had disappeared (Brastiņš 1928: 159).*

Sunken church:

[Svātiune hillfort / Bell hill] *Bell hill is located about 4–5 versts from the village of Vareiki. The old folks say that there is a sunken church with all the people and the bell. On Sundays at noon, if there is hot weather, one can hear the church bells ringing there. A fire can be seen on the hill at night. And the horseherders, when they come closer with their horses, the horses get scared and run away like mad (LFK 740, 7523).*

[Svātiune hillfort / Bell hill] *In Baltinava parish, near the village of Svātiune, there is a hill. The hill is not particularly high, but it is still quite remarkable in this area. The calm, muddy Svētona lake lies near the hill. There is a cemetery nearby. It is said that in ancient times a church was built on this hill, and it sank. After the church sank, the sounds of bells could be heard every year on Easter morning. This is also why the hill got its current name – Bell hill (Ločmelis 1933a).*

During the fieldwork, folklore evidence was obtained about the hillforts in the vicinity of Baltinava: two recorded legends about the Alotāji hill, five about the Puncuļova hillfort, and two about the Svātiune hillfort. The talks documented in the Baltinava vicinity nowadays display similar plot elements to the earlier ones:

[Svātiune hillfort / Bell hill] *A church sank into the hill on Easter morning, and now it is as follows: if you put your ear right where the hole is, they say that you can hear groans there (B-1-2019).*

[Svātiune hillfort / Bell hill] *Old folks tell a story that a church sank there on Easter morning. And it is usually said that if you go there on Easter morning or at midnight, when that Easter comes, the day of the death of the Lord Jesus, or whatever. Oh, what is there – Easter is the day of Christ's resurrection or death, I don't know. There, as they say, if you put your ear right where the hollow is, you can hear groans there. Yes – as if somebody is moaning. My mother-in-law's mother told me that, and my mother-in-law told me as much as I heard (B-2- 2019).*

[Puncuļova hillfort] *As the old folks told me, the 'iron gate' was the entry point to the hillfort when it was. But who was there? It's just from the stories. But iron – because it was a rare thing at that time, that's why it stayed. And that black dog with a golden chain has been running around in all sorts of places, also lying at that gate, barking.*

Then the priests also came and blessed it there in every way. That's what my mother told me again. [...] To my maternal grandmother, a strange woman appeared on the hillfort and asked for the direction where to go. Grandma looks at her feet – those are chicken feet! Well, that's what my grandmother said. Well, I don't know, well! (BA-15-2023).

[Puncuļova hillfort] *I've heard that a church sank in the lake near Puncuļova hillfort* (BA-20-2023).

[Puncuļova hillfort] *Those who were not to be convicted were let through the 'iron gate'. Those who were to be convicted were not allowed through the 'iron gate'* (BA-13-2023).

In general, the Baltnava area still retains the motifs of sunken castles and hidden treasures, which can also be found in archives, periodicals and Ernests Brastiņš' descriptions of hillforts. It can be concluded that the motifs of hillfort legends have survived and are still known in the local community. The motif of the hidden treasure is modified, with the main emphasis on the image of the 'iron gate'.

CONTEMPORARY FEATURES OF HILLFORT FOLKLORE

According to fieldwork results in Baltnava, oral testimonies about the hillforts around Baltnava reveal the role and functions of the hillforts and their adaptation to the changing environment and lifestyle. For example, during the war Svātiune hillfort (Bell hill) was the place where local people hid from military operations (BA-13-2023). Among the local residents, the most memories are of the outdoor dance parties on the Puncuļova hillfort (BA-13-2023; BA-15-2023). The locals remember that the men rode their motorcycles up the hill (BA-20-2023). The women, on the other hand, took off their high-heeled shoes to get to the party site on the steep hill (BA-15-2023). In the past, the locals used to ski and jog on the Puncuļova hillfort (BA-13-2023). Nowadays locals believe that there are good places for berry and mushroom picking, and herbal teas are collected in the meadows around the hillforts (BA-13-2023; BA-15-2023; BA-22-2023).

Nowadays hillfort folklore, albeit indirectly, is used in the context of modern treasure hunting (Vītola 2005). With the development of technology, treasure hunters not only believe and trust the stories and legends about the hidden treasures but also purchase appropriate equipment (metal detectors) and go in search of riches. Latvia joined the European Convention on the Protection of the Archaeological Heritage in 2003 (LR Saeima 2003); nevertheless, ancient cultural and historical heritage sites are popular among treasure hunters. It

seems that those ancient burial grounds and hillforts, characterised by folklore of sunken castles with treasures, are treated as especially attractive. Therefore, many large and small treasure hunting pits can be found on hillforts in Latvia, also in the Baltinava vicinity, especially at the Puncuļova site (BA-15-2023; BA-7-2023; BA-8-2023).

Nowadays, the folklore of hillforts is also associated with popular esoteric contexts and mysticism, in which hillforts become places of “haunting ghosts”. Adherents of esoteric teachings believe that these hillforts are “energetic places”; therefore, geomancing, dowsing, and other New Age esoteric practices are carried out there to “receive power” and to perform neopagan rituals. Hillforts are also popular places to carry out Jāņi or Līgo (summer solstice) celebrations, which are the most popular traditional calendar holidays in Latvia (Dubļāns 2010; Kuldīgasnovads.lv 2022; Ogresnovads.lv 2024).

It should be mentioned that the authors of the study have also recorded perceptions of hillforts in other places in Latvia, which are supplemented with esoteric experience stories. For instance, Aizkraukle hillfort, Satezele hillfort in Sigulda (Vidzeme region), Veckuldīga hillfort in Kuldīga (Kurzeme region), etc. are popular ritual sites. They become valued, especially around the summer solstice. Interviews with local people in the Latgale region also revealed esoteric hillfort interpretations and beliefs that hillforts are sacred places and places with “special energies”. Thus, the woman met at the Rozentava hillfort (near Malta village in Latgale) said that when she was working in the vicinity of the hillfort, she used to have a feeling that the forest does not let her in: “It seems that there are two guards in hoods standing on that side (on the hill, across the ravine) and watching. When you are near the hillfort, you feel that you are not alone”. The hostess also paid special attention to the stones on the hill. She showed the authors of the study a stone standing on which makes her feel whirling “so that you don’t want to get off” (M-1-2019).

CONCLUSIONS

Since the second half of the 19th century, Latvian hillforts have been researched through a close interaction of archaeology and folklore. This approach has proven effective for locating sites and interpreting their historical significance. However, folklore – legends, stories and toponyms – also fulfils other functions: it strengthens local and national identity and serves as a creative resource for communities to identify and communicate the value of their surroundings and place of residence.

The narrative tradition associated with hillfort folklore has remained relatively stable over time. To compare archival and 20th-century publications with hillfort folklore nowadays, similar motifs about sunken castles, churches and hidden treasures are being discovered.

At the same time, the fieldwork data, particularly those of the case study of Baltnava parish, indicate the ability of the tradition to adapt to modern socio-cultural changes: folklore continues to mediate how people experience and narrate the cultural landscape of hillforts.

Altogether, the research still needs to be continued, paying attention to several aspects of the oral tradition connected to the newly discovered hillforts: clarification and official confirmation of the hillfort name, local stories about the hillfort itself and its immediate surroundings and stories of personal experiences – discovering, surveying, and learning about the hillfort for the first time. This kind of oral tradition might provide additional significant meaning for a future archaeological study of a hillfort or for its inclusion in a new tourist route.

The interdisciplinary approach based on folklore and archaeology reveals that the folklore of Latvian hillforts not only preserves historical memory but also adapts to contemporary sociocultural contexts, promoting public interest and the sustainability of cultural heritage.

ACKNOWLEDGEMENTS

The article was developed within the project “Cultural and creative ecosystem of Latvia as a resource of resilience and sustainability” / CERS (VPP-MM-LKRVA-2023/1-0001), which is implemented by the Ministry of Culture, Republic of Latvia.

NOTE

- 1 LFK – Manuscript archives of the Institute of Literature, Folklore and Art, Archives of Latvian Folklore, University of Latvia.

REFERENCES

- Ancelāne, Alma 1988. *Latviešu tautas teikas. Vēsturiskās teikas: Izlase*. [Latvian Folk Legends. Historical Legends: A Selection.] Rīga: Zinātne.
- Bielenstein, August 1866. Tēvu zemes mīlotājiem: lūgtu atbildes. [For Those Who Cherish Their Fatherland: Begging for a Response.] *Latviešu Avīzes*, Vol. 8.
- Bielenstein, August 1869. Die altlettischen Burgberge Kurlands. *Magazin der Lettisch-literarischen Gesellschaft*, Bnd. 14, Stück 2. Mitau, Riga, pp. 12–142. Available at <https://dspace.ut.ee/server/api/core/bitstreams/fe4d3f05-76ba-4419-b64a-f156a798c8a5/>, last accessed on 6 June 2025.
- Bielenstein, August 1883. Lūgšana visiem, kam rūp par Latviešu senatni. [A Plea to All Who Care about the Latvian Past.] *Baltijas Vēstnesis*, No. 62.
- Brastiņš, Ernests 1923. *Latvijas pilskalni. 1. Kuršu zeme*. [Latvian Hillforts. 1. Land of Couronians.] Rīga: Vālodze.
- Brastiņš, Ernests 1926. *Latvijas pilskalni. Zemgale un Augšzeme*. [Latvian Hillforts. Zemgale and Augšzeme.] Rīga: Pieminekļu valde.
- Brastiņš, Ernests 1928. *Latvijas pilskalni. Latgale*. [Latvian Hillforts. Latgale.] Rīga: Pieminekļu valde.
- Brastiņš, Ernests 1930. *Latvijas pilskalni. Vidzeme*. [Latvian Hillforts. Vidzeme.] Rīga: Pieminekļu valde.

- Broka-Lāce, Zenta 2022. Kurzemes Literatūras un mākslas biedrības goda biedra Augusta Bīlenšteina (1826–1907) ieguldījums Latvijas arheoloģijas zinātnē. [The Contribution of August Bielenstein (1826–1907), an Honorary Member of the Courland Literature and Art Society, to Latvian Archaeological Science.] Available at <https://jvmm.lv/lasitava/kurzemes-literaturas-un-makslas-biedribas-goda-biedra-augusta-bilensteina-1826-1907-ieguldijums-latvijas-arheologijas-zinatne/>, last accessed on 3 June 2025.
- Bronner, Simon J. 2011. *Explaining Traditions: Folk Behavior in Modern Culture*. Lexington: University Press of Kentucky.
- Brown, Martin & Bowen, Pat 2005. The Last Refuge of the Faeries: Archaeology and Folklore in East Sussex. In: Amy Gazin-Schwartz & Cornelius J. Holtorf (eds.) *Archaeology and Folklore*. London: Routledge, pp. 246–263.
- Carlton, Richard & Roberts, Ian 2014. Archaeology and Oral History in Northumberland. *Historical Archaeology*, Vol. 48, No. 1, pp. 46–59.
- Cunliffe, Barry 2014. Understanding hillforts: Have we progressed? In: Andrew Payne & Mark Corney & Barry Cunliffe (eds.) *The Wessex Hillforts Project: Extensive Survey of Hillforts Interiors in Central Southern England*. Liverpool: Liverpool University Press, pp. 151–162.
- Dubļāns, A. 2010. Pilskalnā būs uguns rituals. [A Fire Ritual Will Be at the Hillfort.] 17.06.2010. Available at <https://ziemellatvija.lv/arhivs/pilskalna-bus-uguns-rituals/>, last accessed on 6 June 2025.
- Dundes, Alan 2005. Folkloristics in the Twenty-First Century (AFS Invited Presidential Plenary Address, 2004). *Journal of American Folklore*, Vol. 118, No. 470, pp. 385–408.
- Gazin-Schwartz, Amy 2001. Archaeology and folklore of material culture, ritual, and everyday life. *International Journal of Historical Archaeology*, Vol. 5, No. 4, pp. 263–280.
- Gazin-Schwartz, Amy & Holtorf, Cornelius (eds.) 2005. *Archaeology and Folklore*. London: Routledge.
- Geertz, Clifford 1973. *The Interpretation of Cultures*. New York: Basic Books.
- Gilchrist, Roberta & Reynolds, Andrew 2009. 'The Elephant in the Room' and other tales of medieval archaeology. In: Roberta Gilchrist & Andrew Reynolds (eds.) *Reflections: 50 Years of Medieval Archaeology, 1957–2007*. London: Routledge, pp. 1–7. Available at https://centaur.reading.ac.uk/1697/1/MAM_Gilchrist%20and%20Reynolds.pdf, last accessed on 6 June 2025.
- Latvian-hillforts.lv* [database]. Available at <https://www.latvian-hillforts.lv>, last accessed on 6 June 2025.
- Ločmelis, A. 1933a. Zvanu kalns. [The Bell hill.] *Latvijas Jaunatne*, No. 2.
- Ločmelis, A. 1933b. Nostāsts par Puncuļu pilskalnu. [A story about Puncuļi hillfort.] *Latvijas Jaunatne*, No. 2.
- LR Saeima 2003. *Par Eiropas konvenciju arheoloģiskā mantojuma aizsardzībai*. [On the European Convention for the Protection of the Archaeological Heritage.] Available at <https://likumi.lv/ta/id/76423-par-eiropas-konvenciju-arheologiska-mantojuma-aizsardzibai>, last accessed on 7 June 2025.
- Kuldigasnovads.lv. 2024. Maģiski un neaizmirstami – latviskās tradīcijās sagaida gada īsāko nakti. [Magic and Unforgettable – the Shortest Night of the Year is Met with Latvian Traditions.] 21 June. Available at <https://kuldigasnovads.lv/magiski-un-neaizmirstami-latviskas-tradicijas-sagaida-gada-isako-nakti/>, last accessed on 7 June 2025.
- Meinerts, Jānis & Urtāns, Juris 2025. Arheoloģisko senvietu apzināšana Baltinavā. [Identification of Archaeological Ancient Places in Baltinava.] In: Juris Urtāns (ed.) *Arheologu pētījumi Latvijā 2022. un 2023. gadā*. [Archaeological Research in Latvia in 2022 and 2023.] Rīga: NT Klasika, pp. 264–271.
- Misāne, Agita 2000. The Traditional Latvian Religion of Dievturība in the Discourse of Nationalism. *Humanities and Social Sciences: Latvia*, Vol. 4, No. 29, pp. 32–52.
- Muktupāvela, Rūta & Ozoliņa, Lolita & Vītola, Ieva 2023. Latvijas jaunatklātie pilskalni kultūrientitātes un vietas piederības kontekstā. [Newly Discovered Latvian Hillforts in the Context of Cultural Identity and Place Belonging.] *Letonica*, Vol. 50, pp. 154–172. Available at <https://lulfmi.lv/en/Letonica-Nr-50>, last accessed on 7 June 2025.

Oring, Elliott 2021. To Explain Tradition. *Journal of Ethnology and Folkloristics*, Vol. 15, No. 2, pp. 1–18. Available at https://www.researchgate.net/publication/357246744_To_Explain_Tradition, last accessed on 7 June 2025.

Ose, Ieva 2007. Augusts Bīlenšteins un Latvijas arheoloģija. [August Bielenstein and Latvian Archaeology.] In: Ināra Korsaka (ed.) *Augusts Bīlenšteins un latvieši. Veltījums zinātnieka atcerei* [August Bielenstein and Latvians. A Tribute to the Memory of the Scientist]. Rīga: Latvijas Akadēmiskā bibliotēka & Latviešu–vācbaltu centrs “Domus Rigensis”, pp. 65–70.

Ozoliņš, Gatis 2013. The Dievturi Movement in Latvia as Invention of Tradition. In: Kaarina Aitamurto & Scott Simpson (eds.) *Modern Pagan and Native Faith Movements in Central and Eastern Europe*. New York: Routledge, pp. 94–112.

Paphitis, Tina 2014. *The Place of Folklore in Archaeological Landscapes: Narratives and Identity in Medieval to Modern Britain*. Diss. (PhD Thesis). Institute of Archaeology, University College London. Available at <https://discovery.ucl.ac.uk/id/eprint/1453663/1/TPaphitis%20PhD%20Thesis%20Final.pdf>, last accessed on 7 June 2025.

Paphitis, Tina 2020. Folklore and Public Archaeology in the UK. *Public Archaeology*, Vol. 18, No. 3, pp. 139–161.

Ogresnovads.lv 2022. Plāteres pilskalnā nosvinēti Vasaras saulgrieži. [Summer Solstice Has Been Celebrated at the Plātere Hillfort.] 23 June. Available at <https://www.ogrenet.lv/kultura/plateres-pilskalna-nosvineti-vasaras-saulgriezi-3787>, last accessed on 7 June 2025.

Porter, Nicole 2016. *Landscape and Branding: The promotion and production of place*. New York: Routledge.

Ritums, Ritvars 1991. *Teikas par Latvijas pilskalniem kā vēstures avots*. [Legends about Latvian Hillforts as a Source of History.] Rīga: Latvijas Universitātes Vēstures un filozofijas fakultāte.

Ritums, Ritvars 1999. Legends about hillforts: Altered reality. In: *EEA. Abstracts Book*. Bournemouth, p. 73.

Ritums, Ritvars & Tāle, Iveta & Urtāns, Juris & Vītola, Ieva 2006. Teikas par Latvijas pilskalniem. [Legends about Latvian hillforts.] In: Vitālijs Zelčs (ed.) *Latvijas Universitātes Raksti* [Scientific Papers of the University of Latvia], Vol. 679. Rīga: Latvijas Universitāte, pp. 7–26.

Šmits, Pēteris 1937. *Latviešu pasakas un teikas*. [Latvian Fairy Tales and Legends.] Rīga: Valters un Rapa.

Šnē, Andris 2002. *Sabiedrība un vara: sociālās attiecības Austrumlatvijā aizvēstures beigās*. [Society and Power: Social Relations in Eastern Latvia at the End of Prehistory.] Rīga: Inteleks.

Urtāns, Juris 1989. Pilskalnu pētnieks Ernests Brastiņš. [The Researcher of Hillforts Ernests Brastiņš.] *Avots*, Vol. 8, pp. 44–47.

Urtāns, Juris 1991. *Ziemeļvidzemes pilskalni*. [The Hillforts of Northern Vidzeme.] Rīga: Avots.

Urtāns, Juris 1994. *Latvian hillforts: The Originality of the Archaeological Reality*. Amsterdam: Universiteit van Amsterdam.

Urtāns, Juris 2006a. Priekšvārds. [Preface.] In: Juris Urtāns (ed.) *Kultūras krustpunkti* [Cultural Crossroads], Vol. 3, pp. 8–9.

Urtāns, Juris 2006b. Arheoloģiskastudija par Augšzemes pilskalnu aploces vietvārdiem. [Archaeological Study of the Place Names of the Augšzeme Hillfort Area.] In: Juris Urtāns (ed.) *Kultūras krustpunkti* [Cultural Crossroads], Vol. 3, pp. 71–81.

Urtāns, Juris 2006c. *Augšzemes pilskalni*. [Hillforts of Augšzeme.] Rīga: Nordik.

Urtāns, Juris 2011. Ernesta Brastiņa pilskalnu grāmatas un pilskalnu folklore. [Ernests Brastiņš's Hillfort Books and Hillfort Folklore.] *Letonica*, No. 11, pp. 178–187.

Urtāns, Juris 2012. Arheoloģija un folklorā: Latvijas svētvietas un pilskalni. [Archaeology and Folklore: Latvian Holy Places and Hillforts.] Latvijas Zinātņu akadēmijas Vēstis [Proceedings of the Latvian Academy of Sciences], A 66 (5–6), pp. 5–17.

- Urtāns, Juris 2013. *Apceres par Latvijas pilskalniem*. [Reflections on Latvian Hillforts.] Rīga: Nordik.
- Urtāns, Juris 2016. Pilskalņa tēls un vieta mūsdienu Latvijas sabiedrībā. [The Image and Place of the Hillfort in Modern Latvian Society.] In: Eva Mārtuža (ed.) *Latviskas Latvijas spēks. Veltījums Latvijas simtgadei*. [The Power of Latvian Latvia. A Dedication to the Centenary of Latvia.] Rīga: IDE Rozītes, pp. 82–95.
- Urtāns, Juris 2022. *Jaunatklātie pilskalni Latvijā. 1998–2021*. [Newly Discovered Hillforts in Latvia.] Rīga: NT Klasika.
- Urtāns, Juris 2024. *Latgales pilskalni un to folklore*. [Latgale's Hillforts and Their Folklore.] Rīga: NT Klasika.
- Urtāns, Juris 2025. Arheoloģiskā izpēte Baltinavas pilskalnā. [Archaeological Research in the Hillforts of Baltinava.] In: Juris Urtāns (ed.) *Arheologu pētījumi Latvijā 2022. un 2023. gadā* [Archaeological Research in Latvia in 2022 and 2023.] Rīga: NT Klasika, pp. 81–88.
- Urtāns, Juris & Asaris, Jānis 1998. *Latvijas rietumu daļas jaunatklātie pilskalni*. [Newly Discovered Hillforts of the Western Part of Latvia.] Rīga: Mantojums.
- Urtāns, Juris & Pīgozne, Ieva & Grīnvalde, Rita & Vītola, Ieva & Delvers, Rihards 2009. *Atrast pilskalnu*. [To Find a Hillfort.] Rīga: Nordik.
- Urtāns, Juris & Pīgozne, Ieva & Treija, Rita & Vītola, Ieva 2008. *Kalnā bija stalta pils: Latvijas pilskalni un to teikas*. [There Was a Stately Castle on the Hill: Latvian Hillforts and Their Legends.] Rīga: Tapals.
- Vaitkevičius, Vyktintas 2006. Lithuanian Archaeology and Folklore: Towards Cooperation. In: Juris Urtāns (ed.) *Kultūras krustpunkti* [Cultural Crossroads], Vol. 3, pp. 82–90.
- Vasks, Andrejs & Urtāns, Juris 2025. Hillforts. In: Andrejs Vasks & Gunita Zariņa & Juris Urtāns & Antonija Vilcāne (eds.) *Latvian Archaeology*. Rīga: Latvian Association of Archaeologists.
- Vitkūnas, Manvydas & Zabiela, Gintautas 2017. *Baltic Hillforts: Unknown Heritage*. Vilnius: Society of Lithuanian Archaeology.
- Vītola, Ieva 2005. *Simt gadu gulēju, vēl simt gulēšu: Teikas par mantas vietām Latvijas novados*. [I Slept for a Hundred Years, I Shall Sleep for Another Hundred: Legends about the Treasure Locations in the Regions of Latvia.] Rīga: Zinātne.
- Vītola, Ieva 2006. Teikas kā mantas vietu izpētes avots. [Legends as a Source for Researching Treasure Locations.] In: Juris Urtāns (ed.) *Kultūras krustpunkti* [Cultural Crossroads], Vol. 3, pp. 121–130.
- Voss, Jerome A. 1987. Antiquity Imagined: Cultural Values in Archaeological Folklore. *Folklore*, Vol. 98, No. 1, pp. 80–90.

INTERVIEWS

- BA-13-2023; BA-14-2023; BA-15-2023; BA-17-2023; BA-19-2023; BA-20-2023; BA-22-2023; BA-23-2023 – interviews, recorded by Ieva Vītola and L. K. Cērpa in Baltinava, October 2022, June and August 2023, stored in the data repository of the Latvian Academy of Culture.
- BA-1-2019; BA-2-2019 – interviews, recorded by Ieva Vītola in Svātiune, October 2019, stored in the data repository of the Latvian Academy of Culture.
- M-1-2019 – interviews, recorded by Ieva Vītola in Malta, August 2019, stored in the data repository of the Latvian Academy of Culture.

Tenured Professor Rūta Muktupāvela, PhD, is a lead researcher at the Institute of Arts and Cultural Studies of the Latvian Academy of Culture, a member of the expert commission of the Latvian Council of Science, an advisor on cultural policy to the Minister of Culture of the Republic of Latvia, and the representative of Latvia in the UNESCO Intergovernmental Committee for the Protection and Promotion of the Diversity of Cultural Expressions. Her research spans cultural studies, anthropology of culture and arts, heritage studies, and artistic research. She has extensive leadership experience

in national and international research programmes on cultural capital, sustainability of cultural traditions, and cultural heritage governance. She participates in expert bodies and international professional associations, she also performs as a soloist in performances and concerts based on Baltic traditional music worldwide.

ruta.muktupavela@lka.edu.lv

Ieva Vītola, PhD, is a lead researcher at the Institute of Arts and Cultural Studies of the Latvian Academy of Culture. Her academic interests include intangible cultural heritage, archaeology, folklore, and the identities of cultural landscapes. She has considerable experience in field research both in Latvia and in diaspora communities. As an expert, she has participated in the evaluation of cultural projects, provided advice on safeguarding and developing Latvia's intangible cultural heritage, and cooperated with non-governmental organizations and local governments in various cultural and historical research projects. The results of her research have been integrated into educational activities and events, including publications, lectures, seminars, and exhibitions.

ieva.vitola@lka.edu.lv

Evaluation of the Concept of Milk among Tuvans and Tatars in an Ethnolinguistic Context Based on Cultural Memory

BUKET BARAN

Department of Contemporary Turkish Dialects and Literatures, Sezai Karakoç Faculty of Letters,
Dicle University
bukett.yalcin@gmail.com

GAMZE ÇİMEN

Department of Turkish Language and Literature, Faculty of Arts and Sciences, Giresun University
gamze.cimen@giresun.edu.tr

Abstract: Tuvans and Tatars are Turkic peoples living in the Russian Federation today. Tuvans live in the east and Tatars in the west of the region. In the Turkic language classifications, Tuvan and Tatar languages are dialects on two different sides of the Turkic language. The structure of a language is influenced by the geographical and climatic conditions, beliefs and mentality of societies. Although the national culture of societies is one of the priority topics of linguistics today, the ethnolinguistic aspect of the word milk has received little attention in the linguistics of the Tuvan and Tatar languages. From this point of view, it is important to determine the position of milk as a cultural and linguistic element in the memory of the two societies. So milk gains an ethnolinguistic value due to its effective use both in traditional life and in oral culture products. The fact that Tuvans and Tatars, who are located in two different branches of the Turkic world, living in quite distant geographies and having different belief systems, interpret the concepts related to milk in similar ways clearly reveals that milk is one of the common elements in the cultural

memory of the Turkic world. This study aims to determine the position of the concept of milk, which has taken its place in the cultural memory of Tuvans and Tatars, in both the traditional lives and oral culture products of the related peoples, as well as to comparatively analyze its functioning in modern language in an ethnolinguistic context.

Keywords: Tuvan, Tatar, Turkic, milk, ethnolinguistics

INTRODUCTION

Ethnolinguistics is a field of research that demonstrates that language is not merely a means of communication but also a fundamental element shaping cultural values, thought systems and social worldviews. While this discipline emerged as a distinct scientific discipline in the second half of the 20th century, its origins are linked to the works of Franz Boas and Edward Sapir. Franz Boas, one of the founding figures of the American anthropological tradition, argued that language and culture could not be considered separately, particularly when studying the languages of North American Indians. He sought to demonstrate that the structure of a language was directly linked to the cultural practices of the society that spoke that language (Boas 1911: 67–70). This approach paved the way for a new perspective that combined ethnographic observation and linguistic analysis. Edward Sapir, one of Boas's students, systematically developed his teacher's views. In his studies of Native American languages, Sapir argued that language shapes an individual's thought system and is an integral part of cultural identity. According to him, "language is not a passive tool in the construction of social reality, but an active factor" (Sapir 1921: 221–235). Benjamin Lee Whorf took this approach further, arguing that language not only influences thought but also determines how individuals perceive the world. This view is known in the literature as the Sapir–Whorf Hypothesis or the theory of linguistic relativity. According to the hypothesis, people's logical worldview is shaped by the grammatical structure and conceptual systematics of the language they use (Whorf 1956: 29).

Influenced by this theory, ethnolinguistics developed as a discipline examining the interaction between language and culture, demonstrating that language is a "key element" in the construction of cultural identity. Language also plays a key role in the identity construction of Turks, acting as the carrier of culture through ethnolinguistic relations. It is no surprise that there is a close connection between the cultural memory of the Turks and their language. It is known that Turks have been breeding cows, sheep, camels and cattle since they adopted the nomadic lifestyle. For this reason, it has been inevitable that the cultural elements of this lifestyle are reflected in the vocabulary of the language they use, since milk and dairy products obtained from the animals they raise are among the basic food sources.

Among the Turkic communities, this study specifically examines the Tatars (Kazan, Astrakhan, and West Siberian Tatars) and the Tuvans. This is primarily due to the unique historical and cultural status of both communities within the Turkic peoples. The Tatars adopted Islam in the Volga-Ural region and developed a rich oral and written culture shaped by urbanization and a settled lifestyle. The Tuvans, on the other hand, have long preserved their shamanistic religious practices in Siberia and have preserved traces of their nomadic lifestyle based on animal husbandry to the present day. The selection of these two communities offers the opportunity to comparatively examine the meanings of the concept of *süt* 'milk' in cultural memory. Milk is prominent both as a symbol of religious purity, fertility and social sharing in the Muslim Tatar community of the Volga-Ural region, and as a ritual element associated with nature, spirits and sanctity in Tuvan culture. In this context, Tatars and Tuvans were chosen as two representative examples that allow us to observe the different reflections of the concept of milk between the settled-urban/Islamic tradition and the rural-shamanist/animistic tradition. Furthermore, as we move from the Volga-Ural region towards Tuva, we see that the concept of milk among the Tatars living in that region also bears greater ethnolinguistic similarities to the Tuvans.

While the cultural significance of milk has been acknowledged in various ethnographic studies, a comparative analysis of its role within the diverse historical, religious, socio-economic and linguistic contexts of Muslim and Lamanist-Shamanist Turkic communities has not yet been explored. Therefore, this study addresses the question of how the meanings associated with milk in the cultural memory of Tatar and Tuvan communities differ or converge at an ethnolinguistic level. The novelty of this research lies in its comparative ethnolinguistic framework, which examines for the first time the position of the concept of *süt* 'milk' in the cultural memory of these communities, who speak two distinct dialects of the Turkic language and represent two distinct lifestyles and belief systems. This study reveals how one of the common cultural codes of the Turkic world is shaped in language and culture. This aims to fill a gap in ethnolinguistic studies by explaining, at a linguistic level, how these two communities interpret the same concept in their traditional lifestyles and oral cultural products.

The Turkic word for milk appears in Tatar as *söt* and in Tuvan as *süt* due to phonetic variation. Turkic *sü:t* is often compared to Mongolian *sün*. A. Joki suggests that the Turkic and Mongolian forms may derive from the same root (*sü?*). G. Doerfer suggests that the Turkic word for milk developed earlier than the Mongolian *sün*. Given that the Evenk word for milk derives its semantic origin from the verb *uku* (to suck the breast), we can suggest a connection between Turkic and Mongolian (Sevortyan 2003: 347).

Looking at the historical periods of Turkic languages, the word for *süt* 'milk' first appears in Uyghur texts. In Old Turkic, in addition to the word *süt*, the verbs

derived from this word are found: *sütgär-* and *sütgir-* (DTS 518–519; EDPT 798; Nasilov & Kormušin et al. 2016: 550). It is preserved in modern Turkic dialects with various phonetic variants:

Tur. *süt*; Gag. *süt*; Az. *süd*; Turkm. *süt*; Sal. *süt*; Khal. *sīt*; Uzb. *sut*; Uygh. *süt*; Krm. *süt*; Tat. *söt*; Bashk. *höt*; Kyrg. *süt*; Kaz. *süt*; KBalk. *süt*; KKalp. *süt*; Kum. *süt*; Nogh. *süt*; SUygh. *süt*, *söt*; Khak. *süt*; Shr. *süt*; Oyr. *süt*; Tv. *süt*; Chuv. *səwt*; Yak. *ūt* (Starostin & Dybo & Mudrak 2003: 1300).

The word *süt*, which has an important place in the cultural memory and language of Turks since the past, is discussed in the Tuvan language dictionary as follows: “1. White liquid produced in the mammary glands of living creatures to feed their young. 2. Liquid taken from cows and other female animals for feeding” (D. Mongush 2011: 767). In the Tatar language dictionary with explanations, it is defined as “1. The white liquid that flows from the breasts of women and lactating animals and feeds a small child or newborn animal at the age of sucking; 2. The liquid that is milked from some animals such as cows, goats, horses, etc., and used as such or processed to be eaten and drunk. 3. The white or whitish sap, usually sticky, found in some plants. 4. white or whitish liquid (melt) in some substances” (TTAS V 188).

The word *süt* is also explained in a similar way in the dictionaries of both the Russian Federation and other Turkic communities (Arıkoğlu et al. 2023: 1956; Baskakov 1958: 598; Subrakova 2006: 535–536; Tenișev 1989: 592; Begmatov 2007: 59; Čumakayev 2018: 620; Kibirova 1961: 168; Koč 2003: 498; Musaeva 2018: 591; Necip 2013: 370; Pekacar 2011: 305; Uraksin 1996: 740).

Although milk is a staple food for Tuvans and Tatars, it is not only a means of nutrition. It carries a deep meaning in the cultural, religious and social life of both communities. Milk is an ethnolinguistic concept that is embedded in their cultural memory and is effectively used both in traditional life and in oral culture products.

1. MILK IN TRADITIONAL LIFE CULTURE

As in all areas of the Turkic world, milk has an important place in the traditional life of Tuvans and Tatars. It draws attention as a cultural heritage that has survived from the past to the present in both the food culture and belief system of the related peoples, in transition rituals such as birth, death, wedding and in the names of nature.

1.1. Milk in Food Culture

Milk and dairy products appear not only as a nutritional element in both Tuvan and Tatar societies, but also as a carrier of linguistic and cultural meaning. In this sense, “milk” and its derivatives not only refer to a physical object but also become a conceptual domain interwoven with social status, hospitality, rituals, seasonality and even emotional expression.

Milk, which is an important food in the food culture of Tuvan and Tatars, has been included in the names of food and drink. Tuvans call food made from milk and dairy products *ak čem* 'food with milk' (D. Monguš 2003: 93; Kenin-Lopsan 2013: 347), Tatars *söt-may* 'milk fat' (TTAS V 189) and everyday food and drink *ipiy-söt* 'bread milk' (TTAS II 576).

Süttüg šay 'tea with milk', a traditional drink of the Tuvans, is a cultural element that is preserved and kept alive. The basic method of making *süttüg šay* among the Tuvans is as follows: Grind the required amount of tea with a pestle in a small mortar and put it in boiling water, let it boil for about ten minutes to dissolve the color, then add milk, salt and butter. After the tea and milk have boiled, stir constantly. Cow, sheep, goat, mare, yak and camel milk are used for tea. Deer milk is more common in *Taiga* and *Tozhu Tuvans* (Butanayev & Monguš 2005: 83). In the modern era, when globalization has affected the whole world, there have been some changes in the recipes and methods of the famous *süttüg šay*. Tuvans prepare milk tea by adding a little cream/milk and salt to the tea bag they consume, and in today's Tuvan daily life, Tuvans are accustomed to this milk tea. For this reason, no one finds it strange to drink it, and as a result of the high demand, this tea has already taken its place in restaurant menus (Šarayeveva & Ayji 2019: 145). A similar beverage also holds central importance in Mongolian (*süütey tsay*), Kyrgyz (*ak čay*), and Kazakh (*sütti šay*) cultures (Bamana 2015: 193; Çelik 2020: 1405; Çetin 2021: 220).

The Tuvans used to use frozen milk to whiten tea during the winter months until sunrise (Vaynšteyn 1991: 137). In Tuvan culture, tea with milk was a daily drink for wealthy families and often the only drink for low-wealth families (Potapov 1969: 201). The Tuvans drank tea several times during the day: at breakfast in the morning, after milking the mares, close to lunch, in the afternoon, and in the long evenings. Often replacing a meal, tea with milk was a thick and highly nutritious drink. In the hot season, they drank only milk tea in the morning and evening. In addition to tea with milk, they would offer their guests food made from cereals and dairy products such as *öreme* 'cream' and *bıştak* 'cheese'. In harsh winter conditions, if there was a lack of basic food, tea was always consumed with additional types of food (Ibid.: 194).

According to available data, the first time Tatars drank tea was in 1714 in Kazan. In the 19th century, drinking tea and being a Tatar became almost identical. Afterwards, the use of tea reached from cities to villages, and tea was valued as a very important drink on Tatar holidays and entertainment days (Abašin 2020: 172). Tatars associate a smiling face with tea with milk. Showing a smiling face to someone is as acceptable as tea with milk. If the person who shows a smiling face also drinks tea with milk, it means light upon light. This idea is expressed by the saying *yaktı çiray, sötle čey (takta čey)* (Isenbet 1990: 293). Tatars usually offer tea with milk or cream to a woman who has just given birth. This tea, in which only the cream of milk is added, is called *kara čey* or *kuy mayı* in the Astrakhan dialect (Bayazitova 2011: 23, 39, 40). Among the Astrakhan

Tatars, it is also called *tuk čey* ‘full tea’, *kalmık čey* ‘Kalmyk tea’, *kara čey* ‘black tea’, *tatar čey* ‘Tatar tea’. In the mornings, *kalmık čey*, which is cooked by adding milk, salt, butter and sheep’s tail fat to the tea placed in boiled water and boiled in a large cauldron, is drunk (Bulatova 2017: 212). *Tuk čey* ‘full tea’ prepared by adding milk, tail fat and salt to boiled green tea is consumed throughout the day (Bayazitova 2016: 212).

Tatar terms such as *sötlé čey*, *kara čey*, *tuk čey*, and *kalmık čey* refer not only to the type of beverage but also to the way, time and social context of drinking it. These expressions encompass social codes such as social identity, hosting guests and female-motherhood rituals. The idiom *yaktı čıray, sötlé čey*, in particular, bridges the gap between food and emotional meaning by pairing the linguistic imagery of “friendliness” and “goodness” with “milk tea”. The preparation of tea (*süttüg šay / kalmık čey*) is a perfect example of cultural adaptation and geographical determinism. Both peoples have adapted to tea in accordance with their environmental and economic possibilities: while the Tuvans meet their energy needs by adding fat (butter) due to the high altitude and cold climate, the Astrakhan Tatars used tail fat (*kuy mayı*), a reflection of their steppe culture. This difference demonstrates how the same basic beverage varies across different ecological niches.

The traditional way of life is still preserved in rural Tuvan, where cattle breeders live in felt yurts. It is very difficult to keep the milk fresh in summer without refrigeration facilities; on hot days the milk quickly turns sour. Related to this are the names *kalgan sūt*, *ajaan sūt* ‘sour milk’ (Tozhu and western dialects), *irindi sūt* (Tozhu dialect) ‘sour milk, i.e. curdled, sour reindeer milk’ in the Tuvan language. In the past, shepherds used to prepare milk for winter, freeze it and store it in various containers. Therefore, the words *doñjurgan sūt*, *doñ sūt* ‘frozen milk’, *borbak sūt* ‘round milk, round-shaped frozen milk’ were used to express this. The Tuvans used to dry milk at home. Today, the practice of storing milk is obsolete. In the memory of native speakers, the word *kurgag sūt* ‘dry milk’ means a soluble powder obtained by drying pasteurized cow’s milk. *Kurgag sūt* ‘dry milk’ has been replaced by *sopio krıma*, a Korean vegetable-derived cream powder used for food preparation and sold in grocery stores today. In some dialects of the Tuvan language, liquid milk sold in plastic bottles and special bags is called *öl sūt* ‘liquid milk’ (Kuular et al. 2022: 342).

Tuvan and Tatar languages have similar names for milk types. In the Tuvan language there are *xoy sūdū* ‘sheep milk’, *öškü sūtü* ‘goat milk’, *inek sūdū* ‘cow milk’, *be sūdū* ‘mare milk’. Some milk varieties have uses specific to Tuvan regions: in mountainous regions such as Möngün Taiga, Bay-Tayga, Tere-Xöl sarlık sūdū is called “yak milk”; in the taiga regions of the Tozhu region, *ivi sūdū* is called “deer milk”; and in steppe regions such as Erzın and Kyzyl, *teve sūdū* is called “camel milk”. Modern Tuvans mostly prefer to consume cow’s milk (Kuular et al. 2022: 342). Tatar language uses *keče söté* ‘goat’s milk’ (TTAS

I 46), *sıyır söté* ‘cow’s milk’ (TTAS I 103), *biye söté* ‘mare’s milk’, *döye söté* ‘camel’s milk’ (TTAS III 688) and *sarık söté* ‘sheep’s milk’ (TTAS IV 676).

Tuvan words like *süttüg şay*, *öl süt*, *doŋ süt*, and *kurgag süt* reflect a lifestyle intertwined with geographical environmental conditions. These words encompass not only a food type but also elements such as time, climate, lack of technology and social organization (nomadism). Milk storage methods (*doŋurgan süt*, *kurgag süt*) and milk naming by animal species (*ivi südü* ‘reindeer milk’, *sarık söté* ‘sheep’s milk’) are linguistic reflections of hunter-gatherer culture (Tuvan) and settled animal husbandry (Tatar). The emphasis on reindeer and yak milk in Tuvan culture is an adaptation specific to the Sayan–Altai region, while the emphasis on cow and sheep milk in Tatar culture reflects the settled agricultural–animal economy of the Volga region.

Foods and beverages whose main ingredient is milk can be named depending on the type of milk used in their production. For example, cheese, the main ingredient of which is milk, is generally called *glaze* (TTAS V 286), while cheese made from sheep’s milk is usually called *pışlak* (TTAS IV 676). A drink made from mare’s, camel’s or goat’s milk using special methods is called *kımız* (TTAS III 688), while *kımız* prepared from camel’s milk is called dialectal *čuwat* (TTAS VI 448). Among the Astrakhan Tatars, a thick drink made by mixing and fermenting camel’s milk in a wooden bowl was also called *şibat* (Bulatova 2017: 212). One of the traditional drinks of the Tuvans made with milk, *araga* ‘vodka made from milk’ is made by distilling a drink called *hojtpak* fermented with milk. *Araga* is called *süt aragazı* in the western and central dialects (Kuular et al. 2022: 344). In the Tatar language, the word *arakı* is used in the sense of an intoxicating, alcoholic drink consisting of a mixture of ethyl alcohol and water (TTAS I 199). Alcoholic beverages are associated with milk, such as *ak yabalak söté* ‘white owl’s milk’, *akkoş söté* ‘swan’s milk’, *arıslan söté* ‘lion’s milk’ (Isenbet 1989: 53, 43, 93; Hekimcanov 2022: 118, 121, 265), *kotırgan sıyır söté* ‘rabid cow’s milk’ (Isenbet 1989: 403), *laçın söté* ‘lachin milk’ (Isenbet 1990: 7), *şaytan suwı* (*söté, tökéregé*) ‘alcoholic drink’ (Ehetov 1982: 151). The terminology of dairy products among Tatars and Tuvans reveals significant ethnolinguistic differences between the historical production styles, cultural identities and symbolic worlds of both societies. The presence of a word of Arabic–Persian origin such as *arakı* in the Tatars, along with metaphorical names such as *akkoş söté* and *arıslan söté* reflect a social structure intertwined with urbanization and commercial relations, along with a post–Islamic cultural synthesis. In contrast, the preservation of words of original Turkic origin such as *araga* and *hojtpak* in Tuvan indicates the continuity of a nomadic, animal-based lifestyle in the language. This linguistic panorama expands even further among other Turkic peoples; Fundamental concepts such as *kımız* and *ayran* among the Kyrgyz, the terminology *kımıs* centered on the horse milk culture of the Yakuts, and technical terms such as *kurt* (the yeast used in kumiss production) among the Kazakhs are manifestations of a specialized cultural vocabulary directly linked

to each community's ecological niche and animal domestication practices. Milk and fermented products represent a core domain within the alimentary culture of diverse communities. The Tatar Turkic lexical field associated with these products reveals a dynamic interplay between intercultural interaction and metaphorical elaboration. Nevertheless, it sustains its semantic integrity and remains embedded in concrete modes of production in Tuvan and across other Central Asian Turkic societies, thereby producing a marked ethnolinguistic differentiation (Ögel 1978: 1–35).

Since Tuvans live mostly in mountainous areas, they have maintained a nomadic lifestyle and have raised various livestock. Their food is mainly made from meat and dairy products. They attach importance to foods prepared with milk such as *bıştak* 'cheese', *sarjag* 'butter', *öreme* 'milk cream', *tarak* 'yogurt', *kımış* 'koumiss' and *kurut* 'dried cottage cheese' (M. Monguš 2011: 345; Kenin-Lopsan 2013: 347). In Tatar cuisine, *katık* 'prov. yogurt', *kaymak* 'Turkish cream', *érémček* 'chem. precipitate', *may* 'butter' are important foods made from milk. Fermented milk is boiled over a slow fire for a long time until it turns red to make a red cottage cheese called *kort* (TTAS III 376), which is unique to Tatar cuisine. The dark, oily layer that forms on the milk after it has been milked and left for a while is called *söt östé* (TTAS V 189). A drink made by fermenting horse, camel and goat milk, koumiss is consumed during parties and is also used in the treatment of some diseases (Bulatova 2017: 211; TTAS III 688). A similar terminological continuity is observed in other Turkic peoples; common words such as *kımış* in Kyrgyz, *kurt* (*kurut*) in Kazakh, *qatiq* in Uzbek, and *kaymak* in Turkish reveal the deep historical and linguistic ties in the dairy culture of the Turkic world, while phonetic and semantic variations in each dialect bear the linguistic traces of local cultural differentiation.

These linguistic ties reveal the deep cultural and ecological context of the dairy products terminology of the Turkic peoples. Words of original Turkic origin such as *bıştak* (cheese), *sarığ* (fat), *kımış* (koumiss) and *kurut* (dried curd) in the Tuvan language carry the feature of a linguistic archaism, reflecting the nomadic-steppe lifestyle and animal husbandry economy of this society. In contrast, terms such as *kaymak* (Persian origin), *katık* (although of Old Turkic origin, it indicates a culinary culture with Arabic-Persian interaction) and *kort* (red curd cheese) in Tatar language reflect a culinary identity shaped in the agricultural-commercial ecosystem of the Volga-Ural region and enriched by the post-Islamic cultural synthesis. The term koumiss (*kımış* in Tuvan, *kımız* in Tatar), common to both cultures, emphasizes the universality of horse milk culture in the Turkic world. Descriptive expressions in Tatar Turkish, such as *söt östé* (above the milk), demonstrate the language's conceptualization of concrete observations. This terminological diversity demonstrates how geographical conditions and historical interactions have created linguistic variations while preserving the common animal husbandry heritage of the Turkic peoples.

1.2. Milk in the Belief System

Milk, an important and frequently used nutrient in daily life, has also evolved into a frequently used mythological element. In Turkic mythology, it is widely used as an elixir of life, rebirth and immortality, as well as a symbol of motifs such as goodness, beauty and unlimited wealth. Milk, which is also important for other peoples, is considered as the drink of immortality and is also used as a symbol of whiteness, purity and cleanliness (Urmanči 2009: 336).

Tuvans are a Lamaist-Buddhist society, and unofficial Shamanism is also part of the belief system inhabited by Tuvans (Bapaeva 2013: 14). In Tuvan, in addition to the moon, fire, sky, sun, Yedigir, earth, water, mountain and bear, milk is also considered among the sacred elements. The phrase *süt deg ak set-kilig kiji* ‘clean person like milk’ is used for people who do good things without evil in them. This statement establishes a direct link between the cultural image of milk and moral cleanliness. The saying *süttüg xuunnu andara tep bolbas, kejik dudaar* ‘a bucket full of milk will not tip over’ draws attention to the sacredness of milk and states that milk is a sign of wealth (Kenin-Lopsan 2013: 79–80). Similarly, this proverb demonstrates the sacredness of milk and its perception as a symbol of wealth. Milky foods, characterized as *ak-čemner*, are very important for Tuvans (Ibid.). These expressions are examples of how milk transcends its physical nature and takes on a moral, symbolic and social dimension.

The Tuvans consider milk to be the drink of God. A person who pours milk to his god wishes his offspring a healthy and full life (Kenin-Lopsan 2013: 79–80). When the Tuvans scatter milk, they pray: *süzük bolzun, südür-ne čaš, süme bolzun sözüň sögle* ‘scatter your milk for faith, say your word for advice’ (Bapaeva 2013: 63–64). This example demonstrates that milk serves as a mediator for both divine will and the maintenance of social order. Such linguistic uses demonstrate that words are directly incorporated into religious terminology and carry a symbolic load.

According to the beliefs of Tuvans and Tatars, milk calms the anger of the sky. According to Tuvan traditions, although milk is not poured on the ground, when thunder and lightning strike, milk is scattered to appease the anger of the sky (Kenin-Lopsan 2013: 79). Although Tatars associate thunder and lightning with God, they traditionally sprinkle black cow’s milk on the fire when lightning strikes and a fire breaks out (Urmanči 2009: 187). In this case, milk functions as a medium for communication with supernatural forces. Such word usages can be analyzed as layers of meaning embedded within ritual terms, even if they are not directly observable in the language. The Tatar emphasis on *kara sȳır sȳte* (black cow’s milk) is striking. This should be analyzed in terms of color symbolism: “Kara” in this context is not a negative term, but a term associated with land/fertility, belonging to the shamanistic cosmogony (EDPT 643–644). In addition, if it hails in the summer, they take rice porridge made of milk (*budka*) out of the house and think that they have won the favor of the sky (Kalafat & Kamalov 2005: 63). In both peoples, the association of milk with

the sky (especially with natural phenomena such as lightning, hail and storms) can be interpreted as a symbol of peace and appeasement of supernatural forces. The Tatar ritual of serving *budka*, a dish mixed with milk, and the Tuvan practice of sprinkling milk when thunder strikes demonstrate that the word *süt* ‘milk’ in the language is not only a food but also a factor that maintains natural balance.

Beliefs about milk continue to exist in daily life from past to present. For example, Tuvans do not take milk out of the house late at night, believing that if they do, the breastfeeding woman will stop lactating. If the milk boiling on the stove is tipped over, the grass will dry up or the person’s life will end disastrously. The famous shaman Kenin Lopsan states that his grandmother would not let children near a pot filled with milk when they were young (2013: 79–80). Among the Tuvan people, beliefs such as “milk shouldn’t be taken out at night” and “if milk boils over, the grass will wither” demonstrate the association of milk with life energy and cultural taboos transmitted through language. Such narratives also find their way into oral traditions passed down to children, establishing a normative order through words. This demonstrates that language functions not only as a means of communication but also as a moral guide. Vaynshteyn states that Tuvans have a special attitude towards white food, especially milk, and that they never spill milk, and if it is accidentally spilled, it is immediately sprinkled with earth (2009: 255). In the past, Tatars who believed that a snake would come near them used to put milk near them. Since the snake liked milk very much, it would drink it and leave (Kalafat & Kamalov 2005: 76). The White Snake is a widely known motif in Turko-Tatar mythology and folklore. If one sees a white snake, one must sprinkle flour on its head or place a white container of milk in front of it (Urmanči 2009: 64). The association of mythological figures like the “white snake” with milk is also quite striking in Tatar culture. Offering milk to a snake demonstrates both its acceptance as a supernatural creature and the symbolism of milk’s peaceful and reconciling nature. While these uses are not directly formulated in the language, they possess lexical depth due to their role and connotations within the narrative. Tatars believe that a cow with wide ribs and horns, long tail and short legs will be milky. If the person who sells the cow plucks a hair between the two horns of the cow, the milk yield of the cow may decrease, in which case the fertility will remain with the first owner. A cow with the tip of its tail cut off will also have less milk. If the koumiss in the glass is not drunk to the end, the horse will be barren, and if the cow’s milk is left unfinished while drinking, the cow will be barren (Kalafat & Kamalov 2005: 63, 68, 75). These Tatar beliefs are typical examples of folk beliefs that lack a direct language equivalent but are encoded in cultural memory. These practices reflect a mythical-rational system of thought that organizes society’s interaction with nature through the causal relationship established between animals’ physical characteristics (wide ribs, long tails) and milk yield. Furthermore, this symbolic connection of

milk with “fertility” and “abundance” has transformed it into a ritual object of protection against negativity. This provides rich ethnolinguistic data on how language functions through cultural practices and beliefs, beyond words.

Siberian Tatars say *küs tuwalık* ‘eye prayer’ to cure eye disease or the evil eye. If a person is evil-eyed by a Russian, they recite this eye prayer over milk and give it to that person to drink. In some places where Kazan Ardı dialect is spoken, to cure jaundice, the yolk of the egg of the hen that lays on Wednesday and the cream of the milk should be fed to the afflicted one (Bayazitova 2011: 40, 250). Among the Tatars, a prayer recited with milk (*küs tuwalık*) is drunk to cure eye diseases and the evil eye. This demonstrates milk’s position as a tool for physical and spiritual healing, and how language carries this function. Similarly, the healing practice of “a Wednesday egg, a milk” creates a linguistic-ritual structure that combines milk with the sacredness of the weekdays.

In Tuvan and Tatar societies, milk is not merely a food but a powerful ethnolinguistic symbol possessing deep layers of meaning. In both of these Turkic peoples, milk is directly associated with themes such as cosmic order, moral purity, wealth, life energy and communication with supernatural forces. Shamanistic elements, which coexist alongside Buddhism in the Tuvan belief system, consider milk a sacred element, while expressions such as *süt deg ak setkilig kiji* ‘a person as pure as milk’ establish a direct link between milk and moral purity. Similarly, in Tatar folk beliefs, the use of milk as a soothing agent against natural phenomena (lightning, thunder, hail) reveals its role as a mediator with supernatural powers. Uses supported by color symbolism, such as black milk and white milk, offer clues to the shamanistic-based color systems of these peoples. Milk motifs in rituals make language not only a means of communication but also a carrier of cultural memory and a ritual organizing element. In Tatar culture, milk, associated with the white snake motif, serves to establish peace with mythological beings. Among Tuvans, the refusal to drink milk at night, or the belief that spilling it is considered bad luck, cements milk’s connection to life and abundance in the language. Thus, in Tuvan and Tatar, milk becomes not just a word but a multilayered ethnolinguistic construct, a carrier of beliefs, taboos and social norms. In this context, similar examples of the sanctity and symbolic power of milk exist among other peoples of the Turkic world. For example, the Kyrgyz define milk and dairy products as *ak* (pure) and use milk metaphors with prayers for white words at birth and death (Karatayev 2005: 95). Among Anatolian Turks, idioms such as “may his milk be halal” or “may his milk come from his nose” reveal the profound moral and emotional impact of milk (Akalın 2011: 2190). Among the Turkmens, spilling milk is also believed to bring bad luck; a prayer is immediately recited or soil is sprinkled over spilled milk, a sign of respect for the earth spirits (Tatlılıoğlu 2000: 157).

1.3. Milk in Rites and Rituals of Passage

In the life cycle, it is seen that social practices are an important institution that brings life into existence and enables people to exist with a certain identity. Ceremonies and rituals such as at birth, death and weddings take place in the transition periods that are subject to social practices. These ceremonies and rituals are regarded as symbols of the cultural specificity of a particular community. Holidays also serve the function of keeping the solidarity among the members of the community and the national identity consciousness alive. Among Tuvans and Tatars, milk has taken its place as a cultural symbol in social practices that can be characterized as transition ceremonies and rituals such as at birth, death, weddings and holidays.

After the baby's navel falls, the Tuvans put it in a clean cloth, then incense the baby's cradle with juniper so that the evil eye does not touch it and it is protected from evil spirits, and then pray and scatter milk (Türker & Gündoğdu 2016: 145). The tradition of incensing and sprinkling milk over the baby's cradle after the umbilical cord falls off serves both as a protective spell and transforms milk into a ritual element that ties the beginning of life with a sacred connection. In Tuvan, such practices with milk are integrated with the concept of *ak čemner* (white foods), making milk a symbol of cleanliness, innocence and life force. There are also birth rituals related to milk among the Bashkirs and Altai people; after the baby is born, milk-flour mixtures are prepared and these mixtures are offered to nature (Čobanoğlu 2003: 289). This situation shows that milk is positioned as a common "means of transition to life" among the Turkic peoples.

In the Tatar language, *sötleş* (*sötleş* in the Sérgač dialect of the Mišer dialect) is called 'wheat porridge cooked in milk, milky food' (TTAS V 188) and is fed to the new mother to give milk to the baby (Bayazitova 2011: 5, 36, 89). The milk food called *sötleş*, made for the mother to milk after giving birth, refers to both its direct physical function (lactation) and ritualistic support. According to Tatar folk beliefs, a child who is breastfed for forty days becomes attached to his family (Kalafat & Kamalov 2005: 64). The teeth that begin to erupt when the child is five or six months old and fall out at the age of six or seven are called *söt téšé* 'milk teeth' (TTAS V 189). Tatars express someone's youth and inexperience with words such as *söt téšé töškenčé* 'before the milk teeth fall out'; *söt téšleré de töšép bétmegen* 'even the milk teeth have not fallen out' (TTAS V 189; Ehetov 1982: 120; Isenbet 1990: 90). Idioms and phrases such as *söt téšé* 'milk tooth' show that milk is a lexeme that describes stages in the human life cycle. A woman who breastfeeds a child who is not breastfed by her own mother is called *söt anası* (TTAS V 188; Isenbet 1990: 90) or *imček anası* (TTAS II 533) 'milk mother'; each of the children who suckle from the same mother is called *söt kardeşé* 'milk brother' (TTAS V 188). Terms like *söt anası* and *söt kardeşé* create a milk-based kinship system that fosters social bonds beyond blood ties. Such concepts make milk the foundation of cultural and social belonging.

The disease, which has a thrush-like appearance due to the deterioration of the layer inside the mouth of young children and which is reported in dialects with various words, is called *gömbe* (*söt avıruwı*) ‘milk disease’ in literary language (TTAS II 98–99; Ramazanova 2013: 307). This childhood illness, called *gömbe* or *söt avıruwı* in the Tatar language, reflects both the directly observational nature of folk terminology and the transformation of the symbolic concepts of cleanliness and purity associated with milk into a disease agent; this demonstrates that in oral culture, health phenomena are interpreted within the axis of nature, nutrition and sanctity, and that language encodes this cultural framework.

As in many areas of the Turkic world, milk has a cultural significance in the death ceremonies of Tuvans. When someone dies in Tuvan, the body of the deceased is cleaned with spring water mixed with juniper and milk before burial, then dressed in new clothes and wrapped in a cloth by an elderly relative. As it is considered inappropriate to put an end to the life of another living creature while seeing off the deceased, the meal consists mainly of white-meal (*ak čemner*) such as milk, cheese and sugar, and no meat is used (Türker & Gündoğdu 2016: 151–152). The use of dairy products (*ak čemner*) instead of meat in death ceremonies can be seen as a connection to purity and the afterlife. This practice is also consistent with Buddhist influences among the Tuvans. This contrasts with the tradition of slaughtering a sheep as a funeral meal among other nomadic Turkic peoples, such as the Kyrgyz and Kazakhs, demonstrating the diversity of the belief system in the Tuvan culture. The use of a mixture of milk and juniper water in the Tuvan culture to wash the dead demonstrates that milk is both a purification agent and a protective element during the transition to the afterlife. The use of white foods (*ak čemner*) instead of meat in meals also emphasizes milk’s role as a sacred purification food associated with death. Similar rituals are also seen in various regions of the Turkic world. For example, the Sakhas (Yakuts) offer white drink after the deceased; this milky drink is a gift offered to the soul of the deceased (Ksenofontov 1930: 113).

The Tatars consider the arrival of a woodpecker or the howling of a dog in the neighborhood to be inauspicious, and it is assumed that such situations indicate that a funeral will take place or that there will be a sadness. One of these signifiers is the cuckoo. For this reason, it is believed that if the cuckoo is heard singing, milk should be placed where it lands and sings (Bayazitova 2015: 30). In Tatar folk beliefs, natural phenomena, animal sounds and spatial signs are given meaning through symbolic signs shaped in cultural memory. Events such as the sight of a woodpecker, the howling of a dog, or the hooting of a cuckoo are coded at the linguistic level as harbingers of negative events, and these auditory signs become part of a system of “cultural divination” among the people. In this context, the tradition of offering milk after the cuckoo’s hooting represents both a ritual practice designed to neutralize the bird’s perceived ill-fortune and a linguistic and behavioral restoration of the balance

between nature and humanity. The specific expression of such animal-based premonitions in Tatar demonstrates that folk language not only describes nature but also functions as a means of signification that intervenes within it. Indeed, language is a cultural construct that shapes both threatening and soothing behavior.

The cultural importance of milk in traditional Tuvan and Tatar weddings is evident from existing traditions. Among the Tatars, after the wedding, milk cream is placed on the girl's head in a ceramic bowl so that she can easily get used to her new home and be happy (Kalafat & Kamalov 2005: 65). Among the Tuvans, at the time of the wedding, the bride is taken to the groom's house with a woman who is limping and drinks milk from the same bowl with her mother-in-law. After this ritual, the mother-in-law and the bride meet and the bride opens her face (Kenin-Lopsan 2013: 33). The bride and mother-in-law drinking milk from the same vessel symbolizes the ritual unity of two families and two women. When the girl's side arrives at the groom's house, they first walk around the house three times and scatter hair on the bride and groom so that the house the bride comes from will be fertile; then the bride is brought into the house; then she is seated on the bed; then the bride is offered tea with milk. This tradition emphasizes the idea that the management of the house belongs to the bride (Oyun & Oorjak 2004: 74–75). Sprinkling milk around the bride as she enters the house is a practice done with the hope that the bride will bring productivity and abundance.

A similar tradition is preserved among Siberian Tatars. Accordingly, when the girl leaves her home, she is held by both arms by her two aunts and turned around and taken out. Before the girl leaves the house where she was born, they give her milk to drink, feed her oil and say some traditional sayings such as *mayday, yolday bulıp yeşeñ, tatuw bulıp, appak söttey, ak beǵétlé bulıp yeşeñ* 'live like oil, like the road, get along well, live with good fortune like white milk' (Urmanči 2005: 245–246). Phrases like *ak beǵétlé bulıp yeşeñ* (live with happiness as white as milk) demonstrate the direct connection between milk and purity, good fortune. Among Astrakhan Tatars, the groom and his family give money and various gifts to her mother and relatives for raising the bride as *söt aklıǵı, ana ħakı, söt akčası, imézgen söt ħakı, söt akı* 'milk right'. When the bride leaves her father's house, she is made to drink a bowl of milk "so that she will be as white as milk" and is taken out with her back turned so that she will not forget her home by saying various traditional words (Bulatova 2017: 74, 103, 161, 166, 282). The mother-in-law welcomes the bride by spreading a blanket under her feet and makes her drink a bowl of milk. They scatter money and bring her inside with traditional sayings such as "May you come with good luck, may you be white, may you be white as milk, may you be sweet-tongued, may you live a peaceful life". On the second day of the bride's arrival, according to the tradition called "bridal tea", the bride offers guests black tea with milk,

butter and salt (Bulatova 2017: 171–174, 280). Concepts like “milk right” make milk a symbol not only of physiological but also of moral and social obligations.

Tuvans keep milk alive not only in their daily life and language, but also in their ritual culture. It is known that no holiday of theirs passes without honoring it with *ak čem* ‘white food’. When celebrating Shagaa, the beginning of the new year according to the lunar calendar, Tuvans always place dairy foods (such as *süttüg šay*, *sarjag*, *aarjı*, *kurut*) in a place of honor in front of the yurt or Buddhist altar. The fact that the younger generation continues to respect milk as a source of healthy life is seen as an important phenomenon for the Tuvans (Kuular et al. 2022: 346).

In Sabantuy, the traditional national holiday of the Tatars, which takes place in the spring when their work is finished, children go from house to house collecting milk, butter and eggs. An experienced woman cooks a porridge called *zere* (crow) *botka* with these ingredients on the water bank or in her own home and serves it to the children (Urmanči 2009: 301). On the other hand, the crow *botka* is one of the traditional holidays of the Tatars, when they welcome the arrival of the warm and sunny spring after the end of the cold winter and pray for rain. Astrakhan Tatars call this holiday *Emel botka*, Mishers *yañgır botka*, *yañgır beyremé*, *yañgır namazı* and celebrate it on March 24. On the holiday, they cook and eat milk *botka*, that is ‘wheat porridge with milk’ and then pray (Urmanči 2009: 139).

Ethnolinguistically, in both Tuvan and Tatar cultures, milk functions as symbolic capital rather than simply food. The Tuvan concept of *ak čem* is the linguistic manifestation of a color-symbol system in which whiteness is identified with purity and sanctity. This concept demonstrates that dairy products are perceived not only as objects of consumption but also as ritual offerings and sources of health. Among the Tatars, the concept of *botka* – with various adjectives (*zere*, *yañgır*, *emel*) – reinforces the idea of a sacred collective meal by naming both food and ritual.

This coding of milk and dairy products in both societies is a reflection of the nomadic/semi-nomadic livestock economy and sensitivity to natural cycles in language and ritual. While Tuvans integrate dairy products with individual offerings and Buddhist or shamanic symbolism, Tatars associate dairy foods more with collective meals and seasonal rites of passage. This distinction illustrates how the same symbolic substance (milk) can differ in two distinct cultural-ritual contexts but it also shows that through language it creates a common map of meaning.

1.4. Milk in Nature-Related Nomenclatures

In the Turkic world, their respect for nature, which is considered sacred, is deeply embedded in their national identity. Having ruled over vast lands for thousands of years, Turks have taken the words of their archaic memory with them wherever they went. Although Tuvans and Tatars have also traveled to distant geographies, they have brought the ancient words of the Turkic

language with them. In this context, it is seen that the word milk in Tuvan and Tatar languages lives similarly in the names of nature such as plant names and toponyms on the basis of cultural memory. This situation can be interpreted as a reflection in the language of not only the nutritional value or mythological meaning of milk, but also its symbiotic relationship with nature.

Sütleşen (Akalın 2011: 2191), a perennial or annual plant of the spurge family, whose leaves, stems and roots contain a milky, milky-looking, cakey and caustic sap, and whose sap is used in medicine and industry depending on the species, and of which about seven hundred species are known, is called *ak süt-o't* (Serenot 2009: 23) and *süttüg-o't* (D. Monguš 2003: 259) in the Tuvan language, *sötlégen* in the Tatar language and *sötlégençeler* (TTAS V 189) for the family to which the milkweed plant belongs. The preservation of the word *süt* 'milk' in the name of the milkweed plant in both dialects is noteworthy. Furthermore, the milkweed plant, derived from the word *süt* 'milk', reveals different word formation patterns in the Turkic language (Sevortyan 2003: 347–348). The plant's sap is white and liquid, leading to its association with *süt* 'milk'. This is a naive and metaphorical example of how language conceptualizes nature.

In the Tuvan language, the word *süt* 'milk' appears in the name of *sarıg-süt-tüg çeçek*, a poisonous plant with yellow milk and yellow flowers (Serenot 2009: 139). In the Tatar language, it is seen in the name of the plant *sötcésé* (TTAS III 409), a bulbous herbaceous plant with white or yellowish flowers from the asparagus family whose leaves grow from the side of the stem, and the Latin name of this plant, known as white star in our country, means ornithogalum, 'bird's milk'. Again, the plant known as *hezaren* or *palace flower* in Turkish is called *kügerçén* (TTAS III 528) in Tatar language.

In the Tuvan language, the Milky Way is *Süt Oruu* (D. Monguš 2011: 767), while in the Tatar language it is *Kaz Yulı* or *Kiyék Kaz Yulı* (TTAS III 241). The name *Süt Oruu* in the Tuvan language is similar to the names Milky Way in the West and *Mlečnıy Put* in Russia (D. Monguš 1980: 256). The name *Süt Oruu* is part of the Turkic mythological conception of the universe. The Tatar word *kaz Yulı* 'goose path' points to a different mythological narrative and animal symbolism. According to one belief, the Milky Way transforms into a sun near sunset. The Turkmen people of Turkmenistan call the Milky Way "the milk of the white she-camel" which is similar to the belief and tradition that it is also known as the "milk way" (Boratav 2012: 96).

Between Ak-Sug and Işkem in Tuvan, on the left bank of the Kemčik River, on a high plateau surrounded by beautiful pastures, there is a lake called *Süt-Xöl* 'Milky Lake'. According to Grumm-Grjimaylo, this lake, which has clear water and is quite deep, was named *süt* 'milk' because the milk of the cows grazing on its shores increased its yield. The region where the lake is located is also called by the same name (Ondar 2007: 368). According to Altai-Turkic mythology, the *Süt-Ak Göl* 'Milk-White Lake' is considered a lake on which the whole life of people depends (Ögel 2010: 356). This is an important ethnolinguistic indicator

that shows that toponymy and mythology encode societies' worldview and their relationship with nature through a common semantic field.

These names related to milk demonstrate how people's meaningful connections with nature are symbolized in language. The use of the word *süt* 'milk' in particular, to denote the watery properties of plants, such as milk, embodies the interaction of language with nature.

2. MILK IN ORAL CULTURE EXPRESSIONS

The elements that make up oral culture have been widely accepted in the life of the society to which they belong and their effects on the members of that society are quite high. Oral culture products play an important role in the formation and sustainability of national identity. *Süt* 'milk' is not only a food item in the Turkish cultural landscape, but also a deep cultural code representing purity, abundance, the source of life, maternal compassion and even holiness. When we look at oral culture expressions such as proverbs, riddles and epics of Tuvans and Tatars, it is seen that milk has a functional place and is used as an effective cultural element.

2.1. Milk in Proverbs

Milk, which has an important place in the social life of Turks from past to present, preserves its presence in Turkic proverbs. In *Dîvânü Lugâtî't-Türk*, one of the main reference sources of the Turkic world, there are proverbs about milk (see DLT 237, 400). For example; *Iwek sıjek sûtke tüşür* 'hurrying fly falls into milk' (DLT 237) is similar to the proverb in the Tuvan language *daalaşkan küske sûtke düjer* 'hurrying mouse falls into milk' (Budup 2016: 24).

When we look at the oral culture products of Tuvan and Tatar language, proverbs related to milk attract attention. Some of these represent ideas that are similar to each other in terms of their content. For example; in the Tuvan language, regarding the importance of the milk of the animal to be milked being plentiful and of high quality, proverbs such as *Saar maldıñ süttü herek, sadar maldıñ kïrganı xerek* 'The good to be milked must be milky, the good to be sold must be old'; *Ak beleen alır, ak südün amzaar* (Budup 2016: 48, 84) 'You buy its white gift, you taste its white milk' and in the Tatar language, *Sıyır alsan – savıp al, sötén-mayın kabıp al* 'If you buy a cow, milk it and buy it, taste its milk-fat and buy it' (Möhemmetcanova & Yamaltdinov 2020: 68). Both the Tuvan proverbs "*Saar maldıñ süttü herek...*" and the Tatar "*Sıyır alsan – savıp al...*" warn that the essence (milk yield) of a thing should be considered rather than its external appearance. This is more than just practical animal husbandry advice; it reflects a general philosophy of life. There are proverbs such as *Söt birmegen sıyırnı itke suyalar* 'They slaughter the cow that does not give milk for meat'; *Sötlé sıyır bazarga barıp citmiyçe kala* 'A milky cow does not go to the market' (Möhemmetcanova & Yamaltdinov 2020: 136, 68). Such expressions

are typical examples of the language-encoding of the economic and cultural values of societies that rely on animal husbandry. In these proverbs, milk is conceptualized not only as a food product but also as a measure of productivity, abundance, livelihood and status. The first proverb expresses the slaughter of unproductive animals based on their “uselessness”, while the second proverb implies the value of productivity (milk cows) to society and that this value cannot be reduced to market logic. In this respect, proverbs function as ethnolinguistic indicators that reflect the animal-human relationship, production and value systems, and even social ethics in Tatar folk culture at the linguistic level. The disadvantages of empty and unnecessary talk have also been the subject of proverbs in both dialects. In the Tuvan language, the proverbs *Südü çok mal edigen* ‘A cow without milk makes noise’; *Čüree çok kiji katkijı, südü çok mal edigen* (Budup 2016: 50, 69) ‘A cowardly person laughs a lot, a cow without milk makes a stupid noise’ and in the Tatar language, the proverb *Sötséz sıyır kübrek mögriy* ‘A cow without milk bellows more’ (Möhemmetcanova & Yamałtdinov 2020: 68) are used on the basis of this idea. This demonstrates the common wisdom in the Turkish system of thought that “what is empty makes the loudest noise”. Therefore, it may indicate an ancient commonality between the two languages, and it is also ethnolinguistic evidence that similar animal husbandry experiences lead to similar inferences.

In the oral cultural expressions in the Tuvan and Tatar languages, there are similarities in the use of the word milk, but there are also differences due to factors such as the lifestyles, religious beliefs, social and economic lives of the peoples concerned. It is noteworthy that there are more proverbs about milk in the Tatar language compared to the Tuvan language. These proverbs can be classified thematically as follows:

Some of the proverbs that emphasize the importance of breast milk are: *Ten birgen de ana, söt birgen de ana, tél birgen de ana, köy birgen de ana* ‘The one who gives body and milk is the mother, the one who gives tongue and harmony is the mother.’; *Atanıñ kanı, ananıñ söté* ‘The father’s blood, the mother’s milk’; *Ana söté belen kergen onıñmıy* ‘The one who comes into being with mother’s milk is unforgettable.’; the proverb ‘What goes into a mother’s milk, goes into a cow’s milk’ indicates that what is not innate cannot be acquired through later efforts (Taymas 1968: 26), and that a child who does not receive motherly education will not become a well-mannered, loving person (Hekimcanov 2022: 201). In addition, the proverb *Süt blen kirgen can blen çigar* ‘What goes into a mother’s milk, goes out with the soul’ (Taymas 1968: 64) emphasizes that the knowledge acquired through mother’s milk is permanent until death. These proverbs elevate breast milk beyond a biological source of nutrition, coding it as the primary carrier of identity, belonging and cultural transmission. Examples such as “*Ten birgen de ana, söt birgen de ana...*” define motherhood as the joint shaping of body and soul, emphasizing the co-construction of body and language.

This provides concrete evidence of the process of transferring language and cultural codes to individuals, a fundamental thesis of ethnolinguistics.

There are many proverbs about the place and importance of milk in people's daily lives: *Sıyır söté bélen, kéşé éşé bélen...* (Isenbet 2003: 83) 'With cow's milk, with human work ...'; *bozawı ülgén sıyır da söt bulmas* 'A cow whose calf dies cannot produce milk.'; *Sötlé sıyır kötüwden ayırılmaz* 'Dairy cattle do not separate from the herd'; *Sötlé sıyır yabık bulır* 'Dairy cattle are thin'; *Sıyır suw éčer – söt bulır, yılan suw éčer – aguw bulır* 'Cow drinks water and it becomes milk, snake drinks milk and it becomes poison'; *Sıyırğa korı suw birép, söt kötme* 'Don't just give water to a cow and expect milk..'; *Sıyırğa tozlı suw kürsetme; ač kalıp, söt birmes* 'Don't show salt water to a cow, it will starve and not give milk.'; *Sıyırnıñ söté cilénénde tügél, tagaragında* 'The cow's milk is not in her udder, but in her feed'; *Sıyırnıñ tubığına suw tiyse, söté kilmiy* 'If water touches a cow's heel, it will not produce milk.'; *Ügéz mögézle sıyırnıñ söté bulmas* 'A cow with ox horns cannot produce milk'; *Bozaw karawdan kürşége söt sorıy kéresé rehetrek* 'Asking for milk from neighbors is easier than feeding a calf'; *Ügéz bulmagayı çyort bulsın, savıp éçerge söt bulsın* 'It doesn't matter if it's an ox (milk), as long as it's milked and drunk'; *Ügéz tuwsa – it bulır, tana tuwsa – söt bulır* 'If an ox is born, it becomes meat, if a calf is born, it becomes milk' (Möhemmetcanova & Yamaltdinov 2020: 67–73). These proverbs reflect Tatar society's established animal husbandry culture and specialized knowledge in animal husbandry. Proverbs such as *Sıyırnıñ söté cilénénde tügél, tagaragında* emphasize that milk production is not a magical process, but one that requires labor, knowledge and proper resource management. This reflects the society's rational and observation-based worldview. Proverbs also convey a strong message of socio-economic hierarchy and social order. The expression *Sötlé sıyır kötüwden ayırılmaz* underscores the importance of the bond between individuals who produce and create value and the community, thus underscoring collective consciousness.

Apart from these, there are various proverbs that talk about certain qualities related to humans (and sometimes animals): *Ülgén sıyır sötlé bula, kalgan sıyır bétlé bula* 'The dead cow becomes milky, the remaining cow becomes lice-infested' (Möhemmetcanova & Yamaltdinov 2020: 70); *Yahşı buzaw iki ananñ sütün imer* 'A good (skilled) calf can benefit from the milk of two mothers'; *Teke de bulsın, süt de birsin* 'Let it be both a goat and give milk'; *Yun da yuk, süt de yuk* 'There is no wool, there is no milk (said about useless animals and perhaps humans)' (Taymas 1968: 103, 107); *Pési sötné küz yomıp ašagač, üzén bérkém de kürmiy dip uylıy*; 'There are also proverbs like "When a cat drinks milk with its eyes closed, it thinks no one sees it" (Isenbet 2003: 15, 61, 62, 360). This group of proverbs offers a highly nuanced ethnolinguistic example of how the metaphor of milk is used to analyze human character and social behavior from the animal kingdom. They offer a sharp critique of human nature, greed, utilitarianism and hypocrisy through the lens of animals. The proverb "*Ülgén sıyır sötlé bula...*"

encodes a universal human behavior of exaggerating and longing for unattainable things. “*Pési sötné küz yomîp aşagaç...*” is a metaphorical depiction of hypocrisy and secret actions. “*Yun da yuk, sût de yuk...*” is a powerful cultural expression used to describe what is completely useless and unproductive. It reveals the observational, allegorical and moralizing aspect of Tatar culture. Milk and animal imagery are effective cultural tools used to express complex human flaws and social critiques in a concrete, understandable and memorable way.

The abundance of Tatar examples indicates Tatar society’s sedentary lifestyle and expertise in animal husbandry. Proverbs serve as production guides, containing detailed observations on animal nutrition, care and productivity. This demonstrates their historical connection to the advanced livestock farming of the Volga-Ural region. Although fewer examples exist in Tuvan, they generally possess a more poetic and symbolic narrative. This may be due to Tuvan’s belonging to the Siberian Turkic language family and its cultural structure, informed by a shamanistic worldview and intertwined with nature.

2.2. Milk in Riddles

Riddles, which are products of oral culture, are, in their most general definition, according to Brunvand, “traditional questions with unexpected answers” (2007: 1). Riddles about milk are also found in Tuvan and Tatar oral culture. Although the riddles about milk found in both dialects are similar in terms of meaning, they differ from each other in terms of form and vocabulary.

In the Tuvan language there are the following riddles about milk: *Ak sigennin amdanî çaagay (sût)* ‘White grass tastes good (milk)’; *Ak höldün düvü közülbēdi (sût)* ‘The bottom of the white lake is not seen (milk)’; *Čüzün kiirgen čidig ak (sût)* ‘whiteness that gives shape (milk)’; *Amdan kiirgen k̄ygak ak (sût)* ‘Flavoring matte whiteness (milk)’; *Čit kiirgen semis sar̄g (sût)* ‘Fat yellow bag with a smell (milk)’; *Kir̄ sar̄g, ortuzu ak, adaa xörtez̄in (xaȳndir̄gan sût, öreme)* ‘Yellow on top, white in the middle, breast underneath (boiled milk, cream)’; *Deejizinde der̄neşken, ortuzu tün̄ ak, adaa ajay buurul (sût öremeleri)* ‘Flattened where it touched, white in the middle, white-headed at the bottom (milk cream)’; *Deejizi deski sar̄g, duunduzu tün̄ sagaan, adakk̄zī ajay-buurul (öreme, sût)* ‘The part it touches is flat yellow, the middle is like a yellow shell, the bottom is white-headed, gray (cream, milk)’; *Us̄pa dalay sar̄g tor̄gu bar̄ndakt̄ig (öremelig sût)* ‘Yellow silk covered Lake Us̄pa (creamy milk)’ (Dugarjap 2011: 224–225); *Adaa – tun̄ sagaan, üstü üzüm čigir (sût)* ‘The bottom is white like a shell, the top is like grape sugar (milk)’; *Ȫn kiirer, ȫngür ar̄jaan̄m (sût)* ‘My light colored spring water (milk) that gives color’; *Čaȳn tut̄taar xölüm, kij̄n kadar xölüm (süttün öremeleri baza don̄ar̄i)* ‘My lake that forms in the summer, my lake that dries up in the winter (the formation of cream on the milk and its cooling)’ (Kurbatskiy 2002: 63–64).

These milk-related riddles in the Tuvan language are significant not only as products of oral culture but also as ethnolinguistic indicators reflecting

society's perception of nature, economic foundations and the symbolic world. The imagery in the riddles (*ak höldün düvü közülbēdi; čüzün kiirgen čidig ak*) reveals that the Tuvan people equate milk not only with food but also with sanctity and purity. The color *ak* 'white' is here associated with both a physical characteristic and the symbolism of "whiteness" and "cleanliness" found in the shared mythology of the Turkic peoples (Ögel 2010: 336). Similarly, in Kazakh and Kyrgyz oral cultures, milk and dairy products (especially kumiss and *kaymak* 'Turkish cream') serve both ritual and symbolic functions. For example, among the Kazakhs, the expression *ak sūt* is used to convey sanctity (Kul-Muhammed 2011: 442–443), while in Kyrgyz epics, the metaphor of "suckling white milk" is associated with the concepts of lineage and honor (Radloff 1995: 108). In this respect, detailed designations such as *öreme* and *xayındırgan sūt* in Tuvan riddles indicate that dairy products are a status symbol and a cultural memory element beyond daily life and nutrition. Ultimately, these riddles are linguistic reflections of the traditional lifestyle of Tuvan society, its relationship with nature and the cultural value system shaped by milk. Similar forms of expression seen in different regions of the Turkic world demonstrate the ethnolinguistic continuity of oral culture by reinforcing the common symbolic area of the color "white" and dairy products.

It is noteworthy that there are more riddles about milk in the Tatar language compared to the Tuvan language. The greater diversity of Tatar riddles centered on milk points to the centrality of milk and dairy products in the cultural and economic life of this society. Some of the riddles focus on the similarities of milk with other beings in terms of their qualities: *Üzē s̱y̱k – suw ṯügeḻ, üzē ḏimḻ – par ṯügeḻ, üzē appak mamık kēbēk, tik šulay da kar ṯügeḻ* 'It is liquid but not water, it is moist but not steam, it is pure white like cotton, but still not snow' (Isenbet 1970: 227, 554; Urmanči 2005: 165; Mehmutoy 2014: 125). As in the example given, riddles conceptualize milk by comparing it to the qualities of other entities rather than directly defining it. Such comparisons are directly linked both to the common imagination of the Turkic world, which symbolizes milk as *ak* (whiteness, purity) (Čeribaš & Taš 2018: 71) and to the people's environmental experiences (everyday objects such as snow, cotton, and steam). This suggests that the greater comparative imagery in Tatar riddles compared to Tuvan riddles is linked to differences in agricultural production, nutrition and symbolic systems. The familiarity of images such as cotton and snow, and their everyday counterparts, particularly among the Tatars of the Volga-Ural region, has allowed for the diversification of such metaphors used in milk-related riddles. In conclusion, milk in Tatar riddles creates a cultural-conceptual space through both everyday food and "whiteness". This is ethnolinguistically significant, as it demonstrates that the same symbolism is enriched with different materials across different geographies of the Turkic world.

Some riddles ask about things that do not exist in this world. One of the answers to these riddles, which have various variants, is pigeon's milk, or more

generally bird's milk: *Sinde minde yuk, séñgir tawda (očlı tübelé tawda) yuk, ütlé (tişéklé, kuwış) tašta yuk, kipçek (köpşek?) talda yuk. Ul – koş sötédér* 'You don't have it, I don't have it, the sharp-topped mountain doesn't have it, the hollowed-out stone doesn't have it, the hollow-branched willow tree doesn't have it. It's bird's milk'; *Dön'ya yözénde cidé nersede cidé yuk. Nerseler?* (1. *Kügerçén-néñ söté yuk*; 2. *Atnıñ mögézé*; 3. *Yomırkanıñ cöyé*; 4. *Sıyırnıñ yalı*; 5. *Taşnıñ tamırı*; 6. *Yılannıñ ayagı*; 7. *Meçénéñ sakalı*) (Isenbet 1970: 416, 566; Urmançı 2005: 255; Mehmutoy 2014: 315) 'There are seven out of seven things on earth. What are they? (1. The pigeon has no milk; 2. The horse's horn; 3. The egg's stitch; 4. The cow's mane; 5. The root of the stone; 6. The snake's foot; 7. The cat's beard.' There are also surprising riddles about animals that have no milk: *Béznéñ ilnéñ ügézé cit il péçenén aśasa, söté kaysı ilge bulır?* (*Ügézneñ söté bulmıy*) (Isenbet 1970: 412) 'If our village's ox eats another village's grass, which village's milk will it produce? (An ox cannot have milk.)' Riddles about breast milk *imçek söté* 'breast milk' also exist in different regions with different variations. In these riddles, it is emphasized that breast milk, which is not cooked, does not grow in the soil, and is not put on a plate or on the table, is consumed by all of humanity and the importance of this: *Kazanda/bakçada péşmiy, tabakka töşmiy, anı aśamagan üşmiy* (Isenbet 1970: 237, 238; Mehmutoy 2014: 144) 'It is not cooked in a cauldron / in the sun, it is not put on a plate, the one who does not eat it will not grow.

These riddles demonstrate the linguistic reflections of perceptions of both the real world and imagined impossible entities in Tatar oral culture. Answers such as "bird's milk" or "pigeon's milk" express the concept of the "unattainable" or "impossible" by implying a biologically non-existent element; it is noteworthy that a real element such as *imçek söté* 'breast milk' is similarly ritualized in riddles. For example, the riddle *Kazanda/bakçada péşmiy, tabakka töşmiy, anı aśamagan üşmiy* emphasizes that breast milk is a "natural" food that isn't cooked, isn't a product of the soil, and directly nourishes and nurtures humans. This approach is also linked to the sacredness of breast milk and the "right to white milk" among Central Asian Turks (Ögel 2010: 8–9; Čeribaš & Taš 2018: 71). In Kazakh and Kyrgyz oral literatures, the right to breast milk is also known as a category of both legal and moral legitimacy (Čeribaš & Taš 2018: 78; Güler 2022: 371). Therefore, these riddles are not only humorous playfulness but also ethnolinguistic indicators through which social values, prohibitions and sacred foods are linguistically conveyed. Both "non-existent" (bird milk, ox milk) and "existent" (breast milk) examples in Tatar riddles reinforce the intercultural commonality of the concepts of food and purity in the Turkic world.

In the Tatar language and dialects, there are also riddles about both milk and a device for separating milk: *Dürtten töşken bélen, sötten töşken (söt bélen may / seperatta söt ayırtuw)* 'What flows from four (four udders) and what flows from milk (separating milk and fat / milk in a milk separator)'; *Ala (~ ak) sıyırmı –*

kuş imçek, bér imčegénnen söt bire, ikéncésénnen – kaymak (sıyparator / separatta söt ayırtuw) (Isenbet 1970: 349, 560; Mehmutoy 2014: 241, 242) ‘My Ala cow is a double udder. It gives milk from one udder and skim from the second (milk separator / separating milk in milk separator)’. Riddles about milk and dairy products in Tatar and its dialects incorporate not only the food itself but also the tools used in its processing into the linguistic imagination. The riddles “*Dürtten töşken bélen, sötten töşken*” and “*Ala sıyırım – kuş imçek...*” metaphorically express both the animal’s natural biology (milk coming from four teats) and the milk separation devices (*sıyparator/separator*) that entered village life with modernization. Thus, traditional riddles convey the new technological elements incorporated into the people’s daily lives, transformed through folk poetry and humor. This is a process also encountered in other regions of the Turkic world. For example, in Kyrgyz riddles, traditional domestic production tools (*yayık, kumiss tulumu, kaymak’s spoon*) are similarly described with anthropomorphic or animalistic metaphors (Šimšek 2018: 82, 356). In this context, Tatar riddles serve as ethnolinguistic documents, reflecting not only the sanctity and abundance of milk but also the technological transformations of its processing.

The concept of *süt* ‘milk’ in Tatar and Tuvan riddles reveals the profound differences in the perception, conceptualization and material culture of the two cultures from an ethnolinguistic perspective. Tuvan riddles use concrete images drawn entirely from the natural environment to describe milk and its derivatives: *Ak höldün düvü közülbedi* ‘The bottom of the white lake is not seen’; *Čayın tuttaar xölüm* ‘My lake that forms in the summer’. These depictions reflect a nature-centric worldview, closely tied to the Tuvan Siberian landscape and nomadic-shepherd lifestyle. The riddles encode milk as an extension, a part of nature. Tatar riddles are twofold: there are abstract and comparative descriptions. The riddle “*Üzé sıyık – suw tügél...*” describes milk in terms of what it is not like. This reveals the mental structure of a society that was more analytical and abstract in its thinking, and in contact with established and written culture. There are also cultural and technological references: for example, the phrase *koş söté* ‘bird’s milk’ is a metaphor for the impossible and the unattainable. Even more striking is the fact that the milk separator is the subject of a riddle. This is unique ethnolinguistic evidence demonstrating Tatar society’s integration with modern agricultural technologies and how its material culture is reflected in the language.

Accordingly, it is possible to argue that, unlike Tuvan’s symbiotic relationship with nature, Tatar has developed an identity interactively with culture. While milk is a gift of nature in Tuvan, it is simultaneously encoded as a cultural commodity and a technological product in Tatar. This clearly demonstrates how two communities sharing a common heritage have constructed distinct ethnolinguistic identities along distinct historical and geographical paths.

2.3. Milk in Epics

Epics, like other oral cultural expressions, are products of oral culture that shed light on the traditional, economic, social and cultural life of the people. In Tuvan and Tatar epics, the use of milk as a healing and magical drink is one of the motifs common to both dialects. For example; in the Tuvan epic *Alday Buuču*, an old woman gives *Han Buuday* two round things made from her own milk to eat with his horse, *Bahadır* and the horse becomes younger as soon as he eats them; he becomes brothers with the three sons that the woman killed because he drank the woman's milk, and he resurrects the boys he killed upon the woman's request (Ergun & Aça 2004: 129, 169). In the Tatar epic *Yestey Mönké*, the story is about the healing of a fawn's foot when the protagonist drinks the cow's healing milk. This fawn with a sick leg, who asks the hero to come to her after seven years for his kindness, is actually a young girl disguised as a deer, and she takes his clothes and leaves, as she intends to marry the hero in the future (Urmanči 2009: 104).

The use of milk as a healing and magical beverage in Tuvan and Tatar epics demonstrates the existence of a common symbolic code in the mythopoeic universes of both societies. In the Tuvan epic *Alday Buuču* milk grants youth to the hero and his horse, enabling the resurrection of murdered children, positioning milk as a source of both biological and spiritual transformation. Similarly, in the Tatar epic *Yestey Mönké* the cow's "healing milk" heals a crippled deer's foot, linking the plot to a transformation process that culminates in the hero's reward and marriage. In these narratives, milk is not only a nutritive substance but also a "sacred drink" imbued with functions such as life force, healing, rebirth and social bonding. From an ethnolinguistic perspective, this motif shows that the concept of milk is structured in a similar way in the Tuvan and Tatar oral tradition, both at the linguistic (epithets, naming, metaphors) and cultural (ritual, mythological and social codes) levels, and that it has been passed down from generation to generation, keeping alive a common Turkic world symbolism.

In many regions of the Turkic world, milk and dairy products are associated with the concept of *ak* 'white', and this color symbolizes purity, sanctity and fertility. The healing, revitalizing and bonding properties of milk in Tuvan and Tatar epics share the same semantic roots as similar motifs seen in Altai, Bashkir, Kyrgyz, Yakut and Anatolian Turkic narratives. For example, in Altai epics, "Ak Köl or Ak Süt" is depicted as a source of life descending from the sky or emerging from a sacred mountain; in the Kyrgyz epics, heroes often gain strength and sanctity by drinking white milk (Alekseyev 2013: 111, 230; Hacıseyhoğlu 1932: 156; Dilek 2002: 97; Urmanči 2009: 337; Kaya 2015). In these narratives, milk is conceptualized not merely as a beverage but as the "essence of life" that ensures the continuity of the cosmic order. Milk Lake is depicted as the Pool of Life in Turkish, Altai, and Mongolian mythology. It is also spelled *Sütgöl* (*Sütköl*, *Sötköl*). The word *Akgöl* (*Akköl* or *Ağkül*) is also used

as a modifier or synonym. The Mongols know it as *Hünnür* (*Hünnevür*). It is located in the sky, above the Tree of Life. It is shaped like a lake of milk. It carries vital elements. The souls that will come to Earth reside in this pool. Kübey Hanım brings milk from this lake in leather skins and drips it into the mouths of newborn babies. This drop symbolizes the child's soul. Milk Lake is located on the third level of the sky. It is also called the Milk-White Lake. It is considered the source of all life. Nasreddin Hodja's allegory of the lake as milk and the creation of yeast is related to this theme, albeit at a subconscious level. Milk symbolizes whiteness, purity and cleanliness. Sura means white in Chuvash. In Chechen and Ingush, the word "Sura" means milk. In Mongolian, "Sara" means moon, and the concepts are linguistically interconnected. Milk Lake, or White Lake, is a magical lake located in one of the heavenly realms according to the Tengrism belief of the ancient Turks. The first soul and first life are given to believers by a drop taken from the Milk Lake. Beliefs vary from tribe to tribe as to which divine being brings the drop from this milk lake and applies it to the newborn child's lips. This duty is generally attributed to Umay, but in some Altai tribes and northern Turkic peoples, such as the Yakuts, the goddess Ayzıt is also said to accompany the mother when a child is about to be born, bringing with her the fairies of fields, flowers and fruits. She then pours the drop from the Milk Lake into the child's mouth. This becomes the soul given to the child (Karakurt 2012: 676).

From an ethnolinguistic perspective, the terminology "white food" and "white drink" constitutes a common symbolic system both at the linguistic level (naming, adjectives and metaphors) and in cultural practices (offerings, healing rituals and heroic narratives). The expressions "whiteness" in Tuvan epics and "healing milk" in Tatar epics are local variants of this shared system. Thus, "whiteness" becomes a key semantic element in both rituals and oral literature, carrying the linguistic and cultural code of the nature-human-sacred triangle in the worldview of the Turkic peoples.

CONCLUSION

This study examines how the concept of *süt* 'milk' is coded within an ethnolinguistic framework as a constitutive element of cultural, religious and social life, and its place in cultural memory in the Tuvan and Tatar communities, which speak two distinct dialects of the Turkic language and have distinct geographical and religious-cultural contexts. This comparative ethnolinguistic analysis reveals both profound commonalities and significant differences in the ways the concept of milk is encoded in the cultural memories of the Tatar and Tuvan communities. Beyond being a means of nourishment in the cultural memories of both communities, milk is central to collective memory, worldview, belief systems and dynamic rituals. Furthermore, it stands out as a powerful ethnolinguistic concept reproduced through language, actively used in traditional

life practices and oral cultural products. The fact that milk represents purity, fertility, a source of life and kinship ties in the languages of both communities reflects its function as an ancient and shared ethnolinguistic code related to the Turkic cultural basin. At the same time, the religious and urban metaphors in Tatar culture, shaped by Islamic influence, and the animistic and pastoral connotations in Tuvan culture, dominated by the Lamanist-Shamanist belief system, reveal how the same basic concept has been shaped in different religious-historical contexts. Furthermore, as we move from the Volga-Ural region towards Tuvan, it is striking that the concept of milk among Tatars living in adjacent regions bears greater ethnic and linguistic similarities to the Tuvans. This highlights the importance of comparative studies that examine how common linguistic roots are reinterpreted in different contexts to understand the cultural continuity and diversity of the Turkic world.

The diversity of forms (*süt/söt/süd*, etc.) of the concept *süt* 'milk' extending from the historical Turkic language to modern dialects, as well as the range of meanings it acquires in Tuvan and Tatar lexicons, reveal how this concept carries both nutritional and symbolic functions. The terminology for milk in the Tuvan and Tatar languages reveals the linguistic reflection of cultural adaptation, which is directly linked to the economic, geographical and social conditions of both societies. Traditional foods and beverages prepared with milk, widely used in the culinary cultures of both Tuvans and Tatars, have shaped the nutritional habits of both societies. Reflecting this, milk tea holds a significant place in the social lives of both societies. In Tuvan and Tatar cultures, milk tea (Tuv. *süttüg šay* and Tat. *sötlé čey*) is not merely a beverage but also an example of adaptation to geographical and ecological conditions, carrying profound cultural and social meanings. The terminology in Tuvan and Tatar, the tea's preparation methods (e.g., butter in Tuvans, tail fat in Tatars), and contextual uses (e.g., postpartum) are all related to the concept; rituals, hosting guests, expressions of social solidarity reflect the intertwined relationship between language and culture. Expressions such as *yaktı čiray* and *sötlé čey*, in particular, demonstrate how milky tea conveys cultural values through language by embodying abstract concepts such as friendship and hospitality. As a part of the common Turkic cultural memory, it takes shape with different recipes and names (*süttüg šay*, *kalmık čey*, *tuğ čey*), serving as an identity marker and an ethnolinguistic element carrying social codes at the intersection of ecology, culture and language. Ethnolinguistic reflections in the economic and cultural adaptations of societies have also found their place in the nomenclature of dairy products, milk types and their preservation methods. In Tatar, as a result of settled animal husbandry and agricultural economy, a rich and detailed vocabulary has developed for cow's and sheep's milk (*sıyır söté*, *sarık söté*) and their processed products (*kort*, *katık*, *kaymak*). In contrast, it is noteworthy that, as a requirement of the nomadic lifestyle and Siberian ecology in Tuvan, terminology specific to animal species, such as reindeer (*ivi südü*), yak (*sarlık südü*),

and camel (*teve südü*), is prominent, as are words referring to milk storage and preservation methods (*doñurğan süit*, *kurgag süit*). This terminological differentiation demonstrates that language is an active component, not a passive reflection, of the process of adaptation to the ecological structure of society.

In ethnolinguistic terms, milk plays a crucial role in identifying the similarities and differences between layers of symbolic meaning in Tuvan and Tatar cultures. Both cultures associate milk with “purity”, “fertility” and “holiness” through the symbolism of the color *ak* ‘white’. However, this common foundation becomes distinct through interaction with different belief systems. In both Turkic peoples, milk is directly associated with themes such as cosmic order, moral purity, wealth, life energy and communication with supernatural powers. Shamanistic elements coexisting with Buddhism in the Tuvan belief system consider milk a sacred element, while expressions such as *süit deg ak setkilig kiji* ‘a person as pure as milk’ establish a direct link between milk and moral purity. Similarly, in Tatar folk beliefs, the use of milk as a soothing agent against natural phenomena (lightning, thunder, hail) reveals its role as a concept imbued with supernatural powers. Thus, in Tuvan and Tatar, *süit* ‘milk’ becomes not just a word but a multilayered ethnolinguistic structure, carrying beliefs, taboos and social norms. These traces are reflected in other Turkic communities.

The concept of milk appears to be encountered from an ethnolinguistic perspective in Tuvan and Tatar rites of passage (birth, marriage, death and festivals). Positioned as a protective and sacred element in birth rituals and at the beginning of life, milk defines strong, non-biological yet socially significant relationships. Its place in death rituals reflects a distinct belief system aligned with Buddhist influences in Tuvan culture. Among the Tatars, it demonstrates its role in the cultural divination system. While the concept of milk is integrated into the Buddhist/Shamanist altar culture among the Tuvans, it is prominent in collective festivals and rites of passage among the Tatars. Thus, the same fundamental concept, milk, transforms into different ritual practices in different cultural contexts.

The reflections of the concept of *süit* ‘milk’ in nature-related naming in Tuvan and Tatar Turkish also reveal the symbiotic relationship the Turkic world has with nature from an ethnolinguistic perspective. The similar preservation of the concept of *süit* ‘milk’ in plant naming, despite geographical and cultural differences, allows for the tracing of a common cultural code and linguistic continuity. This also reflects the common linguistic logic and conceptualization of nature in other Turkic languages. On the other hand, the mythological and semantic differences evident in the naming of the Milky Way reflect the diverse understandings of cosmology between the two societies. For example, the Tuvan expression *Süit Oruu* (Milky Way) refers to the ancient Turkic mythological conception of the universe and the sacred/vital role of milk, while the Tatar term *Kaz Yulı* reflects animal symbolism (bird/migration motif) and possibly a different understanding of cosmology during the Islamic period.

The ethnolinguistic reflections of the concept of *süt* ‘milk’ in the oral cultural products of Tuvan and Tatar Turks (proverbs, riddles, epics) shed light on both the shared symbolism of the Turkic world and the regional differences among Turkic communities. In proverbs, milk encodes the economic and practical knowledge of societies engaged in animal husbandry, while also providing a moral and philosophical framework. While Tuvan proverbs often contain observations directly related to nature and animals, Tatar proverbs exhibit much more examples and thematic diversity related to breast milk, the milk of various animals, and production and social values. This is an ethnolinguistic coding related to the nature-centered and nomadic cultural structure of Tuvan society, and the sedentary lifestyle and advanced animal husbandry practices of Tatar society. For example, in both languages, metaphors such as “a cow that doesn’t give milk” are associated with infertility, emptiness, or futility, indicating a common system of thought in the Turkic world. While the image of milk in riddles is shaped by direct nature depictions (white lake, white grass, ore, etc.) and allusions to sacredness in Tuvan riddles, comparative and abstract imagery (snow, cotton, bird’s milk, etc.) is more prevalent in Tatar riddles. This demonstrates that Tuvan culture is in direct contact with the environment, while Tatar culture incorporates both nature, culture and technology (e.g., the milk separator riddle) into its linguistic imagination. The use of milk as a healing and magical beverage in Tuvan and Tatar epics demonstrates the existence of a common symbolic code in the mythological universes of both societies. In the Turkic world, milk is not merely a beverage; this motif, shaped around the concept of white, is conceptualized as the “essence of life” ensuring the continuity of the cosmic order.

This study aims to emphasize the importance of the deep perspective provided by ethnolinguistics in understanding the dynamics of continuity and diversity in Turkic language and culture, and to contribute to comparative studies that will also encompass other Turkic communities. We demonstrated that the concept of *süt* ‘milk’ in the Tuvan and Tatar languages is not simply a lexical element; it is shaped by the historical, geographical, cultural, socio-economic conditions and belief systems of both communities. It is a multilayered ethnolinguistic phenomenon that both extends to a common Turkic cultural pool and differentiates within it over time. Here, language functions as the carrier and memory of culture, transforming a concrete nutrient into an abstract world-view. Ethnolinguistics is a field of research that demonstrates that language is not merely a means of communication but also a fundamental element shaping cultural values, thought systems and social worldviews.

NOTE

1 Large leather bag with kumiss inside.

ABBREVIATIONS

DLT = Ercilasun, Ahmet Bican & Ziya Akkoyunlu 2015. *Dîvânu Lugâti't-Türk: giriş-metin-çeviri-notlar-dizin*. [Dîvânu Lugâti't-Türk: Introduction – Text – Translation – Notes – Index.] Ankara: Türk Dil Kurumu Yayınları.

DTS = Nadelyayev, Viladimir Mihaylovič et al. 1969. *Drevnetyurkskiy slovar'*. [Old Turkic Dictionary.] Leningrad: Nauka.

EDPT = Clauson, Sir Gerard 1972. *An Etymological dictionary of pre-thirteenth century Turkish*. Oxford: Oxford University Press.

TTAS I–VI = *Tatar télénéñ añlatmalı süzlégé*. [Explanatory Dictionary of Tatar Language.] 2015–2021. Tom I–VI. Kazan: TEHSİ.

REFERENCES

Abaşin, Sergey 2020. Orta Asya'da Çay. [Tea in Central Asia.] Transl. Mehmet Önder Duran. *Türk Tarihi Araştırmaları Dergisi* [Journal of Turkish Historical Studies], Vol. 5, No. 2, pp. 170–205.

Akalın, Şükrü Halûk (ed.) 2011. *Güncel Türkçe Sözlük*. [Current Turkish Dictionary.] Ankara: Türk Dil Kurumu.

Alekseyev, Nikolay Alekseyevič 2013. *Türk Dilli Sibirya Hakları'nın Şamanizmi*. [Shamanism of Turkic-Speaking Siberian Societies.] Transl. Metin Argun. Konya: Kömen Yayınları.

Arıkoğlu, Ekrem et al. 2023. *Kırgızca-Türkçe Sözlük*. [Kyrgyz-Turkish Dictionary.] Vol. 2. Ankara: Türk Dil Kurumu Yayınları.

Bamana, Gaby 2015. Tea Practices in Mongolia: A Field of Female Power and Gendered Meanings. *Asian Ethnology*, Vol. 74, No. 1, pp. 193–214.

Bapaeva, Janıl Mirza 2013. *Tuva Şamanizmi*. [Shamanism of Tuvans.] Konya: Kömen Yayınları.

Baskakov, Nikolay Aleksandrovič 1958. *Karakalpaksko-russkiy slovar'*. [Dictionary of Karakalpak-Russian.] Moskva: Gosudarstvennoye izdate'lstvo inostrannih i natsional'nih slovarey.

Bayazitova, Flera Saidovna 2011. *Halik traditsiyeleré leksikası: bişék tuyı (yola hem folk'lor tekstları yassılığında)*. [Vocabulary of traditions: bişek tuy (in the form of traditions and folklore texts).] Kazan: Galimcan İbrahimov İsméndegé Tél, Edebiyet hem Sengat' İnstitutı.

Bayazitova, Flera Saidovna 2015. *Halik traditsiyeleré leksikası: soñğı tuy (diniy folk'lor hem cirlé söyleş tekstları yassılığında)*. [Vocabulary of Traditions: soñğı tuy (in the Form of Religious Folk and Folkloric Texts).] Kazan: Galimcan İbrahimov İsméndegé Tél, Edebiyet hem Sengat' İnstitutı.

Bayazitova, Flera Saidovna 2016. Tatar halk geleneklerinde ve yerel ağışlarında 'ekmek' sözünün kullanımı. [The Use of the Word 'Bread' in Tatar Folk Traditions and Local Dialects.] Transl. Murat Özşahin. *Türk Dünyası Dil ve Edebiyat Dergisi* [Journal of Turkish World Language and Literature], Vol. 41, pp. 7–12.

Begmatov, Ernst et al. 2007. *Özbek Tilinig İzahli Lugati III. C., N Tartibli*. [Explanatory Dictionary of the Uzbek Language, Vol. III, Letter of N.] Taşkent: Özbekistan Respublikasi Fanlar Akademiyasi Alişer Navaiy Namidagi Til va Adabiyat İnstitutı, Özbekistan Milliy Ensiklopediyası Davlat İlimiy Naşriyati.

Boas, Franz 1911. *Handbook of American Indian Languages*. Washington: Government Printing Office.

Brunvand, Jan Harold 2007. Bilmeceler ve Diğer Sözlü Bulmacalar. [The Riddles and Other Word Puzzles.] Transl. Kadriye Türkan. *Milli Folklor* [National Folklore], Vol. 74, pp. 137–143.

Boratav, Pertev Naili 2012. *Türk Mitolojisi: Oğuzların – Anadolu, Azerbaycan ve Türkmenistan Türklerinin Mitolojisi*. [Turkish Mythology: The Mythology of the Oğuz Turks of Anatolia, Azerbaijan, and Turkmenistan.] Ankara: Bilge Su Yayınları.

Budup, Bolat-ool (ed.) 2016. *Tıva üleger domaktar bolgaş čečen söster*. [Tuvan Proverbs and Mottoes.] Kızıł: Tıvanıñ nom ündürer čeri.

Bulatova, Minira Rahimovna 2017. *Milliy-medeniy mirasibiz: Esterhan tatarları (Fenniy ékspéditsite-ler hezinesennen; unbérénčé kitap)*. [Our National Cultural Heritage: The Astrakhan Tatars (From the

Archive of Scholarly Expeditions).] Vol. XI. Kazan: Galimcan İbrahimov İséméndegé Tél, Edebiyet hem Sengat' İnstitutı.

Butanayev, Viktor & Monguş, Čoygana Vladimirovna 2005. *Arxaıçeskiye obıçai i obryadı sayanskiv tyurkov*. [Archaic Traditions and Ritual Practices of the Sayan Turkic Peoples.] Abakan: Xakasskiy Gosudarstvenniy Universitet.

Çelik, Fatih 2020. Kırğız Kültüründe "Ak" Renginin Kavramlaşması ve Anlam Alanları. [The Conceptualization of the Color 'White' and Its Semantic Domains in Kyrgyz Culture.] *Uluslararası Türkçe Edebiyat Kültür Eğitim Dergisi* [International Journal of Turkish Literature, Culture and Education], Vol. 9, No. 4, pp. 1395–1410.

Çeribaş, Mehmet & Taş, Emine 2018. Kırğız Sözlü Kültüründe Anne Sütü. [Mother's Milk in Kyrgyz Oral Culture.] *Motif Vakfı Uluslararası Sosyal Bilimler Sempozyumu 8–10 Kasım 2018 / Çanakkale Bildiriler Kitabı* [Motif Foundation International Symposium on Social Sciences 8–10 November 2018, Çanakkale. Proceedings Book], pp. 70–81.

Çetin, Halil 2021. Kazak Türklerinin Törenselleşmiş Günlerdeki Yemekleri ve Bu Bağlamda Gerçekleştirilen Ritüeller. [The Ceremonial Dishes of the Kazakh Turks and the Rituals Performed in This Context.] *Millî Folklor*, Vol. 17, No. 131, pp. 219–229.

Çobanoğlu, Özkul 2003. *Türk Halk Kültüründe Memoratlar ve Halk İnançları* [Memorates and Folk Beliefs in Turkish Folk Culture.] Ankara: Akçağ Yayınları.

Çumakayev, Aleksey et al. 2018. *Altaysko-russkiy slovar'* [Dictionary of Altai-Russian.] Gorno-Altaysk: BNU RA NII Altayistiki im SS. Surazarova.

Dilek, İbrahim 2002. *Altay Destanları I*. [Epics of Altai I.] Ankara: Türk Dil Kurumu Yayınları.

Kaya, Doğan 2015. *Kırğız Destanları*. [Epics of Kyrgyz.] Ankara: Salkım Söğüt Yayınları.

Dugarjap, Aleksey 2011. *Tıva ulustuñ tıvızıktaı*. [Tuvan Nations Riddles.] Kizil: KTSO Anıyak.

Hacışeyhoğlu, Hasan Üçok 1932. *Çankırı Tarih ve Halkiyatı: Ahilikten Kalma Esnaf ve Sohbet Teşkilatı*. [From the Notes on the History and Folklore of Çankırı: Guild and Social Organizations Inherited from the Akhism Tradition.] İstanbul: Okuyan Adam Yayınları.

Eğretov, Gabdulhey Hıram 1982. *Tatar telenen frazeologik eytelmeler süzlégé*. [Phraseological Dictionary of the Tatar Language.] Kazan: Tatarstan kitap neşriyatı.

Ergun, Metin & Aça, Mehmet 2004. *Tıva Kahramanlık Destanları*. [Heroic Epics of Tuvan.] Vol. I. Ankara: Akçağ Yayınları.

Güler, Derya Özcan 2022. *Kazak Kahramanlık Destanları*. [Heroic Epics of Kazakh.] Çanakkale: Paradigma Yayınları.

Hekimcanov, Ferit Selehetin 2022. *Tatar telenen frazeologizmna süzlégé: totırlı süztémeler hem teg'birler (A–B)*. [Phraseological Dictionary of the Tatar Language: Fixed Expressions and Idioms (A–B).] Kazan: Galimcan İbrahimov İséméndegé Tél, Edebiyet hem Sengat' İnstitutı.

Isenbet, Nekiy 1970. *Tatar halik tabışmakları*. [Tatar Folk Riddles.] Kazan: Tatarstan kitap neşriyatı.

Isenbet, Nekiy 1989. *Tatar telenen frazeologik süzlégé (A–K)*. [Phraseological Dictionary of Tatar Language (A–K).] Kazan: Tatarstan kitap neşriyatı.

Isenbet, Nekiy 1990. *Tatar telenen frazeologik süzlégé (L–H)*. [Phraseological Dictionary of Tatar Language (L–H).] Kazan: Tatarstan kitap neşriyatı.

Isenbet, Nekiy 2003. *Tatar halik mekal'leré*. [Proverbs of Tatar.] Yar-Çallı: İdel-yort.

Kalafat, Yaşar & Kamalov, İlyas 2005. Tatar Efsaneleri. [Tatar Legends.] *Karadeniz Araştırmaları*, Vol. 6, No. 6, pp. 52–77.

Karatayev, Olcobay & Erliyev, Süleyman 2005. *Kırğız etnografyası boyunca sözdük*. [Dictionary of Kyrgyz Ethnography.] Bişkek: Biyiktik

Karakurt, Deniz 2012. *Türk Söylence Sözlüğü*. [Turkish Mythology Dictionary.] Türkiye: E-Kitap.

Kenin-Lopsan, Monguş 2013. *Tıva çonnun burungu ujurları*. [Old Traditions of the Tuvan Nation.] Kizil: OAO Tıvapolograf.

- Kibirova, Šamiş & Tsunvazo, Yuri 1961. *Uygursko-Russkiy Slovar'*. [Dictionary of Uygur-Russian.] Alma-Ata: Izdatel'stvo akademii nauk Kazanskoy SSR.
- Koç, Kenan et al. 2003. *Kazak Türkçesi Türkiye Türkçesi Sözlüğü*. [Dictionary of Kazakh-Turkish.] Ankara: Akçağ Yayınları.
- Ksenofontov, Gavriil Vasil'evič 1930. *Legendi i rasskazi o šamanax u yakutov, buryat i tungusov*. [Legends and Stories about Shamans among the Yakuts, Buryats, and Tungus Peoples.] Moskva: Bezbojnik.
- Kul-Muhammed, Mırzağalı et al. 2011. *Kazak edebiy tiliniñ sözdigi*. [Dictionary of Kazakh Literary Language.] Vol. XIII, S–T. Almatı: Til bilimi institutı.
- Kurbatskiy, Gennadiy Nikolaevič 2002. *Tıva tıvıziktar*. [Tuvan Riddles.] Kızıł: Tuvinskoye knijnoye izdatel'stvo.
- Kuular, Elena et al. 2022. Etnolingvističeskaya spetsifika gastronomičeskoy leksiki (moločnıye produktı) v tuvinskom i xakasskom yazıkax. [Ethnolinguistic Specificity of Gastronomic Vocabulary (Dairy Products) in the Tuvan and Khakas Languages.] *Novıye issledovaniya tuvı*, Vol. 4, pp. 338–349.
- Mehmutov, Huciehmet 2014. *Tatar ħalık tabışmakları*. [Tatar Folk Riddles.] Kazan: Tatarstan kitap neşriyatı.
- Monguş, Dorug-ool Aldın-oolovič (ed.) 1980. *Russko-tuvinskiy slovar*. [Russian-Tuvan Dictionary.] Moskva: Izdatel'stvo russkiy yazık.
- Monguş, Dorug-ool Aldın-oolovič 2003. *Tıva dıldın tayılbırlıg slovar (A–Y)*. [Explanatory Dictionary of Tuvan (A–Y).] Novosibirsk: Nauka.
- Monguş, Dorug-ool Aldın-oolovič 2011. *Tıva dıldın tayılbırlıg slovarı (K–S)*. [Explanatory Dictionary of Tuvan (K–S).] Novosibirsk: Nauka.
- Monguş, Marina 2011. Konfessiionalnaya situatsiya v postsovetskoy Tuve. [The Confessional Situation in Post-Soviet Tuva.] *Acta slavica iaponica*, Vol. 26, pp. 191–204.
- Möhemmetcanova, Lütfi & Yamaltdinov, İldar 2020. *Tatar ħalık mekal'leré hem eytémneré*. [Tatar Folk Proverbs and Sayings.] Kazan: Tatarstan kitap neşriyatı.
- Musaeva, Kamilya Mahamedovna (ed.) 2018. *Nogaysko-russkiy slovar'*. [Nogai-Russian Dictionary.] Moskva: Nauka- Vostočnaya Literatura.
- Nasilov, Dmitriy Mikhailovič & Kormuşin, İgor Vladimirovič et al. 2016. *Drevnetyurkskiy slovar'*. [Old Turkic Dictionary.] Astana: "Gıllım" baspaşı.
- Necip, Emir Necipovič 2013. *Yeni Uygur Türkçesi Sözlüğü*. [Dictionary of Contemporary Uyghur Turkish.] Transl. İ. Kurban. Ankara: Türk Dil Kurumu Yayınları.
- Ondar, Biçen Kırğısova 2007. *Toponimičeskiy slovar' Tuvı*. [Toponymic Dictionary of Tuvan.] Kızıł: Tuvinskoye Knijnoye Izdatel'stvo.
- Oyun, Svetlana Borisovna. & Oorjak, Aleksey Kara-oolovič 2004. *Tıva ög-büle pedagogikazı*. [Tuvan Family Pedagogy.] Kızıł: Tıvanıñ nom ündürer čeri.
- Ögel, Bahaddin 1978. *Türk Kültür Tarihine Giriş IV: Türklerde Yemek Kültürü*. [Introduction to the History of Turkish Culture IV: Food Culture among Turks.] Ankara: Kültür Bakanlığı.
- Ögel, Bahaddin 2010. *Türk Mitolojisi*. [Turkish Mythology.] Vol. II. Ankara: Türk Tarih Kurumu.
- Pekacar, Çetin 2011. *Kumuk Türkçesi Sözlüğü*. [Dictionary of Kymyk Turkish.] Ankara: Türk Dil Kurumu Yayınları.
- Potapov, Leonid 1969. *Očerki narodnogo bıta tuvintsev*. [Essays on the Folk Life of the Tuvans.] Moskva: Nauka GRVL.
- Radloff, Wilhelm 1995. *Manas Destanı Kırğız Türkçesi Metin-Türkiye Türkçesi*. [Manas Epic: Kyrgyz Turkish Text – Turkey Turkish.] Transl. E. Gürsoy Naskali. Ankara: Türksoy Yayınları.
- Ramazanov, Dariya Bayramovna 2013. *Tatar télende kéşége beylenéşlé leksika*. [Person-Related Lexicon in the Tatar Language.] Kazan: Galimcan İbrahimov İseméndegé Tél, Edebiyet hem Sengat' Institutı.
- Sapir, Edward 1921. *Language: An Introduction to the Study of Speech*. New York: Harcourt, Brace & World.

- Şarayeva, Tatyana İsayevna & Ayji, Elena Valeriyevna 2019. Čay v traditsionnoy kul'ture kalmikov i tuvintsev. [Tea in the Traditional Culture of the Kalmyks and the Tuvans.] *Noviye issledovaniya tuvi*, Vol. 4, pp. 140–153.
- Şimşek, Serdar 2018. *Kırgız Türklerinin Bilmeceleri (İnceleme-Metin)*. [Kyrgyz Turks Riddles: Analysis and Texts.] Diss. (PhD Thesis), Gazi Üniversitesi, Türkiye.
- Serenot, Stanislav Kujugetovič 2009. *Tıva ulusçu emneeşkin* [Tuvan Traditional Folk Medicine.] Kızıl: Tıvanıñ Yu.Ş. Kyunzegeş attıg nom ündürer čeri.
- Sevortyan, Ervand Vladimirovič 2003. *Etimologičeskiy slovar' Tyurskix yazıkov (L–M–N–P–S)*. [An Etymological Dictionary of Turkic Languages (L–M–N–P–S).] Moskva: Ran.
- Starostin, Sergei & Dybo, Anna & Mudrak, Oleg 2003. *An Etymological Dictionary of Altaic Languages*. Leiden: Brill.
- Subrakova, Olga Valer'yevna 2006. *Hakassko-Russkiy Slovar'*. [Khakass-Russian Dictionary.] Novosibirsk: Nauka.
- Tatlıñoğlu, Durmuş 2000. Türkmen İrmları (Halk İnancıları). [Turkmen Superstitions (Folk Beliefs).] *Cumhuriyet Üniversitesi İlahiyat Fakültesi Dergisi*, Vol. 4 (June), pp. 151–166.
- Taymas, Abdullah Battal 1968. *Kazan Türkçesinde atasözleri ve deyimler (açıklamalar – düşünceler – sözlük – örnekler - bir ek)*. [Proverbs and Idioms in Kazan Tatar Turkish (Explanations – Thoughts – Dictionary – Examples – Appendix).] Ankara: Türk Dil Kurumu.
- Tenişev, Ethem Rahimovič et al. 1989. *Karaçayevno-balkarsko-russkiy slovar'*. [Karachay-Balkar-Russian Dictionary.] Moskva: "Russkiy yazık".
- Türker, Ferah & Gündoğdu, Vildan Koçoğlu 2016. Tıva Türklerinde geçiş dönemi ritüelleri: doğum, düğün, ölüm. [Rites of Passage among the Tuvan Turks: Birth, Marriage, and Death.] *Türkbilig*, Vol. 32, pp. 141–154.
- Uraksin, Zakiya Galiyevna 1996. *Başkirsko-russkiy slovar'*. [Bashkir-Russian Dictionary.] Moskva: Izdatel'stvo "digora", "Russkiy yazık".
- Urmançı, Fatih 2005. *Tatar halik icatı*. [Tatar Folk Oral Creativity.] Kazan: Megarif.
- Urmançı, Fatih 2009. *Tatar mifologiyesé. Ensiklopedik süzlék (D-S)*. [Tatar Mythology: Encyclopedic Dictionary (D–S).] Kazan: Megarif.
- Vaynşteyn, Sev'yan Izrailevič 1991. *Mir kochevnikov tsentra Azii*. [The World of the Nomads of Central Asia.] Moskva: Nauka.
- Vaynşteyn, Sev'yan Izrailevič 2009. *Zagadočnaya Tuva*. [Mysterious Tuva.] Moskva: Domaşnaya Gazeta.
- Whorf, Benjamin Lee 1956. *Language, Thought, and Reality: Selected Writings of Benjamin Lee Whorf*. Cambridge, MA: MIT Press.

Buket Baran (PhD) is a research assistant in the Department of Contemporary Turkish Dialects and Literatures, Sezai Karakoç Faculty of Letters, Dicle University. Her research focuses on contemporary Turkic dialects. Her main area of expertise is the languages of the Tuvans, a Turkic people of the Siberian group and she concentrates on their language, culture, history and traditions. She is also closely interested in other Turkic dialects of the Siberian group.

<https://orcid.org/0000-0002-6192-5766>
bukett.yalcin@gmail.com

Gamze Çimen (PhD) is a faculty member in the Department of Turkish Language and Literature, Faculty of Arts and Sciences, Giresun University. Her research focuses on contemporary Turkic languages and within these, the culture, history and intellectual traditions of the Kazan Tatars, a Kipchak group of Turkic peoples. Her main area of expertise is the languages of Tatars living in Russia.

<https://orcid.org/0000-0003-4693-4469>
gamze.cimen@giresun.edu.tr

Donkey Metaphors in the Oral Culture of Cyprus

FATİH YALINER

Department of Turkish Language and Literature, Faculty of Arts and Sciences,
Cyprus International University, Turkey
fatihhyaliner@gmail.com

MIHRİCAN AYLANÇ

Department of Turkish Language and Literature, Faculty of Arts and Sciences,
Cyprus International University, Turkey

Abstract: Within the framework of the ecological paradigm, stereotypes in collective folk consciousness focus on identifying human behaviors and beliefs toward animals. The gradual shift of anthropocentric data toward an eco-centric perspective over an extended course of time reflects the growing influence of zoo-folkloristic approaches. The domestication of donkeys six thousand years ago established a relationship primarily based on economy and transportation. However, the value attributed to them declined with the invention of motor vehicles. Despite this, donkeys are frequently encountered in various metaphorical uses within the oral culture. This study investigates the metaphorical representations of donkeys in oral traditions. The fact that donkeys still roam freely in Cyprus's Karpaz region and attract tourists from many parts of the world further underscores the significance of this research. Donkey metaphors, which appear with notable frequency in the local oral linguistic expressions, serve as examples of both traditional and complex metaphors within the framework of Conceptual Metaphor Theory classifications.

It has been observed that representations of donkeys are shaped by their economic impact, their shared living practices with humans and their biological characteristics. In cognitive mappings, donkeys are predominantly associated with negative concepts; they are objectified and used to convey inferiority, expressions of anger, emotional mockery, othering and humiliation. Notable behaviors of the wild donkeys in Karpaz – such as opening water tanker valves with their mouths or digging into the ground to find water – suggest the need to question these negative attributions.

Keywords: cognitive linguistics, conceptual metaphor theory, Cyprus, donkey, metonymy, oral culture

INTRODUCTION

In today's world, where human–nature relationships continue to be examined across various disciplines, the shared coexistence of humans and animals is increasingly being questioned from diverse perspectives. Over the past millennium, the human-driven degradation of nature across different regions of the world has led to ecological disasters, prompting the emergence of a new ethical and political paradigm – the ecological paradigm. According to Descola (2013), this intellectual shift has introduced novel approaches and interpretations regarding the value of all living beings, fostering the redefinition and reevaluation of the concepts of “nature” and “culture” from different viewpoints.

It has been observed that critical evolutionary anthropologists are developing new types of natural-cultural critique directed at various animals within rapidly changing ecosystems. Eduardo Kohn argues that the goal of multi-species ethnography is to acknowledge the spiritual essence of animals, thereby granting them moral equality (Kohn 2013). Anthropologists in both ancient cultures and contemporary local communities view human and animal souls as “each other's infinite mimetic twin” (Kropej 2018: 238). As the ontological-anthropocentric perspective evolves into ecocriticism, animals – through zoofolkloristic approaches – are increasingly central figures, opening new horizons in literary, folkloric and cultural studies.

Miranda Levanat-Peričić conducted research on the historical cultural roles of horses and donkeys. Levanat-Peričić notes that while horses are celebrated and glorified in literature and mythology, donkeys are almost universally depicted as stupid and stubborn in later fables, tales, songs and literary works (Levanat-Peričić 2012: 995). The donkey, *Equus asinus* in Latin (along with the zebra), is a significant member of the horse family. The Mediterranean domestic donkey evolved from the African wild donkey (*Equus africanus*), which was domesticated around 4000 BCE. This species differs from the now-endangered Asiatic wild donkey. These species once thrived across a vast region stretching from Iran to India and Mongolia. Domestic donkeys have primarily been bred in Africa, Asia and the Mediterranean, where they continue to be most commonly found (Kropej 2018: 238).

The public's hostile attitude toward donkeys and a more favorable perception of horses are reflected in many major cultural milestones. This distinction between horses and donkeys has led, metaphorically, to an unbridgeable divide in language, religion and literature, representing privilege versus oppression (Levanat-Peričić 2012: 995). However, despite this widespread perception, donkeys are not always viewed negatively. In some cultures, particularly in the East, they are highly respected and treated similarly to cattle.

When appreciated, donkeys – creatures with a significant place in human life – are well fed and carefully looked after by their owners. Historical records show that certain societies, such as the Persians and Greeks, frequently used

donkeys to carry military loads in wars, arguing that they were more careful and durable than horses, even if slower (Kropej 2018: 239).

Throughout history, humans have classified animals into two categories – sacred and demonic – based on religious concepts and beliefs. This duality is particularly evident in the horse/donkey dichotomy. While horses are often endowed with divine and mediating qualities (Kropej 2015), donkeys are usually associated with negative, demonic characteristics. Due to numerous economic, cultural, political and social events across history, many religious beliefs and myths have symbolized the donkey in a predominantly negative light, portraying it as a personification of human weakness. Following the donkey's long history of suffering, the philosopher Jacques Derrida wrote: "So then I am that animal" in *The Animal That Therefore I Am* (Derrida 2008: 25). In another instance, George Orwell, when introducing the donkey in *Animal Farm*, wrote: "Benjamin [the donkey] was the oldest animal on the farm, and the worst tempered" (Orwell 2020: 10).

Globally, before the invention of motor vehicles, donkeys played a vital role in transportation and agriculture. The same holds true for donkeys in Cyprus. During times when donkey power was needed on the island, donkeys were imported from places such as Africa and Asia. However, with the advent of motorized vehicles, the use of animals for transportation was gradually abandoned. Particularly in the Karpaz region, these donkeys have lived independently in the wild since 1974. On the southern side of the island, farms have been established for donkey milk production. In general, the status of donkeys in Cyprus indicates that their value is tied to the extent of their economic contribution to society.

Due to the longstanding coexistence of donkeys and the people of Cyprus, representations of donkeys are frequently found in the island's oral cultural heritage. In *Metaphors We Live By* (1980), George Lakoff and Mark Johnson, whose Conceptual Metaphor Theory forms the basis of this study, argue that metaphors are not merely literary ornaments, but they are essential to human cognition. Since metaphors are cognitive functions of the human mind, they are also influenced by the society in which individuals live. Social structure, culture, beliefs, environment and political and economic conditions all directly shape the nature of these.

AIM OF THE STUDY

This study aims to identify and analyze donkey metaphors and metonymies in Cyprus's oral cultural products using Conceptual Metaphor Theory (CMT) within socio-cultural and socio-economic contexts. Focusing on idioms, proverbs, mani (folk rhymes) and folktales, the study explores the formation of metaphorical and metonymic structures by referencing the ecological life of donkeys on the island, their interactions with humans and their representations

in Cypriot beliefs and traditions. Additionally, to reveal the relationship between Cypriot cognitive constructions and other cultures, information regarding the global presence of donkeys and their representations in religion and mythology is also included.

The linguistic structures derived from the data are categorized into different types. Traditional metaphors formed through the conceptualizations of HUMAN IS AN ANIMAL and ANIMAL IS AN OBJECT, and metonymies based on the concept of A PART OF THE WHOLE, are the primary focus of the study.

The central research questions guiding the study are:

1. What are the donkey metaphors and metonymies found in selected Cypriot oral cultural data?
2. What are the main factors shaping these metaphors and metonymies?
3. How are donkeys perceived and linguistically constructed by society in Cyprus, and what emotional values are attributed to them?

METHOD

This study focuses on the metaphorical conceptualizations of donkeys in the oral culture of Cyprus. In this context, oral cultural materials from Cyprus that have been compiled and transcribed were subjected to document analysis, a form of qualitative research method. The data were examined and analyzed using the approaches of Conceptual Metaphor Theory (CMT). In addition to this theoretical framework, the study draws on the Great Chain of Being (Lakoff & Turner 1989) to interpret human-animal conceptualizations and Wierzbicka's (1985) animal categorization system, which is based on criteria such as habitat, size, appearance, behavior and interaction with humans. Furthermore, donkey-related metonymic expressions in Cypriot oral narratives were analyzed within the framework of conceptual metonymy, using the terminology of frame and pragmatic function as developed by cognitive linguists. These theories enabled a categorical examination of metaphors.

The corpus of Cypriot oral culture was limited to idioms, proverbs, folk rhymes (*mani*) and folktales. These genres were analyzed under separate headings. The metaphorical and metonymic structures identified were interpreted in cultural and environmental contexts. The target and source domains forming the metaphors were categorized systematically in tables. Before evaluating the linguistic data, the ecological history of donkeys and their representations in religious texts and mythology are also presented. These contextual insights are crucial for the metaphor analysis, especially considering Cyprus's layered cultural landscape shaped by various civilizations.

CONCEPTUAL METAPHOR THEORY AND NEW APPROACHES

Metaphors form the basic structure through which humans interpret all entities in the world, including themselves – whether individually, socially, or universally. A metaphor, as a natural construct of the human mind, is a form of cognitive encoding that is constantly reproduced through a variety of influences such as daily experience, cultural structure and genetics.

According to Lakoff and Johnson's (1980) foundational Conceptual Metaphor Theory (CMT) – later expanded by cognitive linguists – metaphors are not ornamental language devices but the result of the mind's natural functioning. They arise from mappings between conceptual domains in the mind. This mental mapping not only shapes a person's worldview and way of life but also determines their cognitive and behavioral boundaries. The integration of language, thought and action through metaphors confirms the mind's inherent tendency to generate metaphors. In this framework, a source domain (e.g., journey, money, games, war) derived from concrete, universally accessible experiences is used to structure a target domain (e.g., life, death, time, love), which is often more abstract.

For instance, when the abstract domain of TIME is linked to the source domains LIMITED RESOURCE or MOVING OBJECT, two distinct temporal experiences emerge. Since resources like "money" and "precious items" have traditionally been perceived as valuable and limited, the metaphor TIME IS MONEY has become dominant in today's economy-driven world. Expressions such as "I spent a lot of time on this", "time loss", "time gained", and "I'll take a bit of your time" reflect this metaphor. On the other hand, TIME IS A MOVING OBJECT appears in expressions like "time flew", "flowed like water", "let life flow", and "time is passing", evoking a different perception of time. As seen in these examples, the coherence between the target and source domains allows for shared understanding across different cognitive and cultural experiences.

In *Metaphors We Live By* (1980), Lakoff and Johnson classified conceptual metaphors as structural, orientational and ontological metaphors. After 1980, with advances in computational science and neural modeling, studies revealed that the synaptic connections of neurons in the brain play a role in meaning-making and metaphor generation (Feldman 2006: 47; Lakoff 2008: 18; Küçük 2016: 73). These findings highlighted that metaphors emerge within a cognitive domain structured by subconscious boundaries. Consequently, CMT was supplemented with frameworks like the Great Chain of Being Metaphor (Lakoff & Turner 1989; Krikmann 1996), Primary Metaphor Theory (Grady 1997), and later, with complex and novel metaphors.

Types of metaphors used in academic studies based on CMT include:

a) Structural metaphors

These are structures formed through consistent mappings between abstract target domains and concrete source domains. Abstract concepts are framed through concrete ones (e.g., LIFE IS A GAME, SEPARATION IS DEATH).

b) Orientational metaphors

These are metaphors that arise from physical and bodily experiences, linking abstract concepts (e.g., good, bad) to spatial directions (e.g., up, down). They are shaped by how we interact with the physical world and are embedded in cultural cognition (e.g. HEALTH IS UP, SICKNESS IS DOWN).

c) Ontological metaphors

These are metaphors in which abstract concepts are understood as concrete entities or objects, based on our physical experiences with the world. Through this process, intangible ideas are given boundaries, substance, or form (e.g. THE MIND IS A MACHINE, INFLATION IS AN ENTITY).

d) Primary metaphors

These are metaphors that emerge from the combination of early sensory-motor and subjective experiences, as described in Grady's (1997: 247) theory of primary metaphors. According to him, these metaphors, formed through shared experiences in early childhood, are universal across cultures. Therefore, primary metaphors, which operate at an unconscious level, are the first conceptual metaphors produced by the mind (e.g., TIME IS MOTION, KNOWING IS SEEING).

e) Conventional metaphors

These are metaphors that are rooted in the collective memory of society, automatically and constantly used by members of society and active in everyday life (e.g., LIFE IS A JOURNEY, LOVE IS A GAME).

f) Complex metaphors

Layered structures formed by the blending of primary metaphors with cultural ones (e.g., PURPOSEFUL LIFE IS A JOURNEY, LOVE IS A DANGEROUS GAME).

g) Novel metaphors

Novel metaphors created by creative minds by pairing different conceptual domains that did not previously exist in society; unlike traditional metaphors, they arise as a result of everyday experiences, just like other types of metaphors. As stated in conceptual metaphor theory, they are the natural

product of the embodied mind. They assign logical meanings to everyday experiences through the pairing of images and concepts. According to Lakoff and Johnson, this is not a miracle born out of nothing. They are novel metaphors acquired as a result of everyday experiences (Lakoff & Johnson 2015: 310). In his doctoral dissertation entitled “Metaphor in Turkish Poetry”, Şahan states that the meaning maps present in all words of language are transferred to another concept through the original metaphors produced by the poet/writer (Şahan 2014: 101). (e.g., INFINITY IS TO TOUCH LOVE, LIFE IS CHAOS).

Despite its influence, CMT has been critiqued – most notably by Zoltán Kövecses, who argues that the source and target domains are not sufficiently explained and that the theory exhibits circular reasoning and methodological limitations (Kövecses 2020). These critiques led to the development of new metaphor theories such as Emotion Metaphor Theory (Kövecses 2000), Embodied Cognition and Metaphor (Varela & Thompson & Rosch 1991; Gibbs & Macedo 2010), Cultural Cognition and Metaphor (Sharifian 2011) and Ecological Cognition and Metaphor (Jensen & Greve 2019).

Each theory offers a distinct approach to metaphor. For example, Kövecses’s Emotion Metaphor Theory posits that metaphors arise from emotional, physical and behavioral effects.

Embodied Cognition (Varela & Thompson & Rosch 1991; Gibbs & Macedo 2010) is an important approach to explaining the mind, developed in the 1990s by Varela, Thompson and Rosch (1991) based on the phenomenological perspective of Maurice Merleau-Ponty. The fundamental claim here is that cognition is not merely a set of activities occurring within mental processes but is shaped by the body’s relationship with the external world. The data the body acquires through its sensory organs or actions influences how it perceives the environment, demonstrating a close connection between bodily action and perception. The mirror neuron system (Gallese 2000; Stamenov & Gallese 2002; cited in Gibbs & Macedo 2010: 682, 696) plays an important role in experiences such as imitation and empathy. According to this theory, metaphor involves the simulation and reenactment of sensory-motor data in different forms. Researchers who cite the metaphor DIFFICULTIES ARE HEAVY BURDENS as an example note that the information about “heavy burdens” acquired through physical action is associated with abstract concepts such as emotional or psychological difficulties and that meanings are created according to the individual’s subjective existence.

Cultural Cognition Theory (Sharifian 2011; Musolff 2017) states that the cultural structure of society influences individuals’ thoughts, lifestyles and in short, many cognitive activities. Therefore, it is based on conceptualizations of “cultural schemas”, “cultural categories”, and “cultural metaphors”. In his book *Metaphor in Cultures: Universality and Diversity* (2005: 11–13), Kövecses

argues that primary metaphors are complex metaphors, drawing attention to the specificity of cultural metaphors. Using the concept of “meaning focus” specific to culture, the researcher argues that there is a limited resource field that matches the target field in a society due to cultural factors. Since societies today generally exist within the model of nation states, the metaphors THE BODY IS THE NATION and THE BODY IS POLITICAL are universal (Musolff 2010). The body, where experiences, emotions and thoughts are located, is defined as the resource field, while culture is defined as the filter that limits this field (Yu 2008: 249; Adıgüzel & Aksan 2023: 75). Cultural metaphors, due to their consensual structure, possess qualities that are not only cultural but also universal (Ansah 2010: 3). This argument is accepted by Kövecses (2000, 2005), Maalej (2007) and Yu (2008) in their theory of embodied cultural prototypes. For example, the metaphor for anger is formed with the source domain HOT LIQUID IN A POT in Turkish and English, while in Chinese, anger is structured with the concept of “GAS”. The metaphors produced by the practices of the society in which a person lives, geographical conditions, history and cultural and social memory reflect the cognitive commonality and uniqueness of the individual and the culture.

Finally, according to the ecological cognition approach, metaphor (Jensen & Greve 2019: 1–5) is a cognitive phenomenon that occurs in the relationship between humans, who are living organisms and the environment-system. Actions carried out within the possibilities of doing things in the world give rise to metaphors. In this context, it is claimed that cognition is not only mental or physical but also based on action. The brain, body and environment are the result of distributed internal and external processes. Hollan, Hutchins and Kirsh (2000) argue that social relationships, material-environmental structures and the products of previous events are distributed over time in such a way that they can change the nature of subsequent events. The determination of the source and effect domain of metaphors results from complex cognitive processes and is composed of difficult dualistic structures. The sensory, experiential and understanding knowledge humans derive from metaphors stems from perceived constants in the environment rather than cognitive processes. Metaphors provide us with the pragmatic action and perception possibilities necessary for the present moment. This feature of metaphor, conveyed by Gibson’s (1979) term “affordances,” determines the boundaries of the field of experience and perception. Analyzing metaphors requires examining sensory inputs, the process of metaphor construction and the relationships between the speaker and the near and distant environments.

These metaphor theories, closely linked to subfields of neurolinguistics such as cognitive psychology and neuropsychology, contribute to research methodologies in literary studies as well. One such interdisciplinary framework is Cognitive Poetics, a theoretical approach developed since the 1970s for interpreting literary texts based on human cognitive processes (Aylanç 2023).

In addition to these theories, researchers have explored metaphors in fields such as economics (McCloskey 1995; Klamer & Leonard 1994) and contemporary global crises, as demonstrated by conferences under the theme “Crises We Live By” (American Folklore Society 2022). These developments illustrate the evolving nature of metaphor studies and their adaptation to different times, cultures, and perspectives.

ANIMAL METAPHORS AND ANALYSIS OF ANIMAL METAPHOR RESEARCH

Animals exhibit biological and cognitive traits that most closely parallel those of humans among non-human life forms. Human cognition has historically drawn upon observations of animal behavior to conceptualize the self, the world and other beings. This relationship between humans and animals has been an important field of research in the scientific world and in metaphor studies. While human-centered research has long dominated the field, the growing influence of eco-centric perspectives has led scholars to reexamine animal metaphors. These inquiries increasingly focus on how animals are represented and symbolized within cultural contexts. Considered in terms of their subjective, socio-cultural and archetypal layers, animal metaphors illuminate the cognitive structures through which modern human existence is imagined and articulated. The meaning and function of animal conceptualizations within a specific cultural context reveal how human and non-human entities are perceived and socially constructed. Scholarly research into animal conceptualizations has predominantly drawn upon Lakoff and Johnson’s (1980) Conceptual Metaphor Theory, Lakoff and Turner’s (1989) Great Chain of Being metaphor and Wierzbicka’s (1985) typology of animal categories. The Great Chain of Being metaphor, as formulated by Lakoff and Turner (1989) and rooted in ancient Greek philosophical thought, presents a hierarchical conceptual system that illustrates how the human-centered mind organizes both itself and the external world. It classifies entities in the world from top to bottom according to their qualities as follows.

At the top are God and supernatural beings, followed by Humans (highly qualified), Animals (instinctive), Plants (biological), Complex Physical Objects and Natural Objects.

In this system, metaphorical expressions are formed when one entity is paired with another to reflect a situation, judgment or evaluation. Entities located higher in the conceptual hierarchy are understood to encompass the attributes of those below. For instance, when human behavior is associated with traits from the animal domain, metaphors such as HUMAN IS AN ANIMAL and HUMAN BEHAVIOR IS AN ANIMAL BEHAVIOR (Kövecses 1988) emerge. These two metaphors have been widely identified in studies on animal representations and often serve as foundational conceptual frames.

According to the Great Chain of Being, conceptual mapping can proceed both upward and downward. Using animals as an example, metaphors such as GOD IS AN ANIMAL, AN ANIMAL IS AN OBJECT or AN OBJECT IS AN ANIMAL illustrate how attributes from different ontological domains are transferred across levels of existence. Wierzbicka's (1985) categorization of animals – based on habitat, size, appearance, behavior, relationship with humans and the emotional value attributed to them – offers a flexible and widely applicable model for analyzing how metaphors are structured. Her examples of the tiger and the snake demonstrate how symbolic meaning is shaped by cultural and emotional associations.

As far as the literature reveals, master's theses (Erboğa 2024; Aygün 2017), doctoral dissertations (Pourhossein 2016) and journal articles have predominantly approached animal metaphors through comparative linguistic (Talebinejad & Dastjerdi 2005; Güneş 2017) and cultural (Aydoğan 2023; Bough 2011) perspectives. To collect metaphorical data, researchers have frequently selected literary genres such as proverbs (Rashid & Hajimaming & Muhammad 2012; Ho-Abdullah 2011), folktales (Ren 2019), poetry (Chatti 2023) and novels (Sun 2015) as their primary research domains. In addition, studies have examined animal metaphors expressed in surveys (Wang & Dowker 2007), websites (Ho 2022) and political discourse (Carter 2021).

The focus on animal metaphors has also been explored through lenses such as gender, eco-criticism, othering, hate speech and socio-cultural analysis. These approaches reveal the symbolic and cognitive functions animals perform within the human imagination, often serving as tools for expressing identity, hierarchy and exclusion.

METAPHOR, METONYMY AND CONCEPTUAL METONYMY

The conceptual boundary between metaphor and metonymy has long been a subject of scholarly debate, with various research studies proposing distinct frameworks to differentiate the two. Lakoff and Johnson (1980) argue that metaphor enables us to understand one conceptual domain in terms of another, whereas metonymy primarily serves a referential function. Despite their differences, both are now widely recognized as fundamental cognitive tools that shape human thought and language (Kövecses & Radden 1998).

Antonio Barcelona offers a widely accepted definition of metonymy, describing it as “a cognitive process in which one conceptual entity (the vehicle) provides mental access to another (the target) within the same domain of experience” (2000: 3–4; 2010: 134). Building on this view, cognitive linguists have attempted to define metonymy through frame-based models (Barsalou 1999; Langacker 1987; Fillmore 1982) and pragmatic functions (Fauconnier 1997). These approaches emphasize that metonymy operates through asymmetrical mappings between source and target concepts, thereby expanding the

boundaries of conceptual frames and enabling the emergence of new metaphorical structures (Kövecses 2013: 76–77).

Grady's (1997) theory of primary metaphors has been particularly influential in this context. Many scholars (Kövecses 2000, 2013; Barcelona 2000; Radden 2002; Taylor 1989; Dirven & Pörings 2002) argue that primary metaphors are inherently metonymic, grounded in bodily experience and conceptual proximity. Dirven & Pörings (2002) and Aksan, Akkök & Aksan (2023: 10) further explain metaphorical and metonymic extensions in terms of levels of imagery and degrees of conceptual distance.

Yu (2008) offers a compelling formulation of this cognitive trajectory: "bodily experiences→metonymy→metaphor→abstract concepts" (2008: 249). Metaphors involving body parts (e.g., brain, heart, mouth), emotions (e.g., anger, fear, happiness) and animals (e.g., behavior or physical traits) are typically rooted in metonymic structures. The body is conceptualized as a vessel for emotions or animal characteristics. For instance, the expression "his face turned red with anger" illustrates the metaphor ANGER IS HEAT, realized metonymically through the face as A PART OF THE WHOLE. Similarly, "his blood ran cold with fear" reflects the metaphor FEAR IS COLD, with "blood" serving as the metonymic vehicle.

These examples demonstrate how bodily reactions serve as the basis for both metaphorical and metonymic expressions. Fass's (1997) claim that "metonymy moves within the field" and Rosch's (1978) observation that metonymy is "arranged horizontally" align with this view, emphasizing the intra-domain nature of metonymic mappings.

Animal metaphors follow a similar cognitive pattern, often structured around perceived similarities and conceptual closeness between humans and animals. Such metaphors are frequently used to concretize abstract emotions and social judgments. Given their proximity to humans in the biological hierarchy, animals have served as a rich source for conceptualizing human behavior, particularly in relation to the Great Chain of Being – a primary metaphor that informs cultural codes and moral evaluations.

Through everyday experience, animals have acquired symbolic meaning that reflects both physical traits and social values. For example, the metonymy PART REPRESENTS WHOLE has led to the horse's visual elegance being associated with wealth and status. In Turkish culture, the horse is conceptualized metonymically as representing nobility. The presence of the horse evokes the abstract concept of nobility, and conversely, a single trait of the animal (e.g., posture) may stand for the whole, as in "the horse has a noble posture". This reflects a WHOLE-FOR-PART metonymy. Because animal-related metonymies, like animal metaphors, mirror the cognitive processes of the human mind, our study includes both structures in the analysis of oral cultural data from Cyprus.

DONKEY REPRESENTATIONS IN WORLD MYTHOLOGY AND RELIGIOUS TEXTS

Donkeys are generally represented negatively in sacred texts, beliefs, mythology and literature. The term mythology includes all the myths produced to explain the creation and nature of humanity and the universe in a particular culture and the reason for traditional beliefs and practices. These basic judgments determine our perspective on life and enter our lives by being transferred from the past to the present. We inherit these interpretations of animals through the transfers that have survived until today. Therefore, identifying donkey representations in mythology and religion helps us to understand the main reason for donkey representations available today.

Kropej pointed out that people in the past divided animals into two binaries according to religious concepts and beliefs as the divine and the demonic. The researcher mentions the dualism of animals, in which some animals are attributed a divine character and some a demonic character. According to Kropej, in the example of the horse and the donkey, the dualistic symbolism of the two animals is evident. The horse is often attributed with divine and mediating properties (Kropej 2015), while the donkey is often associated with negative and demonic ways. In narrative texts, the donkey takes on the role of mediator only when the victim is an animal.

Throughout history, numerous economic, social and cultural events have led donkeys to be symbolized negatively and to become an animal that personifies human weakness in religion, mythology and literature. In India, evil gods such as Nairrita and Kâlarâtrî, the protectors of the world of the dead, both ride donkeys. Asura-Dhenuka even takes the form of a donkey. In Egypt, the red donkey is perceived as one of the most dangerous creatures that the soul of the dead may encounter while travelling to the afterlife. The red donkey may correspond to the beast of the Apocalypse or the red beast from the Revelation of St. John in the New Testament. This image influenced the French saying “bad as a red donkey” (Kropej 2018: 240).

In the Quran, donkeys are mentioned as well; it depicts donkeys as having a good relationship with the devil. There are hadiths which report the angel was visible as the rooster was crowing: “*Ve eşek anırmasını işittiğinizde hemen şeytanın kötülüğünden Tanrı’ya sığının, çünkü o sırada şeytanı görmektedir*” (And when you hear the braying of a donkey, seek refuge in God from the evil of the devil since it sees the devil at that moment). It is understood here that there is a good relationship between the donkey and the devil, not between the donkey and the angel. Since the devil is there when the donkey brays, there is no other angel at that moment (Dursun 1994b: 139).

In ancient Egypt, Set was associated with the wild donkey and it was depicted as having a donkey’s head. Plutarch, who believed that recklessness, stupidity, impiety and immorality were the qualities of a donkey, equated Seth with the

Greek Typhon. Like Typhon, who killed Dionysus, Seth killed Osiris. The Egyptians, who established a relationship between the colour of the donkey and Typhon's red fur, believed that the donkey was an impure animal possessed by an evil spirit due to these similarities (Levanat-Perićić 2012: 998).

In old Turkish culture, it was correspondingly emphasized that donkeys have a relationship with the devil. The devil, who wants to get on Noah's ship, becomes invisible and rides on the back of the donkey. When the donkey does not want to board the ship, Noah shouts and curses at the animal, the curses being a characteristic of Satan. Thus, the devil enters Noah's ark (Boratav 2012: 75–76).

The humiliation of the donkey is also featured in the image of the Greek myth of King Midas. According to the myth, Apollo punished King Midas by giving him donkey ears because he claimed that Pan's music was more pleasing to the ear than the music coming from the Temple of Delphi. This punishment shows us that being human is a higher level of being than a donkey's being (Kropej 2018: 240).

However, there are also examples of the positive perception of the donkey in mythology and religions. In the 259th verse of the Baqara Surah in the Quran, Uzair asks God how everything will be resurrected after the city is destroyed. God takes Uzair's life and resurrects him a century later. He shows Uzair's donkey as evidence to show that he remained dead for a century and has the power of resurrection:

Allah 'Hayır, sen yüz sene ölü kaldın (eğer şüphe ediyorsan) yiyeceğine içeceğine bak, (uzun zaman geçmesine rağmen) hiç bozulmamış bir de eşeğine bak, (onun kemikleri nasıl çürüyüp dağılmış). Biz seni insanlara bir ibret olsun diye böyle yaptık, (ey Üzeyir eşeğin kemiklerine bak, onları nasıl bir araya getirip et giydiriyoruz. (Eşeği nasıl eski haline getiriyoruz)' dedi. Allah'ın kudreti ona (Üzeyir'e) apaçık belli olunca, 'Yakinen bildim ve gördüm ki Allah her şeye Kâdir'dir' dedi buyrulur (Dursun 1994a: 181).

[Allah said, 'No, you have been dead for a hundred years (if you have any doubt), look at your food and drink, and look at your donkey, which has not been spoiled (how its bones have rotted and scattered) at all (even after such a long time). We made an example of you for the people. Look at your bones (Hey Uzair donkey), look how we put them together and clothe them with flesh (look how we restore the donkey) Allah said. When the power of Allah became clear to him (Uzeyir), he said, 'I knew with certainty and saw that Allah is Powerful over all things.']

The donkey also has an important role in the cults of Apollo in Greek mythology. It was used as a sacrificial animal at Delphi. The donkey was the animal that carried the chest to serve as a cradle for Dionysus. The positive connotations presented through the donkey's bond with Dionysus are attributed to the representation of the donkey. The environment, the task performed by the animal and the person guiding the donkey determined the characteristics of these animals. In the cult of Dionysus, the donkey was given characteristics such as humility and intelligence. Another similar representation of this information is found in Christianity. In Christian symbolism, in the scene where Abraham sacrifices his son Isaac, Jacob gifts ten donkeys and five hundred young chickens to appease his brother (Kropej 2018: 241).

The first creatures to recognize the newborn child, Jesus, as saviour were the donkey and the ox standing by the manger. In the New Testament, riding a horse symbolizes war and violence, while riding a donkey symbolizes humbleness. In the iconographic depictions of the escape from Egypt and the arrival of Christ to Jerusalem in the Bible, Jesus rode on the back of a donkey. Christianity has appreciated the humbleness and God-fearing character of the donkey. Jesus clearly states: "The ox knows his master, the ass his master's cradle" (Kropej 2018: 242).

THE ECOLOGY OF DONKEYS IN CYPRUS AND THEIR ROLE IN SOCIETY

To properly comprehend the meaning of donkey metaphors on the island, it is necessary to focus on the ecological environment of their habitat as well as the relationship they formed with the inhabitants. Cyprus donkeys have been living on the island for many years and they are considered the symbol of the island and specifically of Karpaz peninsula. Until the 1970s, these animals were an integral part of society, generally as domestic and working animals. In addition, Archimandrite Kyprianos (1788) recorded the presence of wild donkeys in Akamas and the mountainous regions of Karpaz in 1788.

The breeds of donkeys living on the island are descendants of different breeds of African, Asian and European wild donkeys imported from various countries to be used in a wide array of jobs by divergent civilizations that dominated Cyprus throughout history.

Donkeys in Cyprus have also been sold to other countries such as Turkey, Egypt and Greece (Hatay 2017). The fact that Cyprus donkeys are more durable and active than other donkey breeds in the world has made these animals valuable in terms of their labour force. Donkeys have the ability to cross narrow paths and mountainous places by taking diagonal steps. This ability enabled donkeys to work easily in the plains and hills of Cyprus. Donkeys have an important place in the history of the island, but they became viewed as worthless and harmful creatures in the course of time. This transformation started in the 1970s. After the events of 1974, population exchanges took place between

the north and the south parts of Cyprus. During the migration of people from the Karpaz region to the south, refugees could not take their donkeys with them. Since the duties carried out by donkeys were performed by technological machinery, the islanders did not take responsibility for these animals. For these reasons, the abandoned donkeys of Karpaz were forced to become feral. In countries such as Australia and America, there are feral animals such as horses, camels and donkeys. However, it is worth noting that donkeys do not have the characteristics to live independently of humans in nature. Since the donkey's skin is permeable, it quickly becomes ill and dies when exposed to rain, sun or wind. Therefore, these creatures have to live in shelters or farm areas (Cemal 2011: 2–3).

In addition, stray donkeys also harm nature and humans. A donkey's teeth are not sharp enough to cut an object (for example, a branch). For this reason, they pull the plant and uproot it. Thus, they damage vegetation. The force they apply to the soil with their hooves hardens the soil and makes it sterile for plants. Because they wander around the island, they damage many plants and farmers' crops (Cemal 2011: 2–3). In addition, they also cause traffic accidents (Oğuz, personal communication, July 26, 2024). Due to these negative events, the donkey is defined in the public's mind as *a species that harms the economy*. The slaughter of donkeys that damaged crops on the island by unknown people supports this judgment (Biler, personal communication, July 25, 2024).

In order to control their population, the authorities declared the area from Dipkarpaz to Zafer Burnu a National Park in 1978. The national park was fenced to control the donkey population. Officers were employed in the region by the state to feed and care for the donkeys. A house was built for the officers assigned to the National Park. Staff feed the donkeys with hay and provide them with water. A number of donkeys could not be gathered in this designated area (Çetinkaya, personal communication, July 24, 2024). Although the sale of Karpaz donkeys to farmers was brought to the agenda in the 2000s, the proposal was rejected due to public reaction (Sarpten 2017). In the study conducted on donkeys in Northern Cyprus in 2005 and limited to an area of 132.5 km, 800 donkeys were identified (Hamrick et al. 2005: 108–109). Today, it is thought that there are around 300 or 400 Karpaz donkeys in the Karpaz region. The exact donkey population has not been determined since there is no planning or veterinary control for the donkeys.

The status of donkeys in Southern Cyprus is slightly different. There is a farm called Golden Donkey Farm in the village of Skarinou on the Nicosia–Limassol road. Donkey milk is produced on the farm, thus generating economic profit from donkeys. Pieris Georgiadis, the manager of Golden Donkey Farm, stated in a newspaper interview that the number of donkeys in the South is around 1100 and that there are 200 on his farm. He explains that only 40 of 200 donkeys produce one and a half litres of milk per day (Düzgün 2017). Other donkey farms are found in the south, in the regions of Apeşa, Achnas, Limassol,

Paphos, Kelokedara and Skarinou. In addition to Cyprus, donkey milk is produced in donkey farms in countries such as Belgium, the Netherlands, Turkey and Bosnia and Herzegovina.

Donkey milk is more popular today due to the vitamin values it contains. The reason for the increase in the demand for donkey milk globally is that it is acknowledged as healthy as breast milk. Scientific research shows that donkey milk is valuable for health. In addition to its use in food products such as cheese in various parts of the world, donkey milk is also used in the production of cosmetic products such as skin cream, shampoo and soap. Donkey milk soap production continues today in the south and north of Cyprus. This soap is also known as Cleopatra soap. It is rumored that the Egyptian Queen Cleopatra bathed with donkey milk soap or used soured donkey milk to stay young and beautiful. It would not be wrong to say that this information provides a basis for the use of donkey milk in cosmetic products. In the descriptions of these products sold online, it is explained that donkey milk has many benefits for the skin. It is said to contain proteins that are anti-ageing, good for dryness of the skin and that it restores the skin's brightness and vitality (Handy Spa Cyprus 2023).

The Great Inn located in Nicosia has significant historical importance for Cyprus. It is a place visited with interest by tourists visiting the island. Ayperi Gürdür, who sells her own handmade products in this inn, has been making soap from donkey milk for the past five years. She acquires milk obtained from the donkeys of her acquaintances in Dıpkarpaz and uses approximately 15% donkey milk to make soap. According to her statement, he started producing and selling donkey milk soap because he received a lot of demand. Gürdür stated that it smelled bad because he could not keep the amount of donkey milk in the first phase of production. According to Gürdür, soap produced from donkey milk has a longer lifespan. He believes that these handmade soaps attract attention from tourists (Gürdür, personal communication, July 26, 2024).

In Cyprus, many local souvenirs and postcards contain donkey motifs and are available for purchase. The visual existence of this animal is not only limited to these products. Donkey statues are available in different parts of Cyprus. These objects, which can be interpreted as a symbol of the friendship between the people and the donkey from the past, are for touristic purposes.

In Northern Cyprus, the metaphor of the donkey as harmful is more prevalent since donkeys cause more economic harm than benefit. The prevailing view in the South that the *donkey is a valuable animal* is more prevalent because additional income is obtained through donkey milk. Animal rights advocates – including vegans and feminists – who oppose reducing the donkey to the status of an object or see it in a lower position than humans are against donkey farms. According to them, these farms objectify and exploit animals.

DONKEYS IN BELIEFS AND TRADITIONS OF THE CYPRIOT PUBLIC

Donkeys hold a more prominent place in the beliefs and traditions of Cyprus than other animal representations. In his article published in a local research journal, Hessenburg states that Cypriots learned to prune vines thanks to donkeys. The villagers see that the vine becomes more productive for a certain period after the donkey eats the vine branches. Grapes, which are widely grown in Cyprus, have perhaps become so valuable on the island thanks to donkeys (Hessenburg 1998: 51).

Both Turkish Cypriots and Greek Cypriots hold a belief in evil spirits. An evil spirit is a metaphysical creature that takes the form of a donkey or other animals and may harm children and women. Stories featuring these creatures are often told by adults to scare children. Belief in evil spirits is seen in different forms in many places around the world. In the Turkish Cypriot community, this being is called “goncoloz”, in Turkey “albastı, alkarısı, albiz”; in Greek Cypriot culture “karigancalos” and “alavrostihiotes” (An 1989: 25); in Germany “kobalt”; in England it is named “goblin”, “ogre” and “bogey”. The form and naming of evil spirits varies depending on the language, religion and cultural structure of the society they are in.

In the Turkish Cypriot community, it is believed that the evil spirit, “goncoloz” can disguise itself as different animals such as donkeys. Fearing that it will harm women and children, people throw lokma (yeast fritters) on the roof to make the “goncoloz” leave their house (Ertuğ 1994: 14). This belief is a common feature of karigancalos and “goncoloz”. The difference between the two evil spirits may have occurred due to the religious and linguistic differences between the societies. What “alavrostihiotes” and “goncoloz” have in common is that “those with light shadows” and women and children are afraid of these beings.

Greek Cypriots describe the karigancalos as “a donkey-like creature with dark black skin, thick bones, a beard on its face, a swollen chin, mouse eyes, long messy hair, big teeth, hairy and a hairy tail” (An 1989: 25). It is believed that the goncoloz, a spirit said to appear during the Christmas season, emerges from underground in boats made of precious metals or flies in on white donkeys (Alçıcioğlu 2018: 96–97). This association of donkeys with evil spirits may pave the way for the creation of negative representations of these creatures in the subconscious of the public.

Inevitably, the attitude of the Cypriot people towards donkeys is not always negative. Like cats and dogs, donkeys are seen as humans’ best friends. For example, on New Year’s Eve, animals such as donkeys, oxen and sheep are rewarded with “golifa”¹ by their owners because they contribute to the economy (An 1989: 26). The donkey’s loyalty level to humans is also high. When an owner takes his donkey to a distant place, the donkey can return to its owner (Biler, personal communication, July 25, 2024). If the donkey is injured by the

belt or for any other reason, it cannot work at the desired level. That's why the spores of the plant called donkey mushroom are applied to the animal's wound like powder (Viney 2001: 84–88). Andreas Koçaka, who was born in Karpaz and makes his living as a shepherd there, says that donkeys can detect water under the ground and extract water with their hooves. He states that donkeys are defined as “devils” by Greek Cypriots because of this ability (Koçaka, personal communication, July 25, 2024). “Devil” is not used in a negative sense here. This word shows the donkey's intelligence and its natural ability expressed humorously.

Donkeys surprise the public by exhibiting unexpected movements or behaviors. These creatures open the water taps with their teeth and drink water, then close them in the same way (Koçaka, personal communication, July 25, 2024). These and similar daily events ensure that positive judgments about donkeys are established in society's subconscious.

The fact that a donkey was given as a dowry to a married couple by their parents is an indication of the importance placed on these animals to create a home. Before the 1970s, when the man went to ask for the girl and the other party did not give her, the man would harm the donkey of the house out of anger. This example shows how valuable the donkey is to the family (İslamoğlu & Öznur 2010: 16). Other similar evidence can also be found about donkeys. There is only one judgment supported by the data presented: Donkeys are valued for the economic impact they have on human life.

DONKEY METAPHORS IN CYPRIOT ORAL LITERATURE

To identify the structure and function of donkey metaphors in Cypriot oral literature, and to reveal the socio-cultural and socio-economic dimensions from which they emerge, idioms, proverbs, mani (folk rhymes) and folktales have been analyzed under separate categories. This section presents findings on how positive and negative representations of donkeys appear in Cypriot oral texts, accompanied by examples of donkey metaphors from other cultural traditions.

Donkeys are frequently featured in idioms, proverbs, mani and folktales in Cyprus's oral cultural output. Furthermore, the number and nature of donkey references differ across these genres, making it necessary to evaluate donkey conceptualizations in relation to the specific literary type.

Based on document analysis, out of 4,592 idioms, 434 involve animals. Among these, donkeys appear in 81 idioms, making them the most frequently referenced animal in this category:

Table 1. Most Frequently Used Animals in Idioms

Animals	Frequency in Idioms	Percentage (%)
1. Donkey	81	18,66
2. Chicken	25	5,76
3. Cat	18	4,14
4. Horse	17	3,91
5. Snake	17	3,91

For proverbs, a total of 1,470 proverbs were surveyed. Among these, 322 contain references to animals and 31 of them include donkeys. In Cypriot proverbs, donkeys are the second most frequently referenced animal:

Table 2. Most Frequently Used Animals in Proverbs

Animals	Frequency in Proverbs	Percentage (%)
1. Dog	41	12,73
2. Donkey	31	9,62
3. Horse	24	7,45
4. Bird	19	5,90
5. Snake	19	5,90

From the data collected, 390 out of 5,191 mani include animal references. Among these, 17 mani feature donkeys, making them the fifth most frequently used animal in this genre:

Table 3. Most Frequently Used Animals in Folk Rhymes (Mâni)

Animals	Frequency in Mâni	Percentage (%)
1. Nightingale	44	11,28
2. Dove	35	8,97
3. Horse	33	8,46
4. Fish	28	7,17
5. Donkey	17	4,35

From the 184 folktales analyzed, animals appear 17,095 times in total. Donkeys were referenced 178 times across 36 tales, making them the most frequently mentioned animal in Cypriot folktales:

Table 4. Most Frequently Used Animals in Folktales

Animals	Frequency in Tales	Percentage (%)
1. Donkey	178	1,04
2. Fox	162	0,94
3. Bird	139	0,81
4. Snake	105	0,61
5. Dog	87	0,50

These figures clearly show that donkeys appear more frequently in oral texts than other animals. The high rate of representation can be attributed to the long-standing cohabitation of donkeys and island inhabitants. In these literary genres, donkey metaphors are predominantly negative, though neutral and positive representations are also observed.

In light of the data presented, oral literature samples were analyzed and evaluated through selected examples that reflect the structure and function of donkey conceptualizations in the oral culture of Cyprus, particularly within the framework of socio-cultural and socio-economic factors.

DONKEY METAPHORS AND METONYMIES IN CYPRIOT IDIOMS

Idioms – formed from a community’s traditions, way of life, language and culture – are unique to the society in which they emerge. As fixed expressions, idioms not only reflect cultural characteristics but also illustrate how humans symbolically represent nature.

As the most frequently used animal in idioms, the donkey holds a rich metaphorical and metonymic map. To provide a general overview of donkey metaphors and metonymies and demonstrate their socio-cultural and socio-economic implications, five idiomatic expressions have been selected as examples:

Table 5. Selected Idioms in the Context of Socio-Cultural and Socio-Economic Functions

Idioms	English Equivalent	Meaning
1. <i>Eşek boku yapmak</i>	To do nothing useful	Not doing anything productive or positive.
2. <i>Burnu kara eşek</i>	A cranky mule	Referring to irritable, ill-tempered people.
3. <i>Eşek başı olmak</i>	Be a nobody (to be a donkey’s head)	Lacking status or social status.
4. <i>Götüne kazık sokacak eşek aramak</i>	Look for a fool (donkey) to take advantage of	Looking for someone gullible to deceive.

Idioms	English Equivalent	Meaning
5. <i>Eşek suratlı</i>	Donkey-faced	Referring to someone as ugly.
6. <i>Eşek alıp eşek satmak</i>	Buy and sell donkeys	Engaging in an unprofitable business.
7. <i>Gebermiş eşek arar derisini yüzün</i>	Look for a dead donkey to skin	Someone trying to earn money the easy way.
8. <i>Çık fırının üstüne bekle eşeği gelsin da binesin</i>	Go stand on the oven and wait for the donkey to come so you can ride it	Said to people who wait for the impossible to happen.
9. <i>Eşeğini sağlam kazığa bağlamak</i>	Tie your donkey to a firm stake	Taking precautions to ensure things go smoothly.
10. <i>İyi eşek olmak</i>	Be a good donkey	Used for those who work hard and fulfill their tasks.

The donkey metaphors in the examples below can be analyzed through the conceptual metaphor HUMAN IS AN ANIMAL as follows:

Table 6. Donkey Metaphors Based on the “Human is an Animal” Metaphor in Idioms

Target Domain	Source Domain	Metaphor	Type of Metaphor
1. Incompetent (person)	Donkey	(Incompetent) human is an animal	Conventional metaphor
2. Grumpy (person)	Donkey	(Grumpy) human is an animal	Conventional metaphor
3. Stupid (person)	Donkey	(Stupid) human is an animal	Conventional metaphor
4. Foolish (person)	Donkey	(Foolish) human is an animal	Conventional metaphor
5. Ugly (person)	Donkey	(Ugly) human is an animal	Conventional metaphor

As seen in the examples, individuals labeled as incompetent, grumpy, stupid, foolish and ugly are metaphorically associated with donkeys within the context of these negative traits. The donkey’s appearance and disobedient or submissive behaviors contribute to its encoding in collective memory with such negative concepts. This also relates to the donkey’s failure to provide the expected material benefit. These metaphors, situated in a socio-cultural context, are shaped by the donkey’s material/spiritual impact and its social status: 1. Useless work, 2. Inability to complete a given task, 3. Lack of expected status, 4. Being easily deceived, 5. Ugliness / low social status.

Examples 6–10 show that the donkey is foregrounded as an object:

Table 7. Donkey Metaphors Based on the “Animal is an Object” Metaphor in Idioms

Target Domain	Source Domain	Metaphor	Type of Metaphor
6. Harmful task	Donkey	(Harmful) task is a donkey	Conventional metaphor
7. Valuable object	Donkey	(Valuable) object is a donkey	Conventional metaphor
8.(Impossible) task / tool	Donkey	(Impossible) task/tool is a donkey	Conventional metaphor
9.Valuable object / risky task	Donkey	(Valuable) object / (risky) task is a donkey	Conventional metaphor
10. Load carrier / person/ tool	Donkey	A load carrier/person/ tool is a donkey	Conventional metaphor

These examples show that the conventional metaphors HUMAN IS AN ANIMAL, ANIMAL IS AN OBJECT and ANIMAL IS A TASK dominate the perception of donkeys. Positioned as either a negative or risky task, or as a valuable or worthless object depending on its perceived utility, the donkey is metaphorically used to stigmatize and marginalize individuals with non-conforming behaviors or identities in society. The conceptual map of the donkey is shaped by the articulation of multiple compatible metaphors. Directional metaphors such as DONKEY IS BELOW, CONTROLLED IS BELOW; primary metaphors like COLOR IS CHARACTER, ACTION IS CHARACTER, LESS IS INSIGNIFICANT; and complex metaphors formed from various culturally shaped constructs such as DONKEY IS A RISKY TASK or DONKEY IS A VALUABLE/WORTHLESS OBJECT, all contribute to a narrowly defined ontological understanding of the donkey.

Excluded here for brevity, the use of the donkey in vulgar idioms (e.g., “May a donkey f*ck you”) further demonstrates how derogatory and marginalizing animal metaphors can be formed in expressions of anger.

The prevalence of negative constructions involving donkeys is particularly striking. Most of the Cypriot idioms analyzed carry negative emotional value. Even seemingly neutral phrases referring to the animal’s role in nature (e.g., “A donkey is a vehicle”) are framed through the object-based source domain constructed from a human-centered perspective rather than the donkey’s own natural existence. Positive metaphors are notably scarce. A few examples reference the donkey’s beauty (e.g., eşek gözlü “donkey-eyed”) and its childlike features (e.g., eşek sıpası “donkey foal”).

Correspondingly, metonymies reflect similar negative structures parallel to the metaphors. The analysis of PART FOR WHOLE based metonymies from the examples above is as follows:

Table 8. Donkey Metonymies in Idioms

Metonymic Expression	Target Domain	Source Domain	Metonymy
1. Donkey dung	Negative task	Donkey (dung)	Donkey dung represents a useless or negative task
2. Black nose	Grumpiness	Donkey (black nose)	The black nose represents grumpiness
3. Donkey head	Foolishness	Donkey (head)	The head represents foolishness
4. Donkey's rear	Being deceived / harassed	Donkey (rear)	The rear represents being deceived or harassed
5. Donkey's face	Ugliness	Donkey (face)	The face represents ugliness
6. Donkey's skin	Easy profit	Donkey (skin)	The skin represents easy profit
7. Stake	Precaution	Stake	The stake represents taking precaution

The parts of the donkey's body reveal how negative concepts are conceptualized. For example, in expressions like “goes by the direction of its nose”, the nose symbolizes grumpiness and stubbornness. Similar symbolic associations of other body parts with negative traits emerge in metonymic constructions and are preserved in collective memory. The donkey's appearance and behavioral traits also play a role in the formation of these conceptual mappings.

The only positively charged metonymic expression is *eşek gözlü* (“donkey-eyed”), which refers to someone with large and beautiful eyes. In Cyprus, this idiom is commonly used as a compliment.

Similar to Cypriot idioms, the donkey is metaphorically constructed with negative traits such as stupidity, ugliness and stubbornness in many other languages across the world. For instance, in English, “as stubborn as a donkey” is used to describe a person's obstinacy. In Spanish, “tener memoria de burro” (to have the memory of a donkey) highlights forgetfulness. Numerous expressions in various languages illustrate the objectification of the donkey. For example, in the English sentence “Quit packing so much stuff in these boxes. You're making them heavy as a dead donkey!”, the metaphor “as a dead donkey” illustrates how even the donkey's corpse is objectified. The Spanish expression “No ver tres en un burro” (Not being able to see three on a donkey) refers to poor vision or foresight. It is often used to describe those who make poor investments, miss future profits, or lack business acumen.

DONKEY METAPHORS AND METONYMIES IN CYPRIOT PROVERBS

A proverb is a fixed expression that conveys advice derived from long-term experiences and cultural observations. These expressions, which are rooted in the everyday life and traditions of a community, encapsulate core principles of life in Cypriot society and offer valuable insights from collective memory.

In Cypriot proverbs, the donkey is the second most frequently mentioned animal after the dog. To illustrate the conceptual map of donkey metaphors in proverbs, five examples have been selected:

Table 9. Selected Proverbs in the Context of Socio-Cultural and Socio-Economic Functions

Proverb	English Equivalent	Meaning of the Proverb
1. <i>Tembel eşek her zaman yüklenir</i>	The lazy donkey is always loaded	Tasks not done on time become harder later.
2. <i>Eşeği bizleyen osuruğuna katlanır</i>	Whoever combs the donkey must bear its fart	One who deals with a rude person must be ready for the harm they may cause.
3. <i>Eşek bile eşeği ödünç kaşır</i>	Even a donkey scratches another donkey only if lent	Every deed comes at a cost.
4. <i>Yük altında eşekler kalır</i>	It is the donkeys that are burdened	A person with honor will eventually return every good deed or help received.
5. <i>Eşeğe altın semer vursan da eşek gene eşektir</i>	Even with a golden saddle, a donkey is still a donkey	One's character does not change with possessions.

The donkey metaphors in these sequential examples are structured around the conceptual metaphor HUMAN IS AN ANIMAL, as shown below:

Table 10. Donkey Metaphors in Proverbs Based on the "Human is an Animal" Metaphor

Target Domain	Source Domain	Metaphor	Type of Metaphor
1. Lazy person	Donkey	(Lazy) human is an animal	Conventional metaphor
2. Rude person	Donkey	(Rude) human is an animal	Conventional metaphor
3. Person who lends	Donkey	(Lending) human is an animal	Conventional metaphor
4. Debtor	Donkey	(Debtor) human is an animal	Conventional metaphor
5. Superficial person	Donkey	(Superficial) human is an animal	Conventional metaphor

These proverbs metaphorically map characteristics like laziness, rudeness, superficiality, indebtedness and lending onto the donkey. Compared to idioms, the proverbs use fewer expressions of anger and derogation. The metaphors constructed around the donkey's appearance, behaviors and social role are also closely tied to economic interpretations:

Table 11. Donkey Metaphors in Proverbs Based on the "Human is an Object" Metaphor

Target Domain	Source Domain	Metaphor	Type of Metaphor
1. Waste of time	Donkey	Donkey is a waste of time	Conventional metaphor
2. Impulsive person	Donkey	Donkey is an impulsive person	Conventional metaphor
3. Lender	Donkey	Donkey is a lender	Conventional metaphor
4. Debtor/Tool	Donkey	Donkey is a debtor/tool	Conventional metaphor
5. Wealthy person	Donkey	Donkey is a wealthy person	Conventional metaphor

The examples show that the metaphors HUMAN IS AN ANIMAL and ANIMAL IS AN OBJECT are used to construct the donkey figure. These metaphorical structures are mostly based on associations with the donkey's appearance and temperament. For instance, the donkey symbolizes waste of time in the first example, low status in the second, transactional relationships in the third, a burden-bearing tool in the fourth and a superficial but wealthy figure in the fifth. These economic mappings also reflect the material conditions of people and the tangible/intangible dynamics of their relationships.

The donkey's economic characterization is supported by directional metaphors like THE LAZY IS BELOW, THE IMPULSIVE IS BELOW; primary metaphors like TIME IS A LIMITED RESOURCE, ACTION IS MONEY, DEBT IS A BURDEN, WHAT MATTERS IS INTERNAL; and complex metaphors such as DEBT OF KINDNESS IS A BURDEN, HELPING IS A TRANSACTION.

Aligned with these metaphors, donkey-related metonymies are constructed using the PART FOR WHOLE structure and similar concept mappings:

Table 12. Donkey Metonymies in Proverbs

Metonymic Expression	Target Domain	Source Domain	Metonymy
1. Lazy donkey	Waste of time or Money	Lazy donkey	The lazy donkey represents waste of time or Money.
2. Its fart	Harm or offense	Fart	The donkey's fart represents harm or offense.
3. Its scratching	Self-interest	Scratching	The donkey's scratching represents self-interest.
4. Its load	Debt of kindness	Load	The donkey's load represents debt of kindness.
5. Golden saddle	Material wealth	Golden saddle	The golden saddle represents material wealth without substance.

These metonymic expressions conceptualize meaning through the donkey's behaviors and the items it carries. For example, the donkey's laziness represents waste of time or money; its fart, harmful consequences; its scratching, self-interest; its burden, moral or social obligation; and the golden saddle, the wealth of a person perceived as lacking depth. The only example that could be considered a positive metaphor is the proverb: "*Eşeğin kuyruğuna bakmaz, rüzgâra karşı gider*" (He doesn't check the donkey's tail and goes against the wind). This expression, meaning "one should evaluate conditions wisely", conceptualizes the donkey's tail as a good sign and the donkey itself as a good guide.

Metaphors and metonymies where the donkey is presented neutrally (e.g., as a load-bearer or vehicle) still convey implicit negativity due to the cultural framing of the donkey as an object. Similar negative examples of donkey metaphors and metonymies can be found in various cultures. For instance, the Persian proverb: "*Beguyi va bad bâši behtarast ke naguyi va xar bâši*" (To say something and sound bad is better than saying nothing and seeming like a donkey) suggests that it is better to express oneself – even poorly – than to remain silent and be perceived as a fool. Likewise, the Greek proverb: "*Εἶπε ὁ γαῖδαρος τὸν πετεινὸ κεφάλαιον*" (The donkey called the rooster big-headed) is used to describe someone who criticizes others for faults they themselves possess.

DONKEY METAPHORS AND METONYMIES IN CYPRIOT MÂNI VERSE

Mâni is a form of anonymous folk poetry, typically composed in quatrains, characterized by a unique rhythm created through syllabic meter and sound similarities. It can address a wide range of social and personal topics. Regarded as the folk equivalent of the Turkish classical poetic form *tuyuğ*, *mâni* generally employs 7- or 8-syllable meters. The rhyme schemes commonly found in *mâni* include *aaxa* or *xaxa*, where “x” denotes the free verse and “a” indicates the rhyme. In short, the third line of a *mâni* is usually free, while the other lines are connected by sound harmony. In another common pattern, the first and third lines are free, while the second and fourth lines rhyme to create rhythm. Riddles are also composed in *mâni* form and are generally structured with an *aaba* rhyme scheme (Boratav 1995: 25).

The tradition of *mâni* recitation exists in many Turkic communities. In Turkey and Cyprus, it is called *mâni*; among Iraqi Turks, *hoyrat/horyat*; among Azerbaijanis, *bayatı/mahnı*; Crimean Tatars, *mane*; Tatars, *çinik/çinig*; Kyrgyz, *ay tipa/kayım/öleng*; and Uzbeks, *koşuk/aşula* (Albayrak 2003: 571–573).

On the island, *mâni* are composed in Turkish, Greek, and mixed Turkish-Greek (bilingual) forms. No examples of *mâni* about donkeys in Greek were found, so the representations in this section are based solely on Turkish examples. In this genre, after the nightingale, dove, horse and fish, the most frequently referenced animal is the donkey. To identify donkey-related metaphors and metonymies in *mâni*, five examples were selected:

Table 13. Selected *Mâni* in the Context of Socio-Cultural and Socio-Economic Functions

Mâni	English Equivalent
1. <i>Su gelir akmak ile</i> <i>Ne olur bakmak ile</i> <i>Eşşek adam olur mu</i> <i>Kravat dakmak ile</i>	Water flows by running / What good is just looking? / Can a donkey become a man / Just by wearing a tie?
2. <i>Masa altında ilan</i> <i>İlan masaya dolan</i> <i>İşaredden anlamaz</i> <i>Eşşek kafalı ovlan</i>	A snake under the table / Coils onto the table / Doesn't understand signs / Boy with a donkey's head
3. <i>Gır atımı nalladım</i> <i>Lefgoşa'ya yolladım</i> <i>Senin gibi eşşeği</i> <i>Bir gazziğa bağladım</i>	I shod my gray horse / Sent it to Nicosia / A donkey like you / I tied to a manger
4. <i>Çaydan aşşa koşturma</i> <i>Beni yoldan sapdırma</i> <i>Söylersan mani söyle</i> <i>Eşşeg gibi anırma</i>	Don't make me run downhill / Don't lead me astray / If you speak, recite a <i>mâni</i> / Don't bray like a donkey

Mâni	English Equivalent
5. <i>Bilmeceli Mani</i>	Riddle answer: Donkey
<i>Dört taka taka</i> <i>İki dike dike</i> <i>İki baka baka</i> <i>Bir de salamura</i>	(Four stamping, two standing, two watching and one “pickled”)
(Cevap: <i>Eşek</i>)	

The donkey metaphors in these sequential examples are structured around the conceptual metaphor HUMAN IS AN ANIMAL, as shown in the following table:

Table 14. Donkey Metaphors Based on the “Human is an Animal” Metaphor in Mâni

Target Domain	Source Domain	Metaphor	Type of Metaphor
1. Stupid man in a tie	Donkey	(Stupid) human is an animal	Conventional metaphor
2. (Foolish) boy	Donkey	(Foolish) human is an animal	Conventional metaphor
3. (Stupid) person	Donkey	(Stupid) human is an animal	Conventional metaphor
4. (Instinct-driven) person	Donkey	(Instinctual) human is an animal	Conventional metaphor
5. (Stupid) person	Donkey	(Stupid) human is an animal	Conventional metaphor

In *mâni*, the conceptual mapping between humans and donkeys is predominantly constructed through stupidity and impulsivity. These humorous critiques often portray donkeys through negative concepts. The donkey is conceptualized solely through the HUMAN IS AN ANIMAL metaphor. Supporting structures include: directional metaphors like THE INSTINCTUAL IS BELOW, THE DONKEY IS BELOW; primary metaphors like UNDERSTANDING IS SEEING, VOICE IS CHARACTER; and complex metaphors such as RUNNING DOWNHILL IS DONKEY BEHAVIOR, LEADING ASTRAY IS DONKEY BEHAVIOR.

Aside from these negative examples, only two positive uses are present. In “(...) *I heard my beloved is coming / I hugged the donkey*”, the donkey is conceptualized as a friend (DONKEY IS A FRIEND); while in “(...) *stronger than a mule / are the donkeys of Karpaz*”, the donkeys of Karpaz are metaphorically associated with STRENGTH IS FREEDOM and THE STRONG ARE KARPAZ DONKEYS.

The donkey's metonymic conceptualizations correspond with the above examples. Based on the PART FOR WHOLE metonymic structure, the following examples were identified:

Table 15. Donkey Metonymies in Mâni

Metonymic Expression	Target Domain	Source Domain	Metonymy
1. Donkey with a tie	High status	Tie	The tie represents high status
2. Donkey-headed	Foolishness	Donkey's head	The donkey's head represents foolishness
3. Stake	Being tethered or controlled	Stake	The stake represents being tethered or controlled
4. Braying	Empty or bad sound	Donkey's sound	The bray represents a empty or bad sound
5. Footsteps	Foolishness and slowness	The sound of footsteps	The sound of footsteps represents foolishness and slowness

In both metaphors and metonymies, the donkey is perceived as a figure of low status, often constructed for the purpose of ridicule or marginalization, with anger being the underlying emotional motivation. The donkey is associated with stupidity, inferiority and unpleasant sound – a pattern that also exists in other Turkic cultures.

One illustrative example is a *mâni* from the Crimean Tatars:

"Anañ tat, babañ tat / Ne kerek sağa / Balaban at / Min eşegin corğalat" [Your mother's Tatar, your father's Tatar / Why do you need a tall horse? / Just mount your donkey and go] (Ülküsal 1970: 18).

This proverb sharply contrasts the symbolic value attributed to horses and donkeys, underscoring the lower symbolic status of the donkey.

DONKEY METAPHORS AND METONYMIES IN CYPRIOT FOLKTALES

Folktales, transmitted both orally and in written form from the past to the present, are a type of anonymous narrative that draws on the life experiences and culture of a society and includes extraordinary events, heroes and settings. According to the *Cambridge Dictionary*, they are short, magical stories told to children, usually with happy endings. In *Kâmus-ı Osmânî*, a folktale is described as a didactic word or expression that narrates customs and

experiences widespread in popular language (Gökçeoğlu 2005: 8–9). Turkish folklorist Boratav defines the boundaries of folktales as follows:

A short narrative, spoken in prose, entirely fictional and unrelated to reality, independent of magical beliefs or customs, and not intended to persuade the listener of its truth (Boratav 1995: 75).

In Cyprus, folktales hold a significant place in collective memory. According to the data examined in this study, the most frequently mentioned animal in these tales – having become a symbol of the island – is the donkey. The following tales were selected to illustrate donkey-related metaphors and metonymies in this genre:

Table 16. Selected Folktales in the Context of Socio-Cultural and Socio-Economic Functions

Folktale Title	Depiction of the Donkey in the Story
1. <i>İnsanoğlu Nankördür</i> (Humankind is Ungrateful)	The donkey's owner is cruel. To punish the owner who burned down the forest, the snake acts as a judge and demands the donkey's testimony. The donkey declares its owner cruel. He tells the snake that he puts a heavy load on its back, rides it, and beats it when it falls to the ground.
2. <i>Padişahın Oğlu</i> (The Sultan's Son)	A giant places a bone in front of the donkey and straw in front of the dog. The boy corrects this and earns the animals' help and loyalty.
3. <i>Hak Yerini Bulsun</i> (Let Justice Be Done)	A man sentenced to death places a note in his donkey's saddlebag. After various adventures, the donkey returns home and delivers the note.
4. <i>Sarıl İpim Pırıl Topuzum</i> (Spin the Cord, Swing the Club)	A fairy gives Ali a magical donkey that produces gold. A blacksmith swaps it with an ordinary one. When the new donkey cannot produce gold, Ali's attitude changes.
5. <i>Şahmaran</i> (Shahmaran)	A lame donkey appears in a daily life scene, depicted as a vehicle ridden by its owner to carry loads.

The donkey metaphors in these sequential examples are constructed through the conceptual metaphors HUMAN IS AN ANIMAL and ANIMAL IS AN OBJECT, as shown below:

Table 17. Donkey Metaphors Based on “Human is an Animal / Animal is an Object” in Folktales

Target Domain	Source Domain	Metaphor	Type of Metaphor
1. (Complainant) human	Donkey	(Complainant) human is an animal	Conventional metaphor
2. (Dissatisfied) human	Donkey	(Dissatisfied) human is an animal	Conventional metaphor
3. (Messenger) human	Donkey	(Messenger) human is an animal	Conventional metaphor
4. a) (Valuable) object	(Magical) donkey	Animal is a (valuable) object	Conventional metaphor
4. b) (Worthless) object	(Fake) donkey	Animal is a (worthless) object	
5. (Tool/vehicle)	(Lame) donkey	Animal is a tool/object	Conventional metaphor

In the selected tales, the donkey is mapped onto human roles such as complainant, critic, or message-bearer. Its objectification occurs through roles such as a magical object producing gold, a worthless item that fails to do so, or a transport tool used in daily life. When evaluated from a socio-economic perspective, the conceptual range of these metaphors expands significantly.

Table 18. Donkey Metaphors Based on the “Animal is an Object” Metaphor in Folktales

Target Domain	Source Domain	Metaphor	Type of Metaphor
1. Waste of time	Donkey	The donkey is a waste of time and money	Complex metaphor
2. Test of trial	Donkey	The donkey is a test of trial	Complex metaphor
3. Useful object	Donkey	The donkey is a useful object	Complex metaphor
4. a) Magical object	Donkey	The donkey is a magical object	Complex metaphor
4. b) Fake object		The donkey is a fake object	
5. Functional tool	Donkey	The donkey is a functional tool	Complex metaphor

In the stories analyzed, the donkey falling down represents a waste of time; placing a bone before the donkey is a form of test; using it for transport and burdens positions it as a useful object; producing gold renders it magical, while its inability to do so following substitution marks it as a fake. Directional

metaphors like THE DONKEY IS BELOW, WASTE OF TIME IS BELOW; primary metaphors such as USEFUL IS GOOD, USELESS IS BAD; and complex metaphors like MAGICAL DONKEY IS MONEY, FAKE DONKEY IS DECEPTION all shape the conceptual map of the donkey.

The metonymies in these tales, based on the PART FOR WHOLE structure, align with these metaphorical mappings:

Table 19. Donkey Metonymies in Folktales

Metonymic Expression	Target Domain	Source Domain	Metonymy
1. Donkey's back	A burden-carrying tool	Donkey's back	The back represents a burden-carrying tool
2. Straw	Correct answer	Donkey's food	The straw represents the correct answer
3. Donkey's assistance	Supporting person	Donkey's assistance	The donkey's assistance represents a supporting person
4. a) Gold-producing donkey	Magical object	Donkey (excretion)	a) The gold-producing donkey represents a magical object
4. b) Non-gold-producing donkey	Deception		b) The non-gold-producing donkey represents deception
5. Limping	Fatigue	Donkey's limping	The donkey's limping represents fatigue

According to these examples, the donkey's back symbolizes burden; its food (straw) represents the correct match in a moral test; its defecation symbolizes either magic or fraud; and limping symbolizes exhaustion. The folktales examined contain no neutral or positive donkey metaphors. These overwhelmingly negative portrayals are echoed in other cultural traditions.

For example, in the *Town Musicians of Bremen* (Grimm 1999: 25), the aging donkey is deemed useless by its owner, who stops feeding it and abandons it to die. This tale includes the metaphor OLD DONKEY IS A USELESS OBJECT. Yet, the story eventually offers a critique of human-centered perspectives by showing the donkey, dog and rooster establishing an independent life for themselves – challenging anthropocentric attitudes toward animals.

CONCLUSION

In animal studies, the long-dominant anthropocentric principles have increasingly been replaced by ecology-focused philosophy and metaphor research. The ecological examination of donkey metaphors and metonymies within oral literature and culture provides a new perspective and research domain for folkloristic, ethnographic, socio-cultural and socio-economic studies.

Donkeys – an integral part of Cyprus's ecological system and a symbol of the island – have played a significant role in the daily life, culture, tradition and literature of the local population. In the pre-automobile era, donkeys contributed economically by working in agriculture and transporting people and goods. Despite their contributions, they have been negatively represented in the collective memory not only in Cyprus but also in countries like Iran, Turkey, England and Greece. Today, however, attitudes toward animals are being re-evaluated through the lenses of cultural ecology and ethics, leading to a confrontation with human perception and cognitive processes.

This study was motivated by the question of why donkeys – animals that have long coexisted with humans in Cyprus – are mapped onto negative human traits and objectified. The research examines how donkeys are perceived in Cypriot society and culture and how they are conceptualized in oral literature across socio-cultural and socio-economic dimensions. Considering that both Turkish and Greek are spoken on the island, donkey metaphors in both languages were identified and compared to explore shared representations. Differences in representations between the two communities were also noted. Comparative examples from English, Spanish, Malay, Turkish and Persian were used to contextualize Cypriot representations across cultures.

Overall, the cognitive and linguistic constructions associated with donkeys appear to arise from a hierarchical relationship in which humans occupy a dominant status over animals. This hierarchy is rooted in the conflict between the donkey's actual characteristics (appearance, behavior, ability) and the human desire to transform the animal into a tool that is obedient, efficient and utilitarian.

Findings from idioms, proverbs, *mâni* and folktales indicate that the conceptual map of the donkey is built around three dominant metaphorical structures: HUMAN IS AN ANIMAL, ANIMAL IS AN OBJECT and ANIMAL IS A TASK. Donkeys are frequently associated with negative concepts such as stupidity, incompetence, grumpiness, gullibility, ugliness, laziness and rudeness. These associations are based on the presumed ontological deficiencies of the donkey – its appearance, behavior and cognitive or physical limitations – and are rooted in the desire for minimal labor and maximum profit or time savings.

The metaphorical networks that underpin these conceptualizations include directional metaphors such as THE DONKEY IS BELOW, THE CONTROLLED IS BELOW; primary metaphors like ACTION IS CHARACTER, APPEARANCE IS

CHARACTER, SMELL IS CHARACTER and human-centered ones like KNOWING IS SEEING, WHAT IS USEFUL IS GOOD, WHAT IS USELESS IS BAD. These have transformed the donkey into an ingrained metaphorical reality in collective memory, supported by traditional metaphors like THE DONKEY IS A WASTE OF TIME and THE INSTINCTUAL IS A DONKEY.

Other metaphors highlight the donkey's economic role, such as TOOL / USEFUL AND VALUABLE OBJECT, VALUABLE / WORTHLESS OBJECT, SCRATCHING FOR GAIN IS TRANSACTION and THE DEBTOR IS A DONKEY. As a creature associated with the rural poor, the donkey is also framed as a suffering being – mistreated, impoverished and marginalized. Those with nonconforming behavior are also metaphorically “othered” through donkey references.

Across genres, metaphorical constructions are often rooted in anger, used for mockery, marginalization and denigration – particularly in idioms and mâni. Proverbs offer a more didactic tone, yet still rely on donkey metaphors to illustrate moral lessons. In folktales, the contrast between the imagined and real donkey reflects subconscious perceptions, rendered through complex metaphors. Correspondingly, donkey metonymies show how the animal's body parts are imbued with meaning based on their functions in daily life.

Ultimately, the study concludes that the negative metaphorical associations with donkeys stem from their perceived utility – or lack thereof – in human life. These associations are shaped by human hegemony, leading to the objectification of the animal. Yet, observable behaviors in natural contexts – such as opening a water tank valve with its mouth or digging for water – demonstrate donkeys' problem-solving abilities, challenging the validity of the negative attributes ascribed to them and suggesting the need to reconsider these entrenched views.

ACKNOWLEDGEMENTS

We sincerely thank all interview participants for their valuable contributions during the data collection process regarding the donkey metaphor in Cyprus. We are also grateful to the anonymous reviewers for their insightful comments and constructive suggestions.

FINANCIAL SUPPORT

This research received no specific grant from any funding agency.

DECLARATION OF INTEREST STATEMENT

There are no competing interests.

ETHICS STATEMENT

This study was approved by the Scientific Research and Publication Ethics Committee of Cyprus International University (CIU) on July 3, 2024, in accordance with the decision of the institutional ethics board (Approval No: -020-5789).

NOTE

- 1 A traditional Cypriot dish made with pomegranate, almonds, raisins and boiled wheat.

ORAL SOURCES

- Andreas Koçaka, 1957, place of birth Dipkarpaz. Date of interview: 25 July 2024, 14:29.
 Ayperi Gürdür, 1973, place of birth Lefkoşa. Date of interview: 26 July 2024, 16:17.
 Cemay Onalt Müezzın, 1974, place of birth Lefkoşa. Date of interview: 26 July 2024, 21:52.
 Maria Siakalli, 1980, place of birth Lefkoşa. Date of interview: 26 July 2024, 21:27.
 Mete Oğuz, 1969, place of birth Lefkoşa. Date of interview: 26 July 2024, 16:15.
 Şükrü Çetinkaya, 1979, place of birth Dipkarpaz. Date of interview: 24 July 2024, 14:00.
 Zafer Biler, 1959, place of birth Baf. Date of interview: 25 July 2024, 13:45.

REFERENCES

- Adıgüzel, M. Fatih & Aksan, Yeşim 2023. Türkçe Korku Deyimlerinde Metafor ve Metonimi İzleri. [Traces of Metaphor and Metonymy in Turkish Horror Idioms.] In: Yeşim Aksan & Elif Arıca Akkök & Mustafa Aksan (eds.) *Kavramsal Metafor ve Metonimi Üzerine Uygulamalar*. [Applications on Conceptual Metaphor and Metonymy.] Mersin: Toros University, pp. 57–78.
- Aksan, Yeşim & Akkök, Elif Arıca & Aksan, Mustafa 2023. Kavramsal Metafor Kuramının Temel Kavramları ve Kuramdaki Gelişmeler. [Fundamental Concepts of Conceptual Metaphor Theory and Advances in the Theory.] In: Yeşim Aksan & Elif Arıca Akkök & Mustafa Aksan (eds.) *Kavramsal Metafor ve Metonimi Üzerine Uygulamalar*. [Applications on Conceptual Metaphor and Metonymy.] Mersin: Toros University, pp. 1–17.
- Albayrak, Nurettin 2003. Mâni. *TDV İslâm Ansiklopedisi*. [TDV Encyclopedia of Islam.] Vol. 27, pp. 571–573. Available at <https://islamansiklopedisi.org.tr/mâni> --edebiyat, last accessed on 25 May 2025.
- Alçıoğlu, Şifa 2018. *Nenemin Değişen – Kıbrıs Türk Kültürü Üzerine Yazılar*. [In My Grandmother's Words – Writings on Turkish Cypriot Culture.] Lefkoşa: Argasdi Yayınları.
- An, Ahmet 1989. Kıbrıs Rum Toplumunda Dinsel Kutlamalar (Yortular). [Religious Celebrations in the Greek Cypriot Community.] *Halkbilimi*, Vol. 4, No. 14, pp. 23–25.
- Ansah, Gladys N. 2010. The Cultural Basis of Conceptual Metaphors: The Case of Emotions in Akan and English. *Papers from the Lancaster University Postgraduate Conference in Linguistics & Language Teaching*. Lancaster University, pp. 1–24.
- Aydoğan, Betül 2023. Salihli Kazak Türklerinin Atasözleri Üzerine Metaforik Bir İnceleme: Hayvan Metaforları. [A Metaphorical Study of the Proverbs of the Kazakh Turks of Salihli: Animal Metaphors.] *Dil Araştırmaları*, Vol. 17, No. 32, pp. 219–238. <https://doi.org/10.54316/dilarastirmalari.1213338>.
- Aygün, Uğur 2017. *Métaphores d'animaux dans le Mesnevi de Mevlana et dans les fables de La Fontaine et leurs dimensions didactiques*. [Animal Metaphors in Mevlana's Mesnevi and La Fontaine's Fables and Their Educational Dimensions.] Diss. (Unpublished MA Thesis), Ondokuz Mayıs University, Turkey.
- Aylanç, Mıhrıcan 2023. *Şiirde Anne-Kız Metaforu*. [The Mother-Daughter Metaphor in Poetry.] Ankara: Pegem Akademi.
- Barcelona, Antonio (ed.) 2000. *A Metaphor and Metonymy at The Crossroads: A Cognitive Perspective*. Berlin & New York: De Gruyter.
- Barcelona, Antonio 2010. Metonymy in Conceptualization, Communication, Language and Truth. In: Armin Burkhardt & Brigitte Nerlich (eds.) *Tropical Truth(s): The Epistemology of Metaphor and Other Tropes*. Berlin & New York: De Gruyter, pp. 271–296.

- Barsalou, Lawrence 1999. Perceptual Symbol Systems. *Behavioral and Brain Sciences*, Vol. 22, No. 4, pp. 577–609.
- Berger, Arthur 2014. *Kültür Eleştirisi*. [Cultural Criticism.] Transl. Özgür Emir, İstanbul: Pinhan Yayıncılık.
- Boratav, Pertev N. 1995. *100 Soruda Türk Halk Edebiyatı*. [100 Questions About Turkish Folk Literature.] İstanbul: Gerçek Yayınevi.
- Boratav, Pertev N. 2012. *Türk Mitolojisi – Oğuzların Mitolojisi*. [Turkish Mythology – The Mythology of the Oghuz Turks.] Ankara: Bilgesu Yayıncılık.
- Bough, Jill 2011. The Mirror Has Two Faces: Contradictory Reflections of Donkeys in Western Literature from Lucius to Balthazar. *Animals*, No. 1, pp. 56–68. <https://doi.org/10.3390/ani1010056>.
- Carter, Elena V. 2021. "The First Swallow": Avian Metaphors in Nikita Khrushchev's Political Discourse. *Poznańskie Studia Slawistyczne*, Vol. 21, pp. 75–95. <https://doi.org/10.14746/pss.2021.21.4>.
- Cemal, Lois 2011. *Eşek Bakımı*. [Donkey Care.] Avrupa Birliği Yayını.
- Chatti, Sami 2023. Metaphors We Love By: The Shift from Animal to Fruit Metaphors in Classical Arabic Ghazal. *Metaphor and Symbol*, Vol. 38 No. 2, pp. 184–197. <https://doi.org/10.1080/10926488.2021.1997550>.
- Derrida, Jacques 2008. *The Animal That Therefore I Am*. New York: Fordham University Press.
- Descola, Philippe 2013. *Beyond Nature and Culture*. Chicago & London: University of Chicago Press.
- Dirven, René & Pörings, Ralf (eds.) 2002. *Metaphor and Metonymy in Comparison and Contrast*. Berlin & New York: Mouton de Gruyter.
- Dursun, Turan 1994a. *Kuran Ansiklopedisi*. [Encyclopedia of the Qur'an.] Vol. 7. İstanbul: Kaynak Yayınları.
- Dursun, Turan 1994b. *Kuran Ansiklopedisi* [Encyclopedia of the Qur'an.] Vol. 8. İstanbul: Kaynak Yayınları.
- Erboğa, Ayşe D. 2024. *Animal Metaphors in English and Turkish Proverbs: A Comparative Study*. Diss (Unpublished MA Thesis), Kafkas University, Turkey.
- Ertuğ, Mehmet 1994. Goncoloz. *Halkbilimi*, Vol. 8, No. 35–36, p. 14.
- Estaji, Azam & Nakhavali, Fakhteh 2011. Semantic Derogation in Persian Animal Proverbs. *Theory and Practice in Language Studies*, Vol. 1, No. 9, pp. 1213–1217.
- Fass, Dan 1997. *Processing Metaphor and Metonymy*. Westport, CT: Praeger.
- Fauconnier, Gilles 1997. *Mappings in Thought and Language*. Cambridge: Cambridge University Press.
- Feldman, Jerome A. 2006. *From Molecule to Metaphor: A Neural Theory of Language*. Cambridge: The MIT Press.
- Fernández-Fontecha, Almudena & Jimenez-Catalán, Rosa 2003. Semantic derogation in animal metaphor: A contrastive-cognitive analysis of two male/female examples in English and Spanish. *Journal of Pragmatics*, Vol. 35, No. 5, pp. 771–797. [https://doi.org/10.1016/S0378-2166\(02\)00127-3](https://doi.org/10.1016/S0378-2166(02)00127-3).
- Fillmore, Charles J. 1982. Frame semantics. In The Linguistic Society of Korea. *Linguistics in the Morning Calm*. Seoul: Hanshin, pp. 111–137.
- Gallese, Vittorio 2000. The Inner Sense of Action: Agency and Motor Representations. *Journal of Consciousness Studies*, Vol. 7, No. 10, pp. 23–40.
- Gibbs, Raymond W. & de Macedo, Ana 2010. Metaphor and Embodied Cognition. *DELTA: Documentação de Estudos em Lingüística Teórica e Aplicada*, Vol. 26, pp. 679–700. <https://doi.org/10.1590/S0102-44502010000300014>.
- Gibson, James J. 1979. *The Ecological Approach to Visual Perception: Classic Edition*. New York: Psychology Press.
- Gökçeoğlu, Mustafa 1990. Kıbrıs Türk Atasözü ve Deyimlerinin Bazı Nitelikleri ve Yapıları. [Some Characteristics and Structures of Turkish Cypriot Proverbs and Idioms.] *Halkbilimi*, Vol. 5, No. 19–20, pp. 43–48.

- Gökçeoğlu, Mustafa 1991. *Kıbrıs Türk Atasözleri ve Deyimler Sözlüğü*. [Dictionary of Turkish Cypriot Proverbs and Idioms.] Lefkoşa: Galeri Kültür Yayınları.
- Gökçeoğlu, Mustafa 2002. *Mânilerimiz*. [Our Folk Rhymes.] Lefkoşa: Eğitim Vakfı Yayınları.
- Gökçeoğlu, Mustafa 2005. *Toplu Masallar 1 – He Babam De Babam-*. [Collected Tales 1.] Lefkoşa: Gökçeoğlu Yayınları.
- Grady, Joseph 1997. *Foundation of Meaning: Primary Metaphors and Primary Scenes*. Diss. (PhD Thesis), University of California, Berkeley.
- Grimm, Jacob & Grimm, Wilhelm 1999. *Jacob ve Wilhelm Grimm'den Masallar*. [Fairy Tales by Jacob and Wilhelm Grimm.] Vol. 1. Transl. Kemal Kaya. Dünya Klasikleri Dizisi: 31. İstanbul: Milli Eğitim Bakanlığı.
- Güneş, Sadriye 2017. Hayvan Adları İçeren ve İnsanı Niteleyen İtalyanca ve Türkçe Metaforlar Üzerine Bir İnceleme. [A Study on Italian and Turkish Metaphors Containing Animal Names and Characterizing Humans.] *Gaziantep University Journal of Social Sciences*, Vol. 16, No. 4, pp. 1102–1118. <https://doi.org/10.21547/jss.316281>.
- Hamrick, Richard & Tahir, Pırgalıoğlu & Carroll, John & Şerife, Gündüz 2005. Feral Donkey Equus asinus Populations on the Karpaz Peninsula, Cyprus. *European Journal of Wildlife Research*, Vol. 51, pp. 108–116. <https://doi.org/10.1007/s10344-005-0085-0>.
- Hessenburg, Christina 1998. Kutsal Koruluklar ve Bitki Mitolojisi. [Sacred Groves and Plant Mythology.] *Halkbilimi*, Vol. 12, No. 46, pp. 49–51.
- Ho, Janet 2022. Evading the Lockdown: Animal Metaphors and Dehumanization in Virtual Space. *Metaphor and Symbol*, Vol. 37, No. 1, pp. 21–38. <https://doi.org/10.1080/10926488.2021.1941972>.
- Ho-Abdullah, İmran 2011. A cognitive semantics analysis of Malay proverbs related to the dog (Canis Familiaris). *Journal of Language Studies*, Vol. 11, No. 1, pp. 125–141.
- Hollan, James & Hutchins, Edwin & Kirsh, David 2000. Distributed Cognition: Toward a New Theoretical Foundation for Human-computer Interaction Research. *ACM Transactions on Human-Computer Interaction*, Vol. 7, No. 2, pp. 174–196.
- İslamoğlu, Mahmut & Öznur, Şevket 2010. *Geleneksel Kıbrıs Türk ve Rum Düğünleri*. [Traditional Turkish Cypriot and Greek Cypriot Weddings.] Lefkoşa: Gökada Yayınları.
- İslamoğlu, Mahmut & Öznur, Şevket 2012. *Karşılaştırmalı Kıbrıs Türk ve Kıbrıs Rum Masalları*. [Comparative Cypriot Turkish and Cypriot Greek Fairy Tales.] Lefkoşa: Gökada Yayınları.
- İslamoğlu, Mahmut & Öznur, Şevket 2012. Türkçe ve Rumcada Benzer Atasözleri. [Similar Proverbs in Turkish and Greek.] *Halkbilimi*, Vol. 25, No. 58, pp. 144–147.
- Jensen, Thomas W. & Greve, Linda 2019. Ecological Cognition and Metaphor. *Metaphor and Symbol*, Vol. 34, No. 1, pp. 1–16. <https://doi.org/10.1080/10926488.2019.1591720>.
- Klamer, Arjo & Leonard, Thomas C. 1994. So What's an Economic Metaphor? In: Philip Mirowski (ed.) *Natural Images in Economic Thought: Markets Read in Tooth and Claw*. Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, pp. 20–52.
- Kleparski, Grzegorz A. & Kiełtyka, Robert 2005. The Ups and Downs of the Great Chain of Being: The Case of Canine Zoosemy in the History of English. Available at https://www.researchgate.net/publication/260134232_The_ups_and_downs_of_the_Great_Chain_of_Being_the_case_of_canine_zoosemy_in_the_history_of_English, last accessed on 21 April 2025.
- Kohn, Eduardo 2013. *How Forests Think. Towards an Anthropology beyond the Human*. Berkeley: University of California Press.
- Kövecses, Zoltán 1988. *The Language of Love: The Semantics of Passion in Conversational English*. Lewisburg: Bucknell University Press.
- Kövecses, Zoltán & Radden, Günter 1998. Metonymy: Developing a Cognitive Linguistic View. *Cognitive Linguistics*, Vol. 9, No. 7, pp. 37–77.
- Kövecses, Zoltán 2000. *Metaphor and Emotion: Language, Culture, and Body in Human Feeling*. Cambridge: Cambridge University Press.

- Kövecses, Zoltán 2005. *Metaphor in Culture: Universality and Variation*. Cambridge: Cambridge University Press.
- Kövecses, Zoltán 2008. Conceptual Metaphor Theory: Some Criticisms and Alternative Proposals. *Annual Review of Cognitive Linguistics*, Vol. 6, No. 1, pp. 168–181. <https://doi.org/10.1075/arcl.6.08kov>.
- Kövecses, Zoltán 2013. The Metaphor–Metonymy Relationship: Correlation Metaphors Are Based on Metonymy. *Metaphor and Symbol*, Vol. 28, No. 2, pp. 75–88. <https://doi.org/10.1080/10926488.2013.768498>.
- Kövecses, Zoltán 2020. *Extended Conceptual Metaphor Theory*. Cambridge: Cambridge University Press.
- Krikmann, Arvo 1996. The Great Chain Metaphor: An Open Sesame For Proverb Semantics? *Folklore: Electronic Journal of Folklore*, Vol. 1, pp. 74–83.
- Kroje, Monica T. 2015. The Horse as a Cosmological Creature in Slovene Mythopoetic Heritage. *Studia Mythologica Slavica*, Vol. 1, pp. 153–167.
- Kroje, Monica T. 2018. The Donkey in the Narrative Culture and Changing Sociohistorical Epistemology. *Studia Mythologica Slavica*, Vol. 21, pp. 237–252. <https://doi.org/10.3986/sms.v21i0.7075>.
- Küçük, Okan 2016. *Çağdaş Metafor Teorisi: George Lakoff ve Mark Johnson*. [Contemporary Metaphor Theory: George Lakoff and Mark Johnson.] Diss. (Unpublished MA Thesis), Uludağ University, Turkey.
- Kyprianos, Archimandrite 1788. *Ιστορία Χρονολογική της Νήσου Κύπρου*. [Chronological History of the Island of Cyprus.] Venice: By Nikolaos Glykes of Ioannina, p. 369.
- Lakoff, George & Johnson, Mark 1980. Conceptual Metaphor in Everyday Language. *The Journal of Philosophy*, Vol. 77, No. 8, pp. 453–486. <https://doi.org/10.3986/sms.v1i0.1871>.
- Lakoff, George & Turner, Mark 1989. *More than Cool Reason. A Field Guide to Poetic Metaphor*. Chicago: University of Chicago Press.
- Lakoff, George 2008. The Neural Theory of Metaphor. In: Raymond W. Gibbs, Jr. (ed.) *The Cambridge Handbook of Metaphor and Thought*. Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, pp. 17–38.
- Lakoff, George & Johnson, Mark 2015. *Metaforlar – Hayat, Anlam ve Dil*. [Metaphors We Live By.] Second edition. Transl. Gökhan Y. Demir. İstanbul: İthaki Yayınları.
- Langacker, Ronald 1987. *Foundations of Cognitive Grammar. Vol. 1: Theoretical Prerequisites*. Stanford, CA: Stanford University Press.
- Levanat-Peričić, Miranda 2012. Književno breme našega tovara [Literary Burden of “Our” Donkey.] In: Suzana Marjanić & Antonija Zaradija Kiš (eds.) *Književna životinja – Kulturni bestijarij II*. [Literary Animal – Cultural Bestiary II.] Zagreb: Hrvatska sveučilišna naklada i Institut za etnologiju i folkloristiku, pp. 995–1026.
- López-Rodríguez, Irene 2009. Of Women, Bitches, Chickens and Vixens: Animal Metaphors for Women in English and Spanish. *Cultura Lenguaje y Representación*, Vol. 7, No. 7, pp. 77–100.
- Maalej, Zouhair 2007. The Embodiment of Fear Expressions in Tunisian Arabic. In: Farzad Sharifian & Gary B. Palmer (eds.) *Applied Cultural Linguistics*. Amsterdam & Philadelphia: John Benjamins, pp. 87–104.
- Manavoğlu, İbrahim 2018. *Kıbrıs Türklerinin Bilmeceleeri*. [Riddles of the Turkish Cypriots.] Available at https://www.academia.edu/36275624/K%C4%B1br%C4%B1s_Tu_rklerinin_Bilmeceleri_2_docx, last accessed on 27 February 2026.
- Manavoğlu, İbrahim 2018. *Kıbrıs Türklerinin Mânileri*. [The Mâni of the Turkish Cypriots.] Available at https://www.academia.edu/36713825/K%C4%B1br%C4%B1s_Tu_rklerinin_Manileri_25_May%C4%B1s_20018_docx, last accessed on 27 February 2026.
- McCloskey, Deirdre N. 1995. Metaphors Economists Live By. *Social Research*, Vol. 62, No. 2, pp. 215–237.
- Musolff, Andreas 2010. Political Metaphor and Bodies Politic. In: Urszula Okulska & Piotr Cap (eds.) *Perspectives in Politics and Discourse*. Amsterdam: John Benjamins, pp. 23–41.
- Musolff, Andreas 2017. Metaphor and Cultural Cognition. In: Farzad Sharifian (ed.) *Advances in Cultural Linguistics*, pp. 325–344.

- Orwell, George 2020 [1945]. *Animal Farm*. Transl. Celal Üster, İstanbul: Can Yayıncılık.
- Pourhossein, Shahrooz 2016. *Animal Metaphors in Persian and Turkish Proverbs: a Cognitive Linguistic Study*. Diss. (Unpublished PhD Thesis), Hacettepe University, Turkey. Available at <http://www.openaccess.hacettepe.edu.tr:8080/xmlui/handle/11655/3611>, last accessed on 25 June 2025.
- Radden, Günter & Kövecses, Zoltán 1999. Towards a Theory of Metonymy. In: Klaus-Uwe Panther & Günter Radden (eds.) *Metonymy in Language and Thought*. Amsterdam: John Benjamins, pp. 17–59.
- Radden, Günter 2002. How metonymic are metaphors? In: René Dirven & Ralf Pörings (eds.) *Metaphor and Metonymy in Comparison and Contrast*. Berlin & New York: Mouton de Gruyter, pp. 407–434.
- Rashid, Sabariah Md. & Hajimaming, Pabiyah & Muhammad, Nurul N. 2012. 'Farm' Animal Metaphors in Malay and Arabic Figurative Expressions: Implications for Language Learning. *International Journal of Applied Linguistics & English Literature*, Vol. 1, No. 7, pp. 33–39.
- Ren, Imai 2019. A Comparative Study of Metaphors in Fairy Tales in English and Japanese. *Gyermeknevelés Tudományos Folyóirat*, Vol. 7, No. 1, pp. 77–82.
- Rosch, Eleanor 1978. Principles of Categorization. In: Eleanor Rosch & Barbara B. Lloyd (eds.) *Cognition and Categorisation*. Hillsdale: Lawrence Erlbaum, pp. 27–48.
- Sakaoğlu, Saim 1983. *Kıbrıs Türk Masalları*. [Cypriot Turkish Folktales.] Ankara: Kültür ve Turizm Bakanlığı Yayınları.
- Saracoğlu, Erdoğan 2012. *Kıbrıs Ağzı*. [Cyprus Dialect of Turkish.] Ankara: Akçağ Yayınları.
- Sharifian, Farzad 2007. L1 Cultural Conceptualizations in L2 Learning. In: Farzad Sharifian & Gary B. Palmer (eds.) *Applied Cultural Linguistics*. Amsterdam & Philadelphia: John Benjamins.
- Sharifian, Farzad 2011. *Cultural Conceptualizations and Language*. Amsterdam: John Benjamins.
- Stamenov, Maxim I. & Gallese, Vittorio 2002. *Mirror Neurons and the Evolution of Brain and Language*. Amsterdam: John Benjamins.
- Sun, Ping 2015. Animal Images and Metaphors in Animal Farm. *Journal of Art & Humanities*, Vol. 4, No. 5, pp. 1–7.
- Şahan, Kayhan 2014. *TürkŞiirindeMetafor(1920–1960)*. [Metaphor in Turkish Poetry.] Diss. (Unpublished PhD Thesis), Trakya University, Turkey. Available at https://tez.yok.gov.tr/UlusalTezMerkezi/tezDetay.jsp?id=QkkBsx6Ua00EeJms3Ma4w&no=aBtIXjLQPgA16AsTUjng_w, last accessed on 27 June 2025.
- Taggart, James 1982. Animal Metaphors in Spanish and Mexican Oral Tradition. *The Journal of American Folklore*, Vol. 95, No. 377, pp. 280–303.
- Talebinejad, M. Reza & Dastjerdi, H. Vahid 2005. A Cross-cultural Study of Animal Metaphors: When Owls are Not Wise!. *Metaphor and Symbol*, Vol. 20, No. 2, pp. 133–150.
- Taylor, John R. 1989. *Linguistic Categorization: Prototypes in Linguistic Theory*. Oxford: Clarendon Press.
- Ülküsal, Müstecib 1970. *Dobruca'daki Kırım Türklerinde Atasözleri ve Deyimler*. [Proverbs and Idioms Among the Crimean Turks in Dobruja.] Ankara: Türk Dil Kurumu.
- Varela, Francisco & Thompson, Evan & Rosch, Eleanor 1991. *The Embodied Mind: Cognitive Science and Human Experience*. Cambridge: MIT Press.
- Viney, Deryck 2001. North Cyprus Strangest Toadstool the Donkey Fungus. *Halkbilimi*, Vol. 15, No. 49, pp. 84–86.
- Wang, Chongying & Dowker, Ann 2007. Interpretation of animal metaphors: Evidence from Chinese and English children and adults. *Proceedings of the 2007 Child Language Seminar, University of Reading*, pp. 216–225.
- Wierzbicka, Anna 1985. *Lexicography and conceptual analysis*. Ann Arbor, MI: Karoma.
- Yu, Ning 2008. Metaphor From Body and Culture. In: Raymond W. Gibbs, Jr. (ed.) *The Cambridge Handbook of Metaphor and Thought*. Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, pp. 247–261.
- Yuldashev, Azim 2020. Animal Metaphor Proverbs in Uzbek and Malay Cross-culture. *Science and Education*, Vol. 1, No. 2, pp. 180–185.

NEWSPAPERS AND WEB SITE SOURCES

American Folklore Society 2022. *Crises We Live By: A Metaphorical Approach to the Crisis (University of Potsdam)*, 19 March. Available at <https://americanfolkloresociety.org/cfp-crises-we-live-by-a-metaphorical-approach-to-the-crisis-university-of-potsdam/>, last accessed on 22 April 2025.

Düzgün, Öntaş 2017. Dıpkarpaz'da Denenebilir bir Proje: Eşek Çiftliği. [A Project Worth Trying in Dıpkarpaz: Donkey Farm.] *Havadis Kıbrıs*, 14 August. Available at <https://www.havadiskibris.com/dipkarpazda-denenebilir-bir-proje-esek-ciftligi/>, last accessed on 2 August 2025.

Handy Spa Cyprus 2023. Cleopatra Soap With Donkey Milk. Available at <https://handyspacyprus.com/product/cleopatra-soap-with-donkey-milk/>, last accessed on 2 August 2025.

Hatay, Mete 2017. Kahraman Kıbrıs Eşekleri Garp Cephesinde. [Heroic Cypriot Donkeys on the Western Front.] *Havadis Kıbrıs*, 30 June. Available at <https://www.havadiskibris.com/kahraman-kibris-esekleri-garp-cephesinde/>, last accessed on 3 August 2025.

Sarpten, Hasan 2016. Bir Özgürlük ve Tutsaklık Hikâyesi: Kıbrıs'ın Eşekleri. [A Story of Freedom and Captivity: The Donkeys of Cyprus.] *Havadis Kıbrıs*, 14 August. Available at <https://www.havadiskibris.com/bir-ozgurluk-ve-tutsaklik-hikayesi-kibrisin-esekleri/>, last accessed on 2 August 2025.

Fatih Yaliner is a PhD candidate in the Department of Turkish Language and Literature at Cyprus International University. He has taught courses on Turkish language and Turkish language teaching at the same institution. His research interests include cognitive metaphor theories, animal metaphors and metaphorical structures found in culture and literature. Other areas of his research involve the origins of metaphors, their development through everyday experiences and their cultural and universal patterns of construction.

<https://orcid.org/0000-0002-8664-9171>
fatihhyaliner@gmail.com

Mıhrıcan Aylanç (Assoc. Prof. Dr.) is a faculty member of the Turkish Language Teaching Program at the Faculty of Education of the International Cyprus University. She produces scientific studies in the fields of modern Turkish literature, Turkish Cypriot culture and literature, migration, eco-criticism, and gender studies. She is the chief editor of a folklore/literature journal indexed in ESCI, TR-Dizin, and Scopus.

<https://orcid.org/0000-0002-0524-8131>
maylanc@ciu.edu.tr

Cultural Adaptation of Kazakh Oral Traditions in Diaspora: A Comparative Analysis Across Mongolia, Uzbekistan, Kyrgyzstan and China

NASSIKHAT NABIOLLA

Researcher, Postgraduate Student
Department of Kazakh Literature and Theory of Literature
Al-Farabi Kazakh National University, Almaty, Republic of Kazakhstan
nassikhatnabiolla@gmail.com

YERKHAN KARBOZOV

Senior Lecturer
Department of Kazakh Literature and Theory of Literature
Al-Farabi Kazakh National University, Almaty, Republic of Kazakhstan
yer.karbozov@outlook.com

ZUFAR SEYTZHANOV

Professor
Department of Kazakh Literature and Theory of Literature
Al-Farabi Kazakh National University, Almaty, Republic of Kazakhstan
z-seytzhanov@hotmail.com

GULNAZ DAUTOVA

Acting Associate Professor

Department of Kazakh Literature and Theory of Literature
Al-Farabi Kazakh National University, Almaty, Republic of Kazakhstan
dautova_gul@outlook.com

Abstract: Oral traditions play a crucial role in maintaining cultural identity and conveying historical memory, particularly within diasporic populations encountering international pressures. This research aims to indicate the parallels and contrasts in the oral traditions of Turkic-Mongolian ethnic groups, specifically examining Kazakh narratives and their evolution resulting from migration and cultural interaction. The study analyses myths, legends and epics using comparative historical, content, intertextual and genealogical methodologies to track alterations across various cultural settings. The findings indicate that Kazakh oral traditions maintained among diaspora populations preserve ancient aspects while incorporating new themes shaped by local cultures. In Mongolia, Kazakh oral heritage integrates shamanic and Buddhist components, but in Uzbekistan, Islamic themes transform conventional storytelling. Kazakh stories in Kyrgyzstan demonstrate significant intertextual connections with the *Manas* epic, highlighting themes of communal identity and struggle. In China, cosmogonic narratives concerning natural spirits and sacred sites demonstrate the impact of agricultural and religious traditions, resulting in modifications in their structure and themes. Despite these changes, these oral traditions remain essential tools for cultural transmission and identity maintenance. These findings enhance comprehension of how folklore evolves through migration and intercultural contact, offering insights into cultural resilience within diasporic contexts.

Keywords: ethnic identity, folklore, non-fabulous prose, traditional narratives

1. INTRODUCTION

The oral traditions of the Turkic-Mongolian peoples are a key element of their cultural heritage, encompassing myths, legends, epics and folk narratives reflecting ancient beliefs, traditions and worldview concepts. These narratives function as manifestations of communal memory, instruments of cultural transmission and indicators of ethnic identity. In the modern age, when globalisation and migration have heightened international connections, the examination of these traditions has gained fresh significance. Comprehending the evolution, transformation and persistence of Kazakh oral traditions across diaspora populations offers significant insight into the processes of cultural adaptation, identity preservation and intergenerational knowledge transmission. Kazakh folklore includes mythology, heroic epics, historical stories and folk tales, each fulfilling unique cultural roles. Myths typically elucidate cosmology, natural occurrences and the origins of cultural traditions, whereas epics document acts of courage and legends offer semi-historical narratives of notable persons. The study of these narrative forms must expand beyond mythology to include the whole range of Kazakh folklore and oral tradition as it is conveyed in various diasporic contexts.

Investigating Turkic–Mongolian folklore, particularly Kazakh oral traditions, poses very substantial methodological difficulties. Many narratives have been maintained only by oral transmission, rendering them particularly vulnerable to alteration throughout time. In some instances, the oldest documented versions of these narratives emerged long after their alterations, complicating the reconstruction of their initial forms. Moreover, geographical disparities within the same ethnic group result in several iterations of the same narrative, varying according to location, cultural influences and degrees of assimilation (Kelmendi 2024).

In diaspora contexts, oral traditions are especially susceptible to degradation from linguistic and cultural assimilation. As subsequent generations become more assimilated into the prevailing cultural and linguistic structures of their host nations, the transmission of traditional narratives becomes disjointed or recontextualised. This poses a significant barrier for academics striving to document and study these traditions in their true or original forms. Thus, an interdisciplinary approach, incorporating anthropology, ethnography, linguistics and cultural studies, is necessary to attain a thorough knowledge of how Kazakh oral traditions are perpetuated, adapted, or modified in various cultural contexts.

S. A. Seralimova (2023) examined the key features of myth and the mechanisms of mythologisation in literary texts. The study emphasises the relevance of the study of mythological plots in fiction and the need for a more detailed analysis of them. The scientist analysed the work of Kazakh writers and folklorists, including Akhmet Baitursynov, Mukhtar Auezov, Shokan Valikhanov, and Alkei Margulan, who laid the foundations of the mythological school of Kazakh literary studies. Particular attention was devoted to how Kazakh authors, starting in the mid-20th century, used mythological stories to describe historical events and the most important moments of Kazakh history. Sharustam Shamusarov and Dilafruz Atakhanova (2020) studied the origin and evolution of the mythological heritage of Turkic ethnic groups in Central Asia. The study describes the concept of myth in the context of science and literature and describes the key stages of its development. The role of myth as a means of expressing the emotional attitude of primitive man to the surrounding reality is analysed. The authors focused on the significance of myth in the life of ancient societies and its constant influence on literature, including the formation of new genres and their integration into works.

Anbar Buranov and Karlygash Nurmukhametova (2023) analysed axiological themes in Kazakh and Uzbek folklore, investigating the common cultural values, customs and traditions of the Turkic peoples. Their research specifically highlighted the significance of national characteristics, aphoristic poetry and ritual behaviours in fostering moral stability and reinforcing cultural identity. The components originating from the nomadic lifestyle persist in shaping the worldview and self-identification of Turkic cultures today. Zhuldyz Zanadil

(2024) addressed the mythological role of Korkyt Ata in Kazakh culture and various ethnic contexts, revealing complex symbolism and universal elements. Korkyt Ata had many mythological nuances associated with heroism, fate and spiritual wisdom. Comparative studies have shown that this image had different connotations in Turkish, Azerbaijani and Kazakh mythologies, acting as a spiritual mentor and warrior hero.

Yerkezhan Seitkazy et al. (2024) examined Kazakh literary works from postmodern and neo-mythological viewpoints, demonstrating the adaptation of traditional folklore in modern writing. The research uncovered variances in genre and style within Kazakh prose, emphasising the recontextualization of historical, biblical and folkloric material in contemporary narratives. Gulimat Bieken and Zhanna Alashbaeva (2023) conducted an in-depth study on the analysis of mythological plots in Kazakh oral literature, considering them not only as elements of ancient legends but also as dynamic forms that continue to exist and evolve in the literature of a later period. They addressed how these stories have adapted to changing cultural and historical conditions while retaining their original significance for national identity. The researchers emphasised that mythological images and motifs that originated in the oral tradition continue to be important components of Kazakh literature, influencing its genre and thematic diversity.

This literature review emphasises that, although current studies provide significant insights into Turkic and Kazakh folklore, addressing axiological notions, genre variety in prose and the evolution of oral and written traditions, gaps remain. There is a necessity for more investigation of regional disparities within Kazakh oral traditions, their adaptation among diaspora populations and the evolution of these traditions as a result of migration, cultural assimilation and transnational identity development. Additional examination is essential to comprehend the impact of globalisation on the preservation, transformation and reinterpretation of folklore within Kazakh diasporas, particularly regarding the influence of cultural exchanges, linguistic changes and digital media on narrative traditions and identity.

This research investigates the evolution of Kazakh oral traditions, encompassing myths, legends and epic narratives, across Kazakh populations beyond their native territory. It examines the adaptation of these traditions to new cultural contexts, illustrating changes in identity, historical memory and socio-cultural factors. This research aims to systematise and conduct a comparative analysis of traditional and diaspora Kazakh narratives; examine external cultural and social factors influencing their transformation; analyse changes in genre and thematic structures; and assess their role in preserving national identity amid migration and globalisation.

2. METHODOLOGY

The research was aimed at identifying differences and similarities in the features of oral traditions among Turkic–Mongolian ethnic groups, emphasising Kazakh narratives in the context of their cultural adaptation and preservation due to migration and intercultural interaction. The study included the analysis of the folklore related to figures such as Kokbori, Er–Toshtuk, Zhelmaya, Zheytygen, Koraysh Batyr, Manas, Master of Water, Master of Wind, Orman Baba, Master of Mountains, War of the Pine and Saxauls, Dykhan Baba, Orman Baba, “Right Mountain”, “Kokshe Baba”, “Bohemian Ancestor”, “Mud Batyr”, “Sacred Poplar”, “Sacred Baiterek”, “Kok Ugiz”, “Guest of the Soul”, as well as the epics “Kozy Korpesh and Bayan Sulu”, “Alpamys Batyr”, “Er–Targyn”, “Abylai Khan” (Zhanaidarov 2008).

A comparative analysis was employed to investigate the regional variations in oral narratives among Kazakh diasporas in Mongolia, Uzbekistan, Kyrgyzstan and China, considering their adaptation to various cultural, religious and social influences. The comparative historical method was utilised to examine the development of oral traditions, highlighting their conservation and alteration across various historical and cultural settings. The research methodically compared historical documents, oral folklore and literary adaptations to investigate how historical events, including conquests, migrations, religious shifts and cultural exchanges, shaped the genesis, alteration and evolution of myths among the Turkic–Mongol peoples. The methodology was implemented in two phases. The process was executed in two steps. Initially, early oral texts and traditions were analysed to explain their original forms and functions within Turkic–Mongolian culture. The following phase examined later alterations, especially within diasporic contexts, when these traditions adapted to foreign cultural influences, including Mongolian shamanism, Islamic traditions in Uzbekistan and Kyrgyzstan and animistic beliefs in China.

Content analysis was used for a detailed study of oral narrative texts, identifying the main genre features and their variations depending on the cultural context. This method identified the main elements and structure of oral narratives, as well as their transformation in different cultural settings. The use of content analysis involved several key stages. First, the text was analysed to identify recurring themes, motifs and plot elements that are characteristic of the oral traditions of a particular people. This analysis identified key aspects of the genre characteristics, such as their form, structure, main characters and storylines. This method was then used to study how these genre elements vary depending on the cultural context. This included the study of how stories and characters adapt and change depending on cultural and historical factors, such as the influence of neighbouring peoples and changing religious and social conditions.

The intertextual analysis revealed the interrelationships between the narratives of different communities and the influence of local cultural traditions on them. This approach has contributed to the study of how oral traditions of Turkic-Mongolian peoples intersect with mythological and cultural elements of other communities and how they adapt to new cultural conditions. The intertextual analysis also assessed mutual influences and borrowings between oral texts, as well as the analysis of how elements of one tradition can be adapted or transformed in the context of another culture. This approach revealed how the narratives of the Turkic-Mongol peoples may have interacted with those of neighbouring peoples such as the Chinese and how these interactions contributed to changes and integration of cultural elements.

The genealogical method was used to trace the historical development of motifs, plots and characters, revealing their changes in response to cultural and historical events. It included an analysis of how oral narratives adapted to new social conditions and cultural interactions, thereby clarifying the broader cultural processes that influenced these traditions.

3. RESULTS

Folklore is an extensive category of oral traditions, including tales, songs, legends, epics, proverbs and rituals that embody the collective consciousness of people. In folklore, myths represent a distinct genre: they are holy or symbolic narratives that elucidate essential elements of existence, including cosmology, creation and supernatural forces. In contrast to legends, which are semi-historical and based on real events, or epics, which emphasise bravery and national identity, myths predominantly function to reinforce worldviews and provide cosmological interpretations. Myths develop based on oral traditions, legends and stories that are passed down through generations. They are substantial in maintaining cultural continuity by reinforcing the key values, norms and attitudes of a particular ethnic or cultural group. Myths also serve as explanations for complex natural and social phenomena, helping people to make sense of their experiences, historical events and spiritual traditions (Bazaluk 2017).

Myth, being one of the leading categories of culture, has a significant impact on shaping the worldview and identity of various communities. It not only reflects deep views on the world and the role of humans in it but also serves as a mechanism for transmitting cultural values, norms and beliefs across generations. Mythological stories and images that emerged at the dawn of civilisation continue to have a significant impact on contemporary cultural processes, including literature, art and public life (Clarke & Wake 2021; Mizin & Petrov 2021).

In the context of Kazakh culture, myths are relevant in the formation and maintenance of national identity. They are not only archaic evidence of ancient ideas about the world but also serve as the most important means of transmitting cultural codes, moral norms and socially important attitudes. The

myths integrated into the structure of Kazakh folklore, epic and folk traditions demonstrate the deep interconnectedness of the Kazakh people with their historical heritage, natural environment and way of life (Kaskabasov 2010). The peculiarity of Kazakh myths is their close connection with real life and the natural environment in which nomadic tribes lived. Myths often feature images of animals, sacred mountains, rivers and celestial bodies that are personified and endowed with supernatural qualities. These images not only symbolise natural forces but also serve as intermediaries between man and the divine. They are also a source of inspiration for Kazakh literature, music and art, and contribute to the strengthening and development of the cultural heritage. The myths embody the life experience of the Kazakh people and their ideas about nature, society and man, and remain relevant in the world.

In the context of globalisation and migration, when many Kazakhs were far from their historical homeland, myths acquired new relevance (Aigle 2015). They are becoming an important means of preserving ethnic identity in a foreign language and different cultural environment. However, the myths do not remain unchanged: they are adapting to new cultural and social conditions, reflecting changes in the minds and perceptions of the Kazakhs themselves. These transformations can be manifested in a change of emphasis, reinterpretation of old stories, the emergence of new characters.

For instance, Kazakh diasporas living in other countries often face the need to integrate into a foreign cultural environment while maintaining their ethnic roots. In this context, myths not only preserve traditions but also adapt, help establish links between historical heritage and modernity and introduce Kazakh culture into the cultural context of the host country. Mythological images and stories can be used to express new meanings and identities, allowing cultural heritage to be preserved in a changing environment (Bazaluk 2018). Thus, Kazakh myths remain an important element of ethnic identity. They continue to perform their function as an element connecting the past and the present, ensuring the continuity of cultural tradition and maintaining collective identity. Myths, despite their ancient nature, demonstrate a unique ability to adapt and transform, maintaining their vitality and relevance in a dynamically changing world (Sahoo 2023: 307–316). Their study opens new perspectives for understanding how cultural traditions can be preserved and developed in the context of globalisation and migration and how myths continue to be fundamental in the formation and preservation of national identity.

The study of Kazakh myths in the context of foreign diasporas opens new perspectives for understanding how these ancient cultural forms continue to live and develop in modern conditions. This can be used to trace how mythological motifs are integrated into a new cultural environment, change under the influence of other traditions, and continue to fulfil their function in maintaining national identity and cultural distinctiveness. Kazakh myths, preserved and developed among Kazakhs living abroad in countries such as Mongolia,

Uzbekistan, and Kyrgyzstan, have unique features that reflect their adaptation to new cultural and social conditions, as well as interaction with local traditions.

Kazakhs living in Mongolia, especially in the Bayan Ulgii region, have preserved many elements of their mythological traditions, which are closely intertwined with local culture (Montgomery 2022). The influence of Mongolian shamanistic and Buddhist beliefs is manifested in syncretism, where Kazakh myths are enriched with new motifs associated with natural spirits and rituals. For instance, the myth of the Kokbori (Heavenly Wolf), a symbol of protection and ancestral connection in Kazakh folklore, has gained further attributes. The story of Kokbori (Heavenly Wolf), originating from ancient Turkic beliefs, was initially documented by 19th-century Orientalist academics. Kokbori was regarded in Mongolia as both the patron saint of the Kazakh people and a guardian spirit linked to certain sacred places in the mountainous areas, embodying elements of Mongolian shamanism. Mongolian Kazakhs maintain an alternate understanding of Kokbori as a protective spirit of holy terrains, including aspects of Mongolian shamanism. Conversely, in China's Altai area, interpretations of the story highlight agricultural plenty, associating the wolf's direction with harvest cycles – an indication of sinicised modifications. Kokbori is the Celestial Wolf that descended from the heavens, and the term *kök* in the Kazakh language (as well as in other Turkic languages) signifies the sky. The paramount totem shared across all Turkic peoples is the Blue Wolf (Kokbori) (Toyshanuly 2009).

Another example is the epic about Er-Toshtuk, a hero who travels between worlds in search of a bride. In the Mongolian diaspora, this story was enriched with elements of Buddhist cosmology, where the worlds became more detailed and connected to Buddhist ideas of rebirth and karma. The interpretation of the folklore's characters has also changed: traditional Kazakh nature spirits, such as "Zhelmaya" (magic camel), in Mongolia, acquired features associated with local shamanic guardian spirits, reflecting the fusion of Kazakh and Mongolian beliefs. Here, narratives often include elements related to sacred places and patron spirits, which is indicative of the deep belief in the power of nature and spirits in Mongolian culture. The heroic epic Er-Toshtuk has Mongolian shamanistic themes. The original Kazakh version emphasises supernatural challenges and individual bravery, while Mongolian variations incorporate guardian spirits and aspects of Buddhist cosmology.

In Uzbekistan, where the Kazakh population is concentrated in Karakalpakstan and the Tashkent region, Kazakh mythological traditions have also undergone significant changes. The influence of Uzbek and Karakalpak cultures was reflected in the integration of Islamic elements, which led to the interpretation of some myths through the prism of Islamic values and beliefs. The legend about the "Zhetygen" (seven-stringed lyre), which in traditional Kazakh culture is associated with spiritual search and musical inspiration, has been reinterpreted in Uzbekistan in the light of Islamic traditions (Erkoç 2019). The

legends of “Zhetygen” began to include motifs related to the veneration of Allah and the saints, where music becomes not just a way of self-expression but also a way of spiritual perfection and glorification of the divine. The influence of Islam gave new symbolic meanings to this narrative, emphasising the religious component of musical art. Numerous Kazakh folktales documented herein incorporate Islamic moral themes. The legend of Zhetygen transitions from a secular narrative of loss and resistance to one in which music serves as a heavenly instrument for spiritual cleansing.

The legend of “Kozy Korpesh and Bayan Sulu”, a Kazakh version of a tragic love story, has evolved over time, with the earliest written records dating back to 19th-century Russian ethnographic expeditions. In the Uzbek context, this legend has received an Islamised interpretation, where the characters are often portrayed as righteous Muslims whose love is sanctified by religious norms and moral principles. In the narratives that retain links to Islam, their fate is perceived as a test of faith, and the tragic outcome is seen as divine predestination, reflecting the influence of Uzbek culture on the reinterpretation of traditional Kazakh stories. In addition, the story of Koraysh Batyr, which in Kazakh folklore symbolises valour and defence of the native land, has come to contain elements related to religious wars and the defence of Islam under the influence of Uzbek and Karakalpak traditions (Ahearn 2023). Koraysh Batyr is now presented not only as a defender of the Kazakh people but also as a hero fighting to protect the Islamic faith, reflecting the integration of Islamic warrior ideals into the Kazakh epic. A comparative analysis of the versions from Kazakhstan and Uzbekistan reveals notable thematic divergences. While the Kazakh version stresses ancestral responsibility and honour, the Uzbek adaptation incorporates Islamic moral teachings, along with further verses on divine justice.

In Kyrgyzstan, Kazakh myths have retained a strong connection with epic traditions that are common to the Turkic peoples of Central Asia. This is especially evident in the retellings of epics about heroes and batyrs, such as “Er-Targyn”. In Kyrgyz’s interpretations, this hero not only fights for the honour and freedom of his people but also becomes a symbol of collective resistance against external threats. Elements of the Manas epic added epic proportions to the Er-Targyn epic, emphasising his role as a leader capable of uniting different tribes and peoples in the struggle for justice.

The epic of Alpamys Batyr, a heroic narrative maintained throughout several Turkic-speaking populations, was recorded in Soviet-era compilations of Kazakh folklore and has variants noted among Uzbek and Kyrgyz oral narrators. The primary distinctions are alterations in Alpamys’ characterisation: in Kazakh renditions, he represents the archetypal warrior protecting his territory, while in the Uzbek interpretation, religious motifs are highlighted, depicting him as a celestial guardian of religion. Kyrgyz interpretations also use ideas from the Manas epic, emphasising themes of tribal togetherness and struggle.

As a result of the interaction of cultures, Alpamys was perceived not only as a protector of his people but also as a figure uniting Turkic people in the fight against common enemies (Saginadin 2019). Retellings of this myth in Kyrgyzstan pay more attention to the themes of brotherhood and mutual aid, reflecting the influence of the “Manas” epic, where these motifs are central (Reichl 2019). These changes reflected the strengthening of collective ideals in the myths of the Kazakhs living in Kyrgyzstan. There is a significant interpenetration of cultures here, leading to new interpretations of traditional Kazakh myths. The interaction with Kyrgyz culture is also reflected in the special importance given to the themes of brotherhood and collective resistance in the myths.

In China, the Kazakhs are dominated by cosmogonic myths related to natural phenomena such as wind, water and mountains: “Master of the Water”, “Master of the Wind”, “Orman Baba”, “Master of the Mountains”. Stories about water and plant creatures often describe their miraculous powers, such as reviving the dead or watering the desert, which underlines their importance in Kazakh life. For instance, the story of the “Master of the Wind” describes a spirit that controls the wind, which comes from a cave on Mount Orkachar. Following the narrative, the wind from this cave can be very destructive. Such stories illustrate attempts to explain the origin of natural phenomena and their impact on the environment. Cosmogonic stories like Master of Water and Master of Wind exhibit syncretic influences from Chinese animistic and agricultural mythology. The narrative of Sacred Baiterek, which traditionally depicts a world tree linking several worlds, has been discovered in iterations where Taoist cosmology and Confucian principles are integrated into its framework. Another myth, “The War of the Pine and the Saxaul”, dwells on a battle between two types of trees, symbolising their struggle for survival in different environments, which explains why some trees grow in the desert and others in the mountains. These myths demonstrate how Kazakh legends have adapted to their new environment, maintaining links with natural phenomena and cultural traditions, while they have also been distorted and adapted in the process of preservation. These elements of folklore show a common historical and cultural heritage similar to that of other Turkic–Mongolian peoples (Ouyang 2021).

Among the ancient myths of the Kazakhs living in China is the legend of “Dykhan Baba”, the sacred guardian of plants. According to this myth, when people became new beings, Father Heaven and Mother Earth gave them flour, from which Dikhan Baba annually produced barley and wheat instead of rain and snow. These plants absorbed the properties of the land on which they grew, and people could harvest without sharing. The myth also describes how Dikhan Baba taught people to respect food and showed that hunger can be eliminated only by properly using rainwater for irrigation. The second myth, “Orman Baba”, dwells on a forest spirit who causes rain and preserves the forest. These myths reflect early ideas about the world when natural phenomena were explained through the images of mythical creatures. Kazakhs in China

honour the “Pravaia gora” (Mother Mountain) as a sacred place symbolising homeland and ancestors. In this context, the stories about “Kokshe Baba” in eastern Urumqi and similar Uyghur conceptions of the sky show how mythology reflects early conceptions of nature and sacred places. Myths about natural phenomena and their divine guardians demonstrate how Kazakhs sought to explain and define the world around them, giving natural phenomena human qualities and meanings.

The mythology of the Kazakhs living in China has undergone significant changes compared to its original form in their homeland due to adaptation to local cultural and religious conditions. One of the ancient myths, for example, about “Dyhan Baba”, the sacred guardian of plants, was adapted to reflect Chinese ideas about agriculture, the main character reflecting the increased importance of agriculture in Chinese culture.

The key focus is on the stories of the birth of the human race. The myth, “Bohemian Ancestor”, describes how a primitive woman created children out of clay who became the founders of new nations. This myth emphasises the connection between humans and nature, where clay and cow’s milk are central to the creation of life (Ucan 2024). There is also the “Mud Batyr” myth, which is associated with mountain caves and natural disasters. In the myth, a batyr is a creature whose body is made of clay, symbolising a close connection with the earth and natural forces. The Mud Batyr is a protector who saves the country and its property from the dangers associated with natural disasters. In the myth, the Mud Batyr can prevent landslides and other disasters, but the clay body sooner or later collapses. This aspect of the myth emphasises the fragility of human nature and the importance of connection with natural forces.

In Kazakh myths preserved in China, the key myths related to natural phenomena reflecting ancient ideas about the world and its structure – the narrative “Sacred Topol” which connects heaven, earth and the underworld – stand out. Each leaf on this tree symbolises a person’s soul, and when a person dies, their leaf falls to the ground. This tree is not only sacred but also important in shamanic traditions, acting as a link between worlds. The myth of the “Sacred Baiterek” presents Baiterek as a colossal world tree with a Samruk bird nesting at its top, symbolising the unity of the three cosmic realms – the sky, the earth and the underworld. This tree, considered sacred, was revered by the ancient Kazakhs, and its symbolism has been preserved in their traditions and beliefs. The tree was a place of worship, and people brought sacrifices there to show respect. The narrative of the “Kok Ugiz” (blue bull) is a key element in representations of the creation and sustenance of the earth. According to it, the earth was formed and is held on the back of a blue bull. In this mythical image, the bull acts as a support for the earth, and its movement or ageing causes earthquakes. When a blue bull dies, this event represents the end of one world and the beginning of a new one. This myth is not limited to Kazakh folklore; it is also found among other Turkic-speaking peoples and has parallels in Islamic

mythology (Lee 2024). In Mongolian mythology, there is a similar image, but instead of a bull, the earth is supported by a giant turtle.

The study investigated the adaptation of Kazakh oral traditions within the framework of migration and the settlement of Kazakh diasporas in Mongolia, Uzbekistan, Kyrgyzstan and China. The research indicated that Kazakh oral traditions retained in these nations have seen substantial alterations due to the impact of local cultural and religious practices. Nevertheless, essential components of Kazakh cultural legacy, including symbols representing the relationship among humanity, nature and spiritual forces, persist unaltered. This illustrates the capacity of oral traditions to evolve within new cultural contexts while preserving their essential elements.

The incorporation of Islamic themes in Uzbekistan is seen in narratives like *Zhettygen* and *Kozy Korpesh and Bayan Sulu*. Within the Uzbek framework, *Zhettygen*, historically linked to musical and spiritual inspiration, has been redefined to highlight devotion and heavenly direction, including aspects of Sufi mysticism. Likewise, *Kozy Korpesh and Bayan Sulu*, a renowned epic of tragic love, exist in several iterations throughout Central Asian Turkic civilisations; but, in Uzbekistan, it has been modified to conform to Islamic moral principles. This rendition depicts the protagonists as virtuous individuals who traverse their destiny in alignment with divine intent, emphasising Islamic principles of predestination and moral obligation. These alterations underscore the assimilation of Islamic influences within Uzbekistan's oral traditions, hence enhancing religious elements in storytelling.

The adoption of Kazakh heroic epics in Mongolia illustrates the heightened significance of nature spirits and shamanic components. The *Kokbori* (Heavenly Wolf) tale, historically emblematic of protection and ancestral guidance, has assimilated other characteristics associated with Mongolian shamanistic beliefs, depicting the wolf as a guardian spirit connected to sacred areas. This growth exemplifies the syncretic amalgamation of Kazakh and Mongolian spiritual traditions. Kazakh heroic epics in Kyrgyzstan, particularly *Er-Targyn*, demonstrate notable intertextual relationships with the *Manas* epic, highlighting themes of community identity and resistance. The Kyrgyz adaptation of these epics often integrates ideas of solidarity among Turkic tribes, strengthening a collective historical awareness that aligns with the patriotic themes found in Kyrgyz oral traditions.

In China, cosmogonic legends regarding natural spirits and sacred locations have been shaped by agricultural and animistic traditions. Narratives like *Master of the Wind* and *Master of the Water* illustrate a heightened emphasis on nature as a divine entity influencing human destiny. This adaptation corresponds with traditional Chinese cosmology, which prioritises harmony between mankind and the natural environment. Notwithstanding these regional changes, Kazakh oral traditions remain an essential connection between generations, bolstering the cultural identity of Kazakh diasporas. These traditions have not only

adjusted to new contexts but have also been enhanced with new symbols and narratives, underscoring their durability and ability to shift (Table 1).

Table 1. Genre features of Kazakh oral traditions abroad

Country	Genre category	Main themes and motifs	Elements of genre adaptation
<i>China</i>	Cosmogonic legends; ancestral narratives	The creation of the world, the confrontation between the forces of order and chaos, the unity of heaven and earth. Stories about ancestors, connection with the past, the origin of peoples	Adaptation to Chinese cosmogonic concepts, increasing the importance of agricultural motifs
	Totemic legends	Worship of nature spirits and totem animals	Influence of Chinese shamanic traditions, integration of Buddhist elements
<i>Mongolia</i>	Heroic epics	Heroes defending the people and the land from enemies, fighting natural and supernatural forces.	Increasing the importance of nature spirits and guardians, integrating Mongolian shamanic elements
	Totemic legends; eschatological narratives	Mythical animals, patron spirits, and the relationship between humans and nature. Apocalypse, destruction of the world, rebirth and the cyclical nature of time	Influence of Mongolian shamanic beliefs, adaptation to local totemic traditions
<i>Uzbekistan</i>	Heroic epics (batyr narratives); religious legends	Heroes' deeds in the fight against enemies, defence of their native land, justice and courage. Stories of saints, spiritual guidance	Integration of Islamic elements, strengthening of religious motives
	Cosmogonic legends	Creation of the world, the connection between heaven and earth, symbols of light and darkness	Influence of Islamic cosmogonic ideas
<i>Kyrgyzstan</i>	Heroic epics (batyr narratives)	Striving for freedom and independence, feats of war, defence of the people	Reflection of the epic Manas

The ideas of the soul and its journey after death play a significant role in mythology. Stories such as “Soul Guest” describe the soul separating from the body and travelling to heaven. These ideas have been preserved in folklore, for example, in dastans, where the soul of the hero ascends to heaven after his death. The folklore of the Turkic-Mongolian peoples is characterised by cosmogonic concepts based on animism and totemism. An important place in these narratives is occupied by Tengyr, who is perceived as the Supreme God, the ruler of heaven and earth. The belief in Tengyra reflects ancient ideas

about the cosmos, where the sky is perceived as the father and the earth as the mother. Despite the penetration and spread of Islam, this concept retains its significance in folk beliefs and traditions.

The image of Umai, the mythological mother earth and protector of children and home, significantly contributes to preserving life and procreation (Biran & Kim 2024). She is associated with birth and destiny, and her cult persists even after Islamisation, which is evidence of the deep roots of this image in the mythological consciousness of the Kazakhs. Myths related to the origin of the earth often depict the earth as a living being raised by mythical beings, reflecting ancient ideas about the opposition between the forces of order and chaos. Totem myths are also an important part of mythology, where certain animals, such as the wolf or the bear, are revered as sacred and of special significance to the people (Prychepii 2022). Comparing Kazakh myths in Kazakhstan and abroad, it is possible to note that in the native environment, mythology has undergone significant transformations under the influence of Islam. The image of Tengyr was gradually replaced by God, and many mythological characters lost their original functions. Whereas in foreign diasporas, especially where Islam has not become the dominant religion, these myths have preserved more archaic forms, where natural phenomena and totem animals play a central role.

The mythology of the Kazakh people has a story that reflects their ideas about the creation of the world and is an integral part of their cultural heritage. This myth tells of an ancient creator who, with his creative skill, breathed life into clay, divided chaos into light and darkness, and created the earth and sky. The myth is based on the concept of the world as an arena where the forces of order prevail over chaos, creating an ordered space out of the original pathlessness and darkness. The central figure in this myth is the creator, known as Ilkiata (or Demirug), who is the creative hero who creates all things on earth. His role reflects the Kazakh belief that the world was formed through the intelligent actions of higher powers that gave rise to the heavens, earth, light and darkness (May & Hope 2022). The myth mentions two key stages: the separation of heaven and earth and the transformation of chaos into space, which is an important aspect of the Kazakh mythological system of thought.

This myth is also associated with the ancient beliefs about the ancestors of mankind – Adam Ata and Au Apa, who, according to legend, were created from clay and breathed life through the efforts of the creator. These figures symbolise the origin of human life and the union of earth and sky, light and darkness. Mythology emphasises the importance of light as a symbol of order and warmth, as opposed to the darkness of chaos. Also, the mythical image of the creator remained in people's memory even after the advent of Islam, which is expressed using the concepts of "Tanir, who created", "God, who created", "Allah, who created". This indicates that ancient myths continue to influence the religious and cultural worldview of Kazakhs, preserving elements of archaic thinking (Atwood 2021). Consequently, this mythical narrative explains not

only the creation of the world but also reflects the worldview and conceptual system of the Kazakh people, linking it to universal themes of creation and the struggle for order against chaos. When collecting and analysing such myths, especially in the context of the Kazakh diaspora, it is important to consider their cultural significance and influence on modern society.

The non-fabulous prose of the Turkic peoples, including Kazakhs, Turks, Kyrgyz, Uzbeks and other ethnic groups, represents an important layer of oral folklore that demonstrates the historical, cultural and religious characteristics of these peoples (Hasanova & Najafova 2025). In each of these societies, non-fabulous prose is central to the transmission of cultural traditions, moral values and collective experience, and includes such genres as myths, legends, traditions, epics and tales (Stepanenko 2020). Kazakh non-fairy tale prose is rich in myths, epics and legends about batyrs (heroes) such as Alpamys, Koblandy, Er-Targyn and Abylai Khan, who personify the ideals of courage, justice and defence of the native land. These myths and epics are closely intertwined with historical events, such as the struggle of the Kazakhs against invaders, and often contain elements of spiritual guidance, reflecting shamanic beliefs and respect for the spirits of nature.

Turkish non-fairy tale prose includes myths and legends that are often linked to Ottoman heritage and Islamic culture. For example, the myths of Turkish heroes such as Koroğlu describe the pursuit of justice and the defence of the oppressed. Legends of saints and righteous people, such as Hacı Bektash Veli, integrate Islamic values and elements of Sufism, which underscores the deep connection of the Turkish people to religious traditions. Non-fabulous prose in Kyrgyzstan is characterised by epic narratives, the most prominent example of which is the epic *Manas* (Imankulov et al. 2024). This epic, which is one of the largest in the world, is dedicated to the struggle of the Kyrgyz people for freedom and independence. In addition to *Manas*, Kyrgyz non-fairy tale prose includes legends and traditions in which the central themes are kinship, the fight against enemies and the spiritual trials of heroes, reflecting the importance of unity and brotherhood. Uzbek prose is also rich in myths and legends, which are often intertwined with Islamic beliefs. Legends about heroes such as Tumaris and Jaloliddin Manguberdi emphasise the resilience and courage of the Uzbek people. Uzbek myths also include stories related to Sufi saints, reflecting the significant influence of Islam on Uzbekistan's cultural heritage.

A common feature of the non-fairy tale prose of all Turkic peoples is syncretism, where mythological and historical elements are intertwined with religious and ethnic ideas (Gamaliia & Artemenko 2023). These works not only tell the story of the past but also serve as a way of transmitting moral and cultural values, educating new generations through stories of exploits, spiritual quests and struggles for justice (Favereau 2021). In different regions, Turkic folklore may be adapted to local conditions, but it invariably retains themes of unity,

resistance and connection to the native land, making non-fairy tale prose a powerful means of preserving and strengthening cultural identity.

The analysis of Kazakh myths across various locations underscores the dynamic interplay between traditional folklore and local cultural influences while preserving the strong connection to national identity. In Mongolia, Kazakh myths have integrated aspects of Mongolian shamanistic and Buddhist beliefs, enhancing hero narratives with supplementary spiritual qualities. In Uzbekistan, Islamic narratives have transformed mythical themes by incorporating religious values and reinterpreting ancient elements from an Islamic perspective. In Kyrgyzstan, Kazakh myths have merged with the epic traditions of the Kyrgyz, resulting in common heroic narratives that highlight collective struggle and solidarity. In China, Kazakh myths have maintained their ancient cosmogonic frameworks, including animistic and totemic components that mirror early Turkic-Mongolian beliefs. Despite these regional differences, the fundamental purpose of Kazakh myths – preserving cultural heritage, reinforcing identity and transmitting values – persists unaltered. The adaptation of myths in many circumstances illustrates their persistence and ongoing significance in influencing ethnic identity and cultural memory, especially during globalisation and migration. Kazakh myths, through these changes, function as a bridge between the past and present, preserving national traditions while permitting contextual reinterpretations that reflect changing social and cultural realities.

4. DISCUSSION

This study has significance for both theoretical and practical fields. From a theoretical point of view, it contributes significantly to the understanding of the adaptation of Kazakh myths in the diaspora, offering new models for studying the transformation of cultural narratives and complementing existing theories on the preservation of cultural elements. Practically, the results of the study can provide recommendations for the preservation of cultural heritage, which is useful for cultural organisations and educational institutions, and facilitate the integration of cultural narratives in new social contexts. Socially, the study helps to strengthen public awareness of the importance of cultural heritage and promotes respect for cultural traditions, thereby supporting the formation and preservation of national identity in the context of globalisation.

Kazakh myths are crucial in maintaining the cultural heritage and strengthening the national identity of the Kazakh people. These myths not only transmit ancient traditions, beliefs and worldviews but also contain important moral and spiritual values that have had a significant impact on the development of Kazakh society over the centuries. They fulfil the role of an integrator between historical heritage and current realities, maintaining the link between the modern generation and its ancestors, and ensuring the continuity of cultural practices and customs. Jon Mills (2020) investigated myth

as a complex phenomenon in terms of its origins, meanings and functions in human society. The study addressed myth from different angles, including its sources, power of influence, form of expression, object and purpose, drawing on archaic ontology. The study emphasises that mythology is not just a set of ancient stories but a key element in the cultural and social fabric of a society. Thus, the study defined myth as an important form of inner perception that contributes to an understanding of the world and one's place in it.

Kazakh myths, being outside their homeland, have undergone considerable adaptation depending on the specific cultural and religious factors of the countries of residence. This adaptation includes the integration of local traditions and religious elements, which leads to a change in the interpretation and function of myths. As a result, Kazakh myths not only retain some of their original features but are also enriched with new meanings and forms, reflecting the influence of local cultures and socio-political realities. Amina Urpekova (2022) investigated how diaspora influences the social, political and economic development of their countries of origin and host countries. The study also examined the role of diaspora knowledge, experience and skills in contributing to the social and cultural development of their countries of origin. Central Asia (Kazakhstan and Uzbekistan) is particularly emphasised, where countries are developing relations with diasporas and compatriots, considering migration flows. This is due to the way mythological and cultural narratives are preserved and adapted in new contexts, which contributed to a deeper understanding of the processes of preservation and adaptation of Kazakh myths and cultural themes in the diaspora. The analysis of these processes has provided important insights into the dynamics of cultural identities and their change in the context of globalisation and cultural exchange.

Mythology is an important source of historical information, providing unique insights into ancient societies and their worldview (Ospanova et al. 2024). It not only demonstrates the social and cultural characteristics of ancient peoples but also helps define their values, beliefs and worldviews. Cem Algul (2021) considered mythology as a key source for understanding early forms of civilisation, arguing that myths provide valuable information about the social structures, religious beliefs and cultural practices of the time, thus emphasising their importance for studying the historical context. The study examined how myths contributed to the formation of the concept of peace, social norms and moral values and historical identities among the Turkic-Mongol peoples, as well as their influence in strengthening the collective memory of heritage. Cem Algul emphasised that myths acted as a means of transmitting knowledge and traditions from generation to generation, helping to preserve the historical continuity and cultural identity of peoples.

Kazakh myths are fundamental in preserving cultural identity, even in the face of cultural interaction and migration. Mythological narratives about the creation of the world, spiritual entities and heroic deeds remain important and

are being adapted to new cultural and religious conditions (Buldybai et al. 2015). Ismail Küpeli (2023) provided valuable insights into how nationalist myths and mythological and cultural narratives are shaped and reflected in specific cultural and historical contexts. This study is comparable to the analysis of how Kazakh myths are preserved and adapted in the diaspora, allowing for a deeper exploration of the influence of mythology on cultural identity and national narratives. Gabriel McGuire (2021) analysed how mythological elements are integrated into Kazakh oral literature to form and strengthen cultural identity. In an analysis of the epic *Qız Jibek*, the author explored how mythological themes and symbols are used to reflect the political and social structures of Kazakh society. The study of the genre and political aspects of the epic has shown that myths transmit moral and ethical norms, strengthening the sense of community and maintaining a connection with cultural roots. Thus, the author's research emphasises the importance of myths in the preservation and adaptation of cultural narratives.

The importance of preserving and adapting mythological and cultural themes was highlighted, emphasising that these processes not only help to maintain cultural heritage and identity but also contribute to the integration and transformation of cultural narratives in new social and historical contexts. Holly R. Barcus and Cynthia Werner (2015) studied identity and migration dynamics among Kazakhs living in Mongolia in the context of the collapse of the Soviet Union and the formation of independent states in the 1990s. The focus was on how cultural factors, such as kinship, religiosity and linguistic universality influence the decision to stay in Mongolia or return to Kazakhstan. Based on life stories, observations and questionnaires, the authors emphasise that Mongolian Kazakhs actively use cultural narratives to reconstruct and redefine their identity in another country, as well as to redefine their community and identity. Adam Knobler (2017) examined how mythological narratives and perceptions of allies influenced political and diplomatic strategies in Central Asia. The author analysed how mythology was used to create and maintain political alliances, as well as to legitimise power and strengthen diplomatic relations between different states and cultures. Adam Knobler emphasised that mythological representations have been fundamental in shaping political strategies and diplomatic agreements, reflecting the importance of myths in governance and strengthening interstate relations.

This work complements the authors' current research by providing new data on the preservation and adaptation of Kazakh myths in the diaspora. Unlike existing studies that consider myths in a historical and cultural context, this paper delves into the process of adapting mythological heritage outside the homeland, which opens new perspectives for understanding the transformation of cultural narratives. The results of the analysis confirm the importance of studying the topic of adaptation and preservation of Kazakh myths in the diaspora. The contribution to academic literature, the sustainability of cultural

heritage, social and political relevance and the impact on educational and cultural practices underline the importance and relevance of the study, demonstrating its significance for scientific debate, cultural development and social inclusion.

This study's findings may be effectively employed in educational contexts to instruct about cultural heritage and identity by integrating mythical narratives into history, literature and ethnography curricula. Through the examination of the evolution and adaptation of Kazakh myths in various places, students may attain a profound comprehension of how cultural legacy is conserved, modified and transferred through generations. Interactive techniques, including story-telling workshops, digital archives and comparative assessments of myths from diverse Turkic groups, can enhance involvement and critical thinking around cultural continuity and identity development. Motivating students to investigate their cultural narratives through creative writing, dramatic presentations and multimedia endeavours can enhance their connection to their heritage.

Comprehending the adaptive characteristics of Kazakh tales offers insights into the preservation of intangible cultural heritage. Recording these alterations aids in formulating methods to preserve folklore in both its conventional and altered forms, maintaining its significance for future generations. Incorporating myths into education, literature and internet platforms enhances cultural identification among scattered Kazakh populations and aids diaspora groups in preserving their history while acclimatizing to new surroundings. This study underscores the significance of cultural diplomacy, interregional cooperation and novel techniques such as digital storytelling to conserve and revitalise Kazakh folklore in a globalised context. This version consolidates the essential concepts into a succinct format.

CONCLUSIONS

The study investigated the adaptation of Kazakh oral traditions within the framework of migration and the settlement of Kazakh diasporas in Mongolia, Uzbekistan, Kyrgyzstan and China. The research indicated that Kazakh oral traditions maintained in these nations have seen substantial alterations due to the impact of local cultural and religious customs. Nevertheless, essential components of Kazakh cultural legacy, including symbols representing the relationship between humanity, nature and spiritual forces, persist unaltered. This illustrates the capacity of oral traditions to adjust to different cultural situations while preserving their fundamental elements.

Qualitative analysis revealed distinct modifications in narratives, such as the incorporation of Islamic elements in Uzbekistan and Kyrgyzstan, the increased significance of natural spirits and protective deities in Mongolia and the adaptation of narratives to align with Chinese agricultural and cosmogonic concepts.

The study revealed that in certain locations, notable elements of ancient traditions, like shamanic activities and totemic beliefs, endure, but in others,

there is a more marked assimilation of contemporary cultural influences. Notwithstanding these alterations, Kazakh oral traditions remain an essential connection between generations, fortifying the cultural identity of Kazakh diasporas. These traditions have not only adjusted to new contexts but have also been enhanced with novel symbols and narratives, underscoring their durability and ability to shift.

Further studies should investigate the impact of various religious systems on the evolution of Kazakh mythology and do comparative analyses with other Turkic myths. This will improve comprehension of cultural adaptation and heritage conservation. Addressing the limitations of limited field data necessitates the augmentation of empirical databases throughout Kazakh diaspora regions and the engagement of cultural custodians to uncover novel adaptation strategies. Meanwhile, examining the effects of globalisation and digitalisation on myth preservation will clarify the formation of Kazakh identity.

REFERENCES

- Ahearn, Scott 2023. *Europe and the Turkish language reform: The role of European ideas and preconceptions in the quest to showcase a Turkic language on the world stage*. Diss. (MA Thesis). Harvard University.
- Aigle, Denise 2015. *The Mongol Empire between myth and reality*. Leiden & Boston: Brill.
- Algul, Cem 2021. À la recherche de la Pomme rouge. [Looking for the Red Apple.] *Acta Fabula*, Vol. 22, No. 9. <https://doi.org/10.58282/acta.13674>.
- Atwood, Christopher P. (ed. and transl.) 2021. *The rise of the Mongols: Five Chinese sources*. Indianapolis: Hackett Publishing. <https://doi.org/10.1017/jch.2022.16>.
- Barcus, Holly R. & Werner, Cynthia 2015. Immobility and the re-imaginings of ethnic identity among Mongolian Kazakhs in the 21st century. *Geoforum*, Vol. 59, pp. 119–128. <https://doi.org/10.1016/j.geoforum.2014.12.007>.
- Bazaluk, Oleg 2017. Plato's and Isocrates' traditions in the development of educational theories in the history of culture. *Analele Universitatii din Craiova, Seria Filozofie*, Vol. 40, No. 2, pp. 5–18.
- Bazaluk, Oleg 2018. The feature transformations of the basic meanings of Greek paideia in the educational theories in the middle ages. *Schole*, Vol. 12, No. 1, pp. 243–258. <https://doi.org/10.21267/AQUILO.2018.12.10428>.
- Bieken, Gulimat & Alashbaeva, Zhanna 2023. Mythological images and motifs in Kazakh stories. *Scientific Collection "InterConf"*, Vol. 152, pp. 104–109.
- Biran, Michal & Kim, Hodong 2024. *The Cambridge history of the Mongol Empire*. Cambridge: Cambridge University Press. <https://doi.org/10.1017/9781316337424>
- Buldybai, Anarbai Sagiyul & Daribaev, Samalbai Daribayevich & Ospanova, Aknur Abduzhaparovna & Ospanova, Gulmariya Turysbekovna & Yusupov, Kuanyshebek Esenbekovich 2015. The value of narrative art in folklore. *Mediterranean Journal of Social Sciences*, Vol. 6, No. 451, pp. 481–488. <https://doi.org/10.5901/mjss.2015.v6n4s1p481>.
- Buranov, Anbar & Nurmukhametova, Karlygash 2023. Comparative analysis of national values of Altaians, Kazakhs and Uzbeks. *Al-Farabi*, Vol. 81, No. 1, pp. 59–68. <https://doi.org/10.48010/2023.1/1999-5911.05>.
- Clarke, Hyde & Wake, Charles S. 2021. *Serpent and Siva worship and mythology, in Central America, Africa, and Asia. And the origin of serpent worship. Two treatises*. Berlin: Alpha Edition.
- Erkoç, Hayrettin İ. 2019. *Türk Mitolojisi*. [Turkish Mythology.] Available at https://www.academia.edu/40908561/T%C3%BCrk_Mitolojisi, last accessed on 27 February 2026.

- Favereau, Marie 2021. *The horde: How the Mongols changed the world*. Cambridge: Harvard University Press.
- Gamaliia, Kateryna & Artemenko, Yevheniia 2023. Features of cultural nationalism in museum and gallery activities of decolonised countries of Asia. *Notes on Art Criticism*, Vol. 23, No. 2, pp. 40–46. <https://doi.org/10.32461/2226-2180.44.2023.293911>.
- Hasanova, Jamila & Najafova, Kamala 2025. Research and analysis of opportunities for regional economic integration among the countries of the Organization of Turkic States. *Economics of Development*, Vol. 24, No. 2, pp. 54–67. <https://doi.org/10.63341/econ/2.2025.54>.
- Imankulov, Dzhumamedel & Feng, He & Jing, Tian & Filatova, Tatyana & Akmatova, Aigerim 2024. Buran Minaret as a symbol of the Chui Valley of Kyrgyzstan. *Architectural Studies*, Vol. 10, No. 1, pp. 104–114. <https://doi.org/10.56318/as/1.2024.104>.
- Kaskabasov, Seit K. 2010. *Golden vein: Essays on the folklore and spiritual culture of Kazakhstan*. Moscow: Khudozhestvennaya Literatura.
- Kelmendi, Arsim 2024. Sound identity as a phenomenon. Research on the cultural significance of music in ethnic and subcultural communities. *Interdisciplinary Cultural and Humanities Review*, Vol. 3, No. 2, pp. 16–23. <https://doi.org/10.59214/cultural/2.2024.16>.
- Knobler, Adam 2017. Allies and Mythologies in Central Asia (1240–1405). In: *Mythology and diplomacy in the age of exploration*. Leiden: Brill, pp. 9–29. https://doi.org/10.1163/97890004324909_004.
- Küpeli, Ismail 2023. Mythen und parolen der Türkischen (extreme) rechten: Hintergründe und Möglichkeiten des Pädagogischen Umgang. [Myths and Slogans of the Turkish (Extreme) Right: Backgrounds and Possibilities of Pedagogical Handling.] Available at https://www.perspektiva.de/wp-content/uploads/Mythen_und-Parolen_der_tuerkischen-Rechten.pdf, last accessed on 27 February 2026.
- Lee, Joo-Yup 2019. Turkic identity in Mongol and post-Mongol Central Asia and the Qipchaq steppe. In: David Ludden (ed.) *Oxford Research Encyclopedia of Asian History*. New York: Oxford University Press, pp. 1–39. <https://doi.org/10.1093/acrefore/9780190277727.013.443>.
- May, Timothy & Hope, Michael (eds.) 2022. *The Mongol world*. London: Routledge. <https://doi.org/10.4324/9781315165172>.
- McGuire, Gabriel 2021. Epic inside-out: Qız Jibek and the politics of genre in Kazakh oral literature. *Oral Tradition*, Vol. 35, No. 1, pp. 37–66.
- Mills, Jon 2020. The essence of myth. *Journal of Indian Council of Philosophical Research*, Vol. 37, No. 2, pp. 191–205. <https://doi.org/10.1007/s40961-020-00198-3>.
- Mizin, Kostiantyn & Petrov, Oleksandr 2021. Emotional state gemütlichkeit in cross-cultural perspective: Corpus-based approach. *Studies About Languages*, Vol. 1, No. 38, pp. 43–60. <https://doi.org/10.5755/J01.SAL1.38.26581>.
- Montgomery, David W. (ed.) 2022. *Central Asia: Contexts for understanding*. Pittsburgh: University of Pittsburgh Press.
- Ospanova, Gulmariya & Askarova, Altynai & Agabekova, Balzhan & Zhutayeva, Assel & Askarova, Saule 2024. The grotesque as a literary issue. *Semiotica*, Vol. 2024, No. 256, pp. 103–116. <https://doi.org/10.1515/sem-2022-0090>.
- Ouyang, Wen-Chin 2021. Voices from Kazakhstan. *Middle Eastern Literatures*, Vol. 23, No. 3, pp. 210–219. <https://doi.org/10.1080/1475262X.2021.1921959>.
- Prychepii, Yevhen 2022. Structures of the cosmos and sacred sets on the artefact of the paleolithic. *Interdisciplinary Cultural and Humanities Review*, Vol. 1, No. 1, pp. 30–39. <https://interculture.com.ua/journals/vol-1-1-2022/structures-of-the-cosmos-and-sacred-sets-on-the-artefact-of-the-paleolithic>.
- Reichl, Karl 2019. Oral epics along the silk road: The Turkic traditions of Xinjiang. *CHINOPERL: Journal of Chinese Oral and Performing Literature*, Vol. 38, No. 1, pp. 45–63. <https://doi.org/10.1080/01937774.2019.1633161>.
- Saginadin, G. S. 2019. *Legendary prose and folklore of Turkic peoples (genre and character system)*. Almaty: CyberSmith.

Sahoo, Ajaya K. (ed.) 2023. *Routledge handbook of Asian transnationalism*. London: Routledge.

Seitkazy, Yerkezhan & Maulenov, Almasbek & Satkenova, Zhayna & Yerzhanova, Saule & Soltanayeva, Yerkingul 2024. Manifestation of neo-mythology and postmodernism in the national prose of Kazakhstan. *Scientific Herald of Uzhhorod University Series "Physics"*, Vol. 56, pp. 2711–2719. <https://doi.org/10.54919/physics/56.2024.2711f1>.

Seralimova, S. A. 2023. Mythological motives in Kazakh prose of the XX century. In: K. R. Nurgali (ed.) *Collections of Articles in Three Volumes on the Materials of the International Scientific and Practical Conference "Nurgaliev Readings-XII: Scientific Community of Scientists of the XXI century. Philological Sciences"*. Astana: Master PO, pp. 397–403.

Shamusarov, Sharustam & Atakhanova, Dilafruz 2020. The emergence and development of the mythology of the Turkic peoples of Central Asia. *Eastern Torch*, Vol. 1, No. 1, pp. 3–13. <https://inlibrary.uz/index.php/eastern-torch/article/view/13260>.

Stepanenko, Mykola 2020. Archetypical background of magical helpers in English and Ukrainian fairy tales. *International Journal of Philology*, Vol. 11, No. 2, pp. 31–37. <https://doi.org/10.31548/philolog2020.02.031>.

Toyshanuly, Akedil 2009. *Turkic-Mongol mythology*. Almaty: Baspalar Yui. <https://kazneb.kz/bookView/view/?brId=1170604>.

Ucan, Bahadir 2024. Generation of character designs based on pre-Islamic beliefs of Turks. *International Journal of Religion*, Vol. 5, No. 5, pp. 746–757. <https://doi.org/10.61707/6w8eck77>.

Urpekova, Amina 2022. Building the bonds: A comparison of diaspora engagement policies in Kazakhstan and Uzbekistan. *Turkish Journal of Diaspora Studies*, Vol. 2, No. 1, pp. 41–54. <https://doi.org/10.52241/TJDS.2022.0034>.

Zanadil, Zhuldyz 2024. The mythological image of Korkyt Ata: Spiritual mentor and hero in Kazakh and Turkic culture. *Journal of Oriental Studies*, Vol. 108, No. 1, pp. 49–57. <https://doi.org/10.26577/JOS.2024.v108.i1.05>.

Zhanaidarov, Olzhas 2008. *Myths of ancient Kazakhstan. Children's encyclopaedia of Kazakhstan*. Almaty: Aruna.

Nassikhat Nabiolla is a Postgraduate Student, Researcher at the Department of Kazakh Literature and Theory of Literature, Al-Farabi Kazakh National University. The researcher's interests focus on the adaptation and transformation of Kazakh oral traditions in diaspora communities, emphasising intercultural influences and historical continuity.

nassikhatnabiolla@gmail.com

Yer Khan Karbozov is a Senior Lecturer at the Department of Kazakh Literature and Theory of Literature, Al-Farabi Kazakh National University. His research interests encompass the examination of Turkic-Mongolian folklore, its evolution through migration, and the role of oral storytelling in the preservation of cultural identity.

yer.karbozov@outlook.com

Zufar Seytzhano is a Professor at the Department of Kazakh Literature and Theory of Literature, Al-Farabi Kazakh National University. His research interests are the resilience of Kazakh oral traditions, emphasising genre variations, historical adaptation, and the impact of external cultural influences on storytelling practices.

z-seytzhano@hotmail.com

Gulnaz Dautova is a PhD, Acting Associate Professor at the Department of Kazakh Literature and Theory of Literature, Al-Farabi Kazakh National University. Her research interests include the examination of Kazakh and Turkic historical epics, emphasising the archetype of the defender-hero, the births of epic characters, and the historical relevance of the Kazakh language within the Turkic linguistic framework.

dautova_gul@outlook.com

The Cave as a Ritualistic Place in Turkish Culture

ZEYNEP İREM DEGER

Independent Scholar (PhD)

zeynepiremf@gmail.com

Abstract: This article discusses the mythological and ritualistic meanings of the cave in Turkish culture. Steppe life formed the basis of the Turks' relationship with nature, and respect for nature has gained a sacred meaning. In the belief of Tengriism, natural sites such as mountains, rivers, trees and caves were regarded as sacred. In Turkish mythology, the cave has been identified with the womb and holds a significant place in creation and origin myths. Figures such as Umay Ana and Ak Ene in Turkish mythology are associated with cave cults. In the Göktürk Origin myth, the cave is regarded as the birthplace of the first ancestors. Additionally, for shamans, caves have served as spaces for spiritual journeys and communication with supernatural beings. The cave is imbued not only with mythological meanings but also with religious and mystical significance. In Islam, the Cave of Hira is considered sacred as the place where Prophet Muhammad received his first revelation. In the Sufi tradition, caves have been used as places of seclusion and spiritual purification. Sufi figures such as Ahmed Yesevi and Hacı Bektaş-ı Veli retreated to caves for solitude, completing their spiritual maturation. The origins of the sanctification of caves trace back to mythical times. This study focuses on the origins of caves as ritual spaces in Turkish culture and the rituals that have developed around them. In Turkish culture, caves are regarded as sacred sites where healing, wish-making and communal rituals are performed. Rituals are conducted in times of crisis or in response to societal needs and manifest in various forms. In healing rituals, practices such as touching cave walls, drinking water and rubbing against stones are performed to cure illnesses. Additionally, rituals such as tying cloth to trees, placing stones, offering sacrifices and casting or drawing bones are particularly noteworthy. These rituals are carried out within specific rules, reinforcing social belonging and contributing to the transmission of cultural heritage.

Keywords: mythology, cave, ritual, sacred place, symbol

INTRODUCTION

In the history of Turkish culture, the steppe life represents the period in which the Turks' relationship with nature was experienced in its deepest form. The nomadic lifestyle played a crucial role in shaping the Turks' way of life, belief

systems and social structures based on nature. This way of life not only led to the sanctification of their respect for nature but also instilled the necessity of living in harmony with it. Particularly in the steppe environment, survival was impossible without understanding and respecting nature. As a result, within steppe culture, nature manifested as a sacred entity for the Turks in a holistic sense. This deep reverence for nature and its sacredness strengthened their connection to natural cycles, leading to the emergence of beliefs and rituals related to seasons, the land and animals.

In the belief system of the Turks, Tengriism regarded the balance between the earth and the sky as sacred. Within this cosmological framework, natural sites such as mountains, rivers, trees and caves became integral components of their spiritual worldview. Among these sacred spaces, caves held particular significance. This article aims to explore the mythological and ritualistic meanings of caves in Turkish culture. Rather than adopting an archaeological or anthropological perspective, the study interprets caves within a folkloric context. The methodology is based on a text-centered analysis, incorporating data from various disciplines, including folklore, sociology, the history of religions and mythology. Initially, the study examines the symbolic role and function of caves in Turkish mythology and culture. Subsequently, rituals associated with caves in folk beliefs are analyzed according to their functions. Although a cave is geologically defined as a hollow space extending into rock formations (TDK Güncel Sözlük 2011: 1602; Ozansoy & Mengi 2006: 1), it has held various meanings and roles in human life since mythical times. From antiquity to the present, caves have served multiple functions, including as homes, shelters, sanctuaries, temples, ceremonial sites and tombs. Due to their protective structure, caves have been shaped as living spaces and can be considered humanity's first dwellings. In prehistoric times, driven by the instinct of survival, humans sought refuge in caves to protect themselves from the threats of natural phenomena they could not yet comprehend and from attacks by wild animals. In the living spaces they established in and around caves, prehistoric humans shaped stones to produce simple tools, discovered fire, and thus developed strategies to cope with nature (Davis 2019: 1). Particularly during the Paleolithic and Mesolithic periods, caves served as the most secure shelters for human communities. Arslantaş (2014: 321) notes that during the Middle Paleolithic Age, the increasingly harsh climatic conditions made life more difficult, and human groups were only able to protect themselves by taking refuge in caves or enclosed spaces. One notable example of this is the use of cave huts near Nice, France, approximately 400,000 years ago, which functioned as dwellings. Caves vividly reflect the daily lives of prehistoric humans. Cave life was typically organized into functional zones: one corner was used for butchering hunted animals, while another corner served as a cooking area where a hearth was established. In this context, a section of the cave clearly functioned as a kitchen. Inside the cave or near its entrance, there was usually

a designated space for fire-making, known as a workshop area (Kökten 1952: 186). Special corners were also created within caves for storing firewood. Surplus food, such as gathered plant materials or excess meat, was stored in the cooler, deeper parts of the cave, which functioned much like a primitive refrigerator. Areas closer to the cave entrance were organized into sections for sleeping, dressing and spaces designated for children (Arslantaş 2014: 321).

Caves, which functioned as natural shelters, became more habitable in the Mesolithic Age in terms of living comfort. This transformation into more comfortable living spaces occurred as a result of long and challenging periods. Over time, new forms of social organization, division of labor and communal living began to emerge within human societies. The primary evidence shedding light on the lives of people from this period includes tools and weapons found in caves, as well as cave paintings (Kinal 1998: 12). As can be observed, during a time when humanity struggled to survive under harsh conditions, the cave consistently held a significant place as a protective and vital refuge.

Since the Paleolithic Age – referred to as the earliest period of human history – caves have served not only as shelters for refuge, dwelling and protection but also as the birthplace of art. People who used caves as homes laid the foundations of what is now known as “cave rock art” by depicting the life they observed in nature onto cave walls. The earliest known information about prehistoric humans is derived from these cave paintings. Thus, they provide valuable insights into the thoughts and emotions of archaic human consciousness that once inhabited caves. These paintings, which predominantly feature animal and human symbolism, reflect traces of the cognitive and spiritual world of people from that era. The reason why most Upper Paleolithic cave paintings depict animals lies in this symbolic orientation. The noticeable absence – or extreme rarity – of human figures in cave art is interpreted as an indication of a worldview shaped not by the self or society, but by nature, or by a life lived in deep connection with natural forces (Quennell 1921: 67, as cited in Arslantaş 2014: 329). In these early depictions, one can observe symbolic reflections of nature as imagined and experienced within the mental and symbolic world of archaic humans.

Prehistoric cave paintings are often interpreted not merely as artistic expressions but also as reflections of ritualistic practices associated with hunting. In this context, hunting activities appear to have been embedded within a broader ceremonial framework that combined practical preparation with symbolic and magical elements. A selected group of hunters within the community would engage in preparations prior to the actual hunting activity, planning the hunt and readying their weapons. The hunt leader would establish a tactical scheme, indicating what each hunter should do and where. A ritual feast was first held around a fire, and the details of the hunt were represented on the cave walls. These ritual depictions were accompanied by dance performances reenacting the hunt, during which ceremonial acts were performed by the participating

individuals. Özdemir evaluates the frequent appearance of hunting scenes in cave paintings from this ritualistic perspective (Özdemir 2021: 832). The act of painting the hunt on cave walls can thus be interpreted as a form of magical ritual intended to ensure the abundance and success of the hunt. At the same time, these paintings served as a means of transmitting hunting experience and knowledge to future generations.

Although caves were primarily used as dwellings during the Paleolithic Age – when humans had not yet adopted a sedentary lifestyle – their significance did not diminish in later periods such as the Neolithic and Chalcolithic Ages, during which people transitioned to settled life. In fact, caves continued to be used even into the Early Bronze Age. While their original function as “homes” gradually transformed, caves began to serve as temples or sacred places – a role that, in some contexts, persists to this day (Taşkiran 2018: 63). Since the Neolithic and Chalcolithic periods, caves have also been used as cultic and ritualistic spaces. Religious ceremonies and rituals began to take place within cave environments. Childe notes that in caves where such ceremonial activities occurred, piles of cave bear bones and skulls arranged in a ritualistic manner were discovered, suggesting that these spaces were intentionally organized for religious purposes (Childe 1998: 36, 41). These cave rituals are reminiscent of contemporary ceremonies still performed by hunting tribes in Siberia, where rituals are carried out to appease the spirit of the bear and ensure the abundance of future hunts (Özbek 2011: 154, as cited in Arslantaş 2014: 330).

Cave rock paintings also provide insights into the rituals and belief systems of people living during the Paleolithic Age. In the Lascaux Cave in France, the earliest traces of Shamanism can be observed. One particularly notable depiction related to hunting portrays a figure often referred to as the “man-bison”, which is believed to represent a shaman or spiritual figure. The figure has human-like feet, while other parts of its body resemble various animals: the torso resembles a large animal, the hindquarters and legs are human-like, the tail is similar to that of a fox or a wolf, the forelimbs resemble human arms, and there is a pair of deer antlers on its head (Campbell 2016: 285–286). Kenneth Lymer, in his study of cave rock art in Central Asia, interprets certain locations as ancient pilgrimage centers. One such site, Terekti-Aulie, is considered a sacred space where individuals from different segments of society encountered spiritual experiences. The images carved or painted onto the rocks are visual representations of shamans and their interactions with the spirit world. Today, the site continues to be visited as a center of religious practice. The rock imagery clearly indicates that Terekti-Aulie in Kazakhstan functioned as an ancient pilgrimage center (Lymer 2000: 311). This deep connection with nature positioned caves as significant elements in humanity’s mythical memory. Consequently, caves have become symbolic spaces in myths of creation, origin and lineage.

The cave has been identified with the womb of Mother Earth in many cultures worldwide. In this context, due to its dark, warm and humid atmosphere, the cave is likened to the uterus and is regarded in mythologies as a birthplace for gods and goddesses. The association of caves with Mother Earth or the womb is a common perspective in various mythologies and belief systems. Eliade interprets the symbolic representation of caves as the womb as a reenactment of creation (2018). In the context of fertility and rebirth, rituals associated with birth and renewal have been performed within caves, often dedicated to Mother Earth or other nature goddesses. Similarly, in Turkish mythology, the cave is symbolized as the womb. As one of the most archaic symbols in Turkish mythology, the cave represents fertility, akin to the 'maternal womb' and serves as a sanctuary, akin to a 'protective spirit'. In Turkish mythology, Ak Ene and later Umay Ana¹ are associated with the cave cult. Among the Altai people, Umay is characterized by her connection to sacred caves. It is believed that Umay appeared in a cave located in the Char Mountains near Narina in the Altai region, a place inaccessible to ordinary humans (Sagalayev 1991: 58–59).

The cave, which holds a special place within the mythological Mother complex, gradually became integrated with the Tengriist belief system and was endowed with the ancestor cult. The sacralization of the womb – a metonym of the mythological Mother – under the concept of the cave is rooted in its function as one of the earliest human dwellings. Consequently, over time, the cave came to be envisioned as the dwelling and shelter of the first ancestors. The sacrifices offered in honor of ancestors within caves are linked to the belief that the first ancestors once lived in these spaces and that their spirits continue to reside there (Bayat 2012: 32–33). In Turkish mythology, the creation of the first ancestor and the first human takes place within a cave, symbolizing the fertility function of the Mythological Mother. The foundation of this belief is rooted in the Göktürk origin myth. According to this legend, the Göktürk state traces its lineage to ten sons born in a cave. Another origin myth of the Turks narrates that their first ancestor, Ay-Ata, was born in a cave. As seen in these accounts, the cave, representing the function of the maternal womb, is closely intertwined with the ancestor cult. Due to the reverence for both the cave that gave birth to Ay-Ata and the ancestors, the Göktürks held an annual sacrificial ritual in a cave on the seventh day of the seventh month. This sacrificial ritual took place in a cave known as the Ancestors' Cave as a form of worship dedicated to an ancestor represented by a male and a female wolf (Çoruhlu 2006: 58). The Ancestors' Cave was not only revered by shamans and individuals but also by the entire state apparatus. The crucial aspect of this ceremony was the ruler's leadership of the ritual (Ögel 2014: 25). In *The Poetics of Space* (2020), Gaston Bachelard underscores the human longing for dwelling, protection and inward retreat, particularly through his reflections on the cellar, the cupboard and the hidden corners of the house. Likewise, within historical and mythological frameworks, the motif of the cave serves as a symbolic locus

for existential processes such as turning inward, reconnecting with ancestral roots and undergoing a metaphorical rebirth. The belief in the “ancestors’ cave” found in Turkish mythology resonates with Bachelard’s conception of “the deep layers of space that safeguard the past” (2020: 60–80).

The cave cult, shaped within the framework of the mountain cult, has played a significant role in the formation of various traditions and beliefs. In the Turkish mythological thought system, mountains are envisioned as the dwelling place of the God. For this reason, mountains are considered sacred spaces. Mountains endowed with divine blessing symbolize vertical ascent, representing a connection to the sky. Cosmic mountains serve as the center of the world, establishing a link between the earth and the heavens (Eliade 2018: 333). In the sacred mountains at the center of the world lie caves the dwelling place of the mythological Mother. In this context, mountains are characterized as masculine spaces, while caves possess a feminine nature. As God and sacred spirits descended to the earth, they used mountain caves as passageways. In Turkish mythology, caves have also been perceived as gateways leading to the underworld. In Turkish mythology, caves serve as the connecting points between the three realms: the underworld, the earth and the sky. The most significant passageway between these worlds is often a cave. Functioning as thresholds and gateways, caves facilitate transitions between different cosmic planes. Ögel states that caves are the doors through which deities descend to the earth and shamans journey into the underworld (Ögel 2014: 285).

The earliest traces of Shamanism can be found in caves. Shamans would descend into the underground through passages located in mountain caves. The role of shamans in conducting fertility rituals related to hunting significantly contributed to the perception of caves as sacred spaces. By performing these rituals in caves, shamans were believed to facilitate abundant hunts. Caves were considered sacred places due to their connection with creation. Various rituals were conducted in caves for purposes such as preparing for hunting, ensuring agricultural fertility, healing illnesses, showing reverence to the gods, receiving blessings, avoiding divine punishment and communicating with supernatural beings.

Caves have been significant religious and spiritual sites in many cultures. Several factors contribute to their function as sacred spaces. Due to their natural characteristics and unique atmosphere, caves possess a mystical aura. People experience the power of nature and the divine more intensely within caves. For this reason, since prehistoric times, humans have visited caves to pray, worship and perform various rituals. Another reason for the sacredness of caves lies in their natural structure. A cave is a quiet and dark place. This tranquility creates a suitable environment for retreat. Caves have played a significant role in individuals’ spiritual journeys, their search for meaning in existence, and their processes of transformation. According to monotheistic religions and various mystical traditions, these sacred spaces symbolize

inner enlightenment and spiritual refuge. Therefore, monks, religious figures, prophets and others have sought solace in caves to embark on their inner journeys and fulfill their acts of worship. In the context of the Turkish-Islamic tradition, caves hold significance both as historical and religious symbols. Caves, regarded as sacred in many religions, are also considered holy in Islam due to their connection with its origins. The Cave of Hira, where Prophet Muhammad sought solitude, served as the birthplace of Islam, as it was in this cave that he received the first revelation. The Cave of Hira symbolizes the Prophet Muhammad's spiritual experiences and marks the beginning of his prophetic journey in Islam.

In the Sufi tradition, caves hold significant importance as spaces for spiritual purification, inner renewal and closeness to God. Inspired by the lives of prophets, caves have gained deep symbolic meaning for Turkish Sufis. In Sufism, during a state of seclusion (*halvet*), a Sufi retreats to a cave or a similar structure known as a *çilehane* (a place of ascetic retreat). Çetindağ (2007: 446) states that due to their structure, *çilehane* resemble graves and symbolically represent a place of rebirth. A person entering a *çilehane* emerges renewed, at peace, purified from worldly attachments and cleansed of their ego. In this context, *çilehaneler* are constructed within caves. These places serve as retreats where individuals isolate themselves to cleanse their worldly desires and advance on the spiritual path. Prolonged seclusion in caves provides individuals with an opportunity for purification from sins and the attainment of spiritual purity. The silent and serene environment of the cave allows for the deepening of one's spiritual experiences. In Turkish culture, prominent Sufi figures such as Hoca Ahmet Yesevî and Hacı Bektaşî Veli secluded themselves in caves to complete their personal transformation and spiritual ascension. Therefore, in the Sufi tradition, seclusion in caves plays a crucial role in the mystic's process of spiritual purification and deep contemplation. It serves as an ancient method for attaining spiritual maturity.

1. THE CAVE AS A RITUAL AND SANCTUARY PLACE

Caves, among the most ancient and enigmatic sites in human history, have served not only as physical shelters but also as mystical spaces imbued with profound symbolic and spiritual significance. Since prehistoric times, caves have played a central role in human belief systems, mystical practices, rituals and collective memory. It is through these rituals that caves have become embedded in societal memory. Various rituals have been performed in caves for purposes such as preparation before hunting, ensuring agricultural fertility, healing diseases, showing reverence to deities, seeking blessings, avoiding divine punishment, and communicating with supernatural beings. This supports Alver's perspective on the relationship between rituals, culture and society. By bringing people together in caves for a common purpose, these rituals

have facilitated the formation of a collective consciousness. At this point, rituals – determined by society and traditions – are conscious acts of the mind (Alver 2011: 73–75). Rituals, which play a significant role in attributing symbolic value to spaces, also possess a unifying and cohesive power in the context of caves.

Rituals contribute to the attribution of symbolic value to spaces. Assmann emphasizes the role of rituals in the process of remembrance, highlighting their symbolic significance in shaping cultural memory. Spaces create a world of symbolic meaning, fostering a sense of unity and connection while providing a sense of security, thereby strengthening the feeling of belonging among individuals. Consequently, through various practices and activities performed within a space, significant memories and experiences are preserved, forming recollections of different times and linking the past with the present. The normative, narrative, guiding, and transmissive aspects of culture establish the foundations of identity and belonging among individuals (Assmann 2001: 21). Caves, in this context, fulfill the function of cultural repetition and reenactment through rituals. The relationship between ritual and memory can thus be interpreted through the spatiality of the cave.

Space should be evaluated in conjunction with the social and cultural phenomena that structure, create, define, shape, transform and differentiate it (Alver 2007: 26). The concept of space connects the mental with the cultural, and the social with the historical (Lefebvre 2014: 25). At this point, the relationship between memory and space becomes significant. Memory is formed through the process of socialization. It is dynamic and sustains itself through continuous communication. If there is a disruption in this communication, or if the framework of the present reality changes or disappears, forgetting occurs (Assmann 2001: 45). In the relationship between space and memory, the functionality of rituals gains importance. Here, the role of rituals in the act of remembering becomes particularly significant.

The primary tool of every memory technique is spatialization. The art of memory operates through imagined spaces, while the culture of remembrance functions by marking natural spaces (Assmann 2001: 68). In cultural memory, figures of remembrance are closely linked to space. Spaces play a powerful role in the formation of collective memories and identities (Morley & Robins 1997: 131). Even if memory's function of recollection is neither geographical nor historical, it always requires a concrete space (Assmann 2001: 46). Space holds a dynamic role shaped by human activity and social interaction. Human interaction with place encompasses various processes, including the structural dynamics of the society in which one lives, everyday life practices, socialization and routines of spatial engagement, all of which are continuously reshaped (Akyıldız 2017: 40). What animates and gives meaning to space are the actions of the people within it (Lefebvre 2014: 149). Every community seeking to solidify itself as a group creates spaces as symbols of its identity and anchor points for

its memories. The group and the space together form a symbolic partnership. Even if a group becomes separated from its space, this connection is sustained through the symbolic reproduction of sacred places (Assmann 2001: 46–47).

There are multiple reasons why caves have been used as ritual spaces. Rituals transcend the ordinary atmosphere of daily life, creating a sacred space and time. The time of rituals is sacred, and ritual spaces are surrounded by symbolic elements (Wulf 2009: 231). The emotional intensity that emerges among participants during rituals evokes feelings such as security, pleasure and power in individuals. During the ritual, the symbols, words, gestures and expressions used by participants constitute the language of the ritual. Moreover, this symbol-laden language strengthens the sense of belonging among group members (Collins 2004: 49). The continued existence and vitality of rituals centered around caves today are closely linked to the meanings and perspectives that participants attribute to these sacred spaces. Collins interprets the perspective of ritual participants as follows:

The physical presence of two or more individuals in the same space influences one another. While an emotional exchange occurs among ritual participants, those outside the ritual are emotionally excluded. Participants focus on each other through shared objects, actions, and communication. They are aware of the common focal point they concentrate on. Thus, participants share a collective state of mind or emotional experience (Collins 2004: 48).

Participation in cave rituals fosters a heightened sense of group consciousness and reinforces group identity. Therefore, rituals play a crucial role in organizing and maintaining social relationships as well as ensuring social order (Peacock 1979: 391). They provide individuals with a sense of identity and belonging. People visit caves with various intentions, such as seeking healing, making wishes, praying, or offering sacrifices. They perform these rituals with the aim of connecting their intentions to the sacred. This function of rituals also contributes to social order. By guiding individuals on how to behave within society and providing predetermined behavioral patterns, rituals eliminate the need for constant new searches. Additionally, rituals strengthen emotional ties to the past and, as a result, teach future generations how to act. In this way, they ensure the continuity of the social structure and the transmission of cultural heritage (Karaman 2010: 233).

In a spatial context, the cave is one of the sacred places where culture is constructed and tradition is sustained. In archaic societies, rituals and ceremonies performed in caves taught individuals how to live, whereas today, they serve the function of preserving social order. As Assmann states, rituals form the underlying structures that establish the foundations of social identity systems (2001: 143). While rituals in primitive societies were primarily conducted to

strengthen collective consciousness, they have become increasingly significant in modern societies for the preservation and continuation of identity awareness. In Turkish culture, the cave has also acquired various functions as a ritual space.

1.1. The Cave as a Place of Healing and Wishing

In Turkish culture, healing spaces are places where individuals seek to improve their physical or spiritual well-being. People visit tombs, sacred mountains and caves to find healing. By visiting these sacred sites, they also perform various rituals with the intention of curing their illnesses. In Turkey, many caves are visited for healing and therapeutic purposes. In a ritualistic context, illnesses fall under the category of crisis rites, which are rituals performed in response to unexpected situations. Rituals organized to overcome the uncertainty and distress caused by these crisis situations vary widely. They are collective rituals performed when an entire group is affected by a crisis. Rituals aimed at healing from illness, protection from fire, preventing crop failure and famine through rain-making ceremonies, and safeguarding against theft, jealousy and evil fall into this category (Honko cited in Ersoy 2009: 133). As a healing space, the cave serves as a place of solace for those seeking cures for various illnesses, individuals wishing to conceive, and those praying for good fortune, among other purposes.

One of the healing sites is the Ashab-ı Khef² Cave, located in the Tarsus district of Mersin. Visitors to the cave use various elements within it – such as the perforated stone, the camel stone, the cave walls and the water dripping from the ceiling – for healing purposes.

At the entrance of the Ashab-ı Khef Cave, on the left side, there is a stone approximately one meter high that resembles a headless, seated camel. This stone is known as the “Camel” or “Camel Stone”. According to belief, when Dakyanus and his soldiers found the young men and were about to enter the cave, a camel appeared and lay down at the entrance, blocking their path. No matter what they did, the camel would not move. Eventually, they cut off its head, yet it still did not rise. Meanwhile, the sleepers escaped through a hole above the cave. Today, visitors pray at this stone and believe that rubbing their aching body parts against it will relieve pain. They also touch the stone with their hands and then rub their hands on their faces and bodies. Additionally, the perforated stone, located just behind the camel stone at the cave’s entrance, is used for both seeking healing and symbolically shedding sins. Visitors often use these two stones together. (Uğureli 2017: 41–42)

One of the most significant elements of ritual, the hole, is a crucial symbol with two main aspects. On a biological level, it possesses fertilizing power and is associated with fertility rites; on a spiritual level, it represents an opening between this world and the otherworld. Worshiping or showing reverence to 'perforated stones' is a widespread practice across the world. Examples include sites where women pray for their children's health, infertile women crawling through the hole, perceiving it as the gateway to the world, or envisioning it as a representation of the female reproductive organ (Cirlot 1971: 149–150, cited in Koç 2022).

Hollow stones, rocks, and remnants – such as caves and tree crevices – can be interpreted as thresholds where exchanges take place. Around spaces attributed with threshold significance, beliefs and emotions such as reverence, sanctity, attentiveness, purification, excitement, fear, protection and safeguarding are intensely manifested (Koç 2022: 93). Passing through a perforated stone can be seen as leaving behind evil and chaos while transitioning to order and the good side. Van Gennep classifies the ritual of passing through a hole as part of the category of material and spiritual rites. In rituals involving passage through or beneath a hole, various objects (such as stones, feathers, or cloth) are left as offerings to facilitate the transition. The act of leaving these objects in a sacred space serves as a form of consecration to the protective spirit of the place, which, in van Gennep's terms, is an act of supplication (2022: 31). The rituals performed in caves, such as throwing stones into water while passing through a hole or tying fabric to a tree within the cave, further support van Gennep's perspective.

Passing through a perforated stone is also a renewal ritual performed through the stone as a means of protection from evil and disease. In the village of Teniste in Mersin/Bozyazı, there is a cave that is visited by those who are unable to conceive. Inside the cave, there are two stone pillars standing side by side, sharing a single base but diverging into two as they rise. Those who seek to have children pass between these two pillars. Additionally, offerings are made, and sacrifices are performed in the cave (Kayabaşı 2016: 158). The act of passing between these two pillars can be interpreted, in line with van Gennep's (2022) perspective, as the transfer of misfortune. When one passes through a perforated stone or between two pillars, they symbolically transition from a dangerous world to a better or neutral one. The cave itself serves as the entrance to this new realm. Stones, believed to harbor ancestral spirits, can enable infertile women to become fertile due to both their form and origin. The ritual of touching the stone to attain fertility symbolizes a return to the womb. Passing through a hole is a ritual that signifies rebirth through a feminine cosmic principle (Eliade 2014: 226, 230).

One of the prominent sacred symbols in cave rituals is water. Water flowing from caves has always been considered sacred and healing. The Cave of the Seven Sleepers is a karstic cave due to its geographical features, making

its interior constantly humid and its walls wet. According to local beliefs, the water dripping from the cave walls represents the tears of the Seven Sleepers and is regarded as sacred and healing. For this reason, visitors seeking cures for various illnesses drink the water flowing from the cave walls. In this context, special attention is given to clothing and behavior within the cave to avoid showing disrespect to this sacred site. It is believed that any act of disrespect towards the cave may result in a decrease in the water flowing from its walls (Uğureli 2017: 41–42). According to Eliade, the function of water remains constant: it dissolves unity, erases forms and ‘purifies from sins’. Water both revitalizes and purifies. Every contact with water symbolizes the two fundamental cycles of cosmic rhythm: reintegration with water and creation. This is because water itself is creation and is therefore sacred (Eliade 2014: 217). For this reason, the water within caves is also sacred and must be treated with the same reverence as the cave itself. It is believed that if respect is not shown, the sanctity will be disrupted.

Eliade states that water represents all potential and creative forces. It is the source of existence, possessing universal healing properties; it removes diseases from individuals and restores the health of the sick (Eliade 2014: 196). Contact with water symbolizes a form of rebirth. Similarly, the water found in caves serves as a cosmogenic symbol of universal healing. When consumed, cave water dissolves all forms, absorbing and neutralizing illness and malevolent forces through its transformative power, thus facilitating healing.

One of the notable symbols in rituals is stone. Stones, particularly in monumental structures, tombstones and sacred sites, have been used to mark boundaries and serve as a means of spiritual communication. Their sacredness primarily stems from their association with a specific object or place (Eliade 2014: 222). Similarly, stones within caves are regarded as sacred. The presence of stone within the cave grants it sanctity. In this context, stones function as intermediaries rather than objects of worship. Eliade interprets stones not as objects of veneration but as instruments facilitating sacred connection. In rituals associated with caves, stones are directed toward the spirit awakened within the cave and the sacred symbol that blesses it. At the Cave of the Seven Sleepers, individuals seeking to conceive, those searching for healing and those wishing to improve their fortunes visit the site to perform various wish-making rituals. One such ritual involves pressing a stone against the damp cave wall while making a wish. It is believed that if the stone sticks to the wall, the wish will come true; if it falls, it will not. Another ritual involves touching and rubbing one’s face against footprints on the cave walls, believed to belong to Kitmir, the faithful dog of the Seven Sleepers, while making a wish (Uğureli 2017: 56).

Another healing ritual performed in caves involves sleeping within the cave. In the Bozyazı district of Mersin, a particular cave is visited by women who have experienced recurrent miscarriages. Women seeking to prevent pregnancy loss go to the cave, where prayers are offered to a revered elder believed

to reside there. As part of the ritual, rice is cooked and distributed. Following this, the woman must sleep in the cave for a certain period. It is believed that after this ritual, she will no longer suffer miscarriages (Bali 2015: 170). In a ritual described by Arnold van Gennep regarding the Kamchatkans, the birch tree is considered a sacred tree and is used in many ceremonies. In Kamchatkan society, birch branches are brought into the felt tent as part of the ritual. Inside the tent, participants arrange the branches in a circle and pass through them one by one, a practice they refer to as purification from faults. They regard the branches as carriers of the sacred (van Gennep 2022: 31). Sleeping in a cave stems from the desire to be directly sanctified by the power of the space. Infertility in women can be interpreted as something transferred and transformed through the cave. Sleeping in the cave functions as a form of purification ritual. When the woman awakens and exits the cave, she is believed to have been cleansed of impurities and sanctified. Symbolically, sleeping in the cave represents a return to the womb.

1.2. The Cave as a Shrine Place

In Turkish culture, the structures where religious scholars, saints, and revered figures are buried are called ‘türbe’ (mausoleums). These sacred sites are visited for purposes of reverence and worship, as they are believed to manifest the sacred in folk beliefs. Muslims hold deep respect and veneration for the tombs of prophets, saints and religious figures. By constructing türbes over these graves, they continue to express their reverence for these holy individuals. Eliade explains the act of respecting and visiting sacred sites such as türbes as a way for people to re-experience the sacred (Eliade 1991: 10). The belief in visiting türbes (mausoleums) is rooted in the idea that coming into contact with these sacred spaces through specific rituals and procedures will provide benefits based on one’s needs. It is believed that the spiritual powers (karāmāt) demonstrated by saints during their lifetimes extend after their death to the surrounding trees, stones, rocks, hills and caves (Kıyak 2012: 162). As a result, people visit these sites to connect with the sacred, experience miracles, seek healing for illnesses and make wishes. One such sacred site where these rituals take place is the cave shrines.

Sacred spaces are places where humans encounter the divine. Sacred times, on the other hand, are occasions such as festivals, special days and nights, in short, moments when religions, memories and expectations are experienced (Uygur 2015: 465). Caves are one of the places where people meet the sacred, particularly visiting on special days imbued with sanctity. Visiting the shrines or graves within caves is a mystical act. Something invisible and impossible to describe with words takes on a true and sacred form within these spaces. Those who participate in the rituals and worship conducted in these spaces are believed to manifest a sublime joy through their actions, entering a higher realm beyond their usual lives (Huizinga 2018: 32–33). Sacred spaces are locations of

cultural memory and societal recollection, serving as sites for remembrance and learning. Shrines, mosques and places of offering associated with caves are among these sacred spaces. In these places, where the sanctity of God resides, the tombs and shrines of saints are also considered sacred and blessed. Offerings are made at the shrines of blessed saints, who are believed to possess the divine grace, with the hope that prayers and wishes will be fulfilled (Uygur 2015: 466). Eliade notes that worship and offerings made in temples aim to distinguish sacred spaces from the profane (Eliade 2014: 296). The shrines and pilgrimage sites within caves are structures based on symbolism associated with centers that confirm sanctity. In Turkish culture, the sacred spaces where saints are buried are important means for reaching God (Ergun 2004: 336). The shrines and graves of saints are places that carry the divine grace.

In this study, rituals performed during shrine visits centered around caves, such as tying cloth to a tree, sticking stones to a wall, offering both blood and non-blood sacrifices, throwing and pulling bones, praying, and sleeping in the shrine, have been identified as examples. One of the sacred sites where these rituals are conducted is the tomb of Musa Dede located within a cave in Alanya. Visitors to the Musa Dede tomb come seeking healing for wounds that have not healed for a long time. They first pray for Musa Dede, then use a piece of clean cloth or a cover to wipe the wound. Afterward, they hang the cloth used to wipe the wound on a tree branch inside the cave while praying for the wound to heal. After praying, they leave a coin in the cave and exit without looking back. According to the belief, if the person who leaves the coin turns around and looks, their wish will not be granted (Merdin 2016: 91).

In *Homo Ludens*, Huizinga does not regard play merely as entertainment or a childish pastime; rather, he sees play as the very foundation of culture, with ritual and sacred ceremony constituting the oldest forms of play (2018: 19). Building on Huizinga's perspective, the rituals observed during visits to shrines – such as tying rags to trees, drawing lots with bones, or offering sacrifices – should not be seen as purely religious acts but also as ludic practices. Rituals performed at shrines follow specific rules (e.g., where the blood of the sacrifice must be poured, how the cloth should be tied, the requirement to leave without looking back). The ritual must occur outside of ordinary life, in a designated space and during a sacred time period (such as Hıdırellez or Nevruz). Moreover, the ritual is laden with symbolic meanings; it transcends the tangible world and reveals the invisible. According to Huizinga, all play is symbolic: it represents something real but is not itself real, and in this sense, rituals performed in cave shrines are a clear example of the ritual dimension within the play-culture relationship (Ibid.: 28). According to Huizinga, tying a rag is a ritual gesture but simultaneously an explicit rule of the game: “If you look back, your wish will be voided” – a typical rule in play. The meaning of this ritual is realized only when it is “played” in accordance with the sacred stage of the space. If one steps outside the play – by breaking the rule – then

the wish is nullified. This reflects Huizinga's principle that "a game cannot be played without rules" (Ibid.: 19–20).

Van Gennep interprets the act of leaving objects such as stones, rags, cloth, or feathers as offerings in material and spiritual rites as a supplication to the protective spirit of the region (van Gennep 2022: 31). The Turks, who seek to reach God through His beloved servants and regard sacred spaces as centers where the sacred manifests intensely, have attributed sanctity to trees found near almost every shrine or tomb. Trees located adjacent to shrines, tombs, or graves are considered within the concept of the 'Tree of Life'. In fact, what endows shrines and tombs with their sacredness is the presence of these venerable trees. Therefore, nearly every shrine or tomb is accompanied by such majestic trees. Visitors to these sites offer bloodless sacrifices to these sacred trees (Ergun 2004: 337). Seeking to attain the divine blessing carried by these trees, individuals engage in acts of supplication and prayer at these locations, tying pieces of cloth to the branches of the sacred trees. Through this practice, they believe they can access divine grace, obtain healing, or have their wishes fulfilled.

Rituals involving bones are particularly noteworthy in the ceremonies performed at shrine caves. In a cave within the Abdolvahap Gazi Shrine in Malatya, certain rituals are conducted based on the belief that the soul resides in the bone. The Abdolvahap Gazi Tomb in Malatya contains a cave where visitors seeking to conceive a child perform the 'bone-pulling' ritual. Women who wish to bear children visit the shrine and the cave, pulling bones from the pit at the foot of the grave, where sacrificial bones are discarded. It is believed that if the drawn bone is a vertebra, the woman will give birth to a son; if it is a rib, she will have a daughter. The child, if male, is traditionally named Abdolvahap, while if female, she is named Zeynep (Karaağaç 2013: 25). The use of bones as ritual objects in various ceremonies is based on the relationship between *kut* (divine blessing) and the soul. Indeed, in nomadic and hunter-gatherer societies, bones constitute the fundamental element that enables resurrection and renewal of life. Due to the belief that the soul – the animating force of a person – resides in the bones, they hold a special significance (Bayat 2006: 61). Bones, much like blood, are imbued with power. In Turkish culture, it is believed that lineage originates from bones and that bones form the essence of a living being (Roux 2017: 85). Although the rituals performed in caves for the unborn child can be considered a form of exchange ritual, they also serve to establish the child's societal status. Even before birth, the child attains divine *kut* within the cave. Bone-related rituals conducted in caves are deeply connected to birth and lineage in Turkish culture. These rituals, which center on the relationship between bones and *kut*, create a powerful symbolism within the cultural memory of society.

"Culture is born in the form of play; from the very beginning, culture is something that is played. (...) Through these games, the community expresses

its way of interpreting life and the world. Thus, it is not that play is transformed into culture, but rather, from its earliest stages, culture bears the marks of play and develops within the forms and context of play” (Huizinga 2018: 52). In this ritual, a woman who wishes to have a child draws a bone from among the sacrificial bones placed near the grave. The gender of the child is then determined according to the bone that is drawn. According to Huizinga, this is a form of divination – one of the oldest forms of play. Drawing lots with bones constitutes a “game of chance” with an unpredictable outcome, and at the same time, it is deeply connected to the community’s myth of ancestry. This ritual creates a ludic uncertainty: the woman waits for the result, chance intervenes, and in this way a symbolic future is constructed. This is a clear example of Huizinga’s idea that “play carries within itself the capacity to generate myth” (Ibid.: 53).

In addition to seeking healing for illnesses, people often turn to sacred sites – believed to possess folk therapeutic power – for the fulfillment of their wishes. The public makes votive offerings in the name of the sacred figure associated with the site (Uygur 2015: 469). Visitors to the cave containing the tomb of Asar Dede offer votive offerings and perform animal sacrifices. One of the most notable practices in caves is the act of making votive offerings. Those who visit Asar Dede’s tomb also engage in this practice. Vows are made for divine *kut* (blessing). A votive offering (*adak*) is defined as “a conditional promise or pledge made to God, a sacred figure, or a sacred place (such as a tree, water source, stone, well, or lodge) in exchange for the fulfillment of a specific wish” (Tanyu 1967: 9). Those who make wishes tie pieces of cloth to trees as part of the ritual. Following the sacrifice, the liver of the animal is hung on a tree, and its blood is poured at the base of the tree. The food prepared from the votive offering’s meat is consumed on-site; it is neither taken home nor removed from the sacred space but instead scattered around the trees. Visitors also recite the Qur’an and perform prayers (Ergun 2004: 606). The act of offering sacrifices is regarded as a sacred ritual in many cultures and is considered a means of communicating with God, spirits, or sacred beings.

Eliade emphasizes that sacrificial rituals are performed in differentiated, sanctified and symbolically central places. These rituals are conducted in locations that society considers sacred, and such sites function as central spaces imbued with spiritual and religious significance. The performance of sacrifices in these symbolically central places serves to affirm and reinforce their sanctity and religious meaning (Eliade 1991: 34). Offering sacrifices and making votive offerings can be understood as a means of securing divine *kut* (blessing). Similarly, Tylor interprets sacrifice as an offering made to secure the sanctity of the deity – an original gift presented to the supernatural. Sacrificial rituals are seen as an attempt to balance or influence the impact of supernatural forces and the divine upon humans (Tylor 1920: 375 as cited in Erginer 1997: 21). For this reason, sacrifices are performed at many shrine caves to seek the fulfillment of wishes, to gain the favor of the sacred and to attain divine *kut*.

When considered within the framework of the phenomenological understanding of space articulated by Bachelard in *The Poetics of Space*, caves emerge not merely as physical shelters but as spaces imbued with profound symbolic meanings in both individual and collective consciousness. According to Bachelard, the significance of a space is shaped not by its functionality but by the images, emotions and associations it evokes in the imagination. In this context, the rituals performed by individuals who turn to caves in their quest for fertility, abundance and healing – such as sleeping inside the cave, drinking its water, or touching its walls – reveal the protective and regenerative dimensions of the cave, which align with the archetype of the “maternal womb”. Practices such as tying rags, making votive offerings, or drawing lots with bones further demonstrate that the cave is not only a physical refuge but also an imaginal realm where collective memory and cultural identity take shape. From Bachelard’s perspective, such practices constitute tangible reflections of the emotional and imaginative bond that humans establish with the cave. Here, the cave becomes a locus for both bodily healing and inner purification (2020: 50–80).

1.3. The Cave as a Place for Celebration and Festivity

Caves have been used as spaces for festivities, ceremonies and celebrations since archaic times. In world mythology, caves are regarded as dwellings of gods and spiritual beings. Therefore, celebrations and ceremonies held in caves have been conducted with the intention of paying homage to deities or spirits. The rituals performed in caves encompass various purposes, including seasonal transitions as part of the natural cycle, the celebration of fertility, healing and purification.

The origins of the human need for ceremonies and celebrations lie in the social relationship between humans and nature. People interact not only with those they live alongside but also with the natural environment in which they exist. Natural phenomena leave profound impressions on human life and influence their emotional world. The geographical conditions in which people live, along with natural events and seasonal changes, are among the reasons why individuals commemorate their sorrows, concerns, joys and grief through various rituals and celebrations (Alyılmaz 2009: 30). Rituals serve as a means of seeking refuge in supernatural forces through ceremonies. Rituals are significant events in which religious beliefs and values are put into practice, and religious experiences and rites are performed. Seen as a tool for establishing a connection with the supernatural, rituals represent the practical aspect of religion. They are employed to commemorate significant moments of a society, to cope with social hardships and to alleviate individual sorrows such as death. These ceremonies play a crucial role in fulfilling people’s emotional and spiritual needs. Through rituals, individuals develop a habit of seeking refuge

in supernatural forces and, by believing in their assistance, strive to overcome the challenges of life (Haviland et al. 2008: 664–670).

In cultural memory, remembrance is fundamentally manifested in the form of festivals and ritual celebrations. The structure of rituals necessitates the reproduction of a specific order with minimal alteration. Consequently, rituals are generally transmitted over time without significant change, maintaining a traditional structure. This serves as an essential means of ensuring the continuity of cultural heritage and social identity (Assmann 2001: 99). Ceremonies, rituals and other ceremonial events are employed to evoke images of the past and to recall past experiences. In these events, a society's values, beliefs and history are expressed through symbolic and ritualistic means. Such practices contribute to the preservation and perpetuation of social identity and cultural memory (Connerton 1999: 11–12). Ceremonies do not emerge through improvisation or spontaneous actions. On the contrary, they are deliberately planned and prepared events. The conscious execution of ceremonies creates a special atmosphere that allows for the expression and communication of emotions. Beyond merely revealing emotions, ceremonies foster strong interaction and bonds among participants, facilitating a shared experience within society (Ibid.: 70–72). Ceremonies, festivals and celebrations, which are carried out consistently within a specific period, time and space, reinforce feelings of social belonging. Through the rituals performed in these spaces, individuals acquire a sense of group identity.

Caves are not merely places visited for seeking healing or making wishes; they also serve as sites for festivals and ceremonies. Assmann interprets remembrance as the most essential function of cultural memory. Festivals and ceremonies fulfill the function of “revitalization and repetition” in cultural memory through rituals. The purpose of festivals is not to create a sacred time in contrast to everyday time; rather, they serve to segment time and to distinguish the routines of daily life. Festivals are organized at specific periods in the life of a society and are celebrated on designated days. These regular and recurring celebrations establish a rhythm in society's perception of time. By occurring at fixed intervals throughout the year, festivals function as a means of dividing and structuring time within a community (Assmann 2001: 61).

In Turkish culture, various festivals and ceremonies take place in caves. “Ceremony, festival, and contest... These are the oldest forms of play” (Huizinga 2018: 13–15). One of the festivals celebrated in the Ashab-ı Kehf Cave is the Gadir-i Hum Festival. The Gadir-i Hum Festival perfectly aligns with Huizinga's definition. It is a Shiite festival celebrated by Arab Alevis and is tied to a specific sacred date: the seventh day of the Feast of Sacrifice (Eid al-Adha), commemorating the day when Ali was declared caliph by the Prophet Muhammad. This date constitutes a special, sacred time. According to Huizinga, the time of play is always distinct from ordinary time; it is akin to “sacred time”. The space, too, is special: shrines are visited – these shrines form a “magic

circle” (Huizinga 2018: 17). Moreover, the acts of “sacrificing animals, sharing meals, visiting shrines, burning incense, and reciting the Qur’an” each demonstrate that this is a symbolic, rule-bound, communal ritual play. “Ritual, ceremonial play, cannot cease to be play; when it does, the rite dies” (Ibid.: 19). This statement shows that every aspect of the Gadir-i Hum Festival (visitation, sharing, prohibitions, sacrifice) functions as a living form of play. When the play ends, the ritual loses its effect. Therefore, as Assmann notes, the function of “preserving the identity of the group” is sustained through these festivals and rituals, contributing to the continuity of Arab Alevi identity.

The Gadir-i Hum Festival is celebrated by Arab Alevis on the seventh day of Eid al-Adha. According to belief, this day marks the occasion when the Prophet Muhammad declared Ali as his successor before ascending to the Mi'raj. It is regarded as the “Night of Decree” (Laylat al-Qadr) for Arab Alevis, although they also acknowledge the Sunni belief in Laylat al-Qadr. The celebration begins on the seventh day following the first day of Eid al-Adha and lasts for one and a half days. During this festival, people visit shrines; however, the primary celebrants are the wealthy. In each village, five or six affluent individuals (or more if available) slaughter sacrificial animals and distribute the meat to the poor. Communal meals are prepared and shared. It is believed that on this day, the fire of hell is extinguished. Certain customs are observed, such as refraining from sweeping the house and making pilgrimages to nearby shrines throughout the day, where incense is burned, and the Qur’an is recited. Alcohol consumption is strictly avoided, and continuous prayers are performed. Additionally, cutting anything with a knife is avoided unless absolutely necessary. The day is observed with an emphasis on solidarity and communal spirit. The Cave of Ashab-ıKehf serves as the initial site of the Gadir Hum Festival due to its significance as the largest shrine in the region and its association with the Hajj pilgrimage. (Uğureli 2017: 42)

Cultural memory necessitates ceremonial communication. Hıdırellez is a celebration with ritual origins, marking abundance and prosperity (Özdemir 2005: 49). As a festival commemorating the arrival of spring and the revitalization of nature, Hıdırellez falls within the category of calendrical rites. This date signifies the end of winter and the beginning of summer and is regarded as the start of the new year. Reenacting festivals such as Hıdırellez through rituals, as Eliade suggests, is akin to reliving the act of creation. Rituals are perceived as a means of re-enacting creation and experiencing the world as if it were beginning anew. Therefore, rituals such as New Year celebrations symbolize a new beginning initiated through an act of creation. The New Year

holds an ‘exemplary’ value in society, as it is a day that symbolically marks a new beginning (Pettazzoni 2002: 74, 87). Calendrical rites such as Hıdırellez are regarded as safeguards of social identity due to their function of reenacting creation and symbolizing a new beginning. For years, the Cave of Ashab-ı Khef has served as a site for Hıdırellez celebrations. On the final day of the Hıdırellez festivities, visitors gather at the cave. People from Tarsus and other districts and villages of Mersin visit the Seven Sleepers and participate in the Hıdırellez celebrations. As part of the events organized by the municipality, a Mehter (Ottoman military band) performance takes place. Additionally, the municipality sets up a Halil İbrahim table, symbolizing unity, solidarity, and abundance (Uğureli 2017: 43).

The Cave of Ashab-ı Khef in Afşin, along with the surrounding complex, is one of the region’s significant sacred sites. In the Afşin / Seven Sleepers Cave, the Yemliha Walk is traditionally held. This walk takes place annually during the first week of June; however, it has been discontinued since 2014 due to security concerns.

The walk symbolizes Yemliha’s journey to the city to procure food after waking up and his return to the cave accompanied by the townspeople. The walk extends from the district center to the külliye, covering a distance of approximately seven kilometers. Upon completion of the walk, the community gathers at the külliye, where Çoban Kefeştatayyüş Pilavı is prepared. The participants share the meal and offer prayers together. Subsequently, they walk back to the district center as a collective act, symbolizing the Seven Sleepers’ triumph in their case and their attainment of freedom. Leading the procession, seven individuals symbolizing the Seven Sleepers walk at the forefront, accompanied by a dog. (Uğureli 2017: 52)

As can be observed, rituals exist to ensure the continuity of a group’s identity. In this context, they establish and reproduce the group’s identity by sustaining the ‘world’. For archaic societies, rituals constituted cultural reality and order itself. Therefore, order must be preserved and reproduced through ritual. Since order does not emerge spontaneously, there is a need for the enactment of rituals (Balandier 2010). As sites of ceremonies and festivities, caves contribute to the construction of social identity by hosting rituals. During festivals such as Gadir-ı Hum, Hıdırellez, or Nevruz, individuals visit caves to both reinforce their sense of belonging and serve as a bridge for transmitting traditions to future generations. These celebrations and ceremonies aim to ensure that society lives in harmony with nature and approaches the sacred with reverence. Additionally, rituals performed in caves strengthen the spiritual and cultural bonds within the community. All these rituals enhance individuals’

relationships with nature, the divine and spiritual entities, thereby shaping the identities of communities.

According to Bachelard, the poetics of space lies in its function as a repository of meaning. Rituals performed in caves – such as tying rags, making votive offerings, or drawing lots with bones – are not merely ritualistic acts but also imaginative practices. Through these acts, the cave is revealed not only as a site of physical refuge but also as a space of spiritual memory for the individual. In particular, cave visits during festivals such as Hıdırellez, Gadir-iHum, and Nevruz become ritual moments in which individuals reconstruct the past through imagination and render time itself poetic. Consequently, within the framework of Bachelard's *The Poetics of Space*, caves should be understood as sensory and image-laden realms of individual and collective memory, inner retreat, healing and transformation (2020: 50–90). As Bachelard suggests, caves are not merely “places” but “lived experiences”. They are living poetic spaces in which the individual both turns inward and reconstitutes a sense of communal belonging.

CONCLUSION

The place of caves in human history has transcended their role as mere primitive living spaces, acquiring profound cultural and symbolic meanings. In Turkish culture, caves hold significance not only as shelters that provided ancestors with protection against harsh natural conditions but also as sacred entities. The foundation of this sanctity lies in the resemblance of the cave's structure to the womb, the very source of human life. In Turkish mythology, caves are associated with figures such as Ak Ene and Umay Ana, symbolizing fertility and abundance. This association demonstrates that caves not only serve as physical refuges but also reflect deep-seated beliefs concerning the continuity of life and the cyclical nature of existence.

Primitive societies regarded caves as central spaces for various rituals, including hunting preparations, agricultural fertility rites, healing practices and communication with supernatural forces. These rituals not only reinforced the sacred significance of caves but also strengthened humanity's mystical connection with the universe. Even today, the deep belief systems and ritual practices of the past continue to manifest through modern celebrations and ceremonies centered around caves. Caves persist as both repositories of historical memory and spaces where cultural identity is preserved, maintaining their spiritual significance in contemporary times. This continuity underscores the timeless nature of humanity's relationship with nature and the sacred.

This historical and cultural continuity gains a profound philosophical dimension when considered alongside Plato's Allegory of the Cave (Ferguson 1922: 15–28). Plato's cave symbolizes the illusion experienced by individuals who are confined to a world limited by sensory perception. Attaining truth

becomes possible only by breaking free from this world of shadows – that is, by becoming conscious and enlightened. Allegorically, the cave represents a state in which individuals are content with ignorance, accept what is given without question, and seek truth merely in appearances. However, from the perspective of primal communities, the cave is not a site of estrangement from truth but rather a sacred space where union with the divine and harmony with the cosmic order are achieved. In this context, both a contrast and a meaningful connection can be drawn between Plato's cave and the ritual caves of traditional societies. While Plato's cave signifies an epistemological entrapment in which the individual remains chained by mental constraints, the cave of the archaic community functions as a site where cultural memory is preserved and communication with the universe is established. When these two perspectives are read together, the cave emerges as both a sacred space where mystical bonds are forged, and a symbolic realm representing the possibility of intellectual transformation. In this sense, the cave is simultaneously a site where the individual becomes connected to collective memory through ritual participation, and, in the Platonic sense, a threshold that must be transcended in order to reach the truth. In both interpretations, the cave appears as a timeless and multi-layered symbol that shapes the individual's relationship with the self, society and the truth.

Caves, as one of the oldest sacred spaces in human history, have served not only as natural shelters but also as central sites for both social and individual rituals. In particular, individuals seeking healing have engaged in various practices based on the belief that caves symbolize fertility and abundance. The act of infertile individuals sleeping inside caves, drinking from cave springs, or postpartum women touching cave walls to enhance lactation reflects the healing power attributed to caves, which are often associated with the image of the womb. Additionally, rituals such as tying votive cloths, attaching stones to cave walls, making offerings, presenting bloodless or blood sacrifices and casting or pulling bones serve as tangible expressions of society's mystical connection with nature and the sacred. These practices indicate that caves are not merely physical spaces but also serve as loci where social identity, a sense of belonging and cultural memory are shaped and preserved.

Throughout history, caves have been used as sites for ceremonies, celebrations and festivals, serving as focal points for fertility rituals linked to seasonal cycles, purification ceremonies and rituals expressing reverence for ancestors. The concept of the 'ancestral cave' which reflects the deep respect for ancestors in Turkish mythology, has reinforced the sacred status of these spaces. For instance, it has been observed that the Gadir-iHum Festival is celebrated in the Cave of the Seven Sleepers (Ashâb-ı Kehf), while the Yemliha Walk and special communal meals take place at the Seven Sleepers Cave in Afşin. These ritual practices further solidify the role of caves within the social structure, fostering shared emotional experiences and a sense of group identity among

participants. Visits to caves during festivals such as Gadir-i Hum, Hıdırellez and Nevruz enable individuals to connect with the past both personally and collectively, ensuring the continuation of traditions and the transmission of cultural heritage to future generations.

Ultimately, the role of caves in healing, fertility and abundance rituals demonstrates that these spaces have transcended their status as mere natural formations to become culturally significant centers imbued with deep symbolic meanings. Cave rituals have endured to the present day as a means of both seeking spiritual healing on an individual level and strengthening social bonds, thus supporting cultural continuity across generations.

ACKNOWLEDGEMENTS

This study was created based on the doctoral dissertation entitled "Cave Cult in Turkish Culture" supervised by Professor Dr. Pervin Ergun at Gazi University.

NOTES

- 1 In Turkish mythology, Umay is a sacred goddess associated with fertility, abundance, protection and motherhood. She is generally seen as a spirit that protects children, mothers and animal offspring.
- 2 The Companions of the Cave (Ashab-ı Kehf, also known as the Seven Sleepers) is a story found in both Islamic and Christian traditions. It tells of a group of young men who, in order to escape a tyrannical ruler persecuting them for their faith, took refuge in a cave. This event is narrated in the Qur'an, specifically in Surah Al-Kahf (18:9–26). According to these verses, a few young men, living among a polytheistic people, openly declared their belief in the oneness of Allah and rejected idolatry. To escape being stoned to death or forcibly converted, they sought shelter in a cave, embarking on an eternal journey. Together with their dog, they fell into a deep sleep and are believed to have awakened 309 years later. Their awakening symbolizes a mystical revival, a rebirth into a new era.

REFERENCES

- Akyıldız, Nihal Arda 2017. *İnsan-Mekân İlişkisi Bağlamında Yaşlı Dostu Mekânlar*. [Elderly Friendly Spaces in the Context of Human-Space Relationship.] Ankara: Grafikler.
- Alver, Köksal 2011. Emile Durkheim ve Kültür Sosyolojisi. [Emile Durkheim and Sociology of Culture.] *Journal of Sociology*. İstanbul University, pp. 69–81.
- Alyılmaz, Semra 2009. Maslenitsa ve Nevruz Bayramları Arasındaki İlişki. [The Relationship between Maslenitsa and Nevruz.] *International Journal of Social Research*, Vol. 2, No. 79, pp. 29–54.
- Arsantaş, Yüksel 2014. Paleolitik ve Mezolitik (Epi-Paleolitik) Çağda Barınma. [Sheltering in the Paleolithic and Mesolithic (Epipaleolithic) Ages.] *Fırat University Journal of Social Sciences*, Vol. 24, No. 2, pp. 319–343.
- Assmann, Jan 2001. *Kültürel Bellek, Eski Yüksek Kültürlerde Yazı, Hatırlama ve Politik Kimlik*. [Cultural Memory, Writing, Remembrance and Political Identity in Ancient High Cultures.] Transl. Ayşe Tekin. İstanbul: Ayrıntı.
- Bachelard, Gaston 2020. *Mekânın Poetikası*. [The Poetics of Space.] Transl. Alp Tümertekin. İstanbul: İthaki.
- Balandier, Georges 2010. *Siyasal Antropoloji*. [Political Anthropology.] Transl. Devrim Çetinkasap. İstanbul: İşbankası.

- Bali, Asli 2015. *Mersin Konargöçerlerinin Halk Kültüründe İnanışlar ve Bunlara Bağlı Uygulamalar*. [Beliefs and Related Practices in the Folk Culture of Mersin Nomads.] Diss. (Unpublished PhD Thesis). Adana: Çukurova University Institute of Social Sciences.
- Bayat, Fuzuli 2006. *Ana Hatlarıyla Türk Şamanlığı*. [Outlines of Turkish Shamanism.] İstanbul: Ötüken.
- Bayat, Fuzuli 2012. *Türk Mitolojik Sistemi, Kutsal Dişi, Mitolojik Ana, Umay Paradigmasında İlkel Mitolojik Kategoriler, İyeler Ve Demonoloji*. [Turkish Mythological System, Sacred Female, Mythological Mother, Primitive Mythological Categories in Umay Paradigm, İyeler and Demonology.] Vol. 2. İstanbul: Ötüken.
- Bilgin, Nuri 2013. *Tarih ve Kolektif Bellek*. [History and Collective Memory.] İstanbul: Bağlam.
- Campbell, Joseph 2016. *İlkel Mitoloji – Tanrının Maskeleri*. [The Masks of God. Volume I: Primitive Mythology.] Transl. Kudret Emiroğlu. İstanbul: İmge.
- Childe, Gordon 1998. *Tarihte Neler Oldu*. [What Happened in History?] Transl. Mete Tunçay, Alaeddin Şenel. İstanbul: Kırmızı.
- Cirlot, Juan Eduardo 1971. *A Dictionary of Symbols*. Transl. Jack William Sage. London: Routledge.
- Collins, Randall 2005. *Interaction Ritual Chains*. New Jersey: Princeton University Press.
- Connerton, Paul 1999. *Toplular Nasıl Anımsar?* [How Societies Remember.] Transl. Alaaddin Şenel. İstanbul: Ayrıntı.
- Çetindağ, Gülda 2007. Türk Kültüründe Mağara Motifi. [Cave Motif in Turkish Culture.] *Proceedings of the 38th ICANAS International Congress of Asian and North African Studies, Ankara*, Vol. 1, pp. 443–455.
- Çoruhlu, Yaşar 2006. *Türk Mitolojisinin Anahatları*. [Outlines of Turkish Mythology.] İstanbul: Kabaalıcı.
- Davis, James 2019. *Taş Devrinden Bugüne Tarihimiz-İnsanın Hikâyesi*. [The Human Story: Our History, from the Stone Age to Today.] Transl. Barış Bıçakçı. İstanbul: Türkiye İş Bankası.
- Eliade, Mircea 1991. *Kutsal ve Dindışı*. [The Sacred and the Profane.] Transl. Mehmet Ali Kılıçbay. Ankara: Gece.
- Eliade, Mircea 2014. *Dinler Tarihine Giriş*. [Introduction to History of Religions.] Transl. Lale Arslan Özcan. Ankara: Kabaalıcı.
- Eliade, Mircea 2018. *Şamanizm*. [Shamanism.] Transl. İsmet Birkan. Ankara: İmge.
- Erginer, Gürbüz 1997. *Kurban, Kurbanın Kökenleri ve Anadolu'da Kanlı Kurban Ritüelleri*. [Sacrifice, Origins of Sacrifice and Bloody Sacrifice Rituals in Anatolia.] İstanbul: Yapı Kredi.
- Ergun, Pervin 2004. *Türk Kültüründe Ağaç Kültü*. [Tree Cult in Turkish Culture.] Ankara: AKM.
- Ferguson, A. S. 1922. Plato's Simile of Light . Part II. The Allegory of the Cave (Continued). *The Classical Quarterly*, Vol. 16, No. 1, pp. 15–28.
- Haviland, William & Prince, Haraldet & Walrath, Dana & McBride, Bunny 2008. *Kültürel Antropoloji*. [Cultural Anthropology.] Transl. İnan Deniz Erguvan Sarioğlu. İstanbul: Kaknüs.
- Honko, Lauri 2009. Ritüellerin Oluşum Süreci. [The Process of Rituals.] In: *Theories and Approaches in Folklore* 3. Transl. Ruhi Ersoy. Ankara: Geleneksel, pp. 206–208.
- Huizinga, Johan 2018. *Homo Ludens Oyunun Toplumsal İşlevi Üzerine Bir Deneme*. [Homo Ludens: An Essay on the Social Function of Play.] Transl. Mehmet Ali Kılıçbay. İstanbul: Ayrıntı.
- Karaağaç, Meryem 2013. *Malatya'da Geçiş Dönemleri*. [Transition Periods in Malatya.] Diss. (unpublished MA Thesis). Sivas: Cumhuriyet University Institute of Social Sciences.
- Karaman, Kasım 2010. Ritüellerin Toplumsal Etkileri. [Social Effects of Rituals.] *SDU Faculty of Arts and Sciences Journal of Social Sciences*, Vol. 21, pp. 227–236.
- Kayabaşı, Onur Alp 2016. Taşeli Yöresi Tahtacılarının Geçiş Dönemlerinde Mitolojik Unsurlar. [Mythological Elements in Transition Periods Of Tahtaci Society at "Taşeli" Territory.] *Turkish Culture and Hacı Bektash Veli Research Quarterly*, Vol. 78, pp. 139–158.
- Kınal, Füzuran 1998. *Eski Anadolu Tarihi*. [Ancient Anatolian History.] Ankara: Türk Tarih Kurumu.

- Kıyak, Abdülkadir 2012. Halk Dindarlığı Bağlamında Kutsal Mekân Anlayışı. [The Understanding of Sacred Space in the Context of Folk Religiosity.] *Journal of Gümüşhane University Faculty of Theology*, Vol. 1, No. 2, pp. 159–181.
- Koç, Adem 2022. Kutsal Mekânlarda Delikli Taştan Geçme Ritüeline Arketipsel Bir Yaklaşım. [An Archetypal Approach to the Ritual of Passing through the Perforated Stone in Sacred Sites.] *Bitig Journal of Turkology Research*, Vol. 1, pp. 87–110.
- Kökten, İbrahim 1952. Anadolu'da Prehistorik Yerleşme Yerlerinin Dağılışı Üzerine Bir Araştırma. [A Study on the Distribution of Prehistoric Settlement Sites in Anatolia.] *Journal of the Faculty of Languages, History and Geography, Ankara University*, Vol. 10, Nos. 3–4, pp. 167–207.
- Lefebvre, Henri 2014. *Mekânın Üretimi*. [The Production of Space.] Transl. Işık Ergüden. İstanbul: Sel.
- Lymer, Kenneth 2000. Petroglyphs and sacred spaces at Terekty Aulie, Central Kazakistan. In: Jeannine Davis-Kimball & Eileen M. Murphy & Ludmila Koryakova & Leonid T. Yablonsky (eds.) *Kurgans, ritual sites and settlements: Eurasian Bronze and Iron Age*. BAR International Series 890. Oxford: British Archaeological Reports, pp. 11–21.
- Merdin, Mustafa Şaban 2016. *Doğu Antalya Yöresindeki Belli Yerlere Bağlı Ziyaret Ve Adak Yerleri Üzerine Bir İnceleme*. [A Study on the Places of Visitation and Veneration in the Eastern Antalya Region.] Diss. (Unpublished MA Thesis). Isparta: Süleyman Demirel University Institute of Social Sciences.
- Morley, David & Robins, Kevin 1997. *Kimlik Mekanları, Küresel Medya, Elektronik Ortamlar ve Kültürel Sınırlar*. [Spaces of Identity, Global Media, Electronic Media and Cultural Boundaries.] Transl. Emrehan Zeybekoğlu. İstanbul: Ayrıntı.
- Ozansoy, Caner & Mengi, Hamdi 2006. *Mağarabilimi ve Mağaracılık*. [Speleology and Caving.] Ankara: Tübitak.
- Ögel, Bahaeddin 2014. *Türk Mitolojisi*. [Turkish Mythology.] Vol. I. Ankara: Türk Tarih Kurumu.
- Ögel, Bahaeddin 2014 [1995]. *Türk Mitolojisi*. [Turkish Mythology.] Vol. II. Ankara: Türk Tarih Kurumu.
- Özbek, Metin 2011. *50 Soruda İnsanın Tarih Öncesi Evrimi*. [Prehistoric Human Evolution in 50 Questions.] İstanbul: Bilim ve Gelecek Yayınevi.
- Özdemir, Nebi 2005. *Türk Eğlence Kültürü*. [Turkish Entertainment Culture.] Ankara: Akçağ.
- Özdemir, Muammer 2021. Mağara Resimleri Bize Ne Anlatır? Paleolitik Çağ Mağara Resimleri Bağlamında Tarih Öncesi İnancına İlişkin Bazı Sorgulamalar. [What Do Cave Paintings Tell Us? Some Inquiries regarding Prehistoric Faith in the Context of the Paleolithic Era Cave.] *Journal of History and Future*, Vol. 7, No. 4, pp. 825–843.
- Peacock, James 1979. Notes on a Theory of the Social Evolution of Ritual. In: Lauri Honko (ed.) *Science of Religion. Studies in Methodology: Proceedings of the Study Conference of the International Association for the History of Religions held in Turku, Finland 27–31 August 1973*. New York: Mouton, pp. 390–401.
- Pettazzoni, Raffaella 2002. *Tanrı'ya Dair*. [About God.] Transl. Fuat Aydın. İstanbul: İz.
- Quennell, Marjorie & Bourne, Charles Henry 1921. *Everyday Life in Prehistoric Times*. London: B.T. Batsford.
- Roux, Jean-Paul 2017. *Eski Türk mitolojisi*. [Ancient Turkish Mythology.] Transl. Musa Yaşar Sağlam. Ankara: Bilge Su.
- Sagalayev, Andrey Markoviç 1991. *Uralo-Altayskaya Mifologiya. Smvol i Arhetip*. (Ural Altay Mitolojisinde Arketipler ve Semboller). [Archetypes and Symbols in Ural Altai Mythology.] Transl. Ali Toraman. İstanbul: Bilge Kültür.
- Tanyu, Hikmet 1967. *Ankara ve Çevresinde Adak ve Adak Yerleri*. [Adak and Adak Places in Ankara and its Surroundings.] Ankara: A.Ü. İlahiyat Fakültesi.
- Taşkıran, Harun 2018. Prehistorik Arkeoloji ve Mağaralar. [Prehistoric Archaeology and Caves.] *Mavi Gezegen*, Vol. 24, pp. 62–68.

Türk, Dil Kurumu 2011. *Türkçe Sözlük*. [Turkish Dictionary.] Ankara: TDK.

Tylor, Edward Burnett 1920. *Primitive Culture*. Vol. II. London: John Murray.

Uğureli, Ayşe 2017. *Kültür ve Mekân Etkileşiminin Halkbilimsel Çözümlemesi: Türkiye'deki Yedi Uyurlar Mağaraları*. [Folkloric Analysis of Culture and Space Interaction: Seven Sleepers Caves in Turkey.] Diss. (Unpublished MA Thesis). Ankara: Gazi University Institute of Social Sciences.

Uygur, Hatice Kübra 2015. *Kutsal Mekân Bağlamında Mardin Süryanilerinin Anlatıları*. [Narratives of Mardin Assyrians in the Context of Sacred Space.] Diss. (Unpublished PhD Thesis). Ankara: Hacettepe University Institute of Social Sciences.

van Gennep, Arnold 2022. *Geçiş Ritleri: Tabular, Batıl İnançlar, Büyüler, Ayinler ve Törenler*. [Rites of Passage: Taboos, Superstitions, Spells, Rites and Ceremonies.] Transl. Oylum Bülbül Beşler. İstanbul: Nora Kitap.

Wulf, Christoph 2009. *Tarihsel Kültürel Antropoloji*. [Historical Cultural Anthropology.] Ankara: Dipnot.

Zeynep İrem Deger (PhD) holds a doctorate in Turkish Folklore from Gazi University. Her research focuses on the cave cult and cave symbolism in Turkish culture, sacred spaces and belief practices, folk narratives, and performance theory. In her studies, she examines folk beliefs, mythological motifs (particularly serpent imagery and chthonic symbolism), the narratives of the Book of Dede Korkut, representations of masculinity and gender, as well as archetypal and psychoanalytic interpretations and the transformation of traditional culture in modern contexts. Her work also addresses humor theories, anecdotal tradition, the culture industry, ritual practices and processes of popularization.

zeynepiremf@gmail.com

Digital Technologies in Folk Art Museums: Virtual Tours Management

HAN HE

College of Fine Art, Fujian Normal University, Fu Zhou, China
arielhe@163.com

Abstract: This study aims to investigate the opinion and practical experience of folk art museums' employees on virtual reality (VR) technology, and to determine whether students can successfully master a museum's excursion program with the help of a virtual tour. The study uses a qualitative research methodology and an experimental method. The interviews were recorded and decrypted using Interview Recorder. The survey involved 12 museum specialists from 6 folk art museums in China (CAA Art Museum, Chen Clan Ancestral Hall, Former Residence of Gan Xi, Capital Museum, Fujian Museum, China Museum for Fujian Taiwan Kinship) and 80 students from Fujian Normal University. The author has found different fields of application for VR in museums. The advantages and problems of using VR in museums according to guides with technology experience are also identified. Further research will aim to expand the use of virtual technologies in museums. It is also important to train museum workers in VR technologies using different methods to determine the effectiveness of such training.

Keywords: Chinese folk art, digital technologies, excursion, virtual museum, virtual reality

INTRODUCTION

The world is moving towards digitalization. It is now much easier to access any information on the Internet. Usually, people spend a lot of time online (Schweibenz 2019). Business models based on digital technologies are becoming more

and more profitable, and the latest technologies, for example, virtual reality, simplify the creation of an exciting virtual experience and allow the global art market to transfer exhibition experience to digital space and demonstrate cultural artefacts in a familiar environment (Barbieri & Bruno & Muzzupappa 2017).

A folk art museum is a museum dedicated to folk culture and heritage. Such museums highlight local life in rural communities. A folk museum usually features historical objects that were used by people in their daily lives. Examples of such objects include clothing and tools (Dewhurst & Hall & Seemann 2017).

Over the past three decades, the art market has been making slow and uncertain steps towards virtualization while remaining supportive of the opinion that it is best to interact with cultural artefacts, whether museum exhibits or canvases, and live (Kersten & Tschirschwitz & Deggim 2017). In the 1990s, most institutions considered digitalization too slow and unreasonably expensive, which led to unsatisfactory results due to the insufficient development of virtual exhibition technology. Navigation and the overall quality of such expositions left room for improvement (Besoain & Jago & Gallardo 2021). The fear that the ability to view the exhibition online would deprive people of motivation to visit it physically was another reason why museums and galleries were in no hurry to create virtual analogues of their expositions (Tserklevych et al. 2021).

Two decades later, when virtual expositions no longer seemed like something cosmic but had not yet become widespread, Google launched the large-scale Google Arts and Culture initiative, an online platform for hosting digital artefacts stored in cultural institutions (Besoain & González-Ortega & Gallardo 2022). Today, the platform contains virtual collections of about 2,000 galleries and museums of global importance. It offers high-quality digital expositions, various interactive experiences (for example, visual crosswords and art selfies), and AR and VR functionality. Commercial gallery virtual viewing rooms are the most important recent events in history. David Zwirner did this in 2017 (Pivec & Kronberger 2016).

Virtual galleries were not as we know now: the first online expositions looked like ordinary slide shows. Later, 3D tours appeared, functionally resembling navigation in Google Maps and fully reproducing the experience of being in a physical gallery (Fabola et al. 2017). Such tours resulted from combining several panoramic images of a room, between which a viewer could move, approach, recede and interact with objects. The first 3D tour appeared in 1994 for a virtual walk through the reconstruction of Dudley Castle in England (Syarifuddin & Syahril & Suparman 2017).

Another opportunity to view cultural artefacts online is in virtual exhibition spaces. Unlike 3D tours, with virtual expositions united only by such navigation, they have nothing to do with physical exhibitions and exist exclusively in the virtual dimension (Kiourt et al. 2015). For such expositions, a virtual

exhibition space is created in which digitized or digital objects are subsequently placed. If 3D tours and virtual exhibition spaces are suitable for art in a physical gallery, only the second option applies to digital works since their physical analogues do not exist (Karadimas et al. 2018). VR galleries should also be mentioned, where viewers use glasses or virtual reality helmets. While some VR expositions assume that a visitor will move with virtual reality equipment directly through the exhibition space, others can be visited anywhere with a VR headset. Online viewing rooms are the last way to view art artefacts virtually. Their essence is that a user enters a small room with several selected works (Rojas et al. 2020).

This research will study folk art museum workers' opinions and practical experiences with virtual reality technology in museums. It will also include whether students can successfully master the museum's excursion program with the help of a virtual tour. Previous studies touched on this area of research marginally because there was a need to expand the global database of scientific data. The author interviewed guides and experimented to achieve this goal and to compare a real and virtual visit to the Fujian Museum in China. Descriptions of the museums whose staff members were interviewed in this study are given below.

CAA Art Museum. The Art Museum of the Chinese Academy of Art (CAA) was founded in 2003 based on a gallery built in 1928. The museum consists of three divisions: the Art Museum (modern art), the Design Museum (Bauhaus and European modern design), and the Folk Crafts Museum (ethnic and folk arts).

Chen Clan Ancestral Hall. In 1957, the Guangzhou city government took over the care of the building, and in 1959 it became a museum. It is now the Chinese Folk Art Museum and one of Guangzhou's best tourist attractions. Exhibits include a variety of folk arts and crafts, as well as interesting old maps and family trees, making the visit worthwhile for both the architecture and the exhibition (Shen et al. 2020).

The Former Residence of Gan Xi, known as the Great Court of the Gan Clan, is located on Zhongshan South Road, Nanjing, Jiangsu Province, China. Like the Nanjing People's Museum, it features an exhibition of handmade objects, including a teapot made of Yixing clay, Chinese paper cutting, miniature prints, samples of Chinese opera makeup, old clocks, and local snacks (Tang 2015).

Capital Museum. Visitors can stroll through the seven permanent antiquities exhibitions located in the spiral hall or view the three thematic exhibitions housed in a rectangular block on the west side of the building. Collections of ancient stone, bronze, porcelain, calligraphy, paintings and sculptures contrast beautifully with the museum's informative multilingual LCD screens, high-tech multimedia room, state-of-the-art digital theater, and contemporary art exhibitions from China and beyond (Luo & Lau 2020).

China Museum for Fujian Taiwan Kinship. The museum has a permanent thematic exhibition titled Fujian-Taiwan Kinship. The Fujian and Taiwan

Rural Province thematic exhibition uses panoramic display techniques to present common folk customs practiced in Fujian and Taiwan Province in each of the four seasons (Alexander & Alexander & Decker 2017).

Fujian Museum. The Fujian Museum was founded in 1933. The museum displays artwork and artifacts reflecting the history and culture of Fujian province in every way, including stone carvings, wood carvings, lacquerware, ceramics and objects related to the five local operas. There are also traditional Chinese paintings and calligraphy from the Tang (618–907) and Song (960–1279) dynasties to the present day (Zhou 2020).

Literature Review

Museums have adapted their traditional ways of providing services with the advent of new digital technologies to meet the pace and growing needs of the modern industrial revolution (Deming & Lihui 2015). Mixed reality has enlivened the interpretation of numerous domains, offering immersive experiences in the digital and real world. In Saudi Arabia, researchers attempted to enrich the museum experience of users with relevant multimedia information and to establish a better connection with the artefacts in the Taxila Museum in Pakistan, which perfectly preserved the Gandhara civilization. The proposed solution is an augmented reality (AR) smartphone application that recognizes artefacts using deep real-time learning and extracts auxiliary multimedia information for visitors (Khan et al. 2021).

Greek scientists examined training results in virtual online museums using various technologies, such as images, videos, 3D reconstructions, etc. They questioned the potential educational advantage of including complex 3D reconstructions in virtual museums. Their analysis needs a new methodology. Sylaiou's paper contributes to understanding virtual museums' educational impact, depending on their basic technology and the features of human-computer interaction. Therefore, the findings have a broader impact and can be generalized to be relevant even after the design change of the virtual museums selected for evaluation (Sylaiou et al. 2017).

University museums are powerful resource centers in the field of higher education. The introduction of digital technologies can contribute to personalizing learning in the university museum. In this context, a case study was presented at the Faculty of Pedagogical Sciences of the University of Roma Tre with a group of 14 master's students. The students participated in a two-hour workshop where they were asked to test augmented reality technology through an Android web application. The students highly appreciated the exhibition, especially its multimodality. Most of the topics often found in honest answers are related to critical and visual thinking. Despite the positive overall assessment, there is still room for improvement in technology and educational design (Poce et al. 2019).

The concept of a virtual museum was considered, and the transition of virtual museums from analogue and intermediate multimedia formats to an online environment. Povroznik (2020) examines the turning points in the history of virtual museums, the stages of their development from the digital turn to the appearance of the Internet, and their subsequent transformation after this transition. Using the example of museum information resources in North America and Europe, Japan and Australia, the article traces the history of the first virtual museums on the Internet in the 1990s. Based on analyzing materials from web archives, they determined strategies for creating the first virtual museum resources (Povroznik 2020).

Greek researchers implemented, investigated and evaluated the results of photogrammetric methods and 3D shooting used to create virtual museums. In addition, they described and analyzed solutions, actions, methodology and the main elements of such applications to include and consider. They assume that the results of this application will be helpful to researchers to develop and improve attempts to create virtual museums and mass production of 3D models (Skamantzari & Georgopoulos 2016).

Currently, there are two different trends in the development of virtual museums: exhibition spaces built in virtual worlds, such as Second Life and the Google Art Project. A common characteristic of these approaches is that they both aim to reproduce the experience of visiting a physical museum space and viewing exhibits. However, a deeper examination of some aspects of their interface reveals significant differences between a simulated and digitized exhibition space, low- and high-resolution image representation, single-user and multi-user visiting experience, static and interactive exhibits, etc. (Berger & Jucker & Locher 2016; Polacci 2015).

One study compared these two environments regarding their impact on the visiting experience and attempted to identify critical design features that significantly contribute to this experience. Thus, the author aimed to compare the two approaches based on the experience of visiting the same exhibition space. A museum already presented in the Google Art Project (fourth floor of the Museum of Modern Art in New York) was selected and its copy in OpenSimulator, an open-source alternative to Second Life was modeled. The analysis of the results showed that users recognized both approaches as attractive but for different reasons. It identified many peculiarities that positively influenced the experience and were recognized as essential by the participants (Vosinakis & Tsakonas 2016).

Problem Statement

The study aims to investigate the opinion and practical experience of folk art museum workers with virtual reality technology in museums and to study whether students can successfully master museums' excursion programs with the help of a virtual tour.

Research objectives:

- interviewing museum employees;
- a real and virtual museum tour for students;
- assessing the level of assimilation of the excursion program by the students.

Research questions:

1. How do museums use VR technologies now?
2. What are the advantages and disadvantages of using virtual technologies?
3. Will students be able to learn a museum's excursion program better with the help of a virtual tour than an authentic experience of visiting the museum?

METHODS AND MATERIALS

Study Design

A qualitative methodology was applied to get answers to the study's first and second questions (Morris 2015). The author conducted 12 semi-structured interviews with guides from six different museums. They answered questions about the museums' virtual projects, the experience of using VR technologies, and so on. The author used the experimental method to investigate the third question (Pandey & Pandey 2015). They divided the students into a control and an experimental group. The control group visited a museum in real-time, while the experimental group did it virtually. Then the author compared the results of mastering the excursion program.

Participants

The survey involved 12 museum specialists from six folk art museums in China (CAA Art Museum, Chen Clan Ancestral Hall, Former Residence of Gan Xi, Capital Museum, Fujian Museum, China Museum for Fujian Taiwan Kinship). They were people of different ages and experience with virtual technologies. There were both younger specialists (23–28 years old) and older ones (45 years old). Some of them had regular experience using VR technologies and others had encountered it once. The main criterion for selecting museum employees was little experience with VR. The education of the participants corresponded to their museum field, including historians, representatives of art education and art historians. In addition, 80 students from Fujian Normal University participated in the experimental stage of the study. The author randomized them into an experimental and a control group. There were no particular criteria for the selection of the students. The university administration posted a research invitation on the university website. Eighty random students were selected from among all those who responded. These were young people (18–21 years old)

who attended different courses (from 1 to 4), primarily Chinese (98% of the sample). All students were willing participants.

Experiment Procedure

A preliminary testing procedure preceded the direct experience of visiting the museum (virtual or real) since it was necessary to ensure that the participants had the same knowledge. To do this, the researcher gathered the participants in one of the classrooms for a 20-minute test. One of the teachers of an educational institution supervised the testing process. In addition, none of the participants had previously visited the Fujian Museum. Then they invited the control group of students to visit the museum in real-time. The tour lasted 1 hour, conducted by one of the museum guides. The experimental group had a virtual experience of visiting the museum. The virtual tour was uploaded to the Google Art Project platform. The tour lasted one hour. However, this time is approximate since the participants could control the virtual tour duration. The participants needed no special technical devices except a personal computer for the virtual tour. Both excursions were identical in content of the excursion program. After the tour, the participants gathered again for post-testing, similar to pre-testing.

Instruments

A questionnaire with open questions was created to identify the opinion and practical experiences of folk art museum workers with respect to the use of virtual reality technology in museums. Some of the questions:

1. How long and how often have you been using VR technologies in your museum?
2. How do you use VR technologies in the museum?
3. Name the areas of application of VR technology in your museum.
4. What are the main advantages of VR technology?
5. Describe the problems that the museum faces when using VR technology.

A questionnaire with several options was developed to assess the assimilation of the excursion program of real and virtual tours. The questions in the questionnaire were related to the zones that the study participants visited. The questionnaire questions will not be fully disclosed since the museum management has forbidden this since these questions fully illustrate the whole essence of the tour, which is paid by the visitor. The excursion program belongs entirely to Fujian Museum.

Data Collection and Analysis

The interviews were conducted using Skype. If it was impossible to do this for some reason, then the participants gave written answers to the questions. The author recorded and decrypted the interview audio format using the Interview

Recorder software to facilitate qualitative data analysis. Based on the responses received, the coding process was used, which made it possible to compare different categories of the received data. They used an integrated approach to analyze the data using cross- and non-cross analysis. SPSS version 22 software was also used for descriptive analysis and an independent sample test (t-test), and one-sided ANOVA analysis.

Limitations

The main limiting factors of this study are related to the size and diversity of the sample, and the short time of the experiment.

Ethical Issues

The participants were familiarised with the study's objectives and signed an agreement to participate. The whole study stems from compliance with the principles of voluntariness, honesty, respect for the personality and autonomy of the subject. The experiment did not bring any harm to its participants.

RESULTS

Interview Results

As the interview data showed, for the first time, virtual reality (VR) technologies had been introduced in museums mainly over the past five years. Most museums (4 museums) used VR to organize temporary exhibitions, and only two museums constantly used the technology. In one of the museums, an exhibition was so successful using VR technologies that the management decided to use them constantly. The temporary use of this technology can be explained by its reasonably high cost, and there may be a shortage of professional personnel who would be well versed in VR technologies. The fields of application of technology in museums were different. Some of them used VR so that the visitor could experience a particular space or travel through time. It could be a place depicted in the painting or an artist's working studio. Technology also made it possible to animate paintings, which enhanced visitors' aesthetic experience or provided a deep perception of art. However, two respondents mentioned that these animated paintings were part of the online tools available to visitors. This suggests that VR, while offering new features, can disrupt the overall aesthetic experience when used in museums.

In addition, one of the study's objectives was to determine virtual reality's advantages when used in museum conditions. The author grouped seven categories of VR benefits from the respondents' answers (Table 1). These include an opportunity for interactive interaction with collections, immersion, expansion of education, the active attraction of visitors, relative accessibility, creation of individual experience and the introduction of innovative technologies.

Table 1. The pros and cons of using VR in museums

Pros	Cons
Interactive interaction with museum collections	Technical limitations
Sense of immersion	Lack of social interaction
It expands education	Shortage of qualified personnel
Visitor engagement	Costs
VR tech is relatively accessible	Distractions
Personalized experience	

In addition to the positive aspects of using VR, the disadvantages faced by museum workers were identified. These are problems caused by technical limitations, graphics quality, and lack of social interaction, lack of qualified personnel, cost and availability of technologies, exhibition flow, and distraction. According to the respondents, the most critical problem that VR developers need to solve is the inability of VR to provide a fascinating social experience. This indicates a necessary direction for further research: interactive and social VR applications. In addition, the increase in personnel and training needs results in creating special interdisciplinary teams in museums to deal with technology. This includes the need for further training of both current museum specialists and university students who will become future museum workers, and who usually do not include topics related to technology in their training programs in museums.

The Results of the Assimilation of the Excursion Program by the Students

To obtain objective answers to the third question of the study, all participants needed the same level of previous knowledge. To identify equality or difference between the participants, they were pre-tested. Then, the author compared the results of the groups using the t-test. Table 2 contains the results.

Table 2. T-test results

Experimental Group	Number of students	Mean	SD	t	Significant
VR	40	30.59	2.44	0.314	0.783
Control	40	32.63	2.37		

As seen in Table 2, the p-value of 0.783 is greater than the significance level of 0.05, indicating that the difference between the VR group and the Control group is not statistically significant. This suggests that there is no strong evidence to support a significant difference between the two groups. Therefore,

the author confirmed the assumption of statistically equalizing the students' previous knowledge and insignificance of the level of expertise before the experiment.

Then they calculated the mean and standard deviation for the post-test data (Table 3). There was also an independent t-test for two samples (Table 4).

Table 3. Mean and standard deviation of the post-test results

Experimental Group	Number of students	Mean	SD
VR	40	60.7	2.34
Control	40	73.1	2.69

The participants who visited the museum physically mastered the excursion program more successfully (M=73.1, SD=2.69) than the virtual tour students (M=60.7, SD=2.34). This suggests that the physical museum visitors showed greater cognitive interest and demonstrated the necessary skills and abilities, although they had some inaccuracies in their answers.

Table 4. Independent sample t-test

Assumption of equality of variances	Levene's Test for Equality of Variances	t-test for Equality of Means
Equal Variances Assumed	F = 2.645 Sig. = 0.087	t = 9.89 df = 101.89 Sig. = 0.000 Average Difference = 2.777
Equal Variances Not Assumed	F = 9.47 Sig. = 0.000	t = 91.07 df = 91.07 Sig. = 0.000 Average Difference = 90.073

***Note:** F refers to the F-statistic from Levene's Test, which tests for the equality of variances between the two groups. Sig stands for significance (p-value) associated with both the Levene's Test and the t-test. df refers to the degrees of freedom used in the t-test.

As shown in Table 4, the p-value for Levene's test (0.087) is greater than 0.05, suggesting that the assumption of equal variances is not violated. The p-value for the t-test (0.000), which is less than 0.05, indicates a significant difference between the two groups. This suggests that a full-time guided tour at the Folk Art Museum is more effective than a virtual tour, as evidenced by the average difference of 2.777.

DISCUSSION

Using the results of the experimental stage of the study, the author found that the experience of physically visiting the museum of folk art was better for the students than experiencing it virtually. Namely, the participants of the real excursion learned the excursion program better. Perhaps the reason for such results is that real experience contributes to deeper immersion than virtual. The human brain receives information about real space using sensory systems, which contributes to better emotional expression and increases engagement. The following study supports this assumption. In the USA, researchers studied the spatial relationship between a real and virtual environment to understand how well the virtual experience corresponds to the same experience in the real world. They found that information is less flexible in the virtual world compared to the real one, especially when testing spatial memory from a new location (Clemenson et al. 2020). Another researcher concludes that perception in virtual reality does not necessarily have to be illusory, and experience in virtual reality can have about the same value as experience in non-virtual worlds (Chalmers 2017).

Supporters of virtual innovations from Austria still believe that virtual technologies have great potential to be used to create a unique and individual experience for museum visitors, and virtual tours are considered one of the areas of creating a gaming experience for visitors (Pivec & Kronberger 2016). It is also possible that the virtual experience of students would be better if special glasses for virtual reality were used. Still, in the museum installations, their use was in development at the time of the study. For example, positive results were obtained in an Oman study. The researchers trained an experimental group in a virtual museum and a control one using the traditional method. The results showed significant differences ($\alpha = 0.05$) between the average values of the groups in favor of the experimental one in the achievement test. In addition, students in the experimental group demonstrated more positive attitudes toward archaeology and toward using museums in teaching. Thus, the study shows that virtual museums help provide a favorable and stimulating learning environment (Ambusaidi & Al-Rabaani 2019). Spanish scientists revealed that virtual museums demonstrated a high degree of presence at the level of perception. At the navigation level, traffic patterns in the virtual environment closely resemble those observed in the real museum. Significant differences are observed only at the beginning of the study in percentages of the studied area and time spent on a visit (Marín-Morales et al. 2018). Special glasses were used in the study, confirming the assumption.

In addition to the results of our Taiwan interview, the museum evaluated a virtual tour. The results showed that the exhibition was visually reliable but lacked behavioral reliability. It was also interactive, but this aspect could be improved by enriching the links; the lack of effective navigation for

the exhibition was the main factor affecting the quality of the experience. The exhibition was informative and facilitated learning. However, it requires a different quantity and quality improvement of the information provided (Li & Nie & Ye 2022). In general, the students of this study reported a similar experience of virtual museum visits.

No matter how developed virtual expositions are, it becomes clear from various surveys and statistics that most people would still prefer to visit a physical exhibition, even if its virtual option is available online (Min 2021; Shehade & Stylianou-Lambert 2020). There are reasons for this. First, imperfect navigation and exhibition space. Usually, a visitor to a virtual gallery moves only in a predetermined direction and cannot always stop in front of an object at the required distance, especially if it is about a 3D tour. For example, ‘penetrating’ usually happens when one tries to get closer to a particular artefact online gallery. A space contains several spherical images and usually distorts and deforms the picture. Second, spatial constraints. The author should recognize that most virtual exhibitions contain two-dimensional exhibits. While such a restriction is not critical for paintings, sculptures, installations and other three-dimensional exhibits, these works no longer make the desired impression in the virtual world. In addition, very large or small objects are difficult to reproduce in their accurate dimensions in virtual space. Of course, virtual and augmented reality partially solve these problems. However, the AR function is not integrated into all virtual expositions, and not everyone has a VR headset. Unfortunately, the possibilities of a visitor to a virtual exhibition do not go far beyond the screen of the visitor’s device. The third reason is that virtual exhibitions do not have a sense of inaccessibility and exclusivity, a certain charm preferred by collectors and visitors. Visiting most virtual exhibitions is free of charge, which devalues the exhibited artefacts in a certain sense: they lose their exclusivity since now anyone can easily see the artefacts. However, if visiting online galleries becomes paid, their popularity will decrease significantly because not everyone will agree to pay to click on a specific link.

Within tourism, folk art museums can be the main attraction for tourists because of the experience they provide, or they can be just one of many recreational options for tourists. Museums can serve as a legitimizing force that brings authenticity to their exhibits, minority village reproductions, and even their gift stores and storefronts (Graburn & Jin 2017).

CONCLUSIONS

This study showed that virtual technologies were increasingly being used in folk art museums in China. The author found different fields of application in museums. They also identified the advantages and problems of using VR in museums according to guides with technology experience. The benefits of using VR in museums are as follows. The technology enables an interaction

with museum collections and creates a sense of immersion. It expands education and helps to engage visitors. VR gadgets are relatively accessible and help to personalize individual experience. On the other hand, VR has its technical limitations, some issues with graphics quality and little opportunities for social interaction. Moreover, the technology itself is costly and requires qualified personnel. There are also other drawbacks. Not only can VR disrupt the exhibition flow, but visitors can also get distracted during virtual tours. The students who visited the museum mastered the excursion program more successfully ($M=73.1$, $SD=2.69$) than those on a virtual tour ($M=60.7$, $SD=2.34$). A full-time tour guided by the Folk Art Museum was more effective for the students than a virtual one.

One often hears that the experience of physical contact with art cannot be compared with any other similar venture. It certainly makes sense when looking at the above statement from a different angle: every way of interacting with cultural artefacts, physical or virtual, involves a unique, equivalent experience. There is no exclusive context or environment for culture. First, culture should be where the audience is interested in it. If a large part of this audience uses innovative technologies, then there will be virtual expositions.

These results can find practical applications in adapting museums to virtual technologies. For example, the results will be helpful to museum administrations, which can eliminate the identified shortcomings and improve their VR experience in museums using this study. Further research will aim to expand the use of virtual technologies in museums. It is also important to train museum workers in VR technologies using different methods to determine the effectiveness of such training.

ACKNOWLEDGEMENTS

This research was funded by the General Project of Ministry of Education (MOE) Humanities and Social Sciences Research (Project ID: 25YJA760031; Project Name is "Research on the Value and Function of Ritual Art in the Folk Festivals of Fujian, Guangdong, and Taiwan").

REFERENCES

- Alexander, Edward P. & Alexander, Mary & Decker, Juilee 2017. *Museums in Motion: An Introduction to the History and Functions of Museums*. Third Edition. Lanham: Rowman & Littlefield.
- Ambusaidi, Nada Ali & Al-Rabaani, Ahmed Hamad 2019. The Efficiency of Virtual Museum in Development of Grade Eight Students' Achievements and Attitudes towards Archaeology in Oman. *International Journal of Educational Research Review*, Vol. 4, No. 4, pp. 496–503. <https://doi.org/10.24331/ijere.628304>.
- Barbieri, Loris & Bruno, Fabio & Muzzupappa, Maurizio 2017. Virtual Museum System Evaluation through User Studies. *Journal of Cultural Heritage*, Vol. 26, pp. 101–108. <https://doi.org/10.1016/j.culher.2017.02.005>.
- Berger, Manuel & Jucker, Andreas H. & Locher, Miriam A. 2016. Interaction and Space in the Virtual World of Second Life. *Journal of Pragmatics*, Vol. 101, pp. 83–100. <https://doi.org/10.1016/j.pragma.2016.05.009>.

- Besoain, Felipe & González-Ortega, Jorge & Gallardo, Ismael 2022. An Evaluation of the Effects of a Virtual Museum on Users' Attitudes towards Cultural Heritage. *Applied Sciences*, Vol. 12, No. 3, p. 1341. <https://doi.org/10.3390/app12031341>.
- Besoain, Felipe & Jegó, Liza & Gallardo, Ismael 2021. Developing a Virtual Museum: Experience from the Design and Creation Process. *Information*, Vol. 12, No. 6, p. 244. <https://doi.org/10.3390/info12060244>.
- Chalmers, David J. 2017. The Virtual and the Real. *Disputatio*, Vol. 9, No. 46, pp. 309–352. <https://doi.org/10.1515/disp-2017-0009>.
- Clemenson, Gregory D. & Wang, Lulian & Mao, Zeqian & Stark, Shauna M. & Stark, Craig E. L. 2020. Exploring the Spatial Relationships between Real and Virtual Experiences: What Transfers and What Does Not. *Frontiers in Virtual Reality*, Vol. 1, p. 572122. <https://doi.org/10.3389/frvir.2020.572122>.
- Deming, An & Lihui, Yang 2015. Chinese Folklore since the Late 1970s: Achievements, Difficulties, and Challenges. *Asian Ethnology*, Vol. 74, No. 2, pp. 273–290.
- Dewhurst, C. Kurt & Hall, Patricia & Seemann, Charlie (eds.) 2017. *Folklife and Museums: Twenty-First Century Perspectives*. Lanham: Rowman & Littlefield.
- Fabola, Adeola & Kennedy, Sarah & Miller, Alan & Oliver, Iain & McCaffery, John; & Cassidy, Catherine & Clements, Jo & Vermehren, Anna 2017. A Virtual Museum Installation for Time Travel. In: *International Conference on Immersive Learning*. Cham: Springer, pp. 255–270. https://doi.org/10.1007/978-3-319-60633-0_21.
- Graburn, Nelson & Jin, Lu 2017. Tourism and Museums in China. *Asian Journal of Tourism Research*, Vol. 2, No. 1, pp. 1–35. <https://doi.org/10.12982/AJTR.2017.0001>.
- Karadimas, Dimitrios & Somakos, Leonidas & Bakalbasis, Dimitrios & Prassas, Alexandros & Adamopoulou, Konstantina & Karadimas, George 2018. Current and Potential Applications of AR/VR Technologies in Cultural Heritage. 'NCEPTION Virtual Museum HAMH: A use case on BIM and AR/VR modelling for the Historical Archive Museum of Hydra Greece'. In: *International Conference on Transdisciplinary Multispectral Modeling and Cooperation for the Preservation of Cultural Heritage*. Cham: Springer, pp. 372–381.
- Kersten, Thomas P. & Tschirschwitz, Felix & Deggim, Simon 2017. Development of a Virtual Museum Including a 4D Presentation of Building History in Virtual Reality. In: *The International Archives of Photogrammetry, Remote Sensing and Spatial Information Sciences*. Greece: Nafplio, Vol. 42, pp. 361–367. <https://doi.org/10.5194/isprs-archives-XLII-2-W3-361-2017>.
- Khan, Mudassar Ali & Israr, Sabahat & Almogren, Abeer S. & Din, Ikram Ud & Almogren, Ahmad & Rodrigues, Joel J. P. C. 2021. Using Augmented Reality and Deep Learning to Enhance Taxila Museum Experience. *Journal of Real-Time Image Processing*, Vol. 18, No. 2, pp. 321–332.
- Kiourt, Chairi & Koutsoudis, Anestis & Arnaoutoglou, Fotis & Petsa, Georgia & Markantonatou, Stella & Pavlidis, George 2015. The 'Synthesis' Virtual Museum—an Open Virtual Exhibition Creation Tool. In: *International Workshop on Virtual Archaeology: Museums & Cultural Tourism*. 23–26 September 2015, Delphi, Greece. Delphi: European Cultural Centre of Delphi, pp. 32–35.
- Li, Jia & Nie, Jin-Wei & Ye, Jing 2022. Evaluation of Virtual Tour in an Online Museum: Exhibition of Architecture of the Forbidden City. *PloS one*, Vol. 17, No. 1, p. e0261607. <https://doi.org/10.1371/journal.pone.0261607>.
- Luo, Ning & Lau, Chung-Yim 2020. Community-Based Art Education in China: Practices, Issues and Challenges. *International Journal of Art & Design Education*, Vol. 39, No. 2, pp. 445–460. <https://doi.org/10.1111/jade.12287>.
- Marín-Morales, Javier & Higuera-Trujillo, Juan Luis & Juan, Carla de & Llinares, Carmen & Guixeres, Jaime & Iñarra, Susana & Alcañiz, Mariano 2018. Presence and Navigation: A Comparison between the Free Exploration of a Real and a Virtual Museum. In: *Proceedings of the 32nd International BCS Human Computer Interaction Conference*, BCS Learning and Development Ltd., pp. 1–10.
- Min, Lee 2021. The Real and Virtual: Museum Exhibitions and the Use of Media. *Public History & Museum*, Vol. 4, pp. 8–24.
- Morris, Alan 2015. *A Practical Introduction to In-depth Interviewing*. Thousand Oaks: SAGE.

- Pandey, Prabhat & Pandey, Meenu Mishra 2015. *Research Methodology Tools and Techniques*. Buzau: Bridge Center.
- Pivec, Maja & Kronberger, Anika 2016. Virtual Museum: Playful Visitor Experience in the Real and Virtual World. In: *2016 8th International Conference on Games and Virtual Worlds for Serious Applications (VS-GAMES)*. Barcelona: IEEE, pp. 1–4. <https://doi.org/10.1109/VIS-GAMES.2016.7590376>.
- Poce, Antonella & Amenduni, Francesca & De Medio, Carlo & Valente, Mara & Re, Maria Rosaria 2019. Adopting Augmented Reality to Engage Higher Education Students in a Museum University Collection: The Experience at Roma Tre University. *Information*, Vol. 10, No. 12, p. 373.
- Polacci, Francesca 2015. The Google Art Project: Democratisation of Art or Ideology of Transparency. *La Revue des Musées de la Civilisation*, Vol. 2, pp. 73–84.
- Povroznik, Nadezhda 2020. Digital History of Virtual Museums: The Transition from Analog to Internet Environment. In: *Proceedings of the Digital Humanities in the Nordic Countries 5th Conference Riga*. DHN, pp. 125–136.
- Rojas, Hesmeralda & Renteria, Ronald & Acosta, Ely & Arévalo, Humberto & Pilares, Marisol 2020. Application of Accessibility Guidelines in a Virtual Museum. In: *2020 3rd International Conference of Inclusive Technology and Education (CONTIE)*. Baja California Sur: IEEE, pp. 73–79. <https://doi.org/10.1109/CONTIE51334.2020.00022>.
- Schweibenz, Werner 2019. The Virtual Museum: An Overview of Its Origins, Concepts, and Terminology. *Museum Review*, Vol. 4, No. 1, pp. 1–29.
- Shehade, Maria & Stylianou-Lambert, Theopisti 2020. Virtual Reality in Museums: Exploring the Experiences of Museum Professionals. *Applied Sciences*, Vol. 10, No. 11, p. 4031. <https://doi.org/10.3390/app10114031>.
- Shen, Haili & Wu, Mao-Ying & Wall, Geoffrey & Tong, Yixuan 2020. 'Craft Museum Visitors' Interactive Experiences, Benefits and Behavioural Intentions: Perspectives of Chinese Parents. *Leisure Studies*, Vol. 39, No. 3, pp. 355–371. <https://doi.org/10.1080/02614367.2019.1696390>.
- Skamantzari, Margarita & Georgopoulos, Andreas 2016. 3D Visualization for Virtual Museum Development. In: *The International Archives of the Photogrammetry, Remote Sensing and Spatial Information Sciences*. Greece: Nafplio, Vol. XLI-B5, pp. 961–968. <https://doi.org/10.5194/isprsarchives-XLI-B5-961-2016>.
- Syarifuddin, Syarifuddin & Syahrial, Zulfiati & Suparman, Atwi 2017. Virtual Museum: A Learning Material of Indonesia National History. *International Journal of Multicultural and Multireligious Understanding*, Vol. 4, No. 6, pp. 51–60.
- Sylaiou, Stella & Mania, Katerina & Paliokas, Ioannis & Pujol-Tost, Laia & Killintzis, Vassilis & Liarokapis, Fotis 2017. Exploring the Educational Impact of Diverse Technologies in Online Virtual Museums. *International Journal of Arts and Technology*, Vol. 10, No. 1, pp. 58–84.
- Tang, Xiaobing 2015. *Visual Culture in Contemporary China*. Cambridge: Cambridge University Press.
- Tserklevych, Viktoriia & Prokopenko, Olha & Goncharova, Olena & Horbenko, Inna & Fedorenko, Oksana & Romanyuk, Yaroslava 2021. Virtual Museum Space as the Innovative Tool for the Student Research Practice. *International Journal of Emerging Technologies in Learning*, Vol. 16, No. 14, pp. 213–231.
- Vosinakis, Spyros & Tsakonas, Yannis 2016. Visitor Experience in Google Art Project and in Second Life-Based Virtual Museums: A Comparative Study. *Mediterranean Archaeology and Archaeometry*, Vol. 16, No. 5, pp. 19–27. <https://doi.org/10.5281/zenodo.204963>.
- Zhou, Yan 2020. *A History of Contemporary Chinese Art: 1949 to Present*. Dordrecht: Springer Nature.

Han He holds a PhD degree. She is an Associate Professor of the College of Fine Art at Fujian Normal University, Fu Zhou, China. Among her research interests are Chinese folk art, virtual museum and tourism management.

arielhe@163.com

Folklore, Authenticity and the Tourist Gaze in Touring Chinese Cultural Heritage

RACHEL SUET KAY CHAN

Institute of Ethnic Studies (KITA), National University of Malaysia (UKM)
rachelchansuetkay@ukm.edu.my

Abstract: Of late, Chinese cultural heritage buildings have enjoyed attention as desirable destination images. This has been boosted by the tourist gaze, which derives its object of desire from the soft power of transnationally broadcast Chinese historical films and television series, such as “Longest Day in Chang’an”. Within the experience of tourism lies the issue of finding authenticity, which consists of three types: objective authenticity, constructive authenticity and existential authenticity (Wang 1999). In this globalised and super-diverse environment (Vertovec 1997), does fixed authenticity based on historical experience still exist? I demonstrate how this media-enhanced tourist gaze sublimates its fantasy through tourism of Chinese heritage buildings, through a quantitative survey of tourists’ experiences of authenticity in visiting one such Chinese heritage building. Ultimately, much like “Dracula-tourism” in Transylvania, this phenomenon facilitates the embodying of the folklore of Chinese cultural heritage as desirable images. This in turn represents a form of constructive authenticity similar to film tourism, which mitigates the re-enactment of tourists’ projection of authenticity upon toured objects.

Keywords: Chinese cultural heritage, destination image, constructive authenticity, folklore, tourist gaze, film tourism

INTRODUCTION: FILM TOURISM AND AUTHENTICITY

Tourism is a large and expanding set of activities, with problems in quantification from both conceptual and empirical ends (Shaw & Williams 2004). The

literature on tourism as a consumer activity reveals that there is a relatively recent phenomenon known as film tourism. Closely related to the destination image, film tourism functions as a marketing tool to direct tourists' attention to a particular tourist site. Film tourism has emerged as a burgeoning area of study over the last two decades, with its paradigm a primarily Western-centric one (Ji & Beeton 2011). There are several forms of film tourism, such as celebrity film tourism, nostalgic film tourism, or film tourism pilgrimage (Beeton 2004), though this raises questions about the authenticity of the tourist experience. Then again, one may ask, is tourism itself an authentic "experience"? Scholars such as MacCannell (1999) might criticise tourism as being too superficial for the social sciences, describing it as a commercial activity where real encounters never happen (Korstanje 2012). Meanwhile, others such as Kavrečič & Virloget (2019) raise questions about the so-called "authenticity", continuity, or discontinuity of the tradition, and its relation to tourism.

In philosophy, possessing the quality of authenticity is described as being "what it professes to be, or what it is reputed to be, in origin or authorship" (Somogy & Guignon 2020). For Kierkegaard, it is something one becomes by personal choice, while for Heidegger, it is relative to our social embeddedness, and is known as *dasein* (Somogy & Guignon 2020; Sherman 2009). In this article, we will approach the concept of authenticity from the tourism studies angle.

There are three kinds of authenticity in tourism, namely objective authenticity, constructive authenticity and existential authenticity. Objective authenticity refers to the extent to which an experience aligns with external reality, independent of personal interpretation (MacCannell 1973). This emphasises the tourist experience through the originality or authenticity of toured objects (Ibid.). Constructive authenticity refers to tourists' projection of authenticity upon toured objects, such as images, expectations, preferences, or beliefs, and is viewed as a social construction (Trilling 1972; Wang 1999). Bruner (1989) explains that experiences of the authentic are socially constructed and therefore not objectively measurable. Finally, existential authenticity refers to a "state of being" that is to be activated by tourist activities, but that does not relate to toured objects. This also includes "hot authenticity", which is a specific expression of existential authenticity, relating to myths of the authentic self (Wang 1999).

Sociologically, the process of developing authenticity consists of "cool" and "hot" authenticities. "Cool authenticity" is the top-down approach favoured by authorities, while "hot authenticity" is one's existential authenticity. Thus, in the experience of travel, "cool authentication" leads to the stagnation or "museumisation" of attractions, while "hot authentication", which requires continual (re)enactment, will typically lead to a dynamic process of perpetual transformation, or augmentation, of the attraction (Cohen & Cohen 2012).

For MacCannell, the “tourist” meant sightseers, who were mainly middle-class and deployed throughout the world in search of experience. MacCannell also viewed the “tourist” as a proxy for gauging the modern worldview (MacCannell 1999). The concern of modern individuals for “naturalness” and nostalgia, as well as their search for authenticity were viewed by MacCannell (1999) as somewhat decadent but harmless attachments to the souvenirs of destroyed cultures.

Baudrillard (1983), meanwhile, argued that the world is constituted by models, or simulacra, blurring the distinction between the real and the apparent, creating a situation known as hyper-reality. Copies or representations of objects (simulacra) constitute this hyper-reality (Beeton 2004). Any expectation of “authenticity” is therefore impossible to find, given that all products, including culture, have been commodified (Teo & Yeoh 2001; Beeton 2004).

However, Korstanje (2012), though acknowledging MacCannell’s contribution to the study of tourism, disagrees with the latter’s negative view of it. Korstanje (2012) contends that tourism possesses no unified epistemology, and its methodological concerns lack a specific object. Yet, tourism creates parallel spaces of consumption, similar to virtual realities.

LITERATURE REVIEW: THE TOURIST GAZE

The tourist gaze is described by Urry (1990: 2) as “a system of social activities and signs which locate the particular tourist practices, not in terms of some intrinsic characteristics, but through the contrasts implied with non-tourist social practices, particularly those based within the home and paid work”. This gaze is a synthesis of discursive practices, disciplining the interactions of social actors (Huang 2013). Tourists, the tourism industry and local residents play different roles in the discursive formation of the place-myth, as “seekers”, “designers”, “guiders”, and “boosters” (Ibid.). Television as “myth-maker” transforms empirical time and space into the mythic world and embeds the media narrative into the landscape meaning (Ibid.).

More and more people are travelling to destinations that they discovered through popular novels, films, or television series (Reijnders et al. 2015). This activity is what has been dubbed “film-induced tourism” (Beeton 2006), “cinematic tourism” (Tzanelli 2004), or “media tourism” (Reijnders 2011). In Transylvania, large numbers of tourists travel to visit every year, to hunt for remnants of Count Dracula (Reijnders 2011).

Films can augment the destination image and increase awareness of the host city, while television is even more influential since it can constantly emphasise the appeal of the destination through building awareness (Tuclea & Nistoreanu 2011). Thus, a growing body of literature provides evidence that cinematic film and television drama productions can influence people’s travel decisions and entice them to visit particular destinations (Bolan & Kearney 2017).

For example, in the case of Chinese filmmaker Zhang Yimou, many scenes from his films have become famous tourism destinations for both domestic and international film fans, albeit unintentionally (Ji & Beeton 2011).

In more recent times, Chinese global media is experiencing a surge in television and films produced for a worldwide audience, such as the “Longest Day in Chang’an” (2019) which was broadcast through the web and enjoyed international reception (Chen 2019). Wei Lei (2019) observes that Chinese television dramas are committed to conveying a favourable image of a social and cultural China to the East African public among others, with two Chinese television dramas receiving an unexpectedly enthusiastic reception by East African viewers. Meanwhile, Guo & Jiang (2019) noted that in recent years, a large number of Chinese costume dramas have been exported overseas, and that costume dramas have embodied the industrialisation of Chinese cultural transmission, for example, the iconic drama “Princess Pearl” which represents the heyday of Chinese co-produced teleplays (Gao 2019).

Travel narratives can be created from either the institutional or the grass-roots approach. From the institutional approach, Shen & Jo & Joppe’s 2022 study demonstrated that country image (CI) positively influences travel attitude even in the post-COVID world, though it is also mitigated by other factors. One of the tools used to achieve a positive country image through effective marketing and communication is anthropomorphism (defined by Duffy (2003) as attaching human attributes to inanimate objects) which is further divided into technology, brand and product anthropomorphism (Ding et al. 2022). Anthropomorphism is a relatively new focus in the study of tourism, which emerged circa 2015, according to the authors. In their review of the literature, the authors advocate that anthropomorphism could be applied in paradigms such as servicescape, memory and information processing, theories of emotion, construal level theory, virtual reality (e.g., immersion, interactivity), and communication modality (Ibid.), thus opening up new avenues for the broadcasting of country image in tourism. Meanwhile, from the tourists’ perspective, tourists’ self-image plays a part in their efforts at reclaiming the narrative. In Lam & Dioko & Li’s research (2022), the authors examined Chinese tourists’ narratives related to posting travel photos on social network sites (SNS) and classified these into five categories of self-conceptions, namely their public self, possible self, hidden self, unknown self and filial self.

CONTEXT: CHINESE CULTURAL HERITAGE IN FILM

The Chinese web series “Longest Day in Chang’an” was initially broadcast on the Chinese video-streaming platform Youku in 2019. The series was then internationally aired on the websites Viki, Amazon, YouTube, and Australia’s SBS On Demand (Xinhua.net 2019). It is set in the Tang Dynasty (618–907 A.D.), and sparked interest in Xi’an, the ancient capital of the Tang Dynasty,

which is today located in northeast China's Shaanxi Province (Wang 2019). The drama takes place in Chang'an during the most prosperous and cosmopolitan period of China's imperial history, which made Xi'an become a destination of so-called "dream back to great Tang Dynasty" tourism (Wang 2019). The plot and description according to Dominguez (2018), who wrote in the drama web-site DramaPanda.com, is as follows:

The 48-episode action thriller drama is adapted from a novel of the same name written by Ma Bo Yong. Employing a format that's rarely (perhaps never) been seen in Chinese dramas, The Longest Day in Chang'an follows two protagonists as they try to stop an imminent terrorist attack during the Lantern Festival in the span of 24 hours. Li Bi is a young genius who commissions the help of death-row convict Zhang Xiao Jing to save the city. Zhang Xiao Jing is a former war veteran with the connections, the skills, and the wealth of experience. The two join hands in a political landscape that is about to usher in a new era of change.

Besides CGTN and DramaPanda.com above, other examples of official media which promoted the show include the Australian broadcasting channel SBS (2020), which reported the high attention paid to detail in the costuming and set:

Directed by Dun Cao, the show is visually stunning, and the high production values had people raving upon its premiere in China last year. The show has also been praised for its research into the clothing, make-up and architecture of the time, ensuring its visually rich depictions are as authentic as possible.

Likewise, Dimsum, a Malaysian video-streaming platform, which also broadcast the show, highlighted that one of the reasons for watching the series is that "it is full of stunning costumes and architecture" (DimSum.my 2020).

In terms of unofficial media such as blogs, which featured reviews of "Longest Day in Chang'an", blogger The Fangirl Verdict says:

[...] this is reportedly the most expensive Chinese drama made-to-date, with an extensive amount of attention to detail, in reproducing makeup, costuming and architecture true to the era.

Internet forums such as Reddit.com also had a subreddit, Cdramas, and a page dedicated to discussion of the show, noting:

Well, in this, everything is on point. It's not only beautiful, it's also authentic. We can find Tang Dynasty's style in all women's clothing for example and. We can really find Tang Dynasty at its best in terms of clothing and makeup for sure. Passing on to the decorations, we can also notice that there are lots of details and in lots of scenes, we can see the city of Chang'an and its wealthiness.

These are excerpts from a selection of both official and unofficial media describing the historical web series, “Longest Day in Chang’an”, though this list is not exhaustive. These websites make up the potential resources for a tourist in search of destination information. The meticulous craftsmanship evident in the costumes and set design also enhances the destination image of the location involved, which in this case is the present-day Xi’an.

As recently as 2020, there has been a tourist site specifically dedicated to re-enacting scenes from historical Chinese films and television series. This tourist attraction is called Xia Tianxia Scenic Area, located in the Fujian province in Southern China, and is described as:

One tourist location in Fujian, the Xia Tianxia Scenic Area, with a strategic location near some of China's most picturesque mountain ranges and natural features such as plunging waterfalls and lush green forests, offers tourists a “wuxia” experience. (Chee Kin 2020)

Parasols, scarves, costumes, and makeshift weapons are provided so that you can recreate the famous scenes from your favourite “wuxia” films. (Sukhbir Cheema 2020)

This interest in historical destination tourism can be witnessed through tourist behaviour. For example, the “Longest Day in Chang’an” was reported to have boosted tourism in Xi’an (Wang 2019). According to the CGTN news report, the web series continues to send visitors to the original location of the drama (Ibid.). Die-hard fans of Chinese costume dramas and swordsman movies often like to travel to their shooting locations, to have an opportunity to step into the past (Xu 2020). Even documentary-based television series have been observed to affect tourism, such as in the case of “A Bite of China”, which contributes to regional food-based destination images (Xu & Kim & Reijnders 2020). Another associated example is that of Chinese online literature, which has permeated the Internet and has been translated by fans worldwide, as well as made into television series and film which in turn generates interest in tourism, among other activities (Chan 2017). As for tourism recovery, especially after the global spread of COVID-19, movie studios were believed to play a role, for example, the studios in Xiangshan, which were popular for being locations of costume dramas such as the “Longest Day in Chang’an”.

CONCEPTUAL FRAMEWORK

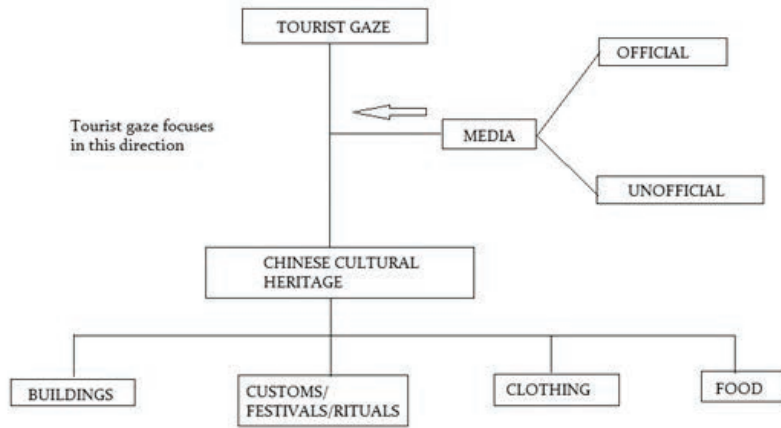


Figure 1. Conceptual Framework of the Authenticity-Based Tourist Gaze.

Based on the conceptual framework above, the tourist gaze is influenced by the media, in both its official and unofficial forms. The official media refers to newspapers, both digital and physical, while the unofficial media refers to platforms such as social media, blogs, word-of-mouth (or its online version, eWOM) or viral news. The focus of the tourist gaze in this case study is towards Chinese cultural heritage, which comprises elements such as buildings, customs/festivals/rituals, clothing and food. For example, the tourist gaze searches for an authentic Chinese historical experience such as places related to Chinese folklore. The tourist reads about interesting places promoted in official tourist guidebooks, or multimedia such as television and YouTube channels. But they also encounter internet forum discussions, social media posts and viral news where previous visitors have shared and engaged in discourse and even debate about their experience. Furthermore, the discussions revolve around and introduce the related sites, which include natural environments; built heritage such as buildings; celebrations held at these sites based on Chinese customs, festivals and rituals according to the lunisolar calendar (Spring Festival, Mid-Autumn Festival, Lantern Festival, etc.); the cuisine and dishes involved with it, such as Tang Yuan (glutinous rice ball) that is consumed during the Chinese Lantern Festival; as well as Chinese clothing such as *qipao* (*cheongsam*), or even the revival of wearing *hanfu* (the ancient Chinese robes) in some places today. To note, Chinese festivals are celebrated all throughout the lunisolar calendar year together with the family (Chan 2022). Chinese annual festivals revolve

around the Chinese lunisolar calendar, a calendar of 24 seasons, or *jieqi*, each containing 15 days (Yuan 2016).

It must be noted, however, that sentimental and critical differences exist within the perception of these cultural heritage sites by domestic and foreign tourists to any given country. In Smith's work on emotional heritage, which aimed at discovering the nature of memory and identity work people engaged in while visiting different genres of sites as well as any national differences, she found a difference between the emotional investment in national heritage sites among domestic and foreign tourists – in that the former tended to be less critical and more emotionally invested, while the latter were more critically engaged (Smith 2019: 17, 18, 21, 22).

There are other precursor theoretical frameworks conceptualised to study travel motivation, as observed by Tsephe & Obono (2013), who state that the push and pull theory (Farmaki 2012) as well as the inner and outer-directed values theory (Gnoth 1977) are the most suitable theories for the modelling of rural tourism motivation factors. For example, Pung & Del Chiappa found that Gen Y Chinese students travelling to Europe are driven by both push and pull motivations. Push factors are related to the travellers' desire to find novelty, to relax, to express social status and prestige and to satisfy what is defined as a "life-long dream"; while pull factors correspond to the respondents motivated by the possibility of experiencing different cultures and landscapes, learning about local history and typical food, as well as attending events (Pung & Del Chiappa 2018). A fundamental pull factor that could also be identified is the destination image, an asset that strongly attracts tourism (Hanqin & Lam 1999).

However, my study focuses on the modelling of urban tourism motivation and thus derives some inspiration from the two theories above, though it also contains media influence as a possible independent variable, as in the case of film tourism. Thus, this paper aimed to gauge the experience of objective, constructive and existential authenticity among tourists who visited a particular historical heritage building in Malaysia.

RESEARCH OBJECTIVE

Thus, given the discursive trajectory above, my paper seeks to discuss the inter-connectivity between tourism authenticity, the tourist gaze, mass media and tourist consumer behaviour in visiting Chinese cultural heritage sites, particularly in an ethnic Chinese diasporic community in Malaysia, a diverse society with multiple ethnicities.

METHOD

This study is a part of the Fundamental Research Grant Scheme (FRGS) project, “Superdiversity Networks: Cantonese Clan Associations in Malaysia as Transnational Social Support System”, sponsored by Malaysia’s Ministry of Education, which examined in particular the Chan See Shu Yuen Kuala Lumpur & Selangor Clan Association (CSSYKL).

One example of cultural heritage which is situated at the crossroads between tourism and tradition is the Chinese clan association temple, especially those located in central urban areas. Chan See Shu Yuen Kuala Lumpur & Selangor Clan Association (CSSYKL) is located on one end of Petaling Street, or Kuala Lumpur Chinatown, a major tourist attraction. CSSYKL is an example of a historical heritage building which continues to function today albeit in an evolved form. Besides being a clan association catering to the needs of its members, CSSYKL is also an important international and local tourist attraction.

The CSSYKL has its headquarters in Guangzhou, Mainland China called the Chen Clan Ancestral Hall, upon which the Kuala Lumpur one is modelled, physically and organisationally. This hall originally functioned as an “academic temple” for candidates’ preparation for the Qing Dynasty imperial examinations and was the template for the Chan See Shu Yuen built by its descendants in Malaysia. It prides itself on the inherited “Ling Nan Style of Architecture” derived from Guangzhou, Guangdong. “[The] CSSYKL building was modelled after the Chan Clan Association in Xi Guan, Guangzhou China as a design blueprint, which combined the characteristics of a family temple and ancestral hall features, incorporating ancient Cantonese-style art and Southern China architecture, which has a mix of Han and Bai Yue elements” (Chan See Shu Yuen Clan Association 2016). The CSSYKL has persisted in functioning ever since. “For more than a century, the Chen’s descendants of CSSYKL had kept the tradition alive and upheld its core values generation after generation. Celebration and paying homage to the birth commemoration of Chen’s Great Grand Ancestors, Honourable Shun Di, Honourable Chen Shi, and Honourable Chen Yuan Guang, Spring and Autumn Festival Praying are the main occasions for CSSYKL. Other celebrations like the CSSYKL anniversary, Lunar New Year, Duan Wu, Lanterns Festival, Winter Solstice Festival, etc. will not be missed yearly. These everlasting practices of CSSYKL are likened to the immortal of incenses” (Ibid.).

Today, an additional function of this clan association is to boost tourism. A great number of tourists come from various European countries as well as China and Malaysia itself. These are recorded in CSSYKL’s guest record book, and they are also observed during participant observation where tourists trickle in daily with their cameras. The CSSYKL has been listed as a historical relic in the protection of ancient buildings by the Malaysian government (Chan See Shu Yuen Clan Association 2016). It was also featured as one out of twelve

places to visit on a tourist trail, designated by the Ministry of Tourism and Culture of Malaysia (Malaysia Tourism Centre 2017).

To understand the significance of the Cantonese or Chinese clan association, I initially started fieldwork using a participant observation approach, integrating interviews with the clan association members in order to understand the history of the place. Data was also obtained from documents provided by CSSYKL itself, such as its official yearbook.

The next phase of my research was observing tourist behaviour in visiting CSSYKL. I designed the Questionnaire for Measuring Individual and Tourist Attractions towards Historical Buildings. This survey questionnaire was designed to accommodate the convenience of tourists visiting the Chan See Shu Yuen Kuala Lumpur and Selangor Clan Association (CSSYKL) building located in Petaling Street. It was designed for brevity, as I had observed that tourists linger mainly in the main courtyard for no more than fifteen minutes on average. With the permission of CSSYKL, I prepared a box containing my questionnaire and signage inviting tourists to fill up an opinion survey regarding their visit, placing this next to the tourist brochures. This survey was carried out from April 2019 to February 2020, which was only halted due to the outbreak of the COVID-19 pandemic, which in Malaysia was contained by instituting a Movement Control Order in March 2020.

A total of 117 responses were collected from local/domestic and international tourists. The questions covered demographics, such as age, gender, education, ethnicity, country of origin, industry, travelling companions; and Likert scale statements about respondents' motivation to visit CSSYKL. These data mirror the data collected by the Tourism Malaysia (the Malaysia Tourism Promotion Board or MTPB) survey, which covered gender, marital status, occupational group, age group and travelling pattern.

The survey consisted of ten statements, to be ranked on a Likert scale. The statements corresponded to the three types of tourism authenticity – objective, constructive and existential. Statements 1 and 2 relate to tourists' recognition of their external reality and were therefore classified as objective authenticity. Statements 4, 5, 6, 8, 9, and 10 relate to the tourists' projection of authenticity upon toured objects, through images, expectations, preferences and beliefs, hence these were classified as constructive authenticity. Statements 3 and 7 related to the self-actualisation of tourists in visiting places that conformed to their beliefs in heritage conservation, hence these were classified under existential authenticity. It is worth noting that these statements could indeed be taken as belonging to more than one type of authenticity, as the definitions often overlap. For example, a tourist could develop an interest in a particular historical site due to the external social construction of knowledge by other social agents, but they may also visit it because they believe that the historical site conforms to their own prior personal ideas regarding cultural heritage preservation. Thus, in my analysis of the survey responses below, I have

used some of these statements as independent variables themselves, to examine the relationship between more than one type of authenticity. The response options were ranked as 1 = Strongly Agree, 2 = Agree, 3 = Neutral, 4 = Disagree, 5 = Strongly Disagree.

Table 1. Questionnaire Statements

Statement	Type of Authenticity
1 - I visited this place because it looks historical.	Objective
2 - Historical places interest me.	Objective
3 - I found out about this place by myself.	Existential
4 - I found out about this place because it was recommended to me.	Constructive
5 - I find this place a good photographic opportunity.	Constructive
6 - I would recommend this place to others.	Constructive
7 - I understand the function of this place upon seeing it.	Existential
8 - I would appreciate more information.	Constructive
9 - I think that historical buildings should be preserved.	Constructive
10 - I think that cities should highlight their unique culture, besides their development.	Constructive

Several hypotheses were derived from the literature, namely:

H0: There is no relationship between the respondent's attitudes towards historical buildings and their visits to CSSYKL.

H1: The respondent visited CSSYKL because it looks historical, due to the respondent's interest in historical places.

H2: The respondent thinks that historical buildings should be preserved, due to the respondent's belief that cities should highlight their unique culture besides their development.

H3: The respondent visited CSSYKL because it looks historical, due to their belief that historical buildings should be preserved.

H4: The respondent visited CSSYKL because it looks historical, due to their belief that cities should highlight their unique culture, besides their development.

H5: The respondent would also recommend CSSYKL to other visitors, because the respondent visited CSSYKL as it looks historical.

H6: The respondent believes that cities should highlight their unique culture, besides their development, because the respondent is interested in historical places.

FINDINGS

Based on the ten statements and the demographics, the relationships between these variables were tested using linear regression and correlation analyses. The demographics as well as statements were considered as independent variables. These statements were tested for their relationships to other statements regarding tourist behaviour in CSSYKL, to gauge the tourists' experience of the three forms of authenticity. The software used for analysis was Microsoft Excel for the demographics and JASP for the correlation analysis. JASP is a free graphical software package for basic statistical procedures such as t tests, ANOVAs, linear regression models, and analyses of contingency tables, and is open-source (Love et al. 2019).

Demographics

According to the latest Tourism Malaysia statistics, in 2018 Malaysia recorded 25, 832, 354 tourist arrivals. The top ten visiting nationalities consisted of Singapore, Indonesia, China, Thailand, Brunei, South Korea, India, Philippines, Japan and Taiwan, all Asian countries with the majority being Southeast Asian countries. The top sources of information on Malaysia for these tourists were "Friends and relatives who visited Malaysia" (96.5%), "Own experience" (95.8%), the Internet which comprised Google or search engines (31.1%), websites (22.9%), online travel providers (14.3%), social media (13.2%), travel review sites (12.4%), travel blogs (3.1%), "Friends and relatives living in Malaysia" (50.6%), "travel agents" (24.4%), and "travel guide books" (18.6%) (Tourism Malaysia 2018). In this survey, 25% of respondents strongly agreed and 0.08% of respondents agreed that they found out about CSSYKL on their own. 17% of respondents strongly agreed and 0.06% of respondents agreed that they would recommend CSSYKL to others. In general, it appears that the majority of tourists surveyed by both this study and the Tourism Malaysia study relied on others such as friends and relatives primarily and the Internet secondarily for constructive authenticity.

Interestingly, the majority of the respondents were aged 51 and above (26%), followed by the age groups of 21–30 (20%) and 31–40 (20%). It appears that most of the tourists who visited CSSYKL and who responded to the survey were of the mature age group.

In terms of gender, 57% of the respondents were female, while 39% of the respondents were male.

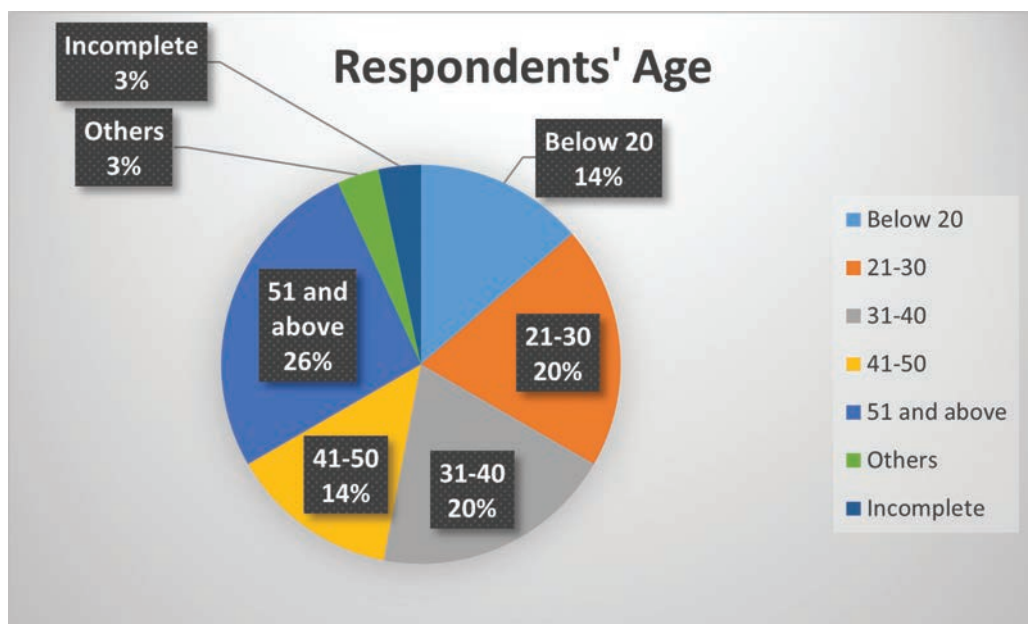


Figure 2. Respondents' age.

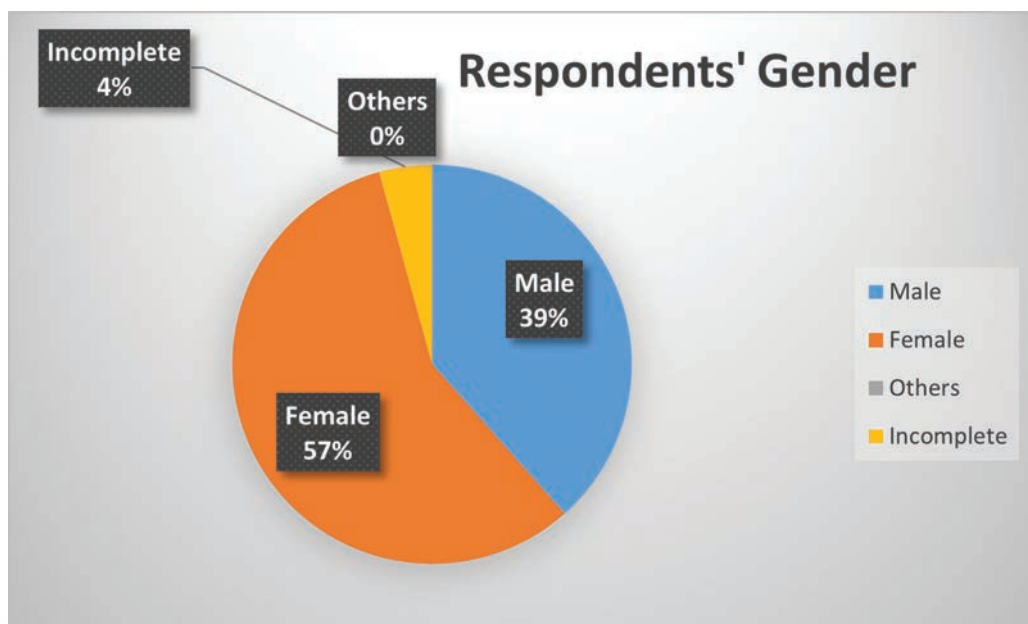


Figure 3. Respondents' gender.

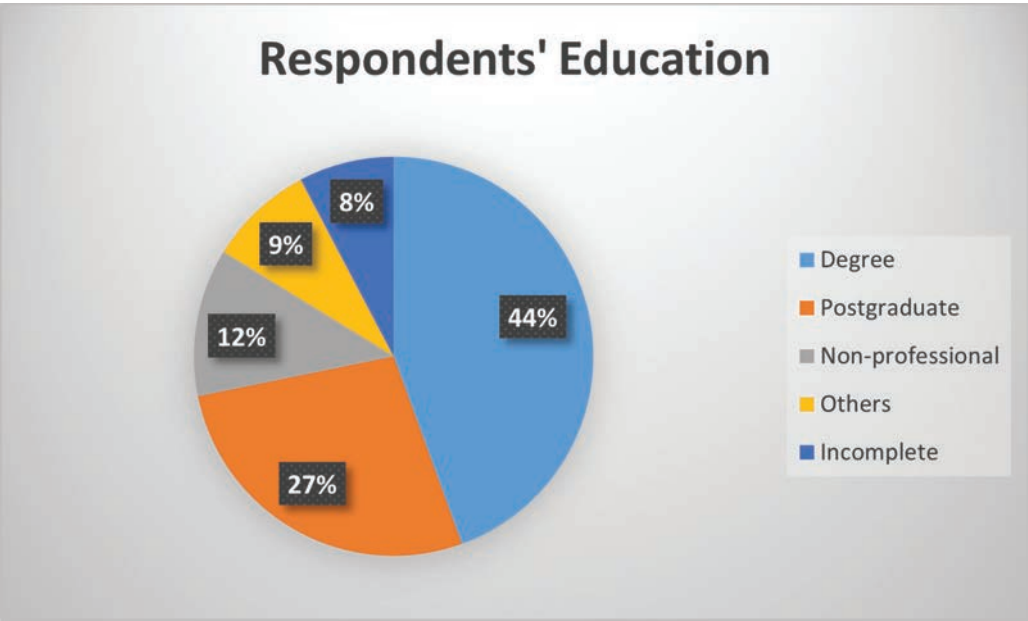


Figure 4. Respondents' education level.

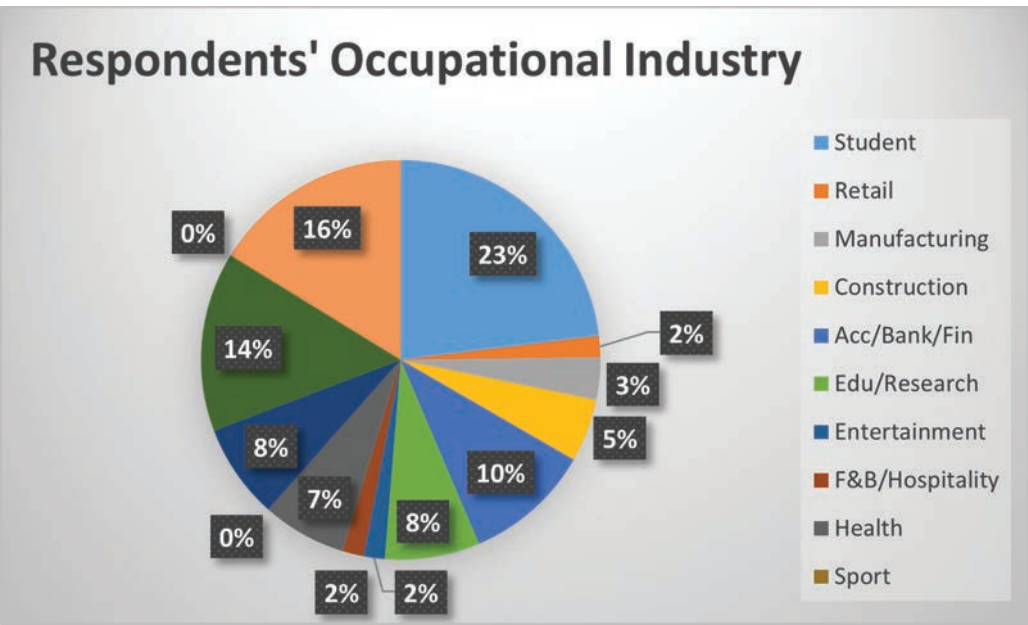


Figure 5. Respondents' occupational industry.

The majority of respondents held a least a Bachelor's degree (44%), while 27% held a post-graduate qualification such as a Master's degree or a PhD.

The majority of respondents were students (23%), followed by those employed in retail (16%), and education and research (14%).

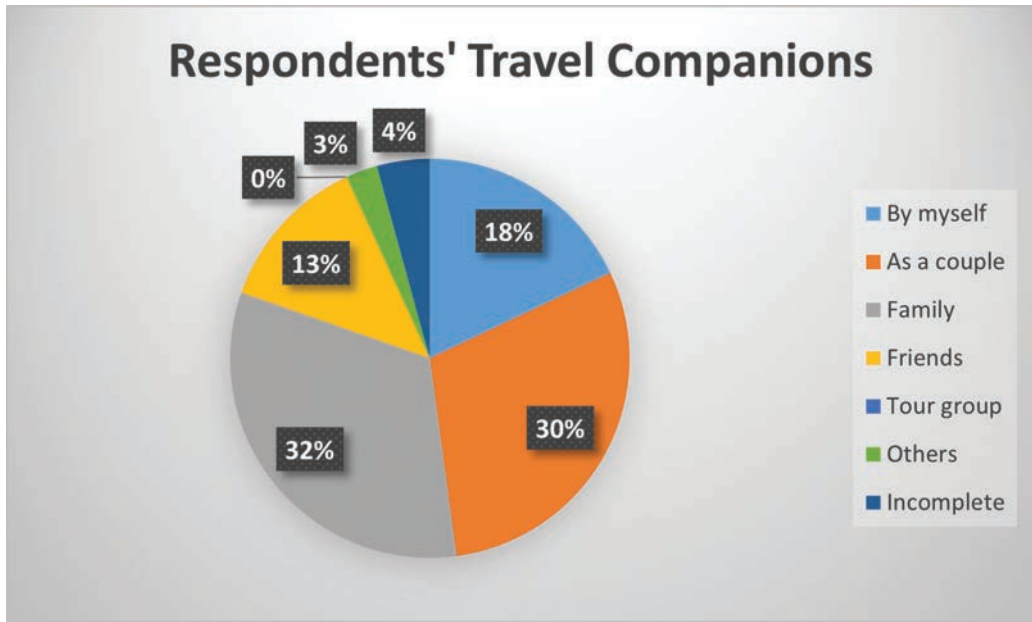


Figure 6. Respondents' travel companions.

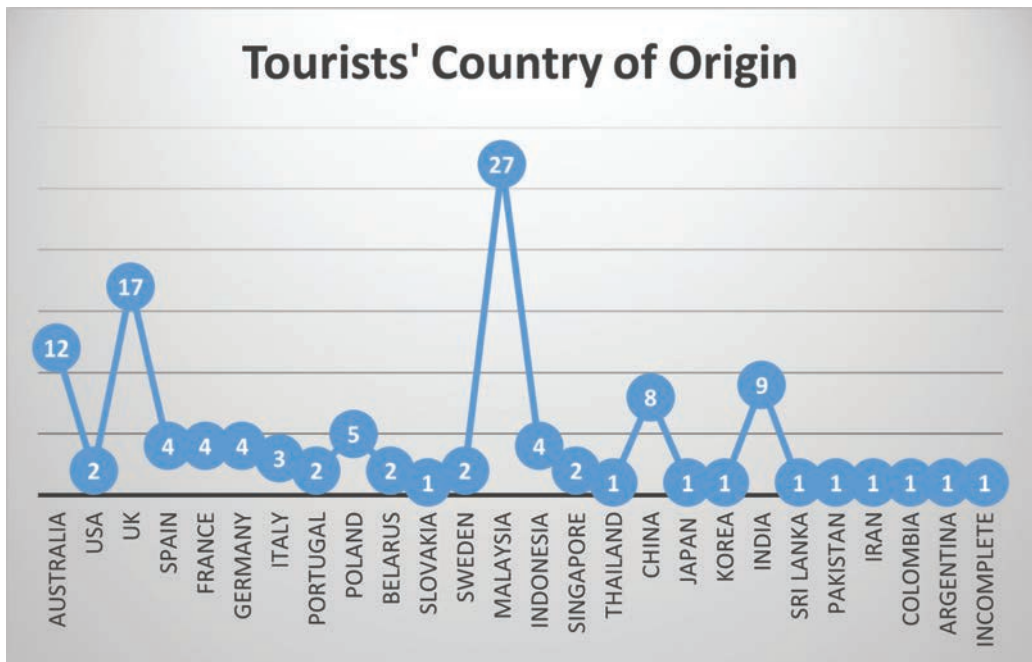


Figure 7. Respondents' country of origin.

Most respondents traveled with family (32%), followed by as a couple (30%), by themselves alone (18%), and with friends (13%).

As for nationality and ethnicity, the survey options were open-ended, as the responses were unlimited. In the keyword frequency calculation, certain terms were used interchangeably, for example, “white” and “Caucasian”.

The respondents consisted of both local and international tourists, with 23% of respondents being domestic tourists from Malaysia, while 77% of respondents were international tourists. In terms of ethnicity, the two major groups of respondents were the ethnic Chinese (21%) and Caucasian (21%). Continent-wise, 48% of respondents were from Asia, 38% were from Europe, 10% were from Australia, 0.02% were from the United States of America, and likewise 0.02% were from Latin America. However, only 0.07% of respondents claimed to be from China or Hong Kong.

Hypotheses

Table 2. Research Hypotheses

Hypotheses	Statements	Pearson’s r	p-value	Result
H0: There is no relationship between respondent’s attitudes towards historical buildings and their visits to CSSYKL.	N/A	N/A	N/A	N/A
H1: Respondent visited CSSYKL because it looks historical, due to respondent’s interest in historical places.	Statement 1: I visited this place because it looks historical. (Objective authenticity) Statement 2: Historical places interest me. (Objective authenticity)	0.829	<0.001	Strong, positive relationship, reject H0.
H2: Respondent thinks that historical buildings should be preserved, due to respondent’s belief that cities should highlight their unique culture besides their development.	Statement 9: I think that historical buildings should be preserved. (Constructive authenticity) Statement 10: I think that cities should highlight their unique culture, besides their development. (Constructive authenticity)	0.892	<0.001	Strong, positive relationship, reject H0.

H3: Respondent visited CSSYKL because it looks historical, due to their belief that historical buildings should be preserved.	Statement 1: I visited this place because it looks historical. (Objective authenticity) Statement 9: I think that historical buildings should be preserved. (Constructive authenticity)	0.789	<0.001	Strong, positive relationship, reject H0.
H4: Respondent visited CSSYKL because it looks historical, due to their belief that cities should highlight their unique culture, besides their development.	Statement 1: I visited this place because it looks historical. (Objective authenticity) Statement 10: I think that cities should highlight their unique culture, besides their development. (Constructive authenticity)	0.775	<0.001	Strong, positive relationship, reject H0.
H5: Respondent would also recommend CSSYKL to other visitors, because the respondent visited CSSYKL as it looks historical.	Statement 6: I would recommend this place to others. (Constructive authenticity) Statement 1: I visited this place because it looks historical. (Objective authenticity)	0.755	<0.001	Strong, positive relationship, reject H0.
H6: Respondent believes that cities should highlight their unique culture, besides their development, because the respondent is interested in historical places.	Statement 2: Historical places interest me. (Objective authenticity) Statement 10: I think that cities should highlight their unique culture, besides their development. (Constructive authenticity)	0.81	<0.001	Strong, positive relationship, reject H0.

Table 3. Scale Reliability

Scale Reliability Statistics			
	mean	sd	Cronbach's α
scale	2.406	1.401	0.716

For the reliability analysis, the value of 0.716 shows that the survey items are reliable since a Cronbach's alpha of 0.70 is the cut-off value for being acceptable (Santos 1999). Several relationships between the statements were observed. It was found that respondents who were generally interested in historical sites visited CSSYKL as it appeared to be a historical building. These tourists also believed that historical buildings should be preserved, and that cities should highlight their unique culture besides their development. Thus, these tourists would recommend CSSYKL to other tourists. There is also a relationship between objective authenticity and constructive authenticity in the case of tourist behaviour in visiting CSSYKL, as evidenced by several statements under both categories demonstrating a strong, positive relationship with values between $r = 0.7$ to 0.9 (Navarro & Foxcroft & Faulkenberry 2019) and small p -values of <0.001 indicating strong evidence against the null hypothesis (Zhu 2016). This indicates that tourists visiting CSSYKL believe that the authenticity of their external reality can be confirmed by the projections of socially constructed knowledge regarding historical tourist sites. This also relates to the construction of “hot authenticity”, where continual (re)enactment of one's external reality is necessary for the perpetual transformation, or augmentation of the attraction, as opposed to the “museumisation” and stagnation of interest in a historical site (Cohen & Cohen 2012). Similarly, a significant amount of interest in historical sites can be observed according to the Tourism Malaysia (2018) statistics, in which tourists engaged in visiting museums (30.6%) and visiting historical sites (36.8%). Cultural events and festivals meanwhile made up 16.1% of tourist activity.

DISCUSSION AND CONCLUSION

Lovell (2019: 448) makes an original contribution to debates about authenticity by asking how tourist experiences of the medieval historic environment are linked to fairy tales, providing a new way for tourists to imaginatively authenticate heritage. According to this argument, the architecture of some historic cities is preponderantly medieval, an era which is strongly associated with fairy tales, as can be seen in the fantasy narratives of Harry Potter and Game of Thrones, which creates a “fluid magi-heritage simulacrum” (Lovell 2019: 448). Lovell's findings imply that “in an era when the fantasy genre is increasingly

popular, the experiential authenticity of heritage tourists may be enhanced by the ‘heritage marvellous’” (Lovell 2019: 448). This applies to the case of film tourism as enabled by media such as the “Longest Day in Chang’an”, which has attracted tourists interested in re-enacting historical scenes through the use of costume, architecture, scenery and *wuxia* or “kung-fu flying” contraptions in present-day Xi’an.

Hovi (2014) also explains how “Dracula-tourism” combines fiction with history and acts as a gateway into Romanian history and culture; he explains that its associated fiction includes all narratives connected to the fictitious Count Dracula, and to the image of Romania and Transylvania in popular culture, though not in official narratives. From this viewpoint, the folkloric perspective of Chinese cultural heritage acts as a path to understanding and appreciating Chinese culture from a material and also from an experiential standpoint. Of course, Hovi (2014) also notes that the acceptance of the “Dracula-tourism” phenomenon, while classifiable as heritage tourism, is not without some reluctance on the part of stakeholders in Romanian culture and history (Light 2012: 135–136, as cited in Hovi 2014).

Of course, such activities may well be regarded as merely a simulacrum of reality, as Baudrillard (1983) proposed. Indeed, the film site as well as its associated tourist spots may be merged to form hyper-reality, a blend of the post-modern with the traditional. It is post-modern because barriers to participating in such historical re-enactments have been removed, through the facilitation of technology where props are concerned; and it is also historical in its narrative and backdrop. Thus, it is such that the folklore of Chinese cultural heritage becomes constructed. A new form of tourist authenticity is created. Nonetheless, Jansson (2002) also observed another layer to this, that in the mediatisation of tourism, even tourism catalogues, travel magazines and Internet sites are simulations of reality as well as of already simulated environments (Eco 1986; Bennetta 1994; Ritzer 1999: 126–128).

Jansson (2002) noted the importance of discussing the relationship between media practices and touristic practices, where the former might bring about the “end of tourism”, or “post-tourism”. Indeed, in doing so, Jansson (2002) was referring to how the lines were blurring between the idea of “home” and “going away”, linking it to the notion of “homelessness” within studies of diaspora and migration. This is where the concept of “authenticity” became problematised. Given the widespread Chinese diaspora, this also challenges whether “Greater China” remains as a source of identification for the Chinese overseas (Chan 2020). The “Chinese overseas” are the ethnic Chinese who live outside mainland China, but acknowledge their Chinese origins (Wang 1993), for example the Malaysian Chinese (Chan 2020). Yow (2005) argues, however, that Southeast Asian Chinese in general have been distancing themselves from the ancestral homeland in China, and that they are instead increasingly rooted in the new host countries (Chan 2020). Likewise, Li & Tucker & Chen (2021)

also point out that the Eurocentric epistemological trend in studying the tourist gaze, has been to overestimate the importance of “Chinese-ness” as a set of cultural values and traditional philosophies guiding it.

In this context of ethnic diversity, especially with regards to “cool and hot authenticity”, there is a parallel conceptual framework developed by a Malaysian social anthropologist, who refers to “authority-defined” and “everyday-defined” social reality (Shamsul 1996). Both of these frameworks deal with the conceptions of external realities and the process of their legitimisation. While the former deals with the authenticity of tourist experiences, the latter relates to macro- and micro-sociological social actions as a whole. In the “authority-defined” and “everyday-defined” social reality approach, Malaysian tourists visit these cultural heritage sites in order to appreciate the cultural and ethnic diversity of their fellow citizens, from a “bottom-up” or “everyday-defined” perspective, alongside “authority-defined” initiatives to encourage unity among Malaysians. While the management and marketing of these sites as official tourist destinations is overseen by Tourism Malaysia, these historical sites also perform their own grassroots efforts to attract historical enthusiasts, such as in the case of CSSYKL which organises cultural festivals, educational outreach and guided tours to domestic and international tourists. A recent development in the wake of the COVID-19 pandemic is to conduct these activities online, by hosting cultural and historical talks about the CSSYKL through its own official Facebook Live channel, garnering thousands of views (with a likely international audience). This in turn represents a form of constructive authenticity similar to film tourism, which mitigates the re-enactment of tourists’ projection of authenticity upon toured objects.

ACKNOWLEDGEMENTS

This work was supported by the Ministry of Education of Malaysia under Grant Number FRGS/1/2018/WAB12/UKM/02/1 (Superdiversity Networks: Cantonese Clan Associations in Malaysia as Transnational Social Support System). Parts of this paper will also be presented at upcoming conferences.

NOTE

- 1 Wuxia refers to a genre of Chinese language literature, which typically features a hero of humble origins adventuring through a world of martial arts and Chinese cultural heritage, bildungsroman-style, set in a pre-modern era (Chan 2023; 2017).

REFERENCES

- Baudrillard, Jean 1983. The Precession of Simulacra. *Simulations*. New York: Semiotext(e).
- Beeton, Sue 2004. Rural Tourism in Australia – Has the Gaze Altered? Tracking Rural Images through Film and Tourism Promotion. *International Journal of Tourism Research*, Vol. 6, No. 3, pp. 125–135.
- Beeton, Sue 2006. Understanding Film-Induced Tourism. *Tourism Analysis*, Vol. 11, No. 3, pp. 181–188.
- Bennetta, Jules-Rosette 1994. Black Paris: Touristic Simulations. *Annals of Tourism Research*, Vol. 21, No. 4, pp. 679–700.

- Bolan, Peter & Kearney, Matthew 2017. Exploring Film Tourism Potential in Ireland: From Game of Thrones to Star Wars. *Revista Turismo & Desenvolvimento (RT&D)/Journal of Tourism & Development*, Vol. 27/28, pp. 2149–2156.
- Bruner, Edward M. 1989. Tourism, Creativity and Authenticity. *Studies in Symbolic Interaction*, Vol. 10, pp. 109–114.
- Chan, Rachel Suet Kay 2017. Game of translations: Virtual community doing English translations of Chinese online fiction. *Journal of Science and Technology of the Arts*, Vol. 9, No. 1, pp. 39–55.
- Chan, Rachel Suet Kay 2019. In With the Old: Community Participation in Heritage Management in Selected Malaysian Tourist Sites. *JATI – Journal of Southeast Asian Studies*, Vol. 24, No. 2, pp. 131–154. <https://jati.um.edu.my/article/view/19644>.
- Chan, Rachel Suet Kay 2020. *The Convergence of Chinese and Western Values as Global Habitus*. Bangi: National University of Malaysia (UKM) Press.
- Chan, Rachel Suet Kay & Khalid, Kartini Aboo Talib 2020. Chan See Shu Yuen: The Cantonese Ancestral Clan in Malaysia as Transnational Social Support Network. *Social and Education History*, Vol. 9, No. 1, pp. 1–37.
- Chan, Rachel Suet Kay 2022. *Chinese Values, Western Values and the Survival of the Chinese Clan as a Social Institution*. Bangi: UKM Press.
- Chan, Rachel Suet Kay 2023. Fairy Tales in Action: Chinese Online Fiction, English Fan Translation, and the Fan as the Author. *The Bloomsbury Handbook of Modern Chinese Literature in Translation*. London: Bloomsbury Academic, pp. 265–276.
- Chan She Shu Yuen Clan Association 2016. *Glory Days Relived: 120 Years of Chan She Shu Yuen*. Kuala Lumpur: Chan She Shu Yuen Clan Association.
- Chee, Kin 2020. Fly Like Your Favourite Chinese Drama Characters At This Tourist Spot in China. *WORLD OF BUZZ*. Available at <https://worldofbuzz.com/fly-like-your-favourite-chinese-drama-characters-at-this-tourist-spot-in-china/>, last accessed on 17 June 2020.
- Chen, Xi 2019. Chinese Drama Becomes Hit with Authentic Tang Dynasty Clothes. *Global Times*.
- Cheema, Sukhbir 2020. This Tourist Attraction Lets You Role Play as a Martial Arts Character in Ancient China. Available at <https://sea.mashable.com/culture/11589/this-tourist-attraction-lets-you-role-play-as-a-martial-arts-character-in-ancient-china>, last accessed on 17 June 2020.
- Cohen, Erik & Cohen, Scott A. 2012. Authentication: Hot and Cool. *Annals of Tourism Research*, Vol. 39, No. 3, pp. 1295–1314.
- Dominguez, Anne 2018. *The Longest Day in Chang'an (2019)*. DramaPanda. Available at <https://dramapanda.com/2018/10/the-longest-day-in-changan.html>, last accessed on 17 June 2020.
- dimsum.my 2020. *Here's why you should be watching the Longest Day In Chang'an*. Available at <https://www.dimsum.my/blog/new-in-the-longest-day-in-changan/>, last accessed on 17 June 2020.
- Ding, Anni & Lee, Rachel Hyunkyung & Legendre, Tiffany S. & Madera, Juan 2022. Anthropomorphism in hospitality and tourism: A systematic review and agenda for future research. *Journal of Hospitality and Tourism Management*, Vol. 52, No. 1, pp. 404–415.
- Eco, Umberto 1986. *Travels in Hyper-Reality*. London: Picador.
- Gao, Yiping 2019. A Probe into the Factors of Rise and Fall of Co-produced TV Series in China: Case Analysis of the Co-produced Teleplay Princess Pearl. In *5th International Conference on Arts, Design and Contemporary Education*. ICADCE 2019. Moscow: Atlantis Press.
- Guo, Lanying & Jiang, Jianxia 2019. The market effect of cultural transmission in Chinese costume dramas: a case study of the Untamed. *International Conference on Economic Management and Cultural Industry (ICEMCI 2019)*. Shenzhen: Atlantis Press, pp. 617–620.
- Hanqin, Zhang Qiu & Lam, Terry 1999. An Analysis of Mainland Chinese Visitors' Motivations to visit Hong Kong. *Tourism Management*, Vol. 20, No. 5, pp. 587–594.
- Hovi, Tuomas 2014. The Use of History in Dracula Tourism in Romania. *Folklore: Electronic Journal of Folklore*, Vol. 57, pp. 55–78.

- Huang, Guanxiong 2013. Mediating Tourist Landscape: A Case Study of Media-Induced Tourism in China. *International Journal of Communication*, Vol. 7, pp. 2678–2696.
- Jansson, André 2002. Spatial phantasmagoria: The mediatization of tourism experience. *European Journal of Communication*, Vol. 17, No. 4, pp. 429–443.
- Jansson, André 2018. Rethinking post-tourism in the age of social media. *Annals of Tourism Research*, Vol. 69, pp. 101–110.
- Ji, Yuqun & Beeton, Sue 2012. Is Film Tourism All the Same? Exploring Zhang Yimou's Films' Potential Influence on Tourism in China. *Tourism Review International*, Vol. 15, No. 3, pp. 293–296.
- Kavrečič, Petra & Virloget, Katja Hrobat 2019. Traditional Festivities in North Istria in Terms of Authenticity and (Dis)continuity. *Academica Turistica-Tourism and Innovation Journal*, Vol. 12, No. 2, pp. 109–120.
- kfangurl 2019. Flash Review: The Longest Day in Chang'an. *The Fangirl Verdict*. Available at <https://thefangirlverdict.com/2019/12/20/flash-review-the-longest-day-in-changan-china/>, last accessed on 17 June 2020.
- Korstanje, Maximiliano E. 2012. Maccannell re-visited: A critical approach to structuralism. *Enlightening Tourism: A Pathmaking Journal*, Vol. 2, No. 2, pp. 117–141.
- Lam, Iok Keng Veronica & Dioko, Leonardo Don A. N. & Li, Fangxuan Sam 2022. Evolving self-conceptions of Chinese travellers suggested by their travel photo-sharing behaviours. *Journal of Hospitality and Tourism Management*, Vol. 52, pp. 331–340.
- Lei, Wei 2019. Encountering Chinese Modernity: The Emerging Popularity of Chinese Television Drama in East Africa. *Stichproben: Vienna Journal of African Studies*, Vol. 36, No. 19, pp. 27–50.
- Li, Mohan & Tucker, Hazel & Chen, Ganghua 2022. Chineseness and Behavioural Complexity: Rethinking Chinese Tourist Gaze Studies. *Tourism Review*, Vol. 77, No. 3, pp. 841–858.
- Light, Duncan 2012. *The Dracula Dilemma: Tourism, Identity and the State in Romania*. Farnham: Ashgate.
- Love, Jonathon & Selker, Ravi & Marsman, Maarten & Jamil, Tahira & Dropmann, Damian & Verhagen, Josine & Ly, Alexander & Gronau, Quentin F. & Šmíra, Martin & Epskamp, Sacha & Matzke, Dora & Wild, Anneliese & Knight, Patrick & Rouder, Jeffrey N. & Morey, Richard D. 2019. JASP: Graphical statistical software for common statistical designs. *Journal of Statistical Software*, Vol. 88, No. 2, pp. 1–17.
- Lovell, Jane 2019. Fairytale authenticity: historic city tourism, Harry Potter, medievalism and the magical gaze. *Journal of Heritage Tourism*, Vol. 14, Nos. 5–6, pp. 448–465. <https://doi.org/10.1080/1743873X.2019.1588282>.
- MacCannell, Dean 1973. Staged Authenticity: Arrangements of Social Space in Tourist Settings. *American Journal of Sociology*, Vol. 79, No. 3, pp. 589–603.
- MacCannell, Dean 1999 [1976]. *The Tourist: A New Theory of the Leisure Class*. Berkeley: University of California Press.
- Malaysia Tourism Centre 2017. *Launching KL Must Visit Attractions Trail Card*. Available at <http://www.matic.gov.my/en/information/gallery/photo/291-launching-klmust-visit-attractions-trail-card-19-oktober-2017>, last accessed on 17 June 2020.
- Navarro, Danielle J. & Foxcroft, David R. & Faulkenberry, Thomas J. 2019. *Learning Statistics with JASP: A Tutorial for Psychology Students and Other Beginners*. Version 1/2.
- Pung, Jessica Mei & Del Chiappa, Giacomo 2018. Understanding Chinese Travellers' Motivations to Visit Europe. In: Kozak, Metin & Kozak, Nazmi (eds.) *Tourist Behavior: An Experiential Perspective*. Cham: Springer, pp. 187–201.
- Reijnders, Stijn 2011. Stalking the Count: Dracula, Fandom and Tourism. *Annals of Tourism Research*, Vol. 38, No. 1, pp. 231–248.
- Reijnders, Stijn & Bolderman, Leonieke & Van Es, Nicky & Waysdorf, Abby 2015. Locating Imagination: an Interdisciplinary Perspective on Literary, Film, and Music Tourism. *Tourism Analysis*, Vol. 20, No. 3, pp. 333–339.

- Ritzer, George 1999. *Enchanting a Disenchanted World: Revolutionizing the Means of Consumption*. Thousand Oaks, CA: Pine Forge Press.
- Santos, J. Reynaldo A. 1999. Cronbach's Alpha: A Tool for Assessing the Reliability of Scales. *Journal of Extension*, Vol. 37, No. 2. Available at <https://commons.joe.org/joe/vol37/iss2/15/>, last accessed on 17 June 2020.
- SBS Guide 2020. Hit drama 'The Longest Day in Chang'an' follows a tense 24 hours in 8th-century China. Available at <https://www.sbs.com.au/whats-on/article/hit-drama-the-longest-day-in-changan-follows-a-tense-24-hours-in-8th-century-china/x1m2se4b2>, last accessed on 17 June 2020.
- Shamsul, Amri Baharuddin 1996. Debating About Identity in Malaysia: A Discourse Analysis. *Japanese Journal of Southeast Asian Studies*, Vol. 34, No. 3, pp. 476–499.
- Shaw, Gareth & Williams, Allan M. 2004. *Tourism and Tourism Spaces*. London: SAGE Publications.
- Sherman, Glen L. 2009. Martin Heidegger's concept of authenticity: A philosophical contribution to student affairs theory. *Journal of College and Character*, Vol. 10, No. 7, pp. 1–8.
- Smith, Laurajane 2020. *Emotional Heritage: Visitor Engagement at Museums and Heritage Sites*. London & New York: Routledge.
- Somogy, Varga & Guignon, Charles 2020. Authenticity. *The Stanford Encyclopedia of Philosophy*. Spring Edition. Edward N. Zalta (ed.). Available at <https://plato.stanford.edu/archives/spr2020/entries/authenticity/>, last accessed on 17 June 2020.
- Teo, Cheok Chin Peggy & Yeoh, Saw Ai Brenda 2001. Negotiating Global Tourism: Localism as Difference in Southeast Asian Theme Parks. In: Teo, Peggy & Chang, T. C. & Ho, Kong Chong. (eds) *Interconnected Worlds: Tourism in Southeast Asia*. Amsterdam: Pergamon, pp. 137–154.
- Tourism Malaysia 2018. *Malaysia Tourism Key Performance Indicators*.
- Tsephe, Neo P. & Eyono Obono, Seraphin Desire 2013. A Theoretical Framework for Rural Tourism Motivation Factors. *International Journal of Economics and Management Engineering*, Vol. 7, No. 1, pp. 273–278.
- Trilling, Lionel 1972. *Sincerity and Authenticity*. London: Oxford University Press.
- Tuclea, Claudia-Elena & Nistoreanu, Puiu 2011. How Film and Television Programs Can Promote Tourism and Increase the Competitiveness of Tourist Destinations. *Cactus Tourism Journal*, Vol. 2, No. 2, pp. 25–30.
- Tzanelli, Rodanthi 2004. Constructing the 'Cinematic Tourist' The 'Sign Industry' of The Lord of the Rings. *Tourist Studies*, Vol. 4, No. 1, pp. 21–42.
- u/goshyvava. *The Longest Day In Chang'An: cdramas*. Available at https://www.reddit.com/r/cdramas/comments/dccxvo/the_longest_day_in_changan/, last accessed on 17 June 2020.
- Urry, J. 1990. *The Tourist Gaze: Leisure and Travel in Contemporary Societies*. London: Sage Publications.
- Vertovec, Steven 1997. Three Meanings of "Diaspora", Exemplified among South Asian Religions. *Diaspora: A Journal of Transnational Studies*, Vol. 6, No. 3, pp. 277–299.
- Wang, Gungwu 1993. Greater China and the Chinese overseas. *The China Quarterly*, Vol. 136, No. 30, pp. 926–948.
- Wang, Zhi Hua & Kandampully, Jay & Ryan, Chris 1998. Taiwanese Visitors to New Zealand: an Analysis of Attitudes. *Pacific Tourism Review*, Vol. 2, No. 1, pp. 29–41.
- Wang, Ning 1999. Rethinking Authenticity in Tourism Experience. *Annals of Tourism Research*, Vol. 26, No. 2, pp. 349–70.
- Wang, Yutong 2019. The Longest Day in Chang'an' boosts tourism in NW China's Xi'an. Available at <https://news.cgtn.com/news/2019-08-01/-The-Longest-Day-in-Chang-an-boosts-tourism-in-NW-China-s-Xi-an-INQjh2s0CA/index.html>, last accessed on 17 June 2020.
- Xu, Lin. Updated: 2020-04-06 09:42. Movie studios play a role in tourism recovery. *China Daily*. Available at <https://www.chinadaily.com.cn/a/202004/06/WS5e8a8921a3101282172848be.html>, last accessed on 17 June 2020.

Xu, Min & Kim, Sangkyun & Reijnders, Stijn 2020. From Food to Feet: Analysing A Bite of China as Food-Based Destination Image. *Tourist Studies*, Vol. 20, No. 2, pp. 145–165.

Xinhua.net 2019. *The Longest Day in Chang'an: Chinese web-drama depicts Tang Dynasty in detail*. Available at http://www.xinhuanet.com/english/2019-07/15/c_138228073.htm, last accessed on 17 June 2020.

Yow, Cheun Hoe 2005. Weakening Ties with the Ancestral Homeland in China: The Case Studies of Contemporary Singapore and Malaysian Chinese. *Modern Asian Studies*, Vol. 39, No. 3, pp. 559–597.

Yuan, Haiwang 2016. *The Origin of Chinese New Year*. *SMS-I-Media Tourism Express*, Vol. 1, No. 1.

Zhu, Weimo 2016. $p < 0.05$, < 0.01 , < 0.001 , < 0.0001 , < 0.00001 , < 0.000001 , or < 0.0000001 . . . *Journal of Sport and Health Science*, Vol. 5, No. 1, pp. 77–79.

Dr Rachel Suet Kay Chan is a Research Fellow at the Institute of Ethnic Studies (KITA), National University of Malaysia (UKM). Her area of research is cultural sociology. She studies various forms of cultural artefacts, including but not limited to cultural capital flows between East Asia and the West, tangible and intangible cultural heritage, Chinese clan associations, English translations of Chinese online fiction, habitus and field in Malaysian cosplay, anti-capital in the Ah Beng subculture, the convergence of cultural values among Chinese-educated and non-Chinese educated Malaysian Chinese, language learning with AI, and most recently, graphic novels and manga.

rachelchansuetkay@ukm.edu.my

IN MEMORIAM

Dong Xiaoping

6. XII. 1950 – 3. I. 2026

Dong Xiaoping, Professor of Folkloristics and Director of the College of Trans-cultural Studies at Beijing Normal University, has passed away. A distinguished folklorist and cultural scholar, her academic endeavors and achievements profoundly shaped the intellectual trajectory of Chinese folklore studies and its engagement with international folkloristics.

Born into an intellectual family in Dalian, China, Dong Xiaoping was immersed from childhood in an environment that valued knowledge and education. Her academic training began in Chinese philology at Liaoning University. In 1989, she defended her doctoral dissertation on the history of folk literature in late imperial China at Beijing Normal University under the supervision of Prof. Zhong Jingwen, becoming the first domestically educated PhD in folkloristics in China. After earning her degree, she served as Prof. Zhong's academic assistant at the same university, at a time when folklore studies in China was still largely a text-oriented subdiscipline of philology.

Her disciplinary horizon was significantly broadened through her experiences as a postdoctoral and visiting researcher in the United States, Finland, the United Kingdom and France beginning in 1994. During this period, she increasingly appreciated the position of folklore studies within an international academic framework and began to reconsider the significance of Chinese folkloristics from a comparative and external perspective. It was also at this time that a methodological transformation took shape in her scholarship: a shift from text-based research approaches toward ethnographic and fieldwork-oriented methodologies.

In 1995, she was appointed Professor in the Faculty of Chinese Philology at Beijing Normal University. From 2002 onward, she served as Head of the Institute of Chinese Folk Culture at the same institution. She held numerous distinguished positions, including Vice President of the China Folklore Society,

member of the Chinese Intangible Cultural Heritage Committee of the Ministry of Culture of China, member of Folklore Fellows (Finland) and member of Asia Society France.

A highly productive scholar, Dong Xiaoping authored over 400 academic publications, including monographs, peer-reviewed articles, edited volumes, conference papers, and translations. Her research encompassed a remarkably broad range of topics within folkloristics and related interdisciplinary fields. Inheriting the intellectual legacy of her mentor, Prof. Zhong Jingwen – founder of modern folkloristics in China – Dong Xiaoping's early work was grounded primarily in traditional written sources, such as local gazetteers, religious texts and other genres of folk literature. She also compiled several volumes organizing Prof. Zhong's collected works and authored studies synthesizing his theoretical contributions, alongside broader research on the disciplinary history of folkloristics in China.

Since the late twentieth century, Dong Xiaoping played a key role in the modernization of theories and methodologies in Chinese folkloristics. Emphasizing the epistemological value of fieldwork and ethnographic materials, she led research projects that integrated primary field data with historical textual sources. This methodological shift was exemplified in her monograph on hydraulic folklore in North China, which analyzed the social relations, narrative structures and value systems reflected in hydraulic practices and water-related social phenomena. Inspired by the richness and creativity of oral genres, she conducted extensive fieldwork on topics including agricultural folklore, land resources, temple culture and gender issues. Her decades of field experience were systematized in her methodological volume 田野民俗志 (Folklore Fieldwork) (Dong 2003) and the essay collection 现代民俗学讲演录 (Speeches on Modern Folkloristics) (Dong 2007).

Following UNESCO's 2003 Convention for the Safeguarding of the Intangible Cultural Heritage, Dong Xiaoping turned sustained attention to the preservation of traditional folklore in the context of globalization. Within the framework of intangible cultural heritage (ICH), she examined the theories, practices and challenges of safeguarding, revitalizing and utilizing folklore as cultural heritage in numerous scholarly articles. In 2003, she founded the Laboratory of Digital Folklore at Beijing Normal University. Under her leadership, the laboratory developed digital applications for folklore materials, established a digital museum of Chinese folktales, designed three-dimensional digital models to document and present folk performances and created multiple databases and archival platforms dedicated to diverse genres of folklore heritage.

In the later phase of her career, Dong Xiaoping increasingly engaged in comparative folklore and transcultural studies, guided by a broad international perspective and a strong commitment to Chinese cultural identity. Focusing on transnational and cross-border folk genres, she sought to construct a systematic and theoretically grounded framework for modern humanities and social

sciences in China, while also encouraging public recognition of the value of indigenous folk culture in the era of globalization. In collaboration with international colleagues, she co-edited the book series 跨文化研究丛书 (Transcultural Studies), which comprises 88 volumes on interdisciplinary and intercultural topics authored by scholars from diverse academic backgrounds.

As a teacher, Dong Xiaoping was rigorous yet deeply supportive. Throughout her long and productive career, she delivered numerous lectures at her home institution and at universities worldwide, mentoring future generations of folklore scholars and inspiring students beyond the discipline. She supervised many master's and doctoral dissertations, and many of her former students have continued their academic careers in China and internationally. Some of those influenced and guided by her have also pursued research in Tartu. In addition to her teaching, research and administrative responsibilities, she served on the editorial boards of several leading Chinese academic journals in folkloristics and related fields. Since 2019, she had been a member of the advisory board of the *Journal of Ethnology and Folkloristics* (JEF).

Among the many international institutions with which Dong Xiaoping maintained close scholarly ties, the University of Tartu held particular significance for her as a major center of folklore studies in the Baltic and Nordic region. In 2016, 2018, and 2019, she visited the Department of Estonian and Comparative Folklore at the University of Tartu. She translated four academic articles and two books by Prof. Ülo Valk on topics including belief narratives, legends, folkloristic theory and the history of folkloristics in Estonia from English into Chinese. Through these translations, she facilitated intellectual exchange between Chinese and Estonian folklorists and introduced Tartu's scholarly tradition to a new generation of students in China.

In a 2014 interview, Dong Xiaoping remarked: "One cannot choose the era into which one is born, but one can choose to exercise independent agency. In turbulent times, individual choices are especially important." For her, such choices were grounded in moral conscience, cultural awareness and social responsibility. Throughout her career, she consistently embodied and advanced these principles.

Haozhen Li

Junior research fellow

Department of Estonian and Comparative Folklore, University of Tartu

REFERENCES

- Dong, Xiaoping 2003. 田野民俗志. [Folklore Fieldwork.] Beijing: Beijing Normal University Press.
- Dong, Xiaoping 2007. 现代民俗学讲演录. [Speeches on Modern Folkloristics.] Guilin: Guangxi Normal University Press.

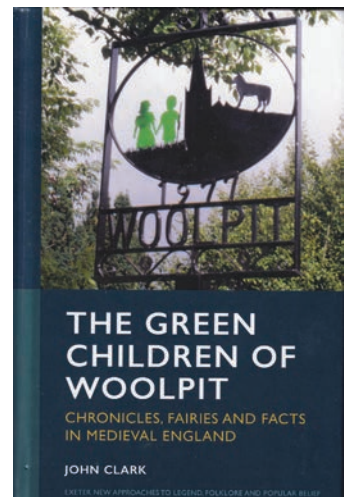
BOOK REVIEW

Sweet Reading: An Exciting, Thought-provoking Book about an Extraordinary Encounter with the Fairy Folk

John Clark 2024. *The Green Children of Woolpit*. Exeter: University of Exeter Press. 260 pp.

Tuan Yi-Fu (1987) summarizes approaches to mythical space: mythical space is an intellectual construct. It can be very precise and rich in detail. Mythical space corresponds to basic human cognitive needs and imaginations. This construction differs from pragmatic and scientific notions of space because it ignores logic and contradictions – these are allowed.

The same applies to mythical beings, whose existence was tolerated in earlier centuries, not



to mention in the media products of the modern age and in people's personal experiences. Several acquaintances encountered a fairy – a *vedasl*.

When studying mythology, certain questions inevitably arise: for example, why do the Slavs have water spirits and mermaids with green or blue skin? Estonia, after all, is a land of a thousand lakes, small rivers, streams, and the sea, yet green mermaids do not appear – in Estonian mythology, at least. Why do Estonians have numerous sea and water myths and mystical motifs associated with the northern lights, while the Balts do not? Why do such motifs not travel across cultures?

Perhaps one reason is that myths are often examined strictly by region or language group, and the similarities remain unnoticed. But why do people repeatedly search for unusual mental abilities through experiments with mediums, in the hope of discovering the sources of mysterious powers or meeting beings from other worlds – including fairies? There is still no good explanation for this.

The publication authored by John Clark follows the human search for meaning and the attempts of the inquisitive mind to construct the world. *The Green Children of Woolpit: Chronicles, Fairies and Facts in Medieval England* offers us far more than a glimpse into medieval England. The story was recorded by two 12th century chroniclers, William of Newburgh and Ralph of Coggeshall. In Woolpit, Suffolk, villagers discovered two children with green skin, speaking an unknown language and wearing unfamiliar clothing. At first they ate only raw beans. Over time, they adapted to ordinary food, and their green colour faded. The boy died soon afterward, but the girl survived, learned English, and explained that they came from a land of perpetual twilight known as St. Martin's Land.

Even a brief summary of the main elements points us toward several broader questions: why do some Slavic peoples and sources assert the existence of another land or island, other worlds, unknown humanlike beings, or mysteriously appearing children? Young presents in an engaging way the earliest so-called alien arrivals and analyses the different interpretations. These range from a folkloric reading, which sees the account as a fairy tale or myth involving "otherworldly" beings; to a historical interpretation connecting the story to outsiders or refugees (for example Flemish immigrants fleeing unrest), although the children's clothing and other characteristics do not match these explanations.

Naturalistic interpretations suggest that the green skin might indicate malnutrition (chlorosis or iron deficiency), yet Young demonstrates why this, too, is not an adequate explanation. Fortean or speculative readings regard the episode as possible evidence of parallel worlds or even extraterrestrial contact. Finally, by comparing the two supposedly independent sources, Young shows that each contains elements that raise doubts.

It is also fascinating to observe how widely the Green Children have been represented across different forms of media, and how they continue to sustain the local community's presence on the tourist landscape, drawing curious visitors and seekers from across the world. Like *Harry Potter*, like *The Hobbit*, like Jim Morrison, their story has taken on a life of its own. One is reminded of well-known cases such as Arthur Conan Doyle's involvement in the Cottingley Fairies (1917–1920), which centred on five photographs allegedly depicting real fairies, taken by two young girls, Elsie Wright and Frances Griffiths, in Cottingley, England. The photographs emerged during the First World War, a period when spiritualism was flourishing. As a passionate advocate of spiritualism, Doyle accepted the pictures as genuine evidence of supernatural beings. He defended their authenticity in his book *The Coming of the Fairies* (1922). Public debates over spiritualism changed nothing – decades later, the girls admitted that the fairies were fabricated.

Such medieval and early narratives, long the subject of dispute, continue to accompany us through their constant representations in modern media – films, stage productions, school and children's literature and more. One of the most striking and enduringly controversial stories is that of the Pied Piper of Hamelin: a sorcerer-like figure who promised, for an agreed-upon fee, to rid the town of its rats. When the town council cheated him and refused payment, the Piper left playing his instrument, leading the town's children away; they vanished forever. Interpretations of this tale span various periods and encompass all the explanatory models also applied to the Green Children (migration, foreign ethnic groups, illness and other factors), including historical episodes such as the recruitment of children for a crusade, who may have been taken away by a recruiter.

The book presents its material as a compelling narrative and is equipped with extensive indexes. In this form, it is an excellent representative of the Exeter series *New Approaches to Legend, Folklore and Popular Belief*, edited by Simon Young (University of Virginia) and Davide Ermacora (University of Turin), a series that strives for a truly global scope.

Mare Kõiva
Head of the Department of Folkloristics
Estonian Literary Museum
mare@folklore.ee

REFERENCES

- Doyle, Arthur Conan. *The Coming of the Fairies*. Available at <https://sacred-texts.com/neu/eng/cof/index.htm>, last accessed on 2 April 2026.
- Yi-Fu, Tuan 1977. *Space and Place: Humanistic Perspective*. Minnesota, London: University of Minnesota.

BOOK REVIEW

Publication of Khakas Heroic Epics



Alyptyg nymahtar = *Khakas Heroic Epics*. Volume I. Compiled by: N. V. Mainagasheva & E. S. Torokova & Yu. I. Chaptykova & N. S. Chistobaeva. Abakan: V. M. Torosov Khakas Book Publishing House, 2022. 656 p. (Khakas chonnynj chaiaachyzy = Folklore Heritage of the Khakas People). ISBN 978-5-7091-1005-2.

Alyptyg nymahtar = *Heroic Epics*. Volume 2: In the Khakas language. Compiled by: N. V. Mainagasheva & E. S. Torokova & Yu. I. Chaptykova & N. S. Chistobaeva. Abakan: V. M. Torosov Khakas Book Publishing House, 2023. 688 p. (Khakas chonnynj chaiaachyzy = Folklore Heritage of the Khakas People). ISBN 978-5-6051079-0-3.

Despite the fact that the heroic epic of the South Siberian Turks began to be recorded in the original language as early as the mid-19th century, it has been documented very unevenly among different ethnic groups and is just as unevenly represented in publications. Compared to, say, the serial publication “Altai Baatyrlar”, which already comprises 18 volumes in the Altai language (125 texts), or the electronic corpus of the Shor epic, which includes 59 texts (<https://corpora.iea.ras.ru/corpora/>), the epic tradition of the Khakas has until recently appeared significantly more modest. This is despite the presence of more than two hundred manuscript recordings of epic texts preserved in the archives of the Khakas Research Institute of Language, Literature and History (KhakNIIYALI) in Abakan (Bibliography 2006). This does not mean that the Khakas epic has not been published. In the 2000s alone (from 2007 to 2021)¹, according to my calculations, seven books were published, which included not only previously published tales but also at least five previously unknown ones (see, e.g., Akh pora attyġ alyp Akh Khan 2007; Khara toraattyġ Khara Khan 2007; Kurbizhekova 2011). However, this did not solve the problem of the large-scale introduction of unique archival materials into scholarly circulation.

The situation began to change significantly in 2022 with the start of the aforementioned institute’s project / book series “Folklore Heritage of the Khakas People”. That year saw the publication of the first volume, and in 2023, the second volume of the Khakas heroic epic. The books contain, respectively, ten texts recorded in 1945–1947 (Alyptyġ nymahtar 2022) and 12 texts from recordings made in 1946–1948 (Alyptyġ nymahtar 2023). Thus, in just two years, 21² unique archival recordings first saw the light of day.

The preparation of archival materials for publication was carried out by researchers at KhakNIIYALI: Nina Mainagasheva, Evgeniya Torokova, Yulia Chaptikova, and Nadezhda Chistobaeva, specialists in the Khakas language and folklore.

Both volumes are structured identically. After a brief introduction (in Khakas and Russian), detailing the time, circumstances of recording and textual features of the archival manuscripts included in the volume, there follow the epic texts in the Khakas language, and then a large appendix section. This contains more detailed information about each text than was provided in the introduction, a glossary of dialectisms with translations into modern Khakas, indices of character names and geographical features found in the texts, a list of references and sources, as well as annotations (in Russian and English) with a brief summary in 5–10 lines of the main plotline of each epic text.

The principles of preparing the epics for publication can quite rightly be defined as academic. The texts are published in full accordance with the archival originals, preserving all their features. Some of the published texts were dictated, accordingly recorded “as is”; some were subject to interference during the recording process by the collector, who attempted to bring the narrator’s dialect speech closer to the contemporary norms of the Khakas literary

language at that time; some are fair copies in the literary language; and in several cases, they are self-recordings by the storytellers themselves (e.g., the epic “Akh khula attyġ Altyn Chaga” – “Altyn Chaga, riding a white-dun horse” in the second volume, which was independently written down by the storyteller D. A. Sazanakov in his native Sagai dialect of Khakas).

Manuscript recordings of the Khakas, as well as the Shor heroic epic – whether dictated by the storyteller or written down by the storyteller themselves – do not reflect the specific performance practices of the epic tales among these ethnic groups. In both traditions, as is known, unless it involves prosimetric declamation, the epic was performed with throat singing accompanied by a musical instrument, with the mandatory “retelling” of each sung part, and there can be 50, 100, 200, or many more such parts in a single tale. Yet, even in this, so to speak, partial form of recording, the archival epic texts currently being published are extremely important, at the very least for epic scholars and linguists. For the former, they provide an opportunity to more fully understand the diversity of plots, and for the latter, the specific features of the language of the Khakas heroic epic.

From recent correspondence with the director of KhakNIYALI, I know that the third and fourth volumes with Khakas epic texts have been prepared for publication. I very much hope that their publication will take place in the near future.

NOTES

- 1 A significant number of electronic copies of Khakas folklore texts published in the Khakas language from 1941–2007 are available on the website of the N. G. Domozhakov National Library https://nbdrx.ru/e_lib/el-bibl_10.aspx.
- 2 One of the twelve texts included in the second volume, namely the epic “Khulatay”, recorded from S. P. Kadyshev, had been published earlier. Under the title “Albynjy”, it was first published in 1951.

REFERENCES

Akh pora attyġ alyp Akh Khan: alyptyġ nymakh = Akh Khan on the light-bay horse: Heroic tale 2007. Storyteller S. I. Shulbaev; text recorded by A. K. Maitakova; literary adaptation by A. E. Sultrekov; artist V. P. Chaptykov. Abakan: Khakas Book Publishing House.

Alyptyġ nymahtar = *Khakas heroic epics* 2022. Volume I. Compilers: N. V. Mainagasheva & E. S. Torokova & Yu. I. Chaptykova & N. S. Chistobaeva. Khakas chonnynj chaiaachyzy = Folklore heritage of the Khakas people. Abakan: V. M. Torosov Khakas Book Publishing House.

Alyptyġ nymahtar = *Heroic epics* 2023. Khakas chonnynj chaiaachyzy = Folklore heritage of the Khakas people. Volume 2: in the Khakas language. N. V. Mainagasheva, E. S. Torokova, Yu. I. Chaptykova, N. S. Chistobaeva. Abakan: V. M. Torosov Khakas Book Publishing House. Available at https://khakniyali.ru/wp-content/uploads/2024/04/alyptyg-nymah_2-tom_compressed.pdf, last accessed on 27 March 2026.

Bibliography of unpublished heroic tales in the Khakas language 2006. Author and compiler A. S. Chochieva; executive editor V. N. Tuguzhekova. Abakan.

Khara tooraattyġ Khara Khan: alyptyġ nymahtar = Khara Khan on the dark-bay horse: Collection of heroic tales 2007. Storyteller K. A. Bastaev; text recorded by A. T. Kyzlasova; compilers: V. E. Mainogasheva & L. K. Achitaeva & S. K. Kulumaeva. Abakan: Khakas Book Publishing House.

Kurbizhekova, A. V. 2011. *Siben Aryġ: alyptyġ nymakh: Heroic tale*. Artist A. A. Topoev. Abakan: Khakas Book Publishing House.

Dmitry Funk
Moscow State Linguistic University
d_funk@iea.ras.ru

Submission Guidelines

Folklore: Electronic Journal of Folklore requests the submission of manuscripts in electronic format. Articles can be sent as attachments to e-mails, but if the text contains unconventional special characters a pdf with embedded fonts is required. Submission of articles and article processing is free of charge.

For the purpose of reviewing, articles for publication should initially be submitted to:

Folklore: Electronic Journal of Folklore

Vanemuise 42

51003 Tartu

Estonia

e-mail: folklore@folklore.ee

Tel.: +372 737 7740

ARTICLE TYPES

The journal welcomes manuscripts in the following areas of interest:

Scientific Contributions (15 to 40 pages, 1 p. = 1800 characters with spaces):

Original articles with a longer and argued exposition of problems, topics or problem areas. These should include an abstract and key words.

Practical Viewpoints / Discussion Point (5 to 15 pages): *Short communications,*

e.g. case discussions, current issues, research project overviews (5 to 15 pages):

Special surveys and articles on programmes and courses in folkloristics, cultural studies, popular religion, ethics and philosophy, education, or exposition of research programmes and results from various centres, departments and institutions.

Review Articles (1 to 5 pages): *Analyses and critical reviews of major recent publications in the area of main themes.*

News in Brief (1 to 2 pages): *Summary reviews of recently published books and reports, main conferences, degrees in the field, etc. The section focuses particularly on reports on literature in non-English languages, aiming to enhance public awareness of studies that would otherwise remain inaccessible.*

Folklore: Electronic Journal of Folklore follows a double-blind reviewing procedure. Each submitted manuscript will be reviewed by two anonymous reviewers. Acceptance of the article will be based on two positive reviews. The editors will announce the acceptance or rejection of the manuscript, along with requisite changes if accepted. Revisions must be made by the author(s).

Articles for the category *Scientific Contributions and Practical Viewpoints* require an **abstract** of 100 to 250 words. Please provide 5 to 10 **keywords** or short phrases in alphabetical order. Since the abstract and the keywords will be used to select appropriate reviewers, it is essential to make them as informative as possible.

Please provide a **short introduction of the author(s)** in the form of a paragraph including institutional affiliation and main research interests.

Acknowledgements of people, grants, funds, etc. should be placed in a separate section before the References.

MANUSCRIPT PRESENTATION

We appreciate any efforts that you make to ensure that the language is corrected before submission. This will greatly improve the legibility of your paper if English is not your first language.

The journal's language is English. British English or American English spelling and terminology may be used, but either one should be followed consistently throughout the article. Please double-space all material, including notes and references.

Please use endnotes only. Bibliographic information should be listed in a separate Reference section. Notes should be indicated by consecutive superscript numbers in the text and collected at the end of the article before the references.

Quotations of more than 40 words should be set off clearly, by indenting the left-hand margin. Use double quotation marks for direct quotations and single quotation marks for quotations within quotations and for words or phrases used in a special sense.

Please refer to the journal's **webpage** (<https://folklore.ee/folklore/>) for additional detailed instructions on manuscript presentation and auxiliary material (illustrations, figures, tables, appendices).

VOL. 98

- **Athanasios Barmpalexis.** Spectral Partisans: Secret History, (Re)enchantment, and Counter-Mythopoiesis in Dungeon Synth
- **Reet Hiimäe, Mare Kalda, Masood Masoodian, Andrus Tins.** Myths, Maps and Vernacular Perception: A Theoretical Framework for Analyzing the Spatial Representations of Environmental Health Crises in Mythological Narratives
- **Ester Khemchyan, Marine Khemchyan, Lusine Ghrejyan, Hasmik Matikyan.** Overall Picture of Shirak's Folklore Collection from the Mid-19th up to the Beginning of the 21st Century
- **Yulia Krasheninnikova.** Mythological Texts and Contexts in the Ritual Dialogues of the Russian Wedding Ceremony (Based on Materials of the 19th – Early 20th Century)
- **Arsim Kelmendi, Hysen Nimani.** Analysis of Certain Aspects of Albanian Musical Folklore
- **Jia Lun Li.** Development of Skills for Quality Sound Extraction on the Erhu within the Educational Process under the Influence of Resonant Sound Development
- **Serap Ünal.** Pottery Triangle on the Eastern Border of the Lake District in Turkey: Doğanhisar, Hüyük, Şarkikaraağaç
- **Rūta Muktupāvela, Ieva Vītola.** Latvian Hillfort Folklore: Historical and Contemporary Insights
- **Buket Baran, Gamze Çimen.** Evaluation of the Concept of Milk among Tuvans and Tatars in an Ethnolinguistic Context Based on Cultural Memory
- **Fatih Yaliner, Mihrican Aylanç.** Donkey Metaphors in the Oral Culture of Cyprus
- **Nassikhat Nabiolla, Yerkhan Karbozov, Zufar Seytzhano, Gulnaz Dautova.** Cultural Adaptation of Kazakh Oral Traditions in Diaspora: A Comparative Analysis Across Mongolia, Uzbekistan, Kyrgyzstan and China
- **Zeynep Irem Deger.** The Cave as a Ritualistic Place in Turkish Culture
- **Han He.** Digital Technologies in Folk Art Museums: Virtual Tours Management
- **Rachel Suet Kay Chan.** Folklore, Authenticity and the Tourist Gaze in Touring Chinese Cultural Heritage

On the cover: Landscape at Rõuge, Southern Estonia. Photograph by Viire Villandi, 2002.

<https://folklore.ee/folklore>