

**ULAR AS ORNITOMORPHOUS SYMBOL:
SEMANTICS AND FUNCTIONS
(ON THE BASIS OF CULTURE OF YAKUT AND
OTHER TURKIC PEOPLES)¹**

**УЛАР КАК ОРНИТОМОРФНЫЙ СИМВОЛ: СЕМАНТИКА И ФУНКЦИИ
(НА МАТЕРИАЛЕ КУЛЬТУРЫ ЯКУТОВ И ДРУГИХ ТЮРКСКИХ НАРОДОВ)**

**ORNİTOMORF SEMBOLÜ OLAN YABAN HOROZU:
SEMANTİK VE FONKSİYON (YAKUT VE DİĞER
TÜRK HALKLARININ KÜLTÜR MALZEMELERİNE GÖRE)**

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ABSTRACT

This article concerns the image of *улар* (wood grouse) in the mythology and folklore of Yakuts with broad attraction of comparative-historical material on languages and traditional culture of the Turkic peoples and its symbolical meaning connected with gender characteristics. In mythological picture of the world, the bird's image is correlated to the south sunny side, and heat; its attribute is red color. The author pays attention to ancient sources of the cult of snow-cock bird in culture of peoples from Altai linguistic community.

Keywords: folklore, myth, metaphor, symbol, meaning, trope

АННОТАЦИЯ

В статье рассматривается образ улара (глухаря) в мифологии и фольклоре якутов с широким привлечением сравнительно-исторического материала по языкам и традиционной культуре тюркских народов, выявляется его символическое значение, связанное с гендерными признаками. В мифопоэтической картине мира образ птицы соотнесен с южной солнечной стороной, теплом; его атрибутом служит красный цвет. Автор обращает внимание на древние истоки культа птицы улар в культуре народов алтайской языковой общности.

Ключевые слова: фольклор, миф, метафора, символ, значение, троп

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ÖZET

Makalede Türk Halklarının dil ve geleneksel kültürel malzemelerini karşılaştırarak Yakutların folkör ile mitolojisinde yer alan yaban horozun sureti nitelendirmiştir. Ayrıca yaban horozun cinsiyet işaretlerine semvolik önemi de belirlenmiştir. Dünyanın evsanevi-şairlik sanatında kuş sureti Güney yanı güneşli tarafla uyum içindedir. Onun sanı kırmızı renktir. Yazar Altay Bölgesi dil toplumunda olan yaban horoz kültürünün eski köklerine dikkatini çekmektedir.

Anahtar Kelimeler: Folklor, efsane, istiare, sembol, önem, mecaz.

No data on the wood grouse² mythological representations in Yakut's culture in the literature has survived into modern days. There are etiological fairy tales, riddles, proverbs, phraseological units about the bird in Yakut folklore; its image underlies epic tropes.

The image of the wood-grouse is of high importance in creating plastic portrait of a Yakut epos character. The olonkho bogatyr "in his strong saddle quicker than the black wood-grouse flown up from a spring thawed patch, dexterously jumped, like a lekking wood grouse with its head leant back, took seat proudly. *Хаҥха дьолуо ыңыырыгар / харалдьыктан көппүт / хара улардаагар хапсагайдык, / хатана түспүтэ, / токутар улар курдук / чоноччу олорон кэбиспитэ*". Experts consider this comparison as a cliché which can also be met in other genres of Yakut folklore (Alekseev, 2008: 456). The text contains language game: the word *харалдьык* 'thawed patch' in Verkhoyansk dialect of the Yakut language means 'wood grouse'³; it may be a part of proper names of epic bogatyrs: *Харалдьыт-Бэргэн ~ Харалык Бэргэн* 'Thawed patch- Slashing fellow'.

It is not only comparison of a horse rider with a lekking wood-grouse, but also the word *чоноччу*, representing imperial bearing of the bogatyr that attract our attention. In the Yakut riddles about the bird "imperial bearing" will be one of the key signs: "*Куруу маска күөкэс баар үһү. They say, somebody appeared proudly in dead standing forest*". Or: *Хоруо хара Хоруодьа, хоногор-чоногор быһыылаах үһү. They say, there is Horuodzha who is as black (as) a soot, and has imperial bearing*".

In national ideas of man's beauty, the straight imperial bearing of the bridegroom is always emphasized: "*Күтүөт киһи күөкэрүтэн иһэр эбит. The son-in-law rides as a stately strong young man*" (Pekarsky, 1958: col.1313). As we see, strong young man and wood-grouse are described here by means of using words containing the same root or closely related words: *күөкэрүтэн – күөкэс; чоноччу – чоногор*, or etc.

² *Улар, тиит улара, хара улар, etc; in folklore texts the word combination куртуйах улар is used.*

³ Ornithologists studying a way of life of a wood-grouse in Yakutia, note that its habitats lay mostly within the southern direction. "During the early-spring period stone wood-grouses live in bearberry larch forests on tops and southern slopes of ridges, where snow comes off earlier and thawed patches appear" (Andreev, 1987: 73). It is interesting that the specified feature of the bird's habitats was reflected in its name in the Verkhoyansk dialect of the Yakut language: *харалдьык ~ харалдьыт* 'thawed patch' (Afanasyev, 1965: 119) – metonymic transfer on contiguity in space.

When a bogatyr runs in the belligerent heat, "his heels slap (with noise), similar to noise of wings of a wood grouse. *Тэбинэн сүүрдэгинэ – уллуңагын тыаһа куртуйах улар кынатын тыаһын курдук тилигирэс*" (Timofeev-Teploukhov, 1985: 26, 303). In olonkho, there is a widely used set comparison: *улуктаабыт улар курдук* 'as a sated wood grouse' – it describes a character who stands in fighting menacing position: sticking out his chest, with his head leant back. In epic tropes, the image of wood grouse⁴ serves as the standard of man's beauty and dexterity, demonstration of aggressive courageous character.

Feathers of wood grouses as a peculiar marker of males are used in the ceremony of Shors devoted to spring prayer to mountains and the rivers. "In each house, the bunches of a wood grouse's feathers were previously prepared, according to the number of men in a family, and bunches of rags according to the number of women. They were tied together in one general bunch *чалаба* which was then lifted onto the top of sacred patrimonial tree" (Sagalayev and Oktyabrskaya, 1990: 53). Yakuts who tied up crow and tail of a wood grouse to the ceiling of their jurts, "so that *abaasy* (=malicious spirits) couldn't enter the dwelling", also sacrificed wings and feathers of the bird along with bunches of horsehair to the spirit of the land-owner (Popov, 1949: 264).

An arrow – a symbol of *кут* (soul) of a boy – is mentioned in Yakut etiological fairy tale "The luce (*сордоң*) and the Black Grouse (*хара улар, куртуйах*)", in which the origin of "arrows" on legs of a wood grouse is attributed to bow shots of the luce (Kulakovsky, 1979: 73). The text begins with the story about the hostility between inhabitants of water and land, and the black grouse⁵ acts as the representative of land. The plot of the fairy tale expresses clearly the spatial opposition of animals of the top/bottom (land/water)⁶: "*Куртуйага буоллагына үөһэттэн ытыалаан сордоңу көхсүгэ түһэрэр эбит. Биирдэрэ алларааттан ытан, ого баран куртуйагы атахха табар эбит*. The black grouse shot from above and the arrow struck into the luce's back. And the luce shot from below, and its struck the legs of the black grouse".

The confirmation of the улар image meaning can be found in the polysemantic lexeme *сүүл* which meant in the Yakut language not only a man's productive force, 'sexual lust to a coition at males, beginning of mating call at males', but also 'a flock of black grouses'; the third meaning of this lexeme is "the highest degree (of thunderstorm, etc.) ... *сүүл этиң* strong thunder, courageous thunder⁷? ..." (Pekarsky, 1958: col. 2387).

⁴ Traditional and widespread in folklore of peoples of the world is the comparison of kindness of a good fellow with an eagle, and in this regard we will point to an all-Turkic name *қара куш* which also has the meaning 'wood-grouse' along with 'eagle', 'golden eagle' (Kononov, 1975: 162; Tenishev, 1968: 228).

⁵ All chickens are afraid of water". But they "step out very quickly", "excellently run and fly" instead (Bram, 1992: 94, 96, 176-177).

⁶ Wood-grouse as a symbol of the Middle World acts in olonkho in the description of three hitching posts intended for guests. the first *сэргэ* is crowned with the image of the mythical heavenly bird *ekseku*, the middle hitching post has an *ular*, at the last hitching post has a cuckoo (Govorov, 1938: 240). In this context the wood grouse represented on the average hitching post (*орто сэргэ* orto serge) serves as a symbol of the Average world (*Орто дойду* Orto doydu).

⁷ In the modern Yakut language only the first meaning of the word *сүүл* remained (YaRS, 1972: 352).

The verb *сүүл* has the following definitions respectively: "1) to lust, to be in lust (for a stud, stag) ... about black grouse: to gather in flocks in spring when coupling, to lek; 2) about thunder: to thunder throughout the sky" (the same source).

Lekking of wood grouse in spring dawns is described by naturalists as a passionate chant in a condition of ecstasy⁸. In the hunting slang, the word *сүүл* means lekking ground itself, located on the southern slopes of ridges and river valleys, "and the very center of lekking ground in Yakut is called the perch of lekking ground" (Andreev, 1987: 69, 74). It is still not clear, whether the last name is based on the basis of metaphor 'heat of passion' ↔ 'fire', or not.

In the light of the discovered semantics of the *улар* image, an ancient Yakut custom of transfer of black grouse's and wood grouse's lekking grounds as a part of bridewealth at bailing out a bride, which were considered a property of the hunter on the basis of a common law is of high interest (Andreev, 1987: 70). "Hunting for wood grouse is a secret one... Good hunter never disclosed his places for a bag of (100) ubles, only to his son when dying" (Seroshevsky, 1993: 123). They say that good lekking ground might be exchanged for "a mare with "trekhravy lonshak" (Andreev, 1987: 70) – significantly is that in this exchange, the "equivalent" unit of black grouse's lekking ground is *эр кuhu сүөһү* 'male cattle', i.e. horses.

Relicts of mythological image of a wood grouse are found in a popular Yakut fairy tale "The Birdie and *Ala Mogus*" which goes back probably to the etiological myth. The text is built up on contrasts and has the clear "question-to-answer" structure. The action is dated to high antiquity when one Birdie was the only feathered inhabitant of the world. The dialogue of terrible glutton and the Birdie who is afraid of water and afraid to cut hands with a sedge, tear her mittens, break a needle, etc. has cumulative character (Ergis, 1994: 323). The increasing tension of the dialogue ends with Mogus having become annoyed with the Birdie gets her on a spit and roasts. Surprisingly, the bird is full of vital energy, she continues conversation indifferently, and, upon being roasted, suggests him to eat her. When she finds herself in Mogus's stomach, and later of his dog's, she asks questions glibly. When the Birdie leaves the dog's stomach together with feces, a monster stretches his hands to grab her; but she "immediately turns into a wood grouse, flies up and sits onto the top of a larch. *Чыычаага соготохто хара улар буола түстэ да, тиит үрдүгэр тахсан олоро түстэ*". According to the text, all variety of feathered tribe in the world appeared from the Mogus's shot to a wood grouse, shattered pieces of which turned into birds (Ergis, 1994: 72 - 74).

Extremely enduring character of the Birdie who passes deadly tests: picking, piercing, getting on a spit, roasting on fire on both sides, first eating by the monster, then his dog, and bow shooting at last serves as the key motive of the fairy tale⁹. Whereas at the beginning of the fairy tale there is a question of damage to subjects or death (mittens will become wet and will tear, needle will break, the smith will fall ill, and shaman will be eaten

⁸ There is a set expression in the Yakut language *улар мэйи* (literally, wood grouse's brain), i.e. stupid, dull person. As we know, wood-grouse in the culmination of their chants called as lekking, become silent for a while.

⁹ Semantic function is probably borne by implicit opposition: Mogus personifies brute physical force, "a low matter and physiology" (gluttony), and the bird in many cultures acts as archetypical symbol of a soul.

by an evil ghost), further development of the plot shows invulnerability and immortality of the small Birdie. The motif of fear before trivial dangers emphasizes her equanimity in the teeth of death. She not only remains safe, but "breeds" in such number of having flown up birds, that "the wide sky has suddenly darkened" (Ergis, 1994: 74).

Being an ornitomorphous symbol of the sunny south side (*күн сирэ* "life place"¹⁰), the image of a wood grouse serves as a quintessence of life itself, ineradicable vital force. In the light of this semantics, the connection of the Birdie with solar heat and red color is quite notable; the dialogue was triggered by special condition of the Birdie who reddened because of heat and sunbeat:

- *Чыычах, того бу курдук кытардың?* Why have you so reddened, Birdie?

- *Куйастаан, куйастаан кытардым.* Because of heat I have reddened (compare: *куйаас* <**küneš* – 'sun' in the most of modern Turkic languages, 'heat, solar heat' in classic Turkic languages; the primary word meaning is, allegedly, 'a blaze of the sun, a solar heat'. For languages and culture of Turkic peoples the concept of the sun as the life source (*күн* 'sun' and 'life') is a key one (Gabysheva, 2003: 154-159).

In Altai congratulation they say: "Multiply yourself more than "*multi-child*" wood grouse (a wood grouse with many children)", and in Yakut epos olonkho the happiness is compared to a wood grouse. "May friendly benefits as big as a motley female wood grouse be with me!" (Lvova, et al., 1989: 16; Orosin, 1947: 194-195). Definition of a female wood-grouse *эбир* 'motley' serves in Yakut folklore as a constant epithet of the goddess a childbearing "*эбирдээх иэдэстээх Иэйэхсит ийэ* Ieyekhsit mother with motley (freckled) cheeks"; it appears turning on a motley (plumose) cloud "*эбир былыт*" (Obr. I, 1908: 131, 173). The name *эбир* 'motley', 'speckled' which is also a nomination of "nipples on the mammary areola of a female breast *эмийин эбирэ*" (Peкаarskyu, 1958: col. 220) contains, probably, a hint at the function of birthing women nurturant. The same epithet may be used for a sprinkling spoon "*сиэл байбыт эбир хамыйах* speckled (motley) spoon with a bunch of horse mane tied to" (Obr. I, 1908: 144). The word *эбир*, acting as an epithet to cloud, sprinkling spoon, associates with the image of drizzling rain which serves as a messenger of heavenly deities and a symbol of fertility (*ибир самыр эбирдээн* 'it drizzles; *эбир-дьэбир* 'drizzling' (Pekarsky, 1958: col. 220).

The solar nature of the wood-grouse image, and also the gender character of ornitomorphous symbol finds indirect confirmation in the Yakut proverb: "*Үтүө эр уота эрдэгэс улар сага буолуутугар аһаан бүтэн барар, куһаган эр уота эрдэгэс улар сага буолан баран умуллар.* A good fellow is already sated and leaves when the flame he has kindled reaches the size of a wood-grouse female, and the fire of a bad fellow dies away having reached the size of a wood-grouse female" (Kulakovsky, 1979: 213). Red (color of copper or bloody collar) color serves as one of the key features of a wood grouse in the Yakut riddles: "*Хаңыл тойон уола харага хааннаах.* They say, the eyes of a haughty man's son are blood edged". Or: "*Наахара огонньор алтан харахтаах (чарачылаах).* They say, the old man *Nakhar* has a copper eye (copper glasses)" (Oyunskaya, 1975: 127). There is a Yakut etiological myth explaining, why the superciliary arches of a wood-grouse are red (Ergis, 1994: 69-70).

¹⁰ *Күн* lexeme meant 'sun' and 'life'.

The bird, in general, associates with 'solar', 'hot', 'male', 'red' features; the ornithomorphous symbol not only has gender character, but also embodies sacred vital energy, expressing the idea of a man's productive force.

Let's note that relicts of the wood-grouse image which belong, according to researchers, to the highest antiquity still remained in the culture of the people of the Altai linguistic community. S. I. Weinstein, analyzing the history of folk art of Tuva points an important role of *улар* bird in the religious views of the Tuvinians. "The image of *улар* in combination with shaman masks is known on Bizhiktakh-Huy's petroglyphs in the western Tuva which are most likely dated to the bronze era" (Weinstein, 1974: 215). The birds similar to hens, are met in well-known Suleksk writing; researchers also write about long-standing use of eggs in different rituals on the territory of Southern Siberia (Lvova, et al., 1989: 158). Analyzing images of birds in the Sakachi-Alyan's neolythic writing, writings from the early Iron Age on Arbi river, and medieval writings near Average Nyukzha former settlement, A. I. Mazin marks cultic worship of a wood goose by Tungus since the most ancient times ¹¹(Mazin, 1984: 49).

"Very ancient representations were reflected in Buryat dances, - T. E. Gergesova says, - they are that "*Tetereviny tanets*" 'Dance of black grouse', "*Glukharinaya plyaska*" 'Dancing of wood grouse' (Gergesova, 2002: 3); A. Ulanov writes about the magic meaning of "*Glukhariny plaska*" 'Dancing of wood grouse' and "*Teteriin naadan*" wood grouse game of Buryat peoples too (Ulanov, 1974: 26). *Ulara* is the Buryat name of an autumn month, which is etymologized by V. Kotvich as the name of a game bird (Kotwicz, 1928: 54). "To each month a distinct, peculiar to this season zoomorphous code was assigned, a symbol of which was the name of a marketable animal" (Dashiyeva, 1998: 70).

The image close to a black grouse or a wood grouse, in a number of cultural traditions of people of the world is, undoubtedly, a rooster¹², one of key symbols of sexual potentiality, man's productive force. "In the cultural traditions of Southern Slavs, Hungarians, and other peoples the bridegroom at the wedding ceremony often bears a live rooster or its image" (Tokarev, 1982: 310). In most traditions the rooster is a herald of light, a zoomorphous embodiment of the sun, a symbol of vital energy and heavenly fire. "As a representative of day dawn, fire and lightning a rooster in mythological legends is represented as brilliant red" (Afanasyev, 1983: 354). According to experts, there is a connection between the sacrifice of a rooster and fire getting. It is curious that the Tatar Mishars who considered the rooster as a messenger of light and happiness, before lighting the hearth of their new house used to cut a rooster on the perch of the stove and spilt its blood to the hearth (Mukhamedova, 1972: 188). The Tatar name *койгорыш* 'a bird of happiness' consists according to F. G. Mukhamedova of two words: *кот* (in the meaning of happiness) and *кыраз* 'rooster' (The same source: 189).

"The rooster is as vigilant and all-seeing, as the sun ... One of the vital strength of a rooster manifestations is its exclusive eagerness to fight ... Arab and Turkic sources steadily provide the ideal military leader with bravery of a rooster" (Tokarev, 1982: 310). It

¹¹ Images of birds of *tetraonidae* family are also used in ornamental art of Mansi. They stand independently and represent not an ornament, but independent figures (Fedorova, 1992: 111-112).

¹² Tetraonidae (wood-grouse, black grouse, partridge, hazel grouse, etc.) is a family of gallinaceous birds.

is comparable with the image of a wood grouse to which a bogatyr in fighting is compared: "(he) as a black wood grouse, flies up dexterously onto a horse, shouting as a partridge. *Хара уларын курдук атын үрдүгэр хабдыгыраан тахсан хан гына хатана түһэр*" (Timofeev-Terploukhov, 1985: 17).

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