

38

Presentation date: January, 2023

Date of acceptance: March, 2023

Publication date: May, 2023

TREE CULT

IN THE MYTHOLOGY OF THE PEOPLES OF THE WORLD

CULTO AL ÁRBOL EN LA MITOLOGÍA DE LOS PUEBLOS DEL MUNDO

Avtandil İsrafil Mammadov¹

E-mail: avtandil.aqbaba@mail.ru

ORCID: <https://orcid.org/0000-0003-2630-008X>

¹Sumgayit State University, Azerbaijan.

Suggested citation (APA, seventh ed.)

Mammadov, A. İ. (2023). Tree cult in the mythology of the peoples of the world. *Universidad y Sociedad*, 15(3), 404-412.

ABSTRACT

The article examines the tree cult, which occupies a large place in the mythology of the peoples of the world using a historical-comparative approach. It is substantiated the idea that in the mythological thinking of most peoples, the tree has various mythical features, such as a means of connecting heaven and earth, a sacred being that acts as a parent, saviour and other functions. It is analyzed how the tree cult still preserves many common features of human culture, regardless of language, religion, race, or place of residence, and combines its sacred essence at the same point in the mythological system of thought of different ethnic groups, performing similar functions. According to the mythical space, these similar functions were created, improved and have survived to the present day due to certain beliefs. Also, early primitive ideas, versions and variants that played a role in the formation of general and specific features of the world tree cult were reviewed and compared. In this sense, various mythological subjects and images created by different ethnic groups living in distant geographical areas (Jewish, Scandinavian, Turkish, Indian, Chinese, Greek, Azerbaijani, Hindu, Slavic, Yakut, etc.) have been analyzed highlighting similar and different features related to the tree cult.

Keywords: Mythology, tree cult, symbolism, primitive imagination.

RESUMEN

El artículo examina el culto al árbol, que ocupa un lugar importante en la mitología de los pueblos del mundo desde un enfoque histórico-comparativo. Se fundamenta la idea de que, en el pensamiento mitológico de la mayoría de los pueblos, el árbol tiene diversas características míticas, como medio de conexión del cielo y la tierra, ser sagrado que actúa como padre, salvador y otras funciones. Se analiza cómo el culto al árbol aún conserva muchos rasgos comunes de la cultura humana, independientemente de la lengua, religión, raza o lugar de residencia, y combina su esencia sagrada en un mismo punto del sistema mitológico de pensamiento de las diferentes etnias, realizando funciones similares. Según el espacio mítico, estas funciones similares fueron creadas, mejoradas y han sobrevivido hasta nuestros días debido a ciertas creencias. Además, se revisaron y compararon las primeras ideas, versiones y variantes primitivas que jugaron un papel en la formación de las características generales y específicas del culto al árbol del mundo. En este sentido, se han analizado diversos temas mitológicos e imágenes creadas por diferentes grupos étnicos que viven en áreas geográficas distantes (judíos, escandinavos, turcos, indios, chinos, griegos, azerbaiyanos, hindúes, eslavos, yakutos, etc.) destacando similitudes y diferencias relacionadas con el culto al árbol.

Palabras clave: Mitología, culto al árbol, simbolismo, imaginación primitiva.

INTRODUCTION

Folklore is understood as the traditional knowledge and beliefs of cultures that have no written language, transmitted by word of mouth and consisting of both prose and verse narratives, poems, and songs (Thompson, 2022). According to Sharaffitdinov & Yusupov (2022) folklore is a national spiritual heritage, which is passed from mouth to mouth and expresses the spirit of the nation without losing its value. Folklore is a form of self-expression that is open and understandable to all, without exception. Folklore studies are significant because they describe the relations of lay and expert knowledge, advocates for mutual understanding and respect within the world's diverse cultural commons, and has contributed unique intellectual insights to the creation, analysis, and evaluation of public policy (Lloyd, 2021). This way, they give us the knowledge to evaluate events in different cultures from various angles allowing us to understand traditions and how they still shape modern societies (Honko, 2013).

As pointed out by Michalopoulos & Xue (2021), folklorists generally believe that elements appearing in a group's oral tradition reflect aspects of its migration history and its interactions with other traditions. This implies that images can be preserved even if the landscapes, climates, and social configurations change. Moreover, stories travel because of the interactions among members of different traditions. Eventually, the borrowed stories are integrated into the stock of indigenous folklore. These migration and cross-pollination processes suggest that the link between a society's landscape at the time of initial observation (in the late nineteenth and early twentieth centuries) and the geographic attributes mentioned in its oral tradition is not straightforward. Following this idea, it is not a surprise that many different cultures to have common traits or archetypes in their myths and stories.

Related to the concept of folklore, mythology is defined as a collection of myths that explain the beliefs, customs, or natural phenomena of a culture, often involving gods or supernatural beings. As a rich and complex ritual-mythological system, a number of cults have a special place in the mythical thinking of the peoples of the world. This feature is determined by the attempts of the great ancestors to understand its mysteries at a time when they were alone with nature, and by the influence of nature on man and man on nature in order to subdue the phenomena and objects of the environment, living and non-living beings.

Natural phenomena, such as rain, wind, lightning, freezing water, changing seasons, and so on, terrified and amazed ancient people, all of which he attributed to supernatural forces. His lack of practice resulted in sometimes

dualistic, sometimes erroneous, and sometimes correct perceptions. Many mysteries of the world are hidden in many myths. However, these truths and mysteries have sometimes remained so long forgotten that the intellect of modern man is incapable of revealing them. In other words, he cannot find the key to it and reveal the secret codes (Agbaba, 2019, p. 30). According to Birline (2014, p. 9):

“There are striking similarities between the myths of different cultures, which are far apart. Such similarities and commonalities allow us to see the human community's beauties behind all diversity: all the earth peoples have had some common features throughout time”.

It should also be noted that in the mythical thinking of the peoples of the world, belief in the cult of plants (forests, shrubs, leaves, flowers, grass, etc.) is widespread, not only in trees (Porteous, 2006). For example, in the Chinese national-ethnic thought, Nyuswa, who acted as a demiurge, soaked a bouquet of flowers in water, dipped in the clay, shook them, and thus the first humans were formed from the crumbs falling from the bouquet. According to the ancient Egyptians, the sun god was formed from a lotus flower. In the Azerbaijani folk tale “Tapdig”, after killing himself, Tapdig comes back to life by rubbing the leaves of the tree of life on his wound. These examples show that the term plant cult is a broad concept, and that the most common of these concepts are tree-based beliefs.

Considering the above, the goal of this paper is to analyze the cult of the tree, which occupies an important place in the mythology of the peoples of the world. For this, the main research methods were the analysis of documents and a historical-comparative approach that allowed finding similarities and differences in this phenomenon once different ethnic groups living in distant geographical areas such as Jews, Scandinavians, Turks, Indians, Chinese, Greeks, Azerbaijanis, Hindus, Slavs, Yakuts, etc.

DEVELOPMENT

In the primitive ideas of the peoples of the world, the earth and the sky were adjacent to each other, or they existed separately, a connection was made between the earth and the sky through a tree, and people became aware of their existence. The Zealand myth “Mother Earth and Father Heaven” depicts the separation between the adjacent earth and the sky by their own children - the gods. At the suggestion of Tane Mahuta, the forest god of the 70 children they gave birth to, they tried to separate their parents - the earth and the sky, but they failed. Unlike his brothers, Tane Mahuta achieves his goal by pushing the sky with his feet on the ground, as in trees, in order to

separate the earth from the sky. The fact that the trees still separate the sky from the earth in this way and act as a link between them reflects the sacred nature of the plot of the myth.

Interestingly, the holy books also tell us that on the first day of creation, God created the earth and the heavens, or separated them. The Bible states that “in the beginning God created the heavens and the earth”. The words “there was nothing in the beginning” of the ancient Indian Rigveda inscriptions indicate that the universe came into being out of nothing: “The non-existent did not exist, nor did the existent exist at that time. There existed neither the midspace nor the heaven beyond. What stirred? From where and in whose protection? Did water exist, a depth?”

The Qur’an contains information about God’s separation of the heavens and the earth, which are adjacent to each other. Verse 30 of Surah al-Anbiya states: “Have those who disbelieved not considered that the heavens and the earth were a joined entity, and We separated them and made from water every living thing? Then will they not believe?” (Bunyadov & Mammadaliyev, 1992, p. 301).

We consider it expedient to dwell on one point, referring to the information in the Bible and the Qur’an about the creation of the universe. Until the beginning of the twentieth century, the prevailing view in the world of science was that the universe had no beginning and no end. That is, the existence of God is denied in the formation of the universe, and the idea that the world existed from infinity to eternity defined a stable model of the universe. As a result of the development of modern science and technology, it has been proved that the universe came into being out of nothing. The sudden creation of the world in a mythical time without matter and energy coincides with the modern the Big Bang Theory, the idea that the universe came into being as a result of the explosion of a point.

Many myths speak of the discovery of the earth and the sky by means of a tree, which is isolated from each other, and of the creation of the human races. The myth of the ancient Hindu-Iroquois tribe tells of the illness of the first human leader’s daughter in the heavens, the digging of the bottom of a medicinal tree to heal her, and of a girl falling to the Earth out of a hole with a tree. The myth then goes that the swans that saved the girl wanted to find the tree with the advice of the Great Tortoise, who is considered the wisest of all creatures, and create a dry land from the magical soil clinging to its roots. As a result of the old frog’s efforts, this land is found and a dry land is created, and light falls from the sky to the earth through holes. This girl became the mother of all people on Earth. One of the most striking features of the myth is the unity of the cults

of tree, water, earth and light with the bird ongon. This motive not only shows the sacredness of the tree cult, but also demonstrates that the archaic content of the myth is associated with older views.

In contrast to the myth of the Iroquois, the plot of the myth, which is widespread among the Indians of North America, tells the story of coming out of the ground. The roots of the tree depicted in this myth, which preserves the mythological idea of the Mandan tribe about the cosmic model of the universe, or rather the vine, connect the underworld and the terrestrial world. The primitive ideas of people who came to the upper world through the roots of the vine seem to be related to the three-dimensional cosmic model. The fact that the tree is a mediator between the lower and upper worlds also indicates a certain animistic view of the ancient Mandans: “But once a fat woman also wanted to ascend, and when she climbed up, the root of the vine was broken; half of the people remained underground. After death, we are also reunited with our relatives who have remained underground” (Birlin, 2014, p. 120). A similar plot can be found in the mythical work of the Apache, another tribe of North American Indians. Mythologist John Francis Beryline notes that, unlike the Mandans, “the Mayans send a hummingbird as a guide to the upper world”. This fact reflects the old beliefs of the Apaches about the structure of the universe and coincides with the primitive ideas of the Mandans.

In ancient Scandinavian creation myths, a giant ash-tree growing in Asgard, inhabited by the gods of As, holds the world together. The roots of this tree, called the Yggdrasil as a symbol of immortality and eternity, work in the deep layers of the earth, and its branches rise to the expanses of heaven. The head of this tree in the heavens is called Lerad, and nearby is the throne of Odin, the most powerful of the Ases. Odin can control the whole world from that height. “Yggdrasil’s branches spread all over the world, and its roots worked in the deep layers of three countries - Niflheim, Jotunheim and Midgard” (Azimzadeh, 1973, p. 17).

In our opinion, in this mythical text called “Asgard and the Gods”, the branches of a tree rise to the sky and its roots work in the deep layers of the earth is due to the fact that the ancient Scandinavians, as in many other nations of the world, also imagined the sky as “father” and the earth as “mother”. Seyidov (1984, p. 164), the founder of Azerbaijani mythology, writes:

Ancestors of Azerbaijanis believed that the sky heats the earth through the sun, fertilizes it through the rain. Heaven, that communicates with Earth through sunlight

and rain, is the creator of the blessings of life. Heaven makes the earth ready to give blessings and harvest.

In the epos "Kitabi-Dada Gorgud", one of the oldest samples of Azerbaijani literature, when Shoklu Malik wanted to hang Uruz, Kazan khan's son, Uruz approached the tree as a mystical force, saying, "Let me talk to this tree".

If I look up, it's a tree without a top,

If I look down, it's a tree without a top.

If I could take your head off, headless tree,

If I can take you to the bottom, you're a fool.

(Zeynalov & Alizade, 1988, p. 40).

In this appeal, the tree is no longer an ordinary object of nature, it is a mythical being, a symbol of immortality, whose crown and roots are invisible. In other words, Uruz believes in the magical power of the tree as a means of connecting the "father" heaven to the "mother" earth and asks him for help.

In his book "Ancient Civilization: General Basics of Myth", the Russian scientist A.E. Nagovitsyn considers the concept of the world tree and talks about the rich mythological symbols of this cult, which are widely used in the primitive ideas of various ethnic groups. According to his scientific findings, there was a belief among the American Indians-Ascetics and Mayans - that when the universe was created, the world tree was the first in its centre. The ascetics believed that the tree growing in Tamoanchan was covered with colourful flowers and fruits. Its branches cannot be broken or its fruit plucked. This world tree reaches the whole sky, and its upper part is located in Tamoanchan. The scientist then writes, focusing on the symbols of the world tree in various social systems: "Koreans believed that some trees had the spirit of their ancestors. If a child climbs a tree and falls from it, his mother says he was punished by the spirit of the tree" (Nagovitsyn, 2005, p. 458).

The Yakut legend "Er-Sogotok" states that the Tree Hagan is the building of the earth and the sky, "its roots covered the underground world, and its peak pierced the nine layers of the sky". Nagovitsyn (2005, p. 458) writes that fir, pine and oak trees act as world trees in the mythological meetings of the Slavs. He cites an ancient manuscript about the sacredness of the oak tree, which functions as the world tree:

Question: Tell me, what keeps the earth? Answer: Higher water. - What keeps the stone? - Four golden cats. -What keeps the four golden cats? - Fiery river. - What keeps that

fire? - Iron oak. First of all, it existed; its roots go back to the power of the gods.

It should be noted that beliefs about the world tree, and ancestral tree spirit occupy a large place in the mythological system of the Turkic peoples. For example, the birch for Shors, the plane tree and hackberry for Kazakhs, the juniper for Kyrgyz, black pine for Yakuts and etc. were considered to be sacred. One of the creation myths of Azerbaijanis speaks of seven evergreen trees: hackberry, fig, pomegranate, apple, mulberry, cornel, gum. The Abakan Turks believed that "the spirit of the shaman is not accepted anywhere: neither in the kingdom of Erlik, nor in the heavens of the gods. The spirit of the shaman is found only in stones and trees" (Gozalov & Mammadov, 1990, p. 116).

In the Altai Epic of Genesis, written by the famous orientalist V. V. Radlov, the god forbids eating the fruit of the four branches of the nine-branch tree (the tree of life) on the east side. For violating this prohibition, Torungei and his wife, as well as the snake and the dog, the guardians of the tree, are punished by the gods. This punishment can be understood not only as a violation of God's prohibition, but also as a threat to the sanctity of the tree. In other words, this motive shows that the sacredness of the tree is protected by God.

In another Yakut epic compiled and written by the famous Russian researcher I. A. Khudyakov, the tree of life growing in the centre of the octagonal world acts as a symbol of eternity. Whoever drank the juice and water flowing from the top of the tree "gained life and was already happy". Regarding this issue, the well-known Turkish scientist Ogel (2004, p. 114) writes:

According to the Yakuts, the world was octagonal. In the middle of it there was a large tree extending to the North Star. The Turks called it "iron stake". The motive of life tree seems to be in harmony with the astronomical thoughts of the Turks.

The etymology of the names of some of the months used in modern times is also related to the tree cult. This is a bright manifestation of how firmly the tree which carries the mythical time to the present day, occupies a strong place in the lexicon of people belonging to different language families and groups. For example, an ancient man who observed trees sprouting in April called the month "aperire", which means "to open" in Latin.

In May, fertility ceremonies included dancing around the May-tree and paying homage to the tree. In ancient Rome, a ceremony dedicated to the goddess Flora (goddess of

plants) was accompanied by songs praising nature in honour of the goddess. Flora means flower.

In some myths of the peoples of the world, the tree plays a crucial role in the creation process of the first man. In other words, by its sacred nature, the tree acts as a parent, giving birth to a child. It is known that in the mythological system of the peoples of the world, the descent of human beings from God, foam, mountain, bead, dog, snake, wolf and other living, non-living and sacred beings has been associated with totemic views. The creative nature- the childbirth of the tree, takes it away from the real object of nature and raises it to the level of demiurge. The feature that makes this reality sacred is, in our opinion, related to the most primitive times of human-tree relations, in general, human-nature relations. An Eskimo legend describes the relationship between a tree and a human as a sensitive relationship between two living beings: "Meanwhile, a man approached the river, and the tree felt the warmth and kindness of his hands. His condition improved as in the summer months".

This warm relationship between man and tree is more fully reflected in the Yakut myth, in the form of parent-child relation. In that myth, the thoughts of the first man who came to earth, "How was I born? How did I come into the world?", bring him to his mother- the tree of life. After thinking about whether he came from the east or the west, whether he fell from the sky or came out of the earth, he finally made the following decision: "If I was born, The Great Mother Kubey Khatun would have given birth to me. Because milk flows from the breast of the tree in which she lives". With this in mind, the first man came straight to the tree of life and said, "You are the mother who gave birth to me! You are the mother who created me! The tree looked at the first man, and the first man looked at the tree, and finally the man realized that this tree was his mother".

An Oghuz legend tells of birch and pine trees growing between the Tughla and Selenga rivers. One of these trees that became pregnant by light from heaven, gave birth to five children with silver dummies in their mouths. The Nine Oghuz raised the children, and when they reached the age of fifteen, the children showed the trees to those who asked their mothers and fathers. "Our dear mother and father" said the children, hugging the tree.

One of the most striking features in the structural semantics of this myth is the light falling from the sky on the birch tree. In this episode, the light is considered one of the symbols of God - the heavenly father. The heavenly father fertilizes the tree with his beam, and the tree bears children. An important element in this episode is the mythopoetic harmony of tree and light cult. The motive of getting

pregnant by light is found in the mythologies of a number of peoples of the world. In the epos of Oghuz, Oghuz marries a girl in the middle of the blue light falling from the sky. Alan Goa, one of Genghis Khan's great-grandmothers, became pregnant by light and gave birth to a child named Bodonchar. In the epos of Kitabi-Dada Gorgud, Basat tells Tepegoz (an Oghuz cyclops) about his ancestors:

If you ask my mother's name, Rough Tree,

You say my father's name, Qagan Lion,

If you ask my name, it is Basat, Aruz's son.

'Anam adin sorar olsan, Qaba Ağac,

Atam adin deyirsən Qağan Aslan

Mənim adim sorarsan Aruz oğlu Basatdır'

(Zeynalov & Alizade, 1988, p. 121)

The ancient Turks had great respect for the owner of trees and forests, believing that as long as they were satisfied, there would be abundance and prosperity, and their lives would be comfortable (Kalafat, 2010, p. 173). In general, long before Islam, the Turks considered the tree a part of God, sanctified it and accepted it as a great ancestor and parent.

In the myth of the "palm people", the anthropomorphic nature of the tree is revealed in a slightly different way. This myth, which belongs to the aborigines of Oceania, depicts a coconut palm growing on a grave after death and people formed from its fruit. The existence of death, the planting of trees by humans, the emergence of people of different classes and genders from fruits, and other motives, while preserving certain remnants of mythical thinking, are likely to have been mixed with the national-ethnic thinking of the ethnos in later periods. The socio-philosophical nature of the content of the myth gives grounds to assume the following:

Out of the largest walnuts came big and rich people.
Out of open-shelled walnuts came light-skinned people.
Out of the red walnuts came handsome men with dark skin.
Short people came out of small coconuts.
Out of the wide and flat walnuts came women (Mammadov et al., 1990, p. 466).

A similar motive can be found in the mythological system of other peoples, such as the Chinese. In Chinese mythology, Nyuwa, who is sometimes imagined as a cultural hero and sometimes the creator of the gods, created a man who looked like herself above the belt. But she was

tired of it, and as she dipped a flower bush into the clay and soaked it in water, people sprang up from the crumbs. Myth is told that the nobles and the rich were the first creation of Nyuwa. The poor and the lower classes were formed from clay fragments. In another myth, a piece of meat that Nyuwa gave birth to, was cut by her husband (and brother) Fuxi, and from these pieces a hundred children named Peach, Tea, Plum, Rock ... were born.

In the myths of the peoples of Oceania, the tree acts not only as the mother of humans, but also as the creator of a number of living things, especially fish. An elder brother's fish made of wood brings blessings to his house. The little brother's fish causes famine and disaster. Because the little brother's shark eats all the fish and even attacks humans. In this mythical plot, the wrong attitude towards the tree, or rather the cult, brings misfortune. According to another myth, a tree walks and approaches the village, the fruits of which form river and sea fish. "If the little boy didn't see the walking tree in time, there wouldn't be Ongari village and no one would be able to fish". In both myths, respect paid to the tree cult and the peculiarities of the mythical space are prominent.

In the mythology of the peoples of the world, all the biological parts of the tree have a wide range of symbolic features with a sacred essence. The fact that certain plots, images and motives about the rejuvenation of the fruits of some trees, giving children to those who do not have a child are deeply rooted in the minds of the people reflects the mythical semantics of the belief in the tree. In the mythical thinking of a number of ethnic groups around the world, including Azerbaijanis, cutting down a fruit tree is considered a sin. It is believed that when a tree is cut down, the owner of the tree does harm.

The mythical function of the apple is rich in the mentioned features. In Scandinavian mythology, the apples in the basket of Idun, the goddess of eternal youth, have an extraordinary energy. In the Scandinavian pantheon of gods, she is the wife of Bragi, who acts as a patron of folk singers and poets. Idun is modest and calm, but without her, none of the Ases would have survived. Idun's basket is full of the apples of eternal youth she reserved for the gods. This basket is magical; it never empties. Because every taken apple is immediately replaced by a fresh one (Azimzadeh, 1973, p. 21). In this mythical text, the angry Thjazi, the ruler of winter and storms, wants to seize the apples protected by Idun and thus deprive the Aces of eternal life. He captures Loki, the god of fire, known among the gods as a cunning and unreliable god, and tells him:

My brothers, the Grimtursens, are fools, they want to defeat the gods in open battle. I have decided to deprive you of eternal youth. Then you will be exhausted, you will grow old, lose your strength, and we will be the rulers of the whole earth (Azimzadeh, 1973, p. 46).

Although Thjazi kidnaps Idun with the help of Loki, he can't achieve his goal. As a result, conjoined Ases kill Thjazi, and Idun returns to Asgard with the apples of eternal youth.

As we know, the desire for eternal life, reaching immortality, is reflected in the mythology of a number of peoples of the world in the common and similar plots caused by mythical thinking. If the sacredness of the symbolic apple, which necessitates the struggle of life and death, is determined by the battles between the Aces and the Thjazi in the myth of "The Kidnapping of Idun", in the Sumerian mythology, this event takes place between Bilgames and the serpent, in Egyptian mythology between Osiris and Seth, and in the mythological imagination of the Azerbaijanis it is realized between Dada Gorgud and the serpent, Malikmammad and the giant. That is, the socio-philosophical essence of the mythical images that achieve immortality or want to gain eternal life is revealed by certain means (flowers, water, apples, etc.).

In the Azerbaijani folk tale called Malikmammad, the apple has the power to rejuvenate a person. In the Greek mythical text "The Apples of the Hesperides", the apple has the same feature. In the Scandinavian and Greek myths mentioned above, the struggle for the apples of eternal youth takes place between gods and demigods, while in the tale of Malikmammad, this struggle takes place between a real person (Malikmammad) and an unreal being (giant). In our opinion, the struggle of an extraordinary magical being with an ordinary person to obtain the apple of eternal youth can be characterized by a more real and vital character. Malikmammad's defeat the giant by killing him, rises to the level of philosophical generalization as a man's spiritual victory over death.

An apple has the power to give children to a childless parent. In the Kyrgyz epic Manas, childless women dance under an apple tree because they believe the tree will give them children. The reproductive power of the apple has preserved its original traces in a mythological ritual performed by Azerbaijanis at a wedding ceremony. When the bride reaches the groom's house, the groom throws an apple at her from above. The apple is cut and sliced with a knife so that the blow of the apple does not hurt the bride. When a sliced apple (it is sliced so that the apple remains intact) touches the bride's head, the slices are scattered around, that is, one apple multiplies and becomes 5-6 slices (children).

Although the apple's ability to reproduce was later transformed under the influence of Islamic traditions, the traces of archaic mythological thinking have not been completely erased. In Azerbaijani fairy tales and epics, the reproductive function of the apple is no longer performed directly, but in the form of Islamic saints, usually dervishes, giving apples to childless parents. In such episodes, the apple is divided according to the condition of the saint, eaten by the parents, and after nine months they have a child. This aspect can be observed in "Magic Apple", "Fairy Tale of Azim Sovdagar", "Latif Shah", "Tahir and Zohra" and other fairy tales and epics.

In mythological thought, the phenomenon of a number of living and non-living things (trees, mountains, snakes, birds, etc.) being transformed into human beings and into certain objects of nature is often encountered. The transformation of man into a snake, a snake into a man after a given time in the mythical plots of *The Story of Ruru* (Indian), *The Purple Snake* (Japanese), the transformation of the brothers into seven mountains in the legend of *The Seven Mountains* (Azerbaijan), in the legend of the Unjust Entrepreneur, the transformation of man into an owl, etc., are archaic motives that reflect the signs of re-anthropomorphism.

In the myth of Apollo and Daphne (Greek), the love affair between the god Apollo and Daphne, daughter of the forest nymph and the river god Peneus, is also based on the process of transformation. Despite Apollo's fiery love, Daphne ignores his love. This free-spirited girl tries to run away from him, but Apollo constantly pursues her. At the request of the girl, who realized that she could not get rid of Apollo, her father Peneus turned her into a laurel tree, and thus, "the laurel becomes the sacred tree of Apollo. To this day, the winners of poetry and sports competitions under the auspices of Apollo receive a laurel wreath as a reward". The transformation of Daphne into a tree by the miracle of the gods is an important sign of the connection of the tree cult with mythological cosmogony. The semantic structure of the myth expresses the participation of the primary ancestor in the creation of certain elements of the universe. (Philpot, (1897)

A similar mythical plot can often be found in the primitive imagination of Azerbaijanis. One of the mythical texts tells of a girl to be forcibly married, was miraculously transformed into a tree. Among the people, this tree is called the lone tree. It is a sin to break it. When you cut the bark of a tree, when you break a branch, blood flows from that place. In this transformation, the shedding of blood from the impact site on the tree further enhances the anthropomorphic nature of its cult. It can be assumed that such

subjects were formed as a result of historical and cultural relations between ancient peoples.

In the myth of *The Three People and the Statue* (Madagascar), the process of transformation takes place in a more complicated way. It describes the transformation of a wooden statue made by God into a human (girl), not a human into a tree, and that the girl born of this transformation inhabited the earth by the human race, which reflects an important semantic aspect of the parental- maternal function of the tree cult. In the myths discussed above, if a child was born from a tree or its fruit, this text shows that the tree performed this function after becoming a human being. That is, although the transformation becomes true as a result of a miracle, in the text this process takes place in certain stages: in the model of a tree a statue girl newborn people.

The fact that the tree acts as a saviour, a protector against evil forces and spiteful spirits is a separate and important aspect of the primitive ideas. That is why the belief that the tree heals the sick and pregnant women, protects babies against evil forces, and evil eye, demonstrates the power of this cult in the mythological meetings of various ethnic groups around the world.

In Slavic mythology, the most sacred tree was the oak tree. In the rituals associated with Perun, the god of lightning, oak is the main attribute, and sacrifices were made to it. Belarusians believe that damaging an oak tree and cutting off its branches brings misfortune.

Describing the salvation and healing properties of the tree, Nagovitsyn (2005, p. 459) writes that "a number of peoples, including the Slavs, believed that the tree heals people, especially children; to do this, they put the sick child under a tree, or the child was passed through the cross branches divided into two trunks".

In modern times, a number of peoples around the world consider many trees as holy and sacred places, believe in the salvation role of these places, and hang colourful textiles on its branches. It is believed that people who take refuge in sacred trees with a certain intention in their hearts perform various rituals and offer sacrifices because they believe that they will succeed and be protected from evil forces.

The image of a birch tree on the drums of shamans is an expression of the belief in the healing properties of this tree and its protection from evil spirits. They carried a birch tree with them to heal the sick, sniffed the smoke of the tree. Belief in the tree was so strong among the Turks that the spirits of future shamans, who grow in the form of leaves on the branches of the soul or spirit tree, descend

into the uterus of pregnant women. While the baby, who will be a shaman, is in his mother's uterus, the soul that comes down from the tree enters his body (Gultepe, 2017, p. 499).

During ceremonies, the Sumerians also burned cedar trees in front of the statues of the gods, sacrifices were made during the ritual, and spells were recited. Greeks, Slavs, Turks, Persians, Indians and other peoples believed in the healing and purifying properties of the smoke of sacred trees and plants, and solemnly performed the ritual of smoke on religious holidays and household ceremonies. It should be noted that most studies examine the smoke ritual as an important part of the anthropomorphic worldview, which is considered the most archaic expression of belief in the tree-plant cult.

A unique manifestation of belief in the tree cult in Azerbaijan is associated with the juniper tree. It is said that the juniper tree does not shed its leaves and stays blue because it hides Mary among its branches to protect her from persecution. Also, in the religious and mythological thought of Azerbaijanis, the plant called Maryam's hair (Saint Mary's hair, i.e. Rose of Jericho) has a sacred character to protect from evil eyes. That's why they tie this grass in a bunch and hang it on the doors and pillars of houses. The famous poet Ashug Shenlik (1850-1913) expressed this archaic idea in his conversation with the poet Abbasali as follows:

Again, Shenlik's sin was far away,

It seems that the power has been taken,

Maryam's hair appeared without a head,

The Kaaba and hair was created.

(Agbaba, 2017, p. 53).

According to the religious and mythological beliefs of Azerbaijanis, there is Maryam's hair in the Kaaba. Ashug Shenlik marked the semantics of the plant-tree cult by illustrating both this detail and the sacred belief nourished by Maryam's hair plant (Rose of Jericho). In the mythology of the peoples of the world, the belief in the cult of the tree was so influential that not only sacred trees, but also various household items made of them were believed to have a protective function. Items such as cradles, beads, rosaries, hamayil (sacral stone) made of pine, beech (Turkic), oak, fir, beech (Slavic), olive, laurel (Greek), ash, hornbeam (German-Scandinavian), date palm, palm (Arabic) and other trees are of this type. For example, the Turks and Slavs believed in the magical power of cradles

made of pine and birch trees, and placed babies in these cradles to hide them from evil forces.

As a final point, according to an Oceanian legend, a wooden boat came to rescue of those who were in trouble in distant waters. It is said that the river took him to the sea, and the boat was still floating in the sea. I did not see it, but they say that it saved most of those who fell into the storm. But it did not want to stay with anyone forever (Mammadov et al., 1990, p. 450). In our opinion, "the boat does not want to stay with anyone forever" demonstrates the heavenly power of the tree cult. If the boat belonged to one person, he would not be able to save those who fell into the storm. Therefore, the boat is a wanderer, it can perform the function of rescue everywhere.

CONCLUSIONS

The tree, which embodies rich signs and symbols, faces and images created by the mythical consciousness of ancestors, and similar and different motives, acts as an extraordinary force in the mythology of the peoples of the world. These functions began with the primordial consciousness and resulted in the formation of the World Tree cult, which underlies the models of the universe and human creation. Thus, the cult of the tree has come down to our time as a sacred product of different civilizations and intercultural relations in different versions and variants.

Trees are revered for their importance in human life and livelihood, and for their connection to nature and the spiritual world. Although there are notable differences in the way in which different cultures venerate trees, there are certain common aspects that can be observed in the mythologies of different peoples of the world regarding the worship of trees such as: a) trees are considered sacred and they are attributed an important role in the creation and life of human beings, b) trees are seen as portals to the spiritual world or the realm of the gods, they are considered as sacred places where they can communicate with spirits of ancestors and divine beings, c) trees are associated with fertility and life as they provide fruit, shade, and shelter, d) trees are seen as symbols of wisdom and strength and are typically symbols of endurance and longevity due to their long life, e) the branches, leaves, bark and fruits of the trees are used in rituals and ceremonies, f) the trees are seen as a valuable resource and therefore should be treated with respect. The indiscriminate felling of trees is considered sacrilege and a violation of the spiritual connection that human beings have with nature.

Although beliefs and convictions related to the cult of the tree have undergone certain transformations during different periods, they have not lost their original essence

and have retained traces of the mythological age. In this sense, the trees act as a sacred being that performs a number of functions in the mythology of the peoples of the world. These functions can be summarized and characterized as follows: a) a tree is a means of connecting heaven and earth; b) a tree gives birth to a child as a father and a mother; c) women get pregnant from the fruit of the tree; d) the tree is a savior, a protector from evil forces, etc. When approaching the problem from this aspect, it is possible to see that in the mythology of the peoples of the world they have common features such as mountains, water, trees, and snakes and so on. These commonalities are also reflected in the cult of the trees.

REFERENCES

- Agbaba, A. (2017). *Crazy In Love Party. Encounters, conversations, narratives*. Ugur Publishing House.
- Agbaba, A. (2019). *Mythology*. Editorial and Publishing Department of SSU.
- Azimzadeh, Y. (1973). *Scandinavian epics*. Youth Publishing House.
- Birline, J. F. (2014). *Parallel mythology* (K. Huseinoglu, Trans.). Science and Education.
- Bunyadov, Z., & Mammadaliyev, V. (1992). *The Holy Quran*. Azernashr.
- Gozalov, F., & Mammadov, J. (1990). *Shamanic Legends and Tales*. Yazichi Publishing House.
- Gultepe, N. (2017). *Turkish mythology*. Kapı Publications.
- Honko, L. (2013). The Folklore Process. In P. Hakamies & A. Honko (Eds.), *Theoretical Milestones: Selected Writings of Lauri Honko* (pp. 29–54). Suomalainen Tiedeakatemia, Academia Scientiarum Fennica.
- Kalafat, Y. (2010). *Traces of Old Turkic Beliefs in Eastern Anatolia*. Berikan Publishing House.
- Lloyd, T. (2021). *What Folklorists Do: Professional Possibilities in Folklore Studies*. Indiana University Press.
- Mammadov, A., Ajalov, A., & Alioglu, C. (1990). *Legends of the Peoples of the World*. Youth Publishing House.
- Michalopoulos, S., & Xue, M. M. (2021). Folklore. *The Quarterly Journal of Economics*, 136(4), 1993–2046. <https://doi.org/10.1093/qje/qjab003>
- Nagovitsyn, A. E. (2005). *Ancient Civilizations: General Theory of Myth*. Academic Proek Publishing House.
- Ogel, B. (2004). *Turkic Mythology: Vol. Volume I* (R. Askar, Trans.). "MBM" Publishing House.
- Porteous, A. (2006). *Forest Folklore, Mythology and Romance*. Hesperides Press.
- PSeyidov, M. (1984). Thinking about the roots of the Azerbaijani people. Yazichi Publishing House.
- Sharaffitdinov, A., & Yusupov, U. (2022). The opportunities of educating morality for children through samples of folklore. *Eurasian Scientific Herald*, 5, 65–68. <https://geniusjournals.org/index.php/esh/article/view/601>
- Thompson, S. (2022). Folk literature. In *Encyclopedia Britannica*. <https://www.britannica.com/art/folk-literature>
- Zeynalov, F., & Alizade, S. (1988). *Kitabi-Dada Gorgud*. Yazichi Publishing House.
- J. H. (1897). *The Sacred Tree: or, the tree in religion and myth*. Macmillan, J.