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The totemic foundations of the dog image in Divan Lugat at-Turk: A mythological reconstruction

Abstract. This article investigates the mythological and possible totemic foundations of the dog image in Mahmud al-Kashgari's Divan Lugat at-Turk. Although the dictionary does not explicitly identify the dog, or any other animal, as a totem, its lexical entries and accompanying explanations preserve elements of an archaic Turkic worldview. Comparing these records with later folklore, ethnography and archaeological evidence from Kazakh and other Turkic traditions, the study reconstructs aspects of the dog's earlier mythological significance. Drawing on classical and structural approaches to totemism, it applies four analytical criteria: ritual, mediation between worlds, genealogy and social classification. Particular attention is paid to the dog's presence in burial traditions, practices associated with an infant's first forty days, protective rituals and accounts of human creation. Recurring narratives of canine ancestry, marriage to a dog and communities of dog-like people are examined alongside the dictionary's account of barak, an extraordinary hunting dog said to hatch from an eagle's egg. The comparison suggests that the dog's ancestral role is articulated most explicitly in certain Kyrgyz genealogical narratives, while related motifs survive in transformed forms elsewhere. Rather than proposing that the dog was a common totem of all Turkic peoples, the article identifies overlapping mythological patterns consistent with elements of a totemic worldview and traces their subsequent reinterpretation across folklore genres.

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Keywords: totemism, dog, barak, mythological reconstruction, Turkic folklore.

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«Диуани лұғат ат-түрік» еңбегіндегі «ит» бейнесінің тотемдік негіздері: мифологиялық реконструкция

Аңдатпа. Мақалада М.Қашқаридың «Диуани лұғат ат-түрік (Түрік сөздігі)» еңбегіндегі ит бейнесінің мифологиялық және тотемдік негіздері қарастырылады. Ескерткіште ешбір жануар, оның ішінде ит те тотем ретінде тікелей сипатталмағанымен, оған қатысты лексемалар мен түсіндірмелерде көне түркілік танымның архаикалық қабаттары сақталған. Осы сөздік деректерін кейінгі фольклорлық,

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этнографиялық және археологиялық материалдармен салыстыра қарастырып, иттің архаикалық семантикасын анықтауға және оның тотемдік сипатын тануға тырыстық. Дәстүрлі және структуралистік тотемизм теориялары негізінде иттің ғұрыптық, медиаторлық, генеалогиялық және классификациялық функциялары сараланды. Қазақ және басқа да бірқатар түркі халықтарының миф, ертегі, ырым-тыйым, ритуалдық дәстүрлері негізінде иттің тұрмыстық және мифологиялық келбеті ажыратылды. Оның ритуалдарда (жерлеу, баланы қырқынан шығару, емдік-қорғаныштық амалдар) қолданысы арқылы арғы дүниемен байланысы ашылса, генеалогиялық критерий негізінде иттің арғы тектік сипаты айшықталды. Сонымен қатар, итке байланысты ертегілік және мифтік тұрақты модельдер жүйеленді. Мифтік уақытта қалыптасқан ит образының сакралды бейнесінің кейінгі трансформациясы мен семантикалық көмескіленуі де мақаланың негізгі көтерген мәселелерінің бірі. Осы ізденістер негізінде М.Қашқари еңбегіндегі ит және онымен қатар аталатын жан-жануарлар туралы лексемалар мен түсіндірмелерді талдай отырып, көне түркілік дүниетанымдағы ит бейнесінің тотемдік негізін реконструкциялауды басты мақсат етіп отырмыз.

Алғыс: Мақала ҚР Ғылым және жоғары білім министрлігі Ғылым комитетінің 2025-2027 жылдарға арналған АР26100871 «Тәуелсіздіктің терең тамырлары: XX ғасыр басындағы халық әдебиетіндегі ұлт-азаттық идеясы» гранттық ғылыми-зерттеу жобасының қаржыландыруы негізінде жарияланды.

Кілт сөздер: тотемизм, ит, барак, мифологиялық реконструкция, түркі фольклоры.

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Тотемические основы образа собаки в «Диван лугат ат-турк»: мифологическая реконструкция

Аннотация. В статье рассматриваются мифологические и тотемические основы образа собаки в труде М. Кашгари «Диван лугат ат-турк» («Словарь тюркских наречий»). Несмотря на то что в памятнике ни одно животное, в том числе собака, непосредственно не характеризуется как тотем, в связанных с ним лексемах и толкованиях сохранились архаические пласты древнетюркского мировоззрения. Путем сопоставления данных словаря с более поздними фольклорными, этнографическими и археологическими материалами предпринята попытка выявить архаическую семантику образа собаки и определить его тотемические признаки. На основе традиционных и структуралистских теорий тотемизма анализируются ритуальная, медиаторная, генеалогическая и классификационная функции образа собаки. На материале мифов, сказок, поверий, запретов и ритуальных традиций казахского и ряда других тюркских народов разграничиваются бытовая и мифологический аспекты данного образа. Связь собаки с потусторонним миром раскрывается через ее участие в ритуалах, связанных с погребальной обрядностью, обрядом, связанным с первыми сорока днями жизни младенца, а также лечебно-охранительными практиками; генеалогический критерий позволяет выявить представления о собаке как о мифологическом предке. Кроме того, систематизируются устойчивые сказочные и мифологические модели, связанные с образом собаки. Одной из основных проблем, рассматриваемых в статье, является последующая трансформация сакрального образа собаки, сформировавшегося в мифологическое время, и постепенное затемнение его первоначальной семантики. На основе проведенного исследования главной целью статьи является реконструкция тотемических основ образа собаки в древнетюркском мировоззрении посредством анализа содержащихся в труде М. Кашгари лексем и толкований, связанных с собакой и другими упоминаемыми наряду с ней животными.

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Ключевые слова: тотемизм, собака, барак, мифологическая реконструкция, тюркский фольклор.

1. Introduction

Mahmud al-Kashgari's *Divan Lughat al-Turk*, compiled in Baghdad in 1072–1074, is among the major monuments of eleventh-century Turkic intellectual culture. Its importance extends beyond lexicography: its entries, proverbs, verse and ethnographic explanations offer evidence of medieval Turkic customs, beliefs, ritual practices and conceptions of the world. Some entries describe everyday realities; others retain traces of mythological concepts and magical practices.

The dictionary has been widely examined from historical, linguistic, dialectological and ethnolinguistic perspectives. Its mythological materials, however, still warrant more focused investigation. The descriptions of animals are particularly valuable when read alongside later narratives. In Kazakh traditions, for example, the dog's possible early totemic meanings have become less explicit, whereas its symbolic, cultic and fairy-tale associations remain prominent.

This article aims to reconstruct the possible totemic foundations of the dog image in the early Turkic worldview through a comparative reading of al-Kashgari's lexical evidence and the folkloric, ethnographic and archaeological records of several Turkic peoples. Its objectives are to identify dog-related lexemes, including *barak*; examine their mythological meanings; investigate the dog's ritual and mediating roles; assess narratives of canine ancestry; and explore the classificatory meanings of such figures as *It eli* («land of dogs»), *Itaaly* and *It-Barak*. The reconstruction treats these materials as evidence of possible mythological connections, not as proof that all Turkic peoples shared one canine totem.

2. Research Methods and Materials

2.1 Materials

The principal source is al-Kashgari's eleventh-century dictionary, particularly its animal-related entries and explanations, cited here from A. Q. Egeubay's Kazakh translation in the *Adebi zhadygerler* series (2007a–c). Comparative sources include Kazakh myths, epic narratives, legends, ritual folklore and beliefs, especially texts published in the hundred-volume *Babalar sozi*, as well as selected traditions of other Turkic peoples. Archaeological studies provide an additional basis for comparison. The theoretical framework draws on works by Chokan Valikhanov, Seit Kaskabasov, Serikbol Kondybai, James G. Frazer, Claude Lévi-Strauss, Alan Dundes, Émile Durkheim, Mircea Eliade and Jean-Paul Roux (Roux, 1966); broader comparative perspectives from Boas (2010) and Dundes (1980) are also relevant.

2.2 Methods

The study combines intertextual and historical-comparative approaches with semantic analysis and mythological reconstruction. Intertextual comparison identifies correspondences between the dictionary and Kazakh myths; historical comparison examines related folklore and rituals among different Turkic populations. Semantic analysis focuses on the ritual and mythological roles assigned to animals. Mythological reconstruction is employed to formulate hypotheses about meanings that may have become obscured or transformed in later traditions. Because narrative parallels do not establish direct historical continuity on their own, the proposed reconstructions are distinguished from the documentary evidence on which they rest.

3. Discussion

Durkheim considered totemism in relation to elementary forms of religious life and emphasized the totem as a sacred symbol of a community and an expression of collective identity (Durkheim, 1995). Frazer associated the totem with an animal or plant regarded as having a special relationship with a social group; kinship, ritual restrictions, ancestry and sacred status figure prominently in this approach (Frazer, 1910). Lévi-Strauss criticized explanations that reduced totemism to a primitive religion or literal human–animal kinship, stressing its role as a classificatory system (Lévi-Strauss, 1963). These approaches do not provide a single universal test for determining whether a particular animal held totemic status. Accordingly, this article uses four complementary analytical criteria:

- *Ritual*: Does the animal participate in rituals and ceremonial practices?
- *Mediatory*: Is it represented as linking this world with another world?
- *Genealogical*: Is it depicted as the ancestor of a person or community?
- *Classificatory*: Does its image distinguish a particular group from other communities?

An overlap between several criteria may indicate an archaic totemic stratum, but no individual criterion is treated as sufficient proof. Kaskabasov, discussing archaic myth, emphasizes mythic time and the perceived unity of human beings and nature (Kaskabasov, 2014a: 73). Such a worldview provides a context in which kinship with an animal can become imaginable. Eliade's account of the reinterpretation of myths likewise helps explain how a once-sacred image may acquire new meanings when religious and cultural frameworks change (Eliade, 1963). Here, therefore, the dog is not presumed to have been an absolute or universal Turkic totem; rather, particular traces of totemic thought are sought in the surviving evidence.

3.1 Reconstructing the Dog's Totemic Foundations

The dictionary contains 43 dog-related textual records identified in the present study. The following selected entries are especially pertinent. The lexical headings retain the spelling used in the cited Kazakh edition, followed by a practical Latin transliteration; the English glosses are translated by the authors from A. Q. Egeubay's Kazakh edition and should not be regarded as verbatim translations of the original eleventh-century manuscript:

ИТЛЫҒ (itlygh): a household with a dog (Adebi zhadigerler, 2007a: 126).

ҰЛЫТҒАН (ulytghan): one who makes a dog howl (Adebi zhadigerler, 2007a: 185).

ЫТЛАДЫ (yt lady): to compare someone to a dog, or insult someone by calling them a dog (Adebi zhadigerler, 2007a: 334).

БАРАҚ (barak): a shaggy, exceptionally swift hunting dog. According to the tradition recorded by al-Kashgari, an aged eagle lays two eggs: a barak hatches from one, while the other produces the eagle's final chick (Adebi zhadigerler, 2007a: 433).

КЕСГҮК (kesgük): a collar or strap fastened around a dog's neck (Adebi zhadigerler, 2007b: 421).

ҰЛЫДЫ (ulydy): «howled,» said of a wolf, a frightened dog howling at night, or a person crying out in severe distress. A proverb states that when a wolf howls on the steppe, the dog at home feels pain within; the accompanying explanation interprets this as the sympathy and mutual assistance expected of close relatives (Adebi zhadigerler, 2007c: 345).

ШАҚЫР (shaqyr): light-eyed. An accompanying saying contrasts a light-eyed dog that can match a horse with a light-eyed horse that cannot match a dog (Adebi zhadigerler, 2007a: 418).

ШЫҒРЫ (shyghry): a verse depicting a falconer on a fine horse pursuing game, accompanied by a long-eared, slender-waisted tazy used in hunting (Adebi zhadigerler, 2007a: 479).

The dog-and-wolf proverb conveys an association of kinship, although the dictionary does not develop either animal's mythological role. The barak entry is more unusual. Its account of a hunting dog emerging from an eagle's egg describes a mythical birth rather than ordinary animal reproduction. It also connects the dog with a bird that carries sacred associations in Turkic traditions. This relationship becomes relevant to the horse–bird–dog grouping discussed below.

The dog's cultural meanings are nonetheless ambivalent. Alongside associations of fidelity and protection, al-Kashgari records its use as an insult, and Kazakh expressions similarly alternate between praising someone as faithful «like a dog» and condemning conduct as «dog-like.» The dictionary's pejorative explanation of qanshyq («bitch») provides another example. Such contrasting meanings show the complexity of the image; on their own, they cannot establish either its antiquity or its former totemic status.

Kaskabasov describes an early stratum of myths concerned with the origins of objects, animals, people and heavenly bodies, followed in his periodization by later polytheistic and monotheistic developments (Kaskabasov, 2014a: 73–74). Within this interpretive framework, the dog's protective and creative roles may preserve features associated with earlier patron-spirit beliefs, while some negative evaluations may reflect subsequent reinterpretations. This remains a historical hypothesis rather than a directly documented sequence.

3.2 Creation, burial and mediation between worlds

The Kazakh myth Kisi ham it («The Human and the Dog») presents the dog as the guardian of the as-yet-lifeless human body. God forms a human being from clay, leaves the body in the dog's care and departs to obtain a soul. The devil attempts to corrupt the body, but the dog resists. The devil sends bitter cold against the initially hairless animal; after overcoming its resistance, he spits on the human body. In the story, this act accounts for human suffering and sin. God then gives the person a soul and provides the dog with a warm coat so that it may accompany human beings (Babalar sozi, 2011a: 123). Another Kazakh myth relates that the dog was formed from clay removed from the human navel during creation (Babalar sozi, 2011a: 267). In both narratives, the animal's origin or original duty is closely connected with humanity.

A comparable Sakha narrative recounts that Yürüng Aiyy Toyon placed newly made human bodies inside a stone house and appointed guards to keep an evil spirit away. Promised a warm coat, a guard allows the spirit to enter and defile the bodies. Yürüng Aiyy Toyon transforms the guard into a dog and turns the bodies inside out, thereby explaining why human impurity is hidden within (Mify narodov mira, 1992: 687). The parallels concern the guardian, the unanimated human body and the warm coat, although the dog's actions differ between the narratives.

The dog's participation in human creation also appears in the Kazakh fairy tale Qulanaijarqyn. An elderly couple owns a bay mare whose foals are repeatedly devoured by a monstrous old woman, zhalmayyz kempir. When the couple decides to slaughter the mare, the tazy warns her and helps her escape. At the decisive moment, the mare and the hound transform into swans and fly away. Later, the hound asks the mare to create a human who can become their owner. She instructs it to bring five handfuls of earth from a human footprint, from which a new person is made; the rest of the tale follows Qulanaijarqyn (Babalar sozi, 2011b: 119–121). Although this is a fairy tale, its combination of animal helpers, metamorphosis and the creation of a person suggests an underlying mythological pattern. The central point for the present study is the cooperation of the mare and hound in obtaining a human being.

Other practices also associate the dog with a child's well-being, including fumigation with dog hair, bathing involving a dog's skull and a custom in which a child was rolled on the spot where a dead dog had lain. A Sakha example more directly connects the dog with fertility and the granting of life. Citing A. Savvin's archival materials, S. Nikiforova describes Yt Aiyhyta, a patron spirit or deity of dogs who could also bestow a soul upon a child. In the reported rite, a woman seeking to conceive prepares a birch-bark shelter for a dog giving birth, covers the animal with her own clothing, hangs jewelry around its neck and shares food with it; the dog's acceptance of the food is taken as a favorable sign (Nikiforova, 2010: 97). These examples invite comparison with the Kazakh belief in patron spirits, later often expressed through the concept of a pir. The parallels are typological and do not, in themselves, establish a common ritual origin.

The connection with the beginning of life leads to another possible role: mediation between the living and the dead. Across the materials considered here, the dog appears both as a guardian associated with the creation or protection of human life and as an animal encountered at the boundary of death. The latter association is particularly visible in Sayan–Altai traditions.

E. Yamaeva examines a striking burial motif in the Teleut epic Keziyke, an Altaian–Teleut version related to Qozy Korpesh–Bayan Sulu. When the hero's mother asks who will bury her, he answers that a black puppy will do so. After her death, a black puppy is cut open, and later Bayan Sulu likewise uses a black puppy's blood in preparing Keziyke's body for burial. Yamaeva observes that the repeated motif has no obvious counterpart in present-day Altaian burial practice and suggests that it may preserve a forgotten ritual element (Yamaeva, 2021: 96). The corresponding Kazakh epic does not contain this dog-related episode. Nevertheless, other Kazakh materials connect the animal with death and the world beyond.

The Kazakh expression *it olgen zher*, literally «the place where a dog died,» now denotes a very distant place. Kondybai proposes an additional mythological reading: the expression may refer to the land of the dead, while the dog may represent a soul associated with the other world (Kondybai, 2024: 838). Related expressions, such as *it bailasa turmaityn zher* («a place where even a tethered dog would not remain») and *it arqasy qiyan* («extremely far away»), invite similar interpretation, although their everyday meanings cannot by themselves demonstrate an original reference to the dead. In the Altai epic *Er*

Samyr, a more explicit image occurs: according to İ. Dilek, Erlik's underworld is guarded by two dogs, one with six eyes and the other with eight. Er Samyr passes them after offering milk and tying a ritual knot of horsehair to a tree (Dilek, 1998). Here the dogs' role as guardians of an otherworldly boundary is part of the narrative itself.

Archaeological evidence provides an independent, though not unambiguous, line of comparison. E. Akymbek and M. Shagyrbayev survey dog burials in Kazakhstan from prehistoric to medieval contexts and discuss changing interpretations of dogs as protectors, guardians and potential guides between worlds. They interpret the dog buried near the entrance to the Koskuduk settlement in relation to the protection of a place and the symbolic abandonment of an earlier settlement. They also discuss dog burials associated with humans at Orlov and Zevakino and the suggestion, attributed to F. Kh. Arslanova, that early Turkic groups practised forms of dog veneration. Later ethnographic accounts of burying a valued dog near the home may be compared with these finds (Akymbek & Shagyrbayev, 2022). The archaeological record documents burial practices; the assignment of one continuous meaning to those practices across periods remains interpretive.

Dog burials also raise the question of the Kazakh notion of *zheti qazyna* («seven treasures»). Lists differ, but recurrent elements include a fine horse, a hunting eagle and a tazy, alongside weapons or other possessions. One possible interpretation advanced here is that an earlier form of the expression referred to the valued belongings of a young man, potentially including things that accompanied the deceased. Burials involving horses at Berel, weapons, birds at Kuryk and combinations of such grave goods at Araltobe offer grounds for comparison. They do not, however, demonstrate that *zheti qazyna* historically denoted a fixed group of seven burial objects. The more securely observable pattern is the recurrent pairing of the horse, bird and dog in the cultural materials considered.

A narrative recorded by Valikhanov, «The Legend of the Dead and the Living and Their Friendship» reinforces this pattern. A deceased young man befriends a living youth and tells him how he died. He instructs the youth to send his killer and the killer's black horse to him in the next world, then to sacrifice people and possessions found in a newly erected yurt, including a hawk and a black tazy wearing a collar. When the youth later returns to the dead man, those he has sent are present beside him (Valikhanov, 1985: 48–70). The narrative presents the possibility that earthly companions and possessions continue to serve their owner after death; its actions are reported here as part of the story, not as evidence of a general historical custom.

Al-Kashgari's hunting verse likewise brings together a mounted hunter, a bird of prey and a tazy (Adebi zhadigerler, 2007a: 479). In a Kazakh legend about Asan Qaigy, his father Sabit releases a black horse, black eagle and black tazy before his death. He leaves their bridle, jesses and collar to his unborn son, who will later be able to summon the animals at Mount Bulgyr (Babalar sozi, 2012: 145). In life, this triad signifies the hunter's valued companions; in narratives involving death, it may acquire an additional otherworldly meaning. Its recurrence suggests a recognizable configuration, although the functions of the three animals should not automatically be assumed to be identical.

Their potential roles can be differentiated. A belief cited by Kurmambaeva holds that the departing soul becomes a bird, flies to the tree of life and alights on the branch associated

with the person's name (Kurmambaeва, 2020: 131). Masked and horned horses found in Altai burial contexts have also been interpreted in relation to journeys beyond death: Francfort associates their visual imagery with an extraordinary mount, while Samashev and Zhumatayev discuss horses accompanying deceased people in funerary contexts (Francfort, 1998: 315; Samashev & Zhumatayev, 2015: 254). Against this background, the dog's guarding and guiding functions may be understood as related aspects of a possible mediatory role. A horse can represent transport; a bird may evoke an upper world; and the dog may guard or guide at a boundary. This differentiation is a comparative hypothesis, not a meaning explicitly stated in al-Kashgari's hunting verse.

Kazakh beliefs about canine howling provide a further, more tentative parallel. A dog howling towards the shanyraq (the roof opening of a yurt) can be interpreted as an omen concerning the household. Prolonged howling is sometimes regarded unfavorably, whereas interrupted howling may receive a positive interpretation. The contrast has a typological resemblance to a customary distinction between interrupted pouring of water over a guest's hands and uninterrupted pouring during the washing of a corpse. The resemblance cannot establish a historical relationship between these practices. Similarly, al-Kashgari's ulytghan entry merely denotes a person who makes a dog howl; any connection with death comes from comparison with later beliefs, not from the dictionary's lexical gloss itself.

The same liminal symbolism may be explored through the significance attributed to the first and last forty days of life. The Kazakh ritual qyrqynan shygharu marks the end of an infant's first forty days; Kurmambaeва also records a belief that the soul leaves the body forty days before death (Kurmambaeва, 2020: 131). Within this belief system, the dog's association with omens may be read alongside its involvement in the infant's transition into social life. Such an interpretation concerns culturally ascribed perceptions of the soul, not an assertion that dogs literally perceive human death.

3.3 The «itkoylek» rite and the puppy-substitution motif

The itkoylek, literally «dog shirt,» is the infant's first garment in Kazakh tradition. It is worn during the period preceding qyrqynan shygharu. In one version of the subsequent rite, sweets are placed inside the shirt, which is then tied around a dog's neck. Village children chase and catch the dog, share the sweets and return the garment to the family. The practice, known as it quu («chasing the dog»), has been explained through a belief that the dog, imagined as an animal with «forty souls,» carries misfortune away from the child (Qazaqtyng etnografiyalıq kategoriyalar..., 2012).

An interpretation discussed by Z. Naurzybayeva, drawing on Kondyбай, suggests an earlier mythological stratum behind explanations that the dog merely removes the child's bad luck or undesirable behavior. In this reading, an infant younger than forty days is perceived as not yet fully established in the world of the living. Kondyбай connects the garment and the accompanying dog to three mythological possibilities: the dog as the embodiment of an unborn soul, as a guardian of the other world and as a manifestation of a deceased person's soul (Kondyбай, 2024: 837). These associations make the rite relevant to the mediatory criterion, although the historical relationship between them remains open to investigation.

Kondyбай also cites a recurrent Kazakh fairy-tale episode in which a ruler's younger wife gives birth to two children. The barren senior wife, aided by a witch, steals the infants,

replaces them with puppies and spreads the claim that the younger wife has given birth to dogs. The younger wife and the puppies are expelled while the real children are concealed elsewhere. Kondybai relates this episode to the idea that the infants have not yet fully entered the human world (Kondybai, 2024: 837). The substitution is also found in the epic Munglyq–Zarlyq, the Bashkir tale *The Black Puppy*, the Uzbek tale *The Shining Enchanted Dish* and the Kazakh Story of Qudaibergen and Kunsulu.

These narratives often combine four elements: a ruler longing for offspring, a younger wife who gives birth, an envious senior wife, and the substitution of puppies for the newborn children. The association between the first and fourth elements is particularly significant. In the reconstruction proposed here, the puppy may once have served as a substitute intended to protect a vulnerable child from the evil eye or from personified death. This hypothesis can be considered alongside Kazakh protective customs involving intentionally unremarkable names, a child's distinctive tuft of hair, soot applied to the forehead or an ornament designed to divert attention. In the worldview represented by these practices, the evil eye need not result from deliberate malice; admiring or intense attention may also be considered dangerous.

Another pertinent Kazakh practice is *balany satyp alu*, the ritual «purchase of a child,» sometimes undertaken by a family whose earlier children have not survived. In the form described in the cited ethnographic account, the parents make an arrangement with an older female ritual specialist (*qushnash kempir*). After the child's birth she claims that the parents have stolen her child and carries the infant away beneath the lattice wall of the yurt. The parents publicly appear to submit, then ceremonially buy the child back. The ethnographic encyclopedia interprets the act as an attempt to deceive death (*Qazaqtyng etnografiyalıq kategoriyalar...*, 2012). This interpretation is compatible with narratives in which death, as in traditions concerning *Aldashy-Azhal*, is personified and can be misled or resisted.

The comparative material also describes a nineteenth-century Sakha practice in which an infant was apparently stolen and a puppy left in its place (Yegizbayeva et al., 2023: 110). The proposed shared logic is substitution: a child who must be protected is presented to dangerous forces as something other than a human infant.

The familiar fairy-tale episode may therefore allow a different hypothetical reconstruction. The senior wife's apparent malice in the surviving story could be a reinterpretation of an earlier protective act: announcing that puppies rather than children had been born would conceal the infants from the evil eye or death. This possibility is considered here in the light of Vladimir Propp's approach to the reinterpretation of ritual in fairy tales (Propp, 1946); it should not be confused with the senior wife's stated motivation in the extant tale, which is envy. In the ritual, an older woman helps preserve the child; in the fairy tale, aspects of that role may have been divided between the hostile senior wife and other older female characters. This proposed change of narrative function requires further comparative testing.

The *itkoylek* rite offers another potential stage in such a transformation. The first infant garment is known by cognate dog-related names among several Turkic peoples, including Kazakhs, Kyrgyz, Uzbeks, Karakalpaks, Bashkirs and Khakas. Among the Kazakh, Kyrgyz and Khakas, accounts describe placing the garment on a dog's head before putting it on

the infant. We suggest that literal substitution by a puppy and symbolic substitution by a «dog shirt» may preserve related protective ideas in different forms. After forty days, tying the garment to a dog that runs away could symbolically transfer the threat away from the settlement. The sequence is a proposed reconstruction, not an established history of the ritual.

Taken together, the creation narratives, dog-associated birth practices, protective rites and funerary evidence place the animal at several perceived thresholds between life and death. This combination provides the strongest basis in the present study for considering the ritual and mediatory dimensions together.

3.4 Canine ancestry and the classification of communities

The genealogical evidence begins with a Tibetan document found at Dunhuang and dated to approximately the second half of the eighth century. In his study of the text, F. Venturi describes an account of two Turkic travelers who lose their way beyond a desert and mountain range and encounter a young woman among dogs. A narrative explains that the first dog descended from the sky and produced a black dog and a red dog. When a female wolf proves an unsuitable mate, the dogs abduct a young Turkic woman. Their sons are born as dogs and their daughters as human beings; their descendants are said to form groups distinguished as «red-snouted» and «black-snouted» (Venturi, 2008: 9). Venturi does not claim that the text traces the ancestry of all Turks to dogs. Its importance here lies in the combination of canine genealogy, group differentiation and a remote, difficult-to-reach setting.

Kyrgyz material provides a notable comparison. In *Sketches of Dzungaria*, Valikhanov records a tradition describing Kyrgyz descent from a red taigan (hound) and a princess accompanied by forty female attendants, and comments on its archaic character (Valikhanov, 2010: 347). O. Karataev and K. Zhanybekova likewise discuss the «red dog» in Kyrgyz mythology, linking genealogical traditions, ethnonyms and canine protective rituals to totemic beliefs (Karataev & Dzhanibekova, 2024: 60–61). In the evidence considered here, these traditions express canine ancestry more directly than the corresponding Kazakh narratives. The recurrence of a red dog is a suggestive parallel with the Tibetan account but is not sufficient to prove that the narratives descend from one documented source.

The black dog of the Tibetan account has a potential parallel in Anatolian fairy tales. In a study of two stories involving marriage to a black dog, F. Çolak proposes that their fantastic plots preserve elements of a dog-ancestor myth (Çolak, 2024). A related marriage motif appears in an Altai fairy tale discussed by İ. Dilek. In *The Yellow Dog*, an old man's youngest daughter marries a yellow dog; her husband later reveals his human identity by removing the skin that gives him canine form. When her sisters burn the skin, the couple ascend to the sky (Dilek, 2007: 215). These texts share an identifiable pattern – a male figure in canine form and a human bride – while differing in color, plot and the representation of descent.

Çolak's reading is important because it encourages examination of genealogical meanings that may survive as marriage motifs after the original explanatory setting has been forgotten. Nevertheless, animal marriage occurs in many narrative contexts; it is not, by itself, evidence of historical dog worship or descent. Within the corpus studied here, its

significance grows when considered together with explicitly genealogical narratives and images of dog-identified peoples.

This comparison returns us to al-Kashgari's barak. The dictionary describes its extraordinary origin from an eagle's egg, while Çolak draws attention to possible connections between barak, black-dog tales and traditions concerning canine ancestors (Çolak, 2024). The barak episode also links two members of the horse–bird–dog grouping through a single mythical origin: the dog and eagle emerge from the eagle's two eggs. This is a narrative relationship, however, and must be distinguished from a claim that the dictionary explicitly presents barak as the ancestor of a community.

In the Oghuzname tradition, Oghuz Khan is said to encounter a northern people called the It-Barak, whose men resemble dogs while their women are described as beautiful. The version discussed here does not expressly trace this people's descent to a canine ancestor. It is consequently more useful, for present purposes, as evidence of classification through animal imagery than as direct genealogical testimony.

A comparable community appears in the Manas tradition. The version attributed to S. Orozbekov recounts how a companion of Manas spent three years in a country named Itaaly, whose women were human and whose men were dogs (Manas Encyclopedia, 1995: 247). Kazakh narratives of the «land of dogs» retain the same contrast. In Tobet, two fugitives escaping from Itzhéken, a remote place of exile, lose their way and come upon livestock guarded by a large dog. A woman receives them and describes the inhabitants: daughters are born as humans, sons as dogs (Babalar sozi, 2011a: 54). In The Itelgi Clan, the poet Zhiembet unexpectedly reaches this country after falling into disfavor with Esim Khan (Babalar sozi, 2011a: 57). In It eli, a traveler likewise encounters it by chance (Babalar sozi, 2011a: 57).

The repeated setting deserves attention. Neither the travelers in the Tibetan narrative nor the protagonists of these Kazakh stories deliberately seek out the dog-identified community. They reach it after losing their way or traveling into unfamiliar territory. The desert and mountains of the Tibetan account, like the remote country in Kazakh myth, may mark a boundary between everyday geography and mythological space. The narrative then identifies a group through a striking bodily or reproductive distinction: men take canine form, whereas women remain human. The shift from an origin story to the portrayal of a distant and unusual community is a plausible model of narrative transformation, although the materials do not establish its historical chronology.

A separate Kazakh etiological account, in which the dog is created from clay removed from the human navel, strengthens the idea of closeness between humans and dogs but does not itself constitute a genealogical myth (Babalar sozi, 2011a: 267). Valikhanov associated the weakening or reinterpretation of certain Kyrgyz traditions concerning dogs with Islamic ideas about ritual impurity (Valikhanov, 1985: 55). Çolak similarly discusses the transformation of older mythic patterns within later religious and fairy-tale contexts, while Kaskabasov describes the reinterpretation of earlier spirit figures under monotheistic frameworks (Kaskabasov, 2014b: 17). These interpretations suggest one possible context for semantic change; they should not be taken to imply that Islam affected all Turkic communities, or all canine traditions, in the same way.

Across the compared materials, genealogy and classification frequently overlap. The Tibetan account and certain Kyrgyz traditions refer to descent, whereas the It-Barak, Itaal and Kazakh «land of dogs» narratives foreground features used to distinguish a community from outsiders. We propose that some of these stories may preserve differently transformed elements of an earlier dog-ancestor motif. The genealogical link is clearer in some sources than in others; its extension to the entire corpus remains a reconstruction rather than a documented historical fact.

4. Results

4.1. Lexical evidence. Dog-related entries in Divan Lugat at-Turk encompass ordinary usage and material potentially relevant to mythology. The barak entry, in particular, preserves an extraordinary birth narrative linking the hunting dog with the eagle. It therefore provides a distinct lexical starting point for comparison with later traditions.

4.2. Ritual and mediation. Kazakh and other Turkic myths, protective practices, infant rites, epics and burial evidence place dogs in contexts associated with the beginnings and endings of human life. Read alongside the recurring horse–bird–dog grouping, these materials support a hypothesis that guarding and guiding could be related dimensions of the dog's perceived mediatory role. Their precise historical relationships require further investigation.

4.3. Genealogy. The Tibetan narrative, Kyrgyz traditions and selected Anatolian and Altai tales share elements of canine ancestry or marriage between a human woman and a male in canine form. The Kyrgyz accounts examined preserve relatively explicit genealogical statements; the analogous meaning of the fairy-tale motifs elsewhere remains interpretive.

4.4. Classification. Accounts of It-Barak, Itaal and It eli distinguish particular communities through canine imagery, especially the recurring pattern of canine men and human women. Together with the genealogical evidence, they make it possible to propose a model in which an ancestral motif is preserved, reinterpreted or fragmented into other narrative forms. The four criteria identify overlapping features of possible totemic thought; they do not establish the dog as a universal Turkic totem.

5. Conclusion

A comparative reading of al-Kashgari's dictionary and later Turkic materials reveals several layers of meaning associated with the dog that cannot be reduced to its everyday role. The dictionary itself does not designate any animal as a totem. It does, however, preserve distinctive elements most notably the myth of the barak, born from an eagle's egg that become significant when examined alongside later narratives and practices.

In Kazakh creation myths, the dog guards the human body or is created from the same material as a human being. Its appearances in infant-protection rites, stories about the soul, funerary traditions and accounts of otherworldly guardianship suggest a recurrent association with boundaries between forms of existence. Within the horse–bird–dog configuration, the dog's proposed role as guardian and guide complements, but is not equivalent to, meanings attributed to the horse and bird.

The genealogical evidence is unevenly preserved. Certain Kyrgyz traditions explicitly describe descent involving a dog, while Anatolian and Altai animal-marriage tales and

Kazakh stories of canine communities preserve comparable narrative elements without necessarily stating that descent. The It-Barak, Itaaly and It eli materials are especially revealing at the classificatory level: communities are identified by canine features after genealogical explanations have become less visible or are absent from the surviving text. Their relationship to a common dog-ancestor tradition is a hypothesis for further comparative testing, not a demonstrated single line of transmission.

It would therefore be unwarranted to claim that the dog was a shared totem of all Turkic peoples. The more defensible conclusion is that dog-related lexemes, myths, rituals and community narratives preserve overlapping archaic features consistent with elements of a totemic worldview. Their comparison illustrates the value of mythological reconstruction while also revealing its evidentiary limits. Extending this approach to the dictionary's wider zoomorphic vocabulary, including the horse and various birds, may make it possible to reconstruct broader patterns in early Turkic mythological thought.

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