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THE HERO EMBODYING THE COMING OF SPRING, THE WATER ELEMENT AND FERTILITY IN ARMENIAN AND IRANIAN FOLKLORE

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In the article we have attempted to examine the characters of one of the shared heroes found in Armenian and Iranian folk tales and festive ceremonies, Kosa, and his companions, the flower-spring bride and the demon giant. They embody the cyclical alternation of the seasons, namely winter and spring, springtime agricultural work, fertility, the water element and rain that ensure the germination of seeds sown in the soil. These heroes, who have identical functions in the tales of both peoples, are the survivors

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of their shared ancient deities. These spirit-deities have been preserved in the collective memory of generations in anthropomorphized forms, gradually transforming into ordinary heroes. In the folklore of the peoples living in regions with a dry continental climate, particular significance is naturally attached to the water element, rain-invoking rituals, spring agricultural works, soil fertility enhancement, and the ritual ceremonies associated with them. These shared heroes found in Armenian and Iranian folk tales are closely related to the worship of the mother goddess of fertility, Anahit. In the Armenian and Iranian folk tales woven around the hero known as Kosa, this figure is mainly fictionalized in the roles of a womanizer who abducts women, an ingenious trickster, a cunning thief, and a wealthy landowner who tortures his servants. In the course of analyzing the hero's character, we have also drawn on relevant material from the rituals of spring holidays. In the folk plays dedicated to the awakening of spring and the accompanying rain-invoking rituals, Kosa's demonic rival persistently courts his bride attempting to seduce and abduct her. We witness the fictionalized story of this rivalry as a recurring narrative of the love triangle with varying success in numerous fairy tales centered on the motif of returning the abducted wife. In folk play-performances staged during the Armenian Barekendan, Trndez, Hambarzum, and Iranian Kousegardani, Kousebarneshin Arus Goli, and other holidays, this hero or his alter egos (Aklatiz, Pas papuk, Pir babu) assume a central role. In Armenian and Iranian folklore, Kosa embodies the death and rebirth of nature, the awakening of spring, rain-invoking rituals, and the image of a fertile male serving the temple of the goddess Anahit.

Keywords: Anahit, Kosa, Barekendan, Trndez, Kousegardani, Arus Goli

Introduction

In the study of the fairy tale genre, it is essential to focus not only on the plot-related issues, but also on the image of the hero, as the carrier of the tale's central idea. It can be decisive not only for character development but also for a deeper analysis of the plot itself.

Owing to millennia of close interaction, the folklore traditions of Armenians and Iranians feature numerous heroes performing identical or closely related functions who may be regarded as survivals of ancient shared deities of the two peoples. The collective memory of generations has embedded them in the deep layers of folklore, where they have assumed humanized forms and characteristics.

In this article¹, we aim to reveal the images of Kosa², the patron spirit of spring awakening, fertility, plowing and sowing, generation, and the water element, as well as his immediate companions in folk tales. In examining the specific functions of these heroes, who appeared in blurred or disguised forms over the centuries, we have drawn on useful material from Armenian and Iranian folk holidays and rituals. The comparative analysis of the latter has been conducted to a relevant extent.

Nowadays, the problems caused by climate change have become extremely relevant. Since ancient times, man has always struggled with natural phenomena such as drought giving rise to deities, performing religious rituals, with the help of which he tried to invoke the

¹ Author contributions: *Garnik Gevorgyan* – conceptualization, the section dedicated to Iranian folklore; *Tamar Hayrapetyan* – the section dedicated to Armenian folklore.

² *Kosa* means a beardless man, which in folk interpretation symbolizes infertility. According to the Iranian philologist Agha Abbasi, *Kosa* originally functioned as a protector of the tribe's herds and flocks. The ritual associated with his veneration was performed by shepherds in midwinter, marking the beginning of the livestock breeding season. Owing to its close connection with pastoral life, *Kosa* was associated with the prophet Moses in regions such as Atrpatakan and Hamadan. The central participant in this ritual was a shepherd who went from house to house, knocking on doors with his stick and offering blessings, while the villagers presented him with gifts. In some provinces, the shepherd wore bells around his neck and waist and was accompanied by a group of people, each fulfilling a symbolic role in the ritual narrative. According to Agha Abbasi, the number of participants in the *Kousegardi* ritual varied from one to six, including the *Kosa* dressed in goat-skin and mask, his wife or bride (*Naz Khanum*), the demonic giant, a bearer of the offering basket, a lamp bearer, and several musicians [Aqaabbasi 2010, 229]. In southern Iran, particularly in Hormozgan, this festival-rite is known as "*Shushi*" and is performed at the end of the fishing season. Another Iranian scholar, Mir Shokrayi, interprets the *Kousegardi* ritual as a surviving echo of an ethnic totem from the hunting era, which later acquired new functions during the transition to animal husbandry [Aqaabbasi 2010, 227; Shokrayi 1980, 60]. At a later historical stage, *Kouse* came to symbolize the arrival of the spring festival of Nowruz, the hardships of winter, and the conclusion of the "ugly" period of nature characterized by cold and darkness.

“mercy of heaven”. The article explores representations of the rain god, the water element and the deities of fertility in the folklore of peoples living in countries with arid regions, which are associated with the worship of the mother goddess Anahit. Such studies are especially significant from the point of view of identifying the centuries-old commonalities in the spiritual and cultural life of different peoples, thereby fostering greater mutual understanding and recognition among them.

Descriptive, historical-comparative, and analytical methods are the most appropriate for conducting research of this kind.

In Armenian and Iranian folk tales, Kosa’s image is mainly fictionalized in the roles of a womanizer who abducts women, an ingenious trickster, a cunning thief and a wealthy landowner who tortures his servants.

By contrast, in the spring folk festivals and the associated rain-involving rituals, the groom Kosa is portrayed as a heroic figure who fights against a rival demon giant (dragon)³ to protect his spring (flower)-bride⁴. Here, the demon persistently courts Kosa’s bride and tries to seduce and abduct her. This competition allegorically symbolizes the cyclical transition from winter to spring.

We witness the fictionalized story of this rivalry as a recurring narrative of the love triangle with varying success in numerous fairy tales centred on the motif of returning the abducted wife (Armenian “Pahlevan the Warrior and His Son”, Iranian “The Thin-Haired Man (Kosa) and the Merchant’s Son”, etc.).

In fairy tales with such a plot, Kosa and his rival demon giant alternatively assume the role of the abductor of the wife from her husband.

The kidnapped woman at times supports her husband in this rivalry, who is trying to reclaim her, and at other times the abductor –

³ The demon in this context embodies the underworld and the realm of the dead. Accordingly, his face is blackened.

⁴ In Iran’s Gilan Province, during the festival known as *Arus Goli* (literally “Flower Bride”), which precedes Nowruz, the Flower Bride is accompanied by her guardian spirit, Kas Khanum. In the local dialect, the word *kas* means “sea-colored” or “blue”; therefore, Kas Khanum is commonly interpreted as a blue-eyed woman. On this basis, some Iranian scholars classify her as a sea spirit.

Kosa or the demon. The behavior of the woman, which determines her priority in choosing a husband, suggests that the narrative may be a reminiscence of the times of matriarchal social order. In our view, Kosa is probably the embodiment of the male guardian-servants of the temple of the goddess Anahit. Iranian philologist Khojaste Kia likewise argues that the Kousegardani ritual, celebrated at the beginning of spring, may be a remnant of the times when the eunuchs served the mother goddess [Kia 1996, 180; Aqaabbasi 2010, 231].

This version appears closer not only to the spirit of analogous fairy tales, but also to that of the ritualized courtship-stagings enacted during spring-related festivals of the two peoples.

Such plots, dating back to ancient times, at some stage also assumed the character of genealogical legends, so the origin of their central hero may also be interpreted in the spirit of totemism [Faqiri 2010, 12]. The exceptional strength and extraordinary abilities of Kosa can also be considered as a consequence of his half-animal origin.

While in Iranian theatrical festivals with the participation of Kosa, the functions attributed to him are primarily associated with ritual ceremonies known under the names such as Kousegardani (translated as Kosaptuyt), Barneshastan-e Kouse, Kousenaghghali, Kousebarneshin, Arus Goli, Kousegalin and others, in the Armenian environment this spirit appears in separate episodes of folk performances staged during the holidays of Barekendan, Saint Sarkis [Bdoyan 1972, 445], Trndez, Great Lent and Ascension, reframed under a Christian guise [Kharatyan 2005, 8–9].

The study shows that in Armenian and Iranian folk tales, spring festivals, and related rituals, Kosa embodies the death and renewal of nature, the beginning of agricultural work, fertility [Bdoyan 1972, 467], generation, rain-invoking rituals, the water element that fertilizes the seeds of cultivation, and, ultimately, the image of a fertile male serving the temple of the goddess Anahit.

1. The characteristics of the character of Kosa in Armenian and Iranian folk tales

By juxtaposing the plots of Armenian and Iranian folk rituals and fairy tales, we have attempted to decipher, within the limits of our analytical scope, not only the content of prehistoric myth, but also to

trace the transformation of the myth into a fairy tale as a consequence of de-ritualization, which entails a transition from the collective destiny of the mythological hero to an individualized one, from the cosmic to the social sphere, from the mythological hero to the fairy tale hero, whose mythological origins and character traits require a unique interpretation [Meletinski 1986, 51].

The fairy tale plots woven around Kosa and his companions are not identical with the religious myths of the later period and the dogmas formulated by the priestly class [Meletinski 2005, 9–10]. The roots of these heroes originate from the intertwining of human productive activity in still unstratified societies, elements of religious-magical thinking, early geographical and calendrical conceptions, as well as the beginnings of artistic production.

According to E. Meletinski, along with creative feats, the “cultural hero” of the ancient period of human history was attributed with actions resembling fraud and humorous pranks [Meletinski 2005, 9–10]. It is likely that the application of such a principle is the result of attributing the characteristics of a *deceiver*, *charlatan* or *robber* to Kosa in the fairy tales, who was originally considered the spirit embodying spring awakening, plowing and sowing, rain-invoking rituals and the water element, fertility, and male procreation.

It is also possible that after the adoption of monotheistic religion (Christianity, Islam) the rejected deity was reinterpreted and disguised under negative characteristics and names. This is how the goddess Anahit was treated in Armenia, and the people concealed her under the guise of the “black-faced old woman”. In a similar way, the men who served the temple of the goddess Anahit and were distinguished by their masculinity were disguised under the image of thin-haired men (*kosa*) – beardless, barren men and deceivers, which is considered a symbol of infertility.

The image of the former hero who assumed the characteristics of a deceitful thin-haired man is found in the Armenian folk tales “The Seven Thin-Haired Men (Kosas)”, “The Three Thin-Haired Men (Kosas) and Haro the House-Wrecker”, “The Three Thin-Haired Men (Kosas)”, the Iranian “Pesar-e Bazargan va kouse” (“The Merchant’s Son and the Thin-Haired Man (Kouse)”), as well as in many other fairy tales.

In the fairy tale “The Seven Thin-Haired Men” [AFT 1967, 211–212] this spirit is endowed with the characteristics of clairvoyance and supernatural abilities. The seven thin-haired brothers practice divination, identify their robber, and travel to the distant “land of Ajam⁵, Hamadan” in order to find the thief and recover their stolen money. In accordance with the principle of “face blackening”, the wife of the Hamadan thin-haired man, Gyulkhandan⁶, is portrayed as equally crafty and deceitful, who tries to extort at least “five gushes”⁷ from the seven brothers while returning their money. Once again, the brothers’ all-seeing ability to practice divination helps them, and with this ability to foresee, they discover the “five gushes” concealed in Gyulkhandan’s pant pocket.

In the fairy tale “The Three Thin-Haired Men and Haro the House-Wrecker” [AFT 1968, 176–182], as well as in its variation “The Three Thin-Haired Men” [AFT 1984, 506–511], the people once again depict the spirit embodying masculinity marked by Christian moral rigor through the image of a “deceitful merchant”. The thin-haired men fool the peasant by convincing him that his milk cow is just a calf, and extort the animal for a small sum. The episode in which Haro pretends to kill his wife in order to frighten or mislead the thin-haired men is probably a later addition, symbolizing the decline of matriarchy and the consolidation of patriarchy.

In the Iranian fairy tale “The Merchant’s Son and the Thin-Haired Man” [FAMI 2002, 151–154], the thin-haired man is no longer subjected to the mechanisms of disguise imposed by a rigid Christian society. Owing to his unrestrained ingenuity and cunning, his companion, the merchant’s son, manages to seduce and spend a night with the king’s daughter, while the thin-haired man himself, unites with the princess’s maid. At dawn, the two manage, with the equal success, to sneak out of the palace with the willing assistance of the young women, while many young men had paid with their lives without even seeing the princess’s face.

⁵ Ajam is the Arabic name for Iranians, meaning a person of non-Arab origin.

⁶ The name *Gyulkhandan*, translated from Persian as “cheerful flower”, fully corresponds to the name of the heroine in the *Arus Goli* (“Flower Bride”) ritual celebrated in Iran’s Gilan province.

⁷ Monetary unit.

In this fairy tale, we do not find a single word of reproach about either the thin-haired man or the merchant's son. In the behaviour of the princess who disobeys her father, the king, we also notice a sense of fulfilment, without any indication of guilt. The thin-haired man functions in accordance with his original mission, the role of a guardian and servant of the temple of the fertility patron goddess.

2. Kosa as an embodiment of masculinity, fertility, the end of winter, and the water element

In the Armenian folk tale "Pahlevan the Warrior and His Son" [AFT 1959, 450–458], the arrogance of Kosa and his practice of abducting women may be rooted in his original function associated with the awakening of nature, fertility, and the continuation of generation.

In the narrative, Kosa abducts the wife of a Pahlevan, the servant of a merchant, who is on his way to Jerusalem. During his quest to retrieve her, the Pahlevan encounters a tent-keeper who tells him how Kosa, once their servant, had forcibly seized his father's "massive land and kingdom". He recalls: "We had a servant named Kosa. Do not call him Kosa, call him a tyrant, the whole world trembled in his hands; he was such a powerful man. There came a time when Kosa drove us from our country, our home, and our land, and he sat on the throne as king. That Kosa left no woman in our province untouched: he took them away and made them his wives. To tell the truth, he might have a thousand wives now" [AFT 1959, 452].

In this tale, Kosa remains in his true form as a "giant man". The story told by the tent-keeper about his "having a thousand wives" may allude to the "virgins" of the goddess' temple.

The tent-keeper's old mother⁸ "is the one who bathes Kosa's wives, the one who safeguards them". "Not far from Kosa's palace there were nice water ponds, and every Thursday she would bring them there to bathe" [AFT 1959, 452].

This passage highlights another function of Kosa, his identification with the water element. For this reason, people mostly settled him near springs, rivers, or other water sources. He often appears to humans from a spring or returns to his own realm through the same

⁸ Most likely, the old woman in this scene assumes the role of Kas Khanum, the guardian of the Flower Bride in the Arus Goli ritual common in Gilan. She even misleads Kosa about the direction in which the pahlevan took his wife.

spring [Dehghan 2007, 3]. Typical examples of this are the Armenian fairy tales “Okhay Babi” and the Iranian tale “Kachalak” (also known as Kachalik). In both tales, the son of a poor old woman becomes the apprentice of Kosa who lives near a spring with his only daughter.

In the Armenian fairy tale “Pahlevan the Warrior and His Son”, the merchant’s pahlevan, with the help of the tent-keeper’s mother, retrieves his wife on the way to the ponds. “To the boy’s good fortune, Kosa fell fast asleep, and no one dared to wake him up, as the forty days had not yet ended. They waited until the days passed, and Kosa woke up from his sleep” [AFT 1959, 453]. Upon awakening from the forty-day sleep, Kosa “because of having a horse as strong as the wind, which could travel a year’s journey in one day... reached the boy in half a minute”.

This episode illustrates Kosa’s function as the embodiment of the harsh forty-day period of winter, from the winter solstice to the beginning of February⁹.

The image of Kosa cannot be fully understood without reference to the peculiarities of ancient matriarchal society. Certain aspects of his role will remain obscure unless occasional reference is made to the image of the woman abducted by the hero, since the woman tries to control the men who are fighting for her possession, and actively influences their behaviour. During the confrontation between the pahlevan and Kosa, who arrived in half a minute on a horse as strong as the wind, the woman demonstrates behaviour of maintaining mastery over the situation rather than assuming the role of a victim, and, in the popular saying, “betrays her halal”¹⁰.

⁹ The forty-day period begins with the winter solstice on December 22 and extends to the beginning of February. It is at this time that the Kousegardani festival-ritual is celebrated in Iran. During the ritual, a folk song proclaims that forty days have passed and that fifty days remain until Nowruz. Among Armenians, the feasts of Saint Sarkis, Trndez, and Barekendan are celebrated successively during this same period. In a song dedicated to Trndez, we likewise hear: “Trndez is half a remedy; in winter, a month and a half remains”. The phrase “a month and a half after Trndez” corresponds to the arrival of Nowruz itself, that is, the period from March 20 to the beginning of April, given that Nowruz is celebrated for thirteen days.

¹⁰ This means leaving her lawful husband to be with her kidnapper, Kosa. This judgment may be a reflection of attitudes from a later patriarchal society.

“They started fighting. The dear boy struck Kosa so harshly down that a sigh came out of his mouth. The woman seeing that Kosa was in difficulty reached out with all her strength, pulled Kosa out from under him and dropped him down over the boy. With that, they trampled the boy down, tied his hands and feet. It was the scorching heat of summer. They dug up the boiling sand and buried the boy’s body to his neck in the sand... He wanted a little water, but there was no one to give him so that he could drink and his heart would cool down. We should say there was a jug of water next to them, but the poor man’s hands and feet were tied...” Here we return to the function discussed above regarding the water element. Kouse embodies the water in the jug, and the description of hot weather can be traced back to the episode of Khousegardiri ritual described by the Iranian medieval author Abureyhan Biruni, when Kouse fans himself in the cold winter, exclaiming: “It is hot, it is very hot” [Albiruni 1983, 256].

The boiling sand covering the Pahlevan represents Mother Earth, warmed in spring and in need of irrigation and fertilization through thirst-quenching rains. The episode of the Pahlevan being brought a jug of water with the help of a dragon emerging from the depths of the mountain probably symbolizes the transfer of the function of spring rains, the water element, to its rival, the demon-dragon. Here, too, the role of Kosa to personify cold weather comes to an end: “he burst out and broke in two pieces”. Thus, the cold period of nature ends. As in the ritual ceremonies of Kousegardani, here too, the struggle between Kosa and the demon proceeds with varying success: at times one prevails, at times the other, or they become functionally identical. In this episode of the tale, we witness the last option – the identification of their functions.

In accordance with matriarchal ideology, the woman seeks to influence the outcome of the struggle between Kosa and the pahlevan in the way she wants¹¹. Her sympathy lies with Kosa (the water element, the rainfall). On the way back with the pahlevan, she even helps Kosa, leaving a sign so that the latter can trace the path taken by the pahlevan. “The wife, who had been kidnapped by the boy, secretly tore

¹¹ Allegorically, it also symbolizes the triumph of spring over winter. In ritual ceremonies, the thin-haired man (Kosa) embodies the water element, while the Flower Bride embodies spring.

pieces from her headscarf and scattered them on the road so that Kosa would know the way and could come following the trace”.

The conflict is ultimately resolved by the fourth hero, the dragon-snake¹², which brings water to the pahlevan: “...he saw that the mountain split open, a dragon came out and moved directly towards him.

– Glory to you, God, may your glory be great, – said the boy, – I did not escape this trouble, only to fall into another.

But he stood in awe, when he watched the dragon go, bring the jug and give it to him: Drink, as much as you wish, – he said... The dragon then took it and placed it near them, opened its mouth, poured a few drops of poison into the jug, and retreated to the mountain... Having drunk it, Kosa burst out and broke in two pieces”.

The woman, endowed with the powers of the goddess Anahit, persistently struggles to maintain her power and her advantage in asserting her will in a mother-centred society. It is therefore unsurprising that she even resorts to weapons for this purpose. Seeing Kosa *burst out and break in two pieces* after drinking the dragon’s poison, “...she ran away, took out Kosa’s sword, and rushed towards the boy to kill him” [AFT 1959, 455]. Yet, she accepts the pahlevan’s proposal and does not want to lose him either after Kosa. “Oh, woman”, he said, “why are you doing this to me? Aren’t I your husband? Come, – he said, – free my hands and feet, I am still your husband, and you are my wife. Let’s go and live together in peace of mind” [AFT 1959, 455].

3. Kosa as the patron spirit of nature’s awakening, fertility, and cultivation

We come across the functions of Kosa as the patron of the awakening of nature and the spring cultivation in the Iranian fairy tales “Ghel Mamad Pahlavan” (“The Demon Mamad Pahlavan”), “Har Chi Migi” (“Whatever You Say”) [Khazayi 2001, 307–326] and the Armenian fairy tale “The Bald Man and the Master” [AFT 1973, 529–536].

The characters of *Ghel Mamad* and *Whatever You Say* can be interpreted in the general content of the tales of ATU 590. According to them, the king’s son kills the dragon, throws it into the well, and lives

¹² The widespread worship of rocks and stones in ancient Armenia gave rise to monuments dedicated to rain-bearing deities, known as ushab-vishap [Bdoyan 1972, 488].

with his mother or sister in the dragon's house. Violating the condition of not soiling the well – not combing her hair over it, not washing her head in it, not throwing bread, water, or flowers into it, which revives the dragon – the mother or sister, secretly from the boy, spends a night with the dragon and bears a child. She leaves the child on the way back from the hunt, and the boy finds the child and brings it home [Hayrapetyan 2016, 122].

A number of tales of this type also centre on the theme of mutual assistance between uncle and nephew, where the nephew, upon learning of his parents' (woman and father dragon) intention to kill his uncle, saves him. Here, the cousin-nephew relationship perhaps once again emphasizes the fact of matriarchy [Hayrapetyan 2016, 124].

The plot of the fairy tale "Ghel Mamad Pahlevan" also revolves around the struggle between the demon's son, Ghel, and Kosa. After the death of the king's wife, the king's son and daughter run away from home one after another as a result of their stepmother's cruel treatment. The boy wanders in the mountains while the girl, in search of her brother, marries a demon living in a cave. From their marriage, Ghel Mamad Pahlevan is born. The boy finds his sister, accepts her marriage to the demon, starts hunting with him, until one day he leaves for a neighbouring village in search of work. The nephew, born of the sister and the demon, tells his uncle not to hire himself out as a servant to a thin-haired (Kosa) man with blue-green eyes¹³. The uncle ignores the advice of his nephew Ghel and finds himself in a difficult situation.

Kosa sets a condition for the uncle not to provoke his anger and carry out his instructions without complaint, otherwise he will kill him. Then he orders the uncle to take the oxen and the seed to the mountain, plow the land and sow the wheat at the spot where his dog lies down. The animal, passing through the plots of land suitable for plowing, lies down on a rocky area. Unable to plow the stony ground, the uncle returns without completing the task. Kosa, in accordance with the condition he made, kills him. His nephew, Ghel Mamad, who was born of a demon, after some time sets out to look for his

¹³ In mythology, Kosa is the jug and is associated with the worship of the water goddess and Mihr. In the Gilan province of Iran, green-eyed men and women are called Kas Agha and Kas Khanum, respectively.

uncle and, having found out what has happened, he also hires himself out to the blue-green-eyed Kosa. He avenges his uncle's murder, kills Kosa's dog, and distributes the wheat and oxen to the villagers so that they may cook harissa, perform a sacrifice, and give alms in memory of his uncle. He also kills Kosa's wife and son.

Some time later, Kosa attends a wedding with his daughter. Ghel slaughters the master's cattle and rushes after him. Halfway along the way, together with the master's daughter and with his ingenuity he throws Kosa into the river, returning him to his original, water element.

In the fairy tale "Whatever You Say", which is another variation of "Ghel Mamad Pahlevan", the boy runs away from home because of the slander of his neighbours. Years later, the sister sets out in search of her brother. On her way, she encounters a man returning from the flour mill who gives her flour from his sack and urges her to bake gata and roll it down a hill, which will take her to her brother.

In Iran, there is a widespread rain-invoking tradition according to which if a gata rolled from a height lands face up toward the sky, it will be a rainy year, and if it lands face down, it foretells drought. Since the girl's action draws directly to this tradition, the fairy tale "Whatever You Say" is probably related to the rain-invoking tradition, and the events are likely to take place near the spring symbolizing the water element associated with Kosa [Khazayi 2001, 319].

These two tales are variations grounded on the same mythological basis. In both tales, the child born from the marriage of the sister and a demon is half-human, half-demon. In "Whatever You Say", the sister marries the demon secretly from her brother, and when the union is discovered, a conflict arises between the demon and the brother. The sister defends the demon, and both are ultimately killed.

In the fairy tale "Ghel Mamad Pahlevan", the sister feels happy with the demon, and the brother accepts the demon as her sister's husband, coming to terms with reality. This episode appears to align more closely with the original plot. The life of the son born from the sister and the demon unfolds in a cave, and the stone of the cave symbolizes water, rain, or clouds in Mihr's beliefs.

In the third part, the plots of the fairy tales seem to completely dissolve. In the episode of the uncle's departure from the cave, his

nephew advises him to stay away from a thin-haired (Kosa) and blue-green-eyed man [Khazayi 2001, 318] while searching for work. The nephew knows in advance that the uncle is not endowed with the ability to decipher Kosa's magic and will suffer defeat. By the call of providence, the earth-born uncle falls into Kosa's trap and meets his death.

Interestingly, in the fairy tale "Ghel Mamad Pahlevan", Kosa, while looking for a servant, utters a formula associated with spring agricultural work: "One day of work, forty days of rest". This expression is interpreted as follows: after one day of work, spring precipitation will persist, eliminating the need for irrigation and other cultivation work.

The oxen intended for plowing the land are probably the remnants of the mythical ox that Mihr sacrifices to disseminate life across the earth. Kosa's dog ascends to the top of the mountain, since mountains are the symbol of Mihr. And Mihr himself was born from rock. According to the myth, he strikes the rock with a symbolic arrow causing water to flow from it. Ultimately, the rock turns into a rain cloud. In accordance with the logic of the ancient Iranian myth, the dog in the fairy tale appears exactly in its proper place – on the top of the rocks, where the *chamrush*¹⁴ dwells.

¹⁴ A dog-like winged creature that inhabits high cliffs by the sea and is said to spread the seeds of fruits that fall from the tree as a result of the flapping of the wings of the mythical bird Simurgh, so that they can sprout again.

According to Hamidreza Khazai, the dog is likely the same mythical animal (the *chamrush*) with the body of a dog and the wings of a bird that lives on top of Mount Alborz. According to another myth, this bird lives under the Haoma (Soma) tree on the top of the cliffs. This is the same place where the bird Simurgh spends the night. According to the myth, when Simurgh descends to the ground, all the ripe grains fall to the ground, the *chamrush* collects them and sows them elsewhere. Ahuramazda is said to have created a tree and two immortal birds on the shore of the Varukasha sea. Every spring, a thousand branches sprout from that tree, on which all kinds of fruits grow. Soon the fruits ripen, and a bird named Amrush comes and sits on the branches of that tree, causing the ripe fruits to fall. Then a bird named *chamrush* comes, gathers them all with its wings and pours them into the sea. The seeds rise with the steam into the rain clouds, fall to the earth and germinate.

In the fourth part of both tales, the half-demon, half-human Ghel Mamad or Whatever You Say manages to solve the mystery by killing the dog. It is assumed that this episode is a later addition to the tale, when the meaning of the mythical functions of the dog or *cham-rush* had become obscure. Perhaps this is the reason why the king's son is unaware of the secret behind Kosa's assignment. Later, the half-human, half-demon Ghel replaces Mihr. At his command, people must eat harissa and the meat of the sacrificed animal and give alms for the soul of his uncle. The latter perhaps symbolizes the rain-involving prayer.

In Armenian fairy tales corresponding to number 1000 of Hans-Jörg Uther's International Classification of Folktale Types, the allegory of the winter-spring conflict, the awakening of spring, and the water element is actualised through the figures of Kosa, the servant, and his wife [Uther 2011, 7].

The Armenian fairy tale corpus includes nine printed versions under various titles: "The Tale of the Thin-Haired Man (Kosa)", "Two Brothers", "The Crazy Servant", "Ero and Tero", "Dinar", "The Master and the Servant", "The Servant Becomes a Master", "The Bald Man and the Master", "The Bird Calling Pu-Pu Untimely" – recorded in different ethnographic regions of Armenia. Collectively, they are grouped under the title "The Labor Contract", the general content of which is as follows: before his death, the father instructs his two sons not to become a servant of a thin-haired man (Kosa). The older brother goes to the city, where a thin-haired man (Kosa) (in some variants, a priest) appears to him three times in different disguises, convinces him to become his servant, exploits him, keeps him hungry, and tortures him. According to the terms of their contract, Kosa removes a stripe of skin from the servant's back, the servant returns home in pain and sufferings (or, in some variants, he dies). Deciding to avenge his brother, the younger brother sets out to the city, becomes a servant of the thin-haired man (Kosa), cunningly carries out his assignments, and makes his master very angry. Kosa wants to get rid of the servant, but according to the terms of their contract, the boy must skin Kosa. Terrified, Kosa flees with his wife, pursued by the servant.

In the version of the fairy tale "Two Brothers", in order to get rid of the servant, the priest orders his mother (in this version, his wife)

to climb a tree and imitate the call of a cuckoo, signalling the arrival of spring and, consequently, the time for the servant's release. The boy throws the old woman down from the tree, who barely escapes death. The priest decides to flee with his wife. The servant hides himself in a basket. The priest shoulders the basket, and they set off with the wife. When they reach the river, the priest and the wife secretly decide to throw the basket with the servant into the river at night. The servant changes places of the baskets, and the priest throws his own wife into the river [ATF 2012, 692–694].

The above-mentioned tales reveal interesting details at the level of motifs.

In the tale “The Servant Becomes a Master”, in order to get rid of the servant, the Kosa wants to throw the boy into the river, but instead, the boy throws Kosa into the river. Kosa's wife is happy to get rid of her husband, because Kosa had taken her as a wife in exchange for her father's debt. The woman proposes marriage to the boy. The boy agrees, becoming the owner of the Kosa's property [Hovsepyan 2009, 158–164].

Regardless of whether the wife is thrown into the river or the husband, this ending of the tale appeals to the ritual sacrifice supporting the awakening of nature, while the marriage of Kosa's wife and the young boy is an allegory of springtime awakening and fertility.

In the fifth and final part of the fairy tale “Whatever You Say”, the actions seem to contradict the mythical logic. Most likely due to the interventions of folk narrators, a motif of revenge emerges within the plot of the fairy tale, which disrupts the general mythical beginning and logic: the hero kills Kosa's wife and son [Khazayi 2001, 321]. A similar logic of revenge is observed in the Armenian fairy tale “The Bald Man and the Master”. The third younger brother takes revenge on the Lord for torturing his two older brothers.

The tale of “Ghel Mamad Pahlevan” probably remains more faithful to the original version of the story, since at the end the half-human, half-demon Ghel together with Kosa's daughter throw Kosa into the river, returning him to his primordial state, the water element. By the will of Providence, in many rain-invoking rituals sprouted wheat resembling a stone or a green disk of the sun is also cast into water.

In the Armenian fairy tale “The Bald Man and the Master” [ATF 1973, 529–536] the *master* assumes the role analogous to that of Kosa of the aforementioned Iranian fairy tales, and removes two stripes of skin from the backs of the first two brothers. After returning home, both brothers die. The youngest of the three, the *Bald man*, is distinguished by his ingenuity and decides to avenge his brothers. “No matter what, I’m going to find him. I’ll avenge my brothers; I won’t let him get away with what he has done”. This episode brings the Armenian fairy tale closer to the Iranian “Whatever You Say” than to “Ghel Mamad Pahlevan”. In both cases, the central conflict is resolved in a logically significant space – the water element [Khazayi 2011, 318]. The Bald man manages to deceive the *master*, who is performing the functional role of Kosa, and causes the master’s wife to be thrown into the water instead: “As soon as they fall asleep, the Bald man lies in the woman’s place... At one point during the night, the Master slowly reaches out and, instead of his wife, wakes the Bald man up, and the Bald man, who had deliberately covered his head with a headscarf, gets up, seizes the Master’s wife by the legs, and the Master seizes her by the head. Together, they throw her wrapped up into the river...”

Conclusion

Through the comparative analysis of Armenian and Iranian folk tales, as well as spring-related festive and ritual performances, we have arrived at the following conclusions:

1. The image of the hero named Kosa, who appears in these narratives, emerges from the interweaving of the productive activities of early unstratified societies, ancient beliefs, primitive geological and calendrical abilities, as well as the formative stages of artistic thinking. The hero’s exceptional strength and extraordinary abilities suggest that his character also incorporates elements from ancient folklore plots woven around the totemic animal (the goat).

2. His role as a masculine, womanizing figure who abducts women is probably a reminder of the image and heterosexual symbolism associated with the male attendants of the temple of the mother goddess (Anahit, Ardivisura Anahita). This is further evidenced by the flirtatious nature of the spring rituals that developed alongside the folktales under consideration.

3. Due to the fact that the hero is attributed the function of the patron spirit of fertility and the water element, he is most often believed to dwell near springs, rivers, or water basins. He frequently appears to people from the source of a spring or returns to his world through the same spring.

4. The allegory of the conflict between winter and spring, the awakening of nature, and the beginning of agricultural labour is conveyed through the roles of the Kosa, the servant and the servant's wife. In folktales, he often appears as a wealthy landowner who orders his servants to carry oxen and seed to the mountains, cultivate the land, and sow wheat in hard-to-reach places.

5. The reason why he is sometimes portrayed as a deceiver, charlatan, or robber lies in the fact that after the adoption of Christianity in Armenia and Islam in Iran, the people hid the deities of the old religion, which were rejected, in the form of heroes characterized by outwardly negative traits in folklore. As a result, the former deity acquired a second life and preserved its existence.

6. In the observed folktales and rituals, the image of Kosa's wife evokes the philosophy of ancient matriarchal societies. In matters of choosing a partner and engaging in courtship, the woman always acts as the one who asserts her will and significance.

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ГЕРОЙ, ЯКИЙ УСОБЛЮЄ ПРИХІД ВЕСНИ, СТИХІЮ ВОДИ ТА РОДЮЧІСТЬ

У ВІРМЕНСЬКОМУ ТА ІРАНСЬКОМУ ФОЛЬКЛОРИ

У статті ми спробували поміркувати над образами одного зі спільних героїв вірменських й іранських народних казок і святкових обрядів – Коси – та його супутників – весняної квітки-нареченої і демона-велетня. Вони втілюють чергування пір року в природі: зими та весни, весняних сільськогосподарських робіт, родючості, водної стихії та дощу, що сприяють проростанню насіння, посадженого в ґрунт. Ці герої, які мають однакові функції в казках обох народів, є пережитками їхніх спільних божеств давнього періоду. Ці духи-божества збереглися в колективній пам'яті поколінь у гуманізованих образах, перетворюючись на звичайних героїв. У фольклорі народів країн із сухим континентальним кліматом не випадково водній стихії, ритуалам викликання дощу, весняним посадковим роботам, підвищенню родючості ґрунту та зв'язаним із ними ритуальним церемоніям надається особливе значення. Ці спільні герої, що зустрічаються у вірменських та іранських народних казках, пов'язані з поклонінням богині-матері родючості Анаїт. У вірменських та іранських народних казках, що спілітаються навколо героя на ім'я Коса, його образ переважно вигаданий у ролях бабія, який викрадає жінок, хитромудрого обманщика, хитрого злодія та багатого землевласника, який катує своїх слуг. У процесі аналізу образу героя ми також спиралися на відповідний матеріал із ритуалів весняних свят, що відзначаються навесні. У народних п'єсах, присвячених пробудженню весни та пов'язаним із ним ритуалам викликання дощу, демон-суперник Коси постійно залицяється до його нареченої, намагаючись спокусити та викрасти її. Ми спостерігаємо вигадану історію цього змагання, що нагадує любовний трикутник зі змінним успіхом, у численних казках на тему повернення викраденої дружини. У народних п'єсах, що виконуються під час вірменських Барекендан, Трндез, Амбардзум, та іранських Кусегардані, Кусебарнешин Арус Гол й інших

свят, цей герой або його альтер-его (Аклатіз, Пас папук, Пір бабу) відіграють провідну роль. У вірменському та іранському фольклорі Коса втілює смерть та відродження природи, пробудження весни, ритуали викликання дощу й образ плодючого чоловіка, який служить храму богині Анаїт.

Ключові слова: Анаїт, Коса, Барекендан, Трндез, Кусегардані, Арус Голі

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