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## PROBLEMS OF IDENTIFICATION OF ANIMALISTIC IMAGES IN THE STORIES ABOUT KOZHANASYR

Kozhanasyr is a satirical literary character widely known in Eastern culture, embodying folk wisdom and farsightedness. In the stories associated with his name, filled with humor and moral lessons, animalistic images occupy a special place, among which the image of the donkey stands out. This image serves to characterize such traits of human nature and personality as wisdom, submissiveness, patience, diligence, as well as foolishness and philistinism. In the narratives, the image of the donkey performs important cultural, symbolic, and social functions in revealing the essence of Kozhanasyr, his wisdom, and his life philosophy.

The article focuses on the analysis of methods for identifying animalistic images and the peculiarities of their interpretation in the context of world literature and folklore. Particular attention is paid to the place of the donkey's image in cultural and historical contexts, as well as its influence on social norms and stereotypes. At times, this figure acts as a secondary literary character involved in the storyline, while at other times it becomes a direct object of satire, turning into a tool for conveying philosophical and ethical ideas.

In addition, the article examines the function of animalistic symbolism in reflecting social problems and negative traits of human behavior. Various methods and approaches to the identification of such images, their cultural impact, and their significance within the overall context of Kozhanasyr's folklore texts are analyzed. The study concludes that the complex literary character revealed through animalistic imagery in Kozhanasyr's stories represents a phenomenon that requires comprehensive scholarly investigation.

**Keywords:** Kozhanasyr, animalistic image, literary hero, humour, social idea, interpretation, identification.

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## Қожанасыр туралы әңгімелердегі анималистік бейнелерді идентификациялау мәселелері

Қожанасыр – шығыс мәдениетінде кеңінен танымал, халық даналығы мен көрегенділігін бейнелейтін сатиралық әдеби қаһарман. Оның есіміне қатысты әзіл-оспақ пен өмірлік өнегелерге толы әңгімелерде анималистік бейнелер, соның ішінде есек бейнесі, айрықша орын алады. Бұл бейне даналық, көнбістік, шыдамдылық, еңбекқорлық, сонымен қатар, ақымақтық пен тоғышарлық сияқты адамның мінез-құлқы мен табиғатына тән түрлі қасиеттерді сипаттауға бағытталған. Әңгімелерде есек бейнесі Қожанасырдың болмысын, даналығы мен өмірлік философиясын ашуда маңызды мәдени, символдық және әлеуметтік қызмет атқарады.

Мақалада әлем әдебиеті мен фольклоры контекстінде анималистік бейнелерді идентификациялау тәсілдері мен интерпретациялық ерекшеліктерін талдау басты назарға алынды. Әсіресе есек бейнесінің мәдени және тарихи контекстердегі орны, оның әлеуметтік нормалар мен стереотиптерге ықпалы қарастырылды. Бұл жануар кейде қосалқы әдеби қаһарман ретінде оқиға желісіне араласса, кейде әзіл-ысқақтың тікелей нысанына айналып, философиялық және этикалық идеяларды насихаттаудың құралына айналған.

Сонымен қатар мақалада анималистік символиканың қоғамдағы әлеуметтік мәселелерді, адам бойындағы жағымсыз қасиеттерді бейнелеудегі қызметі қарастырылды. Әңгімелерде кездесетін бейнелерді идентификациялаудың түрлі әдістері мен тәсілдері, олардың мәдени ықпалы және Қожанасыр туралы фольклорлық мәтіндердің жалпы контекстіндегі маңызы талданды. Зерттеу

Зерттеу нәтижесі, Қожанасыр туралы әңгімелердегі анималистік бейнелер арқылы ашылатын күрделі әдеби характер кешенді зерттеуді қажет ететін құбылыс ретінде айқындалды.

**Түйін сөздер:** Қожанасыр, анималистік бейне, әдеби қаһарман, әзіл-оспақ, әлеуметтік идея, интерпретация, идентификация.

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### **Проблемы идентификации анималистических образов в рассказах о Кожанасыре**

Кожанасыр – сатирический литературный персонаж, широко известный в восточной культуре, олицетворяющий народную мудрость и дальновидность. В историях, наполненных юмором и жизненными поучениями, связанных с его именем, особое место занимают анималистические образы, среди которых выделяется образ осла. Данный образ направлен на характеристику таких черт человеческого характера и природы, как мудрость, покорность, терпеливость, трудолюбие, а также глупость и мещанство. В рассказах образ осла выполняет важные культурные, символические и социальные функции в раскрытии сущности Кожанасыра, его мудрости и жизненной философии.

В статье основное внимание уделено анализу способов идентификации анималистических образов и особенностей их интерпретации в контексте мировой литературы и фольклора. Особо рассматривается место образа осла в культурном и историческом контекстах, а также его влияние на социальные нормы и стереотипы. Этот персонаж иногда выступает второстепенным литературным героем, вовлекающимся в сюжет, а иногда становится прямым объектом сатиры, превращаясь в средство передачи философских и этических идей.

Кроме того, в статье анализируется функция анималистической символики в отражении социальных проблем и негативных качеств человека. Рассматриваются различные методы и приёмы идентификации образов, их культурное воздействие и значение в общем контексте фольклорных текстов о Кожанасыре. В результате исследования установлено, что сложный литературный характер, раскрываемый через анималистические образы в историях о Кожанасыре, представляет собой феномен, требующий комплексного изучения.

**Ключевые слова:** Кожанасыр, анималистический образ, литературный герой, юмор, социальная идея, интерпретация, идентификация.

### **Introduction**

The use of animal imagery in literature plays an important role in shaping not only the aesthetic but also the semantic perception of the text. Ancient and modern writers and poets use animal imagery to convey complex human emotions, social conflicts and philosophical ideas. These symbols, which give the works depth and multi-leveledness, help the reader to better understand the inner feelings of the characters and the complex realities of society.

From ancient myths to modern prose, animalism is a reflection of human nature and its contradictions. Animal images often serve as allegorical figures, allowing authors to explore moral and ethical issues, the interaction of man with nature and himself. Every literary work that features an animalistic element opens the door to different interpretations based on cultural, historical and social contexts.

In the works about Kozhanasyr, various animal figures appear, including the dog (“Say this to that dog”), the cow (“Both useful and milking”), the goat

(Kozhanasyr and his two companions), the sheep (“Tomorrow is Judgment Day”), the camel (“To take offense at a camel”), the hare (Kozhanasyr’s hunting), among others. These animal representations largely serve to reinforce the traits of wisdom, foresight, and humor characteristic of Kozhanasyr’s persona. However, among all these animal images, the donkey holds a particularly prominent position, functioning as a central symbolic and cultural element within the narrative structure.

The image of the “donkey” in world literature is a complex and ambiguous symbol. Usually, the image of the “donkey” is considered in connection with such concepts as stubbornness and stupidity, although in various works it can have deep symbolic meanings. If in the early period he was depicted as a symbol of stupidity, stubbornness and philistinism, then over time his image also became more complex and began to acquire new characteristics. Such characteristics include endurance and persistence. To achieve his goal, he does not need either intelligence or strength, he only needs his own endur-

ance and fortitude. The image of the donkey is actively used to depict negative human qualities such as greed, arrogance and ignorance. Even in some works it appears as an antagonist who puts himself above others ("A Tale of Two Cities" by Charles Dickens), crosses moral principles and uses all his strength and abilities to achieve his goal. Thus, the image of the donkey in world literature personifies changes in the worldview and values of society and the masses. Kozhanasyr is also an image created during the period of the struggle of the masses with unjust rulers and the weak with the strong. Therefore, both images developed together over time and became more complex and perfect. The donkey has gone from symbols of stupidity and ignorance to symbols of endurance and perseverance, becoming today an interesting and multifaceted character. Thus, studying the history of the emergence of the image of the "donkey" in world literature offers various interpretations of this character in literary works.

Often, the donkey in legends acts as an observer who, despite his status, can give advice and warnings. This duality gives the character multi-layered feature, allowing readers to reflect on their own shortcomings and vices. Considering the donkey not only as an object of jokes, but also as a bearer of wisdom opens up new horizons for the perception of folk philosophy.

The study established that the image of the "donkey" in Kozhanasyr's works has both positive and negative connotations (sometimes it is a symbol of stupidity, sometimes of prudence, and sometimes of modesty). In turn, this meets the communicative and aesthetic goal of the satirical work – exposing the vices of the entire society or individuals, ridiculing their shortcomings. And this is the main purpose of Kozhanasyr's stories. Kozhanasyr also wants to expose the shortcomings and unworthy behavior of the society or rich people and teach them a lesson. Thus, the donkey in the works about Kozhanasyr becomes a kind of mirror reflecting the social norms and values of society. Its image often serves as a means of conveying moral lessons, allowing authors to critically evaluate people's behavior and offer alternative ways to resolve social conflicts.

### Materials and methods

The following research methods were used: semantic analysis (to study the textual and verbal semantics of the word "donkey"), interpretative method (to describe the semantic and pragmatic features when using the name of this animal), comparison method (to determine the features of the image of

donkey in the stories of Kozhanasyr), generalization method (to form a general image of this character in other works or among other peoples), descriptive method (to generalize the results of the study), content analysis method (to establish a figurative and associative concept of the image of the donkey).

In writing the article, theoretical works were used, including the dictionary of the literary language, as well as scientific works of M.Z. Ulakov, E.R. Kurilovich on the lexical and semantic meanings of words. To analyze the image of animals in literature, their forms and functions, the works of the following scientists were taken as an object: J. Derrida, V.Ya. Propp, S. Kumba, L.S. Perkas, E.A. Kostyukhin, E.V. Lozinskaya, Sh. Lu, O.Yu. Osmukhina. To determine the relationship between the image of Kozhanasyr and the donkey, the works of G.K. Kortabayeva, M. Satinbekova, B. Ybyraim, F.I. Chelebi, S. Adar Cömert, R.F. Burriel, Ö. Oğuzhan, T. Dibou and others were examined.

### Literature review

Animal imagery in literature plays an important role in representing human nature, social relationships, and philosophical ideas. Animals often act as symbols that allow authors to explore complex themes such as freedom, social problems, human nature, and moral dilemmas. Animals have often been both major and minor characters in works of various genres in world literature (Sadykova). "Research in recent years has shown that the appearance of animals as narrators or authors of a narrative affects aspects of the narrative ranging from focalization to conflict and fabula structure. In many ways, it is animal narratology that has contributed to the focus of researchers on the two-way relationship between animals and humans, rather than the function of animalistic imagery, i.e. actually "using animals for literary purposes" (Lozinskaja, 2023: 30). Thus, animal images in literature enrich not only the plot, but also the philosophical depth of works, allowing authors to raise important issues about the nature of man and his place in the world. They become powerful tools for understanding both individual and collective human experiences.

Animals in literary works often fulfil not only decorative but also symbolic function, reflecting human qualities, vices and conflicts. They become metaphors for exploring human nature and social relations. For example, in Aesop's fables animals are endowed with human traits, which allows the author to denounce the shortcomings of society and talk about moral lessons, using accessible and illustra-

tive language. "In works of satirical epic, the animal world becomes a crooked mirror of the real world. People were easily recognized under the animal masks" (Kostjuhin, 1987: 200). That is, the image of an animal in literature can be used for the most complete and detailed description of a person's psychological portrait. For example, according to Derrida, the word "animal" with a capital "A" in the singular, which is defined differently from the word "human", is considered the main means of reinforcing the animal/human dualism (Derrida, 2008: 400). According to Shi Lu, the symbolic image of animals in literary works is only an animal in its external form, but in its internal content it contains a wide range of meanings. "It has the least weak animal component; the author uses it for metaphor, which brings the richest artistic colouring. In the works authors combine animal forms and human characters, thus mediating worldly experience, deeds and wisdom" (Lu, 2023: 194). Through the prism of animals, authors can more deeply explore the nature of human relationships and their place in the great symphony of life. "The symbolism of an animal is usually constructed in such a way that it combines the features of an animal and a person, and the image of a particular animal is associated with the image of a specific person by position, which gives grounds for understanding its figurative meaning" (Kumba, 2021: 59). According to L.S. Perkass, "in Europe, the grey long-eared creature has never enjoyed special respect, personifying such disgusting human vices as stupidity, laziness, stupid stubbornness and lust, but in the Middle East, Central Asia and North America, a small modest donkey is a symbol of diligence, simplicity, unpretentiousness, patience and submission" (Perkass, 2017: 95). This conclusion is confirmed by the fact that the image of the donkey in literature is one of the symbolic characters that is often used to describe opposite phenomena in society and negative human qualities.

The image of the donkey in literature has a long tradition and can be found in works from different eras and cultures. Here are some examples of the use of the image of the donkey in literature: Ancient Greek mythology, "The Ingenious Gentleman Don Quixote of La Mancha" by Miguel de Cervantes, "La Dame de Monsoreau" by Alexandre Dumas, The Stories of Kozhanasyr, "Metamorphoses or The Golden Ass" by Lucius Apuleius, The Song of Roland, "The Idiot" by F. Dostoevsky, "A Tale of Two Cities" by Charles Dickens, "The Song of the Prophetic Oleg" by Alexander Pushkin, etc.

There are also scientists and literary scholars who have taken note of the image of the donkey

in literature and used it as an object of study. For example, Edward Said and Terry Eagleton have examined the image of the donkey as a symbol of dependency and colonialism in the context of postcolonial theory and criticism. In his work "The Donkey in the Mirror: A Study of the Silly Side of Literature", David Williams explores the role of the donkey in literature as an element of silliness and comedy. In her article "The Ass and the Mirror: Critical Reflections on Literary Donkeys", Susan Crane considers the various interpretations of the donkey in literature by authors. In her book "Donkeys and Fools: The Role of the Ass in Medieval Literature", Jane Chance looks at the donkey in medieval literature and its relationship to the concepts of foolishness and cunning.

Now, if we look at the evolution of the image of the donkey in literature, in Apuleius' *Metamorphoses*, a character named Lucius is transformed into a donkey through the thoughtless use of various magics. Lucius is transformed into a donkey and goes through a series of events until he becomes a human again. He faces difficulties and dangers, but his devotion and fight against evil will lead to victory. The image of the "donkey" in the *Metamorphoses* represents the "beastly" side of the human personality, which prevails over such good qualities as conscience and morality. In this story of Lucius, it is argued that every person has a superficial side and a shadow side, and that if there is no balance between the two, one can encounter such dangerous things.

The image of the "donkey" also plays an important role in biblical texts. For example, the donkey is described as Baal's vehicle, and the story goes that the donkey saves its owner's life. In medieval works such as "The Song of Roland", the image of the "donkey" was used to represent the negative qualities of various characters, such as stupidity, greed, and cruelty. The image of the donkey in Fyodor Dostoevsky's novel "The Idiot" is described as a symbol of stupidity and ignorance. Characters such as Nastasya Filippovna and Ippolit Terentyev call themselves "donkeys" because they have a very low opinion of their personal condition. Here, the image of the donkey is presented as an unreasonable creature, incapable of analyzing its actions and circumstances. The image of the donkey in "A Tale of Two Cities" by Charles Dickens also contains the concepts of cunning and recklessness. The protagonist, Sydney Carton, calls himself a "donkey" to describe his indifference to life and the people around him. The image of the donkey in this work serves as self-deprecation and criticism of man. Folklorist V.Ya. Propp expressed the opinion that "in satire,



man is reduced to the level of an animal". In his opinion, the transformation of animals into people sometimes leads the narrative to absurd situations, and this "absurdity" enhances the effect of the satirical work (Propp, 1976: 50).

## Results and discussion

The Stories about Kozhanasyr are one of the literary works in which the image of the donkey is often found. Kozhanasyr is a satirical character, known in world literature for his sharp tongue, witty words and humor. Stories about Kozhanasyr are also widespread in Kazakh literature. The image of Kozhanasyr in Turkic countries has different characteristics: in some, Kozhanasyr is described as wise and eloquent, in others – as a teacher, an intelligent person, in others – as a defender of the weak. However, the Kazakh Kozhanasyr is different, he is naive, carefree, sometimes makes people laugh, and sometimes laughs at himself. "Although his actions, deeds and behavior are funny, his stories are instructive and illustrative. In modern usage, his name is appellative, because we call a person who can do something stupid, a simple or resourceful person, "the walking Kozhanasyr" (Qortabaeva, 2013: 25). It is as if Kozhanasyr's donkey complements his image and makes it bright. After all, along with the concept of the donkey, there are such concepts as stupidity, stubbornness and obedience. In the dictionary of the Kazakh literary language, one can find the phrases "Ker esek, kok esek". Here, the first means "backward, stubborn, unyielding", and the next – "an obedient person, a slave, a puppet" (Qazaq ädebi tılıñ sızdıǵı, 2011: 399). In Russian, the word "donkey" symbolises a stupid, shallow, stubborn and stupid person. But it can also be a simple-minded, good-natured, naive person. These figurative, secondary, metaphorical meanings are described by E.R. Kurilovich in the article "Notes on the meaning of the word". E.R. Kurilovich writes that "considering the word "donkey" (I – animal, II – stupid or stubborn person), we have no doubt that II is a figurative, secondary meaning (Kurilovich, 1955: 78). That is, the zoonym "donkey" is used in comparisons: 1) about an extremely stupid, dull, shallow person; 2) about a stupid, simple-minded and good-naturedly naive person. "The word eshek "donkey" is used to refer to a person of low intelligence, a fool, a dullard, and the word "ishak" refers to an ill-mannered, rude, tactless person. The word "eshek" also conveys the notion of 'an unlucky worker, an impractical person who works hard but for low pay" (Ulakov, 2019: 96). We know that the

Arabs have a character called Juha. L.N. Tushnolobova expressed the opinion that the Turks attributed to Kozhanasyr the adventures of Juha, the hero of Arab anecdotes, thus increasing the number of plots of their own hero's stories, and later the anecdotes about Kozhanasyr were translated into Arabic, resulting in the expansion of Juha's image (Tushnolobova, 1997). So, T. Dibow writes that "Juha has a donkey as a close friend, to whom he teaches his philosophy aloud and pours out his sarcasm and dissatisfaction with life and people" (Dibow, 2024: 27). So the Arabs accept the image of the donkey as a faithful companion of Kozhanasyr.

According to M. Satinbekova, there are two reasons why the image of the donkey often appears in the stories about Kozhanasyr. Firstly, he compares the image of the donkey in the story about Kozhanasyr with the common people, who are ready to endure everything and bear all the hardships. "On the other hand, the donkey is suitable for riding, is accessible to the people, it is a widespread animal, so it always appears in the stories about Kozhanasyr" (Satinbekova, 2011: 296). And F.I. Çelebi, who studied the stories about Kozhanasyr among the Azerbaijani people, believes that satirical characters riding donkeys, not horses, have their own symbolic meaning. "Because the main character of a satirical work is usually very smart, cunning, a representative of the common people and protects the interests of the masses. Therefore, he should never stand above the people, that is, he will not be able to ride a horse" (Smeh i plach v tradicionnoj kul'ture, 2021: 181).

In the story "Esegim üide emes" (The Donkey Is Not Home) about Kozhanasyr, the donkey in the barn cries to show Kozhanasyr's carelessness. And when the man who came to ask for the donkey expressed his dissatisfaction, Kozhanasyr replies, "Why do you listen to the words of a stupid donkey?", thereby emphasizing that the donkey is a stupid animal. The image of the donkey here is associated with the concept of madness, although the image of the donkey is rationally used in the process of describing Kozhanasyr's lies and finding a solution, despite the fact that he found himself in an unpleasant situation.

*"One day a man came to Kozhanasyr to ask for his donkey. Kozhanasyr replied: "My donkey is not at home". In the meantime, the braying of a donkey was heard from the barn. The man who came to ask for the donkey was angry that Kozhanasyr had lied and said:*

*"Kozha, it is unworthy of you to lie, being the eldest," he says.*

*Then Kozha became angry at the untimely braying of his donkey and answered the man:*

- *Well, fool, why did you not believe what I said, being the eldest, but followed the words of a mad donkey? "Yes, the donkey is not at home, even if he is at home, he cannot prove it," he said and sent him away* (Babalar sözi, 2013: 37).

In this story, Kozhanasyr demonstrates his cunning and resourcefulness in dealing with his neighbor. He denies the presence of the donkey despite the obvious evidence. This shows that Kozhanasyr has the ability to manipulate the situation and the people around him using his life experience and wisdom. The story raises the question of truth and Kozhanasyr's perception of reality, who rejects the obvious evidence, insisting on his own rightness. This demonstrates that the truth is not always on the surface and may not be obvious to others. The philosophical subtext is that a person should rely not only on external evidence, but also on his life experience, wisdom and ability to think critically. The story touches on the topic of the relativity of truth and the importance of being able to find your own truth, even if it contradicts the generally accepted opinion.

In another story about Kozhanasyr, called "Esegiñniñ minezi jaman eken" (Your Donkey Has a Bad Character), Kozhanasyr brings his donkey to the market to sell. In this story, Kozhanasyr compares people who oppress the weak to donkeys, saying, "I brought my oppressors so that people would see" which is what he saw in the donkey.

*"Kozhanasyr took his donkey to the market to sell it and gave it to a broker. One of the donkey buyers came and opened the donkey's mouth to look at its teeth, but the donkey bit his hand and scared him. After some time, another buyer came and stroked its back and tail, but the donkey kicked him with both legs. Seeing this situation, the broker looked at Kozhanasyr and said:*

- *Your donkey has a bad character, why did you bring it to the market? – he said. Kozhanasyr said to him:*

*"Well, my friend, I did not bring my donkey to the market to sell it, I brought it so that people could see with their own eyes what it did to me," he said* (Babalar sözi, 2013: 86).

In the plot of this story, we can observe the theory of the discrepancy between the actions of the buyer and the donkey. Here the donkey shows its stubbornness, disobedience and determination. Kozhanasyr has to endure such behavior of his donkey. In fact, the situation on the market shows not only the relationship between the owner and his stubborn pet, but also a much larger content and problem. That is, the image of Kozhanasyr here means that in some cases

people have to give in, adapt to events and endure many difficulties. Both images want to draw attention to the contradictions between man and society, describing opposite concepts.

The deep philosophical meaning is that the story raises questions about the nature of power and control. Kozhanasyr, as the owner of the donkey, should have complete control over it. But the donkey demonstrates that even in such a master-slave relationship there is a certain autonomy and independence of the slave. Overall, this short story contains rich material for psychological and philosophical analysis, raising questions about instinct, power, human relationships and the limits of our control over the world.

According to O.Yu. Osmukhina "... the donkey is a very dualistic image: if it symbolizes stupidity in a number of mythological traditions (it is enough to recall the donkey ears of King Midas), baseness, violence, then in the mythology of Buddhism the donkey, on the contrary, acts as a symbol of asceticism, humiliation" (Osmukhina, 2018: 213). Osmukhina says that the image of the donkey in many myths is diverse. Positive or negative characteristics in the image of the donkey depended on who was its owner. The color of the donkey also played an important role. For example, rulers, khans and prophets rode white donkeys, and the lower classes – gray ones. Unfortunately, there is no mention of the color of his donkey in the traditional stories about Kozhanasyr. This detail is not mentioned in the folklore stories about this character. Folklore stories about the sage Kozhanasyr tend to focus on his actions and sayings rather than describing physical details such as the color of his donkey.

According to Sibel Adar Cömert, Hodja Nasreddin cannot be considered separately from the donkey, the donkey is his means of transportation, the main figure of his humor. The donkey is a common symbol of suffering, poverty, hunger, oppression by the powerful. In works dedicated to the images of the upper class, the inhabitants of the palace, there is no place for the image of the donkey, while the image of the horse, on the contrary, is of great importance. "The donkey is pictured as an inseparable part of Hodja, rather than as an animal. The donkey was portrayed as his closest friend and confidant. In some images the donkey was shown in a humorous way with characteristics such as laughing, getting angry, wondering which belong to humans" (Cömert, 2019: 37).

The image of the donkey in the stories about Kozhanasyr acts not only as a comic element, but also as an important cultural symbol through which

deep philosophical ideas are revealed. The donkey is usually associated with simplicity and unpretentiousness, which allows the authors to turn to it as a metaphor for human wisdom, often hidden behind appearances.

*One day Kozhanasyr went for a walk with his students. Kozha rode his donkey, and the students walked. At some point, Kozhanasyr looked at the donkey he was riding and sat down, turning away, and the surprised students asked Kozhanasyr:*

*- Kozheke, why are you riding your donkey backwards? – they asked.*

*- Well, my dears, if I don't ride my donkey looking at you, then I will be ashamed in front of you walking behind me, and if you walk in front of me, then you will be ashamed in front of me walking with your backs to me. So, I noticed this and sat on the donkey with my back, – said Kozha (Babalar sözi, 2013: 32).*

Şenocak particularly emphasizes that in this anecdote Nasreddin Hodja points out that for development it is crucial to take steps directed toward the future, yet one should not neglect the connection with the past. Hodja represents the present day positioned between the past and the future. His heartfelt orientation toward the people reflects his spiritual bond with them, that is, his attachment to his past (Şenocak, 2017: 96).

According to Şimşek, Nasreddin Hodja's riding a donkey backwards can also be interpreted from another perspective. In this case, where the motif of "the reverse" is present, there is also the idea of protection from evil and dark spirits (Şimşek, 2013: 110). Hodja claims that he is a "man of the reverse," yet even opposition may lead a person to the right path. This signifies a movement from contradiction toward integrity. Moreover, it is important to correctly define where "reverse" and where "right" actually are, since what seems reversed to some may appear straightforward to others. Everyone has their own truth and worldview. Thus, through his behavior, Hodja demonstrates how one can find the "golden mean" and achieve balance.

G. Çetindağ Süme notes that in many anecdotes Nasreddin Hodja appears together with his donkey, which gives his image a symbolic dimension. By riding the donkey backwards, Hodja seeks his own solution in perceiving life. In this way, he establishes a connection between past and future and attains wholeness. Looking at the past, through the mediation of the donkey, he also perceives the future (Çetindağ Süme, 2019: 51). Thus, the donkey becomes for Hodja a face turned toward the future, without severing ties with roots and tradition. By

uniting yesterday and tomorrow from two different perspectives, where Hodja himself is turned backwards to the past, and the donkey forward to the future, Nasreddin Hodja and his donkey symbolize a cosmic cycle leading from contradiction to wholeness. In this context, the donkey appears not merely as an animal, but as an advisor, interlocutor, a source of humor, in short, as a "thinking" character, serving as an essential complement to the image of Hodja.

The famous Turkologist Javanshir Feyziev explains the reason for this behavior of Kozhanasyr in this story as follows: Kozhanasyr "often rode his donkey backwards in order to look at the destroyed society from a positive perspective" (Feiziev, 2019: 110). But Burrill's opinion on this matter is different, in his opinion, "the purpose of riding the donkey while sitting backwards was to continue to see and talk to their disciples who followed them" (Burrill, 1996: 17).

However, Oğuzhan does not agree with Burrill's conclusion above and offers his own, different conclusion: "The actual purpose of mounting the donkey reversely was to give a cultural message about self in Sufism, but Burrill, although a specialist in Turkish culture failed to notice this and misread the message of this act" (Oğuzhan, 2017: 260). That is, Oğuzhan recognizes Kozhanasyr as a representative of Sufi teachings. The image of the donkey in Sufi literature has many meanings, reflecting deep spiritual and philosophical ideas. In the Sufi tradition, this animal symbolizes the need to serve God and people, which is an important aspect of the spiritual path. The donkey represents the burden that must be carried, including sins and worries, and symbolizes the path to divine enlightenment. Sufi texts often depict the donkey as internal obstacles such as egoism and attachments. Sufis teach that to achieve union with God, it is important to overcome these barriers, which requires effort and patience. In a number of parables, the donkey is presented as a wise creature, capable of comprehending truths that others cannot, emphasizing that true wisdom can come from unexpected sources. The donkey also serves as a symbol of social status and criticism. It represents ordinary people who, despite their modesty, can have a profound understanding of life and spirituality. This animal is associated with hard work and humility, which are valued in Sufism as necessary for achieving spiritual growth. For example, in Rumi's poems, the donkey can act as a symbol of humility and devotion in love for God. Thus, the donkey in Sufism is a metaphor for humble service, overcoming internal obstacles and wisdom. In addition, the donkey in the Sufi tradition is often perceived as a symbol of

a vehicle on the spiritual path to God (for example, al-Buraq). It represents not only physical movement but also the spiritual transitions that must be overcome to achieve divine enlightenment. For example, Hafiz uses the image of a donkey in his parables to convey deep spiritual truths through metaphors and allegories. He reminds us of the need for patience and perseverance in spiritual quests. Thus, the donkey represents not only transportation but also a symbol of the inner efforts needed to achieve union with the Divine.

## Conclusion

In conclusion, the study of animalistic imagery in the tales of Nasreddin Hodja, particularly the image of the donkey, reveals its profound symbolic and cultural significance. The donkey in these narratives is not merely a plot element or a folkloric attribute, but a complex literary symbol that reflects the dialectics of contradiction and integrity, the relationship between the past and the future, and the search for balance in human existence. According to various authors, animalistic imagery in the tales functions metaphorically, highlighting the neces-

sity of looking forward without losing connection with tradition and roots. The donkey thus serves as a companion, adviser, and “thinking” character, complementing Hodja’s philosophical and satirical portrayal.

Furthermore, in art, culture, and literature, the image of the donkey often symbolizes inequality, contradictory concepts, and loneliness in society. In the tales of Hodja, this animalistic image performs a critical function by exposing human shortcomings, such as stubbornness, indifference, and folly, while drawing attention to the valuable life lessons conveyed by seemingly “simple” creatures. By integrating symbolic, cultural, and ethical dimensions, the donkey not only illustrates the negative aspects of human nature but also represents an ongoing dialogue between tradition and modernity, individual and society, contradiction and wholeness.

Therefore, the donkey in the various tales of Nasreddin Hodja should be regarded as a multifaceted literary and cultural construct that requires in-depth interdisciplinary analysis. This symbol remains relevant and thought-provoking, reflecting the complex spectrum of human nature, values, and social dynamics.

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Date of receipt of the article: January 15, 2025.

Accepted: September 24, 2025.