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An Analysis of the Shape-Shifting Motif in Turkish Tale Narratives from Macedonia

Abstract: *Turkish folk literature in Macedonia has taken shape since the Ottoman era, emerging as a rich oral cultural heritage through the blending of narrative traditions brought from Anatolia with local elements. Tales, legends, folk stories, and anecdotes form the core components of this narrative tradition and stand out as significant elements reflecting the region's cultural identity. These narratives exhibit parallels with the shared Turkish narrative heritage while also incorporating motifs specific to the region.*

This study focuses on the shape-shifting motif as it appears in Turkish folk narratives collected in Macedonia. The motif involves the transformation of a being or object into another form – such as a human turning into a stone, animal, tree, or bird; or the reverse, where animals and objects take on human form. These transformations may be permanent or temporary and are often symbolic.

The study is based on Makedonya Türk Halk Edebiyatı Metinleri by Nimetullah Hafız. In this work, the shape-shifting motif was identified in twelve tale narratives. The findings indicate that shape-shifting typically serves a functional role within a reward-and-punishment framework, although it occasionally appears as a magical or supernatural phenomenon.

Overall, the motif deepens the symbolic dimension of the narratives and facilitates the transmission of cultural values and collective beliefs. It also marks critical turning points in the stories, reflecting characters' inner transformation or destiny. The study concludes that shape-shifting is a meaningful narrative element in Turkish folk literature in Macedonia, with both individual and cultural significance.

Keywords: *Macedonia Turks; Folk tale narratives; Shape-shifting; Metamorphosis; Motif analysis; Turkish Folk Literature.*

Introduction

The motif of shape-shifting occupies a significant place in Turkic narrative traditions, originating from Central Asian oral cultures where

shamanistic beliefs, animism, and mythological themes were deeply intertwined with everyday life. In early Turkic myths and epics such as the *Oğuz Kağan Destanı* and *Manas*, transformation into animals, celestial bodies, or natural elements served not only as literary devices but also as reflections of cosmological worldviews. These motifs, which symbolized spiritual journeys, heroic trials, or moral transformations, persisted as the Turkic peoples migrated westward. With the Ottoman expansion and the centuries-long presence of Turks in the Balkans, these ancient narrative elements were adapted and localized within the sociocultural fabric of the region. Turkish folk tales in Macedonia, shape-shifting motifs-such as transformation into stone, animals, or plants – continue to echo the symbolic depth and cultural memory of their Central Asian roots while simultaneously integrating new meanings influenced by Balkan folklore and local belief systems. Thus, the study of shape-shifting motifs in Turkish narratives from Macedonia reveals a dynamic continuity between the mythic imagination of Asia and the rich oral traditions of the Balkans.

This continuity is not merely a passive preservation of ancient elements but reflects a living, evolving tradition shaped by historical processes. As Turkish communities firmly established themselves in the Balkans, particularly during the Ottoman period, they carried with them their oral storytelling heritage, adapting it to the new cultural environments they encountered. This evolution laid the groundwork for the rich and distinctive corpus of Turkish folk literature in Macedonia.

Turkish folk literature in Macedonia constitutes an essential element of the rich oral cultural heritage that Turkish communities in the Balkans have cultivated over the centuries. The Turkish presence in the region, which predates the Ottoman era (Hamzaoglu, 2010; İsen, 1997), became firmly established during Ottoman rule. These communities not only sustained the narrative traditions they had brought primarily from Anatolia but also, through continuous interaction with local cultures, generated new forms of storytelling that reflect a dynamic process of cultural adaptation and innovation.

Research on Turkish folk literature in Macedonia plays a crucial role in documenting the cultural continuity of the Turkish presence in the region and in critically assessing oral narrative traditions through scholarly methods. Particularly from the second half of the twentieth century onward, numerous folk narratives have been collected and incorporated into academic literature through compilation and analytical studies. Researchers such as Hüseyin Süleyman, Sevim Piličkova,

Nimetullah Hafız, Arif Ago, Hamdi Hasan, Suat Engüllü, and Selçuk Kürşad Koca have gathered and published oral cultural products, including fairy tales, legends, folk songs, and manis, offering folkloric, linguistic, and literary analyses of these texts. Furthermore, several academic theses and articles produced in Turkey have examined Turkish folk literature in Macedonia, often conducting comparative analyses with Anatolian folk literature. These studies contribute not only to the documentation of Turkish folk culture in the Balkans but also to the visibility of the shared literary heritage of the Turkic world. In this context, ongoing research highlights the richness of Turkish folk literature in Macedonia, playing a critical role in preserving this cultural legacy for future generations.

Narrative genres such as fairy tales, legends, folk stories, anecdotes, and laments continue to exist in the region as reflections of its cultural diversity and historical continuity within oral memory (Koca, 2017a: 4). Turkish folk narratives of Macedoni exhibit both thematic parallels with the Turkish narrative of Anatolia tradition and variations featuring motifs unique to the region. In this context, the richness of these narratives in terms of content and form offers a distinct area of study within folklore research. As Koca and Çeçi state in their work *Gostivar Fairy Tales* (2021: 8), despite the richness of this tradition, comprehensive academic studies in the field have only recently begun, with earlier efforts primarily consisting of compilations. It can be noted that the collection of folk materials in this area commenced largely due to the *Yücelciler* movement, which contributed significantly to the revival of Balkan Turkish identity following the Ottoman period, particularly through activities related to Turkish culture in Macedonia, language, and literature (Koca, 2017b). A considerable part of these collected materials appeared in the journal *Sesler*, which was widely regarded as the voice of the Turkish community in Macedonia. Serdar Uğurlu, in his presentation titled ‘Turkish Folklore of Macedonia and the Journal *Sesler*’, highlights this development and enumerates the contributions to Turkish folk culture published in *Sesler* (2017: 640-672).

The motif of transformation, referring to the alteration of an individual’s or an object’s physical form into another entity, is a powerful and widespread narrative element. Pertev Naili Boratav defines this phenomenon as “the loss of essential qualities by humans, animals, plants, or inanimate objects, resulting in a transition from one form to another; the animation of the inanimate, or the transformation of the

animate into inanimate matter” (1973: 76). According to Bahaeddin Ögel, transformation or metamorphosis has been a recurring motif in the fairy tales and epics of Turkic peoples for thousands of years (1995: 133). In folk narratives, this motif is often situated within an ethical framework, functioning as part of a reward-and-punishment mechanism, though it also appears in instances of magical or supernatural transformations. Additionally, it symbolically reflects the character’s internal changes, pivotal life moments, or transformations of destiny, thereby adding depth to the narrative. In this regard, transformation serves as a functional motif that both expands the boundaries of the narrative world and facilitates the transmission of cultural values. According to Metin Ergun, transformations in narratives may occur either with or without the hero’s consent (1997: 176-177). In legends, transformations are typically permanent, while “in fairy tales and epics, transformations are often temporary and based on magic or sorcery” (Sakaoğlu & Türkan, 2019: 179). As Küçük suggests, this motif reflects subconscious desires and expectations (2020: 100) and may represent voluntary or involuntary changes experienced by the protagonist. When the transformation occurs by the hero’s will, it is often referred to as ‘don değişimi’ (metamorphosis or assumed transformation) (Aslan, 2004: 38). In the examined fairy tales, divine or supernatural figures that either facilitate or prevent transformations are also encountered. As noted by Nedim Bakırcı, characters such as Hızır, old men, dervishes, and sages frequently assist the heroes (2015: 186).

This study primarily draws on *Turkish Folk Literature Texts in Macedonia*, a compilation by Nimetullah Hafız, as its main source. This book, which includes examples from almost all genres of folk literature, is notably rich in folk narratives as well. Within the scope of the research, fairy tales and legends contained in the book were examined, and the narratives featuring the motif of transformation were identified. The analysis revealed that the motif of transformation appears in one legend and thirteen fairy tales. It was observed that the transformation motif fulfills different functions depending on the literary genre and that the transformations are not limited to humans but also involve various beings. It is evident from our field studies that the book does not encompass all of the legends and fairy tales narrated in Macedonia. Nonetheless, it undoubtedly constitutes a significant corpus Turkish Folklore narratives of Macedonia

Among the motifs observed in folk narratives, transformation manifests in various forms. Based on Ergun’s interpretation (Ergun,

1997: 198) of the motif of transformation classified under the D (Magic) category – specifically within the D800–D899: Transformation subcategory – of Stith Thompson’s *Motif-Index of Folk Literature*, twelve subtypes of transformation have been identified. In addition to these, a new category, ‘returning to human form,’ has been introduced in the present study to facilitate a more comprehensive evaluation of the narratives. In the examined Turkish folk narratives in Macedonia, five distinct forms of transformation are observed: transformation into stone, into an animal, into a plant, into a human, and returning to human form. These instances of transformation illustrate an integrated perception of humanity and nature, reflecting a worldview wherein humans are not perceived as separate from the natural world (Ayaz, 2022: 596).

As is well known, Stith Thompson’s *Motif-Index of Folk Literature* systematically classifies recurring narrative elements (motifs) found in world folk literature. The theme of transformation is one of the key motifs in this index and is examined under various categories. The transformations identified in the analyzed narratives have been evaluated in accordance with the categories listed in the *Motif-Index of Folk Literature*:

- D865 – Transformation to stone,
- D855 – Transformation to animal,
- D860 – Transformation to plant,
- D870 – Transformation to human.

1. D865 – Transformation to Stone

Throughout history, from primitive times to the modern era, stone has carried various symbolic meanings for humanity. It has been revered as a sacred entity and used as a talisman believed to protect against evil. Different societies have utilized stones for diverse purposes, such as marking temples or identifying graves, thereby granting stone a significant place in social life.

In the Turkish narrative tradition, stone also appears as a component of the transformation motif. In these narratives, petrification is not limited to humans; animals, plants, supernatural beings, and objects are also observed to undergo transformation into stone.

The ‘transformation to stone’ motif is widely found in Anatolian and Balkan legends, often occurring within a framework of reward or punishment. Turkish legends such as *Gelin Kayası* (The Bride’s Rock) (Feyzioğlu, 2011: 115–133), *Gelin Alayı* (The Bridal Procession), *Gelin Taşı* (The Bride’s Stone), *Kadın Kayası* (The Woman’s

Rock), and *Asker Taşı* (The Soldier's Stone) (Oğuz & Ersoy, 2007) incorporate this motif in various forms.

In the examination of Turkish folk tales in Macedonia, the 'transformation to stone' motif was identified in two narratives. In the cases analyzed, this transformation was found to be reversible.

1.1. Kör Adam (The Blind Man)

The tale *Kör Adam* (The Blind Man), collected from Kalkandelen (Tetovo), features the motif of transformation into stone.

In the story, a blind man has three sons. The man learns that a queen living beyond the ninth mountain possesses a nightingale and a flower; if the flower is brought to him, his sight will be restored. His eldest son sets out to retrieve it but, despite an old man's warning not to look back, he hears his mother's voice, turns around, and is turned to stone. The same fate befalls the second son. The youngest son also embarks on the journey but obeys the warning and reaches the queen's palace. There, he encounters a lion and a goat, with grass placed before the lion and meat before the goat. He switches their food and thus earns the lion's support. Finding the queen asleep, he steals the nightingale, the flower, and the queen's ring, then flees. The magic ring breaks the spell, restoring his brothers to human form. The youngest son returns home with his brothers, washes his father's face with the flower, and the blind man regains his sight. Eventually, the queen arrives, marries the youngest son, and they celebrate with a wedding lasting forty days and forty nights.

In this tale, human transformation into stone is explicitly tied to disobedience: the sons are forbidden from looking back or responding to forbidden sounds, and when they violate this rule, they are turned to stone. Transformation here functions as a punishment for disobedience and failure to adhere to prescribed rules. The success of the youngest son emphasizes the importance of perseverance and forward movement without succumbing to distraction. The motif of transformation into stone in this narrative encapsulates key folkloric elements of trial and punishment, symbolizing the stagnation and impotence of those who fail the test, while highlighting that patience and faith lead to ultimate success (Hafiz, 1989: 224-225).

1.2. Hızır'ın Kızı (Hızır's Daughter)

Another narrative featuring the motif of transformation into stone is the tale *Hızırın Kızı* (Hızır's Daughter), collected from Gostivar.

The story begins with a state official overhearing the wishes of three sisters. The eldest and middle sisters boast that they could bake bread large enough to feed all the soldiers or weave a tent big enough for the entire army, yet they fail to fulfill their promises. The youngest sister claims she will bear a boy with golden hair and a girl with pearl-like teeth – and she does. Driven by jealousy, the elder sisters place the newborns in a chest and cast them into the sea, replacing them with a dog and a cat. Believing he has been deceived, the ruler punishes his wife. The chest is found by a wise old man, who raises the children.

Years later, the golden-haired boy learns of his true heritage. By purchasing abandoned palaces and horses of the state, he begins to reclaim his rightful place. However, the jealous aunts impose new challenges, demanding that he bring Hızır's Flower and Hızır's Daughter. The young man accomplishes these tasks, aided by a magical seal that protects him from petrification and reverses the stone transformations of others. During a feast, Hızır's Daughter recounts a story revealing the entire truth to the ruler, thereby exposing the boy's true identity. The treacherous aunts are punished, the queen regains her rightful place, and the tale concludes with a happy ending.

In the narrative, the young hero faces the danger of being turned to stone while attempting to retrieve Hızır's Daughter. Hızır's Daughter possesses supernatural powers; at her first cry, the horses turn to stone; at her second cry, the young man is half-petrified; and a third cry would have fully turned him into stone. However, the magical seal he carries prevents complete transformation by neutralizing the curse, also transforming Hızır's Daughter in the process. The ability of the hero to prevent his petrification by kissing the seal highlights the motif of magical objects as instruments of salvation. Hızır's Daughter, obeying the hero's commands, reverses the transformations by sprinkling sherbet over the half-petrified young man, the horses, and the ruler's soldiers. In this tale, the motif of petrification serves as a major trial within the hero's journey. Adherence to rules, patience, and possession of protective magic allow the protagonist to avert his fate, while cursed individuals can be restored to their original state through the correct magical intervention. This reinforces the themes of justice and trials that are central to fairy tale narratives (Hafız, 1989: 254-256).

2. D855 – Transformation Into an Animal

The motif of transformation into an animal is a prominent element frequently encountered in Turkish folk narratives, particularly in legends and fairy tales. Sometimes this transformation occurs as a reward or punishment through the will of God or the prayers of saints, while at other times it results from the intervention of supernatural beings such as sorcerers or magicians. The meaning attributed to the transformation varies depending on the narrative genre: in legends, it often serves as a moral lesson, whereas in fairy tales, it primarily introduces elements of entertainment and mystery.

The transformation of humans into wolves, birds, snakes, or other animals symbolizes both the human connection to nature and inner psychological change. This motif offers valuable insights into the belief systems, value structures, and imagination of the community. Moreover, “motifs, which hold vital importance in the formation of narratives, contribute not only to the shaping of the plot but also to the enrichment of the narrative” (Demirtaş, 2020: 234).

Within the analyzed narratives, the motif of transformation into animals appears in four fairy tales: in two cases, the protagonist transforms into a bird; in one case, into a donkey; and in another, into a deer. Kadriye Türkan notes that the fate of the transformed hero corresponds to the nature of the animal into which they change (2008: 149). In these tales, the heroes who become birds fly freely, the hero transformed into a donkey becomes subject to the control of whoever holds its halter, and the hero transformed into a deer merges into the wilderness and remains unnoticed. Across numerous folk narratives within the Turkic world, transformations into various animals such as moles, monkeys, rabbits, and birds are frequently observed (Boratav, 1997: 63).

2.1. *Haydutlar (The Tale of the Bandits)*

Among the folk tales featuring shape-shifting, *Haydutlar* (The Tale of the Bandits) addresses the motif of transformation into a bird. The tale can be summarized as follows: A woman has two daughters; she favors her biological daughter while despising her stepdaughter. She deceives the stepdaughter and takes her to the mountains intending to kill her, but the girl survives and seeks refuge in the house of three bandits. The mother attempts to kill her again by poisoning her with a comb. The bandits place the girl in a glass coffin. The prince discovers her, removes the poison from the comb, restores her to life, and marries her. The malicious stepmother poisons the girl once more with a needle,

transforming her into a bird. The prince captures the bird, removes the needle, and the girl returns to human form; they live happily ever after.

The motif of transformation into a bird, as seen in this tale, is a common element in both Turkish and global folk narratives. In this story, the motif is triggered by a malevolent character (the stepmother) using magic or a magical object to transform someone against their will. The transformation occurs beyond the hero's control, symbolizing a temporary withdrawal from the world, a period of trial, and ultimately the attainment of deserved happiness. Moreover, the motif serves as a turning point in the tale, ensuring justice is served. It strengthens the dramatic structure of the story while highlighting the widespread folk narrative themes of magical transformation and eventual return (Hafiz, 1989: 217-218).

2.2. *Gölperyanım Gölperyanım (My Gölperyan, My Gölperyan)*

In Turkish narratives from Macedonia, the theme of human-to-bird transformation is also evident in the tale *Gölperyanım Gölperyanım* (My Gölperyan, My Gölperyan), collected from Üsküp (Skopje).

The tale can be summarized as follows: A sultan's son disappears during childhood and remains missing for many years. One day, while a beautiful girl is sitting at home, a bird approaches and suddenly transforms into a human. The young man and the girl fall in love, but he soon vanishes, leaving behind only his veil. Later, while fetching water, the girl notices a strange-acting rooster, follows it, and arrives at a giant's house. The rooster protects her. The young man, once again appearing as a bird, expresses his love for her. Following his instructions, the girl enters the palace as a servant. Every night, the young man, in bird form, comes to the window to speak with her. One of the other servants observes this and informs the sultan's wife, who realizes that the girl is involved with her lost son. The young man instructs the girl to reveal the way to break his curse: burning forty-one pieces of cloth. Once this is done, he regains his human form and reunites with his family. The tale concludes with a grand wedding.

In the tale, the sultan's son reappears in bird form, although the manner of his transformation is not explicitly explained. It is implied to be the result of a supernatural spell or the workings of fate – an ambiguity common in folk narratives, which adds a layer of mystery and enchantment to the story. The boy's disappearance is thus linked to his transformation into a bird. Despite taking the form of a bird, he retains

his emotional and cognitive human traits, as seen in his love for Gülp-eryan, his ability to speak, and his memories. Although he moves between human and bird forms – first appearing in the garden, then at the giant's house, and later at the palace window – his human identity remains intact.

In the final part of the tale, the young man reveals that he can be freed from his bird form through a magical act: burning forty-one knotted pieces of cloth. This suggests that his transformation is indeed the result of a spell, reinforcing the motif of magical intervention common in fairy tales (Hafiz, 1989: 222-223).

2.3. *Humma Kuşu (The Humma Bird)*

Another narrative featuring the motif of transformation is the tale *Humma Kuşu* (The Humma Bird), collected from Kalkandelen (Tetovo). In this story, a human transforms into a donkey.

The tale tells of a poor man who finds a Humma bird that lays eggs of gold, leading him to great wealth. However, during his absence, his wife is deceived into killing the bird. Their children consume the bird's heart and liver, thereby gaining magical powers. When an Arab master notices the missing organs, he orders the children's execution, but a servant helps them escape. One of the children discovers he can find money every morning. Later, after being tricked by a girl he loves into losing his magical heart, he falls into poverty and wanders into a forest. There, he eats the fig of a magical tree and transforms into a donkey. Upon consuming the fig of another tree, he regains his human form. He subsequently uses the magical fig to transform the deceitful girl into a donkey as an act of punishment. Eventually, he reunites with his brother and father, and the treacherous mother is punished. The boy then transforms the 'world's most beautiful girl' back into human form and marries her.

In this tale, the motif of transformation into a donkey occurs through the consumption of magical figs found in the forest. One child eats the fig of the first tree and transforms into a donkey, but by eating the fig from the second tree, he returns to his human form. The protagonist uses the transformative power of the magical fig to exact revenge on the deceiving girl, illustrating transformation as a means of punishment. However, by later restoring her human form, the tale emphasizes its underlying sense of justice. These transformation motifs demonstrate how fate can be altered through magical objects and enchanted

foods, revealing that transformation can serve both punitive and redemptive functions within the narrative (Hafiz, 1989: 225-226).

2.4. *Yusufcukle Fatmacik (Yusufcuk and Fatmacik)*

Another tale featuring the motif of transformation into an animal is *Yusufcukle Fatmacik* (Yusufcuk and Fatmacik), collected from Üsküp (Skopje). In this tale, the motif of transformation appears at multiple stages.

The story can be summarized as follows: A husband and wife live with their two children. One day, the father accidentally consumes human flesh and subsequently develops the urge to eat his son, Yusuf. Learning of this, the daughter, Fatmacik, convinces her brother to flee. As they escape, their father pursues them, but the magical obstacles created by Fatmacik's thrown objects hinder his chase. During their flight, Yusuf, unable to withstand his thirst, drinks from a forbidden water source and transforms into a deer. Fatmacik is left alone and climbs a tree for safety. A bey (ruler) notices her and attempts various methods to persuade her to come down, including having the tree cut down. However, Yusuf, now a deer, licks the cuts on the tree, magically healing them and preventing its fall.

Eventually, an old woman tricks Fatmacik into descending from the tree, leading to her marriage with the bey. However, jealous servants conspire against her, throwing her into the sea and taking her place. A fish swallows Fatmacik. Upon the bey's return, he is deceived by the impostor. Meanwhile, the impostor demands that Yusuf, the deer, be slaughtered for food. Before his execution, Yusuf requests to be taken to the seaside, where Fatmacik emerges from the fish, revealing the truth. The bey punishes the deceitful servant, and Yusuf and Fatmacik live happily thereafter.

In this tale, the transformation occurs when Yusuf drinks from the forbidden water and becomes a deer. Although Fatmacik warns him not to drink, Yusuf succumbs to his thirst, leading to his transformation. This moment reflects the inevitable working of fate, deeply connected with supernatural elements. The transformation serves two functions: first, it acts as a punishment for disregarding a prohibition, echoing the widespread folkloric concepts of 'taboo' and 'forbidden acts'; second, it functions as a protective mechanism. As a deer, Yusuf is able to evade enemies and survive, demonstrating that transformation is not always a curse but can also serve as a means of protection.

Furthermore, Yusuf's act of licking the wounded tree to heal it suggests that he gains a magical connection with nature, elevating him beyond the status of an ordinary human to that of a magical being. Unlike other tales, no reversal of the transformation – returning to human form – is observed in this narrative (Hafiz, 1989: 229-230).

3. D860 – Transformation into a Plant

Among the various transformation motifs in Turkish folk narratives, transformation into a plant stands out, particularly in the genres of legends and fairy tales. This motif typically involves the transformation of a human into a plant – such as a tree, flower, or vine – as a result of extraordinary events, functioning as a form of punishment, reward, or the effect of magic.

Transformation into a plant often carries symbolic meanings. For instance, a lover who is unable to reunite with their beloved may transform into a tree, flower, or vine, symbolizing eternal love and longing. Such transformations not only intensify the emotional depth of the narrative but also establish a powerful connection between humanity and nature.

As noted by Özcan and Kaval, “transformation into a tree usually occurs outside the hero's will” (Özcan & Kaval, 2019: 321).

Among the narratives examined, one tale incorporates the motif of transformation into a tree. This tale appears to be a folkloric account explaining the origin of the quince and pomegranate trees, combining elements of myth and fairy tale tradition.

3.1. *Ağlayan Ayva ile Gülen Nar (The Crying Quince and the Laughing Pomegranate)*

The motif of transformation into a tree is prominently featured in the tale *Ağlayan Ayva ile Gülen Nar* (The Crying Quince and the Laughing Pomegranate). In this story, humans transform into fruit trees. The narrative centers around Felek, a supernatural figure, who transforms two young individuals into trees as a consequence of their disobedience.

The tale can be summarized as follows: Once upon a time, a young man named Ayva (Quince) and a girl named Nar (Pomegranate) set out to a mill to grind flour. However, they waste time along the way and arrive at the mill in the evening. The miller, an old man named Felek, refuses to let them enter and warns them not to enter the mill, not to drink from the crystal stream, and not to fall asleep, as he must leave

to visit a magical spring. Disregarding his warnings, the youths enter the mill, drink from the stream, and fall asleep. Upon returning at dawn, Felek finds them asleep and, sprinkling them with magical water, transforms them into fruit trees. After the transformation, Ayva begins to weep while Nar laughs. Felek tells them they will remain this way forever, and that they will bear the names they had as humans. Consequently, quince is regarded as a sorrowful fruit and pomegranate as a joyful one.

In this tale, transformation serves as a punitive mechanism. The protagonists are transformed into trees as a direct result of ignoring Felek's warnings. In Turkish folk narratives, the use of transformation as a form of moral enforcement is a common motif. Here, the metamorphosis of Ayva and Nar symbolizes the consequences of disobedience. Additionally, transformation is framed as part of the natural and cosmic order. The name and role of Felek suggest an authority that embodies fate itself. By transforming the youths into trees, Felek not only punishes them but also integrates them into the eternal cycle of nature, aligning with animistic beliefs that emphasize the interconnectedness of humans and the natural world. Furthermore, the weeping of the quince and the laughter of the pomegranate reflect the symbolic extension of the characters' personalities. These emotional characteristics persist even after their transformation, aligning with traditional associations: quince is known for its tart, melancholic flavor, while pomegranate is celebrated for its sweetness and vitality (Hafiz, 1989: 199-200).

4. D870 – Transformation Into a Human

In Turkish folk narratives, the motif of transformation into a human often occurs through supernatural or magical intervention and symbolizes both internal and external transformations of characters. This motif, whether involving an animal or another being transforming into a human, or a human reverting to human form after being transformed into another entity, adds dramatic tension to the narrative while also enhancing its thematic depth.

Beings that become human typically undergo an emotional or moral development; for example, the transformation of a loyal animal into a human often symbolizes a reward for its loyalty and virtue. Moreover, shapeshifting beings frequently serve to instruct human characters, compelling them to make moral choices between good and evil. In

many narratives, such transformations represent a hero's quest for identity or personal evolution, emphasizing the significance of social values and individual responsibilities.

This motif reflects the Turkish people's understanding of the profound connections between humanity, nature, and the cosmos, and contributes a unique richness to folk narratives.

In the tales examined, the motif of transformation into a human appears in four narratives: transformations from a frog, an orange, a snake, and an unspecified animal into human form.

4.1. *Kurbağa Gelin (The Frog Bride)*

The tale *Kurbağa Gelin* (The Frog Bride), collected from Kalkan-delen (Tetovo), offers a significant example of the transformation motif within Turkish folk literature, particularly from the perspective of transformation into a human. In this story, a magical transformation and the revelation of a hidden identity are central elements.

The narrative can be summarized as follows: A man instructs his three sons to shoot arrows at the palace gate in order to win the hand of the sultan's daughters. The two elder sons succeed, but the youngest fails three times and, as a result, must marry a frog. When the two elder brothers set off to attend a wedding with their brides, the youngest and his frog wife also depart. The elder brothers and their wives ride in golden carriages, while the youngest rides in a muddy cart with the frog. Upon entering the cart, however, the frog transforms into a stunningly beautiful woman. Witnessing this, the onlookers remove the youngest couple from the muddy cart and place them in a golden carriage, while relegating the elder brothers to the muddy one.

Later, the father sets an impossible task for the youngest son: to find a tent large enough to cover the entire world. With his wife's help, he succeeds. Following this trial, the father presents a grim ultimatum, declaring that either the son must kill him, or he will kill the son. Left with no choice, the son kills his father, inherits his estate, and lives happily with his wife.

The frog figure at the beginning of the tale initially represents an entity marginalized and undervalued by society. Over time, the frog's inner strength is revealed, culminating in its transformation into human form, which symbolizes the themes of identity and self-worth. The frog's transformation sends the message that true value lies not in external appearances but in inner virtues and strength. In this tale, the function of the transformation motif goes beyond a mere physical

change; it symbolizes the character's internal maturation and acceptance into society as a fully developed individual. The frog's eventual human form offers not only physical but also moral and social rewards to the hero.

This transformation reflects a common theme in folk narratives: the tension and eventual reconciliation between outward appearance and inner value. Additionally, the transformation serves as a metaphor for rebirth and social acceptance, emphasizing the importance of recognizing true worth beneath superficial judgments (Hafiz, 1989: 207).

4.2. *Portakal Kızı (The Orange Girl)*

Another narrative featuring the motif of transformation is the tale *Portakal Kızı* (The Orange Girl). In this story, the transformation involves the change from a fruit into a human being, highlighting a miraculous birth and a supernatural metamorphosis.

The tale can be summarized as follows: A woman and her husband, unable to have children, pray to God for a child. Their prayers are answered, and the woman gives birth to an orange. Over time, a beautiful young girl grows inside the orange. One day, when the girl emerges from the peel, she is seen by the son of a bey (local ruler). With the help of his mother, the bey's son acquires the orange and places it on a shelf in their home. Whenever the bey's mother and sister attend weddings, the Orange Girl expresses her desire to join them, but each time she is mistreated and prevented from doing so. Nevertheless, she manages to attend the weddings, each time transforming into a beautiful maiden. The bey's mother, unaware of her true identity, eventually proposes her as a bride for her son. Upon realizing the truth, the bey's mother accepts her, and the tale concludes with a joyful wedding.

In *The Orange Girl*, the transformation motif is employed through a direct physical metamorphosis, where the character's identity undergoes a profound change. Initially existing as a fruit, the Orange Girl transforms into a human being as the result of a divine response to a prayer. This supernatural transformation allows her to be recognized and accepted within human society.

The transformation motif in this tale symbolizes not only a physical change but also the broader process of social acceptance and identity formation. Through this transformation, the narrative emphasizes a deep and fundamental development within the character's life. The tale thus highlights transformation as both a literal and metaphorical journey toward self-realization and societal integration (Hafiz, 1989: 208).

4.3. *Kirk Bir Entari (Forty-One Dresses)*

Another narrative that features the motif of transformation into a human is the tale *Kirk Bir Entari* (Forty-One Dresses), collected from Ohrid. This story centers on the revelation of a hidden identity.

The tale can be summarized as follows: A sultan and his wife, unable to have children, one day see a snake and its offspring while on a walk. They declare, 'If only we could have a child, even if it were a snake.' Their wish is granted, and a snake-child is born. As he grows, the snake-child desires to marry. A poor man's daughter is purchased to be his bride. Distraught, the girl is visited by a saintly figure in a dream, who advises her to have forty-one dresses made. On their wedding night, she is to have the snake shed one layer of skin for each dress removed. Following the saint's instructions, the girl succeeds; with each dress, the snake sheds a layer of skin until he finally transforms into a handsome young man. She then burns the discarded skins, declaring, 'A snake cannot live in the palace'.

Later, when the young man travels to a distant land, a deceitful messenger contrives to have his wife expelled. Disguised as a man, the wife journeys to the foreign kingdom, proves her identity through a clever contest, and exposes the messenger's treachery. The story concludes with the husband and wife reunited and justice restored.

The narrative begins with a sultan and his wife who, after fervent prayers, are blessed with a child in the form of a snake. Although the child has the physical appearance of a snake, he possesses human intellect and emotions. This 'animal-form human' motif is common in folk narratives, often symbolizing a test or magical condition. A saintly figure serves as the guiding force in the story, offering critical advice.

The snake's transformation into a human is portrayed through a gradual shedding process involving the removal of forty layers of skin, symbolized by the girl's forty-one dresses. The symbolic use of the numbers forty and forty-one, along with the burning of the snake skins, signifies the irreversible severing of the hero's animalistic past – a common motif in folklore, where destroying an object is necessary to break a spell.

Notably, the transformation is only possible through the intervention of the female character, who is portrayed as intelligent, determined, and courageous. By following the saint's advice, requesting the forty-one dresses, executing the shedding ritual, and destroying the skins, she plays an active, central role in enabling the transformation. In this way,

the female protagonist is not passive but stands as the true catalyst for change within the narrative (Hafiz, 1989: 219-220).

4.4. *Tüvlice Masalı (The Tale of the Furry Creature)*

Another narrative featuring the motif of transformation into a human is the tale *Tüvlice Masalı* (The Tale of the Furry Creature), collected from Üsküp (Skopje). In this tale, the transformation involves a furry, animal-like being (referred to as *tüvlice*, meaning ‘furry’ in Turkish) who ultimately reveals a hidden human identity.

The tale can be summarized as follows: A woman wishes to arrange a marriage for her son, but he prefers hunting and attending nighttime gatherings. One day, during a hunting trip, he captures a mysterious furry creature known as a *Tüvlice*, who is in fact an enchanted girl. Each night, the *Tüvlice* adorns herself in different styles and secretly attends the gatherings, drawing the young man’s attention. When asked where she lives, she enigmatically responds with phrases like ‘where fezzes are worn,’ ‘where sashes are tied,’ and ‘where watches are broken.’ Although the young man’s mother searches for her in these places, she cannot find her. Eventually, the young man falls ill from longing. One day, the *Tüvlice* drops a ring into his soup. Recognizing the ring, the young man summons her. She unveils herself, revealing a beautiful girl, and they marry, celebrating with a wedding that lasts forty days and forty nights.

In this tale, the transformation motif appears through the magical metamorphosis of a furry, undefined creature into a human girl. This repeated transformation highlights the themes of concealed identity, recognition, and ultimate acceptance. The act of dropping a ring into the soup serves as the symbolic catalyst for the full revelation of her true form.

The motif here carries magical, ethical, and symbolic dimensions. Additionally, the motif of the ‘forty days and forty nights’ wedding vividly evokes traditional conceptions of communal celebration within folk culture (Hafiz, 1989: 227-229).

5. Return to Human Form

One of the most striking examples of the transformation motif in folk narratives is the restoration of a character to human form after being transformed into another being. Typically triggered by magic, a curse, or punishment, this transformation is reversed at the end of the tale or legend through the hero’s courage, loyalty, or righteous actions.

Characters who have been turned into stone, animals, or plants are often released from their altered state by means of a miracle, a magical object, or the intervention of a sacred figure.

Thus, the motif of returning to human form not only enhances the dramatic structure of the narrative but also conveys moral or mystical messages. It holds an important place in folk narratives, symbolizing both the realization of justice and the promise of hope and salvation.

As the summaries of the relevant tales have already been provided under earlier sections, they are not repeated here to avoid redundancy. Among the narratives analyzed, five fairy tales feature the motif of return to human form.

5.1. *Haydutlar (The Bandits)*

Among the narratives analyzed, the tale *Haydutlar* (The Bandits), collected from Üsküp (Skopje), features the motif of transformation occurring in a sequence of human–bird–human.

The central transformation theme in the tale unfolds when the stepdaughter is poisoned with a comb and a needle, leading to her death. She is later revived in her coffin, subsequently transforms into a bird, and finally regains her human form. The transformation motif is triggered by the use of magical objects, with the return to human form achieved by discovering and removing the enchanted needle.

Thus, the narrative illustrates how magical objects both facilitate and resolve transformations, linking the motif of metamorphosis to broader themes of death, rebirth, and restoration (Hafiz, 1989: 217–218).

5.2. *Gülperyanım Gülperyanım (My Gülperyan, My Gülperyan)*

In the Turkish narrative tradition from Macedonia, the tale *Gülperyanım Gülperyanım* (My Gülperyan, My Gülperyan), collected from Üsküp (Skopje), prominently features the transformation motif, specifically involving a transition from human to bird form and subsequently back to human form. This motif exemplifies the pattern of magical transformation frequently encountered in Turkish folk narratives.

In the tale, the sultan's lost son intermittently appears in bird form. During these appearances, he temporarily regains his human form to reveal himself to a young girl before reverting to a bird and flying away. A similar pattern occurs at the house of the giant, where he again alternates between bird and human forms.

Although the reason for his initial transformation into a bird is not explained, the narrative follows a classic motif of ritual resolution to end the transformation. His mother binds and burns forty-one pieces of cloth – a magical act traditionally used to reverse transformations. The motif of ‘forty’ and the ‘burning ritual’ are deeply rooted in Turkish folk culture and symbolically serve to restore order.

In *My Gülperryan, My Gülperryan*, the return to human form is achieved through the power of love, loyalty, and ritual, reflecting both the mystical and emotional dimensions central to folk beliefs (Hafiz, 1989: 222-223).

5.4. Humma Kuşu (The Humma Bird)

Another narrative featuring the motif of return to human form is the tale *Humma Kuşu* (The Humma Bird).

In this story, a sequence of transformation occurs: from human to animal, and then back to human. The animal form chosen is a donkey, and the transformation is triggered by the consumption of a magical fig.

At the beginning of the tale, the Humma Bird – a mystical and magical creature rather than an ordinary bird – lays eggs that generate a small fortune for its owner each day. Two children consume parts of the bird: one eats its heart, the other its liver, thereby acquiring supernatural powers. This motif, where eating the heart, liver, or flesh of a magical being grants special abilities, is a common feature in folk narratives.

The transformation motif appears when one of the children mistakenly eats a fig from a magical tree and turns into a donkey. Later, by consuming a different fig from another tree, he regains his human form. This progression demonstrates not only the direct physical aspect of transformation but also the organic, nature-based means of reversing it.

The child uses this knowledge strategically: he transforms the ‘world’s most beautiful girl’ into a donkey as an act of revenge, illustrating how transformation can also serve as an instrument of justice. In the end, he feeds her another magical fig, restoring her human form, and they marry. Thus, the tale concludes with a happy ending (Hafiz, 1989: 225-226).

5.5. Hızırın Kızı (Hızır’s Daughter)

Another narrative featuring the motif of return to human form is the tale *Hızırın Kızı* (Hızır’s Daughter), collected from Gostivar. In this

tale, the transformation involves a progression from human to stone and then back to human form.

The motif of returning to human form is intricately interwoven with classical folk narrative traditions, incorporating themes of magic, moral testing, personal maturation, and the restoration of justice.

In the tale, the young hero sets out to retrieve Hızır’s Daughter. However, upon his arrival, Hızır’s Daughter, displeased by his presence, curses him by declaring, ‘Turn to stone!’ On the first occasion, his horse is turned into stone; on the second, the boy himself is turned to stone up to his waist. Just before a third curse would fully petrify him, he remembers the ‘seal’ left to him by his father. Following his father’s advice – that in times of dire need he should kiss the seal to dispel hardship – he kisses the seal, which breaks the spell.

The act of kissing the seal symbolizes respect for ancestry and the importance of recalling the wisdom of the past. Upon recognizing the boy’s sincerity and true identity, Hızır’s Daughter agrees to fulfill his wishes.

Another magical object featured in the tale is a sherbet. Hızır’s Daughter sprinkles sherbet over those who had previously been turned into stone, restoring them to human form. Even the sultan’s soldiers, who had been petrified earlier, are revived through this act. Thus, the hero is not only able to reclaim his own fate but also acquires the power to alter the destinies of others. In doing so, the narrative symbolizes the achievement of broader social justice (Hafiz, 1989: 254-256).

Table 1: Analysis of Transformation Motifs

Narrative Title and Type	Type of Transformation	Instrument of Transformation	Instrument of Liberation	Reason for Transformation	Description of Transformation
Kör Adam (The Blind Man)	Human → Stone → Human	Forbidden sound	Magical object (ring, handkerchief)	Punishment, spell breaking	Two brothers turn into stone and then return to human form.
Hızır’ın Kızı (Hızır’s Daughter)	Human → Stone → Human	Hızır’s Daughter’s curse	Magical object (seal)	Magic and sorcery	A child is turned into stone and then restored to

					human form.
Haydutlar (The Bandits)	Human → Bird → Human	Step-mother's attack with poisoned needle	Removal of needles	1- Magic and sorcery 2- Magic and sorcery	The girl transforms into a bird and later returns to human form.
Humma Kuşu (The Humma Bird)	Human → Donkey → Human	Eating magical fig	Eating magical fig	1- Magic and sorcery 2- Punishment	A boy and later a girl transform into donkeys, then return to human form.
Yusufcukle Fatmacik (Yusufcuk and Fatmacik)	Human → Deer	Drinking from a magical water source	None	Punishment	Yusuf, ignoring warnings, drinks water and transforms into a deer.
Ağlayan Ayva ile Gülen Nar (The Crying Quince and the Laughing Pomegranate)	Human → Quince and Pomegranate Trees	Supernatural power	None	Punishment	Ayva and Nar, ignoring the miller's warnings, turn into trees.
Kurbağa Gelin (The Frog Bride)	Frog → Human	Magical transformation	None	Reward	A frog suddenly transforms into a beautiful maiden.
Portakal Kızı (The Orange Girl)	Orange → Human	Magical birth and magical resolution	None	Supernatural origin and hidden identity	A child born as an orange emerges as a beautiful girl.
Kırk Bir Entari (Forty-One Dresses)	Snake → Human	Magical birth and spell breaking	None	Supernatural origin and hidden identity	Through a ritual involving forty-one dresses, the snake child

					becomes human.
Gülperyanım Gülperyanım (My Gülp- eryan, My Gülperyan)	Human → Bird → Hu- man	1- Un- known cause 2- Magical ritual	Burning forty-one knotted cloths	1- Disap- pearance 2- Magical love and hidden identity	A lost child transforms into a bird and later re- turns to hu- man form through love.
Tüvlice Ma- salı (The Tale of the Furry Creature)	Furry creature → Hu- man	Magical so- lution, hid- den identity	None	Revelation of hidden identity, love	A magical furry crea- ture is cap- tured and later trans- forms into a beautiful girl, marry- ing the household's young man.

Conclusion

Turkish folk narratives have, for centuries, served as a powerful medium for transmitting the lifestyle, beliefs, value systems, and historical experiences of communities through oral tradition. These narratives are not merely forms of entertainment; they are foundational elements that preserve collective memory, support identity formation, and ensure cultural continuity. Through these narratives, past societal events, heroic deeds, moral lessons, and religious-mythological elements have been embedded into collective consciousness. At the same time, the people's imagination, linguistic richness, and aesthetic sensibilities have been shaped.

This study examines the motifs of transformation identified in Turkish fairy tales collected from Macedonia. A total of twelve tales containing transformation motifs were analyzed. It is evident that the transformation motif significantly enriches the symbolic and psychological depth of the narratives. These transformations often represent the characters' inner development, quests for identity, or turning points in their destiny.

Thus, the examination of the transformation motif is not merely an exploration of a fantastical element but also provides insights into how folk narratives function as vehicles for transmitting cultural and societal values.

Within the scope of the study, the transformation motifs found in Turkish folk tales from Macedonia were categorized under five main headings: transformation into stone, animal, plant, human, and the return to human form.

The motif of transformation into stone, encountered in two tales, emerges as a significant narrative tool for emphasizing the preservation of individual and communal values.

The motif of transformation into an animal appears in four narratives. This transformation typically occurs when characters violate social norms, break taboos, or undergo certain trials. Transformation into an animal sometimes serves as a form of punishment and, at other times, as a means of protection. Additionally, it reinforces the protagonist's dramatic journey and symbolizes their inner evolution.

The motif of transformation into a plant holds an important place in Turkish folk narratives from Macedonia. Often resulting from extraordinary events linked to punishment, reward, or magical influence, this motif highlights the deep connection between humans and nature. In the single analyzed tale involving plant transformation, the change functions as a moral sanction directly related to the character's choices and actions.

The motif of transformation into a human is found in four tales and typically involves the revelation of a hidden identity, symbolizing a process of self-discovery. This motif reflects the character's inner transformation, quest for identity, and journey toward self-realization.

The motif of return to human form represents a crucial phase in the transformation process in folk narratives. Typically arising from spells, curses, or punishments, these transformations are resolved through the hero's courage, loyalty, or righteous actions. Characters turned into stone, animals, or plants are often restored to human form through miraculous interventions, magical objects, or sacred figures.

Thus, the motif of returning to human form holds an important place as a symbol of justice and salvation in folk narratives.

In the Turkish folk tales from Macedonia analyzed, the motif of return to human form is observed in five tales, each depicting a process of transformation and redemption. This aspect of the transformation motif not only restores the characters' physical existence but also enhances the symbolic messages and universal themes conveyed within the narratives.

It is hoped that this study will contribute to the deeper understanding of transformation motifs in Turkish folk narratives and promote a

broader appreciation of folk culture. Furthermore, it is believed that the preservation and transmission of folk literature will play an essential role in safeguarding cultural heritage for future generations. It is our hope that such research will inspire more comprehensive studies, helping the profound meanings embedded in folk narratives reach a wider audience.

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