

MYTHOLOGICAL SYMBOLS IN NATIONAL LITERATURE: GREECE AND
UZBEKISTAN

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This paper explores how mythological images and symbols function in the literary traditions of Greece and Uzbekistan. The study analyzes similarities and differences between these traditions, emphasizing how myths express each nation's worldview and values. Both cultures use symbolic storytelling to connect humanity with nature and the divine, though their interpretations differ according to historical and religious contexts. The paper concludes that mythological symbols remain a vital part of national identity, preserving the collective memory and spiritual heritage of each culture.

Introduction

Mythological symbols have always played a fundamental role in shaping the literature, philosophy, and worldview of nations. They serve not only as artistic expressions but also as carriers of deep cultural meanings, values, and traditions. Myths are more than ancient stories; they reflect humanity's attempts to explain the universe, human emotions, and moral

principles through symbolic narratives. Across different civilizations, mythology has provided a foundation for understanding life, death, and the relationship between human beings and divine forces¹⁵. Greek and Uzbek literary traditions represent two distinct yet fascinating worlds of mythology. Greek mythology, with its pantheon of gods and heroes, embodies the intellectual and artistic achievements of Western civilization. In contrast, Uzbek mythology is deeply connected with Eastern spirituality, folk wisdom, and ethical values derived from centuries of oral storytelling and poetic expression. Both cultures employ mythological symbols to illustrate their moral ideals, national identity, and spiritual beliefs, though they do so in unique ways.

The aim of this paper is to explore and compare the symbolic role of mythological imagery in the national literature of Greece and Uzbekistan. It seeks to identify how these myths reflect the social, cultural, and spiritual dimensions of each nation's worldview. The study also examines how mythological symbols continue to influence literary creativity and cultural identity in modern times. Through this comparative analysis, the research highlights the universal power of mythological symbolism as a bridge between the past and the present, uniting different cultures through shared human imagination. The concepts of myth and symbol are deeply interconnected and essential to understanding the foundations of national literature. A myth can be defined as a traditional narrative that explains natural or social phenomena through the actions of gods, heroes, or supernatural beings. Myths serve as a reflection of collective consciousness, illustrating the beliefs, fears, and aspirations of a society. They are not merely fictional tales but complex systems of meaning that preserve historical memory and shape cultural identity.

A symbol, in turn, is a linguistic or visual representation that conveys ideas or emotions beyond its literal meaning. In literature, symbols function as bridges between the visible and invisible worlds, allowing authors to express abstract concepts such as justice, love, or destiny through tangible forms. Mythological symbols, therefore, embody both cultural and philosophical dimensions — they carry messages that transcend time and geography.¹⁶ In Greek mythology, symbols often originate from natural phenomena and human emotions, reflecting an anthropocentric worldview. The thunderbolt of Zeus, the owl of Athena, and the sea trident of Poseidon are more than attributes — they represent universal human experiences such as power, wisdom, and unpredictability. In contrast, in Eastern traditions

¹⁵ Calame, C. (2009). Greek mythology: Poetics, pragmatics and fiction (J. Lloyd, Trans.).

¹⁶ Woodard, R. D. (Ed.). (2007). The Cambridge companion to Greek mythology.

such as Uzbek folklore, mythological symbols tend to be spiritually oriented and connected with moral purity, harmony, and divine guidance.

Greek literature represents one of the richest sources of mythological symbolism in the world. Ancient Greek myths have deeply influenced Western culture, art, and philosophy, serving as a foundation for the moral and aesthetic ideals of European civilization. The Greeks viewed their gods and heroes not only as divine beings but also as reflections of human virtues, weaknesses, and passions. Through these mythological figures, Greek writers and poets expressed universal ideas about power, wisdom, justice, and fate. One of the central symbols in Greek mythology is Zeus, the king of the gods, who represents authority, justice, and cosmic order. His thunderbolt symbolizes both the destructive and creative power of nature — a reminder of the gods' control over human destiny.¹⁷ Athena, the goddess of wisdom and war strategy, symbolizes intelligence, rationality, and civic responsibility. Her sacred animal, the owl, became an enduring symbol of knowledge and philosophical insight, often appearing in Greek art and literature. Similarly, Aphrodite, the goddess of love and beauty, embodies the eternal power of desire and harmony, representing the connection between human emotion and divine inspiration. The myth of Prometheus is another profound example of Greek symbolic thinking. Prometheus, who stole fire from the gods to give it to humanity, symbolizes human courage, creativity, and the pursuit of knowledge. His suffering as punishment for this act reflects the moral complexity of human progress and the price of enlightenment. Likewise, Hercules (Heracles), the hero of twelve labors, stands as a symbol of strength, endurance, and redemption through struggle. His victories over monsters and chaos represent the human battle against inner and outer evil. Natural elements also play a symbolic role in Greek literature. The sea, governed by Poseidon, symbolizes unpredictability and emotional depth, while the sun, associated with Apollo, embodies light, reason, and artistic creation. The sacred mountain Olympus, the home of the gods, represents divine perfection and spiritual elevation — a symbol of humanity's aspiration toward the divine ideal.

Greek playwrights and poets such as Homer, Hesiod, Aeschylus, and Sophocles used these symbols not only to entertain but also to educate. In *The Iliad* and *The Odyssey*, mythological motifs illustrate the values of bravery, loyalty, and honor. In the tragedies of *Oedipus Rex* or *Prometheus Bound*, mythological symbols are used to explore fate, guilt,

¹⁷ Leeming, D. (2005). *The Oxford companion to world mythology*.

and the limits of human knowledge. These works show that Greek mythology was not just a collection of stories but a philosophical system that explored the meaning of life, morality, and existence.¹⁸

Uzbek literature, with its deep historical and cultural roots, is rich in mythological imagery that reflects the spiritual, moral, and social worldview of the nation. Unlike Greek mythology, which is largely anthropocentric and based on the actions of gods resembling humans, Uzbek mythological tradition is closely tied to nature, spirituality, and ethical ideals. The myths, legends, and dastans (epic poems) of the Uzbek people preserve centuries-old wisdom, moral lessons, and symbolic representations of the struggle between good and evil.¹⁹ These symbols reveal the moral strength, patience, and unity of the Uzbek people. One of the most powerful mythological symbols in Uzbek literature is the Simurgh (Semurg‘) — a legendary bird found in Persian and Central Asian mythology. The Simurgh symbolizes divine wisdom, purity, and spiritual rebirth. It is believed to possess healing powers and represents the connection between the earthly and heavenly realms. In Sufi philosophy, which deeply influenced Uzbek thought and poetry, the flight of the Simurgh symbolizes the soul’s journey toward divine truth and enlightenment. This image appears not only in oral traditions but also in classical Uzbek poetry, where it serves as a metaphor for self-discovery and spiritual awakening. Another significant symbol is Alpomish, the heroic protagonist of the national epic of the same name. Alpomish represents bravery, loyalty, justice, and the protection of one’s homeland and family. His heroic deeds reflect the collective ideals of courage and moral strength valued in Uzbek culture. The figure of Alpomish also symbolizes the unity of the nation and the eternal struggle for freedom, a theme that resonates with the historical experience of the Uzbek people. Equally important is the image of the Khumo bird, often associated with happiness, luck, and divine blessing. In many Uzbek tales, the Khumo chooses a person to bestow prosperity and honor, symbolizing destiny and divine favor. Its symbolism is closely connected with hope, freedom, and good fortune — values that continue to hold meaning in contemporary Uzbek literature and art. Nature itself serves as a symbolic element in Uzbek mythology. The sun represents life, warmth, and divine presence, while water symbolizes purity, fertility, and the continuous renewal of life. Mountains and deserts, frequently mentioned in Uzbek dastans, stand as metaphors for endurance, patience, and the eternal bond between humans

¹⁸ Nayernouri, T. (2010). The Simurgh as a medical symbol for Iran.

¹⁹ Nabavi Nejad, B. (2017). The Simurgh: Representations and meaning in Persian literature.

and their homeland. These natural elements embody the Uzbek people's respect for harmony between humanity and the environment — a central aspect of their worldview. In many classical works, including those of poets such as Alisher Navoi, mythological symbolism is used to express ethical and spiritual ideas. Navoi's mystical poetry employs symbols of birds, light, and divine love to illustrate the human soul's longing for perfection and union with the Creator. This integration of myth and spirituality demonstrates how deeply rooted symbolic thinking is in the Uzbek literary tradition.²⁰

The mythological traditions of Greece and Uzbekistan reveal both profound similarities and striking differences in their use of symbolic imagery. In both cultures, myths serve as a means of expressing moral values, human experiences, and the connection between the visible and invisible worlds. However, the ways in which these symbols function and the ideas they communicate differ according to historical, religious, and philosophical contexts.

Greek mythology is primarily anthropocentric. Its gods and heroes possess human characteristics — emotions, flaws, and ambitions — which make them relatable yet divine. The symbols of Zeus's thunderbolt, Athena's owl, and Prometheus's fire reflect a civilization that values intellect, justice, and the pursuit of knowledge. The Greek worldview emphasizes the human struggle for excellence (arete), wisdom, and self-realization within a rational, ordered universe. Mythological symbols in Greek literature thus represent human potential and the quest for harmony between man and fate.

Uzbek mythology, in contrast, embodies a spiritual and ethical worldview rooted in harmony with nature and divine order. The symbols of the Simurgh, Alpomish, and Khumo are not simply heroic or aesthetic but moral and transcendental. They express ideals of purity, faith, patience, and devotion to higher truth. Unlike Greek myths, which often explore the tension between humans and gods, Uzbek myths emphasize unity, spiritual balance, and the triumph of moral goodness over evil.²²

Another important distinction lies in the function of mythological narratives. Greek mythology sought to explain natural phenomena and human psychology through personification, while Uzbek mythology aimed to preserve communal wisdom and moral guidance through allegory. Despite these differences, both traditions demonstrate that mythology serves as a universal language of symbols — one that unites societies across

²⁰ Turdimov, S. (2021). The epic "Alpomish" by Fozil Yuldash oglu and the works of Hamid Olimjon.

²¹ Khayitov, K. A. (2020). Symbolism of birds in Uzbek literature.

²² Kushkarbekova, M. U. (2021). The image of magical birds in Alisher Navoiy's works.

time and geography by addressing fundamental questions of existence, morality, and identity. Ultimately, the comparison reveals that mythological symbols, whether Western or Eastern, express the timeless human desire to understand the world and define one's place within it. The Greek tradition focuses on intellectual discovery and heroic individuality, whereas the Uzbek tradition highlights inner harmony and moral purity. Together, they demonstrate two complementary dimensions of human civilization: reason and faith, courage and humility, material and spiritual values.

Conclusion

Mythological symbols are the foundation upon which the cultural and literary heritage of nations is built. Both Greek and Uzbek literatures show how myths transcend mere storytelling to become powerful vehicles of moral, philosophical, and aesthetic meaning. Through divine figures, heroic narratives, and natural imagery, these two traditions express humanity's eternal search for truth, beauty, and harmony. The comparative study of Greek and Uzbek mythological symbols illustrates the universality of symbolic thinking. Despite differences in geography, history, and religion, both cultures use myth to explore the same essential questions: What is the nature of good and evil? What is the purpose of human existence? How can one achieve balance between the earthly and the divine? These questions are answered differently, yet both traditions affirm the same human longing for wisdom and transcendence. In Greek literature, mythological symbols emphasize human intellect and the heroic pursuit of excellence. In Uzbek literature, they reflect spiritual integrity, collective unity, and moral virtue. Together, they enrich world literature by offering two complementary visions of humanity — one rooted in rational thought, the other in spiritual faith.

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