



Function and Meaning in the Costumes of Altai and Siberian Shamans

Altay ve Sibirya Şamanlarının Kostümlerinde
İşlev ve Anlam

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Abstract

It is known that especially in the Altai Shamanism tradition, shamans wear costumes consisting of their own complex symbols and colors. These special costumes are designed in a way to represent holiness and a religious cosmography. In addition to these special costumes designed to be used in ceremonies and celebrations in the Altai Shamanism belief, it is known that drums, tambourines, headdresses and masks are also adorned with symbols in a unique way. Shamans do not have the right to choose these costumes

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and other items of their own free will. These costumes and items are selected and given meaning by the guidance of the spirits in whose service they are. In fact, all the details, including the symbols on the costumes and items, are shaped through the direction of the spirits. Otherwise, it is a common belief among Shamans that if the demands of the spirits are not met, many things - especially the ritual to be performed - will not go well. The costume that Shamans use especially in rituals is called "manyak". In order to use this costume, the person must have Shamanic characteristics. The main part of this specially designed costume called manyak is a jacket made of deer and white sheepskin. The remaining symbols and pieces find their place on this jacket. Each symbol and piece here represents the elements in the spirit world. When we look at the costumes of Altai Shamans in general, it is possible to see that nine small puppets are lined up on the collar of their robes. Again, the small springs, rattles and other metal items on the robes are used as weapons in the fight against evil spirits. In addition, the animal symbols attached to the robe serve a defensive function to protect against evil spirits. In this context, the article will emphasize the functions of the costumes used by Altai and Siberian Shamans and the meanings of the symbols in these costumes.

Keywords: *Shaman costumes, Altai and Siberian Shamans, symbols of costumes, functions of costumes*

Öz

Özellikle Altay Şamanizm geleneğinde Şamanların kendine has komplike simge ve renklerden oluşan kostümler kullandıkları bilinmektedir. Bu özel kostümler bir yönüyle kutsallığın ve dinsel bir kozmografyanın resmedilmesi şeklinde tasarlanmışlardır. Altay Şamanizm inancında tören ve kutlamalarda kullanılmak üzere tasarlanmış bu özel kostümlerin yanı sıra davul, tef, başlık ve maskelerin de kendine has bir biçimde sembollerle bezendiği bilinmektedir. Şamanlar bu kostümleri ve diğer eşyalarını kendi iradesiyle seçme hakkına sahip değildir. Hizmetlerinde buldukları ruhların yönlendirmesiyle bu kostüm ve eşyalar seçilir ve anlamlandırılır. Öyle ki, kullanılan kostüm ve eşyaların üzerindeki simgeler de dahil olmak üzere tüm detayların nasıl şekillendirileceği ruhların yönlendirilmesi ile vücut bulmaktadır. Aksi takdirde ruhların talepleri yerine getirilmezse, yapılacak ayin başta olmak üzere, birçok işin yolunda gitmeyeceği Şamanlar arasında yaygın bir inançtır. Şamanların özellikle ayinlerde kullandıkları kostüme "manyak" adı verilmektedir. Bu kostümü kullanabilmesi için kişinin Şamanik özelliklere sahip olması gerekir. Manyak denilen bu özel tasarım kostümün ana bölümünü maral ve beyaz koyun derisinden yapılan bir ceket oluşturmaktadır.

Geriye kalan diğer sembol ve parçalar bu ceket üzerinde kendine yer bulur. Buradaki her sembol ve parça ruhlar alemindeki unsurları temsil etmektedir. Altay Şamanlarının kostümlerine genel olarak bakıldığında cübbelerinin yakasında dokuz küçük kuklanın sıralandığını görmek mümkündür. Yine cübbe üzerindeki küçük yaylar, çingiraklar ve diğer metal eşyalar kötü ruhlarla yapılacak savaşta silah olarak kullanılmaktadır. Ayrıca cübbeye iliştirilmiş hayvan sembolleri de kötü ruhlardan korunmak için savunma işlevi görmektedir.

Anahtar sözcükler: *Şaman kostümleri, Altay ve Sibiry Şamanları, kostümlerin simgeleri, kostümlerin işlevleri*

Introduction

Clothing, as the visual language of societies, plays a very important role in reflecting the common universal thoughts of societies with different cultures, lifestyles and values. Clothing culture, as a medium that illuminates all historical periods and carries the traces of the past to the present, exists as one of the most important needs of humanity in this context.

It is possible to find at least some of the cultural codes that Central Asian Turkish communities have created throughout history in the oldest beliefs and myths of these communities. One of these belief systems is Shamanism. Shamanism can be described as a nature-based belief system that the common cultural values of Central Asian Turkish Communities. Shamanism has been addressed and examined by cultural researchers under different statuses and functions such as culture, lifestyle, belief, religion, and trance techniques.

Ethnographic, folkloric and archaeological studies show that the most primitive religions can be evaluated within and evidence of Shamanism has been encountered since the Paleolithic Age (Winkelman, 2015: 331; İnan, 2000: 396). For the native Turkish people of Siberia, who regard Shamanism as a determinant of religious identity, Shamanism is, first and foremost, a religion or, in other words, a belief system (Krippner, 2004: 204; Davletov, 2017: 16). According to a current ethnological trend, Perrin (2001: 9) described Shamanism as a social phenomenon that concerns the entire society and its institutions. At the same time, it is both a religious and symbolic, economic, political and aesthetic phenomenon.

The essence and foundation of the Shamanic system lie the cosmic meanings and functions of the body. Through symbolic actions and physical acts representing the initiation of death and resurrection, the shaman, who experiences the feeling of being reborn, can be either male or female. Shamans have cosmic powers and abilities such as being able to ascend to the sky, descend to the underground, and thus establish a bridge between this world and the other world and act as interpreters, by separating their souls from their bodies in high pleasure excitement and ecstasy.

In this respect, they are not just any individuals of the society, but individuals who are chosen and hold a special status (Harvey, 2003; Giles, 2004; Kafesoğlu, 2003: 300; Kılıç, 2010: 316).

The Siberian region, which lies within the borders of the former Soviet Union and now Russia, preserves significant data on Shamanism from the past to the present. Classical literature on Turkish Shamanism has mostly focused on Siberia. It is known that Shamans, who exist in many countries of the world, are also concentrated in North and South America, Australia, Indonesia, South-East Asia, China, Tibet and Japan. In addition to the differences between countries and regions in the Shamanic practices, there are also differences among different peoples of the same region. As in the different communities of the Shamans of the Altai and Siberian regions, which define the boundaries of this study, there are some differences in the interpretations of costume forms, functions and meanings. The symbols of the costumes, masks, drums and materials, which are the material culture of the Shamans, have functional duties and codes related to these duties. They have come from the cults of the earth-sky-underworld elements, animal mother, assistant and protective spirits, sun, moon and stars, beech tree and nature spirits. The symbols found in the costumes and other materials are completely for the requirements of religious ceremonies. For this reason, the costumes and materials of the Shamans in the material culture have a special importance and duty. These duties constitute the codes of the symbols. Shamans, who have an important place in the belief worlds and lives of Turkish communities, represent an archaic, religious-mystical-magical authority type (Güngör, 2000: 265; Fitch, 2006: 197; Kılıç, 2010: 315; Direnkova, 2014; Alp and Mutlu, 2021: 1026).

When Shamanic clothing are generally evaluated, they differ according to their rank. A new Shaman wears a forehead tie or eye mask, a sash and a short shawl-type scarf. As their degrees and levels increase, the clothes and accessories change. However, the degree and level do not necessarily change over time. In some cases, the Shaman's rank and status, and therefore his clothes, remain the same until he dies. When the degree increases, the old clothes lose their meaning. The decision to continue using the old ones is not made by the Shaman themselves, and after the decision is made by the higher-degree Shamans, the old ones are taken away and replaced with new ones. In some societies, no Shaman has higher-ranking clothing.



Figure 1. 1-2 Left and right: Front and back of a Shaman costume from the region along Lake Baikal. The fabric is cut to a length and lined with reindeer skin. Far Right: Template showing the cut shape of the Shaman's coat. The armpits are not joined, the coat is worn like a poncho (SH, 2010: 28).

One of the important features of Turkish Shamanic clothing is that there is little difference between the clothes of male and female Shamans except for the ornamental elements on them. These ornamental elements are sometimes braids, bead necklaces or headdresses specific to women. There are clothes that Turkish Shamans generally must have. A robe with iron plates and figures representing mythological animals, an iron or copper breastplate, a handkerchief that can cover his eyes so that he can go to the spirit world with his own inner light, a rattlesnake shoulder scarf, a headdress made of scalp including the horns of the animal, shoes with animal claws, and gloves with either two or five fingers. These are the necessary additions to a Shaman's clothing, but having some excess or deficiency in the additions does not pose a problem for the meaning and function of the clothing. Daily clothes and special clothes of the Shaman are different from each other in almost all the peoples of Siberia. Although there are some differences between tribes, it is always necessary to look for the measure of the power of Shamanism in the richness and coherence of the clothing (Holmberg, 1922: 8-11; Gürcan, 2018; Kılıç, 2010: 315-330).

The Shaman's clothing also has the quality of a badge that separates her-his from other members of society. This is an extension of their isolated life and isolation from society. When interpreting a Shaman's clothing, it is necessary to evaluate its large parts rather than its small parts. Shaman clothing can vary in order to functionally adapt to the environment in which it is worn. Clothing used in times of war means protective armor. For this reason, there are war symbols such as swords on the headgear; arrows or bows on the robe. Shamanic clothing is a sacred cult item that is passed down either by inheritance from father to son or by the method of summoning. Naturally, the storage and protection of the Shaman clothing, which is considered sacred, brings with it certain prohibitions and rules. The Shaman protects his clothing from all kinds of harm and damage with great care during the period he uses it. Because if the clothing is damaged for any reason, the Shaman who owns the clothing will face illness or death. The clothing is stored in a special section of the shelter and all necessary precautions are taken to prevent children from reaching it. Otherwise, it is thought that their magic, power and strength-giving supernatural properties will be lost. In cases where a Shaman leaves Shamanism due to compelling reasons such as death, old age or illness, his clothes, which are considered cult items, are either placed in the grave with him or abandoned on a tree in the forest. In addition to these meanings of the costumes, the symbols used also have a special importance. As in all Shaman communities, one of the most common types of symbolism in Siberian Turkish Shaman communities is bird symbolism and the other is skeleton symbolism.

Bird motif: It is one of the most used, utilized and symbolic motifs in Shaman costumes and drums. One of the regions that benefit the most from bird motifs is Siberian Turkish Shamans. One of the most characteristic aspects of Siberian Turkish Shamans is the bird depictions that dominate the entirety of the clothing.

Skeleton motif: The skeletal depictions on the Shaman's clothing are related to the initiation of death and resurrection. The skeleton on the Shaman's clothing is the re-updating of the drama of initiation into the secret, that is, the initiation of death and resurrection. Sometimes it represents a human and sometimes an animal skeleton. In both cases, what is

actually represented is the life essence or raw material protected by mythological ancestors. The human skeleton serves as the most archaic model of the Shaman. The concept of root family or lineage is expressed with the terms “bone”. The source of the bird skeleton depiction is related to the myth that the first Shaman was formed from the union of an eagle and a woman. In addition, in order to gain the ability to fly like a bird, he needs to carry its skeleton on his body and achieve cosmic integrity with it (Eliade, 2006: 188-190; Bayat, 2006: 22-23).

Shamanism, which was originally seen in the Asian and Siberian regions, still exists in many parts of the world today. In this context, the clothes and costumes belonging to the Shamans who adopted the Shaman belief system in the past and today in the Asian and Siberian regions are very important. In this respect, the study is extremely important in order to make an evaluation and analysis specifically on the functions and meanings of the Altai and Siberian Shaman costumes. At the same time, this study, which aims to reach the meaning codes of the Shaman symbolic elements by going from their functional roles, tries to put forward a perspective that prioritizes the function in reading the codes of some Shaman symbols and reaches the meaning from there.

Method

The clothing tradition, which has undergone a significant transformation through cultural change and development, awaits further research in terms of its objects, clothing tradition, production methods, patterns, colors, formation and aesthetic dimensions, and functions and meanings. In this context, the functions and meanings of Shamanic clothing are a subject worth investigating. In the study, the Altai and Siberian Shaman costumes and accessories preserved in museum collections were examined. The clothes and accessories belonging to Shamans were discussed in terms of function and meaning.

In this context, the works in the Museum of History and Culture of Peoples of Siberia and Russian Far East in Novosibirsk were examined. The Museum of History and Culture of Peoples of Siberia and Russian Far East was established in 1970 with a total area of 150 square meters, expanded in the 1980s and began to occupy an area of 380 square meters, and is currently on its way to becoming a rich museum with an area of 500 square meters. This museum is an extremely important museum in terms of exhibiting the latest archaeological, ethnographic and archaeographic findings and helping to popularize scientific knowledge about the ancient Siberian people and their rich culture. This museum, established in Novosibirsk, hosts an impressive heritage consisting of numerous Shaman costumes and accessories. Among these heritage objects in the museum, Shaman costumes and accessories stand out in terms of color, pattern, ornamentation and motifs.

In this context, the rich heritage of this museum located in Novosibirsk, the capital of the Siberian Federal District and the most populous city in Siberia and the third largest city in all of Russia according to the 2018 census, was a factor in our decision to work here. In this study, the Altai and Siberian Shaman costumes in the museum were examined in terms of function and meaning. This study, which was carried out to detail the meaning and function of Shaman costumes as presented in ethnological and anthropological studies, aims to highlight the importance of the functions and meanings of Shaman costumes.

Analysis of Shamans costumes- In terms of function and meaning

Shamans used elaborate costumes and ritual tools. Each costume and object (such as a drum, a crown, a round bronze mirror) (Figure 2-3) had defined symbolic meanings. These objects also served as markers of the classification of some Shamans and Shaman women. Symbols held significant importance to the community as they show where the Shaman who conducts the ceremony stands in the hierarchy among local Shamans. Thus, questions such as the power of the Shaman, whether he is a chosen Shaman, and what his area of expertise is are answered. In other words, the material culture of Shamans expresses many things. At the same time, the Shamans' equipment (such as clothes, drums, Shaman trees) served as mediums for the depiction of their mythological and worldly images.



Figure 2: General View from the Museum - Museum of History and Culture of Peoples of Siberia and Russian Far East (Photographed by the Z. Bayraktar. 09.07.2024)



Figure 3: General View from the Museum - Museum of History and Culture of Peoples of Siberia and Russian Far East (Photographed by the Z. Bayraktar. 09.07.2024)



Figure 4: Examples of Shamans Costumes - 1 (Photographed by the Z. Bayraktar. 09.07.2024)

One of the most significant of a Shaman's unique equipment is the dress. The shape of the dress reflects the Shaman's auxiliary spirit animal. Among these, it is possible to distinguish Shamanic clothing bearing the symbols of deer, bear and bird. The idea that the Altai Shaman costumes symbolize birds is related to the ribbons and strings on the costumes (Potapov, 2012: 264). These are the symbols of the Shaman's auxiliary spirit animals; therefore these animal skins are used in his work clothes.

In the example shown in Figure 4, the Shamanic motifs on the piece of sailor clothing belonging to the Siberian Region are considered protective motifs and are believed to protect sailors from evil spirits.

As Hoppal (2012-2013) also stated in his study, the Finnish researcher Uno Holmberg photographed a couple of Shamans in the early 1910s. The dress of the Shaman in these photographs is reinforced with iron ornaments and symbolizes the skeleton of a fishman. The Shaman can dive underwater with this dress.

At the beginning of the 20th century, researchers drew attention to the presence of skeletal ornaments on the clothing of Siberian Shamans. The skeletal clothes of the Shamans show the power of the belief in rebirth. The skeletal state symbolically represents a return to the state before birth, while the movement of the bones represents complete revival or rebirth.

Shaman clothes are an indispensable element of Shaman ceremonies, with each piece carrying a symbolic meaning and especially strengthened during the use of skeletons. Here, the bone represents a tribe or a community that will accompany the Shaman during his journey to the other world. For this reason, the Shaman dress is never buried with the dead, but is inherited from a grandchild. These data reinforce the idea that the Shaman does not have any

power without a special dress, and that with a special dress he becomes the representative of the community. Simply put, ‘the dress creates the Shaman’.

As Hoppal (2012: 213) states, it can be said that all the symbols of the ritual dresses of Siberian Shamans are inspired by a cosmogonic view that responds to the Shamanist’s world picture. In short, the ritual dress of the Shaman symbolizes universality. The spine, which extends along the back of the dress, can be explained as representing the position of the world during its rotation on its own axis. The decorations on the head represent the upper world, those on the dress represent the middle world, and those on the legs represent the lower world.



Figure 5: Examples of Shamans Costumes and Accessories - 2 (Photographed by the Z. Bayraktar. 09.07.2024)

There is also a strong bond between blacksmiths and Shamans. Turks believe that a person whose nine ancestors were blacksmiths can become a Shaman, Tuvans call those who are both Shamans and blacksmiths “tsarin”. According to Yakut Turks, a blacksmith from the ninth generation has supernatural powers. For this reason, only they can forge the iron objects on the Shaman’s clothing on the anvil. The piece in Figure 5 (top right) is a piece of clothing made of iron.

Some Shamanist Turkish communities believe that blacksmiths and Shamans come from the same home. According to the belief, Shaman candidates must undergo a spiritual

disintegration and be re-completed. Blacksmiths and iron tools are important in this process.

Many elements related to iron can be found in the Shamanist beliefs and rituals of the Altai Turks. Most of the ceremonies and rituals were performed while the iron was being melted, cast or forged. In addition, gold was also used in Altai ceremonies in addition to iron (Radlof, 2008).

Siberian Shaman costumes are also arranged with round objects made of iron and a breastplate made of iron or copper. An iron chain is hung on the back of the costume to represent the Shaman's strength and durability (Eliade, 2000). Altai Shamans often have the symbols of "nine arrows" and "bows" embroidered on their shoulders; these are "things handed down from God". It is believed that Shamans fly by riding on these arrows. Blacksmiths make the iron in the Shaman's costume and it is said that they drive away evil spirits while forging iron. Shamans sometimes hide their faces with metal masks during rituals in order not to be recognized by evil spirits (Tryjarski, 2012: 242).

In rituals related to Shamanism, iron objects and tools are mostly used to protect against evil spirits. Therefore, Shamans light fires on swords and dance with these swords.

The fact that the role of iron objects is so emphasized is definitely related to the Shamans' close relationship with the blacksmithing profession.



Figure 6: Examples of Shamans Costumes and Accessories - 3 (Photographed by the Z. Bayraktar. 09.07.2024)

There are also iron pieces and plates that serve as rattles in objects such as drums and staffs that the Shaman uses during rituals. Generally, there are nine iron pieces hanging from the right side of the iron beam of the Shaman drum, five on the left side and four on the right side, each 9-10 cm long. Hanging metal, mineral or iron elements that allow the Shaman to see the other world allows him to see the universe more clearly. Shamans are required to organize and perform ceremonies/rituals in accordance with the traditions, customs and laws of Shamanism of the society they are in (Eliade, 1999: 292). The Shaman needs materials considered sacred to perform all these rituals. First of all, there is a headdress specially prepared to help him organize all kinds of rituals (Figure 5-6). These headdresses are ceremonial materials with talismanic pendants and metal elements hung on them, animal furs and bird feathers (Price, 2001: 5). Although Shaman headdresses are unique to each Shaman and vary depending on the community, the Shaman's experience and the type of ritual performed, they have some common features because they are prepared within the framework of a certain discipline.

The most important part of the specially prepared Altai Shaman costume is the headdress. This headdress can be prepared in several different ways. The most commonly used one is half a meter long, made of Siberian deer calf or lynx skin and is square in shape. In later periods, red fabrics were used. Strips were sewn onto the headdress to divide it into three parts and decorated with seashells. Numerous bird feathers (mostly eagle owl, owl and eagle) were added to the headdress (Prokofyeva, 1971: 62-63). In the light of all this information, it is possible to say how important the costume and accessories were for the Shamans.

Conclusion

Data on the Shamanism belief and rituals, which reflect one of the oldest forms of belief in the world and have been of interest not only to anthropology and ethnography but also to archaeology in recent times, are known from both hunter-gatherer communities and small-scale agricultural societies. There is no doubt that the existence of Shamanism belief in early societies is closely related to symbolism. As Hoppal (2012: 19) states, some elements of culture quickly lose their influence and give way to other motifs. In particular, objects used by human beings should be considered within this scope. However, some motifs that form our emotional culture, as we can feel intensely, are subject to much slower change, defy time, and preserve their content more brilliantly under great pressure, like diamonds. In this context, Shamanism has preserved its structure in exactly the same way.

The social performance of the main cults that constitute the Shaman culture is carried out through rituals. These main cults that constitute the Shaman culture, the structures of the cults that turn into rituals, and the material and spiritual products used in rituals constitute a large symbol family. However, these symbols at each stage are not in a pure form-meaning relationship, but are fundamentally functional symbols. In other words, they are necessary for the continuation of social life. It is recorded that the costumes of Shamans are the special costumes of all religions that have existed from the prehistoric period to the present day and of the clergy who are their representatives. The costumes of Shamans are defined as religious microcosms. On the other hand, it can be said that they are equipped with spiritual powers, that is, spirits, due to their sanctity, as well as forming a symbolic system. The symbols found in costumes and other materials are completely functional for what needs to be done

in religious ceremonies. Therefore, the costumes and materials of the Shamans in their material culture have a special importance and duty. These functions constitute the codes of the symbols. The materials used in the costumes of the Shamans are extremely important and striking. It is seen that deer and cattle, and to a lesser extent bear furs are generally used in the costumes. Altai Shamans generally prefer lamb and foal furs. The characteristic features of the costumes are reflected by designing the fur part on the inside and the leather part on the outside. The costumes of the Shamans generally reflect that the characteristic features of the Shamans have carried their personalities to the other world. The clothes of the Shamans include symbols of the upper and lower worlds, animal and bird furs, bells that act as armor provided by the God. As Anohin (2006: 45-47) states, there are arrows and bows drawn by the God, iron plates representing the sun and the moon, and distinctive buckles. The symbols in the culture of Shamans mean reaching the secrets that create that culture. The functional tasks of the symbols in the costumes, masks, drums and materials that are the material culture of Shamans and the codes related to these tasks are extremely important in this respect.

The cults that constitute the culture of Shamans represent the changing characteristics with religious ceremonies and the symbolic structure of spiritual and material products used in religious ceremonies. These symbols do not have a purely formal-meaning relationship. They are only fundamentally functional symbols. They are necessary for the continuation of the social structure. Clothing generally constitutes the cultural structure of every nation. The mythology of the society has shed light on the deep traces of the history that has been transformed by gaining perspective with the symbols of the Sufi and mystical universe of Shamans.

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