

Hoopoe in Persian Literature and Myths

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ABSTRACT

Hoopoe has important status in Persian literature. In mystical texts such as Logic of Birds by Attar this bird appears as a guide that directs the mystics toward God. What is the reason for the great mystics in selection of hoopoe as a symbol of guide?, Does hoopoe play an important role in Quran in the story of Solomon? Why In Quran hoopoe is commissioned to great duty?, Are there any birds in the myths and cultures have commission like hoopoe? This paper tries to answer above mentioned questions.

Key words: hoopoe, myths, Persian literature, Attar's Logic of Birds, Solomon

Received 10/04/2013

Revised 02/05/2014

Accepted 29/05/2014

INTRODUCTION

Hoopoe is from order of birds with thin, long and sharp beak. It is small bird. There are feathers on its head that it could open or close them like a fan.

Hoopoe in old medicine

Its meat is hot and dried and strong. It meat eliminates gripes and it is tranquilizer. It is also used for treatment of abdominal pain, kidney and bladder disorders. If its essence is poured in the eye it removes extra eyelashes and strengthens memory. It is useful in prevention of leprosy. Eating its feather and tongue causes to kindness with people and its meat prevents frequent urination. Its suspension is used for treatment of fever. The dried blood of hoopoe combined with sesame oil and lily make the hair to be dark and wavy and its feather is used for killing of ants and fleas[1].

HOOPOE IN QURAN

"He inspected the birds, and said: "What is the matter that I see not the hoopoe? Or is he among the absentees?"(An-Naml:20 [2]).

"I will surely punish him with a severe torment, or slaughter him, unless he brings me a clear reason."(ibid:21[2]).

"But the hoopoe stayed not long, he (came up and) said: "I have grasped (the knowledge of a thing) which you have not grasped and I have come to you from Saba' (Sheba) with true news"(ibid:22[2]).

"I found a woman ruling over them, and she has been given all things that could be possessed by any ruler of the earth, and she has a great throne"(ibid:23[2]).

"I found her and her people worshipping the sun instead of Allah, and Satan has made their deeds fair-seeming to them, and has barred them from (Allah's) Way, so they have no guidance"(ibid:24[2]).

"We shall see whether you speak the truth or you are (one) of the liars(ibid:27[2]).

"Go you with this letter of mine, and deliver it to them, then draw back from them, and see what (answer) they return"(ibid:28[2]).

Some scholars said that the birds casted shadow on Solomon head and he became aware of hoopoe by a hole in the curtain. Other group believed that hoopoe was commissioned to bring water in Solomon system and it was absent when Solomon asked water. It was said that hoopoe had specific knowledge and it could find water underground. An Arabian proverb refers to this trait of hoopoe: "He is as sharp sighted as hoopoe"[3]. When Solomon wanted to do ablution in the desert the hoopoe found water spring and dug the ground. Attar refers to hoopoe sharp sightedness and symbolizes it as the guide of the wayfarers that directs them to truth and certainty.

HOOPOE IN PERSIAN LITERATURE

The attendance of hoopoe in Persian literature is mostly originated from An-Naml verse. As miracles 20-28 of An-Naml verse depict the almighty God narrates the story of Queen Saba and Solomon. The poets

and writers have referred to the story of Solomon and hoopoe to give glad tidings. In some poetical divans hoopoe is symbol of the perfected man, messenger and guide. In Persian literature hoopoe has exalted position because of quotation of Quran.

The hoopoe of paradise

The poet symbolizes hoopoe as exalted man according to the story mentioned in An-Naml verse.

O, the hoopoe of paradise put on the stone
Never sit and nested on the lotus (Urfi divan: 137[2]).

The messenger of glad tidings

Hafez introduces hoopoe the messenger of glad tidings according to An-Naml verse:

O the heart, the zephyr came back
The hoopoe came from Saba by glad tidings (Hafez divan,118)[4].

Solomon's hoopoe

According to the stories the Solomon's hoopoe guided him toward water and it was messenger of Queen Saba.

Saba gives message of happiness for Solomon hoopoe
It brings glad tidings of Saba (Hafez divan, 99)[4].

Hoopoe in myths

There is hoopoe in ancient Egypt hieroglyphs. A child with a hoopoe on his hand is seen in the tomb of Ptah- Hotep. It depicts its mysterious attendance in the folk tales and legends where it possesses magical power and used for magic affairs[4].

HOOPOE IN FOLK TALES

Nowadays the scientific findings indicate that hoopoe could predict earthquake and storm and it is not unique in the world of the animals. In Old Testament eating the meat of hoopoe is illegal. This bird is seen in the folklore literature. In Iranian folklore is narrated that hoopoe was a bride and she was combing her hair in front of the mirror and her father in law came and saw her hair and she was ashamed of her conduct and flew with the comb and left her home. In an old Greek tale it is narrated that when the parents of hoopoe was old he took their old feather and licked their bodies and they became young so hoopoe is symbol of kindness. Hoopoe could identify underground waters and where it lands a well can be found there. There are different beliefs on hoopoe in Afghanistan, German, England, Italy, Turkey, and Portuguese and Arabia (ibid)[5-7].

THE HOOPOE OF MAGIC

It can be said that the attendance of hoopoe in magical affairs can be traced in Middle Age. It seems that the blood of hoopoe was used for eliminating fairies and nightmares and it was believed that its heart cures the diseases. In other regions the dried organs of this bird was used for eliminating evil eye. Utilization of hoopoe in sorcery and bewitching has caused to extinction of this bird in some areas of Iran. There are inaccurate beliefs on hoopoe and it has led to ever increasing hunting of this creature. This bird is held in cage for decoration purposes and it is not unpleasant affair but in one of the books on the talisman we read following sentences: the person should imprison a hoopoe for twenty four days and give it rose- water and in the twenty fifth day prepare a sharp knife and write a specific talisman on it and behead the hoopoe and he should be careful to not pour a drop of its blood on the earth and then remove its head between its shoulders.

The above text is a part of explanation of killing of a hoopoe and removing its bones for doing magical affairs written in four pages. Now this question is arisen: how we could catch a bird and imprison it for twenty four days and say praying and then kill it and take its heart? Has the writer offered the recipe for psychosis or sadism?

In other text it was written that: if a person beheads a hoopoe with a gold coin and combines its blood with sugar and drinks the solution he will be popular. There are other superstitions about this bird that it is ordered to kill the bird by specific ritual. For this reason hoopoe is expensive bird since its organs, feather and wings are used for magical affairs. It is believed that its nail cures speaking disorder and if a person puts its eyes under his pillow he could sleep better and if he puts its feather on his ears he will win his enemy. There are specific talismans that in them the written text is placed on the peak of a hoopoe and its peak is used as a pen and in other case there is no result. These superstitions are true about most of the birds and most of the hunters catch birds similar to hoopoe and sell them instead of this bird since a few people could identify hoopoes easily. These affairs have led to extinction of the other birds. One of these birds is *GaleridaCristata*. Scenarios like destruction of natural inhabitants and pollutions resulted

from human activities threaten animal and plants lives. But in this case superstitions and books on magic and talisman and lack of punishment of the seller of rare birds play significant role in this regard. It is possible that by approval of codes and fines for selling of these birds and educating by collective media it can be protected the life of this bird. Of course, the effort of religious scholars in explaining the taboo of this conduct will aid the environmental in protection of these birds. Finally, this question is arisen that: Does this small bird have metaphysical power? Is there any magical power in hoopoe [5-7]?

HOOPOE IN ATTAR'S LOGIC OF BIRDS

Attar's Logic of birds is quest of the wayfarers toward God and this story is narrated symbolically. The poet refers to the birds as wayfarers and mystics and introduces the hoopoe as their guide. At first, the poet calls different birds and explains them and then describes the hoopoe [5-7]:

The guide in seven valleys of love:

O, the guided hoopoe

Indeed you are the messenger of each valley (Logic of birds: 606)

The messenger of unseen and unheard messages (from Saba and Bilges to Solomon realms):

You travel in the realm of Saba

You are accompanied by Solomon logic of birds (ibid:607)

Who that carried the name of lord in its peak

And acquired knowledge and wisdom (ibid: 682)

I took his letter and returned

Now I am his confidential and messenger (ibid: 691).

Ability to speak with Solomon (referring to miracle 20 verse An-Naml)[2]:

I talked with Solomon and then I came to you

Ability to see underground water:

I discover underground waters

I am knowledgeable and know secrets (ibid:686)

Favorite of Solomon:

Surprisingly, what he lost in his territory

He asked it and it found the lost things(ibid:688)

When I was absent for a while

He searched everywhere(ibid:689).

The oldest, wise and experienced bird:

I flew everywhere for years

I was wanderer everywhere (ibid: 694)

I nested in the mountains and deserts

I encountered with storms(ibid: 695).

The true guide toward God:

Now accompany me

And enter to the court of the king (ibid:698)[2].

All birds gathered together around the hoopoe and expressed their eager to the king and since the trip was hard every bird excused and the hoopoe replied them rationally. Then they unified and began to travel. Some birds could not continue due to hardship, thirsty and hunger and continuous flying. Finally, they reached Simourgh (phoenix) by the help of hoopoe and calm down forever.

CONCLUSION

In any periods the heads and wise men of any tribe tried to employ symbols and stories for indicating the goodness and badness of conducts and behaviors. For this reason they entered to animals' world and transferred their ideas by language of these animals. Hoopoe has important position in Persian literature. In mystical texts such as Attar's Logic of Birds, this bird appears as a guide that directs the mystics toward God.

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Citation of this article

Kamran P F, Rogayye M B, Parvaneh A . Hoopoe in Persian Literature and Myths. Int. Arch. App. Sci. Technol; Vol 5 [2] June 2014: 41-44. <http://dx.doi.org/10.15515/iaast.0976-4828.5.2.4144>
