SHARED MYTHOLOGICAL LAYERS IN BALKAN AND AZERBAIJANI FOLKLORE: SHAMANISTIC ARCHETYPES AND STRUCTURES

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Abstract. *Oral cultural products are the most significant dynamic systems that transmit a society's mento-psychological worldview and cultural memory codes across historical periods. In this study, under the title "Traces of Shamanism in Balkan Turkish Fairy Tales", the Shamanic-Animist elements, mythical motifs, and archetypes preserved within the internal structure of regional fairy tales ("Padişah ve Üç Kız Kardeş", "Üvey Ana", "Beyaz Güvercin", "Köy Ağası", "Tepegöz") are analyzed through a comparative-mythological method. As a result of the investigations, it has been determined that guiding figures such as the Gray-Bearded Old Man, the Dervish, and Khidr encountered in the tales – despite bearing terminological names belonging to Islamic culture – represent a direct continuation of the "Spotted-Horse Riding Road Deity" cult in the ancient Turkic pantheon by virtue of their cosmic functions and interrealm mediatory missions. It is demonstrated that the frequently observed motifs of casting children into a river, burial within a pit, and bathing in waters of three distinct colors (white, red, black) display a structural parallelism with the practices of "ritual death and rebirth" in Shamanic initiation. Furthermore, the burial of slaughtered animal bones facilitating mythical aid is directly linked to the archaic Shamanic bone cult (osseous resurrection); assuming avian guises and shaking actions to ecstatic metamorphosis; and healings provided through storytelling to logotherapeutic treatment methods executed during Shamanic healing sessions. In conclusion, it is scientifically proven that the traces of shamanism in Balkan Turkish fairy tales share a genetically and semantically identical variant nucleus with samples of Azerbaijani oral folk literature ("Göyçək Fatma", "Məlikməmməd"), illustrating that Turkic mythical cognition possesses an unyielding cultural continuity independent of spatial boundaries.*

Keywords: *Balkan Turkish Fairy Tales, Traces of Shamanism, Initiation, Bone Cult, Shape-Shifting, Cultural Continuity.*

INTRODUCTION

Folklore stands as the most dynamic ethnocultural memory system that transmits a nation's cultural matrix, mento-psychological worldview, and historical-social experience down through the generations by withstanding the test of time. Oral tradition is not merely a static relic of the past, but rather a polyvariant operational structure that continuously renews and develops dialectically. Throughout the process of historical evolution, the intercultural and socio-diplomatic interactions among the peoples of the world have laid the groundwork for the structural and semantic enrichment of folklore, as well as the formation of shared mythical strata. We can see this same cultural and structural model in the folk stories and myths of all Turkic

groups. Historically, the borders of the Turkic cultural world were very large. This space reached from Mongolia to Bosnia and Herzegovina, and from Siberia to Iraq and Cyprus. Inside this big area, Turkic culture deeply affected the local people. At the same time, it created a strong unity in language and shared beliefs. In this context, the Balkan Peninsula is one of the most important places where Turkic groups lived and kept their old mythical memories alive. The historical and cultural connection between the Turks and the Balkans started very early. This relationship goes back to the heavy migration waves that grew stronger from the 5th century AD onward, and to the military campaigns of Attila the Hun (İsen, 1997, p. 13).

Having coexisted for centuries in spiritual reciprocity with Slavic, Albanian, Greek, and Romanian peoples, the Balkan Turks (including the Turks of Bulgaria, North Macedonia, Kosovo, Western Thrace, and the Gagauz) engaged in a rigorous folkloric exchange with neighboring ethnicities.

At the structural core of the shamanic beliefs and ritual systems of Turkic peoples lies the trial of "becoming a shaman" (attaining the status of kam). A shaman, first and foremost, possesses a robust personality structure that drastically distinguishes them from ordinary members of society through their psychological and mythical attributes. The source of this distinction is the initiation phase through which the shaman candidate passes. Leaving behind the status of an ordinary individual to acquire a new mytho-sacral status is the mission of a sacred herald – one who regulates the belief system of society, provides magical mediation between the transcendent realm and the real world, and executes all of this through a distinct synthesis of word and music.

Regarding the psycho-social and mythical essence of shamanism, Ahmet Yaşar Ocak writes: "It is a religious-magical belief system centered around a person known as a Shaman or Kam, who possesses certain innate extraordinary powers, high psychological capacity, and a strong character" (Ocak, 2017: 71).

Füzuli Bayat emphasizes that the primary functional mission of the shaman is to introduce sacral knowledge to society and to restore the disrupted balance between the macro-cosmos (cosmic order) and the micro-cosmos (the human world) (Bayat, 2006: 21). The researcher classifies the central operational spheres and functions of the shaman as follows: healing the sick, conducting the souls of the deceased to the otherworld, treating infertility, ensuring a bountiful hunt, foretelling the future through divination, purifying spaces from malevolent spirits, presenting sacrifices to Bay Ülgən and Erlik Khan, managing seasonal rituals, protecting livestock, and mythically revealing the location of lost items. Over time, shamans also became the magical directors of cultic ceremonies, such as house-building and the purification of irrigation canals (Bayat, 2006: 21).

As is evident from the theoretical analyses conducted by researchers, the fairy tale genre shares common invariant characteristics with shamanism by genesis. In the subsequent chapters of this paper, the shamanic traces, motifs, and archetypes located within Balkan Turkic fairy tales will be investigated and analyzed through a comparative method.

1. The Archetypes of the Gray-Bearded Old Man, Bearded Dede, Dervish, and Khidr (The Mythical Guardian of the Road)

In Turkish fairy tales, one frequently encounters guardians and guiding helpers possessed of transcendent (supernatural) attributes. These auxiliary characters appear abruptly during the most critical and dead-locked moments of the plot to resolve the cosmological or social plights of the hero, subsequently vanishing in the same mysterious manner.

Bahaeddin Ogel explains that these characters actually come from old, pre-Islamic Turkic beliefs. Specifically, they go back to the wise old men with sky-beards or gray beards (Ogel, 1995, p. 89).

In folk studies, this kind of character is often called the “Guardian of the Road””. The idea of a “road” is very holy in Turkic myths because it connects different worlds like the Sky, Earth, and the Underworld. In ancient times, a shaman could not travel between these worlds without this idea of a road. At first, this character was a part of the old ancestor spirit beliefs. But after Islam arrived, most of these old functions were passed over to Khidr. The original job of this Road God,which we can even find in the ancient Uyghur book Irk Bitig, was simply to give people good luck, destiny, food, and happiness.

The fact that the word "road" (*yol*) in Old Turkic also possesses the semantic nuances of "fortune, fate, law, and custom" (*töre*) linguistically and culturally substantiates this mythical connection.

One of the most prominent examples of this trial-and-reward mechanism is found in the fairy tale "Ayşe ile Fatma," recorded within the cultural milieu of Romanian Dobruja.

In the fairy tale **"Ayşe ile Fatma"**, recorded within the cultural environment of Romanian Dobruja, the archetype of Prophet Khidr – who encounters the orphaned girl on the road, bestows transcendent beauty (sacral status) upon her by commanding her to bathe in white, red, and black waters, and conversely punishes the envious girl by immersing her into the black water due to her rudeness – represents a transformed version of the Gray-Bearded/Sky spirit found in shamanism.

Inside Azerbaijani folk stories, we see the exact same thing with the bright “Old Grandmother” (Qarı nənə in the story of “Göyçək Fatma”) or the “Dervish”. These characters do the same job of testing people and making sure things are fair. In the story, Khidr gives three different waters to the girl: white, red, and black.These three colors actually show the three levels of the world in old shaman beliefs. White means the Sky world, being clean, and good things. Red means the Earth, physical life, beauty, and the energy of blood. Black means the Underworld, trouble, curses, and death. Because the good girl (Ayşə) passes the tests, she washes in the white water and uses the other waters correctly. So, she becomes incredibly beautiful, which means she gets good luck, or Qut, and special spiritual power. But the bad, jealous sister (Fatma) is thrown straight into the cursed black water. Her body turns completely black as a punishment, which shows she belongs to the world of trouble. So, even though these characters like Khidr, the Dervish, or the Wise Old Man have Islamic names in Balkan Turkish stories, their real job is different. They are actually just like the old Turkic Road God who rode a spotted horse, protected the shaman between worlds, gave people luck, and showed them the right way. Another important shaman element in this 'Ayşe ile Fatma' story is the belief in the “bone cult” and how life can come back from old bones.

According to shamanic cosmology, the soul, the essence of life, and the potential for future reincarnation (rebirth) of a living being reside not within the transient flesh, but within the inviolable and permanent bone. For this reason, in shamanic rituals, it was imperative not to break the bones of the sacrificial animal and to bury them intact in the ground (or suspend them upon sacral trees) to ensure the restoration of abundance and the resurrection of the animal's spirit. Mircea Eliade substantiates this sacral role borne by bone during shamanic initiation as follows: "Among shamans, the life or soul in both living entities (humans and animals) resides precisely within the bones, and therefore, it is expected that the deceased will be resurrected

from their bones in the future... For this reason, the bones of hunted or sacrificed animals are never broken; they are collected with great care and, according to ancient tradition, are either buried in the ground, placed in an elevated spot such as the branches of a tree, or thrown into the sea/water" (Eliade, 1999: 190). These funerary practices in shamanism are directly linked to the power of natural elements to purify the soul and return it to the Cosmos.

In the story of “Ayşe ile Fatma”, before the magic cow is killed, it talks to the girl and gives her a rule: 'Do not throw away my bones, bury them! If you bury them, it will help you a lot” (Turan & Önal, 2023, p. 977). Later, whenever the girl is in trouble, she goes to these bones to get magic help. This shows a very clear belief that life and power can come back from the bones of a dead animal. This exact same shaman layer is just like the plot in the Azerbaijani fairy tale “Göyçək Fatma”. In that story, the bones of the Yellow Cow are buried too, and the magic help comes directly from those bones.

2. **Ritual Death-Resurrection and Transmutation (Initiation and Transformation)**

The idea of dying and coming back to life is one of the most important parts of becoming a shaman. Mircea Eliade explains that for a person to officially become a real shaman (kam or qam), they must go through a symbolic ritual of death and rebirth. During this spiritual transition, the candidate experiences scary visions like bad spirits cutting their body apart, separating their bones, or opening their stomach (Eliade, 1999, p. 80). This process cleans them from normal human flesh and rebuilds their body in a holy, cosmic way. Füzuli Bayat also points out a similar idea: “Dying and resurrecting is the main path and key theme of becoming a shaman.The shaman must go through this ritual death and come back to life because it is the only way to move from the normal human world to the spirit world. The shaman uses this journey to understand a hidden world that normal human logic and science cannot explain. By bringing the dead back to life, turning back time, and traveling to the spirit land, the shaman lives in two different worlds at the exact same time” (Bayat, 2006, p. 50).

For instance, the episode in the Macedonian Turkish fairy tale "Padişah ve Üç Kız Kardeş" where the envious maternal aunts place the twin infants into a chest and cast them into the river immediately upon birth is a direct equivalent to the process of "initiation death in water" within shamanic philosophy. Within shamanic civilization, water (river, stream, sea, spring) represents the inception of primitive chaos, the underworld, and simultaneously the focus of spiritual purification (catharsis). As Eliade notes, for the hero to survive cosmological trials and attain a new, elevated status, it is a structural necessity for them to come into contact with the water or earth element – that is, to undergo a symbolic death. The promise of the youngest sister in the tale: *“...God shall grant me a child with silver-golden hair and silver-golden teeth”* (Turan, Önal, 2023: 841) and the subsequent birth of the children with hair and teeth radiating a golden luster declare that they are not ordinary mortals but divinely elected, mythical entities (masters of the future). Right after they are born, they are thrown into the river, which actually shows the world of trouble or chaos. But they do not drown. Instead, the spirits of nature (Yer-Su iyesi) protect them and safely bring them to a holy millrace. This clear miracle proves that these children passed their first important shaman test while they were still babies. By surviving this dangerous river journey, they came back to life with a completely new and special holy status.

The retrieval and rearing of the infants by a bearded old man (the Guardian Spirit/Ancestor Spirit) in the mill, and their subsequent summoning of him through sacral interrealm communication by burning beard hairs after his death, form a unified composition of this death-

resurrection process. Another collective act of resurrection within the tale is the revitalization and awakening of the warriors who had been turned to stone (temporarily deceased) by the fairy's curse, achieved through the sacral intervention of the guardian spirit or the children.

When a person wants to become a shaman, they must pass many difficult tests to learn holy secrets and high knowledge. In the exact same way, when a hero in a fairy tale goes through dangerous trials and changes, it helps them become much more than a normal character. These hard paths allow the hero to understand the real truth of the world and find the answers to deep mythical mysteries.

3. **The Archetype of Shape-Shifting (Metamorphosis / Metamorphic Guise)**

One of the oldest ideas we see in fairy tales is changing shapes, which is often called 'don değiştirme' in Turkish. This idea originally comes directly from shamanism (kamlık), which is the ancient religious and belief system of the Turkic peoples. In the shaman worldview, shamans (kams) enter the bodies of different animals. They do this to travel easily between the spirit worlds, complete holy missions, or fight against bad spirits.In shamanic philosophy, depending on the existential milieu, the *kam/qam* possesses the capacity to enter the form of a snake, eagle, horse, deer, bear, or other animals. Füzuli Bayat writes regarding the subject: *“Shape-shifting among shamans is a unique type of miraculous power in its own right. Widely encountered in shamanic legends and memorates, shape-shifting is fundamentally linked to the shaman's ancestral animal projection. By entering the guise of the mother-animal that serves as their protective spirit – which can typically be a bear, wolf, bird, etc. – the shaman aims to escape impending perils”* (Bayat, 2006: 163). The researcher O. Yetişli similarly notes that by undergoing metamorphosis into an animal guise, the shaman combats mythical adversaries and malevolent demons, even transforming into an eagle to undertake ecstatic journeys into the highest strata of the heavens (Yetişli, 2020: 110).

4. **The Sacral and Transformative Essence of the Fire Cult**

The cult of fire is one of the most fundamental cosmological elements carrying shamanic traces within Balkan Turkish fairy tales. In shamanic eschatology, fire is not merely a physical substance; it is a sacral element that purifies the ritual environment, provides healing, and ontologically obliterates malevolent forces. In the Kosovo variant of the tale "Beyaz Güvercin," the hero’s act of burning the dove skin in a hot furnace to escape the fairies' curse and the destruction of the evil forces in fire represent a direct narrativized version of the purification rite by fire in shamanic rituals.

5. **Magical Word Formulas and Enchanted Attributes**

Shamanic traces in Balkan Turkish fairy tales are not restricted to animate mythical characters; they are also preserved within the internal structure of the tales through the mythical animation of inanimate objects and magical word formulas. Concerning this topic, N. Drury notes: *“The shaman manifests his power and intention through songs and secret (sacral) chants. Songs are the voices of God and the spirits, and much like the sacred drum, they help the shaman feel propelled forward by the energy they bestow”* (Drury, 1996: 77). Mircea Eliade indicates that the magical word formulas (*arvaşlar*) and the poetic language employed during trance (ecstasy) by shamans constitute the most potent ritual method for subjugating malevolent forces. The *kam* initially executes a sacral dance around the fire and invokes his protective spirit with occult incantations. Addressing this spirit, which embodies the archetype of the "Great Thunder Bird" (or Eagle), the shaman promises fresh blood and chants magical formulas: *“Your iron wings!... Your iron feathers clatter when you fly!... Your powerful beak is ready to seize the*

enemy!...” At the climax of this magical invocation, the shaman reaches the pinnacle of trance, shouting in a different guise with the voice of the spirit, executing a magical flight in the mythical world to expel the evil spirit that stole the sick child's soul, and finally captures the child's soul in his palm in the guise of a sparrow (bird) to return it, thereby resurrecting the child (Eliade, 1999: 112).

6. **The Mythical Healing Motif and the Shaman's Healing Function**

Within the shamanic pantheon, the most critical socio-cultural function of the *kams* is *sağıltım* (healing). Within the various therapeutic methodologies of shamans, the role of chanting prayers, the power of breath, and the narration of mythical tales (emotional dramatization) bear an invaluable therapeutic value. In ancient Turkic thought, the word is not a conventional medium of communication, but a sacral energy regulating the physical world. Eliade notes that to retrieve the soul of a sick child into the physical world and extract it from chaos, the Teleut shaman commands directly via the magical power of the word: *“Return to your homeland!... To your yurt, to the side of the bright fire!... Return to the side of your father... your mother!...”*; similarly, the Buryat shaman narrates during the session, fostering an emotional catharsis in the yurt: *“The yurt is in sorrow... Your children are asking: Where are you, our father? Return!... Your horses are asking: Where are you, our master? Come to our side at once!...”* The shaman vividly narrates the mystical journey he undertook to pursue the illness-causing spirit, recounting the mountains and seas he crossed as a symbolic tale to those present. For instance, upon returning from the trance session, the *kam* of the Abakan Tatars lights his pipe and alters the x-state of the patient by narrating in detail (logotherapy) that he traveled as far as China to find the cure for the disease, surmounting numerous mountains and seas (Eliade, 1999: 250-252).

CONCLUSION

This comparative-mythological study conducted on the oral memory system of Turkic ethnicities settled in the Balkan geography clearly demonstrates how resilient and stable the fundamental belief codes of ancient Turkic civilization have remained within the region's polycultural environment. centuries of heavy migration from Central Asia to the Balkans did not destroy the old myth stories.

In conclusion, these elements preserved in Balkan Turkish fairy tales share a genetically, structurally, and semantically identical invariant nucleus with samples of Azerbaijani oral folk literature (particularly the tales of *"Göyçək Fatma"* and *"Məlikməmməd"*). This great similarity clearly shows that no matter where the migration paths went, shared Turkic myth stories and shamanic roots have a very strong and endless cultural connection that never broke.

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