

EXAMINATION OF FOLK BELIEFS IN YOMRA DISTRICT ACCORDING TO FUNCTIONAL THEORY

TURGAY KABAK

ABSTRACT

When looking at studies on folk beliefs in Turkey, we generally find two types of publications. The majority of research focus on revealing the origins of folk beliefs, which identified through fieldwork, in old Turkish religion and mythology, and establishing connections between the past and the present. The studies in the second group involve analyses of folk beliefs collected from one region of Turkey with those from other regions, or with folk beliefs from different regions of the Turkic world using a comparative method. There are scarcely any studies that address the functional dimension of folk beliefs and examine them from this perspective. The existing studies are quite narrow in scope. There is no study that extensively examines folk beliefs collected from a specific region according to the functional theory, as done in this study, which is one of the context-centered theories used by many researchers in the field of folklore. In this study, folk beliefs obtained through the field collection method from the district of Yomra, located in the Trabzon province of the Eastern Black Sea region of Turkey, were analyzed according to functional theory. As a result of the examination conducted, it has been found that the folk beliefs in the region have eleven functions which are: helping to protect public health, assisting public veterinary, protecting from evil spirits and beings, ensuring abundance and prosperity and protecting from famine, bringing good luck and averting bad luck, predicting and directing natural phenomena, transferring intangible cultural heritage, helping to make prophecy, establishing a connection with sacred, reconciling the old and the new, and securing social unity. Thus, the folk beliefs of a region have been examined for the first time with a holistic approach, from a functional perspective, and a model is developed that can be applied to other regions as well as folk beliefs will remain.

Keywords: Turkey, Yomra, folk beliefs, functionalist theory, religion.

INTRODUCTION

The phenomenon called culture has a continuity that perpetuates itself by constant change and transformation during the historical process. Within culture, there exist numerous bridges established to provide this continuity. One of these bridges is represented by folk beliefs.

Many definitions have been offered for folk beliefs until today. Boratav defines folk beliefs as “the acceptance, whether personally or socially, of the reality

of an idea, a phenomenon, an object, or a being. Folk beliefs do not hold accuracy and strictness as religion or morals and they vary from region to region and from one community to another” (1997: 7). From Boratav’s definition, we can say that folk beliefs are not religion, but they are not entirely outside religion either. It shares many common features with religion but also exhibits many differences from it (Kabak 2011: 8). In other words, folk beliefs are not religion, but the way religion is perceived by the people (Kalafat 1999a: 88). Therefore, folk beliefs are like a treasure chest containing all layers of a nation’s world of faith from mythological ages to the present day. Delving deeper into this treasure chest, it is possible to see many different layers, identify the foundations of the society’s current world of belief, and understand more accurately the meanings of these beliefs.

Correspondingly, a review on the folk belief literature in Turkey shows that the majority of studies like theses, articles, and presentations focus on explaining folk beliefs by tracing their origins back to the old Turkish religion. There are very few studies on the functional aspect of folk beliefs. The article titled *The Functions and Intellectual Foundations of Folk Beliefs* by Ali Abdurrezzak is one of the exceptional works written in this field. The author focuses on three functions of folk beliefs in this article: Psychosocial, Sociocultural, and Socioeconomic (Abdurrezzak 2021). Yet another study is *A Functional Analysis of Uzbek Turks’ Living Folk Beliefs About Marriage*, written by Zehra Işık. In this study, the author emphasizes that these beliefs have the function of serving to consolidate the institution of marriage (Işık 2022). There is currently no study that encompasses the scope of this research.

AIM AND METHODOLOGY

In this study, the folk beliefs gleaned from Yomra district, Trabzon, will be examined in the light of functional theory. In this study, consideration will be given not only to the period in which folk beliefs were collected but also to the earlier periods in which they emerged, with a focus on explaining the needs these beliefs address for the Yomra residents and the functions they serve in the regional culture along with identifying the narrators, listeners, performers, and believers. For data collection literature review, and for examination document analysis in the light of functionalist theory methods will be used in this research.

Functionalist theory, which falls under the category of context-centered theories, was developed by anthropologists who studied anthropology and, due to the affinity of anthropology with folklore do research on artifacts of folklore, especially of folk literature. Therefore, the functionalist theory is also referred to as “Anthropological Theory and Method.” The functionalist theory that has major figures like Bronislaw K. Malinowski, Franz Boas, Margaret Mead, Frances S. Herskovits, and Ruth Benedict as representatives, has advanced folklore studies in a different direction (Ekici 2010: 124).

The starting point of functional theory is the context in which folklore/folk literature products are created, created, recreated and transmitted. The core inquiries of the functionalist theory in folklore encompass the primary motivations

behind narrating or performing a cultural product, the rationale driving the narrator or performer to create, convey, and employ it, as well as the incentives prompting listeners to engage in its listening, comprehension, and utilization, along with other related factors (Ekici 2010: 124).

Anthropologist William R. Bascom developed a model based on his research on the functions of folklore creations. According to this model, folklore creations have four main functions, which are: a) entertainment, diversion and amusement, b) supporting social institutions and rituals c) transmission of education and culture to younger generations d) escape from social and personal pressures (Ekici 2010: 124-125). However, it is also seen from the studies conducted today that the functions of folklore creations are not limited to these.

FUNCTION OF HELPING PUBLIC HEALTH PROTECTION

One of the most crucial issues for a society to sustain its existence is the preservation of public health. A society of healthy individuals would be healthy in terms of productivity, military strength, and reproduction. For this purpose, at times when there was not modern medicine, a method known as folk medicine was developed and it continues to exist to this day.

Some folk beliefs involve beliefs and practices that help folk medicine. Some of these beliefs includes preventive measures, and some others address the treatment of the disease developed. The belief in Yomra, “Ayak altında bir kavilik oluştuğu zaman, bunları iyi yapmak ereğiyle tavuğun götüne süreceksin [When hardness forms under the foot, one should rub it to a chicken’s arse in order to heal them]” (Fountainhead 1) explains how to treat cornification that occurs on the foot.

Being affected by the evil eye is a condition that disrupts human health and must absolutely be treated. In Turkish culture, there are numerous methods devised for the treatment of the evil eye, and most of these methods are rooted in folk beliefs. A belief in Arsin district offering “Birisine kötükem (nazar) değdiği zaman, onu iyileştirmek için bir tasın içine su koyup bu suyum içine de ateşten alınıp köz atılır. Eğer közler batarsa kötü kem değmiş, batmazsa değmemiştir [When someone is touched by the evil eye, to cure him, he pours water into a bowl and embers taken from the fire are thrown into this water. If the embers sink, they are touched by evil; if they do not sink, they are not touched]” (Fountainhead 1) helps to understand whether a person has been affected by the evil eye.

The belief “Bir kişi hasta oldu mu ya eve hoca getirilir ya da camiye üç cuma giderek hem su okutulur ve hem de kendisi okunur. Eğer okunmadan bir yarar görmezse o zaman doktorlara ya da bir falcıya götürülür [When someone falls ill, either a hodja is called to the house or they go the mosque for three consecutive Fridays, where water is recited over and the person themselves is prayed on. If no improvement is observed after these, then he/she is taken to doctors or a fortune-teller]” (Fountainhead 1) describes how to sure the disease. In this belief, practices such as having a person blessed with prayers by a hodja at home or in a mosque or made blessed water drink carry the traces of magical folk medicine. However, these aspects have been Islamified through the inclusion of hodja, mosque, and

the recitation of Quranic verses. This situation is a good example for the layering of the folk beliefs mentioned above. The practice has traces of both the pre-Islamic Shamanic and the Islamic period in it.

One of the common illnesses among children is bedwetting at night for an extended period. In Yomra, the belief-based medical practice as “Çocuk altına işediği zaman kesilmiş koçun taşağı pişirip yedirilir [When a child wets the bed, the testicles of a slaughtered ram are cooked and fed to the child]” (Fountainhead 1) shows the treatment of this condition. The belief of “Elde kuza denen birtakım kabarcıklar olursa ya dere köpüğünden ya da ağaç kovuklarında bulunan sudan alınıp yıkanırsa iyileşir [If blisters called kuza develop on the hands, they heal by washing with water taken from either a foam of a stream or tree hollows]” (Fountainhead 1) is about the treatment of blisters appear on hands.

These beliefs pertain to the treatment of the disease. The belief “Çocukların gelecekte boğmaca hastalığına yakalanmaması için ceviz ağacının kökünden ya da ikiz çocuk anasının donunun bağından üç kez geçirilir [To prevent a child from contracting whoop-cough in the future, the child is passed three times through the roots of a walnut tree or through the waist belt of a woman’s panties who is mother of twins]” (Fountainhead 1), on the other hand, is a belief that involves preventive measures. Since whooping cough was commonly seen in children at those times, the belief demonstrates how to take precautions so that the child does not get infected with it.

FUNCTION OF ASSISTING PUBLIC VETERINARY

Turks appeared on the stage of history in the Asian steppes as a nomadic nation whose main economic activity was pastoralism. Although their economic activities diversified over time to include pursuits like agriculture, trade and craftsmanship, animals and animal husbandry has consistently remained important for the Turkish nation.

As Yomra is a district founded the Eastern Black Sea region which is known for its frequent rainfall and fertile geography, animal husbandry is one of the most important activities. The local population have sustained their livelihoods by raising various types of animals, primarily cow as cattle and sheep for small livestock in the grass reserve pastures of expansive highlands located at the summits of the Black Sea mountains. The pillar of household economy consists of the products derived from the meat, milk and wool of these animals, therefore the well-being of these animals is just as important as the health of the household members. Since these animals were raised in mountainous regions and distant highlands where transportation is extremely challenging and limited, accessing veterinary care in past times was very difficult. As a result, a rich body of public veterinary knowledge has developed within the region’s livestock and shepherding culture (Köse 2001: 160-168). It is understood from this body of knowledge that there are various practices local population use to heal their sick animals or prevent illness before they get sick. One of the elements contained in these practices contributing to public veterinary is the folk beliefs. For instance, the belief “Evde

kullanılan bir ipin üzerinden insan geçerse o kişinin çocuğu olmaz. Hayvan da geçse onun dahi yavrusu olmaz [If a person steps over a rope used at home, he/she cannot not have children. Even if an animal passes over it, they won't have offspring either]" (Fountainhead 1) is a belief aimed at preventing animals from becoming infertile. Infertility in animals is an undesirable condition because if an animal (e.g. a cow) does not reproduce, it leads to financial loss due to the absence of income from both its products and offspring. For preventing this unfavourable situation the folk belief advises agasinst allowing animals to pass over the ropes used at home and helps animal owners by providing guidance in order to prevent the condition of remaining without offspring.

Turks place a high value on animals because animals play a significant role in their daily lives, and regard them as human in many fields of life. Just as killing a human is a wrong act, so is killing a live animal. This thought manifests in the belief "Gebe bir kadın ya da kadının kocası, canlı bir hayvanı öldürürse doğacak çocuk sakat olur [If a pregnant woman or her husband kills a live animal, their child will be born disabled]" (Fountainhead 1). Killing a live animal is considered a wrongful act and the belief warns that the person committing this act will be punished by having their child born with a disability. Thus, in a sense, the lives of animals are protected.

As previously mentioned, the most commonly raised cattle in the region is cow, and cows are of great importance for sustaining the household. For this reason, it is important to keep them healthy. The belief "İneğin boğazının altında şiş ya da ur oluştuğu zaman, canlı durumda iken alınan köstebeğin elleri, ineğin, şişen yerine sürülürse iyileşir [When a swelling or tumor forms under the throat of a cow, if the hands of a mole, taken when it is alive, are rubbed on the swollen area of the cow, the cow heals]" (Fountainhead 1) offers a treatment method to help cure a cow with a tumor or lump in its throat. The time when cows give birth is a period of weakness, just like in humans. The belief "İnek yeni doğurduğu zaman, hastalığının kısa sürede geçmesi için çalı çırpı toplanarak bir kiremit üzerinde yakılıp tütsü yapılarak ineğin karnının altına tutulursa iyileşir [For the quick recuperation of a cow that has just given birth, if brushwood is gathered, burned on a tile and its incense is then held under the cow's belly, she will recover]" (Fountainhead 1) guides the animal owner to ensure the cow's fast recuperation.

The evil eye is as dangerous for animals as it is for humans. Thus, it is necessary to protect animals from the evil eye as well. The belief in the region "Yeni doğurmuş bir ineğin sütü ya da ayranı, uzak bir yere götürülürken içine kömür konur ki inek çalınıp kötükem (nazar) değmesin [When the milk or buttermilk of a newly calved cow is brought to a distant place, coal is put in it so that the cow is not stolen affected by the evil eye]" (Fountainhead 1) is a belief that assists in protecting the cow from the evil eye.

FUNCTION OF PROTECTING FROM EVIL SPIRITS AND BEINGS

The concept of spirit is a familiar concept since Turkish mythology. As understood from ancient texts and shamanic rituals, Turks believe in the existence of both good and evil spirits. It is known that numerous rituals are

performed to invoke the aid of good spirits and safeguard against the wrath of evil spirits (İnan 2006: 26-41). The belief in these spirits from ancient times has not vanished during the Islamic period, but rather, it has persisted by adapting to Islamic traditions. In this context, for instance, Umay Ana has transformed into Hz. Fatima, and Erlik and evil spirits have continued to exist as jinn and demons.

Even today, in the Yomra region, evil spirits/entities from the pre-Islamic era such as *alkarısı*, *obur*, *hortlak* and *cazu* as well as malevolent beings brought through Islam like *cin* and *şeytan* are believed, and various precautions are taken to protect against them. Among these precautions, folk beliefs hold a significant place. Because folk beliefs tell them how to protect themselves from these entities/spirits and how to get rid of if they happen to be possessed. For instance, the belief “Horoz zamansız, kapıda öterse saklanması (yaşatılması) iyi değildir, çünkü bela getirir [If the rooster crows untimely at the door, it is not good to keep it (alive), because it spells trouble]” (Fountainhead 1) refers to an evil spirit or entity. In this belief, the untimely crowing of a rooster is thought as to invoke evil spirit, and it is said that the rooster must be slaughtered to get rid of this situation.

One of the most well-known evil entities in the region is *hortlak* (ghoul). The belief “Kötü ruhlu kişiler öldüklerinde gömütlerinden çıkarak hortlarlar. Böylece evlerin kapısına gelip insanları korkuturlar [When wicked people die, they rise from their graves and haunt. Thus, they come to the doors of houses and frighten people]” (Fountainhead 1) confirms this. These ghouls are also known as *obur* in the region. To protect against these evil spirits, practices like staking a reversed basket with an acorn branch on the grave of the person who haunt (Kabak 2016: 313).

In the region, one of the most feared entities is the jinn (*cin*). There are various practices and beliefs to protect against them. The belief “Bir insanı Müslüman cinleri çarpmışsa o hocaya okunacak. Aynı kişiyi gavur cinleri çarpmışsa papaza okunacaktır [If a person is struck by Muslim jinns, he will be brought to a hodja to be prayed. If he/she is struck by giaour jinns, the person will be brought a priest to be prayed]” (Fountainhead 1) is about saving a person who is struck by a jinn. Yet another belief “Geceleyin cin gibi yaratıklarla karşı karşıya gelince, okuma yapılır. O zaman görülen o varlık yok olur [When encountering supernatural beings like jinn at night, prayer are made. Thus the entity seen disappears]” (Fountainhead 1) is about jinns, and shows that when encountering jinn, it is believed that the recitation of prayers from the Quran prevents the jinn from harming the person.

This belief “Dünya kopmaya yakın *Deccal* çıkacak. Bu eşeğiyle dağdan dağa, kentten kente adımlarını atarak gezecek. Bu arada kırk telden çalgı çalacak. Çalgıdan hoşlanıp peşine giden kişiler doğruca cehenneme gidecektir [Near the end of the world, the Dajjal will emerge. He will roam from mountain to mountain, city to city with his donkey. Meanwhile, he will play forty instruments. Those who like the instrument and follow him will directly go to hell]” (Fountainhead 1) concerning *Deccal*, an entity believed to emerge on the day of resurrection and considered evil, emphasizes the importance of not falling into the trap of *Deccal* by not falling for the timbre of his instrument and not going after him.

The belief in Yomra saying “Genç bir ağacı kökten kestikleri zaman günah olmaması için kesilen kökün üzerine bir taş konur [When a young tree is to be cut down, a rock is put on the root after it is cut to avoid sin]” (Fountainhead 1) is associated with early Turkish belief of forest spirits (*orman iyeleri*). According to early Turkish belief, forests have guardian spirits and it is important to avoid angering them. If they get angry, they can harm the people in the forest (İnan 2006: 63). This belief describes a practice that should be carried out to prevent the forest spirit from harming the person who cuts down a tree. Covering the stump of the felled tree with a stone is likely a practice aimed at preventing the root from being visible, so that the forest spirit does not notice the tree being cut down.

FUNCTION OF ENSURING ABUNDANCE AND PROSPERITY AND PROTECTING FROM FAMINE

For people living in close connection with nature, one of the most desirable things is abundance and prosperity. The abundant yield of planted crops and the reproduction of animals make people happy, and are therefore desired. Just as abundance and prosperity are highly desirable, famine is equally undesirable and avoided. Therefore, many beliefs and practices were established to provide abundance and prosperity, and to avoid famine. The belief in Yomra district, described in “Kapı eşiğinin üstünde oturan kişinin rızkı kesilir [The sustenance of the person sitting on the doorstep will be off]” (Fountainhead 1), is intended to prevent scarcity. Disruption of an individual’s livelihood (*rızk*) implies that they are facing scarcity. In the belief, it is advised not to sit on the doorstep in order to avoid this. Likewise, the belief “Kızgın bir sac ayağının üstünde kurumlar yana yana genişleyip büyürse gelecekte kuraklık olacaktır [If soot depositions on a hot trivet expand and grow side by side, there will be drought in the future]” (Fountainhead 1) tells the omens of a forthcoming famine. The person who follows this belief would prevent the formation of soot on the trivet, thereby escaping from drought, or in other words, famine.

The belief “Kurban Bayramının birinci gününün sabahı kesilen hayvanların kanları alınarak daha iyi versin diye yemiş ağaçlarına sürülür [On the morning of the first day of Eid al-Adha, the blood of the slaughtered animals is applied to the fruit trees so that they yield better harvests]” (Fountainhead 1) on the other hand, describes a ritual to be performed for abundance and prosperity. If a person spreads the blood of the sacrificial animal on the first day of Feast of Sacrifice onto a tree, that tree will yield an abundant harvest of fruits. This will ensure that the tree bears abundant and plentiful fruits.

FUNCTION OF BRINGING GOOD LUCK AND AVOIDING FROM BAD LUCK

Auspiciousness and inauspiciousness hold a significant place in the belief system of traditional societies. Everyone wants to communicate with auspicious objects and entities while avoiding the inauspicious ones. Because the auspicious entities possess properties such as granting long life, abundance, prosperity, and helping to overcome obstacles, while the inauspicious ones are associated with negative attributes like bringing death, causing famine, and rupturing relations/

bringing about chaos. Therefore, all behaviors, periods, directions, surrounding objects, individuals, animals are categorized as auspicious or inauspicious in folk beliefs. Folk beliefs have a function that involves preferring the auspicious elements and avoiding the inauspicious ones, as well as assisting in avoiding harm that may come from them (Boratav 1997: 94-95).

Just like in the entire Eastern Black Sea region, in Yomra district as well, Kalendar night is the night when the first day of the year begins, and it is believed that what is done that day will influence the entire year. The belief “Kalendar sabahı ahırda körpe buzağı varsa uğur ereğiyle eve getirilir [If there is a tender calf in the stable, it is brought home on the morning of *Kalendar* for good luck]” (Fountainhead 1) recommends bringing the calf in the barn into the house first thing in the morning so that the new year is auspicious. Likewise, the belief “Kalendar sabahı bir baltayla yemiş ağaçları korkutulur [On the morning of *Kalendar* (*Kalendar* is a New Year celebration according to ancient tradition, signifying the first day of the month; Based on the lunar calendar, the first day of *Kalendar* corresponds to the 14th day of January in the Gregorian Calendar.), fruit trees are intimidated with an axe]” (Fountainhead 1) advises a practice to be performed to prevent the new year being inauspicious. The belief “Yılbaşında bir komşunun evine gidilirse uğursuzluk getirmemesi için üzerine kül atılır [If a neighbor visits the house on New Year’s Day, the host throws ashes over the guest to avoid them bringing bad luck]” (Fountainhead 1) explains how to avoid the bad luck that might be brought by the first person entering the house on the first day of the year by using the purifying power of ash which is originate from fire.

There are numerous beliefs in the region related to the idea that improper use of the trivet bring bad luck. For example, the belief “Yıpranan bir sacayağını yapan ustanın ailesi ölür. Bunun için kırılmış bir sac ayağı onarmaya getirilmez [The family of a repairman who fixes a worn-out trivet will die. Therefore, a broken trivet should not be repaired]” (Fountainhead 1) states that repairing the trivet brings bad luck and the consequence of this is the death of a member of the repairman’s family. It advises not to get broken trivets repaired to prevent this from happening. The belief “Sac ayağı ateşte boş olarak durursa ölü suyu bekler” (Fountainhead 1) warns that the trivet should not be left empty on the stove; otherwise, it predicts that someone will die.

Among beliefs related to auspiciousness and inauspiciousness, there are warnings regarding various time periods. For example the belief “Salı günü yolculuk yapılmaz. Yapılırsa mutlaka kötü bir olayla karşılaşılır. Uğursuzluk getirir kanısı ile bu durum yola çakmayı engeller [Traveling is not done on Tuesday. If done so, encountering an unfortunate event is certain. The belief that it would bring bad luck prevents embarking on travel]” (Fountainhead 1) advises against setting out on a journey on Tuesdays to avoid bad luck on the road.

FUNCTION OF PREDICTING AND DIRECTING NATURAL PHENOMENA

For a nation like the Turks, who live closely intertwined with nature, having knowledge of when and how natural events like rain, hail, and wind occur is crucial

because this enables them to take necessary precautions or even direct these events when needed.

The most important thing known about the old Turk's interference with natural events was their use of a specific stone called *yada*. The *yada* stone, which could only be used by shamans and was known to have the ability to make heavy rain when needed, is known to be used even in the battles by Turks (İnan 2006: 160-165; Kalafat 1999b: 41-42).

The main source of livelihood in Yomra district is agriculture and animal husbandry. For this reason, knowing the weather and being able to adjust when necessary are highly important for organizing the daily life as well as agricultural and animal husbandry activities. The beliefs in the region “Akşamleyin baca dumanı çekmeyip evin içine dolarsa ertesi gün hava iyi olacaktır [If in the evening the chimney fails to draw smoke and the smoke fills the house, the weather will be good the following day]” (Fountainhead 1), “Ebe kuşağının oluşması, havanın ertesi gün iyi olacağını gösterir [The formation of a rainbow indicates that the weather will be good the following day]” (Fountainhead 1), “Geceleyin çakallar sürüler durumunda ulurlarsa, havanın yakın açacağı anlaşılır [If coyotes howl in packs at night, it is understood that the weather will soon clear up]” (Fountainhead 1), and “Geceleyin şimşek oynamaması havanın bozacağını gösterir [No flash of lightning overnight shows it will be foul weather]” (Fountainhead 1) enable forecasting the weather for the next day and taking precautions accordingly.

These beliefs “Yağmur dursun diye kızgın sacı kapıya atarlar [To stop the rain, they throw the hot sheet metal out the door]” (Fountainhead 1) and “Yağmur yağmaması için suya kısrak başı konur [To prevent rain to fall, a mare's head is put into water]” (Fountainhead 1) are associated with stopping a natural event, rain, and the belief “Yağmur yağması ereğiyle yüksek bir yere çıkılarak dua yapılır [In order to rain to come, prayers are offered ascending to a high ground]” (Fountainhead 1) is about making an absent natural event happen (bringing rain).

FUNCTION OF TRANSFERRING INTANGIBLE CULTURAL HERITAGE

Since folk beliefs are cultural elements formed through the accumulation of millennia of human experiences, they encompass intangible cultural heritage elements accumulated by people over thousand of years, and transmit them to future generations through oral tradition. For instance, the belief “Yazın böcekler tarlada lahanaları yerse birkaç tane böcek bir beze bağlanıp zincire asılır [In summer, if insects eat the cabbages in the fields, a few insects are tied to a cloth and hung on a chain]” (Fountainhead 1) conserves a practice that was obtained through years of experience and demonstrates how to combat the pests that harm cabbages in the region. Likewise, the belief “Kancık bir köpek yavrusu kızgın sac ayağından geçirilirse bir daha yavru lamaz [If a female puppy is stepped over a hot trivet, it will not whelp anymore]” (Fountainhead 1) carries a piece of folk knowledge that explains what needs to be done to prevent dogs from breeding. All of this information, the folk knowledge products learnt by the general public through many ages of experience are a part of their intangible cultural heritage.

FUNCTION OF HELPING TO MAKE PROPHECY

Throughout history, humans have always been curious about what the future holds and how these forthcoming events will affect them. For this reason, fortune tellers and oracles have always been who are both feared and consulted for their knowledge in every period of history. On the other hand, rulers have always placed value on fortune tellers and oracles, keeping them in close proximity.

It is known that one of the duties of shamans in old Turkish culture is making prophecies using methods such as divination by fire and fortune telling with talus (İnan 2006: 151-160).

Despite the developments in positive sciences and technology, curiosity about the future remains as it was on the first day at the present time. Therefore, folk beliefs containing predictions about future events still exists. For example, the folk belief in Yomra region “Bir kimsenin gözünde arpacık denen kızarıntılı şişkinlik olursa, o kişi gelecekte zengin birisiyle evlenecektir [If in one’s eye a red swelling called a sty appears, that person will marry someone rich in the future]” (Fountainhead 1) suggests that some kind of eye condition can be used to infer who a person will marry in the future. Furthermore, the statement “Bir kimsenin sıkıntısı olduğunda falcıya giderek derdinin ne olduğunu öğrenmek için fal baktırır. Böylece falcının verdiği öğüde göre hayatını sürdürür [When someone is distressed, they visit a fortune teller to have their fortune told in order to learn what their problem is. Subsequently, they live their life based on the advice given by the fortune teller]” (Fountainhead 1) shows that fortune telling is still believed in the region.

One of the most commonly used elements in making predictions about the future is animals. Throughout history, people have believed that animals, through their behaviors and the sounds they make, provide insight into future events. The belief in Yomra region “Köpek gece uluduğu zaman, adam öleceğini gösterir [When a dog howls at night, it indicates that a man is going to die]” (Fountainhead 1) says that the howling of a dog at night is an omen of death. The belief “Kişi nerde bulunursa bulunsun, başının üstünde karga öttüğü zaman kötü bir haberin ya da bir olayın olduğu anlaşılır [No matter where a person may be, if a crow caws above their head, it is understood that there is bad news or an event unfolding]” (Fountainhead 1) indicates that the cawing of a crow is an omen of death or a bad event, foretelling that a person with a crow cawing above them will face this fate.

Making predictions about the future by observing people’s behaviours and actions is also a common practice of prophecy. The beliefs in the Yomra region “Uzakta bulunan bir insanın adı anımsandığında geleceğine inanılır [It is believed that when the name of a person who is far away is recalled, that person is going to come]” (Fountainhead 1), “Saç ayağı üzerinde oturan bir kadının çocukları tüm kız olur [All the children of a woman who sits on trivet will be girls]” (Fountainhead 1), and “Ocaktaki zinciri sallamak iyi değildir. Çünkü borcun artar [It is not good to shake the chain on the stove. Because it increases one’s debt]” (Fountainhead 1), which are based on people’s actions, are beliefs that provide information about future events.

FUNCTION OF ESTABLISHING CONNECTION WITH SACRED

Whether it is within divine religions or other beliefs, the concept of the sacred exists in every belief system, and its meaning scope is very extensive. Rituals, myths, divine forms, sacred and worshipped objects, symbols, cosmologies, sacred individuals, animals, plants, and sacred places are all included in the domain of this concept (Eliade 2003: 27).

According to Eliade, the sacred and its hierophanies have a historical dimension, and throughout the historical process, everything can, in some way, become a hierophany, in other words, manifestation of the sacred. Whether in the form of a ritual, an animal, or a belief, a hierophany helps people to establish a connection with the sacred (2003: 28-29). This makes people feel psychologically relaxed, secure and, in a sense, special. Because in this way, people express their desires, share their concerns, ask for help, and protection from the sacred, which they aim to reach.

One of the beliefs for connecting with the sacred in the Yomra region is “Eğri günde sandık, ev, serender açılmaz. Bunun yanında tarlaya gidilip çalışılmaz. Eğer iş yapmak kaçınılmazsa ya tarlada toprağa bir orak vurulur ya da bir avuç tuz gömülür. Bunun nedeni doğacak çocukların organlarında bir eksiklik olmamasıdır [On the *eğri gün* (the lame day: 11th day of February), chests, houses, and *serenders* (A type of room placed on four pillars, always located outside the house with no passage or bridge connecting it to the house.) are not opened. Furthermore, no work is done on the field on that day. If working is imperative, either a sickle is struck into the soil or a handful of salt is buried in the field. The reason for this is to ensure that the children born will not have any deficiencies in their organs]” (Fountainhead 1), and this belief is associated with earth-water spirits which are the sacreds from pre-Islamic period. The belief that if one must work on an unfavorable, inauspicious day, called *eğri gün*, a sickle must be struck on the ground, comes from the protective nature of the iron cult. Additionally, it is known that Turkish folk beliefs attribute purifying properties to salt (Kalafat 2012a: 73-74). Striking the ground with a sickle is performed to avoid punishment from the guardian spirit of the earth through the protective nature of iron. The act of burying salt is, on the other hand, offering to the earth spirit a tribute. In this way, a connection is established with the shrined earth spirit, and people seek forgiveness for performing actions they should not have, attempting to evade punishment.

The belief “Geceleyn gökyüzünde aya bakıldığı zaman, Hz. Muhammet anımsanır [When looking at the moon in the night sky, one should recall Prophet Muhammad]” (Fountainhead 1) is related to the moon, holding a special significance in both the pre-Islamic and Islamic eras. The moon, along with many other celestial bodies are manifestations of the sacred for Turks both in the pre-Islamic and Islamic periods, and in this respect, it carries sacred attributes. The recognition of the moon, especially the crescent, as a symbol of Islam and its use on the tops of minarets signifies the sanctity of the moon. The belief that an ordinary individual who looks at and communicates with this sacred should

mention and remember the name of the Islamic Prophet, Muhammad, so that he can stand the power derived from the sanctity of the moon, provides the person protection.

In Islamic belief, there are beings referred to as *jinn* and these entities are feared because they can harm humans (Şahin 1993: 5-8). There is a common belief among people that possession particularly at night. The belief in Yomra region “Geceleyin cin gibi yaratıklarla karşı karşıya gelince okuma yapılır. O zaman görülen o varlıklar yok olur [When encountering supernatural beings like jinn at night, prayer are made. Thus the entity seen disappears]” (Fountainhead 1) is for connecting with the sacred against possession. The *reciting* in this belief means reciting verses from Quran. A Muslim who reads the Quran implores the assistance of Allah, the greatest sacred figure in Islam. This belief provides a pathway for connecting with the great creator.

FUNCTION OF RECONCILING THE OLD AND THE NEW

Culture is not a rigid entity but rather a living organism in itself. It continuously changes according to temporal, geographical, and economic factors. This change is particularly pronounced in nations such as the Turks, who inhabit a vast geography spanning from Asia to Europe, allowing them to interact with a multitude of diverse cultures. Turkish people have been interacted with many cultures throughout the history. Therefore, there have been many changes in their culture and beliefs. The faith world of the Turkish people is remarkably diverse due to the embrace of a range of religions like Tengrism, Shamanism, Buddhism, Islam, Christianity, and Judaism. Harmonizing and concording all these beliefs is a distinct skill. The Turks have achieved this by adapting their former beliefs to the principles of their new faith. When entering a new belief system, the old beliefs have not been entirely abandoned; instead, they have been adapted to the new faith to prevent conflicts. In a sense, the old and the new have been reconciled. In a sense, the old and the new have been reconciled. One of the elements that plays the most active role in the reconciliation process is folk beliefs. The belief in the Yomra region “Kurtlar uluduğu zaman, gökten Tanrı tarafından kurut yağdırılır [When wolves howl, kurut (dried yogurt) is rained down from the sky by God]” (Fountainhead 1) reconciles the wolf which is accepted as a sacred and divine animal in Tengrism, Turks’s religion preceding Islam (Duman 2012: 193-194), and the Islamic understanding. Kurut, as it is known, is one of the daily staple that the old Turks obtained by drying yogurt and consumed by watering down it when necessary (Kabak 2023: 54). The raining of *kurut* from the sky as a result of the howling, in a sense, praying or demanding of the wolf signifies God providing sustenance to the Turkish nation during times of famine through the wolf’s prayer. This suggests that the sacred status of the wolf, which was the sacred animal of the old Turkish religion, has endured in the Islamic period. According to belief, Allah allows for a miraculous event to happen by accepting the prayer of the wolf and raining kurut from the sky. While the howling of dogs and jackals is associated with bringing bad luck, the howling of wolves is believed to have the power to

transform adverse circumstances, including unfavorable weather conditions, food scarcity, and hunger, into favorable ones. The belief in the Yozgat region about falling of “kudret helva” from sky appears to resemble the belief in the Yomra region, and in both beliefs, the wolf’s prayer is accepted by Allah (Kalafat 2012b: 41).

There are many other sayings and beliefs that indicate the sacredness of the wolf continues in the Islamic era. For example, the statement “Kurt yüzü mübarektir” (Kaçalın 2023: 329) in the *How the House of Salur Kazan was Pillaged* tale from Dede Korkut demonstrates the continued belief in the sacredness of the wolf. All of these sayings and beliefs serve to reconcile old beliefs with new ones, allowing them to coexist harmoniously.

FUNCTION OF SECURING SOCIAL UNITY

One of the fundamental characteristics of folk beliefs is commonality. People living in the same region share certain beliefs and assumptions (Çelik 1995: 131). For instance, in the Yomra region, there is a belief that states, “Birbirine yakın günlerde evlenen kadınlar, çocukları daha olmaz korkusuyla biri öbürünün düğününe gitmez [Women who marry on days close to each other do not attend each other’s weddings for fear of having no children]” (Fountainhead 1), and women who hold this belief refrain from attending the wedding of other women who get married on dates close to their own. To provide another example, there is a belief in the region “Bir yaşlı kadın eline ya da saçlarına kına yakmadan ölürse kıyamette o ceza görecektir [If an old woman dies without applying henna on her hands or hair, she will face punishment on the Day of Judgment]” (Fountainhead 1), and all women who adhere to this belief apply henna to their hair before they pass away.

In this way, people form a common collective consciousness exhibiting similar behaviors in similar situations and this collective consciousness develops common behavioral patterns. These shared behavioral patterns, transmitted through folk beliefs across generations, play an important role in the transformation of human communities from a crowd of people into a nation bringing them together around common values.

CONCLUSION

Folk beliefs are rooted in mythological times and closely intertwined with religion, but they are not religion. In a sense, folk beliefs, as cultural elements that reflect how people interpret and practice religion, are multilayered, complex, and possess origins and meanings that are sometimes difficult to comprehend due to their origins dating back to mythological times. However, when folk beliefs are well understood, it becomes possible to map the belief system of the society where they exist from the past to the present, to know which cultures the belief system of the society in question has interacted with, and, more importantly, to get reliable information into the belief psychology, core values, and sacred elements of the society.

In this study, an investigation was conducted into the folk beliefs of the Yomra region to understand which specific needs of the society they emerged to

fulfill, which problems they solve for people, and the functions they served within the culture. Based upon this research, it has been determined that folk beliefs in the Yomra region serve eleven functions, which are helping to maintain public health, supporting public veterinary, protecting against evil spirits and beings, ensuring abundance and prosperity, protecting against famine, bringing good luck and avoiding bad luck, predicting and guiding natural events, ensuring the transmission of intangible cultural heritage, aiding in making prophecy, establishing connections with the sacred, reconciling the old with the new, and providing social unity. This shows that folk beliefs are not merely empty and superstitious beliefs believed by the older generations. They have significant functions within the culture. These functions are aimed at fulfilling various needs of society. Folk beliefs have emerged as a result of these needs, and folk beliefs will continue to exist as long as these needs of society continue.

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Fountainhead 1: Mustafa Altınışık. 60 years old. Primary school graduate.