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THE ALKARISI AND ALBASTI PHENOMENON IN TURKIC WORLD MYTHOLOGY WITHIN A CULTURAL SEMANTIC CONTEXT

Annotation. This study focuses on the Alkarısı (a mythical female demon) and the harmful event she causes, often resulting in the death of the baby or even the mother, known as "Albasti," which is among the most widespread myths of the Turkic world. Within the context of our cultural semantics, the earliest period of Turkic mythology is one dominated by women. During this period, women were considered superior to men, primarily due to their fertility. Accordingly, matrilineal communities of approximately 15-20 people were formed under the guidance and leadership of "kam ana" (shamanic mothers). Given the connection between women and the birch tree as origin myths, the conceptualization of "woman" in Turkic mythology during this early period will be examined. With the advent of nomadic life and pastoralism in the steppes, some women who lost their dominance fought back (as Amazons or Umai followers), but the attacks on women who fell under male dominance, killing them and their babies, form the origin and widespread nature of the "Al Karısı" and "Albasti" beliefs. In this context, the physical similarities between women and birch trees, the nourishing nature of both, the nurturing effect of birch milk or sap on women, the maternal care and nurturing nature of birch trees, the early use of birch trees as homes, dwellings, or homes in places called "alacık," and their relationship with camps managed by "odağan" (commanders), and the formation of family structures are all examined.

Keywords: Matriarchal Turkic Mythology, Conceptualization of Matriarchal Turkic Women, Umai Followers, Al Goddess, Albasti, Cultural Semantics of the Turkic World

Introduction

The interplay of all elements within a culture, from its extraordinary beings to the most ordinary aspects of daily life, possesses a unique systematic logic and capacity for generating meaning, which is called cultural semantics. In this context, the subject of our study is to identify and analyze the role of "Al Karysy," one of the most striking extraordinary being designs in Turkic mythology, in its continued resistance against the patriarchal structure during the transformation and eventual disappearance of the matriarchal structure. In this context, "Al Karysy," also known as "Al Anasy" or "Albasty," is an extraordinary being believed to exist in Turkic folk cultures.

The Alkarysy¹, whose name includes the word "al" in its various forms and is always associated with the color "al" in beliefs, is found throughout the Turkic world and has even

¹The terminology of an ancient religion, possibly the "Altaic religion" or "mythology," which extends to non-Turkic peoples within the cultural ecology of the Turkic world and whose traces are still very clearly visible, is



passed into the cultures of non-Turkic peoples such as Armenians, Georgians, and other Caucasian peoples, despite belonging to the Turkic cultural ecology. According to tradition, the Alkarısı is generally envisioned as a blonde and tall woman, but it is believed that she can also appear in different forms.

Among these, it is described as a creature with a human-animal hybrid appearance, tall, with long fingers, disheveled hair, a greasy body, small hands and feet, buck teeth, sometimes a black face, able to throw its breasts back from its shoulders like giants in fairy tales, with an eye on top of its head, and wearing a red shirt [1]. Among the people, stables, barns, ruins, riverbanks, rocks, fountains, and water sources are considered places where the Alkarısı resides and hides; approaching these places with the Bismillah and "destur" [2] is one of the indispensable practices in our folk religion and beliefs.

In short, we can take a closer look at the matriarchal period in Turkish mythology, where the Alkarı, possessing these fundamental characteristics, originated. The fact that the role of "kam" or "shaman" was monopolized by women, considered the sacred and superior gender, in the earliest periods of Turkish cultural history, led to the creation of the creator as "female" during the matriarchal period. As is known, in Turkish mythology, the creator mother goddess in the matriarchal period is named "Umay" and is symbolized by the "moon." In particular, the birch tree forms one of the most important origin myths of this period. Indeed, according to Mahmud al-Kashgari, birch means "woman" in Old Turkish, and the sacredness of the birch tree was also used in later kinship naming conventions such as "kayın-ana" (mother-in-law) and "kayın-ata" (father-in-law). In this context, the female shamans of this period, who appeared as the administrative, religious, political, and spiritual leaders of the society, governed the proto-Turkic communities living in the forested region located in the triangle between Southern Siberia and the Altai Mountains, leading clans or families averaging 15-20 people. Each clan or family camp was formed around a sacred family hearth or camp hearth.

Partly for this reason, the oldest known word in Turkish meaning "family" is "odbaşı," derived from the word "od" (fire). This word continues to be used as "odbaşı" in modern Kazakh Turkish. In Turkish, it is used as "aile ocağı" (family hearth), along with the word "aile," which is thought to originate from "avıl/ağıl" (courtyard/sheepfold). In this context, keeping the campfire burning at all times is undeniably the most important place in clan or community life, both because of the difficulty of lighting a fire and because of the belief, even in modern Turkish, that the fire going out signifies the end of the family hearth. More importantly, it is used to find direction and gather when necessary by looking at the smoke from the campfire, and perhaps most importantly, because of the protection it provides against wild animals such as bears, wolves, and leopards.

Keeping the hearth and fire burning was presented as the most important task of the female shamans, who also had the role of representing the hearth. In other words, throughout the matriarchal period of Turkish culture, this place and task was monopolized by female shamans with the title of "odağan"² (one who nourishes the fire and rises in the fire). The fact that fire is also called "al" and is associated with extraordinary beings such as "al bastı," "al kızı," "al karısı," or "al arvadı" (woman) [3] again indicates that Turkish women, as powerful female shamans associated with religious mystical cults, held power and authority for a very

a crucial area of research that has not been sufficiently explored. The need for an independent and international institute dedicated to this subject is evident.

² This word is still used today among Mongol and Saha (Yakut) Turks as a fixed expression meaning "female shaman".



long period, and accordingly, they kept men completely under their control, except for long-term "hunts" lasting five or six months.

The "kam-çı," (whip) a symbol of the first weapons and mystical powers of female shamans, must be a product of this period. Especially considering the findings unearthed to date, we believe that the "bow and arrow," which came into use as a product of this region, not only represented a high level of technological advancement as hunting, defense, and attack weapons, but also reshaped the mentality regarding women and the perception of women in Turkish society, starting from the Proto-Turkic period.

The use of the "whip," a symbol of the religious and mystical power and authority of female shamans empowered by fire as mentioned above, and the "bow and arrow," which allowed women with relatively weak physiques to strike and eliminate larger, stronger men from a distance without getting close, first began in the heart of Eurasia. This technological development, which enabled women to virtually equalize their power against stronger beings, primarily men, is extremely important. The motif of the famous female ruler of the historical period, Tomris Khan, and other Scythian women having one of their breasts (their left breast) removed in order to use the bow and arrow more easily and functionally, is highly significant in this context and explains how Turkish women, within our socio-cultural structure, equalized their physical power after their mystical-religious power. Furthermore, in our opinion, although the concept of "gender equality" developed on Earth and transformed into³ a religious pattern that we call "Al religion" [3], it ended with the suppression and forced migration to other lands of those who could not be assimilated by the followers of the dominant, masculine-natured Sky God (Köktengri) religion, which became dominant as a result of the rise of patriarchy, and their elimination. However, all these developments did not lead to the complete elimination of the traditional sources of power of Turkish women, which have continued from the proto-Turkic period we mentioned to the present day. Even in the most unfavorable socio-cultural conditions, Turkish women have produced elite or leader representatives that other cultures could not easily even imagine, and have always retained some of the traditional sources of power and authority under all circumstances. The equation of power between religious-mystical authority and physical strength, stemming from the aforementioned bow and arrow technology, with women, must have been the primary source of the extraordinary representation or "female rulers" that Turkish women have almost always produced throughout history, from the proto-Turkic period to the historical period⁴. In this context, the fact that female rulers reigned in many parts of the Turkic world, or that the main heroine in epic tales was a woman, should be considered a reflection of the socio-cultural structure we mentioned above, and which, at least in outline, points to as the sources of power.

In this context, those living in a nomadic society divide the year into two main seasons of approximately six months each: winter and summer. They spend the winter in a region with a broader and milder climate, known as a "winter pasture." After what is called New Year's Day (March 21st), winter ends. The flocks of sheep and goats, which were kept and cared for in barns under the roofs during the winter, gradually begin to graze in the pastures, spending the summer months in areas called "summer pastures" (yaylak), and returning to the winter pastures at the beginning of autumn. Within this lifestyle, the lives of women and children are not very different from those of men. They too follow their flocks and, from almost the age of three, do whatever work they are able to do to earn their living.

³For more information on this and other extraordinary being designs in Turkish folk culture, see (Çobanoğlu 2003a).

⁴ For information on the "Matriarchal period" in Turkish mythology, see (Çobanoğlu 2001; Çobanoğlu 2009).



Nomadic life imposes many tasks, and in this lifestyle, where owning "slaves" is inherently impossible, almost everyone must work, stand on their own two feet, or be ready for fierce conflict at any moment. Therefore, although the nomadic lifestyle has become male-dominated within the Turkish socio-cultural structure, Turkish women appear as if they were living in a period where they were warriors and active in almost every field and stage of social life, almost as if in a matriarchal society [4-6].

However, Turkish and proto-Turkic communities, commonly known as the "Amazons," who did not abandon the worship of the goddess Umay and did not submit to patriarchy or male dominance, managed to establish and maintain their own socio-cultural system for a considerable period [7-8]. Rather than focusing on this aspect, which largely constitutes a subject of history, the reflection of this period in our mythology forms the main topic of our discussion. Al Karısı is an extraordinary being who, precisely within this socio-cultural context, preys upon women who have surrendered to male dominance and abandoned or forgotten their matriarchy. It is precisely for this reason that Al Karısı torments and kills the bride and her child who submit to and marry a man⁵[5, 9-11]. In our opinion, the belief, particularly as recounted by Mahmud al-Kashgari, that "worshiping Umay will result in a male child," refers not so much to the "afterbirth" involving the baby, but rather to rituals directly directed towards Umay, the creator female goddess of the matriarchal period. In a way, this ensures that women do not abandon their old beliefs.

The fact that Al, the wife, harasses and tires out the horse - the man's most important companion and tool against patriarchy, and which, to some extent, also sustains the male-dominated structure or patriarchy - can also be seen as an element of resistance. Considering the opportunities the horse provides, especially within our male-dominated structure, the resistance we are talking about becomes more understandable and easily interpretable.

The act of Al Karısı attacking and killing women who have submitted to men and lived within a patriarchal structure, and who had married and given birth to their children, can be seen as an act of "revenge" stemming from the matriarchal nature of the goddess Umay and her worship⁶[9, 12]. Similarly, within a patriarchal structure, the harassment of women doing needlework, knitting, or weaving at night, especially on Wednesday nights, and the act of destroying the woven parts, etc., are other examples of the socially accepted forms of harassment and assault perpetrated by the mythological being Al Karısı within the contemporary Turkish socio-cultural structure.

⁵The Epic of Altın Arıĝ is an epic poem containing extremely intense mythological elements and compiled from among the Khakas Turks. This epic, whose main heroine is a warrior girl named Altın Arıĝ, is extremely important both for reflecting some traces of the matriarchal period and for the fact that linguists believe it reflects the same characteristics in terms of language, style, ideals, and understanding as the Kültegin monument belonging to the Göktürks. For more information on this subject, see (Özkan 1997; Çobanoğlu 2003b). It is seen that these transformations, stemming from lifestyles that can influence, are the products of clearly different dynamics, not religions.

⁶This situation culturally imposes the warrior or heroine type as a desirable type or model. Indeed, in the Dede Korkut Stories, Kan Turalı, the son of Kanlı Koca, tells his father that the woman he loves should ride a horse, attack the enemy, and bring back heads, as a necessary quality for the girl he will marry (Ergin 1989:185). Despite its male-dominated structure, the nomadic lifestyle could not eliminate the active and extroverted heroine personality of Turkish women, including their warrior spirit, which they possessed from the proto-Turkic period onwards. On the contrary, it encouraged this personality and tried to present these characteristics as desirable social and societal values, and to integrate this type of woman into our social fabric as a "role model" through epics and similar traditional narratives. However, as settlement on the land and the transformation into an agricultural society occurred, the male-dominated structure's practices aimed at confining women to the home would also emerge in the communities of the Turkic world.



Conclusion

In conclusion, the events we have discussed regarding the Alkarısı (a mythical female figure associated with the malevolent spirit) and exemplified by oral traditions within the contemporary Turkish socio-cultural structure, serve as "counter-functions" that reduce the adjustments and adaptations of the patriarchal system - including Tengriism and similar systems. We see and interpret these narratives about the Alkarısı belief, numbering in the thousands, as reflections or expressions of the resistance of the matriarchal structure and system in our collective subconscious. The Alkarısı's insensitivity and lack of influence towards Islamic elements such as "besmele" (invocation of God's name), her fear of iron, and her fear of men - all these oral cultural patterns - have been transformed into a form and function that reinforces male dominance in our culture. Further research in this area can reveal more deeply the traces of the Umay Goddess belief and the matriarchal structure, and, based on our cultural semantics, the socio-cultural elements living within the cultural ecology of the Turkic world can be organized and analyzed in a more meaningful and functional way.

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Озкул Чобаноглу

МӘДЕНИ СЕМАНТИКАЛЫҚ КОНТЕКСТТЕГІ ТҮРКІ ӘЛЕМІ МИФОЛОГИЯСЫНДАҒЫ АЛҚАРЫСЫ МЕН АЛБАСТЫ ҚҰБЫЛЫСЫ

Аңдатпа. Бұл зерттеу түркі әлемінде кең тараған мифтердің бірі болып табылатын «Албасти» деп аталатын нәрестенің немесе тіпті анасының өліміне әкелетін Алқарысы (мифтік әйел жын) және оның тудыратын зиянды оқиғасына назар аударады. Мәдени семантика контекстінде түркі мифологиясының ең ерте кезеңі әйелдердің басым болған кезеңі болып табылады. Бұл кезеңде әйелдер ерлерден жоғары саналды, ең алдымен олардың құнарлылығына байланысты. Сәйкесінше, «кам ана» (шаман аналар) басшылығымен және жетекшілігімен шамамен 15-20 адамнан тұратын матрилиндік қауымдастықтар құрылды. Әйелдер мен қайыңның шығу тегі туралы мифтер ретіндегі байланысын ескере отырып, осы ерте кезеңдегі түркі мифологиясындағы «әйел» концептуализациясы қарастырылады. Далада көшпелі өмір мен мал шаруашылығының пайда болуымен үстемдігінен айырылған кейбір әйелдер (амазондар немесе ұмай ізбасарлары ретінде) қарсы күресті, бірақ ерлердің үстемдігіне түсіп, оларды және олардың сәбилерін өлтірген әйелдерге жасалған шабуылдар «Әл Қарысы» және «Албасти» наным-сенімдерінің шығу тегі мен кең таралу сипатын құрайды. Бұл тұрғыда әйелдер мен қайың ағаштарының физикалық ұқсастықтары, екеуінің де нәрлендіретін қасиеті, қайың сүтінің немесе шырынының әйелдерге күтім жасауы, қайың ағаштарының аналық қамқорлығы мен күтімі, қайың ағаштарын «алажық» деп аталатын жерлерде үй, баспана немесе баспана ретінде ерте пайдалануы және олардың «одағандар» (одағандар) (одағандар) құрылымдары басқаратын лагерьлермен қарым-қатынасы).

Кілт сөздер: Матриархалдық түркі мифологиясы, матриархалдық түркі әйелдерінің концептуализациясы, Ұмай ізбасарлары, Әл құдайы, Албасти, Түркі әлемінің мәдени семантикасы

Озкул Чобаноглу

ФЕНОМЕН АЛҚАРЫСЫ И АЛБАСТЫ В МИФОЛОГИИ ТЮРКСКОГО МИРА В КОНТЕКСТЕ КУЛЬТУРНОЙ СЕМАНТИКИ

Аннотация. В данном исследовании рассматриваются Алқарысы (мифологический женский демон) и вредоносное явление, которое она вызывает и которое часто приводит к смерти младенца или даже матери, известное как «Албасти», одно из наиболее распространённых мифологических представлений тюркского мира. В рамках культурной семантики ранний период тюркской мифологии характеризуется доминированием женщин. В этот период женщины считались превосходящими мужчин прежде всего благодаря своей способности к деторождению. Соответственно, под руководством и управлением «камана» (шаманских матерей) формировались матрилинейные сообщества численностью примерно 15–20 человек. Учитывая связь женщин с берёзой как с мифом происхождения, в работе рассматривается концептуализация образа «женщины» в тюркской мифологии этого раннего периода. С переходом к кочевому образу жизни и скотоводству в степях некоторые женщины, утратившие своё доминирующее положение, оказывали сопротивление (в образе амазонок или последователей Умай), однако нападения на женщин, оказавшихся под мужским господством, их убийство вместе с младенцами легли в основу происхождения и широкого распространения верований об «Ал Карсы» и «Албасти». В этом контексте анализируются физическое сходство женщин и берёз, их питательная природа, благотворное воздействие берёзового молока или сока на женщин, материнская забота и вскармливающая функция берёзы, раннее использование берёз в качестве домов, жилищ или укрытий в местах, называемых «алачик», их связь с



кочевыми стоянками, управляемыми «одаган» (предводителями), а также формирование семейных структур.

Ключевые слова: матриархальная тюркская мифология, концептуализация матриархальных тюркских женщин, последователи Умай, богиня Ал, Албасты, культурная семантика тюркского мира.