THE *ALP* (HERO) AND THE MONSTER IN BEOWULF AND THE BOOK OF DEDE KORKUT

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Abstract

In epics, in general, there are two types of heroes: the hero and the monster. Before Islam and Christianity, the hero is considered to be the god-like creature that has the exemplary characteristics and does his best for the sake of his nation. In the belief system of the Sky-God and shamanism before Islam, the hero is selected by the Sky-God by means of a trance, dream or the deed that he gained success by killing the supernatural character. Similarly in the belief system of Paganism before and after Christianity, the hero who endures the worst possible scenarios in life to save his people from disasters, has supernatural powers or inborn abilities to fight against the monsters,. Therefore, the epic is usually known by the hero's or the *alp's* name.

Furthermore the other character which shapes the structure of the epic is known as the monster. It is sometimes in the disguise of a giant, a wicked hag, a serpent, Satan, wicked angel or underworld creature. In this article the relation of the hero or the *alp* and monster will be studied and the concept of monster in Turkish epic (*The Book of Dede Korkut*) and in English epic (*Beowulf*) will be analysed.

Key words: Epic, *The Book of Dede Korkut, Beowulf, alp* (epic hero), monster, pre-Islam, pre-Christianity, monotheism (Islam, Christianity).

Beowulf ve Dede Korkut'taki Alp ve Canavar

Özet

Destanlarda genel olarak karşımıza iki tür karakter çıkmaktadır: destanı şekillendiren kahraman karakter ve kahramana karşı savaşan canavar. İslamiyet'in ve Hıristiyanlığın kabulü öncesindeki destanlarda kahraman, davranışları ile halkına iyi örnek olur ve halkının takdirini toplamak için elinden gelenin en iyisini yapardı. İslamiyet öncesinde Gök-Tanrı ve Şamanizm inancını içinde barındıran destanlarda kahramanın kahraman olabilmesi transa geçmesi, rüya görmesi yada doğa üstü güçlere karşı başarı sağlaması gerekirdi. Buna benzer bir şekilde Hıristiyanlığın kabulü öncesindeki ve sürecindeki paganizmi içinde barındıran destanlarda da doğaüstü güçleri olduğuna inanılan kahraman doğuştan getirdiği meziyetleri ile canavarla savaşır halkını korur, ülkesini kurtarırdı. Böylece destanın adı kahramanın ya da alpin adını alırdı.

Destanın şekillenmesine katkısı olan canavar ise dev, kocakarı, yılan, lanetlenmiş bir melek ya da yeraltında yaşayan ifrit olarak karşımıza çıkmaktadır. Bu makalede kahraman karakter ile canavar karakterinin destanı nasıl şekillendirdiği, hangisinin neye göre kahraman olduğu *Dede Korkut Hikâyeleri* ve *Beowulf* incelenerek anlatılacaktır.

Anahtar Kelimeler: Dede Korkut Hikâyeleri, Beowulf, alp, canavar, İslamiyet öncesi, Hıristiyanlık öncesi, İslamiyet, Hıristiyanlık.

Epic is an extended narrative poem, grand in scope, exalted in style, and heroic in theme that often gives expression to the ideals of a nation or race. Although the locations and the eras of the epics differ, the similarities of conditions bring them into existence. The epic is easy to memorize and the gleemen or the scops memorize the epics to recite them to their societies, for this reason the process of the epic started orally and passed on from one generation to other by word of mouth. Within the epic it is not difficult to recognize the folklore, customs, social structure and the political issues of the society that it belonged to. In epic, there is the reflection of the traditions and myths of a culture or group of people. In addition to this, the deeds of the major and functional characters are shaped by these traditions and myths. *Beowulf* and *The Book of Dede Korkut* are the epics which both preserve and reflect the virtues and values of their societies.

In an epic, the supernatural elements are intermingled with the social rituals, folklore, and the religious beliefs. In this respect, it may be asserted that the supernatural elements of *Beowulf* and *The Book of Dede Korkut* have common characteristics. Generally, in epics, giants, monsters, dragons or fairies are mentioned. Çobanoğlu asserts that the fight between the supernatural character and the hero is almost always one of the major charateristics of the epic tradition (Çobanoğlu, 2003, s. 20). The supernatural beings in *Beowulf* can be listed as Grendel, Grendel's mother, the dragon and Beowulf himself (which some critics still debate); and similarly Hızır, Tepegöz and the fairy mother of Tepegöz are the supernatural characters in *The Book of Dede Korkut*. The hero tries to bring peace to his society and wants to put an end to the threat or chaos caused by the supernatural being or beings. Beowulf, for instance, slays Grendel, his mother and the dragon in order to protect people. Similarly Basat, a hero in *The Book of Dede Korkut*, kills Tepegöz to protect his society from this supernatural character in the story of Basat, Killer of the One-Eyed Giant. Although the fairy mother of Tepegöz is encountered in the epic, she is not depicted in detail. Hızır is another supernatural character that is introduced in the story of Boğaç Kağan, and he differs from the other supernatural characters. He is considered to be a holy supernatural character; he always helps the people who are in need. He is like a holy spirit; who suddenly appears in order to help people and disappears after accomplishing his mission.

In *Beowulf* and *The Book of Dede Korkut,* supernatural elements, events and characters, relations with the inter-tribal societies directly influence the establishment and the development of the belief systems, and the relation of the *alp*[1] and the supernatural elements (monsters) display similarities depending

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[1] It is a title of a Turkish hero who kills the monster or saves his nation at the age of thirteen.

upon the belief systems. In epic it is observed that values such as folklore, culture, social and political issues, supernatural elements, gender relations and setting establish and directly influence the belief system of a society.

In the *Beowulf* and *The Book of Dede Korkut,* the poets accomodate a double tradition: Christian and pre-Christian, Islamic and pre-Islamic; Boratav points out that epics passed on from one generation to the other by word of mouth, and through the transition from oral culture to written culture, and that more than one poet recited epics (Boratav, 1988, s. 57). The date of composition of *Beowulf* covers the heroic and Christian periods. Similarly, the date of the composition of *The Book of Dede Korkut* covers the heroic and Islamic period.

The comparative study of the belief systems within the concept of the *alp* and monster relation in *Beowulf* and *The Book of Dede Korkut* aims to analyse the concept of heroism and antiheroism within the belief systems in epics. The significance of monsters and heroic deeds in *Beowulf* are shaped and influenced respectively by Germanic and Scandinavian paganism, and Christianity; and they are also shaped and influenced by the Sky-God belief with its cults and shamanism and Islam in *The Book of Dede Korkut*. Hence, it may be asserted that the *alp* and the function of the monster change depending upon the belief systems that they are in.

First of all, the concept and the deeds of the hero in both of the epics display similarities. The difference is that both of the epics have monsters or supernatural characters, and their existence or physical shapes symbolize different things. The major deed of the hero is to prove his prowess, and has to kill the monster to save his country from disasters. Although in both epics there is a similar concern, deserving the title of being a hero differs in *Beowulf* and *The Book of Dede Korkut*. In *Beowulf* the name "Beowulf" is given when the baby is born and he is not given any name after killing the creature or monster. Contrary to Beowulf, the name of Basat in *The Book of Dede Korkut* is given to the hero when he kills a wild animal. Basat is fifteen years old and he deserves to earn a name to prove his prowess. Both Beowulf and Basat are the heroes of the epics, and they both fight with the supernatural creatures such as giants or monsters.

It may be asserted that there are three kinds of monsters in *Beowulf*. In this respect it is necessary to draw attention to the fact that the man eater giant Grendel, his vengeful mother, and the fiery dragon are personifications of malice, greed and destruction.

> So times were pleasant for the people there
> Until finally one, a fiend out of hell,
> Began to work his evil in the world.
> Grendel was the name of this grim demon

> Haunting the marches, marauding round the heath
> And the desolate fens; he had dwelt for a time
> In misery among the banished monsters (Donoghue, 2002, ss.
> 5-6).

Similar to Grendel depicted in *Beowulf*, the monster or in other words the giant Tepegöz is also a personification of malice, greed and destruction. When the Oğuz people and Bayındır Han come to the fountain, they encounter a frightening thing, a shapeless mass, lying on the ground. Although he has a human body, he has only a single eye on the top of his head. Uruz Koca takes Tepegöz, this creature with one eye home, where he calls for a nurse:

> When the nurse gave the child her breast, he sucked once and
> drew all the milk she had. He sucked once more, and this time
> he drew her blood. He sucked a third time and took her life.
> They brought several other nurses after that, but they were all
> killed by him in the same manner (Sümer, Uysal & Walker,
> 1991, s. 124).

Similar to the characteristics of the monsters in *Beowulf* and *The Book of Dede Korkut*, the dwelling places are to some extent similar. Grendel and Grendel's mother's dwelling place is in water, and the dragon lives in a barrow, Grendel and his mother's dwelling place is described as follows in *Beowulf:*

> Hard by the rock face that hale veteran,
> A good man who had gone repeatedly
> Into combat and danger andcome through,
> Saw a stone arch and a gushing stream
> That burst from the barrow, blazing and wafting
> A deadly heat. It would be hard to survive
> Unscathed near the hoar, to hold firm
> Against the dragon in those flaming depths (Donoghue, 2002,
> s. 64).

The sleeping dragon dwells in a barrow and guards the treasure, wakes up in order to guard the treasure from the intruder who attempts to steal it. When the fiery dragon wakes up, he belches out flames and burns bright homesteads. Not only he damages the dwelling places of people, but he also kills them. Like Grendel and his mother, the dragon destroys everything and brings chaos to the society. Similar to the dwelling places of the monsters in *Beowulf*, the dwelling place of Tepegöz is in a cave called Salhana. In this cave like the sword of Grendel, the sword of Tepegöz is hung over the wall. Tepegöz guards his treasure in his cave like the dragon keeps it: "Basat went to the

Slaughter Rock where Tepegöz now lived, and there he saw Tepegöz lying with his back turned toward the sun (Sümer, Uysal & Walker, 1991, s. 128).

Tepegöz is considered to be the evil giant that is in disguise of a humanbeing, and the leader of the one eyed giants in the Kaf Mountain (Beydili, 2004, s.168). It is interesting that he first lives with people and plays with the children, but while he is playing with them, he eats their noses and ears, for this reason he is dismissed from the homeland of the Oğuz society and sent to the Salhana barrow.

In epics it is observed that the *alp* achieves his goals by killing the supernatural characters. The readers are always aware of the characteristics and the identity of the a*lps*, and similar to this, the description of the monsters who fight with the *alps* are given in detail. For example, Grendel is described as a man eating giant that devours people. Grendel's vengeful mother also eats people, and the dragon which is like a serpent devastates the country. The descriptions of the monsters are given, and they are continually referred to as the descendants of Cain in *Beowulf*. Contrary to *Beowulf*, the description of Tepegöz is given in detail:

> There was a famous watering place there called Long Fountain, which had been possessed by fairies. This time, the sheep were frightened all of a sudden. The shepherd, angry at the young lead ram that he thought was responsible, walked to the front of the flock to see what was amiss. He saw a troop of fairies, linked wing to wing and dancing about. He threw his shepherd's cloak upon them and caught one of them. He took this fairy to bed with him, but soon the sheep began to be frightened. When the shepherd ran to the head of the flock, the fairy flipped her wings and flew flew away, saying: "Shepherd, when a full year has passed, I shall have something for you. Come then and get it. But know that you have brought misfortune to the Oghuz people". (Sümer, Uysal & Walker, 1991, s. 123).

The mother of Tepegöz is a fairy, and the father is a shepherd. A year passes and the shepherd goes to the same fountain and sees a huge glittering mass lying on the ground, that is, of course, Tepegöz that has a human body but only a single eye on his forehaed in *The Book of Dede Korkut*. Another characteristic described in *The Book of Dede Korkut* is Tepegöz's bargain with the Oğuz society. When he goes to live at the Salhana cave, he devastates the

Oğuz society, for this reason Korkut Ata[2], who is considered to be the shaman before Islam, and a holy person after conversion to Islam, goes to the cave to make a bargain with Tepegöz:

> He went to the giant, and, after greeting him, he said, " My son, Tepegöz, you have devastated the country and oppressed the Oğuz people so much that they have sent me to you to kiss the dust of your feet and tell you in their behalf that they will give you whatever you want."
>   Tepegöz said, "I want to eat sixty men a day."
> Dede Korkut said: "This will leave hardly a man into the country. Let us give you two men and five hundred sheep a day." To this offer Tepegöz said: "Very well. Let it be so! Provide me also with two men to cook my food." (Sümer, Uysal & Walker, 1991, s. 124).

Tepegöz also interacts with Korkut Ata to make a bargain in *The Book of Dede Korkut* that is not observed in *Beowulf*.

In epics, the characteristics of the monsters, their identities, and dwelling places are important in order to display the relation of the monsters and the heroes. It may be stated that the heroes come into being in order to stop chaos or to kill the monsters that threaten the society. In *Beowulf*, Beowulf is the epic hero and comes from Geatland to Denmark to save Hrothgar's society from Grendel. Beowulf is aware of the fact that once Hrothgar helped his own father, and for this reason Beowulf, himself intends to help Hrothgar by killing the monster. However, Basat belongs to the Oğuz society, and he decides to kill Tepegöz that threatens his society. After the bargain between Korkut Ata and Tepegöz, Tepegöz eats men every day, and those who have three sons give one away have two left and those having two sons give one away and have one left:

> There was a name by the name of Kalpak Khan who had two sons. He had given one son away and was left now with only one. But now it was his turn to give the remaining son away. His wife cried and expressed much grief. It happened to Basat, the son of Uruz Koja, who had been away on an expedition against the infidels, returned home at this time. The poor woman thought: "Basat has just returned from a raid, but let me go to him; perhaps he will give me one of his prisoners, whom I can give to Tepegöz instead of my son". (Sümer, Uysal & Walker, 1991, s. 126).

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[2] This name has the same meaning of Dede Korkut. Korkut Ata is considered to be the wise man of the Oğuz society. When he gives advice he is referred to as Korkut Ata, but when the story is told he is called Dede Korkut.

After listening to the grief of the mother, he decides to meet Tepegöz in order to kill him. In this respect Basat is not aware of the fact that Tepegöz is carrying a magical ring, which protects him from death. In *Beowulf* there is not any token such as the magical ring that Tepegöz has in *The Book of Dede Korkut*. This ring was given by the fairy mother of Tepegöz: She said "My son, may an arrow never pierce your body and a sword never cut your skin" (124). Beowulf does not belong to the society of the Danes, but comes from Geatland to protect them from the disaster in *Beowulf*. Contrary to this Basat belongs to the Oğuz dynasty and saves the Oğuz people by killing Tepegöz.

Both of the epics have the a*lps*, they fight with the monsters that bring disasters to societies. Beowulf, for example, kills three monsters and he does not talk to them. He only does his task as an examplary hero, and kills Grendel, Grendel's mother and the dragon respectively:

> Beowulf was granted
> The glory of winning; Grendel was driven
> Under the fen-banks, fatally hurt,
> To his desolate lair (*Donoghue, 2002, s.* 22).

Contrary to the fighting scene in *Beowulf*, Basat kills Tepegöz after long speeches in *The Book of Dede Korkut*. Basat tries to kill Tepegöz many times but due to the magical ring of the monster, he cannot achieve his goal at first, and after that he realizes the only vulnerable point in his eye:

> Basat got near Tepegöz's head, lifted his eyelid, and saw thathis eye was really made of flesh. He then said, Ho, cooks, put the skewer in the fire and make it red-hot. Basat took it in his hand, and, repeating his belief in Mohammed- his name be praised- he then pushed the skewer so hard into Tepegöz's eye that he completely destroyed it. Tepegöz roared so much that his cry echoed in the rock and mountains (Sümer, Uysal & Walker, 1991, s. 129).

After giving harm to the eye of Tepegöz, Basat springs away and jumps into the flock of sheep in the cave. Tepegöz knows that Basat is still somewhere in the cave and Tepegöz starts to play a magical game with him. Tepegöz talks to Basat to understand where he is in the cave; the monster intends to give his magical ring, and tells the place of his hidden treasure in order to kill him, but Tepegöz cannot deceive him. After a long speech Tepegöz understands that Basat is a clever hero not to be killed and cries out:

> My eye, my only eye.
> Young man, you denied me my single brown eye.

> May Allah Almighty withdraw your sweet life.
> This eye pain which now I endured is so great
> Let Allah give no man such pain to be borne (Sümer, Uysal &
> Walker, 1991, s. 131).

It is interesting that the giant Tepegöz is in pain and although he is not Muslim he prays as if he were religious. After the speech of Tepegöz, Basat also answers the questions of the monster and kills him without getting a fatal wound: "Basat stood up, angry. Making Tepegöz kneel down like a camel, he cut off his head with his sword. He made a hole through the head, put the string of his bow through it, and dragged it to the entrance of the cave (Sümer, Uysal & Walker, 1991, s. 132).

In the end of the epic, Beowulf gets the fatal wound after killing the dragon, and he dies:

> Then the bane of that people, the fire-breathing dragon,
> Was mad to attack for a third time.
> When a chance came, he caught the hero
> In a rush of flame and clamped sharp fangs
> Into his neck. Beowulf's body ran wet with his life blood
> (Donoghue, 2002, s. 67).

Contrary to Beowulf's death, Basat kills Tepegöz victoriously and Korkut Ata appears to pray for him:

> May the dark mountains listen to you. May the bloody rivers allow
> passage to you. You have taken vengeance for your brother's
> blood in a manly way, and you have relieved the strong Oğuz beys
> of a heavy burden. My khan, may Allah never separate you from
> the clean faith as long as you live, and may He forgive your sins
> for the sake of Mohammed- his name be praised- oh, my khan
> (Sümer, Uysal & Walker, 1991, s. 133).

As a consequence it may be asserted that the relation of the *alp* and the monster in the Western epic, *Beowulf*, and in pre-Islamic epic, *The Book of Dede Korkut*, displays both differences and similarities. The concept of the belief system in epics varies depending upon the periods before and after the monotheistic beliefs that are respectively Christianity and Islam. At this stage it may be inferred that Grendel, Grendel's mother and the dragon may stand for the deities depicted in Celtic and Scandinavian mythologies in terms of polytheism, but after conversion to Christianity they stand for the descendants of Cain. Although *Beowulf* is put down into writing in the seventh century B.C. the hero Beowulf is considered to be a pure Christian after conversion to

Christianity as well. Similar to *Beowulf*, *The Book of Dede Korkut* both preserves the Sky-God belief and a monotheistic belief Islam although it is put down into writing in the ninth century A.D. There is no clue that Tepegöz was in disguise of the Sky-God, but after conversion to Islam, he prays like a Muslim. Basat, the *alp* of *The Book of Dede Korkut*, is also depicted as if were a Muslim. Altough both of the epics have the similar process in converting into monotheistic beliefs, the deeds of the heroes do not change, but they act as if they were the believers of the new faiths.

It may be asserted that in pre-Christian *Beowulf* and pre-Islamic *The Book of Dede Korkut* the hero has supernatural powers or inborn abilities to fight against the monsters. The major character of the epic is an *alp* or epic hero, who endures the worst possible scenarios in life to save his people from disasters. Epic is usually known by the *alp*'s name. He is fully supported by a sizable cast of characters and is opposed by powerful and treacherous monsters. Regardless of the hopelessness of the circumstances, the alp of *Beowulf* and *The Book of Dede Korkut* can never be subjugated and can never abandon the fight, and in the end they deserve their titles to be heroes.

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