

ABSTRACT

Most nation has epics. Because epics have an important function in forming nations' identities. Epics are important in the unity of nations around heroism. Epic of Dede Korkut has an important place in the Turks living in Turkey. Besides, Dede Korkut is a literary example in which not only heroism, but also moral advices are displayed. What makes Dede Korkut significant is it's synthesis of Turkishness with Islam. An important issue is that the modern era aims to keep religion and national elements separate, causing an identity problem. These issues will be evaluated in our article.

Keywords: Dede Korkut, Epic, Parable, Nationality, Islam, Modernity

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When one speaks of the Turkish-Islamic tradition, it is important to explain and make sense of this compound word. If religion is taken as having a more dominant structure, then considering Turkishness and Islam together as in when one speaks of the Turkish-Islamic, this can seem to be a problematic disposal. While it may be problematic to say Arabic-Islam, saying German-Christian points to the same problematic meaning when it comes to Christianity. However, one can say that the compound word of Turkish-Islam does not adhere to a similar problematic, at least in our minds. The most important reason for this is because of the harmony achieved between the tradition of the Turks and Islam. What is particularly emphasized in Turks who found themselves a direction with Islam are not fundamental values like warfare or bravery. As we will indicate in our article, Islam is a religion that encourages keeping and even developing upon elements that it considers as part of cultural identity, if they are indeed useful. In other words, Islam is a religion that aims not to assimilate national identity, but to develop it. As a matter of fact, Turks adhered to different beliefs and religions other than Islam. However, these beliefs and religions have either changed or obscured the identities of the Turks. In this article, this aforementioned identity structure will be discussed. Doing so, the role of the Epic as well as other narrational genres will be mentioned in the context of identity formation. The function and structure of religion, which should be considered to be a more fundamental element in identity formation, will also be analyzed by comparing it with the epic. Within the framework of this analysis, some tension points between Turkishness and Islam which need to be approached philosophically will be evaluated.

First of all it is necessary to mention an important point about this subject. The reason why I specifically indicate this is because I adhere to a stance against a modernity approach that is consolidated with the modernization process of Turkey and the modern world. Once the Western civilization understood the experience of Christianity as a dark period, it naturally associated its development with independence from religion.¹ According to this approach, people have to overcome the inconsistent, bigoted and regressive aspects of religions as a requirement of the age of reason. It was impossible for both the Ottoman Empire as well as its successor, the Republic of Turkey, to be unaffected by this approach.² As a matter of fact, the Ottoman Empire first started to discuss this issue in the 19th century and an approach regarding it was put forward with the formation of the Republic. Consequently, as much as it is seen in many of the official laws of the state, we still encounter different versions of the orientation achieved in this issue within our people today. However, although it had some grounded concerns, this approach aimed to completely alter the relationship between

religion and the human being, especially because western modernity had a fundamentally different structure. For instance, we can inspect the discourse which states that “religion is between God and man”. Here, we can observe the desire to reflect the religious experience of western civilization, which has become synonymous with and even surpassed the clergy, to our country and our understanding of religion. In the course of Western thought, the Protestant understanding emerged, which, in an understandable reaction against the clergy becoming a priority over religion, wanted religion to remain between man and God, rather than between church and man, in order to set aside the clergy and its authority.³ However, as mentioned above, in the course of its modernization process and within the framework of the conception of individualization and rationalism, the West has completely lost its belief in God and religion. A wealth of literature exists on an elaborate explanation of this. But it suffices to just take a look at Max Weber’s “Protestant Ethics and the Spirit of Capitalism”. Since such a class and individual-centric approach in Islam does not exist, the emergence of a similar reaction can only be evaluated as artificial or as the concern to emulate the West. Therefore, it is not right to strip down religion to the individual by ignoring both its social aspect and its doctrines. Ironically, however, taking this reduction to be correct is interpreted as modernism.

Another type of this approach in question is making a distinction between being Turkish and being a Muslim. Considering the religion of Islam as a religion specific to the Arabs and the Arabic language is actually a result of the racial viewpoint. In other words, an approach that considers its own race as unique inevitably looks at which nation and which language a value originated from instead of looking at the deep and universal meaning of a value which has emerged from a place or a nation and of course, searches for ways to directly and indirectly reject it. When this is the case, instead of Islam, it tries to accept fundamentally the structure put forward by the Turkish nation before this religion or in the instance of Dede Korkut. Just as the conception of pure Turkish⁴ was against the use of Arabic and Persian, this same concern begins to be reconstructed under the name of pure religionism.⁵

Therefore, when trying to understand Turkish culture and traditions, it is not possible for us to adhere to an approach that wants to understand this as a triumph over Islam. The thought

3 Of course Protestantism did not consider removing the clergy. On the other hand, it is certain that the church is decisive and there is a problem with what it determines.

4 Öztürkçecilik.

5 In the modernization process, we can also see self-awareness as natural religiousness in a way. Because both approaches have similar claims. To explain the character and deficiency of this understanding by giving an example, there is no return to the original religion, neither in natural religion nor in self-consciousness. Basically, with the claim that the essence of religion is morality, it is aimed to develop a new understanding without considering the theological and faith dimensions of religion. In this insight, the complementary theology and faith need to be changed because it has been necessary to redesign the way the modern subject is at the center. For this, it is necessary to mention the moralism of the modern individual as well as his morality.

1 Sukru Hanioglu, *Osmanlı'dan Cumhuriyete Zihniyet Siyaset ve Tarih*, (İstanbul: Bağlam Yayınları, 2006), 19-23.

2 Thomas Paine, *Akıl Çağı*, trans. Ali İhsan Dalkılıç (İstanbul: İş Bankası Yayınları, 2018), 3-13.

of reading the Dede Korkut Epics as an alternative to the religion of Islam is wrong. It is also not correct to present this idea in a different way by arguing that Islamic values are already present among the Turks. Religions, as we will consecutively try to demonstrate, correspond to an understanding that is different from narratives such as the epic. The fact that Islam, which presents itself as a mature religion, not the last one, offers itself as the strengthening of this conception shows that religion and especially Islam should be evaluated more carefully.⁶ Furthermore, the fact that Turkishness, which was already influential during the Dede Korkut period, chose Islam indicates that the purpose and context of the aforementioned racism was different. In other words, if the Turks had not chosen Islam, or had rejected these epics after choosing it, then we could have thought that this was not related to the political meaning of nationalism, but to a profound issue between Turks' traditions and religion. However, the conception pertaining to Dede Korkut did not create any tension between Islam and Turkishness.

After stating these important issues, we want to initiate our main subject with the following question: What should be paid attention to in the Dede Korkut Saga? When approaching a topic philosophically, it is necessary to act from a perspective which is universal. For this reason, before proceeding to the fundamental characteristic of narrative genres such as myth, including epics, we must start from the reason why these human-made activities blossom. Human beings are creatures who experience time in three dimensions. This three-dimensional conception of time caused its abilities to differ from that of other living beings. To give an example, unlike other living beings, human beings are creatures who dream. We do not dream about things that are happening in the present, but rather we desire and this capacity for desire implies being stuck in the present and making us identical to animals. When we are hungry, we do not dream; just like animals, we have a desire to eat. However, as a human being, we dream about the past and the future. Our dreams about the future are our hopes. If the present expresses the desire to obtain and the future to realize something, then myths express the desire to know what has happened and what is actually happening. This desire is the motif for dreaming. Dreams related to the past express the myths that constitute our subject. It should be remembered that religions give elaborate information related to the past.

We must make a distinction at this point. One of the important differences between the man of the past and the modern man is their distinguishing between the qualitative meaning and the quantitative meaning of time. In the past, myths were regarded as truth.⁷ This means

⁶ Religion, as we see in the Western understanding, especially in the philosophy of Hegel, is the stage for the finalization of Geist. This means the perfection of a thought that transcends religion in its comprehension, not the perfected form of religion.

⁷ Mircea Eliade, *Mitlerin Özelliikleri*, trans. Sema Rifat, (Istanbul: Om Yayınevi, 2018), 28. Perhaps as an exception we can find a more critical approach to myths in ancient Greek thought.

that the discourses about the beginning do not actually tell a story, but rather report something that just happened. When this is the case, what just happened expresses reality in qualitative time. However, modern people's narrative does not refer to a past that just happened. What is real is now, not the past. For this reason, there is no such thing as the repetition of the beginning as there is in myths. For the present to be repeated in the positive, it was thought that what happened in the past was the pathway to the present. When this is the case, the past is significantly quantitative, or at best, instrumental.⁸

That the past qualifies as news, that is, as reality, becomes more meaningful when it is described as the beginning. The beginning can manifest itself in different ways. Cosmogony, which is the beginning of the universe, and theogony, which is considered as the beginning of the gods, are different. In the mythical thinking about the past, the initiator as well as the beginning is sought, and at times this initiator and the beginning as seen as identical. Mythical thinking tells people how everything started and its backstory. As a matter of fact, this reporting mode and having someone who reports are different in scientific/philosophical thinking. Although we will explain it in more detail below, it would be helpful to explain this point. While this situation of the past causes the usage of a particular past tense, scientific thinking uses the present tense suffix. In other words, when we say that the source of everything is water, the source/*arkhe* here refers to a perennial state which includes the past. In other words, when an idea is reached regarding the source, we see that it is classified in a separate category in terms of time. Indeed, in his work titled *Timaeus*, Plato expresses this in the following words: "Now when the father that had begotten it beheld it moving and quick, a created image of the eternal gods, he rejoiced, and in his delight devised how to make it yet more like its model. So, as that is an eternal living being, he sought to make this universe also such, as far as might be. Now the nature of that living being was everlasting, and this it was impossible to confer wholly on a creature. But he devised the making of a moving likeness of everlastingness, so, in his ordering of heaven, he makes a likeness, proceeding by number of everlastingness that abides in unity, the same we have named time. For days and nights and months and years,—these were not before heaven was made, he contrived them then, as it was being fashioned. All these are divisions of time, and 'was' and 'shall be' are created parts of time, we unwittingly do ill when we attribute them to eternal being. We say it was and is and shall be, but, if we would speak truly, only 'is' belongs to it, 'was' and 'shall be' should be said of becoming that proceeds in time, since they are motions. But to that which is ever immutably self-same it belongs neither to grow older or younger by lapse of time, nor yet to have come to be heretofore, nor to continue to be now, nor again to be still to come nothing belongs to it of all that becoming attaches to the changing things of sense, all have come to be and are

⁸ We see the most obvious example of this point of view in the German philosopher Hegel.

parts of time, imitating everlastingness by its numbered revolution. It is the same, too, with all those phrases, that what has come to be *is* come to be, what comes to be is coming to be, and even that what will come to be *is* to come to be and what is not is what is not—none of them all is exact. But the present, perhaps, is no fitting time for exact discourse of this”⁹ Secondly, myths reveal themselves through the reporter. In other words, it is necessary to pay attention to having a person who narrates the event in narrative forms including epics and myths. This is such an important thing that Hesiod who is an important figure in Greek and western thought begins like this to demonstrate that his own narration is correct. Even though he is a philosopher, Parmenides, who is aware of the importance of this narration, begins by stating that what he says is delivered to him from a Goddess.¹⁰

Our search for what happened in the past could in fact be larger than the past itself. This surplus is also reflected to definitions. Myth, epic and religion have given people the sacred answers of the past. Epics have a slightly different position in relation to the past compared to myths. They are also related to the past, but ancestors rather than gods; heroes are here in question. Later, with the emergence of philosophy, it will come to refer to the arrangement of sacred narrative forms with a formal rationality. When philosophy actualizes this, it had to exclude the aforementioned narrative forms. Because philosophy begins to change the way of thinking and begins questioning rather than changing these ways of thinking and conveying, that is, making changes on them and revealing alternative myths.¹¹ In other words, philosophy questions the meaning of the way of thinking in any given approach. Questioning the meaning in mythical thinking is the most obvious example of this. I would like to make a distinction that I believe is important to this context. At the beginning of the previous paragraph, I mentioned reporting about the past. It is necessary to pay more attention to the difference between news and information. Although news and information at times replace each other, at times they differentiate. To explain this by giving an example, what we call scientific knowledge is related to events while news is related to facts. Here, we encounter a difference between a reality pertaining to humans and a reality pertaining to nature. What we obtain about the substances that make up water and how it works is information but not news. But when this water turns into a flood and threatens people, is news. Secondly, especially in scientific knowledge, by way of observation and methodology, there are results the mind reaches through its own inferences. Although it is the case for the mind to acquire information on its own, it is accepted in the news that the citation of a person or a group is correct.

After stating this important issue, we can go back to our topic. While analyzing Dede

Korkut from a philosophical point of view, I will focus on the conceptual, that is, what is attempted to be comprehended with the epic in general and Dede Korkut in particular, instead of analyzing it empirically.

First of all, it is necessary to question the meaning of looking into the past. If the past is the subject of people’s common point of view, it is necessary to think that a “common” understanding has been established here. This common understanding potentially involves the evolution pertaining to human creation when it informs about how existence came about. Thus, the creation of being becomes the point that people convey to each other in their perspective regarding the past. Why is such a common language formed? Although there are diverse reasons, we must say that this is fundamentally related to the need for forming a common identity through a common language. As the common language is passed down from generation to generation, it becomes a stronger factor in forming the aforementioned identity. Thus, the narrative form we call epic approaches Fuad Köprülü’s use of the national epic.¹² We should immediately state that what we refer here to as language is not the written or spoken language that is used. To be precise, commonality itself becomes a language. To explain this better, one enters the plot through the heroization of people and this paves the way to form a national identity through exactly this hero. It is also necessary to pay attention to the function of the aforementioned narrator. The narrator also has a function in nationalizing. For example, if Homer was not a Greek, but a Persian, and his stories were related to the Trojan War, it would not be possible for a Greek national identity to be present because, at the very least, someone who is Persian conveyed it. For this reason, say in the instance of Dede Korkut being Chinese and even Mongolian, then it would not be possible to talk about a Turkish identity, about being an Oghuz.

How do genres such as parables, dictums and stories from our culture differ from epics? We can say that parables correspond to events in the Qur’an that are not fabricated and intended to teach lessons. In dictums, instead of the actualization of a specific event, a specific issue is emphasized with a symbol.¹³ Stories, on the other hand, are human products. Therefore, even if events are conveyed as if they were real, or are inspired by a real event, they are a literary form of expression known to not be literal. What is common to parables, fairytales and epics is that they try to warn people who read or listen to them with moral intent and try to create awareness.

On which points do epics differ from religions? We may begin by differentiating the epic from the sacred. The epic expresses the effort to bring what happened in the past to the present, while the sacred is, in a way, the eternal carried to the present. But the main difference

9 Platon, *Timaieus*, ed. R.D. Archer-Hind, M.A. (London, Macmillan and Co., 1888), 37d-e.

10 Hesiodos, *Theogonia*, trans. Furkan Akderin (Istanbul: Say Yayınları, 2012), 5-25.

11 R. C. Collingwood, *Tarih Tasarımı*, trans. Kurtuluş Dinçer (Ankara: Gündoğan Yayınları, 2010), 35-38.

12 Kazım Yetiş, “Destan” (Epic article), *TDV İslâm Ansiklopedisi* (1994), 9: 202-205.

13 Hüseyin Yazıcı, “Kıssa” (Short Story article), *TDV İslâm Ansiklopedisi* (1998), 17: 479-485.

is that while the source of religions is God, the source of epics is the human being. Religion is truth for all humanity, as we clearly see in the Abrahamic tradition, especially in Islam. However, epics are considered as the adventure of a certain tribe. An interesting situation is that, especially in the Ottoman Empire, national distinction is made over religion. Definitions such as the Armenian nation and the Jewish nation show that their identities are determined through religion. Religions are obliged to answer the question of identity, of what I am, why I am as such, and who has given me my determination. On the other hand, epics, and Dede Korkut which is our focus, gives me the answer to my lineage within the framework of heroism, that is, by idealizing. In addition, an important feature of epics is that they contain moral and pragmatic advice. The attitudes of the heroes towards events and the narration of all that has happened to them, whatever that may be, can actually be seen as lessons to be learned by those who share these epics. Here, Dede Korkut clearly demonstrates its function. The Dede Korkut epics have a structure in which not only the traditions we will mention below are conveyed but also heroes gain importance in the transmission of these traditions. In other words, heroes do not have a tradition, on the contrary a tradition has heroes. This distinction may not seem correct at first glance, but it is very important because, for example, the kagans in the Orkhon Monuments state their foundership in the following way: "Because God had commanded it, because I myself had a state, I took up the kaganate. When I took up the kaganate, I always had the poor and hungry people gathered. I made the poor folk rich. I made the few folk a multitude. Is there a lie in these words?"¹⁴ However, in almost all of the Dede Korkut epics, not the founding structure but the one that provides continuum, shows itself clearly.

After this stage, we need to focus more on at what points religion differs especially from epics and how this difference will contribute to our evaluation of the epic within a cultural structure. We have said that epics aim to create a common identity. In fact, as we have mentioned, religions also aim to create a common identity. On the other hand, the main feature of epics and especially of Dede Korkut, is that he does not put forward the need for creating a national culture in a way that includes our individual today. There are people and heroes. However, their identity is not due to their inner world but due to their skills. If we want to explain it better, we can look at the fine distinction between Dede Korkut himself and the epicizing of Dede Korkut's discourse. Dede Korkut is not a hero, despite his wisdom. He is mostly the person who conveys heroism and is the vehicle in forming a common identity. Indeed, Dede Korkut's playing of kopuz is related to his shamanism. In other words, Dede Korkut is not an important person because he is a hero. He is wise and his wise character is important to give assurance that the heroes actually experience the things they describe. Therefore, we can reason that the stories told have become epics because they were conveyed by

14 Muharrem Ergin, ed. *Orkhon Monuments* (Kültigin Monuments, Hisar, South Side, 2003), Line 9-11.

Dede Korkut. Dede Korkut is wise, but the identity that is tried to be created in the epics is not about his wisdom, rather, it is about the heroism of those in his narrative and the continuation of the tradition that conveys these heroisms. On the other hand, the last prophet of Islam does not construct the Muslim identity only by conveying Allah's messages. At the same time, he wants to construct an identity through leading by example, on Allah's command.

When we consider this, the difference between religion and epic makes itself clearer. Let us try to understand this difference through the claim that the cultural understanding in which the sages who are the transmitters of myths and epics is attempted to be surpassed by the religions in the Abrahamic tradition. When religions emerge with the claim that they bring the truth, they do not accept anything other than their own proposals. If a religion sustains or succumbs to the form of wisdom of the culture preceding it, despite being nourished by both a single creator and the text and prophet sent by this creator, it is necessary to mention some of the problematic of the religion in question. To clarify, there is a lack of either the prophetic or bookish element. As a matter of fact, this is what happened to both Christianity and Judaism. Jews not only disobeyed their prophets but also had some structural problems due to their own texts being corrupted. Christianity felt this deficiency with the early death of Jesus. As a matter of fact, the need for his personality was in a way compensated by sort of deifying him as a god and by making the views of his companions, those who had joined him, a sacred text. As such, religion secularized itself to a certain extent. This secularization, in an interesting way tried to differentiate itself from that which is worldly by way of its own interpretation. However, as it is separated from its true source, religion came to be defined by that which is worldly. Thus, the process that started with Saint Peter begins to express not the transference of what is from God, but the thought that is being put into the form of the clergy. This is the position of the church. In addition, granting sainthood to important personalities in cultures encountered is a reflection of the same structural problem and solution. If there is no solid book and a prophet as its protector, it is very possible to sacralize important figures in cultures encountered as well as try to establish a new structure. This need not be done by the central church itself. If the cultures encountered view the religion as weak, they spontaneously want the aforementioned people or their own religious values to be introduced into this religion.¹⁵

This has not been the case with Islam. This is because trust in the authenticity of the book and the prophet has not been shaken. As such, there has been only one person that was to be taken as an example. But there is a book which came before that exemplary person. In other words, when it comes to the book, the exemplary personality of the prophet is as an

15 The same thing happened to the Prophet in the formation of Islam. Such as the Pagans proposed that some of their idols should be approved and some of the commands by Islam should be changed for them. Then they would accept Islam.

important point as to create an awareness which is ready to emulate him. In addition, the religion of Islam puts Allah as the focal point with the Quran.¹⁶ This is interesting because when God's greatness is conveyed through the book, it gives the individual an awareness that is not present in epics. In other words, the type of individual who accepts God as the protagonist or agent of the act of creation is quite different from the type of individual created in epics. The relationship in this structure needs to be analyzed diligently. Before bringing up the subject by making some comparisons, I would like to point out an important point regarding what we have conveyed so far. This point will also shed light on the comparisons I will show with examples below. While Greek thought before philosophy had heroes, it then acquired sages and philosophers after philosophy. For instance, Plato's Socrates is accepted as an example.¹⁷ This type of a philosopher has been so dominant that another important philosopher like Nietzsche opposed it, saying that all western thought was doomed. As we mentioned above, the Prophet Muhammad is different from heroes who are the bearers of any given culture and belief because he is accepted as a universal example. If we try to explain it by comparing it with Dede Korkut, the bravery of the heroes in this epic makes jihad against the external enemy important, while our prophet makes jihad against the internal enemy more important.¹⁸ This difference is also seen in the internal development of Greek thought as an indicator of lucid intellectual or idea-based development. While heroism is important in Iliad and Odyssey, which are accepted as Greek Epics, in philosophy that substitutes myths, virtue evolves in a way to the correct understanding of the creation of being or its coming about through nature with God as the agent.

For example, let's take a look at the relationship between gods and human in what is also accepted as Greek epics, Iliad and Odyssey.¹⁹ The relationship between gods and humans is in a way between two equal beings. This is because the gods are also included in the plot. Therefore, God will not determine events but at most change them. One can talk about the involvement of the gods not in the occurrence of the event, but when it does occur or after it occurs. There will be a god-human relationship in which a god at times protects a certain person or people, becomes jealous of certain people or gets angry. Indeed, the relatively passive stance of the

gods in the plot brings about tragedy or comedy as conception of being.²⁰ Therefore, it is not surprising that, within the plot, such a concentration on the gods causes myths to continue in the form of epics. Equipped with the knowledge of hardships caused by this, philosophers constructed theology as to regulate the relationship between God and man.²¹ As a matter of fact, particularly in the eyes of philosophers, theology will begin to replace religion, and this will take place in the history of thought as a conflict between faith and reason.

One of the reasons why the Greeks are this way is that the important element in their life is the city/police rather than the gods. Urbanism, rather than religiousness, is important for the Greek. As a matter of fact, we can see examples of this thinking in some important works.²² Thus, awareness also developed in parallel with this. In the religion of Islam, this awareness must be Allah-centered. The point that needs to be taken into consideration is that with the development of this awareness along with the heart, mind and morality, it is aimed to raise a Muslim as an ideal type.

If we are to return to our subject, the epic, the awareness here is in the way that the sages convey their heroism, not their wisdom. As such, it will of course be possible to preach morality in a certain way, but it is out of question that this is particular to the extent of the effect of Islam. However, our issue here is not to reveal which of the two, namely Dede Korkut and Islam is superior. This is because not only is the structure of epics different as we have already stated, but also Dede Korkut is the epic of a nation that has accepted Islam, even if its origins are not related to Islam. Thus, what takes priority is to find out what the issue or issues that enable the two different structures to harmonize with each other are.

One of the concepts that provides similarity between the two structures is jihad. The most important feature of Turks that perhaps also affected the world was that they were warriors. Since this warriorism is compatible with the concept of jihad in Islam, the elements in epics become ripe to undergo a kind of Islamic evolution. As long as the people fought against are Christians, what is expected is not an intellectual development or a perfect understanding of God in faith, but the defeat of Christians and the construction of a mosque in place of a church. Thus, even though issues such as drinking alcohol in epics and mad Dumrul's fight against Azrael are contrary to Islam, they should be regarded as the state of affairs of a culture that is relatively new to Islam. We have pointed out above that the concept of jihad was handled differently with Islam. Unlike the heroes in epics, the Prophet Muhammad commanded Muslims that the true jihad is aimed at the conquest of one's carnal soul at self-discipline.

16 Toshihiko Izutsu, *Kuran'da Allah ve İnsan* (God and Man in the Qur'an), trans. Süleyman Ateş (Ankara: Ankara Üniversitesi Yayınları, 1991).

17 Wilhelm Dilthey, *Hermeneutik ve Tin Bilimleri*, trans. Doğan Özlem (İstanbul: Notos Kitap, 2011), 57.

18 For example, from the Epic of Uşun Koca Son Segrek: "Hey, son of Uşun Koca, each of these sitting gentlemen took the place where they were sitting with the strength of his sword and his bread. Have you beheaded, shed blood, fed hungry, naked or equipped?" Segrek asks, "Is it trick to behead and shed blood?" Reverse Prolonged "Trick!" he says.

19 Alasdair McIntyre, *Etiğin Kısa Tarihi*, trans. Hakkı Hünler, Solmaz Zelyut Hünler (İstanbul: Paradigma, 2001), 97-125. See also Werner Jaeger, *Paideia: The Ideals of Greek Culture* (Oxford: University Press, 1986), 221.

20 Plato, *Republic (Devlet)*, 379a-b, translated: Sabahattin eyüboğlu, M. Ali Cimcoz (İstanbul:Türkiye İş Bankası Yayınları, 1999).

21 The Epic Released from Captivity by Salur Kazan's Son, Uruz.

22 Aristotle, *Nicomachean Ethics*, trans. Saffet Babür (Ankara: Ayraç Yayınları, 1998), 1097 b 10.

In the hadith emphasizing the development of jihad in this direction, it is necessary to pay attention to the prophet's return from a campaign. The meaning of this is that after the spread of Islam is achieved, that is, after an external jihad has been won, one can concentrate on the internal jihad. Indeed, the internal jihad is the main goal, but what takes precedence is to win wars in the sense of external jihad.

It is necessary to point out one more point that is important to consider within the framework of the concept of jihad. We cannot deny that there are similarities between Mongols and Turks.²³ Although this distinction is known, an evaluation made by other Muslim nations is important. The fact that the Turks are described as a nation with a sword in their hands causes them to be considered identical or very similar to the Mongols. The concept of jihad we offered above seems to support this prejudice. On the other hand, if one is careful, the epic in which Dede Korkut liberates Salur Kazan's son Uruz from captivity, shows that the purpose of demolishing the church and building a mosque in its place is different. In these epics, one observes that there is no aggression against the enemies, but rather a response to their counterattack. Bravery is not related to the force demonstrated in aggression, but to the intelligence, strength and skill shown in the case of treason on part of the enemy.

Another important point is that unlike religion, epics shed light on something specific. Epics and our Dede Korkut Epic are important in terms of observing some elements in Turkish culture. For instance, approaches to women and family structure can be seen. Here, we encounter an important topic of discussion. Is the religion of Islam a religion that should not be understood within the framework of the Bedouin Arabic culture, but is nevertheless animated in that culture since it descended into its social structure? Of course, religion has a superior structure, but manifesting in Arabic culture does not mean that it belongs to Arabic culture. As a matter of fact, prophet Muhammed stated that the Arab is not superior to the non-Arab. Alongside this, it must be admitted that Islam does not change every aspect of the culture it encounters or is within. As such, as long as the creed of Islam is not lost, cultures will either have to protect their own values or evolve in line with Islamic awareness. Therefore, it would be more correct to read the twelve Dede Korkut Epics in terms of what elements of Turkish culture are compatible with Islam, rather than what elements are a part of Turkish culture. Of these elements, the foremost is the way Turks form unions. Bayindir Khan is the lord of each principality or Oghuz, so in a way he is the *beylerbeyi* (lord of the lords). Furthermore, this lord also has an assistant, Kazan Han. If one pays attention, the system of a nomadic nation has a similar appearance to a state system. An important reason for this is that although they are nomads, at their origin, they have the Turks state experience. The importance given to

order and vitality in each Dede Korkut Epic is due to either that it is a tradition or that the Turks have the experience of establishing a state with their desire for vitality and order. As a matter of fact, the conception of being a nomad could transform itself into establishing a state very quickly after settling down. This understanding of establishing a state is so important that in the state tradition of the Ottoman Empire, state and religious affairs manifested in their distinction.²⁴ As we have left the philosophical perspective and slipped into political history, we can benefit from the important Ottoman expert Halil İnalçık. According to him, there are two structures in the Ottoman administration, namely religious and customary. Although there is no competition between the two, it is the will of the Ottoman sultan that is absolute. One aspect of this should be attributed to the importance of the leader within the state system in the tradition of the Turks. In addition, the shock experienced by the Ottomans especially during the interregnum made it necessary to consider the fact that a leaderless structure cannot elevate religion to its deserved status. If the leadership of the leader is aimed at spreading Islam, inevitably there will be bilateral harmony between religion and the state.

When we inspect the Dede Korkut Epics in general, the important point we encounter is that these epics are aimed to convey the identity and traditional characteristics of the oghuz rather than the heroism of a certain one. The fact that the epics have a structure that emphasizes the traditions rather than the narration of what happened to a protagonist confirms this point. The important point is not to admire and glorify someone's heroism, but rather the traditionalization and identification of the Oghuz structure through these heroisms. We can interpret this point from another angle. According to this angle, the leader is highlighted in the structure of the Oghuz and attention is paid to the relationship this leader has with his people. The fact that leadership is based on activity rather than lineage naturally creates a situation in which the leader is deserving of leadership.

Do epics have a religious nature alongside being moral? In fact, before modernity, every moral value could find its place in a religious structure. When modernity included philosophy to its backlash against Christianity, it made a claim that a distinction between morality and religion must be made, a claim which is still quite popular today. Therefore, our aforementioned question is actually related to the modern perspective. Nevertheless, there is still a distinction between the religious and the moral. This distinction is that the subject in morality is the human being, while the subject in the religious is the sacred and the divine. For this reason, what is moral in the relationship between morality and religion is the surrender of the subject of morality to the subject of religion, to God. Although this subject is important, it can divert us from our main subject due to its depth. We can say that shamans are wise people who convey certain values rather than perform magic. It would at least not be wrong

23 Rinçindorji, "Mongolian-Turkic Epics: Typological Formation and Development", *Oral Tradition*, 16/2 (2001), 381-401.

24 Of course, this separation does not mean that secularism is to be evaluated within the framework of secularity.

to say that Dede Korkut has this structure. Thus, there seems to be no problem remaining in the relationship between the epic and religion. As we have stated before, Islam does not aim to change elements in culture so long as it is not contrary to its own basic elements. Dede Korkut's identification with the Oghuz does not cause any problem so long as this tribe serves for Islamic jihad. On the contrary, this identification can come to the forefront if it contributes to the dynamism of jihad.

In terms of making a general assessment, I think the following question is important: Being affected by Islam, have the Turks developed or regressed? I have partially touched upon the answer to this question above. Now it needs to be considered more seriously. This question pertains to a similar equation to Nietzsche's thought on the Christian degeneration of ancient Greek values. Known already, Nietzsche states that religions (though he mentions Christianity in particular) exhibit a disdainful attitude towards worldly affairs due to their conception of the afterlife. Nietzsche's criticism of modernism preserves its vitality today. However, this problem flourishes on the basis of approaches such as the conditions of 1500 years ago should not be compared to that of today and that every value and even truth is bound by the context of that period. In addition, when we take into consideration that the historicist approach supports modernity's negative attitude towards religion, we must be even more careful with this problem at hand.

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