

HIZIR-ILYAS CULT IN THE *DIVAN OF YUNUS EMRE*

Yunus Emre Divan'ında Hızır-İlyas Kültü

Der Hızır-Ilyas-Kult im Diwan von Yunus Emre

Hüseyin AKSOY *

ABSTRACT

The concept of “cult” can be defined as a religious ceremony or belief that evokes common connotations in society. Additionally, the cult is used in many different disciplines with partially similar meanings. To analyze cults which were created by each society with their own belief systems and rituals, it would be beneficial to first look at the meaning of this concept because mythologies, belief systems, and cultures have been formed and shaped around these cults on a large scale. Cults were formed in Mythic periods and began to gain meaning. The influence of cults on societies continues today. Related to cults, culture is a series of symbols that occur, develop, and is produced as a result of the actions of humans. The archaic form of this can be found in cults. In this respect, researching, understanding, interpreting and analyzing cults also mean to unearth “the first and the oldest cultural remains”. Hızır and İlyas are spiritual figures who are thought to have attained immortality by drinking the ab-ı hayat (water of immortality). Narratives about Hızır-İlyas have a great place in belief system of Turkish people. Yunus Emre, who deals with different aspects of Turkish culture with a pure language in his poems, also directly

* Karamanoğlu Mehmetbey University, Faculty of Letters, Division of Turkish Language and Literature, Department of Folklore, Karaman/Turkey, akshuseyin@gmail.com, ORCID: 0000-0002-1002-1302.

or indirectly benefited from this cult. For this reason, the cult of Hızır-İlyas stands out as one of the common themes of folk and divan literature in Yunus's Divan. In this article, traces of the cult of Hızır İlyas in Yunus's divan were identified and interpreted.

Keywords: Yunus Emre, Divan, cult, Hızır-İlyas, water of mortality.

ÖZ

Farklı disiplinlerde kısmen birbirine yakın anlamlarda kullanılan “kült” kavramının “ortak çağrışımlar uyandıran, dini tören veya inanç” şeklinde genel bir tanımı yapılabilir. Toplumları anlamak adına, onların inanç sistemi ve ritüelleriyle yarattığı kültürleri incelemek faydalı olacaktır. Çünkü mitolojiler, inanç sistemleri ve kültürler, büyük ölçüde bu kültürlerin etrafında oluşup şekillenmişlerdir. Mitik dönemlerde oluşup şekillenmeye başlayan kültürlerin bireyler ve toplumların üzerindeki etkisi günümüzde de devam etmektedir. Kült ile bağlantılı olarak kültür, insanların yapıp etmeleri sonucunda ortaya çıkan, gelişen ve dolayısıyla üretilen bir semboller dizisi halinde var olmaya devam etmektedir. Bu açıdan kültürleri araştırmak, anlamak, anlamlandırmak ve çözümlenmeye çalışmak “ilk ve en eski kültür kalıntılarını” gün yüzüne çıkarmak anlamına da gelmektedir. Atalar kültü olarak kabul edebileceğimiz Hızır ile İlyas, ab-ı hayatı (ölümsüzlük suyunu) içerek ölümsüzlüğe kavuştuğu düşünülen ruhani varlıklardır. Hızır-İlyas ile ilgili anlatılar, Türk halk inanışında büyük bir yer edinmiş, divan ve halk edebiyatına mensup pek çok kültür aktarıcısına ilham kaynağı olmuştur. Türk kültürünün farklı cephelerini şiirlerinde saf bir dille ele alan Yunus Emre de bu kültürden doğrudan veya dolaylı olarak istifade etmiştir. Bu nedenle Yunus Divanı’nda halk ve divan edebiyatının ortak mazmunlarından biri olarak Hızır-İlyas kültü öne çıkmaktadır. Bu makalede, Yunus’un divanında Hızır İlyas kültüne dair izler tespit edilmiş ve yorumlanmıştır.

Anahtar Kelimeler: Yunus Emre, Divan, Hızır-İlyas Kültü, Ab-ı Hayat.

ZUSAMMENFASSUNG

Eine allgemeine Definition des Begriffs "Kult", der in verschiedenen Disziplinen mit teilweise nahen beieinander liegenden Bedeutungen verwendet wird, kann als "religiöse Zeremonie oder Glaube, der gemeinsame Konnotationen hervorruft" vorgenommen werden. Um Gesellschaften zu verstehen, wäre es nützlich, die von ihnen geschaffenen Kulte mit ihren Glaubenssystemen und Ritualen zu untersuchen. Weil Mythologien, Glaubenssysteme und Kulturen weitgehend um diese Kulte herum gebildet und geformt wurden. Der Einfluss von Kulturen, die sich in mythischen Perioden zu bilden und Gestalt anzunehmen begannen, auf Individuen und Gesellschaften dauert bis heute an. Im Zusammenhang mit Kult ist Kultur eine Reihe von Symbolen, die als Ergebnis der Handlungen von Menschen entstehen, sich entwickeln und daher produziert werden. Die archaische Form dieser Produktion finden wir in Kulturen. In dieser Hinsicht bedeutet auch dass, die Kulte zu erforschen, zu verstehen, der Versuch, es zu verstehen und zu analysieren, die "ersten und ältesten kulturellen Überreste" hervorzubringen. Hızır und Ilyas, die wir als Ahnenkult annehmen können, sind spirituelle Menschen, von denen angenommen wird, dass sie durch das Trinken vom Unendlichkeitswasser (das Wasser der Unsterblichkeit) Immortalität erlangt haben. Die Erzählungen über Hızır-Ilyas haben einen großen Platz im türkischen Volksglauben eingenommen und waren die Inspirationsquelle für viele kulturelle Überträger der Diwan Literatur und Volksliteratur. Yunus Emre, der sich in seinen Gedichten mit verschiedenen Aspekten der türkischen Kultur mit einer reinen Sprache auseinandersetzt, profitierte auch direkt oder indirekt von diesem Kult. Im Diwan "Yunus" kann der Kult "Hızır-Ilyas" als eine der gängigen Metaphern¹ der Volksliteratur und Diwan Literatur hervorgehoben werden. In diesem Artikel wurden Spuren des Kultes "Hızır-Ilyas" im Diwan von Yunus festgelegt und ausgelegt.

Schlüsselwörter: Yunus Emre, Diwan, Kult, Unendlichkeitswasser.

1 Mazmunlar (Pl., Türkisch): (Hier), die mokanten und künstlerischen Worten, mit den indirekt einige Konzepte in der Diwan Literatur beschrieben werden. D. h. Metaphern.

Introduction

The concept of “cult” can be defined as a religious ceremony or belief that evokes common connotations in society. Additionally, the cult is used in many different disciplines with partially similar meanings. To analyze cults which were created by each society with their own belief systems and rituals, it would be beneficial to first look at the meaning of this concept because mythologies, belief systems, and cultures have been formed and shaped around these cults on a large scale. The beliefs around certain cults emerged in the mythical periods have continued until today. The concept of the cult that is used in different meanings nowadays is related to *cultus* defined as worshipping in Latin. The concept has been defined in several ways over time in many fields such as folklore, theology, archeology, anthropology and sociology. In terms of myth-religion, the cult is a manifestation of sacralized and anthropomorphic functional divine power or divine strength accepted as sacred in belief, related to the Creator, or thought to be a way for communication with Him. In this respect, they constitute a special category of mythical consciousness. They represent the essence of divine power apportioned to various beings and objects individually. In this share, each cult appears lively and personified. In the concept of cult, divine power is assigned to the mythical creatures of the earth, air, water, mountain, and many other objects (Dilek, 2020: 46-49).

Related to cults, culture is a series of symbols that occur, develop, and is produced as a result of the actions of humans. The archaic form of this can be found in cults. In this respect, researching, understanding, interpreting and analyzing cults also mean to unearth “the first and the oldest cultural remains” (Yıldız Altın, 2019: 1065).

Throughout the history, the Turks have been under the influence of many different religions or belief systems. The belief systems of the oldest Turkish communities in Central Asia consist of a triple understanding, namely the cult of ancestors, the cult of nature, and the cult of Gök Tanrı. It can be asserted that the cult of ancestors is one of the most rooted and oldest beliefs among various ancient Turkish groups. The cult of ancestors, which is a belief that the ancestor would help his/ her family after his/ her death, and which consists of an understanding combined with fear and respect, continues its existence among the Turks without losing anything of its strength even after the spread of Buddhism, Manichaeism, and Islam (Turan, 2017: 110). Cultural actors seen as spiritual leaders in Turkish culture can be called “ata, baba, bab, evliya, veli, aziz, sultan, dede, dervish, sheikh” related to

changing cultural circles. In addition, they are also entitled “bakshi, bakstı, oyun, kam, shaman” according to their professions. All of these can be evaluated within the cult of ancestors (Yıldız Altın, 2019: 254).

The cult of ancestors can also be defined as the belief based on commemorating dead ancestors and sacrificing for them. According to this belief, the spirit of a deceased ancestor is able to survive in such a way that it can do a kindness or evil to those who are alive. For this reason, the feeling of gratitude for them forms the basis of the cult of ancestors (Güngör, 2002: 264). Furthermore, it is believed that the souls of ancestors live after he dies and do not break up their relations with society. Again, according to this belief, man loses his body yet, their self, or more precisely, their spiritual existence, remains on the earth and can affect the lives of those he leaves behind. In the cult of ancestors emerged from such a belief, people worship, pray to or sacrifice for tribal ancestors, famous warriors, clergies. The superhuman abilities that distinguish these people from others continue after their deaths. It is possible to enlarge the numbers of plants and animals by pleasing such people having some mystical powers through remembering their memories, commemorating them with sacrifices and offerings. To this end, the figures and masks of the ancestors are prepared and feasts and ceremonies are organized for them (Örnek, 1988: 94-95).

Societies have the opportunity to transfer their culture to future generations thanks to their literary works. Despite the change in geography and religion, some cultural elements presented in the literary works continue their existence even if their forms change. For instance, the gray wolf has an important place in Turkish culture and functions as a guide in the narratives. With the influence of Islamic period, it gives his place to the cult of Hızır-İlyas having a similar function (see Duman, 2012; Oğuz, 2002).

Hızır and İlyas are spiritual figures who are thought to have attained immortality by drinking the ab-ı hayat (water of immortality). Narratives about Hızır-İlyas have a great place in belief system of Turkish people. In Turkish culture, Hızır is a holy figure who is asked for help. Moreover, it is believed that he responds to this help and solves the problems of people (see also Boratav, 1965; Çetin, 2002; Ocak, 2007). The belief that “Hızır can come to the rescue of those who are in a difficult situation” is quite widespread among Turks. This situation is kept on in Turkish sayings such

as “Kul bunalmayınca Hızır yetişmez², Hızır gibi yetişmek³”. Turkish folk beliefs generally regard him as a prophet, even though he is ‘very different from the portrait of a prophet’. Hence, he is called as a “Hızır Peygamber⁴, Hızır Nebi⁵” or “Hızır Aleyhisselam⁶”. (Çobanoğlu, 2003: 143). In addition, the place of “Hıdırlık”, which can be found in many cities, is the new form of this belief or cult after the adoption of Islam (Ekici, 2005: 49).

Since the legend of Hızır is also very common among the people, it has been the subject of many stories and epics. It is believed that he is able to walk and pray on the sea as laying his prayer rug on the water, ride a gray horse and travel around in green clothes from head to toe. It is also said that Hızır is a nickname given to the Prophet Elijah. Hızır has meanings of “green, greening, freshness”. Therefore, people believe that the places he visits becomes green and blessed.

It is believed that Hızır and İlyas lived in the reign of İskender-i Zulkarneyn (Alexander) and they go to the land of Zulumat (darkness) to guide İskender who wants to search for ab-ı hayat. İskender has two jewelleries that can illuminate the darkness. İskender gives one of them to Hızır and İlyas, He tells them that whoever finds the water should inform the other. Hızır and İlyas who started to look for Ab-ı Hayat sit by a spring to eat their fill after long adventures. While eating the salted fish, a drop of water from Hızır’s hand drips onto the fish. The fish then comes to life and jumps into the water. They realize that the water of the spring is the ab-ı hayat and they drink it heartily. According to a rumor, even if they inform İskender, they cannot find this water again (see also Baysal, 2020).

In another story, they do not inform İskender because of the divine order. In both cases, İskender is deprived of ab-ı hayat. On the other hand, Hızır and İlyas who have become immortal start to rush to the help of those who are in trouble in the world by the order of Allah. The people believe that Hızır will do this sacred

2 It means literally that unless a creature is in a difficulty, Hızır does not rush to help him.

3 To rush the help like Hızır.

4 The prophet Hızır.

5 A prophet. One who has received direct inspiration (wahiy) by means of an angel, or by the inspiration of the heart (ilham); or has seen the things of God in a dream. (Kitabu’t-Ta’rifat.) A rasul, or “messenger,” is one who has received a book through the angel Gabriel (Hughes, 2007: 427).

6 Hızır (peace be upon him).

duty, until the end of the day, in the sea, and Ilyas on the land. They both meet once a year and make a pilgrimage together. The day they meet is called “Hıdırellez”, based on the words “Hızır and İlyas”. On the sixth day of May, people go out to the countryside, have fun and celebrate this day (see also Pala, 2004: 204-205).

This legend has been a source of inspiration for many litterateur of divan (classical literature) and folk literature. Yunus Emre, who presents different aspects of Turkish culture with a pure language in his poems, also directly or indirectly was inspired from this story around the cult of Hızır-İlyas. Therefore, the cult of Hızır-İlyas can come to the fore as one of the common themes in Yunus’s Divan. Yunus sometimes refers to Hızır-İlyas by name, and sometimes refers to them through *ab-ı hayat*. Considering the period he lived in, Yunus Emre, purely understands the language and culture of the society which converted into a new religion and conveys them through his works. In this sense, his divan, is an important source in which the traces of cultural change is sought. For this reason, in this study, the elements belonging to the cult of Hızır İlyas in the Divan of Yunus have been especially selected. In fact, if the anecdotal narratives are taken into account, it is possible to trace the cultural heritage of Yunus Emre back to Ahmet Yesevi. According to the legend, Ahmet Yesevi’s student is Hoca Lokman Perende, and Hoca Lokman Perende’s student is Hacı Bektaş Veli. Both Hoca Lokman Perende and Hacı Bektaş Veli attended Ahmet Yesevi’s conversation for years and benefitted from his conversations. After wearing his dervish *kbırqah* (rag), Hacı Bektaş left Turkistan by following the staff thrown by Ahmet Yesevi and established his dervish lodge in Sulucakarahöyük, where the staff fell. After a while, it is learned through the legends that many erens (saints), especially Tapduk Emre, are connected to Hacı Bektaş (Gölpınarlı, 2016). It is thought that Yunus Emre both gets training in the dargah of Hacı Bektaş and stays with Tapduk Emre for years. Based on this information, it can be thought that many cultural values may have passed to Yunus Emre from Ahmet Yesevi.

Hızır-Ilyas Cult in the Divan of Yunus Emre

Yunus Emre is one of the earliest Turkish Sufis in Anatolia. Yunus Emre writes his poems with a simple expression in 13th century’s Anatolia that no one could. He enriches his poems with motifs that reflect of the belief of his society. Thanks to this capability, he frequently refers to religious-mystical elements such as İskender, *ab-ı hayat* and the land of darkness in his Divan. In this study, these references in

Yunus Emre's Divan will be determined and also it will reveal in which contexts they are used.

Yunus uses this cult and the concepts around it in nine different poems in the Divan. In his divan, Yunus uses the motif, ab-ı hayat, as a guide or as a tool in the distinction between soul and body to highlight the temporality. Moving on this, this study will determine and evaluate the range of meaning of this phrase and its different equivalents in Turkish culture.

In general, there is not any material desire for immortality in Yunus' Divan. The immortality he desires is to reach the rank of "fanafillah". In other words, it is a spiritual immortality gained by dying before the real death. According to Yunus, if a person is overwhelmed with the love of God, then he reaches real immortality:

Hızır u İlyâs degüliken ölmez dirlige sataşdum

Hergiz yimez içmez iken içüm toptolu aş oldu (Tatçı, 1990: 356).

In this couplet (beyit), Yunus mentions that immortality was given to Hızır-İlyas through "ab-ı hayat". So, he is not immortal like them. On the other hand, he states that he aspires to immortality through love. It is understood from the expression "while not eating or drinking" in the second line, he desires to acquire immortality not from any material source, but directly and spiritually.

In another couplet, Yunus touches upon the same desire. He considers the one who wants immortality of abı-hayat as a fool while there is immortality of a divine love on the other side:

Senün gibi cân var iken Âb-ı Hayât isteyenî

Karanlığa gireni ben anı hayvân tutaram (Tatçı, 1990: 188).

In the couplet, the words "ab-ı hayat" and "karanlık" (cruelty) refer to Hızır-İlyas. As explained above, those who are mystics (masters of Sufism) long for the truth, and the truth does not exist in this world. Therefore, Yunus insults those who wish immortality in this world.

"Ab-ı hayat" keeps people alive until the end of time. (Tarlan, 2005: 386). Poets usually want to achieve this immortality together with their beloved. However,

masters of Sufism do not incline towards “ab-ı hayat” since they desire eternal life. For them, the real immortality is in the afterlife. According to Yunus Emre ab-ı hayat ends in doomsday and it was bestowed only on Hızır-İlyas in this world:

Yûnus Emre bu dünyâda iki kişi kalur dirler

Meger Hızır-İlyâs ola Âb-ı Hayât içmiş gibi (Tatçı, 1990: 390)

Yunus Emre implies in this couplet that “ab-ı hayat” has a feature of living until the end of life. By stating that this was given only to Hızır-İlyas, he once again emphasizes the mortality of the world and the creatures. Yet in another verse, he also says that Hızır and İlyas will survive at least for a certain period of time thanks to ab-ı hayat they drink. Nevertheless, Yunus draws attention to the fact that even immortality is temporary:

Şol Hızır’ıla İlyâs Âb-ı Hayât içdiler

Bu birkaç yıl içinde bunlar ölesi degül (Tatçı, 1990: 167).

Sometimes poets and writers speak on behalf of the Creator in their works. Yunus Emre frequently uses this style in his Divan. Yunus expresses like a Creator that he will qualify Hızır who is identified with ab-ı hayat, as a saka (water dispenser) in the afterlife (with the word ‘tomorrow’ in the couplet).

Benem ebed benem bekâ ol Kâdir ü Hay mutlaka

Hızır ola yarın saka anı kılan Gufrân benem (Tatçı, 1990: 227).

Yunus also uses the reference of Hızır-İlyas in a different context rather than the overall message of the story (kıssa):

Kula nasîb degicek sultân elden alamaz

Zülkarneyn n’eyledi yâ Hızır u İlyâs ile (Tatçı, 1990: 340).

As seen, Yunus deals with the belief in divine decree in Islam by indicating to the cult of Hızır-İlyas in this couplet. In the couplet, the importance of “nasîb” is emphasized with a strong reference. Even the strongest authority on earth cannot deprive servants of the value or reward bestowed by the Creator. Thus, the belief “destiny will not change” finds a place in Yunus’ mystical lyricism. As a result, the

importance of “tevekkül”, accepted as the reflection of belief in divine decree on human life, is emphasized.

Love is often compared to the sea/ocean in Sufism. Sufis desire swim in the sea of love. The sea is also a place where Hızır rushes to the help of those who are in difficulty. Also, he walks on it and can pray by laying down his prayer mat (seccade). Yunus Emre, who is aware of this quality of Hızır, shows this feature as a skill in himself in a couplet:

Girdüm ‘ıskun denizine bahrileyin yüzer oldum

Geşt idüben denizleri Hızır’layın gezer oldum (Tatçı, 1990: 235).

Here, Yunus draws a parallel between love and sea. Yunus states that he is swimming in this sea of love as if he is swimming in the real sea. In the second line, he says that he is traveling on the seas as Hızır does. Yunus asserts in these lines with his words that “I could move on the sea of love just as Hızır can walk on the sea.”

Cânlar içinde cânsın sen bir Âb-ı Hayvânsın

Bize dîn ü îmânsın îmân kayısı degül (Tatçı, 1990: 172).

In this couplet, Yunus sees the Creator as the ab-ı hayvan (water of immortality). In Sufism, there is a belief that the Creator blows a breath of His light (nur) into man. Every person carries a light/breath from Him. Yunus also states in this couplet that the “soul within souls”, namely, the “Creator”, like ab-ı hayat, carries man to eternity. According to Yunus, the servant should be in the aim of attaining the eternity of the Creator, not in the anxiety of faith, such as the fear of hell or the desire to ascend to heaven.

Yüz bin Ferhâd küliing almış kazar taglar bünyâdını

Kayalar kesüp yol eyler Âb-ı Hayât akıtmağa

Âb-ı Hayât’un çeşmesi ‘âşıklarun visâlidür

Kadehi tolu yürüdür susamışları yakmaga (Tatçı, 1990: 17).

It was mentioned above that lovers are after ab-ı hayat. In this couplet, he mentions the lovers by the name of Ferhat and refers Ferhat about drilling the mountains.

Here, Yunus talks about how hard they try to find “ab-ı hayat”. Ferhat’s drilling the mountains is the test of his love. He has to pass this test to win his beloved’s love. Moreover, Yunus identifies the meeting his beloved with “ab-ı hayat”. However, the love that Yunus expresses with reference to Ferhat is divine love.

Conclusion

Societies have the opportunity to transfer their culture to future generations through their literary works. Although geography and religion change, some cultural elements continue to exist even if their forms change. The cults, which can be accepted as the first step in the formation of culture, also serve such a purpose. One of the cults that finds its place in different ways in Turkish culture is the cult of Hızır-İlyas.

It is seen that Yunus uses culture and folk narratives in his poems in several ways through references and similes. In this study, it was detected that in which ways, functions and contexts the concepts “ab-ı hayat/ab-ı hayvan, zulümat, Zülkarneyn/ İskender” mentioned in Hızır-İlyas have been used in Yunus’ Divan.

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