



Environmental Awareness Around Human and Animal Relations in Turkish Epics*

Türk Destanlarında İnsan ve Hayvan İlişkileri Etrafında Oluşan Çevre Bilinci

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Abstract

The aim of this study was to examine the ways in which people utilise animals to meet their various needs and to highlight the environmentally conscious behaviours they exhibit whilst doing so. The study employed a qualitative research method and a purposive sampling technique, analysing 35 epics. Ten of these epics were selected as the focus of the study. Based on the findings, and in the light of traditional ecological knowledge, the protection of animal species, ensuring that the ecological balance is not disrupted, and safeguarding the continuity of natural life emerge as primary objectives. These approaches can be listed as follows: Animals with young are not killed, hunted or sacrificed. In hunting, elderly or sterile animals are hunted. In sacrificial, votive and feast ceremonies, elderly or sterile animals are sacrificed instead of young ones. Elderly or sterile animals are preferred to meet nutritional needs. Species are protected because of the requirement not to kill animals considered sacred. Within their natural way of life, individuals hold the elements of nature—particularly animals—in high regard and adhere to the principle that they have a right to life. Animals are not viewed as objects of exploitation or merely as means of consumption. When utilising animals to meet basic needs, care is taken to ensure that the ecological balance is not disrupted and that the hunted animals do not have offspring. Consequently, based on these accounts, Turkish regard nature and its elements as the most important part of their lives and take the utmost care to preserve the ecological balance.

Öz

Çalışmada insanların farklı ihtiyaçlarını karşılamak amacıyla hayvanlardan hangi şekillerde faydalandıkları ve hayvanlardan istifade ederken çevre bilinciyle sergiledikleri davranışların ortaya konulması amaçlanmıştır. Çalışmada nitel araştırma yöntemi ve amaçlı örneklem yöntemi kullanılmış, 35 destan incelenmiştir. Çalışmanın merkezine 10 destan alınmıştır. Elde edilen bulgular etrafında geleneksel ekolojik bilgiler ışığında hayvan türlerinin korunması, ekolojik düzeninin bozulmamasına özen gösterilmesi, doğal hayatın sürekliliğinin sağlanması temel gayeler olarak ön plana çıkar. Bu yaklaşımlar ise şöyle sıralanabilir: Yavrusu olan hayvanlar öldürülmez, avlanmaz, kurban edilmez. Avda yaşlı veya kısır hayvanlar avlanır. Kurban, adak, toy

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törenlerinde genç hayvanlar yerine, yaşlı veya kısır hayvanlar kurban edilir. Beslenme ihtiyaçlarının giderilmesi için yaşlı veya kısır hayvanlar tercih edilir. Kutsal kabul edilen hayvanların öldürülmemesi gerekliliği sonucunda türler koruma altına alınır. Doğal hayat içinde bireyler tabiat unsurlarına özellikle hayvanlara büyük bir saygı duyar ve onların yaşam haklarının olduğu kuralına riayet ederler. Hayvanlar bir sömürü veya sadece bir tüketim aracı olarak görülmez. Temel ihtiyaçlar doğrultusunda hayvanlardan yararlanırken ekolojik düzenin bozulmamasına, avlanan hayvanların yavrusunun olmamasına dikkat edilir. Sonuç olarak anlatılardan hareketle Türkler doğayı ve tabiat unsurlarını yaşamlarının en önemli parçası olarak kabul etmekte, ekolojik düzenin korunması için son derece büyük bir özen göstermektedirler. Doğaya tüketim veya sömürü aracı olarak yaklaşmamaktadırlar.

Introduction

It can be stated that the environment is one of the most significant factors that shape the human life, beliefs, practices, emotions, thoughts, worldviews, and artistic perceptions. From the primitive times to present, natural life and elements of nature undergone a great change to meet basic needs such as shelter, nutrition, and clothing. The main factors shaping this change are population growth, consumerist mindset, and wars. The increase in the population, the increase in the needs and the activities to meet these needs, the wars arising from economic or different reasons, and the entertainment culture have led humanity to unconsciously destroy nature and environmental elements, disrupt the ecological balance, and endanger the habitats of beings that are part of nature. As a result of the fact that every entity existing in the ecological order is directly or indirectly affected by these circumstances, the necessity of addressing environmental problems emerged. The relationships between humans and the environment in ancient times, often referred to as the "primitive mind", were examined and cave paintings, epics, mythologies, oral, or written products containing traditional ecological information were scrutinised. This orientation created an environmentalist study and research area in literature, and this emerging discipline came to be known as Ecocriticism. These efforts brought the tangible evidence of environmental issues into scientific reality. The conducted analyses and research paved the way for creating an ecological consciousness in people, leading to a reconsideration of the human-nature relationship, and contributing significantly to preventing the misuse or unconscious destruction of other beings and nature itself (Bulut, 2005). These orientations are defined as a kind of nature conservation effort. According to Yücel, this effort is essential for ensuring the guarantee of human health and life. Preserving the existence of plant and animal species, their growing and living environments, in short, protecting every element of natural life is of vital importance for all living things (Yücel, 2005). The underlying reason for such efforts and orientations is to protect nature, considering it in all its dimensions and to contribute to the realisation of this in various ways through religion, culture, and art. Thus, through these means, humanity, who distanced itself from nature and consumed the elements of nature unconsciously, can be reconnected with nature, consciousness of the functioning of the ecological balance can be created and the natural elements can be protected.

1. Significance and Scope of Research

In the modern age, nature and natural elements are seen as resources to be exploited or mere consumables. For this reason, animals which are the most important parts of natural life and human life are also at the centre of unconscious consumption. The approaches of societies that lack environmental consciousness towards natural elements cause the rapid extinction of

animal species, the destruction of nature, and the exploitation of natural life. The underlying reason for all these is that people lack environmental consciousness and do not act around a sense of responsibility towards the elements of nature. It was emphasised that one of the effective methods of preventing this destruction is literature and it was pointed out that a kind of environmental consciousness can be created in people through literary works or that consciousness in the cultural memory can be awakened. Thus, ecocritical approaches, often referred to as “green reading”, started to gain importance. The aim of this study is to reveal the environmental consciousness that existed in the past by showing the society’s perspective on animals, and their responsibilities and approaches to animals, in the context of epics that contain the rich cultural accumulation and value judgments of Turkish tribes. Through the lens of traditional ecological knowledge present in epic texts, the study aims to contribute to the development of an environmental consciousness among contemporary individuals. In the context of the natural consciousness to be created, human-animal relations will be able to progress on a healthier plane, and it will be conducive to the continuity of the ecological order and the animal species.

There were no studies conducted on the evaluation of epics within the scope of “green reading”. Given the rich cultural heritage and valuable traditional ecological knowledge contained in epic narratives, it becomes of great importance to approach them from an ecocritical perspective. This study aims to fill this gap in the literature, examine animal-human relations in an ecocritical context through epic texts selected from Turkish tribes.

2. Purpose and Question of the Research

The main objective of this study is to examine the traditional ecological knowledge of society reflected in the Turkish epics under consideration, particularly regarding their consciousness of nature and their relationship with animals. In line with this purpose, the study seeks to answer the question: How is the approach of various Turkish tribes to animals around the ecological order and their basic needs, and how have these tendencies been reflected in the epics? search for an answer to the question.

3. Materials and methods

Research Pattern

Qualitative research approaches were used in this study. Within the framework of a qualitative approach, various epics of Turkish tribes were examined. The main reason for choosing qualitative research method is its capacity to provide a comprehensive approach to societal and individual value judgments, allowing for the thorough analysis of all resulting data in accordance with this perspective.

Data Collection

In the study, “purposive sampling method” was used in data collection. The purposive sampling method involves selecting materials based on their contribution to the defined research question or their relevance (Çakmak ve Baysen, 2017). In this context, 35 epics were examined in line with the defined research question, and 10 epics were selected as the focal point of the study. While all examined epics included human-animal, the analysed epics were included in the scope of the study due to their inclinations towards preserving ecological balance

through the utilization of animals in activities such as hunting, sacrifices, ritual practices, and ceremonies.

Data Analysis

Content analysis method was used in the analysis of the data in the study. The content analysis method is used to define, interpret, decipher the main idea within the examined texts, messages contained in the texts, information, and documents to analyse the existing problem or the emerged data effectively (Çakmak ve Baysen, 2017). In this study, through content analysis, the traditional ecological knowledge presented in the narratives was examined by analysing texts from various regions: Közüyke Epic, Ösküs Uul Epic, Oçı Bala Epic, Buuçay Epic, Kan-Kapchikay Epic from the Altai region, Köroğlu Epic from the Gagauz region, Han Orba Epic from the Khakas region, Manas Epic from the Kyrgyz region, Cantugvan Epic from the Karachay-Malkar region, and İdil and Yayık Epic from the Bashkir region.

In this context, initially, epic texts that emphasize a central role for animals and extensively explore animal-human relationships were chosen, and these texts were subjected to a detailed reading process. The data obtained were evaluated in the context of social ecology approach around an ecocritical perspective, and how people approached animals around traditional ecological knowledge, how they benefited from them, which approaches they adopted about the continuity and healthy functioning of the ecological order were determined.

In the study, the following processes were carried out to establish the coding in the analysis of the data obtained on the protection of the animals in the epics in the ecological order:

Within the scope of the application, initially, 35 epics were examined, and 10 epics were included as the central focus. The main reason for choosing these texts can be expressed as the fact that epics are extremely rich in terms of traditional ecological knowledge and that important data in the context of animal-human relations in the social order are included in these narratives. It is possible to come across animal-human relations in all the examined epics. These types of relationships are referred to as the dyadic tradition (such as the relationship between the hero and their horse). However, in this study, beyond the dyadic traditions, efforts were made to determine what the sensitivities and approaches of people towards the continuity of the ecological order are while benefiting from animals in daily life. The selection of epics was made carefully, considering the attention, value judgments, and rich accumulation of knowledge related to the preservation of the ecological order concerning the various purposes for which the society interacts with animals.

In the study, only the epic texts translated into Turkish were examined, and the traditional ecological information in these texts was evaluated.

In the study, the meaning, scope and application forms of traditional ecological knowledge, in which animals are in a central position, were analysed with examples and an ecocritical reading was created. Around this approach, epic texts of Gagauz, Altai, Khakas, Karachay-Malkar, Kyrgyz and Bashkir epics were examined.

In coding process, practices around human-animal relations in epic texts were revealed. Within this scope, it is stated that which application was made for what purpose and for what purpose it was carried out.

Based on traditional ecological knowledge emerging within the context of human-animal relationships in societal order and everyday life, the gathered data highlighted tendencies towards the preservation of ecological balance and these tendencies encompassed the transmission of the ecological insights to individuals, raising consciousness among the younger generation, and educating people about what constitutes a healthy ecological balance and how it should be maintained.

In the coding process, the names of the epics were given in detail, and under the “categories” section, the traditional ecological information emerging from the epics were categorised as knowledge, attitude, meanings, behaviour, and consciousness. Traditional ecological information formed in the context of human-animal relations in the social order were listed, and under the “codes” section, the activities that determine human-animal relations and the ways people benefit from animals were explained.

4. Results

As a result of the analysis of the data, the ways of protecting animals in the traditional ecological order were examined in the context of the epics. In this framework, the categories of ensuring the continuation of animal generations, maintaining the ecological balance to prevent disruption, tendencies towards sustaining natural life, and protection of animal species were reached, as shown in Table-1 below. The contents of the categories based on the identified epics are listed in Table.1 as follows: Animals with offspring are not killed/hunted/sacrificed to ensure the health continuity of the ecological order and protect animal species. In hunting, old, or barren animals are targeted. In sacrificial/offering/ celebration ceremonies, old or barren animals are sacrificed instead of young animals. Old or barren animals are preferred to meet the nutritional needs. The necessity of not killing animals that are considered sacred results in the protection of species. Around the traditional ecological information in the epic texts, many different findings were discovered about the approaches to the protection of animals, the maintenance of the ecological order, and the continuity of natural life. In natural life, both societies or individuals have great respect for the elements of nature, especially animals, and abide by the rule that they have the right to life. Animals are not seen as mere means of exploitation or consumption. Accordingly, attention is given to avoiding the hunting of animals with no offspring and sacrificing animals that are barren or old. A conscious effort of the protection of animals established and settled. This accumulation of knowledge was included in the narratives, both preserved and transferred from generation to generation. Detailed information on the findings is given in Table1. The study revolves around the significance of the preservation of animals within the context of traditional ecological knowledge and the resulting environmental consciousness (Table.1).

Table 1. Directions for Conservation of Biodiversity

THEME	EPICS	CATEGORIES	CODINGS	FINDINGS
METHODS OF ANIMAL PROTECTION IN THE CONTEXT OF TRADITIONAL ECOLOGICAL INFORMATION	Altai/ K�z�yke	Continuation of animal generations	Hunting	<p><i>Animals with offspring are not hunted.</i></p> <p>In the narrative, the hero goes hunting, and he comes across a doe with her fawn. Doe begs the hero not to hunt her, stating that she has a fawn. The hero also gives up the hunt by thinking of his own offspring. "Ak Kagan went hunting. He saw that just below a dark brown rock, the bald spot of a dark brown doe was visible. He shot his arrow with a golden tip, and on the side where he shot, the female deer, the dark doe, spoke like a human: Are you going to feed your stomach with my flesh, or cover yourself with my hide, roaming to fill my teats with milk, carrying my delicate fawn in my belly, I was just about to give birth to add a deer to your vast Altai" (Dilek, 2002).</p> <p>"Those who separate a mare from her foal and make her cry a lot..." (Dilek, 2002).</p> <p>"In the village of Bashan, it became customary to hunt deer fawns. The curse of Apsat was waiting for Cantugvan. Young hunters</p>
	Altai/ Buu�ay			
	Altai/�sk�s Uul			
	Altai/O�ı Bala			
	Altai/Kan-Kapchikay			
	Kyrgyz/ Manas			
	Gagauz/K�ro�lu			
	Khakas/Han Orba			
	Bashkir/ İdil and Yayık			
	Karachay-Malkar/Cantugvan			

			<p><i>do not trample the tracks of the elder. Do not bring curses upon yourselves, especially to your blonde-haired girls. Apsat protects their deer, takes vengeance of the animals from the hunters. Apsat is loyal to their herd, to their word; a wicked hunter quickly falls into their two eyes... Apsat was the representative of the deer..."</i> (Tavkul, 2004).</p> <p>Hunting old or barren animals is recommended during hunting.</p> <p><i>"He kept the prey of the water in the water and chose the barren and hunted..."</i> (Dilek, 2007).</p>
		Preservation of ecological balance	<p>Sacrifice</p> <p>Insacrifice/offerings/celebration ceremonies, old or barren animals are sacrificed instead of young ones.</p> <p>At the celebration, Koroğlu orders, <i>"Slaughter the forty-year-old ox..."</i> (Özkan, 2007).</p> <p><i>"Let it be an endless celebration, or cutting the fat mares from the herd of the fast stallion that hadn't given birth for nine years or cutting the mares from the herd of the old stallion that hadn't given birth for forty years."</i> (Aktaş, 2011).</p> <p><i>"Capture a mare from the herd of Kamber Boz,</i></p>

				<p><i>created to be sacrificed, and bring it, let it be a nine-year-old aged mare. After slaughtering all of these, have a big celebration. Let the hungry ones be satisfied. If you sacrifice an animal, it will bring forth offspring...</i>" (Musayev ve Akmatallyev, 2007).</p>
		Ensuring the continuity of natural life	Celebration/Feeding	<p>Old or barren animals are preferred to meet nutritional needs.</p> <p><i>"Aged horse for slaughter..."</i> (Dilek, 2002).</p> <p><i>"Old horse is for slaughter; old man is for death..."</i> (Dilek, 2007).</p> <p><i>"He struck the cow that hadn't given birth for forty years and turned it into meat."</i> (Aktaş, 2011).</p> <p><i>"He ate the meat of the barren rabbit and got full."</i> (Dilek, 2007).</p> <p><i>"The dish made from the meat of the barren sheep was here."</i> (Dilek, 2007).</p>
		Conservation of species attributed with sacredness	Taboo	<p>As a result of the necessity for not killing the animals considered sacred, species are protected.</p> <p><i>"After many years had passed, Huma had missed Ural and flown along his path, flapping its wings, coming to the mountain, thinking of Ural on the</i></p>

			<p><i>rock, and singing like a swan, reproducing the swan lineage. Everyone knew this and they called them Huma birds, treating them like siblings, forbidding hunting them, and making an agreement among themselves not to eat swans, saying they wouldn't be consumed. Swans kept reproducing." (Suleymanov vd. 2014).</i></p> <p><i>"People who go hunting should not kill the partridge; if the partridge is killed, rain will not come, and this bird cannot be used in trade." (Dilek, 2007).</i></p>
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Conclusions and Discussion

In the context of the findings obtained in Table-1 above, it can be stated that one of the most important reflections of ecological consciousness in Turkish epics emerged in line with the relationship of humans with hunting animals. Because the fundamental rule adopted by society in this regard is to hunt only as much as is needed and not to cause harm beyond that. Thus, hunting without cause has been prohibited, and animal species have been protected out of respect for nature (Küçük yıldız Gözelce, 2023). In order to ensure the continuity of life and the continuity of nature in a healthy order, it can be seen that factors such as not hunting animals with offspring and selecting those that are old or barren are taken into consideration. The first example to be given in this manner appears in the Közüyke Epic. Following a legendary motif, the deer speaks and pleads with the hero not to hunt it due to its young. The doe begs the hero not to hunt him, stating that she has a fawn. The hero gives up the hunt by thinking of his own offspring "Ak Kagan went hunting. He saw that just below a dark brown rock, the bald spot of a dark brown doe was visible. He shot his arrow with a golden tip, and on the side where he shot, the female deer, the dark doe, spoke like a human: Are you going to feed your stomach with my flesh, or cover yourself with my hide, roaming to fill my teats with milk, carrying my delicate fawn in my belly, I was just about to give birth to add a deer to your vast Altai" (Dilek, 2002). When doe says she has a fawn, the hero rides his horse and goes home. As seen in the narrative, the sensitivity towards the reproduction and multiplication of animals, which is a crucial aspect for the continuity of nature's circulation, is presented as traditional ecological knowledge to the reader's attention. The hero refrained from hunting the doe with a fawn considering that the

hunting it could have negative intervention on the functioning of nature. The healthy functioning of the natural life and the continuity of the life depend on the bond between the parents and the offspring. For the conservation of species and the continuation of generations, the dependency of the young on the mother, particularly in terms of care, is taken into account and the preservation of ecological balance is tied to the continuity of this relationship. In the narratives, this situation was sometimes presented using metaphors or fixed expressions. As seen in the Buuay Epic, people with a bad reputation or those who are ruthless and not well-intentioned are referred to as *“Those who separate a mare from her foal and make her cry a lot...”* (Dilek, 2002) in the folk tradition. This short expression in the epic can be seen as a reflection of an important ecological consciousness. Throughout history, Turkish communities that had a close relationship with the environment since ancient times observed animals in detail and at times have even regarded their needs as superior to their own, showing great care in preserving the existence and continuity of species. In this context, it can be stated that one of the most important information they acquired is the relationship between mother and offspring in animals. This value judgment is sometimes conveyed in the narratives with directly prohibitive expressions such as *“animals with offspring should not be killed”* or *“young animals should not be separated from their mothers”*, and as in the example above, it is also given around the element of comparing or defining bad people. All these expressions can be regarded as literary manifestations of the existing nature consciousness within the society, reflecting in various forms.

The rule of not killing offspring, as seen in the epics, can be seen in the next generations with the transfer of cultural memory. The most important means of this is oral-written culture, that is, literature. It is possible to see the reflections of the nature consciousness that existed in the past in Adil elik’s compilations of hunters. In these compilations, it is stated that when hunters meet animals with offspring, they do not hunt these animals under any circumstances or conditions. It should be stated that this approach is supported by a legend and the value judgments formed against nature are transferred from generation to generation with these narratives. In the compilations, it is stated that various disasters befall the hunter who hunts a partridge with an offspring and the fear of the disasters led hunters to avoid killing animals with offspring. The legends that recount the partridge’s curse as *“May those who eat my flesh never be satisfied / May those who kill me never feel good,”* as well as the stories and myths about mountain goat hunters falling from cliffs and dying or their children falling ill, can be listed as significant examples of an established ecological consciousness within that society (elik, 2019). In the examples mentioned above, although the intervention in nature was shaped around a taboo or fear, it led to the idea that the hunters should not touch the animals with offspring and created a consciousness for the protection of the animals with offspring. This consciousness aimed at protecting the functioning of nature and ensuring the continuity of the animal population reached the present day through various narratives, prohibitions, and stories. Clearly, literature is one of the most significant means through which traditional ecological consciousness was established and rooted. Reading literary works with an ecocritical approach is of great importance in this sense. One of the important reflections of ecological consciousness is the fact that the animals that are hunted or slaughtered for various purposes (nutrition) in the epics in order not to disturb the ecological balance are barren or old. It is seen that this

traditional ecological knowledge is also present in different Turkish tribes, and the society meets its needs in line with environmental consciousness. For example, the expression “Aged horse for slaughter...” (Dilek, 2002) in the Altai epics is one of the most obvious reflections of this. Horses have a valuable position in Turkish societies due to their contributions in battles, their significance as a means of transportation, and their role as a source of feeding. In this context, in Turkish tribes where horses were used as a feeding tool, it was seen that slaughter horses were chosen from the old ones, and they were chosen from horses that no longer contribute to reproduction or population growth in the ecological order and would not be beneficial. In this framework, Turks showed great sensitivity in order to meet their needs, ensure the continuity of the species, and prevent animal species from being a means of consumption or exploitation. The expression “aged horse for slaughter” in epic texts is one of the valuable reflections of the environmental consciousness of the Turks. It can be said that this conscious approach and sensitive attitude towards the elements of nature became a kind of rule that should be learned in the society and transferred to the next generations. This sensitivity was preserved and transferred to the next generations with proverbs, idioms, or stereotypes. The following stereotypical expression in the epics “Old horse is for slaughter; old man is for death...” (Dilek, 2007). is important in terms of showing how deeply this environmental consciousness is rooted. The issue of paying attention to the old age of the animal to be killed is also encountered in Gagauz epics in a different way. In a narrative, Koroğlu wants to hold a celebration due to being reunited with his son. Animals are asked to be slaughtered in order to be offered to people at the celebration. In the text, Koroğlu’s reference to old animals with the phrase “Slaughter the forty-year-old ox...” (Özkan, 2007). instead of “slaughter the animals” appears as one of the important references to this environmental consciousness. Although it may appear as a minor detail within the narrative, this statement reveals the underlying strength of an ecological consciousness.

Around the concept of animals being old or weak, Callenbach offers a different perspective. “*When hunters catch their prey, they test their survivability. Those who are weak or not smart enough are caught. Thus, hunters contribute to the genetic development of their prey.*” (Callenbach, 2010). This analysis is an important conclusion that covers all hunting practices (human-animal or animal-animal hunts). This orientation holds a great importance in terms of the preservation of natural life, natural elements, animal species, and ecological elements in the functioning of nature, as well as ensuring their continuity. Approaches such as not killing the offspring, slaughtering barren animals, and sacrificing animals that do not give birth for a long time or that are old for a long time can be seen as reflections of the ecological consciousness that contributes to this healthy functioning of nature. In this context, it can be said that the tendency of sacrificing old animals or slaughtering them for feeding purposes as depicted in the narratives can be interpreted as contributing to the goal of maintaining this circulation in nature without disruption. One of the notable tendencies in the narratives in terms of not disturbing the ecological balance and ensuring the continuity of life of animals is to pay attention to the fact that the hunted or slaughtered animal is barren. The expression “He kept the prey of the water in the water and chose the barren and hunted...” (Dilek, 2007) used in epics reveals the nature consciousness formed in the society in the hunting activity and how to act based on this consciousness. This information conveyed in the text is extremely important in terms of

determining the direction of the environmental value judgments of that society and the rules that need to be followed in hunting. In the same epic, expressions such as “The dish made from the meat of the barren sheep was here.” (Dilek, 2007). “When he ate the meat of the barren rabbit, he was full.” (Dilek, 2007) are important examples showing how that society uses animals according to their needs without exploiting them and disturbing the balance of nature. In the Khakas epics, there is a particular emphasis on the fact that the animals to be used for feeding or celebration were barren or did not give birth for a long time and were old. “He struck the cow that hadn’t given birth for forty years and turned it into meat.”, “Let it be an endless celebration, or cutting the fat mares from the herd of the fast stallion that hadn’t given birth for nine years, or cutting the mares from the herd of the old stallion that hadn’t given birth for forty years.” (Aktaş, 2011). In this context, the selection of barren animals in line with both hunting activities and feeding purposes is very valuable in terms of ensuring the continuity of the existence of living things. This sensitivity in society is extremely valuable in terms of the reproduction and population growth of animals and the prevention of extinction of species.

It is known that the Turks gave great importance to the phenomenon of sacrifice both before and after their acceptance of Islam. In ancient times, Turks sacrificed and offered sacrifices to mountains, rivers and sacred places according to their beliefs. These sacrifices are divided into bloody and bloodless sacrifices. Bloody sacrifices involve the shedding of the blood of various animals for the sake of the being for whom the sacrifice is offered, while bloodless sacrifice ceremonies involve offering various objects (ornaments, money, clothing, etc.) to the sacred (Özkan, 2003). In epic texts, it is seen that animals were sacrificed for various purposes (gratitude, fear). However, in practices shaped around the concept of sacrifice, it is seen that they acted with a natural consciousness, and it is stated that attention was paid to whether the animal to be sacrificed was old or barren or had no offspring. “*Capture a mare from the herd of Kamber Boz, created to be sacrificed, and bring it, let it be a nine-year-old aged mare. After slaughtering all of these, have a big celebration. Let the hungry ones be satisfied. If you sacrifice an animal, it will bring forth offspring...*” (Musayev ve Akmatallyev, 2007). In the text, traditional knowledge suggests that sacrifices are recommended by individuals who want to have children. In this sacrificial ceremony, there is a reference to the old age of the animals to be sacrificed, and it is evident that animals and all natural elements are protected to the maximum extent according to the needs, even within the religious beliefs and practices of the community. It is seen that some events and situations shaped around the traditional ecological information depicted in the epics are based on a myth of origin or a legend, and these widely spread legends in the society result in the protection of various animals, the prohibition of hunting, and the formation of taboos. As stated earlier, epics contain the knowledge of a nation in many different fields such as customs, traditions, religious beliefs, economic orientation, and cultural activities, reflecting their world views. In this context, considering how significant epics are for a society, the information presented within them forms a set of rules that must be followed within that society, encompassing things that should or should not be done, presented in various ways through narratives, and all these orientations were passed down from generation to generation as a set of rules. Another example that reflects the ecological consciousness of Turks in epics is presented with an origin myth. “*After many years had passed, Huma had missed Ural and flown along his path, flapping its wings, coming to the mountain, thinking of Ural on the rock, and*

singing like a swan, reproducing the swan lineage. Everyone knew this and they called them Huma birds, treating them like siblings, forbidding hunting them, and making an agreement among themselves not to eat swans, saying they wouldn't be consumed. Swans kept reproducing." (Suleymanov vd. 2014). As can be seen, traditional knowledge was included in the narrative around the origin of the swan, the preservation, and reproduction of the swan generation and thus shaped the perspective of this bird. Through a narrative embedded in the collective memory, how people's approach to the mentioned animal species developed and how this was transmitted through oral and written culture can be observed. With the story included in the text, the formation of an ecological consciousness within the society's belief system and the underlying beliefs that shape people's relationship with the creatures in nature are reflected. There are many examples in epics showing that beliefs create an ecological consciousness around traditional knowledge. The expression "*People who go hunting should not kill the partridge; if the partridge is killed, rain will not come, and this bird cannot be used in trade.*" (Dilek, 2007) is one of the important examples that shows how the society approaches the elements of nature and what the factors determine their relations with them within the context of their cultural beliefs. In the context of beliefs, these two examples depict the process of the formation of an animal-centred environmental consciousness through narratives and provide answers to questions such as why certain animal species are not hunted or killed and why specific species are respected more.

"There is a relationship between social prohibitions, and taboos and the protection of ecology. We can talk about the indirect positive effects of taboo and avoidance behaviours, which are a part of folklore, on ecological protection. For example, beliefs based on nature cults, more commonly found in societies that are closely connected to nature, are beneficial in terms of preventing the pollution of certain regions, water resources, and forests, as well as preventing excessive consumption of natural products in those regions. Similarly, some beliefs about animals prohibit hunting those animal species, thus protecting these species from extinction. This is important in terms of not disrupting the food chain in nature." (Yolcu ve Aça, 2019).

The close relationship between religious beliefs and practices, ecological consciousness, and oral and written culture, which are the important dynamics of the society should be emphasised. Thus, people managed to ensure the protection and reproduction of animals through various religious beliefs and practices, traditional ecological knowledge, and value judgments such as different customs and traditions and succeeded in transferring this from generation to generation through transmission of traditional knowledge to literary works.

Another example that shows how beliefs shape the ecological consciousness and protect the lives of living creatures in nature is the Karachay-Malkar epics that emphasise that animals with offspring¹ should not be killed and convey this message through a belief system, showcasing significant insights. "*In the village of Bashan, it became customary to hunt deer fawns. The curse of Apsat was waiting for Cantugvan. Young hunters do not trample the tracks of the elder. Do not bring curses upon yourselves, especially to your blonde-haired girls. Apsat protects their deer, takes vengeance of the animals from the hunters. Apsat is loyal to their herd, to their word; a*

¹ In the text, this sensitivity is conveyed through the deer. This is because deer has an important place in Turkish culture. Many legends revolve around the idea of not killing deer or their offspring.

wicked hunter quickly falls into their two eyes... Apsat was the representative of the deer..." (Tavkul, 2004). The attention given to incorporating these concerns into the narrative according to society's beliefs can be interpreted as contributing to the conservation of that animal species. Along with such legends that took a place in the social memory, a kind of ecological consciousness was instilled in individuals through certain animal species, and the narratives played an important role in conveying value judgments. In the text, it is stated that the people have a habit of hunting fawns and that great disasters may happen to them for this matter. The emphasis on young deer in the narrative can be seen as a reference to tempering the inclination to hunt young animals or animals with offspring, thereby tabooing these animals. This situation is of great importance in terms of reflecting the ecological consciousness formed in that society through an animal species and establishment of the respect for the elements of nature through that species. When this approach is evaluated around the social ecological theory, this perspective highlights the necessity for individuals to engage in various activities in their daily lives to fulfil their needs without disrupting the natural balance. The sensitivity towards not killing the fawn or not hunting the animals with offspring and maintaining the functioning of the ecological order should be seen as an important reference to the observance of natural life in all aspects during hunting.

One of the valuable examples showing how people act against nature in line with their needs and refrain from using or consuming the elements of nature unconsciously can be seen in the relationship of children with birds in Bashkir epics. It is seen in the epic that the children did not kill the quails they caught because they were weak or meatless. It has been brought to attention in the narrative that they hunted quails to learn the art of hunting but did not harm the birds (Suleymanov vd. 2014). However, in the modern world, people acted unconsciously and recklessly towards animals, leading to the extinction of their species due to their hobbies or other pursuits. The main reason for this is that human beings do not use animals in proportion to their needs and see them as a kind of exploitation or consumption tool. For instance, it has been noted that during the Ice Age, some of the most valuable creatures such as mammoths, moa, an ostrich species in New Zealand, and bison in North America (with a population of around 60 million), along with approximately two billion passenger pigeons in the 1700s, faced extinction or approached extinction due to large-scale hunting driven by the explorations and transition to settled life in North America. It was stated that the lion is a species living in the Peloponnese (1865) and Morokko (1865), but the lion family is no longer found here due to excessive hunting by humans. In the Caucasus, it was determined that wild cattle and various bison species are also extinct as a result of excessive hunting due to various economic reasons. The examples listed are important in terms of showing the interventions of human beings in the existence of animals (Özkan, 2006). The examples listed above, as well as the approach included in the epic narrative highlight the direction of nature consciousness and ecological sensitivities in the past and present, and how they changed. The value judgment conveyed in the epic shows that even children have an ecological consciousness, they act around a sense of responsibility towards nature in line with their needs, without harming the functioning of nature, while individuals living in the contemporary world act without this consciousness, interfering with the lives of animals by exceeding their needs, leading to the extinction of their species. The reverence that ancient societies showed towards animals and their utilization based on

necessity should be regarded as a natural consequence of the functioning of ecosystems. Garrard stated that there was no contradiction between the admiration that humans had for animals and their hunting-killing in pre-modern times. According to him, the distancing of animals from everyday life and their transformation into commodities or objects of exploitation primarily occurred after the Industrial Revolution. Thus, animals have been marginalized, destroyed, and made extinct. This situation is the result of modern humans' unconscious approach to nature and their desire to have more than their needs (Garrard, 2020). The above statements of Grek Garrard can be considered as a product of the social ecological approach. It is known that in ancient times, people used or killed animals for various needs. However, human intervention in nature or animals is limited here. They acted by respecting the elements of nature, especially animals, and by ensuring their right to life. They avoided interventions that exceeded their needs and maintained the natural balance. The social ecological approach argues that the relationship between animal, human and literature should be evaluated considering this reality. All 'stress factors' created by humans that are directly or indirectly linked to biological processes within the ecosystem pose a major threat to ecological life. This approach of humans towards the environment also causes the ecosystem to deteriorate in a chain reaction (Ayaz ve Altunsoy, 2024). In this context, various animal populations have declined significantly due to human activities, and some animals are facing extinction, particularly as a result of human impact. 'Ecological plans' developed to eliminate these problems are of great importance in ensuring the survival of animal species (Özşahin ve Öztürk, 2024). These ecological plans vary according to the period and environmental conditions. The approaches of people in epics towards the protection of animals, which occupy an important place in natural life, particularly within natural elements, serve as important references for solving the ecological problems that have emerged in today's world. It is seen that the sensitivities expressed in this context are included in the epic texts in different ways. In the narratives, it is shown that people benefit from animals without exceeding their needs, act by respecting their right to life, prevent the extinction of animal species, form various value judgments for the continuity of species, and these aspects are presented alongside examples to indicate how animal-human relationships should be. These examples in epics were evaluated through the perspective of social ecology, examining how human intervention in nature or natural elements is shaped by these value judgments.

Based on the findings of the conducted study, the following conclusions were reached. Turks saw nature and natural elements as the most important part of their lives and built a culture and civilisation around this sensitivity. It should be stated that animals are one of the most important factors that deeply affect and shape their worldviews, feelings and thoughts, literature, arts, religious beliefs, in short, all their value judgments about social life. For this reason, Turkish societies highly valued the animals and built traditional ecological knowledge, beliefs, and practices around animals. In religious, social, and cultural life, traditional ecological knowledge was preserved and transferred from generation to generation in various ways. In this context, the society exhibited various approaches in religious ceremonies, daily life, and cultural order in order to protect animals and ensure the continuity of the ecological order. First and foremost, the killing of animals with offspring or pregnant animals is prohibited, and strict adherence to this rule has been emphasised. One of the conclusions drawn from the findings is

the sensitivity of hunting old or barren animals during hunting ceremonies of a society that sustains its life through hunting. This orientation is important in terms of showing an established ecological consciousness in the society. While benefiting from elements of natural life on one hand, the society takes great care not to disturb the ecological balance. Similarly, the results also reflect in sacrificial ceremonies, offerings, and celebrations, as well as in meeting nutritional needs. In these ceremonies or in addressing nutritional needs, it is seen that old and barren animals are sacrificed instead of young animals in order not to disturb the natural life balance. One of the conclusions reached as a result of the findings is the fact that the society creates various beliefs and taboos in order to protect the ecological order and to ensure the continuity of animal generations. It should be stated that these beliefs, which have a significant influence on individuals in social life, are extremely important and effective in terms of the protection of animals in the ecological order and the continuation of the healthy functioning of the ecological order.

As a result, it is seen that traditional ecological knowledge is preserved in various ways in society and transferred to younger generations. Examined epic reveal that the society pays great attention to the preservation of the ecological order and does not consider nature as a means of consumption or exploitation. In order to protect animal species and to contribute to the healthy functioning of natural life, approaches such as not touching animals with offspring, not killing young animals, preferring barren or old animals in hunting, feeding, and sacrificial rituals are embedded as a norm within the narratives. All these tendencies are important examples showing that that society has an ecological consciousness. Especially in the last centuries, the perception of consumption society, economic wars, and entertainment culture have deeply shaken natural life and caused the extinction of species. Individuals without natural consciousness treated the elements of nature as a means of exploitation and started to destroy natural life rapidly. Since the problems of nature reached their peak, important studies were carried out in different disciplines to reawaken environmental consciousness. In this context, literary works were examined and evaluated with ecocritical approaches, known as green reading. Since epics are extremely rich sources in terms of traditional ecological information, it is extremely important to examine these texts from an ecocritical point of view. The knowledge in these texts holds great importance to propose solutions to the ecological problems of contemporary world.

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