

ABSTRACT

Title of Thesis: THE POLITICS OF SOCIAL HISTORY IN
EARLY TURKISH EPICS: REMEMBERING
GENDER, FAMILY AND SOVEREIGNTY

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The early Turkish epic tradition is relatively understudied, and many existing works focus on using Turkish epics to reconstruct earlier eras without fully understanding their role in the period from which the manuscripts date. Using a translation of *Battalname* based on the earliest fifteenth- and sixteenth-century manuscripts, and a translation of two sixteenth-century manuscripts of *The Book of Dede Korkut*, this work examines the social context of Turkish literature in Anatolia in the fifteenth and sixteenth centuries as well as its relation to the social world of epic society. A memory studies framing is used to situate the works and understand their role as a fifteenth- and sixteenth-century depiction of the past. Chapters are devoted to the role of literature in society, including circulation and reading practices, creation of Turkish literature and the vernacularization process, as well as to the role of women, men and gender, and to the structure and political significance of the family.

THE POLITICS OF SOCIAL HISTORY IN EARLY TURKISH EPICS:
REMEMBERING GENDER, FAMILY AND SOVEREIGNTY

by

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Note on Orthography

Spelling conventions when writing in English about Islamic history are full of difficult choices, all the more so when, as in this study, dealing with scholarship concerning multiple languages. Throughout this work, I have attempted to use the spelling chosen by the translators of the primary sources I refer to, with apologies for the inconsistencies that occasionally appear (e.g., as in the word khatun/hatun, spelled differently by different translators from Turkish). Likewise, names and locations are spelled as they are in referenced sources. Otherwise when using words which have been adopted into English (e.g., ulama), especially those which are transliterated differently from different languages, I have used the most common English spelling.

Introduction: Time, Manuscripts and Memory

In this thesis, using English translations of *The Book of Dede Korkut*¹ and *Battalname*,² I plan to discuss some aspects of their history as works of Turkish literature before investigating whether that history can be combined with the actual contents of the epics to shed light on aspects of the history of the period as a whole. Specifically, I suggest that because both epics depict political events in the context of elite family life, they can be used, cautiously, as a window into the popular perception of politics and of family life in general. Because the epics are set in the past relative to the time of the earliest manuscript editions, I examine them as - fictional - memories of the recent past, rather than direct products of the circumstances they depict.

The Turkish-language epic tradition, while relatively understudied, introduces complicated issues of timing, production and the distinction or relationship between history, fiction and myth. Therefore, before embarking on a discussion of the specific audience and producers of Turkish epics in chapter one, and the elements of social history I find displayed in their narratives in chapters two and three, I will first justify my view of the time period reflected by the early Turkish epics, and the nature of their relationship with the cultures of that period.

1. Dating Epics

References to written epics in the Arabic language had begun at least by the 12th century. They apparently became objects of more social controversy as time went on, possibly as they were popularized and those scholars who regarded themselves as experts on history became

1 *The Book of Dede Korkut: A Turkish Epic*, trans. Faruk Sümer, Ahmet E. Uysal and Warren S. Walker (Austin & London: University of Texas Press, 1972).

2 *Battalname: Introduction, English Translation, Turkish Transcription, Commentary and Facsimile*, trans. Yorgos Dedes (Cambridge: The Department of Near Eastern Languages and Civilizations, Harvard University, 1996).

concerned that the population at large was more likely to consume epics than works which stood up to the time's definition of factualness and scholarly rigor.³

This Arabic beginning pre-dated the origins of Turkish as a literary language in general and the Turkish epics in particular.⁴ The earliest surviving epic manuscripts written in Turkish date from the fifteenth and sixteenth centuries. It is generally agreed that these epics are based on preexisting material, but the exact nature of that preexisting material and the relationship between it and these early manuscripts are matters of considerable dispute. I will go into more detail as I cover particular epics, especially my main source materials for this study, *Battalname* and *The Book of Dede Korkut*. These are the only Turkish epics with full translations available in English, unfortunately a requirement for my selection of them. Usefully, these two epics also include one selection from the tradition of *Battalname* and its sequels, and the main - and fairly extreme - outlier epic from the Turkish tradition.

1.1 Dating *Battalname*

Battalname is the Turkish epic about the life of Sayyid al-Battal, originally an Umayyad hero transposed multiple times into later eras in later tradition.⁵ The Turkish version certainly references Arabic material, and there are references to - if not surviving text from - an Arabic

3 Konrad Hirschler, *The Written Word in the Medieval Arabic Lands: A Social and Cultural History of Reading Practices* (Edinburgh: Edinburgh University Press, 2012), 186-193.

4 There are several secure dates from the thirteenth century, a number of works which are traditionally attributed to it but may be later, and a larger number of securely dated works from the fourteenth and fifteenth centuries. Discussed in A.C.S. Peacock, *Islam, Literature and Society in Mongol Anatolia* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 2019), ch. 4, "The Emergence of Literary Turkish;" Linda Darling, "Ottoman Turkish: Written Language and Scribal Practice, 13th to 20th Centuries," in *Literacy in the Persianate World: Writing and the Social Order*, ed. Brian Spooner and William L. Hanaway (Philadelphia: University of Pennsylvania Press, 2012), 173-176. The older and earlier view may be found in Mecdud Mansuroğlu, "The Rise and Development of Written Turkish in Anatolia," *Oriens* 7, no. 2 (1954): 250-264.

5 Summary in Irene Mélikoff, "al-Baṭṭāl," in *Encyclopaedia of Islam, Second Edition*, ed. P. Bearman, Th. Bianquis, C.E. Bosworth, E. van Donzel, W.P. Heinrichs. Online.

language epic about al-Battal from the twelfth century.⁶ The earliest manuscript of the Turkish version, however, dates to 1436-7.⁷ Various attempts have been made to date *Battalname* to an earlier period based on its contents. Yorgos Dedes views its composition as clearly earlier, but states, in my opinion, correctly, that we have no idea what the nature of any oral predecessors was, and can only discuss the fifteenth-century text that actually exists.⁸ For an alternative view, Buket Kitapçı Bayrı identifies anachronisms from the fifteenth and sixteenth centuries in *Battalname*, but views the political conditions of the frontier as specifically those of the ninth and tenth centuries, and the anachronisms as later insertions.⁹

In any case, numerous other copies of *Battalname* exist, post-dating the first extant manuscript. There is considerable variation between them. This variation may reflect parallel traditions, perhaps because of variation in performance¹⁰ and other interaction with oral transmission and reproduction for different audiences. The edition used for this study was based primarily on the oldest known manuscript, with three other pre-seventeenth-century manuscripts used to fill in missing sections from the oldest manuscript, in stories which existed in the former.¹¹

1.2 Dating *The Book of Dede Korkut*

Similarly, we have references to earlier material long before extant text of the *Book of Dede Korkut*. The "Book of the Oghuz" is first mentioned in the fourteenth century, but there is no proof that this was a written work matching the manuscripts, and if it was, it no longer

6 Dedes, *Battalname*, 3-8 and Hirschler, *The Written Word*, 186-193.

7 Dedes, *Battalname*, 13-14; he asserts it is clearly a copy of another manuscript without explanation, but later describes the manuscript including non-sequential heading numbers with a considerably greater number of non-numbered section headings, suggesting copying from multiple other manuscripts, 91-92.

8 Ibid.

9 Buket Kitapçı Bayrı, *Warriors, Martyrs, and Dervishes: Moving Frontiers, Shifting Identities in the Land of Rome (13th-15th Centuries)* (Leiden & Boston: Brill, 2020), 25-26, 30.

10 Dedes, *Battalname*, 75-76.

11 Dedes, *Battalname*, 85-86.

exists.¹² There are two extant manuscripts, both from the sixteenth century¹³ and with considerable variation in their content. Opinions differ as to whether they derive from a single original manuscript¹⁴ and whether they can be seen as tracing to a single fifteenth-century tradition.¹⁵ Recently, a third manuscript has been discovered from the eighteenth century, not yet published in English and post-dating the translation used here.¹⁶

Attempts have been made to date *Dede Korkut* by tracing its events to historical sources as well, with less plausibility than *Battalname*. Lewis discusses some of the issues in relation to specific suggestions, but he is probably correct in saying this strategy is useless, and that we may never know who actually collected this book or under what circumstances. What we do know is that the narrator clearly indicates the "days of the Oghuz" were long past.¹⁷

1.3 Related Works

Two more Turkish epics, *Danişmendname* and *Saltukname*, survive in manuscript form from the sixteenth century at earliest.¹⁸ Unlike *Battalname* and *The Book of Dede Korkut*, in both cases those involved in copying or producing these works included some comments on the circumstances of production and reproduction. These are worth repeating for their implications.

The author of the source manuscript for *Saltukname* explained his project as follows: for Prince Cem (d. 1494), he embarked on a project of collecting stories about the legendary Sarı

12 Jelena Krstovic et al., "An Introduction to Kitab-i dedem Qorkut (Book of Dede Korkut) (Circa 9th-14th century)," in *Classical and Medieval Literature Criticism*, vol 8, ed. Jelena Krstovic (Farmington Hills: Gale, 1992), 95.

13 Krstovic, "An Introduction," 95.

14 Arzu Öztürkmen, "Performance in Late Medieval Turkish Texts: Signs of Orality in Literary and Historical Sources," in *Homo Legens: Styles and Practices of Reading: Comparative Analyses of Oral and Written Traditions in the Middle Ages*, ed. Svetlana Loutchitsky and Marie-Christine Varol (Turnhout: Brepols Publishers, 2010), 219-220 cites Geoffrey Lewis against the view that they derive from a single source.

15 Krstovic, "An Introduction," reprinting Zhirmunsky on p. 97 and Başgöz 108.

16 *Kitabi-Dədə Qorqud'un Üçüncü Əlyazması*, trans. Ramiz Əsgər, Əli Şamil, and Nailə Əskəer (Baku: Elm və Təhsil, 2019). Thanks to Ahmet Karamustafa for this citation.

17 Krstovic, "An Introduction," reprinting Lewis, 103-106.

18 Kitapçı Bayrı, *Warriors, Martyrs, and Dervishes*, 25-26.

Saltuk, and wrote down every story he heard for compilation. He completed this project in 1480, and the scribe responsible for the extant sixteenth-century manuscript copied his explanation.¹⁹

The most recent redactor of the oldest *Danışmendname* manuscript provides no such helpful statement of purpose, but does describe the process of copying a manuscript which he described as nearly illegible from age and stylistically difficult to read because of its compact text and lack of breaks. This description is similar to the oldest *Battalname* manuscript, and may suggest a fifteenth century source. He also complains that the source included no poetry, and explains that he has fixed this by inserting it. It is difficult to know what else he may have changed.²⁰

In summary, when we speak of Turkish prose epics, the best evidence is that we speak of a tradition which reached its known form in the fifteenth and sixteenth centuries, albeit with influence from earlier material. Furthermore, it seems to have reached that form, to an extent, self-consciously, with efforts to collect oral material, collate stories from different manuscripts, or beautify and redact old and illegible manuscripts for the time.

1.4 The Search for Manuscript "Origins" and Memory

No one disputes that the Turkish epic works incorporate material from older traditions. The questions generally pursued are, instead, what is old and what is new? How old is the old, and how new, the new? And from which cultures does this material come? Scholars have taken the approach of combing through epics in an effort to identify evidence of, or from, a particular date. Sometimes this is done by assuming any surprising material, or anything not obviously

¹⁹ Dedes, *Battalname*, 43-45.

²⁰ Ibid.

representing urban and Islamic tradition, must be old. Sometimes there are more rigorous attempts to match details to known and specific earlier periods.²¹

The methodological issues are many. Events in the epics are not easily traced to specific historical episodes, and details of, for example, military organization, tend to be vague and contradictory, flexibly shifting to whatever the plot demands at that particular moment. Circular argument is a serious risk, especially when there are no other detailed sources for whatever period is being used for comparison (and sources on, e.g., pre-Islamic Turkish culture are not plentiful). Comparisons across different manuscripts and later print editions of a particular popular work demonstrate that certain kinds of cultural information may be particularly vulnerable to manipulation and "correction," as in Zayde Antrim's study on sexuality and romance in *1001 Nights*.²²

Most attempts to use the Turkish epics as sources for early time periods rely on periods of oral transmission with no reference to written manuscripts. The "accuracy" or precision of oral transmission of long works is an issue on which individual scholars' views differ. Jack Goody's work on oral and written literature has the particular advantage of comparisons between the author's own anthropological fieldwork before and after tape recording became portable enough to eliminate the need to transcribe oral performances by hand. Goody, while noting that even when witnessing the same performances, he and colleagues sometimes disagreed about how similar or different they were, found that long recitations were virtually never verbatim, even when conducted by the same performer on different occasions, even dealing with sacred

21 E.g., Kitapçı Bayrı, *Warriors, Martyrs, and Dervishes*, for a more rigorous attempt to compare military conditions to different periods of Byzantine-Islamic frontier conflict. Compare to various efforts reprinted and debated in Krstovic, "An Introduction."

22 Zayde Antrim, "Qamarayn: The Erotics of Sameness in the 1001 Nights," *Al- 'Uşūr al-Wuṣṭā/The Journal of Middle East Medievalists* 28 (2020): 1-44.

literature. Sometimes this variation was clearly intentional, as when performers changed the perspective of a quasi-historical story for audiences of different but neighboring ethnic groups. But in general the process of memorization involves singers' selection of important information to memorize, followed by filling in logical connections in the process of performance.²³

Generalizing from this evidence suggests performances will vary, but it also means that the singer's world view - which information is important, and what makes a logical connection between those pieces of information - will always be expressed in a long performance. None of this means any oral transmission of Turkish epics was *inaccurate* or *false*, but rather that it was not *verbatim*, and it would have constantly shifted to accommodate the cultural world of each generation of performers and each individual audience.

It is not my intention to suggest that the approach of looking for material for different and earlier time periods in the Turkish epic tradition is hopeless, especially as the use of earlier material is indisputable. But here, I suggest an additional and complementary approach of examining manuscripts first as works of the period in which they were produced, and more specifically as a reflection of how people of this period *wanted* to remember the past, and how they creatively adapted and added material to do it. Epics - and their sudden birth in written Turkish in the period from about the mid fifteenth to mid sixteenth centuries - are clearly a component of this memory of the past. Genuinely historical material was included in this memory, but it was also edited, spliced together, redacted, selected and framed to suit the political and social needs and concerns of the time.

23 Jack Goody, *The interface between the written and the oral* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1987), discussed in great detail regarding Homer in ch. 3, "Africa, Greece and oral poetry;" also pp. 174-182 from ch. 8, "Memory and learning in oral and literate cultures: the reproduction of the Bagre."

Using this memory-focused approach allows us to step, for a moment, out of the framework of authenticity and the issue of categorizing episodes and details as old or new, Islamic or non-Islamic (or pre-Islamic, Christian, shamanic, etc.). Examining early Turkish epics fully as products of the fifteenth and sixteenth centuries, I hope, will shed light on their purpose and process of composition at that time, which in turn may assist us in meaningfully discussing their origins.

What does it mean, then, to say that epics represent a memory - or rather, competing memories - of the past as it was recalled in the fifteenth and sixteenth centuries?

The past of a given society is not an objective and preexisting truth, but a cultural construction. To be meaningful, the past must be curated and explained through cultural means of production, performance and reproduction, always filtered through the perspective of the people and societies involved. This concept of cultural memory, one of the modes of memory studies as a field, was created by Jan and Aleida Assmann, and elaborated on by, among others, Ann Rigney. Importantly, this cultural recollection of the past depends on the circulation of memories among a group, and the selection of particular memories, always dependent on the values of the group (and for the same reason, alternate values can lead to calling upon alternate pasts). Because identity, needs and concerns are constantly shifting with present circumstances, the remembered past is in flux alongside the present. As the people remembering and their situation shift, their memory changes as well, as for example they select and disregard particular information as more or less important, explain past events in different ways in terms of changing beliefs about cause and effect, and actually fabricate or destroy information. History and historiography, of course, undergo this process and are a part of cultural memory, but they are not

the entirety of cultural memory. Other cultural content or texts also represent and influence views of the past, including myths, legends and folklore, as well as fiction and other imaginary depictions.²⁴

The Turkish epics are set in the past relative to the times of the manuscripts' production and to their most recent editors, as demonstrated by the anachronisms and distancing descriptions of the setting referenced above. But they are not set in just any exotic past. Both *Battalname* and *The Book of Dede Korkut* deal with the conquest of Anatolia and its Christian kingdoms - the geographical area in which many of the people involved in their production, consumption and patronization lived. Turkish-speaking Anatolians in the fifteenth and sixteenth centuries would be well aware Anatolia had only recently come into Muslim hands. (Indeed, the earliest *Battalname* manuscript dates from before the conquest of Constantinople in 1453.) Consequently the epics represent versions of how Muslim Turks came to rule the lands in which they lived at the time of the epics' production, and perhaps the circulation of memories - not literally true but preserving cultural values and narratives - which were important to the collective cultural understanding of this process. *Battalname* and *The Book of Dede Korkut* attribute that conquest in turn to the two

24 For a general overview of recent memory studies, see Marek Tamm, "Beyond History and Memory: New Perspectives in Memory Studies," *History Compass* 11, no. 6 (2013): 458-473, discussion of Jan and Aleida Assmann's work 461-462 and Rigney's 462-463. See also Jan Assmann, *Cultural Memory and Early Civilization: Writing, Remembrance, and Political Imagination* (Cambridge & New York: Cambridge University Press, 2011), particularly the introduction where cultural memory is defined and the link between cultural memory, political imagination and cultural continuity is drawn (1-11). Ann Rigney, "Plenitude, scarcity and the circulation of cultural memory," *Journal of European Studies* 35, no. 1 (2005): 11-28 expands upon the way cultural memory is experienced vicariously and externally and must be actively maintained. Moving into the field of Islamic history, Antoine Borrut, "The Future of the Past: Historical Writing in Early Islamic Syria and Umayyad Memory," in *Power, Patronage, and Memory in Early Islam*, eds. Alain George and Andrew Marsham (Oxford & New York: Oxford University Press, 2018), 275-300, discussing the early Islamic period, addresses the layered nature of early historiography and the need to recognize alternate pasts and reinterpretation, as well as the potentials of growing literacy, in a way I believe may also be applied to the fifteenth and sixteenth centuries in Anatolia as the political order of the day was rewritten.

communities from which the political actors of the day traced their legitimate right to rule:²⁵ in *Battalname*, the Abbasid Caliphate, and in *The Book of Dede Korkut*, the Turkish Oghuz tribe.

By offering differing - competing? - visions of the conquest of Anatolia, articulated through successful popular literature enjoyed in and outside of the ruling class, epics allow us to study the cultural memory of readers and speakers of Turkish in general in the fifteenth and sixteenth centuries. I will discuss the exact relationship of the epics with reality as lived later, but at the very least, this gives us a window on what memory of the past people in this period preserved and circulated, and presumably found satisfying enough to serve as entertainment.

2. Fiction vs. History

Throughout this work, I approach the Turkish epic tradition as fiction set in a loosely identifiable time period. This period has ideological and cultural meaning to the audience, and incorporates certain legendary or historical figures presumed to have existed and with real significance - but the tradition still consists of fictional, that is imaginary, stories. Given the ongoing debates in scholarship about the nature of genres in the past, the invention and definition of fiction, and the perception of epics as relatively factual (or dishonest) in the history of the Islamic world in particular, this choice deserves some justification.

2.1 Fiction vs. Lies: The Historical and Historiographical Debate

There was a real historical debate about the relative ethics of telling or writing stories from the imagination in the several centuries leading up to my period, at least among scholars who shared certain cultural values, that is, the ulama. While references to epics became common

25 Halil İnalcık, "The Ottoman Succession and Its Relation to the Turkish Concept of Sovereignty," in *The Middle East and the Balkans under the Ottoman Empire: Essays on Economy and Society*, Halil İnalcık (Bloomington: Indiana University Turkish Studies, 1993), 37-69 but especially 41-49.

in the twelfth century in the Arabic-speaking areas, in the following century scholars began to criticize these epics.²⁶

The development of controversy surrounding epics well after they were popularized is important as a partial corrective, because some scholars have treated a moral skepticism towards the use of imagination or the condemnation of fiction as "lies" as essentialized and timeless traits of the Arab or Middle Eastern population, at least in the premodern era.²⁷ We should notice that criticism of epic storytelling, and imaginative storytelling in general, came from a specific subset of the population, the ulama, who were defined and gained their status from their ability to mandate the standards and official opinions of the Islamic community. As Hirschler says, epics' sheer popularity meant any rival image of the past they propagated threatened to out-compete the standard, official histories, and while their readership and the associated reading and oral practices overlapped with "scholarly" locations and people, these practices also included settings, people and information of which many scholars certainly did not approve.²⁸ Scholars who disapproved of epics did their best to associate this practice with disreputable people, lower class occupations and distrusted ethnic groups.²⁹ They accused the audiences of epics of believing the fictional versions instead of "real" history³⁰ - an accusation many modern scholars have taken at face value.³¹

26 Hirschler, *The Written Word*, 167-169 for the emergence of this criticism.

27 E.g., Thomas Herzog, "'What They Saw With Their Own Eyes...': Fictionalization and 'Narrativization' of History in Arab Popular Epics and Learned Historiography," in *Fictionalizing the Past: Historical Characters in Arabic Popular Epic*, ed. Sabine Dorpmueller (Leuven & Paris & Walpole: Peeters Publishers, 2012), 25-43. A representative quote on p. 25 characterizes the Arab public as distrusting all invention.

28 Hirschler, *The Written Word*, 167-175.

29 Hirschler, *The Written Word*, 172-173.

30 E.g., Hirschler, *The Written Word*, 168-169, 173.

31 E.g., Peter Heath, "'Antar Hangs his Mu'allāqa: History, Fiction, and Textual Conservatism in Sirat 'Antar ibn Shaddād,'" in *Fictionalizing the Past: Historical Characters in Arabic Popular Epic*, ed. Sabine Dorpmueller (Leuven & Paris & Walpole: Peeters Publishers, 2012), 9-10, asserting epics' version of the past was 'widely believed' despite implausibility.

I believe the concept of cultural memory, which includes myths, images, performances, and other representations of the past that are not necessarily "true history," can us help avoid a simplistic and misleading interpretation of this debate. While in some individual cases, especially involving satire, a particular work might be mistaken for a serious dishonest claim,³² in general we should understand that these anti-fiction polemics are polemical. The scholars who condemned storytelling knew what it was, and referred to it as legendary, fabricated, stupid and invented, etc., alongside the word "lie,"³³ with its implications of a conscious attempt to deceive. Indeed, a society-wide debate over the ethics of fiction would not be possible without some concept of fiction's existence. And fiction clearly had a popular audience in order to provoke the ulama so frantically.

In what sense was the ulama concerned that fiction "deceived" or "lied"? It probably was not a factual sense. (Allegory, legendary and questionable citations, and narrativization of historical events were common in serious and "factual" work anyway.³⁴) Rather, they were concerned that epics misled the public in the same way that controversies occasionally erupt over the misrepresentation of historical eras in modern fiction. Both fiction and factual narratives represent the past, and all circulation of representations plays a part in our collective memory. By telling an imaginary story in a defined setting, popular fiction contributes to the public's ideas about that time - major events and figures, but also its culture, the lives of ordinary people, and so on. Popular fiction is especially influential because the public in general is often more likely to consume popular fiction than "serious" scholarly work, whatever the definition of that may be.

32 Herzog, "What They Saw," 30, for an example of a satirical author (not an epic story teller) and a scholar who seems to have missed the point.

33 Hirschler, *The Written Word*, 168-169.

34 As noted by Hirschler, *The Written Word*, 168-170 and in fact Herzog, "What They Saw," 31-40.

When the period concerned is of great cultural importance and contestation, competing memories - with their expressions of different values - can become a matter of intense and vicious public debate. What slavery was like in the American South, the nature of the relationship between German and British groups in early medieval England, or the personal behavior of individual figures in the Bible are all issues with real meaning for modern political and religious debates in which historical fiction has had its say. When we are puzzled by the attacks of premodern scholars on epics,³⁵ we should consider whether it may be explained by stories in which, for example, a woman commands the Umayyad troops³⁶ - not because the scholars *or* the population at large actually thought *Sīrat Dalhama wa-al-Baṭṭāl* was factual, but because it was not obvious to the public *which* details were fictional, and they might believe Dalhama a historical person independent of the epics, or simply that women in general *might* fulfill her military role in the early Islamic era.³⁷ While it may sometimes be difficult to discern the exact nature of the popular epics' threat to the ulama's authoritative memory of the past, we should investigate the question in this vein, rather than resorting to psychological explanations of why the premodern Muslim public could not understand or identify imagination in stories.³⁸ This approach is similar to those scholars of epic and premodern literature who suggest "levels" of fiction with varying levels of fact and relationships with reality,³⁹ in that I also acknowledge

35 Hirschler, *The Written Word*, 169, quoting Shoshan.

36 Hirschler, *The Written Word*, 167-168 on Dalhamma; see also Remke Kruk, *The Warrior Women of Islam: Female Empowerment in Arabic Popular Literature*, (London & New York: I. B. Tauris, 2014) chs. 3-5.

37 Which they did. Rana Mikati, "Fighting for the Faith? Notes on Women and War in Early Islam," *Journal of Near Eastern Studies* 78, no. 2 (2019): 201-213.

38 Contra Herzog, "What They Saw," 27-28, 31.

39 Karl Reichl, *Singing the Past: Turkic and Medieval Heroic Poetry* (New York: Cornell University Press, 2000), 136-143. Also Gül Şen, "The Function of Poetry in Sixteenth Century Historiography: A Narratological Approach to the Künhü'l-ābār by Muṣṭafā 'Ālī," in *An Iridescent Device: Premodern Ottoman Poetry*, eds. Christiane Czygan and Stephan Conermann (Göttingen: Vandenhoeck & Ruprecht unipress/Bonn University Press, 2018), 99-101; Şen notes, speaking of historical narratives which fuse legendary material and descriptions, that we can't eliminate the possibility readers would have perceived elements like these devices as (presumably intentional) fiction.

narratives have varying close or distant relationships to fact, although I do not attempt to put them into a classification scheme.

I belabor this point because a great deal of nuance is lost when we look at epics and other popular works as acts of deception or unsuccessful attempts to write "true" history by the ignorant. By taking the polemical framework of the conservative ulama's reaction for granted, we take on their perspective. We can easily become bogged down trying to find historical antecedents for fictional events,⁴⁰ or neglect aspects of the works because, if viewed as attempted "true" history, their inclusion of blatant fantasy elements can be embarrassing.⁴¹ We are led to misread the intention and originality of framing devices like spurious chains of transmission and "eyewitness" accounts.⁴² Another example is the introductory prologue of *Battalname*, in which the protagonist's conquest of Rum for the Muslims is foretold by the Prophet Muhammad. This revelation comes after his companion comforts him with stories of that land's wonderful attributes in a time when he is stressed by the prolonged absence of new revelations⁴³ - a creative and humanizing account, but obviously not a historical one, and one which actually attributes a spurious, fictional revelation to Muhammad!

On the other hand, the fiction-as-lies framework makes it difficult to ask open questions about how audiences *did* interact with epic literature. Even among scholarly elites, reactions were not constrained to credulous belief or condemnation. For example, the scholar of natural science Samaw'al al-Maghribi (d. 1180) regarded reading compilations of tales as a child as a step that led him to read scholarly works later in life, and other scholars referenced stories from

40 Krstovic, "An Introduction," reprinting Lewis, 103-106, dismissing a long history of attempts at this quest with *The Book of Dede Korkut*.

41 Dedes, *Battalname*, makes an (initial?) attempt at taking these elements seriously in his discussion of an epic connection with "wondertales" in Persian tradition, and notes that this connection has been ignored, 40-42.

42 Herzog, "What They Saw," 27.

43 *Battalname*, trans. Dedes, 99-100.

epic and popular literature without particular condemnation or judgment.⁴⁴ Rigney's discussion of the circulation and reception of texts, and what they *did* mean for cultural memory, is a more useful framework,⁴⁵ in no small part because it does not begin with the presumption that the audience and author were acting from ignorance.

In order to meaningfully analyze both the content of epic literature and its role in society, we must ask questions about how it was perceived, used, consumed and reproduced by different sectors in societies over time. We must always keep in mind that regardless of the hostility of some sources or our reactions as modern readers, epic literature was above all successful, with many works in "print," circulated in popular performances and manuscripts, for spans of well over five centuries. (For the same reason, analysis which focuses solely on epic authorship and origins is missing most of the story.) A number of works with manuscripts extant before the modern era are still being printed in new editions today, or adapted into new mediums, in the twentieth and twenty-first centuries.⁴⁶ Therefore we should neither adopt the polemical framework of certain ulama, nor make simple assumptions about epics' aims and then conclude they fail at those aims.⁴⁷ The questions are - what do we gain by adopting a given framework? What do we lose? And what do we actually know about how premodern audiences interacted with epic literature?

2.2 Events Depicted in Epics

I proceed, then, with the assumption that epic literature in the Islamic world was *not* written or told with the intention of creating "true history," but as a different type of

44 Hirschler, *The Written Word*, 174.

45 Cited in Tamm, "Beyond History and Memory," 462-463.

46 Kruk, *Warrior Women*, 9-13.

47 E.g., Heath, "'Antar Hangs his Mu'allāqa,'" 19-20, suggesting the aim of epics is to give readers an individual and personal view of historical figures but that they do so only crudely to an educated audience.

representation of the past. If historical materials - as in specific events - are included in epics only insofar as they suit the purpose for people at the time, and they represent a memory of the past that was, at least, acceptably satisfying for their popular audience, what sort of events *do* they include? And what implications does this catalog of events have?

The epics are typically described as "frontier" narratives,⁴⁸ and they indeed involve the conquest and military confrontation by the protagonists of a wide variety of threats to Islam, from the undistinguished "infidels" of *The Book of Dede Korkut*,⁴⁹ to a wide variety of infidels in *Battalname* categorized as Byzantines,⁵⁰ (possibly conflated with Zoroastrian or at least pre-Islamic Persian religion),⁵¹ polytheists who are located in India and presumably represent practitioners of Indian religions,⁵² Jews⁵³ - here imagined as ruling an independent state in the Maghreb - Crypto-Christians within the domain of Islam,⁵⁴ Franks representing Latin Christendom,⁵⁵ and messianic rebels who have apostasized from Islam and claim to abrogate

48 E.g., Kafadar, *Between Two Worlds*, 65-70; Dedes, *Battalname*, 1-3.

49 *The Book of Dede Korkut* "Introduction," xi, assumes "infidels" refers to Kipchak Turks prior to the Golden Horde; see example references to infidels, pp. 19, 23, 30, 37. Sometimes these are clearly Byzantines, as when this occurs alongside Byzantine place names, e.g., p. 42, the infidels of Avnik Castle, or p. 51 with the infidel commander of Bayburt Castle, but they are not referred to as Christians and there are none of the references to the Bible, Christ, etc., that occur in *Battalname*. References to "churches" or "monks" among the infidels occur late in the book, are few and scattered, and give the impression of a generic infidel religion stripped of its identifying characteristics, e.g., p. 69, where the "infidels' church" is pulled down and replaced with a mosque.

50 The "Caesar of Rum" is introduced as an enemy in the first story, *Battalname* p. 101.

51 The "fire of light" (nar-i nur) which is supposed to burn eternally is presented repeatedly as a Byzantine holy object, e.g., 120, 129, 131, 133-134, 333, and Christian priests are also sometimes referred to as Magis, e.g., p. 246. It is also possible that the former is a misunderstanding of Christian practices involving real and/or metaphorical fire, an observation I owe to my advisor, Ahmet Karamustafa.

52 Mainly when Battal miraculously visits India to obtain the white elephant as a dowry for the daughter of Amir Amur in *Battalname* Chapter Fourteen, "Battal Rescues the Daughter of Mihrasp from the Qari Div and Brings the White Elephant of India," 227-241.

53 Again primarily occupying one story, *Battalname* Chapter Ten, "In the Land of Maghrib: The Story of Firdaws Shah the Jew," 155-164. A Jewish agent of the Caesar of Rum also appears in *Battalname* Chapter Eight, "The Story of Bayda the Witch, Daughter of Aqratis," 149-152; in this story the Jewish character, Yamliha, enables the plot of Bayda but does not instigate it and exits the story again alive. He is not the main enemy.

54 Primarily Uqba the Judge and secret Christian, introduced *Battalname* 211, and subsequently his son.

55 The "padishah of the Franks" is with the Byzantines on *Battalname* p. 131. The army of the Franks appears without much explanation in Chapter Six, "The Story of Sunbat," 145-147. The son of the king of the Franks is killed by Adan-Banu on p. 245. Various individual Franks are named as parts of Christian or infidel armies, e.g., Taghanos the Frank, p. 178.

shari'a law,⁵⁶ sometimes appearing as part of a global conspiracy against Islam.⁵⁷ In addition, in both epics the protagonists occasionally face supernatural foes who are not and were never human. In *The Book of Dede Korkut*, they are not represented as infidels per se, only monstrosly hostile.⁵⁸ In *Battalname*, however, non-humans, too, are either Muslims (in which case they are helpful to the protagonists)⁵⁹ or infidels, and several of them aid human infidel enemies,⁶⁰ or are converted by Battal to Islam.⁶¹ There are occasionally other supernatural elements as well, especially in *Battalname*, usually as plot devices in the course of conquest.⁶²

On the other hand, occasionally the political conflicts occur within the group, between Muslims. In this case the resolution is generally less or non-violent. In the case of *Battalname*, for example, the child Battal⁶³ and his widowed mother are reduced to poverty by Abdu'l Salam's usurpation of his father's position. Abdu'l Salam resists Battal's adulthood and readiness to take

56 *Battalname* Chapter Eighteen, "The Story of Babak, 303-321." The historical Babak's (d. about 838) rebellion would have been a long-distant memory by the fifteenth century manuscript, but there had been more recent messianic revolts.

57 A good example on *Battalname* p. 185, where the Caesar of Rum writes to "...the kingdom of the Franks, to the land of As and Rus, to Khitay and Khotan, to Samarkand, to Circassia, to Transoxiana and Taliqan, to Mazandaran, to Haluq, to Garja, to Sarhang-Abad, to the province of Jamshidiya and to any province where there were infidel begs."

58 *The Book of Dede Korkut*, Legend VIII: "The Story of Basat, Killer of the One-Eyed Giant," 122-133. Interestingly, in this case the cyclops is raised as a brother to the protagonist by a loving father who is devastated he cannot, by dint of conscientious parenting, reform his monster son's violent ways. The protagonist later laments his brother in a poem about his grief before embarking on a quest to kill the cyclops to save his people from oppression.

59 For example. the King of Snakes who Battal meets when thrown into the cave of Hell, *Battalname* p. 256.

60 E.g., Guzandu Jazu, a monster wizard who rides a rhinoceros and shoots flames, who is hired by the Byzantine Caesar. *Battalname*, 270.

61 E.g., Anjaf and his brother Azraf, each a zangi, *Battalname* 233-234. These two monster converts subsequently marry human Muslim women, p. 236. In the first account, we are informed that the bride immediately reciprocates her (non-human) husband's feelings.

62 Such as several miraculous journeys which help or hinder Battal, *Battalname* 290, 324, etc. In my opinion these are distinct from elements such as dream visions of religious figures which come true, which might be considered "magical realism" to a modern audience, and represent events some people in the audience would feel they had actually experienced. Cases such as Battal traveling to a shrine and receiving the assistance of the Prophet Ilyas in temporarily reviving the dead in order to impress Jews into converting are probably borderline between these extremes, pp. 162-163.

63 Referred to as Ja'far until he receives the name Battal from a new friend and convert who has just received his own new "Muslim" name from Battal, *Battalname* 124-125. I will refer to him as Battal in this work to avoid confusion.

up his father's military position for some time after, but the conflict is ended when Battal rescues Abdu'l Salam from torture at the hands of the Byzantines.⁶⁴ Similarly in *The Book of Dede Korkut*, conflicts between Bayindir Khan or Kazan Khan, the two leaders of the Oghuz in the collection, and various vassals occasionally flare up, usually as a result of thoughtless insults, but mostly are smoothed over without bloodshed, often by the advice of women.⁶⁵ In the final story of the collection, the Outer Oghuz tribes revolt against Kazan Khan and kill his "favorite" by treachery. Kazan Khan in turn kills the rebels' leader, but afterward the rebels are reconciled to their leader without more violence.⁶⁶

Finally, both the setting and the stake of many stories is the family. Relationships between family members, including both support and interpersonal conflict, are as likely to make up plot events and resolutions as military conflict. Often both combine and occupy about equal space in a given episode. These include alternation between different individual Oghuz families in *The Book of Dede Korkut*, although there are several stories of the family of Salur Kazan which allow different members to act as protagonists. In *Battalname*, Battal is the main protagonist, but his assistance to others with family problems, rotating cast of wives with their own families, acquisition of new allies, and invasion of different Byzantine and polytheist family holdings give the epic opportunity to explore different family relationships, dynamics and conflicts nonetheless.

I would like to briefly call attention to what the epics are *not*: realistic battle manuals.

Combat tends to be represented as a contest of courage, will and divine favor between the

64 The plot of *Battalname* Chapter Four, "The Story of Abdu'l-Salam and Nawruz Banu," 136-142.

65 E.g., *The Book of Dede Korkut* Legend IX, "The Story of Emren, Son of Begil," 133-144; the story begins with Bayindir Khan's concern about provoking insult with his distribution of meager tribute (134), and later an insult at court to Begil nearly makes him revolt until his wife convinces him to go hunting in order to calm down instead, 135-137.

66 *The Book of Dede Korkut* Legend XII, "The Story of the Revolt of the Outer Oghuz against the Inner Oghuz and of the Death of Beyrek," 168-175.

protagonists and either faceless hordes or specific, charismatic enemies, with only sporadic and vague references to anything that might be considered a real military tactic and occasional divine intervention. Protagonists often perform impossible feats through sheer will, such as the episode where Battal, his first wife and cousin Zaynab and the converted Byzantine princess Mah-Piruz are cornered by the entire Byzantine army and prevail against them,⁶⁷ or where the young Bugach Khan single-handedly wrestles and defeats a bull in hand-to-hand combat.⁶⁸ The epics are set on the frontier, but there is nothing about them that demonstrates conclusively anyone involved in their production had actually seen a battle, let alone that they represent the views of career soldiers.⁶⁹ In my judgment, most likely their appeal to soldiers or ghazis was similar to their appeal to society in general as popular literature.

In conclusion, overwhelmingly the episodes in epics are political fiction, revolving around conflict and cohesion at the levels of the (politically elite) family, the wider community, and finally between the community and its outside enemies. Personal relationships between family members are constantly sources of support or tension throughout these conflicts. This produces stakes which would probably be meaningful and comprehensible to a wide range of audiences, without necessarily requiring technical knowledge or deep familiarity with the specific settings portrayed. Interpersonal conflict - played out through the clash of armies or a verbal argument between husband and wife - could be compelling to anyone, even if army life or pastoral nomad politics were exotic and alien. It also suggests that family life was an important component of collective recollection of the past - perhaps for ideological reasons and perhaps

67 *Battalname*, 135-136. This episode also provides an opportunity for lengthy speeches on Mah-Piruz's part, as she confronts and dispatches her brothers one by one and converts the youngest, who is most sympathetic to her. The latter joins them in fighting the Byzantines.

68 *The Book of Dede Korkut*, 12-13.

69 Contra., eg, Cemal Kafadar, *Between Two Worlds: The Construction of the Ottoman State*, (Berkeley: University of California Press, 1995) 67-70, where he describes epics as "frontier literature" and, with this interpretation in mind, suggests that they depict the conversions of Byzantine princesses to advertise the pleasures of the frontier.

because it helped people in the present establish an emotional relationship with people in the past and come to "know" them.⁷⁰

2.3 The Relationship Between Epic and Reality

If epics are not meant to depict factual reality, they also have *some* relationship with reality. Minimally, successful epics made sense, logically and emotionally, to their audiences, at least enough to gain audiences in the first place. As Bauman comments in his discussion of folklore studies, texts circulate both socially and over time in a certain context because of their properties, including how they represent the real world.⁷¹ Furthermore, their depictions of the past must have resonated with the values and needs of the present in order to become so popular. Because epics are set in a meaningful historical period, they could have been viewed as expressions of "authentic" or historical behavior and culture, without necessarily being "true" histories. As the narrator says in *The Book of Dede Korkut*, things were different "in those days."⁷²

Fiction about the past may express behavior that should be emulated, particularly when the subject is "the ancestors" and the heroic past. It may explain or give a pedigree to present behavior and customs, creating a sense of continuity through narrative.⁷³ It can also lend plausible deniability to commentary about the present, either advocating for the possibility of an unrealized ideal, or for criticism and satiric exaggeration of present behavior. In general, because cause and effect are subject to invention in fiction, and because everyone knows it, fictional narrative may express worldview and values better than ostensibly factual narratives. "Truth is

70 Rigney, "Plenitude, scarcity and the circulation of cultural memory," 25, remarks on how representations of the past create sympathy for unknown people both in and outside of the imagined community.

71 Richard Bauman, "The Philology of the Vernacular," *Journal of Folklore Research* 45, no. 1 (2008), 31-32.

72 *The Book of Dede Korkut*, 41, 42, 75.

73 Assmann, *Cultural Memory*, introduces this role of cultural memory in providing continuity, pp. 2-3.

stranger than fiction," after all, and has a potential defense if it is not satisfying or logical.

Accordingly, when narratives, factual or fictional, about a historical period depart noticeably and especially consistently from "truth" about a period, something causes this departure. It may be the producers' access to information - the layers of previous, inaccessible sources that premodern historical writers depended on - but it may also be their attitude towards this information, or that of a previous generation. At *some* point, the information we have was selected and cultivated.

Some attention has been given to the issue of anachronisms in scholarship on Anatolia. For example, Flemming notes that Ottoman historical materials often frame sexual relationships between conquerors and conquered women as consensual seductions, and suggests this demonstrates that the audience of chronicles found rape unacceptable even in the context of war.⁷⁴ (Consensual or arranged marriages with Christian women might also be erased from historiography, as they could be embarrassing for other reasons.)⁷⁵ The political ramifications of intermarriage and sexual violence between Muslims and Christians, in general and in the political classes, were and remain enormous,⁷⁶ and it probably is not an accident that the epics similarly depict many "consensual" abductions, although the very nonexistence of real referent events makes them even more ambiguous in interpretation. I will return to this subject later.

In another example, Peirce suggests that the historical records' attention to Sheikh Edebali's daughter's marriage to Osman and likely inaccurate claims that various sultans' mothers

74 Barbara Flemming, "Āşıkpaşazāde's View of Women," in *Essays on Turkish Literature and History*, Barbara Flemming (Leiden & Boston: Brill 2018), 366-367.

75 Peirce, *The Imperial Harem* 31-32 on minimizing or erasure of marriages with Christian powers in Ottoman historiography.

76 Discussed in the context of epic literature by Buket Kitapçı Bayrı, *Warriors, Martyrs, and Dervishes: Moving Frontiers, Shifting Identities in the Land of Rome (13th-15th Centuries)* (Leiden & Boston: Brill, 2020), particularly in chapter 3 on *Danışmendname*, 38-95. In the context of modern historiography, see Scott Redford, "The rape of Anatolia," in *Islam and Christianity in Medieval Anatolia*, eds. A.C.S. Peacock, Bruno de Nicola and Sara Nur Yıldız (London & New York: Routledge, 2016), 107-112, 116.

were their fathers' high ranking wives indicate public concern about female lineage.⁷⁷ I would argue the persistent reinvention of biographical details of Edebali's daughter⁷⁸ - including multiple names incorrectly ascribed to her in different traditions - suggests a similar interest, to the point of fabricating information about a female figure at the beginning of the Ottoman state when none available was satisfying enough. A third example not directly related to women is the absence of enslavement as a post-battle consequence in later chronicles, in some cases including outright claims that in the past Ottomans did not trade in slaves at all.⁷⁹ Instead, chronicles claim, incorrectly, that captives and defeated foes who did not convert were killed. This "offer... of Islam or the sword"⁸⁰ is echoed in the epics of the same period as these chronicles.

So the departure of fiction from the facts of its historical setting often echoes "factual" narratives' omissions and insertions from the same time period. Aside from the possibility that producers of epic literature "corrected" their material with respect to contemporary understandings of the past, this demonstrates how both history and other ways of representing the past could work together in creating cultural memory - but by the same token, they could also oppose each other.

Perhaps the most important reason to attempt to use fiction as a historical source is that fiction is available to us - and available depicting subjects which do not otherwise appear in historical records. Detailed narratives of family life and descriptions of the behavior of women and children are difficult to find in premodern sources from most areas of the Islamic world, all

77 Leslie Peirce, *The Imperial Harem: Women and Sovereignty in the Ottoman Empire* (New York & Oxford: Oxford University Press, 1993), 31-32.

78 V. L. Ménage, "On the Recensions of Uruj's 'History of the Ottomans,'" *Bulletin of the School of Oriental and African Studies* 30 (1967): 314-322 discusses different versions of one narrative of Osman's ascension, with varying names and details ascribed to this figure.

79 Flemming, "Āşıkpaşazāde's View of Women," 353-354; also Linda Darling, "Reformulating the *Gazi* Narrative: When Was the Ottoman State a *Gazi* State?" *Turcica* 43 (2011): 44-45.

80 Darling, "Reformulating the *Gazi* Narrative," 44.

the more so when our interest is in the "popular" classes who consumed epic literature alongside elites. As de Nicola remarks, justifying his use of hagiographies as sources for women's lives, either hagiography or epic may not be literal or historical reality, but they provide information about aspects of private lives that are otherwise totally inaccessible.⁸¹

3. The Context of the Fifteenth and Sixteenth Century World

Before continuing on with an analysis of the Turkish epic tradition and its role in memory of the conquest of Anatolia, I would like to briefly provide some context as to political events - and more nebulously, cultural life and its own processes of change - in the time period of the manuscripts. To reiterate, the earliest established date for the Turkish epic tradition is the *Battalname* manuscript dated to 1437, and other manuscripts dating from before the turn of the seventeenth century have been used to fill in gaps in the edition used for this study. *The Book of Dede Korkut* manuscripts which still exist date no earlier than the sixteenth century. Consequently, the manuscripts used for this study date from between the first reign of Murad II (r. 1421-44 and 1446-51), through perhaps Murad III (1574-95) at latest.

3.1 Political Events

The first important point is that the earliest firmly established date follows by several decades the Battle of Ankara (1402), Timur's victory and the shift in Ottoman historiography towards an absolutist version of "ghaza" that followed.⁸² The manuscripts stretch over the years in which the Ottoman state consolidated its possession of Anatolia, including the conquest of Constantinople in 1453 and the also-Christian Trebizond in 1461 - and Murad II's reconquest of

81 Bruno de Nicola, "The Ladies of Rûm: A Hagiographic View of Women in Thirteenth- and Fourteenth-Century Anatolia," *Journal of Sufi Studies* 3 (2014): 134-135.

82 Darling, "Reformulating the *Gazi Narrative*, especially 49-51.

the Muslim emirates to which Timur had re-granted independence. By the time of the later manuscripts, these conquests had become history.

There was also a great deal of internal unrest. Before the 1437 manuscript came the Ottoman interregnum with its civil war between Bayezid I's sons, but after it came the war between Bayezid II (r. 1481-1512) and Cem (d. 1495) in the latter part of the fifteenth century. To these royal civil wars, we can add various rurally-based rebellions, usually associated with "heretical" religious leaders, sometimes messianic in nature.⁸³ There was also a revolt of the elite, enslaved kul class in the 1440s, apparently instigated by a court faction.⁸⁴

Beginning slightly earlier than usual with events to the east, the Aqqyunlu, a Turco-Mongol oriented state, transitioned from principality to empire and underwent several civil wars over this period, ending with its final death and the rebirth of the Safavid state from its ashes.⁸⁵ The consequences of the Safavid project for the Ottomans are well known and would proceed through the sixteenth century.

Alongside, beneath or contributing to the major events listed above, the Ottoman state interacted with locally-based organizations and individuals. Apparently relationships with many Sufi organizations and tribal groups, especially nomads and semi-nomads, were deteriorating in association with greater centralization of authority and more predatory tax schemes.⁸⁶ Opportunities, financial security and tolerance for Christians and other religious minorities were probably declining through the period as well, albeit with local variation and not in a linear and

83 For example, Shah Kulu in Teke in 1511-1512, Sheykh Celal 1519-20, Bozok in 1526, Kalendar Shah in 1527, etc. Some apparently under Safavid influence but not necessarily all. Nikolay Antov, *The Ottoman "Wild West": the Balkan Frontier in the Fifteenth and Sixteenth Centuries* (Cambridge & New York: Cambridge University Press, 2017), 23. Kafadar, *Between Two Worlds*, 141.

84 Kafadar, *Between Two Worlds*, 146.

85 John E. Woods, *The Aqqyunlu: Clan, Confederation, Empire*, (Salt Lake City: University of Utah Press, 1999). Also Antov, *The Ottoman "Wild West"*, 20-22.

86 Kafadar, *Between Two Worlds*, 130-131. Rudi Paul Lindner, *Nomads and Ottomans in Medieval Anatolia* (Bloomington: Research Institute for Inner Asian Studies, 1983), especially 51-74, 104-112.

uniform way.⁸⁷ We should remember that these relationships were not unidirectional, monolithic or uniformly hostile, with negotiation, accommodation and simple bribery accompanying repression.⁸⁸

The background to these deteriorating relations was the centralization of the Ottoman state and the growth of its institutions into increasingly familiar, "classic" forms.⁸⁹ We should recall two things about this process. The first is that the state itself was not a monolithic entity, and even decisions which appear inevitably predestined to us like the conquest of Constantinople were fiercely contested *internally* at the Ottoman court at the time.⁹⁰ The second is that centralization was not an inevitable and one-way process of development - indeed, centralized states had formed in the region before - but a competition between one vision of a centralized state and other possible forms of economic and political organization.⁹¹

3.2 Transformations in Cultural History

Political events and social history do not occur in isolation from each other. Each political event, instead, causes real effects on daily life, if sometimes temporary and quickly reversed effects.

To begin, transitions between pastoral and sedentary life, in both directions and traveling on a continuum rather than between binary options, were a constant feature of what has been

87 Kafadar, *Between Two Worlds*, 130-131. Darling, "Reformulating the *Gazi* Narrative," 43, 46-47.

88 E.g., Ayşe Baltacıoğlu-Brammer, "Neither Victim Nor Accomplice: The Kızılbaş as Borderland Actors in the Early Modern Ottoman Realm," in *Historicizing Sunni Islam in the Ottoman Empire, c. 1450-c. 1750*, ed. Tijana Krstić and Derin Terzioğlu (Leiden: Brill, 2021): 423-450.

89 E.g., the first kadi'asker's appointment, Kafadar, *Between Two Worlds*, 142.

90 Kafadar, *Between Two Worlds*, 146.

91 Antov, *The Ottoman "Wild West"*, quotes Lapidus noting that tribe to empire is not a one direction evolutionary transition but both can exist and compete simultaneously. Also e.g., Woods, *The Aqquyunlu*, 19-20 on corporate vs. individual sovereign rule, etc.

called the Middle Islamic Period.⁹² A transition in either direction would immediately affect household organization and distribution of labor in the family and the local community. We should remember these transitions involved specific individuals, families and communities, who voluntarily changed allegiances, invested in different property or land, moved households, and transformed their daily work in response to concrete situations. One alternative was more appealing - or more survivable - for specific reasons at a given time, and it would have further effects once adopted.⁹³

Conflict also had consequences for the population at large. Either rural farmland or urban neighborhoods could be destroyed or damaged. Property and land were transferred between individuals and groups. The religious and political organization of communities was transformed on a local as well as a regional scale. People died, or fled. Increased access to cheaper slave labor would change the distribution of labor and household life for the victors, and for the losers, populations would be transferred into slavery, resulting in the forcible dissolution of families and communities as well as the mass removal of people from surviving communities left behind.

The growth of centralized "Islamic" institutions would also have complicated effects. Increased literacy and access to education across social classes were possible results, and could be used for purposes the educators would not necessarily approve of.⁹⁴ Certain educational trajectories might both become more accessible, and come with increased prestige and better career opportunities.⁹⁵ Changes in judicial organization would have effects on a variety of

92 E.g., as discussed in this period in Lindner, *Nomads and Ottomans*; Kitapçı Bayrı, *Warriors, Martyrs and Dervishes*.

93 For example, if women systematically fill a different role in nomadic rural life than sedentary, individual women's lives would be drastically affected by this change. This could theoretically be part of an individual's motivation for making it.

94 Studied slightly earlier in the Arabic-speaking lands by Hirschler, *The Written Word*.

95 Abdurrahman Atçıl, "Mobility of Scholars and Formation of a Self-Sustaining Scholarly System in the Lands of Rûm during the Fifteenth Century," in *Islamic Literature and Intellectual Life in Fourteenth- and Fifteenth-*

aspects of daily life. More broadly, the incentives for conforming to certain ideologies and associated practices - and punishments for failing to conform - would change, probably systematically.

Finally, there are a few general things to keep in mind when considering changes in cultural life. First, changes in economic opportunities, centralization and accompanying expansion in opportunities in certain urban locations, and conflict would lead to constant movement of people between geographical locations. Travelers constantly remark on differences between different locations, which modern studies on different locations have confirmed - in particular differences in family life and gender expectations, as well as economic activity, architecture, etc.⁹⁶ Population movements would inevitably expose the people involved to new ways of doing things, many considered equally "Islamic" by local Muslim populations.

Second, individuals in the past - just like the present - made choices and lived their lives in the face of both practical, material consequences and their own and others' beliefs about the world. We cannot discard, but must incorporate, both materialist, unconscious processes of change and conscious choices between affiliations, ideologies and values.

Finally, people in the past were capable of imagining different worlds - at least as capable of us. Their remarks on different societies, both contemporary to them and in the past, as well as their speculation about the future, bear a constant testimony to this capability.⁹⁷ Changing memories of the past as preserved in texts are related to both the needs of their present and their visions of the future.

Century Anatolia, ed. A.C.S. Peacock and Sara Nur Yıldız (Würzburg: Ergon Verlag, Würzburg, 2016): 315-332, discusses the increase in Anatolian-educated scholars in the fifteenth century.

⁹⁶ E.g., Kafadar, *Between Two Worlds*, 198. Also different movements in the same locations, as on pp. 200-201.

⁹⁷ Rashid al-Din (d. 1318) describing earlier Mongols as practicing total gender equality as justification for his inclusion of royal women in his history strikes me as a particularly interesting example; whether he is literally correct about this is beside the point. Discussed in Peirce, *The Imperial Harem*, 274.

4. Conclusion

To conclude, the Turkish epic tradition includes a mix of "old" and "new" material dating up to the time of the manuscripts' completion. Identification of this information is difficult except when there are obvious anachronisms, which makes reconstructing earlier periods fraught and circular. Instead, we can look at them as representations of the fifteenth and sixteenth century memory of the past, because information was minimally circulated and reproduced at that time.

Examining popular epics as fiction about culturally important political history allows us to use them as a source for popular responses to political developments of the time, as well as social history insofar as they depict daily life, and possibly connect the two.

Chapter One: Writing, Recitation and Reception

In order to trace the historical meaning of epic literature, some idea of who was involved in producing and consuming it is necessary. Neither the Turkish *Battalname* nor *The Book of Dede Korkut* can be connected to a named author, and the circumstances of the redactions we possess of both are unclear - but even in cases where this information is available, for example with *Saltukname* as discussed earlier, simple authorship and sponsorship hardly explain the entire life of a work of popular literature. In this chapter, I will discuss the issues of who consumed Turkish epic literature and how, the rise of Turkish as a literary language, and the extent to which we can connect *Battalname* and *The Book of Dede Korkut* to known political environments and views.

1. Audiences and Access

Various audiences have been proposed in existing scholarship, but all of them are narrow and specific - probably too narrow. The epics can't be automatically traced to ghazis, or ghazis and mamluks,⁹⁸ simply because they involve military action. Likewise, *The Book of Dede Korkut* certainly depicts nomadic life but its very survival in manuscripts shows it was not limited to a nomadic setting.⁹⁹ On the other hand, while incorporation of modern epic performances is useful for shedding light on possibilities in the premodern past, professional coffee house performers

98 Contra. Kafadar, *Between Two Worlds*, 62-90

99 Contra., e.g., Arzu Öztürkmen, "Orality and Performance in Late Medieval Turkish Texts: Epic Tales, Hagiographies, and Chronicles," *Text and Performance Quarterly* 29, vol. 4 (2009): 330.

don't represent the full span of their cultural life now,¹⁰⁰ and certainly coffee house audiences can't be fully representative of a time before coffee houses existed as an institution.

A text or a story can have a long and diverse life with many audiences. The longer that life, the more situations and people that text must have appealed to, and the less likely it is that we can limit our understanding of its appeal to one narrow professional class. On the other hand, "everyone" is precisely as helpful an answer as "no one." We should rather expect to identify multiple audiences, settings and modes of transmission, and multiple perspectives among both the producers and the consumers of epic literature.

These different audiences adapted cultural materials, plots and themes for their own perspectives, forming a collective body of memories about the past in epics, but a body incorporating many different voices of specific communities or authors.¹⁰¹ Many of these adaptations are permanently lost to us. But the format of our manuscripts, which contain a variety of stories apparently collected from multiple sources, is encouraging. It suggests that we may be able to identify both a perspective of the most recent redactor(s) covering the entire work, and of different communities, storytellers or settings in different stories, especially when they substantially differ from each other. While not feasible for this study, differences among manuscripts of the same work should also be investigated.

Analyzing the use of the gazel poetic form in society, Andrews and Kalpaklı suggest that it was the fact that gazels were recited and composed by all classes and constantly used to express the emotion of everyday life that gave them their potency in expressing religious

100 Contra., e.g., Kruk, *Warrior Women*, assuming an all-male audience for the actual work based on coffee house performance (ix, 10-11), although she also discusses popular printed editions from the last couple of centuries up to today, 11-13.

101 Again, see Antrim, "*Qamarayn*," but also Kruk, *Warrior Women* throughout on differing perspectives on women between epics.

experiences as well.¹⁰² I agree, and I would like to expand the point. Literature in both written and oral forms was present constantly for all people in Anatolia in the fifteenth and sixteenth century, as were memories of past heroes. It was the broad familiarity of stories about these past heroes - of the Abbasid Caliphate, of the Oghuz Turks, and more - that made appeals to these figures effective for political purposes, whether by royal family members seeking political legitimacy, rebels seeking support, or members of local religious organizations trying to raise funds for ordinary expenses. Therefore, all kinds of emotional and material desires could be articulated through epic literature and its characters, regardless of the actual profession or class of the audience.

1.1 The Audience of Written Texts

Inevitably when speaking of the audience of written texts we must discuss literacy. While for a long time it was assumed that literacy in the Islamic world would have fallen after the end of the regional caliphates as political authorities, a recent study has found the opposite: literacy expanded in the Arabic-speaking lands between the eleventh and sixteenth centuries.¹⁰³ But the situation in Anatolia was very different and systematic work on the issue has yet to be done, although one study on more advanced education found that in the fifteenth century, the number of scholars who were able to finish their educations in Anatolia increased significantly.¹⁰⁴ The

102 Walter Andrews and Mehmed Kalpaklı, "Gazels and the World: Some Notes on the 'Occasional-ness' of the Ottoman Gazel," in *Ghazal as World Literature II: From a Literary Genre to a Great Tradition: The Ottoman Gazel in Context*, ed. Angelika Neuwirth et al. (Würzburg: Ergon-Verlag, 2006), 153-155, 160-162. The point about the ubiquitous presence of poetry is also made by Hatice Aynur, "Ottoman literature," in *The Cambridge History of Turkey*, vol 3, ed. Suraiya Faroqhi (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 2006), especially 497-499.

103 Hirschler, *The Written Word*, summarized in introduction, 1-10.

104 Atçıl, "Mobility of Scholars," especially 315-316, 324-327.

expansion of Turkish *language* writing in this period is clear,¹⁰⁵ but the implications of this for literacy are not.

If the situation was broadly similar in Anatolia to the rest of the Islamic lands, access to education would vary by gender, by class, and by other increasingly individual factors like parents' profession, their piety and interest in education, the availability of local schools, urban vs. rural residence, etc. The exact effects of these variables would not be the same everywhere, however, so some caution must be used in extrapolating. For example, girls apparently could more easily obtain a primary school education in Persian-speaking areas than Arabic-speaking ones according to Hirschler's study,¹⁰⁶ and in the absence of specific research it is difficult to anticipate whether Anatolia should resemble one case or the other more.

Again, assuming similarities between Anatolia and the rest of the Islamic world, literacy was probably not an enormous barrier to accessing popular literature across the entire body of sub-elite classes. Primary school education may have been fairly available even to poorer urban classes, and both lending libraries and low-cost book rentals were accessible in the Arabic-speaking areas.¹⁰⁷ In addition, a few members of a group who were literate could give functional access to their communities by sharing information or actually reading texts aloud, both in public and private settings.¹⁰⁸ Nevertheless, urban audiences, followed by sedentary audiences in general, would have easier access to written texts.

Epic literature, specifically disapproved of by the "most" literate class of the ulema, was popularized precisely when literacy had expanded outside the scholarly classes in the Arabic-

105 Peacock, *Islam, Literature and Society*, 151-157; Darling, "Ottoman Turkish," 173-176.

106 Hirschler, *The Written Word*, 108-110.

107 Hirschler, *The Written Word*, primary schools 99-113; libraries ch. 4, 124-163.

108 Ami Ayalon, *The Arabic Print Revolution: Cultural Production and Mass Readership* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 2016), 158-159, in the context of the modern era; but also applicable earlier.

speaking areas of the twelfth and thirteenth centuries, and the same may be true of Turkish epic literature in the fifteenth. Perhaps this is why we find, in epics, a memory of the past preserved in writing which does not seem to reflect the scholarly view of history, and visible conflict over these competing memories. In any case we should avoid assuming all writing represents a single elite. Different literate audiences had different tastes, and illiterate audiences could interact with texts, mediated through various social practices.

The question of who *was* reading epics is if anything harder to answer than the question of who *could* read epics. I will return to this issue at the end of section 1 of this chapter.

1.2 The Audience of Oral Literature

On the one hand, there is no question of education in consuming oral literature, *per se*. On the other, the reciter has direct control over imparting a story to the audience, and the ability to sit and listen anonymously is limited in comparison with the ability to anonymously read a book out of context. Insofar as a person becomes literate once and then, as long as they continue to use this skill, remains that way and can read in private, orality can be equally or more exclusive. Likewise, a performer's identity is generally known to the audience, unlike the circulation of anonymously authored texts or pamphlets.

Most of the work on performance of epics, or oral literature in general, focuses on professional performance. It's difficult to say much about this with certainty, as descriptions of premodern performances are limited. Consequently assumptions in existing work vary, especially with the great variation in modern data available for comparison.¹⁰⁹ It seems safe to assume that

¹⁰⁹ E.g., Öztürkmen, "Orality and Performance," 330, assumes oral sources for *The Book of Dede Korkut* came from storytellers of a particular nomadic community, vs., e.g., Karl Reichl, "Medieval Turkish Epic and Popular Narrative," in *Medieval Oral Literature*, ed. Karl Reichl (Berlin: De Gruyter, 2012), 696-697 comparing to

there were public performances by professional story tellers in venues like markets and other public urban spaces, as occasionally described by travelers,¹¹⁰ and as there are in modern times. In later centuries, traveling court poets complained of being accosted and asked to perform in large village households, suggesting this was a regular practice by less elite performers at least later in Anatolian history.¹¹¹ This hints at one problem of limiting ourselves to imagining professional storytellers in public:¹¹² professionals can be hired to perform in private homes. Public performances which are easier to witness for travelers, including academics, are not necessarily representative. Non-professionals retelling favorite stories to each other might be even more common and untraceable.

To get an idea of the possible diversity of locations for literary activity in an urban environment, one useful paper is a study by Aynur on meetings for the purpose of sharing poetry in Istanbul in the sixteenth century. Using a handful of narrative, factual sources, she found references to meetings in wealthy households, madrasas, dervish lodges, public gardens, public squares around fountains, taverns, bathhouses, and a handful of specific individual shops including a store selling herbs and a fortune telling business.¹¹³ Presumably each of these locations would be accessible to a different constellation of people of different classes, genders, ethnicities, etc., and similarly diverse locations could probably serve as meeting places for prose literary activity as well. Aynur also notes that coffee houses were *not* mentioned in her sources,

professional urban performances although he referenced nomadic oral culture earlier. Also discussed in Dedes, *Battalname*, 51-61.

110 Reichl, "Medieval Turkish Epic," 684 on a seventeenth description of storytellers of Erzurum, and 696-697 generally. Hirschler, *The Written Word*, chpt 5, "Popular Reading Practices," 164-196.

111 Aynur, "Ottoman literature," 500, with examples from the eighteenth and nineteenth centuries.

112 As in Kruk, *Warrior Women*, explicitly on pp. 10-11, and as others do implicitly.

113 Hatice Aynur, "Representations of Istanbul as a Literary and Cultural Space in Ottoman Texts (1520-1566)," in *An Iridescent Device: Premodern Ottoman Poetry*, eds. Christiane Czygan and Stephan Conermann (Göttingen: Vandenhoeck & Ruprecht unipress/Bonn University Press, 2018), 247-252.

and probably hadn't spread enough to be prominent places for literary activity yet.¹¹⁴ This observation is particularly important for epic literature, because many modern performances observed by scholars take place in coffee houses - but coffee houses are a very particular kind of space and their use is gendered in ways that don't necessarily apply to public space in general.¹¹⁵ There is not necessarily a direct equivalent in earlier times.

1.2.1 Oral Literature in Nomadic Settings

If we can say little concrete about performance of oral literature in the fifteenth and sixteenth centuries, what we do know is almost entirely confined to urban performances. We know the least - and have directed the least analytic attention - to how performance actually occurred in nomadic environments. Comparisons to modern ethnography are always possible,¹¹⁶ but we should remember that nomads belong to various different cultures with their own traditions and processes of historical change - and consequently there is no singular "nomadic culture." Ethnographic studies on nomadic and recently-nomadic peoples which, rather than focusing on collecting stories alone, examine the role of performance in society, the career trajectories of performers and processes of transformation and local variation are a good corrective here, and show how the occasions, itineraries and locations of performances, the exact makeup of the audiences, the process of training, etc., all change over the course of a human lifetime as well as being specific to (and variable within) particular cultures.¹¹⁷ In short, insofar

¹¹⁴ Aynur, "Representations of Istanbul," 253.

¹¹⁵ Alan Mikhail, "The Heart's Desire: Gender, Urban Space and the Ottoman Coffee House," in *Ottoman Tulips, Ottoman Coffee: Leisure and Lifestyle in the Eighteenth Century*, ed. Dana Sajdi (London & New York: Tauris Academic Studies, 2007), 133-170.

¹¹⁶ E.g., as is the project of Karl Reichl, *Singing the Past: Turkic and Medieval Heroic Poetry*. New York: Cornell University Press, 2000, which seeks to reconstruct the social conditions of *all* medieval epic literature with reference to modern Turkish nomads (and recently sedentarized nomads).

¹¹⁷ A good example is Nienke van der Heide, *Spirited Performance: The Manas epic and society in Kyrgyzstan* (Amsterdam: Rozenberg, 2008), especially chapter two, "The Oral Performance of the Manas Epic," 99-162.

as we can trace epics like *The Book of Dede Korkut* to a real nomadic setting, the question of what they meant in that setting has yet to be asked, let alone answered. Continuity with the past and group identity would probably mean something very different not only to nomads in comparison to sedentary people, but to different groups of nomads in different situations, with different relationships to sedentary neighbors and local and regional political centers.

To conclude on the subject of audiences, it was probably possible for a broad variety of people to access epic literature, whether in direct written form, by listening to professional storytellers, or informally by listening to family members or neighbors read aloud or retell stories they had heard elsewhere. Typical milieus - like the public market or a wealthy village household - probably cut across social classes, rather than being the domain of a specific professional or class group. The memory of the past in historical epics circulated through different social milieus as well as through space and time, allowing people who would not have socialized in person to connect with the same heroic past - insofar as they chose to.

The question, then, is not who *could*, but who *would* give their attention to epic literature? Many of the ulama obviously wanted to discourage that choice, precisely because it was accessible to groups perceived as weak and easily led astray like women, children and lower classes. In short, the epics were truly popular literature, in both the class and the statistical sense. Whatever themes and events they contain must have resonated broadly across society and appealed across different demographic groups, even as some objected and different epics

This study discusses issues such as the changes in career paths for Manaschi (performers of the Manas epic), the way different audiences interact with performances, how female Manaschi are treated, efforts to trace the length of the tradition, and how Kyrgyz audiences understand variation between performers of the same epics. The point is not that any of this directly translates to nomads of the fifteenth century, but that they would have had their own cultural institutions surrounding performance of oral literature which would be subject to change over time.

appealed to different tastes. The connecting factors were an interest in epic literature, and the ability to consume literature - whether oral or written - in the Turkish language.

2. The Meaning of Writing in Turkish

To work with early Turkish literature - in any genre - is to brush on the difficult question of why it emerged when it did. There is no particularly obvious reason why Turkish should not have come into existence as a literary and administrative language centuries earlier, when Turkish speakers first became politically important in the highly literate Islamic world. On the other hand, these groups having functioned for centuries as political powers without writing Turkish routinely, there is no obvious reason why speakers of Turkish should have been forced to begin to write it in the thirteenth through fifteenth centuries. Therefore we must ask why so late, but also why so early, and why, at all?

In pursuit of an explanation for the appearance of written Turkish, I will review the theoretical concept of vernacularization and how it does or perhaps does not apply readily to the case of Turkish, before raising some questions and making a necessarily speculative attempt to explain the emergence of Turkish.

2.1 The Concept of the Written Vernacular

Pollock's monumental study on vernacularization¹¹⁸ introduced, among many others, the idea of a vernacular millennium in which vernacular languages in Europe and in India simultaneously replaced previously existing, cosmopolitan languages. Pollock adopts a specific political explanation for this development, in which cosmopolitan languages are associated with

¹¹⁸ Sheldon Pollock, *The language of the Gods in the World of Men: Sanskrit, Culture, and Power in Premodern India* (Berkeley: University of California Press, 2006).

universalism and vernaculars with bounded spheres of influence, although he is careful to emphasize that especially in India they do not precisely correlate with geography.¹¹⁹

Pollock criticizes the field of linguistics for taking a blind change approach to vernacularization which totally erases any component of human agency.¹²⁰ Having completed my initial education in linguistics, I agree with this criticism, but I believe that Pollock goes too far in the opposite direction in refusing *any* practical, material or pragmatic element in changes in written languages. If nothing else, infrastructure is required to maintain competency and literacy in a second language for a large segment of the population and must be maintained on purpose. An example of the relevance of this issue to the Islamic world can be found in Goody's studies of West Africa, where in the mid-twentieth century it was common for people to be taught to write Arabic without learning the Arabic language. Many "literate" people could sound out words but not understand any information in what they read as a result. Those of particular drive and intelligence - and with better opportunities - sometimes did acquire knowledge of the Arabic language and become scholars, and it was some of those exceptional people who innovated writing in the vernacular languages of the community - exceptions which demonstrate that infrastructure and practical language learning issues can have a significant effect.¹²¹ This example should not be extrapolated to medieval Anatolia, of course, but shows that we should pay attention to both the choice to write in Turkish and the motives behind it, and the practical factors which made it possible (or easier, or more attractive) to write in Turkish, or any other language.

119 Here I feel I must apologize for simplifying the work, perhaps beyond recognition. It is simply impossible to discuss without doing so.

120 Pollock, *The language of the Gods*, 437-438.

121 Goody, *The interface between the oral and the written*, ch. 5, 125-138, and ch. 9, 191-208.

At any rate, Peacock has previously noted that Pollock's thesis both works and does not when applied to Turkish.¹²² Among other things, Peacock remarks that Pollock's theory depends very much on issues of patronage, but much early Turkish literature is anonymous and apparently un-sponsored. The first half of Pollock's timeline - administrative use (literization) to literary use (literarization) - also does not fit Turkish. I would like to add a few more points of contrast before embarking on speculation as to their significance.

First, and most significantly, Pollock's vernacular emerges as a consequence of geographically bounded kingdoms. Even his cosmopolis is geographically bounded; a point of his is that cosmopolitan languages border each other but do not overlap.¹²³ This is logical insofar as Pollock's cosmopolis inherently has a claim to universality, and presumably can admit no partner with an equal claim to universal hegemony. None of this is much like the emergence of Turkish as a literary language in the Islamic world. For one, the Islamic literary world Turkish joined already had two "cosmopolitan" literary languages, Arabic and Persian. Both were spoken as vernaculars in some communities, but both had spread far beyond those communities as literary languages, and if they were not quite coextensive in their geographical spread they were often combined. Certainly the areas in which Turkish emerged - Anatolia, Mamluk Egypt and Syria, the Chaghatai Golden Horde and in Iran under the Ilkhanate and later Timur's court¹²⁴ - used both Arabic and Persian as written languages.

And, as the previous list suggests, Turkish did not emerge into the written record in one geographically bounded polity, but regionally, sponsored by a number of different courts but also adopted by apparently independent writers without patrons at the same time. The sponsorship of

¹²² Peacock, *Islam, Literature and Society*, 150-151.

¹²³ Pollock, *The language of the Gods*, 236-237.

¹²⁴ Peacock, *Islam, Literature and Society*, 149-150. Darling, "Ottoman Turkish," 174-175.

Turkish language works by a number of independent states more or less simultaneously,¹²⁵ many relatively unimportant from the distance of something like seven centuries, is likely part of what makes the whole issue so difficult to explain. We cannot assign sponsorship of the Turkish language or the choice to write in it to a single decision maker or political power. It seems to have simply been in the air, from this vantage point.

In fact, depending on how we define vernacular or vernacularization, the issue begins to rise - *was* literary Turkish a vernacular language, in the sense that vernacularization is usually meant? Certainly we cannot speak of a single Turkish-speaking community abandoning a high language and beginning to write in the vernacular language of everyday speech. The areas in which Turkish emerged as a written language were profoundly multilingual - in the speech on the streets and in the homes as well as the writing of the court - and remained so for centuries later. That some people - many people - spoke the Turkish they began to write is not in question, but was it everyone, and what did these two uses of Turkish have to do with each other? We may want to speak, not of "vernacularization," but of the rise of Turkish as a *third* cosmopolitan, trans-regional language, and an attempt to add a third dimension to the Arabic-Persian relationship - but more work on this issue is needed.

2.2 Demographics of Literacy

A central problem with existing attempts to discuss or explain the rise of written Turkish is that the linguistic situation immediately beforehand - and of the actual people involved - has been somewhat neglected.

¹²⁵ Ibid., and also A.C.S. Peacock and Sara Nur Yıldız, introduction to *Islamic Literature and Intellectual Life in Fourteenth- and Fifteenth-Century Anatolia*, ed. A.C.S. Peacock and Sara Nur Yıldız (Würzburg: Ergon Verlag, Würzburg, 2016), 28-34.

More concretely, if we imagine an individual who begins, for the first time, to write in Turkish in approximately the fourteenth century, there are a number of possibilities. This individual might have spoken Turkish in the community - as the only vernacular language or one of several - but always written in Arabic and Persian (or another language, e.g., Greek, Aramaic, etc.). They might have spoken Turkish but written nothing at all because, until they were taught to read and write in Turkish (and perhaps simultaneously Arabic and/or Persian) they were illiterate. Or they might not have spoken Turkish at all, but learned it as a second (or third, fourth, etc.) language in order to learn to read and write it. In this last case, they might have previously written in Arabic and Persian or another language and learned Turkish in response to a demand for Turkish writing, or they might have again been illiterate. This last option was certainly the case for, for example, many mamluks or janissaries enslaved and imported from regions where most people did not receive a formal education and then were educated in wealthy households.

Most likely individuals who would belong to all of these categories existed and participated in the emergence and growth of Turkish as a literary language.¹²⁶ The question, then, is how common each possibility was (and most likely answers would differ for different communities). Research examining this issue, and related issues such as the existence of primary schools in Anatolia in this period and their language(s) of instruction, would help in explaining the emergence of written Turkish - and perhaps through this interesting example, the emergence of new literary languages in general. What the Islamic case makes clear is that written languages, or even the choice between writing in local or shared, universal languages across a region, are not necessarily a zero sum game and we cannot treat them as such.

¹²⁶ For examples, read any cited work on Turkish literature and consider the authors' and patrons' backgrounds.

2.3 Reading Communities

As Pollock emphasizes in his study, the choice to write and read in a new language *is* a choice. Early and isolated experiments in Turkish and other languages which were not followed up upon¹²⁷ only demonstrate this fact: individuals could invent the idea of writing in Turkish, or any other generally unwritten language, independently and even compose works that way, but without the adoption of Turkish by an actual community of readers these experiments went nowhere.

It is tautological to say that writing in a language is directed towards people who read in that language - but if we follow this spiral, it may lead towards explanation. What the writers and readers in a language add up to is a particular community. In linguistics, field research is carried out in a speech community which shares certain norms.¹²⁸ We may speak, then, of a reading community, which shares a certain set of language norms along with values, relationships, and so on, and which is maintained by regular participation and interaction between members. Because this reading community consumes a certain number of shared texts (as well as others which are not shared), certain ideas circulate through most or all of its members. (In some cases this might include illiterate members or even have an illiterate majority which interacted with texts through social practices involving their literate members.)

¹²⁷ Peacock, *Islam, Literature and Society*, 148.

¹²⁸ Pollock, *The Language of the Gods*, drifts close to this with his "sociotextual community," but ties this to the production of *political* texts only, 27. For an explanation of 'speech community' as a linguistics term, Gerard Van Herk, *What Is Sociolinguistics?* (West Sussex: Wiley-Blackwell, 2012), 1-3. For more discussion of the process of actually studying a speech community, see Isabelle Buchstaller and Ghada Khattab, "Population samples," in *Research Methods in Linguistics*, ed. Robert Podesva and Devyani Sharma (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 2013), 74-95.

To be clear, the reading community is not the nation, although the nation could be an example.¹²⁹ A reading community might be a religious community (all of the Muslims with Arabic literacy), a professional community (all of the people who are conversant in Persian poetry styles), communities of daily life and space (all of the people in a certain village along a dialect continuum) or, most likely, many other options. Individuals can and usually will have membership in multiple speech or reading communities, as they participate in different kinds of groups, travel between geographic areas, marry or divorce, age, etc., and through these very individuals with multiple contacts and affiliations norms and ideas may spread between communities.

We may also go up and down in scale. Depending on our interests, a speech or reading community may be tiny (three or four households at a particular point in a dialect continuum who make up one village; the students at a particular school who read a certain set of works and write with certain quirks) or immense (all of the people who are functionally literate in Modern Standard Arabic or literary Persian).

When a new literary language is created, it may be either adopted by an existing reading community or signify the creation of a new reading community. Turkish, like other vernaculars studied by Pollock,¹³⁰ was self-consciously created by people who were aware they were doing something new.¹³¹ We should recall that 'Turkish' was a concept with a preexisting meaning and many associations in the Islamic world, long before the existence of a Turkish literary

129 Arguably, as in Benedict Anderson, *Imagined Communities: Reflections on the Origin and Spread of Nationalism: Revised Edition* (London & New York: Verso, 2016).

130 Pollock, *The language of the Gods*, throughout.

131 Peacock, *Islam, Literature and Society*, 160-161.

language.¹³² Writing in - elevating - the dialect of this group of people must have had symbolic significance as well as practical. Historical memories which were translated into Turkish, or created as new works early in the history of Turkish literature, probably related to this community's - or communities' - attempts to define itself or themselves as groups, establishing a collective past for a new or transformed community and continuity that could be brought into its altered circumstances.

In the very time period in which Turkish emerged into writing, new political ideologies which attached nomadic lifestyles - already associated with the Turks - to legitimate political power and married them to the idea of Islamic sovereignty were forming.¹³³ The use of Turkish by multiple *independent* states in which Turkish ethnicity was associated with power - through membership in the Mamluks or descent from nomads or Turkish dynastic powers - may be related to a new sense of identity and community between these powers, regionally, reinforced by the circulation of both manuscripts and scholars between these states and not merely within them.¹³⁴ Once reading materials and a market for scholars literate in Turkish existed, more reading communities would form outside the court, not necessarily sharing all of its values or practices even as they used the same or similar languages. But this is a speculative reconstruction, and more work is needed to confirm, elaborate or disprove it.

3. The Affiliations of Epics

As I have mentioned several times above, individual works of epic literature - and probably individual stories within traditions or different manuscript "editions" - reflect the tastes,

132 Yehoshua Frenkel, "The Turks of the Eurasian Steppes in Medieval Arabic Writing," in *Mongols, Turks, and Others: Eurasian Nomads and the Sedentary World*, ed. Reuven Amitai and Michal Biran (Leiden & Boston: Brill, 2005), 201-241.

133 Woods, *The Aqquyunlu*, 16-17. Also İnalçık, "The Ottoman Succession," 37-69.

134 Peacock, *Islam, Literature and Society*, 179-187.

values and experiences of different groups of people. Therefore, when comparing two works, it should be possible to extrapolate from the expectations and values of the texts some guesses as to the identities of the audience and producers, especially by contrasting them. This does not make epic literature self-conscious political propaganda. Epic literature was probably meant foremost to entertain, and insofar as it addressed questions of identity and group consciousness, these could relate to personal and local processes as much as court-sponsored, "official" ones.¹³⁵ I will return to the exact nature of the relationship between epic literature and the political and group perspectives I suggest in section 3.3

3.1 *Battalname*

Battalname is the story of the conquest of Anatolia by the Arab hero Sayyid al-Battal, here transposed as an Anatolian Turkish figure. It imagines the Anatolian Turkish past in continuity with the world of settled, centralized Islam, centered on the caliphate in Baghdad. Indeed, in *Battalname* the caliph acts as an emperor in full command of the state, mustering armies to defend Islam against invaders, collecting his portion of plunder from the conquests of the main characters, commanding the obedience of subordinates, having them arrested and tried when (he believes) they commit offenses, appointing officials, and so on.¹³⁶ Here, the past of the Anatolian Turks and the caliphate are melded into one, reflecting a certain view of authority, politics and civilization that might apply to daily life in the present, or to a fantasy of

135 Sabine Dorpmueller, introduction to *Fictionalizing the Past: Historical Characters in Arabic Popular Epic*, ed. Sabine Dorpmueller (Leuven & Paris & Walpole: Peeters Publishers, 2012), 2.

136 *Battalname*, e.g., providing instructions 104, 111, 149, accepting portion of spoils from war 118, 136, making appointments to provincial military commands 118, organizing military defense of the entire Islamic world, 185, 189, personally leading armies of Islamic world, 203; the episode of the caliph's corruption by his crypto-Christian judge, summoning, arrest and nearly execution of several Muslim heroes is told in Chapter Thirteen, 211-227.

empowerment or justice through the government for people who felt they lacked one or both.

This is Sunnism mythologized, uniting a powerful, idealized past and present.

The enemies of *Battalname*, listed first in 1.2.2, reflect the reverse image of the audience: Christians (Byzantine, Latin, Crypto-Christian and other), Jews (independent or Byzantine), polytheists (in India and elsewhere), apostates who abandon Islam to defect to the Byzantines and messianic rebels who claim to abolish the shari'a. Enemies may become allies only by sincere conversion, which instantly transforms them,¹³⁷ although occasionally the protagonists are deceived by a fake conversion. *Battalname* is only sympathetic to Muslims, although it allows a heroic role for Muslims who live in the Byzantine domains, either falsely attesting to Christianity or as minorities, who secretly render help to the protagonists,¹³⁸ and converts are of course welcomed. This list all represents kinds of people who existed in the fifteenth century, many in Turkish Anatolia or in areas bordering it. Consequently *Battalname* makes it very explicit which people are envisioned as part of the audience of the epic and the descendants of this glorious past, and which people are envisioned as outside the community, acceptable targets for fictional but indiscriminate violence.¹³⁹

The community of the protagonists sometimes experiences conflict and differences within as well as without. There are competitions for positions and their financial benefits,¹⁴⁰

137 *Battalname*, numerous examples, but an early one is the Caesar's nephew and military commander, Ahmar Tarran, who converts and is renamed Ahmad Tarran and proceeds to fight on behalf of the Muslims for most of the epic. His conversion takes place pp. 121-126.

138 *Battalname*, Shammās, the crypto-Muslim false monk is introduced p. 107 and becomes a recurring source of aid to Battal. Another, interesting example is the briefly introduced Mahak the Indian, a Muslim blacksmith who lives in Istanbul and spies for the Muslims, p. 137.

139 "Indiscriminate" is really the only word for the massacres the heroes regularly commit and are celebrated by the narrative for, e.g., p. 140 (the monks of Istanbul), 148 (the inhabitants of another monastery containing monks acting as soldiers, which the narrator specifies is also looted and set on fire), etc. It should probably be emphasized that *Battalname* and sequels portray heroes as much more indiscriminately violent than was usually the case in the actual conquests - see Darling, "Reformulating the *Gazi* narrative," 44-45.

140 *Battalname*, Battal and Abdu'l Salam, especially 104-126.

attempts to cheat children out of their inheritance,¹⁴¹ and domestic quarrels between husband and wife.¹⁴² None of these are solved with the overwhelming violence directed at outside enemies. Instead, while arguments sometimes have negative effects by causing people to act rashly,¹⁴³ in general the parties restrain themselves to verbal argument and are reconciled over time,¹⁴⁴ or else a benevolent ruler intervenes.¹⁴⁵ When the ruler acts unjustly it is because he has been corrupted by a Crypto-Christian.¹⁴⁶ *Battalname* does not admit for criticism of Muslim rulers in general. If a Muslim character commits violence against another Muslim, it is because they have been persuaded to apostasize from Islam, and they must either return to Islam or be killed like any other enemy.¹⁴⁷ Muslim kingdoms and states never go to war - conversion means a kingdom will instantly join with the vast Muslim alliance, and good rulers are either already Muslim or will promptly go about converting (if perhaps with some quibbles that allow Battal to display his rhetorical and military skill first).¹⁴⁸ Ethnic and racial differences exist in this world but are somewhat independent of religious affiliation, and nomadic Muslims are envisioned as immediately eager to join the settled state as junior, obedient partners.¹⁴⁹ On the other hand, non-

141 *Battalname*, e.g., the two boys who come to Battal because their uncle has cheated them out of their inheritance, p. 153.

142 *Battalname*, e.g., 227-228, Battal and Gul-Andam.

143 Arguably all three of the above are examples, causing troubles for Battal although he ultimately resolves them.

144 *Battalname*, e.g., Battal and Abdu'l Salam are reconciled after Battal rescues Abdu'l Salam, 142, or after his argument with Gul-Andam over his excessive charity, he resolves to prove his financial abilities to her by proposing to Amir Umar's daughter as an additional wife, and spends the rest of the episode acquiring the resources to pay for her dowry in India. 227-239, until he returns and discovers he must rescue Malatya from troubles incurred by his absence. He argues with his wife but clearly cannot simply order her to stop questioning his decisions - instead he resolves to prove her wrong.

145 *Battalname*, as when the caliph intervenes to appoint Battal over Abdu'l Salam during their conflict above, 118.

146 *Battalname*, 211-227.

147 *Battalname*, one episode of apostasy and repentance, in which the period of apostasy is directly spent aiding the Byzantines in attempting to kill Battal, 153-155.

148 *Battalname*, e.g., an episode in India, 231-238.

149 *Battalname*, 152.

violent relations between Muslims and non-Muslims virtually never end well. For example, when Battal acquires a non-Muslim concubine, she tries to assassinate him.¹⁵⁰

To conclude, *Battalname* is a story about heroic protagonists who represent a unified, institutionalized and settled Muslim state, led by the caliph. Religious differences are the cause (or possibly consequence) of all violence and combat. Violence never occurs between Muslims, although jealousy and competition may and must be managed. Peace never occurs between Muslims and non-Muslims. The Abbasid caliphate, functioning in a way the Abbasids never could have, leads the entire world of Islam. This state never errs unless due to non-Muslim corruption.

The extent to which *Battalname* would be received as a political message, as opposed to an entertaining story about a powerful hero, would probably depend on the exact timing, current events, the location and means of transmitting it, and so on. Even in an assumed political context, we can envision quite different messages depending on, for example, whether the audience was contemplating rebellion or convinced that Christian or Jewish court officials were behaving suspiciously. But at any time it would represent the prejudices and sympathies of a very particular segment of the Turkish-speaking population.

3.2 *The Book of Dede Korkut*

The Book of Dede Korkut's vision of the past is nomadic, decentralized and a continuation of Turkish tribal politics of Central Asia - but still Muslim. In the political world of this epic, the ultimate authority is the Khan of Khans of the Oghuz, Bayindir or Kazan Khan depending on the story. But the Khan is not a commanding and unquestionable authority. He must make efforts to

¹⁵⁰ *Battalname*, 149. The story of Bayda's mission to assassinate Battal ends with her conversion, resolving the tension, although not before she attempts to kill him with a knife in his sleep.

pacify and prevent jealousy among his subordinates.¹⁵¹ He errs because of simple bad decisions or for no apparent reason,¹⁵² and the collection ends with the story of how an insult by him incites rebellion by half of the Oghuz tribes,¹⁵³ including some characters who appear as protagonists elsewhere. Political assistance often comes through individual familial relationships,¹⁵⁴ only sometimes from the Oghuz as a collective group, in which case the Oghuz beys arrive as individuals rather than under the command of their leader.¹⁵⁵

The institutions of sedentary Islam are absent from the world of *The Book of Dede Korkut*. Converting to Islam instead connects an individual to a decentralized web of alliances, and Muslim faith is demonstrated by individual, personal actions like praying before battle.¹⁵⁶ Nevertheless at least one story revolves around an individual who lacks crucial information about Islam and must acquire it.¹⁵⁷ Much has been made of the "shallow" Islamization of the Oghuz protagonists, but I believe we should view the book as representing an alternate vision of Islam, not a mindless survival of pagan customs. The protagonists *are* depicted as Muslims. If

151 *The Book of Dede Korkut*, 135, where Bayindir Khan is concerned that distributing meager tribute may insult the recipient, is a good example.

152 *The Book of Dede Korkut*, 9-10, begins the collection with Bayindir Khan publicly humiliating vassals without children for no apparent reason. In 156-157, Khan Kazan accepts a malicious gift of a falcon from the King of Trebizond and is captured because he unwisely chases it into enemy territory. In 168, rebellion is provoked by Khan Kazan overlooking the Outer Oghuz tribes by leaving them out from gift giving, again for no apparent reason.

153 *The Book of Dede Korkut*, Legend XII, 168-175. Legend I also incorporates a murder plot by the warriors of Dirse Khan and his son, involving violence inside the Muslim community and culminating in their attempt to dispose of their leader by handing him over to the infidels, 13-19.

154 *The Book of Dede Korkut*, e.g., Khan Kazan's young son grows to maturity and resolves to rescue him, 163; Begil is injured and his young son Emren pleases his father by declining to get help from the Oghuz but defending his camp against attack himself, 139-140 and many others.

155 *The Book of Dede Korkut*, e.g., Yigenek discovers his father was captured when he reaches maturity and receives troops from Bayindir Khan before going to rescue him, 116-117; a similar case where a family member is required to rally support from the Oghuz in 86-88, where Burla Hatun mounts support to rescue her son and husband.

156 *The Book of Dede Korkut*, e.g., 68, but occurs in most battle scenes.

157 *The Book of Dede Korkut* Legend V, "The Story of Delü Dümrlü, Son of Duha Koja," 89-97, who learns about the oneness of God and saves his life by acknowledging it. To be fair, Delü Dümrlü is not exactly an ordinary convert or ignorant Muslim, as he also begins the story unaware humans are able to die from natural causes, 90.

this is viewed as a retrospective edit, any story which contains, e.g., alcohol consumption¹⁵⁸ could have been likewise edited and was not. Even explicitly religious literature from the sixteenth century is hardly devoid of references to Muslims drinking.

The enemies of *The Book of Dede Korkut* are not classified and differentiated as *Battalname's* are. Instead they are simply infidels, which the translators of this edition take for references to the Oghuz's traditional tribal enemies in Central Asia,¹⁵⁹ although Byzantine and Anatolian place names and real fortresses are used throughout the text.¹⁶⁰ Nevertheless the religion of the enemies is a generic one, with "churches," "monks," and an "evil" character,¹⁶¹ but no name, no collective identity and no identifying symbols. When they must engage in festivities for the plot to function, the infidels "hav[e] a religious celebration" rather than holding mass or discussing the Bible as they might in *Battalname*.¹⁶² While the Byzantine place names are often interpreted as a retrospective re-casting of Central Asian enemies as Christian,¹⁶³ the most recent redaction could well have gone the other direction and *removed* positive identification of the

158 Alcohol is often brought up as an example of how *Dede Korkut* is shallowly Islamicized or similar, e.g., Kitapçı Bayrı, *Warriors, Martyrs and Dervishes*, 69-70. However, it is worth pointing out that consuming wine is often explicitly tied to negative consequences and the narrator appears to be making an argument *against* consuming alcohol, e.g., *The Book of Dede Korkut* 23-24, where Salur Kazan's drinking causes him to decide to go hunting with his court and his camp is subsequently sacked and his wife and son are taken prisoner. In other cases wine appears neutrally as a background detail, e.g., 42.

159 Sümer, Uysal and Walker, introduction to *The Book of Dede Korkut*, xi.

160 E.g., *The Book of Dede Korkut*, Avnik castle, p. 42; Georgian kings and territories, 72-73, etc. Some legends seem to envision Anatolia as a distant place, as when Anatolia and Syria are mentioned as far-off lands on p. 89. I would view this as an element of distancing from an Anatolian present, like references to the far off days of the Oghuz, rather than a sign that the Oghuz ancestors were concerned about their reputations in Anatolia and Syria before migrating there.

161 *The Book of Dede Korkut*, church and priest, 69; church and monks, 163; church replaced with mosque, 166; advice to a ruler, "...the border of Georgia with its foul, evil religion," in a defensive capacity concerned about invasion by these infidels, 24.

162 *The Book of Dede Korkut*, 54; this party provides a chance for Bamsi Beyrek to be forced to play bard and communicate with his father's spies through music.

163 E.g., Sümer, Uysal and Walker, introduction to *The Book of Dede Korkut*, xi, describing the reference as originally to Qipchaq ancestors of Golden Horde (in Central Asia?); Krstovic et al., "An Introduction to Kitab-i dedem Qorkut," describes two layers, one the deeds of Kazan Khan in Central Asian "homeland," one against Qipchags, Georgians and Kingdom of Trebizond enemies later, 96; in the same source a reprint of Lewis, saying that the Islamic layer is imposed over the source and "infidel" has been applied to enemies with it, presumably because the original conflict was not religious, 104 and 106.

infidels as Christians or Byzantines. After all, presumably a re-casting of Central Asian enemies to root them firmly in an Anatolian context, which went so far as to ascribe specific Byzantine castles to them, would have referred to them as Christians, denizens of Rum, or similar - as *Battalname* does. On the other hand, an effort to strip the enemies of their identifiable Christian character might have left the text as it currently is, including Anatolian place names and references to generic religious buildings and practices, but no specific group name and no necessarily Christian practices.¹⁶⁴ In any case the protagonists of *The Book of Dede Korkut* also do not battle apostates, messianic rebels or different named varieties of infidel, and all but two of their military conflicts are defensive - with both of the aggressive conflicts framed as bad decisions by the narrator.¹⁶⁵ The protagonists of *The Book of Dede Korkut* also vary. The setting rotates between different families of the Oghuz tribes and different individuals within those family. Men, women and children all have turns in the heroic spotlight, as does one commoner shepherd.¹⁶⁶

164 The use of church, monk, etc., certainly implies the identification with Christians, but it is the lack of any actual Christian practice, name, or symbol that has given various scholars the feeling Christianity is only loosely attributed or superimposed on these enemies.

165 Legend I involves internal conflict. Legend II involves an attack on the protagonists' camp and rescue of prisoners. Legend III involves three defensive conflicts, one an attack and two rescues of people held prisoner after attacks. In Legend IV, Kazan and Uruz are touring the places Kazan has previously fought infidels to prepare Uruz, but apparently not aiming to attack until they are ambushed; later there are rescues. Legend V stars a highway brigand but the actual conflict is supernatural (and the victims who appear on the page are Muslim). In Legend VI, Kan Turali wins a contest to marry an infidel princess and they are ambushed when her father changes his mind after they leave. In Legend VII Kazilik Koja asks permission for an offensive raid, but the narrative blames this on the fact that he is drunk (115); he is immediately captured because of his bad decision, and the narrative then focuses on his son rescuing him. Legend VIII involves a conflict against a supernatural foe who has forced the Oghuz to give him human beings to eat. Legend IX is defensive, against an attack on the camp. Legend X again involves aggressive raiding framed as a reckless and foolish decision by a young braggart embarrassed by his boasts (145-146); Eghrek is captured as a result of his actions and must be rescued, the subject of the rest of the story. In Legend XI, Khan Kazan is captured while hunting and isolated, and must be rescued. Finally in legend XII the Outer Oghuz rebel. Only two of these stories involve aggressive warfare against the infidels, and both cases are framed as bad decisions taken as the result of character flaws and result in others taking the spotlight to rescue the foolish aggressors.

166 Karajuk the shepherd, introduced *The Book of Dede Korkut* 25.

In short, *The Book of Dede Korkut* does not draw such a clean line around the community it sees as sympathetic. While *Battalname* appears to run through every possible enemy of Islam over the course of its episodes, *The Book of Dede Korkut* rotates between demographics for its choices of protagonists. Leaders are human, fallible, and make mistakes, or are overcome by emotion and have to be urged into action.¹⁶⁷ Violence can occur unpredictably within the group as a result as well as externally. No one has an infallible right of command.

The enemy of *The Book of Dede Korkut* is vague and generic, perhaps even as a result of a deliberate attempt to remove a positive identification of Christians as the enemy in some previous version. This enemy might serve as a cipher for a different enemy it would be unwise to name. It might have no intended referent at all, serving only as a plot device that was never meant to represent a real group of people. Or it might be a sign that some redactor made an attempt to appeal to a mixed audience. They might have expected a partially Christian audience who could sympathize with Muslim heroes defensively fighting potential polytheists or generic "bad guys," or an audience of Muslims who had ties to Christian neighbors and did not want to hear stories about killing Christians - particularly as these manuscripts, dating from the sixteenth century, are from long after the end of independent Christian kingdoms in Anatolia. The selection of stories which portray military aggression uniformly in a negative light may support this idea.

3.3 Propaganda, Sympathies, Patronage?

I have referenced the issue of propaganda occasionally, and here would like to devote a few remarks to it. Analysis and speculation on the role of epic literature in society often seems to boil down to the issue of propaganda, whether the epics are envisioned as sponsored by

¹⁶⁷ In *The Book of Dede Korkut* Legend XII, Khan Kazan is so overcome with grief at his favorite Beyrek's death he has to be summoned after seven days of isolation to act against the rebels, 173.

particular families to promote their image,¹⁶⁸ or they are thought to advertise the pleasures or political achievements of the activities they depict - that is, frontier ghaza - to the audience by virtue of their contents.¹⁶⁹ Patronage and authorship of epics, then, are considered overtly political acts meant to propagate the narratives they contain.

I would like to question the simple trajectory from political aim of the patron to literary epic. The epics are immensely complicated narratives which seem to contain numerous authorial voices and to have been collected from varied sources. As I state in the introduction, any simple explanation of their appeal, purpose or goal is probably too simple to explain their centuries-long lifespans. Even if, say, *Danişmendname* could be definitively traced to the Danişmendid court, and we came across a first person account by the sponsor or editor which explicitly stated the work was created in order to propagate a heroic view of the dynasty to the common people - an unlikely scenario - this would fail to explain what it was doing circulating centuries after the Danişmendids ceased to exist as a political power, and we would also have to explain the agendas of those who copied, edited and circulated it in that later period. Likewise, all of the epics were circulated long after the Byzantine-Muslim frontier ceased to exist.

In any case, it is clear in other contexts that there could be various motives for patronage and that a sponsored work does not necessarily reflect a pre-programmed political agenda of the patron. Philosophical, religious-legal and scientific works produced under the sponsorship of known political patrons are usually analyzed with an eye foremost to their authors' views. The political context is not viewed as off-limits but neither is it determinative.¹⁷⁰ When we have knowledge of particular writers - including writers of epics and other literary material - it often is

¹⁶⁸ E.g., Dedes, *Battalname*, 9-14.

¹⁶⁹ E.g., Kafadar, *Between Two Worlds*, 62-90.

¹⁷⁰ As Kafadar comments in the beginning of the above, regarding other sorts of works, 62-63.

clear that they began works out of personal interest or goals and searched for sponsors after the fact, changed sponsors, left the patronage of particular individuals partway through works, sometimes lived on the income from other activities (teaching, commerce, etc.) while writing, or wrote works which appealed to their patrons' literary or intellectual interests instead of their political ones. They might also defend a patron's political interests by raising the prestige of a certain art-form or intellectual tradition, or simply demonstrating the patron's generosity towards scholars and artisans and adding these elements to their court.

We should extend the same nuanced view of patronage to epic literature insofar as we assume a patron behind the known manuscripts. Such a patron may not exist anyway, at least in all cases. Peacock, in addition to noting that much Turkish literature is anonymous and not apparently sponsored, points out that some accounts of patronage may actually be fictional devices¹⁷¹ - perhaps like the spurious "transmissions" at the beginning of some epics, mentioned earlier.

In short, we can certainly discern values, sympathies, and beliefs about the world in fictional narratives. What we cannot necessarily be certain of is the exact political context, especially in long-lived works which were certainly transmitted through changing circumstances. As I commented in section 3.1 above, the same narrative could be referenced or distributed in different political situations for very different messages, in the same way that people from across the political spectrum may quote classical fiction for very different purposes now. At the same time, some works have more overt meanings than others, and I would argue that both *Battalname* and *The Book of Dede Korkut* imply some fairly specific things about their most recent redactors' social circles and worldview. *Battalname*'s point of view, as described above, clearly relates to

¹⁷¹ Peacock, *Islam, Literature and Society*, 153-154, speaking of *Danishmendname*.

the relationship between Muslims and authority as well as between Muslims and non-Muslims. *The Book of Dede Korkut*, in my opinion, is most explicitly political in a different sphere of action, when it comments on the family, and it is this realm that will feature heavily in the next two chapters.

4. Conclusion

Writing a history of reading and listening is a difficult prospect even in periods with much better documentation than fifteenth and sixteenth century Anatolia. Nevertheless I have made some attempts to discuss the settings in which epic literature might be circulated in different forms, and the people who might have been able or willing to give it attention. I have also discussed the choice to write in Turkish as a means of speaking to and joining a particular reading community, or several reading communities which used the Turkish language in different ways beginning slightly before the first Turkish-language epic manuscripts. All of these issues relate to the problem of identifying the collective which transmitted Turkish epic literature as a form of cultural memory.

With the particular political sympathies and worldviews discernible in *Battalname* and *The Book of Dede Korkut* - distinct from each other - in mind, we may envision these epics appealing to overlapping but distinct communities of readers and listeners, perhaps demographically or geographically different as well as different in opinion and taste. For reasons of education, convenience and perhaps self-image, these people consumed epic literature in Turkish, but they did not necessarily share all of the same values and corresponding selections when they remembered their ancestors.

Chapter Two: Gender in Epic Society

The presence of female characters in epics is often remarked upon, sometimes with puzzlement.¹⁷² In part, this is because the female characters are very active in unexpected ways, and yet they defy classification and explanation. Attempts to cast them as either liberated symbols of equality¹⁷³ or exoticized and two-dimensional Amazons¹⁷⁴ are unconvincing.

Of course, as I have argued extensively in the introduction, epics are fiction and the audience did not perceive them as depicting true events. Nevertheless the female characters surprise us for a reason: gender in fiction suggests behavior and activities people found, at least, interesting to hear about, and sympathetic and compelling enough to root for in the case of protagonists.¹⁷⁵ In the case of epic literature, which clearly relates to the collective understanding of the past, the apparent violation of our reconstructed gender ideals is more surprising yet. When fiction follows family life and other familiar situations, it may give us at least a good a basis to speculate on as historiographies and advice manuals which barely mention women and assume an idealized view of reality, allowing us to revise that reconstruction of ideal female behavior when it seems to be violated. Further, when gender in fiction varies between works and over time and space, it may give us a glimpse at social change in an area that is very difficult to study in the premodern past.

172 E.g., Dedes, *Battalname*, 50, describing an "Amazon theme;" Lewis in Krstovic et al., "An Introduction to Kitab-i dedem Qorkut," 103, remarking on their activity, etc.

173 As in Kruk, *Warrior Women*.

174 Dedes briefly as in footnote 166, and more substantively, Helga Anetshofer, "How Equal Are Female Converts? The Case of the Medieval Warrior Heroine Efromiya," (paper presented at *MESA Annual Meeting*, Denver, CO, November 23 2015).

175 As remarked by Fatemeh Keshavarz, "Taming the Unruly King: Nizami's Shirin as Lover and Educator," in *Women in Iran from the Rise of Islam to 1800*, ed. Guity Nashat and Lois Beck, (Urbana & Chicago: University of Illinois Press, 2003), 201-203.

Gender is not static, but a highly politicized kind of social division. It is a source of ideological conflict over religious and moral practice - even when those practices seem similar to us from the present - and an important force in displaying group identity, just as memory of the past is. It requires constant performance and maintenance on a daily basis.¹⁷⁶ People constantly come into contact both with people of other genders and with groups which perform their genders differently on a daily basis, which means they are constantly made aware of these differences and must justify them, or fail to justify them. Insofar as gender is often envisioned as natural and universal, this variation provokes ideological tension, and perhaps a greater need to demonstrate continuity with the past. Political conflict, for all of these reasons, often plays out in part by differing performance of gender - especially by women - and this was no less true in the premodern Middle East than elsewhere.

In line with the assumption that gender and political difference may be entwined, we should not dismiss unexpected findings on gender as exceptional and uninteresting, or as mythological, without evidence. We have strong preexisting views about how gender "was" back "then," because of the strong association between certain views of gender roles and modernity and Westernization. But interpreting the past in light of these expectations is misleading. Instead we should look with interest at surprising or apparently contradictory evidence on gender in order to determine how and why the past differs from our expectation.

¹⁷⁶ Judith Butler, *Gender trouble: feminism and the subversion of identity*, 2nd Edition (New York: Routledge, 2007).

1. Relations Between Men and Women

Most of the time women in epics are depicted interacting with or in the context of relationships with men, which makes the question of how the epics envision male and female relations a useful one for investigating their view of gender.

1.1 Misogyny

Perhaps unsurprisingly, the epics contain their share of explicit hatred and dislike of women, violence directed towards women which seems to be related to their gender, and disparaging statements about women. Interestingly, however, only rarely does this behavior end well for the male characters who engage in it. In fact, several episodes in *The Book of Dede Korkut* derive their plot tension and stakes from the problems misogyny causes for both male and female characters and male characters learning not to continue it. This is particularly common as a source of tension between married or engaged characters.¹⁷⁷

1.1.1 Men Learning Not To Hate Women

The episodes in which men learn, over the course of a narrative, that hatred or violence towards women is not a desirable or productive action are limited to *The Book of Dede Korkut*.

They include the very first chapter, Legend I, in which Dirse Khan returns home from Bayindir Khan's camp, insulted for his lack of children, and threatens his unnamed wife. He praises her poetically and expresses his love for her before describing the insult and asking which of them it is who cannot have children. Then he graphically threatens to murder his wife,

¹⁷⁷ Misogyny could cause real problems for men in real life in this period as well, even at the upper echelons of society. Several grand vezirs lost their positions by offending female royal family members with insulting comments about women in general (Peirce, *The Imperial Harem*, 91) or prosecutorial policies which too heavily targeted poor women (201-202).

asking if he should kill her by decapitating her and spilling her blood on the ground, at the same time he addresses her as "child of a khan." His wife is apparently unimpressed, but neither does she react as though this is an appropriate thing to say to her. She explicitly rebukes him for being cruel to her, angry, and speaking harshly to her, before giving him some advice on how to have children: he should arrange a feast and give charity, and then pray to God for children. The narrator explains that he follows her advice and they conceive a son, who, it is further specified, Dirse Khan's wife has raised by a nurse.¹⁷⁸ Later in this story, Dirse Khan's wife will again be forced to intervene in his poor judgment to save their son, but this episode will be discussed in the chapter on family.

The other most prominent example is Legend VI, in which Kan Turali, a young man, seeks a bride who is able to fight like him. He finds one in the form of Seljen Hatun, the daughter of the infidel ruler of Trebizond,¹⁷⁹ but her father regrets giving her up and pursues them with his army. They are separated and Seljen Hatun must ride back and fight off her father's soldiers to rescue him, which she does. Kan Turali then resolves to kill her in case anyone finds out he was rescued by a woman. Seljen Hatun knows his intentions without being told, and like Dirse Khan's wife she attempts to appease him, saying that combat is for girls but bragging is not, and can't make a girl a man. When this does not dissuade Kan Turali, Seljen Hatun rebukes him for falling in love with her and then tiring of her immediately without even consummating it despite her loyalty. The lovers resolve to fight because Kan Turali cannot be dissuaded from murdering his new wife, but he courteously allows her the first shot because she is female. Seljen Hatun is unable to bear the prospect of actually killing her new husband and instead removes the head of her arrow before shooting at him, which terrifies him. He rushes forward, embraces her and tries

¹⁷⁸ *The Book of Dede Korkut*, 11-12.

¹⁷⁹ *The Book of Dede Korkut*, 99-100.

to appease her, lying and saying he was only testing her. He does not fool her, but she admits to the headless shaft after his repentance. After embracing and kissing, they go to his father's house to celebrate the wedding.¹⁸⁰

In both of these stories, a central part of the plot tension derives from men who threaten to harm their wives in gendered contexts - in the first because Dirse Khan's wife has not borne children, in the second because Seljen Hatun embarrassed Kan Turali by saving him as a woman. In both, the male characters are eventually successfully chided. And in both stories the "point of view" changes between male and female characters, so that we follow each character in turn and experience events from their perspective. The men's repentance and troubles are experienced alongside women who have to cope with and resist their violence, and both may function as audience stand ins. Often the active female characters in Turkish epics are explained as a "survival" from presumably more egalitarian pre-Islamic times or a blind consequence of nomadism,¹⁸¹ but the fact that they have to struggle to uphold their positions and activities suggests otherwise.

1.1.2 The Social Origins of Misogyny

The other interesting thing about these two incidents is that both actually provide a "cause" for the violent threats the male characters direct towards their wives, and the cause is the same in both cases. In Legend I, Dirse Khan is humiliated by Bayindir Khan for not having had children, forced to eat the meat of the black sheep in the black tent in public while those who had sons or daughters are served in white or red tents instead. He comes home and tells his wife

¹⁸⁰ *The Book of Dede Korkut*, 109-113.

¹⁸¹ As described by Selim S. Kuru, "Women, Gender and Representations of Sexualities and Gender in Poetry and Prose; Pre-Modern, including Courtly Poetry and Prose: Turkish," in *Encyclopedia of Women & Islamic Cultures*, ed. Suad Joseph & et al. (Leiden & Boston: Brill, 2007), 494.

about the insult immediately before threatening her.¹⁸² The connection between his humiliation and his desire to take vengeance on his wife for her lack of children is clear.

Likewise in Legend VI, Kan Turali's primary motive for threatening violence against Seljen Hatun is explicitly stated: his fear that at home, people will mock him for being saved by a woman, if she should brag about rescuing him.¹⁸³ This event is foreshadowed shortly beforehand, when Kan Turali, accompanied by his companions, fights the series of monstrous beasts Seljen Hatun's suitors must kill before marrying her. His friends in the audience praise him and his courage whenever he falters, encouraging him to rally and kill the monsters instead of being killed. At one point when he seems to be defeated, his friends tell him how Seljen Hatun is watching adoringly and signaling to him to get up and fight. Kan Turali is encouraged by this but rebukes them, saying to change subjects and praise him, in case people tell this story and claim Seljen Hatun's encouragement was what saved him.¹⁸⁴ Kan Turali's initial fear of being humiliated for a woman's assistance is allowed to pass unremarked upon, but it clearly leads him into trouble later.

The Book of Dede Korkut, then, has two stories in which misogyny in a family setting causes danger and plot tension which characters have to solve. Moreover it presents this misogyny as ultimately futile, but caused by men's embarrassment in front of their peers. We could view these events as "didactic" in the way Heath suggests romances may be,¹⁸⁵ but because misogyny and criticism of women were elements of political and religious discourse at the time, advocated by some authorities,¹⁸⁶ I believe we must also view such "messages" as political.

182 *The Book of Dede Korkut*, 9-11.

183 *The Book of Dede Korkut*, 112.

184 *The Book of Dede Korkut*, 104-108.

185 Peter Heath, "Romance as Genre in 'The Thousand and One Nights,'" *Journal of Arabic Literature* 18-19 (1987): 11-15 (Part I), 16-21 (Part II).

186 As discussed by Kuru, "Women, Gender and Representations," 494-495.

Violence against women in a real social context of perceived humiliation is presented as unfair and satirically exaggerated past what audiences could probably view as just, and the audience is encouraged to identify with the women who must avert it. These incidents, transposed into the heroic past, show ancestors struggling with social tensions that were probably common in the present and overcoming them to what the redactor and author(s) must have viewed as a satisfactory conclusion.

1.1.3 Editorial Comments

The prologue of *The Book of Dede Korkut* includes a diatribe on the types of wives, one good and several bad, which has been characterized as dating from a later time from the rest of the stories, understandably as misogynist, and less understandably as promoting the glories of the "housekeeper."¹⁸⁷ The "bad" types of wives are those who waste resources while complaining about the failure of their husbands to provide for them, those who go out all day gossiping while the chores go undone and the livestock run rampant, then come back and blame the neighboring women for not helping her, and finally those who refuse to provide hospitality for guests. The virtuous wife is the one who is generous and hospitable, crucially *even in the absence of her husband*. In other words, she is capable of stepping into her husband's role flexibly and behaving as host and head of the household when he is gone, as many of the women in the stories actually do. (The final "bad" type of wife is in fact criticized for refusing to associate with men).¹⁸⁸ In the view of the narrator, the flexibility and diligence of a woman's work is what makes her a good or

¹⁸⁷ Contra. Kuru, "Women, Gender and Representations," 494.

¹⁸⁸ *The Book of Dede Korkut*, 7-8.

bad wife, making the editorial comments on women perfectly in keeping with the attitude of the stories.¹⁸⁹

Returning now to *Battalname* and more tentatively, there are several incidents where the lack of comment by the narrator is interesting. The first is the episode early on where Zaynab, Battal's cousin and wife, insists on accompanying him to battle and is eventually kidnapped by a Byzantine prisoner as he escapes. Zaynab and Battal argue, first over her desire to come with him, and then when she appears anyway after being forbidden to accompany him. Battal's arguments are rather fleshless in comparison to Zaynab's. He tells her "It would be much better if you stayed at home," in response to her declaration, "I am also coming along, I am helpless without you," and finally asks, "Why did you come?" while Zaynab kisses his hand and retorts, "I cannot live on separation."¹⁹⁰ In contrast to other situations where characters make mistakes - even ones hinging on information they have no way of knowing¹⁹¹ - the narrator is silent on Zaynab's appearance and does not explicitly connect it to risk or catastrophe. (Battal also does not specify what would be "better" about Zaynab remaining at home.) Zaynab's kidnapping allows Battal to acquire Mah-Piruz, the daughter of the Caesar, as a wife, as she has been converted by the Prophet in a dream,¹⁹² and ultimately the episode ends when the three are cornered by the Byzantine army in the course of their escape, and Zaynab and Mah-Piruz arm themselves alongside Battal and fight off the Byzantines with him, joined by Mah-Piruz's half-brother when he converts. The narrator specifies the women's participation in the fighting and in

189 Contra. Lewis in Krstovic, "An Introduction to Kitab-i dedem Qorkut," 108, who like many commentators assumes the evaluation of types of wives is fundamentally mismatched to the world of the narrative.

190 *Battalname* 127-128.

191 Compare to the same episode, *Battalname* 132, where the prisoner Shammas, who later kidnaps Zaynab, escapes and the narrator specifies the guards were not doing their jobs, but rather observing the armies.

192 *Battalname*, 135.

the capture of horses and men, and ultimately a share of the spoils is sent to the caliph.¹⁹³ While no explicit statement is made, the episode's conclusion seems to refute the idea that women should not be on the battlefield.

A later, similar episode in which a woman's errors in judgment lead to disaster without editorial criticism occurs in chapter fifteen. In this episode one of Battal's wives, Fatima, who does not appear by name elsewhere, is seen combing her hair by the traitorous Walid. He falls in love with her at once, and contrives to trick her into riding with him to the edge of the city a few days later by claiming Battal has requested her presence. There he reveals his intentions and threatens to kill her if she does not fulfill his desire. She curses him, pulls away and flees on horseback, although she is killed fleeing by a fall from her horse. The narrative pauses for her funeral before Battal seeks vengeance, chasing after the fleeing Walid.¹⁹⁴ Both of these stories hinge upon both gendered violence - kidnapping and attempted rape - and female characters whose decision to go into male space and interact with men result in their own vulnerability. One story ends well, the other disastrously. But in neither case does the narrator allow condemnation to be directed at the women - at least in the edition of the work that exists now. And in both *Battalname* and *The Book of Dede Korkut*, the narrator may criticize women, evaluate them by their use to men or follow their mistakes, but does not question their essential presence in public or participation in public affairs.

1.2 Male-Female Parallels and Partners

In a number of places in both epics, male and female characters, especially spouses or betrothed couples, are explicitly paralleled in the text, or behave as partners in cooperation.

¹⁹³ *Battalname*, 135-136.

¹⁹⁴ *Battalname* 241-242.

Antrim's article on *1001 Nights* similarly identifies an idealized vision of a parallel sexual relationship between similar partners in manuscripts from the Mamluk period, at about the same time as the Turkish epic manuscripts. Antrim comments that this equal and parallel sexual ideal existed alongside the ideal hierarchical sexual relations that have been the subject of more attention in scholarship.¹⁹⁵

Examining *The Book of Dede Korkut* and *Battalname*, I agree with Antrim's conclusions. In *The Book of Dede Korkut*, daughters and sons are often parallel in theoretical worth: in Legend I, Bayindir Khan honors those men who have sons and daughters while cursing those with neither, and Dirse Khan laments his lack of either a son or a daughter.¹⁹⁶ Likewise in Legend III, when the childless Bay Büre Bey asks all of the Oghuz to accompany him praying for a son, Bay Bichen follows up immediately by asking the Oghuz to next pray for him to have a daughter. The two men agree that if God answers their prayers, they will engage their children.¹⁹⁷ When young men who are about to get married are asked what sort of bride they would like, both examples ask for a girl who is in effect just like them - a girl who can move before them, mount a horse first, and bring the enemy's head back before they can get there. Both are told they are asking for a companion instead of a wife, both agree, and both achieve exactly that.¹⁹⁸ A similar episode occurs in *Battalname*, when Battal resurrects a young couple, an extremely beautiful young man and woman, to demonstrate the power of Islam, before they ask to be returned to their release in death.¹⁹⁹ There are also the ending formulas of each story in *The Book of Dede Korkut*, in which the narrator interposes wishes for the audience's father and

¹⁹⁵ Antrim, "Qamarayn," especially 5-7, 35-36.

¹⁹⁶ *The Book of Dede Korkut*, 9-11.

¹⁹⁷ *The Book of Dede Korkut*, 41.

¹⁹⁸ Bamsi Beyrek and Kan Turali. The latter, as discussed in section 1.1.1-1.1.2, has some trouble adjusting to this as a reality but the story ends with his repentance, not Seljen Hatun's. *The Book of Dede Korkut*, 113-114.

¹⁹⁹ *Battalname* 163.

mother's fortune, swapping the order so that sometimes each comes first, and sometimes elaborating on one parent or the other.²⁰⁰

There are also a number of cases where the plots of *The Book of Dede Korkut* set up a situation where a man and a woman are parallel in devotion and loyalty, whether to each other or a third party, and in attraction. For example, much of Legend III's plot hinges on Bamsi Beyrek and Banu Chickek's parallel desire and loyalty to each other - first their attraction when they unexpectedly meet before marriage,²⁰¹ then their loyalty over the years when Bamsi Beyrek is held captive and Banu Chickek grieves while waiting to hear news of him.²⁰² Kan Turali and Seljen Hatun likewise are instantly and intensely physically attracted to each other.²⁰³ In Legend X, when Eghrek is captured and held prisoner, his brother Seghrek's determination to search for him against their parents' wishes is aided by Eghrek's fiancée, even as she is re-engaged and married to Seghrek.²⁰⁴ Finally and probably most strikingly, in Legend V, Delü Dumrul has fallen afoul of Azrail, but made a bargain that if he can find anyone who will give up their life in his stead he will be allowed to survive. He goes home and asks his parents, one by one, who both refuse him. Delü Dumrul is married, but he does not ask his wife to give up her life. Instead he asks Azrail for a brief respite so that he can say goodbye, and travels home to tell his wife that everything he has is now hers, and she should remarry, love again, and find a man who will be a

200 *The Book of Dede Korkut*, e.g., 22, "May your white-haired mother's and white-bearded father's place be paradise;" 39 the same with the opposite order; 69, "May your mother not be separated from her son and her brothers and sisters, and may she be not alienated from faith in the last days of her life;" 88, mother is not mentioned.

201 *The Book of Dede Korkut*, 45-47.

202 *The Book of Dede Korkut*, 51-56, 65-66. Note that Beyrek agrees to marry the daughter of his captor in exchange for letting him escape.

203 *The Book of Dede Korkut*, 103 in which Kan Turali is publicly stripped to fight and Seljen Hatun's physical attraction is vividly described ("When she saw him, she almost fainted and began to tremble in excitement. Her cat miaoued, and she began to salivate like a sick calf. She addressed her girl companions, saying: 'I wish that Almighty Allah would fill my father's heart with mercy and that he would give me to that young man. It will be a great pity if a young man like this is killed in the clutches of the monsters.'"); through 108 Kan Turali for her, and Seljen Hatun's beauty is described as she watches.

204 *The Book of Dede Korkut*, 148-150.

father to his sons. His wife tells him that she would rather die than outlive him, and offers to die in his place, but Delü Dumrul also cannot bear the idea of being the survivor. He pleads with God to either kill them or spare them together so that neither will be alone. God is so pleased by this that he grants the couple a miraculously long life and tells Azrail to go and kill Delü Dumrul's parents instead.²⁰⁵

In *Battalname*, of course, Battal has a very large number of relationships with different women. Nevertheless individual stories attempt to portray him and his female partner of the moment as parallel and similar. His first wife is his cousin, and when first they see each other they fall in mutual love immediately. (The narrator makes a point of telling us that a couple like Yusuf and Zulaykha would - both - have fallen in love with Zaynab's beauty.)²⁰⁶ Later in the same story, Mah-Piruz's sexual attraction to Battal is also emphasized.²⁰⁷ Both epics imagine that sexual desire is normally mutual. In general, *Battalname* takes pains to arrange for women to convert to Islam before marrying Muslim men even when this sequence of events is incredibly implausible (e.g., Nowruz Banu's post-abduction conversion).²⁰⁸ The only case when Battal has sex with a concubine as opposed to a wife is the episode of Bayda mentioned above, in which the girl is not "really" a slave but willingly disguised herself as one, and where she proceeds to try to murder him.²⁰⁹ In various cases the narrator is careful to establish that a previous wife has coincidentally died before a new romance occurs, suggesting a certain discomfort with

205 *The Book of Dede Korkut*, 93-97.

206 *Battalname*, 127

207 *Battalname* 135, "Mah-Piruz feasted her eyes on Sayyid's perfect beauty and handsome stature, and her infatuation became even stronger."

208 *Battalname*, 136-142.

209 *Battalname*, 149.

polygamy.²¹⁰ There are also the deaths of Adan-Banu and her husband Bidrun, warrior companions who are martyred in the same battle, one after the other.²¹¹

The complicated romance/abduction of Katayun, another Byzantine princess, is also interesting. Katayun is abducted by Battal but escapes and helps her brother the Caesar take him prisoner. Katayun was attracted to Battal when she did not know his identity. After she escapes, she is given cause to regret her refusal, when her brother considers engaging her to an old man whom she is disgusted by in order to obtain the man's political loyalty. Her brother suggests they will only pretend to the engagement but Katayun does not trust him, and the incident makes her cry, regretting that she has, she believes, caused Battal to die. There is no question that Battal is a preferable husband to Katayun and, presumably, to the audience in part because he is close to age to Katayun, in addition to his status as a Muslim and the protagonist.²¹²

1.2.1 Women as Advisors, Trusted Subordinates and Protectors

In other cases women function as subordinate partners, in the service of men as advisors, subordinates who carry out men's plans, or protectors. Throughout both epics, men are depicted as soliciting, listening to and following their women's advice. Sometimes, when male characters fail to follow their wives' advice, their wives act on their own and assume the role of protagonist of the next section of the story. The example of Dirse Khan's wife explaining to him how to

210 *Battalname*, 185, where Zaynab dies on the spot on hearing false news of Battal's death, shortly after Gul-Andam converts to Islam and before she and Battal become involved. A second example is Mihriyayil's daughter, who marries Muhammad b. Fallah in chapter five (142-145) and who we are told has died in the same breath as Muhammad b. Fallah announces he has fallen in love with another woman and needs Battal's help asking for her, presumably because a second romance would not be sympathetic if he had a living wife,¹⁵². The main counter-example, where simultaneous polygamy is explicit on the page and not simply implied by the acquisition of multiple women across different stories, is Zaynab and Mah-Piruz, who become friends on the page before Battal marries the latter, 134-135.

211 *Battalname*, 254-255.

212 *Battalname*, 246-263. Interestingly, much earlier in the epic, Battal also overhears Katayun praising him even as his enemy, 134.

obtain a child from God was already mentioned above. She later acts again to protect her son from the plotting of her husband's treacherous soldiers.²¹³ In Legend IV, Burla Hatun correctly determines that their son did not really desert the battlefield but was captured. She sends her husband to search for him, and when her husband is unsuccessful, searches herself, rescuing both husband and son.²¹⁴ In Legend IX, Begil's wife persuades him not to revolt and apostasize after he is insulted by the other Oghuz beys, suggesting he go and hunt to calm down instead.²¹⁵

In *Battalname*, Battal is first advised by his mother about the politics of Malatya when seeking his father's position (although he is successful in disregarding her advice, given that she tells him the same thing his male tutor does, this does not appear to be a comment on her gender), and reassured by her when he is upset by the commotion caused.²¹⁶ Mah-Piruz, the Byzantine princess, converts her brother Ramin by telling him about her dream of Muhammad.²¹⁷ In other cases converted women provide advice and information to Battal for military purposes, usually unprompted.²¹⁸ In several cases an old woman, who is named Rabia in one episode and later acknowledges she is the same recurring character, appears and gives Battal and his comrades miraculous help.²¹⁹ In a less positive example, Amir Umar's wife gives him advice on how to prevent Battal's proposal to their daughter from succeeding.²²⁰

213 *The Book of Dede Korkut*, 15-20.

214 *The Book of Dede Korkut*, 77-88.

215 *The Book of Dede Korkut*, 136-137. This leads him to break his leg and provides a chance for his son to save the camp, but it is difficult to believe his wife persuading him not to go join the infidels is supposed to be bad advice. Granted, women's speech cuts both ways in this story, in which the enemies find out about Begil's broken leg as soon as he finally caves and tells one person - his wife, 138.

216 *Battalname*, 105-106.

217 *Battalname*, 135.

218 *Battalname* 143; 184-185 where Gul-Andam rescues him from prison; 246.

219 *Battalname* 170, 213-214, 267. Possibly a reference to the famous Sufi Rābi' al-Adawiyya al-Qaysiyya (d. 801)?

220 *Battalname*, 228-229.

On the one hand, this role as advice-giver was also a social reality in Anatolia from the Mongol to Ottoman periods.²²¹ On the other hand, advice literature and other elite men often advised specifically against taking women's advice.²²² The epics' portrayal of women's advice as a routine fact of life in the history of the community, ending both well and badly, among protagonists and antagonists, is interesting as a comparison to this literature. It suggests, perhaps unsurprisingly, that this role of elite women reflected the organization of decision making in the lower classes, which have left fewer documentary records on the subject.

Women also appear as the subordinates of men, carrying out tasks delegated to them - sometimes military tasks. In *Battalname*, Bayda the "Witch" proposes and attempts to carry out an assassination mission for the Caesar (and is promised his son to marry if she succeeds, in a parallel to a reward often promised male characters).²²³ Adan-Banu the warrior fights for Battal on her father's behalf and helps him abduct Katayun, finally appearing as the champion of the Muslim army to kill an unbeatable Byzantine warrior.²²⁴ Finally there is the last story, the death of Battal, in which yet another converted Byzantine princess sneaks out to him by telling her father she is going to behead Battal on his behalf.²²⁵ In *The Book of Dede Korkut* women more often act without needing authorization of men, although the rescue of male relatives by Burla Hatun, Seljen Hatun or Dirse Khan's wife are clearly in their service (and Seljen Hatun informs Kan Turali's parents she is going to rescue him before she does so).²²⁶

221 Anne Broadbridge, *Women and the Making of the Mongol Empire* (Amherst: Cambridge University Press, 2018), especially 31-37; Peirce, *The Imperial Harem*, 229-236 on the Ottoman Empire.

222 Kuru, "Women, Gender and Representations," 494-495. Also discussed by Peirce, *The Imperial Harem*, 268-270, and the existence of an alternate discourse which confirms women's authority, 273-274.

223 *Battalname*, 149

224 *Battalname*, 244-255.

225 *Battalname*, 333.

226 *The Book of Dede Korkut*, 110.

I will further address the issue of women as combatants in epics in section 2, but here I would like to say a word about their subordinate status. We may see women as military agents and women subordinated to male actors as in tension with each other,²²⁷ but we should keep in mind that the vast majority of military and political actors in history *and* in the epic version of reality were subordinates to someone, rather than wholly independent. When women are portrayed as trusted, capable subordinates, especially in a military context, they are probably being depicted in a masculine or de-gendered role. At the same time, there is another grain of truth here, in that women might fulfill real roles as subordinates of men in the context of dynastic politics or Sufi organizations.²²⁸ Not all of these roles were gender-specific. Many of them could be filled by men or women, and even when, for example, we consider the gender-specific roles of royal women in protecting their sons, the specific functions they served as their sons' protectors were typically not gender-specific. If we see fictional women as de-gendered or as filling "typically" but not necessarily male roles when they act as capable subordinates, this might also be true of real women.

Finally, when thinking about combatants in general, we should remember that the actual status implications of involvement in combat could vary. Some positions were desirable but some were not. High status people's involvement in combat might be limited to command or symbolic actions in some situations. Reward or social acknowledgement after combat might vary depending on status even when actions were similar. Scholarship on women and combat has often conflated status, power and direct combat, but they are not necessarily synonymous, and we should not automatically assume that if women fought, they would automatically be accorded the usual social recognition and high status for it (or that if they didn't receive those things, they

227 E.g., Anetshofer, "How Equal Are Female Converts?" 1-2, 7-9.

228 De Nicola, "The Ladies of Rum," 137-145 and 152-155, Peirce, *The Imperial Harem*, throughout.

must never have fought).²²⁹ Probably the least disputed example of women routinely engaged in combat in this period is Mongol society, and among Mongols women generally stopped fighting at the same stage of life when they gained access to property and some ability to make decisions in general - after childbirth.²³⁰

1.3 Authority and Sexual Relationships: Arranged Marriage, Runaways and Abduction

So far I have emphasized ways in which epic literature treats female characters as partners of male characters, with relative autonomy and similar virtues and strengths, while handling gendered violence inflicted by men on women as a problem. However, the social setting in which epic literature was transmitted and heard was not egalitarian. At least in theory, male authority was supposed to govern relationships between men and women. Another element that has been heavily emphasized in literature is female vulnerability to sexual violence, which I will address again in section 3 of this chapter. I will briefly note that, as Redford suggests in his article "The rape of Anatolia,"²³¹ the emphasis on this point has as much to do with modern politics as the historical period in question.

In *Battalname* and *The Book of Dede Korkut*, questions of authority, power and permission are involved in nearly all sexual relationships, but the epics have very different attitudes to these questions. Abductions occur in both epics, but in *The Book of Dede Korkut* they inevitably are conducted by the enemies of the Oghuz, usually involve men as victims, and the Oghuz protagonists have to rescue them. In only one case is a woman abducted, Burla Hatun in

229 To quote *The Book of Dede Korkut*, 112, people might have believed that "A girl cannot become a man through boasts," even if she could fight like one, as Seljen Hatun does in this story before saying so.

230 Bruno de Nicola, *Women in Mongol Iran: The Khatuns, 1206-1335* (Edinburgh: Edinburgh University Press, 2017), 133 and Broadbridge, *Women and the Making of the Mongol Empire*, 137.

231 Redford, "The rape of Anatolia," 107-112.

Legend II, although unlike the others she is clearly threatened with sexual violence.²³² Slave girls are present on occasion, but they are a background detail the narrator perhaps does not want to get into.²³³

There are two stories which look a bit like the "willing abductions" of *Battalname* and Ottoman historiography,²³⁴ in which Oghuz men marry "infidel" women after fighting their families, but in both cases the narrator goes to extensive length to avoid the implication of force. In Legend VI, Seljen Hatun, the infidel bride, is offered as a prize by her father, likes Kan Turali immediately and goes with him willingly after the marriage. The couple is only pursued when her father changes his mind after they leave.²³⁵ In Legend III, Bamsi Beyrek is assisted in his escape by the daughter of his captors, and at the end of the story he returns with the other Oghuz to capture the castle and marry her. This is not presented as his decision at all: instead, the daughter proposes that if she facilitates his escape he will return to marry her later, and extracts an oath from him to ensure it.²³⁶ On the other hand, when relatives arrange a marriage, the narrator separately introduces the couple and persuades us of their love,²³⁷ or else the

232 *The Book of Dede Korkut*, Dirse Khan is abducted by his rebellious men, 19; Burla Hatun, Uruz and the rest of Salur Kazan's camp are abducted by infidels, 23-39; Bamsi Beyrek is abducted by the infidels of Bayburt Castle, 51; Uruz is abducted again by different infidels, 75; Kazilik Koja is captured while raiding, 116; Eghrek is captured with his companions while raiding, 146; Khan Kazan is abducted while sleeping, 157; Beyrek is abducted by the Oghuz rebels by a trick, 170.

233 E.g., *The Book of Dede Korkut* 23, "Nine beautiful infidel girls with black eyes, lovely faces, and braided hair, their hands hennaed up to their wrists, their nails all painted, all wearing dresses with red buttons on the breast, were offering drinks to the strong Oghuz beys."

234 Flemming, "Aşıkpaşazâde's View of Women," 366-367.

235 *The Book of Dede Korkut*, 103, 108-109.

236 *The Book of Dede Korkut*, 55-56. She also decides to help him without being asked. We are informed that she has made a habit of visiting him every day, that she asks after his sadness in a particular day and finds out he has discovered his fiancée is going to marry someone else, and that she makes her offer because she is in love with him.

237 *The Book of Dede Korkut*, 41, the engagement and 45-47 for Bamsi Beyrek and Banu Chichek's meeting; her brother's vicious refusal to agree to her marrying anyone is presented negatively, as a problem to be solved by all the Oghuz by delegation to Dede Korkut, 47-49. Kan Turali's father also consults him about his marriage, 99. Another possible example is Seghrek's marriage to his abducted brother's fiancée; his parents are trying to prevent him from going after his brother by means the marriage. He and his wife come to agreement about this matter without consummating the marriage until Seghrek completes Eghrek's rescue, 149-150, 155.

arrangement is made by trickery and averted.²³⁸ In short, *The Book of Dede Korkut* presents a world where authority has a role in sexual relationships, but without defending this role. The agreement of a couple's relatives is either a plot device or an obstacle, but neither necessary for a good marriage, nor sufficient.

In *Battalname*, on the other hand, there is one ultimate authority on relationships endorsed by the narrative, Battal himself. In a number of cases, Battal is captured or attacks an infidel ruler, usually a Christian, to discover that some female relative has been converted in a dream and is waiting to be rescued by him, sometimes having been promised to Battal or his warriors in the aforementioned dream.²³⁹ Battal also abducts women who are not initially willing, who the narrative often assures us later become so.²⁴⁰ He is able to distribute women, free or captives, as when he defeats the warrior woman Adan-Banu and commands her to marry not himself, but the man who is in love with her whose challenge she previously defeated.²⁴¹ At times Battal's moral authority is shown to be superior to those whose legal rights would theoretically be greater, causing conflict in the narrative. For example, Amir Umar and his wife wish to refuse their daughter in marriage to Battal, but their daughter prefers him. They suspect she will not obey a refusal, and Battal would be offended, so they are resigned to trying to discourage Battal with an impossible dowry. They are punished for this arrogance: while Battal travels to lay claim to the requested white elephant, the city of Malatya is sacked without his

238 *The Book of Dede Korkut*, for Yaltajak's betrothal to Banu Chickek via tricking her brother, the misery at the wedding and Banu Chickek's delight when Bamsi Beyrek reappears, 53-66.

239 *Battalname* 135, Mah-Piruz; Mihriyayil's daughter, 143-144, who is married to Muhammad b. Fallah; an interesting example is Gul-Andam, who falls in love with Battal in prison and attempts to convert him to Christianity, but is shown a vision and converts herself, 183-185. They marry after she convinces her father, still unaware of her conversion, that he must give her up to Battal 215; etc.

240 *Battalname* 140-142, Nowruz Banu, who we are informed "becomes Muslim;" Sunbat's daughter who Battal marries to Husayn b. Ali, 146; Firdaws's daughter is promised and then married to a Jewish merchant who asks for Battal's help in getting her in return for his conversion. She is given to him after her father is killed, 156 and 164; and of course the last example is Katayun, 246-263.

241 *Battalname* 244-246, where Battal ultimately orders Adan-Banu's father to give her to Bidrun once Adan-Banu's cooperation is secured.

protection, and on his return Amir Umar is humiliated and apologetic.²⁴² Even when parents and women are cooperative, Battal is often involved as a facilitator.²⁴³

Some of these women are clearly captives. In other cases their status is more ambiguous, and they might equally be considered runaways or simply disobedient (such as Adan-Banu who will not marry, or Amir Umar's daughter who wants to marry despite her parents' objections). But the most important factor is Battal's authority, which legitimizes any sexual relationship. In short, *Battalname* and *The Book of Dede Korkut* are reacting to and fictionalizing the same, or at least very similar, social conditions when it comes to the role of authority and violence in legitimate sexual relationships. But the perspective of each work has a distinct moral logic. The same was probably true of individual people at the time.

2. Women Warriors and Women in Warfare

As I have commented, the number of women involved actively in warfare in epic literature has attracted relatively frequent commentary, precisely because it is unexpected. Existing treatments of these characters tend to assume they can be "translated" into the desire they really symbolize (e.g., a male fantasy of access to Byzantine women,²⁴⁴ or a male fantasy of something like equality)²⁴⁵ or to dismiss them as uninteresting noise, either because they are not really gender nonconforming *enough*²⁴⁶ or because they are assumed to reflect a past, pre-Islamic and presumably therefore uncontroversially equal heroic age.²⁴⁷

²⁴² *Battalname* 227-229 and 239.

²⁴³ E.g., *Battalname* 152, where Battal helps Muhammad b. Fallah ask for Yuhanna's daughter.

²⁴⁴ Kafadar, *Between Two Worlds*, 67-70.

²⁴⁵ Kruk, *Warrior Women*

²⁴⁶ Anetshofer, "How Equal Are Female Converts?" especially 1-2.

²⁴⁷ Various, but a repeating element in the essays reprinted in Krstovic, "An Introduction to Kitab-i dedem" and, e.g., Kuru, "Women, Gender and Representations," 494 sees them as complex and somewhat misogynistic but still survival narratives.

I will take a slightly different approach. I have argued previously that the epics are fiction, and certainly will not suggest that female warriors represent specific historic figures. However, rather than assuming female warriors represent an unreal sexual fantasy, I believe they tell us something about how people at the time viewed gender. I also believe it is possible that they reflect a social reality, albeit loosely, just as Muslim-Byzantine conflict or political institutions are loosely reflected. I will discuss examples in the epics first, before reviewing first literature on women in combat and then speculating about the role of women in war in both reality and fiction in the fifteenth and sixteenth century.

However, I am aware the assertion that medieval Muslim women were actually involved in combat will be extremely distracting to some readers. Before I depart back into epic territory, I note that the participation of real women in combat in the Mongol armies into the Islamic period in Iran is accepted among Mongol specialists,²⁴⁸ and at this time Anatolia had fairly recently been under Mongol rule. This is not as exceptional a claim as it may seem.

2.1 Women Warriors in the Epics

In *The Book of Dede Korkut*, of course, there are Burla Hatun and Seljen Hatun, who are depicted fighting to rescue male relatives.²⁴⁹ Banu Chichek is described as a capable warrior and engages in shooting and wrestling contests with Bamsi Beyrek when they meet.²⁵⁰ I would also add Dirse Khan's wife, who as it turns out does not have to fight, but rides out in search of her son to rescue him²⁵¹ similarly to Burla Khatun and is fortunate to find him abandoned to die instead of captured. This allows the additional observation that both Burla Hatun and Dirse

248 Broadbridge, *Women and the Making of the Mongol Empire*, 137.

249 *The Book of Dede Korkut*, 79-88; "Tall Burla Hatun struck the enemy with her sword, hurling many to the earth." 110-112 for Seljen Hatun.

250 *The Book of Dede Korkut*, 45-46.

251 *The Book of Dede Korkut*, 16-19.

Khan's wife are attended by forty women who ride out with them,²⁵² paralleling the forty men who serve prominent male protagonists (and perhaps Adan-Banu's Amazons).²⁵³

These women are not aggressive warriors, but then, as discussed earlier, only two male characters are, and both are depicted as behaving foolishly. It also is not the case that Burla Hatun or Seljen Hatun fights only because either has no choice. Burla Hatun rallies the Oghuz warriors and fights alongside them, while Seljen Hatun reaches Kan Turali's parents before realizing he is missing, and tells them to wait while she rescues him. Both women had an opportunity to get help and leave the field of combat. Another woman who does not feature heavily but apparently carries a weapon and is ready to fight is Seghrek's unnamed wife, who declares that if Seghrek should vanish on his rescue mission, she will wait at the crossroads, reward anyone who brings her good news, and behead anyone who brings her news of his death.²⁵⁴ In general, the women in *The Book of Dede Korkut* act independently on the basis of their own judgment, if on behalf of their families.

In *Battalname*, of course, Battal is the most important authority, and fighting women, just like other fighting men, mostly accompany him (unless they are enemies). Zaynab and Mah-Piruz fight alongside Battal in their escape.²⁵⁵ Adan-Banu is occupied fighting her suitors and training with her Amazon women when they meet, but marries one of Battal's men and then fights alongside Battal's forces until her death in single combat with a Byzantine champion.²⁵⁶ Bayda may not go into combat as a warrior, but undertakes an assassination mission and tries to kill Battal with a knife.²⁵⁷ Several more women don't have the opportunity to fight in the text, but

²⁵² *The Book of Dede Korkut* 16-17, 85.

²⁵³ *Battalname*, 244-245.

²⁵⁴ *The Book of Dede Korkut*, 149-150.

²⁵⁵ *Battalname*, 135-136.

²⁵⁶ *Battalname*, 244-255.

²⁵⁷ *Battalname*, 149.

are depicted as habitually armed and, in my opinion, are strongly implied to be capable of it: Yuhanna's daughter, who marries Muhammad b. Fallah, is first taken by him for one of a group of mounted men,²⁵⁸ Katayun carries a sword and at one point draws it to try to kill Battal in a rage,²⁵⁹ and the unnamed Byzantine princess in the final chapter also carries a sword and makes a casual offer to leave the fortress walls to kill the sleeping Battal for her father. (When she finds him dead even after her dream conversion, she kills herself by falling on it).²⁶⁰ Again, it is clear that these are not women who fight as a last resort. All of them have male allies readily available, and in many cases they simply volunteer for tasks and are entrusted to carry them out.

What is particularly striking to me about these examples is the routine way they are described. In both epics only one of the women is depicted as supernaturally exceptional, Adan-Banu, who is introduced carrying a lion like a cat.²⁶¹ But this makes her depiction similar to male characters who assume the role of champion of their armies.²⁶² There is no need to explain how the women acquired their abilities to fight, to justify their permission or presence, or even to establish firmly that these are women who carry swords, lances and bows around before they are called upon to use them. Both epics seem to assume all noble women go around armed. Only in *The Book of Dede Korkut* is there some consciousness that these warriors belong to a category of exceptional women, where Kan Turali and Bamsi Beyrek describe the brides they want. Bamsi Beyrek's father immediately knows who he is talking about, while Kan Turali's father has to

²⁵⁸ *Battalname*, 152.

²⁵⁹ *Battalname* 252. Battal is tied up at the time. The narrator informs us that God intercedes, and as a result Katayun's blow only severs his bonds.

²⁶⁰ *Battalname* 333.

²⁶¹ *Battalname*, 244-245.

²⁶² E.g., Anqas, who Adan-Banu kills as champion, can split a shield in two with a casual blow, *Battalname* 254-255; and of course Battal himself.

search outside Oghuz lands before finding Seljen Hatun.²⁶³ But their superlative courage and strength in battle may not be unlike their exceptional beauty in the context of bridal quests - a real trait of some women made extreme for the sake of the story.

2.2 Women Warriors in Literature

I am not aware of any publications which specifically handle the issue of women in combat in medieval Anatolia in detail, but there is at least one article discussing female warriors in early Islam, "Fighting for the Faith? Notes on Women and War in Early Islam," by Mikati. As second article on medieval Europe, "The Woman Warrior: Gender, Warfare and Society in Medieval Europe," by McLaughlin may also be useful.²⁶⁴

Mikati discusses the evidence of women in the early Islamic community in combat, reaching the conclusion that women's presence for domestic labor while traveling to battle and for medical aid and water-bringing on the battlefield, traditional in Arabia and transitioning into actual army service during the Islamic conquests, allowed them to spontaneously join combat. She relates this to the kinship bonds that held the early Islamic military together. Professionalization, therefore, gradually (and non-ideologically) removed women from battle in Mikati's view, although among certain groups like the Kharijites they maintained combat importance for much longer. Mikati notes that accounts of women fighting do not make arguments justifying this, apparently meaning that there was no need to do so. Mikati also argues

263 *The Book of Dede Korkut* 47, Beyrek: "Father, get me a girl who can move before I can, who can mount my black stallion before I can, and who can bring me my enemy's head before I reach him. This is the kind of girl I want." 98-99, "...but can you find a girl who would be my match? Father, I want a girl who must get up before I do. She must be able to mount her horse before I mount my black stallion. She must be able to reach the bloody land of the infidels before I do, and she must bring me an enemy head," which in Kan Turali's case elicits the reply "Son, you do not want a girl. You want a brave warrior, so that you can eat and drink and have a good time at her expense." (Kan Turali agrees.)

264 Megan McLaughlin, "The Woman Warrior: Gender, Warfare and Society in Medieval Europe," *Women's Studies* 17 (1990): 193-209.

against the idea that women's role on the battlefield had to do with access to public space, the view of Leila Ahmed, and raises the point that the reason we are aware of these women is that their descendants preserved their stories, and sometimes embellished them.²⁶⁵

Writing about medieval Europe, McLaughlin came to similar conclusions about the central Middle Ages, connecting women's participation in warfare to the "domestic" or private nature of warfare between kin groups, and noting that professionalization came with greater prescriptive judgment in references and fewer actual examples later in the fourteenth and fifteenth centuries.²⁶⁶ She also points out that the ability of women to organize military defense in times of crisis implies "military preparedness" by at least some women in general.²⁶⁷ McLaughlin sees medieval female warriors as having more connection to the values and ideology of gender, but related to basically the same factors as Mikati.

As far as I know, these arguments, attributing women's occasional role in combat to a kin-based system of warfare where combat might be considered an aspect of "private," family life, or to women's access to public space in general, are the main theories. Both, in my opinion, have merit, but particularly when positioned as alternatives they are not adequate. Reference to the Mongol example, involving a professionalized army structured to remove kinship ties alongside the kin-based ruling class, routine women's command over the organization of military camps, and women's full participation in selection of rulers as members of the nobility, should demonstrate that far from being in opposition, acceptance of women's access to public life and political participation, the integration of women's domestic roles with military service, and

²⁶⁵ Mikati, "Fighting For the Faith?" 202-213.

²⁶⁶ McLaughlin, "The Woman Warrior," 199-205.

²⁶⁷ McLaughlin, "The Women Warrior," 197.

women's appearances in combat roles are probably entwined.²⁶⁸ The practical opportunities and ideological choices cannot be separated. The blind, family-based military model also fails to account for many cases where kin-based armies do not accommodate female combatants, or where armies that cannot honestly be described in this way do.²⁶⁹

2.3 The Meaning of Women Warriors in Epics

I would like to reiterate that I do not mean that the specific women in the epics are real. However, there *do* exist numerous yet scattered references to women coordinating defenses, in command of fortresses or military forces, rallying military support for themselves or their relatives, or as at least temporarily successful rulers of small, military-based states in the Middle East, from the Seljuk and Mongol periods through at least the early Ottomans.²⁷⁰ No one would

268 Broadbridge, *Women and the Making of the Mongol Empire*, and de Nicola, *Women in Mongol Iran*, provide slightly different explanations of this system with different timescales, but agree on the major elements. Neither devotes any particular attention to explaining women in combat.

269 McLaughlin, "The Woman Warrior," 197-198, mentions chronicle and archaeological evidence for female Vikings as part of her argument. Vikings were organized somewhat differently from feudal armies. More recently, but perhaps not as recently as expected, there is also interesting evidence of Tatar women serving in mid-nineteenth century armies under Russian rule, Agata Nalborczyk, "Muslim Women in Poland and Lithuania: Tatar Tradition, Religious Practice, *hijab* and Marriage," in *Gender and Religion in Central and Eastern Europe*, ed. Adamiak et al. (Poznań: Adam Mickiewicz University, 2009), 58-59. The source treats this as an ethnic trait of the Tatar people and does not interrogate when it began or under what circumstances. I would like to note that the documentary evidence cited is from about when we would expect any documentary evidence of individual soldiers' names, so it is not easy to guess whether this is a break with the past or not. There are also, of course, numerous modern armies which recruit female soldiers.

270 This is not the place for a complete survey, but some examples include Peirce, *The Imperial Harem*, 34 on ibn Battuta encountering a wife of Orhan in a deserted post-conquest Iznik commanding soldiers in 1331; Rashid al-Din's praise of Mongol women for going into battle under the Ilkhanate, 274; the capture of royal women during battles that did not necessarily take place in cities where they would have been resident, e.g., the Safavid Taçlu Khatun at Chaldiran in 1514. According to Europeans, the capture of Bayezid's Serbian wife Maria by Timur in 1402, may be another example depending on whether we take the European sources' word for it; it is not clear to me that Europeans in this period would be more likely to assume women would be present at battles, pp. 37-38; a 14th century Anatolian reference to women binding the wounds of veterans in combat, Kafadar, "Women in Seljuk and Ottoman Society," 196; Colin Imber, *The Ottoman Empire: 1300-1481* (Istanbul: Isis Press, 1990), Bayezid's sister as the widow of the Karaman ruler surrendering to her brother for Konya, 40. De Nicola, *Women in Mongol Iran* discusses a number of female Turkish rulers in the section "Women's Rule in the Ilkhanid Provinces," 104-116, including, e.g., Terken Qutlugh Khatun who ruled for twenty-six years in Kerman and went to lengths to establish her formal authority over the military, 105-106. Various other sources suggest participation in activities like horseback riding and hunting which would have given many women the skills and means, e.g., horseback riding, de Nicola, "The Ladies of Rum," 146.

seriously question whether a man in any of these positions was in a military role, and these are one kind of reference McLaughlin's study in Europe charted. We should take them seriously, especially when they accompany rule by or contact with a state in which women routinely fought, popular literature in which women routinely fight, and in many cases, a relative scarcity of contemporaneous historiographical and chronicle material which would provide more detailed descriptions. I do not claim that this was a *typical* role for aristocratic women, only that it existed at least for a time.

Returning to the issue of epic literature, the question remains how the popular audience of epics would have responded to these portrayals and their possible reflection of social reality. Awareness of women with authority and active public roles in the past would probably frame women's authority as more legitimate in the present. Military women in the epics may have represented a fulfillment of fantasy for women as well as men, not necessarily of military service, but of public participation, heroics and acclaim,²⁷¹ and encouraged them to identify with the past so portrayed and the community it represented. Identifying with a fictional character or historical persona does not mean wanting to share their life path. It does imply that the audience could imagine women as successful warriors and considered them interesting and sympathetic protagonists, perhaps because they were aware of real examples. Making this connection allows us to consider how the population in general living under the command of, for example, Shajarr al-Durr (d. 1257) or during Terken Qutlugh Khatun's (d. 1282/3) twenty-six year reign,²⁷² or perhaps later women with visible political careers of varying kinds,²⁷³ might have thought about

271 Also martyrdom: the death of warrior women has been interpreted as an indictment (Anetshofer, "How Equal Were Female Converts?" 8-9) but many male characters in epics are also martyred, and the popularity of hagiographies also suggests a certain interest in reading about the emotional, tragic deaths of heroic characters on the part of the population.

272 De Nicola, *Women in Mongol Iran*, 105.

273 Peirce, *The Imperial Harem*, charts a great deal of public reaction to this phenomena over the course of the book.

these individuals or the idea of women in command in general, including but not limited to the opinions of the court. It also sheds a different light on what popular fantasies warrior women might represent if we consider them, not as exotic, semi-human and therefore unthreatening figures, but as fictional representatives of a class of women who actually existed and inspired moral debate.

Peirce, in *The Imperial Harem*, concludes that public opinion checked how far the royal family could subordinate members other than the sultan - and that the public defended the authority and status of royal women as well as princes.²⁷⁴ If so, epic literature might be another expression of these views and a means of gauging the population's sympathy to them. A memory of independent, active elite women could provide a defense of their activities in the present, or an argument that they *should* be active when they were prevented from doing so. Or it could simply demonstrate that many people considered women's activity and autonomy normal, because it made sense to them based on their own lives, and therefore that this view came into play when royal family politics became an issue in current events.

3. Conclusion: Where is Gender Located?

Men and women have remarkably indistinguishable physical bodies in both epics. They are easily mistaken for each other, as when Muhammad b. Fallah mistakes Yuhanna's daughter for a man when they meet.²⁷⁵ Their beauty is described in similar terms and metaphors and paralleled to each other.²⁷⁶ Their capabilities are similar: both men and women are warriors

²⁷⁴ Peirce, *The Imperial Harem*, 277-278.

²⁷⁵ *Battalname*, 152.

²⁷⁶ E.g., *Battalname* 107 - Battal is described: "face resembling a full moon," "eyelashes covered his cheeks," "small round mouth," "teeth like pearls," all of which makes Mihriyayil's brother Shamasp "lose his mind." 109 - Battal is again compared to the moon, asleep on Mihriyayil's throne. The same phrase is used on p. 123, where instead Battal sees a young woman "as beautiful as the full moon" on a throne spying on Ahmar Turran, and in

fighting with the bow, lance and sword, both men and women ride horseback over long distances, both men and women wrestle.²⁷⁷ Bamsi Beyrek's captor's daughter lowers him over the castle walls with a rope.²⁷⁸ Even when women are vulnerable it is not because of physical weakness. For example, when Battal's wife Fatima dies in a botched abduction attempt, she is fully able to physically pull herself from her captor, mount, and ride off. The redactor arranges her tragic death and Battal's vengeance by having her fall from her horse as it jumps over a gully mid-flight.²⁷⁹

Their clothing is also similar when described, as is evidently the case with Yuhanna's daughter, and other women who are noted to put on armor like men.²⁸⁰ Moreover many of the male protagonists are described as wearing veils. *The Book of Dede Korkut* mentions four Oghuz men who wear veils and are evidently famous for doing so, including both Bamsi Beyrek and Kan Turali,²⁸¹ and Battal, too, wears a veil.²⁸² It does not appear to be a religious symbol, as it is when it appears in *Battalname* as part of the caliph's garments,²⁸³ or as with the forty veiled dervishes Battal meets.²⁸⁴ Of course, there are some examples in Islamic history of men going

numerous further examples. *The Book of Dede Korkut*, 154, where Eghrek and Seghrek meet again and Seghrek, asleep is "as handsome as the fourteenth day of the moon;" the translators comment on the feminine nature of this metaphor in modern Turkish. Dirse Khan's wife is described, 10-11: tall like a cypress tree, long black hair to her feet, bow-like brows, a small mouth, red cheeks. Both men and women are often described as black/brown/dark-eyed; "dark-eyed sweetheart" 56 (of Banu Chickek); "Your slit black eyes... let them open," of Bugach Khan (17), etc.

277 See section 2.1. In addition to the female warriors, Battal's escapes tend to involve rescued or abducted women riding alongside him at an urgent pace, e.g., *Battalname* 221.

278 *The Book of Dede Korkut*, 56.

279 *Battalname* 241.

280 *Battalname* 152, 135.

281 *The Book of Dede Korkut* 45, where Banu Chickek recognizes Beyrek because he is veiled, and 103, where the narrator tells us four young men among the Oghuz wear veils: Kan Turali, Kara Chögür, his son, Kirk Kinuk, and Beyrek, before Kan Turali removes his veil.

282 *Battalname*, 122, "...when he drew near he pulled the veil from his face and Ahmar saw that it was only a boy," and as an adult, 158, 207.

283 *Battalname* 203.

284 *Battalname* 240.

veiled. In early Islam, veiling was not exclusively female,²⁸⁵ although these references are far removed from the period of the Turkish epics and appear to be a practice used on certain occasions, whereas in *The Book of Dede Korkut* veiling is a habitual attribute of certain identifiable men, and this seems to be what is envisioned for Battal, too. It clearly is *not* an ethnic practice as with, say, the Almoravids. It may relate to the male protagonists' great beauty, but if so this connection is not explicit.

So men and women are not always quickly distinguishable on sight even within the world of the epics, and seem to be broadly physically similar. Women's vulnerabilities, so frequently the subject of the scholarly literature,²⁸⁶ are not unique: men are frequently abducted,²⁸⁷ and may even be vulnerable to marriage to women of their captors' family, although this is presented as seduction instead of outright rape.²⁸⁸ In fact, the first character in *Battalname* who faces sexual assault is Battal, who infiltrates the Byzantine governor Mihriyayil's court as a young boy. He pours wine - also a feature of Burla Hatun's captors' sexual threats²⁸⁹ - and is taken into a corner by Mihriyayil, who kisses his face, then caresses his neck. Battal becomes frightened and manages to kill Mihriyayil at this point, as he acknowledges the situation is serious.²⁹⁰ A possible

285 Yedida Kalfon Stillman, *Arab Dress: A Short History From the Dawn of Islam to Modern Times* (Leiden & Boston: Brill, 2003), 21, 141.

286 As reviewed by Redford, "The rape of Anatolia," or for example Broadbridge, *Women and the Making of the Mongol Empire*, who makes comments about women's general vulnerability pp. 9-10.

287 See note 226 for *The Book of Dede Korkut*. Men abducted in *Battalname*: Abdu'l Salam is captured, 137; forty Muslims held captive in a monastery rescued by Battal, 144; an old man asks Battal to find his two missing sons who turn out to be imprisoned, 147; two young men helped by Battal are captured and held prisoner, 153; Battal is captured by them after they turn traitor, 153-154; various prisoners held by Firdaws Shah the Jew, 155-164; another elderly man asks Battal to help free his (male) servant and other young men held prisoner, 181, and Battal is subsequently imprisoned, 181-182; Battal is captured by KAtayun, 250; both daughters and sons are mysteriously missing in both caliphate and Byzantine lands and Battal is called to rescue them, 272-303; Abdu'l Wahhab is captured, 274;

288 *Battalname*, 153, two young men imprisoned are converted to Christianity and married to Byzantine women; Abdu'l Wahhab is captured and seduced by the Caesar's daughter who he subsequently converts to marry, 274-276. Gul-Andam's father also offers Battal to her as a husband and reward if she manages to convert him, although it doesn't come to pass. 183.

289 *The Book of Dede Korkut*, 31-32.

290 *Battalname* 109-110.

similar example in *The Book of Dede Korkut* is in Legend XI, where Salur Kazan is held captive and thrown into a well. After Kazan alarms them by pretending he "rides" their dead in his underground prison, his captors let him out and debate what to do with him. He offers to agree to their demands if they give him a man "to ride," whom he saddles and bridles, jumps on, and then kills in a scene with decidedly suggestive insinuations.²⁹¹ So women are not unique in facing abduction or sexual violence in epic literature, either.

Perhaps the best way of examining gender is to consider how we as readers discover that women in epics are female. The narrator usually informs us of their status as female relatives of men. That is, women are gendered in relation to other people, in kinship relations or prospective kinship relations. We might broaden this and say women are made women by society, which requires them to act out female roles for male relations. Society could also call upon them to act in masculine ways, particularly in the context of those relationships, and they are praised for being prepared to answer.²⁹² But unlike men, they had to be able and willing to fulfill a female role when it was demanded of them, too, and accept that lower status, in epics and in political reality.²⁹³ In the sixteenth century Hijaz, at the same time as the epic manuscripts, a male scholar defending the right of women to access the Kaaba at night sarcastically asked if women were

291 *The Book of Dede Korkut*, 157-158. Lewis in Krstovic, "An Introduction to Kitab-i dedem Qorkut," 104, also interprets "ride" as a sexual euphemism, commenting that Kazan "pretends to necrophily" to persuade his captors to release him.

292 It is in this context that we should look at the prologue of *The Book of Dede Korkut* and its praise for the woman who can "entertain the guests and send them away happy, in the absence of her husband." P. 7. There are also interesting cases where women were reputed to have become men, either metaphorically (Peirce, *The Imperial Harem*, 275) or apparently literally, as in Cemal Kafadar, "Women in Seljuk and Ottoman Society Up to the Mid 19th Century," in *Women in Anatolia: 9000 Years of the Anatolian Woman*, ed. Günsel Renda (Istanbul: Istanbul Topkapi Sarayı Museum, 1993), 195, which describes an incident where the female candidate for succession to a dervish community's leadership was said, by some of her followers, to have miraculously changed sex in response to her father's prayers.

293 Peirce, *The Imperial Harem*, 17, remarks that royal women were denounced primarily when their political action was perceived to be in their own interest instead of their sons'.

simply of lowly rank in comparison to men.²⁹⁴ The answer of many of his contemporaries may have been "yes."

²⁹⁴ Marion Holmes Katz, *Women in the Mosque: A History of Legal Thought and Social Practice* (New York: Columbia University Press, 2014), 228. Ibn 'Abd al-Ghaffar (d. before 1558/9) asks if his opponents "...infer that men are forgiven for committing sins that are not forgiven to women because of the lowliness of [women's] rank and the deficiency of their intellects and religion!" Interpolation is Katz's.

Chapter Three: Negotiating and Representing the Family

Both *Battalname* and *The Book of Dede Korkut* deal with political and military events in societies where these activities were overwhelmingly family based, and so naturally the setting of many events is the family. The epics' family focus goes further in that the plots of many stories are based around family conflict and the ways in which relationships between family members are strained, formed, or called on for support. These relationships create plot stakes and tension throughout both epics.

As a result, both epics include many descriptive accounts of family life, enough that it is possible to write a description of the family as an institution and as a network of relationships between individuals in them, something I will attempt in this chapter. First, I will discuss the ways in which family members draw on each other for support and battle each other, subdivided into types of relationships. Next, I will discuss the ways in which individuals function to represent, or undermine, their families. Finally, I will discuss the structure of the family as an institution.

1. Conflict and Support Within the Family

Relationships between individual characters within families are dynamic and emotional. Family members raise their voices, use pet names to address or describe others, and poetically praise and insult each other. They are physically affectionate and expressive, hugging and kissing, throwing themselves at others' feet, and bursting into tears when they hear bad news or are reminded of an absent family member. Their relationships are clear on the page, and can just as

easily be called on for support as turn dangerously sour. This expressiveness is true across the actual nature of the relationships, but the context varies, and so I have divided this topic across the kinds of relationships that seem to make the most sense based on the material.

1.1 Spouses

Unlike all other familial relationships, spouses are always chosen, and the process of acquiring a wife or husband is occasionally a focus of plot events. But going beyond bridal quests to examine already-married couples gives a fuller picture of marriage in epic literature.

Both epics assume that spouses turning to each other for advice, and particularly men turning to their wives, is a normal part of family life. Most of the time the narratives assume that spouses' priorities are naturally aligned: Begil and his wife share an interest in maintaining their camp's security and status,²⁹⁵ Amir Umar and his wife agree that they do not want Battal to marry their daughter or to suffer embarrassment if she ignores their wishes,²⁹⁶ Taryun and his wife agree that they want to avoid Battal attacking them and consult their daughter Gul-Andam in tandem,²⁹⁷ and Eghrek and Seghrek's parents are united in attempting to stop Seghrek from going out to rescue his brother.²⁹⁸ A more dramatic example is Delü Dumrul and his wife. When Delü Dumrul is forced to find a substitute for Azrail to kill in his place, neither he nor his wife is willing to live alone because of their mutual devotion. Delü Dumrul tells God to take both of them or neither, and God rewards them for this unity with unnaturally long lives.²⁹⁹ This default unity between spouses is true of both protagonists and antagonists.

²⁹⁵ *The Book of Dede Korkut*, 137.

²⁹⁶ *Battalname*, 228-229.

²⁹⁷ *Battalname*, 215.

²⁹⁸ *The Book of Dede Korkut*, 149.

²⁹⁹ *The Book of Dede Korkut*, 95-97.

At other times we see a just-married couple, or a couple in the process of agreeing to marry, as this unity forms: Seghrek and his new wife argue first over his refusal to consummate their marriage before he rescues his older brother, but once his wife understands his purpose she commits herself to it and resolves to tell his parents herself and then wait for him.³⁰⁰ Similarly, Bamsi Beyrek is tested by Banu Chickek when they first meet and she recognizes him as her fiancé, and later in the narrative he tests her on his return from captivity. Both "tests" end with the characters' recognition of each other as worthy spouses.³⁰¹ In the same narrative, Bamsi Beyrek promises to marry the daughter of his captors at Bayburt Castle when she helps him escape. Their agreement begins with her recognition that Bamsi Beyrek, who has just found out Banu Chickek believes him dead and is engaged to another man, is miserable, and she commits to help him after he tells her about his problems, which he reciprocates with a commitment to return and marry her.³⁰² These new relationships, in which the spouses' unity is not related to religious conversion, can be compared to the numerous dream conversions of women in *Battalname* who join the cause of Islam at the same time as they agree to marry Muslim men.³⁰³ A particularly interesting example is Adan-Banu's conversion and agreement to marry the recent convert Bidrun, after which the couple join Battal, together, as warriors in his service.³⁰⁴ In all of these cases, marriage is a joint venture which begins with men and women recognizing a common purpose.

However, marital life is not always peaceful. A difficult spouse can cause problems for their partner. Dirse Khan and Kan Turali both threaten their wives with violence, and both of

300 *The Book of Dede Korkut*, 149-150.

301 *The Book of Dede Korkut*, 45-47 and 65-66.

302 *The Book of Dede Korkut*, 56.

303 *Battalname*, e.g., Mah-Piruz, 134-135; Mihriyayil's daughter, 143; Gul-Andam's dream conversion after meeting Battal, 183-184.

304 *Battalname*, 245-246.

their stories involve their wives, and in Dirse Khan's case his son, solving problems they create.³⁰⁵ Salur Kazan repeatedly endangers his family by getting drunk, starting fights, and going hunting at bad times, and as a result his wife and son are captured together once, his son alone once, and he himself another time. In Legend II, his wife Burla Hatun and son Uruz must scheme to avoid sexual abuse, murder and cannibalism while Salur Kazan realizes what has happened and rallies allies to rescue them. In Legend IV, Salur Kazan abandons his son and must be forced to ride out to rescue him by Burla Hatun, who then is further required to rescue both her husband and son while rallying the Oghuz allies. In Legend XI, Salur Kazan's son must find out what happened and rescue his father over his mother's protests.³⁰⁶ Begil and his wife are also a partial example, as Begil proposes betraying the Oghuz and joining the infidels after being insulted by Salur Kazan, but his wife persuades him to only go hunting to calm down.³⁰⁷

In *Battalname*, arguments between Battal and two wives also provide interesting examples. There is the incident where Zaynab insists on joining Battal at war. He tells her not to, but she arrives on her own later, anyway.³⁰⁸ Later, Battal argues with Gul-Andam twice. First, after Gul-Andam converts to Islam and helps Battal escape from prison, Battal is staying with her as her husband and she has secured a promise from him not to leave the house without her permission. He tolerates this for a year before his grief for his family at home and his warfare for God become too much, and he bursts into tears. Gul-Andam here reveals she has just found out the Caesar is marching against Islam, and agrees to let him go to fight on the condition that he promises not to forget her or her imminently arriving child.³⁰⁹ Later on, after Gul-Andam has

³⁰⁵ See Chapter 2, section 1.1.2.

³⁰⁶ *The Book of Dede Korkut*, 23-39; 70-88; 156-167.

³⁰⁷ *The Book of Dede Korkut*, 136-137.

³⁰⁸ *Battalname*, 128; also see chapter 2, 1.1.3.

³⁰⁹ *Battalname*, 182-186.

come to live with Battal at home, they get into an argument about money: evidently Battal is giving away too much of his battle loot for charity and Gul-Andam feels he is impoverishing them. They argue about whether Amir Umar's greater luxury is a better example and Battal proposes to ask for Amir Umar's daughter as another wife. Gul-Andam essentially dares him to ask, predicting Amir Umar will refuse. Gul-Andam is correct that Amir Umar would *like* to refuse, but his daughter is amenable and he and his wife decide that an outright refusal will end badly.³¹⁰ Battal's quest to acquire the impossible dowry they ask for instead, and his rescue of Malatya after it is sacked because of his absence, occupy the rest of the plot of this episode.³¹¹

In short, conflict between spouses occurs about as regularly as support, often because one spouse fails to live up to their responsibilities in one way or another, but it is not considered natural and inevitable. Instead it presents a problem which has to be solved. There is a striking lack of direct force between spouses in conflict resolution, and it seems neither spouse really has the power to *make* the other cooperate. At most they can issue threats or refuse to act themselves, as when Seghrek vows not to consummate his marriage and places his sword between himself and his wife in bed.³¹² The narrative lambastes the two men in *The Book of Dede Korkut* who propose to use violence against their wives, and neither moves beyond verbal threats.³¹³ (Both also threaten murder for events that are clearly not their wives' faults, rather than some lesser act like beating a disobedient wife, which an audience might or might not consider normal.) Battal, on the other hand, can do nothing about Zaynab's disobedience, must submit and offer obedience to Gul-Andam until he persuades her to relent, and later can only attempt to prove her wrong

310 *Battalname*, 227-229.

311 *Battalname*, 229-241.

312 *The Book of Dede Korkut*, 149.

313 See Chapter 2, 1.1.1-1.1.2.

about their financial situation by example. In both epics, the spousal relationship is normally supportive, can be conflicted and difficult, and *should* never be violent.

1.2 Siblings

Sibling relationships are normally supportive in an uncomplicated way, in contrast to the potentially difficult process of forming a marriage and the apparently destined difficulties between generations, which I will discuss in the next section. When Bamsi Beyrek returns from captivity after sixteen years, he first encounters his sisters, one by one, devastated by the wedding day of his fiancée, and seeing their pain without revealing himself hurts him so much he cannot help but cry, too.³¹⁴ When Seghrek discovers that he has an older brother held prisoner, he naturally cannot rest until his brother is rescued or avenged, and when Eghrek is set loose by his captors in order to kill Seghrek in return for his freedom, the two brothers are drawn to each other and recognition proceeds immediately.³¹⁵

However, there are counter-examples, which are revealing. In *Battalname*, Christian brothers make for poor support. Katayun begins to regret rejecting and escaping Battal when her brother, the Caesar, contemplates betrothing her to a much older and repulsive ally. When he sees her disgust, he suggests they would simply pretend to the engagement, but Katayun does not trust this assurance.³¹⁶ Earlier in the story, there is Mah-Piruz, the first Byzantine princess Battal marries. Her brothers come with the Byzantine army to capture her along with Zaynab and Battal. The first two brothers attack Mah-Piruz and are cut down, but the final brother, Ramin, accuses

³¹⁴ *The Book of Dede Korkut*, 58-61.

³¹⁵ *The Book of Dede Korkut*, 146-149, 152-154.

³¹⁶ *Battalname* 254.

her of shaming them, giving Mah-Piruz an opportunity to respond. She tells him about her dream vision and conversion, and he is persuaded, converts himself, and joins Battal.³¹⁷

In *The Book of Dede Korkut*, by contrast, the counter-examples are simply crazy or monstrous. The first is Banu Chichek's brother Delü Karchar, who, as his name indicates, is mad. He kills any man who asks to marry his sister. When Bamsi Beyrek and his father resolve to ask for the promised Banu Chichek anyway, they go to the Oghuz for advice for dealing with this inappropriate behavior, and the eponymous Dede Korkut himself volunteers and, by way of a miracle, manages the proposal without being killed. Delü Karchar will cause further trouble, first by asking for an impossible dowry which Dede Korkut helps procure, and second by offering his sister to anyone who can prove Bamsi Beyrek is dead, setting the ground for Yaltajak's fake evidence and the end of the story. Dede Korkut takes revenge on him for the first, trapping him in the sheepfold with the impossible quantity of fleas he requested, and after the latter he more or less vanishes, with Banu Chichek finally marrying Bamsi Beyrek and going to live with him and his parents.³¹⁸

The second example is that of the cyclops and Basat. Basat's father Uruz Koja adopts the cyclops when he is discovered as an abandoned child and attempts to raise him alongside his own son. In *The Book of Dede Korkut* this attempt is doomed, as monstrosity determines morality. The cyclops kills his nurses and various other people until Uruz Koja gives up and turns him out. When Basat returns from raiding to find that his one-time adopted brother has forced the Oghuz to provide human prisoners for him to eat, he undertakes the job of killing the cyclops, but not without a lengthy monologue about his sorrow at finally losing his brother for

³¹⁷ *Battalname*, 135-136.

³¹⁸ *The Book of Dede Korkut*, 47-51; 53; 66-69.

good.³¹⁹ Because the detailed plot of this story is fairly incoherent and involves many recognizable motifs from elsewhere, an older generation of scholars concluded it had been rewritten to adapt it into the Oghuz setting.³²⁰ If so, the insertion of a familial relationship between the hero and the giant (not mentioned later in their confrontation) and the pathos of a conflict between brothers suggest something about that redactor's interests and values.

Therefore, conflict between siblings in the epics cannot be resolved, except for Mah-Piruz and Ramin, where Ramin quickly converts. It is the result of factors intrinsic to one sibling - who is crazy, monstrous, or simply Christian and unwilling to convert. Because this sibling's nature is incompatible with the nature of sibling relationships, these relationships must end in separation.

1.3 Cross-Generation Relationships

Relationships between parents, grandparents and uncles and children, grandchildren and nieces and nephews, by contrast, are more difficult. There is routine affection on both sides: parents and children miss each other when they are absent, are physically affectionate when they are together, and express their love and devotion. Battal's father Husayn Ghazi is delighted when news of his son's birth comes during Amir Umar's enthronement, and everyone present shares in his celebration - and in his actual son later, who the narrator tells us was so charming, "Whoever picked him up could not put him down."³²¹ Battal himself expresses his love for his sons and his grief at separation throughout the narrative later.³²² There are similar moments throughout *The*

319 *The Book of Dede Korkut*, 124-127.

320 C. S. Mundy, "Polyphemus and Tepegöz," *Bulletin of the School of Oriental and African Studies* 18 (1956): 279-302.

321 *Battalname* 102-104.

322 *Battalname*, e.g., when this is part of the argument that persuades Gul-Andam to release him, 185.

Book of Dede Korkut, as when Bamsi Beyrek's return helps cure his father's blindness, caused by crying for his lost son.³²³

But despite devotion on both sides, parent-child relationships, and other cross-generation relationships, which are depicted less frequently, are often fraught. Sometimes this is clearly related to the flaws of one side, as when Dirse Khan, already portrayed as violent and capricious, is tricked into trying to murder his son,³²⁴ or when Salur Kazan, with a similar history of questionable decisions, decides his son has deserted the battlefield and therefore fails to realize he is a prisoner until his wife intervenes.³²⁵ Likewise, Seljen Hatun's father, an infidel who set up a murderous bridal contest, changes his mind about her marriage to Kan Turali and sends the army after them to recapture the couple.³²⁶ Another example, less in focus, is the uncle who attempts to defraud two nephews of their inheritance in *Battalname*.³²⁷

At other times, however, generally sympathetic characters act in capricious ways as parents, as when Bamsi Beyrek's father Bay Büre, otherwise a devoted and loving figure, is violently offended by his merchants greeting his son first and has to be appeased by the information his son saved them from an infidel attack on the road.³²⁸ Similarly, Amir Umar is usually depicted as an effective and sympathetic ruler, but when Battal asks for his daughter in marriage and he and his wife realize his daughter likes the idea of a match they oppose, his wife is infuriated and slaps their daughter, and while Amir Umar separates them, he joins his wife in distrust of their daughter as they plan to prevent the marriage.³²⁹

323 *The Book of Dede Korkut*, 67-68. Beyrek's blood rubbed into his father's eyes is the cure.

324 *The Book of Dede Korkut*, 13-15.

325 *The Book of Dede Korkut*, 75-77.

326 *The Book of Dede Korkut*, 109.

327 *Battalname*, 153; they appeal to Battal for help.

328 *The Book of Dede Korkut* 43-44. Because Bay Büre is depicted as a sympathetic and reasonable figure, he is immediately appeased and distracted by celebrating his son's achievement.

329 *Battalname*, 227-229.

Conflicts also arise where both parties are depicted in sympathetic ways. Seghrek and Eghrek's parents are introduced as wanting simply to avoid losing their second son to death when they first lie to Seghrek and then plot to marry him off and prevent him from rescuing his brother, but Seghrek is rightfully infuriated, threatens his mother and refuses to obey them, and the narrative validates him with success.³³⁰ In Legend XI, the here-unnamed wife of Salur Kazan takes on a similar role with Uruz, convincing her son that Bayindir Khan is his father and not his grandfather to prevent him from going to rescue his imprisoned father. Likewise Uruz curses and threatens his mother when he finds out, but in this story she admits to her fears and comes around, calling on his uncle and the Oghuz beys to help him with the rescue.³³¹ A similar conflict with lower stakes occurs in *Battalname*, where the young Battal resolves to ask for his deceased father's position and his mother Sa'ida Hatun and his tutor Tawabil both advise him against it because Abdu'l Salam, who currently occupies it, is too strong. Battal disobeys their advice and is proven right, albeit their warnings about Abdu'l Salam's political power are also proven right. There are no threats between Battal and his mother.³³²

A common element in these relationships, peaceful or combative, is the service of the younger generation. Dirse Khan and Salur Kazan may be irresponsible, but their sons still rescue them from peril in the end.³³³ Kazilik Koja is another irresponsible father whose son must rescue him from imprisonment.³³⁴ Begil is perhaps less to blame for breaking his leg hunting, but celebrates when his son Emren elects to defend the camp himself instead of appealing to the Oghuz who insulted his father.³³⁵ Seljen Hatun's father may be a capricious infidel, but she offers

330 *The Book of Dede Korkut*, 146-149; 154-155.

331 *The Book of Dede Korkut* 162-163.

332 *Battalname*, 105-106.

333 *The Book of Dede Korkut*, 20-21; 162-167.

334 *The Book of Dede Korkut*, 115-121.

335 *The Book of Dede Korkut*, 137-140.

her service instead to her husband's parents, promising to rescue their son while they wait.³³⁶

Battal defies his mother's advice to reclaim his father's position for his own sake but also for hers, as they both live in poverty without his father.³³⁷ Adan-Banu, too, serves Battal in her father's stead, as Khusrow admits he is a coward unwilling to defy the Caesar despite his sympathy for Islam.³³⁸ This moral duty of the young is clear, but does not necessarily require obedience; in several cases it occurs against the explicit wishes of older relatives.

A further element which is unique to parent-child relations is the relative prominence of physical violence. Violence is still not *typical* in these relationships, but it occurs more often than in any other type. Dirse Khan attempts to kill his son.³³⁹ Salur Kazan threatens to kill *his* son, but is prevented by his son's physical absence.³⁴⁰ Uruz Koja attempts to beat the cyclops, before finally dismissing him, to stop him from killing people.³⁴¹ Amir Umar's wife slaps their daughter.³⁴² Finally, both Uruz and Seghrek threaten their mothers graphically in response to finding out their father and brother respectively were held prisoner without their knowledge.³⁴³ The vast majority of these examples are strikingly unsympathetic and futile. Dirse Khan and Salur Kazan are condemned by the narrative, having resorted to violence against their sons because of their own bad judgment. Amir Umar and his wife are humiliated for opposing Battal. Uruz Koja attempts beating the cyclops as a last resort in what is clearly an impossible task, and is unsuccessful, although he is portrayed more sympathetically. Only the sons' threats to their

336 *The Book of Dede Korkut*, 110.

337 *Battalname* 105-106.

338 *Battalname*, 245-246.

339 *The Book of Dede Korkut*, 15.

340 *The Book of Dede Korkut*, 76-77.

341 *The Book of Dede Korkut*, 124; 148-149.

342 *Battalname*, 227-229. This example is interesting because it appears in circumstances we might expect to "justify" it; their daughter has just made a salacious comment about Battal, apparently to oppose her parents' decision. But the narrative is unsympathetic: it describes the injury the slap causes ("her mouth and nose drowned in blood"), Amir Umar immediately tries to separate them, and the narrative punishes him and his wife.

343 *The Book of Dede Korkut*, 162-163.

mothers are allowed to stand as successful, perhaps because they are not in positions of authority, per se, to abuse, or perhaps because both limit themselves to threats and acknowledge the questionable nature of their own words.

1.3.1 Mother-Son Alliances

A particular kind of relationship I want to address is the alliance of mothers and sons, either against fathers or in their absence. This type of relationship was visible and ideologically supported when it came to the ruling elites across the period.³⁴⁴

It also appears in the epics. When Dirse Khan is persuaded to kill his son Bugach Khan, his wife first searches for her son, then rescues him, and finally advises him on his father's capture and the necessity of rescuing him.³⁴⁵ Similarly, when Uruz is captured and Salur Kazan abandons him, Burla Hatun discerns he was captured, persuades her husband to search, and finally searches herself, rescuing her husband and son.³⁴⁶ In the earlier story where both are captured, they likewise plot against their captors together, although in Legend II they are unsuccessful in doing more than delaying until their rescue.³⁴⁷ Both of these cases involve mothers looking out for their sons' interests against the wishes of their husbands. Battal and his mother Sa'ida Hatun are a third, less extreme example. After Husayn Ghazi's death, Battal's mother raises him, and we are introduced to Battal, Sa'ida Hatun and Battal's tutor Tawabil as a unit with distinct political interests even if Battal is successful in defying their advice.³⁴⁸

344 Peirce, *The Imperial Harem*, in the Ottoman context, and de Nicola, *women in Mongol Iran* and Broadbridge, *Women and the Making of the Mongol Empire* in the Mongol context, also Woods, *The Aqquyunlu* with further examples.

345 *The Book of Dede Korkut*, 15-21.

346 *The Book of Dede Korkut*, 77-86.

347 *The Book of Dede Korkut*, 31-37.

348 *Battalname*, 105-106.

Of course, it is not particularly surprising that mothers and sons are attached to each other in epics. But their political action as a unit is a more specific formulation of that attachment. The appearance of a relationship that was also a real and specific political institution in fiction may suggest either intentional incorporation of what was known about the elite into popular fiction, that this political institution reflected a kind of relationship common in different classes of society, or both.

To conclude, cross-generation relationships, while still affectionate, are normatively combative and difficult in a way that same-generation relationships are not. Conflict here is not necessarily the result of character flaws, but the naturally different positions of older and younger generations. Service from the young is an important element of moral action, even when the old are not necessarily worthy of receiving it on their own merits - a situation both epics certainly acknowledge, although parents are more likely to cause negative plot events in *The Book of Dede Korkut*.

2. The Family and the World: Individuals Representing Their Families

As a component of the service from younger characters to older relatives, discussed in section 1.3 of this chapter, and from women especially to husbands or fathers as in section 1.2.1 of chapter 2, characters often function as representatives of their families to the outside world. They may lead others in battle in service of the family's objectives (as when they rescue family members or undertake offensive military action) or in service to a higher authority on behalf of their family (like Adan-Banu, or initially, Battal). In some cases young characters apparently

become adults by volunteering to represent their families, as in the various rescues described above. As described in both sections, this role is not limited to adult men. Women and children are both able to act on their families' behalf. (Indeed in the real political history of Anatolia, older women might serve as diplomatic representatives,³⁴⁹ while princes and other subordinate male relatives could have significant tasks delegated to them,³⁵⁰ so this is not unrealistic.)

The pattern of representation of families by individual members is also periodically reversed, in cases where individuals undermine their family by betraying it.

2.1 Individuals Subverting the Family

The pattern of Byzantine or infidel princesses converting to Islam in epic literature is matched by a pattern of Byzantine *princes* and other male dependents converting. To examples already discussed like Mah-Piruz, Gul-Andam, Katayun and Mihriyayil's daughter, we can add male relatives: Ahmar/Ahmad Turran, Battal's companion, is the nephew of the Byzantine Caesar as well as his commander.³⁵¹ Ramin, Mah-Piruz's half-brother, is his stepson.³⁵² Rabi', the son of the Caesar, is also captured and converts.³⁵³ This motif is less present in *The Book of Dede Korkut*, perhaps because *The Book of Dede Korkut* is less concerned about a conflict with a unified body of infidels in general and contains few conversions, but in *Battalname*, conversions of male relatives of the Caesar are as common as female relatives.

Consequently, I believe we should look at these conversions not as the possession of Byzantine women by Muslims, but as the undermining of the Caesar's patriarchal authority and

349 Peirce, *The Imperial Harem*, 219, and ch. 8.

350 Discussed particularly with regard to princely provincial governorships, in the Ottoman context, e.g., Peirce, *The Imperial Harem*, 20-21 and 97-99, Inalcik, "The Ottoman Succession," 49-61.

351 *Battalname* 118; 123-126.

352 *Battalname*, 135-136.

353 *Battalname*, 112-116.

his inheritance-based sovereignty by the subversion of his relatives. The Caesar cannot control, guide or lead his own dependents; instead, they defect, constantly, to Battal. Therefore, the Caesar's authority as a ruler is undermined as well. This element of the epics, too, reflects ideas in real political circulation, as in the 1553 letter of Hurrem Sultan to Süleyman, urging him to capture the shah of Iran's wife or son in order to have a victory to report to the Ottoman population.³⁵⁴ Perhaps it represents both the view of familial authority of the epics' period, and a retroactive legitimization of the conquest, by portraying Byzantine rulers as incompetent patriarchs whose subordinates willingly defected.

3. The Structure of the Family

The expected structure of the family in the epics, as in Anatolian society, was patriarchal. The default family in *Battalname*, whether Muslim or not, is led by a male husband and father, while the prototypical camp in *The Book of Dede Korkut* likewise consists of a man and his (single) wife, daughters, sons, and daughters-in-law. I will not dwell for an extended period on these "defaults," but in this section I will discuss variation in household arrangements, the use of bilateral descent in connecting households, and the nature of authority and decision making within the family.

3.1 Households

As above, the "default" household arrangement in each epic is patriarchal. But there is a fair amount of variation. Widows may lead a household with their children, like Sa'ida Hatun and the young Battal,³⁵⁵ or as Delü Dumrul expects his wife to do once Azrail takes his life,

³⁵⁴ Peirce, *The Imperial Harem*, 37.

³⁵⁵ *Battalname*, 105-106.

inheriting his property and raising his sons, choosing her own husband as she wishes.³⁵⁶ A woman may also live more or less alone, as the head of her household and dependents, for other reasons. When Bamsi Beyrek meets Banu Chichek, she pitches her tent alone (perhaps because of her unstable brother) except for her servants.³⁵⁷ Likewise in *Battalname*, Gul-Andam evidently has her own house in which Battal can live without her father's knowledge, and eventually Battal leaves her for a time, despite her pregnancy.³⁵⁸ This history may relate to Gul-Andam's assertiveness when she does eventually go to live with Battal.³⁵⁹

3.2 Bilateral Descent

Just as the household is by default patriarchal, inheritance is by default from the male line, as in the various stories where sons succeed their fathers in leading camps or in their political positions. (Although the characters are willing to consider exceptions, as with Delü Dumrul and his wife above.)

When it comes to political allegiance and relationships between households, however, connections may extend along the female line as well as the male, especially in *Battalname*. In the very beginning of the epic where we are introduced to Battal's paternal great-grandfather, we are informed of his distant genealogical background: he is "...from the sons of Abdullah whose mother was also descended from the daughters of Ali."³⁶⁰ The male line is not enough. The Byzantines, too, reckon relationships in this way. Mihriyayıl, the Byzantine governor and the first antagonist, is related to the Caesar by his marriage to the Caesar's sister.³⁶¹ The brother who

³⁵⁶ *The Book of Dede Korkut*, 95-97.

³⁵⁷ *The Book of Dede Korkut*, 45.

³⁵⁸ *Battalname*, 186.

³⁵⁹ *Battalname*, 227-228.

³⁶⁰ *Battalname*, 101.

³⁶¹ *Battalname*, 103.

converts for Mah-Piruz is her half-brother, related on their mother's side.³⁶² We also see these marital alliances through the female line in the making: Katayun is engaged to an ally of her brother's,³⁶³ while Yuhanna's connection to Battal is secured by the marriage of his daughter to one of Battal's followers.³⁶⁴

Despite its "tribal" setting, *The Book of Dede Korkut* is less concerned with extended family in general. The Oghuz beys can be called upon for assistance as a general group by any Oghuz and tend to give that assistance to a nuclear family's camp, while the "infidels" are not affiliated with one another and so the storyteller has no need to connect them. But in the main story where extended family becomes politically relevant, Legend XII, the conflict between matrilineal and patrilineal alliances becomes an explicit plot point. The Outer Oghuz invite Beyrek to speak to them under false pretenses because he is not one of them, but married an Outer Oghuz girl, and they can't be sure which loyalties will prevail. (Ultimately, his loyalty to Khan Kazan because of their personal ties rules and he refuses to aid them, so they take him prisoner and kill him.)³⁶⁵ Kinship ties by their nature are flexible and unstable because of individuals' choices about which to heed. As a result, both matrilineal and patrilineal ties matter, even when one is "officially" prioritized.

3.3 Authority and Decision Making in the Family

Authority and decision making throughout the examples discussed above are flexible depending on the situation. The "official" authority of the patriarch is sometimes upheld, but sometimes reversed. We can compare Battal's authority - especially as an authority who

³⁶² *Battalname*, 135-136.

³⁶³ *Battalname*, 254.

³⁶⁴ *Battalname*, 152.

³⁶⁵ *The Book of Dede Korkut*, 170-172.

intervenes in others' problems - to Adan-Banu's military power, combined with her father's cowardice. Battal himself is authoritative in some situations, but ineffective against Zaynab, and goes from obeying Gul-Andam to arguing with her. Likewise we can compare Uruz and Salur Kazan's martial unity in combat at the end of Legend XI to Burla Hatun's rescue of both in Legend IV. In other cases spouses make decisions together, like Taryun and his wife or Amir Umar and his own, or are induced to do so like Dirse Khan and *his* wife. Sometimes younger family members act against their parents' wishes, as discussed in examples like Seghrek, Uruz or Battle in section 1.3.

Overall, therefore, while there is definitely a recognition that parents and husbands are supposed to have authority in both epics, the reality is different. Personality is very important in which characters dominate group decision making, and individuals can generally make decisions about what they will do even if they are theoretically subject to others' authority.

4. Conclusion: Elite Families, Common Families, and Politics

Throughout the fifteenth and sixteenth centuries, and most of premodern history, family life was the setting for both politics and most productive labor. As a result, the activities of political rule had a parallel in family life for most ordinary people, and could be made comprehensible through this metaphor. As a second result, changes in family structure would be immensely significant for politics and social production as well as reproduction - and the opposite would also be true, with changes and variation in labor activities affecting family life in all its dimensions.

Family life is subject to historical change and geographical variation, as well as to ideological conflict and change. But our sources' nature means we have a limited view of family

life through premodern Islamic history.³⁶⁶ A fictional version of family life in collective memory, then, may shed light on real and important processes which we have a difficult time examining. The family life in the epics provided a comprehensible setting and stakes for every sector of society, because most people have families (and those who don't, like orphans or slaves dissociated from kinship bonds, tend to be preoccupied with this lack). By adhering to the emotional logic of their own family settings, epic literature connected people with their pasts and while handling political events like historical warfare or long ago tribal confederations abstractly.

This "connecting glue" between the popular audience and the political events is also one connection between political ideology and popular sympathies in reality. The ideology of sovereignty was heavily connected to the idea of family. Questions like who could legitimately act for a family, who should be consulted in the course of decision making, which members "owned" sovereignty belonging to a family, and when, if ever, disobedience could be justified, were significant politically.³⁶⁷ They also related to questions about navigating everyday life that ordinary subjects also experienced when managing jointly or family-owned property and business ventures, organizing production, reproduction and decision making, and navigating the family in general. Not every community reached the same answers, even in the same time and place. But the very flexibility preserved in collective memory, as represented in the epics, shows how this variation could be justified and presented as in continuity with past tradition, whether that continuity was traced to the Abbasid world or the Turkish Oghuz tribe.

The epics, as popular fiction, can't tell us how elite families actually acted, either in the time the manuscripts were written and circulated or the time they portray. What they can tell us is how popular audiences imagined the elites of their ancestors' generations had acted, especially in

366 De Nicola, "The Ladies of Rum," 135-137; Peirce, *The Imperial Harem*, 113-114.

367 The public was invested in and debated these issues. Peirce, *The Imperial Harem*, 268-278.

a familiar, family setting. Examining *The Book of Dede Korkut* and *Battalname*, we can see different ideas about how benevolent authority necessarily could be. But in both epics a picture is formed where women, children and subordinate family members are involved in decision making and action on behalf of the family, where conflict regularly occurs between family members but generally is resolved without physical violence (and where physical violence is usually condemned when it does occur), and where family members are deeply attached to each other and openly affectionate. Furthermore the family is imagined as a flexible institution, where the personalities and needs in a given situation may dictate different household arrangements, decision-making processes, and kinship connections.

The picture I draw above is very different from the advice literature's prescriptive vision of family life.³⁶⁸ Likely neither view is purely "correct." Instead we must consider how they might be combined or used in different situations to give us a fuller view of family life in the past.

³⁶⁸ As described in Kuru, "Women, Gender and Representations," 494-495, and Peirce, *The Imperial Harem*, 268-270. Not only the active participation of women, but other details like the level of affection between parents and children and husbands and wives might be frowned upon in advice literature.

Conclusion: Politics and Popular Epics: Remember the Ancestors Through Epics

To conclude, the Turkish epic literature tradition begins, as far as our direct manuscript evidence is concerned, in the fifteenth and sixteenth centuries. It consists of works which tell the story of the conquest of Anatolia by Muslims in the preceding centuries, presented in the context of elite family life, in the Turkish language. These works have some connection to oral material which circulated in the centuries before the earliest manuscripts, but little can be proven about the nature of this connection or the oral material.

The questions which my material can most directly address involve the memory of the recent past and the conquest of Anatolia by people who spoke, read and wrote Turkish in the fifteenth and sixteenth centuries. Popular society was interested in this time period and circulated epic tales (and other genres) about it, forming a collective understanding about the recent history of their civilization. Individual works, and episodes within the broader works, relate particular and varied views. But overall there are patterns as well as recognizable differences, discernible in a close reading and comparison of *Battalname* and *The Book of Dede Korkut* with each other and with historical evidence of the period.

The audience and creators of these works were not terribly concerned about the technicalities of military conquest or army life. They were, however, interested in the personal struggles and hardships of ancestral heroes. These heroes could be envisioned as part of the Abbasid tradition, or part of the Oghuz, nomadic tradition. They might have different

relationships with authority and with the institutions of settled Islam. Violence against enemies is universally approved of in *Battalname*, but foolish unless defensive in *The Book of Dede Korkut*. The ancestors of *Battalname* are encircled by a conspiracy of enemies from virtually every religion except for mainstream Islam, while in *The Book of Dede Korkut* enemies are more vaguely envisioned. In both epics defeated enemies are usually converted or killed and only very rarely enslaved.

But regardless of epic, they participated in expressive and dynamic family life. Women, children and subordinate men are invested and involved in family decision making and communal life, and subordinate family members make decisions with their families' interests in mind but autonomously. Violence within the family is condemned. Very little gender segregation is present in either epic. In *Battalname* this picture is presented fairly neutrally, while *The Book of Dede Korkut* appears to actively defend it in stories where, for example, women overcome male threats based on insecurity about others' perceptions. In both epics, mothers defend their sons' political interests, and siblings and spouses are more or less naturally aligned except for difficult and irresponsible individuals, while inter-generational relationships are warm but more intrinsically difficult.

Certain aspects of the epics' picture of society are more "historically accurate" than others, but all of it would have meaning for its audience as consciously circulated and adapted representations of history. Some "accurate" details - women's roles in politics, for example - may be more accurate than "factual" histories and advice literature as a general picture, even as the epics apply them to fictional situations.³⁶⁹ This may be a sign that the population was aware of these women's roles and sought to establish traditional background for them, that the elite

³⁶⁹ Certainly the epics more recognizably depict the same world as Peirce, *The Imperial Harem* or de Nicola, *Women in Mongol Iran*.

women's activities, which we know more about, reflected the role of women in society in general and therefore the logic people projected onto their ancestors, or both. But regardless of their accuracy, these details demonstrate that popular audiences in general imagined that their ancestors' elite families had incorporated subordinate family members, regardless of gender, into their actions and decision making. Presumably they viewed this way of conducting family business as legitimate among rulers, and perhaps in daily life among themselves. This may be a sign of how the population in the fifteenth and sixteenth centuries regarded what has been referred to as "confederate" sovereignty, even as it died out, and the ongoing importance of women and royal princes in politics. If we take the differences between the epics seriously, this view of gender and sovereignty seems to be present even in audiences with strikingly different sympathies - or lack thereof - to non-Muslims and to sedentary political institutions.

Whose memory is preserved in the epics? The nature of the documentation means that a certain answer is probably unobtainable. But we can say certain things: the audience was large, because the epics survived, and crossed class lines, because discussion and polemic about epics demonstrate it was not confined to the elite, and their very survivals demonstrate epic literature had an audience large enough to persist over time, even through periods of immense change. The audience spoke or read Turkish - both in that some of them were literate in Turkish, and in that they chose to consume literature in Turkish. Some of them may have identified in some sense with an international community of Turkish speakers and readers that emerged in the thirteenth and fourteenth centuries. Some of them may have had access to literacy in Turkish because of this community and the effects its existence created for education and economics, without fully identifying with it.

A final comment regarding popularity: so far I have treated *Battalname* and *The Book of Dede Korkut* as equivalent alternatives, but there are many more extant *Battalname* manuscripts, and of course there is the tradition of related works for *Battalname* which does not exist for the latter, as discussed in the introduction. It may be the case that *Battalname* was a more broadly popular narrative and point of view. But other possibilities exist. The only manuscripts of *The Book of Dede Korkut* are later, and it may have been collated into an epic manuscript in response to the already-popular *Battalname* tradition, never able to spread as far because it was a secondary development rather than because it was an unpopular view, but still surviving from the sixteenth to eighteenth centuries at minimum. It also seems possible that the material we can only access through these manuscripts circulated in communities less likely to consume literature in written form (for example, actual nomads or semi-nomads, or rural people with less sympathy for urban institutions, or communities who were less interested in formal education or in interacting with written literature even indirectly).

In any case, political fiction about the past was adapted into written form in an increasingly centralized and always changing Turkish speaking world. From the first *Battalname* manuscript, just over fifteen years before the Ottoman conquest of Istanbul, through the later *Battalname* manuscripts and the two extant of *The Book of Dede Korkut*, we move forward in time through the end of the Aqqyunlu and Mamluk states and the final conquest of all other independent Anatolia states by the Ottomans, the birth of the Safavids, and the polarization of the central Islamic world into a Sunni-Shi'a, Ottoman-Safavid conflict as well as the death of confederate sovereignty in the Ottoman world. These political changes had repercussions for political life and for social history. In popular works from this period, depicting the past, we can

isolate elements of political and family life that may have reflected the present *and* the past - or at least, the past as people needed to remember it

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