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## AN ANALYSIS OF THE LEGEND OF STONE BRIDGE AND THE SKOPJE CASTLE FROM A LITERARY STRUCTURE PERSPECTIVE

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**Abstract:** The Legend of the Stone Bridge and the Castle is an important folk narrative that reflects the historical and cultural richness of Skopje. This legend, encompassing both individual and societal dimensions, conveys the relationship between humans and nature, love, labor, and social values through a dramatic structure enriched with profound symbols. In the legend, the loneliness of the giant, his love for the fairy maiden, and the struggles he endures for this love, along with the efforts of Osmanoğlu Murat in constructing the bridge, are presented as metaphors for individual self-realization and social responsibilities.

The architectural elements featured in the legend are seen as carriers of both individual and collective values. The castle symbolizes resilience, patience, and the strength derived from labor, while the bridge represents societal connections, solidarity, and cultural continuity. The “marriage” of these two structures emphasizes the integration of physical and spiritual bonds within society.

Nature plays a significant role in the narrative, not merely as a backdrop but as a source of wisdom and guidance. The fairy maiden’s call for the giant to learn from nature highlights the transformative power of living in harmony with the natural world and its impact on both individuals and communities.

The legend also draws attention to its historical context. The castle and bridge, architectural structures from the pre-Ottoman and Ottoman eras, symbolize the Turkish presence in the region during both periods. Through this narrative, these structures are preserved as integral parts of the historical and cultural memory of the local community. The castle and bridge are not merely architectural entities but also serve as symbols of societal solidarity, aesthetic perception, and collective effort throughout history.

The narrative defines cooperation, collective labor, and individual sacrifice as the cornerstones of social order. The concepts of love and aesthetics reflect the balance between personal desires and societal values. The efforts of Osmanoğlu Murat in constructing the bridge highlight the significance of individual contributions to societal memory.

Structurally, the legend is enriched with motifs unique to Balkan folklore. It also functions as a vehicle for transmitting local identity and cultural memory. More than just a folk tale, this legend serves as a valuable resource for understanding the cultural and historical context of the Balkan region. Offering rich material for disciplines such as folklore, literature, architecture, and cultural studies, it provides broader perspectives on Turkish culture in the Balkans. Preserving this legend and similar local narratives and transmitting them to younger generations are crucial for sustaining folk culture.

**Keywords:** Legend, Skopje Castle, Stone Bridge, Balkan Folklore, Ottoman Architecture, Turkish Culture

### 1. INTRODUCTION

The literary activities and creations found in the oral cultural tradition of society are presented by the storytellers and accepted by the listeners, becoming a part of the collective memory. In this process, each oral narrative or creation gains social meaning by conveying the community's shared values, experiences, and knowledge. The interaction between the storyteller and the listener not only ensures the transmission of this knowledge but also creates a cultural identity, value judgments, and a consciousness of the society's past. These narratives accumulate over time, preserving the experiences of the past and passing them on to future generations. In this way, as new generations follow the traces of the past, they shape and learn their own lives through this accumulation. In this context, oral culture plays a critical role in preserving and transmitting the collective memory of societies to the future (Yıldırım 2023: 105).

Legends are a fundamental aspect of oral culture, serving as literary artifacts that preserve the historical and folkloric heritage of societies. These narratives, passed down through generations, not only reflect traces of the past but also provide insights into the belief systems, moral values, and daily lives of various communities. The reality of the hero, space, and events featured in legends makes the storyteller more eager (Şimşek, 2024: 124). This situation helps create a connection between the legend and reality in the listener's mind. Their role in preserving cultural diversity and shaping identity elevates legends beyond mere storytelling, making them significant sociological and anthropological records.

Skopje, the capital of North Macedonia and the focus of this study, has long been a cultural and historical hub in the Balkans. The city has been home to numerous civilizations and retains a rich cultural heritage, heavily influenced by

its long period under Ottoman rule. As Xhanari Latifi also points out (2024: 109-112), it is natural to consider that the existence of the Turkish language and culture dates back to the centuries before Christ, and this can be observed not only in all areas of life but also in the literary field (Akgün, 2022: 195-224). The oral traditions of Skopje have played a crucial role in preserving this heritage and ensuring its transmission to future generations.

Culture, as a product of social processes, functions as a medium for transmitting collective memory and reinforcing national identity (Koca, 2017: 531). As social processes change, the sense of social belonging also changes (Kurt, 2022: 10). “The Legend of the Stone Bridge and the Fortress,” the subject of this study, is a prime example of how cultural elements are perpetuated across generations. Legends, as significant literary products, convey cultural diversity through oral tradition within a historical and folkloric context (Yiğit, 2018: 218). The legend, as one of the oldest products of oral culture, has been studied in the context of history, society, and belief, drawing the interest of many disciplines, particularly folkloristics (Koçyiğit Tuna, 2024: 9).

During our stay in North Macedonia from 2015 to 2017, it was observed that “The Legend of the Stone Bridge and the Fortress” was widely known among the Turkish community of Skopje. Other Skopje legends familiar to the Turks include: Six Feet, Six-Legged Tomb, Borozan Mosque, Butel Cemetery, Demon Stream, Should I go out?, Davut Pasha Bath, Cold Bath, Stone Monument, Fall Water Church,, Husband and Wife Lodge, Old Womens, The King's Daughter, Mustafa Pasha Mosque, Pasha Yiğit Mosque, Serava Sunset, Salo Minaret, Teraska Lake, Tütünsüz Mosque, The Name of Skopje City, Yahya and Mustafa Pasha Mosque, and Chained Father (Ruşid, 2022: 90-100).

## 2. MATERIALS AND METHODS

This study examines “The Legend of the Stone Bridge and the Fortress” through a structural analysis approach. Only one documented version of this legend exists, transcribed by Hüseyin Süleyman in his book “Ottoman Heritage in Skopje” (Süleyman, 2010, p. 73). Born in 1900, Süleyman was a dedicated scholar who worked to preserve Turkish folklore in the region. His compilations remain essential in preventing the loss of Macedonian Turkish folklore (Uğurlu, 2017: 643).

The methodology employed in this study is a text-centered literary structural analysis. The folklore text analysis method is applied to interpret the data derived from the legend, forming the basis of this academic examination.

The legend text is as follows:

### **The Legend of the Stone Bridge and the Fortress**

A long time ago, in a corner of the Balkan Peninsula, before humans had settled there, giants, fairies, and demon inhabited the land. In those days, there were no houses, roads, people, tools, or weapons in our city and its surroundings. Only dense forests filled with wild animals and colorful birds covered the land.

At that time, a giant lived in a cave on the site where the present-day fortress stands. The giant had grown weary of solitude and longed for a companion. He crossed mountains, wandered through forests, and roamed the valleys in search of a mate, but he found none. He was deeply sorrowful, and the years passed in vain.

One morning, as the golden sun cast its light over the blue mountains, a fairy girl was washing her golden hair in the shimmering waters of the Vardar River. She was so beautiful, so radiant, and so delicate that she appeared to blend with the foamy waves, sometimes disappearing beneath the surface and sometimes emerging to play with the fish.

Upon seeing her, the giant felt the flames of long-suppressed love ignite in his heart. Overwhelmed with passion, he sprang from his cave like an arrow, landing on the rock where she stood with a thunderous roar. Frightened, the fairy girl ascended like a white cloud toward Vodno Hill and vanished into the vast blue sky.

The giant stood frozen in despair.

The next day, the giant woke up early and returned to the Vardar River, hiding behind the willow trees to wait for the fairy girl. However, she did not appear. Instead, he heard a sorrowful melody rising from the river's depths. He listened intently, captivated by the mysterious sound that echoed through the silver darkness. Once again, the sun rose over the mountains.

Birds chirped, branches rustled, waves kissed each other, and the wind whispered through the trees. Suddenly, the beautiful girl, dressed in green, appeared once more in the Vardar's waters, washing her golden hair in the river's crystal-clear flow.

The giant called out:

— Are you human, jinn, or fairy? What are you?

The fairy girl gathered her hair and disappeared beneath the foamy waves without answering.

The giant did not move; he waited all day and night.

At dawn, golden rays spread across the hills, a cool breeze caressed the land, birds sang, and the eternal melody of the wind played once more. The fairy girl reappeared, this time dressed in light blue, washing her golden hair in the river's pristine waters.

The giant pleaded:

— Ah! I am so lonely. Let us unite our lives; I want to have you.

The fairy girl replied:

— If you wish to have me and unite our lives, you must first learn the secrets of life.

— Where can I learn this secret?

— You can learn it from nature!

— But how?

— Look around. Birds and animals live together with their own kind. You must work as they do and build yourself a home.

— What kind of home?

— A solid, strong, and wide building made of stone! Only then will I speak to you.

To win the fairy girl's heart, the giant tore down mountains, cut down forests, and built himself a great and mighty fortress.

Years passed. The fortress was surrounded by high walls. The giant eventually died, and humans began to build houses, shops, inns, and places of worship within the city. However, one thing was missing—a grand, magnificent bridge.

The fortress changed hands over time. One morning, as the fairy girl washed her golden hair in the silver waters of the Vardar, a man named Osmanoglu Murat saw her. He, too, fell in love with her and wished to possess her. He begged for her love.

The fairy girl said:

— If you wish to have me, you must build a stone bridge where I was captured. The bridge must have twelve arches. Through these arches, I will watch over nature and continue to live. You, in turn, will gain fame and honor through this bridge.

Osmanoglu Murat agreed. He spent sacks of gold and employed hundreds of carpenters and workers to construct the bridge. The bridge was built. Osmanoglu Murat fulfilled the fairy girl's request, connecting the fortress and the bridge.

Now, each day, these two historical structures whisper love songs to each other, offering Skopje's residents the magical essence of romance. Inspired by their enduring story, we continue to walk toward eternity, beautifying this beloved and charming city year after year.

“This bridge weds the fortress.” (Süleyman, 2010: 73-76).

### 3. RESULTS: ANALYSIS OF THE LEGEND IN TERMS OF LITERARY STRUCTURE

The structural characteristics of legends have often been identified by taking fairy tales into account. The Brothers Grimm designed legends with fixed forms similar to fairy tales. According to them, while fairy tales are more poetic, legends have a stronger historical character (Çobanoğlu, 2003: 41). Boratav (2019:112) also emphasized the structural aspect when discussing the features that distinguish legends from other genres.

The legend of the Stone Bridge and the Fortress in Skopje is a folk narrative that stands out with its historical and cultural texture. This legend presents a rich structure where individual, social, and natural elements converge. When analyzed structurally, the dramatic framework, symbolic elements, characters, and folkloric motifs—along with the legend's time and setting—constitute the fundamental components that make it both a local and a universal legend.

#### **Dramatic Structure**

The legend follows a classical dramatic structure consisting of the introduction, development, and conclusion, which are frequently used in storytelling.

**Introduction:** The legend describes a mythological time in which giants, fairies, and supernatural beings inhabit the land. This section establishes the setting and timeframe of the narrative, emphasizing the relationship between nature and humans, as well as between nature and supernatural beings. It begins with the giant's loneliness and his love for the fairy girl, laying the emotional foundation of the story.

**Development:** The giant's loneliness and his love for the fairy girl become central themes. However, this love goes beyond mere emotion; it serves as a motif that leads to both the giant's transformation and spatial change. His desire to reach the fairy girl turns him from a passive entity into an active force. At this point, the fairy girl's demand that the giant learn from nature suggests that love is not just about possession but also about learning and growth.

The giant's struggle symbolizes the process in which an individual desire evolves into social construction. By shaping nature under the guidance of the fairy girl, the giant creates something not just for himself but also for future generations. Similarly, Osmanoglu Murat's construction of a bridge to reach the fairy girl reflects how an individual pursuit transforms into a collective value. This section highlights the intersection of personal desires with social responsibilities, shaping a space where conflicts and transformations occur.

At this point, love becomes a trial, requiring sacrifice and effort. Neither the giant nor Osmanoğlu Murat can attain their desires merely by wishing; they must exert effort and comply with the rules of nature and society. This narrative pattern underscores the individual's responsibility toward the community.

**Conclusion:** The completion of the fortress built by the giant and the bridge constructed by humans symbolizes the transformation of the legend into a tangible cultural heritage. The giant's struggle, which began with loneliness and nature, leaves a permanent mark with the rise of the fortress. Similarly, Osmanoğlu Murat's bridge construction demonstrates how an individual quest turns into a collective value.

With the completion of the fortress and the bridge, not only are physical structures created, but also a sense of unity between spirit and space. The fortress represents strength and protection, while the bridge signifies connection and continuity. Thus, the legend illustrates how an individual's relationship with nature and society can leave a lasting impact.

This process also symbolizes the triumph of individual effort and social solidarity. Neither the giant nor Osmanoğlu Murat achieves their goals alone; rather, they create lasting works through labor, sacrifice, and adherence to nature's rules. Ultimately, the legend transcends a simple love story to become a timeless narrative of human effort and collective consciousness.

The storyteller metaphorically concludes the story by describing the bridge and the fortress as "married" structures. In this way, the deep imprint these constructions have left on the people is kept alive, preserving cultural identity and conveying a message of unity and productivity on both individual and societal levels.

### **Symbolic Elements**

The legend explores themes such as nature, love, loneliness, inaccessibility, protection, the construction process, and human will through symbolic elements. These symbols can be interpreted as follows:

**The Fairy Girl:** She represents unattainable beauty and the mystical spirit of nature. She acts as a divine guide directing human intelligence and labor.

**The Giant:** He symbolizes raw power, primitive existence, and pre-human eras. However, in the pursuit of love, he transforms into the founder of civilization.

**The Vardar River:** It serves as both the setting and the source of life in the legend. The water in which the fairy girl disappears signifies fluidity and the continuity of nature.

**The Fortress and the Bridge:** As human-made structures, they symbolize the emergence and progress of civilization. The bridge, beyond its physical existence, establishes a connection between humans and mythological beings.

**The Vodno Mountain:** The moment when the fairy girl "rises like a white cloud to Vodno Hill" is a crucial point in the narrative. This emphasizes her supernatural and unreachable nature. Vodno serves as a refuge and sanctuary for the fairy girl.

**Nature:** It is depicted as the source of wisdom and transformation, symbolizing the place where the meaning of life is learned.

### **Characters**

The legend includes both supernatural beings (the giant, the fairy girl) and historical figures (Osmanoğlu Murat).

**The Giant:** He represents the loneliness of a primitive being and his transformation through love. His construction of the fortress serves as a metaphor for humanity's effort to dominate nature and establish civilization.

**The Fairy Girl:** She is a figure who knows the secrets of nature and guides humans. The fortress and bridge, built at her request, ensure the continuity of cultural heritage.

**Osmanoğlu Murat:** As a historical figure, Osmanoğlu Murat completes the transformation initiated by the giant. His presence ties the legend to historical processes. He symbolizes social responsibility and collective effort. The labor he invests in constructing the bridge highlights the role of individual sacrifices in shaping collective memory.

### **Folkloric Elements**

The legend is enriched with motifs characteristic of Balkan folklore:

**Supernatural Beings:** The giant and the fairy girl are common mythological figures in legends. The giant represents internal conflicts and social exclusion, while the fairy girl is a wise guiding figure.

**Love and Inaccessibility:** The giant's love for the fairy girl drives his efforts, but this love is only attainable when certain conditions are met.

**Construction Legends:** Many legends surrounding castles, bridges, and other architectural structures often involve supernatural requests or themes of sacrifice.

**Geographical Connections:** Real locations such as Skopje Fortress, the Stone Bridge, the Vardar River, and The Mount Vodno help the local community embrace the legend as part of their heritage.

### **The Time and Space of the Legend**

**Time:** The legend begins in an undefined mythological past and becomes historicized during the Ottoman era. This is a common storytelling technique that helps legends gain legitimacy by linking them to historical events.

**Space:** The setting includes Skopje and its surroundings, depicting a transformation process between natural elements (river, mountain, forest) and human-made structures (fortress, bridge).

### **4. DISCUSSIONS**

When examined in terms of literary structure, the legend of the Stone Bridge and the Fortress in Skopje presents a rich narrative with its dramatic composition, symbolic elements, characters, and folkloric motifs. The fundamental narrative components of this legend include elements that symbolize both individual and societal transformations. In the discussion section, various interpretations of the legend's literary structure will be explored, offering different perspectives.

First, when analyzing the dramatic structure of the legend, it is evident that it follows classical narrative patterns. The introduction, development, and conclusion sections are distinctly separated, each serving different functions. The introduction depicts a supernatural world, while the development section focuses on the transformation of individual desires into social responsibilities. In the conclusion, the permanence of human labor as a legacy is emphasized. This structure strengthens the legend as a narrative form. However, in certain sections of the legend, the story detaches from direct historical context and takes on mythological elements. This allows the legend to bridge historical reality and fictional storytelling.

The symbolic elements within the legend are crucial components that enhance its depth. The giant represents primal strength and solitude, while the fairy maiden symbolizes nature's guidance and unattainability. The Vardar River stands out as an element representing continuity and life. The fortress is associated with protection and power, while the bridge signifies the establishment of physical and cultural connections. Vodno Mountain serves as a symbol of refuge and sanctuary within the legend. These symbols elevate the legend beyond a mere narrative, embedding it in the collective memory of society and contributing to identity construction.

The characters in the legend function as reflections of both individual and societal dynamics. The giant is depicted as a pre-human entity, and his transformation represents the emergence of civilization through human labor. The fairy maiden embodies harmony with nature and wisdom, while Osmanoglu Murat is introduced as a historical figure within the legend. This balance between mythological and historical elements strengthens the depth of the narrative. However, it can also be observed that the female figure in the legend is placed in a passive position—although she acts as a guide, she does not directly participate in the action. This highlights another significant aspect of the narrative that requires examination within the context of gender roles.

From a folkloric perspective, the legend contains numerous narrative motifs characteristic of the Balkan region. The presence of supernatural beings, themes of love and unattainability, structures unique to construction legends, and the integration of geographical locations into the narrative reinforce the legend's local and cultural identity. In this respect, the legend serves not only as a narrative element but also as a component that shapes the collective memory of the people.

Finally, in evaluations regarding the time and space of the legend, it is observed that the narrative is continuously reproduced within a historical context. The legend takes shape over a timeline that begins in mythological ages and extends into the Ottoman period. This demonstrates the ongoing interaction between historical reality and fictional elements within the narrative. The selection of Skopje and its surroundings as the setting contributes to the legend's acceptance among the people and its role in identity formation.

In conclusion, the legend of the Stone Bridge and the Fortress presents a rich narrative example in terms of literary structure and content. Its dramatic composition, symbolic elements, characters, and folkloric motifs allow the narrative to gain significance both individually and socially. In this context, the legend can be regarded not only as a tale of the past but also as a dynamic cultural heritage that contributes to contemporary identity construction.

### **5. CONCLUSIONS**

The legend of the Stone Bridge and the Fortress in Skopje stands out as a narrative where individual desires merge with social structures and human labor intersects with nature. The dramatic structure of the legend symbolizes the transformation of an individual story, beginning with the loneliness of the giant, into a collective legacy through the construction of the fortress. The construction of the bridge by Osmanoglu Murat completes this transformation process, ensuring that individual effort becomes embedded in societal memory.

The symbols used in the legend strongly emphasize the relationship between nature and humanity. While the fairy maiden represents the wisdom of nature, the construction efforts of the giant and Osmanoglu Murat symbolize

humanity's endeavor to build civilization. Locations such as Vodno Mountain, the Vardar River, the Stone Bridge, and the fortress emerge as elements that complement both the physical and spiritual dimensions of the narrative. In conclusion, this legend, which shapes the cultural identity of Skopje, goes beyond being merely a love story and transforms into a timeless narrative of human labor and collective consciousness. By intertwining supernatural elements, historical context, and social values, this story continues to serve as a significant literary structure that strengthens the identity perception of the local people and transmits cultural heritage from generation to generation.

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