

## FOLK MEDICINE PRACTICES OF SOME FAMILIES IN THE PROVINCE OF BITLIS

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### ABSTRACT

From past to present, the people of Anatolia have frequently resorted to folk medicine for the treatment of many diseases they have encountered. Although folk medicine practices have decreased with the development of modern medicine, they are still maintained. Today, families commonly first take their sick individuals to a doctor according to the condition of the illness, and those who cannot find a remedy from the doctor seek healing for their patients in folk medicine. In some illnesses considered simple, such as the common cold, healing may be sought in folk medicine before consulting a doctor. Families often prefer folk medicine because it is more easily accessible and sometimes due to lack of means. The Bitlis region is one of the regions where folk medicine is still maintained. In this paper, folk medicine practices resorted to by some families in the Bitlis region will be explained. In order to obtain data related to the subject, field research using the oral interview technique was conducted in the districts and villages of Bitlis along with a literature review. As a result of this study, it was observed that some families in the Bitlis region resort to certain medicinal, religious, magical, surgical, and mixed treatment methods of folk medicine. Among these methods, medicinal treatments are applied the most. In medicinal treatments where animal, plant, and mineral sources are used, it has been observed that plant-based sources are generally preferred.

**Keywords:** Bitlis folk medicine, folk medicine practices, traditional treatments.

### INTRODUCTION

The practices carried out in the past for protection from diseases and for the healing of diseases, the experiences gained as a result of these practices, and the transmission of these experiences from generation to generation led to the emergence of folk medicine. Boratav (1994) defined folk medicine as follows: “When people cannot go to a doctor due to lack of means or for other reasons, or when they do not want to go, all of the methods and procedures they resort to for the purpose of diagnosing and treating their illnesses are called ‘folk medicine’” (Boratav, 1994:123). The word “healing” (*sağaltma*) used in the definition means treatment.

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In folk medicine, the scope of the concept of disease is quite broad. Disorders in a person's general health condition, as well as ailments believed to be caused by supernatural beings such as jinn and fairies and by magical influences, fall within this scope. The aim of folk medicine, also referred to as "traditional medicine," "medical folklore," or "folkloric medicine," is to protect public health and to restore sick individuals to health with the help of the material and spiritual means it employs. Undoubtedly, cultural beliefs and practices possessed by societies lie at the foundation of these practices aimed at public health (Kurum, 2008:8).

While people treat certain diseases through their own experiences, they also frequently consult individuals referred to as "folk healers." Although these individuals are generally called "folk healers," they are given different names according to the work they perform (Kurum, 2008:9).

In Anatolia, individuals such as hodjas, sheikhs, prayer healers (*okuyucu-üfürükçii*), *ocaklı*, and *izinli* are encountered who practice folk medicine for the purpose of treating diseases. Hodjas perform a magical function rather than a religious identity in folk medicine practices. Sheikhs, encountered mostly in Eastern and Southeastern Anatolia, have the duty of treating patients in addition to managing the tribes they lead. Individuals called prayer healers, who are generally male, carry out their treatments based on magical principles (Acıpayamlı, 1969:4).

The term *ocak* refers to a family that deals with a specific disease. The individuals of this family who engage in treatment are called *ocaklı*. The *ocaklı* is the most fundamental folk healer. An *ocaklı* acquires the authority to heal through bloodline from their family. No period of education or training is required to obtain this authority. Being descended from any *ocaklı* is sufficient. However, in order for an *ocaklı* to be successful, certain rules must be observed. To learn these rules, the *ocaklı* goes through an apprenticeship period. Most *ocaklı* are women, and female *ocaklı* are considered to be more competent in treatment. Disease treatment is not the main professional occupation of *ocaklı*; they earn their livelihood through other means. The diagnosis of the diseases treated by *ocaklı* is made by the community itself, and physicians are considered ineffective for the diseases that *ocaklı* are obliged to treat (Acıpayamlı, 1969:5; Temizsoylu, 2012:41–42).

An *ocaklı* who is not based on blood relation is called *izinli*. An *ocaklı* who has no child or close relative to continue the lineage takes a talented child under their care at a young age and subjects them to special training; when the time comes, the power to treat diseases is transferred to the apprentice through a ceremony called *elverme*. Thus, the child who gains the title *izinli* acquires the power to treat diseases like an *ocaklı* (Acıpayamlı, 1969:4; Temizsoylu, 2012:43).

As in many regions of Anatolia, traditional treatment methods continue to maintain their validity alongside modern medicine in the Bitlis region. Especially in recent years, alternative medicine, which has become highly popular through means of communication, has become quite widespread. For diseases perceived as simple, such as the common cold, many people believe that it is unnecessary to go to a doctor and therefore turn to herbalists and folk healers. In the Bitlis region, concepts such as *ocak*,

*ocaklı*, and *izinli* do not exist. Folk healers in the region are called *ara hekimi*. The folk medicine practices known in the region are generally applied by individuals themselves or by a family member. Plants purchased from herbalists or collected from nature can easily be used for treatment at home. In addition, many other methods can easily be practiced within the family. Religious treatment practices are quite common in the region. Those who have any ailment have prayers recited over them by sheikhs, hodjas, or imams. Apart from these, there are also individuals believed to have healing hands. It is believed that those whose hands are healing can cure the people over whom they recite prayers. Those who possess healing hands can transfer their healing power to another person through the *elverme* method. This process takes place as follows: the person with healing hands holds the hand of the person to whom the healing power will be transferred, recites blessings three times, and says, "By God's permission, I give you the healing that is in my hands. God willing, you will use this hand to heal people" (K1).

Human beings have struggled with diseases since their existence, sought ways to heal them, and developed certain healing methods in this regard (Acıpayamlı, 1978:11). Acıpayamlı (1978) classified healing methods into main groups as follows: treatment with medication, treatment through magical practices, treatment through religious practices, treatment through surgery, and mixed treatment. In this study, treatment practices are presented based on this classification.

Within the scope of this study, field research using oral interview techniques was conducted in the districts and villages of Bitlis province in order to identify folk medicine practices applied by some families in the Bitlis region, and the findings obtained were compiled and presented under headings.

## **BITLIS REGION FOLK MEDICINE PRACTICES**

In the Bitlis region, folk medicine is preferred either because healing cannot be found through modern medicine or because it is easily accessible. Due to long winter conditions in the region, village roads may remain closed to transportation for a period of time, and for this reason it can be seen that some families are inevitably directed toward folk medicine.

In the study conducted, treatments with medication, treatments through magical and religious practices, surgical treatments, and mixed treatment practices were encountered in the Bitlis region. These treatment methods were classified and presented under headings. Treatment methods that could not be included in this classification were presented under the heading "other treatment methods." Although it is observed that many of these treatment practices have decreased considerably compared to the past, it is still seen that they continue to be preferred.

## TREATMENT PRACTICES WITH MEDICATION

People who have their own treatment methods and prepare medicines from plants are folk healers. While the practices of some of these people or the medicines they prepare have no direct relation to the treatment of diseases, it is seen that the practices and medicines of some of them yield positive results. These are mostly experienced individuals who have learned their treatment methods from their elders and use “folk medicine” prepared with plant, mineral, and animal substances in treatment (Şen, 2016:2). In this treatment method, which is known among the public as “old wives’ remedies,” most of the medicines have been learned as a result of long experience and have survived to the present day by being transmitted from generation to generation.

The sources of treatment practices with medication consist of plant-based, animal-based, or mineral-based sources and their mixtures. Plant-based medicines consist of the roots, stems, bark, leaves, flowers, fruits, and seeds of various plants, or they are used as medicine after undergoing processes such as drying, pounding, and similar procedures. Animal-based medicines are obtained from dead or living creatures. The medicine may be a piece of an organ, an organ, or a single body part. Salt is at the forefront of mineral-based medicines. Others include stone, water, agate, or any minerals that may come to mind. Minerals are generally used in treatment after being mixed with water or olive oil or after being brought into powdered form (Acipayamli, 1978:11–12).

In the Bitlis region, some plant-based medicinal treatment methods can be listed as follows:

**Barley:** Against an increase in fever, barley water is drunk. Barley is boiled in one liter of water until its husk bursts, then strained, and lemon and honey are added to the water and drunk (K28).

**Quince Leaf:** Quince leaves are boiled and drunk for flu and throat infections (K1).

**Reed Leaf (*Bağ Yaprağı*):** It grows near water sources. When boiled and drunk, it helps open the heart vessels and is good for stomach ailments. When made into a poultice, it is wrapped on inflamed wounds (K1).

**Meadow Flower:** The meadow flower, which blooms in the summer months, is used for the treatment of open wounds. After being dried, it is pounded and turned into powder. After being sprinkled on the wound, the wound is wrapped with a cloth and left for five days (K27).

**Mountain Gum:** Mountain gum is chewed for stomach pains. Mountain gum is milky in form and turns into gum as a result of boiling (K9, K10).

**Nettle:** Eating nettle sautéed with eggs ensures that the intestines work well. Nettle is also used in the region for many childhood diseases. Nettle is boiled and its water is given to the sick child to drink. It is believed that this water is good for many diseases

such as fever, measles, diarrhea, and cough. Nettle water is also good for rheumatism (K9, K10).

**Black Radish:** For cough, it is eaten in the mornings on an empty stomach together with honey or molasses (K9, K10).

**Onion:** Onion is smelled by those who have epileptic seizures. It is believed that onion will soften the body (K16, K18).

**Mushroom:** Mushroom is eaten for abdominal pain and cramps (K9, K10).

**Maryam Hort:** For stomach pain, cramps, and gas in babies, the Maryam hort plant is boiled and drunk, or it is rolled in the palm of the hand and swallowed with water (K1).

**Uçkun:** For diabetes and blood pressure diseases, cleansing of the intestines, indigestion, and heartburn, the uçkun plant, which grows naturally in the high parts of the region and is known as “plateau banana,” is consumed abundantly. This plant, which is eaten by peeling its outer skin and has a sour taste, is widely consumed in the region (K3, K4, K29).

**Green Walnut:** For the treatment of goiter disease, newly formed green walnuts the size of a hazelnut are swallowed one by one for a period of 40 days (K26).

**Snake Tongue:** For cut wounds, the snake tongue plant is crushed and made into an ointment and applied to the wound. This plant is also good for stomach pains (K6, K7, K8).

In plant-based medicinal treatments in the region, herbal cures prepared by mixing different plants are also applied. At the forefront of these are cures prepared for women who cannot become pregnant. Green zucchini is cooked and turned into a poultice, placed into a cloth, and wrapped on the groin of women who cannot become pregnant and who have frequent miscarriages, and left for one day. Another practice applied for the same problem is a cure formed from the flowers of summer plants. A plant known among the public as “gulik” is mixed with beet and the flowers of fruit trees that are in bloom and boiled. After the mixture cools to a level that will not burn the skin, the woman who cannot become pregnant is seated over this mixture. The woman is covered with a cloth and made to sweat. It is believed that this practice cleans the ovaries, dries inflammation, and renews dead cells (K16, K17, K18).

In the Bitlis region, animal-based medicinal treatment methods can be listed as follows:

**Trout:** For calcification in the waist and knees, boneless trout is wrapped. Since it is thought that trout dissolves bone, the application time is adjusted carefully. While the application continues from evening until morning in adults, the duration of application is kept short in children (K1).

**Blackbird:** The meat of the blackbird is minced and tied to the groins of women who cannot have children (Kalafat, 2009:26).

**Magpie:** The meat of the magpie, which is called “alaca karga” in the region, is fed to those who have hemorrhoids (K1).

**Leech:** Because it is believed to be good for varicose veins, leeches are placed on varicose areas so that the leech removes dirty blood (K7, K8).

**Donkey Milk:** Donkey milk is rubbed on the knees of children who cannot walk (K1).

**Animal Skin:** The most commonly applied animal-based medicinal treatment method in the region is the “animal skin wrapping” method. For bruises and blows on the body, the freshly slaughtered chicken or sheep skin is wrapped with its heat onto the bruised and impacted area. In this way, it is left for several hours (K2).

**Tail Fat:** Sheep tail fat is wrapped on areas with back pain and calcification. The tail fat must be wrapped before it cools, immediately after it is separated from the skin (K2).

In the Bitlis region, healing waters are used as a mineral-based medicinal treatment method. Hot springs, which have been utilized by various methods for centuries, have also been an important treatment method in folk medicine. Water holds an important place among traditional treatment methods. Some ailments can be treated by applying water to the patient. For this reason, facilities such as hot springs are filled with people seeking remedies for their ailments. The hot spring located on the shore of Lake Van in Tatvan district has become one of the preferred healing waters in recent years. People living in surrounding provinces also show interest in the hot spring for healing. The hot spring is preferred for the treatment of diseases such as skin diseases, especially psoriasis, rheumatic diseases, calcification, lumbar and cervical hernia and pains, bone diseases, fractures and dislocations, joint problems, kidney stones and gallstones, and hemorrhoids.

It is believed that the hot springs located in Budaklı village of Güroymak district are beneficial for the gastrointestinal system, ulcers, and urinary tract infections (K6). It is also believed that the “nizül” water located around the Meydan township of Mutki district is good for rheumatic diseases and headaches (K21, K22).

## **TREATMENT PRACTICES THROUGH MAGICAL PROCEDURES**

The basis of treatment through magical procedures is formed by two separate actions that constitute magic or by the operation of these actions together. Briefly, it is to bring the patient into contact with beings, inanimate objects, or events that are believed to be powerful, alive, and healthy, or to make the patient resemble such objects. Some of the treatment procedures are as follows: lead pouring, fumigation, oil pouring, salt popping, extinguishing embers, cutting the spleen, etc. These procedures are carried out either by any person or persons, as well as by individuals who are experts in this field such as *ocaklı*, *cindar*, and shamans (Acıpayamlı, 1978: 12).

The most commonly encountered treatment method through magical procedures in the Bitlis region is the practices performed against the evil eye. Among the public, the evil eye is explained as the negative effect left on living beings in the form of illness,

disability, and even death, and on inanimate beings in the form of breaking or deterioration, by ill-intentioned people who are believed to possess a sharp and effective eye that carries harmful power in their gaze. On the other hand, the evil eye may arise from bad feelings such as jealousy as well as from excessive affection felt toward close ones (Çiblak, 1962:205).

The most common practice performed against the evil eye in the region is lead pouring. The lead pouring procedure is performed by women who have experience in this matter. The lead melted in a ladle is poured into a bowl filled with water over the head of the patient, whose head is covered. The lead is melted again and this time poured into the water over the patient's navel and feet (K28). Other magical practices performed against the evil eye are as follows:

- The bone of an animal is burned, ground, and made to be smelled by the person affected by the evil eye (K20, K23).
- Blood is taken from the person affected by the evil eye with a small incision made from the upper part of the forehead or from behind the ear (K20, K23).
- Salt is thrown into the fire in order not to be affected by the evil eye (K19, K24).
- The bones of a sacrificed animal are broken, mixed with salt, and burned (K9, K10).

For the treatment of people who develop boils or have excessive acne, the practice of "showing sparks" is carried out. People who have boils are taken to individuals who have herded livestock for many years. The duration of herding must be at least 7–8 years. When night falls, the shepherd strikes two hard stones against each other to produce sparks. The sick person must watch this and see the sparks that emerge. It is believed that the patient will recover when they see the sparks (K9, K10). It has been observed that this practice is carried out in the Güroymak district. In the Mutki district, there is also the practice of "striking a lighter" for the treatment of patients with boils. A lighter is struck in front of the patient, but it is not lit. The patient is made to see the spark of the lighter. In this way, it is believed that the boil will heal (K19, K21).

Another magical treatment method encountered in Mutki is as follows: when the moon takes the form of a crescent, children experience ailments such as vomiting and weakness. In such cases, a piece of lead is crushed and shaped into a crescent and attached to the child together with an amulet. Another practice carried out in this situation is as follows: while the child is distracted, cold water is suddenly sprinkled on the child's face without the child's knowledge. With this practice, it is believed that the child will suddenly startle and throw off the illness (K23).

One of the Turkish folk beliefs in Ahlat is "Forty Pressing." The forties of a mother and child who have not yet completed forty days after birth may mix. From the mother and child whose forties have mixed, one mother and child press the other. A person who is subjected to forty pressing cannot develop, becomes weak, and becomes ill. For treatment, the pressed child is bathed with water mixed with soil taken from the house of the party who performed the pressing. Another practice in this case is as follows: salt secretly taken from the house of the party who performed the pressing is burned in the house of the pressed person. It is believed that funerals can also press babies whose

forty days have not passed, and if a funeral passes near the house, the baby whose forty days have not passed is taken outside the house. If a funeral has pressed a baby whose forty days have not passed, the pressed child is bathed on three Wednesdays with water mixed with soil brought from the grave of that funeral (Kalafat, 2009:25).

Other treatment methods through magical procedures encountered in the Bitlis region are as follows:

- When women whose children do not survive give birth to a new child, they do not buy clothes for the child with their own money until the child is seven years old so that the child will not die. The child's clothes are bought by neighbors (K5, K6, K7). In the Behranlı tribe, clothes bought by the father are not dressed on the child whose siblings did not survive so that the child will live and not die. In Ahlat, in order for the children of those whose children do not survive to live, fabric is collected from seven houses belonging to people named Ahmet. The baby's quilt or clothing is made from this fabric (Kalafat, 2009:37–51).
- Women who cannot have children keep the umbilical cord of a miscarried baby. In this way, they believe that they will become pregnant (K11, K12).
- It is believed that the perforated stone located in the Harabesehir neighborhood of Ahlat district is sacred. Women who cannot have children are taken there and passed through the perforated stone several times. Likewise, children who have difficulty walking are also passed through this perforated stone several times (K14).
- The *üzerlik* plant is mixed with salt. The name of the person believed to have caused the evil eye is written on a piece of paper, thrown into this mixture, and burned. In this way, it is believed that the evil eye of that person is prevented (K26).
- After the name of the person suspected of having caused the evil eye is written on a piece of paper, it is burned. The person affected by the evil eye is made to inhale its smoke (K1).
- The shoe of the person suspected of having caused the evil eye is measured seven times with a string from the toe to the heel, and then the string is burned (K1).
- The soil on which the footprint of the person suspected of having caused the evil eye remains is mixed with water and applied to the face of the person affected by the evil eye (K1).
- In the Heloyi tribe, a child who cannot step is placed in a sieve, and in this state seven houses are visited and eggs are collected. During this time, the phrase “baş gelip ayak ister” is said. These eggs are fed to the child (Kalafat, 2009:30).
- In the Heloyi tribe, children who cannot speak are said to have a “closed tongue.” In order for the tongue of the child with a closed tongue to be opened, water is collected from seven doors. The keys of seven different houses are shaken in this water. This water is given to the child to drink (Kalafat, 2009:31).
- A string is tied to the foot of a child who cannot walk, and the first person to leave the mosque after Friday prayer is made to cut this string. Another method of making the child walk is that the child is held facing the call to prayer (*sela*) and the following words are said: “selasela saza. This one will recover/walk

small. I will mount him on a horse, I will take him on a horse" (Kalafat, 2009:31).

- For babies with jaundice, the "trout treatment" is applied. Water is put into a basin and a trout is placed into the water. The baby is constantly made to look at the trout swimming in the basin. When the trout turns yellow and dies, it is believed that the baby's jaundice has passed (K1).

## TREATMENT PRACTICES THROUGH RELIGIOUS PROCEDURES

The basis of treatment through religious procedures consists of the acts of eliminating or subduing the sources of illness that cause disease by pleading and supplicating to God, gods, spirits, and totems. As can be seen, the feature that differs here from magical procedures is that pleading and supplication have replaced the human will that uses the principles of imitation and contact in magic. In place of magical objects such as salt, black cumin, and black pepper, prayers, prayerful objects, and supplications have taken their place. The *ocaklı* has been replaced by figures such as hodjas, religious officials, and shrines (*yatır*) (Acıpayamlı, 1978:12).

In the Bitlis region, the most widespread treatment method through religious procedures is beliefs related to shrine visits. Bitlis is a province that hosts within its borders the graves of hundreds of scholars, saints, professors (*müderris*), and companions. For this reason, there are many shrines and mausoleums throughout the province and its districts. Some of the shrines visited for treatment purposes in the region are as follows: the shrine of Sheikh Abdurrahman et-Tâgî, called Merkad, in Güroymak; the shrine of Sheikh Muhammad in the village of Gayda in Hizan; the shrine of Sultan Seyit and the shrine of Abdurrahman Gazi in Ahlat; the shrine of Hüseyin Dede (Bapir-i Kal) and the shrine of Kotum Baba in Tatvan; the shrine of Şih Garip and the shrine of Karababa in the center of Bitlis; and the shrine of Haniy-ı Reş located between Bitlis and the Baykan district of Siirt.

Patients in families for whom no remedy can be found place their last hope in the spiritual power of the person buried in the shrine and ask the Creator for help through prayer in his honor. They supplicate to God for a cure for their illnesses, to be freed from their troubles, and for the fulfillment of various wishes, and they see the person buried there as an intermediary. In order for their wishes to be accepted, they sacrifice animals, make vows, and say prayers. Those who make vows fulfill them when their wishes come true. Some shrine practices encountered in the region are as follows:

Those who have epilepsy patients in their families and women who cannot have children go to the shrine of Sheikh Abdurrahman et-Tâgî, called Merkad, and to the Seyda cemetery in Güroymak, where they pray and read the Qur'an in line with their wishes (K9, K10). Another shrine visited by women who cannot become pregnant is the shrine known in the region as Haniy-ı Reş, located between Bitlis and the Baykan district of Siirt, in the Bitlis Stream area. In these shrines, women pray in accordance with their wishes, make vows, and sacrifice animals (K16, K18).

The shrine of Sheikh Muhammad located in the village of Gayda in Hizan is also one of the places visited for treatment purposes. Those who have any illness pass the rosary

located in front of the shrine around their necks three times and remove it. With this practice, it is believed that the illness will leave and go away. Some people also tie a thread to the rosary in order to get rid of the illness. The practices of making vows and sacrificing animals are also common at this shrine. The shrine is also a frequent destination for people who have whooping cough or who cough excessively. It is believed that passing through the perforated stone located in front of the shrine or passing the head through the hole will cure these diseases. If the patient is a child, the child is passed through the perforated stone three times. If the patient is an adult, only the head is passed through the perforated stone three times (K11, K12, K13).

The shrine of Sultan Seyit in Ahlat is a place where those who cannot have children, those who are ill, and weak children are taken. Those who are ill pass through the perforated stone located in this shrine nine times (K1, K2) and bathe in the healing water of the sacred cave located there (Kalafat, 2009:15–20). The practice is carried out on Wednesdays and is repeated for three weeks. Likewise, people go to the shrine of Abdurrahman Gazi in Ahlat for all kinds of illnesses, where they pray and make vows (K1, K2). Votive cloths are tied at the shrine of Sultan Seyit. An attempt was made to introduce the practice of tying votive cloths at the shrine of Abdurrahman Gazi, but it was prevented by the officials (Kalafat, 2009:15–16).

Children who cannot speak, lisp, or stutter are taken to the shrine of Hüseyin Dede (Bapir-i Kal) located in Tatvan. After the chain located in the shrine is dipped into a container of water, the water is given to the child to drink. Women who cannot have children also frequently go to the shrine of Kotum Baba located in the village of Küçüksu in Tatvan. This visit is repeated seven times. It is believed that the desired wishes will be fulfilled as a result of these visits. So much so that women who have children in the region are asked, “Did you go to the shrine of Kotum Baba?” (K1, K2).

Apart from shrine visits, the most frequently resorted treatment method through religious procedures in the region is undoubtedly people who are believed to have healing in their hands. People who have healing in their hands treat some diseases with the chapters and prayers they recite. For those who have headaches, the person with healing in their hands rubs their hands together for 1–2 minutes, then, after reciting blessings upon the Prophet, places one hand on the patient’s head and the other on the chest. Then, after reciting Ayat al-Kursi three, seven, or nine times, Ikhlas three times, Fatiha once, and the chapters of Falaq and Nas once each, they say, “By God’s permission, leave and go.” After the recitation is completed, it is believed that the patient experiences relief. This method can be applied for all pains (K1).

Another religious treatment method observed in the region is as follows: until children reach the age of 3–4, when the moon takes its first crescent form, it is said that “the child falls from the moon.” When the child falls from the moon, the child becomes ill. The child develops fever, has diarrhea, has discharge in the eyes, and vomits. In such cases, the 39th verse of the Surah Yasin is recited (K6, K7, K8). The Turkish meaning of the verse is as follows: “As for the moon, We have determined phases for it until it returns like the old date stalk.”

Other treatment methods through religious procedures observed in the Bitlis region are as follows:

- A child who cries constantly is taken to a shrine and the earlobe is squeezed (K15).
- Those who are paralyzed, disabled, or suffer from mental illnesses are taken to individuals known in the region as “sheikh” or “şih.” These individuals recite prayers for the patients (K28).
- Children who have bruising on their bodies are taken to the Karababa Shrine located in the center of Bitlis (K24).

### **TREATMENT PRACTICES THROUGH SURGERY**

Treatment through surgery is a form of treatment performed by making incisions in some organs of the patient or by opening holes in the body. It is rarely resorted to by the public. Cutting off a toe or finger, splitting under the tongue, etc. (Acıpayamlı, 1978:12).

The most commonly encountered surgical treatment practice in the region is “cutting for jaundice.” In this treatment method, the underside of the tongue, the palate, or the area under the ear of the person who has contracted jaundice is cut with a razor so that a few drops of blood come out. In this way, it is believed that jaundice is cured and that this method is quite beneficial (K9, K29).

Another surgical treatment method is “cupping” (*hacamat*). The act of drawing blood by scratching the surface of the skin at certain points with a cupping instrument is called cupping. This method is generally used for severe headaches (K24).

### **MIXED TREATMENT PRACTICES**

Mixed treatment practices consist of the combined use of other treatment methods. Examples include a hodja pouring lead, reciting forty-one Yasin verses over grapes, asking for healing by reciting prayers to a tree, wearing an amulet with written prayers, etc. (Acıpayamlı, 1978:12).

The most commonly encountered mixed treatment practice in the region is having amulets written. In order to be protected from and rid of evil, people have amulets written by individuals called “sheikh” or “şih” in the region or by imams, and hang them around their necks or carry them on themselves. In this way, it is believed that they will be protected from all kinds of negativity. Those who cannot have children, those whose children do not survive, those who are paralyzed, children who cry constantly, the disabled, and those who suffer from mental illnesses are taken to these individuals to have amulets written. The written amulets are hung around the patient’s neck or carried by the patient. Again, small pieces of paper on which healing verses are written are dissolved in water and given to the patient to drink (K24, K28). Or after the paper on which healing verses are written is dissolved in water, the patient is bathed

with this water. When there is discord between spouses in the home, this water is also poured around the house (K1).

There are many similar practices in the region for the treatment of warts. For wart treatment, forty grains of barley are placed inside a piece of cloth and buried in the ground. The barley remains buried in the soil for forty days. During this period, prayers are recited. As the barley rots in the soil, the warts on the person's hand fall off on their own (K28). A similar practice for wart treatment is as follows: barley over which healing verses have been recited is buried in the soil. When the barley rots, the wart also falls off (K1). In another wart treatment, on a Wednesday, an egg is taken and a hole is opened in it. Forty grains of barley split lengthwise are placed inside the egg. In this state, the egg is buried in the ground and left to rot. When the barley rots, the warts also fall off. In another wart treatment, the warts are tied one by one with a string while the relevant prayer is recited; as days pass, the warts fall off. The pieces that fall off are buried in the ground (Kalafat, 2009:43).

For the treatment of *temre* disease, before sunrise on three Wednesdays, the area around the *temre* is scratched with an unused needle while blessings upon the Prophet are recited. The needle used is then stuck into a hole in a wall. The procedure is repeated on Wednesdays for three weeks. Another practice applied for the treatment of *temre* disease is as follows: a person who has herded livestock for at least seven years takes a red stone into their mouth and then applies their saliva onto the *temre*. In this way, treatment is provided (K1).

For the treatment of a type of eczema known as *demirov*, two flat stones are taken, the relevant verse is recited, saliva is applied to these stones, and they are rubbed together. The resulting mud is applied to the area affected by eczema. This practice is repeated on three Wednesdays. The same practice is also carried out with henna (Kalafat, 2009:42).

Other mixed treatment practices observed in the region are as follows:

Those who suffer from mental illnesses and those who fall into fear have a cloth placed over them and are made to look into a bowl filled with water. During this time, prayers are recited (K25).

## OTHER TREATMENT PRACTICES

Practices that cannot be classified among the treatment practices given under the headings above are presented under this heading. At the forefront of the treatments in this category are "fracture-dislocation treatments" and "cupping."

Individuals known in the region as bone-setters determine the location of the problem by feeling the broken or dislocated bone with their hands. The dislocation is pulled appropriately and placed back into position. Broken bones are corrected by hand and tightly wrapped. The healing period of fractures depends on age. While the bones of younger individuals heal in a shorter time, this period becomes longer as age increases.

Cupping treatment is applied for headaches, bodily pains, colds, extreme fatigue, lumbar hernia, cervical hernia, shoulder pain, and back pain. This procedure is also called “placing a glass” in the region. In some areas, paper or cotton is burned inside the glass, while in other areas a matchstick dipped in dough is burned (K1, K24, K28). The cupping procedure is also applied for umbilical displacement. In cases of umbilical displacement, the application is performed by placing a large water glass on the center of the navel. Another practice applied for umbilical displacement is as follows: the navel is rubbed for a while with warm soapy water. A towel or cloth is rolled and folded into a cylindrical shape. The end of the cloth is pressed onto the navel and left for about 20 minutes (K1).

Other treatment practices in this category are as follows:

For inflamed wounds, flour, egg yolk, and sugar are mixed and applied to the wound. The mixture is left on the wound from evening until morning. If the wound has scabbed over, olive oil is added to the mixture (K1).

For lumbar hernia, traction is applied. While one person lifts the patient upward by carrying them on their back, another person presses downward from the feet (K1).

In the region, especially in villages, although rarely, bone-setters, uncertified circumcisers, injectors, dentists, and midwives are encountered among the public. These individuals are the first people families resort to for treatment in emergency situations in villages whose roads are closed due to heavy snowfall during long winter months.

## CONCLUSION

One of the most important sources of Turkish folklore studies is folk medicine research. This is because Anatolia has a rich folk medicine culture. For centuries, the people of Anatolia have tried to treat their illnesses through various methods, have accumulated extensive knowledge and experience, and have created traditional medicine by transmitting this knowledge and experience to future generations. As treatment methods, many practices have been used, primarily herbal- and animal-based remedies. Those who applied these treatments in Anatolia were known by names such as *ocaklı*, *izinli*, *hodja*, *sheikh*, and *healer-prayer reciter*. However, these concepts are not encountered in the Bitlis region. In the region, folk healers are called “*ara hekimi*.”

In the region, although folk medicine practices have decreased compared to the past, they are still ongoing today. People seek treatment by going to doctors for all ailments, use the medicines deemed appropriate by modern medicine, and those who cannot find a remedy for their illness resort to folk medicine for solutions. In some illnesses considered minor, people do not feel the need to go to a doctor and instead treat themselves using plants purchased from herbalists or collected from nature, along with experiences passed down from the past to the present.

In this study, folk medicine methods practiced by some families in the Bitlis region were investigated, and it was observed that people resort to some of the medicinal, religious, magical, surgical, and mixed treatment methods. Among these methods,

medicinal treatments were found to be the most commonly applied. In medicinal treatments, animal, plant, and mineral sources were used. The most frequently used sources are plant-based. Barley, meadow flower, nettle, *meryemhort*, *uçkun*, and snake's tongue are some of the plants used in treatments. In addition, trout, magpie, leech, tail fat, chicken skin, and sheep skin are animal-based sources, while thermal spring waters are mineral-based remedies used.

In the region, the foremost among treatment methods involving religious practices are visits to shrines. The shrines of Sheikh Abdurrahman et-Tâgî, Sheikh Muhammed, Sultan Seyit, Abdurrahman Gazi, Hüseyin Dede (Bapir-i Kal), Kotum Baba, Şih Garip, Karababa, and Haniy-i Reş are visited for treatment purposes. Apart from this, magical treatments such as pouring lead, burning salt, and fumigation are also common. Taking blood from under the tongue for the treatment of jaundice and cupping (*hacamat*), which is believed to be beneficial for many diseases, are among the leading surgical treatment practices. The most commonly used mixed treatment practice in the region is having amulets written.

With the significant development and easy accessibility of modern medicine, folk medicine, which has lost its effectiveness, should not be regarded as unnecessary; it should not be forgotten that the source of many medicines produced by modern medicine consists of plants that have been used in folk medicine for centuries. The beneficial and harmful aspects of folk medicine methods should be investigated through scientific methods, and beneficial practices should be recommended by doctors and offered to the public. The public should also be informed about harmful and ineffective methods

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