COSMIC DESTRUCTION AND THE ESCHATOLOGICAL THRESHOLD: A COMPARATIVE ANALYSIS OF THE APOCALYPSE MOTIF IN THE QUR'ĀN, MYTHOLOGY, AND TURKISH FOLK NARRATIVES

Kadir Gömbeyaz & **Fatma Aygün Erdem**
Kocaeli University, Kocaeli-Türkiye
kadir.gombeyaz@kocaeli.edu.tr
https://orcid.org/0000-0002-5204-5564

İstanbul Sabahattin Zaim University, İstanbul-Türkiye
fatmaygun19@hotmail.com
https://orcid.org/0000-0001-8220-0046

Abstract

Since ancient times, images of the apocalypse, deluge, cosmic cataclysm, and divine punishment have provided the basis for narrative patterns that reveal the relation between man and time, ethics, and religion. According to many apocalyptic narratives, the dissolution of cosmos in the process of divine punishment is not an absolute destruction but a threshold beyond which new forms of order come into being. This study proposes that apocalyptic and cosmic destruction narratives, despite their various cosmological and theological assumptions, possess a common liminal structure that acts

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as a threshold between destruction and regeneration, chaos and order, mortality and transcendence.

Patterns of apocalyptic and cosmic destruction will be explored through a comparative analysis of Qur'ānic narratives, classical myths, and Turkish folklore narratives. Comparative textual analysis will be conducted as the primary methodology of the research, and the concept of liminality, borrowed from anthropology and narrative theory, will be the main framework of the research. Previous scholarly approaches have examined those traditions separately or have focused on thematic similarities among those traditions, while a holistic view of their liminal function has not been elaborated yet. Liminality in the current study is conceived as a transitional period when old structures are dismantled, transformed, and rearranged into the new one. The originality of the study consists in showing how different traditions use apocalyptic narratives as liminal structures by which cosmic transformation, moral reconstruction, and existential rebirth are narrativized.

The research results show that according to the Qur'ān, the apocalyptic cataclysm is an irreversible threshold in the linear understanding of time when the manifestation of divine power and absolute justice takes place through resurrection, judgment, and the hereafter. At the same time, mythological stories usually depict cosmic destruction within the cyclic understanding of time and renewal. The Turkish folk narratives combine features of both linear and cyclic time schemes. Thus, the apocalyptic narrative appears to be not only a narrative about the end but a multi-dimensional symbolic structure through which the human interpretation of finitude, sacred order, and existence occurs.

Key Words: Eschatology, apocalypse, cosmic destruction, liminality, the Qur'ān, mythology, Turkish folk narratives

Introduction

Eschatology, to the extent that it deals with concepts of the end of the universe, afterlife, and the future destiny of the cosmic order at the end, has been of paramount importance not only in sacred narratives but also in myths, memory and folklore. The concept of the "end" has been fictionalized through various means such as floods, cosmical disasters, divine wars and apocalypses; consequently, such narrative genres have created symbols which make sense of human relation to time, being, and the sacred.[1] Therefore, stories of apocalyptic visions

[1] Mircea Eliade, *Myth and Reality*, trans. Willard R. Trask (New York & Evanston: Harper & Row, Publishers, Incorporated, 1963), 54-77; Mircea Eliade, *Cosmos and*

and cosmic doom cannot be seen as simple accounts of disaster; rather, they should be viewed as multiple threshold narratives, filled with metaphysical, moral, and ontological meanings.[2]

In the general context provided above, the central question posed by the present research paper is as follows: although the motifs of apocalyptic visions and cosmic destruction in Qurʾānic stories, mythologies, and Turkish folktales have been analyzed in terms of thematic commonalities before, still there exists a gap in providing a holistic and comparative understanding of their "liminal" role. However, the motif is important not only because it provides the construction of the notion of "the end", but also because it produces meanings in terms of moral responsibility, time conception, and existential beliefs. Using the concept of liminality proposed by Victor Turner, the apocalyptic motif can no longer be studied as a theological/mythological topic.[3]

The review of the relevant literature shows that in the general scope of Islamic philosophy and eschatology studies this theme has been approached mostly from the viewpoint of theology with the focus on the Qurʾān. These studies have considered in great detail topics such as the day of judgment, resurrection, and God's reckoning. The symbolic and doctrinal aspects of the Qurʾānic apocalyptic images have been thoroughly discussed. However, in these studies

History: The Myth of the Eternal Return, translated by Willard R. Trask (New York: Harper & Brothers, 1959), 60, 73, 106, 107, 111, 124-125, 141-145; Sebastian Günther, "Eschatology", *The Oxford Handbook of Qurʾanic Studies*, ed. Muhammad Abdel Haleem - Mustafa Shah (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 2020), 472-487; Nida Tabassum Khan, "Eschatology: An Introduction", *Journal of Bio Innovation* 14/3 (2025), 530-535.

[2] This conceptualization applies the theoretical framework of "rites of passage" developed by Arnold van Gennep; see esp. Arnold van Gennep, *The Rites of Passage*, trans. Monika B. Vizedom - Gabrielle L. Caffee (Chicago: The University of Chicago Press, 1960), 10-11. While van Gennep focuses on the transitions of individuals within a social structure through the concept of the "liminal" (threshold), this study extends this framework, later systematized as the "liminal phase" in broader social theory, to the macro-level of cosmic destruction, treating the apocalypse as a transitional threshold between two distinct existential orders.

[3] This approach draws upon the concept of "anti-structure" (or communitas) as developed by Turner; see Victor Turner, *The Ritual Process: Structure and Anti-Structure* (Ithaca, NY: Cornell University Press, 1991), 94-97. Turner defines "anti-structure/communitas" as a liminal phase where social hierarchies and categories are suspended, creating a space for existential and sacred transformation, a framework that this study applies to the cosmic dissolution of the apocalypse.

mythological stories and Turkish folklore have been discussed indirectly and in the framework of rather vague comparisons.

The study of mythologies and folklore shows that the narratives about cosmic destruction have been analyzed in terms of cyclical time. Thus, in such frameworks, floods, the end of the world catastrophes, and wars of gods have been studied within the dialectic of order, chaos, and re-order. Ragnarök in Norse mythology, deluge in Mesopotamian mythology, and cosmic catastrophes in Greek mythology have been viewed as symbolic representations of the concept of the universal destruction. However, these studies have remained far from the systematic comparison with the concept of apocalypse in the Qurʾān; they have found it difficult to combine the revelation-based linear eschatology and the mythological cyclical view of time within one approach. In many mythological concepts of cyclical time, the concept of apocalypse is an attempt to cleanse time from its profane aspects and get back to the beginning.[4] From this perspective, one can see that both linear and cyclic models of time can be considered the same human response to concerns about finiteness, meaning, and cosmic order.

But this model cannot be equated with the idea of the apocalypse from the Qurʾān. In the teachings of kalām, the *qiyāmah* does not imply purification of the existing world in view of its further transformation into new historic cycles. *Qiyāmah* means the end of this world and the entrance into an eternal state of justice and retribution. Consequently, while in mythology the end of the world usually serves as a prelude to a new cycle of history, it is placed in the context of linear sacred history according to the principles of Qurʾānic eschatology.

The research on Turkish folk narratives has mainly concentrated on the search for traces of pre-Islamic myths in folklore or peculiarities of Turkish oral folklore tradition. Such apocalyptic motifs like piercing the heavens, splitting the earth, cataclysms, and other extraordinary signs have been analyzed as symbolic phenomena of the oral tradition,

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[4] This perspective draws upon Mircea Eliade's conceptualization of the "myth of the eternal return". Eliade argues that archaic and religious man seeks to abolish "historical" or "profane" time through rituals and narratives of cosmic destruction, thereby recovering a primordial, sacred state of being. See Mircea Eliade, *Cosmos and History*, 51-92.

but the connection between those narratives, Qurʾānic eschatology, and mythological cosmogonies has not been considered from a comparative perspective. The study of Cengiz Batuk[5] provides important evidence that the idea of "the end of history" is a consistent mode of thinking in religious and mythological traditions. Nevertheless, the study does not consider the role of apocalyptic motifs as liminal signs nor conducts a comparative analysis of narratives from Qurʾānic, mythological, and folkloric traditions.

Just like that, the study by Muharrem Kaya titled *Mitolojiden Efsaneye*,[6] highlights the presence of Turkish mythology in folktales, but it lacks a comparative study with Qurʾānic narratives or the use of Turner's notion of "liminality" and therefore falls short of being comparative structural.

In this context, the main deficiency in the literature is that there is not enough research about the structure of apocalyptic and catastrophic symbols as a kind of "threshold" ontologically and symbolically in the Qurʾān, myths, and Turkish folk narrratives. Past studies[7] have mostly analyzed these realms of narratives independently of each other, without investigating their structural continuity, transformation, and discontinuities through one unified conceptual frame of reference.[8]

This paper attempts to bridge the mentioned gap by analyzing the concepts of apocalypses and cosmic destruction as an ontological and symbolic boundary from the perspective of comparative narrative analysis of the Qurʾān, classical mythological narratives, and Turkish folktales. The contribution of this paper is primarily based on the

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5 Cengiz Batuk, *Tarihin Sonunu Beklemek* (İstanbul: İz Yayıncılık, 2003).

6 Muharrem Kaya, *Mitolojiden Efsaneye: Türk Mitolojisinin Türkiye'deki Efsanelerde İzleri* (İstanbul: Bağlam Yayıncılık, 2011).

7 Yavuz Gözen, *Metinlerarasılık Bağlamında Eskatoloji Mitleri ve Dini Literatürde Kıyamet Tasvirleri* (Ankara: Ankara University, The Institute of Social Sciences, Ph.D. Dissertation, 2023); Nurdane Güler, "Kur'ân'da Kozmik Kıyamet ile Hesap Gününün İç İçeliği ve Yoruma Etkisi", *Cumhuriyet İlahiyat Dergisi* 24/3 (2020), 1475-1496; Kader Hocaoğlu Alagöz - Nagihan Baysal Yurdakul, "Eskatoloji Mitlerinden Kıyametnâmelere Geleneksel Türk Dünya Görüşünde Kıyamet Olgusu: Dâsitân-ı Mahşer-nâme Örneği", *Korkut Ata Türkiyat Araştırmaları Dergisi* 11 (June 2023), 563-586; Onur Alp Kayabaşı, "Türk Mitolojisinde Eskatoloji Mitleri", *Folklor/Edebiyat* 22/86 (2016), 167-180.

8 As Victor Turner emphasizes, such liminal moments are zones where social and cosmic structures dissolve, thereby allowing the human condition to emerge in its purest form. See Turner, *The Ritual Process*, 200.

understanding of the apocalypse not as a mere story of "the end", but as a meaning-forming boundary situated between order and chaos, this life and the afterlife, and the past and the future.

With this aim, this study utilizes comparative narrative analysis, symbolic analysis, and thematic reading as its key methodological tools. Textual materials used in this research include selected parts of the Qurʾān devoted to the concepts of apocalypses and cosmic destruction, namely al-Takwīr, al-Infiṭār, al-Inshiqāq, al-Qāriʿah, and al-Zilzāl; mythological narratives such as the Epic of Gilgamesh, the Deucalion and Pyrrha story, Ragnarök, Pralaya, and the Osiris-Seth narrative; and Turkish folk narratives devoted to apocalyptic signs, cosmic disaster, petrifaction, 'remaining with the wolf' motif, and other end-of-time themes recorded in Anatolian and Turkic folk traditions. It needs to be highlighted that the comparative approach applied in this study does not assume any equivalence of ontological nature of the Qurʾān, mythological narratives, and Turkish folk narratives. While the Qurʾān is viewed as a revealed text in Islamic theology, mythological and folkloric narratives are analyzed as cultural discourses transmitted via literature and oral tradition. Therefore, the comparison undertaken in this study is restricted only to the symbolism, narrativity, and liminality of apocalyptic motifs represented in the analyzed narratives.

The article is structured in two main sections. In the first one, the relationship between cosmogonic and eschatological concepts is considered at the theoretical level in terms of cosmological destruction as a boundary. In the second part of this study, the motifs of apocalypses and cosmic destruction are analyzed comparatively in the framework of three subsections. The first subsection deals with the apocalyptic images in the Qurʾān in terms of the concepts of divine justice, individual accountability, and linear time. The second subsection discusses the motif of cosmic destruction in mythological narratives in terms of cyclical time. The third subsection deals with the apocalyptic and cosmic destruction motifs in Turkish folk narratives within the syncretic boundary framework of Islamic eschatological motifs and pre-Islamic mythological legacy.

1. The Apocalyptic Motif as a Liminal Threshold between Cosmogony and Eschatology

The term "threshold" used in the present study is based on the theory of liminality proposed by Victor Turner. On the basis of the

concept of rites of passage developed by Arnold van Gennep, Turner defines liminality as a transitional phase where old structures are put on hold while new ones may emerge.[9] In this context, a threshold is impossible to interpret as an endpoint – it is a transitional phase between one state of being and another. As regards the apocalypse, the idea of liminality could be considered a useful concept in the interpretation of the destruction of the world as a transition to another order of things.

In the development of the history of religious thinking, there has always existed an attitude to regard eschatology and cosmogony as associated notions. It is believed that stories of the end of the world have been usually linked to problems of regeneration and creation of a new world order. In other words, eschatology does represent not only the teaching on the end of the world but also the teaching on its renewal.[10]

Such a correlation is best evidenced when considering the eschatology of the ancient civilizations. There have been many cases where the destruction of the cosmos does not necessarily imply the destruction of everything, for this means that the old system is being wiped out. In many stories where there are floods, fire, earthquakes, and even wars among the celestial objects, there has always been a resulting creation of the cosmos.[11]

Whether they occur in the form of sacred writings, myths, or folklore, it is typical for apocalyptic themes to serve as symbolic indicators of great change. Apocalyptic symbols include disasters like floods, disruptions in the cosmos, flames, darkness, and other disruptions to nature that symbolize periods of instability within the current structure where great changes can occur. Liminal theory can provide an interpretation of these apocalyptic symbols as symbolic transitions rather than catastrophes.[12]

In Islamic belief, the archetypal imagery is conveyed by the idea of *qiyāmah*. The apocalyptic vision of the end of the world in the Qurʾān conveys images of cosmic destruction within the context of God's

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9 Arnold van Gennep, *The Rites of Passage*, 20.

10 Eliade, *Myth and Reality*, 54-55.

11 Batuk, *Tarihin Sonunu Beklemek*, 43-45; Bilge Seyidoğlu, *Mitoloji Üzerine Araştırmalar: Metinler ve Tahliller* (İstanbul: Dergâh Yayınları, 2017), 34-36.

12 Eliade, *Myth and Reality*, 54-55; Batuk, *Tarihin Sonunu Beklemek*, 48-51.

judgment, moral reckoning, and resurrection. Thus, imagery of the tearing apart of the sky, the extinguishing of the stars, movement of the mountains, and turmoil of the oceans does not just convey the idea of the disintegration of the existing cosmic order but also highlights the aspect of divine justice being revealed and humans having to pay for their sins.[13]

However, a comparative study between Qurʾānic narratives, mythological narratives, and folktales shows that there are marked differences in the symbolism of cosmic destruction. Although in mythology destruction is always linked to cycles of renewal in the cosmos,[14] the Qurʾānic understanding of destruction fits in a linear eschatology of judgement and resurrection.[15] Folktales particularly in the Turkish-Islamic cultural framework incorporate elements of religious instruction together with themes that have been preserved in their story culture.[16] Even though quite distinct in nature, all these tales make use of the image of disorder within the universe to provide answers to the most basic questions of order, morality, destiny, and the relationship between man and God. Apart from its cosmological and theological significance, apocalyptic writings could also serve the purpose of symbolic depiction of psychological transformation.[17] Consequently, it might be suggested that the apocalyptic theme is a liminal archetype lying between cosmogony and eschatology. Besides being an indicator of the end of the world, it is also a way of explaining changes and continuities in the cosmos.

2. Apocalyptic (*Qiyāmah*) Imagery as a Threshold in the Qurʾān, Mythology, and Folk Narratives

Human beings' reflections about the end of the world have created an entire narrative universe where sacred, mythological, and folkloric tradition has approached the issues of cosmic order and its destruction and renewal. Despite the fact that each one of these traditions comes from a different epistemological system, their use of similar imagery of cosmic upheaval can be noted quite often.

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13 Batuk, *Tarihin Sonunu Beklemek*, 81, 188, 193, 203, 297, 320.

14 Eliade, *Myth and Reality*, 46.

15 Günther, "Eschatology", *The Oxford Handbook of Qurʾanic Studies*, 472-487; Artem S. Dankanich, "Islamic Eschatology: Its Origins and Theological Interpretations", *VI Конгрес сходознавців* (Kyiv: Baltija Publishing, 2022), 132-135.

16 Kaya, *Mitolojiden Efsaneye*, 166-176.

17 Batuk, *Tarihin Sonunu Beklemek*, 325.

In the Qurʾān, depictions of the apocalypse portray the collapse of the cosmic order through images such as the sky being torn apart[18] or being ripped apart,[19] the stars being dimmed[20] or scattered,[21] the mountains being set in motion[22] or vanishing like a mirage,[23] the seas boiling over,[24] and the seas burst forth.[25] Meccan *sūrah*s describe the Day of Judgment and the Hereafter in colorful detail. This type of verse allows us to contemplate humanity's existence and the mortality of our earthly reality.[26]

Many mythological traditions share similar motifs. Tales of Ragnarök, great floods and challenges among the divine typically record the failure of a settled order and the rise of another.[27] Equally similar images are found in folklore where the earth cracks open, the sky shatters, and wondrous signs rise in the sky.[28] Influenced by Islamic eschatology and local cosmological traditions, these images of cosmic destruction are shared by many stories.

A comparison of these narratives shows a consistent pattern. Destruction of the world then often leads to the establishment of a new order. That is, the motif lies between two different understandings of time. Mythological stories tend to think about time as recurring in a series, while stories of revelation move towards a specific ending. The Qurʾān includes images of cosmic tumult associated with judgment and of the life to come. Typical mythical accounts generally consider events that fundamentally alter the relationship among the divine powers, the natural world, and humans. In folk tradition, elements of each approach are often fused together in different cultural contexts and applied to represent cultural aspects of things. The fact they are

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18 Q 82/1. Unless otherwise stated, all English translations of Qurʾānic verses in this article are taken from M. A. S. Abdel Haleem, *The Qurʾan: A New Translation* (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 2005).

19 Q 84/1.

20 Q 81/2.

21 Q 82/2.

22 Q 81/3.

23 Q 78/20.

24 Q 81/6.

25 Q 82/3.

26 Abū Manṣūr Muḥammad ibn Muḥammad al-Samarqandī al-Māturīdī, *Taʾwīlāt al-Qurʾān*, ed. Bekir Topaloğlu (İstanbul: Dār al-Mīzān, 2007), 16/281-311; 17/85-110, 123-139, 177-186.

27 Batuk, *Tarihin Sonunu Beklemek*, 49-51; Eliade, *Myth and Reality*, 60-61.

28 Kaya, *Mitolojiden Efsaneye*, 168-176.

ubiquitous across so many different narrative traditions implies that questions of the future of our existence have been in human consideration for centuries. Facing this wider perspective, the next part looks at the Qurʾānic accounts of the annihilation of the cosmos and the specific position of those in a revelation-based perspective on the end of time.

2.1. The Motif of Cosmic Destruction as a Threshold in the Qurʾān

Although the Qurʾān is not comparable to mythology or folk narratives in terms of its nature and origin, its message has inevitably intersected with these traditions throughout history. The accusation of *asāṭīr al-awwalīn* (fables of the ancients)[29] made by the polytheists of the Jāhiliyyah period and the Qurʾān's direct rejection of this claim demonstrate that the distinction between revelation and mythological narratives was already recognized and debated in the earliest Islamic community. The fact that this accusation was raised particularly in connection with the denial of resurrection[30] also suggests that Arab society was familiar, albeit through altered forms, with narratives derived from earlier sacred accounts. In this context, the semantic structure of the relevant verses points to a revelatory metaphysical framework that distinguishes the Qurʾānic narrative from mythological traditions.[31]

The influence of revelation, which permeated nearly every sphere of life, became subject to diverse cultural interpretations under varying historical and social conditions. As these narratives circulated through oral tradition, they gradually gave rise to forms of storytelling in which mythological and folkloric elements became intertwined. Thus, while the Qurʾān cannot be equated with mythology, it nevertheless contributed indirectly to the formation of a rich and multilayered

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[29] Q 6/25; Q 8/31; Q 16/24; Q 23/83; Q 25/5; Q 27/68; Q 46/17; Q 68/15; Q 83/13.

[30] Q 23/81-83; Q 27/68-69.

[31] As Toshihiko Izutsu emphasizes in his semantic analyses, the Qurʾān adopted these ancient motifs and restructured them by integrating them into a radically new monotheistic ethical system. Through this process, traditional concepts were detached from their pre-Islamic tribal contexts and reoriented around a central framework of divine unity and moral accountability; see Toshihiko Izutsu, *Ethico-Religious Concepts in the Qurʾān* (Montreal & Kingston - London - Ithaca: McGill-Queen's University Press, 2002), 54.

narrative tradition within Islamic culture, particularly concerning conceptions of the end of the world and the afterlife.

Indeed, the scenes of cosmic destruction in the Qurʾān, which generally begin with the first blast of the Horn (*Ṣūr*), are presented through brief yet vivid descriptions. These portrayals are frequently linked, without any sense of discontinuity, to the narratives of resurrection and judgment that follow the second blast. This narrative structure demonstrates that the Qurʾān treats the cosmic end and the process of metaphysical reckoning within a unified framework of meaning.[32] In examining the cosmic destruction associated with the first blast, it becomes clear that the Qurʾān's language and mode of expression regarding the end of the universe hold particular significance. The concepts employed to describe the end of the world refer not only to physical destruction but also to a theological, symbolic, and moral reckoning. In doing so, they perform a transformative function by calling human beings to assume responsibility in light of an awareness of the Hereafter. For this reason, the Qurʾān presents highly powerful and symbolic depictions of the end of the universe, portraying both the collapse of the established cosmic order and a transformation of universal proportions.

As the apocalyptic narratives were particularly concentrated in the Meccan *sūrah*s –in al-Takwīr, al-Infiṭār, al-Inshiqāq, al-Zilzāl, al-Ḥāqqah, al-Nabaʾ, and al-Qiyāmah– images of visual and aural intensity that were also designed to shock the beholder to the core were most striking. When these suras illustrate the fall of the foundations of the universal order, the breaking of the heavens, the scattering of the stars, the sweep of the mountains, the boiling of the seas; more than just annihilation, they refer to a metaphysical fracture through which the power of God's justice and absolute judgment is brought into effect. In the Qurʾān, however, these scenes are not only about destruction. They are closely linked to resurrection and the afterlife, where destruction is not the final end but is followed by renewal, re-creation, and resurrection, along with moral reckoning. In this way, Qurʾānic eschatology presents cosmic rupture as part of a larger process that also includes resurrection and divine judgment.

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[32] Güler, "Kur'ân'da Kozmik Kıyamet ile Hesap Gününün İç İçeliği ve Yoruma Etkisi", 1478-1479.

The narrative of the end of the universe, referred to in the Qurʾān as *al-sāʿah* (the Hour),[33] is expressed through images such as the sun being shrouded in darkness (*takwīr*), the sky being torn apart (*infiṭār*), and the sky being ripped apart (*inshiqāq*). These terms signify not only physical destruction but also the disruption of the fundamental balance of existence and the termination of the order recognized by nature. For instance, Sūrat al-Takwīr begins with the verses, "When the sun is shrouded in darkness, when the stars are dimmed, and when the mountains are set in motion…",[34] presenting a scene where the universe ceases to be a cosmos and is transformed back into chaos. The expression "folded up" (*kuwwirat*) points to a metaphysical rupture through the meanings of both the cessation of light and the folding away of time. Similarly, Sūrat al-Infiṭār opens with the verse, "When the sky is torn apart."[35] The expression "being torn apart" (*infaṭarat*) emphasizes the disruption of the heaven as a cosmic dome and the collapse of the order of the celestial realm.

In the Qurʾān, the occurrence of the apocalypse is generally portrayed as a cosmic upheaval in which the sky is torn apart, the stars are scattered, and the seas burst forth.[36] The earth is depicted as shaking violently in its final quaking, throwing out its burdens and revealing all that has taken place,[37] while the mountains will be like tufts of carded wool,[38] and will be blasted into dust and left as a level plain.[39] On that Day, the sun and the moon are brought together and the moon is eclipsed,[40] while the sky is ripped apart[41] and the heavens are split apart with clouds, as the angels are sent down in streams.[42]

The sun and the moon are joined together, and the heaven is shaken and rent asunder. In these narratives, cosmic elements such as

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[33] The Qurʾān emphasizes the certainty of the coming of the Hour while simultaneously stating that its exact time remains hidden: "The Hour is coming – though I choose to keep it hidden– for each soul to be rewarded for its labour" see Q 20/15.

[34] Q 81/1-3.

[35] Q 82/1.

[36] Q 82/1-3.

[37] Q 99/1-4.

[38] Q 101/5.

[39] Q 20/105–107.

[40] Q 75/8-9.

[41] Q 84/1.

[42] Q 25/25.

the heaven, earth, mountains, stars, and seas appear on the stage as "witnesses" to the Day of Judgment. These are not merely natural elements but are also witnesses to the cosmic order. Therefore, their destruction signifies not only a physical end but also an ontological rupture through which the relationship between God and humanity is re-established and absolute justice is manifested. Following this destruction, the stages of resurrection (*baʿth*), reckoning (*ḥisāb*), and punishment/reward (Hell/Paradise) begin. Thus, cosmic destruction is not just a catastrophe but a transition to a new reality.

According to this unique approach, the apocalyptic narrative signifies not merely an end but is understood as the opening of a new plane of existence where the absolute justice of God is manifested and His eternal judgment begins. In this regard, the narrative of cosmic destruction in the Qurʾān diverges epistemologically, theologically, and ontologically from the destruction-rebirth cycles found in mythological and folk narratives. Thus, with its conception of linear history and the idea of a unique end, Qurʾānic eschatology draws an original horizon in terms of both the perception of time and the order of existence. Islamic eschatology is positioned as a decisive force that shapes human behavior and encourages spiritual development, while also representing a significant intellectual discourse aimed at revealing metaphysical reflections on divine truth.[43]

In the Qurʾān, cosmic upheaval is presented not merely as a terrifying and disruptive event but also as a moment of manifest clarity in which divine justice is fully revealed, all realities are brought to light, and the veils concealing the truth are removed. Therefore, Qurʾānic apocalyptic narratives represent both a process of rupture and a process of unveiling. Indeed, on that Day, humanity will be brought to judgement and none of its secrets will remain hidden.[44] In the apocalyptic scenes of the Qurʾān, the ideas of the "unveiling of truth" and "recreation" are particularly striking. In this regard, certain thematic parallels are observed between the Qurʾānic narratives and mythological accounts. However, a significant distinction emerges here: while Qurʾānic eschatology points to a "singular and definitive"

[43] Siti Humairoh et al., "The Concept of Eschatology in Islam: An Analysis of Fazlur Rahman's Perspective and Al-Munir's Exegesis on Surah Al-Infithar", *Journal of Middle East and Islamic Studies* 11/1 (2024), 2.

[44] Q 69/18.

end within a linear understanding of time,[45] mythological narratives are generally cyclical and built upon continuously repeating cycles of destruction and rebirth.

The apocalyptic depictions in the Qurʾān are presented through powerful symbols that construct cosmic destruction as an irreversible threshold between worldly life and eschatological existence.

Consequently, cosmic catastrophe narratives within mythological systems offer powerful narrative patterns that symbolically interpret the relationships between humanity, the deities, nature, and time. In these accounts, apocalypse and destruction are envisioned not merely as an absolute end, but as a prerequisite for transition, transformation, and a new beginning. Qurʾānic eschatology, however, diverges from these mythological understandings by not viewing destruction as part of a recurring process of renewal. In the Qurʾān, the apocalypse is presented as a singular and irreversible threshold where the absolute justice of God is manifested and His eternal judgment begins. In this regard, the apocalyptic narrative signifies not only an end but also the opening of a new and ultimate plane of existence. At this point, it will be meaningful to examine how mythological narratives position cosmic destruction in contrast to revelation-based accounts.

2.2. The Imagery of Cosmic Destruction as a Threshold in Mythological Narratives

Myths can be viewed as one of the earliest forms of oral and written literature that describe existential issues like fear, hope, purification, and rebirth together with the efforts made by human beings to explain the universe. In most of these myths, apocalyptic issues about the destruction of the universe, gods' struggle, and disturbance of the order in the cosmos emerge. Destruction, within this context, should be viewed not only as a disaster in nature but also as a narrative pattern including moral degeneration, divine intervention, and rearrangement of the cosmos.

Mesopotamian mythology is characterized by the story of Gilgamesh, where the myth of the flood represents divine intervention into over-population and moral degradation in human world. As a

[45] İlhan Kutluer, "Zaman", *TDV İslâm Ansiklopedisi* (İstanbul: Türkiye Diyanet Vakfı Yayınları, 2013), 44/111-112.

result, Utnapishtim becomes the carrier of life among people.[46] The same concerns the Greek myth of Deukalion and Pyrrha, which represents purification of moral decay and creation of human race by means of divine intervention.[47] Thus, in both cultures cosmic destruction becomes an intermediate stage through which divine order is restored after moral decay.

On the contrary, cosmic destruction in the Norse mythology, namely the myth of Ragnarök, involves complete destruction of cosmos and even gods. However, destruction of the world is not the end of everything since, after this process, a new world, populated by gods, appears. [48] Cyclic nature of existence makes possible such view on cosmic destruction as cosmic rejuvenation. Cyclic nature of destruction is presented in Hinduism through the theory of Pralaya. This theory is based on the Vedas and Puranas and is cyclic.[49]

In the Egyptian mythology, namely in the myth of Osiris and Seth, there appears another approach to cosmic destruction. It is due to the fact that in this mythology, disruption is not done by destroying everything but by disrupting cosmic harmony through the violation of Maat.[50] Disruption of the order represented by the fight between Horus and Seth is just restoration of cosmic balance, rather than creation of something completely new. [51]

Thus, in all the above-described religions and mythologies, destruction of the world represents intermediate stage between order and chaos, destruction and creation. Therefore, destruction is never

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[46] Samuel Noah Kramer, "Myths and Epics from Mesopotamia", *The Ancient Near East: An Anthology of Texts and Pictures*, ed. James B. Pritchard (Princeton: Princeton University Press, 1958), 40-75.

[47] There is a close connection between flood narratives and creation narratives; see M. Barnard, *The Mythmakers* (Athens, OH: Ohio University Press, 1966), 153. Furthermore, it would be more appropriate to state that the flood is a 're-creation' myth rather than a creation myth; see Alan Dundes, "The Flood as Male Myth of Creation", *The Flood Myth*, ed. Alan Dundes (Berkeley - Los Angeles, CA: University of California Press, 1988), 172.

[48] Joshua J. Mark, "Ten Norse Mythology Facts You Need to Know", *World History Encyclopedia* (Accessed July 19, 2025).

[49] As Eliade notes, this periodic dissolution serves to restore the primordial purity of the cosmos; see Eliade, *Myth and Reality*, 60-62.

[50] Maulana Karenga, *Maat, the Moral Ideal in Ancient Egypt: A Study in Classical African Ethics* (London: Routledge, 2003), 32.

[51] Mircea Eliade, *A History of Religious Ideas, Volume 1: From the Stone Age to the Eleusinian Mysteries*, translated by Willard R. Trask (Chicago: The University of Chicago Press, 1978), 54, 97-100.

presented as an absolute end but an intermediate stage leading to restructuring of the order of the cosmos. The structural aspect of myths allows claiming that myths, regardless of their cultural origin, have common structure, which is represented by destruction as an intermediate stage.

Mythological narratives that arise from different cultures indicate that the issue of destruction of the universe has similarities not only in terms of their subject matter, but also in the aspect of their structure in connection with this concept. Despite the presence of diverse theological and cosmological speculations in connection with these cultures, it becomes clear that all of them understand destruction of the universe in terms of recreation or restoration of the same. In this case, the idea of apocalypse turns into structural liminality.

2.3. The Motif of Cosmic Destruction as a Threshold in Turkish Folk Narratives

Oral folklore, as the carrier of oral culture, is not just a means of transmission which preserves the accumulation of the past but also the manifestation of the collective unconscious, fears, and patterns of beliefs on the narrative level. In this respect, the motifs of apocalyptic and cosmic destruction in the narratives of folklore have multiple-level character which combines traces of pre-Islamic cultural traditions along with the reflection of eschatological imagery based on revelations within the framework of folk memories. Taking into account the broad nature of the term "folk narratives", the focus of this paper will be placed on the Turkish-Islamic folk narratives. The belief of the Turks in life after death is quite old and goes back to the ancient periods. In accordance with this belief, eternal life can only start with the end of the current system. In order to understand both the death of human and death of the world, people have created the belief of apocalypse; in accordance with this belief, they created various narratives over time.[52]

As seen in legends, hagiographies, and folklore transmitted in oral culture of Turkish folk narratives, motifs of splitting of the earth, splitting of the sky, and falling of fire from the sky are specific instances of the theme of cosmic destruction. It has been created by borrowing

[52] Hocaoğlu Alagöz - Baysal Yurdakul, "Eskatoloji Mitlerinden Kıyametnâmelere Geleneksel Türk Dünya Görüşünde Kıyamet Olgusu", 564-565.

elements from Islamic eschatology and Shamanic cosmogony, respectively; the theme of destruction is usually introduced as a natural result of certain factors including the disobedience of God by the individual and society, dishonor to sacredness, and imbalance between cosmos. Some of the popular beliefs like "three days of night", "birth of the red-tailed comet" and "black smoke filling the sky" can be regarded as the symbols that apocalyptic signs assume in the folk memory.

In Turkish folk tradition, especially in many legends, hagiographies, epics, and folktales gathered in Anatolia, the motifs of apocalyptic and cosmic destruction draw attention. They must be analyzed not only as products of folkloric genre but also as expression of the eschatological world view created in the historical memory of people. Destruction and disasters in the stories are not only the interpretation of the apocalyptic images based on revelation in the local memory but also continue cosmogonies filtered from the pre-Islamic beliefs systems.

In the process of the transition of Turkish eschatological thought from mythological narratives to the Islamic conception of the apocalypse, it is observed that cosmic destruction in the Turkish-Islamic narrative tradition is mostly associated with natural events and portrayed as punitive disasters following moral dissolution and violations of sacred values. Through these narratives, moral norms, a sense of destiny, and the understanding of divine power are transmitted to society. Certain Anatolian folk narratives display symbolic correspondences with Qurʾānic depictions of the apocalypse; however, these similarities are better understood within the broader context of interaction between Islamic religious discourse and local oral traditions rather than as evidence of direct textual borrowing. Elements such as the splitting of the earth, the cracking of mountains, the darkening of the sky, fire raining from the heavens, petrifaction, black smoke, three days of night, and the receding of waters only to return as a deluge appear with similar symbols in both the Qurʾān and Anatolian folk narratives. Apocalyptic descriptions in the Qurʾān, such as *zilzāl*, *takwīr*, *infiṭār*, and *qāriʿah*, have integrated with more concrete and local elements in folk culture and have been translated into the language of oral aesthetics and collective memory.

Among the narratives widely known in the regions of Kayseri and Yozgat in Turkey, Azerbaijan, and the Khalkhāl district of Iran, the

"staying until the apocalypse with the wolf" story is noteworthy. In the Kayseri version, it is stated that "When the apocalypse is about to occur, an old woman and a Bozkurt (Grey Wolf) will remain; finally, the Bozkurt will eat the old woman, and then Azrael will take the soul of the Bozkurt". In the Yozgat folk narrative, when adultery increases, women forget modesty, and people become incorrigible, Isrāfīl will blow the Horn. Buildings will be torn like paper, and everyone will disappear into the ground. Only an old woman will remain, a wolf will eat her, and thus the end of humanity will come. In Azerbaijan, when the Horn is blown, all living things will die and mountains will be leveled. Amidst this destruction, a Bozkurt will struggle to stay upright against a terrible wind until the very last moment. In the vicinity of Khalkhāl, Iran, it is told that "Everyone created by God dies... This woman remains alone... One day, this old woman and the wolf wrestle. If the old woman defeats the wolf, the world will exist again and everyone will be resurrected. If the wolf defeats the woman, nothing will remain".[53] These narratives position destruction not as an absolute end but as a necessary threshold for cosmic reconstruction. It should be noted that such narratives do not constitute components of orthodox Islamic doctrine and should not be understood as direct extensions of Qurʾānic eschatology. Rather, they represent syncretic folkloric formations in which Islamic eschatological themes interact with pre-Islamic Turkic mythological motifs and local oral traditions. Their significance in the present study lies in their value as cultural expressions of collective perceptions regarding cosmic destruction and the end of time, reflecting processes of folkloric adaptation and cultural memory rather than authoritative theological teachings.

With this point in mind, the legends concerning the signs of apocalypse, which are prevalent in Anatolia, become significant. In this respect, it is said that the apocalypse takes place due to the decline in the cosmic and moral order in the world. The basic question at this point is whether these signs are perceived as signs indicating that the apocalypse is going to happen, or as causes triggering the event of apocalypse. Also, the basic question posed by these narratives is whether the apocalypse becomes a purification process for the world, or a divine act in the conflict of good and evil. Within this narrative

[53] Gülcan Kızılözen, "Metinlerarasılık Bağlamında Kurt ile Kıyamete Kalmak Anlatısının Dönüşümü", *Folklor/Edebiyat* 26/104 (2020), 818-819.

framework, the apocalypse is generally portrayed as a process through which moral disorder is resolved, evil is eliminated, and justice is re-established. The process leading to the apocalypse is associated with the moral collapse of individuals and the disintegration of social order. Indeed, colloquial expressions such as "the world's nail has come out" or "stones will rain upon our heads" used to express moral decline, point to this very perception.[54]

Narratives such as the heavens descending to the earth, the collapsing and roaring of the ground, the darkening of the sun, earthquakes, the shattering of mountains, floods, trees being uprooted, droughts, and the emergence of a poisonous herb on the earth[55] reveal a local eschatological language that the people have constructed by drawing from both the Qurʾān and ancient cultural heritage. This narrative overlaps both with the theme of cosmic darkness in the Qurʾān and with Shamanistic-rooted myths regarding the darkening of the sun.[56] Here, darkness is utilized not merely as a physical state, but as a sign of a threshold time where cosmic balance is disrupted and universal order is broken.

In *Dede Korkut*, apocalyptic motifs are represented through signs such as the disappearance of love and respect between the young and the old, father and son, or mother and daughter; men resembling women; and engaging in gossip like women.[57] These motifs do not denote a literal eschatological end of the world in the Qurʾānic sense, but rather function as moral indicators of social and cosmic disorder within the narrative structure. It is observed that in folk narratives, cosmic destruction is predominantly staged within a framework of moral and divine punishment. Accordingly, societies that insult a sacred being, cease to pray, resort to rebellion, or tell lies are directly punished by the Creator. These punishments often take the form of natural disasters: stones rain from the sky, mountains are shattered, the earth cracks, and people are turned into stone. The motif of

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54 Gözen, *Metinlerarasılık Bağlamında Eskatoloji Mitleri*, 162.

55 Gözen, *Metinlerarasılık Bağlamında Eskatoloji Mitleri*, 156; Kayabaşı, "Türk Mitolojisinde Eskatoloji Mitleri", 173.

56 Saadet Çağatay, "Altay Türklerinde Kıyamet Anlayışı", *Türkoloji Dergisi* 7/1 (1977), 8.

57 Gözen, *Metinlerarasılık Bağlamında Eskatoloji Mitleri*, 160.

"petrifaction"[58] is interpreted as the materialization of moral corruption and the manifestation of divine justice in physical form. In these narratives, individual guilt transforms into collective catastrophe; the disaster functions not only as punishment but also as moral warning and didactic lesson. Overall, these narratives construct a symbolic economy of disorder and retribution rather than a doctrinal eschatological system. A short excerpt from a longer narrative regarding the Altai Turks' conception of apocalyptic destruction is as follows:

> ...The bottom of the iron stirrup is pierced, the eye of the needle is torn, the people are corrupted, the black insect sprouts wings, blood spreads to the black eye, the black water (water sources) flows mixed with blood, the earth rumbles, the mountain turns upside down, the mountain slopes collapse, the sky trembles, the sea churns, the earth is overturned and its surface goes down, the tree moss is torn away and only its dust remains, the sky quivers and its stitching is opened (torn), the sea churns and its bottom becomes visible...[59]

Accordingly, Shamanistic and Tengrist beliefs, along with steppe cosmogonies originating from the pre-Islamic belief systems of the Turks, have permeated into folk narratives. In ancient Turkic beliefs, the "Sky Pillar"[60] or "World Tree"[61] is a sacred structure that forms the axis of the universe. The collapse of this pillar signifies not merely a physical downfall, but an ontological apocalypse. Images in Anatolian narratives such as the "piercing of the sky", the "toppling of the

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[58] One of the many versions of petrifaction stories is as follows: "A shepherd whose wife has died has two children. This shepherd, disliked by the villagers, lives in his own house on a hill far from the village. Although treated very well by his mother and father, the shepherd is not respectful toward them at all. One day, his mother prays to Allah for him to be turned into stone. Her prayer is accepted, and the son turns into stone at the place called 'Dedelik/Çoban (Shepherd) Stone'." Today, locals frequently tell this legend to instill respect for family in their children; M. Öcal Oğuz - Petek Ersoy, *Türkiye'de 2006 Yılında Yaşayan Taş Kesilme Efsaneleri: Mekânlar ve Anlatılar* (Ankara: Gazi Üniversitesi Türk Halkbilimi Araştırma ve Uygulama Merkezi Yayınları, 2007), 19.

[59] Çağatay, "Altay Türklerinde Kıyamet Anlayışı", 8.

[60] Bahaeddin Ögel, *Türk Mitolojisi II* (Ankara: Türk Tarih Kurumu Yayınları, 1995), 169-172.

[61] Bahaeddin Ögel, *Türk Mitolojisi I* (Ankara: Türk Tarih Kurumu Yayınları, 1993), 90-92, 100-101.

heavens", or "fire emerging from beneath the earth" establish a bridge between this ancient thought and Islamic eschatology. The integration of motifs such as "the wrath of Ülgen"[62] or "Erlik's emerging from the underworld"[63] into the Islamic conception of the apocalypse over time to produce a syncretic narrative demonstrates the permeability between beliefs and the cultural adaptation capability of folk culture.

These narratives have been found not just to be accounts of cosmic disasters but also to have the role of an instrument of education, a culture-based system, and also a means of social control. This kind of narrative is being passed down from one generation to another via traditional storytellers like *maddāḥ*s (traditional public storytellers), *ʿāshiq*s (minstrel-poets), village imāms, and older storytellers, thereby influencing the view that people have of God, time, the world, and afterlife. While the apocalyptic descriptions in the Qurʾān provide a more universal, and metaphysical framework, it is observed that these images become localized, personalized, and topographical in folk narratives. Mountains, villages, and people are named; the apocalypse is narrated as an event occurring in a specific "place" or to a specific "person". This indicates that the motif of the apocalypse is constructed on two levels in the folk mind: both cosmic and local.

Overall, the analysis of apocalyptic motifs in Turkish folk narratives demonstrates that cosmic destruction functions as a multilayered symbolic structure shaped by the interaction of Islamic eschatology, earlier mythological traditions, and local cultural memory. Rather than constituting a unified doctrinal system, these narratives reflect a culturally embedded understanding of order, morality, and divine authority. In this sense, the discussion of apocalyptic imagery leads naturally to a broader consideration of how different narrative traditions conceptualize the end of the world as a threshold between existence, meaning, and transcendence.

Conclusion

Rather than being explained solely through recurring themes shared across traditions, apocalypse and cosmic destruction narratives involve another layer that must also be taken into account. This layer can be described as a threshold, or liminal mode of structuring these

[62] Çağatay, "Altay Türklerinde Kıyamet Anlayışı", 10.
[63] Çağatay, "Altay Türklerinde Kıyamet Anlayışı", 9.

narratives, which appears across different cultural settings. When revelation-based narratives, mythological systems, and Turkish folk stories are considered together, the differences between them do not lie primarily in how the apocalypse is represented. Instead, they are rooted in more fundamental assumptions about time, continuity, and moral order.

One of the main findings of this study is that the Qurʾānic understanding of the apocalypse differs clearly from mythological accounts of cyclical destruction. In the Qurʾān, cosmic destruction is positioned as an irreversible ontological break and a threshold of final accountability. This suggests that the Qurʾānic vision of the end times is not a symbolic story of rebirth. Instead, it forms a moral and metaphysical boundary where human actions take on their ultimate meaning. From this perspective, cosmic destruction does not mark the end of divine order. It marks the moment when divine judgment fully begins.

Mythological traditions approach cosmic destruction from a different angle. The destruction of the existing order does not bring history or the cosmos to a definitive close. Instead, it creates the conditions from which a new order can emerge. Apocalyptic episodes therefore belong to a larger cycle in which dissolution is followed by renewal. Within this pattern, the threshold is not the point at which moral judgment begins. It marks the passage from one cosmic order to the next and preserves the continuity of the cycle.

Turkish folk narratives reveal a space where Qurʾānic eschatological ideas and pre-Islamic mythological motifs come together and gradually blend into one another. Within these stories, cosmic destruction is no longer presented as an abstract metaphysical event. It is anchored in familiar places, recognizable figures, and local communities. As a result, the apocalypse becomes part of collective memory, serving both as a moral warning and as a way of defining the boundaries of the social order.

This study's comparative approach does not place revelation-based, mythological, and Turkish folk narratives on the same ontological or metaphysical level. It is not concerned with such an alignment. Instead, it examines how the motif of cosmic destruction is constructed and interpreted within each tradition's own symbolic and

cultural framework, with attention to narrative structure and the production of meaning.

In conclusion, this study does not treat the motif of apocalypse as a shared "end narrative" across different cultural and religious systems. What it highlights instead is a threshold model through which meaning is produced and takes shape in different contexts. From this point of view, apocalyptic narratives are not simply accounts of destruction or catastrophe. They also make visible human finitude, the limits of the sacred, and the ways moral order is thought at its edges. The notion of the "threshold" is used here as a way of reading these narratives rather than as a fixed analytical category.

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