Apsu (Abşu, Avsu)

Erdal Gezik
e.gezik@gmail.com

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Address: Alevi Ansiklopedisi Körnebachstr. 49-51, 44143 Dortmund

info@aleviansiklopedisi.com

Summary
"Apsu" (Kırmanckî/Kurmancî: Avsu, Abşu, Absu) is a ritual practice within the Dersim belief system that carries functions of protection, purification, and healing. Apsu is also referred to as apsu kerdene in Kırmanckî and apsu kırın in Kurmancî, that is, "to perform apsu." In its basic sense, it is a practice aimed at protecting a person (individuals), the household (objects), or domestic animals from the evil eye, harmful entities, and malign influences through the use of consecrated water or salt. During the ritual, prayers are recited over water or salt by a pir, a dervish, or a mılla (molla/hoca); subsequently, this water or salt is sprinkled around the household, accompanied by specific prayers. Within the Raa Haqi belief world, this practice is performed with the purpose of ensuring the protection of nature and the living beings inhabiting the domestic sphere. The Apsu ritual represents an instance in which belief and everyday life are closely intertwined and has persisted to the present day as a holistic practice of protection.

Keywords: Abşu, Apsu, Avsu, Dersim, Raa Haqi

Origins and Semantic Field [1]

First, *Apsu* evokes the Iranian-derived terms *afsun* or *efsun*. *Efsun* denotes magic or sorcery and is more commonly associated with practices such as recitation and blowing, as well as acts of spell-casting. In the Dersim tradition, *efsu* refers to practices carried out using materials such as *şilan* (rosehip branches), thread, or ash from the hearth. The Apsu rite is distinct from these practices.

Apsu also recalls a deity known in ancient Mesopotamia as *Absu* or *Abzu*. Absu represents the primordial sweet water

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that existed prior to creation and is depicted as the source of life. It is known that, in ritual contexts, priests would bless the community with this water. Both in conceptual terms and in its ritual dimension, this belief displays striking similarities with the apsu tradition practiced in Dersim.

Forms of Ritual Practice

The most widespread form of the Apsu ritual is performed using water and salt. Dervishes, pirs, or *mılle*s recite prayers over water taken from specific sources. In cases where water is unavailable, salt may substitute for water. The consecrated water or salt is then sprinkled inside the house or around it by the pir or the head of the household. When salt is used, in addition to sprinkling, it may also be thrown into the fire. During this act, prayers such as *"Haq nezer u çımo xıravın to ra dür bero"* ("May Haq keep the evil eye and harmful gaze away from you") are recited, and the salt is cast into the fire. In some cases, an amount of salt sufficient for the entire year is consecrated at once and stored. When needed during the year, small portions of this salt are taken and used to perform apsu.

These practices are individual in nature. Apsu is also employed in collectively performed ceremonies. It is likewise the term used for acts of blessing and purification carried out with water during *Gağan*, *Hawtemal/Heftemal*, and *cem* rituals.

Conclusion

Within the Raa Haqi belief system, Apsu is not merely a ritual of protection but a practice of purification in which the relationships between humans, nature, and *Haq* are rendered tangible. Performed through elements such as water, salt, and fire, this practice represents both respect for the living spirit of the universe and an effort to preserve goodness, balance, and *rıza* (consent/harmony) within the community.

Beyond warding off harmful influences, Apsu gains meaning

as an act of spiritual cleansing and social solidarity through which individuals re-establish their inner balance and their harmony with the surrounding world. In this sense, Apsu continues to exist as an ancient practice that carries into the present the understanding of “living nature” and “living word” that constitutes the core of the Dersim Raa Haqi belief, keeping collective memory alive.

Endnotes

[1] Editorial Note: This entry has been prepared on the basis of the relevant entry included in Raa Haqi - Riya Haqi / Dersim Aleviliği İnanç Terimleri Sözlüğü by Erdal Gezik and Hüseyin Çakmak (Ankara: Kalan Yayınları, 2010) and represents a version that has been reviewed and updated by the authors of the original publication.

References & Further Reading

Gezik, Erdal, and Hüseyin Çakmak. 2010. Raa Haqi – Riya Haqi / Dersim Aleviliği İnanç Terimleri Sözlüğü. Ankara: Kalan Yayınları.

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