

A SYMBOLISM ESSEY IN CULTURAL GEOGRAPHY: A CASE OF ERZURUM CITY

DOI: <http://dx.doi.org/10.18509/GBP.2016.36>

UDC: 316.752(560)

Assist. Prof. Dr. Alperen KAYSERİLİ

Agri Ibrahim Cecen University, Faculty of Arts and Sciences, Department of Geography, Agri, Turkey

ABSTRACT

Symbols are among the most important facts and can be evaluated topic in cultural geography studies. This topic is a special research area which is named symbolism or symbolic. And also this phenomenon took attention from cultural geographers in these days. Especially, former and today's communities which were lived in the research area; religious faiths, social classifications, economic functions, sexual attitudes, individual assessments and many different aspects of people can be transferred to current society and future communities by symbols more comfortably.

Erzurum City is a historical settlement which is back dates to 4000 (BC). The city was administrated by 24 different states and civilizations that has been identified in approximately 6000 years historical processes. Study area controlled Muslim and Turkish communities in last thousand year's processes, rarely it can be possible to see symbolic sign from different religions. This study aims to explain the symbols with cultural geography research principles.

Keywords: Cultural Geography, Symbolism, Erzurum City.

INTRODUCTION

ICONOGRAPHY

Everything that are produced by humankind as they struggle to survive from past to present are evaluated in the phenomenon of culture. Intangible assets must be evaluated as a cultural production as well as the material culture elements. Considering the aspects people dream about are delivered in various ways of material dimensions and brought into production, the fact that intangible elements are also part of cultural production gains more significance.

The function of delivering the dreams and emotions of humankind to material dimensions can manifest itself in different ways. For example, while some emotions can be delivered to a material dimension with words and sounds, some emotions can come into existence via music, painting, sculpture and other branches of art.

Another way of distinctively conveying the emotions, dreams or a message needs to be conveyed is use of the symbols. By means of symbols, daily life rules are defined in the same form as it is used in traffic signs, and also religious messages can be delivered via the symbols such as cross, crescent or Star of David etc.

One of the most striking details of the cultural heritage values is the symbolic meanings they contain in themselves. Thanks to the narratives that express them, these meanings carry great importance in terms of cultural tourism. Historical love stories, religious

patterns, roads leading to eternity or metaphysical entities believed to protect people can be obtain from stone or marble dressings via symbols. [1]

The amount of evidence used by geographers to interpret cultural landscape and symbolism is much broader than in the past. [2] Therefore, the increase in the work done in relation to the symbolism provides various conveniences for the researchers.

On the other hand, the aim is to maintain national consciousness by keeping collective memory alive via symbols or sculptures representing historical events or persons who made the history. Also, by means of flags which are considered the most important sign of national independence, freedom of state and people is symbolized in effort to constitute a social cohesion system.

PURPOSE AND METHOD

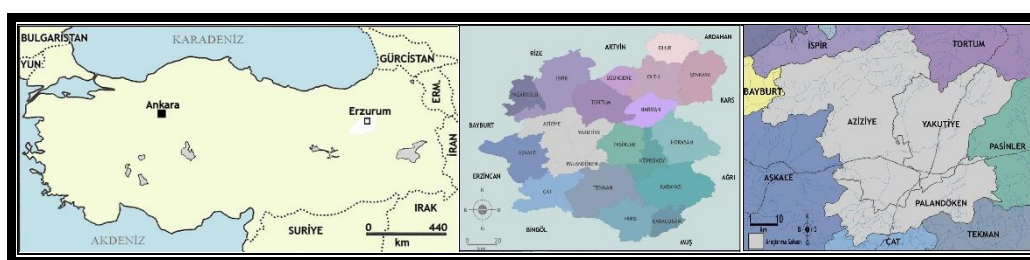
In this study, origins and mythological meanings of the symbols located in the city of Erzurum as well as how they are positioned in the cultural landscape and the messages intended to convey are evaluated. Qualitative research methods were used during the performance of the work.

First, visual materials were compiled using field trip observation method which followed by scanning necessary literature to obtain the sources needed. After obtaining the written and visual materials, writing process was completed evaluating them within distribution-link- cause-effect relationship.

RESEARCH AREA AND GENERAL GEOGRAPHICAL FEATURES

Erzurum City is located in the Erzurum-Kars region of Eastern Anatolia. Surrounded by the mountains Dumlu on north, Palandöken on south and Kargapazarı on east Erzurum City is established on the south and east sides of Erzurum Plain in the elevation of approximately 1750-2000 m. [1]

There are three metropolitan districts are located within the research field that are called Yakutiye, Palandöken and Aziziye [2]. Within the administrative boundaries there are a total settlements of 62 villages and 113 quarters of which Yakutiye district contains 10 villages and 42 quarters, Palandöken district 3 villages and 36 quarters, and Aziziye district 49 villages and 35 quarter.[3] (Map 1)



Map 1. Location of Erzurum City

Despite the change and evolvement of cultural values as a result of human activities, the role of physical geographical properties of living location in the emergence of culture and progress can not be overlooked. Consequently, examining the geological and geomorphological features of the research field that are effective in the formation of the cultural properties, has a great importance in terms of determining the type of geography where the cultural values are developed.[4]

Jeologically, Erzurum-Kars Region shows a formation that particularly consists of outer igneous rocks such as andesite and basalt creating a very wide cover expanding in the north-east direction. This cover is composed of partially Neogene lava and partially of young explosion of the quaternary period. Mountainous areas surrounding Erzurum Plain that includes Erzurum City in its entirety consist of volcanic formations. In Erzurum Basin and surrounding areas there are Upper Miocene and Plio-Quaternary sediments. Based on the distribution of the rocks in the region the frequency of people's benefiting from it increases. Abundant usage of basalt, exclusively in residence constructions, is one of the most obvious signs of this.

Situated in approximately in 40° ($39^{\circ}57'$) north latitude Erzurum City there are significant differences throughout the year in terms of both angle of incident of sun's rays and sunshine duration. Accordingly, the angle of incidence of the sun's rays on December 21 $26^{\circ}36'$, on June 21 $73^{\circ}30'$, on March 21st and September 23rd varies between $60^{\circ}30'$. Accordingly, the angle of incidence of the sun's rays in Erzurum City, in comparison of summer and winter months, emerges with the value of higher than twofold. [5]

The temperature change originating from the features due to the fact that mathematical positioning of Erzurum city located in the middle latitudes and high elevation caused by its special position has a great impact on people's daily lives. People residing in the city have to struggle with adverse conditions of winter season and continue living under difficult circumstances in snow-covered days with duration of 113 days.

SYMBOLISM IN ERZURUM CITY

While evaluating Erzurum city from past to present a period emerges that attains to four thousands B.C. Therefore, there must be an evaluation of a very old settlement unit and twenty-four ruling states and civilizations in the area. However, for realization of it there must be monuments from those states standing remained. But as the remaining monuments examined there is possibility to encounter with the monuments from Byzantine, Seljuks, Saltuks, Ilhans, Ottomans and Turkish Republic. For that reason, the symbols on the monuments of these 6 states can be evaluated. From Erzurum Castle that built by Byzantine Empire there is only Inner Castle that remained to our times. But, because the epigraph of this castle is destroyed and no symbol of Byzantine found on it no evaluation was conducted.

Twin Minaret Madrasa as one of the most important monuments built during the Seljuk Empire has a great importance in terms of symbolism both with its symbolic importance as a whole and with the samples of stone carvings. In Erzurum city as well as in many of Anatolian settlements janus-headed eagle symbol is used widely in the structures built by the Seljuks. This symbol can be seen in two separate monuments of Erzurum city one of which is Twin Minarets Theology School also known as Hatuniye Medresa and the other Yakutiye Theology School also known as Ahmediye Medresa.

Janus-headed eagle icon that engraved in both monuments which were built after acceptance of Islam by Turks were evaluated attributing different meanings. One is the idea that having mythological meanings, it would enrich the power of the community with its double head and beaks. On the other hand there is another mythological interpretation of hand janus-headed eagle that being the symbol of sun and power as well as guardian spirit and justice it is characterizing sovereigns or beys. However, the artists who state that it could be regarded merely as an artistic icon interpret it as it was materialized with double head for the exigency of symmetry. The widespread opinion in

our days is that double-headed eagle meant to be the symbol of the eastern and western domination of the Seljuks. (Picture 1)



Figure 1: Above janus-headed eagle with tree of life below and two dragon icons on the bottom that engraved on the wall of Double Minaret Theology School.

One of the most notable aspects of Erzurum on historical monuments is that animal patterns are used excessively. It was determined that animal patterns were applied in particular form of Central Asian Turkish culture which is executed either using reciprocal animal patterns or using only animal head patterns. [6]

One of the monuments where the animal patterns used the most is the niches on octagonal pulley of Emir Saltuk Mausoleum in Three Tombs. Although the figures in these niches said to be representing the 12-animal-calendar that is common in Far East, Turkish and Chinese cultures, the number of these animals being only 5 is weakening the relation to this calendar. However, it is certain that these compositions are reflecting the mythological themes related to Central Asian Turkish believe systems and life style.[7] (Picture 2)

Interlocking dragon pattern is thought to be used for its meaning of guarding of the harm's way.[8] The bull symbol that one of the most important symbols Turks used is known as the symbol of valiantness, sovereignty, power and strength. However, human head placed on the horns of a bull is thought to be the symbol of evil trying to destroy the valiantness. Rabbit pattern has become the symbol of abundance, artfulness and good luck in Turkish believe system after acceptance of Islam.[9]



Figure 2. Bull and human head, two eagle with lion body lion, rabbit with dorsa of sun and who dragon icons on Emir Saltuk Shrine.

One of the most important symbolic elements of Anatolian mythology is the myth of fertility. The fertility myth, in some cases, is indicated with a depiction of a woman and in other cases it is reflected with the plant patterns.[10] In Erzurum city the fertility symbols in form of grapes is often found on tombstones. Grapevine and grapes that are

used rather as an ornamental pattern in Ottoman Period were precious to early cultures of Anatolia. We can say that grapes, both in the mythological sense and in categories such as legends, tales etc. is the source of fertility, vibrancy, interminableness and symbol of love. The use of grapes or grapevines on tombstones is attributed particularly to the second life after death and eternity. (Picture 3)



Figure 3: A sample of a grapevine on the tombstone in Murat Pasha Mosque cemetery.

RESULTS AND DISCUSSION

Aiming to analyse the cultural meanings and values of the symbols in Erzurum city, this research was focused on culture and civilization of their origin, religious and mythological connections as well as the structures generated from cultural interactions and the ways they are expressed at the present time.

The fact that the city of Erzurum and its regions were ruled by Muslim Turks for approximately a thousand years can be understood easily from the heritage elements obtainable in the area. Except for Inner Castle of Erzurum no monument from the Byzantine Period was found and no iconographic data was reached in prehistoric tumulus's. Therefore, in this study, symbols of Islamic culture have been evaluated extensively.

While examining the iconographic sources, there was an encounter with the fact that the most notable phenomenon is the referrals that made to the supernatural forces. It is understood that especially the fear of humankind felt against the obscurity manifested itself expressively in the icons. Eternity, the second life after death, the fertile period required to live a second life, the need for protection against evil spirits and mythical creatures can be seen in line with these needs as often reflected through icons.

Eternity, the second life after death, the fertile period desired to live in second life, the need for protection against evil spirits and mythical creatures in line with these needs are often reflected via icons.

The study is intended to be conducted in a more comprehensive way. However, due to its nature as a symposium assertion not all the icons obtained in the city are placed into the text. Therefore, it is necessary to give this information which may be limiting to the readers.

REFERENCES

- [1] Doganer, S., *Turkey Cultural Tourism*. East Publications. Istanbul. 2013.
- [2] Denis Cagrove, "Geography is Everywhere: Culture and Symbolism in Human Landscapes", *The Cultural Geography Reader*, Edt.: Timothy S. Oakes and Patricia L. Price, Routledge, USA. 2008.
- [3] Kocaman, S., Zaman, S., Kara, F., Keçeli A., "Erzurum Squatters Prevention and Urban Transformation Studies in the City" *Marmara Journal of Geography*, 18, İstanbul. p.187-189. 2008.
- [4] Koday. Z., Erhan. K., "Analysis of the Province of Erzurum Administrative Geography ". *Atatürk University Faculty of Arts and Social Sciences Journal*. 8(41). Erzurum. p.231-248. 2008.
- [5] Altas, N. T., *Terms of Erzurum City Urbanization Interaction with Geographic Environmental Elements*. Pegem Academy Publications. Ankara. 2015.
- [6] Coskun, O. *Human and Economic Geography of Karaçoban County*, Atatürk University Publication. Erzurum. 2013.
- [7] Koca, H., Zaman, S., Coşkun, O., "Erzurum Sport- Camp Tourism Potential " *Eastern Geographycal Journal*, 18, Erzurum. p.205-224. 2007.
- [8] Coruhlu, Y., *Emergence and Development of Early Turkish Art Interior Turkish Art in Asia*. Kabalci Publications. Istanbul. 2013.
- [9] Ozkan, H. "Saltuklu Architecture" *Azizia Journal of Ancient City*, Erzurum. 1(3), p.52-67. 2015.
- [10] Coruhlu, Y., *Cosmological, Mythological, Astrological, Animal Symbolism in Turkish Art by Literary and Religious Mysticism*. Komen Publications. Konya. 2014.
- [11] Catalbas, R., "Animal symbolism in Turkish Relations and Religion" *Turan Strategic Research Center Journal*. 3(12). Istanbul. p.49-60. 2011.
- [12] Alp, K.O., *Cultural Symbols Introduction to Anatolia from Central Asia*. Eflatun Publication. Ankara. 2009.