SOCIOLOGICAL ANALYSIS OF TRANSFORMATION OF SACRED SPACES:
A CASE STUDY ON MERSIN/ASHAB-I KEHF CAVE

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ABSTRACT

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Religion, an institution that needs to be discussed and analyzed due to its important position in human history, produces and reproduces social dynamics. Sacred spaces, which are among the places where religion is performed, are places where these dynamics and relations are reproduced. Just like the concept of "space" itself, sacred spaces are not self-exclusive, physical structures. They are produced, changed, and transformed economically, politically, and socially. How they emerge, how they change, how they are shared by different religious groups impacts the historical transformation of space, and how dominant religious groups impact the production and use of space are all important. In this context, this thesis, based on a field study that examines the transformation around the Tarsus Ashab-ı Kehf Cave and its compound, focuses on how controversions between different religious and social groups are negotiated through the transformation of a sacred space. The fact that the chosen site is a shrine where Orthodox Islam forbids some religious practices which are embedded folk culture will reveal one of the unique aspects of the study.

Keywords: Sacred space, shrine, the transformation of space, religioscape, Ashab-ı Kehf

ÖZ

KUTSAL MEKÂNLARIN DÖNÜŞÜMÜNÜN SOSYOLOJİK ANALİZİ: MERSİN/ASHAB-I KEHF MAĞARASI ÜZERİNE BİR VAKA ÇALIŞMASI

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İnsanlık tarihindeki önemli konumu nedeniyle tartışılması ve incelenmesi gereken bir kurum olan din, toplumsal dinamiklerin üretilmesi ve yeniden üretilmesi açısından önemlidir. Dinin performe edildiği mekanlardan olan kutsal mekanlar ise bu dinamiklerin ve ilişkilerin yeniden üretildiği sahalardandır. Kutsal mekanlar, aynı "mekân" kavramının kendisi gibi, kendinden menkul, fiziki bir yapı değildir. Bu mekanlar da ekonomik, siyasi ve toplumsal olarak üretilir, değişir ve dönüşür. Nasıl ortaya çıktığı, nasıl değiştiği, mekânın farklı dini gruplar tarafından paylaşılmasının mekânın tarihsel dönüşümünde nasıl bir etkiye sahip olduğu, hâkim dini grupların mekânın üretimi ve kullanımı üzerinde nasıl bir etkiye sahip olduğu önem arz eder. Bu bağlamda, Tarsus Ashab-ı Kehf Mağarası ve yerleşkesi çevresinde gelişen dönüşümü inceleyen ve bir saha çalışmasına dayanan bu tez, farklı dini ve toplumsal gruplar arasındaki çekişmelerin kutsal mekânın dönüşümü üzerinden nasıl müzakere edildiğine odaklanmıştır. Seçilen mekânın Ortodoks İslam'ın yasakladığı halk kültürüne gömülü bazı dini pratiklerin uygulandığı bir türbe olması, çalışmanın özgün yanlarından birini ortaya koyacaktır.

Anahtar Kelimeler: Kutsal mekân, türbe, mekânın dönüşümü, dini peyzaj, Ashab-ı Kehf

Kehf

To the Seven Sleepers awakened from their deep sleep

ACKNOWLEDGMENTS

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CHAPTER 1

INTRODUCTION

It is essential to discuss religion and its significance in the history of humans and societies. After all, it is one of the main drivers in social organization and cohesion that produces and reproduces the social dynamics in society. This production and reproduction process occurs throughout various interactions and encounters between individuals and groups. Physical or not, all interactions or encounters occur in a "space". For this reason, the space where practitioners of religious practices interact, encounter, and show their social presence as well as the notion of space itself, are important subjects of analysis to better understand the role of religion in social life.

All spaces have transformed throughout history with the components that make up the space, both concretely and abstractly. In this respect, space should not be understood as a self-evident structure. Space has been produced as an economic, political, and social value and transformed throughout history by the interventions of different groups' powers and/or their hegemony. As a result of reflecting the visible traces of the dominant group in the memory of the society, spaces also create and preserve impressive images as a means of continuation of power dynamics. These images manifest themselves in spaces and are the means of the legitimacy of the power. The functions and appearance of the spaces, as well as the practices conducted within, are altered by the dominant groups to reveal their own symbols and ensure their legitimacy of power. The functions and appearance of the spaces, as well as the practices conducted within, are altered by the dominant groups to reveal their own symbols and ensure their legitimacy. In this context, it would not be wrong to say that space is an effective tool as well as an area of debate for power and politics.

Regarding historical and social transformations in Turkey, space has become a visible political tool of the government (Şahin, 2014). Spaces have historically shaped and transformed alongside the ideologies of the powers because every power that legitimizes its authority based on God, man, or different holiness also seeks to appoint new ones as its own responsibility (Patacı, 2020, p. 361). Sacred spaces, which have been attributed a meaning with various symbols and various rituals are performed within, have also taken their share of this transformation. Therefore, one of the ways to analyze the visibility of the hegemony and legitimacy of power is to study the changes that occur in sacred spaces because the legitimacy of powers is related to sanctity (Balandier, 1972, pp. 101-116).

The change or transformation that will occur in the sacred space is not only related to the "physical location that will receive" this change (Gambetti, 2011, p. 122). These places, attributed to holiness, have remarkable importance in constructing self and identity (Bilgin, 2013; cited by Uygur, 2020). In other words, sacred spaces are critical elements that ensure the continuity of an identity, an opinion, a belief, or a culture. Therefore, any change or transformation that occurs in a sacred place directly affects the spiritual, social, or political bond that the person or people who practice various rituals establish with the place.

In this study, a significant amount of emphasis will be put on how controversion[1] has negotiated the transformation of the sacred space. As mentioned above, the transformation of space brings a transformation not only in the physical dimension but also in the social, cultural, political, and even economic dimensions. In this framework, this study aims to deal with the transformation of the sacred space alongside the transformation of all these aforementioned dimensions.

In this sense, three main points need to be explained here. The first one is why controversion between different social or religious groups is examined through a religious & sacred space. The areas where the sacred is discovered and experienced emphasize their concreteness in the space. "Sacred space is a place where human beings find a manifestation of divine power, where they experience a sense of

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[1] It refers to contention between communities or individuals.

connectedness to the universe" (Hughes & Swan, 1986, p. 247). That is, sacred spaces are the space where the divine connects with the believer. Moreover, going beyond its connection with the individual, "the sacred is one dimension of the political sphere; religion may be an instrument of power, an assurance of its legitimacy, one of the means used in political struggle" (Balandier, 1972, p.117). Sacred spaces offer important opportunities as they are places where the sacred becomes concrete and provide the visibility of the relationship between religion and power. At the same time, spatial changes and transformations in a sacred space facilitate the studying of controversion between different social and religious groups.

The second one is about the type of sacred spaces these controversions can be observed. At this point, focusing on the spaces used by at least two groups that differ in religion, culture, and/or ethnicity at the same time would prove to be more beneficial. Conceptualized as shared sacred spaces, the negotiations that occur within these spaces by different social groups will be examined within the framework of the concept of religioscape.

The last point is about determining the specific shared sacred space to be analyzed. Within the scope of this study, Tarsus Ashab-ı Kehf Cave was chosen as a case. The choice of this place is related to both the transformation of the space over the centuries and its being a shared common space. The details of the case's selection are presented in Chapter 3.

In this context, as well as in this study, the discussions will be following along how the changes and transformations on sacred spaces are experienced by people from different ethnic, cultural, political, or social backgrounds; how the relationship is established between the subjects, groups, and "others" that are represented in the space; how the transformations in the space continue will be discussed. These sub-research questions are formulated as below:

- How are the controversions over sacred spaces experienced among the different religious groups?
- How do power relations shape the controversions that occur over these spaces?
- What kind of effects does the sharing of space by different religious groups have on the historical transformation of space?
- What kind of effects do the dominant religious groups have on the production and use of the space?

With these questions, the aim was to understand and interpret the experiences of the participants. In this context, the qualitative research method was adopted, and the field research was conducted in Mersin/Tarsus Ashab-ı Kehf Cave. Fieldwork was conducted in September 2021, October 2021, November 2021 and September 2022. Participants consisted of visitors, religious leaders, Alevi association's leader, and shopkeepers within the framework of sequential sampling. Within the scope of the study, importance was given to interview people who have visited the Ashab-ı Kehf at least twice in their lifetime to experience and analyze the spatial transformation. In-depth, semi-structured interviews were conducted with the participants with some questions being open-ended. Details on the method of fieldwork have been presented in Chapter 3.

1.1. Significance of the Study

It is extremely important to explain the place of religion in social life with the mutual interaction processes of individuals living in society. Sacred and religious places, which can also be defined as centers where religion is carried into the social sphere of life, are of great importance in the interactions of those who visit them for any reason. The encounters that occur in sacred spaces impact the religious beliefs of individuals or social groups, their interest in religious worship, the ways they perform their worship, and how they use and transform the space.

Based on the Tarsus Ashab-ı Kehf case, this study aims to understand how controversion has negotiated the transformation of the sacred space. For this reason, it

is necessary to be familiar with the framework drawn by recent studies, in this field, especially in Turkey, in order to describe the roadmap that will be followed. Although the details will be given in the theoretical background, considering this field of study, which is also on the agenda of the sociology of religion, it is possible to say the following,

(i)   When the studies on sacred spaces in Turkey in the last decade are examined, it is seen that research studies on sacred spaces are focused on the fields of theology and folklore (Akçay, 2021; Kaplan, 2021; Günaydın, 2019; Kartal, 2017; Narçın Demir, 2021). On the other hand, although the sociology of religion is a wide field of study, the number of studies that focus on "shrines"[2] within the concept of "sacred space" is limited.

(ii)   In this study, the sacred space will not be discussed only with the symbolic meaning of the place. In other words, it will not focus solely on the religious meanings of cults and rituals in holy places. The transformation that took place in the sacred places will be examined through controversy and sacred space (Atran et al. 2007; Ginges et al. 2007; Hassner 2009; Atran et al. Ginges 2012; Hayden et al. 2014) and the social reproduction of the sacred space (Gültekin, 2004; Gültekin, 2020; Gültekin 2022; Atay, 2005). In the last 20 years, although shared and contested sacred spaces are read through the religioscape, it has not been studied in depth in the context of the sociology of religion in Turkey. Similarly, although various studies have been carried out on the Ashab-ı Kehf Cave in Turkey and the world, the limited study tries to examine it by exceeding the theological and folkloric values of the space. In this context, one of this study's main aims and significance is to deal with the reproduction of Ashab-ı Kehf with its social dimensions.

(iii)   The coexistence of various structures and cults in the Ashab-ı Kehf campus is important regarding this place's use and user profile. The different usage practices of the space and the different user profiles cause controversions

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[2] At this point, the shrine indicates not only the sacred tombs known as "yatır", but also the visiting (ziyaret) phenomenon around elements such as trees, water, houses, caves, mountains and hills (Aday, 2013, p. 27).

among some social groups that use the space. Different social groups that inevitably encounter multi-cultural and multi-faith cities, such as Mersin - Tarsus[3] interpret the spatial transformation, use, and frequency of use of the Ashab-ı Kehf differently. This situation is also important in terms of understanding how the conflict and negotiations occur over the Ashab-ı Kehf took place.

1.2. The Organization of the Thesis

Within the scope of the study, the ways in which controversion has negotiated the transformation of the sacred space will be examined. Moreover, the study will focus on how contention and negotiations between different social groups maintain themselves in sacred spaces. This discussion will be examined throughout four chapters.

In the first chapter of the thesis, the background of the study is given. Furthermore, as well as the framework and significance of the study are explained.

The second part of the thesis presents the relationship between the concepts of space, the sacred and the phenomenon of hegemony/power as well as the conceptual and theoretical framework related to these concepts. Firstly, the concept of space is discussed, and accordingly, the relationship between the sacred space and the representation of hegemony is conceptually discussed. The theoretical framework started with Henri Lefebvre's handling of space as a political concept. It has been emphasized that the transformation of spaces should not be evaluated only as an output of the physical change of the space but with its social and political backgrounds as well. Following Lefebvre's narrative of space, one of the cornerstones of this study and the concept of religioscape conceptualized by Hayden (2002) will be given importance. It will be possible to analyze the transformation of sacred spaces shared as contentious spaces and the effects of hegemony to this transformation in sacred spaces within the framework of religioscape.

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[3] Tarsus is the district of Mersin.

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The third chapter of the thesis will give detailed information about the research methodology where the research designs and techniques are explained thoroughly. This section involves how the research case is determined, the respondents' profiles, the structure of the interviews, the data analysis method of the research, and the researcher's position.

The data collected in the field was analyzed in the fourth chapter of the thesis. The data obtained from the field have been arranged in parallel with the theoretical framework and the results are discussed under three main headings. First of all, the Ashab-ı Kehf narrative and its reflections in different cultures were examined. Then, the Ashab-ı Kehf caves in the world and in Turkey were explained, and introductory level information was given about the Tarsus Ashab-ı Kehf cave, which is the case of this study. The spatial transformation of Ashab-ı Kehf was analyzed within the framework of the concept of religioscape and the consequences of the change in space will be discussed.

Lastly, the conclusion section follows the evaluation of the findings. This chapter highlights the issues that make the Ashab-ı Kehf a contentious place within the framework of the findings.

CHAPTER 2

THEORETICAL FRAMEWORK

Religion has been found in all known human societies and has influenced societies' perceptions and reactions to their environment throughout history (Giddens, 2006, p. 533). At that point, when it is considered that religious discourse has been in our lives since society existed, it is clear that to examine the relationship between society and religion, we require epistemology, ontology, and methodology. In my study, religion will be examined in the context of ongoing controversial negotiations over sacred spaces. Therefore, it will be essential to evaluate the sacred spaces in the context of controversion, negotiation, religion, and the space itself where this conflict occurs.

This chapter consists of two main parts. The first part of the chapter, the production of space itself has been examined. In the second part, the concept of space will be examined through sacred spaces. Here, firstly, the aim is to discuss the concepts of sacred – profane, ritual, and cult. Subsequently, the focus on sacred spaces will be limited to shared sacred spaces. The spatial transformation happening on the sacred spaces shared by social groups with different religious, ethnic, and/or cultural backgrounds can also be interpreted as the hegemony for the representation for space itself. The ways in which controversion has negotiated the transformation of the sacred space will be explained around Hayden's discussion of religioscape.

2.1. The Notion of Space

The space has gained new forms and functions with the social and economic changes in society throughout history. It has taken different forms and transformed to meet people's everyday needs. In other words, every society has created spaces to meet these needs for individuals in line with the needs of society. In this respect, it is important

not to perceive the space as a self-appointed space but to look at these transformations from a more comprehensive perspective.

Space is a subject of analysis and debate studied in many social sciences fields because people's social, cultural, and political life is intrinsically related to space. Space has social meanings with all its socio-cultural dimensions and forms while at the same time, it is a multidimensional discussion space. In many situations, such as the individual's self-identification in society, the administrative and intellectual reflections of the political conjuncture occur within the space.

The fact that space is not independent of social life and relations has been supported by many thinkers. In some approaches, the concept of space itself is in the center, while in others, space is embedded in other concepts/phenomenon. For instance, Elden (2004, pp. 93-95) states that many thinkers argue Marx falling far from the discussion of space. From Marx's own perspective, the analysis of space is not central to his own work. In this respect, it would be correct to say that this criticism has a grain of truth. On the other hand, it should be taken into account that he basically analyzes "how capitalist accumulation is based upon the annihilation of space by time and how this consequently produces striking transformations of agriculture, industry, and population across time and space" (Urry, 2004, pp. 4). In situations where the space is at the periphery, in other words, the space is embedded in the production-consumption relations, as we see in the works of Marx, is important for space studies. However, it cannot be denied that space has a passive position in these works. The realization of production and consumption relations in a space is one of the parameters that make space important. On the other hand, the fact that the space itself creates these relations ensures the elimination of the passive position attributed to the space. This is only possible by considering space as a social product (Lefebvre, 1991, pp.30), and approaches that center around space are important in this regard.

According to Lefebvre, "every society - and hence every mode of production with its subvariants (i.e., all those societies which exemplify the general concept) - produces a space, its own space" (1991, pp.31). The production of space is a necessity of social existence. In other words, a social existence that cannot produce space will remain a

type of abstraction and inevitably disappear completely. For this reason, it is meaningful to examine the domination practices, which try to establish the social and political field in terms of space.

Space is not just a physical structure. It has also the interaction with all of the elements that constitute itself. These interactions add many social meanings to the space and these multiple meanings give the space a dynamic character. Understanding the dynamism of space and understanding the reciprocal and multidimensional relationship between space and society is a way of understanding society for Lefebvre (1991). However, understanding society also means unraveling the structural integrity of the space. The conceptual framework established by Lefebvre, i.e., the spatial triad, serves this purpose: representations of space, spatial practices, and representational spaces. Seeing space as a multifaceted but integral being and analyzing the commonalities and distinctions of space are Lefebvre's main tools for understanding society.

2.2. Sacred Spaces

All social life is shaped, changed, and transformed within the space. Şahin (2014, pp. 7-8) argued that the shaping of daily social life and situations such as belonging, and alienation are all related to space. Moreover, he said that belonging to a place and forming all political relations and organizations in space highlights the importance of space. In daily life, one of the places where these relations and organizations are formed is sacred spaces that constitute the subject of analysis of this research. In this case, the first point of discussion is determining what sacred is and what sacred space is. Secondly, the differences between sacred and profane spaces are established.

Sacredness is the quality attributed to the thing/things to which the individual or society has attributed some magical-mystical values, exalted excessively, therefore deserves excessive respect, surrounded by certain norms and sanctions to protect the attributed values (Emiroğlu & Aydın, 2009, p. 509). The distinction between the sacred and the profane is made by Durkheim (1995, pp. 35-36) as follows:

> ...all known religious beliefs display a common feature: They presuppose a classification of the real or ideal things that men conceive of into two classes -two opposite genera- that are widely designated by two district terms, which the words profane and sacred translate fairly well. The division of the world into two domains, one containing all that is sacred and the other all that is profane- such is the distinctive trait of religious thought. Beliefs, myths, dogmas, and legends are either representations or systems of representations that express the nature of sacred things, the virtues and powers attributed to them, their history, and their relationships with one another as well as with profane things. Sacred things are not simply those personal beings that are called gods or spirits. A rock, a tree, a spring, a pebble, a piece of wood, a house, in a word anything, can be sacred.

Durkheim, as stated above, does not impose any limitations on the sacred by stating that everything can be sacred. What sacred is or isn't may differ according to religions and beliefs. As a matter of fact, man can also change his position towards the object, the place to which he attributes sacredness.

> There are things with which man feels relatively at ease, even though they are sacred to the highest degree. An amulet has sacredness, yet nothing extraordinary about the respect it inspires. Even face to face with his gods, man is not always in such a marked state of inferiority, for he very often uses physical coercion on them to get what he wants. He beats the fetish when he is displeased, only to be reconciled with it is, in the end, it becomes more amenable to the wishes of its worshipper. To get rain, stones are thrown into the spring or the sacred lake where the god of the rain is presumed to reside; it is believed that he is forced by this means to come out and show himself (Durkheim, 1995, pp. 35-36).

On the other hand, there are definitions where the sacred is not so touchable. Eliade referred to the sacred definition of Otto in his book "The Sacred and the Profane". Otto described the sacred as a "feeling of terror", which radiates awe, the supremacy of power. Eliade states that the sacred is not like anything human or cosmic, and one inevitably feels it (1959, pp. 8-10). Nevertheless, Eliade argued that "the sacred always manifests itself as a reality of a wholly different order from 'natural' realities" (1959, p. 10). Sacred is noticed by man because it shows itself "as something wholly different from the profane" (Eliade, 1959, p. 10). Like the objects described as sacred, the spaces described in the same way fulfill various functions for the life of the individual and society. Cultural and religious variables determine the selectivity in perceiving or characterizing any space as sacred. Sometimes the places where ancestral spirits and some supernatural powers have been sanctified, and sometimes certain places are built and included in the perception of sacredness (Gültekin, 2004, pp. 62-63).

Sacred spaces are places to which holiness is attributed, visited, respected, and miracles are expected (Uygur, 2020, p. 132). Sacred space can consist of anything from a natural site or a building. While some sites which are natural consist of at least a tree, a water source, a cave, and a stone, the others can consist of a mosque, religious school, shrine, cemetery, and additional buildings (Abramson & Karimov, 2007, p. 321; Kenneth, 1969). In other words, sacred space refers to visiting some cemeteries, shrines, and places (such as trees, water, mountains, stones, etc.) with various purposes and methods, which are believed to have superhuman divine powers, and what attracts people to these places is the spiritual power believed to be in them (Keskin, 1999, p. 186). Sacred spaces, which will be conceptualized as *ziyaret*[4] within the scope of this thesis, "…forms a single category denoting shrine, pilgrimages to shrines in a variety of social contexts" (Tapper, 1990, p. 236). *Ziyaret*s are expressed through various means and movements during human relationships with the sacred. In other words, *ziyaret*s imply more complex structures formed by combining different cults. Gültekin (2004, pp. 64-65) classified the visits under four headings in terms of the qualities of the instruments of their holiness: (1) Tombs; (2) Trees; (3) Mountains, rocks, stones, caves; (4) Water. Thus, *ziyaret*s can be applied shrines or places associated with people who are believed to have a certain spiritual power, or blessing, as well as the objects associated with nature such as trees, water, mountain, and stone, which are sometimes associated with various supernatural powers.

2.2.1. Cults around *Ziyaret*

A cult is defined as a belief and worship formed around sacred beings, which requires respect, prayer, sacrifice, and rituals. Moreover, it has festivals and ceremonies in unique places and times and includes community leaders with cult tools (Emiroğlu & Aydın, 2009, p. 519). Cults have an important position in all religions. "In the anthropological meaning, a cult is a set of practices and beliefs of a group, in relation to a local god. In sociology, it is a small group of religious activists, whose beliefs are typically syncretic, esoteric, and individualistic" (Scott & Marshall, 1994, p. 148). Another definition of a cult is "…the respect for objects and beings known as supreme and sacred and therefore believed to have extraordinary powers, and the ways and

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[4] This concept indicate the all of cults around elements such as the sacred tombs known as yatir, trees, water, houses, caves, mountains and hills.

practices of worshiping these objects and beings in traditional ways or rituals"
(Çobanoğlu, 2003, p. 68). Within the scope of this thesis, "ziyaret" which is
conceptualized as sacred spaces also consists of different cults. In this context, cults
can be classified as follows:

2.2.1.1. Mountain Cult

In some beliefs, mountains are seen as the cosmic center of the world (Eliade, 1961,
pp. 41-47). On the other hand, some believe that mountains are the source of life and
death, and others as the source of imagination and revelation. Mountains, in terms of
the meaning attributed to them, were considered as a divine force, and accepted as the
residence of the sacred (Baş, 2013, pp. 167-169). Ögel (1998) stated that the mountains
are accepted as the place of God because of their proximity to the dome of the sky,
which is assumed to be inhabited by the god, and the belief that it connects the three
realms.

Mountains have an important place in almost all belief systems. Mountains are the
realm of divine light for the Sumerians, Hittite, Chaldean, and Egyptians (Kramer,
2001, p. 86; cited by Sönmez, 2008, p. 49). Moreover, in Mesopotamian cultures,
mountains are where "man was fashioned at the 'navel of the earth', where there is also,
the 'link between Heaven and Earth'" (Eliade, 1961, p. 43). However, in Semitic
traditions, the center was imagined as the summit of the cosmic mountain. High
mountains were considered sacred by the Phoenicians, and rituals and temples were
held on high (Can, 1997; Tanyu, 1973, p. 6). The residence of the twelve great gods
of the ancient Greeks was Mount Olympus (Marım, 2022, p. 409; Can, 1997, p. 37;
Tanyu, 1973, p. 6). Besides, mountains are a place of service and worship for the
Germanic gods; the place where the god living in the sky descended to the earth in the
Mongols; the place where the gardens of paradise are located in the Hebrew myth;
associated with the myth of death in Native American mythology (Tanyu, 1973, pp. 5-
8).

Bayat (2007, pp. 212-215) stated that the mountain cult is seen in almost all Turkish
communities and that this cult exhibits a synthesis in mythology with the cult of stone

and oba[5]. The reflections of the beliefs of the communities and civilizations of the Middle East and Anatolia about the mountains are also seen in the monotheistic religions that emerged in this region. For example, Mount Nur, where the Hira cave is located, can be considered a critical cult place for Islam.

In this context, it can be said that in several known belief systems, the mountain cult's relationship with the sacred is essential. Mountains or hills to which a certain sacredness becomes attributed also relate to other sacred designs. Examining the transformation of a sacred place becomes meaningful by considering all of these relations.

2.2.1.2. Cave Cult

Caves, mythologically, are considered indispensable elements of "mountain" symbolism (Bayat, 2007, pp. 32-33). Caves, the safest environment in which humanity sheltered in prehistoric times, were used not only for shelter but also as places where worship ceremonies were held to get closer to the god (Karakuzulu, 2002, p. 228). In a symbolic sense, the cave is a space that hosts individuals in the process of getting to know and introducing themselves, enabling themselves to change dimensions. The cave, where a person experiences self-actualization once again, finds his own self, transforms, and starts life again, is actually a birth point (Çetindağ, 2007, p. 444). In a religious and mystical sense, caves are places of isolation where the individual isolates himself from the mortal world, where the soul is trained, where constant worship is made, and which is used to get rid of sins (Bars, 2017, p. 78).

The cave is especially the place of genesis myths or legends. It symbolizes rebirth concerning the metaphor of sleep (Akyüz, 2017, pp. 160-162). The cave, where a person re-realizes himself/herself, finds his own self, transforms and starts life again, is actually a birth point (Çetindağ, 2007, p. 444). According to the cave description Akyüz quoted from Dorson's Contemporary Folklore Theories, the cave symbolizes the female gender as a space of giving birth. That is, he evaluated the common point

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[5] It means a place where nomads stay, a plateau, pastures in the plateaus, a village with five or ten houses, a hill-shaped grave (Besli, 2012, p. 402).

of the caves in the narratives in the context of derivation and assigned the caves a female genital function. Fromm (2013) explains this issue as follows:

> The male genital is symbolized by sticks, trees, umbrellas, knives, pencils, hammers, airplanes, and many other objects which can represent it either by their shape or by their function. The female genital is represented in the same manner by caves, bottles, boxes, doors, jewel cases, gardens, flowers, etc.

Without the cave, a person cannot cross the threshold, then mature, and start a new life. Entering a cave is one of the essential tests in one's life. Only if those who enter the cave see the signs in the cave and interpret them correctly, which then the cave turns into a place that gives birth (Bars, 2017, p. 77).

2.2.1.3. Stone Cult

Stone cult is a set of practices frequently seen in both monotheistic religions and heterodox structures (Gültekin, 2004, pp. 68-69). Stones and rocks were either cult tools or sacred objects that were directly worshiped, sacrificed, and begged for help (Örnek, 1988, p. 101). It is claimed that hollow objects such as natural stones and rocks, ancient ruins, building stones, arches, and millstones awaken the human mind to some imaginations and encourage some practices (Koç, 2022, p. 191).

There is a kind of "transition from one realm to another" through these stones, which are many examples in Anatolia (Uca, 2003, p. 118). Worship or veneration of "hole stones" in one form or another is very common throughout Turkey. Tanyu, in his work "Beliefs Related to Stone in Turks", showed that there are many perforated stone motifs along the southern and south-eastern borders of Turkey today. The narrative about passing through perforated stones, considered sacred, is generally based on several themes (Tanyu, 1968, p. 97:162).

(1) By passing through the hole stone, sins are purified.
(2) Only those without sin can pass through the hole stone.
(3) Hole stone can be passed to find healing
(4) Using hole stone against rain

Hole stones, which have also appeared in Ashab-ı Kehf, can be considered as thresholds. Eliade defined the threshold as "the limit, the boundary, the frontier that distinguishes and opposes two worlds -and at the same time the paradoxical place where those worlds communicate, where passage from the profane to the sacred world becomes possible" (1958, p. 25). It is expected that the person before the holed stone and the person after going through the hole stone are different. Hole stone is seen as a purification or a healing tool. Therefore, it is expected to be purified and healed after passing the hole stone and as such, passing through the hole stone can be considered a "rite of passage" (Gennep, 1909) because it is a transitional moment between two different states.

2.2.1.4.Water Cult

In addition to cults such as stones, caves, and mountains, water also has an important religious place. The purifying property of water, its relationship with abundance, its overflow in specific periods, and for certain reasons play a role in the emergence of the water cult (Örnek, 1988, pp. 103-104). Eliade (1961, pp. 152-153) also stated that the waters invariably have a function in whatever religious context they are found.

> ...they dissolve or abolish the forms of things, "wash away sins", are at once purifying and regenerative. It is their lot both to precede the Creation and to re-absorb it, incapable as they are of surpassing their own modality -that is, of manifesting themselves informs.

Although the cult of water is a belief in societies belonging to different cultures in various geographies, it is seen as a common cult element among Turkish communities. Pre-Islamic Turkish beliefs continued to influence the spiritual life of the Turkish Muslim community and Islam. In some cases, these beliefs sought a place for themselves with Islamic motifs and were effective. It is possible to observe this vividly in the practices of the water cult in Anatolia (Oymak, 2010, p. 53). In particular, the connection of water with Zamzam or some religious figures such as companions and saints is an example. Today, in many parts of Anatolia, there are elements attributed to holiness in the form of springs, fountains, rivers, and lakes, depending on the cult of water.

2.2.1.5.Tree Cult

The tree cult is significant for the mythological period of Turkish culture, as it is in many cultures. It is stated that the tree is shown as the main motif in the creation narrative (Ergun, 1998, p. 72). Especially in a geography such as Anatolia, where different seasonal conditions are observed, and the trees shed their leaves in autumn, the drying and then greening and reviving of the trees with the spring was seen as a symbol of death and resurrection (Örnek, 1988, p. 102).

Beliefs about the tree and various practices accordingly have an important place in Anatolian folk culture. Cloth (çaput) is tied to trees that are attributed to sacredness, and some wishes are made (Eröz, 1992, p. 106). Furthermore, the cult of the tree has great importance among the Alevi-Bektashi groups, and it is even said that this cult is seen mainly among Alevis and Bektashis (Artun, 2007, p.14). It can be said that the most important reference point is Tahtacı Alevis (Gürsoy, 2012, p. 48).

2.2.2. Rituals around *Ziyaret*

Religion is stagted through ritual or 'rite'. Ritual is the activity that brings religion to life (Atay, 2016, p. 48). Ritual has defined the repetition of some values related to individuals or groups, with symbolic and unchanging consecutive behaviors at appropriate times (Honko, 1979, p. 372). Through these behaviors, human beings establish a relationship with the sacred while it is thought that rituals have different functions. Durkheim considers religious rituals as activities that serve the solidarity and unity of society. On the other hand, anthropologist Victor Turner reminds us, in line with his studies, that ritual is not only a function of supporting social cohesion but also has an aspect that expresses the existing inequalities and conflicts in society, thus creating relief with a temporary upheaval (Turner, 1969; cited by Atay, 2016).

Gusfield and Michalowicz (1984) point out that rituals, one of the main subjects of Durkheim's sociology, have yet to be adequately researched in the modern era because sociologists tend to treat society in a rational context with a Weberian approach (p. 418). However, it can be said that modernization tendencies did not destroy the fundamental dynamics of societies, such as rituals. These tendencies do not disappear;

on the contrary, societies continue to provide new forms of these dynamics to maintain their existence. In other words, rituals have changed and transformed together with the values of the society in which they were produced. On the one hand, it has transformed itself; on the other hand, it has undertaken a transformative role. The rituals performed in sacred places were inevitably affected by the changes. The visibility of a ritual may decrease or increase concerning these transformations, or there will be differences in the practice of the ritual.

"Ziyaret"s, which constitute an important dimension of folk belief & religiosity in various cults and rituals and whose general framework is drawn above, will be discussed within the scope of the sacred space and controversion in this thesis (Atran et al. 2007; Ginges et al. 2007; Hassner 2009; Atran et al. Ginges 2012; cited by Hayden et al. 2016). Understanding how sacred spaces are negotiated or recreated as changes in situations and contexts needs to be added to sacred place studies. In other words, as the broader societal circumstances change, how spaces can be perceived as sacred or not, and what new processes and rituals are required to define sacredness (Kiong & Kong, 2000, p. 31).

The transformation of the space will be examined through the controversions between different religious and social groups. Hence, this thesis discusses a sacred place used/visited by different religious groups at the same time. At this point, examining the concept of "sharing religious space" is crucial.

2.3. Sharing of Religious and Sacred Spaces

There is a rich literature concerning identity, politics, encoded cultures, the public sphere, the shaping of space, and the blurring of boundaries of public and private space (Zukin, 1995; Harvey, 2000; McDowell, 1997; cited by Morrissey & Gaffikin, 2006, pp. 873-874). Hayden (2016, p. 40) argued that shared sacred spaces have been studied by many scholars in the scope of the nature of sharing (Albera and Couroucli 2012; Bigelow 2007, 2010, 2012), lack of sharing (Carpenter-Latiri, 2012) and type of sharing sacred space (Albera and Couroucli 2012). Although there is a concept that many different definitions can be made about space, within the scope of this study, it is argued that space is socially produced, changed, and transformed, as stated before.

However, it should be said that this perspective does not facilitate the analysis when it comes to sacred spaces. The characteristics of the people and groups using the space which makes them unique, such as their religion, ethnicity, and gender, lead to the space not to being used uniformly. At this point, shared sacred spaces should be discussed.

"Sacred spaces where several religious groups perform devotional practices, often within the same space and at the same time" (Albera & Couroucli, 2012, p.1) are one of the areas of encounter that are not used uniformly. This encounter, which takes place in shared sacred spaces of social groups or individuals with different religious, ethnic, political and cultural backgrounds, brings along a process of contention and negotiation. Hassner (2003, p. 15-24) summarized the reasons that create contentions over sacred spaces as follows: First, the division of a religious tradition into different branches within itself will lead to contention. These divisions can create contentiousness over a shared sacred space when they split into rival branches. The second is related to the displacement of the local culture, belief, and the place where it is embodied in order for an occupied geography to learn the occupant's culture, religion, and life. This situation which the notion of syncretism can explain is the process by which religious movements voluntarily or involuntarily incorporate the beliefs, rituals, festivals, and sacred sites of other religions into their traditions. Third, when sacredness is attributed to a worldly space, it is about the contention that may arise with the secular powers who want to use this place in various ways. Finally, control of sacred spaces for political purposes will lead to contention.

As mentioned above, these contentions, which occur in different dimensions, were handled by Hayden within the framework of the concept of Antagonistic Tolerance (AT). The "Antagonistic Tolerance" model, inspired by the early twentieth-century work of F.W. Hasluck (1973 [1929]; cited by Hayden & Walker, 2013, p. 402) and first presented by Hayden in an article in Current Anthropology in 2002 and then developed into a project contributing by several researchers in 2014; "applies to communities living together [...] that define themselves and each other primarily on religious grounds as I and the Other" (Hayden, Erdemir, Tanyeri-Erdemir, Walker, Rangachari, Aguilar-Moreno & Bakić-Hayden, 2016, p.1). It is a kind of

conceptualization of the contentions we encounter in shared sacred spaces. The communities identified in the study, as mentioned above, compete for dominance over important local, national, or international religious sites. The change of dominance over these spaces is embodied in the change of spaces.

> ...contestation develops in a region in which one religious tradition is dominant when a community identified with a differing religion arrives via trade, warfare, migration, or indigenous development. The AT model posits that in such situations, there is "tolerance" in the Lockean sense, of enduring the presence of the other but not embracing it, so long as one group is clearly dominant over others. Such dominance is indicated in part by control of the primary identity of major religious sites. However, when existing dominance is threatened, violence results, and violence often accompanies the transformation of sites, which may happen when one group replaces the dominance previously held by another. The processes involved are long term, though transformations may take place in short periods. Thus, the model is one of punctuated equilibrium. The AT model sees the transformations of major religious sites as markers of these processes, indicating which group is dominant at particular times (Hayden & Walker, 2013, p. 402).

In the Antagonistic Tolerance model, it has been said that there was no conflict or strife for a long time with the change of dominance; therefore, the space and even "Self" and "Other" had tolerance to each other because they lived in cohesion. On the other hand, it should not be forgotten that they still have a conflict with the inevitability of being "Self" and the "Other". In other words, there is competitive sharing instead of sharing the space with a mere consensus. One of the places where this can be observed is the inevitably shared sacred and religious spaces

In order to define the subject of study of shared locations while avoiding "extending the matter to be examined to absurd dimensions," Glenn Bowman (2010, pp. 199) has proposed focusing on shrines which means "a place associated with a divinity, sacred figure or relic". Shrines are sacred places where people perform the activities such as visiting a certain place, examining and spending time there, going to the places which are attributed as sacred, offering sacrifices, offering vows, and praying in these places. They are visited to express gratitude or provide assistance from supernatural forces (Gültekin, 2004, p. 64). Similarly, within the scope of this study, a space known and visited by people as a shrine will be discussed. This sacred and religious space provides an excellent opportunity to analyze "the contexts of other sites nearby, which may belong to adherents of the same religion or, more interestingly, to those of a different

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one" (Hayden, Erdemir, Tanyeri-Erdemir, Walker, Rangachari, Aguilar-Moreno & Bakić-Hayden, 2016, p.1). Moreover, the members' interactions in shared sacred spaces should not be ignored. To ignore them or to isolate them from the aforementioned relations would not be an adequate analysis method to study this space. These interactions can be followed with religioscapes, which can be considered as physical signs of religious communities.

2.3.1. Religioscape

Religioscape is conceptualized by McAlister (2005) based on Appadurai's phrase "disjointed flows that are set in motion with increased globalization: ethnoscapes, mediascapes, technoscapes, financescapes" (1990, p. 6). McAlister defines the religioscape as "the subjective religious maps -and attendant theologies- of immigrant, or diasporic, or transnational communities who are also in global and flow and flux" (2005, p. 251). On the other hand, Turner defined the religioscape as "the global flow of religious ideas and practices that produce global religion, global exchanges, and local resistance" (2006, p. 209). Hayden and Walker said that they had developed the concept of religioscape further. According to their perspective, "...religioscape refers to the distribution in spaces through time of the physical manifestations of specific religious traditions and of the populations that build them" (2013, p. 407).

Religioscapes, which are "physical markers of the space in which practitioners of a given religious community interact, and thus... [are] the spatial parameters of social presences" (Hayden et al. 2016, p.37) are inherently fluid (Hayden & Walker, 2013, p. 408). Their built environment changes as the ideological environment changes (Flanagan, 2017, pp. 3-4). The fluidity of religioscapes is associated with social groups or individuals changing and transforming the existing environment to reflect their beliefs. The contention between the social groups presents in a given space, or the hegemony of one social group over another, moves and changes the religioscape to reflect the presence of the dominant one.

Two aspects of this definition should be emphasized: (i) a physical place can contain more than one religious space, and this can be interpreted to mean that a place may

contain more than one religious space or narrative; (ii) a particular physical thing may be part of a religioscapes rather than at some other historical moment if the community to which it is associated no longer exists (Hayden et al. 2016, p. 44-45). Moreover, when we consider the religious landscape as a reflection of dominance, the contentions that can arise can be seen in several different ways in space. These are,

(i) constructed structures that competitively challenge the hegemony of the rival group that can dominate from the competing groups,

(ii) a group accepts a lower power position by building non-challenging roads,

(iii) the non-dominant group does not undergo spatial transformation or avoids it for the sake of being invisible.

The changeability and dynamism of shared sacred spaces can cause the aforementioned situations to be experienced quite fluidly. The change of groups and people who dominate the space demonstrates the spatial changes and transformations. This is possible by creating a more perceptible and central structure than the space represented by the group that dominated in the past.

2.3.2. Perceptibility and Centrality

As religious sites are seen as indicators of political dominance or challenge to it, measures of dominance were developed that are considered to have potentially universal applicability (Hayden et al, 2016). These measures are based on perceptibility and centrality.

Major religious sites are built in a way that makes them noticeable, which is called perceptibility. Perceptibility has certain properties such as height, audibility, and color which are encountered in this regard. For example, building a higher minaret or reconfiguring a space with more striking colors can increase perceptibility. On the other hand, trying to keep some existing structures and practices invisible is also perceptible (Hayden et al, 2016). The ban on bell towers and church bells is one such example. On the other hand, prohibiting and/or not applying the practices & rituals performed in sacred & religious spaces such as shrines can also be considered within the same category.

Centrality "must be defined in terms of location and religious significance at specific moments in time – in keeping with the fluid nature of the concept of religioscape, and, counterintuitively, with the fluid nature of the 'center' itself" (Hayden et al, 2016). In this framework, centrality was not used as a rigid and unchanging location. On the contrary, it appears as a concept that absorbs the fluidity of the concept of the religioscape. Centrality and centralization of a place is a dynamic process, not static. The centrality indicator is the critical factor indicating dominance (Hayden at al, 2016). It is assumed that the religious structure built in a central location in space reflects a dominance over other structures located in less central locations.

In this thesis, two basic approaches to discussing space are explained above. The first is the issue of the production of space, based on the triad of space conceptualized by Lefebvre. Lefebvre mentioned that every society and every mode of production produces a space for itself. He explained this as a necessity of social existence. This is important to understand both the production and transformation of the space. As a matter of fact, it is also helpful in understanding the influence of powers on the production and transformation of space. However, when it comes to the shared sacred spaces within the scope of this thesis, that is, when the spaces used jointly by at least two groups are mentioned, it was inevitable that the religioscapes concept conceptualized by Hayden would constitute the main framework of this study. Ashab-ı Kehf, the subject of this thesis, will be evaluated in terms of the theoretical background mentioned above.

CHAPTER 3

METHODOLOGY

This chapter focuses on the methodology of the study, research design, and data collection techniques of the study for data collection. Moreover, this chapter also includes the respondents' profile, scope and detail of the fieldwork, and data analysis method.

3.1.Why Sacred Spaces?

Religion is a critical institution in society due to the fact that it provides social cohesion, and it has the power to re-establish social institutions. It not only persistently maintains its own existence but also maintains its influences (a) political beliefs and commitments, (b) family relationships, (c) health and happiness, and (d) free space and social capital (Sherkat & Christopher, 1999, p.8). For this reason, it is a significant part of the community's cultural, social, and even economic system. It consists of shared beliefs, values, norms, ideas, and attitudes that create a common identity among a group of people. In other words, it is a collective social thought. It also has a significant position in reproducing the social relations in society as a result of including various conflict management and reconciliation mechanisms. For this reason, it is essential to discuss religion which is still found with its both institutionalized and primitive (non-institutionalized) forms in the contemporary world.

When examined in the Turkish case, it can be said that Turkey has a hegemonic religious structure of Sunni Islam. However, it can be said with certainty that the religious dimension of Anatolia is deeper than this prevailing understanding. Anatolia is a region of high ethnic and religious diversity. This diversity is inevitably reflected in the religious/sacred spaces and their usage. At this point, the diversity of

religious/sacred space in terms of its emergence or use can be examined in two different ways. First, the multi-ethnic and religious structure of Anatolia has led to the emergence of different religious sites belonging to different religious communities. The presence of religious and sacred spaces such as mosques, churches, *cemevis*[6], and shrines in Anatolia can be evaluated under this situation. On the other hand, this multi-ethnic and multi-religious structure has made the existence of hybrid religious and sacred spaces inevitable as well as the emergence of different religious structures. These hybrid religious spaces can be interpreted as sharing sacred spaces, which have occurred freely in many mixed societies. Moreover, these are taken to understand both peaceful coexistence and contentions. Shared sacred spaces are defined by Barkey (2014, pp. 33) as follows:

> Shared sacred sites are holy for multiple religious groups (groups that may also be ethnically or nationally distinct) and serve not only as places where persons are brought together to variously respect the site but also as sites where they are forced by their coexistence to mediate and negotiate their otherness.

In multicultural fields such as Anatolia, it would be useful to analyze the spaces considered sacred by the society to understand the interaction (which will not be one-sided, by necessity) between religion, social and political life. However, at this point, it is important for the chosen space to reflect multiculturalism, so priority is given to examining the shared sacred spaces. As Karey says above, shared sacred spaces are not only places of veneration but also places of encounter. This encounter includes various dimensions such as the encounter of different cultures with each other, and the encounter of the dominant and the non-dominant.

There are two main reasons for choosing sacred places within the scope of this study. The first of these is to examine the production and use of space and the political and social domination established on space in the areas where religious practices and rituals are performed. In this regard, it will be revealed how different applications in the same space affect the use and transformation of the space. Moreover, the dimensions of the subject transforming the space and the resistance against the transformation of the space will be revealed. Secondly, sacred spaces, specifically

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[6] They are places where Alevis worship collectively.

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shared sacred spaces, are encounter points of different cultures. Different societies and cultures have historically influenced the change and transformation of space. Which cultural, social and political actor dominates the shared sacred space is one of the determining factors of spatial transformation.

3.1.1. Why Ashab-ı Kehf and Why Tarsus?

"The Seven Sleepers" (Ashab-ı Kehf) or "Companions of the Cave", which has different narratives in Christianity and Islam, with the same essence, tells the story of seven young individuals who believe in Christianity, which is a monotheistic religion and ignores the rule of a pagan ruler who declared himself to be a god. These seven young people escape the ruler's cruelty because of their beliefs and take shelter in a cave. They fall into a long sleep in their cave.

This narrative, which is based on the fact that God put these faithful young people to a long sleep to save them from the tyranny of the ruler, and wake them up after centuries, has resonated not only in Turkey but also in many parts of the world. The fact that there are many different interpretations of the narrative and dozens of addresses about the location of the Ashab-ı Kehf cave today support the echo of the narrative.

The Narrative of the Seven Sleepers has found its place in many different cultures and has created cult centers in different parts of the world. Spain, Morocco, Algeria, Tunisia, Egypt, Jordan, Yemen, Syria, Iraq, Iran, Afghanistan, China, Indonesia, Palestine, Cyprus, Italy, Greece, East Turkestan, France, India, Ukraine-Kyiv, Northern Europe (Scandinavia), Nahcivan, Turkey are countries with caves (Sert, 2009; Akpınar, 2010; Uğureli, 2017). The fact that most of the cult centers are within the borders of Islamic geography also shows the importance of the religious message it carries in the spread of the legend, which is a story of the Qur'an (Uğureli, 2017). Today, a significant part of the caves along the borders of Turkey is located in the east and southeast of Turkey. The Seven Sleepers cave in Izmir - Ephesus, as an exception, is located in the west of the country. Sert (2009, pp. 125-140) states that there are six Ashab-ı Kehf cult places in Turkey; namely, in Malatya, Sivas, Diyarbakır, Mersin, İzmir and Kahramanmaraş. Four of these places are the caves of Ashab-ı Kehf, which

are known and also accepted today. They are in Diyarbakır, İzmir, Kahramanmaraş and Mersin. The information about these four locations where the cave of Seven Sleepers is located is given in Chapter 4.

Finding a place for itself in many different geographies and being considered sacred and visited by different communities played a significant role in the selection of the Ashab-ı Kehf cave, which was formed around this narrative as a field case. Because of this feature, Ashab-ı Kehf demonstrates the characteristic of shared sacred space by people and groups with different cultural backgrounds. On the other hand, the Ashab-ı Kehf, whose narrative is mentioned in the Qur'an in the chapter of Kahf, has an important place in Islamic geography. Only the features of the cave, whose location is not fully explained in the Qur'an, are described. Although different mystics put forward different views, many mystics accept the cave in Tarsus as Ashab-ı Kehf (Ateş, 2010; Akpınar, 2010; Aşkar, 2010; Tekin, 2010). This can be seen as another reason for choosing this cave.

Tarsus Ashab-ı Kehf Cave, which contains all these features and has witnessed many spatial transformations historically, has been seen as the most appropriate place to examine the aforementioned transformation regarding domination practices.

3.2.Research Design

Space is the location where different groups interact with each other. The encounter areas of different social groups bring the practice of dominating the space. It is thought that one of the areas where these domination practices can be traced historically is the sacred places. In the scope of this study, this spatial transformation has been monitored throughout the Ashab-ı Kehf campus, a shared sacred space consisting of different components such as a cave and a mosque.

This study aims to examine the conflicts that occur in shared sacred spaces (contested sacred spaces) through the production, transformation, and use of space. In this context, the research question of this study is "How has hegemony negotiated the transformation of the sacred space?". In this context, this study will be carried out in Ashab-ı Kehf; it was established with qualitative research methods to understand the

production of space, the use of space, and the political and social domination on space. In order to examine the related social issue, this study was designed as a case study, one of the qualitative research methods. In this study, which benefited from the case study method called a single instrumental case study by Creswell and Poth (2018), a single subject was given attention. Then Ashab-ı Kehf was chosen to show and explain this subject.

> Case study research is defined as a qualitative approach in which the investigator explores a real-life, contemporary bounded system (a case) or multiple bounded systems (cases) over time, through detailed, in-depth data collection involving multiple sources of information (e.g., observations, interviews, audiovisual material, and documents and reports), and reports a case description and case themes. The unit of analysis in the case study might be multiple cases (a multisite study) or a single case (a within-site study) (Creswell & Poth, 2018, pp. 365).

For selecting the participants of this study, sequential sampling is used in this qualitative research. Sequential sampling has some similarities with purposive sampling; the main difference between them however is that the researcher continues to gather cases until the amount of new information or diversity of cases is filled in the sequential sampling (Neuman & Robson, 2014, pp. 145). Within the scope of the study, importance was given to interviewing people who have visited the Ashab-ı Kehf at least twice in their lifetime. In order to monitor the spatial transformation of the Ashab-ı Kehf, it is considered critical to visit enough times to follow the spatial transformation.

3.3. Fieldwork

Within the scope of this thesis, Ashab-ı Kehf was visited in four different periods. The first visit took place from 17 September 2021 to 18 September 2021. This can be considered as a pilot field study. Within the scope of this study, observations were made in Ashab-ı Kehf; short interviews were held with the shopkeepers who trade around this place. As a result of this visit, the scope of the field studies was determined.

The second visit includes the process of key informant meetings with Alevi associations in Tarsus. Within the scope of this fieldwork held in October 2021, in

addition to the key informant interviews, Ashab-ı Kehf was also visited and an interview with a visitor was made during this fieldwork.

The third visit was made in November 2021. This part of the fieldwork involved approximately three weeks. During the fieldwork, in-depth interviews were conducted with both visitors and key informants. In addition, Ashab-ı Kehf was visited frequently, and observations were made.

The fourth and last visit within the scope of the fieldwork took place on September 17th and 18th, 2022. Within the scope of this study, in-depth interviews were conducted with the Fathers of the Orthodox and Catholic Churches in Mersin. Ashab-ı Kehf was visited for the last time within the scope of the thesis and informal interviews were conducted with shopkeepers during this visit. Thus, the fieldwork carried out within the scope of the thesis was completed as a result of the interviews and observations made in this fieldwork.

The fieldwork process will be examined under four sections. The first one is transportation to Ashab-ı Kehf. Considering that the vehicles and roads used on the way to Ashab-ı Kehf are important parameters for the field experience, this information is shared in this section. The second section is the presentation of the profile of the participants. During the fieldwork, some basic information about the people interviewed was given. The third is the content and construction of the interviews. In this section, the flow of the interviews will be explained. The fourth is my position as a researcher during the fieldwork. In this section, I will convey my position in the field as someone who learned about Ashab-ı Kehf during a touristic visit and then went as a researcher.

3.3.1. The Transportation to Ashab-ı Kehf

There are two ways to go to the Ashab-ı Kehf cave. It is possible to go to the cave with a private car or by bus. Those who will choose to visit with a private vehicle should go to Tarsus District Center and follow the Dedeler village road. There are signs directing visitors to the Ashab-ı Kehf cave in the town center of Tarsus. My first visit to Ashab-ı Kehf was touristic, and transportation was provided by a private vehicle. It

can be said that it is possible to reach Ashab-ı Kehf quite easily with the help of navigation systems as well as the signs directing to Ashab-ı Kehf from the center of Tarsus. On the other hand, the first visit to Ashab-ı Kehf within the scope of this thesis took place between September 17th and 19th, 2021, again by private vehicle. It can be said that it is more comfortable to provide transportation by private car as it makes it easier to spend time in the region without being subject to any time restrictions. As a matter of fact, it has been observed that a significant part of those who want to visit the region as a tourist attraction or for reasons such as worship to reach the cave with their own private cars or rented vehicles.

Photograph 1 Direction signs showing Ashab-ı Kehf in the city

Both the villages of Tarsus located around this cult center and as the Ashab-ı Kehf itself have a touristic meaning. As a result, transportation services are provided to both Ashab-ı Kehf and these villages by Mersin Municipality. Bus number 232[7], which departs from Tarsus Bus Terminal, reaches Ashab-ı Kehf approximately after a 30-minute journey and continues its journey towards the villages of Tarsus (see Map 1). This bus, which has only four bus services a day, is vital for the villagers and the visitors of the Ashab-ı Kehf. If people do not have a car and they miss these buses, there is no transportation alternative. As a matter of fact, I had to also plan my study by taking into account the bus hours in order not to miss the bus, as I used this bus for my field visits other than my pilot field visit.

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[7] https://moovitapp.com/adana-4586/lines/232/66312424/5952448/tr?ref=1&customerId=4908
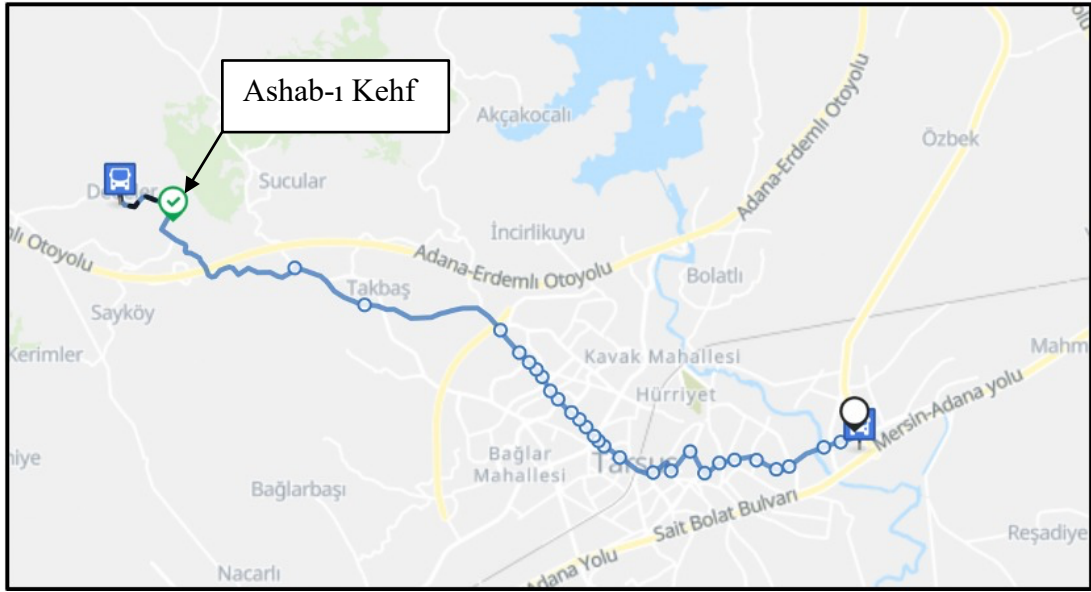
Map 1 The direction of the bus which is number of 232 provided by "moovitapp"

During my field visit, I observed that this bus, which I frequently use, was used by people living in villages on the route of this bus rather than visitors to Ashab-ı Kehf. Each of these bus journeys also became a space to have a talk with the villagers who commuted using this bus. During these conversations, I learned that the reasons people go to the city (Tarsus) and, therefore, the reasons for using this bus are mostly related to reasons such as going to the hospital or shopping. Furthermore, in each of these talks, I have conducted informal interviews about the spatial transformation of the Ashab-ı Kehf.

3.3.2. Respondent's Profile

Respondents were selected with the sequential sampling technique. In sequential sampling, the researcher continues to gather cases until the amount of new information ends or a certain diversity of cases is reached. The principle is to gather cases until the researcher reaches a saturation point (Neuman, 2000, pp. 276). This is precisely why it differs from purposive sampling.

> Sequential sampling is similar to purposive sampling with one difference. In purposive sampling, the researcher tries to find as many relevant cases as possible, until time, financial resources, or his or her energy is exhausted. The goal is to get every possible case. In sequential sampling, a researcher continues to gather cases until the amount of new information or diversity of cases is filled. In economic terms, information is gathered

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until the marginal utility or incremental benefit for additional cases, levels off or drops significantly (Neuman, 2007, p. 145).

In this context, the interviews continued until sufficient information on the transformation of Ashab-ı Kehf was gathered. Since the aim was to ensure a diversity of information, the interviewees were selected from people who were associated with Ashab-ı Kehf in various ways. Within the scope of the study, interviews were conducted with the visitors of Ashab-ı Kehf, the shopkeepers around Ashab-ı Kehf, the imams of the Ashab-ı Kehf mosque, the representatives of Alevi Associations, and the fathers of Catholic and Orthodox Churches in Mersin.

In the scope of this study, twenty-one respondents were interviewed in-depth. Pseudonyms were used (R1, R2 etc.) to ensure interviewees' safety and ethical concerns about research while using the data it has obtained from the interviews in this study. The details of the respondents are given in *Table 1*.

During the fieldwork, as a preliminary question, it was asked whether they had been visited before. In-depth interviews were conducted with the interviewees, who stated they had visited at least twice. The only exception is the interviews with the father of the Catholic and Orthodox churches. In the interview with the father of the Christian churches, they were not asked as a prerequisite whether they had visited Ashab-ı Kehf before. Due to Ashab-ı Kehf essentially being a Christian narrative, the fathers of the Orthodox and Catholic churches in Mersin have been accepted as the only key informants who can give the Ashab-ı Kehf narrative with Christian motives.

Table 1 Respondent's Profile

The Number of Respondent	Gender	Date of Interview	Respondent's Feature	The Ethnic or Religious Feature of Respondents
R1	M	25.10.2021	The Representative of an Alevi Association	Turkish, Alevi
R2	M	26.10.2021	The Representative of an Alevi Association	Arabic, Alevi
R3	M	27.10.2021	The Representative of an Alevi Association	Kurdish, Alevi
R4	F	28.10.2021	Visitor	Kurdish, Shafii
R5	M	12.11.2021	Visitor & Shopkeeper in the Ashab-ı Kehf	Yuruk
R6	F	14.11.2021	Visitor	Alevi
R7	M	14.11.2021	Visitor	Alevi
R8	M	16.11.2021	Visitor & Shopkeeper in the Ashab-ı Kehf	Yuruk, Hanafi
R9	F	17.11.2021	Visitor	Yuruk, Hanafi
R10	M	18.11.2021	Visitor & Imam of Ashab-ı Kehf	Yuruk, Hanafi
R11	F	21.11.2021	Visitor	Arabic, Alevi
R12	F	21.11.2021	Visitor	Arabic, Aleviş
R13	F	22.11.2021	Visitor	Yuruk, Hanefi
R14	M	23.11.2021	Visitor & old imam of Ashab-ı Kehf	Hanafi
R15	M	23.11.2021	Visitor	Arabic, Alevi
R16	F	24.11.2021	Visitor	Arabic, Alevi
R17	M	24.11.2021	Visitor and Arab Alevi sect leader	Arabic, Alevi
R18	M	24.11.2021	Visitor and Arab Alevi sect leader	Arabic, Alevi
R19	M	24.11.2021	Visitor	Yuruk, Hanafi
R20	M	17.09.2022	Father of Catholic Church	Christian
R21	M	17.09.2022	Father of Orthodox Church	Christian

Seven of the interviewees are women, and fourteen of them are men. Furthermore, the respondents are from different belief groups as given in *Table 1*. The respondents defined themselves as Alevi, Arab Alevi, Hanafi, Shafii, Catholic, and Orthodox. Nevertheless, having interviews representing different faith groups is important in terms of interpreting the diversity and transformation of the practices applied in the Ashab-ı Kehf. This diversity strengthens the claim that Ashab-ı Kehf is visited by different faith groups and therefore is a shared sacred space. In these meetings with the leaders of different faiths/beliefs, the interviewees are people who have been visiting Ashab-ı Kehf for many years and have lived in Mersin and/or Tarsus for many years.

3.3.3. Interviews

Interviews that can be conducted in person or over the phone are usually one-on-one between an interviewer and an individual, meant to gather information on a specific set of topics (Harrell & Bradley, 2009, p. 6). On the other hand, any interview or conversation is different from in-depth interview which is also used in this study. Sidney and Beatrice Webb (1932, p. 130) define an in-depth interview as a kind of 'conversation with a purpose'. Legard, Keegan and Ward (2003, p. 138) argue that the roles of the researcher and the participant are different in an in-depth interview than in any conversation. Although an in-depth interview may seem natural, it is different from an everyday conversation.

This research was conducted with a semi-structured interview as a qualitative research method. Semi-structured interviews provide a more flexible studying space for the researcher than structured interviews. Thus, a researcher can better make "...use of the knowledge-producing potentials of dialogues" (Brinkmann, 2014, p. 256). However, it also allows the researcher to appear more participatory during the interview. On the other hand, compared to unstructured interviews, semi-structured interviews allow the researcher to focus on issues that the researcher considers necessary concerning the research topic. Moreover, the interview questions are open-ended due to the importance of the respondent's role during the interview. "The advantages of the open-ended questions include the possibility of discovering the responses that individuals give spontaneously, and thus avoiding the bias that may result from suggesting

responses to individuals, a bias which may occur in the case of close-ended questions" (Reja, Manfreda, Hlebec and Vehovar, 2003, p. 216). In closed-ended questions, participants choose from a fixed set of answers, whereas in open-ended questions, participants are free to give the researcher the answer they want (Neuman, 2014, p. 331).

In-depth interviews were conducted with the visitors, shopkeepers, and key informants. A gender quota would have been planned to apply for an in-depth interview with the individuals. In this study, it was significant that the implementation of the gender quota was based on the different experiences of men and women over the conflicts that occur in these spaces. However, due to the fact that the key informants were mostly men because of religious doctrine and the absence of female managers in the associations, the number of women remained below the quota. In other words, while a significant portion of the visitors who participated in this study were women, the respondents who were the administrators of the association and religious leaders were men. Key informant interviews with association managers and religious leaders are one of the key reasons for this unequal distribution.

Details of the interviewees and the method by which the interviewers were determined are given in Section 3.3.2 above. Interviews were held with those who visited Ashab-ı Kehf, shopkeepers, religious officials working in Ashab-ı Kehf, Alevi associations due to the high Alevi population in Tarsus, and fathers of Catholic and Orthodox Churches.

The first visit and informal interviews within the scope of the fieldwork were held in September 2021 as the pilot fieldwork. This visit and informal interviews provided the basis for the fieldwork that will be constructed within the scope of the thesis. The determination of the sample within the scope of the thesis study was influential in shaping the interview question. As a result of the relations established during this visit and the first data collected about the field, the field study of the thesis study was established. Within the scope of the thesis work, the first formal interviews were held in October 2021 with Alevi associations and a female visitor. Then, in November 2021, the fieldwork was maintained with interviews with key informants, visitors, and

shopkeepers. The last fieldwork was completed in September 2022, with meetings with Catholic and Orthodox fathers. The researcher conducted all interviews during the fieldwork.

Before the interviews, information about the study was explained to the participants. After that, either written or oral approvals were requested from participants for their consent of sharing their information. If they had permission, the conducted interviews were recorded. Only two respondents did not want their voice to be recorded for possible concerns of privacy and lack of trust. For this reason, notes were taken during these interviews. A field interview involves a mutual sharing of experience (Neuman & Robson, 2014, p. 296). The lack of opportunity to share something enough to establish this relationship may have been one of the factors that prevented this trust relationship from being established during the interview.

Introductory questions were asked to get to know the respondent at the beginning of the interview. After that, interviews continued with case-specific questions. These questions are grouped under three subheadings. The first part of the questions is based on the narrative of the space. This section, constructed around the Seven Sleepers narrative, shows how people know the visited place. This section also gives information about the production story of this visiting space. In the second part of the questions, the aim is to understand the use of space. In this section, the answers reveal how often the space is used, for what purposes, and what kind of rituals are performed in the space. The questions in this section are also important because they allow the tracing of the transformations that have taken place. In the third part of the questions, the information about the social, cultural, and political dynamics of the Ashab-ı Kehf is requested. The contentions in Ashab-ı Kehf, which is accepted as a shared sacred place, were analyzed with the questions in this section.

The interviews lasted approximately 30 minutes to 2 hours. The interviews with the visitors and the meetings with the current religious officer of the Ashab-ı Kehf were held in Ashab-ı Kehf. In addition, the meetings with the people who were shopkeepers in Ashab-ı Kehf were also completed in the Ashab-ı Kehf campus. While the interviews with the representatives of the association were held in the buildings of the

association, the interviews with the former religious officer of the Ashab-ı Kehf and an Arab Alevi religious leader were held in their homes. Interviews were held with Catholic and Orthodox fathers in the Catholic church and Orthodox church in Mersin.

3.3.4. The Position of Researcher

Research can be thought of as a systematic collection of methods people use to produce knowledge. It is not only a beginning and ending but also a process between those two dimensions. For this reason, this process should be thought dynamic, changeable, transformative, and require interaction. The researcher is also a part of this dynamic and interactive process. Researchers affect and are affected by the whole research process from beginning to end (Sherif, 2001, p. 437). Researchers use different sources for developing research interests, ideas, and subsequently, research questions as benefiting from personal experiences and circumstances, societal problems, and political commissioning (Flick, 2007, pp. 17-18). In other words, the personal experiences of the researcher in determining the research topic and research question; social, cultural, and political background can be decisive. On the other hand, the position and influence of the researcher in the field may also change during the research process. This section explains the changes in the researcher's positions with the concepts of being an insider/outsider and the researcher's identity.

3.3.4.1. Roles and Identities of the Researcher: The Determination of Being an Insider and Outsider

While defining the concept of Insider and Outsider, Merton's related conceptualization was used. Merton defines Insider and Outsider as: "Insiders are members of certain groups and communities or residents of certain social statuses; Outsiders are non-members" (1972, p. 21). So why is being inside or outside important in research? Within the scope of this study, it was observed that being an Insider or Outsider determined the participant's motivation and/or concern to share information about research. At this point, the question is what factors determine being an Insider or Outsider.

The identity and roles of the researcher and the participant are among the factors that determine the borders of Insider or Outsider during the research. Gender, ethnic and

religious identity, professional status, and even marital status can play important roles in shaping the relationships between researchers and information sources. In this case, the most prominent of these factors are gender, ethnic and religious identity, and being a student. It is thought that considering these identities with an intersectional perspective will be more effective in understanding the dynamics in the field and defining being an "Insider or Outsider". How the fieldwork is performed with these roles and identities, in other words, how these identities are transformed into a negotiation tool, not a conflict, is important for the outcome of the work. As mentioned above, the issues that come to the fore within the scope of this fieldwork are gender, ethnic and religious identity, and being a student.

Conducting fieldwork as a female researcher had several advantages and disadvantages throughout the study. Being a woman researcher in the Ashab-ı Kehf and making these visits and interviews alone were considered strange, especially by the shopkeepers and religious officials in the Ashab-ı Kehf. It took time to establish a relationship of trust, especially with the shopkeepers. On the other hand, my access to some information has been difficult due to my female identity. It was observed that they were reticent about providing information on some issues, especially in my interviews with Arab Alevi men, and it was stated in the interview with an Arab Alevi woman that some information was shared only with Arab Alevi men, not with women. Since it is stated that most of these information transfers are related to the Arab Alevism belief and rituals, it is thought that it does not constitute a serious limitation within the scope of this field study.

Another factor is ethnic and religious positioning. Here, it can be said that two different situations are encountered based on ethnic and religious positioning, and the situation of being inside or outside varies according to the two situations. During the interviews, one of the fundamental questions asked by almost all the participants in order to establish a relationship of trust is the question: "Where are you from?" It is one of the inevitable consequences that the answer to this question will have an impact on the answer of the participants and the positioning of the researcher as Inside or Outside. As a matter of fact, this question is one of the issues where the activeness of the participant in the research processes is visible. This question, which I frequently

encountered during fieldwork, affected both my position as a researcher and whether I was an Insider or an Outsider. For example, although I was accepted as an Insider as a researcher in the interviews with Alevi associations, the Alevi identity was not sufficient to be positioned as an Insider in the interview I made with an Arab Alevi association representative or in the interview with Arab Alevi visitors. On the other hand, they did not also define as an Outsider. In other words, it can be said that there was in a very uncertain position during the interviews as a researcher due to the identities I have. This uncertainty, which is defined as a partial Insider position, required that my relationship with the interviewers be constantly negotiated and that trust be renewed periodically. In other words, it can be said that I was in a very ambiguous position during the interviews as a researcher due to the identities I have. This uncertainty, which is defined as a partial Insider position, required that my relationship with the interviewers be constantly negotiated and that trust be renewed periodically.

The last factor is related to being a university student. Being a student put me in an entirely advantageous position. All of the respondents tolerated and supported me because of being seen as a student and the motivation of respondents to help a student.

3.3.5. Limitations

The main limitation encountered in this study was finding interviewers. Ashab-ı Kehf is a place that is visited for a single day. Therefore, each meeting with visitors actually means taking some of the time allotted to visit that place. People have been able to refrain from sharing their time due to their own schedules.

The main difficulty encountered in shopkeepers' interviews is that the respondents must also be interested in selling products to those who visit there. This situation resulted in the shopkeepers not wanting to interview at the beginning. It has been observed that not wanting to meet with a visitor he does not know, which will disrupt his commercial activities, is the primary motivation here. Inevitably, during research, a relationship of trust is essential for interviews and observations. Without the construction of this relation, it was not possible to interview with the shopkeepers. The

communication established with the regular visits of the place has eliminated this problem and negotiations could be made.

The last limitation concerns language. One of the key informative interviews conducted as part of the field research was with an Arab Alevi faith leader. He himself could not speak Turkish fluently, but could speak his mother tongue, Arabic. For this reason, I had to interview with the help of a translator. Having completed this interview with the help of a translator suggests that there may be some gaps or misinterpretation of data collected during the interview.

3.4. Data Analysis

Within the scope of this study, the data analysis process started with the transcription of the audio recordings taken with the consent of the respondents and the transferring of a handwritten note to the computer during the interviews. Then, the transcribed data were transferred to the MAXQDA 2022 software. In the data analysis phase, primarily, all transcripts were read and coded. The coding mentioned here differs from the coding practices made within the scope of quantitative research. In qualitative research, the researcher organizes raw data into conceptual categories and creates themes or concepts. Qualitative coding is integral to data analysis (Neuman, 2000, pp.480).

In the coding process, an approach called lean coding was used where only the list of initial codes was expanded as needed. This approach begins with five or six categories with shorthand labels or codes and then expands as the first and second review of the database continues (Creswell & Poth, 2018, pp. 636). The codes and categories used in the data analysis are organized with the production of space, use of space, sharing of space, and domination practices indicators specified in the study's theoretical framework. In this framework, it can be said that the codes used in data analysis show parallelism with the theoretical framework.

CHAPTER 4

THE TRANSFORMATION OF SACRED SPACES: CONTROVERSION AND NEGOTIATION

4.1.   The Narrative that Created Its Space: Ashab-ı Kehf

Narrative and legends living in cultural memory are transmitted orally from generation to generation, from geography to geography. It lives with different variants in new contexts and places wherever it goes (Uğureli, 2017, p. 27). Ashab-ı Kehf (Seven Sleepers) is also a narrative that has found a place in different religions and mythologies and has reproduced according to the cultural characteristics of the geography it reaches. The narrative has a broad spectrum extending to different cultures, religions, languages, and geographies. Due to the motifs in the narrative, Ashab-ı Kehf has found its place in many different cultures, especially in Christianity and Islam.

Von Sydow (1934, pp. 350) stated that each narrative is reproduced in different contexts and then settled in its geography. The diversity caused by this reproduction process should not be considered a deviation but rather an adaptation to the new space. The narrative of Ashab-ı Kehf has also been reproduced and resettled in its new space in various ways, both in religions, mythology, and folk culture. Furthermore, it became localized in this new space where it was placed and even became a value identified with that local by the society. In this context, examining the Ashab-ı Kehf as a case is not examining a monolithic narrative. On the contrary, it is a narrative with spatialized, localized, common and differentiated motifs in different geographies. This situation makes it inevitable to deal with the Ashab-ı Kehf in a multidimensional way.

In this section, firstly, the narrative of the Ashab-ı Kehf will be conveyed by considering their differences and commonalities as a result of the interview data. Then, visits to Ashab-ı Kehf in the world and Turkey will be given, and Tarsus Ashab-ı Kehf which is a sacred space will be examined spatially.

4.1.1. The Narrative and the Motif Structure of the Ashab-ı Kehf

Although there are many narratives about Ashab-ı Kehf in Islam and Christianity, the standard narrative of Ashab-ı Kehf (Seven Sleepers, the Companions of Cave) is as follows:

The Seven Sleepers is a narrative of the "Sevens" who adopt Christianity and take shelter in a cave to escape the persecution of the society they live in and their rulers. In this narrative, God puts the "Sevens," who escape the persecution of society and ruler, to sleep for years in a cave in order to preserve. When the "Sevens" awoke from their long sleep, they did not realize that they had been sleeping in the cave for a long time. Because they were hungry, they sent one of them to the city. The person who went to the city gave the money in his pocket to the baker in exchange for the bread he bought. The seller, who thinks that the money offered by the young man is a treasure, took the young man to the ruler of the period. The young person told this ruler about his experiences. While the young person realized that the society in which he woke up had different characteristics compared to the period in which he fell asleep, other people also noticed that this person was from another era. At the end of the narrative, it is stated that these seven young people disappeared when they realized that they had awakened into another period.

Although the Ashab-ı Kehf narrative is known in its most general form as above, there are micro-scale changes in the narrative. Due to the fact that, like every narrative, the events in the Ashab-ı Kehf, the heroes of the events, the perception of time and space of the event are also associated with their own reality of the culture in which the narrative is conveyed. This actually means the localization of the narrative, which means the embodiment of the narrative, its liberation from timelessness and spacelessness. The narrative of Ashab-ı Kehf has shown various similarities and

differences in the motifs it contains due to its localization in all the geographies it has strolled through. Another thing that is as important as the spread of a legend is that it can take hold and localize in the spaces it goes. Taking hold and localization is only possible with common cultural motifs. Although the narrative of the Ashab-ı Kehf varied, the common motif that formed the basis of the narrative in question was inevitably "long/deep sleep". Sert (2009, p. 25) stated that the motif of long sleep is intertwined with the motif of resurrection (afterlife or resurrection). The awakening of these seven young people who stayed in the cave for three hundred years proves the possibility of resurrection (Altınova & Tunçel, 2013, p. 1283).

4.1.2. The Seven Sleepers in Christianity and Islam

4.1.2.1. The Seven Sleepers in Christianity

The oldest source of the Ashab-ı Kehf narrative, which has no information about it in the Old and New Testaments, belongs to Yakup of Suruç (Dağhan, 1998; Sert, 2009; Karaoğlan, 2016). The Ashab-ı Kehf, who entered the Christian world with this narrative, were later discussed and conveyed by a different researcher. In the narrative, which is based on the belief of seven young people in the face of a pagan empire, the cave cult and deep sleep motif are processed.

Ashab-ı Kehf, handled by Christian sources, points at just a specific space in terms of its narrative and cult space: Ephesus. During the interviews, only Ephesus was shown as the cult place of the Ashab-ı Kehf in Christianity, based on a reference book called "Holy Orthodox Church History".

> In the History of the Holy Orthodox Church, this is referred to as seven young men. It is known that these took place in the Ephesus region. It is not in Tarsus. The event takes place not here but in Ephesus (R21, September 17th, 2022).

A reference book called Senskar[8], translated as "Saints Calendar", gives the days of commemoration of Christian saints. In this source, which is stated to be a human book, not a divine one, the lives of the saints are explained and the details of why these people were appointed as saints are given. One of the issues mentioned in the

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[8] This term was used by an Orthodox religious leader.

interviews is that this source is used as a guide in all churches. Ashab-ı Kehf is one of the saints who found a place for himself in this reference source. The following information is essential here by the Father of the Orthodox Greek Church:

> The fact that the Ashab-ı Kehf was brought back to life shows the hope of the Resurrection, representing the basis of the Christian faith. Since they accepted the Seven Sleepers as a prediction of the belief that people would be resurrected at the end of the world, their lives were recorded, and sanctity was attributed to them. The Holy Orthodox Church History has fixed their commemoration as the 22nd of October. From that year on, every year on the 22nd of October, these seven brothers are commemorated as Ashab-ı Kehf. Their Memorial Day is the 22nd of October. Catholic churches do this on the 27th of July (R21, September 17th, 2022).

During the interview, it was stated that this commemoration ritual, which continues in the Orthodox, is not carried out by the Catholics. The Father of the Catholic Church explains the lack of commemoration of the Seven Sleepers in Catholic churches as follows:

> The Seven Sleepers is a mythological narrative. It is essential to learn a lesson from these stories. This narrative is also important because it is actually told as proof of the Resurrection (R20, September 17th, 2022).

It was stated that it was accepted as a mythological story by the Catholics, it did not reflect reality, and therefore it was not commemorated. On the other hand, it has been noted that the commemoration of the Seven Sleepers continues in Orthodox churches.

> This commemoration is eternal in the history of our church. We pray for the 22nd of October. We have a commemoration calendar. We pray to whoever has a memory there. There are so many saints. Especially the first 400 years. ...all the martyrs of Christianity were formed in the first 400 years. That's why we call it the golden age of the Holy Church. ...The martyrs of the first 400 years are considered holy in all denominations of Christianity today. I do not include Protestantism because Protestants are against this event. They have an opinion that does not accept the subject of sainthood and does not value it. ...But in the Eastern and Western churches, the martyrs in the first 400 years are common ones. These have a lot of importance. Ashab-ı Kehf is one of them because this event happened before the fourth century. In addition, in our holy church, a commemoration is made for them on the 4th of August. There are two commemorations in our Orthodox church. After the first four hundred years, churches began to issue their own saints. Catholics began to have different saints, Orthodox ones have different, or Syriac ones have different saints (R21, September 17th, 2022).

The Seven Sleepers, which spread throughout the Christian world, were considered martyrs because they were supposed to have died for the sake of religion and were counted among the Christian saints. However, it could not find a place for itself among Christianity's belief principles and sacraments since it is considered a mythological narrative and a tool for concretizing the resurrection (Karaoğlan, 2016, p. 53).

4.1.2.2. The Seven Sleepers in Islam

Previously, although the Ashab-ı Kehf is a narrative that records the faith of 7 Christian youths, it was mentioned that the cult places of the narrative are widespread in today's Islamic geography. It is possible to consider the prevalence of the Ashab-ı Kehf in Islamic geographies in two stages. First, the story of the Ashab-ı Kehf is explained in the 9th - 26th verses of the chapter of Kehf in the Qur'an. The universally known motifs of the narrative are repeated in the Qur'an in the same way. On the other hand, the Qur'an does not tell the story of the Ashab-ı Kehf by giving any date, name, or place. This situation is described by an interviewer as follows:

> I learned it by reading the story of the Ashab-ı Kehf. The plot is almost the same. Some people leave everything behind for their faith. The number is not precise, and it is unclear how many years they slept. ...The details are not explained in the Qur'an; the essence is explained because if it were written that there were people dressed in red, everyone would wear red today. If the Ashab-ı Kehf were said here, this place would be like Mecca. We call this "Unseen Faith[9]"(R10, November 18th, 2021).

It is not just a coincidence that the geography where the narrative and cult places spread is primarily Islamic. In order to understand why this narrative, which has created and localized dozens of cult places around the world, is in the geographies where the Islamic faith is widespread, it is necessary to understand how the Ashab-ı Kehf are handled in terms of these two beliefs.

Although there is definitive information about the whereabouts of the Ashab-ı Kehf in Christianity, this place has not been turned into a "pilgrimage" place by Christians today. This is because, as stated in the previous section, the Christian world accepts the Ashab-ı Kehf as a narrative and treats it as an event embodying an abstract affair.

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[9] It has been established as a translation of the concept of "gaybi iman".

On the other hand, the situation is different in Islamic geographies. The Qur'an did not directly show the cult place of the Ashab-ı Kehf of the Cave but only described the cave. According to this description, "sun when it rose, inclining away from their cave on the right, and when it set, passing away from them on the left" (Qur'an, Sura 18, Verse 17). In addition to this, information was given that they slept in a large area inside cave[10]. This situation constitutes one of the stories of the "discovery" of the actual cult place of Ashab-ı Kehf. Just as the Seven Sleepers became localized in the geographies where it traveled as a folk tale narrative, it was subject to the same procedure while navigating the geographies that took the Qur'an as a guide. The points mentioned in the Qur'an were taken into consideration, discoveries with references to the Qur'an were made and efforts were made to find the "true Ashab-ı Kehf". However, the Ashab-ı Kehf are only described in the Qur'an, and no precise information is given about their whereabouts. This ambiguity in the Qur'an about Ashab-ı Kehf could have resulted in the fact that more than half of the Ashab-ı Kehf of the world is in these geographies.

4.1.3. The Seven Sleepers around the World

The narrative of the Ashab-ı Kehf has influenced many different cultures, and it created many cult centers for itself in the places where this narrative spread. This is one of the aspects that make the Ashab-ı Kehf narrative interesting. Various caves, considered where the Ashab-ı Kehf slept, showed themselves in the places where this narrative spread. Spain, Morocco, Algeria, Tunisia, Egypt, Yemen, Syria, Iraq, Iran, Afghanistan, China, Indonesia, Turkey, Cyprus, Italy, Greece, East Turkestan, France, India, Ukraine-Kyiv, Jordan, Nakhchivan, Spain, Germany, Russia, and Turkey are countries with caves (Sert, 2009; Akpınar, 2010; Karaoğlan, 2016; Uğureli, 2017).

It is impossible to give detailed information about the whole places mentioned above in terms of the scope of this study. However, to provide an idea about the subject, it would be appropriate to give information about a few of the places in Turkey where it is believed that the cave where the Ashab-ı Kehf lived in Section 4.1.4.

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[10] Qur'an, Sura 18, Verse 17

4.1.4. The Seven Sleepers in Turkey

Ashab-ı Kehf, which we see many examples of in the world, has also found a significant place in Anatolian lands where the cult of saints is very rich. It was also localized in the cult centers formed in Anatolia and blended with the characteristics of the geography in which it settled. When the studies on Ashab-ı Kehf are examined, it is found that six Ashab-ı Kehf cult places, four of which are still standing, are in Anatolian lands (Dağhan, 1998; Sert, 2009; Karaoğlan, 2016; Uğureli, 2017). Among these cult places, those that still exist today are in İzmir, Diyarbakır, Kahramanmaraş, and Mersin. It is stated that Ashab-ı Kehf, whose traces were also found in Malatya and Sivas, did not survive physically in these two cities (Sert, 2009). The first three of these cult places will be examined in this section. On the other hand, Tarsus Ashab-ı Kehf in Mersin hosted the research area of this thesis. In this context, Tarsus Ashab-ı Kehf will be examined in more detail in the next chapter.

Firstly, Ephesus, located within the borders of the Selçuk district of İzmir (see Map 2), is considered to be the place where the Ashab-ı Kehf lived, especially among Christians. The Ashab-ı Kehf visit is at the foot of Panayır Mountain, which is on the border of Ephesus today. Hasluck argued that the localization of the narrative at Ephesus is probably due to the currency there of the similar legend of S. John (Hasluck, 1929, p. 311).

Map 2 The airline distance of the Ashab-ı Kehf and Selçuk City Center

Secondly, another cult place where Ashab-ı Kehf was localized and settled is located within the borders of the Lice district of Diyarbakır. It is stated that it is located on Rakim Mountain, north of Der-i Rakim village (today's Duru District), which is approximately 15 kilometers southwest of Diyarbakır. The airline distance of the cave to Der-i Rakim village is approximately 700 meters (see Map 3). Since it is believed that the Seven Sleepers are only awake in May, this cave is only visited in May (Karaoğlu, 2016, p. 191).
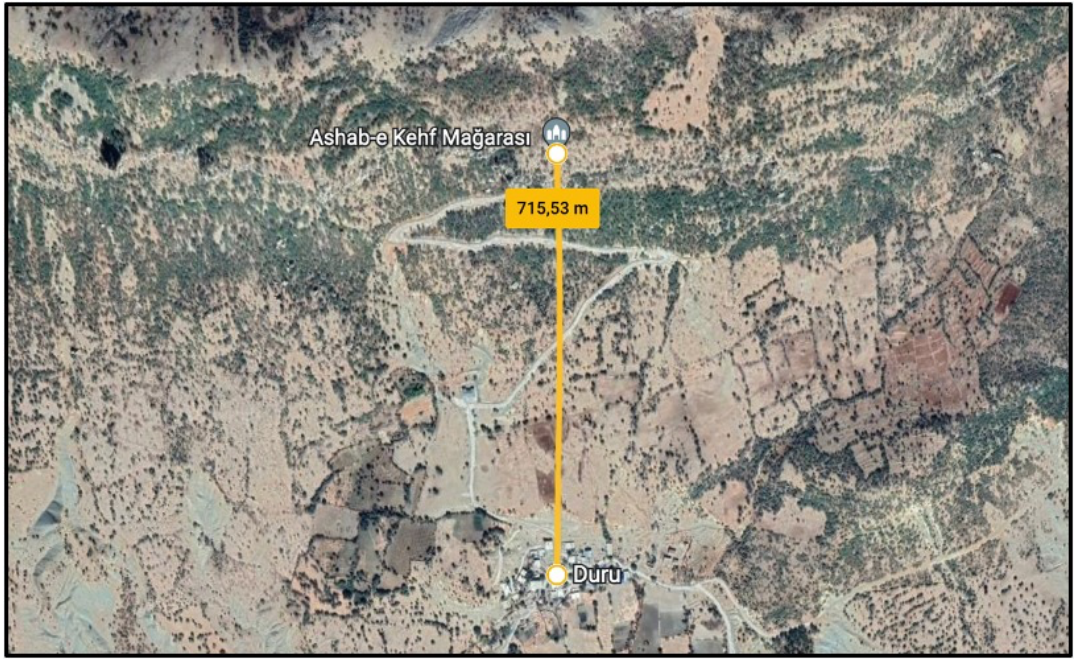
Map 3 The airline distance of the Ashab-ı Kehf and Der-i Rakim

Thirdly, the Ashab-ı Kehf cave, located in the Afşin district of Kahramanmaraş and approximately 5 km airline distance from the current city center, is on the skirts of a mountain called Enculus Mountain (see Map 4). It is stated that this visit, which is said to have become famous during the Seljuk period, was built at the beginning of the 13th century on top of the church ruins, and a foundation was established (Sert, 2009, pp. 135-139).
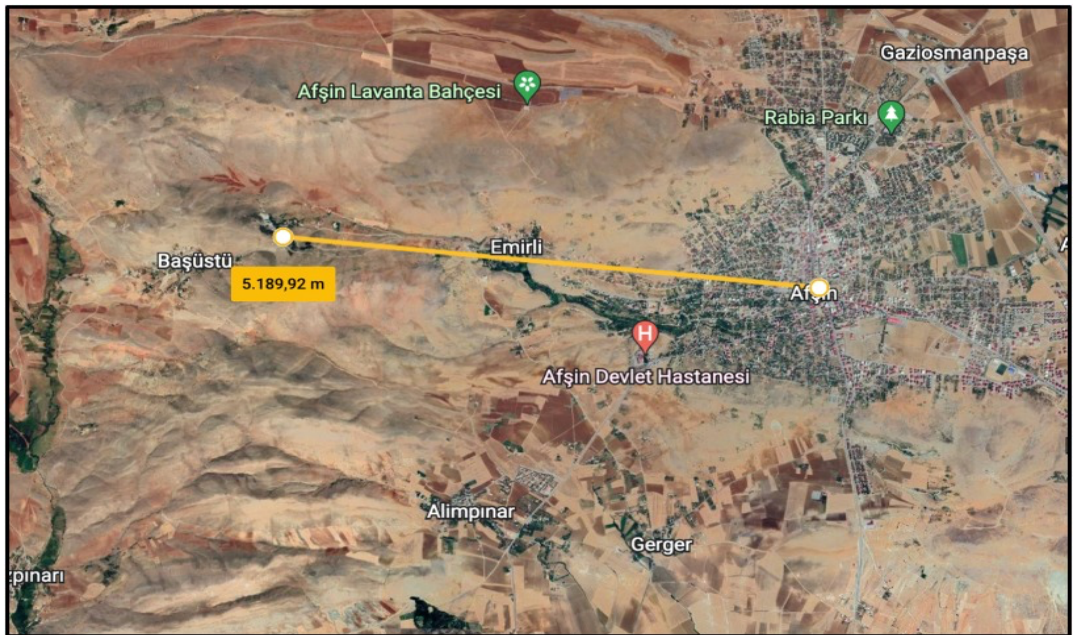
Map 4 The airline distance between Afşin city center and Ashab-ı Kehf

Finally, Tarsus Ashab-ı Kehf, which constitutes the case study of this thesis, is located in Mersin. Tarsus Ashab-ı Kehf is the main place where fieldwork was carried out within the scope of this thesis. For this reason, the current situation of the Ashab-ı Kehf cave in Tarsus will be detailed in Section 4.2.

4.2.   Ashab-ı Kehf in Tarsus

The cult center where the Ashab-ı Kehf lived and slept is located approximately 13 km away from the city center of Tarsus (see Map 5). This cult center, located in the north of Tarsus, near the village of Dedeler, is located on the foothill called Encülüs Mountain or Ziyaret Mountain. Over time, physical growth has occurred in the space with other structures built around this cult center.
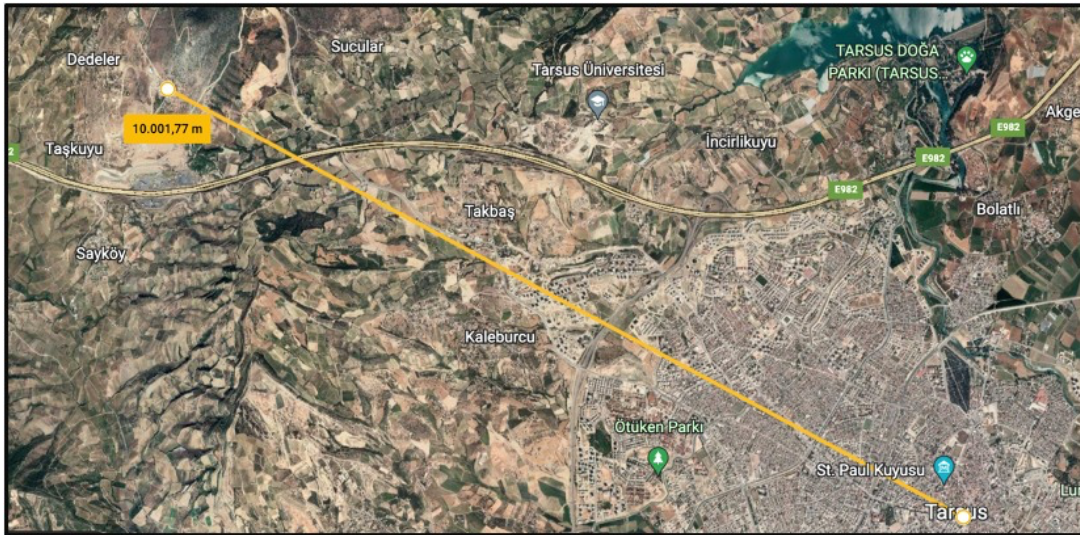
Map 5 The airline distance between Tarsus city center and Ashab-ı Kehf

Tarsus is one of the richest places in Turkey in terms of religious geography. Tarsus, which stands out with this feature, has a history of seven or eight thousand years due to historical research (Akdağ, Yağcı & Aydın, 2014, p. 6). It has been the cradle of various civilizations for thousands of years and has survived in the cultural atmosphere created by these civilizations. It felt the tangles of religious belief formed by the great Roman, Greek, Jewish and Islamic cultures in his identity with similar or different motifs. In addition to Ashab-ı Kehf, the fact that influential personalities such as Daniyal (a), Bilal-i Habeshi (r.a.), St. Paul were born and lived in Tarsus could be

shown as an example of the formation of these cultural and belief tangles (Akdağ, Yağcı & Aydın, 2014, pp. 7-11). In this context, it would not be wrong to say that Tarsus is significant for Muslims and Christians. The fact that important figures for both belief systems find a place in the city's history makes it inevitable for Tarsus to have an inclusive role in these two beliefs. One of the representations of this multi-cultural structure of Tarsus, which hosts the visits of different cultures, is indisputably Ashab-ı Kehf.

The idea of analyzing Ashab-ı Kehf within the scope of this thesis actually emerged by coincidence. Ashab-ı Kehf, which was visited during a touristic trip in Mersin in 2021, presented an interesting image with its mosque, the single-balcony minaret added to this mosque and the three-balcony high minaret added to this building in the second half of the 1900s, which draws a very different image from the existing architecture. In addition, the proximity of the Ashab-ı Kehf cave, located just behind this mosque, to the mosque, the "forbidden" sign at the entrance of the cave, the large signs with the Ashab-ı Kehf narrative became increasingly striking the current situation of Ashab-ı Kehf. Following this first visit, the details of the work to be carried out at this site were determined after a pilot site visit in September 2021. Following September 2021, field visits and interviews were conducted in October 2021, November 2021, and September 2022. This study and the analysis of the case, mainly benefitted from these site visits.

There is a cave, a mosque, a picnic area where people have picnics, small shops where visitors shop and a restaurant, and a paragliding track on the Ashab-ı Kehf campus. Furthermore, there is a hotel on the campus that has not been open for a while. Each of these spaces is located very close to the other. The positioning of some of these sections within the Ashab-ı Kehf compound is shown in Map 6 below.
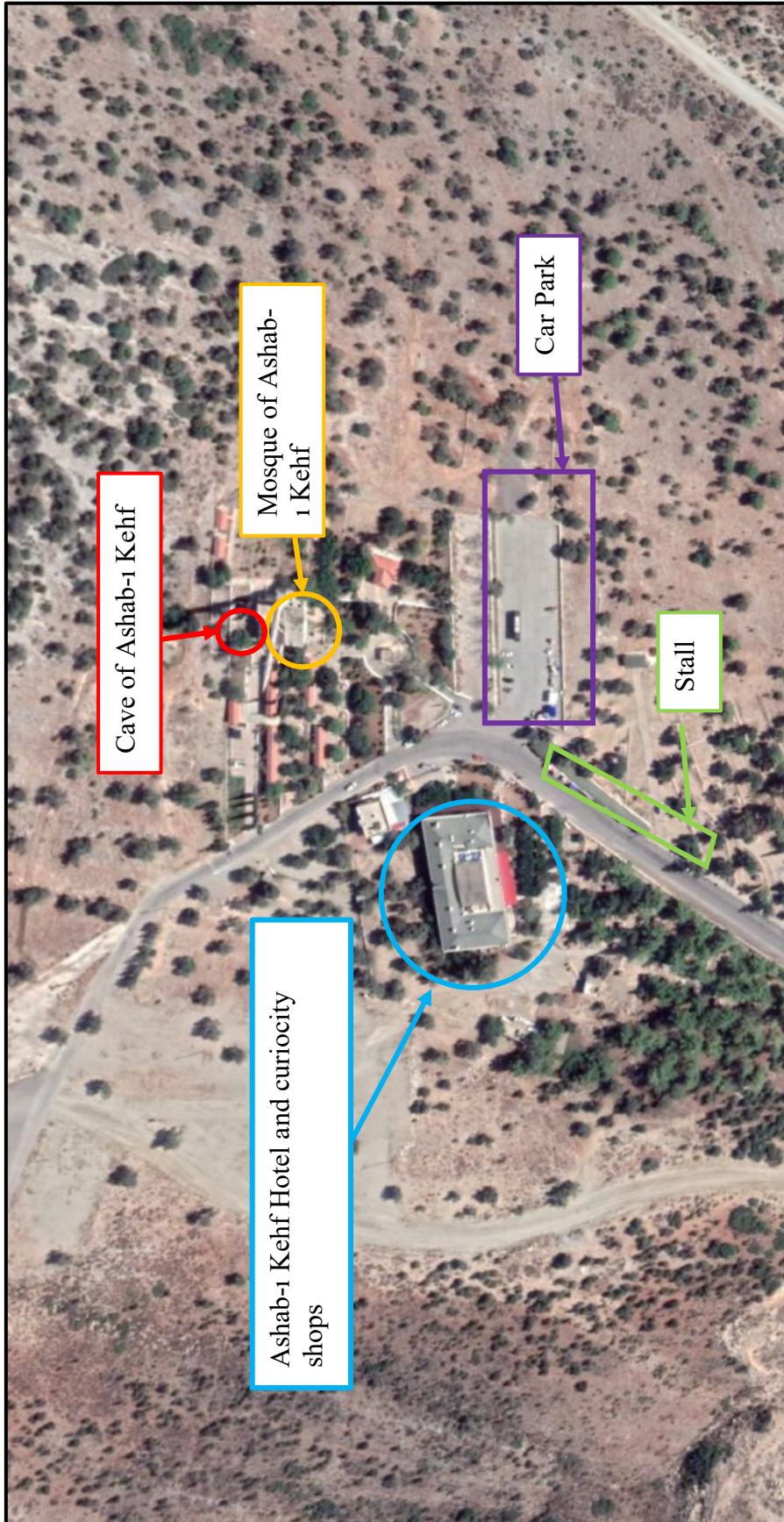
Map 6 The layout of the Ashab-ı Kehf

4.3. Spatial Parameters of Social Presences: The Transformation of Ashab-ı Kehf's Religioscape

Space is produced by power and the co-production of political and social relations (Lefebvre, 2003, pp. 84-85) and makes the living space of the political power visible in a hierarchical manner. Space, which has a political content, is shaped by the ideological conditions it carries. The fact that space is laden with politics and ideology is due to the existence of abstract power relations under the spatial practices of the social structure. With this interaction, ideologies that shape society's political power want to perpetuate their influence on spaces through power (Lefebvre, 2013, pp. 75-117). The role of the sacred in the relationship between power and space has two intersecting dimensions. Firstly, the sacred constitutes a dimension one of the dimensions of the political sphere. Sacred and religion can both act as an apparatus of power and a source of the legitimacy of power (Balandier, 1972, p. 117). In other words, the power can consolidate its power and maintain its legitimacy through the sacred space. Secondly, when sacred manifests in space, it privileges the space, distinguishing it from other spaces. Sometimes this "privilege" is embodied through the practices in the space while sometimes through the physical appearance of the space. One of the places where this relationship of the sacred, power, and space is most visible is sacred spaces.

Hayden et al. (2016, p. 12) argues that control over "key" religious sanctuaries (in the context of this thesis, sacred spaces) in a region is considered a sign of dominance. Thus, the capture and transformation of these sites is an important indicator of hierarchical relations between communities living together. On the other hand, a sacred space is a space of encounter for those who share that space. As a result of this encounter, those who use the space define each other as Self and Other, make competitive claims over the form and use of the space, and assert claims of dominance; thus, the encounter leads to a contestation (Hayden, 2013, pp. 401-406). Sacred spaces continue to exist today as spaces where hegemony is performed in various ways. Within the scope of this thesis, the control of sacred spaces or *ziyaret*s will be accepted as a space reflection of controversion, and the physical change and transformation of Ashab-ı Kehf will be examined in this context. On the other hand, when the change and transformation of Ashab-ı Kehf over the years is traced, it can be said that this

change and transformation is not unique to Ashab-ı Kehf, but Ashab-ı Kehf is a link in a transformation policy pursued in sacred spaces.

The transformation of sacred sites is a common phenomenon in Anatolia, part of a worldwide phenomenon characterized by population exchanges, conquests, and changes in the status of religious buildings. Whenever these changes occur, existing sacred sites undergo a series of physical transformations to adapt to the new order. The first examples that come to mind here are the conversion of churches into mosques (Hayden et al. 2016). The removal of Christian symbols and icons in various ways in churches and the placement of symbols of Islam in the building are among the religious space transformations encountered in Anatolia (Tanyeri - Erdemir, Hayden & Erdemir, 2014, p. 492). On the other hand, another form of transformation encountered in Anatolia can be taken as sacred spaces or shrines. The transformation of these spaces has unique features in terms of orthodoxizing the heterodox belief systems.

4.3.1. From the Cave to the Mosque Construction: The Kalam of Qur'an

Ashab-ı Kehf, a narrative based on the long sleep of seven young people in a cave, which is shown as a concrete example of resurrection after death, has become a narrative that is embraced in many parts of the world and localized. Due to the spread of the narrative over a wide geography, many caves where the Ashab-ı Kehf were supposed to sleep, emerged. Of a total number of more than thirty sites, six Ashab-ı Kehf cult sites are in Anatolia. As a matter of fact, not only the caves, but also every settlement and structure around the caves where the Ashab-ı Kehf was supposed to lie, could not escape from being mentioned together with the Ashab-ı Kehf. On the one hand, there are places and structures that are referred and related to as Ashab-ı Kehf because they are already around Ashab-ı Kehf; on the other hand, there are structures that are built around the cave, and they are related to Ashab-ı Kehf in this way.

While Tarsus Ashab-ı Kehf was originally only a cave settlement, it has undergone frequent spatial expansion works with the buildings built around it later. The boundaries of the sacred, which started with the cave of Ashab-ı Kehf, expanded on this occasion. The place where the sacred space is revealed and manifests itself

determines the boundaries of the sacred space, thus causing a boundary between the sacred and the profane. However, the fact that there is a boundary between the sacred and the profane does not mean that these boundaries and those on either side of the boundaries are absolute. Kong argued that although the boundaries and definitions of the sacred and profane are somewhat clear, sacred spaces continue to be malleable in some way (Kong and Woods, 2016, p. 18). In other words, although there is a boundary between the secular sphere and the place where the sacred is manifested, these boundaries and the symbols, which are representations of the sacred, can be subject to some changes. In his study, Kong linked this transformation and change to contention. He argued that "the source of religious competition lies in attempts by religious groups to expand the extent of group-specific religious spaces" (Kong and Woods, 2016, p. 18).

It is not known when the Tarsus Ashab-ı Kehf cave was first discovered. In fact, when the secondary sources are examined, it is observed that there is no exact date on when the mosque or masjid in front of the Ashab-ı Kehf cave was built. According to Sümer, al-Muqaddesi uses the expression that "There is also a masjid in the region of the city. They said that this masjid is above the cave" (1989, p.31). Considering that al-Muqaddesi[11] have produced this work around the 10th century, it would not be wrong to say that the first mosque was built early from today. On the other hand, some sources argued that Sultan Abdulaziz ordered the mosque to be built in 1873. It can be said that this statement does not reflect the truth, because, as seen above, there is a statement in the older sources that there is a mosque here. On the other hand, Hasluck stated that a new mosque was built in the 1870s, and a foundation was established by the mother of Sultan Abdulaziz (1929, p. 316). According to the information given on the sign hung on the mosque's wall by the General Directorate of Foundations, Ashab-ı Kehf Mosque was renovated in 1872 by the city mufti Ahmet Efendi on behalf of the mother of Sultan Abdulaziz. In other words, in the second half of the 1800s, a mosque was not built for the Ashab-ı Kehf, but the existing one was renovated. In this context, given the recent situation, Ashab-ı Kehf Mosque can be interpreted as a shrine mosque which "usually contains a tomb or cenotaph of some holy person with whom baraka, or charismatic religious grace, is associated" (Fernea and Fernea, 1972, p. 389).

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[11] Sümer, 1989, p.31

Although there is no information about the first construction date of the Ashab-ı Kehf Mosque, it is known that the Qur'an is the guide for constructing a mosque in front of the Ashab-ı Kehf Cave. This situation is expressed as follows in the 21st verse of Surat al-Kahf:

> And similarly, We caused them to be found that they [who found them] would know that the promise of Allah is truth and that of the Hour there is no doubt. [That was] when they disputed among themselves about their affair and [the] said, 'Construct over them a structure. Their Lord is the most knowing about them.' Said those who prevailed in the matter, 'We will surely take [for ourselves] over them a masjid.'

It is thought that the motivation for constructing the first mosque is the one mentioned in the Qur'an. However, it is not possible to analyze considering the period when the mosque was built since no record of this period could be reached. On the other hand, various documents belonging to the Ottoman period have been reached regarding the mosque renovated in the second half of the 1800s. Aydın (2018, pp. 17–18) stated that the Ottoman Empire entered a "Sunni identification" process as of the 16th century, strengthened the related Sunni institutions, and changed its attitude towards unorthodox practices.
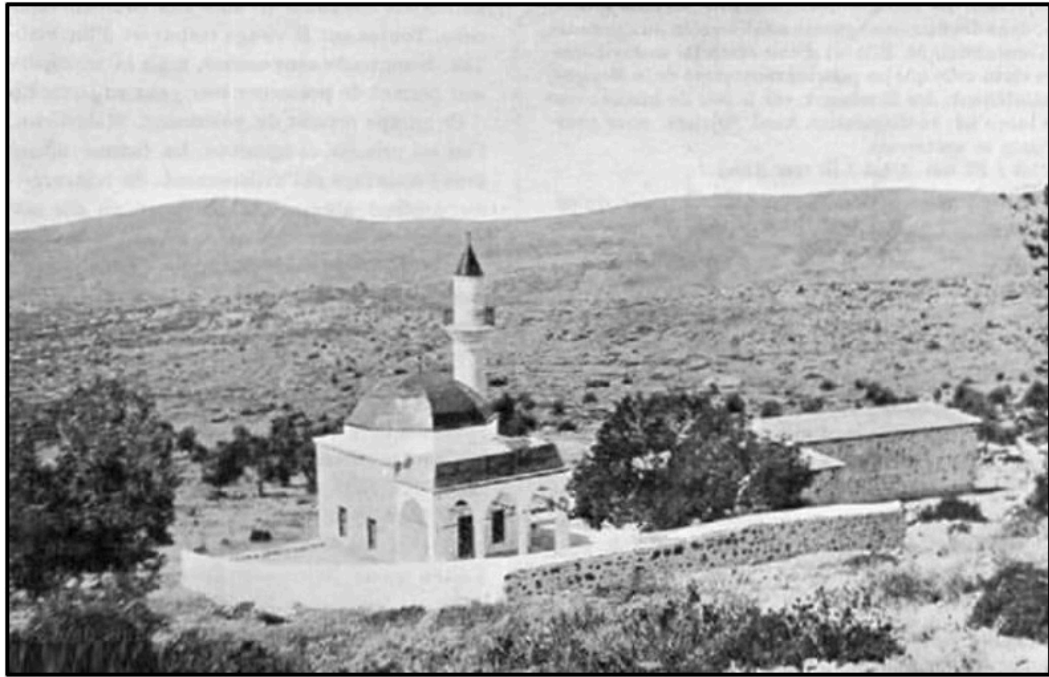
Photograph 2 A photograph from 1908, Ashab-ı Kehf [12]

Photograph 3 An old photograph of the Ashab-ı Kehf[13]

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[12] Taken from the Facebook page named "Eski Tarsus Fotoğrafları".

[13] Shared by the older religious leader of the Ashab-ı Kehf Mosque

In the 1800s, "Sunni identification" policies gained momentum, and heterodox belief practices were reinterpreted within the "Sunni identification" framework. In this context, it can be said that the sacred spaces of heterodox belief groups also got their share from the "Sunni identification" policies that gained momentum in the Ottoman Empire. The transformation of the Ashab-ı Kehf in the second half of the 1800s can be interpreted as the product of such a policy.

Tarsus Ashab-ı Kehf was designated as the real Ashab-ı Kehf by the Ottoman Empire. Based on the documents obtained from the Prime Ministry Ottoman Archives, Tekin (2010, pp. 151-167), describes the process of acceptance of Tarsus as the true Ashab-ı Kehf as follows:

> The document dated January 29, 1861, in the Ottoman archive contains some information. This document explains the salaries of the zawiyedar and supervisor duties of the Ashab-ı Kehf Cave located on the Bencilüs mountain in Tarsus not to be covered by the sufficient income of the foundation. Moreover, it was requested by the relevant authorities that the salaries be paid from the state treasury. The relevant authorities prepared the said report. The summary of the content is as follows:
>
> ...The Ashab-ı Kehf cave, located at the foot of the mountain two hours away from Tarsus, in the north of Tarsus in Adana Province, is located in the Qur'an's Kehf Surah. It is in accordance with the 17th verse[14] in the Qur'an.

Subsequently, Tekin (2010, p. 154) states that the zawiyedar[15] and supervisory duties of the cave have been in the Naqshbandis since the past. Ahmed and Mehmed Efendi, son of Sheikh Ömer Efendi, who were caliphs of the Nakşibendei, lived near the Ashab-ı Kehf, prayed day and night in the cave, and protected the *ziyaret*. Since they did not have any other income, they were asked to appropriate a salary for their duties from the treasury.

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[14] "And [head you been present], you would see the sun when it rose, inclining away from their cave on the right, and when it set, passing away from them on the left, while they were [laying] within an open space thereof."

[15] The name given to the sheikh to whom the zawiyas are allocated.

It is not a simple coincidence that Ashab-ı Kehf's the institutions of zawiyedar are held by the Naqshbandis. Naqshbandism was founded and developed in accordance with the basic principles of Islam and was described as an orthodox religious organization (Yapıcı, 2012, p.23). The Naqshbandis, who showed absolute loyalty to the Ottoman Empire and were seen as the guarantors of Sharia in the Ottoman Empire (Algar, 2007, pp. 42-44), were supported by the Ottoman sultans (Eraydın, 1994, p. 100). As a matter of fact, the Naqshbandis, who supported the reforms made by Mahmut II, were sponsored by the Sultan, and even the Bektâşî lodges that were closed down were placed under their supervision (Yapıcı, 2012, p. 100). The fact that the duty of protecting a heterodox sacred space is among the Naqshbandis, who have close relations with the current power and who embrace an orthodox interpretation of Sunni Islam, shows the motivation of the power to protect its domination over these spaces.

Immediately after the establishment of the 1923 Republic, Turkey experienced structural changes in the relationship between the state and religion. Nevertheless, the abolishment of these Ottoman religious establishments did not mean a complete rupture from the Ottoman past. The foundation of the Diyanet in 1924, the establishment of the Directorate General of Foundations gathered pious foundations under its roof, open courses for training religious personnel (imam and hatip) are indications that there is no total rupture from Ottoman (Berkes 1998, 479-506; Lewis 196l; Ahmad 1993; Gözaydın 2009, l3-27; Davison 2003; Parla and Davison 2008; cited by Şen, 2019, p. 42). In the newly established state, the view of the brotherhoods (tarikat) as potential opposition to the political authority rather than being evaluated according to their religious functions closed the places of worship of the brotherhoods other than the mosque and the masjid with the Law No. 677 enacted in 1925. However, allowed places of worship would be placed under the direct jurisdiction of the state with an imam (imam), his assistants (muezzin), and the other officials appointed and employed by the state (Kulak, 2019, p. 116). Although the state's administrative system has changed within the framework of all these changes, its motive to control the religious sphere has not changed.

When we look at the transformations that took place in the Ashab-ı Kehf together with the republican period, we encounter the following administrative situations: (1)

Ashab-ı Kehf is affiliated to the General Directorate of Foundations, (2) there is a religious official in the Ashab-ı Kehf Mosque. However, the changes are not limited to administrative ones. Its appearance has also changed a lot over the years.

In the analysis of the architecture of Tarsus Ashab-ı Kehf Mosque, Yüzücü (2019, p.50-55) stated that the mosque consists of three square spaces added to each other at different times. There are two minarets adjacent to the two square structures on the east and west facades of the mosque, which were built in different periods. The old-dated minaret, with a single balcony, was built in proportion to the architecture of the building (see Photographs 2 and 3). On the other hand, the new minaret has three balconies, and its proportion to the mosque's architecture differs significantly. This building with three balconies can be seen in many parts of Tarsus (see Photograph 4).

Photograph 4 Today's view of Ashab-ı Kehf, September 2022

The space component that welcomes visitors to Ashab-ı Kehf before they even reach the place is the minaret with three balconies, also seen in Photograph 4. This minaret was later built by Hacı Ali Menekşeoğlu. It is argued that Hacı Ali Menekşeoğlu has built the three balconies minaret due to his dream (Menekşeoğlu, 1986, p. 4). An interviewer gave the following information about the construction process of the minaret:

> That minaret started building at my birth in 1967 and finished in 1975. It is the tallest minaret with three balconies in Turkey. It was built by Ali Efendi from Adana. Ali Menekşeoğlu is a financial advisor. He dreams of

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the Ashab-ı Kehf. He has a minaret built so that a place can be seen at the foot of the mountain. ...Who is this Ali Bey, I have not met him. ...They call it Deli Ali. I asked the people, "Do you know this Ali Menekşeoğlu?" people said, "He was crazy. He did not thank anyone, and his behavior was different. He used to take his rosary in his hand, sit under the tree and count one's beads until the evening. The man has withdrawn from people, has stayed away from people, and retreated, but his mind is working. What does it mean to raise a stone minaret to ninety-nine meters in the conditions of that time? A copy of Selimiye, with three entrances. Three people enter at the same time, but no one sees anyone. How could they have done such a thing without a machine, without installing a crane, under the conditions of that day? The men say, "We used to lift the stone one by one with our hands," so it's halal (R14, November 23rd, 2021).

On the other hand, in the study titled "Ashab-ı Kehf according to the Qur'an and Tafsir" (1986) written by Şahin Menekşeoğlu, the brother of Hacı Ali Menekşeoğlu, Şahin Menekşeoğlu also stated that he saw two of the Ashab-ı Kehf in his dream on the night of January 7, 1963. The content of the dream is one of the important aspects. Sahin describes his dream as follows:

"Someone said:
- Eshab-ı Kehf can be entered without identity papers.
The other one immediately added:
- It can also be entered without a seal.

I woke up a little later, and it was 01.30. I wrote down my dream on a piece of paper and interpreted it as follows: No matter which tribe and nation, no matter which religion and which sect, the door of wish is open here for everyone who believes in the oneness of Allah. ...It is ruled that everyone's visit is acceptable, regardless of their degree of knowledge, class, and rank in the community and congregation" (Menekşeoğlu, 1986, p.4).

The construction of the minaret and inclusivity of the Ashab-ı Kehf as a *ziyaret* is associated with a dream motif as seen above. The dream is a significant motif. Uğureli argued that the authors had brought a romantic perspective to the issue of localizing the Ashâb-ı Kehf in Turkey through the motif of dreams from a folkloric perspective (2017, p. 13). However, the importance of this motif is not limited to the localization of Ashab-ı Kehf in Tarsus, but the process of orthodoxizing a heterodox belief structure such as Ashab-ı Kehf is legitimized by the dream motif. In other words, the motif that legitimizes the process of institutionalization of Ashab-ı Kehf is associated

with the dream motif, which is seen as superstitious in orthodox Islam but has an important place in folk narratives (Kuzubaş, 2007).

Religioscapes are inherently fluid, as people move they take their religious practices with them, potentially changing the built environment to reflect their beliefs (Hayden et al. 2016, p. 46). Moreover, it is thought that religious sites (sacred spaces in the scope of this thesis) as "nodes of social interaction that also manifest political dominance, or challenges to it" (Hayden et al. 2016, p. 50). Thus, changes and transformations of space are one of the spatial parameters of the contestation for political hegemony between social groups. In this context, how can Ashab-ı Kehf be interpreted in the scope of religioscape? Studied as a site of encounter between different cultures, does Ashab-ı Kehf, as a shared sacred space, have religioscapes where one group dominates over another?

The indicators of perceptibility and centrality used by Hayden et al. to measure controversion and "dominance" in Hayden's conceptualization will be good tools to answer these questions. Here, the role of perceptibility and centrality will be discussed roughly as follows: (1) The dominant religious group in a sacred space produces more "perceptible" structures to demonstrate its dominance. A change in the religious landscape can occur as a result of one religious group demonstrating and reinforcing its dominance over other religious groups. (2) The centrality of a sacred site may be associated with its location within a settlement or the location of its economic or political activities. The orientation of the religious landscape of a sacred site in relation to a settlement or to an economic or political activity is a means for a group to assert its dominance over the sacred site.

I have already mentioned the transformation of the religious landscape when we look at the changes that Ashab-ı Kehf has undergone over the years. Here, I will talk about how to analyze these transformations according to dominance indicators.

4.3.2. Perceptibility of the Ashab-ı Kehf: "We can build a mosque that fits the minaret"[16]

I have already mentioned that the mosque, located right in front of the Ashab-ı Kehf cave, may have been initially built in accordance with the directives in the Qur'an. However, I believe that the transformations that have taken place in the mosque over the years are different from this initial motivation.

The fact that renovation, which took place in the 1800s during the reign of Sultan Abdülaziz, took place at a time when the state was developing a policy of "Sunni identification" against heterodox belief systems, and the control of the Ashab-ı Kehf cave and mosque was given to the Naqshbandis, are indicators of this. This is because the rituals practiced in the cave constitute a composition of rituals that are a product of folk religion and are considered superstitious in orthodox Islam. Therefore, the conflict is between orthodox Islam represented by the power, and folk religion. Indeed, Tarsus is a settlement where different ethnic and religious groups live together. Ashab-ı Kehf is a cult site visited by these different communities. "The religioscapes of the interacting religious communities will mark competition between them, with dominance indicated by the appropriation of sites that are central to settlements, or by physical structures that increase the perceptibility of a shrine" (Tanyeri-Erdemir, Hayden, Erdemir, 2014, p. 502).

Perceptibility will be examined here regarding the features that make sacred spaces recognizable. Parameters such as height, sound, and color are the main ones (Hayden & Walker, 2013, pp. 415-415). It has been observed that height and sound parameters are important in terms of perceptibility in Ashab-ı Kehf.

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[16] R14, November 11th, 2021

Photograph 5 Ashab-ı Kehf Mosque[17]

As seen in the photo above, the first image someone who wants to visit Ashab-ı Kehf will encounter is the Ashab-ı Kehf mosque. *Caves* are spaces under the ground (Arpacı, Zengin & Bostan, 2012, p. 59), and the Ashab-ı Kehf cave generally fits this cave definition. Since the Ashab-ı Kehf cave is underground, the mosque built in front of the cave has become more "perceptible" than the cave. The fact that a structure was built in front of the cave can be considered as a perceptibility factor in itself. However, it can also be stated that the sound of the ezan, as this structure is a mosque, also increases perceptibility. In other words, ezan emerges as another perceptibility factor. The fact that the mosque in the Ashab-ı Kehf campus is more perceptible than the cave can be interpreted as the more substantial representation of Sunni Islam in the space.

The transformation of the Ashab-ı Kehf, which gained momentum in the 1800s, continued in the 1900s. Significant changes and transformations took place in the religious landscape of the Ashab-ı Kehf in the second half of the 1900s. The most striking of these transformations in the religious landscape is the three-balcony minaret added to the Ashab-ı Kehf mosque.

Hayden & Walker argued that religious sites are constructed in ways that make them noticeable, which is related to perceptibility (2013, p.413). To increase the

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[17] Taken from the Facebook page named "Eski Tarsus Fotoğrafları".

perceptibility of space, height may be increased, audibility may be enhanced, or contrasting colors may be used for a more attractive space.
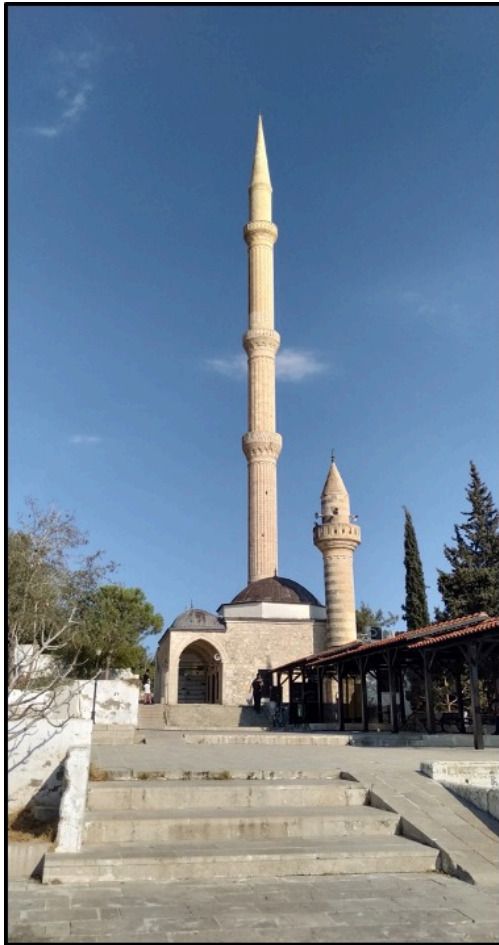
Photograph 6 Ashab-ı Kehf Mosque, November 2021

In the Ashab-ı Kehf mosque, height is an important perceptibility indicator. In the single minaret version of the mosque, although the body length of the minaret is proportional to the general architecture of the mosque, the three-balcony minaret built by Hacı Ali Menekşeoğlu is quite tall compared to the general architecture of the Ashab-ı Kehf mosque (Yüzücü, 2019, pp. 52-54).

For cases where the centrality indicator is equal, it is stated that the perceptibility shows itself best with height (Hayden & Walker, 2013, p. 415). In the case of Ashab-ı Kehf, the most important criterion of perceptibility is height. This minaret with three balconies gives a stunning impression due to being seen from many parts of Tarsus. The fact that the Ashab-ı Kehf mosque's minaret with three balconies can be seen from far distances in a few houses which was visited, and on the way to Ashab-ı Kehf has been a fundamental criterion for the perceptibility of this place.
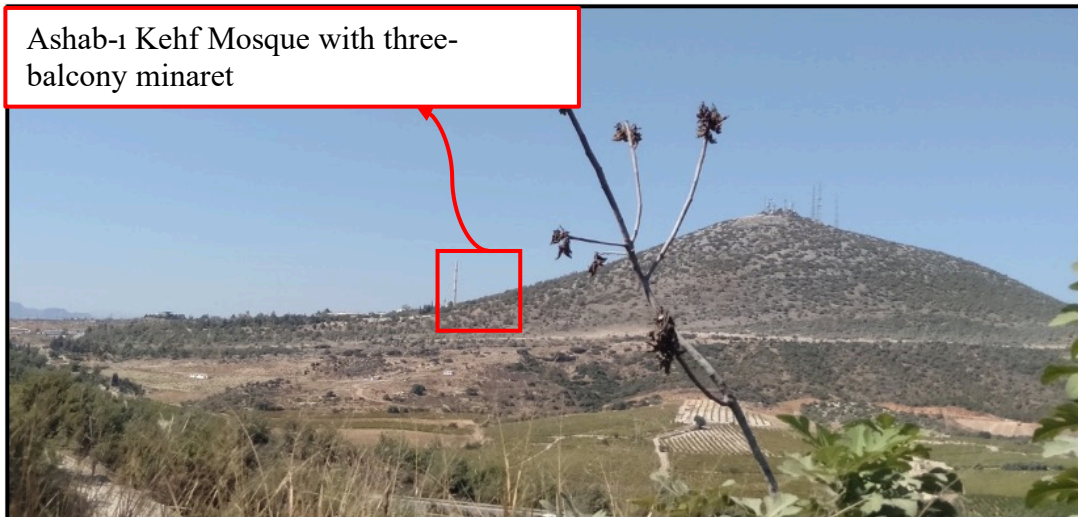
Photograph 7 Ashab-ı Kehf Mosque with three-balcony minaret, September 2021

The interviewees also underlined the length of the three-balcony minaret. R14 explains the reason for the construction of three-balcony minaret as follows:

> The tallest minaret in Turkey, with three balconies, was built to mark the location of Ashab-ı Kehf. Ali Efendi from Adana was a financial advisor. He dreamt of Ashab-ı Kehf, a place at the foot of a mountain. He built this minaret so that Ashab-ı Kehf could be seen. Of course, it is not compatible with the masjid. Not everyone understands it. They say, "It looks like a freak", and you should not think like that. Why was it built in the conditions of that day? I would call the mosque in front of the historical texture, which is made of briquettes, a freak, and maybe it sends a message to build a mosque in line with it. Mr. Ali thought, "Let the location of this place be clear from the surroundings so that people would not be mixed up."

Between 1960s and 1970s, when Ashab-ı Kehf was built, a strategic step taken by the government of the time to prevent the rise of the leftist movement in Turkey was important for the consolidation of Sunni Islam in Turkey. In this period, it raised the power and status of the Directorate of Religious Affairs and developed its field of activity. Thus, it was "qualified the Diyanet on behalf of the state to produce, introduce, and disseminate the principles and rules of Orthodox Sunni lslam in the public sphere" (Şen, 2019, p. 43). In other words, the state has appointed the Directorate of Religious Affairs as an instrument of control on its behalf. Although this change in the religioscape of Ashab-ı Kehf is said to be based on the dream of a "philanthropist", the fact that it took place at a time when political Islam was on the rise again shows that it is more than that. Likewise, space stands before us as a means for powers to consolidate their legitimacy and is a precondition of institutions and the

state at the head of these institutions (Lefebvre, 2014, p. 110-111). In this period, the addition of a second minaret with three-balcony to Ashab-ı Kehf caused the Sunni-Islamic motif to become dominant in this place, which contains cults belonging to the heterodox belief system and is intensely visited by Alevis, Sunnis, Kurds, Turks, Yoruks and their various intersectional clusters in the region.

> I had heard that it was where Muslims were not allowed to go for a long time because they thought, "This is a place for giaour". Later, when they could not stop people from coming and going, they tried to make it what they wanted it to be. As the phrase is that once upon a time in this country, the colors yellow, red, and green were seen as the bogeyman; however, so were the traffic lights. At the point where they could not prevent this, they said that yellow, red and green were actually the colors of Turks. Nowruz was banned for a long time. When they did not prevent the celebration of it, they said that Nowruz was actually a Turkish holiday. When they could not prevent people from coming and going, they said that Eshab-ı Kehf is actually a place mentioned in the Koran and is important for Islam. Because all the sovereign understandings established in the lands of this country know how to attribute occupation and annexation to themselves, to count them as their own. They considered Eshab-ı Kehf a part of Islam and built a masjid there, so those who went there could easily perform their prayers. In time, the masjid was not enough, and they turned it into a mosque. There was a modest mosque, but then they had to turn it into a show, as they always do. They built this minaret. I think it is called the tallest minaret in Turkey, and they even say that there are not many mosques in Turkey with three minarets. The minaret was built to make the image that this place with its splendor was supposed "ours, not the Giaour's". It is not very old; it's something newer (R3, October 27th, 2021).

One of the highlights of the interviews was that the place of worship was built with the motivation to establish dominance over the place, not the building of a place of worship in the Ashab-ı Kehf. It is widely believed that the minaret with three balconies, which was built in the interview with the Alevi respondents, was built with the motivation of making a certain group of faith dominates the Ashab-ı Kehf.

> The mosque was constructed years ago, and we have no objection, a mosque can be built, and a church can be built. However, it is not right to make a certain group of faith dominate there. ... It is not a bad thing to have a place of worship in such places. People go and pray, but things done later are not like that. Several things are done there to reveal the dominance of a certain group over time in order to say, "This is ours" (R2, September 26th, 2021).

When a building is converted, the transforming group gets a new sacred space dedicated to their religion, while the previously controlled group loses a sacred space

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(Tanyeri-Erdemir, Hayden, Erdemir, 2014, p. 502). As Sunni Islam became a critical parameter of national politics, the competing religious landscapes of Ashab-ı Kehf changed. The visibility of heterodox faith practices at the site has decreased compared to the past, while that of orthodox Islam has increased.

4.3.3. Transformation of Centrality from Cave to Mosque

Ashab-ı Kehf Cave is a cult site that the local community have visited for centuries, and there are even studies indicating that it has been visited for seventeen centuries (Akpınar, 2010, p. 127). Although the exact dates of the cave's first appearance are unknown, Akpınar (2010, p. 124) stated that Zamakhshari first mentioned Ashab-ı Kehf in his work al-Kashshāf in 528. On the other hand, according to Faruk Sümer, the first person to report that the cave of Ashab-ı Kehf was in Tarsus was al-Muqaddesî, a geographer who wrote his work in the late 10th century. Sümer also quoted Fahreddîn Muhammed Er-Râzî[18], Kâtip Çelebi[19], Evliya Çelebi[20] as saying that Ashab-ı Kehf was in Tarsus (1989, p. 31-32).

Ashab-ı Kehf Cave is located just behind the Ashab-ı Kehf Mosque (see Photograph 8 and Photograph 9). The choice of mosque location is arguably important at this point. It does not seem possible to enter the cave of Ashab-ı Kehf without interacting with the mosque as a structure. There is only one entrance to the cave, this entrance being opposite to the mosque, the two roads leading to the entrance of the cave inevitably come into contact with the mosque.

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[18] Fahri Râzî, Mefâihu'l-gayb, Kahire, 1308-1310.

[19] Kâtib Çelebî, Cihân-nümâ, İstanbul, 1145.

[20] Seyahatname, 1935, IX , s. 332.
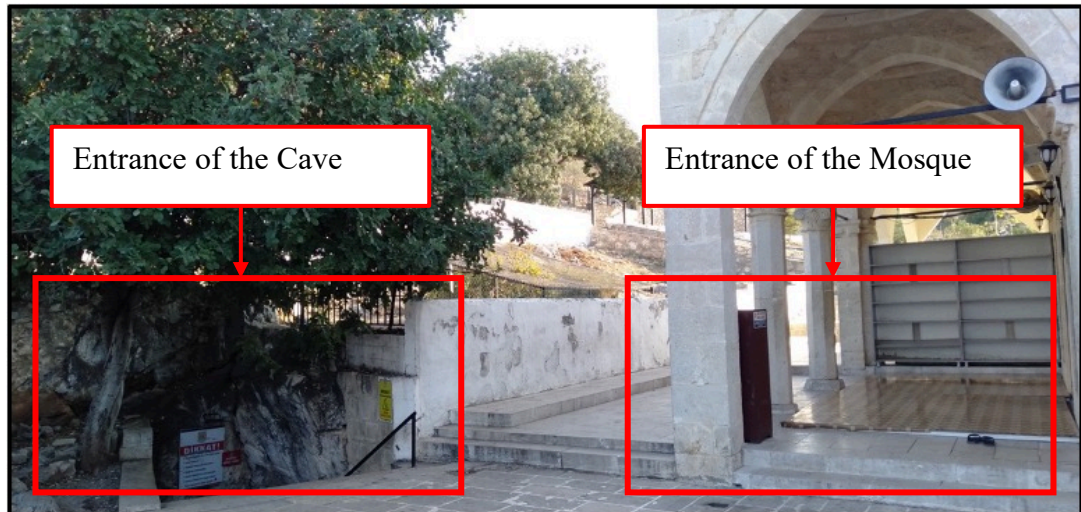
Photograph 8 Entrance of the Cave and entrance of the Mosque

Photograph 9 Entrance of the Cave

In this context, it is first necessary to discuss centrality. *Centrality* can be defined as the location within a settlement or the location of significant political, social, religious, or economic activities (Hayden & Walker, 2013, p. 414). While some places are considered central because of their cosmological connections (Eliade 1958), others have become central for pragmatic and logistical reasons (Hayden et al., 2016). Ashab-ı Kehf cave has a centrality in terms of its cosmological meaning. However, in accordance with the fluidity inherent in the concept of religioscape, the centrality of Ashab-ı Kehf has changed. This should not be taken to mean that a different place of belief is more central than Ashab-ı Kehf. This centrality change is from the Ashab-ı Kehf cave to the Ashab-ı Kehf mosque. Just as a religious structure built in a central location in a settlement has dominance over less centrally located shrines, a highly

perceptible mosque built right in front of the Ashab-ı Kehf cave has an impact on the Ashab-ı Kehf cave.

4.3.4. Transformation of the Cult and Rituals in the Ashab-ı Kehf

Ashab-ı Kehf has experienced a significant change and transformation in the last 60 years. It looks significantly different compared to its appearance in the early 1900s with the three-balcony minaret construction and the landscaping. Moreover, there are also notable changes not only around the cave but also inside the cave.

Ashab-ı Kehf Cave, including the cave itself, embodies many of the cults encountered in sacred spaces. The cave, which is carved into the rocks and consists of three separate sections, can be descended through an artificial tunnel with ten steps on the southwest slope of the hill. There is a sign hung by the Tarsus Municipality at the entrance of the cave. This sign contains information about the visiting manners of the Ashab-ı Kehf.

Photograph 10 The sign in the entrance of the Cave

There is another sign hung by the Directorate of Religious Affairs in this first narrow hall. It can be said that this sign also guides the visiting manners of the Ashab-ı Kehf

in a way. However, unlike the first sign, the language of this sign is highly controversial.
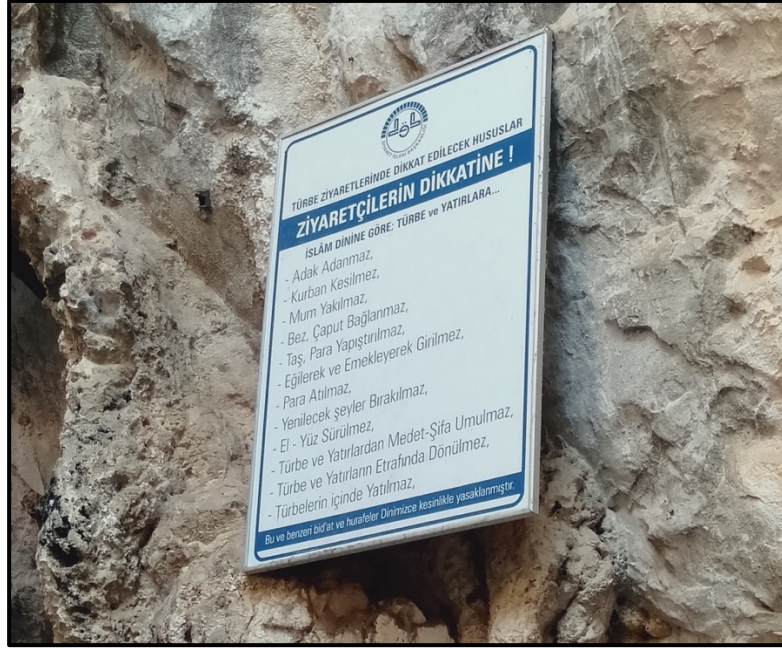
Photograph 11 The sign hung by the Directorate of Religious Affairs

During the interviews, there are two different approaches to this sign hung at Ashab-ı Kehf. The first one is that these signs are for warning purposes and are seen as useful.

> These rituals were performed before. Later on, the sign was put up as a warning so that people would not expect anything from it, so that they would not seek help from it (R8, November 11th, 2021).

On the other hand, the view that this situation has a political background was a common theme that came across during the interviews. Religious modernization trends in Turkey, starting with the unionists, started from the point that there is only one religion in Turkey. It has yet to be accepted that folk beliefs were a meaningful practice in themselves. For this reason, they only talked about superstition, interpreted in the scope of folk beliefs. It is seen that the Presidency of Religious Affairs in the Republic of Turkey follows the same policy (Mardin, 2021, pp. 145-146). Practices that fall outside the framework set by orthodox Islam are considered superstition by the Presidency of Religious Affairs and are discouraged.

> The Diyanet has no right to put up such a sign. It cannot be said to people not to do this. What do you care about how I worship? In the past, there were no such signs. For example, recently, the Diyanet put up a signboard

at the Mikdat Shrine, "If you need an imam, contact our mosque", they direct people (R2, October 26th, 2021).

These rituals were being done, and people still do them despite those warnings. I do not want to compare them too much, but I also see them during our visits to Hacı Bektaşi Veli; I also see people opening their hands and praying there, reading verses from the Koran. I also see people tying rags and lighting candles together with Alevis, even if they are few. I think the reason for those warnings is an effort to transform an ancient belief. If people are not going to light candles, if they are not going to rub against those stones, if they are not going to tie "çaput" to those trees and branches, there is no point in going to Eshab-ı Kehf. They can do that in the mosque where they already live, and they can do that in their homes if they are calling out to their only god there (R3, October 27th, 2021).

Afterward, religious and political rituals are staged in spaces at specific times with various expressions of standard customs and traditions. Rituals take place publicly in spaces as an interpretation of symbolism. Thus, rituals represent a community's past and future, as well as determine social relations and what is essential in that community (Lukes, 2008, p. 582; cited by Şahin, 2016, p. 20). In sacred places shared by different religious groups, the relationships that represent that community, the values that are important, and, of course, the rituals inevitably differ. Therefore, the statements on the sign explaining Sunni Islam's approach to the cult of sacred space create controversy for other religious groups using the site.

When it comes to the issue of belief, you go in, do not touch there, do not touch here, do not do this, do not do that. People, of course, need to protect the place, it needs to be protected, but I mean, I am Alevi. Let me come and worship here according to my own belief. There is no such thing. So they enlarged that mosque, and they appointed the official imam there. Only a person who adheres to, let's say, Sunni beliefs can worship here. Other than that, there is no Alevi imam (R17, November 24th, 2021).

After these two signs welcoming us from the entrance of the cave, a narrow hall is reached, and stairs reach the main cave hall (Küçük, 2017, p. 39). When you descend the stairs, the first thing you encounter in the narrow hall is a large rock. This rock is believed to be Kıtmir, who fell asleep in the cave with the Seven Sleepers to protect them in the narrative of Ashab-ı Kehf. Karaoğlan (2016, pp. 103-109) states that Christian sources do not mention a dog named Kıtmir with the Seven Sleepers and that there are many different narratives about Kıtmir in Islamic sources. There are many rumors about who Kıtmir belongs to, his color, and even whether he is a real dog. Different statements about the nature of Kıtmir have also come to the fore in

interviews. Some interviewees said that Kıtmir was a dog, while others said that it was a camel.

> Ashab-ı Kehf went to Mount Encülüs with the shepherd and the shepherd's dog named Kıtmir. ... Kıtmir put his feet up at the entrance of the cave and slept like a guard (R13, November 23rd, 2021).

Especially in Islamic versions of the narrative, Kıtmir is presented as a dog. The interviewee who identified Kıtmir as a dog during the interviews believes that this pairing is correct due to the dog's loyalty to humans. On the other hand, the fact that this stone at the entrance of Ashab-ı Kehf is expressed as a dog in some interviews and as a camel in others is related to the localization of the narrative. Localization is the blending of local cultural elements such as production-consumption, clothing-dressing, geographical elements, food-drinking, traditions, customs, way of life, way of thinking, way of perceiving life and beliefs of the region where the narrative is performed with various motifs and types according to its theme, subject, volume and content (Önal & Sargın, 2018, p. 117). The fact that camel breeding has been practiced in the Tarsus region since the past may have led to the localization of the stone as a camel instead of a dog in this narrative.

> At the entrance of the cave, they compare a piece of rock to a petrified camel, they see it there as a petrified camel (R3, September 26th, 2021).

It is said that the stone at the cave's entrance, on the left side of the narrow hall, resembles a camel sitting headless, which is called Camel or Camel Stone. Uğureli (2017, p. 41) states that according to the belief when Dakyanus and his soldiers found the young people, a camel came when they were about to enter the cave and lay down at the entrance of the cave and did not allow the soldiers to enter the cave, so the camel's head was cut off. However, despite this, the camel did not get up. This stone is not only seen as a dog or a camel petrified to protect the Seven Sleepers. Visitors to the cave of Ashab-ı Kehf believe that by rubbing this stone on their sore places, the pain goes away. In this respect, this stone is also thought to be a source of healing.

> My mother was having serious back pain, she was having treatment, and the doctor recommended physiotherapy. One day I took my mother out for a tour, there was Ashab-ı Kehf on the way, and I said, "Mom, let me take you to Ashab-ı Kehf." When we entered Ashab-ı Kehf, I could see from the way they were dressed that there were people, especially women, most

of whom had Islamic beliefs and were obviously involved in sectarian and congregational activities. They were trying to do something by touching their arms and backs to the rocks. Then my mother must have been scared of me, too, because she was stealthily trying to go to the rocks and rub her aching parts, although if she had told me, I would not be angry with her. On the contrary, I would say, "Do it." After all, some minerals and magnetic things in that rock may have an effect (R3, September 26th, 2021).

Photograph 12 The stone cult in the Cave of Ashab-ı Kehf

However, this is not the only stone cult in the cave. There is also a hole stone in the cave, which is closed off today. The hole stone, associated with folk medicine and seen as a source of healing (Uca, 2003), is also associated with purification and cleansing from sins. In the Ashab-ı Kehf cave, the "Camel" stone is seen as a source of healing, while the stone with holes is seen as a means of purification. Only one interviewee mentioned the stone with a hole as a source of healing.

There was a small hole inside the cave and a separate entrance from there. If I remember correctly, it is even called an asthma hole. My aunt has asthma. There was a rumor that when you passed through that hole, your asthma would get better. You enter and come out on the opposite side (R15, November 23rd, 2021).

Photograph 13 Hole Stone in the Cave of Ashab-ı Kehf

The belief that those who pass through the stone with holes are sinless is more common than believing that the stone with holes is a source of healing. According to this belief, sinless people pass through this hole quite easily, regardless of their weight, while those who have sins are stuck here.

> It is high up. It was obviously closed later. According to a rumor, a woman got stuck and died here. They say it was closed because of that, but I do not think so. I think it was closed because it was a bit dangerous. It was very slippery because people used to cross that way for years. You could pass very easily. I used to be very scared when I was crossing. There is

probably a distance of one meter to get out of the other hole. You get out
of there and jump down again (R4, October 28th, 2021).

There was a pit called the sin pit. We used to pass through there when we
were children. A few people fell from there, they fell and broke something.
Then the municipality closed it (R19, November 24th, 2021).

Since the holes of the hole stone are covered with stones, as seen in Photograph 13, it cannot be subjected to a ritual practice by visitors today. Although one visitor said that these holes were covered by the municipality, a former official stated that Ashab-ı Kehf is under the Directorate of Foundations and that the permission of this institution is required for any changes. Although it is thought that all of the changes that occurred in Ashab-ı Kehf were carried out by the Municipality, it has been observed that this is expressed in this way based on a presupposition.

Another cult site in Ashab-ı Kehf is where Ashab-ı Kehf is supposed to sleep. This area is surrounded by iron bars, and people are not allowed to pass through this area. There is a hole at the very top of this area, and it receives sunlight through this hole. People pray and make wishes around this area, which resembles a burial place in terms of its design.

Photograph 14 The area where Ashab-ı Kehf is thought to have slept

In addition to praying around this fenced area, different rituals are also practiced. For example, there is a common belief that a wish is made by throwing a stone into the

fenced area. If the stone sticks to the wall, the wish is granted. On the other hand, it was also observed that money is thrown into this area with similar motivations.

Photograph 15 Stones and coins thrown to make a wish

In addition to those who throw stones and money for their wishes to be accepted, some interviewees stated that this ritual is also called "stoning the devil". In this respect, the practice of stoning the devil in Ashab-ı Kehf is reminiscent of the ritual of stoning the devil during the Islamic pilgrimage.

The cult of water is one of the important cults in Ashab-ı Kehf. As with the camel stone, the water flowing through the cave walls is used by visitors for healing purposes. During their visits, visitors apply the water flowing from the cave walls on their faces or on their sore spots. Thus, they believe that their pain will be relieved, and their illnesses will be cured. In addition, they fill the bottles they bring with them and carry the water to the people they want to be healed.

> In general, people used to go there, rub their hands and faces on those stones. A water would flow from there, they would fill it in containers, multiply it for healing water and drink it (R18, November 24th, 2021).

Photograph 16 Water Cult in Ashab-ı Kehf Cave

Due to its important role in sustaining life, water has been sanctified in many cultures, religions, and mythologies and has been described as a source of life (Yolcu, 2014, p. 94). As with the camel stone in Ashab-ı Kehf, the water flowing from the cave walls is also used by visitors for healing purposes. It would not be wrong to say that the water flowing from the cave walls is similar to Zamzam water in terms of its usage. The water flowing from the walls of Ashab-ı Kehf is used in the same way as Zamzam water is used for dripping Zamzam water into the mouth of a dying person (Hançerlioğlu, 2004, p. 570), to heal the sick, and to open the minds of students (Türkmen, 2011, p. 60). As a result of the observations and informal interviews conducted during the cave visits, it is observed that there are visitors who believe in the sanctity of this water. On the other hand, it has been observed that a significant number of the interviewees have developed a decrease in their belief in the sanctity of

this water. This is related to the fact that they started to have scientific knowledge about the nature of the water flowing through the cave walls.

> We used to go to the cave, visit it, and water would always flow from between the stones. They used to say that the headache would go away with that water, but it is not like that. The stones sweat; it flows. We used to apply it as a cure. That is what our elders used to say back then (R16, November 24th, 2021).

Moreover, some of the interviewees who say that the water flowing from the cave walls has decreased compared to previous years explain this decrease with reasons such as temperature, while others explain it with the decrease in the belief in Ashab-ı Kehf. Water, which was previously widely seen as a source of healing and was one of the important cults of the Ashab-ı Kehf visit, has undergone *desacralization*[21] (Lutkajtis, 2020, p. 123) and has begun to take on a meaning outside of its sacred.

One of the issues rumored among the people about the cave of Ashab-ı Kehf is related to the exit point of the cave tunnels. Today, three different opinions have come to the fore about the exit point of the tunnels, which are closed and covered with stones. The first of these is that the tunnels of Ashab-ı Kehf led to the city center, and the Seven Sleepers escaped from here and became a secret. The second is the idea that there is a connection with the Taşkuyu Cave, which was discovered in recent years and very close to the Ashab-ı Kehf cave. Lastly, the exit of the Cave of Ashab-ı Kehf was in Mecca (Uğureli, 2017, p. 39).

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[21] "Desacralization is defined as the reverse of sacralisation and occurs when a formerly dedicated sacred object is used for another purpose outside of the particular religious setting which dedicated it for a sacred purpose, hence rendering the object desacralized" (Lutkajtis, 2020, 123).

Map 7 Distance between Ashabı-ı Kehf Cave and Taşkuyu Cave

> They said that one end of the cave in Ashab-ı Kehf came out of Mecca from the Kaaba, an unscientific discourse, but something interesting happened. Another cave was found just two hundred and three hundred meters away. It is called Taşkuyu cave. There is a possibility of a connection between that cave and the cave of Eshab-ı Kehf, but it is impossible to connect it to a place coming out of Mecca (R3, October 27th, 2021).

"The great pilgrim road towards the Holy Cities" (Hasluck, 1929, p. 316) may have been influential in the formation of this idea. Because Ashab-ı Kehf still maintains its feature of being a place visited before pilgrimages. It has been frequently mentioned in the interviews that both the Ashab-ı Kehf are referred to as a place of pilgrimage (R18, November 24th, 2021) and that it is a stop on the road of pilgrims. Almost all interviewees who listed the reasons for visiting Ashab-ı Kehf emphasized that pilgrims visited Ashab-ı Kehf at a specific time in the past. It was stated that those who were going on pilgrimage visited Ashab-ı Kehf in the form of groups before going on pilgrimage and then going on the pilgrimage.

Photograph 17 The visit of the group that will perform the pilgrimage to the Ashab-ı Kehf

> In fact, we know that before the pilgrimage, buses used to visit Ashab-ı Kehf first and then the pilgrimage. That was what we were told in our childhood. (R4, October 28th, 2021).

> In the past, there used to be a tradition here. People from this neighborhood, even from outside the neighborhood, would stop by here before going to Hajj. (R8, November 16th, 2021).

> Now, we have seen the story of Eshab-ı Kehf before. When we were children, people who were going on pilgrimage would come and flock to this place. They would come and visit this place and go on pilgrimage. Huge buses, big buses were coming. (R1, October 25th, 2021)

Today, it is stated that these visits of those who will go on pilgrimage have decreased. The pandemic was one of the reasons that explained the issue that caused the pause in this ritual. It was stated that during the pandemic process, pilgrims did not come to Ashab-ı Kehf in convoys after the restrictions on accommodation and travel.

During the interviews, it was observed that the cult places in the Ashab-ı Kehf cave and the rituals practiced there have changed over time. Although there is a spatial change in the entire Ashab-ı Kehf compound, the changes that took place in the cave and in the mosque, which is in close contact with the cave, should be emphasized. For example, while landscaping and the establishment of recreation areas in Ashab-ı Kehf

are one of the changes that make Ashab-ı Kehf "attractive" for people, it has been observed that the changes made in the cave have reduced people's connection with this sacred space. At this point, reflecting on the nature of spatial transformations that occur in a sacred space is important.

The rituals performed inside the cave are a reflection of folk beliefs and represent the ways of worship of different religious groups. Today, many rituals that are declared "forbidden" by the Diyanet signboard as a requirement of Sunni Islam are important for other religious groups, especially Alevis living in Tarsus. It has been observed that the transformation of the religious landscape of Ashab-ı Kehf to reflect Sunni Islam motifs; in other words, the dominance of Sunni Islam motifs in the perceptibility and centrality criteria of the place, has changed the frequency of use of the place by other religious groups sharing this place. This leads to an impact in visitors' sense of belonging to the place.

4.4.   The Transformation of Economic Relations in Sacred Space

Harvey argues that every capitalist tries to convince consumers of the unique and unreplicable qualities of their commodities, and that a way must be found to keep some commodities or places unique and sufficiently special (2009, p. 95-96). Because the cultural uniqueness of a practice leads to surplus value; discursive constructions on historical narratives and collective memories also affect the value of the cultural practice in question (Şahin, 2016). Sacred spaces also have a cultural uniqueness with the narratives and site-specific components that constitute them in the places where they are localized. Therefore, they offer a unique experience to generate surplus value. Ashab-ı Kehf, like many other sacred sites in Turkey, has had its share of the commodification of narrative and economic reorganization of space.

In the process of commodifying Ashab-ı Kehf and reorganizing the Ashab-ı Kehf compound, we can identify two circles that are both affected and influenced. The first is the villages around this site and the residents living in these villages. Visits to Ashab-ı Kehf, both by the people of the region and pilgrims, have been utilized as a livelihood opportunity for the residents living around Ashab-ı Kehf. Although residents of Dedeler village stated that their primary sources of livelihood in the past were

agriculture and animal husbandry, due to the fact that the economic activities observed in the settlements have been transformed (in other words, had to be altered) over time, new livelihoods have emerged today (Alpaydın, 2022, p. 297). For instance, the villagers actively incorporated trade into their livelihoods. They started to gain economically by selling their own products to Ashab-ı Kehf visitors. Villagers sold grape leaves, walnuts, olives, local fruits, and marmalades made from berries such as cranberries and rose hips in Ashab-ı Kehf.

Photograph 18 A peddler in Ashab-ı Kehf

Initially, the villagers set up these stalls informally. Still, the interest of Ashab-ı Kehf visitors in their production led them to make them permanent. At this point, Tarsus Municipality appears as the second circle of this reorganization process of space's economic relations. The landscaping organized by the Tarsus Municipality played a major role in this situation. Now, while few villagers in Ashab-ı Kehf sell their products informally at any point of the campus, the main economic activity in Ashab-ı Kehf takes place in stalls rented to shopkeepers by the Tarsus Municipality.

When you reach Ashab-ı Kehf by bus or car from the city center of Tarsus, it will be inevitable to pass the road with stalls one after another. On one side of the road, shopkeepers from the surrounding villages or Tarsus sell natural products, in the stalls that were placed by the roadside as part of the landscaping made in Ashab-ı Kehf. Şevket Can, the municipality's mayor, allocated an area of commerce to those who come to Ashab-ı Kehf regularly and trade there. The following information was given by an interviewee who was a tradesman at one of these stalls:

Burhanettin Kocamaz was the Mayor of Mersin Metropolitan Municipality, and Şevket Can was the Mayor of Tarsus. In the scope of landscaping, Şevket Can came and said that they would give stalls to the shopkeepers and villagers who are here all the time to make sales. All of a sudden, he sent a police team, for a week, for two weeks... The police officers came and made lists many times. Moreover, they controlled that the lists always had the same names. They called these people to the assembly hall of the municipality. In the notary public's presence, he gave the shops in front of the press members by lots (R8, November 16th, 2021).

Photograph 19 Ashab-ı Kehf station and stalls

The villagers, who have been allocated an area for them by the municipality, sell many kinds of products prepared with the local produce, such as jam, marmalade, oil, and spices on their stalls and earn their living from here. Although the residents of Dedeler Village carry out more commercial activities in the area due to its proximity to Ashab-ı Kehf, it was also observed that among those who rented stalls were business owners from other villages.

Photograph 20 Products which are sald at Ashab-ı Kehf

When you approach the stall to shop, you are greeted with warmth and generosity that allows you to taste as much of the products as you wish. All of the stalls are run by women and very few of them have their husbands accompanying them. It is not necessary to visit Ashab-ı Kehf to access the products sold in these stalls. One of the

business owners interviewed, a young woman, said that she is from Cinköy and sells her products both through social media and directly from her stall.

Photograph 21 Business cards given at the stalls in Ashab-ı Kehf

On the other side of the road, there are souvenir shops, a small restaurant, a small market, and a hotel, which is now closed. In all these places, it is possible to come across traces of the mountain where the Ashab-ı Kehf cave was located and Ashab-ı Kehf. All souvenir shops in Ashab-ı Kehf are located in the area shown in Photograph 22.

Photograph 22 A market in Ashab-ı Kehf

In this area, where there are about ten shops, products such as clothing and accessories, jewelry, home accessories, kitchen accessories, food (Turkish delight), toys, etc. are sold. These products' general concept is figuring out the names of the Seven Sleepers or sleep motifs. Rather than shaping the souvenir within the framework of the practice of faith, the faith content is tried to be added to the object by applying the motifs specific to the relevant culture (Akbulut, 2014, p. 179).

Photograph 23 Gift shops in Ashab-ı Kehf

Photograph 24 Ashab-ı Kehf magnet

Gifts function as a means of support, evidence, memory, representation, and keep the visitor's experience alive as visitors establish an object-place-person relationship. Apart from this, they also provide many advantages in terms of personal development and strengthening social relations, contributing to the happiness of their close environment, gaining prestige and status, increasing satisfaction from the travel and

acting as an important cultural decorative product (Akyürek & Özdemir, 2019, pp. 197-198). The presence of souvenir shops in these places provides these opportunities, especially for those who visit the region for touristic purposes.

Photograph 25 Gift shops in Ashab-ı Kehf

Although souvenirs are considered as a reminder and a factor that strengthens the bond with the place for those who visit Ashab-ı Kehf for touristic purposes, a significant number of the interviewees stated that they are uncomfortable with this touristic image that Ashab-ı Kehf has gained and said that this place had become "commercial".

> It was not seen as a shopping place in the past. Now, many places were opened there, both food and souvenirs shop. Even if I go there now, I do not necessarily go there for worship. There have been times when I have gone there for shopping, seeing that there is something for sale at Eshab-ı Kehf. This also makes me feel bad. Now you start to question if that sanctity is gone or if it was real. Was it real? Did we believe in something that did not exist? I used to feel as if your prayer would come true when you went and came back. However, now I just see it as a picnic place (R13, November 22nd, 2021).

This situation can also be interpreted as the Ashab-ı Kehf cave being taken out of its sacred image, that is, being desacralized. Since, it is seen that all of the arrangements made by the Tarsus Municipality around the Ashab-ı Kehf cave were made not to reflect the representation of different belief rituals of Ashab-ı Kehf but to bring Ashab-ı Kehf to tourism. As a matter of fact, the map published on the Municipality website

under the name of Tarsus Tourism Map and presented in Appendix-B is supporting this.

Just as space is organized according to the needs of the state and its constituent institutions (Lefebvre, 2014, pp. 110-111), and sacred spaces are also regulated. Different forms of transformation and organization may appear here. When the case of Ashab-ı Kehf is analyzed, it can be said that this sacred space is organized in two ways. The first is reorganizing the religioscape, as explained in Section 4.3. The transformations that occur in the religioscape as a reflection of the controversion between different social groups can be considered as a sign of hegemony of the dominant one, the one in power. The second way in which sacred spaces are affected by spatial arrangement is related to changes in the economic and social organization of space. It is important to note that I am not claiming that these two forms of reorganization that occur in sacred spaces are entirely different processes. All these processes of reorganization are certainly intersecting and influencing each other. For example, Ashab-ı Kehf is open to the influence of the Directorate of Foundations, and the mosque located there is open to the impact of the Directorate of Religious Affairs and the mufti offices. It is not surprising to see that the current governments and the needs and policies of these institutions are taken into consideration, especially in the transformations that occur in the religious landscape. For this reason, it is possible to say that a significant part of the change in the religious landscape in the cave and the mosque is the changes brought about in the space by the relevant administrations through these institutions. There is even a widespread opinion that the transformation of Ashab-I Kehf's religioscape was carried out by the Directorate of Religious Affairs. On the other hand, it would not be wrong to state that after the Directorate of Religious Affairs, Tarsus Municipality is seen as the most influential institution in the spatial transformation of Ashab-ı Kehf. Tarsus Municipality impacted the social and economic transformation of the space directly, through practices such as landscaping.

As mentioned at the beginning of this section, Ashab-ı Kehf was previously dominated by a model where villagers sold their products at informal stalls on their personal initiative and interacted with the visitors. However, with the changes made by the

Tarsus Municipality under the subject of landscaping, both the spatial use of Ashab-ı Kehf and the economic relations within the site have changed.

These transformations realized on Ashab-ı Kehf can be called representations of space which reflect the knowledge and ideology. Representations of space are spaces organized and produced according to the logic of the established order, namely political power, dominant ideology (or discourse), and dominant economic order, and as such are "part of the history of ideology" (Lefebvre, 2014, p. 116). In this context, the municipality-organized transformations of Ashab-ı Kehf are in fact a reflection of an ideology. Making Ashab-ı Kehf a tourist attraction, the desacralization of Ashab-ı Kehf, and the approach involving the transformation of sacred spaces reflecting heterodox belief practices by orthodox belief systems were also manifested here. In this context, the changes made to Ashab-ı Kehf are a case of designing a space.

4.5. The Transformation of Sense of Belonging: "We feel like a *sığıntı*[22] there"[23]

Shared sacred spaces undergoing change and transformation are places where different approaches to sacredness intersect. Sharing a sacred space is not static, but it involves a dynamic process (Fowden, 2002, p. 145). The existence of shared sacred spaces reflects a common past and the practice of different social and religious groups living together for a long time. Sharing a common past and having a practice of coexistence, such as daily interaction, is not a simple matter of sharing a space, although it is heard as a peaceful expression (Couroucli, 2012, pp. 3-6). In other words, the fact that different religious and social groups practice coexist does not mean that there is no hierarchy between these groups and that these groups are equal to each other. This is because religious groups "interact in a highly regulated space where social status and rights are granted to the individual as a member of a particular religious community" (Couroucli, 2012, p.4).

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[22] A person who is not wanted to stay where s/he is, whose existence is deemed unnecessary (https://sozluk.tdk.gov.tr/)

[23] R2, October 26th, 2021

Ashab-ı Kehf, as a shared sacred space, is also visited by different religious groups who have different social statuses. As a result of the fieldwork carried out, the meaning of these visits for different religious groups has changed over the years. It would not be wrong to state that the most significant share of this difference is the change in the religious landscape of Ashab-ı Kehf. Changes in the religious landscape create pressure on different religious groups, and it is revealed that the sense of belonging that these groups have established with the place has weakened due to this pressure.

> When it comes to the issue of Ashab-ı Kehf being a common value of societies, there is a problem there. I will go back to forty years ago. We used to go there for picnics in the back of horse carts and trucks. We would make our offerings and have a picnic. In those times, there was no pressure and the overwhelming superiority of the local people there, and it was a place visited mainly by Arab Alevis. Nevertheless, the space started to change shape, and a certain Sunni group started dominating it. Now Arabs can only go there to visit, and they do not feel the awe they used to. A certain group has taken over the place, and the mosque there has put its weight (R2, October 26th, 2021).

The transformations in the religioscape at Ashab-ı Kehf increased the visibility of the groups with Sunni Islam representation in the space. This has caused the groups that could not dominate the space to avoid a spatial transformation. The groups without Sunni Islam representation, who could not establish a spatial dominance, stated that due to the transformations that took place in Ashab-ı Kehf, their sense of belonging to the place decreased, and they thought that the place did not represent them anymore. The sense of belonging is realized in a common point and space (Sönmezsoy, 2022, pp. 12-13). Durkheim states that the whole system of beliefs and practices is indispensable for a person's identity and sense of belonging to the group. In this context, cults and rituals in sacred places are practices that create a sense of belonging. Cult and rituals' transformation at Ashab-ı Kehf has shown that this sense of belonging has diminished over the years.

> The state has put its Sunni imam there, and it is under Religious Affairs. We have no say there. An Arab Alevi or any other person cannot freely practice their faith there. ...Everyone should be free. There is no freedom there. ...We used to be more free in Eshab-ı Kehf, but since the state appointed a Sunni imam there, we are not free (R18, November 24th, 2021).

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Tarsus is a geography with a dense Arab Alevi population. Ashab-ı Kehf is also a place frequently visited by Arab Alevis. Ashab-ı Kehf, which is an important site for Anatolian Alevis only as a cult of visitation, has a more special place for Arab Alevis as it is a narrative mentioned in the Qur'an. In an informal interview with an Arab Alevi visitor, the interviewee stated that they first cut their sons' hair at Ashab-ı Kehf. However, over the years, the strengthening of the Ashab-ı Kehf's representation of Sunni Islam and the associated decrease in the frequency of visits by the Arab Alevi community led to the abandonment of these rituals. The inability to identify with the view represented in the space has resulted in the transformation of a sense of belonging to the space and the values it represents. Although Tarsus is a city where different cultures live together, this practice of living together and encountering in space has not always brought with it a sense of belonging. Similarly, it can be said that Ashab-ı Kehf has not always been embraced by the communities visiting there with the same level of belonging in the historical flow of the place. The weakening of the bond of belonging does not mean a complete cessation of the practice of visiting the site. The decrease in the frequency of visiting the place and the "abandonment" of the rituals practiced in the place are related to the decrease in this sense of belonging.

CHAPTER 5

CONCLUSION

Sacred spaces, the cults, and rituals practiced in these places have long been studied in sociology in various contexts. This thesis aimed to provide a snapshot of how controversion has negotiated the transformation of the sacred space. It is not surprising that sacred places are also the scene of various intersections in geographies such as Anatolia where different cultures have lived together. These shared spaces are going through some transformations to represent the dominant group when one group is superior to the other, in other words, politically powerful. Today, these transformations still remain in sacred spaces. It is not difficult to observe that these transformations in sacred spaces are a representation of the hegemony established by the powers that be. The changes in the religious landscape of shared sacred spaces, which can also be traced in Turkey, clearly demonstrate this.

In this thesis, the transformation of sacred spaces was analyzed under three headings. In this context, the focus was on the narrative that created the sacred space. Through the localization of the narrative and the creation of the cult space, the Ashab-ı Kehf narrative was explained, as well as the basic motif structure of the Ashab-ı Kehf narrative, and the locations where Ashab-ı Kehf is localized in the world and Turkey. The rationale for the spread of the Ashab-ı Kehf narrative in Islamic geographies was presented and, in turn, how the Orthodox and Catholic Christian communities in Mersin evaluated Ashab-ı Kehf. This assessment was considered necessary in tracing the transformation of the religioscape of Ashab-ı Kehf. In tracing the transformation of the religioscape in Turkey, the most noteworthy studies were observed to be of religious sites that have been converted from churches to mosques, and then perhaps back to churches and then mosques (Hayden et al. 2016). However, since the Ashab-ı Kehf in Tarsus is not accepted as the "real Ashab-ı Kehf" by Christians, it was seen

that a church was not built in this region, and therefore no such transformation was made. In this scope, understanding the manifestation of the Ashab-ı Kehf narrative in Christianity and Islam will make it easier to understand this analysis.

Secondly, the spatial transformation of Tarsus Ashab-ı Kehf was analyzed within the framework of the concept of religioscape. The religioscape of Ashab-ı Kehf was elaborated in terms of the perceptibility and centrality parameters of Ashab-ı Kehf Mosque and Ashab-ı Kehf Cave. Furthermore, this discussion was informed by the process of "Sunni identification" in Anatolia, which started in the 16th century and accelerated in the 1800s. In this context, (1) the change of the Ashab-ı Kehf Mosque over the years, (2) the effect of the change of the mosque over the years on the perceptibility criterion, (3) the effect of the construction of the mosque on the centrality criterion, (4) the effect of the transformations in the religious landscape on the practice of cults and rituals have been examined in the context of the religioscape, and it has been observed that the Sunni Islam representation of the place has been strengthened in parallel with the Sunnization policies in Turkey. In addition, the changes in the space were not limited to the cave and the mosque. It would not be wrong to claim that the landscaping of the Ashab-ı Kehf compound and the transformation of Ashab-ı Kehf into one of the touristic images of Tarsus was also a practice of hegemony. The commodification of a place considered sacred and making it a part of a touristic visit, and the fact that the changes that occur in the place with the landscaping are of a nature that will serve tourism, served to de-sacralize Ashab-ı Kehf. Although this intervention was not as direct as the Diyanet's sign on the cave wall, it has been observed that the visitors who go to Ashab-ı Kehf for worship have moved away from worship today because of a new image of Ashab-ı Kehf.

Finally, it is important to mention the impact of these transformations in Ashab-ı Kehf on the users of the space. As mentioned in section 2.3.1 that three different situations must be encountered in religious landscape changes. Accordingly, it is possible to interpret the conflicts over sacred spaces in three ways through the religious landscape. The first is to build more perceptible and centralized structures than the existing ones; the second is to accept a lower position by taking non-challenging paths, and the third is to undergo at the expense of being invisible. When Ashab-ı Kehf is analyzed in this

manner, it is clear to state that the second and third situation better reflects Ashab-ı Kehf. Among the different social groups sharing Ashab-ı Kehf, the group with the highest visibility on the religious landscape is undoubtedly the Sunni representation of Islam. In contrast, there is no information that there was an idea to build a more perceptible or centralized structure than today's mosque at Ashab-ı Kehf. On the contrary, interviewees mentioned plans to enlarge the existing mosque at Ashab-ı Kehf. However, the visitors who continue to visit the cave today "according to their beliefs" prefer not to enter a challenging path with the rival group. They acknowledge the visibility of Sunni Islam in the space; on the other hand, they engage in a more conciliatory contestation by practicing their own beliefs as much as possible while visiting the cave. Finally, Christian communities, which have no desire for any spatial representation in Ashab-ı Kehf, are completely invisible in the space.

Especially in Turkey's recent history, with the change in the status of Hagia Sophia by the government, the discussion of the transformation of sacred spaces has gained importance nationally and globally. In multicultural and multi-faith geographies such as Anatolia, there are many examples of the spatial transformation of Hagia Sophia at different scales (Albera, 2021, pp. 11-13). The transformation of the religious landscape and the entire compound at Ashab-ı Kehf also is a representation of a pattern encountered in Turkey and worldwide. In this framework, this thesis is intended to be a humble contribution to the complex and multidimensional debates on the transformation of sacred and religious spaces in the context of contestation and political hegemony.

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APPENDICES

A. APPROVAL OF THE METU HUMAN SUBJECTS ETHICS COMMITTEE

Sayı: 28620816/   01 ARALIK 2021

Konu   : Değerlendirme Sonucu

Gönderen: ODTÜ İnsan Araştırmaları Etik Kurulu (İAEK)

İlgi   : İnsan Araştırmaları Etik Kurulu Başvurusu

Sayın Mustafa ŞEN

Danışmanlığını yürüttüğünüz Dilan ELVEREN'in "KUTSAL MEKANLARDA MEYDANA GELEN TAHAKKÜM KURMA PRATİKLERİNİN SOSYOLOJİK ANALİZİ: MERSİN/ASHAB-I KEHF MAĞARASI ÜZERİNDEN BİR VAKA ÇALIŞMASI" başlıklı araştırmanız İnsan Araştırmaları Etik Kurulu tarafından uygun görülmüş ve **450-ODTU-2021** protokol numarası ile onaylanmıştır.

Saygılarımızla bilgilerinize sunarız.

Prof.Dr. Mine MISIRLISOY
İAEK Başkanı

109

B. TARSUS MUNICIPALITY'S TOURISM POSTER

<div align="center">
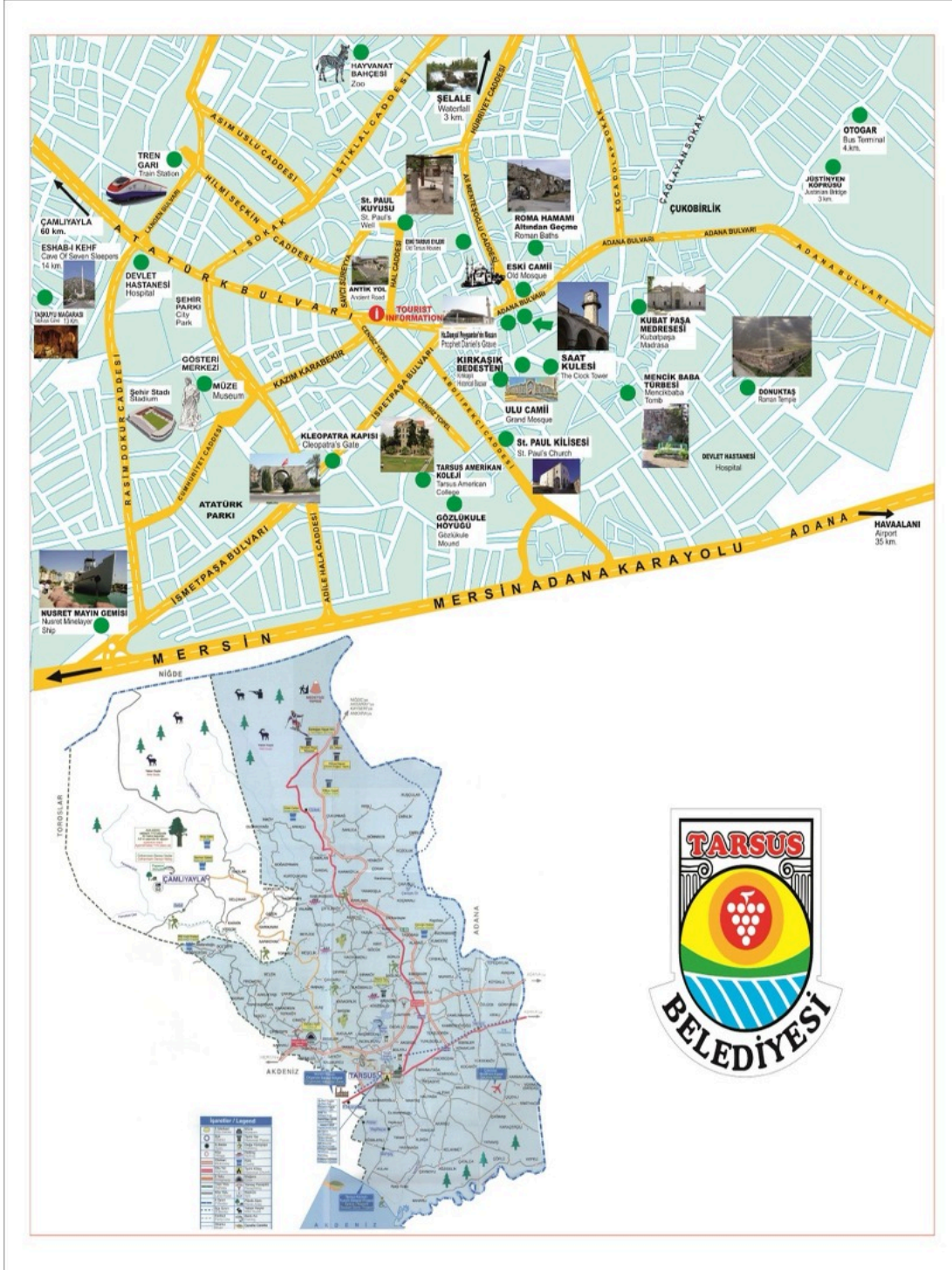
C. QUESTIONNAIRES

</div>

1. **Introductory Questions**

    - Do you live in Mersin/Tarsus?

    - Have you visited Ashab-ı Kehf before?

2. **Narrative of Ashab-ı Kehf**

    - Can you share the story of Ashab-ı Kehf as much as you know?

    - From whom did you learn this story?

3. **The Spatial Information about Ashab-ı Kehf**

    - When was the mosque here built?

    - When were the minarets built?

    - When was the picnic area built?

    - When was the signboards which are given the information about Ashab-ı Kehf built?

    - When were the stalls built?

    - Who built these structures? (Mosque, minarets, signboards, picnic area, stalls)

4. **Using of Space**

    - Why do you visit this place?

    - How often do you visit this place?

        o   If there are special days you visit, which days are these?

    - What do you do when you visit this place?

    - What order do you follow in what you do during your visit?

    - Do you go everywhere when you visit this place?

        o   If no: Where did you not spend any time?

        o   Why didn't you spend time there?

- Is there any practice you did before that you don't do now when you visit this place?
  - What are these practices?
  - Why are these practices no longer done?
  - How long have these practices been discontinued?
- Is there a religious/cultural practice in Ashab-ı Kehf that was not practiced before but is being practiced now?
  - What are these practices?
  - Why have these practices emerged?
  - How long have these practices been in place?

5. **Sharing of Space**
- When you think of Ashab-ı Kehf, is there an institution/person that you think represents this place?
  - What do you think about this place being associated with this person or institution?
- What do you think about people from different communities/cultures visiting this place?
- Who should have a say in determining the practices in this space? Why?
- Is your / your organization's opinion asked in any changes made / to be made in Ashab-ı Kehf?
  - If so, how (or by which means?)

D. TURKISH SUMMARY / TÜRKÇE ÖZET

Din, toplumsal örgütlenme ve uyumu sağlaması; toplumsal dinamikleri üretmesi ve yeniden üretmesi itibariyle tartışılması gereken kurumlardandır. Bilinen tüm toplumlarında çeşitli formlarda bulunmuş ve tarih boyunca toplumların çevreye yönelik algılarını ve tepkilerini etkilemiştir (Giddens, 2006, s. 533). Dini söylemin toplum var olduğundan beri hayatımızda olduğu düşünüldüğünde, toplum ve din arasındaki ilişkiyi incelemenin bir epistemoloji, ontoloji ve metodoloji gerektirdiği açıktır.

Dinin toplumsal ilişkileri ve dinamikleri ürettiği ve yeniden ürettiği süreç, bireyler veya toplumsal gruplar arasındaki çeşitli etkileşimler veya karşılaşmalar yoluyla gerçekleşir. Etkileşimler ya da karşılaşmalar fiziksel olsun ya da olmasın bir "mekânda" vuku bulur. Bu nedenle, dini pratiklerin uygulayıcılarının etkileşime girdikleri, karşılaştıkları ve toplumsal varlıklarını gösterdikleri mekân kavramı, dinin toplumsal hayattaki yerini analiz etmek için önemlidir. Bu bağlamda, bu çalışma din, kutsal mekanlar üzerinden mekânsal dönüşüm, süregelen çekişmeler ve müzakereler bağlamında incelenecektir.

Mekân hem somut hem de soyut olarak mekânı oluşturan bileşenlerle birlikte tarihsel olarak değişmiş ve dönüşmüştür. Bu açıdan mekân, kendinden menkul bir yapı olarak anlaşılmamalıdır. Ekonomik, siyasi ve toplumsal bir değer olarak üretilmiş ve geçmişten geleceğe farklı grupların iktidar ve/veya hegemonya müdahaleleriyle değişmiş/dönüşmüştür. Egemen olanın toplumun belleğindeki görünür/algılanabilir izlerini yansıtan mekanlar, iktidarın kendi sürekliliğinin bir aracı olarak çeşitli imgeler barındırır ve hatta bunları yaratır. Mekâna hâkim olanlar, kendi iktidarlarının sembollerini, imgelerini görünür kılarlar; böylece geçmişten kopuşun resmini çizerler. Bu çerçevede, mekânın iktidarın var oluşu ve meşruiyeti için etkili bir araç olduğunu söylemek yanlış olmayacaktır. Nitekim, Türkiye'de de tarihsel ve toplumsal

dönüşümler göz önünde bulundurulduğunda mekânın, iktidarın görünür bir politik aracı haline geldiği su götürmez bir gerçektir (Şahin, 2014). Mekânlar tarihsel olarak iktidarların ideolojileri ile şekillenmiş ve dönüşmüştür. Otoritesini Tanrı, insan ya da farklı kutsallıklar üzerinden meşrulaştıran her iktidar, yeni kutsallar belirleme ve üretme yetkisini de görev bilmektedir (Patacı, 2020, s. 361). Öte yandan, yeni bir kutsal belirlemektense var olan kutsallığı yeniden üretme & dönüştürme sıklıkla karşılaşılan bir meşruiyet pekiştirme örneğidir.

Çeşitli sembollerle anlam yüklenen ve çeşitli ritüellerin gerçekleştirildiği bir alan olarak kutsal mekânlar hâkim grupların/iktidarın varlığını göstermek ve meşruiyetini pekiştirmek için sahip olduğu dönüştürücü güçten kaçınılmaz olarak etkilenmiştir. Dolayısıyla iktidarın hegemonyasının ve meşruiyetinin görünürlüğünü analiz etmenin yollarından biri de kutsal mekân üzerinde meydana gelen dönüşümün peşinden gitmektir. Kutsal mekânda gerçekleşecek değişim ya da dönüşüm sadece bu dönüşümü yaşayacak "fiziksel mekânla" ilgili değildir (Gambetti, 2011, s. 122). Kutsallık atfedilen mekânlar, benlik ve kimlik inşasında dikkate değer bir öneme sahiptir (Bilgin, 2013; akt. Uygur, 2020). Bir başka deyişle kutsal mekân, bir kimliğin, bir düşüncenin, bir inancın ya da bir kültürün devamlılığını sağlayan kritik unsurlardan biridir. Dolayısıyla kutsal bir mekânda meydana gelen değişim ya da dönüşüm, çeşitli ritüelleri uygulayan kişi ya da kişilerin mekânla kurduğu manevi, sosyal ya da siyasi bağı da etkilemektedir.

Yukarıdaki çerçeve gözetilerek, bu tez, çekişmelerin kutsal mekânın dönüşümünü nasıl müzakere ettiğine odaklanacaktır. Bu araştırma sorusu, devamında dört alt araştırma sorusunu da beraberinde getirmiştir: (1) Farklı dini gruplar arasında kutsal alanlara ilişkin çekişmeler nasıl yaşanıyor? (2) Mevcut iktidarlar bu mekânlar üzerinde yaşanan çekişmeleri nasıl şekillendiriyor? (3) Mekânın farklı dini gruplar tarafından paylaşılmasının mekânın tarihsel dönüşümü üzerinde ne tür etkileri var? (4) Hâkim dini grupların mekânın dönüşümü ve kullanımı üzerinde nasıl bir etkisi var?

Bu sorular çerçevesinde, kutsal mekânın dönüşümü araştırmanın konusu olarak belirlenmiştir. Hem heteredoks hem de ortodoks inanç pratiklerinin bir arada sergilendiği bir mekân olan Ashab-ı Kehf mekânın dönüşümünün izlenmesi için

seçilmiştir. Ashab-ı Kehf, farklı dini ve kültürel gruplar tarafından ziyaret edilmesi yani paylaşılan bir kutsal mekân olması ve mekânın dönüşümünde dini peyzaj bakımından gözle görünür değişikliklerinin olması itibariyle kutsal mekânın dönüşümünün izlenmesi için gerekli kriterleri karşılamaktadır. Farklı dini gruplar arasında kutsal alanlara ilişkin çekişmeler nasıl yaşandığını ve müzakere edildiğini, iktidarlar politikalarının kutsal mekânlar etrafında şekillenen çekişmelere etkisini, mekânın farklı dini gruplar tarafından paylaşılmasının mekânın tarihsel dönüşümü üzerindeki etkisini, hâkim dini grupların mekânın dönüşümü ve kullanımı üzerinde nasıl bir etkisi olduğunu anlamayı hedefleyen bu çalışma bir nitel araştırma metodu olan vaka çalışması şeklinde gerçekleştirilmiştir.

Bu tez kapsamında Ashab-ı Kehf dört farklı dönemde ziyaret edilmiştir. İlk ziyaret pilot bir saha çalışması olarak 17 Eylül 2021 – 18 Eylül 2021 tarihleri arasında gerçekleşmiştir. Bu ilk ziyarette, Ashab-ı Kehf'te gözlemler yapılmış; bu mekânın çevresinde ticaret yapan esnafla resmi olmayan görüşmeler gerçekleştirilmiştir. Nihayetinde, bu ziyaret sonucunda tez kapsamında gerçekleştirilecek saha çalışmasının kapsamı belirlenmiştir. Ekim 2021'de gerçekleştirilen ikinci ziyaret ise Tarsus'taki Alevi derneklerinin yöneticileri ile yapılan kilit bilgilendirici görüşmeleri sürecini içermektedir. Ekim 2021'de gerçekleştirilen bu saha çalışması kapsamında kilit bilgilendiriciler ile gerçekleştirilen görüşmelerinin yanı sıra Ashab-ı Kehf ziyaret edilmiştir. Bu ziyaret esnasında bir ziyaretçi ile derinlemesine mülakat yapılmıştır. Üçüncü ziyaret, Kasım 2021'de gerçekleştirilmiştir. Bu saha çalışması, yaklaşık üç hafta sürmüştür. Saha çalışması sırasında hem ziyaretçilerle hem de kilit bilgilendiricilerle derinlemesine görüşmeler gerçekleştirilmiştir. Ayrıca Ashab-ı Kehf sık sık ziyaret edilerek gözlemler yapılmıştır. Saha çalışması kapsamındaki dördüncü ve son ziyaret 17-18 Eylül tarihlerinde gerçekleştirilmiştir. Bu çalışma kapsamında Mersin'deki Ortodoks ve Katolik Kiliselerinin Pederleri ile derinlemesine görüşmeler gerçekleştirilmiştir. Ashab-ı Kehf ise tez kapsamında son kez ziyaret edilmiş, bu ziyarette esnaf ile resmi olmayan görüşmeler gerçekleştirilmiştir. Bu dört ziyaretin ardından, saha çalışması neticelenmiştir.

Mersin/Tarsus Ashab-ı Kehf Mağarası'nda gerçekleştirilen bu çalışmada katılımcılar sıralı örnekleme çerçevesinde seçilmiştir. Katılımcılar; ziyaretçiler, Alevi dernekleri

temsilcileri, esnaf ve dini liderlerden oluşmaktadır. Çalışma kapsamında dini lider olarak Arap Alevisi inanç önderleri, Ortodoks ve Katolik Kiliseleri rahipleri ve imamlarla görüşmeler yapılmıştır. Mekânsal dönüşümün analiz edilebilmesi için ziyaretçilerin Ashab-ı Kehf'i en az iki kez ziyaret etmiş olmasına önem verilmiştir. Katılımcılarla derinlemesine mülakatlar yapılmıştır. Bu bağlamda mülakat soruları açık uçlu ve yarı yapılandırılmış olarak tasarlanmıştır. Mülakatlarda, katılımcılardan onam formu ile onay alınarak ses kaydı alınmıştır. İki katılımcı ses kaydı alınmasını istememiştir. Bu iki görüşmede, mülakat notları tutulmuştur ve bu notlar görüşme sonrası analiz edilmiştir.

Veri analizi süreci, katılımcıların onayı ile alınan ses kayıtlarının yazıya dökülmesi ve görüşmeler sırasında el yazısı ile tutulan iki saha notunun bilgisayara aktarılması ile başlamıştır. Deşifre edilen veriler MAXQDA 2022 programına aktarılmıştır. Veri analizi aşamasında öncelikle tüm deşifreler okunmuş ve kodlanmıştır. Kodlama sürecinde, yalın kodlama adı verilen ve yalnızca başlangıçtaki kod listesinin gerektiğinde genişletildiği bir yaklaşım kullanılmıştır. Bu yaklaşım, kısa etiketler veya kodlar içeren beş veya altı kategori ile başlar ve daha sonra veri tabanının gözden geçirilmesi ve yeniden gözden geçirilmesi devam ettikçe genişler (Creswell & Poth, 2018, s. 636). Veri analizinde kullanılan kod ve kategoriler, çalışmanın kuramsal çerçevesinde belirtilen mekânın üretimi, mekânın kullanımı, mekânın paylaşımı göstergeleri ile düzenlenmiştir. Bu çerçevede, veri analizinde kullanılan kodların kuramsal çerçeve ile paralellik gösterdiği söylenebilir.

Araştırmanın teorik çerçevesinde, kutsal mekânın dönüşümü hakkında kapsamlı bir çerçeve çizilmesi amacıyla çeşitli yaklaşımlara yer verilmiştir. Bu bağlamda, hem mekânın üretimi hem de kutsal mekânlar, özel olaraksa paylaşılan kutsal mekanlar, hakkında yazılan çalışmalardan faydalanılmıştır. Lefebvre'nin (1991) mekânın üretimini anlattığını çalışması, Eliade'nin kutsala ve kutsal mekâna dair çalışmaları (1961, 1996), Hasluck'un kutsal mekânın dönüşümü ele aldığı ve bu alanda neredeyse ilk olma özelliği gösteren çalışması (1929), Hayden ve arkadaşlarının dini peyzajın dönüşümü üzerinden kutsal mekanları ele aldıkları çalışmaları (2002, 2013, 2014, 2016) ve Sert (2009), Karaoğlan (2016) ve Uğureli'nin (2017) Ashab-ı Kehf çevresinde kurdukları kült anlatısını içeren çalışmaları bu araştırmanın genel

çerçevesini oluşturmaktadır. Bunların yanı sıra, kutsal mekân kültlerine yönelik çalışmalar yapan pek çok araştırmacının çalışmalarından da faydalanılmıştır.

Saha çalışmasından elde edilen veriler neticesinde yürütülen tartışmalar şu şekildedir: (1) Mekânını yaratan bir anlatı olarak Ashab-ı Kehf, (2) Ashab-ı Kehf'in dini peyzajının dönüşümü, (3) Ashab-ı Kehf'teki ekonomik ilişkilerin dönüşümü, (4) Ashab-ı Kehf'i ziyaret edenlerin mekânla kurduğu aidiyet hissinin dönüşümü.

Kültürel bellekte yaşayan anlatı ve efsane türleri nesilden nesile, coğrafyadan coğrafyaya sözlü olarak aktarılır. Gittiği her yerde yeni bağlamlarda ve mekânlarda farklı varyantlarla yaşar (Uğureli, 2017, s. 27). Ashab-ı Kehf (Yedi Uyurlar) da farklı din ve mitolojilerde kendine yer bulmuş, ulaştığı coğrafyanın kültürel özelliklerine göre yeniden üretilmiş bir anlatıdır. Von Sydow (1934, s. 350) her anlatının ulaştığı coğrafyanın farklı bağlamlarında yeniden üretildiğini ve sonrasında kendi coğrafyasına yerleştiğini belirtmiştir. Bu yeniden üretim sürecinin yol açtığı çeşitlilik anlatının özünden uzaklaşıldığı anlamına gelmemektedir. Aksine anlatının yeni mekâna uyumuna işaret etmektedir. Ashab-ı Kehf anlatısı hem dinlerde hem mitolojide hem de halk kültüründe çeşitli şekillerde yeniden üretilmiş ve yeni mekânına yerleşmiştir. Dahası, yerleştiği bu yeni mekânda yerelleşmiş ve hatta toplum tarafından o yerelle özdeşleştirilen bir değer haline gelmiştir. Bu bağlamda Ashab-ı Kehf'i bir vaka olarak incelemek yekpare bir anlatıyı incelemek değildir. Aksine mekânsallaşmış, yerelleşmiş, farklı coğrafyalarda ortak ve farklılaşmış motifleri olan bir anlatıyı incelemektir. Bu durum Ashab-ı Kehf'in çok boyutlu bir şekilde ele alınmasını zorunlu kılmaktadır.

İslam ve Hristiyanlıkta Ashab-ı Kehf ile ilgili birçok anlatı olmasına rağmen, ortaklaşan Ashab-ı Kehf (Yedi Uyurlar, Mağara Arkadaşları) anlatısı şu şekildedir: Yedi Uyurlar, Hıristiyanlığı kabul eden ve içinde yaşadıkları çok-tanrılı toplumun ve yöneticilerinin zulmünden kaçmak için bir mağaraya sığınan "Yediler"in anlatısıdır. Bu anlatıda Tanrı, toplumun ve yöneticinin zulmünden kaçan "Yediler"i korumak için bir mağarada yıllarca uyutur. "Yediler" uzun uykularından uyandıklarında uzun zamandır mağarada uyuduklarını fark etmezler. Acıktıkları için içlerinden birini şehre gönderirler. Şehre giden kişi, aldığı ekmek karşılığında cebindeki parayı fırıncıya

verir. Gencin verdiği paranın eski tarihli olması itibariyle bir hazine olduğunu düşünen fırıncı, genci dönemin hükümdarına götürür. Genç, bu hükümdara başından geçenleri anlatır. Genç, içinde uyandığı toplumun, uykuya daldığı dönemden farklı özelliklere sahip olduğunu fark ederken, diğer insanlar da bu kişinin başka bir çağdan geldiğini fark eder. Anlatının sonunda bu yedi gencin başka bir döneme uyandıklarını anladıklarında ortadan kayboldukları belirtilir.

Ashab-ı Kehf anlatısı en genel haliyle yukarıdaki gibi bilinse de anlatıda minör değişiklikler söz konusudur. Zira her anlatı gibi Ashab-ı Kehf'teki olaylar, olayların kahramanları, olayın zaman ve mekân algısı da anlatının aktarıldığı kültürün kendi gerçekliği ile ilişkilidir. Bu anlatının yerelleşmesi ile ilgilidir. Ashab-ı Kehf anlatısı, gezindiği tüm coğrafyalarda yerelleşmesi nedeniyle içerdiği motiflerde çeşitli benzerlikler ve farklılıklar göstermiştir. Bir efsanenin yayılması kadar önemli olan bir diğer şey de gittiği mekânlarda tutunabilmesi ve yerelleşebilmesidir. Tutunma ve yerelleşme ise ancak ortak kültürel motiflerle mümkündür. Ashab-ı Kehf anlatısı çeşitlilik gösterse de söz konusu anlatının temelini oluşturan ortak motif kaçınılmaz olarak "uzun/derin uyku" olmuştur. Sert (2009, s. 25) uzun uyku motifinin diriliş (ahiret ya da yeniden diriliş) motifiyle iç içe geçtiğini söylemiştir. Üç yüz yıl boyunca mağarada kalan bu yedi gencin uyanması, yeniden dirilişin mümkün olduğunu kanıtlamaktadır (Altınova & Tunçel, 2013, s. 1283).

Bu anlatı, dünyada otuzdan fazla, Anadolu'da ise altı kült mekanına sahiptir. İspanya, Fas, Cezayir, Tunus, Mısır, Yemen, Suriye, Irak, İran, Afganistan, Çin, Endonezya, Türkiye, Kıbrıs, İtalya, Yunanistan, Doğu Türkistan, Fransa, Hindistan, Ukrayna-Kyiv, Ürdün, Nahçıvan, İspanya, Almanya, Rusya ve Türkiye mağaraların bulunduğu ülkelerdir (Sert, 2009; Akpınar, 2010; Karaoğlan, 2016; Uğureli, 2017). Anadolu'da bulunanlar ise Diyarbakır – Lice, İzmir – Selçuk, Kahramanmaraş – Afşin, Mersin – Tarsus, Malatya ve Sivas'tadır. Malatya ve Sivas'ta bulunan kült mekanları bugün varlıklarını sürdürmemektedir. Kült mekanları incelendiğinde, mekanların önemli bir kısmının İslam inancının yayıldığı coğrafyalarda olduğu görülmektedir. Anlatının ve kült mekânlarının yayıldığı coğrafyanın İslam inancının yaygın olduğu sahalarda olması bir tesadüften ibaret değildir. Dünya üzerinde onlarca kült mekânı yaratan ve yerelleştiren bu anlatının neden İslam inancının yaygın olduğu coğrafyalarda

olduğunu anlamak için Ashab-ı Kehf'in Hristiyanlıkta ve İslamiyet'te nasıl ele alındığını anlamak gerekir. Hristiyanların "Kutsal Kilise Tarihi" kitabında, Ashab-ı Kehf kült mekânı İzmir – Selçuk olarak net bir şekilde ifade edilmektedir. Öte yandan, İslamiyet'te kutsal kitap olarak kabul edilen Kur'an-ı Kerim, Ashab-ı Kehf'in kült mekânını doğrudan göstermemiş, sadece mağarayı tasvir etmiştir. Bu tasvire göre, güneş doğduğu zaman mağaralarının sağından meylederken battığı zaman da solundan geçer ve Ashab-ı Kehf bu mağarada geniş bir alanda uyumaktadır (Kur'an, Sure 18, Ayet 17-18). Bu belirsizlik, Ashab-ı Kehf'in asıl kült yerinin "keşfi" serüvenini başlatmıştır. Yedi Uyurlar nasıl bir halk anlatısı olarak dolaştığı coğrafyalarda yerelleştiyse, Kur'an'ı rehber edinen coğrafyalarda gezinirken de aynı işleme tabi tutulmuştur. Kur'an'da bahsedilen hususlar dikkate alınmış, Kur'an referanslı keşifler yapılmış ve "gerçek Ashab-ı Kehf" bulunmaya çalışılmıştır. Ashab-ı Kehf'in Kur'an'da sadece tasvir edilmesi ve kült mekanının nerede olduğuna dair kesin bir bilgi verilmemesi, dünyadaki Ashab-ı Kehf'in yarısından fazlasının bu coğrafyalarda olmasıyla sonuçlanmış olabilir.

Bu tez kapsamında incelenen Ashab-ı Kehf Tarsus'ta bulunmaktadır. Kutsal bir mekân olarak Sünni hegemonyanın çeşitli şekillerde baskın geldiği Ashab-ı Kehf'in yıllar içindeki değişim ve dönüşümünün izi sürüldüğünde, bu değişim ve dönüşümün Ashab-ı Kehf'e özgü olmadığı, Ashab-ı Kehf'in kutsal mekânlarda izlenen bir dönüşüm politikasının yalnızca bir halkası olduğu söylenebilir. Kutsal mekânların dönüşümü Anadolu'da yaygın bir olgu olup, nüfus mübadeleleri, işgal ya da fetihler ve dini yapıların statülerinin değiştirilmesi pratikleri ile karakterize edilen daha geniş bir olgunun parçasıdır. Bu değişimler her gerçekleştiğinde, mevcut kutsal mekânlar yeni düzene uyum sağlamak için bir dizi fiziksel dönüşüm geçirir. Burada akla gelen ilk örnekler kiliselerin camiye dönüştürülmesidir (Hayden vd. 2016, Tanyeri – Erdemir, Hayden & Erdemir, 2014). Kiliselerdeki Hristiyan sembol ve ikonlarının çeşitli şekillerde kaldırılması ve yapıya İslam'a ait sembollerin yerleştirilmesi Anadolu'da karşılaşılan dini mekân dönüşümleri arasında yer almaktadır (Tanyeri – Erdemir, Hayden & Erdemir, 2014, s. 492). Öte yandan, Anadolu'da karşılaşılan bir diğer dönüşüm biçimi de kutsal mekânlar ya da türbeler olarak ele alınabilir. Bu mekânların dönüşümü, heterodoks inanç sistemlerinin ortodokslaştırılması açısından

kendine has özellikler taşımaktadır. Ashab-ı Kehf'te gerçekleşen dönüşümlerin önemli ölçüde bu ikinci kategoride değerlendirildiği söylenebilir.

Kutsal mekânın açığa çıktığı ve kendini gösterdiği yer, kutsal mekânın sınırlarını belirlemekte, böylece kutsal ile profan arasında bir sınır oluşmasına neden olmaktadır. Ancak kutsal ile profan arasında bir sınır olması, bu sınırların ve sınırların her iki tarafındakilerin mutlak olduğu anlamına gelmez. Kong, kutsal ve profan olanın sınırları ve tanımları bir şekilde net olsa da kutsal alanların bir şekilde şekillendirilebilir olmaya devam ettiğini savunmaktadır (Kong ve Woods, 2016, s. 18). Başka bir deyişle, seküler alan ile kutsalın tezahür ettiği yer arasında bir sınır olsa da bu sınırlar ve kutsalın temsilleri olan semboller bazı değişikliklere maruz kalabilmektedir. Kong çalışmasında bu dönüşüm ve değişimi çekişme ile ilişkilendirmiştir. Dini çekişmenin kaynağının, dini grupların gruba özgü dini alanların kapsamını genişletme girişimlerinde yattığını ileri sürmüştür (Kong ve Woods, 2016, s. 18). Tarsus Ashab-ı Kehf, anlatısı itibariyle bir mağara kültü temsiline sahipken çevresine inşa edilen yapılarla mekânsal olarak bir genişlemeye uğramış, dönüşmüştür. Ashab-ı Kehf'te meydana gelen mekânsal dönüşüm de bir gruba özgü dini alanların genişletilmesi kapsamında değerlendirilebilir. Ashab-ı Kehf'in mağaradan camiye uzanan mekânsal genişlemesi ve dönüşümünde Sünni İslam temsilini yansıtan imgeler oldukça ön planda durmaktadır. Bu çerçevede, Ashab-ı Kehf'te meydana gelen dönüşümleri üç ana başlık altında toplamak mümkündür. Bunlardan ilki, mağaradan camiye dini peyzajda meydana gelen değişimlerdir.

Tarsus Ashab-ı Kehf, bir kutsal mekân olarak "keşfedildiğinde" yalnızca bir mağara oluşumu iken ilerleyen yıllarda mekân yeni yapıların inşası ile genişlemiştir. Tarsus'ta yer alan bu mağaranın ne zaman keşfedildiği ve mağaranın hemen önünde bulunan "mescit"in ne zaman inşa edildiğine dair bilgiye erişilememiştir. Buna rağmen, Sümer, El-Mukaddesi'nin Tarsus Ashab-ı Kehf için "Şehrin bölgesinde bir de mescit var. Bu mescidin mağaranın üzerinde olduğunu söylediler" dediğini iletmiştir (1989, s.31). Mukaddesi'nin bu eseri 10. yüzyıl civarında yazdığı düşünüldüğünde, ilk caminin (veyahut mescidin) 10. yüzyıla kadar inşa edilmiş olması beklenmektedir. Öte yandan Hasluck, 1870'lerde yeni bir cami inşa edildiğini ve Sultan Abdülaziz'in annesi tarafından bir vakıf kurulduğunu belirtmiştir (1929, s. 316). Vakıflar Genel Müdürlüğü

tarafından caminin duvarına asılan levhada verilen bilgiye göre, Ashab-ı Kehf Camii 1872 yılında Sultan Abdülaziz'in annesi adına şehir müftüsü Ahmet Efendi tarafından yenilenmiştir. Yani 1800'lü yılların ikinci yarısında Ashab-ı Kehf adına bir cami inşa edilmemiş, var olan cami yenilenmiştir. Ashab-ı Kehf'in mağaradan camiye uzanan yolculuğu burada son bulmamış, mekân üzerinde majör ve minör dönüşümlerle devam etmiştir. Dönüşümlerin önemli bir kısmı heteredoks inanç pratiklerinin "Sünni özdeşleşme" politikaları çerçevesinde yeniden yorumlanması ile ilişkilidir. Mağaranın önünde bulunan yapının başlangıçta bir mescit olması, zamanla tek şerefeli bir camiye dönüşmesi[24], nihayetinde 1900'lerin ikinci yarısında üç şerefeli oldukça uzun bir minarenin[25] bu camiye eklenmesi ile mekân, algılanabilirlik ve merkezilik parametrelerince Sünni İslam temsillerinin oldukça yoğun görüldüğü bir sahaya dönüşmüştür. Bunun yanı sıra, Diyanet İşleri Başkanlığı tarafından geçtiğimiz on yıl içerisinde asıldığı belirtilen ve Mersin'de yer alan başka türbelerde de karşılaşılan bir tabelanın varlığının oldukça dikkat çekici olduğu belirtilebilir. Ashab-ı Kehf'in ziyaret adabını oldukça çekişmeli bir dille aktaran bu tabelada, Ashab-ı Kehf'te uygulanan pek çok ritüel "bid'at ve hurafe" olarak adlandırılmış ve "dinimizce" yasaklandığı belirtilmiştir[26]. Nitekim, mağaranın içerisinde yer alan ve katılımcılar tarafından "delikli taş"[27] olarak adlandırılan taşın akıbeti bu müdahalenin yalnızca tabelalarda iletilen yazılarla olmadığını göstermektedir. Bu delikli taşın giriş ve çıkışı taş örülerek kapatılmış ve bu ritüelin uygulanabilirliğine fiziksel olarak da son verilmiştir.

Dini peyzajı, hakimiyetin bir tür yansıması olarak ele aldığımızda farklı dini ve toplumsal gruplar arasındaki ortaya çıkabilecek çekişme üç farklı şekilde görülebilir (Hayden et al. 2016, 44-47). İlk olarak, farklı dini gruplar arasındaki çekişme, çekişme halinde olan gruplardan baskın olanın diğer dini gruplara meydan okuyan yapılar inşa eder. İkinci olarak, bir grup algılanabilirliği daha düşük yapılar inşa ederek bu çekişmede daha düşük bir konumda olduğunu kabul eder. Ashab-ı Kehf'te dini peyzajın dönüşümü incelendiğinde, baskın konumda olan Sünni İslam temsilinin

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[24] Bknz. Fotoğraf 2 ve Fotoğraf 3

[25] Bknz. Fotoğraf 6

[26] Bknz. Fotoğraf 11

[27] Bknz. Fotoğraf 13

algılanabilirliği ve merkeziliği yüksek yapılar inşa ettirdiği görülmektedir. Bunun yanı sıra mekânı ziyaret eden farklı inanç gruplarından kimselerin bu mekâna alternatif bir mekân yaratmadığı, mağarada sürdürebildiği ritüellerden doğru mekanla ilişki kurulduğu görülmektedir. Öte yandan, Tarsuslu Hristiyanlar için önemli bir kült mekânı olmayan Ashab-ı Kehf'te mekânsal dönüşüme uğrayan herhangi bir Hristiyan temsili olan ikona rastlanmamıştır. Burada Tarsuslu Hristiyanların görünmez olmak için mekânsal bir dönüşümden kaçınmaları söz konusu değildir. Ashab-ı Kehf'in kült mekanının Efes – Selçuk'ta olduğu bilgisinde ortaklaştıkları için bu mekânı dönüştürme motivasyonu olan birer özne olmadıkları düşünülmektedir.

Tarsus Ashab-ı Kehf'te meydana gelen dönüşümlerden bir diğeri, mekânın ekonomik örgütlenmesinin/ekonomik ilişkilerinin değişmesi ile ilişkilidir. Ashab-ı Kehf, sahip olduğu kutsiyet itibariyle gerek Tarsus'tan gerek Tarsus'un çevre illerinden gerekse Anadolu'nun dört bir yanından ziyaret edilmektedir. Geçmişte hacca giden kimselerin, hacdan önceki durağı olan, günümüzde ise bir "turizm" değeri olarak da özellikle hafta sonları ziyaretçi akınına uğrayan Ashab-ı Kehf mekânsal dönüşümünün yanı sıra ekonomik faaliyetlerinin çeşitlenmesi ile de dikkat çekmektedir. Çevre köyler ve bu köylerde yaşayan köylüler tarafından kutsal anlamının ötesinde ticari bir anlama da sahip olan Ashab-ı Kehf, bugün bu köylerde yaşayanlar ve hatta Tarsuslular için bir geçim kaynağı halini almıştır. Örneğin, Ashab-ı Kehf'in hemen yanında bulunan Dedeler köyü sakinleri geçmişte birincil geçim kaynaklarının tarım ve hayvancılık olduğunu belirtirken, bugün bu faaliyetleri Ashab-ı Kehf'te açtıkları tezgahlarla ile birleştirdiklerini ve bu tezgahların temel geçim kaynakları olduğunu belirtmektedirler. El emeği ürünlerini Ashab-ı Kehf ziyaretçilerine satarak ekonomik kazanç elde etmeye başlayan köylüler, Ashab-ı Kehf'te üzüm yaprağı, ceviz, zeytin, yerel meyveler ve kızılcık ve kuşburnu gibi meyvelerden yapılan marmelatlar satmaktadırlar. Başlangıçta gayrı resmî olarak kurulan bu tezgâhlar, Tarsus Belediyesi'nin çevre düzenlemesi faaliyeti kapsamında resmi bir statü kazanmıştır. Artık Ashab-ı Kehf'te çok az köylü yerleşkenin herhangi bir noktasında gayrı resmî olarak ürünlerini satarken Ashab-ı Kehf'teki temel ekonomik faaliyet Tarsus Belediyesi tarafından köylülere kiralanan tezgahlarda gerçekleşmektedir.

Bunun yanı sıra, Asahb-ı Kehf yerleşkesinde hediyelik eşya dükkanları, küçük bir restoran, küçük bir market ve şu anda kapalı olan bir otel bulunmaktadır. Tüm bu

mekânlarda Ashab-ı Kehf mağarasının bulunduğu dağın ve Ashab-ı Kehf'in izlerine rastlamak mümkündür. Ashab-ı Kehf'teki tüm hediyelik eşya dükkanları Fotoğraf 22'de gösterilen alanda yer almaktadır. Yaklaşık on dükkânın bulunduğu bu alanda giyim ve aksesuar, takı, ev aksesuarları, mutfak aksesuarları, yiyecek (lokum), oyuncak vb. ürünler satılmaktadır. Bu ürünlerin genel konsepti Yedi Uyurlar'ın isimlerinin ya da uyku motiflerinin figürleştirilmesidir. Hediyelik eşyanın inanç pratiği çerçevesinde şekillendirilmesinden ziyade, ilgili kültüre özgü motifler uygulanarak inanç içeriği nesneye eklenmeye çalışılmaktadır (Akbulut, 2014, s. 179). Hediyeler nesne, mekân ve kişi arasında kurulan ilişkiden doğru kanıt, hafızayı canlı tutma gibi işlevler görür. Bunun dışında kişisel gelişim ve sosyal ilişkileri güçlendirme, yakın çevrenin mutluluğuna katkı sağlama, prestij ve statü kazandırma, seyahat memnuniyetini artırma ve önemli bir kültürel dekoratif ürün olma açısından da birçok avantaj sağlamaktadır (Akyürek & Özdemir, 2019, s. 197-198). Bu mekânlarda hediyelik eşya dükkânlarının bulunması, özellikle bölgeyi turistik amaçla ziyaret edenler için bu imkânları sağlamaktadır. Hediyelik eşyalar, Ashab-ı Kehf'i turistik amaçla ziyaret edenler için bir hatırlatma ve mekânla bağı güçlendiren bir unsur olarak değerlendirilse de görüşülen kişilerin önemli bir kısmı Ashab-ı Kehf'in kazandığı bu turistik imajdan rahatsız olduklarını belirtmiş ve buranın "ticari" hale geldiğini söylemiştir. Sonuç olarak, Ashab-ı Kehf'te daha önce köylülerin kendi inisiyatifleriyle kurdukları resmi olmayan tezgâhlarda ürünlerini sattıkları ve ziyaretçilerle etkileşime girdikleri bir model hâkimken Tarsus Belediyesi'nin çevre düzenlemesi başlığı altında yaptığı değişikliklerle birlikte Ashab-ı Kehf'in hem mekânsal kullanımı hem de alan içindeki ekonomik ilişkiler değişmiştir. Ashab-ı Kehf üzerinde gerçekleştirilen bu dönüşümler, bilgi ve ideolojiyi yansıtan mekân temsilleri olarak değerlendirilebilir. Mekân temsilleri, kurulu düzenin, yani siyasi iktidarın, egemen ideolojinin (ya da söylemin) ve egemen ekonomik düzenin mantığına göre düzenlenen ve üretilen mekânlardır ve "ideoloji tarihinin bir parçasıdır" (Lefebvre, 2014, s. 116). Bu bağlamda, Ashab-ı Kehf'in belediye tarafından yeniden organize edilmesi, kutsal mekanlar üzerinde görülen bir ideolojinin yansımasıdır. Ashab-ı Kehf'in turistik bir cazibe merkezi haline getirilmesi, Ashab-ı Kehf'in desakralizasyonu ve heterodoks inanç pratiklerini yansıtan kutsal mekânların ortodoks inanç sistemleri tarafından dönüştürülmesini içeren yaklaşımın tezahürüdür. Ashab-ı Kehf'in mekânsal olarak yeniden tasarlanırken, farklı kültürel ve dini grupların ziyaret ettiği bir kutsal mekân

olmaktan ziyade, Sünni İslam'ı benimseyen kimselerin ziyaret ettiği bir dini mekân ve "herkes"in ziyaret edebileceği bir turistik mekân olarak düşünülmüştür.

Paylaşılan kutsal mekanlar, kutsallıkla ilgili farklı yaklaşımların kesiştiği yerlerdir. Kutsal bir mekânı paylaşmak durağan değil, dinamik bir sürece sahiptir (Fowden, 2002, s. 145). Ortak kutsal alanların varlığı, ortak bir geçmişi ve farklı sosyal ve dini grupların uzun süre birlikte yaşama pratiğini yansıtır. Ortak bir geçmişi paylaşmak ve günlük etkileşim gibi bir arada yaşama pratiğine sahip olmak, her ne kadar barışçıl bir ifade olarak duyulsa da basit bir mekân paylaşımı meselesi değildir (Couroucli, 2012, s. 3-6). Başka bir deyişle, farklı dini ve sosyal grupların bir arada yaşaması, bu gruplar arasında hiyerarşi olmadığı ve bu grupların eşit olduğu anlamına gelmez. Çünkü dini gruplar "belirli bir dini cemaatin üyesi olarak bireye sosyal statü ve hakların verildiği, son derece düzenlenmiş bir alanda etkileşim halindedir" (Couroucli, 2012, s.4). Ortak bir kutsal mekân olan Ashab-ı Kehf, farklı sosyal statülere sahip farklı dini gruplar tarafından da ziyaret edilmektedir. Gerçekleştirilen saha çalışması sonucunda, bu ziyaretlerin farklı dini gruplar için ifade ettiği anlamın yıllar içinde değiştiği görülmüştür. Bunda en önemli payın Ashab-ı Kehf'in dini peyzajındaki değişimler olduğunu söylemek yanlış olmaz. Dini manzaradaki değişimler farklı dini gruplar üzerinde baskı yaratmakta ve bu grupların mekanla kurdukları aidiyet duygusunun bu baskı nedeniyle zayıfladığı ortaya çıkmaktadır.

Sonuç olarak, kutsal mekânın dönüşümünün dini peyzajda ve bununla ilişkili olarak kült ve ritüellerde, ekonomik ilişkilerde ve aidiyet hissinde olduğu görülmüştür. Türkiye'nin yakın tarihinde, Ayasofya'nın statüsünün hükümet tarafından değiştirilmesiyle birlikte kutsal mekânların dönüşümü tartışması ulusal ve küresel ölçekte önem kazanmıştır. Anadolu gibi çok kültürlü ve çok inançlı coğrafyalarda Ayasofya'nın mekânsal dönüşümüne dair farklı ölçeklerde pek çok örnek bulunmaktadır. Ashab-ı Kehf'teki dini peyzajın ve tüm yerleşkenin dönüşümü, aynı Türkiye'de ve dünyada karşılaşılan bu örüntünün temsilidir. Bu çerçevede, bu tez çalışmasının, kutsal ve dini mekânların çekişme ve siyasi hegemonya bağlamında dönüşümüne ilişkin karmaşık ve çok boyutlu tartışmalara mütevazı bir katkı sunması amaçlanmıştır.

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