



The 3rd International Geography Symposium - GEOMED2013

Geographical symbols in beliefs of the Tahtacı Turkomans around Kaz Mountain, W Turkey

Recep Efe*, Abdullah Soykan, İsa Cürebal, Süleyman Sönmez

Balikesir University, Faculty of Arts and Sciences, Department of Geography, 10145 Balikesir, Turkey

Abstract

Kaz Mountain is culturally very important mountain mass located in the northwest of the Anatolian Peninsula. It is physically and culturally significant among Turkmens. High mountains were considered sacred since they were close to Tengri and regarded as its place or home. Geographical motifs and their origins in the belief system of Turkmen communities around Kaz Mountain (i.e Tahtacı Turkomans) were examined in this study. In the preparation phase of the study, previously conducted research on this topic and the area was reviewed, and scientific data that would lay the basis for this research were compiled. Turkmen communities living around Kaz Mountain and their cultural features were observed on site in various time periods. People who are knowledgeable on this topic were interviewed many times. In the last phase, data provided by fieldwork, interviews, and literature reviews were compiled, and a final text was composed. It was established in the study that Tahtacı Turkomans who live around Kaz Mountain maintain their old beliefs and their culture. Tahtacı people consider Kaz Mountain, geese, and some trees sacred, and they continue rituals related to them. Both physical geographical evidence and legends pertaining to this mountain suggest that the name of this magnificent mountain is related to the animal "goose".

© 2013 The Authors. Published by Elsevier Ltd. Open access under [CC BY-NC-ND license](https://creativecommons.org/licenses/by-nc-nd/4.0/).
Selection and peer-review under responsibility of the Organizing Committee of GEOMED2013.

Keywords: Kaz Mountain; the Tahtacı Turkomans; Geographical Motifs; Rituals.

* Corresponding author. Tel.: +90-532-247-4807; fax: none.
E-mail address: recepefe@hotmail.com

1. Introduction

Human beings are in constant interaction with living and non-living things in their environment. Humans have not only shaped their living spaces, but also have been influenced by certain things around them. Mountains, trees, and some animals are the main things that are respected and venerated by people. In Anatolia, societies venerating these things live in various places. There is a particularly firm relationship between the Alevi belief system in Anatolia and the beliefs practiced in Central Asia, where formerly inhabited by Turks. Tahtaci Turkomans' beliefs about things around them become part of their life. They enshrined mountains, trees, and animals. This belief is different from other Turkish communities.

Mountains are physically and culturally significant for Turkish communities. Since high mountains are close to Tengri (God) and are regarded as its place or home, they were hallowed. Some trees and animals are among things that are hallowed.

When the Turks migrated to Anatolia, they brought different cultural practices with them. Some of these are the veneration of mountains, great trees, and some animals. Thus, they gave the names of their former locations to mountains, rivers, and various places in Anatolia. The Turks maintained some of their old beliefs and traditions after converting to Islam.



Fig. 1. Location map of Kaz Mountain

2. Findings and Discussion

The Tahtacı Turkoman living around Kaz Mountain in the western Anatolia, are among the communities that sustain their old beliefs and cultures. Tahtacı people hallow Kaz Mountain, geese, and some trees and continue to practice their rituals. This holiness is not just about the fact that Kaz Mountain is a mountain. It is also related to the Legend of Sarıkız (Blond Girl). Sarıkız is believed to have lived on Kaz Mountain. One of the summits of Kaz Mountain is named Sarıkız, and the other is named the Baba Hill. Each year in August, this place is visited by the Tahtacı Turkoman groups. They make wishes, take vows, and sacrifice animals.



Fig. 2. Tahtacı people deal with cutting and sawing trees in the forest. They work together with family member and spend their all summer season in the forest.

Tahtacı people, who have been called so since the 16th century, used to lead a nomadic life, yet today they live a settled life. They have their own lifestyles, customs and traditions, religious beliefs, social lives, and introvert characteristics.

Ottoman Sultan Mehmed the Conqueror is known to have brought Tahtacı people from the Taurus Mountains in order to produce timber and wood from the forests on Kaz Mountain for the construction of ships that were used for the conquest of Lesbos Island. The cultural identity of Tahtacı people has become prominent in the last few years as a tourist attraction. Members of some villages located around Edremit express that they came from the Taurus Mountains in Adana to saw wood.

The fact that, this mission started during the reign of Mehmed the Conqueror. A group of “*Tahtacı*” was brought from the Taurus Mountains in order to provide timber from Kaz Mountain. Timber was needed to build ships for the conquests of Lesbos and Istanbul. Tahtacı people who were brought settled in “Şabadan” location near Altınoluk. Later, this community grew in number and spread around. Doyran village is in this location today.

Tahtacı Turkomans on Kaz Mountain made their living by cutting and sawing trees until the mid-19th century. They maintained a nomadic lifestyle and lived in tribes. They spent winters on the southern foothills of Kaz Mountain. They went to forests to cut and saw wood in summer. During the period when they were nomads, they lived in dome-shaped shelters built from tree branches.

They were subjected to compulsory settlement after 1850 and settled in villages by the order of Hudavendigâr Governor, Ahmed Vefik Pasha. Today, Tahtacı settlements in the south of Kaz Mountain are Güzelköy (Kısacıkaltı), Uzunalan, Tuztaş, Bahçedere, Doyran (Doyuran, Şebedan-ı sâni), Arıtış, Kavlaklar, Tahtakuşlar, Yassıçalı, Kavurmacılar, Çamcı, Mehmetalan, Hacıaslanlar (Hacıhasanlar).

Shamanistic, Alevi, and Bektashi beliefs and customs have merged and can be observed in Tahtacı Turkoman’s lifestyles. They place importance on preservation of Turkish language and Central Asian traditions. Their language is more similar to Turkish used in Central Asia than those of other tribes.

3. Kaz Mountain, Sarıkız and Tahtacı Turkomans

Every year in August, Tahtacı people of Kaz Mountain gather in the location of the highest summit and have a festive meeting by visiting the place of sacred Sarıkız. During this meeting, they perform some rituals. Tahtacı Turkoman people living in other regions also join these celebrations.



Fig. 3. Sarıkız hill in Kaz Mountain. It is believed to be the tomb of Sarıkız (Blond Girl) is on the summit.

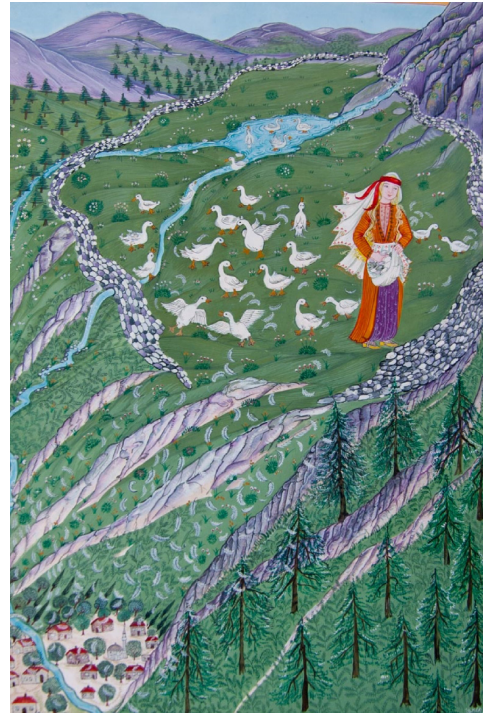


Fig. 4. Sarıkız and Goose yard (Miniature by Ülker Erke)

“The Sarıkız Celebrations”, held on the third week of every August, lasts for 10 days, and Turkmens coming from different cities go up to Kaz Mountain. They visit Sarıkız’s shrine (tomb) and perform their rituals.

4. Goose, Goosefoot, and Kaz Mountain

Goose has an important place in folklore of Kaz Mountain. Wild goose (*Anser anser*) is folklorically significant in that Kaz Mountain was named after this bird species. Turks named this mountain “Kaz”. The name of this mountain in mythology is “Ida”. Geese are sacred animals in Shamanism, and they are believed to make people reach God. This is because geese are known to be the highest-flying bird species, and thus they are believed to be able to reach God.

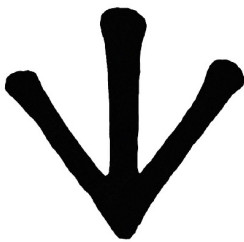


Fig. 5. Goosefoot motifs used by Tahtaci Turkoman are frequently seen on gravestones. (Tahtakuşlar Village)

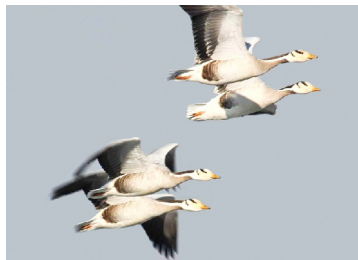


Fig. 6. *Anser indicus* (photo: Jari Peltomäki) Living spaces of *Anser indicus* include all Central Asian plateaus.



Fig. 7. Monumental and old trees are considered holy by Tahtaci Turkomans. Usually there is a sacred tomb near these trees.



Fig. 8. It is common behavior to tie cloths and to take vow to the lonely or monumental trees

In Shamanism, it is believed that goosefoot brings luck, and that places where it steps on are sacred since geese are birds that can reach God. Shamans who can communicate with God cannot go up to God without the help of geese. Thus, they are not able to bring sacrifices presented to God in order to provide God’s mediation without the help of geese. Some goose species (*Anser indicus*) are known as the highest-flying birds. These birds live in Central Asian highlands and spend winters in India. Each year, they pass the Himalaya mountains in 8 hours, go to India from Inner Asia, and then go back so as to spend summer.

This migration path, which reaches Siberia, is about 8,000 km long. They live on plateaus of Central Asia. These plateaus have an average elevation of 4000 meters. There are many Turkish tribes using goose and goosefoot motifs. It is particularly believed that tripartite skirts worn by Karapapak women are made of goosefeet, and they are believed to be worn for they bring luck. Women put goose feathers on their newborn babies’ dresses in order for them to grow healthy and be successful.

This tradition is still preserved by some Karapapaks. Ground mats such as carpets, rugs, and light rugs woven in Anatolia, Central Asia, and Caucasia are embroidered with goosefoot motifs so that they will bring luck.



Fig. 9. Gravestone and goosefoot figure in Tahtaci Turkoman village (Tahtakuslar)



Fig. 10. Tahtaci Turkomans put the favorite items and tie clothes the graves.



Fig. 11. Shrine of Sankız on the summit. Thousands of people visit here every year during the celebrations in August. People tie clothes and take vow

This belief is common among Turkish tribes, and goosefoot motifs can also be seen on gravestones. Goose motifs are very common in Turkish culture and Shamanism. These motifs are used in Dede Korkut stories and the Epic of Creation. These motifs are still used in Alevi Bektashi beliefs.

Goosefoot was used as a letter and symbol in Pure Turkish. This letter and symbol means “God” and “incarnation”. Goosefoot is the symbol of Tahtaci people on Kaz Mountain and Alevis.

Kaz Mountain is located on bird migration routes. Geese, swans, and wild ducks migrate seasonally and visit Kaz Mountain. The second proof indicating that the name “Kaz Mountain” is related to “Goose” (Kaz) is “the Legend of Sarıkız”. There is certainly a goose motif in versions of the Legend of Sarıkız.

Stone polygons that were formed spontaneously around the summit of Kaz Mountain are called “goose yards” by local people. Legend has it that Sarıkız gathered all her geese into these yards.

One of the oldest sources in which Kaz Mountain is mentioned is *Kitab-ı Bahriyye*, which was compiled by Piri Reis in 1528. In a document belonging to the period of Bayezid II (1592), Kaz Mountain is also mentioned (Özdemir and Yağcı, 2007). As a result, both physical geographical evidence and legends pertaining to this mountain suggest that the name of this magnificent is related to the animal “goose”.

Another element that has an important place in Tahtaci Turkoman belief system is trees. Trees are materially and spiritually important in Turkish world and Anatolian culture. The most interesting features of trees are that they have long life spans, and that they are big. Trees, which reach the ground with their roots and the sky with their branches, function as a bridge between two unknown worlds. The “Tree Cult”, an element of the belief systems of old Turkish communities, is still important today (Ergun, 2004). Especially “monumental trees” have had an important place in mythological beliefs in that they often symbolize the unity of God.

Great and solitary trees have a connection with God. There is usually a grave next to a monumental tree. The tree becomes sacred together with this grave. Tahtaci Turkomans usually celebrate Hıdırellez (spring festival) in cemeteries. In the area where they live there are great trees on which they take vows and perform rituals.

In old Turkish communities, Hakans chose a tree and an animal as symbols for each of their sons. This tradition is still common in Anatolia. The best examples of this are found in Alevi and Tahtaci cultures. Tahtaci Turkomans living around Edremit also regard some great and solitary trees as sacred. One of them is the tree near the grave of Sarıkız, located close to the summit of Kaz Mountain. Each year, a piece of cloth is tied to this tree, and wishes are made during the celebrations. The oak and the tomb in Hacıarslanlar village are considered sacred. “Dead Oak” in Tahtakuşlar Village, “Ali Bey, Çiftlik, and Kozlubahçe plane trees” in Kavlaklar village, “Küçükusu and Dramalı Çemali plane trees” in Doyran village are regarded as sacred trees by Tahtaci Turkomans.

References

- Bayat, F. (2004). *Türk Şaman Metinleri, Efsaneler ve Memoratlar*, Piramit, Ankara
- Bayat, F. (2006). *Ana Hatlarıyla Türk Şamanlığı*, Ötüken Neşriyat, İstanbul
- Bayat, F. (2006). *Türk Mitolojisinde Dağ Kültürü*. *Folklor/Edebiyat* 12 (46), 47-60
- Cılbak, N. (2005). *Mersin tahtacıları. Halk Bilimi Araştırmaları. Ürün yayınları*, Ankara
- Efe, R. (2005). *Edremit Körfezi ve yakın çevresinde sürdürülebilir arazi kullanımı, doğal ortam- insan etkileşimi*, 1. Balıkesir Sempozyumu (Sosyal, Kültürel ve Ekonomik) 17-20 Kasım 2005, Balıkesir.
- Ergun, P. (2004). *Türk Kültüründe Ağaç kültü. Atatürk Kültür Merkezi Başkanlığı Yayınları*. Ankara.
- Evliya Çelebi (1982). *Seyahatname I-X cilt*, Üçdal Neşriyat, İstanbul.
- Gümüštepe (Kitapçıoğlu), F. (1995). *Edremit’te Turizm*, *Türk Coğrafya Dergisi*, Sayı 30, İstanbul.
- İnan, A. (1986). *Tarihte ve bugün Şamanizm materyaller ve araştırmalar*. Atatürk Kültür, Dil ve Tarih Yüksek Kurumu yayınları. Ankara.
- İnan, A. (2000). *Tarihte ve Bugün Şamanizm*, *Türk Tarih Kurumu*, Ankara

- Kalay, E. (1997). Sarıkız Efsanesi ve Edremit körfezi. Milli Folklor, 34.
- Korkmaz, E. (2003). Eski Türk İnançları ve Şamanizm Terimleri Sözlüğü, Anahtar Kitaplar Yayınevi, İstanbul
- Mutaf, A. (1995). Salnâmelerde Karesi Sancağı (1847-1922), Balıkesir.
- Özdemir, Z. (2000). Adramyttion'dan Efeler Toprağı Edremit'e, Cilt I, Ankara.
- Özdemir, Z. (2002). Adramyttion'dan Efeler Toprağı Edremit'e Cilt II, Ankara.
- Özdemir, B.; Yağcı, Z.G. (2007). Osmanlıdan Cumhuriyete Balıkesir, Yeditepe Yayınevi No:50, İstanbul.
- Roux, J.P. (1994). Türklerin ve Moğolların eski dini. Çev.Aykut Kazancıgil. İşaret Yayınları. Ankara.
- Selçuk, A. (2005). Tahtacılar. Yeditepe Yayınevi, pp. 379. ISBN: 9756480130;
- Selçuk, A. (2008). Ağaçeri Türkmenleri- Tahtacılar; IQ Kültür Sanat Yayıncılık.
- Seyirci, M. (2007). Batı Akdeniz bölgesi tahtacıları yaşamlarından kesitler. Derin yayınevi. İstanbul
- Yılmaz, A. (1948). Tahtacılar'da Gelenekler. Halkevleri Yayınları. Ankara.
- Yörükkan, Y. Z. (2005). Müslümanlıktan Evvel Türk Dinleri. Şamanizm. Ankara, 2005
- Yörükkan, Y. Z. (2006). Anadolu'da Aleviler ve Tahtacılar. Ötügen Neşriyat, İstanbul.