

## CULTURAL HERITAGE AND TOURISM IN ŞALIURFA MIEVIAL CAVE STONE QUARRIES “BAZDA CAVES”

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**OLCAY ÇETİNER ÖZDEMİR<sup>1</sup>, FATMA TUNÇAY<sup>2</sup>, ŞENTÜRK ÖZDEMİR<sup>3</sup>**

**ABSTRACT.** Cultural and natural heritage is a consociate heritage of all humanity. As the country and region where the cultural heritage is located gains importance, more tourists come and thus economic gain for the region increases with tourism. Located in the UNESCO World Heritage Tentative List, the Bazda Caves with their appearance and mysterious history, that are located within the borders of the historical Harran district of Şanlıurfa, should be introduced to the world by bringing them together with cultural tourism. In the study, “Bazda Caves” will be examined and the relationship with tourism as a Cultural Heritage value will be conveyed.

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<sup>1</sup> Corresponding author. Assoc.Prof.PhD. Department of Architecture, İstanbul Istanbul Health and Technology University, İstanbul,Türkiye. cetiner.ozdemir@istun.edu.tr; cetinerozdemir@yahoo.com

<sup>2</sup> Interior Design Master Student Hasan Kalyoncu University, Gaziantep, Türkiye; ftmatncy63@gmail.com

<sup>3</sup> Quality Control Manager, İzmir,Türkiye; senturk.ozdemir@yahoo.com.tr

## **Introduction**

Since the cultural and natural heritage is very important, UNESCO has created the “World Heritage Convention” for the heritage to be protected internationally as long as humanity exists and to transfer them to the future generations. (UNESCO WHC, 2021)

“The purpose of the World Heritage Convention is to define the cultural and natural heritage, to develop social awareness and cooperation that will protect this heritage, to preserve the universally valued cultural and natural areas at an international level by preparing an internationally selected list and pass on to future generations with all their qualities.” (Böke, 2020)

Cultural and natural heritage is a consociate heritage of all humanity. Therefore, cultural heritage values have international value. It is important to carry out conservation studies as long as humanity exists and to transfer it to future generations at an international level. As the country and region where the cultural heritage is located gains importance, more tourists come and thus economic gain for the region increases with tourism.

Harran and its surroundings region is an important center for cultural heritage tourism. The tourism road of Tektok Plateau of Harran consists of Bazda Caves, Han El-Ba’rür Caravanserai, Suayip City and Soğmatar Ancient City in an order. Located in the UNESCO World Heritage Tentative List, the Bazda Caves with their appearance and mysterious history, that are located within the borders of the historical Harran district of Şanlıurfa, should be introduced to the world by bringing them together with cultural tourism. In the study, “Bazda Caves” will be examined and the relationship with tourism as a Cultural Heritage value will be conveyed.

## **Literature Review**

### **Caves and Cave Tourism**

Caves are brought to tourism in the form of visual cave enterprises in our country as well as in the world. It is also seen that the visual cave enterprises in western countries are operated as theme parks, whereas in our country, they mostly serve with picnic areas, local products and restaurants. Based on the values inside the cave, visual cave operators make walking paths and lighting inside the cave based and make the cave ready for visitors.

The business operators set up remote sensing systems to observe the slightest change in the cave; and they apply a reservation system so that the visits can take place in a certain order. (Yozcu, 2020).

Caves, which are formed by natural means or human influence, can serve their visitors under different types of tourism such as geotourism, health tourism, faith tourism with the help of cultural, geological, ecological, atmospheric etc. values they contain. In recent years, travelers are shifting from mass tourism to alternative tourism types. With the changes in the touristic demand, the diversification of tourism and its spread over twelve months, cave tourism is also developing. Each cave exhibits its own unique structure when its geological formations are taken into account, and it is formed over thousands of years as a process. The geological formations in the caves constitute visual appeal; the air quality formed by the cave climate constitute health appeal; anthropological remains constitute cultural attractions. Errors should not be made in practice in opening and operating the caves for tourism.

## **Harran**

Located roughly 20 kilometers from Turkey’s present-day border with Syria in Upper-Mesopotamia, Harran lies at the heart of where mankind first settled down. Archaeological remains — such as those at the nearby site of Göbekli Tepe— demonstrate the earliest signs of civilization as we know it (Figure 1).



**Figure 1.** From Göbeklitepe  
Source: Authors’ photo

Here, the cultivation of crops and the domestication of animals first came into practice, and the first connections between religion and architecture were formed. The city was once populated by the *Sabians*, a community of star worshippers, and became a vital trading post in the ancient world. Its geographical location provides an outstanding view of the constellation Orion. The world's first observatory and university were constructed here, of which the great archway still stands today. Much later, in the 9th century AD, Harran was the leading city for the production of celestial globes in the Arab world. (2).



**Figure 2.** Harran Map  
Source: 14.04.2022 Google Map



**Figure 3.** Baza Map  
Source: 14.04.2022 Google Map

It is reported that Harran was a place where the moon was worshiped before people started farming and it is the oldest observatory to study the stars. It is predicted that Harran's "sin" belief and opening to faith tourism will quickly bring Baza to the agenda of the world public opinion. (Figure 2, Figure 3) The historical importance of Harran, the city of Sin, has been revealed in many studies. In the belief of the Sumerians and Assyrians, the symbol of the moon god Sin is the crescent. This symbol was later used by Turkish tribes and later used in Muslim places of worship. Sin cult has made Harran an important center. Most of the agreements were made in this center, and the first "university" education institution in history was established here (Figure 4) (Çalapkulu, 2021).



**Figure 4.** First “university” education institution

Source: (4) <http://www.harran.gov.tr/ilk-universite>

### **Bazda**

It is estimated that Bazda Caves were built in the Roman period. From the Arabic inscriptions written on the rocks it is indicated that the stone quarry was operated by Abdurrahman al-Hakkari, Muhammet İbn-i Bakır and Muhammed el-Uzzar during the 13th century and also indicated that historical places such as the Harran Walls, Shuayip Ancient City and Han el-Barur Caravanserai in the vicinity were built with stones taken from the cave. (Figure 5) Many squares, tunnels and galleries were formed in the caves as a result of stone removal for hundreds of years, while some caves are seen to have three floors (Önal, 2019).



**Figure 5.** Bazda Cave

Source: Tunçay, 2021



**Figure 6.** Bazda Cave Photo and Sketch

Source: Photo (Doğan, 2021) Sketch (Tunçay 2021)

Hundreds of meters of galleries and halls were opened by carving the hard rocks. In the Middle Ages, stone blocks were cut and many historical buildings were built with stones taken from here. The biggest one is located in the village on the right at the 16th km of the road. Wide squares were created by putting buttresses 10-15 meters in height in this huge cave, which was carved in two floors from place to place. With many long galleries and tunnels, exits were provided towards various directions of the mountain (Figure 6).

## **Research Methodology**

The main purpose of the study is to understand the place of Bazda Caves in tourism which are in our cultural heritage, to examine the sustainability of its existence, to examine ideas that will increase its role in tourism, and to contribute to its promotion to the world.

Within the scope of the study, having conducted sketches, photo shoots and architectural determinations in the field, the aim is to create sustainable-oriented ideas in terms of the tourism value of the cultural heritage owned by obtaining information about the area by literature studies and meeting with the people living in the region. (Özdemir Çetiner et al. 2021)

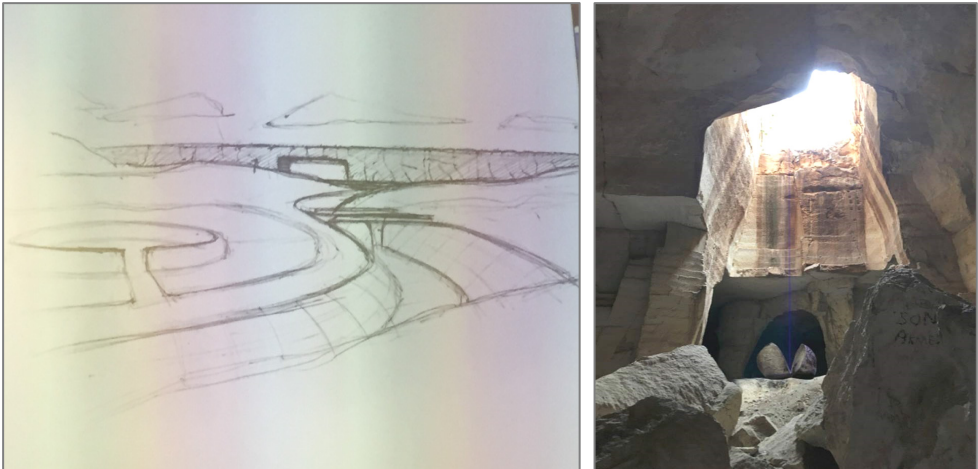
## **Discussions**

By the restoration realisation of Bazda Caves, the stone quarries, whose activities dating back centuries, have ended, will keep the cultural heritage alive with tourism. By restoration works of cleaning the floor, ceiling and wall parts of the cave and strengthening the columns of the cave, it should be ensured to be transferred to the future generations. While restoration works of the cultural heritage, accommodation, eating-drinking and activities (workshops, courses and seminars where local objects can be produced, art events, sports events, etc.) should be held.

Located on the route of Harran-Şuaybşehri-Soğmatar, which is an important tourism route in Southeastern Anatolia, Bazda Caves, together with the Han el-Ba'rür caravanserai in its immediate vicinity, belonging to the Ayyubids period and was restored by the Ministry of Culture and Tourism after the reinforcements and cleaning excavations, should be

considered as an accommodation and resting center for tourists. (Kürkçüoğlu, 2021). Virtual reality experience software to be used with VR glasses will be developed for the underground enterprises of Bazda, and the whole world humanity; will be invited to the Southeast Anatolian geography, which is the starting point of faith, agriculture and mining. In this way, time travel will be experienced in a virtual reality environment in order to meet Mesopotamian stonemasons in the Bazda underground operation (Çalapkulu, 2021).

The Illuminated Bazda Caves Art Center Project will be transformed into an Art Center with the restoration of the quarries (under the guidance of world-renowned photographer Michael Comte). The caves, which are composed of stone quarries, have remained idle in many aspects such as history, aesthetics, and atmosphere. The restoration works will first start with the cleaning of the floor and other parts of the cave, then the cave columns will be strengthened and so this historical structure will be transferred to the future generations. While preserving the historical remains of this thousands of years old historical region, artistic activities will be carried out in the region at the same time. Laser lights will expand to both the ancient site and modern art such as the city walls and olive plantation area with the help of solar panels (Figure 7).



**Figure 7.** Laser light installation reflected from cave ceiling and cut stone  
Source: Sketch and Photo (Comte 2021)

In the project, that will be realized without harming the natural texture of the region by preserving the cultural heritage, the region will turn into a multi-alternative area with restaurants, museums, hotels and seed bank. For the development of the local economy at a great scale, working in cooperation with local craftsmen and production workshops in the region will be supported.

Illuminated Bazda Caves Art Center Project will add a new dimension to cultural tourism activities in the world and will be reflected as a very special meeting point of history and contemporary life. The planned project; with its contemporary, active and modern cultural destination identity, it will be one of the favorites of Şanlıurfa. It is aimed to be a pioneering tourism project in terms of education and cultural development, as well as making a great economic contribution to the region. Studies on the planning of branded tourism campuses and the rapid and stable organization of tourism cities are continuing (1).

## **Conclusions**

Bazda, which held many important features, is an important heritage site as a document quality that has survived to the present day after its destruction as a result of the invasion. There is a need for a certain process due to regulations in the detailing and implementation of the restoration works to be carried out for the events to be held in the venues.

Preserving the cultural heritage by bringing it in use of tourism, transferring it to future generations, providing economic benefits will make a significant contribution to the local people.

The tourism route allows visitors to visit the region comfortably. It should be considered as an accommodation and resting center for tourists, together with its cultural heritage values, near the biggest, most mysterious and worth visiting historical stone quarries in Anatolia.



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