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Research paper

Route Study On The Cultural Heritage Of Bilecik City Center

Serdar Kasap[a,*], *Parisa Güneş*[b]

[a]Bilecik Seyh Edebali University, Faculty of Fine Arts and Design, Department of Interior Architecture and Environmental Design, Bilecik, Türkiye.
[b]Bilecik Seyh Edebali University, Faculty of Fine Arts and Design, Department of Interior Architecture and Environmental Design, Bilecik, Türkiye.
[*]**Corresponding author:** serdar.kasap@bilecik.edu.tr

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ABSTRACT

Cultural routes aim to preserve and promote cultural heritage within the framework of sustainability. The "Council of Europe Cultural Routes Program," of which Türkiye is a signatory, seeks to ensure the preservation and promotion of cultural heritage. Türkiye has significant potential for developing cultural routes within the scope of this program. Creating a route for cultural heritage can be seen as a form of "tracing." This study focuses on identifying the locations of cultural heritage assets in the city center of Bilecik, establishing a route among these sites, and providing informative content. The significance of forming a cultural route centered in Bilecik extends back to the foundation of the Ottoman Empire in this region. The planned route connecting the Clock Tower, Governor's Mansion, Sheikh Edebali Tomb, Bilecik Museum, Municipality Building, Orhan Gazi Mosque, and the historic soup kitchen aims to enhance the visibility of these heritage sites, aligning with the overall purpose of promoting cultural heritage.

Keywords: *Bilecik, Cultural Heritage, Cultural Route, Architectural Works.*

I. INTRODUCTION

Culture is the most significant factor that has emerged with the existence of social life, enabling the transmission of this life from generation to generation. Every society has a unique social life and way of living shaped by its own country and geography. Habits and traditions developed in areas such as belief, morality, law, architecture, and art within the surrounding environment constitute the essential elements of that geography's culture. The intergenerational transmission of lifestyles over the years gives rise to cultures that serve as a legacy for future generations. As long as human beings exist, they instinctively cannot suppress their curiosity, leading them to explore and investigate the heritage left to them. Thus, they undertake the role of guardians of these inheritances, which have been passed down from the past to the present. In this context, among the many cultural values and heritages, architectural structures stand out as some of the most tangible and symbolic elements.

Cultural heritage is a treasure that conveys the shared past of a society's members, strengthening their feelings of solidarity and unity. The continuity of experiences and traditions accumulated throughout people's lives ensures that the future is built upon a solid foundation. Cultural heritage is a foundational element of tourism and a key factor in increasing competitiveness. It can be seen as a connection between the past and the future. To protect this connection, awareness must be raised. There are many ways to raise awareness, but the significance of route creation lies in its dual role as both a planning tool and a

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means of leaving a cultural map of the geography for future generations. No cultural value, no cultural structure is merely a name. For this reason, every structure mentioned in all the created routes must be carefully examined. In the Bilecik-centered route study, the aim is to bring visibility to the hidden treasures deemed worthy of being included in a route.

II. CULTURAL HERITAGE AND CULTURAL ROUTES: CONCEPTUAL FRAMEWORK

A. The Concept Of Cultural Route

Culture is the most critical consciousness that defines social distinctions. Humans are born with a sense of belonging, and this feeling sometimes unites people within a shared environment, while at other times it separates individuals and their surroundings. The abstract and concrete effects created in this context are referred to as cultural values. Preserving existing values is one of society's most ethical duties. Creating a cultural route is one method to protect and promote these values. This study can be described as a guiding document. Developing a cultural route serves to preserve cultural heritage and ensure its transmission to future generations without any harm (Fırat & Erbaş, 2023). Cultural route studies have evolved in response to changing needs over time, considering new tourism trends and people's efforts to evaluate their time differently. These studies should not only consider touristic paths but also aim to introduce the works along the route and make them reusable.

Within the scope of this study, it is essential to research the cultural heritage in the designated area, establish a route around these significant heritage sites, and increase their visibility.

A.1. Meaning And Definition Of Cultural Routes

In our country, which is rich in cultural heritage, cities possess their unique characteristics and textures. Unveiling cultural heritage for tourism purposes and structuring it through travel routes will increase awareness, foster the development of cities, and promote their cultural heritage. Addressing cultural heritage through city interaction will contribute to transmitting the city's distinctive local features and lifestyle to future generations, encouraging the growth of cultural activities.

In the past, transportation routes used for military, religious, commercial, and social purposes are now utilized for tourism activities. With the development of cultural tourism, these routes have become essential for promoting cultural heritage. Nowadays, international organizations define the concept of "Cultural Routes" (Halaç & Benzer, 2019). Every society has its own unique cultures and habits, distinguishing it from others and shaping its traditions. Over time, these traditions shape each society's identity. In cultural routes, cultural traditions gain visibility alongside cultural heritage, introducing these cultures and traditions to people from different backgrounds. They can be learned through both research and travel. The experiential learning aspect also benefits the tourism industry. This feature is crucial in bringing visibility to small living areas, such as Bilecik. It fosters interaction among those who investigate and between the local people and visitors.

The concept of the cultural route first emerged in the early 1960s with the "European Routes" initiative, which aimed to increase awareness of historical sites and educate European citizens about their past. By the late 1980s, various approaches had led to the creation of numerous cultural routes based on different themes (e.g., natural, religious, military, commercial) that highlighted European values. In 1987, with the launch of the "European Cultural Routes Program," the concept of cultural route began to develop, with the Council of Europe recognizing the Santiago de Compostela Route and Architecture Without Borders as concrete examples of cultural routes.

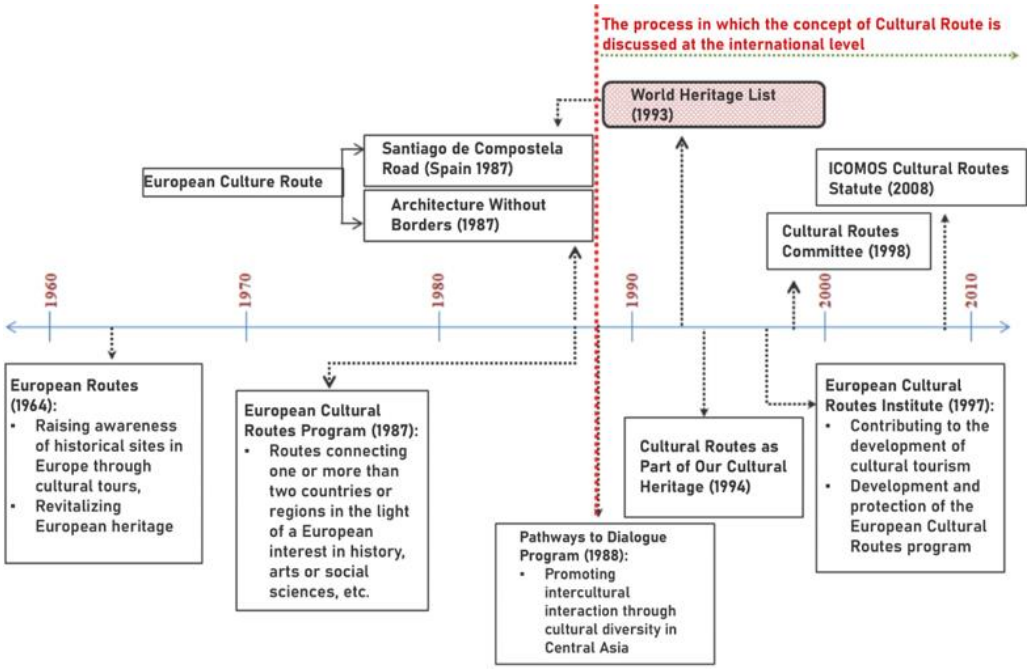
In 2003, during a meeting in Madrid with representatives from UNESCO and ICOMOS, previous abstract definitions of cultural routes were clarified, and it was agreed that cultural routes possess distinctive features within the realm of cultural heritage. The decisions made during this meeting were shaped by the principles developed by CIIC in 1994. The concept of heritage routes, mentioned in earlier reports, was replaced by cultural routes, and it was decided that these routes would be included in the World Heritage List. The final definition of the cultural route concept made during the meeting was as follows: “Routes that can be physically identified and distinguished by their unique historical dynamics and functions, reflecting not only the reciprocal movements of people within or between countries and regions during a certain period but also the multidimensional and continuous movement and mutual interaction of goods, ideas, knowledge, and values; providing opportunities for cultures to interact across

time and space; finding meaning within their tangible and intangible heritage; and existing as roadways, seaways, or combinations thereof" (Toraman, 2022).

Interest in cultural heritage has increased with the "Council of Europe's Cultural Routes Program." Additionally, preserving cultural heritage through cultural routes has emerged as a more effective and contemporary practice. Through these routes, paths that transcend borders have reached a universal value consciousness, and the diversity of European culture has become concrete. The concept, which was first discussed in the early 1960s, has evolved and continues to develop.

The following section presents a chronological overview of the institutions, relevant institutes, committees established, declarations, reports, and regulations regarding cultural routes. As seen in the chronological study, the intensive efforts of international institutions and organizations have firmly established the concept in the literature, leading to a new approach to cultural heritage preservation, as mentioned earlier (Table 1).

Table 1. History of cultural routes (Eriçok, 2019).



A.2. Classification Of Cultural Route Types

Cultural routes represent significant pathways at the intersection of history, culture, and geography. They protect, interpret, and share the heritage passed down from one generation to the next.

In the ICOMOS 2008 declaration, cultural routes were defined as follows:

"The innovation presented by the concept of 'Cultural Routes' reveals the heritage content of human mobility and interaction, developed through the connections facilitating human mobility and interaction that serve a tangible and original purpose. A Cultural Route can be created specifically for this purpose, or it may partially utilize existing paths originally designed for completely different purposes. However, beyond the feature of communication or transportation, the existence and importance of a cultural route can be explained by its use for a specific purpose over a long historical period, reflecting the mutual influences between different cultural groups through the creation of heritage values and cultural assets with distinctive dynamics" (ICOMOS, 2008).

Cultural routes can be classified under four main headings:

A.2.1. By Purpose or Function

Routes are determined according to social, economic, political, or cultural purposes (Köseoğlu, 2023).

A.2.2. Regional Basis

Routes focusing on a specific geographical region. Examples include the Lycian Way, Saint Paul Trail, and Sufi Trail in Turkey (www.cultureroutesinturkey.com).

A.2.3. Historical Basis

Routes based on historical events or periods. Examples include the Evliya Çelebi Way and the Troy Cultural Route (Tuğalan, 2020).

A.2.4. By Cultural Characteristics

Routes focusing on a specific cultural theme or heritage.

Examples include routes centered on ancient cities, old civilizations, or traditional handicrafts. Designed routes can be built around a single value in the region or incorporate many other features. Different thematic routes can also be created based on the objectives of the proposed route. Historical paths, virtual trail tracking, and thematic routes restructured according to the values they possess are all examples. Thematic routes are designed to protect cultural heritage and natural values, promote cultural heritage, raise awareness, commemorate and honor essential figures, and develop sustainable tourism (alternative, artistic, and nature-based). These routes can also focus on fostering the development of the local population (Kuruç, 2018).

B. *The Concept of Cultural Heritage*

Cultural heritage refers to any phenomena, conditions, and cultures that have survived from the past to the present, located in a particular geographic area, and require protection for future generations. These heritages vary in every society, contributing to a sense of belonging and uniqueness. Each distinct structure and heritage left by a specific community reflects a particular period in human history. Every structure preserved and protected today reflects the era in which it was constructed. As people witness new cultural structures and heritage over time, they can compare the era in which they live with the heritage they examine. The ability to observe and transmit the development and changes in human history is crucial for humanity's progress.

UNESCO categorizes cultural heritage under three main headings in its 1972 World Cultural Heritage Convention. The first category is monuments, the second is groups of buildings (monument ensembles), and the third is sites. According to ICOMOS, cultural heritage includes structures, collections, cultural practices, sites, landscapes, and biodiversity.

Globally, there are 1,154 heritage sites. Among these, 218 are natural, 897 are cultural, and 39 fall into natural and cultural heritage categories. In Turkey, there are 19 heritage sites, 17 of which are artistic and two that combine natural and cultural elements (Fırat & Erbaş, 2023). The primary topics covered by the category of monuments include sculptures, inscriptions, paintings, architectural works, caves, and epitaphs. The second category, groups of monuments, encompasses landscapes or architectural structures of artistic, scientific, or historical significance. The final category, sites, covers phenomena and places created by human intervention.

Over time, the concept of cultural heritage has evolved. Cultural heritage is no longer limited to physical artifacts but now includes individuals' cultural practices. Each piece of knowledge, observation, and method emerging from cultural heritage or its values can serve as a guide for future generations. Humanity learns lessons from past problems, preventing similar issues from arising. This is why cultural heritage serves as a bridge between the past and the future.

Since cultural heritage provides insights and inferences about the period in which it was created, it must be meticulously preserved and protected. Cultural heritage is also a part of the well-being of the society in which it exists. In 1972, UNESCO signed the "Convention Concerning the Protection of the World Cultural and Natural Heritage." This convention was followed by two subsequent agreements: the "Convention for the Safeguarding of Intangible Cultural Heritage" in 2003 and the "Convention on the Protection and Promotion of the Diversity of Cultural Expressions" in 2005 (Gündoğan, 2021)

B.1. Tangible Cultural Heritage Values

Cultural heritage refers to the physical assets derived from humanity's shared past and regarded as valuable. These include religious, cultural, and social phenomena. Tangible heritage encompasses cultural values created by human hands, which can be perceived through the senses and contain values for future generations. These values include historic structures, cultural objects, architectural buildings, and archaeological sites. These are the legacies left by people who lived before us, forming our society's history and traces of the past. Tangible cultural heritage can be categorized into movable and immovable assets.

B.1.1. Topkapı Palace

Built by Sultan Mehmed the Conqueror, this historic palace is in Istanbul.

Travelogue:

A 10-volume work written by Evliya Çelebi, it reflects the travel culture of the Ottoman Empire.

Tangible cultural heritage is a crucial element that reflects a society's identity and past. Preserving and passing these works on to future generations is a significant responsibility.

B.1.2. Intangible Cultural Heritage Values

Culture is a collection of values that have endured through time, embedded in collective memory, sustaining the lives of communities, and ensuring continuity. The following excerpt from Jan Assmann's Cultural Memory book provides a perspective on the construction of social identity:

"What we call 'social identity' is rooted in the awareness of social belonging, which is reached through participation in common knowledge and memory, achieved by speaking a common language or, more generally, using a common symbolic system. What matters here are not words, sentences, and texts but traditions, dances, patterns, embroidery, garments, tattoos, food, drink, monuments, pictures, geographies, road signs, and borders. Anything that signifies commonality can be a symbol. What is essential is not the instrumentality of language but the function of symbols and the structure of signs. What these symbols represent is what we would like to call 'culture' or, rather, a 'cultural system.' Social identity corresponds to a certain cultural system that shapes and reproduces it. The cultural system is the tool through which shared identity is maintained across generations." (Tangüler, 2019).

B.2. The Protection and Importance Of Cultural Heritage

The preservation of cultural heritage involves taking measures to ensure that both tangible and intangible values, reflecting humanity's shared past and identity, are protected and passed down to future generations. Some of these measures include Documentation and Research, Conservation and Restoration, Education and Awareness, Legal Regulations, Sustainable Tourism, and Community Participation.

Experiencing cultural routes by walking is an effective tool in preserving cultural heritage, allowing people to discover the values of these heritage sites with joy and great satisfaction. By walking along these routes, individuals will experience the contributions of shared heritage values to society and themselves, while learning about the importance of preserving and sustaining these sites for future generations (Kuruç, 2018).

B.3. Cultural Heritage Management

In today's rapidly changing world, managing cultural heritage effectively and strategically to sustain it, ensure its transmission to future generations, and make it visible is crucial. This concept emerged in the 19th and 20th centuries. The protection of every cultural heritage element is vital, especially for those that have been damaged in the face of the evolving world. Thus, the concept of cultural heritage management was born. Specific management plans are being developed to preserve and transfer cultural heritage to future generations. Each plan must be tailored to suit the needs of individual artifacts, ensuring that every piece of heritage has a specific management strategy (Halaç & Benzer, 2019).

Cultural heritage preservation must be considered in conjunction with tourism, urbanization, and climate change. This context examines current approaches and practices in Turkey from a critical perspective. Moreover, sustainable heritage management encompasses a planning approach that prioritizes the preservation, use, and revitalization of cultural assets. This approach supports local development, raises awareness of heritage, and aims for a rational management structure. Changing priorities and conscious cultural heritage management are crucial for leaving a rich legacy for future generations (Deniz, 2022).

Visitor Management: Cultural heritage values are of great importance for tourism. Therefore, visitor management should be established to plan tourism activities effectively. The aim is to ensure that visitors experience and perceive the artifacts they examine at the highest quality. To provide better visitor management, the following measures can be taken: Managing large numbers of people by either concentrating them in specific areas or dispersing them across broader spaces as needed, Identifying and marking circulation areas and critical routes, and making positive adjustments for less popular activities, Improving infrastructure in the vicinity of the artifact to address any obstacles that may impede access, such as barriers or roads, Finding solutions to prevent adverse impacts from excessive visitor flows, ensuring that both visitors and residents find common ground and avoid adverse effects, Organizing events to attract different visitor groups and engaging their interest, Implementing legal restrictions and bans to address and prevent any issues that may arise.

Effective and well-planned visitor management can lead to positive feedback and contribute to tourism. As visitors increase, cultural heritage sites can become more visible and appreciated.

III. MATERIAL AND METHOD

A. Study Area

The study was conducted in the city center of Bilecik, Turkey, a historically rich settlement that played a significant role during the foundation period of the Ottoman Empire. The selected area includes both tangible cultural heritage (historical buildings, mosques, tombs) and intangible elements (local traditions, urban layout, historical narratives). The study area was chosen due to its concentration of early Ottoman structures and its potential for cultural route development.

B. Material

The materials used in this study include:

B.1. Historical and Architectural Documents

Archival records, previous research, floor plans, photographs, and restoration reports of the buildings (e.g., Bilecik Governor's Mansion, Bilecik Museum, Sheikh Edebali Tomb, Orhan Gazi Mosque).

B.2. Field Data

On-site surveys, measurements, photographic documentation, and observational notes collected during visits to the selected cultural heritage sites.

B.3. Literature

Academic articles, books, and reports on cultural heritage management, cultural routes, and urban tourism in Turkey and Europe.

B.4. Digital Sources

Official websites, governmental portals, and online resources providing updated information on historical sites.

C. Method

The study employed a mixed-method approach combining qualitative and quantitative techniques:

C.1. Field Survey and Observation

Each cultural heritage site was visited individually. Observations focused on spatial relationships, accessibility, current conditions, and visitor experience. Photographs were taken to document architectural features, urban context, and cultural elements.

C.2. Route Planning

The cultural heritage route was designed by connecting key historical sites based on proximity, historical significance, and accessibility. Geographic observations and field notes guided the route sequence.

C.3. Documentation and Analysis

Collected data were systematically recorded, analyzed, and compared with archival and literature sources to ensure accuracy. Floor plans, photographs, and descriptive notes were integrated into the analysis.

C.4. Synthesis and Proposal

Based on findings, a proposed cultural route connecting major heritage sites in Bilecik city center was developed. Considerations included visitor experience, cultural visibility, and sustainable tourism principles.

IV. CULTURAL HERITAGE ROUTE OF BILECIK CITY CENTER

A long Eskişehir-Bilecik road runs through the city center of Bilecik (marked with a yellow line). The mentioned cultural heritage sites are located near the outskirts of Bilecik. These cultural heritage values are near one another and are easily accessible. The fact that the city center of Bilecik is a small settlement provided an advantage while planning the route. Visitors who wish to follow this suggested cultural route will also benefit from this convenience. As part of the proposed cultural route project, efforts have been made to increase the visibility of cultural heritage sites.

To create a route, starting from the Governor's Mansion and continuing to the Sheikh Edebali Tomb, each site was visited, researched, and photographed individually. Observations were made by paying attention to the distance between each point on the route. Impressions were gained from the perspective of a visitor using the proposed route plan (Figure 1).

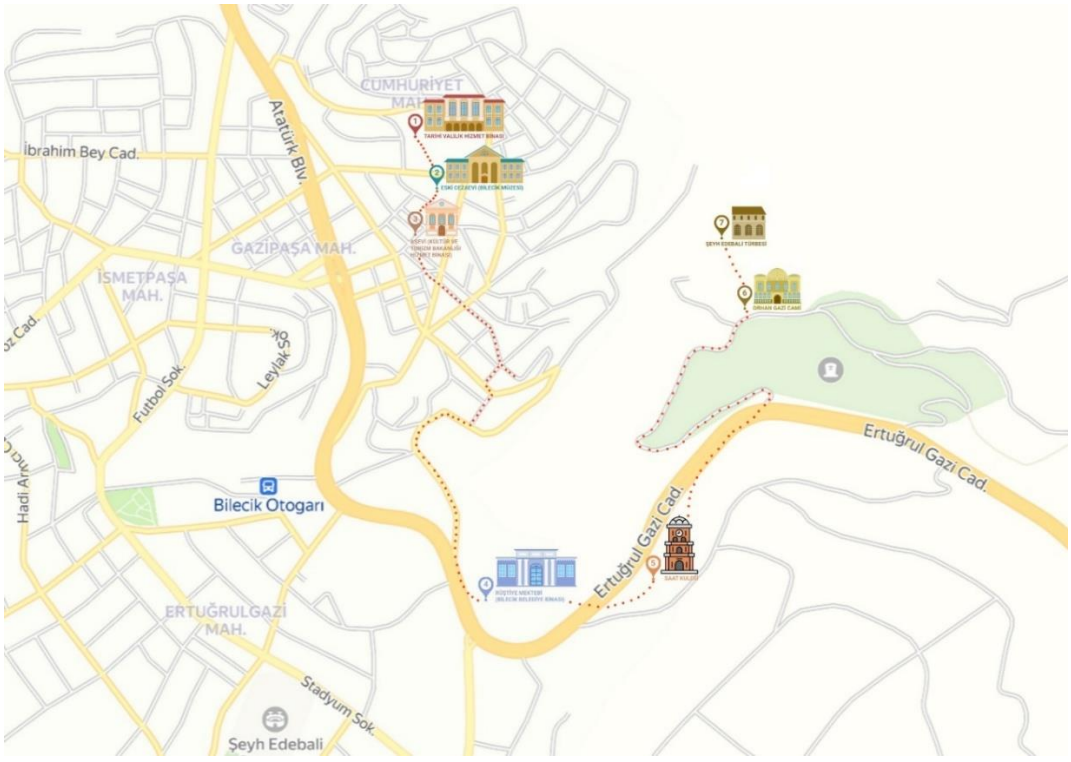


Figure 1. Proposed cultural route in Bilecik province study.



Photo 1. Architectural heritage in Bilecik province culture route.

A. *Bilecik City Center Cultural Heritage List*

A.1. Historical Governor's Office Building

Believed to have been built by Sultan Abdulhamid II in 1905, this building was destroyed by the Greek army during the Turkish War of Independence, along with many other structures. It still bears the Ottoman coat of arms and is a work of the 1st National Architecture Movement. Currently serving as the Bilecik Governor's Office, the building has a rectangular east-west plan. It features a total of 16 rooms: 6 in the basement and eight parallel rooms on the ground floor (Figure 2). When divided in half, the building is entirely symmetrical. The right and left facades each have doors leading to the garden, and these doors are parallel to each other. Access to the upper floor is via a three-armed wooden staircase. The first floor mirrors the ground floor plan, featuring a central hub and doors that lead to rooms extending to the left and right. Many buildings from this period share a similar plan to the Bilecik Governor's Office (Çolak & Erarslan, 2021).

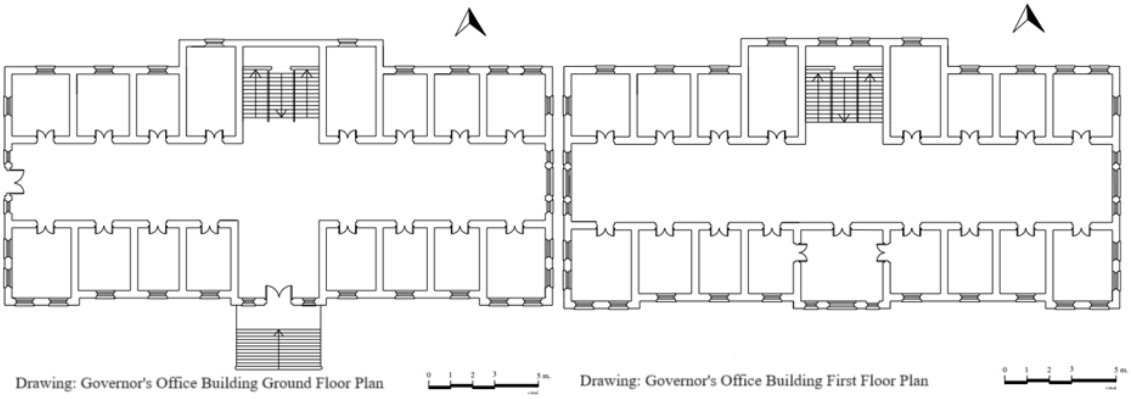


Figure 2. Bilecik historical governorship service building floor plans (Ünal, 2008).

The walls of the building are plastered externally. The entrance doors are rectangular with a slightly arched top and are double-leaf and made of wood. The doors are 1.10 meters wide and 3.00 meters high, with their edges accentuated by cartouches to highlight the entrances. Similar to the entrance doors, the wooden windows are rectangular with a slightly arched top and have cartouches marking their edges. A rectangular band of cornices marks the separation between floors and encircles the entire building, maintaining a sense of unity. Finally, the building, which underwent restoration between 2017 and 2021, remains a significant cultural heritage site (Photo 2).

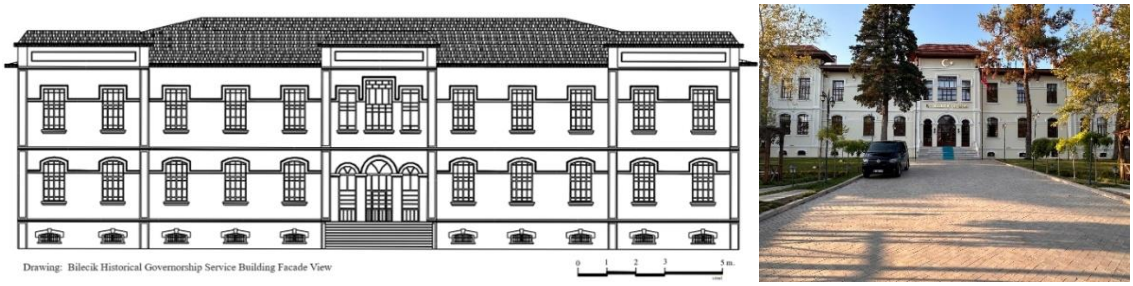


Photo 2. Bilecik historical governorship service building facade view.

A.2. Former Prison (Bilecik Museum) Building

Located in the center of Bilecik, across from the Governor's Service Building, this structure was initially constructed as a two-story military building in 1794 and later converted into a prison. During the Greek occupation of 1921-1922, the building was completely burned down and reduced to ruins. Subsequently, a two-story courthouse was built on the foundations of the original structure, with the lower floor used as a prison.

Due to the relocation of the prison and courthouse, the building was transferred to the Ministry of Culture and Tourism in 1996, where it was converted into a museum. It was opened as the Bilecik Museum in 2007 as a branch of the Söğüt Museum Directorate and officially began operating as the Bilecik Museum Directorate on April 7, 2010. The museum houses archaeological artifacts from the Neolithic, Chalcolithic, Bronze Age, Hellenistic, Roman, and Byzantine periods, as well as ethnographic displays related to the establishment of the Ottoman Empire, depictions of nomadic and domestic life, weaponry, ceramics, and glassware (source: Kültür ve Turizm Bakanlığı).

The lower floor comprises a rectangular corridor and five rooms. The northern rooms are used as the archaeology storage, while the southern sections are designated for the director, experts, and the accountant. The corridor and rooms feature tile flooring and wooden paneling on the ceilings. The corridor's east and west walls have round-arched, rectangular double-leaf iron doors. Four windows with round arches, 0.56 meters wide and 2.00 meters high, equipped with iron railings, illuminate the corridor. At the same time, rooms are lit by rectangular wooden windows measuring 0.84 meters in width and 1.50 meters in height. Room entries are through rectangular single-leaf wooden doors. Access to the upper floor is via a wooden staircase located in the northeast of the corridor (Figure 3).

The upper floor comprises a total of twelve rooms: the Nomadic Culture Room, Ottoman Room, Bridal Room, Harem, Selamlik (gathering area), kitchen, rooms displaying carpets, textiles, weapons, and glassware, and two restrooms. These spaces are arranged around a rectangular corridor. Both the flooring and the ceilings of the corridor and rooms on the upper floor are made of wood. The building is considered one of the finest examples of its period, showcasing significant characteristics of civilian architecture in both facade design and layout.

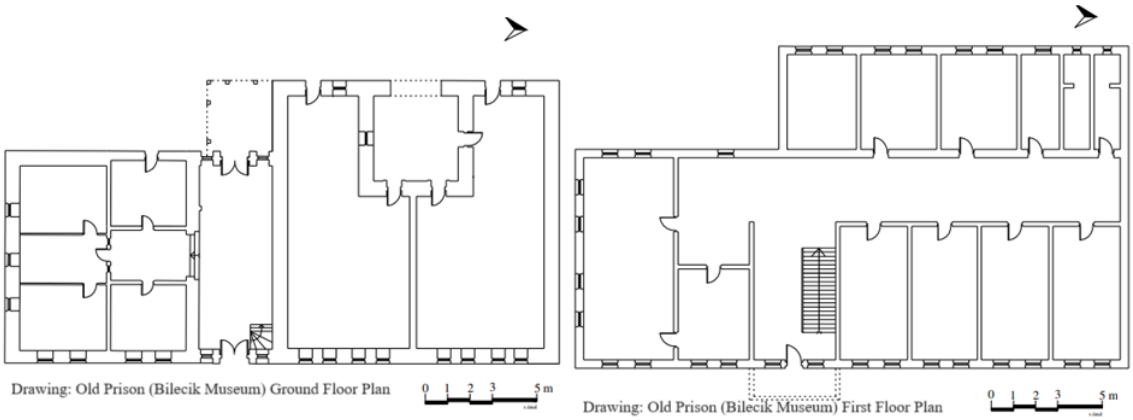


Figure 3. Old prison (Bilecik Museum) floor plans (Ünal, 2008).

The building, constructed with a rectangular plan using masonry and enclosed by high walls, features a stuccoed façade with a roof covered in a hipped design and a 1.00-meter eaves. The numerous window

solutions suggest that the building is a later-period structure. The windows on both the lower and upper floors are rectangular and constructed from wood. The window frames on the upper floor are highlighted with decorative profiles, and the separation between the floors is accentuated with wooden moldings, similar to those in the Cultural Directorate building. On the upper floor, a square wooden balcony is supported by two columns. The balcony railing is adorned with geometric patterns, and above the balcony, a wooden canopy is situated. Two-tiered wooden towers, rising in stages, are located above the canopy. The lower tier of the towers features profiled columns at the corners, with a rectangular panel positioned between them (Photo 3).

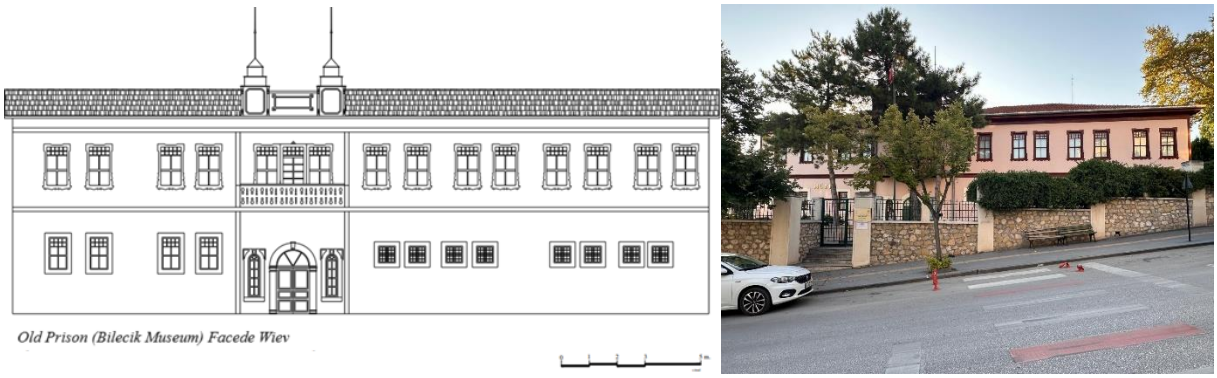


Photo 3. Soup kitchen (culture and tourism directorate service building) facade view.

A.3. Soup Kitchen (Cultural and Tourism Directorate Service Building)

This building, constructed after the 18th century, has been used for various purposes. It served as a military office, a soup kitchen, and staff housing. In 2002, it was restored and opened as the Provincial Directorate of Culture building. The structure, built in the Ottoman architectural style, reflects the character of historical buildings found in Bilecik province and its districts. Many mansions in Bilecik share these same architectural features (www.kulturportali.gov.tr).

The small-scale structure exhibits an asymmetrical plan. It features a rectangular layout, oriented north-south, and was constructed as a two-story building with a ground floor and an upper floor. The masonry building is covered with a hipped roof tiled with clay tiles. Entry to the ground floor is through a double-winged wooden door located in the center of the east facade, while entry to the upper floor is through a single-winged wooden door shifted to the east on the north facade. The building's eaves project approximately 1.00 meters outward and are decorated underneath with latticework and diamond-shaped medallions featuring additional diamond patterns in the center. While the structure's plan is asymmetrical, the facade arrangement is designed symmetrically.

The entrance facade features fourteen rectangular windows, six on the lower level and eight on the upper level, along with a rectangular, double-winged wooden door. The lower windows have iron railings. The arches of the windows on the ground floor are emphasized with a prominent curve and highlighted with protruding moldings. Wooden moldings mark the division between the lower and upper floors. Wooden bands are applied at the corners of the upper floor and where the wall meets the roof, adding dynamism to the facade.

The ground floor has eight rooms, illuminated by rectangular window openings. Entry to the rooms is through single-winged wooden doors. Both the floors and ceilings of the rooms and corridors are covered with wood. Access to the upper floor is via a wooden staircase. While the upper floor follows a similar plan to the ground floor, some differences are noticeable. The number of rooms on the upper floor exceeds that on the ground floor. Additionally, the walls on the upper floor are thinner than those on the lower floor, resulting in larger spaces. There are thirteen windows on the ground floor and eighteen windows on the upper floor. The upper floor comprises eleven rectangular rooms, accessible via double and single-winged wooden doors. The floors and ceilings are also covered with wood, and rectangular windows provide illumination to the rooms. The former soup kitchen is well-lit by numerous windows, particularly those in the corner rooms, which have windows on both facades (Figure 4).

The building is quite simple in design, with little decorative embellishment. However, a ceiling decoration that is not original but added later can be found above the stairwell, featuring a star motif

within a medallion, created by latticework nailed from below. Today, the building serves as the Bilecik Provincial Directorate of Culture (Photo 4). Although it has not retained its original form, it still possesses a unique charm and character (Ünal, 2008).

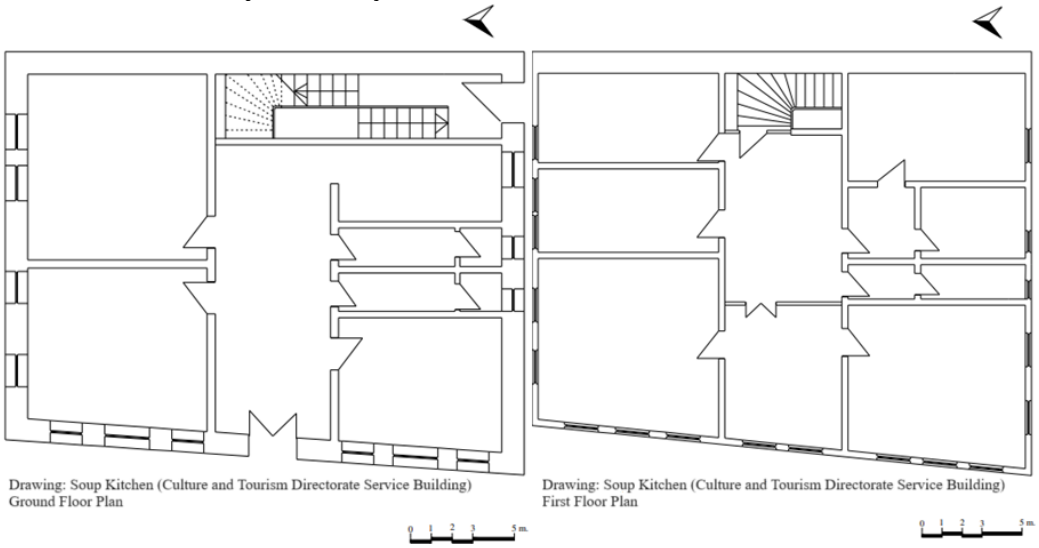


Figure 4. Soup kitchen (culture and tourism directorate service building) floor plans (Ünal, 2008).

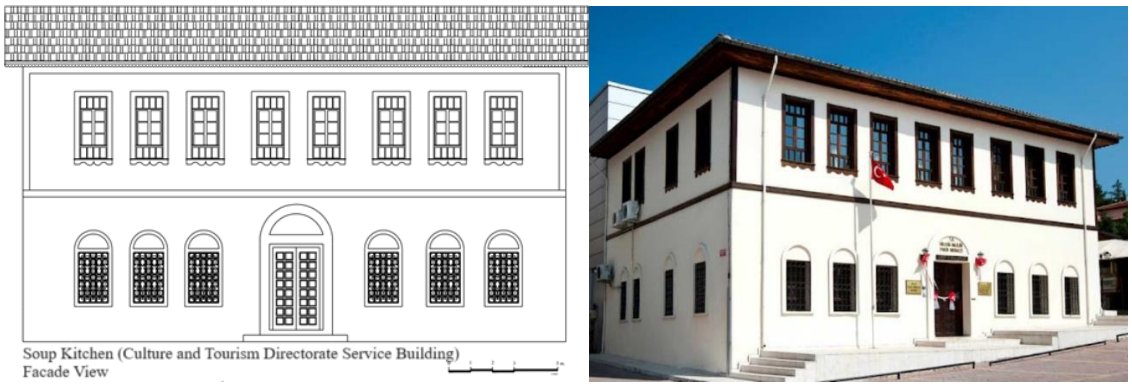


Photo 4. Soup kitchen (culture and tourism directorate service building) facade view.

A.4. Rüştiye Mektebi (Bilecik Municipality Building)

During the reign of Sultan Mahmud II, a plan was devised to establish Rüştiye schools, bridging the gap between primary education and higher education. Initially, it was proposed to name these schools "second-grade" institutions. However, Sultan Mahmud II found the name "Rüştiye" more appropriate, as the graduates of these schools would be of age to prove their maturity upon completing their education. Consequently, the 1869 Maarif-i Umumiye Regulation established the educational procedures for Rüştiye schools, which were to be based in towns with more than 500 households. The study period lasted four years, and those who completed primary school and obtained a certificate were admitted to these schools (Demiryürek, 2011).

Most buildings in Bilecik, including this one, were constructed during the reign of Sultan Abdulhamid II. Built in 1905, the building served as a Rüştiye School until the early years of the Republic. It later became Bilecik Middle School, continuing in this capacity until 1957, then as Bilecik Teacher's School until 1972, and finally as Bilecik Vocational School until 1985. It remained an Anadolu High School until 2001. In 2005, the building was restored by the Bilecik Municipality and repurposed as the Bilecik Municipality Service Building. The Rüştiye Mektebi is a fine example of Ottoman-era architecture. Features such as garden landscaping, Ottoman-style interior materials, and wooden stairs are notable (Photo 5). The municipal building also houses the Clock Tower, a significant cultural heritage site of the region, in its garden (Vatan, 2015).

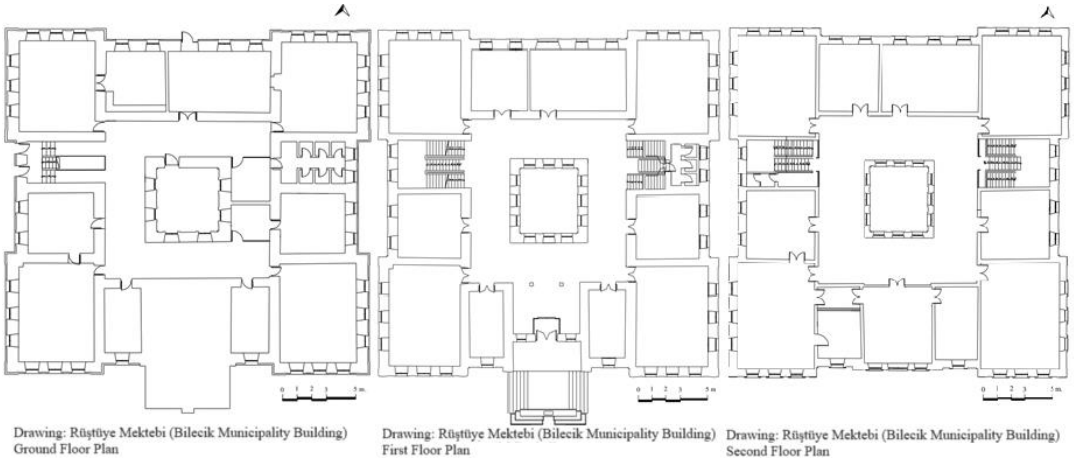


Figure 5. Rüştüye Mektebi (Bilecik Municipality Building) floor plans (Ünal,2008).



Photo 5. Drawing: Rüştüye Mektebi (Bilecik Municipality Building) facade view.

A.5. Bilecik Clock Tower

The tradition of building clock towers in the Ottoman Empire began to take shape in the late 16th century. This tradition gained popularity in Ottoman cities throughout the 18th and 19th centuries, spreading from west to east. One of the main reasons for the proliferation of clock towers deep into Anatolia was Sultan Abdulhamid II's edict, issued on the 25th anniversary of his ascension to the throne (1901), instructing governors to construct clock towers (www.kulturportali.gov.tr).

According to the inscription at the entrance, the Bilecik Clock Tower was built in 1907 by Musa Kazım Bey, the governor of Ertuğrul. It was restored in 1987 by Bilecik Governor Adil Yazar. The tower, a symbol of Bilecik, is built in the shape of a rectangular prism that widens from top to bottom (Vatan, 2015). The lower two stories are constructed of cut stone at the corners, with rubble stone walls, while the upper floors are made of wood. At the bottom, there is a round-arched door with a round window above it. The second floor features a balcony, and above it is a wooden block with a square clock face on each of its four sides. The tower is topped with a pyramidal roof, and there is no difference between its appearance today and its depiction in the 1907 Hüdavendigar salname (Vatan, 2017).

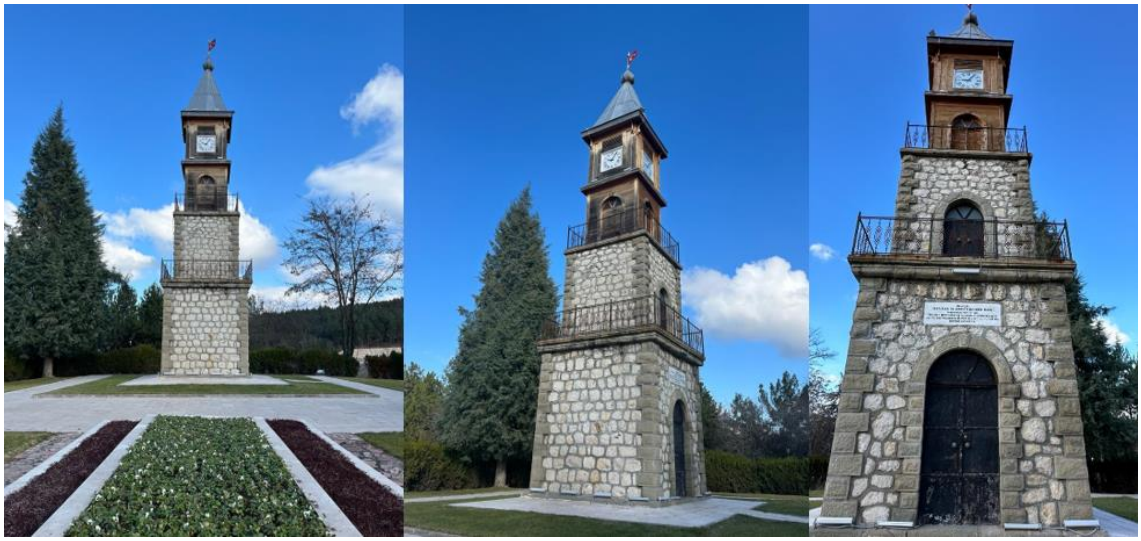


Photo 6. Bilecik clock tower facade view.

The clock tower, situated in the garden of the Rüştiye School (now the municipal service building), boasts a well-designed landscape. Clock towers in Turkey are categorized into two groups: those with balconies and those without. The significance of the Bilecik Clock Tower comes from its balconies. Among the clock towers with balconies, they can be further classified, and this tower belongs to the category of multi-balcony clock towers (Photo 6).

In Turkey, there are two notable examples of multi-balcony clock towers. The first is the Edirne Clock Tower, which has three balconies, and the second is the Bilecik Clock Tower, which has two balconies. This unique feature gives it a special place in cultural heritage routes. Visitors to the Rüştiye School can admire this exceptional work in its garden.

A.6. Orhan Gazi Mosque

The Orhan Gazi Mosque is situated on a platform atop rocky terrain that forms the center of the old Bilecik, characterized by steep slopes and valleys. The exact construction date of the mosque is unknown. Various sources provide different dates for its construction. According to a study by the General Directorate of Foundations, the mosque's construction date is listed as 1331–32 CE. However, despite an added plaque at the entrance stating 1392, the absence of an inscription makes the exact date uncertain (Demiryürek, 2011).

Located 50 meters from the Edebali Tomb, one of the most intriguing aspects of the mosque is that its original minaret was built on a separate rock, 30 meters away from the main building (Karacaoğlu, 2023). The mosque was repaired once during the reign of Mahmud II in 1814, and again during the reign of Abdulhamid II in 1889, during which it is likely that twin minarets were added. The mosque has a nearly rectangular plan, measuring 17.35 × 16.50 meters.

Despite its simple plan and exterior appearance, it is considered one of the earliest monumental examples of Ottoman mosque architecture. The interior space has been expanded by carving out recesses 2.40 meters deep in the solid walls, creating an effect reminiscent of iwans (vaulted halls). This approach also reduces the massive appearance of the walls. The transition to the dome is facilitated by simple triangular surfaces, with the dome resting on a narrow octagonal base. The dome has a diameter of 9.50 meters, and is slightly egg-shaped rather than circular due to the irregular alignment of the building, which is narrower along the qibla axis. The internal space measures 15.30 meters along the south-north axis and 14.30 meters along the east-west axis (Figure 6) (Kuyucu, 2017).

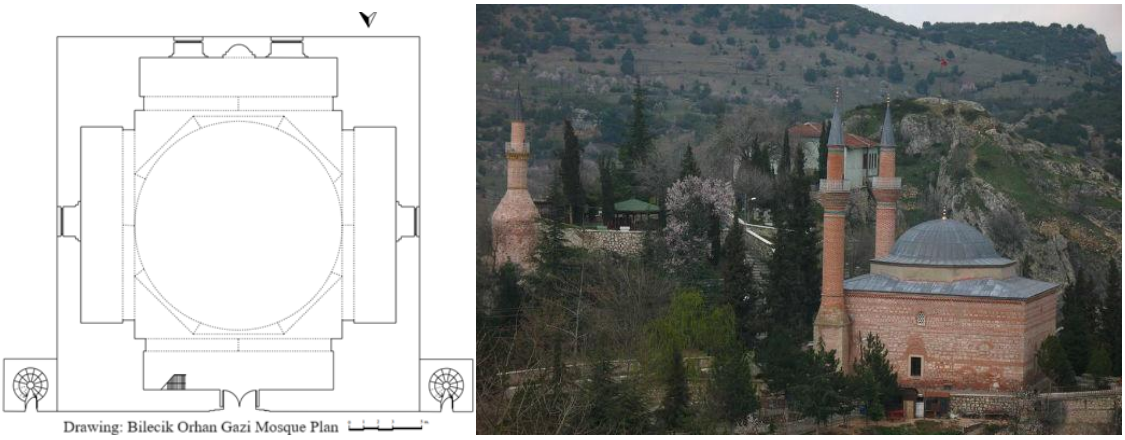


Figure 6. Orhan Gazi Mosque plan and facade view.

The mihrab of the Orhan Gazi Mosque is semicircular in section and simple in design, with a slightly elevated platform in front of it. The minarets on either side of the mosque's front façade are tall, cylindrical, and feature single balconies; however, they do not stylistically align with the mosque's architecture. Photographs from 1882 show that these minarets did not exist at that time. It is likely that these two minarets, along with the wooden portico (last congregation area), were added later.

The original minaret of the mosque, which is now in ruins, stands 30 meters away on a platform formed by a rock to the north of the mosque. This minaret has a thick, polygonal, low body and a balcony with a saw-tooth design of stalactites underneath (Karakaya, 2007).

A.7. Şeyh Edebali Tomb

The tomb of Sheikh Edebali is situated at the historic site of Bilecik, northeast of the twin-minaret Orhan Gazi Mosque, standing 10 meters high and 50 meters away. Orhan Gazi constructed it on a small hill at the ridge of the valley where the old city of Bilecik was founded (Demiryürek, 2011).

Located in the center of Bilecik, the Edebali Tomb was built during the time of Orhan Gazi. The tomb underwent restoration in 1854 during the reign of Abdülmecid. Later, Sultan Abdülhamit II requested a report from Ertuğrul Sanjak's governor, Mustafa Nuri Bey, regarding the tomb. Archival records show that on March 25, 1903, repairs were ordered for the tomb of Sheikh Edebali, including arrangements for visitor rooms and renewal of the shrouds covering the sarcophagi. In 1913, the shrouds of both Edebali and Mal Hatun were renewed. The tomb underwent various restorations from the time of Abdülhamit II until the early years of the Republic. Notably, during the Republican era, Ali Saim Ülgen led comprehensive restorations of both Sheikh Edebali's and Malhun Hatun's tombs (Bilgili, 2022)

Located in the Tabakhane Valley in İstiklal Mahallesi, Bilecik city center, the tomb houses the spiritual founder of the Ottoman Empire, Sheikh Edebali, who was also the father-in-law of Osman Gazi and one of the first Ahi sheikhs in Anatolia. Sheikh Edebali rests in the tomb alongside his relatives and disciples. Upon entering the tomb, there are eleven graves inside—seven large and four small. Besides Sheikh Edebali, Dursun Fakih (whose symbolic grave is located there), Molla Karahisari, Sheikh Muhlis, and other close associates of Edebali are also buried there (Yılmaz, 2017).

Next to the tomb, on the easternmost side of the complex, a small structure built into a rock contains the graves of Edebali's wife and his daughter, Malhun (Bala) Hatun. The complex features a courtyard, and in the northeast corner lies the tomb of Mal Hatun, the mother of Orhan Gazi. The entrance to the courtyard is from the northwest corner. The structure is accessed via a five-step staircase and features wooden-ceiling rooms with wattle-and-daub walls. Inside the building, there is a life space to the north, a storeroom to the east, a women's prayer room to the south, a masjid, and the room housing Sheikh Edebali's sarcophagus (Kunduracı, 2016).

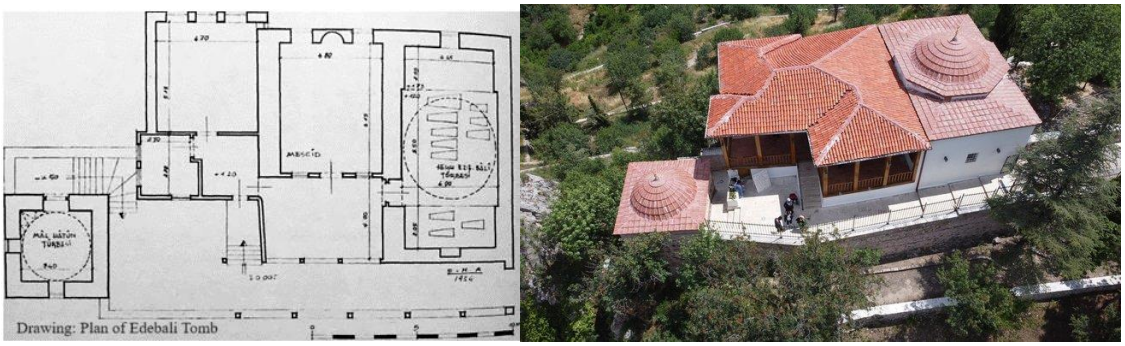


Figure 7. Drawing: plan of Şeyh Edebali Tomb **(**https://x.com/furkanal**).**

Although the tomb is a small structure, it carries the characteristics of Ottoman Tomb Architecture.' It is evident that the tombs with rubble stone walls and the primary lines of the Masjid-Tevhidhane date back to the initial construction period, while the sheikh's chamber, with Baghdadi walls, took its final form in the 19th century. The Sheikh Edebâli Tomb, located at the western end of this complex, has a rectangular plan that extends in the direction of the qibla. The tomb features a door that opens onto the courtyard on the eastern wall and a window on the southern wall. The tomb is covered by a slightly oval and flattened dome situated between two arches, functioning as a vault. The only decorative element visible in the tomb is the plaster top window in a classical style from the 16th or 17th century, crowning the window on the southern wall. The masjid-tevhidhane, located adjacent to the eastern wall of the tomb, is a smaller space with a rectangular plan that approximates a square. A window is placed on either side of the mihrab in the south, and the door is in the north. Above the door leading to the courtyard, the tughra of Sultan Abdulhamid II and the date 1307 (Hijri) are visible. The wooden ceiling, in the Empire style and likely dating to the second quarter of the 19th century, and the plaster top windows, which are later than those in the tomb, are remarkable (Figure 7) (Tanman, 1994).

The sheikh's chamber, located to the east of the masjid-tevhidhane, consists of a small hall (sofa) that opens to the courtyard and two rooms connected to it, one of which is larger. The larger one is likely the sheikh's room, while the smaller one probably served as a service unit, such as a coffee corner. With its Baghdadi walls and wooden ceilings featuring rectangular windows, this section creates an interesting contrast to the masonry units of the zaviye, adding a touch of civil architecture to the building's exterior appearance. The Mal Hatun Tomb, which is situated lower than the other sections, is accessed via stairs from the courtyard. The tomb, containing a single wooden sarcophagus belonging to Mal Hatun, is a small, square-plan, domed structure. Its door opens to a southern porch, and the transition from the walls, with small windows on the north and east sides, to the dome is achieved through a belt of prismatic triangles (www.islamveihsan.com).

V. CONCLUSION AND RECOMMENDATIONS

This study emphasizes the necessity of a multidimensional approach in the planning and implementation processes of new cultural routes. Based on findings obtained from field studies conducted in the city center of Bilecik, recommendations addressing this need have been developed.

In particular, the planning of cultural routes highlights not only the importance of physical infrastructure (such as determining the route path and signage) but also how highly participatory and interdisciplinary processes are managed. In this context, the active involvement of the local community in the route planning process is considered a critical factor.

Approaching this process as a vital component of the region's socio-economic development, the evaluation of differences and similarities revealed through the comparison of various case examples provides original and practical suggestions for the route planning process.

Adopting this multidimensional and participatory approach in the cultural route study in Bilecik city center is expected to enhance the sustainability of the route and increase local community ownership.

The local people are among the most important stakeholders who can make significant contributions to the tourism industry. In the conducted studies, the attitudes of the local population towards tourism, their perceptions of tourism, and their expectations from it have been examined in relation to the

promotion and development of the region. The local people are the stakeholders who best understand the destination and its cultural heritage resources. Therefore, it is crucial to adequately inform and raise awareness among the local people about cultural heritage and its importance. This will ensure that the elements highlighting the cultural tourism appeal in the city center of Bilecik and the challenges to its development are addressed through awareness among local people.

Bilecik's proximity to major cities like Istanbul, Ankara, Bursa, Sakarya, Kocaeli, and Eskişehir is seen as a significant opportunity for promoting the city through a cultural heritage route. Additionally, Bilecik's location in the region where the Ottoman Empire was first established, along with the presence of tombs and graves of famous historical figures, provides a basis for developing cultural tourism and establishing a historical city image. Although the limited number of cultural heritage structures in the city center presents a disadvantage, the Sheikh Edebali Tomb and the damaged mosques from the Greek occupation in the Edebali Valley are attractions on the cultural route. The lack of tourist value assigned to abstract cultural heritage, such as traditional food and beverages, and handicrafts, creates a challenge for cultural tourism from the local people's perspective. Revitalizing abstract cultural elements can effectively contribute to promoting the destination and meeting visitors' expectations.

Evaluating the mechanisms of Edebali Valley's archaeological, cultural, religious, and tourist features together and establishing the necessary facilities for visitors will enhance the enjoyment of local and foreign visitors in the area, allowing them to view the past from a different perspective and feel a sense of belonging as part of the place.

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