



Comparing the Past and Present Traces of Cultural Assets with the Reference of Literature and Architecture Arts to Each Other: Milas Greek Orthodox Church and Its Surroundings in Resat Nuri Güntekin's Novel "Ateş Gecesi" (Night of Fire)

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Abstract

Milas district, located in the province of Muğla, is a rich settlement in terms of historical and cultural monuments. Among the mentioned monuments in the settlement, especially religious monuments exhibit a great diversity and cover a wide range of historical periods. This diversity and historical range are directly related to cultural and religious communities that have lived in the region. However, some religious monuments in the district are disappearing or losing their architectural identities to a great extent due to reasons such as lack of preservation awareness, property issues, and neglect by users. One of the most important religious monuments that has largely lost its architectural identity in the Milas district is the Milas Greek Orthodox Church. This monument holds significant importance in Milas's cultural and religious inventory. The monument and its surroundings are also described in some parts of the plots in terms of some architectural features in Reşat Nuri Güntekin's novel *Ateş Gecesi* (Night of Fire), which was serialized in *Yedigün Magazine* in 1940 and published as a book in 1942. Although it has largely lost its architectural identity today, the Milas Greek Orthodox Church is still frequently mentioned in local legends, city memories, place and location names, and city literature, as can be seen in the pages of the "Ateş Gecesi" novel. The study aims to document and evaluate the changes that the Milas Greek Orthodox Church and its surroundings have undergone from past to present in the light of the "Ateş Gecesi" novel. The study was conducted in three stages, which involved examining the spatial and architectural descriptions mentioned in the *Ateş Gecesi* Novel, focusing on the narratives related to the Milas Greek Orthodox Church and its surroundings, and documenting and evaluating the current conditions of the spatial and architectural descriptions mentioned in the focused narratives. As a result of the study, it was determined that the Milas Rum Orthodox Church and its surroundings had largely lost their architectural identity over approximately a century, from the time the novel was written to the present day. However, within the interior space of the church structure, many elements related to the original architectural identity are still present. In contrast, it is considered that the outer walls, garden arrangement, and boundaries of the structure have lost their original qualities. It was also found that very few examples of traditional residential buildings that constitute the regional context have survived to the present day. In addition to its cultural and religious identity, the Milas Rum Orthodox Church necessitates the development of a comprehensive architectural conservation approach for its historical and archaeological context, monument, and immediate surroundings. Therefore, it is considered crucial to plan the region between the Milas Rum Orthodox Church and Milas Kartal Gazinosu, taking into account the Çaputçu Han section, with a comprehensive conservation approach.

Keywords:

Church, preservation, Milas, Orthodox, Reşat Nuri Güntekin.

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INTRODUCTION

Milas district, located in the province of Muğla, is a rich settlement in terms of historical and cultural monuments. Among the mentioned monuments in the settlement, especially religious monuments exhibit a great diversity and cover a wide range of historical periods. This diversity and historical range are directly related to cultural and religious communities that have lived in the region. The religious monuments in the district are able to sustain their existence to a significant extent thanks to support from public authorities, local governments, and foundations, along with regular maintenance and restoration activities. However, some religious monuments in the district are disappearing or losing their architectural identities to a great extent due to reasons such as a lack of preservation awareness, property issues, and neglect by users (see Figure 1a-c).



Figure 1. Some religious monuments that have disappeared or largely lost their architectural identities; a) Milas Synagogue (currently Milas Halk Eğitim Merkezi); b) Hayıtlı Mosque; c) Greek Orthodox Church (currently Prof. Dr. Aşkıdıl Akarca Sahnesi).

It is known that these monuments, which have disappeared or largely lost their architectural identities, belonged to cultural and religious communities that once existed in the district but are now only the subject of historical research. These religious monuments, which no longer exist today, carry important references to Milas's urban history and urban culture. They can be easily traced through local legends, city memories, place and location names, and city literature. Furthermore, these religious monuments often served as focal points of life for the communities they represented in the past, leading to the concentration of certain historical accumulations in the locations where these monuments were situated. Through these accumulations, it is considered that these religious monuments, although they have disappeared or largely lost their architectural identities, continue to exist in their original locations. Regarding this evaluation, Lektorski (2016: 237) states that a disappeared object always leaves a trace. Eisenman (1984: 7) introduces the concept of "locus" and defines it as a specific structure determined not only by space but also by time, topography, and form, and most importantly, as a place where both old and new events follow each other. Rossi (1984: 50), in addition to this statement, argues that the shapes, formations, and evolutions of land parcels in a city represent a long history of city ownership and closely related classes. Rossi (1984: 59), in reference to the concept of "persistence" originally proposed by Marcel Poète, argues that "persistence" or, in Turkish, "süreklilikler," emerge through monuments, which are the physical signs of the past. Doyduk (2010: 39) also points out that these places, which have lost objects on their

surfaces (lost monuments) and are part of the historical context, are not only valuable as archaeological research areas but also as spaces where rituals, habits, or socio-political events from ancient times have accumulated. In the Milas district, one of the most important religious monuments, which embodies many of the situations indicated by these views and has largely lost its architectural identity, is the Milas Greek Orthodox Church. This monument holds significant importance in Milas's cultural and religious inventory. Additionally, in Reşat Nuri Güntekin's novel "Ateş Gecesi", serialized in the Yedigün Magazine in 1940 and published as a book in 1942 (Poyraz and Alpbek, 1957: 9), certain sections describe some architectural features of the church (Güntekin, 2018). Reşat Nuri Güntekin is believed to have visited Milas in either 1907 or 1931, according to Kunduracıoğlu (2022: 211), as reported by Olcay Akdeniz. Looking at the spatial and architectural descriptions in the novel, it can be understood that the author made detailed observations about the Milas Greek Orthodox Church and its surroundings. Although it has largely lost its architectural identity today, the Milas Greek Orthodox Church is still frequently mentioned in local legends, city memories, place and location names, and city literature, as can be seen in the pages of the "Ateş Gecesi" novel. In addition to its cultural and religious identity, the historical and archaeological fabric of the surrounding area and the monument itself necessitate a comprehensive architectural preservation approach. When creating preservation approaches, special attention is given to the careful examination of spatial and architectural references related to the past of the monuments (Ahunbay, 2009: 60-62, 67, 85-86, 130). Therefore, in the context of the future preservation approaches that may be created for the Milas Greek Orthodox Church and its surroundings, it is thought that the spatial and architectural descriptions in the "Ateş Gecesi" novel can be an important source of data. Thus, this study aims to document and evaluate the changes that the Milas Greek Orthodox Church and its surroundings have undergone from the past to the present, illuminated by the "Ateş Gecesi" novel. The study is believed to provide a comparative contribution, both in textual content and in the compilation of current data, to the architectural preservation approaches that may be developed for the Milas Greek Orthodox Church and its surroundings in the coming years. Additionally, the study is considered to create a new perspective on the relationship between literary texts and architectural preservation approaches.

MATERIAL OF THE STUDY

It is known that the presence of the Greek community in Milas dates back to long before the present day. Based on the information provided by Adıyeke (1994: 104) and historical sources, there was a Greek community in Milas that can be traced back to the 16th century. This community was clustered in the town in the 19th century (Çolak, 2003: 158; Çolak, 2004: 60), and at the beginning of the 20th century, it created its social institutions and organizations on an inclusive scale

(Kılıçoğlu Cihangir, 2017: 327). This community clustered in the town in the 19th century (Çolak, 2003: 158; Çolak, 2004: 60), and in the early 20th century, it established its social institutions and organizations on a comprehensive scale (Kılıçoğlu Cihangir, 2017: 327). The Greek community is considered the second element in Milas (Adıyeke, 2017: 89). In the late 19th-century population data, the Greek population in the district appeared as the second-largest ethnic and religious community (Akarca and Akarca, 1954: 11). For a Greek Orthodox community of this size, the church institution in Milas undoubtedly constituted one of the focal points of life due to daily and weekly worship, wedding ceremonies, and funeral rituals. The focal point hosting the church institution in Milas is the Greek Orthodox Church, located near a school, as mentioned by Adıyeke (1994: 70, 82, 106). Regarding the church, Akarca and Akarca (1954: 94-95) state that the church is dedicated to the Virgin Mary and mention that after a major renovation in 1931, the church building was used as a Military Recruitment Office. Adıyeke (2017: 72, 91) mentions that the church is dated to the early 19th century and that the church building was demolished in 1936 after the Greek community migrated to Greece in the population exchange. Kunduracıoğlu (2022: 214-215), referring to Olcay Akdeniz's research on the post-exchange state of the church, mentions that the monument was first used as a warehouse, then the church walls were cut from the foundation to the third meter in 1936 to build a Military Recruitment Office, and later a new building was constructed with masonry walls. As of today, the monument is located on parcel number 6 of block 141, within the boundaries of Gazipaşa Neighborhood, Milas Center (see Figure 2a, b). The external walls of the monument are largely hidden due to adjacent buildings. However, the northwest and northeast facades of the monument constitute the visible surfaces of the monument in the urban space (see Figure 2c, d). Examinations of the facades reveal that the monument is approximately 10.60 meters in height from the ground level. It can be easily understood that the exterior facade, which combines masonry and reinforced concrete construction systems, does not represent the original facade pattern of the church. It is also difficult to speculate about the original entrance door and entrance structure of the church due to the surrounding structures. In the current situation, entry to the monument is through a triangular-shaped area, which makes a 45-degree angle with Kışla Avenue (see Figure 2b, c). The entrance leads to a space thought to be rectangular and serves as a narthex, which is believed to be the entrance area of the church (see Figure 2e). Today, this section houses the ticket counters of a cultural center (see Figure 2e).



Figure 2. Visual data related to the current condition of the church; a) location of the monument within Milas (Google Earth Pro, 2023); b) position of the monument within the current urban texture and parcel layout (TKGM, 2023a); c) northwest facade of the monument; d) northeast facade of the monument; e) space thought to be the narthex; f) main space thought to be the naos; g) floor and roof of the main space; h) door from the main space to the garden.

From this space, a door in the southeast direction leads to the main space, thought to be a rectangular nave (see Figure 2f). The floor of the space, which is currently used as an event center, shows a sloping feature due to its usage, and this slope is divided into sections by steps (see Figure 2g). The upper covering of the nave is in the form of a pointed vault, supported by distinct arches (see Figure 2g). Two doors also open to the northeast from the nave, and these doors overlook a garden (see Figure 2h). At the southeast end of the main space, there is a section arranged as a stage, which is approximately 1.02 meters higher than the ground level. Before the alteration of the monument, this section is thought to have had an apse. Currently, the monument serves as the Prof. Dr. Aşkıl Akarca Stage under the jurisdiction of the Milas Municipality.

METHODOLOGY OF THE STUDY

The study was conducted in three stages, which involved examining the spatial and architectural descriptions mentioned in the *Ateş Gecesi* Novel, focusing on the narratives related to the Milas Greek Orthodox Church and its surroundings, and documenting and evaluating the current conditions of the spatial and architectural descriptions mentioned in the focused narratives. In the first stage of the process, the 2018 edition of the *Ateş Gecesi* Novel published by İnkılâp Kitabevi was read, and the spatial and architectural descriptions mentioned within the novel were thoroughly examined (Güntekin, 2018). In the second stage, the study concentrated on the narratives related to the Church structure and its surroundings. These focused narratives were transferred to this study in the form of paragraphs that maintain coherence and context to avoid disconnection from the main text as much as possible. In the third stage, the spatial and architectural descriptions mentioned in the focused narratives were photographed and documented in their current conditions. They were then evaluated by comparing them with the past. Throughout these processes, spatial and architectural descriptions were documented as much as possible from the perspectives of location and settlement as mentioned in the texts.

STUDY RESULTS AND DISCUSSION

When the spatial and architectural descriptions in the novel are examined, four distinct groups of descriptions stand out, which provide insights into the settlement structure of the region where the Rum Orthodox community lived in Milas, depict daily life in this settlement, describe the *Ateş Yortusu* or *Ateş Gecesi* (Fire Festival or Fire Night) – a significant celebration for the Rum Orthodox community, and portray the educational and religious structures of the Rum Orthodox community. Looking at the descriptions related to the settlement structure of the region where the Rum Orthodox community lived in Milas, it is conveyed that the settlement was a neighborhood consisting of old houses arranged around a square. This square was mentioned to be muddy in winter and dusty in summer (Güntekin, 2018: 42). It is emphasized that the heart of the neighborhood was the square located in front of the church/monastery (Güntekin, 2018: 21). In modern times, it is considered that the square where *Kışla Caddesi* and *Sabunhane Caddesi* intersect is the most suitable place that corresponds to this description (see Figure 3a, b). Today, there are occasionally historical and traditional residential buildings around this square (see Figure 3c, d). The neighborhood described by the author (Church District) extends towards the back streets of the mentioned square (Güntekin, 2018: 43), and in these mentioned streets, there is hardly any encounter with residential structures displaying historical or traditional features. The descriptions indicate that the doors of houses in the settlement were always open, and elderly women wove in dim courtyards (Güntekin, 2018: 42). It is mentioned that the facades of the houses were ash-

colored, adorned with slender vines and ivy, and that geranium and basil pots were placed in front of the windows (Güntekin, 2018: 42). However, it was challenging to find any present-day locations that match these descriptions. Most of the buildings in the region have construction plaques indicating they were built between 1930 and 1960 (see Figure 3e, f). Additionally, considering design trends and construction technologies, some buildings in the region could be dated between 1960 and 2000. Therefore, it is possible that the residential buildings described in the novel may have disappeared between 1930 and 2000. Nevertheless, it is believed that a 2-story building located at plot no. 142, parcel no. 4 on Kışla Caddesi, with a construction plaque dating back to 1913 (Figure 3g, h), could be one of the described houses in the novel.



Figure 3. Visual data related to the settlement texture of the Milas region where the Greek Orthodox community lived; a) location of the square where Kışla Caddesi and Sabunhane Caddesi intersect in the urban texture (TKGM, 2023a); b) view of the square; c) historic residential structure located on plot no. 131, parcel no. 31; d) traditional residential structure located on plot no. 15, parcel no. 8; e-f) some residential-commercial structures built between 1930-1960; g-h) residential structure with a construction inscription from 1913 located on plot no. 142, parcel no. 4 on Kışla Caddesi.

The slender vines and ivy found around this building's facades also resemble the descriptions in the novel. When examining the descriptions of daily life in the settlement, it is observed that life in the neighborhood was divided into two different periods: daytime and evening. Descriptions of daytime activities indicate that people sat around the square, children played, and young people strolled (Güntekin, 2018: 21). It is mentioned that during the day, only women and the elderly remained in the neighborhood, while men and young girls went to work, and children attended the church school (Güntekin, 2018: 42). Descriptions of the evening section of life in the neighborhood suggest that life inside homes gradually spilled into the streets as evening approached (Güntekin, 2018: 42-43). It is narrated that children rushed out from the church to the square during this process (Güntekin, 2018: 42). As night fell, people came out into the streets in a cheerful crowd through the side streets (Güntekin, 2018: 43). Comparing these descriptions with the present, it can be observed that the square, both during the day and in the evening, is now described as quiet, calm, and even stagnant. Descriptions of the Ateş Yortusu or Ateş Gecesi, a significant celebration for the Rum Orthodox community, provide numerous details about this ritual in the novel. Koçu (1960: 1270) mentions that Ateş Gecesi was a festival celebrated by Rum Orthodox communities until the proclamation of the Republic, which included enthusiastic celebrations in which even Turkish Muslim communities in the ashmaker profession participated. Koçu (1960: 1270-1271) further states that the festival was celebrated by Istanbul Greeks on June 24th with large fires lit in squares and courtyards, with people jumping over these fires for good luck, and it was dedicated to Ayios Yuanis / Saint John. In the novel, it is mentioned that the Kilise Mahallesi (Church Neighborhood) becomes crowded, with the addition of many Muslim and Jewish spectators from other parts of Milas, making it busier than usual during the celebration (Güntekin, 2018: 74). It is described that during the celebration, the elderly of the neighborhood, dressed for the festival, entered the church when the church bell rang, marching in groups (Güntekin, 2018: 74). Especially after dark, it is narrated that brushwood fires were lit in the square and alleyways (Güntekin, 2018: 74). People were said to jump over these fires while having fun (Güntekin, 2018: 74). It is also understood that the fire-jumping ritual took place not only in the square and alleyways but also in the small, tree-filled garden that was entered through the courtyard of the monastery (Güntekin, 2018: 75). Comparing these descriptions of the Ateş Yortusu or Ateş Gecesi with the present, it can be seen that such a ritual is no longer performed in Milas. When the descriptions related to the educational and religious structures of the Rum Orthodox community are examined, it is mentioned that the church or monastery opened onto a square (Güntekin, 2018: 21). This square, as mentioned before, is considered to be the square where Kışla Caddesi and Sabunhane Caddesi intersect. It is emphasized that there was a door on

the wall of the church (Güntekin, 2018: 42), but no trace of this door can be found today. Additionally, it is stated that the church also had a school (Güntekin, 2018: 42). It is mentioned that the church had a large door that was always closed but opened during Ateş Yortusu or Ateş Gecesi celebrations (Güntekin, 2018: 74), and no traces of this door could be found. Considering these descriptions, it is speculated that the church and monastery structures may have been separate buildings.

Regarding the church and monastery structures, it is observed in the novel that the concepts of church and monastery were sometimes used interchangeably and sometimes described as separate structures. This perception is influenced by some variations in the descriptions in the text. The novel also mentions a monastery structure next to the church (Güntekin, 2018: 75). The main character, Kemal, is brought to a small but very wooded garden from the monastery's courtyard by Stematula, and this garden is said to be surrounded by high walls (Güntekin, 2018: 75). Although it is not entirely clear to which structure this monastery corresponds, it is emphasized that the area surrounding the small but heavily treed garden entered from the monastery's courtyard is enclosed by high walls (Güntekin, 2018: 75). Another mention regarding the monastery is when the protagonist Kemal enters the inner courtyard of the monastery, which is intended exclusively for the priests (Güntekin, 2018: 146). In light of these descriptions, it can be considered that the church and monastery structures may be separate buildings.

Regarding the church and monastery structures, the plot developments in the novel have been examined on an urban scale, and concerning urban topography and positional references, it is thought that the monastery structure may be located at Milas Kartal Gazinosu (Military Casino) (see Figure 4). It is considered that the high retaining walls to the north of Milas Kartal Gazinosu, which emerged due to the elevation difference, could be spatially compatible with the situation mentioned in the novel when entering a small but multi-tree garden from the courtyard of the monastery and surrounding this garden with high walls (Figure 4). In addition, the distance between the church structure and Milas Kartal Gazinosu being less than 100 meters suggests that the relationship between these two structures in the past may have been much stronger compared to the present (see Figure 4). Furthermore, the church school may have been part of this monastery. Based on these assessments, it is conceivable that Milas Kartal Gazinosu could correspond to the described structures. However, since Milas Kartal Gazinosu is under the use of the Turkish Armed Forces, no detailed examination could be conducted regarding this building. Therefore, it is currently difficult to present these assessments as definitive conclusions.



Figure 4. Milas Greek Orthodox Church and its surroundings within the context of the event sequences in the novel (TKGM, 2023a, b, c).

CONCLUSION

The comparative analysis of cultural assets, their past conditions, and contexts with their current situations and contexts through literary texts can provide valuable data in the process of developing architectural conservation approaches. In the scope of this study, the spatial and architectural descriptions related to the Milas Rum Orthodox Church and its surroundings in Reşat Nuri Güntekin's novel "Ateş Gecesi" were examined, and the assessments made were discussed in the context of the event sequences and present-day settlement conditions. As a result of the study, it was determined that the Milas Rum Orthodox Church and its surroundings had largely lost their architectural identity over approximately a century, from the time the novel was written to the present day. However, within the interior space of the church structure, many elements related to the original architectural identity are still present. In contrast, it is considered that the outer walls, garden arrangement, and boundaries of the structure have lost their original qualities. It was also found that very few examples of traditional residential buildings that constitute the regional context have survived to the present day. In addition to its cultural and religious identity, the Milas Rum Orthodox Church necessitates the development of a comprehensive architectural conservation approach for its historical and archaeological context, monument, and immediate surroundings. Therefore, it is considered crucial to plan the region between the Milas Rum Orthodox Church and Milas Kartal Gazinosu, taking into account the Çaputçu Han section, with a comprehensive conservation approach. This way, it is evaluated that at least the remaining cultural heritage elements related to the Milas Rum Orthodox Church and its surroundings, which are frequently mentioned in settlement legends, city memories, place and location names, and urban literature, can be passed on to future generations in their current conditions, at least without further destruction.

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Resume

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