

**The Mountain-Based Culture of the Taurus Yörüks: Cultural and Economic
Approaches**

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ÖZET

Bir kültür olarak göçer hayvancılık, Türk boylarının Anadolu'ya göç etmeye başladığı yıllardan günümüze kadar, özellikle Akdeniz bölgesinin dağlık alanlarında çeşitli Yörük ve Türkmen aşiretleri tarafından sürdürülen hem ekonomik hem de kültürel boyutu olan bir etkinlik olagelmıştır. Dağlara bağımlı olarak gelişen bu ekonomik etkinlik zamanla kendine özgü kültürü de geliştirmiştir. Yörükler esas olarak Toros dağları boyunca Batı Anadolu'dan Doğu Akdeniz Bölgesine kadar olan bölgede yaşarlar. Dağlara bağımlı olarak gelişen bu ekonomik etkinlik zamanla kendine özgü kültürü de geliştirmiştir. Bu kültürün bileşenleri dağlarda yapılan hayvancılıktan büyük oranda etkilenmiştir. Ancak hayvancılığın göçerler nedeniyle azalması bu kültürün de zamanla yok olmaya yüz tutmasına neden olmuş ve iletişim araçlarının yayılmasıyla egemen kültürün etkisi altına girmiştir. Bu kültür geleneksel hayvancılıktan beslenen Yörük kültürüdür. Akdeniz Bölgesinde yapılan hayvancılık açısından göçerlik bir zorunluluktur. İklim ve topografya bunu zorunlu kılmaktadır. Bunun temel nedeni havaların ısınmasıyla alçak rakımlarda otların kuruması ancak yüksek rakımlarda yeşil ot bulunmasıdır. Yörüklere yönelik kırsal kalkınmayı gerçekleştirmeye yönelik genel strateji üretim sistemlerinin devamlılığını, kültürel ve doğal altyapıyı bozmadan yönetmek olmalıdır. Ancak bileşenlerden bazılarını veya tümünü dışlayıp sadece Yörük kültürünü temsil eden hayvancılık sisteminin dikkate alınması da yanlıştır. Bu çalışmada Yörük kültürünün dağlarla ilişkisi ve günümüzdeki durumu incelenmiştir.

Anahtar Sözcükler: Akdeniz Bölgesi, Yörükler, Kültür, Türkiye

ABSTRACT

Nomadic stock-breeding has always been an activity with both economic and cultural aspects for the Yörük and Turkmen tribes living in the mountainous areas of the Mediterranean region of Anatolia from the initial immigration of Turkish clans to date. Yörüks who spread to many mountainous areas in Turkey have their own original culture. They originally lived along the Taurus Mountains, from the west part of Anatolia to the east Mediterranean region. The traditional highland stock-breeding is not popular anymore for the Yörüks. Migration is a must for stock-breeding in the Mediterranean region. Both the climate and topography require migration because of the fact that as the summer advances, grass dries at lower altitudes and remain green only at higher altitudes. As general strategy for development of rural areas, the production systems should be continued and the cultural and natural substructures should not be upset. On the other hand, it would be wrong to exclude some or all of the components and to focus on the traditional stock-breeding system of the Yörüks. For development of this traditional culture, some economic and social approach is recommended in this paper.

Keywords: Mediterranean Region, Yörüks, Culture, Türkiye

INTRODUCTION

Nomadic stock-breeding has always been an activity with both economic and cultural aspects for the Yörük and Turkmen tribes living in the mountainous areas of the Mediterranean region

of Anatolia from the initial immigration of Turkish clans to date (Geray and Özden, 2003). The areas in question are mountainous and contain widely different altitudes. Most of the areas are karstic; their highlands are poor in terms of pasture. There are only a few pastures containing grass enough to reap. Despite this scarcity of grass, the summer and winter rhythm solves the problem of scarcity in such a manner to allow good stock-breeding. Since short-stem grass and steep and broken grounds prevail, the dominant stock-breeding form is sheep and goats. Especially hairy goats are bred thanks to their endurance under the harsh local conditions. Sheep can be bred only at the lowland. This mountain-based economic activity had caused the nomads to develop their own culture in time. Components of the said culture had been heavily influenced by the stock-breeding carried out in the said mountains. In time stock-breeding activities decreased due to migrations, so that this culture is now on the verge of extinction and is under the influence of the dominant culture through ever expanding mass communication means. It is called the traditional livestock-based Yörük culture. This study examines the relations between the Yörük culture and the mountains, and its present state.

Yörük Culture and Nomadic Life

Culture or civilization is that complex whole which includes knowledge, beliefs, art, morals, law, custom and any other capabilities and habits acquired by man as a member of society (O'Hagan, 1999). Furthermore corporate culture consists of values, norms, feelings, hopes and aspirations held by members of organizations (Gorman, 1989). Yörüks who spread to many mountainous areas in Turkey have their own original culture. They originally lived along the Taurus Mountains, from the west part of Anatolia to the east Mediterranean region. Their traditional migration route is from the lowlands extending along the coast to the highlands of the mountains. They used to ride on camels, now they migrate less and use modern vehicles. The biggest group of the still migrating Yörüks is called Sarikecililer

(Sakatoğlu, 1999), (Figure 1). Most of the Yörüks had migrated to Thrace and the Balkans when the Ottoman Empire began to expand its territory and settled there. In the present only a few groups live as nomads and they gradually settle.

Past and present of the culture

The traditional highland stock-breeding is not popular anymore for the Yörüks. They prefer to breed their livestock at pastures near or inside the forests around the settlement areas and employ the sedentary stock breeding method. Some of the Yörüks winter at the lowlands and use the highlands of the Taurus Mountains. Groups of the said Yörüks used to migrate with tens of tents, now they are reduced to a few tents. For example, the Yörüks who winter at the village of Gebiz near the borough Serik in Antalya migrate to Kuzukulagi highland near the borough of Aksu in Isparta, altitude 1400 m. (Özden, 2000). They begin to migrate to the said highland in late May, and return from there in mid-October. They used to ride on camels until 1975, thereafter they began to use motor vehicles as good roads were built and motor vehicles spread. They carry their stuff, young animals and sick animals on motor vehicles, while the main herd is walked to the highland under supervision by the male Yörüks.

Essential components of the Culture

Migration is a must for stock-breeding in the Mediterranean region. Both the climate and topography require migration because of the fact that as the summer advances, grass dries at lower altitudes and remain green only at higher altitudes. Therefore, migration bears a special importance for the Yörüks. The ones who winter at the lowland begin to prepare for migration in the spring. They prepare the necessary materials and brand the ears of their animals to prevent them from mixing with other herds. Each herd owner uses his own brand

to distinguish between the livestock. They pack their belongings inside their tents, say goodbye to their relatives and friends, and get up early in the morning. They drink the traditional soup of *tarhana* (dried curds and flour) and load the packages on their camels. Everybody waits the chieftain to get the migration underway. All families follow the chieftain; this is a traditional custom of respect for him. Some tribes assign the most beautiful girl to lead the migration; some other tribes assign a well-dressed and armed man to ride a horse and lead the migration. Camels are ornamented with various objects including charms and bells. The packages are covered with the best Yörük rugs (Figure 2).

The number of camels and packages indicate how rich or poor is that family. It takes approximately ten days to migrate from the lowland to the highland. Stopover points nearby water sources are used. The migrants stop over at the same points every year. Purpose of the stopovers is to let the animals rest and milk them. Depending on the weather conditions, tents may be pitched at the said points. If the tents are not needed, the migrants wear a cloth made of coarse felt, called “kepenek”. After arriving at the highland, the migrants accommodate at housing facilities called “yurt”, which are the same every year.

Since the Yörüks are nomads, they live in tents hand- woven of black hair. They consider the tents sacred and believe that the tents are protected by the Prophet. Their daily life naturally follows the nomadic tradition. The Yörüks are decent, honest, dependable, hospitable and likeable people. They show great respect to elderly people and strangers. Their domestic problems are generally solved by a committee of elders (Güvenç, 1997).

As a tradition they produce a kind of cheese called “tulum” in a skin, and it is very famous in the region. The said cheese is generally sold in October. They also produce a milky food

called “dolaz” cooked by boiling a mixture of milk and flour. After cooking it turns brown, is stored in bags made of skin, and is fried in cooking oil; the Yörüks consume it in winter. In August the rate of fat in their animals’ milk increases, so that it is used for producing yogurt. Thereafter the milk is put in caskets made of skin, called “tuluk”, to produce butter. Ayran, a mixture of yogurt and water, is boiled to produce a kind of fat-free cheese called “kesh” (skimmed milk cheese).

The Yörüks live far from settlement areas, so that they have to solve their medical problems through traditional treatment methods. There are numerous methods; most of them are based on plants collected from natural environment. One of the most interesting treatment methods is a home-made cautery, especially for flu. They collect juniper cones, pound them to a powder and apply the powder to patient, or extract resin from pine trees, mix it with flour, apply the material on the patient’s abdomen, and make the patient lick the material. Serious wounds inflicted due to a fall, etc. are treated by wrapping the patient with a large animal skin. The Yörüks truly believe in the said treatment methods.

Animals are the sole property of the Yörüks, so that they are given the same special care as humans (Figure 3). Some Yörüks have been observed to cry when one of their animals died. The animals are ensured to be comfortable, well fed and well cared. The herds are counted every morning before checking whether they are well fed and whether some of the animals are sick. Every family competes with the others to own the best herd.

Carpet-making and carpet are almost synonymous with the highland Turks all over the world, due to the fact that the basic raw material of carpets is wool. Carpets are woven for various purposes: praying rugs, daily household or tent carpets, tapestries, etc. Almost all Yörüks used

to know how to woven a carpet, but the craft in question is about to disappear in the last 15-20 years. This cultural craft should be revived to ensure the Yörüks to enjoy considerable income and the craft to survive.

Mountain is an indispensable theme in the poetry and songs of the Yörüks. The most important sources of inspiration seen in the poetry of Karacaoglan and Dadaloglu, the most influential poets of the nomadic people, are the mountains and forests. Inspired from nature, these poems and songs survived for centuries (Eröz, 1991).

Outlook and Recommendation

Sustainable development of rural areas is often presented as being divided into the economy, environment and society. The three sectors are often presented as three interconnected rings (Giddings et al, 2002; Holland, 1999; Sefa Dei, 2002). As general strategy for development of rural areas, the production systems should be continued and the cultural and natural substructures should not be upset. On the other hand, it would be wrong to exclude some or all of the components and to focus on the traditional stock-breeding system of the Yörüks. As other systems are developed and their productivities increase, pressures on the natural resources will decrease. The more the productivities of agricultural fields, forests and pastures increase, the more the stock-breeding fields expand. Development of business sectors not depending on soil will reduce the agricultural pressures on pastures, so that stock-breeding will get easier and the Yörüks will be able to continue their traditional craft of nomadic stock-breeding. In fact, such sectors as handicrafts and soft tourism not depending on the soil should be developed together with traditional stock-breeding. In this context the present policy of

forestation should be reviewed to select plant and tree genes suitable for silvopastoral purposes and having such supplementary functions as prevention of erosion and beekeeping.

For this strategy, the following approach is recommended: basics of the existing production system should be protected; in other words the open field grazing tradition should be preserved to support husbandry, and the forest resources should be developed as a point of interest for cultural, ecological, food and tourism purposes. Another purpose is to continue the centuries old traditional culture, so that the existing culture tourism potential will be activated. The significance of culture tourism for the Mediterranean region came at the same time as the growing crisis of classical bathing holidays, with the richness of cultural heritage also making up a significant part of the Mediterranean region's attractiveness for the classical bathing tourist (Pechlaner, 2000). To achieve these targets, new businesses suitable for the region should be started to help the local poverty level to improve.

Problematic aspects of the present system should be corrected in order to continue the nomadic stock-breeding culture and to increase the local people's income level. The said corrections should be designed to ensure development on the one hand and to protect the traditional culture on the other hand. Furthermore, measures should be taken to reduce or prevent the environmental pollution, rehabilitate the degraded forests, stop agricultural works in marginal fields by increasing the productivity of agricultural fields, ensure marginal agricultural fields to be allocated to pastures or forests, increase the income levels and expand the market in a short time by continuing the silvopastoral system without damaging the other production systems, develop the handicrafts in cultural and economic terms, attract tourists by ensuring the existence and continuity of such regions, and increase soft tourism facilities.

Another method applicable for increasing the husbandry incomes is measures to be taken for the processing of traditional products. Goat milk and cheese are valuable products, but the present marketing methods cause their prices to remain at low levels. On the other hand, imported goat milk cheeses are sold at high prices at supermarkets located in big cities. Certain changes can be made to the marketing policies to save high prices paid for such imports and to ensure the relevant value-added not to leave the region. To do this, a milk collection and processing facility is needed. It can be built by a professional multi-partner cooperative or as a State-owned enterprise. Different kinds of cheese to be produced and packaged at such facility can be sold to tourism facilities located at coastal areas. Furthermore, a well-planned marketing policy can be developed to market them in the worldwide. For competition purposes, however, the production process should be fully natural and no preservatives should be added to the products.

Places where natural regeneration is possible should be rejuvenated as soon as possible, and other places should be planted for stock-breeding purposes. Thus stock-breeding activities will be provided with input on the one hand and the local people will have business opportunities on the other hand. Grazing should be prohibited at forestation and regeneration areas, and they should be classified as areas under protection by teaching the peasants of their values, increasing the peasants' income level, and taking legal and technical measures. After the forests got sufficiently older, thinning chops should be performed to increase the grass productivity and to produce good quality timber. These areas should be divided into zones to prevent the soil from being damaged by the animals grazing there, and a rotation method should be employed for grazing purposes. Furthermore, potential agroforestry areas should be determined as a soil saving method and the income per unit area should be increased.

The nomadic stock-breeding culture, providing extremely valuable cultural and commercial outputs, is a system depending on the mountain ecosystems. The system in question can only be continued by taking economic and social measures ensuring the representatives of the said culture not to migrate to other regions.

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Figure 1- The biggest group of the still migrating Yörüks is called Sarikecililer (Photo by A. Fatih Pinar)

Figure 2- A camel caravan on the road of the upland (Photo by A. Fatih Pinar)

Figure 3- Yörüks give special care to wounded, sick and young animals (Photo by A. Fatih Pinar)