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Ottoman Fountains as Tangible and Intangible Cultural Heritage: The Case of İskilip

Somut ve Somut Olmayan Kültürel Miras Olarak Osmanlı Çeşmeleri: İskilip Örneği

Abstract: This article explores the Ottoman fountains of İskilip, Türkiye, as heritage assets that connect architectural expression with living cultural practices. While these fountains remain visible elements of the urban landscape, their origins reflect long-standing religious, social, and philanthropic traditions associated with the Ottoman waqf system. Beyond their functional role in water distribution, Ottoman fountains historically operated as socially embedded spaces where belief systems, charitable ethics, and everyday communal interaction converged. The study aims to examine how İskilip's fountains integrate tangible architectural features with intangible cultural values shaped by belief systems, commemorative intentions, and community rituals. In the existing literature, Ottoman fountains have largely been examined through their stylistic and structural characteristics. This study addresses this gap by interpreting fountains not only as architectural heritage but also as carriers of intangible cultural meaning, particularly in the context of small Anatolian towns. Methodologically, the research combines archival and literature analysis with field-based architectural documentation and typological study. Ottoman fountains surviving in the historic centre of İskilip were examined through on-site observation, photography, and measurement, and their current conditions were compared with earlier documentation. The findings indicate that, despite the decline of their original hydraulic functions, these fountains continue to function as cultural reference points through inscriptions, spatial memory, and ritualised remembrance, demonstrating the close relationship between tangible architectural heritage and intangible cultural practices.

Keywords: Cultural Heritage, Intangible Cultural Heritage, Islamic Architecture, İskilip, Ottoman Fountains, Philanthropic Architecture, Waqf Tradition.

Öz: Bu makale, Çorum'un İskilip ilçesinde bulunan Osmanlı çeşmelerini mimari özellikleri ile yaşayan kültürel pratikler arasındaki ilişki bağlamında ele almaktadır. Günümüzde kentsel dokunun görünür unsurları olarak varlıklarını sürdüren bu çeşmeler, kökenleri itibarıyla Osmanlı vakıf sistemiyle bağlantılı dini, toplumsal ve hayır temelli gelenekleri yansıtmaktadır. Su temin etme işlevlerinin ötesinde Osmanlı çeşmeleri, inanç sistemlerinin, hayır anlayışının ve gündelik toplumsal etkileşimlerin kesiştiği kamusal mekânlar olarak da önemli bir rol oynamıştır. Çalışma, İskilip'teki çeşmelerin somut mimari özellikleri ile inanç sistemleri, hatıra yaşatma amacı ve toplumsal ritüeller tarafından şekillenen somut olmayan kültürel değerleri birlikte değerlendirmeyi amaçlamaktadır. Mevcut literatürde Osmanlı çeşmeleri çoğunlukla biçimsel ve yapısal özellikleri üzerinden incelenmiştir. Bu çalışma ise çeşmeleri yalnızca mimari miras unsurları olarak değil, aynı zamanda somut olmayan kültürel anlamların taşıyıcıları olarak ele alarak bu alandaki değerlendirmeyi genişletmektedir. Araştırma yöntemi arşiv ve literatür incelemesi ile saha temelli mimari belgeleme ve tipolojik analiz çalışmalarını bir araya getirmektedir. İskilip şehir merkezinde günümüze ulaşan Osmanlı çeşmeleri yerinde incelenmiş; gözlem, fotoğraf ve ölçümlerle belgelenmiş ve mevcut durumları önceki belgeleme çalışmalarıyla karşılaştırılmıştır. Bulgular, özgün su işlevleri büyük ölçüde azalmış olsa da bu çeşmelerin kitabeler, mekânsal bellek ve ritüelleşmiş hatırlama pratikleri aracılığıyla kültürel referans noktaları olmaya devam ettiğini göstermektedir.

Anahtar Kelimeler: Hayır Amaçlı Mimari, İskilip, İslam Mimarisi, Kültürel Miras, Somut Olmayan Kültürel Miras, Osmanlı Çeşmeleri, Vakıf Geleneği.

Introduction

In the Ottoman Empire, water-related architecture was deeply embedded in daily life, shaped by both religious doctrine and cultural customs. Islamic principles, particularly those emphasising cleanliness and charity, promoted the establishment of public fountains (*çeşme*) as acts of communal benevolence.¹ Fountains, regarded as one of the most meritorious forms of charity in Islamic tradition, embody the profound spiritual and cultural significance attributed to both water and benevolence. Within this tradition, Turkish architectural and philanthropic practices further reinforced the moral significance of providing water, reflecting the prophetic saying “*Cleanliness is part of faith*”.² By accepting water as sacred within Islamic belief, its cultural meaning is reinforced through expressions such as “flowing water does not gather impurities,” and “human life begins with a drop of water and ends with a handful of earth,” which collectively associate water with generosity, purity, and humility.³ For this reason, in the cities they established, fountains of varying scales and forms in almost every neighbourhood were constructed, ensuring public access to clean water. The act of endowing a fountain was not only a practical service but also a pious deed, with the sole expectation that those who quenched their thirst would offer a prayer (*Fatiha*) in remembrance of the benefactor.

From the late nineteenth century onward, however, the Ottoman Empire, similar to many other regions, began to experience a growing awareness of the dangers posed by contaminated water and its role in the spread of epidemic diseases.⁴ This shift led to a renewed focus on the construction and maintenance of fountains, which increasingly came to be regarded as essential infrastructures for ensuring public health. While public fountains played a vital role in Ottoman urban life as both infrastructural and spiritual elements, this significance began to diminish in the modern era. Their gradual decommissioning began in the 1950s, as centralised water supply systems became the norm and households were connected to modern pipelines.⁵ From a heritage perspective, these changes draw attention to the dual character of fountains as both physical structures and carriers of everyday practices. Tangible cultural heritage is generally associated with durability and material presence, whereas intangible heritage evolves through the people and social settings that sustain it. Yet, tangible heritage cannot be meaningfully separated from the communities and historical experiences that shape it, nor can intangible heritage be considered independently from the physical environments in which it is performed.⁶ In a similar vein, the Yamato Declaration stresses that the protection of intangible cultural heritage is as important as the conservation of tangible heritage and argues that these two dimensions should be addressed together through an integrated approach.⁷

Contemporary heritage discourse increasingly emphasises the concept of “living heritage”, which understands heritage as a dynamic process sustained through ongoing social practices, community continuity, and everyday cultural interaction rather than as a purely material entity.⁸ Similarly, ICCROM’s living heritage approach emphasises that heritage conservation should consider the ongoing connections between communities and heritage places through participatory

¹ Hacer M. Danacı and Ceren Özata, “Water Architectures in the Ottoman Empire: Examples from Antalya”, *Global Journal of Human-Social Science: D History, Archaeology & Anthropology* 17/2 (2017), 1–7.

² Ammar Ibrahimgil, “The Place and Importance of the Ottoman Period Sabilhanes in the Crete Aqua Architecture”, *Technics Technologies Education Management* 15/2 (2021), 61–79.

³ Nurcan Bahargülü, “Afyonkarahisar İli Bolvadin İlçesi’ndeki Çift Yönlü Çeşmeler”, *Selçuk Üniversitesi Sosyal Bilimler Enstitüsü Dergisi* 55 (2024), 184–215.

⁴ Sharon Mizbani, “The Art of Infrastructure: Hamidiye Fountains in Late Ottoman Istanbul”, *Journal of the Ottoman and Turkish Studies Association* 8/1 (2021), 395–404.

⁵ Dinçkal, “Reluctant Modernization”, 682.; Ibrahimgil, “Ottoman Period Sabilhanes”, 70.

⁶ Ezgi M. Basat, “Somut ve Somut Olmayan Kültürel Mirası Birlikte Koruyabilmek”, *Millî Folklor* 25/100 (2013), 61–71.

⁷ UNESCO, *Yamato Declaration on Integrated Approaches for Safeguarding Tangible and Intangible Cultural Heritage* (Nara: UNESCO, 2004).

⁸ Ioannis Poullos, “Discussing Strategy in Heritage Conservation: Living Heritage Approach as an Example of Strategic Innovation”, *Journal of Cultural Heritage Management and Sustainable Development* 4/1 (2014), 16–34.

and people-oriented conservation practices.⁹ Cultural landscape approaches likewise emphasise the interrelationship between culture and nature, as well as the connections between people, place, tangible heritage, and intangible cultural values.¹⁰ From this perspective, Ottoman fountains in Iskilip can be understood not only as architectural structures but also as components of a broader urban and cultural landscape shaped through everyday use, collective memory, and social interaction.

This study focuses on the fountains located in the city centre of Iskilip, which have largely retained their original architectural features and structural integrity. These fountains are not only part of the town's architectural fabric but also living reminders of its long-standing relationship with water. In the past, fountains were also built beyond the city, especially in the vineyard and orchard areas that once defined Iskilip's rural life.¹¹ However, in order to maintain a focused and coherent scope, the present study limits its analysis to the fountains located within the city centre, leaving those in the surrounding countryside for future exploration.

1. Methodology

This study adopts a mixed-method approach combining field survey, archival research, and typological analysis in order to examine Ottoman fountains in Iskilip as both tangible and intangible cultural heritage elements. The study is guided by the following research questions:

- *How can the Ottoman fountains of Iskilip be interpreted as both tangible and intangible cultural heritage?*
- *In what ways do architectural features, inscriptions, and everyday practices contribute to the cultural meanings associated with these fountains?*

The study is primarily based on systematic fieldwork carried out in the historical centre of Iskilip. During the field research, each surviving fountain was documented through direct observation, photography, and measurement. Architectural features such as plan layout, façade composition, arches, inscriptions, and ornamental elements were recorded on site and later evaluated through typological classification and comparison. To support the field findings, archival sources, local historical publications, and existing academic studies were also consulted. These materials were used to verify construction dates, identify benefactors, and better understand past restoration interventions.

The study evaluates the fountains through both tangible and intangible heritage dimensions. Architectural form, construction techniques, materials, and typological characteristics constitute the tangible aspects of the analysis, while commemorative practices, ritual use of water, inscriptions, philanthropy, and collective memory are considered within the intangible heritage context. By combining architectural documentation with cultural interpretation, the study aims to present the fountains not only as physical structures but also as living cultural heritage shaped through everyday social practices.

2. Ottoman Fountain Culture

Until the late nineteenth and early twentieth centuries, public fountains “çeşme” held a central place in the everyday life of Anatolian and Ottoman communities. Water collected from natural springs or distant sources was conveyed to urban centers through aqueduct and pipeline systems and distributed to residents via stone-built structures designed for public use. Situated in squares, streets, and neighborhood junctions, these architectural elements fulfilled both practical

⁹ ICCROM, *Promoting People-Centered Approaches to Conservation: Living Heritage* (Rome: ICCROM, 2012).

¹⁰ Ken Taylor and Jane Lennon, “Cultural Landscapes: A Bridge between Culture and Nature?”, *International Journal of Heritage Studies* 17/6 (2011), 537–554.

¹¹ Ali Kılıcı, *İskilip Suları, Hamamları ve Çeşmeleri* (İstanbul: Biyografi Net Yayıncılık, 2022).69.

and social functions.¹² In Ottoman culture, funding or maintaining a fountain was considered one of the most virtuous charitable acts, reflecting deep spiritual devotion and social responsibility. Similar traditions of public fountain culture can also be observed across many Islamic and Mediterranean cities, where fountains historically functioned not only as water infrastructure but also as spaces associated with religious practices, everyday urban life, and the symbolic meanings attributed to water.¹³ Within the Ottoman context, fountains also became closely connected with waqf traditions and charitable practices that played an important role in urban and religious life.¹⁴ In this broader context, Ottoman fountains in Anatolian towns such as Iskilip may be understood as part of a wider water heritage tradition associated with philanthropy, urban culture, and collective memory.

In Anatolian towns beyond Istanbul, traditional construction techniques and materials persisted well into the classical period, with 15th-century fountains typically featuring domed or vaulted reservoirs and deep niches, while the 16th century introduced more refined elements that combined functionality with ornamentation.¹⁵ Two main types of fountains existed: those connected to public water systems, and those sourced privately. The operation and maintenance of these endowments were governed by the terms of the waqf charters, which sometimes included detailed regulations for water distribution when several endowments intersected.¹⁶

In Islam, water is regarded as the origin and sustainer of all life, a divine element that holds profound spiritual, symbolic, and ritual significance. It serves not only as a means of physical purification through the ablution practices of wudhu and ghusl required before prayer, but also as a manifestation of purity and divine grace. This understanding is further reflected in the imagery of flowing waters in the gardens of Paradise (Jannah) described in the Qur'an.¹⁷ The act of washing and performing ablutions (wudhu) using water from public faucets was regarded not merely as a matter of physical cleanliness but as an essential step toward spiritual purification, reflecting the belief that water serves as a divine medium between humanity and God.¹⁸ This sacred perception is further reinforced in the Qur'anic verse, "*We have created all living things from water.*" (Surah Al-Anbiya 21:30), emphasising water's role as the source and sustainer of life. In Islamic tradition, water occupies a central place in both religious life and social responsibility, and providing water is regarded as one of the most rewarding charitable acts. In this regard, the Prophet Muhammad is reported to have stated that "*the most virtuous form of charity is providing water,*" reflecting the importance attributed to responding to communal needs through acts of benevolence (Abū Dāwūd, *Zakāt*, 41; Ibn Mājah, *Adab*, 8). Influenced by these teachings, the endowment of wells and the construction of fountains emerged as prominent forms of religious philanthropy, particularly among Turkish communities, where fountain building was widely perceived as a lasting and highly meritorious charitable practice.¹⁹

Until the last quarter of the nineteenth century, this collective practice was sustained by a neighborhood-based communal culture, in which fountains functioned as vital components of social interaction and public welfare. From the late nineteenth century onwards, however, as

¹² Erdem Topçu, Gökhan Liman, Ahmet H. Topçu and Yusuf A. Baykal, "The Properties of Seljuq and Ottoman Era Public Fountain Faucets and Some Rare Faucet Samples", *Water Science & Technology: Water Supply* 13/3 (2013), 656–665.

¹³ James W. P. Campbell and Amy Boyington, "Fountains and Water: The Development of the Hydraulic Technology of Display in Islamic Gardens, 700–1700 CE", *Studies in the History of Gardens & Designed Landscapes* 38/3 (2018), 247–267.

¹⁴ Danacı and Özata, "Water Architectures in the Ottoman Empire", 1.

¹⁵ **Yılmaz Önge**, *Türk Mimarisinde Selçuklu ve Osmanlı Dönemlerinde Su Yapıları* (Ankara: Türk Tarih Kurumu Basımevi, 1997).

¹⁶ Dinçkal, "Reluctant Modernization", 682.

¹⁷ Campbell and Boyington, "Fountains and Water: The Development of the Hydraulic Technology of Display in Islamic Gardens, 700–1700 CE", 247.

¹⁸ Topçu vd., "Seljuq and Ottoman Era Public Fountain Faucets", 660.

¹⁹ **Semavi Eyice**, "Çeşme", *Türkiye Diyanet Vakfı İslâm Ansiklopedisi*, 277–287 (İstanbul: TDV Yayınları, 1993).

urban modernization and new hygienic standards reshaped daily life, the communal use of fountains gradually diminished. Water began to flow directly into private households, and washbasins were fitted with single or double faucets, signaling a transition from shared ritual spaces to individualized domestic practices within the evolving urban fabric of the late Ottoman period.²⁰ Many fountains have lost their original function as a result of river depletion, the impacts of global warming, and human-induced alterations to the natural water network.²¹

2.1. Waqf System and Philanthropic Motivation

The waqf has historically played a central role in shaping Islamic cities by financing the construction and maintenance of mosques, schools, fountains, baths, and other public facilities. Over the centuries, it evolved into an institutional framework that contributed to social welfare, public health, education, and a wide range of community-oriented activities.²² At the same time, waqf represents an intangible spiritual heritage rooted in altruism and social solidarity, forming a distinctive cultural mechanism through which much of the historical fabric of Islamic cities was created, sustained, and transmitted across generations.²³ In the Ottoman context, waqfs not only provided essential social and religious services but also shaped urban life and the architectural character of the city, thereby ensuring the continuity of public welfare.²⁴ Ottoman imperial philanthropy shows how the politics of giving influenced charitable projects, with waqfs becoming the most visible form of sadaqa that ensured the maintenance of buildings.²⁵

During the Ottoman period, waqfs played a decisive role in establishing and maintaining essential urban infrastructure. In addition to schools, soup kitchens, libraries, and dervish lodges, they also financed water-related structures such as public fountains, bathhouses, dams, and water mains. While large-scale infrastructure like water mains were typically endowed by members of the ruling class, such as sultans or viziers, fountains could also be funded by wealthy individuals as a means of social prestige and religious merit.²⁶ These fountains functioned as places of charitable exchange and communal care, where the act of providing water was reciprocated through prayers and blessings. This spiritual interaction gradually diminished with the spread of domestic tap water and the decline of public fountain culture.²⁷

Among these endowed structures, fountains were significant waqf projects, providing free access to water while embodying both the charitable and symbolic functions of philanthropy in the Ottoman urban context. Fountains located in city centres became important elements of the urban landscape and reflected the cultural identity of the communities they served. They varied according to the cultural characteristics of the cities in which they were situated. Thus, fountains not only shaped urban identity but also played key roles in daily life and social interaction among residents.²⁸

²⁰ Topçu vd., “Seljuq and Ottoman Era Public Fountain Faucets”, 660.

²¹ Esra Eken Güney and Neriman Ş. Güçhan, “Investigation of Old Water Supply System in the Historic Town of Beypazarı”, *Megaron* 18/1 (2023), 1–14.

²² **Muhammad S. I. Ishak and Abdulmajeed M. Aderemi**, “Waqf-Based Crowdfunding Model for Islamic Heritage Conservation in Malaysia”, *Jurnal Hadhari* 14/1 (2022), 101–118.

²³ Manoochehr Jahanian and Sahar Movahedi, “Tourist Perception of Waqf as Spiritual Heritage in Iran”, *International Journal of Tourism, Culture & Spirituality* 4/1 (2019), 77–91.

²⁴ Fawaz Abdul Salam, “Recovering the Ottoman Waqf: The Reconfiguration of Ottoman-Islamic Intellectual Culture in Twentieth-Century Istanbul”, *Middle Eastern Studies* 61/6 (2025), 833–849.

²⁵ **Amy Singer**, “The Politics of Philanthropy”, *Journal of Muslim Philanthropy & Civil Society* 2/1 (2018), 2–20.; Amy Fallas, “Charity and Philanthropy in Middle East History”, *History Compass* 21/3–4 (2023).

²⁶ Dinçkal, “Reluctant Modernization”, 682.

²⁷ Mizbani, “Hamidiye Fountains”, 399.

²⁸ **Filiz Ç. Karafaki**, “Tarihî Çeşmeler ve Niğde Tarihî Kent Merkezi Çeşmeleri Üzerine Bir Araştırma”, *Journal of Old Turkic Studies* 7/1 (2023), 50–72.; Yahya Bulut and Ömer Atabeyoğlu, “Fountains as Urban Furniture in Historical Urban Structure and Usage Culture: Erzurum City Case”, *Building and Environment* 42/6 (2007), 2432–2438; **Fehime Mine Temiz and Servet Özkan**, “Hatay Kuseyr Platosu Kırsalında Çeşmeler”, *Mimarlık ve Yaşam* 7/3 (2022), 901–950.

2.2. Architectural Features of Ottoman Fountains

Ottoman fountains represent one of the most distinctive elements of the empire's architectural and social landscape, reflecting both aesthetic refinement and philanthropic intent. The term çeşme, derived from the Persian çeşm meaning "eye," originally referred to natural springs or water sources, places where water "emerged like an eye." Over time, the meaning of the term expanded to denote the small architectural structures built to channel and distribute water to the public.²⁹ Although fountains existed long before the Ottoman period, they acquired renewed cultural and religious significance with the spread of Islamic notions of purity and charity, as the act of providing clean water was regarded as a meritorious deed. Most fountains were constructed as hayrat (charitable endowments), intended for the benefit of all, and their façades often featured inscriptions recording the name of the patron, the date of construction, or verses and hadiths emphasizing the spiritual value of generosity.³⁰

In the sixteenth century, a more refined typology of Ottoman fountains emerged, characterized by twirling spout taps (lüle) placed on both interior and exterior façades and occasionally incorporating specially carved mirror stones (ayna taşı) with recessed cavities designed to hold water urns (ibrik) for communal use.³¹ These innovations reflected the increasing sophistication of hydraulic engineering and aesthetic design, merging functionality with ornamental expression. The architectural vocabulary of Ottoman fountains expanded considerably over time, encompassing diverse typologies such as plaza fountains—free-standing structures with cistern façades and decorative taps; wall-mounted fountains attached to religious or civic buildings; kerb fountains, typically small-scale units with console basins or mirror stones; şadırvan-style fountains located near pools and recalling ablution practices; and namazgâh fountains integrated into the façades of open-air prayer platforms.³² On the other hand, as in Seljuk fountains, they generally continued to be constructed with water reservoirs.³³ Beyond urban settings, fountains were also constructed along main roads, rural landscapes, and travel routes, where they fulfilled both practical and symbolic purposes. Known as menzil fountains, these roadside structures often included troughs for animals and multiple spouts for travellers. Simpler versions, referred to as shepherd fountains (çoban çeşmesi), provided essential water access in open terrains. Depending on their location, water was either drawn from nearby springs or conveyed from distant sources through stone or terracotta channels, and in some cases collected in reservoirs built behind the structure before being released through the spouts.³⁴

Ottoman fountains generally consist of two principal components: a spout stone, usually a curly-ornamented block of stone set within an arched niche and fitted with a metal spout, and a basin, positioned on the ground in front of it to collect the flowing water. These elements are typically framed by an arched architectural structure that encloses them on three sides and at the top, forming a unified composition. Beyond this plain and functional type, however, there also exist fountains that display remarkable ornamental richness and stylistic variety, reflecting regional craftsmanship and artistic expression.³⁵ Architectural composition of a traditional Ottoman fountain façade demonstrates the structural and decorative elements that define the typology of Ottoman public fountains. Figure 1 provides a schematic illustration of the principal architectural elements commonly found on these façades. It highlights key components such as the crown (tepelik), moulding (silme), arch band (kemberbend), and mirror stone (çeşme aynası), as well as functional parts including the spout (lüle), basin or trough (tekne/yalak), and seating

²⁹ Eyice, "Çeşme", 277.

³⁰ Eyice, "Çeşme", 279-280.

³¹ Danacı and Özata, "Water Architectures in the Ottoman Empire", 4.

³² Danacı and Özata, "Water Architectures in the Ottoman Empire", 4.

³³ Nurhan Kara Pilehvarian, Nur Urfahoğlu and Leyla Yazıcıoğlu, *Osmanlı Başkenti İstanbul'da Çeşmeler* (İstanbul: YEM Yayınları, 2000).

³⁴ Eyice, "Çeşme", 278.

³⁵ Önge, *Türk Mimarisinde Selçuklu ve Osmanlı Dönemlerinde Su Yapıları*, 87.; Emel E. Yavaşcan vd., "Historical Niğde Fountains", *Sanat ve Tasarım Araştırmaları Dergisi* 1/1 (2020), 53–72.

platform (oturma sekisi). Together, these elements reflect the harmonious integration of form, function, and ornamentation, illustrating how Ottoman architects combined aesthetic expression with public utility in the design of fountains.

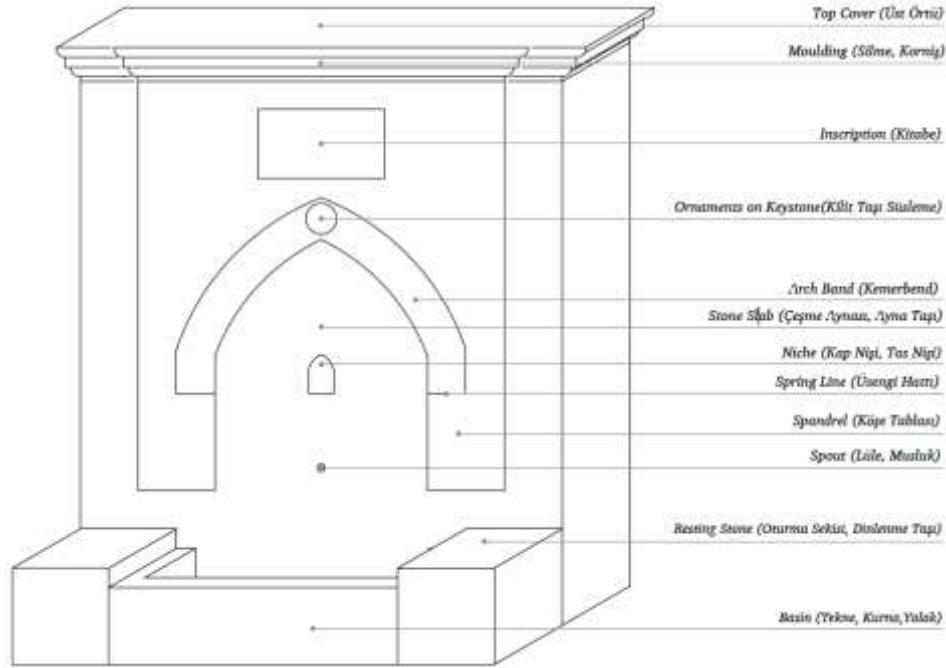


Figure 1: Architectural Elements of Ottoman Fountains, Showing the Main Structural Components of Traditional Ottoman Fountain Design (Author's Drawing, 2025).

3. Ottoman Fountains in Iskilip

The fountains examined within the scope of this study are situated in the historical core of Iskilip, where they continue to serve as tangible witnesses of the town's architectural and cultural heritage (Figure 2). Fountains in Iskilip are predominantly located along the narrow streets of historic neighbourhoods or within small, square-like spaces in front of significant buildings such as mosques, and their distribution across neighbourhood centres and key circulation routes reflects historical patterns of urban life and the social importance attributed to public water structures in the town.³⁶

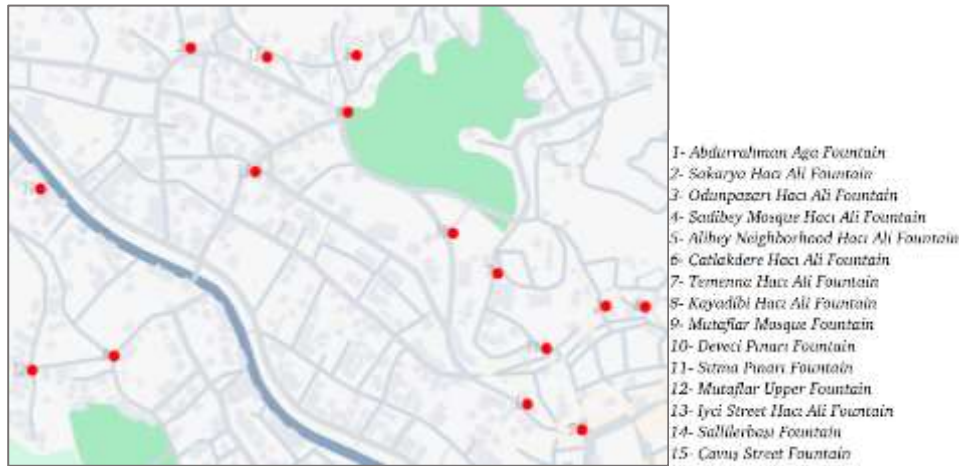


Figure 2. Distribution of fountains in Iskilip town centre (Author's drawing on Mapstyle)

³⁶ Fügen Ilter, *Bir Anadolu Kenti İskilip* (Ankara: Türk Tarih Kurumu, 1992).102.

3.1. The Waqf System and Philanthropic Motivation for Fountain Construction

A significant portion of the historical fountains that have survived to the present day in Iskilip were commissioned and donated by Hacı Ali, a prominent local benefactor, during the early decades of the 19th century.³⁷ According to their inscriptions, additional fountains were commissioned by Hacı Ali's brother Hacı Ahmet (Şadıbey Mosque Hacı Ali Fountain), his wife Lebebe Hatun (Alibey Neighborhood Hacı Ali Fountain) and Hacı Ali's eldest daughter Sabire Hatun (Çatlakdere Hacı Ali Fountain)³⁸, indicating that charitable fountain construction was embraced across multiple members of the same family. These fountains exemplify the traditional craftsmanship of the period, being constructed primarily from finely cut stone and often incorporating integrated water reservoirs that ensured a continuous water supply. Characterised by their symmetrical façades, modest ornamentation, and functional design, they not only fulfilled essential urban needs but also reflected the philanthropic and aesthetic sensibilities of their patrons. The frequent appearance of the phrase “rûhuna el-Fâtiha” in the inscriptions clearly expresses the spiritual motivations behind their construction, reflecting the intertwined aims of gaining religious merit (sevap), performing a lasting charitable act (hayrat), and ensuring continued prayers for deceased relatives.

3.2. Architectural Analysis of Fountains

Ottoman fountains in earlier centuries, with the notable exception of meydan fountains were predominantly wall-integrated constructions. Typically established as part of a religious complex or charitable foundation, the sixteenth- and seventeenth-century examples generally took the form of an arched niche set within the enclosing walls of a mosque or madrasa courtyard, or incorporated into street and cemetery walls. These façades were commonly faced with finely dressed stone panels and surmounted by dedicatory inscriptions, emphasising both the aesthetic refinement and the pious intent of their patrons.³⁹ Fountains may be classified according to their location, form, and function as wall fountains, square or meydan fountains, corner fountains, room fountains, column fountains, root or base fountains, fountains designed together with sebils, namazgâh fountains, and selsebils, ornamental wall fountains typically found in the gardens of waterfront mansions.⁴⁰

The historical fountains of Iskilip reflect these typological features through their wall-integrated forms, pointed arches, and ashlar-cut stone façades. All of the historical fountains in Iskilip (Table 1), which bear the characteristics of cultural heritage, are constructed from ashlar-cut stone. The uniform appearance of the stones suggests that the material was likely quarried from the same local source, reflecting a degree of standardisation typical of the period. The Hacı Ali Fountains were likely built by an unknown local craftsman, while the inscriptions indicate that the restoration of the Sabire Hanım Fountain was carried out by a master from Istanbul and the construction of the Sıtmapınarı Fountain by a craftsman from Osmaniç.⁴¹ The water troughs (yalak) in front of the fountains have all been replaced with reinforced concrete structures in recent times. Originally, however, these features consisted of monolithic stone troughs, as evidenced by a surviving example found near the now-demolished fountain close to Cafer Cazi Mosque. The niches located on the façades of the fountains are enclosed by pointed or semicircular arches. Among these, pointed arches constitute the most common type, observed in nine examples within the study area. Their frequent use reflects architectural preferences characteristic of the Ottoman period.⁴²

³⁷ Kılıcı, *İskilip Suları, Hamamları ve Çeşmeleri*, 42.

³⁸ Kılıcı, *İskilip Suları, Hamamları ve Çeşmeleri*, 46–49.

³⁹ Shirine Hamadeh, “Splash and Spectacle: The Obsession with Fountains in Eighteenth-Century Istanbul”, *Muqarnas* 19 (2002), 123–148.

⁴⁰ Seda Ş. Tolacı and Mehmet A. Karagöz, “Osmanlı Su Medeniyetinin Bir Temsilcisi: Aldanzade Hacı Osman Çeşmesi ve Onarımı”, *Stratejik ve Sosyal Araştırmalar Dergisi* 5/1 (2021), 129–144.

⁴¹ Kılıcı, *İskilip Suları, Hamamları ve Çeşmeleri*, 69.

⁴² Karafaki, “Niğde Tarihi Kent Merkezi Çeşmeleri”, 58.

The architectural features summarised in Table 1 show that the fountains of Iskilip share a strong degree of continuity in terms of material use, façade composition, construction technique, and arch forms. Most of the fountains display wall-integrated layouts, ashlar-cut stone façades, and pointed arches that reflect common architectural characteristics of the Ottoman period. At the same time, differences in plan arrangement, roof configuration, inscriptions, and ornamental details point to variations in spatial context, patronage, restoration history, and commemorative intentions. These findings suggest that the fountains functioned not only as utilitarian water structures but also carried commemorative and symbolic meanings reflected through inscriptions, patronage, and architectural expression.

Table 1: Analysis of Fountains in Iskilip (Author's Table Produced for This Study.

The Inscription Translations of the Fountains Were Quoted by Ali Kılıcı from the Book Titled Iskilip Waters, Baths and Fountains.)

	Abdurrahman Ağa Fountain (01)	Sakarya Hacı Ali Fountain (02)	Odunpazarı Hacı Ali Fountain (03)	Şadibey Mosque Hacı Ali Fountain (04)	Alibey Neighborhood Hacı Ali Fountain (05)
Fountains					
Construction Date	1813	1826	1826-1827	1839-1840	1843
Listed Status	Listed	Listed	-	Listed	Listed
Location	Alibey Neighborhood	Sakarya Street	Kaleboğazı Square	Gulbaba Cemetary	Alibey Neighborhood
Plan	rectangular shaped, with water tank, fountain unit on the south facade	rectangular shaped, with water tank, fountain unit on the south facade	adjacent to the building, a fountain unit on only facade to the south	adjacent to the building, a fountain unit on only facade to the south	rectangular shaped, with water tank, fountain unit on the north facade
Façades Number (including fountain)	1	1	1	1	1
Arch	1 arch in the center	3 arches (1 large in the center)	1 arch in the center	3 arches (1 large in the center)	3 arches (1 large in the center)
Roof	timber roof	timber roof	adjacent to the structure	adjacent to the structure	timber roof
Current Situation	simply maintained, in use, in average condition	restored, in use, in good condition	poorly maintained and lost its originality, in use	restored, in use, in good condition	simply maintained, in use, in average condition
Inscription Transcription*	"...Va'zına oldu Hacı Abdurrahman sebeb, Makamın cennet etsin Halık-I Rahman"	"Ehl-I hayrın muktezası olup haspeten Lillah için çeşme bina, memlekete nadir idi böyle ab yoğ iken var eyleyen"	"Ehl-I hayrın muktezası olup haspeten Lillah için çeşme bina, memlekete nadir idi böyle ab yoğ iken var eyleyen"	"Sahibül hayrat v'el hasenat, Ehac Ali Bay'ın kardeşi, Ahmed Ağanın hayratıdır"	"Sahib'ül-hayrat ve'l-hasenat Peyk el-hac Ali, ağanın ihya eylediği çeşmelerden iş bu, çeşme zevcesi Şerife Lebabe"

		bari Huda, çeşmelerde mai cari çağalsun lülesinden iç suyu olur şifa, bin iki yüz kırk ikide hamd ola oldu itmami müyesser-I bi-riya, hayr ile yad eylesin nüş eyleyen niyeti bir dua sahib-I hayrın ancak”	bari Huda, çeşmelerde mai cari çağalsun lülesinden iç suyu olur şifa, bin iki yüz kırk ikide hamd ola oldu itmami müyesser-I bi-riya, hayr ile yad eylesin nüş eyleyen niyeti bir dua sahib-I hayrın ancak”		Hatuna, hediye edilmiştir.Ruhuna el-Fatiha”
Fountains	Çatlakdere Hacı Ali Fountain (06)	Temenna Hacı Ali Fountain (07)	Kayadibi Hacı Ali Fountain (08)	Mutaflar Mosque Fountain (09)	Deveci Pınarı Fountain (10)
					
Construction Date	1866	1849	1863	unknown (probably repair in 1867)	unknown (repair in 1892)
Listed Status	Listed	Listed	Listed	Listed	-
Location	Çatlakdere Neighborhood	Temenna Neighborhood	Kayadibi Neighborhood	Mutaflar Neighborhood	Sakarya Street
Plan	rectangular shaped, with water tank, fountain unit on the south facade	single-sided fountain, attached to the retaining wall	rectangular shaped, with water tank, fountain unit on the south facade	single-sided fountain, attached to the garden wall	rectangular shaped, with water tank, fountain unit on the south facade
Façades number (including fountain)	1	1	1	1	1
Arch	1 arch in the center	1 arch in the center	1 arch in the center	2 arch in different size	1 arch in the center
Roof	adjacent to the structure, concrete roof	there is no roof	there is no roof	there is no roof	timber roof
Current Situation	simply maintained, in use, in average condition, later-added roof	simply maintained, in use, in average condition	simply maintained, poorly restored and lost its originality, in use	simply maintained, in use, in average condition	simply maintained, in use, in average condition

Inscription Transcript ion*	“Bi-hamd-illah olmaz icken çeşmenin icra suyu, Sabire Hanım kendi vakfından nisif masurayı, iffet-i bir ile cari eyledi ol halisati, nuş iden atşane ola cevheri sıldk-u hayat”	“Sahib’ül-hayrat Peyk el hac Ali Ağa zevci, Nazende Fatma kadın için, inşa edildiği çeşme mai lezizdir”	“Çeşme-i hayati tevfik ilah – müyesser eyledi elhamdülillah, Hayır kıldı el-hac Ali kendi şayi elhamdülillah, içildikçe hergiz ab-i zülali okunsun ruhuna Fatiha lillah, Hakkı tarihiyle pur peymanesi kandırur atşani fi sebil illah”	The inscription has not survived to the present day.	“Ehl-i hayrın muktezası hasbeten lillah çeşme-i bina, nuş iden bulsunlar şifa-i zemzem abı zülal, pur iman bahş Ahmed Efendi etdi tamir bi iznillah”
Fountains	Sıtma Pınarı Fountain (11)	Mutaflar Upper Fountain (12)	İyçi Street Hacı Ali Fountain (13)	Sallilerbaşı Fountain (14)	Çavuş Street Fountain (15)
					
Construction Period	1919	20. century	unknown	unknown	unknown
Listed Status	-	Listed	Listed	Listed	-
Location	Tosyo Street	Mutaflar Neighborhood	İyçi Street	Temenna Neighborhood	Çavuş Street
Plan	single-sided fountain	single-sided fountain, attached to structure	single-sided fountain, attached to structure	rectangular shaped, with water tank, fountain unit on the south facade	single-sided fountain
Façades Number (including fountain)	1	1	1	1	1
Arch	2 arch in different size	1 arch in the center	3 arches (1 large in the center)	1 arch in the center	2 arch in different size
Roof	No roof	adjacent to the structure	adjacent to the structure	concrete roof	non-adjacent timber roof
Current Situtation	neglected, in use	neglected, in use	simply maintained, in	simply maintained, in use, in	neglected, in use

			use, in average condition	average condition	
Inscription Transcription*	“ <i>Osmanlı ...oğlu İbrahim</i> ”	The inscription has not survived to the present day.	The inscription has not survived to the present day	“ <i>Bir hayra vesile olan onu yapan gibidir</i> ”	“ <i>Hayr ehli ettiler tamire himmet kat kat, hakka şükür olsun Resulüne hazeran salevat, bu çeşmeden nuş ede imameyn aşkına mü'minat</i> ”

3.2.1. Classification according to plan

In previous studies on fountains, scholars have proposed various classification schemes based on different architectural and contextual criteria.⁴³ Within the scope of plan-based classification, fountains can first be grouped as **free-standing-plan fountains**, **attached-plan fountains** and **wall fountains** (Table 2). Attached fountains are those whose plan layout is directly integrated into another architectural element, such as a façade or boundary surface, thus forming a dependent spatial configuration.

Detached fountains, on the other hand, are conceived as self-standing units, planned independently within the urban space. In this context, the fountains of Odunpazarı Hacı Ali Fountain, Şadıbey Mosque Hacı Ali Fountain, Mutaflar Upper Fountain, and İyçi Street Hacı Ali Fountain are identified as attached types, while the remaining examples in the study area fall under the detached category.

A second classification can be the presence or absence of a water reservoir, which plays a decisive role in the functional organisation of fountains. Fountains with a reservoir are designed to store and regulate water flow, indicating a more complex hydraulic arrangement within their structural configuration. In the study area, the Abdurrahman Ağa Fountain, Sakarya Hacı Ali Fountain, Alibey Neighborhood Hacı Ali Fountain, Çatlakdere Hacı Ali Fountain, Kayadibi Hacı Ali Fountain, Deveci Pınarı Fountain, and Sallilerbaşı Fountain are identified as examples that incorporate a reservoir. The remaining fountains, lacking such a storage component, operate as direct-flow units and therefore form the group of fountains without a reservoir.

Beyond these basic classifications, analysing the fountains through their spatial organisation offers insight into the design logic and functional priorities of Ottoman water architecture in Iskilip. Attached fountains generally reflect a pragmatic relationship with existing structures, making use of boundary walls, mosque enclosures, or terraced urban surfaces to minimise construction effort while ensuring accessibility for neighbourhood residents. Detached fountains, on the other hand, indicate deliberate placement within wider urban settings, often serving as focal points at junctions, squares, or main circulation routes. When considered alongside the presence or absence of a water reservoir, these spatial distinctions reveal how architectural decisions were shaped by both technical conditions, such as topography and water supply, and the social practices that structured communal life.

The classifications presented in Table 2 indicate that attached fountains were more closely integrated into the surrounding urban fabric, while detached examples occupied more independent positions within the urban environment. The table also shows that the presence or absence of a water reservoir played an important role in the functional organisation of the fountains.

⁴³Ödekan, A. “Kentiçi Çeşme Tasarımında Tipolojik Çözümleme.” *Semavi Eyice’ye Armağan: İstanbul Yazıları*. İstanbul, 1992, 281–297.; Eyice, “Çeşme”, 277.; Önge, *Türk Mimarisinde Selçuklu ve Osmanlı Dönemlerinde Su Yapıları*, 87.

Table 2: Analysis of Fountains in Iskilip According to Plan Layout (It Was Produced by the Author Through the Simplification and Updating of the Measured Drawings Prepared by MIR-A Architecture in 2006, Which Are Held in the Iskilip Municipality Archive.).

Free-standing plan fountain	(01)	(02)	(05)	(08)	(10)	(14)
Attached-plan fountain	(03)	(04)	(06)	(12)	(13)	
Wall fountain	(07)	(09)	(11)	(15)		

3.2.2. Classification according to façades

In fountain architecture, arches constitute the most defining element of façade composition, with the main elevation typically articulated through forms such as pointed, semicircular, or lobed arches that emphasize the overall mass.⁴⁴ It is observed that the pointed-arched niche application inherited from the Seljuk period continues to be used on the façades of the fountains.⁴⁵ The fountains in Iskilip can be categorised into three groups based on their façade arrangement. The first and most striking group are the three-part arched fountains (Figure 3). These fountains consist of a prominent central arch flanked by two smaller arches, all carved from large ashlar stones. Şadibey Mosque Hacı Ali Fountain, Sakarya Hacı Ali Fountain and Iyci Street Hacı Ali Fountain, are among the fountains in this group. The fountains in this group have survived to the present day in their original form, with some minor modifications. The similarities in stone workmanship and façade composition suggest that these fountains may have been produced by the same master.



Figure 3. Three-arched fountains illustrating a common arch composition (Author's archive, 2025)

(Şadibey Mosque Hacı Ali Fountain, Sakarya Hacı Ali Fountain, Iyci Street Hacı Ali Fountain, respectively)

⁴⁴ **Türkan Acar**, "Banaz'daki Çeşmelerinin Uşak Çeşme Mimarisi İçerisindeki Yeri ve Korunma Durumları", *Manisa Celal Bayar Üniversitesi Sosyal Bilimler Dergisi* 18/3 (2020), 1–27.

⁴⁵ **Nurhan Kara Pilehvarian**, "Osmanlı Çeşme Mimarisi", *Türkler Ansiklopedisi*, c. 12, 247–251 (Ankara: Yeni Türkiye Yayınları, 2002).

The second group of fountains (Figure 4) consists of façades articulated with two arches of similar design but slightly unequal size. This subtle asymmetry is characteristic of several examples in Iskilip and reflects the practical adaptations of local craftsmen rather than a strictly symmetrical architectural scheme. The Mutaflar Mosque Fountain, Sıtma Pınarı, and Çavuş Street Fountain belong to this group, each demonstrating a comparable two-part composition despite minor variations in arch proportion and stone arrangement.



Figure 4. Two-arched fountains showing variations in arch arrangement (Author's archive, 2025)

(Mutaflar Mosque Fountain, Sıtma Pınarı, Çavuş Street Fountain, respectively)

The third group consists of single-arched fountains (Figure 5). Most of these smaller fountains were built by Hacı Ali. The same craftsman may have also created single-arched fountains such as the Temenna Mosque Fountain, Odunpazar Fountain, Kayadibi Fountain, and the Alibey Neighbourhood Hacı Ali Fountain. In all of these arched fountains, the arches are carved into large stones like motifs. Abdurrahman Aga Fountain is distinguished by the fact that, instead of a single piece, the arch is carved into horizontally stacked stones. Mutaflar Upper Fountain is distinguished from the others by its arch shape.



Figure 5. Single arched fountains illustrating the most common arch type (Author's archive, 2025)

(Temenna Mosque Fountain, Abdurrahman Aga Fountain, Deveci Pınarı Fountain, Alibey Hacı Ali Fountain, Kayadibi Hacı Ali Fountain, Mutaflar Upper Fountain, Odunpazarı Hacı Ali Fountain, Çatlakdere Hacı Ali Fountain, respectively)

3.2.3. Ornaments

Beyond their functional roles, fountains stand out as water structures distinguished by their ornamental compositions composed of various motifs.⁴⁶ On the other hand, most of the fountains in Iskilip exhibit a restrained architectural character, with plain and unadorned façades that nonetheless achieve a sense of dynamism through proportion and composition. In certain examples (Figure 6), star motifs appear on the keystones of arches are most common examples. The six-leaf, star-shaped motif is also found on the keystones of the central arches of the Sakarya Hacı Ali Fountain (1826) and the Iyci Hacı Ali Fountain. On Mutaflar Mosque Fountain and Alibey Hacı Ali Fountain (1843), the motif with the inscription "Allah" within interlocking circles is on the keystone. On Çatlakdere Hacı Ali Fountain (1865), the "Masallah" is inscribed in relief within a large ewer motif, intended for use as a relief within the arch. Rarely surviving motifs are on the Mutaflar Mosque Fountain, one is the wheel of fortune motif, and the second is a six-pointed star motif, repeated endlessly within the circle. Some fountains, such as the Cuval Mosque Fountain (1840), lack any decorative elements. Mutaflar Fountain is special in terms of its low-relief medallion decorations placed on both sides of the arch junction, symbolizing infinity and eternity. The left medallion features hexagons with six-pointed stars formed by converging grooves, while the right medallion presents a three-tiered circular composition with a central hexagon, a surrounding wheel-of-fortune motif, and an outer border of inward-facing semicircles.



Figure 6. Ornaments of fountains in Iskilip showing variations in decorative details (Author's archive, 2025)

(Mutaflar Mosque Fountain (the first three), Alibey Hacı Ali Fountain, Sakarya Hacı Ali Fountain, Iyci Hacı Ali Fountain, Temenna Fountain, Sıtma Pınarı, Çatlakdere Hacı Ali Fountain (the last two), respectively)

Furthermore, inscriptions (Figure 7) containing details of construction, repair interventions, Quranic verses, or hadiths function not only as documentary records but also as decorative and commemorative elements, integrating textual and architectural expression within the same visual field.

⁴⁶Ayşe Nur Taşdelen, "Konya Çeşmelerinde Gülbezek", *Selçuklu Araştırmaları Dergisi* 18 (2023), 147–180.



Figure 7. Inscriptions of fountains in Iskilip reflecting commemorative and charitable traditions
(Author's archive, 2025)

(*Abdurrahman Ağa Fountain; Odunpazarı Hacı Ali Fountain; Deveci Pınarı Fountain; Kayadibi Hacı Ali Fountain; Temenna Hacı Ali Fountain; Çatlakdere Hacı Ali Fountain; Sakarya Fountain; Şadibey Mosque Hacı Ali Fountain; Alibey Hacı Ali Fountain; Çavuş Street Fountain, respectively*)

3.2.4. Construction techniques and materials

As one of the principal components of Anatolian water architecture, fountains generally adopt a vertically proportioned rectangular volumetric form.⁴⁷ Although the dominant vertical rectangular mass is common, some fountains also exhibit square prismatic or, more rarely, horizontally oriented rectangular forms, while a limited number are composed entirely of reused architectural elements (spolia).⁴⁸ In Iskilip, fountains are predominantly constructed of local cut stone, occasionally combined with rubble masonry in secondary walls and water reservoirs. Construction techniques are generally modest and functional, relying on load-bearing masonry walls and simple bonding patterns rather than complex structural systems. In several examples, later repairs have introduced modern materials such as concrete or cement-based mortars, partially obscuring original workmanship while leaving the overall construction logic legible.

3.3. Authenticity and Integrity

In Iskilip, later interventions such as the addition of concrete canopies are often visually and historically incompatible with the original character of the fountains, interrupting their architectural coherence. Moreover, gradual changes in street levels have altered the immediate surroundings of many fountains, resulting in stepped ground conditions that leave partially or fully below the present street level. In many cases, the original basins have been entirely replaced or renewed using concrete materials, making it difficult to determine whether the fountains originally resting stone; comparisons with historical photographs suggest that such elements were likely not part of the original design. Despite the later-period interventions, the majority of the fountains have endured to the present day while largely preserving their original architectural character, demonstrating a notable degree of continuity and resilience despite partial alterations.

⁴⁷ Önge, *Türk Mimarisinde Selçuklu ve Osmanlı Dönemlerinde Su Yapıları*, 5.

⁴⁸ Acar, "Banaz'daki Çeşmelerinin Uşak Çeşme Mimarisi", 12–14.

3.4. Commemorative Practices, Ritual Water, and Social Memory

Iskilip is a small Anatolian town with a notable concentration of Ottoman-era fountains, which form an integral part of its historic urban landscape. Beyond their practical role in water supply, these fountains were closely embedded in everyday social and religious life, shaping how water, charity, and memory were experienced within the community. Inscriptions commonly record the names of donors or commemorate deceased individuals, indicating that fountains also functioned as markers of remembrance rather than solely as utilitarian structures. A recurring feature observed during the field survey is the frequent appearance of the name “Hacı Ali” on fountain inscriptions. Because a significant number of the fountains are fed by a source known as Hacı Ali Water, local naming practices have come to associate almost every fountain with the term “Haceli” (Hacı Ali).⁴⁹

Fountains are not merely structures for drawing water; through both the life-sustaining role of water and the social life that develops around them, they constitute an important element of cultural life.⁵⁰ This commemorative dimension is particularly visible in the location of many fountains, especially those situated near mosques, where they became part of Islamic ritual practice, notably in relation to wudu. Fountains functioned not only as sources of drinking water but also as shared spaces where animals were watered, agricultural produce was washed, laundry was done, and various everyday cleaning activities took place, making them central to daily life within the settlement. At the same time, everyday customs such as drinking water in memory of the deceased point to the lasting spiritual meanings attached to these structures. For many residents, especially older members of the community, fountains continue to evoke strong emotional and mnemonic associations, recalling personal experiences, family histories, and neighbourhood life. These forms of ritualised remembrance and shared practice correspond closely with UNESCO’s Intangible Cultural Heritage category of “Social practices, rituals and festive events”⁵¹, as fountains remain embedded in acts of prayer, blessing, and collective memory. In this sense, ritual use, remembrance, and commemorative value are reflected not only in oral traditions and dedicatory inscriptions but also in the spatial arrangement of Iskilip, where religious, historical, and emotional meanings remain present in the town’s everyday settings.

Field observations during the study show that several fountains still remain part of neighbourhood life despite the decline of their original function. In some areas, cleaned troughs and maintained fountain surroundings indicate that these structures continue to be used and cared for by local residents. Informal conversations with older residents also revealed that many fountains are still associated with neighbourhood gatherings, shared memories, and everyday practices connected to water use. The continued use of names such as “Haceli Fountain” among local residents also reflects how these structures remain embedded in neighbourhood memory and local identity. These observations show that fountains continue to hold a social and cultural presence within neighbourhood life despite the decline of their original function..

Conclusion

In Iskilip, the Ottoman tradition of public water endowments found a particularly rich and enduring expression, shaped by the town’s abundant natural springs and the deep-rooted religious and philanthropic sensibilities of its inhabitants. The fountains endowed by Hacı Ali Ağa and his family exemplify this cultural synthesis. As architectural artefacts, they provided essential urban services; as charitable endowments, they embodied the values of faith, generosity, and moral responsibility. Rooted in the waqf tradition, the act of providing water operated simultaneously as a practical intervention and a spiritual gesture, transforming water into a sacred medium through which communal bonds, remembrance, and gratitude were continuously renewed.

⁴⁹ İlter, *Bir Anadolu Kenti İskilip*, 102.

⁵⁰ Lokman Tay, “Mersin Erdemli Çeşmeleri”, *MANAS Sosyal Araştırmalar Dergisi* 7/2 (2018), 675–701.

⁵¹ UNESCO. *Convention for the Safeguarding of the Intangible Cultural Heritage*. Paris: UNESCO, 2003.

Yet, the intertwined tangible and intangible values represented by these fountains are increasingly fragile. Environmental degradation, declining water sources, climate impacts, and unsystematic or inappropriate restoration practices have threatened both the physical structures and the cultural meanings attached to them. While some fountains have lost their original function due to drying springs, others suffer from neglect or poorly executed repairs that compromise their authenticity. These vulnerabilities place at risk not only the architectural integrity of the fountains but also the social rituals, prayers, and collective memories that have historically animated them.

Safeguarding these multi-layered heritage assets requires a holistic conservation strategy, one that integrates architectural restoration, environmental management, and the preservation of living cultural practices. Recognizing fountains as both tangible structures and intangible cultural carriers reframes them as dynamic cultural entities rather than merely historical structures but also as active parts of cultural life. Conservation efforts must therefore address material integrity while also revitalising the spiritual, commemorative, and communal traditions that sustain their significance in local life. In this respect, local conservation policies should move beyond monument-based approaches and place greater emphasis on the relationship between built heritage, water culture, and community memory. Greater cooperation between municipalities, conservation authorities, and local communities may also contribute to the long-term sustainability of these heritage structures. Through scientifically informed restoration, sustained community engagement, and renewed appreciation of their symbolic and historical value, the fountains of Iskilip can continue to function as living monuments of faith, philanthropy, and collective identity. Their preservation would not only uphold the architectural legacy of Ottoman water culture but also affirm the enduring capacity of built heritage to transmit ethical values, belief systems, and shared memories across generations.

Although this study focuses on Iskilip, similar challenges can also be observed in many small Anatolian towns where historic fountains continue to survive within changing environmental and urban conditions. In this respect, the findings of the study may contribute to broader discussions on the conservation of water-related cultural heritage and the relationship between physical heritage and living cultural practices.

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