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AN EVALUATION ON SİVAS YILDIZ RIVER BRIDGE AND STONE DECORATION WITH HUMAN FIGURES¹

SİVAS YILDIZ IRMAĞI KÖPRÜSÜ VE İNSAN FİĞÜRLÜ TAŞ BEZEME ÜZERİNE BİR DEĞERLENDİRME

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Abstract

In this study, the spolia human figures found on the Yıldız River Bridge, about which there has been no detailed research to date, were discussed and the figures were evaluated by comparing them with the Seljuk Age and neighboring cultural environments. Since no detailed research has been conducted on the Yıldız Bridge regarding the inscriptions and spolia materials, this study is considered to be important in terms of contributing to and shedding light on period research on the use of figurative decoration in medieval architecture. Yıldız Bridge is located on the Yıldız River, 27 km away from Sivas. The bridge was rebuilt during the Seljuk period on foundations from the Roman Period. The bridge, which is 4 m wide and 70 m long, has thirteen arches. There is an Armenian inscription on the south-facing downstream side of the bridge. The figures that are the subject of the research are placed horizontally on the eighth row of stones from the bottom, on the inside of the middle arch of the bridge. The piece, which is stated in sources to belong to the Roman Period, features three human figures carrying each other on their hands, dressed, bearded and with pointed hats. The presence of spolia figures in a water-related structure such as a bridge is in line with the decoration concept of the period. The type of figure carrying something by raising its hands

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in the air is also detected in Byzantine, Georgian and Western European art, as well as in Turkish art, and is a common iconographic scheme. It should be noted that Kutaisi Bagrati and Mtskheta Svetitskhoveli cathedrals, dating back to the 11th century, are two important examples of this type of figures in Georgian art. It is understood that the spolia figures on the Yıldız Bridge are the figures carrying the bridge, like the caryatid female figures on the Malabadi Bridge, a structure of the Artuqid Period. Figure type carrying something by raising its hands in the air, Konya II. It was also detected in the plaster decorations of Kılıçaslan Mansion. In the examples in the Konya Mansion, standing dressed figures carry fish figures with water elements in their hands raised upwards. As can be seen, this iconographic pattern is generally used in relation to water. Therefore, the use of these spolia figures on the Yıldız Bridge indicates a conscious design.

Keywords: Sivas, Yıldız Bridge, Stone Decoration, Spolia Material, Human Figures.

Öz

Bu çalışmada günümüze kadar hakkında detaylı bir araştırma bulunmayan Yıldız Irmağı Köprüsü'nde bulunan devşirme insan figürleri ele alınmış, figürler Selçuklu Çağı ve komşu kültür çevreleriyle karşılaştırılarak değerlendirilmiştir. Yıldız Köprüsü hakkında, kitabe yazısı ve devşirme malzeme ile ilgili detaylı bir araştırma yapılmamış olmasından dolayı bu çalışma Ortaçağ mimarisi figürlü bezeme kullanımı ile ilgili dönem araştırmalarına katkı sağlaması ve ışık tutması açısından önem arz ettiğini düşünülmektedir. Yıldız Köprüsü Sivas'a 27 km uzaklıkta Yıldız Irmağı üzerinde bulunmaktadır. Köprü Roma Dönemi'ne ait temeller üzerine Selçuklular zamanında yeniden inşa edilmiştir. 4 m genişliğinde ve 70 m uzunluğundaki köprü on üç gözlüdür. Köprünün güneşe bakan mansap tarafında Ermenice bir kitabe bulunmaktadır. Araştırmanın konusu olan figürler köprünün orta göz kemerinin iç kısmında, alttan sekizinci taş sırasına yatay olarak yerleştirilmiştir. Kaynaklarda Roma Devri'ne ait olduğu belirtilen parça üzerinde birbirini elleri üzerinde taşıyan, elbiseli, sakallı ve sivri külahları olan üç insan figürü bulunmaktadır. Devşirme figürlerin köprü gibi suyla ilişkili bir yapıda bulunması dönemin bezeme anlayışına uygundur. Ellerini havaya kaldırarak bir şey taşıyan figür tipi Türk sanatı dışında Bizans, Gürcü ve Batı Avrupa sanatında da tespit edilmekte olup yaygın bir ikonografik şemadır. 11. yüzyıla tarihlenen Kutaisi Bagrati ve Mtskheta Svetitskhoveli katedrallerini Gürcü sanatında bu tipte figürlerin yer aldığı iki önemli örnek olarak belirtmek gerekir. Yıldız Köprüsü'nde yer alan devşirme figürlerin Artuklu Dönemi yapısı olan Malabadi Köprüsü'ndeki karyatid kadın figürleri gibi köprüyü taşıyan figürler oldukları anlaşılmaktadır. Ellerini havaya kaldırarak bir şey taşıyan figür tipi Konya II. Kılıçaslan Köşkü'ne ait alçı bezemelerde de tespit edilmiştir. Konya Köşkü'ndeki örneklerde ayakta duran elbiseli figürler yukarıya doğru kaldırdıkları ellerinde su unsuru olan balık figürlerini taşımaktadır. Görüldüğü gibi bu ikonografik kalıp genellikle suyla ilişkili olarak kullanılmaktadır. Dolayısıyla bu devşirme figürlerin Yıldız Köprüsünde kullanılması bilinçli bir tasarıma işaret etmektedir.

Anahtar Kelimeler: Sivas, Yıldız Köprüsü, Taş İşçiliği, Devşirme Malzeme, İnsan Figürleri.

1. Introduction

Figures have been shaped in every period in which human beings have lived since the beginning of history, and have been a means of understanding, perceiving, dominating and striving to understand nature according to the thought and life styles of the period in which they were produced². Thus, the figure reflected the sacred feelings of the society and was also used as a symbol and totem. Figures that shed light on the ancient lives, cultures and beliefs of societies have developed and shown some changes until today and have become a means of expressing people's inner feelings. The use of figures as symbols and totems began to be seen in Central Asia, spread to Central Europe, and developed and formed a style in Central and Central Asia in the periods before Islam³.

Stylized motifs were used as architectural stonework in Southeast Asia, China and Scandinavian countries, from the British Isles to Mesopotamia during the Ancient and Middle Ages, as well as in the northern shores of the Black Sea, Siberia, the east of Europe and the east

² Mülayim 2015, 135.

³ Diyarbakirli 1972, 123-124.

of Asia. It is seen that it is also applied to materials such as wood, metal, tiles and miniatures and a style is created⁴.

The first examples of the human figure which are the source of Eastern-Islamic art can be seen in Uyghur wall paintings in XIIIth Century. VIII and IXth century wall paintings and miniatures in manuscripts dating back to centuries are the oldest known examples. In these paintings, foundation builders, Manichean and Buddhist priests and musicians are depicted⁵. In Uyghur Turks and later periods, stone decorations, miniatures, plaster reliefs and other elements; a general typology was formed with the figures position, clothes, hairstyle and jewelry⁶.

Turks used figures in architecture in the XIth century. Starting from the mid-century, they started to settle in Anatolia and dominated Anatolia in a short time⁷. In this period, heterogeneous urban culture dominates the geography and political history of Anatolia. The Seljuks adhered to the Central Asian tradition, which established relations with Iran, Mesopotamia and Sasanian art, which were important stops, and also used the materials they encountered when they came to Anatolia. In architectural buildings, they designed figures such as a double-headed eagle as a coat of arms, a lion, an eagle, an angel, and a harpy, a dragon as a symbol of power, a fish as a zodiac symbol, a human sitting cross-legged, a fish and a bull. Especially the use of plaster decoration and floral motifs influenced Islamic art with figurative and symbolic motifs expressing nomadic Turkish culture. During this time, they produced various works by combining the culture, art and experiences they brought with them with the traditions of the places they settled⁸.

XIIIth period of research and experimentation, which constitutes the essence of Anatolian Turkish Architecture in the XIXth century, was also reflected in the architectural works of Turkish principalities such as Artuqid, Saltukids and Menguchek in Anatolia⁹.

The reliefs, which use geometric, floral and figurative decoration elements, are concrete examples of Seljuk culture and art that have survived to this day. Between VIII-XIth centuries a transition took place in the Anatolian geography and the Islamic world¹⁰.

The use of spoliated materials is quite intense in the buildings of the Anatolian Seljuk period. It refers to the use of processed materials brought from destroyed buildings in different structures. The use of spoliated materials in Islamic Art goes back to the early ages. One of the important reasons for the use of spoliated materials is the establishment of settlements on or near cities or sacred areas. These materials, which were reused during the Anatolian Seljuk and Principalities periods, may have been used throughout the buildings and during the actual construction periods, or they were also used as repair or completion materials after demolition. Spoliated pieces can be used in accordance with their old function, or they can be used three or more times with a new function, partially or without being processed at all¹¹. The pieces, which were often transferred from an ancient work and reused, were in harmony with the stonemasonry of the Seljuk masters, despite their different styles¹².

⁴ Çoruhlu 2011, 12-14; Mülâyim 2015, 135; Şahin 2015, 1.

⁵ Aslanapa 2015, 15.

⁶ Taşçı 1998, 48.

⁷ Cahen 1979, 82.

⁸ Öney 1992, 1; Kuban 2002, 1.

⁹ Altun 1998, 43.

¹⁰ Ögel 1986, 2-3.

¹¹ Şaman Doğan-Yazar 2007, 210; Boleken 2010, 135-136.

¹² Öney 1992, 12.

After the Anatolian Seljuks entered Anatolia, they built new structures and structures such as castles and bridges were repaired and used in line with their needs. The use of this ready-made material not only saves labor and costs economically, but also accelerates the construction process in zoning activities¹³. Many materials such as columns, column capitals, lintels, jamb plates, and sarcophagi that were usable from damaged or collapsed structures were used in new structures for the same or different functions and were placed in the structure in vertical or horizontal positions depending on their size¹⁴.

In the Byzantine Period, when spoliated materials were brought, marble and limestone were used as materials, and openwork, scraping, relief and carving techniques were applied to stone works. The motifs and compositions in the pieces showing the influence of the Early Christian Period are from the Vth and VIth periods. It shows that materials, styles, motifs and decoration techniques were used in harmony in the architectural structures of the Anatolian Seljuk Period in different regions during the XIXth century Byzantine Period¹⁵.

Yıldız River Bridge, which was rebuilt during the Seljuk period on the foundations of a bridge from the Roman period, is one of the structures where spolia was used. In this study, the Sivas Yıldız River Bridge spolia human figures were evaluated.

2. Methodology

In this study we conducted about the Yıldız Bridge, information was collected by scanning resources. The building was visited, its location and the locations of the figures were determined, and photographs were taken. In the first part of the study, information about human figures, medieval Anatolian architecture, and the use of spoliated materials was given. In the next section, information is given about the history of the Yıldız Bridge, which is the subject of the research, the spolia found in the structure. In the evaluation and comparison section, structures containing human figures used in Medieval Anatolian Turkish Islamic Architecture and neighboring cultures, period decoration programs and figures were researched and comparisons were made with the Yıldız Bridge figures. The findings and comparisons obtained through on-site observation and photography techniques were evaluated in the conclusion section.

3. Sivas Yıldız River Bridge

The bridge, built over the Yıldız River on the Sivas-Ankara highway, 27 kilometers away from Sivas, is approximately 4 m wide and 70 m long. The bridge, which has thirteen arches formed by piers and pointed arches, is made of cut stone. The yellow stones on which the bridge was built are from the quarries around Sıcak Çermik. The eyes are flat, pointed and with round arches. There are 1 m high triangular flood gates on the upstream side of the bridge¹⁶ (Fig. 1a.b).

¹³ Boleken 2010, 135-136.

¹⁴ Şaman Doğan-Yazar 2007, 209-230.

¹⁵ Ötüken et al. 2007, 29.

¹⁶ Acun 1987, 199.



Fig. 1a: Bridge, North Direction, **b.** South Direction.

The exact construction date of the building is not known. According to the data we have, it is accepted that the bridge was built in the Seljuk Period on the foundations of the Roman Period after the river bed was filled. The bridge was built in the 19th century under the leadership of Sivas Governor Halil Rıfat Pasha. At the end of the century, it was repaired by Silahdar-zade Mehmet Ali Efendi from Sivas. Near the bridge is the Yenihan Caravanserai, which is known to have been built by Ahi Emir Ahmet, son of Hacı Zeyneddun, dated 1322. This caravanserai, whose inscription was transferred to the Sivas Museum in 1935, was demolished in 1944¹⁷.

There is an inscription written in Armenian and a birdhouse-like decoration near the middle of the bridge, which extends in the east-west direction, on the southern downstream side¹⁸ (Fig. 2a.b). In the text of the inscription:

“Love the three holy ones and accept yourself as one of them, Amen. Those who read this should not delete it and spread it, it is important, amen. My son and the forty soldiers will recover, get back to health, get out of this difficulty and stay health....my prayers are for you and... freedom and justice.” is read. We came to the conclusion that this could be a prayer, with no separation of words, it was written as a single word, only the letters were deleted with the spelling understanding of that time¹⁹.

¹⁷ Çulpan 1975, 68; Acun 1987, 199; Denizli 1998, 157.

¹⁸ Acun 1987, 199; Denizli 1998, 157.

¹⁹ The inscription was translated into Turkish by Garbis Baghdad.

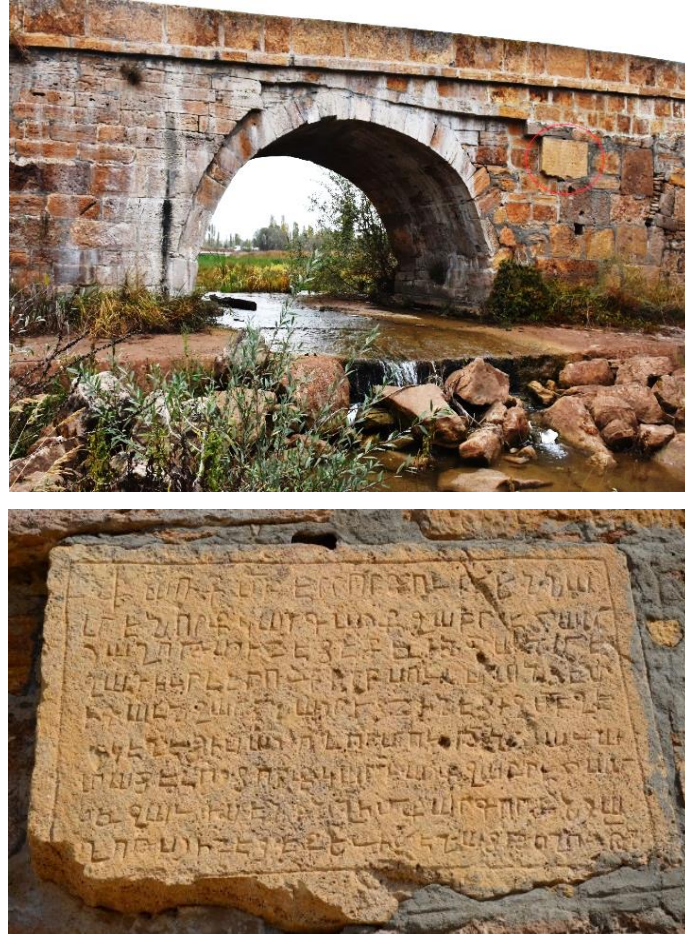


Fig. 2a.b: Yıldız Bridge, Armenian Inscription.

On the north side of the Yıldız Bridge, there is a spolia stone slab placed horizontally in the eighth row of stones from the bottom, at the left corner of the bridge arch, sixth from the left and fourth from the right. On the plate, three figures are depicted in a row, with their arms raised at shoulder level, and each figure's feet standing on the shoulders of the figure below, at the level of their hands. Above the figures; there are dresses with a belt at the waist that leave the ankles exposed. The facial and dress details of the figures, whose facial details are clearly visible, are damaged in some places.



Fig. 3a: Yıldız River, Human Figures, Drawings.



Fig. 3b: Yıldız River, Human Figures, Drawings.

The long triangular beard of the figure at the top is carved in detail. The figure, which is understood to be older from the facial details, is depicted as having a flat nose, drooping eyebrows, and round eyes. His mouth, distinguished from his beard and moustache, is in the shape of a line. His hair is depicted as long as his beard, covering his ears (Fig. 4a).

The beard of the figure in the middle cannot be seen, but it is possible to say that he is younger than the others based on his facial details. It can be seen that the round-faced figure has a small nose and eyes, and a sad expression with his mouth turned down. Her hair is in a way that covers her ears (Fig. 4b).

The triangular long beard of the figure at the bottom is damaged in places. The figure, which is understood to be young from the facial details, is depicted as having a small nose and round eyes. His mouth, distinguished from his beard and moustache, is curved upwards. His hair is depicted as long as his beard, covering his ears. Additionally, her bangs are depicted in detail on the upper part of her face, under her hat. Another caped head can be seen under the figure's feet. This suggests that there is another stone at the bottom. However, there is no mention of the existence of such a piece in the records or in the environment (Fig. 4c).

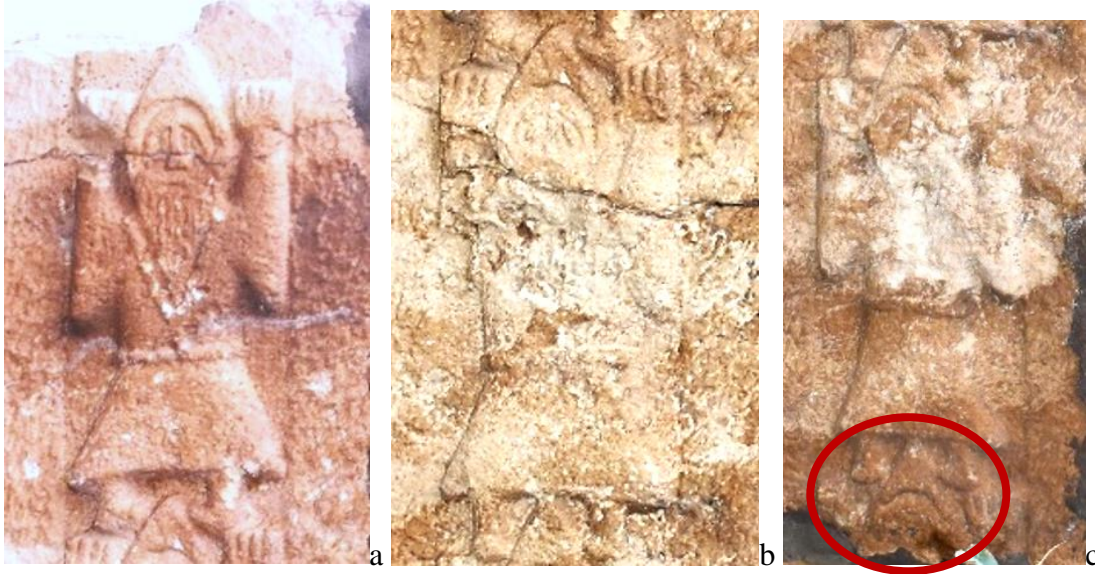


Fig. 4a.b.c: Human Figures, Detail.

4. Evaluation and Comparison

We see similar figures of the Yıldız Bridge in the Malabadi Bridge (H. 542/AD 1147-1148), which is a structure of the Artuqid period²⁰. Among the figures with caped heads, the shorter figure on the east side has his feet on an object, as if he were sitting. The other figure is shown standing. The figures are seen extending the objects in their hands to each other. This design may depict the administration of Silvan due to the services of Sultan Mugisüddin Mahmud of the Iraqi Seljuks, the giving of the key to the city to Ilgazi from the Artuqids, or the presentation of the bridge plan to the Artuk Emir Timurtaş, who had the bridge built. Çulpan also states that one of the eight gates of the city of Miryafarkin (Silvan) is Babü'ş-şehve' and that it creates a talismanic effect on those who enter and leave the gate. The spacious decorations on another door named Babü'l-ferah ve l-gam' mention a man moving with his hands, and the gam decorations mention a man standing with a rock on his head²¹. In the panel above, the male figures have cone-shaped headdresses on their heads, just like the Yıldız Bridge male figures. The places where the Artuqids ruled are the regions where Sumerians, Assyrians, Hittites, Byzantines and Romans lived. There are many scenes where something is offered to a king or god. The headdresses of the figures in this design resemble the clothes of the Hittite period²². It is possible to say that the female figure carrying the panel in this design may be a caryatid designed as a column (Fig. 5).

²⁰ Çulpan 1975, 40.

²¹ Çulpan 1975, 43.

²² Çulpan 1975, 43.



Fig. 5: Malabadi Bridge, Figures.

The Yıldız Bridge figures resemble the caryatid-shaped female figure of the Artuqid structure, the Malabadi Bridge, in terms of their postures (Fig. 4). Caryatids are marble female figures in long clothes, used instead of columns in ancient architecture, with cornices and droppers (mutule) placed on their heads²³ (Fig. 6).



Fig. 6: Karyatid²⁴

It is thought that the caryatids seen in Greek architecture symbolize women who are condemned to hard labor, waiting for their husbands to go to war and having to do all the heavy work; Caria, a state on the Peloponnesian peninsula, sided with the Persians against Greece. The Greeks gained their freedom with victory in the war, declared mobilization and declared war on the people of Caria. They killed the men and kidnapped the women as slaves. They did

²³ Sözen-Tanyeli 2015, 161.

²⁴ [Sanat Sözlüğü](https://sanatsozlugum.blogspot.com/2012/06/karyatid.html), "Karyatid" 21.08.2024.
<https://sanatsozlugum.blogspot.com/2012/06/karyatid.html>

not allow them to take off their long garments and other marriage symbols and forcibly paraded them in the victory procession. Crushed under the weight of their shame, these women forever represented slavery and atoned for their state. Thus, the architects of the period placed the statues of these women in public buildings so that they could be seen carrying loads so that the sins and punishments of the Carian people would be known and continued by their successors²⁵.

XII. Artuqid period Cizre Bridge²⁶ is one of the Artuqid period structures where human figures were used in its decoration. Cross-legged human figures, objects and writings on the panels on the bridge represent the zodiac signs²⁷ (Fig. 7).



Fig. 7: Cizre Bridge, Cross-legged Human Figures²⁸.

One of the bridges of the period where human figures were applied is the Tigris Bridge (510 AH / 1116 AD)²⁹. The Tigris Bridge figures, first identified by Taylor, were brought from their feet and exhibited in the garden of the Batman Museum. It is thought that the human figures, stylistically reminiscent of the Yıldız Bridge figures, may have been depicted as zodiac symbols, as in the Cizre Bridge, and that they carry the same iconographic meanings³⁰. The Tigris Bridge figures are slightly turned sideways from the front, and the figures wearing dress-style skirted clothes are depicted standing. These dresses are in the same style as the dresses of the Yıldız Bridge figures; their waists are belted and their legs are exposed. Some of the figures whose faces cannot be seen have halos on their heads and objects in their hands (Fig. 8a-b-c).



Fig. 8a-b: Tigris Bridge, Human Figures³¹

²⁵ Hasol 2014, 243; Vitruvius 2021, 5-6.

²⁶ Çulpan 1975, 88-89.

²⁷ Çulpan 1975, 45; Otto-Dorn 1980, 107-108.

²⁸ Nicolle 2013, 223-264.

²⁹ Çulpan 1975, 39; Eyice 1994, 283.

³⁰ Taylor 1865, 33.

³¹ Turan 2014, 133-134.



Fig. 8c: Tigris Bridge, Human Figures, Batman Museum Garden.

The type of figure carrying something with its hands up, found in Anatolia, is from Konya II, which is now in the Konya Karatay Museum, apart from the bridges exemplified above. It is also included in the casts of Kılıçaslan (Alâeddin) Mansion. The figures in high relief are depicted on an arabesque background, standing, frontally, with their hands in the air, along with fish figures with water elements. It is accepted that this depiction depicts the zodiac sign Pisces and the planet Venus³².

As can be seen in the example above, the pattern of figures carrying something with their hands up can be found in water structures such as Yıldız or Malabadi bridges or in Konya II. It was used with symbols related to water, as in the Kılıçaslan Mansion.



Fig. 9a.b: Kılıçaslan Mansion, Figures, Konya Karatay Madrasa Tile Works Museum³³.

Examples of figure molds carrying something with their hands up, as in the Yıldız Bridge, are also encountered in Georgian architecture. On the middle window of the north façade of Mtskheta Svetitskhoveli Cathedral (1010-1029), there are figures in dresses, carrying the window columns, with their hands in the air³⁴. The tip of the cone-shaped hat on the head of the figure on the left is curved downwards. The dresses and hats that fit tightly around the waist of the figures are reminiscent of the Yıldız Bridge figures. The small feet of the figures, open to both sides, are depicted in a similar manner to the figures of the period. The hair details of the figure on the right and the linear and circular forms used in the facial details of both figures are similar to the Yıldız Bridge figures (Fig. 10).

³² Öney 1968, 154-155.

³³ Bozer-Çeken 2016, 86.

³⁴ Dadiani et al. 2017, 195.



Fig. 10: Mtskheta Svetitskhoveli Cathedral, Figures ³⁵.

Another example in the same style is located in the Bagrati Cathedral of the 11th century Medieval Georgian period. A mason (master/craftsman) holding a stone block in his hands is depicted in the frame of the window on the east side of the south facade of the cathedral. This composition features a Tetramorph and three animal figures placed on either side of the window. This theme is generally encountered in Byzantine and Western European art³⁶ (Fig. 9). The position of the figure from the waist down and without facial details and the posture of its arms reflect the characteristics of the figures of the period.



Fig. 9: Bagrati Cathedral, Figure³⁷

³⁵ Dadiani et al. 2017, 213.

³⁶ Dadiani et al 2017, 192.

³⁷ Dadiani et al 2017, 192.

5. Conclusion and Discussion

Human beings have used human figures as symbols and a means of expressing their emotions in every period since the beginning of history. Stonemasonry is one of these areas of use. Seljuk Period Anatolian Turkish art is one of the periods in which figural decorations were widely used. One of the methods of providing materials in Turkish architecture is the collection of materials. In this context, Yıldız Bridge is an important example in terms of shedding light on both the understanding of figures of the period and the conscious use of spoliated materials.

The figures seen in Turkish art since the Hun Period have created a typology with their postures, dresses and hairstyles. Human figures were also widely used in Medieval Anatolian Turkish art, which was nourished by this tradition. In the examples we described above, the figures are depicted with their hands in the air and carrying something. It is seen that these types of figures appear in water-related structures such as bridges or with elements such as fish representing water. The Yıldız Bridge figures are a good example of this iconography. The fact that the figures on the Yıldız Bridge are spolia is also noteworthy, as it shows that there was a conscious choice in the use of figures. The dresses, cone-shaped headdresses and facial details on the figures reflect the style of the period.

Even though they are placed in a horizontal position, it is possible to say that the spolia figures on the Yıldız Bridge are either carrying the bridge, as in the Malabadi Bridge, or working on the construction of the bridge, as in the Bagrati Cathedral.

Spoiled materials were widely used in the buildings built during the Seljuk Period. Spolia pieces are prominently placed on the facades of some buildings. In some examples, figures are placed horizontally on the structures. It is possible to say that this application is due to the rectangular form of the material suitable for masonry. It is possible to attribute the fact that the figures on the Yıldız Bridge were not used visibly on the façade but in a less visible way inside the arch, to the form of the stone slabs on which the figures are located or to a cautious attitude towards the figure.

Çıkar Çatışması / Conflicts of Interest: Yazar, herhangi bir çıkar çatışması olmadığını beyan eder. / The author declares no conflict of interest.

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