



Tourism and Recreation

<https://dergipark.org.tr/tourismandrecreation>

E-ISSN: 2687-1971

Mythological origins and mapping of plants in Turkish garden art

Türk bahçe sanatında bitkilerin mitolojik kökenleri ve haritalandırılması

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ARTICLE INFO MAKALE BİLGİSİ

Research Article / Araştırma

Key Words:

Turkish gardening culture, Mythological significance, Turkish gardens

Anahtar Kelimeler:

Türk bahçe sanatı, Mitolojik önemi, Türk bahçeleri

Received Date / Gönderme Tarihi:

07.11.2024

Accepted Date / Kabul Tarihi:

07.02.2025

Published Online / Yayımlanma Tarihi:

30.06.2025

DOI:

[10.53601/tourismandrecreation.1581116](https://doi.org/10.53601/tourismandrecreation.1581116)

ABSTRACT

Turkish culture, deeply rooted in nature and influenced by diverse interactions with various civilizations, holds a unique gardening tradition dating back thousands of years. This study explores the evolution of Turkish gardening culture, focusing on Istanbul's historical peninsula, and examining plant species' roles in shaping cultural identity and tourism narratives. Beginning with the ancient nomadic and spiritual practices in Central Asia, the study traces the influence of major religious shifts, including Islam, which introduced the "Paradise Garden" concept. The Ottoman period further refined Turkish gardens, integrating influences from Mediterranean, Iranian, and Byzantine sources while maintaining a distinct natural harmony. Ottoman gardens flourished, emphasizing functionality, spirituality, and symbolic plant use, with species like roses, tulips, and cypress trees gaining prominence. This research aims to document and map plant species found in Istanbul's prominent historical sites, linking each to its mythological roots. Utilizing Geographic Information Systems (GIS), the study creates visual representations of these plants, supporting their narrative use by tour guides, and enhancing tourists' engagement with Istanbul's heritage. The findings underscore the cultural and mythological significance of these plants, offering insights into Turkish garden aesthetics and their symbolic evolution. By highlighting mythological storytelling in tourism, this study also provides practical implications for heritage preservation, tourism enrichment, and urban planning, inviting future research on plant symbolism across cultures and its integration into modern urban spaces.

ÖZET

Türk kültürü, doğayla derin bağlara sahip olup, farklı medeniyetlerle olan etkileşimlerden büyük ölçüde etkilenmiş bir geleneksel bahçecilik kültürüne sahiptir. Bu çalışma, Türk bahçeciliğinin evrimini incelemekte olup, İstanbul'un tarihi yarımadasına odaklanarak, bitki türlerinin kültürel kimliğin şekillenmesindeki ve turizm anlatılarındaki rollerini araştırmaktadır. Çalışma, Orta Asya'daki eski göçebe ve manevi uygulamalardan başlayarak, İslam'ın "Cennet Bahçesi" kavramını tanıtmaya birlikte büyük dini dönüşümlerin etkilerini izlemektedir. Osmanlı dönemi, Akdeniz, İran ve Bizans kaynaklarından gelen etkiler, Türk bahçelerini daha da rafine etmiştir. Osmanlı bahçeleri, işlevselliği, manevi boyutları ve sembolik bitki kullanımı üzerine odaklanarak, gül, lale ve servi gibi türlerin öne çıkmasını sağlamıştır. Bu araştırma, İstanbul'un önde gelen tarihi mekanlarında bulunan bitki türlerini belgelemeyi ve haritalamayı amaçlamakta ve her birini mitolojik kökenleriyle ilişkilendirmektedir. Bu sayede bu çalışma, turist rehberlerinin anlatımlarında tarihi mekanların yanı sıra güzergâh üzerinde görebilecekleri bitki türlerinin mitolojik anlatımlarına katkı sağlayarak turistlerin İstanbul mirasıyla daha derin bir bağ kurmalarını sağlayacaktır. Çalışmada, Coğrafi Bilgi Sistemleri (CBS) kullanılarak güzergâh üzerindeki çiçek ve ağaçların haritalandırılması yapılmıştır. Bulgular, bu bitkilerin kültürel ve mitolojik önemini vurgulayarak, Türk bahçe estetiği ve sembolik evrimi üzerine içgörüler sunmaktadır. Turizmde mitolojik anlatıların öne çıkarılmasıyla, bu çalışma aynı zamanda mirasın korunması, turizmin zenginleştirilmesi ve şehir planlaması açısından pratik uygulamalar sunmakta, kültürler arası bitki sembolizmi ve bunun modern şehir alanlarına entegrasyonu üzerine gelecekteki araştırmalara ışık tutmaktadır.

1. Introduction

The roots of Turkish culture, known for its nomadic, warrior, and sky-god beliefs, date back 4000 years to Central Asia. Throughout history, as the Turks interacted with various

cultures, they influenced some while being influenced by others. Over time, the political and geographical conditions they faced led Turkish culture to adopt the religions and beliefs of different societies. The influence of Chinese culture

and various belief systems was evident in Turkish society from early periods (1000 BCE – 1000 CE) (Bilgin, 2009: p.1). From the 10th century onward, as some Turks embraced Islam, Islamic influences began to emerge in social and cultural spheres, introducing a new perspective to gardens. The most concrete and meaningful impact of this shift was the concept of the “Paradise Garden.” While the influence of Islamic culture was felt in Turkish gardens, the Turkish approach to gardening was also shaped by the Mediterranean, Iranian, and Byzantine traditions, due to the Turks' presence across a vast geography.

In the Ottoman period, the unique characteristic of the Turkish-Islamic complex was the harmonious integration of diverse religious and national elements, nomadic Turkish communities, and the cultural legacy inherited from the Seljuk state, resulting in a unique garden concept (Aslanoğlu Evyapan, 1972: pp. 9-11). During the Ottoman era, plant and garden culture found expression across various domains, from palace gardens and recreational sites to coastal gardens, architecture, painting, miniatures, decorative arts, ceramics, illumination, textiles, and literature. Gardens became essential for ceremonies and celebrations. In the early 18th century, Çelebi Mehmet Efendi traveled to Paris as an ambassador and was deeply influenced by the gardens and palaces of Versailles and similar sites. This experience marked a turning point in the Ottoman Empire's approach to nature. Western influences began to appear in many areas, starting with interior and exterior architectural elements (Evin, 2000: 45). Gardening and architecture entered a new phase, and the gardens gradually began to lose their original character.

The purpose of this study is to trace the Turkish gardening culture, shaped by the influence of various cultures throughout history, specifically in Istanbul within a historical and cultural context. The study aims to identify and map plant species found in gardens of Istanbul's historical peninsula—sites frequently visited and narrated by tourists and tour guides—and to explore the mythological stories associated with these plants. In this regard, the research will provide a comprehensive analysis of the transformations in garden aesthetics during the Ottoman period, elements introduced to Turkish garden design through Islamic and Western influences, and the cultural roots of gardening with specific plant species. The study seeks to highlight both the cultural and mythological significance of local plant species while supporting the narrative frameworks used by tour guides. Ultimately, it aims to shed light on the evolution of Istanbul's gardening heritage from the past to the present. In this research, plant species are categorized into trees and flowers, and mapped to indicate their specific locations. The research questions are as follows:

- What are the types of flowers and trees that can be encountered on a tourist route in Istanbul?
- What are the mythological origins of these species that tour guides can use in their narratives during tours?

2. Literature Review

2.1. Turkish Gardens Throughout History

The concept of gardens entered Turkish culture relatively late, influenced by the semi-nomadic lifestyle adopted by the Turks. Due to challenging climate conditions, such as harsh winters and arid summers, Turks lived in winter pastures, called “kışlak,” and summer mountain slopes, known as “yaylak.” Nature played an essential role in their lives. This early cultural framework in Central Asia encompassed a triad of beliefs focused on nature, the Sky God, and ancestor worship. Before the advent of Islam, Turks practiced various beliefs, including Shamanism, Buddhism, and Manichaeism. In each of these beliefs, they revered nature, considering certain natural elements and trees sacred, which they preserved and protected (Tazebay & Akpınar, 2010).

Starting in the 10th century, Turks began migrating from Central Asia to settle in Anatolia as nomadic, semi-nomadic, and urban groups. This transition brought significant changes to the historical, cultural, demographic, and architectural landscape of Anatolia. The “garden” concept became a vital cultural element upon the adoption of a settled lifestyle (Aslanoğlu Evyapan, 1972: p.57). The Turkish approach to gardens in this period emphasized “naturalistic arrangements” that respected nature's order, supported by the region's fertile soil, diverse plant species, and advantageous climate (Kuş Şahin & Erhan, 2009: p.63).

During the Seljuk period, gardens were described as simple, functional, and respectful of nature, adapting to the environment. These gardens were primarily devoted to vineyards, orchards, vegetable and fruit gardens, and farming areas. Additionally, gardens served as spaces for entertainment, leisure, hunting, and relaxation. Notable Seljuk cities such as Konya, Kayseri, Sivas, Erzurum, Amasya, Kırşehir, Alanya, Niğde, Antalya, and Aksaray featured summer and winter palaces with gardens for the Seljuk sultans. For example, the traveler Ibn-i Bibi describes the Keykubadiye Palace gardens in the Seljuk city of Kayseri as follows: “... There was a green sea in its garden. The rings in the ears of the swimming fish were gold, and the scales on their backs were silver. The sultan would sit on a porch, and in front of the porch was a fountain with water flowing from paradise, and a stream flowing with rose water. The whole garden was covered in grass, meadows, and roses. It was as if the gate opened into paradise...” These descriptions reflect the influence of Islamic culture on garden imagery (Ibn-i Bibi, 1996). In Seljuk gardens, trees and flowers held a special place, and certain species, such as cypress and chinarr trees, were used extensively, both as shade and for religious purposes (Şahin & Erol, 2009). Flowers, including narcissus, hyacinth, rose, and tulip, were planted for their beauty and fragrance. Gardens typically featured single-flower areas for simplicity (Aslanoğlu Evyapan, 1972; Evyapan, 1991).

2.2. Ottoman Gardens and Culture

Ottoman gardens reached a peak of sophistication and functionalism. Unlike the architectural and geometric rigor of Western designs, Ottoman gardens emphasized practicality and harmony with the natural landscape (Yıldız, 2014: p.548). Popular flowers like roses and tulips adorned seating areas and ponds, while trees like cypress and chinarr offered shade. Water was a central element, preferred in moving forms that

added sound and coolness. Fountains, ponds, and small pools, including “selsebil” (cascade fountains), were common. Examples of the most exquisite Ottoman gardens include Istanbul’s “hasbahçe,” Bosphorus gardens, and Haliç gardens, as well as those in Bursa, Edirne, and various princely cities.

Regardless of ownership, maintenance, and care of these gardens were overseen by the Bostancı Ocağı corps, with gardens evolving in number through the centuries—from 23 in the 16th century to between 58 and 68 in the 18th century (Yıldız, 2014: p.549). Vegetables, fruits, and flowers were also cultivated within palace gardens, with supplies for the imperial kitchen frequently sourced from local markets and nearby gardens (Sak, 2006: p. 148).

3. Methods

This study employed qualitative methods to trace the mythological origins of plants in Turkish garden art and map their geographic distribution within Istanbul. The research followed two main steps: (1) compiling mythological and cultural data and (2) mapping the plant species' distribution across Istanbul. Primary sources included literature on the mythological and cultural origins of various plants, as well as historical documents detailing gardening practices in Ottoman and earlier Turkish societies. The study focused on Istanbul’s historical peninsula, particularly areas frequented by tourists. Parks, palace gardens, and religious sites in these regions were observed, with specific attention to plants found in areas such as Sultanahmet, Topkapi Palace, Eyüp Sultan, and the Bosphorus. Geographic Information Systems (GIS) technology was used to map the locations of each species, creating visual layers that highlighted their mythological meanings.

4. Results

4.1. Trees

Humanity has long conveyed experiences, emotions, and beliefs to future generations through plants bearing symbolic meanings in mythology. Trees, revered for their connection to nature and the heavens, were believed to house spirits and deities. In many cultures and religions, trees are deemed sacred due to their longevity, ability to regrow, shade, fruit, sound, beauty, and medicinal properties. These qualities have made trees significant from cradle to grave (Üçer, 2019: p.5). Ancient philosophers identified the four essential elements for sustaining life—air, earth, fire, and water—while ancient China recognized five elements: fire, wood (tree), water, metal, and earth (Üçer, 2019: p.7). The Tree of Life, symbolizing wisdom, youth, and immortality, is also known as the cosmic tree. In Norse mythology, it is referred to as “Ash Yggdrasil (Ygg’s Horse)” in the European Creation Myth. This vast tree, whose roots extend to the world's core and connect all realms, represents the World Tree (Ergun, 2004: p.19). In Abrahamic religions, the tree from which Adam and Eve ate the forbidden fruit—often depicted as an apple—is known as the Tree of Eternity or Wisdom. In various traditions, the Tree of Life takes many forms, including beech, poplar, pine, oak, cedar, fig, palm, mulberry, and amber trees (İvgin, 2013:153). In ancient Turkic beliefs, trees served as intermediaries between nature and God. In Yakut folklore, a tree helped Er-Sogotoh descend from the divine realm to

Earth, symbolizing the Tree of Life that reaches the heavens (Ergun, 2004: p.347). In Shamanism, the central Tree of Life was depicted with birds and eagles, symbolizing realms (Altınbaş, 1987:143). In the Altai Creation Epic, after creating the Earth, God fashioned nine branches, which gave rise to nine nations (Üçer, 2019: p.15). Connecting heaven and earth, the tree is a crucial element in epic narratives as a source of life and as a divine creation tool, earning its place as a central symbol in Turkic culture. The tree could even lend its name to tribes; for instance, “Kipchak” translates to “tree hollow” (Karakurt, 2011:12: p.55). Although not all trees hold equal significance, those considered sacred in Turkish culture include beech, pine, poplar, juniper, plane, cedar, cypress, oak, mulberry, and willow trees (Ergun, 2004: p.246). Here is a selection of trees and their mythological significance in Turkish culture:

4.1.1. Beech Tree (Fagus)

Locations: Sultanahmet Square

Key Features: Smooth, light, and dark gray bark throughout its life.

Benefits: Used in furniture-making and as animal fodder.

Mythology: In Turkish culture, the beech tree is central to spirituality, serving as a channel for benevolent spirits. This tree embodies divine energy (“kut”) and is believed to bring peace. It is also linked to female fertility and ease in childbirth, making it forbidden to cut down. Branches were used for healing mild illnesses, and prayers performed by the beech tree were believed to be heard (Ergun, 2004: p.247). According to Turkish beliefs, the beech tree holds maternal blessings for women. It is also believed that the branches of a forked beech tree help women experience an easier childbirth. For this reason, cutting down the beech tree is forbidden (Ergun, 2004: p.248). Due to its perceived purifying and soothing properties, beech was also used in treating mild ailments (Yıldırım, 2000). The tree is believed to make a person kinder and more compassionate, with prayers made by the beech thought to be especially effective (İnan, 1987: p.447). In ancient Turkish beliefs, the beech tree was thought to have been created in paradise. The World Tree, which unites the three realms, is located in the center of paradise, with the beech to its south. The Er Sogotoh epic briefly describes this as follows: “...When he stepped outside and looked to the south, he saw a great beech tree rising. This beech was so beautiful that it resembled a young girl. It stood tall on this hill, forming what looked like a small island...” (Tarama Dictionary, 1969: p.2373). In ancient sources, the word “kayın” (beech) also appears to mean “woman” (Eren, 2001: p.685). According to Turkish belief, the spirit Umay (protector of women and children) descended to earth carrying two beech trees by the command of God. Shamans who saved people from evil spirits and resisted Erlik (the god of death) made their drums, staffs, utensils, and tambourines from beech wood. They drew the image of the beech on the upper part of the drums, facing the sky (İnan, 1987: p.64). The beech tree is also known as the birch tree. Among Altai Turks, it symbolizes man, whereas among the Yakuts, it represents an old woman with white hair. Among the Yakuts, items made from beech are believed to carry magical power, so they are

highly valued. Shovels and forks made from this tree were considered divine arrows, believed to drive away evil spirits during storms (Ergun, 2004). Among the Yakuts, sacrifices were also offered to the beech tree through prayer, and even if the tree dried up, it would never be cut (Esin, 1979: p.162). Chinese sources mention that the Kyrgyz also offered sacrifices to the beech tree. The Bashkirs also consider the beech tree sacred (Ülkütaşır, 1963: p.15). In the *Dede Korkut* epics, the beech tree is symbolized by an arrow and represents sovereignty. It is believed that God or a divine messenger appeared and spoke through the beech tree (Ögel, 1971: p.479).

4.1.2. Cypress Tree (*Cupressus*)

Locations: Karacaahmet, Edirnekapi, Topkapı Palace Courtyards I and II, Eyüp Sultan, Dolmabahçe Palace

Key Features: Extremely slow-growing; average lifespan of 2,000 years.

Uses: Cypress wood is utilized in shipbuilding, bridges, and dock foundations. In health applications, it is believed to benefit those with diabetes, coughs, and high fevers.

Mythology: In ancient Turkish beliefs, places where cypress trees grow were considered sacred spaces for prayer to God. Among the Çalkans of the Altai region, the cypress is called "yürük," meaning heart, as it was believed to bring life to people and many creatures in the forest (Ergun, 2017: p.292). The cypress tree represents God's attributes of mercy (*er-Rahim*), protection (*el-Müheymin*), greatness (*el-Azim*), and majesty (*el-Kebir*) (Ergun, 2017: p.292). After the Turks embraced Islam, the cypress was likened to the letter Elif (the first letter of the Arabic alphabet) in the Qur'an and came to symbolize unity and monotheism. It is also believed that the sound "hü" it makes in the wind can dispel fears of the deceased. This disinfecting quality has led to its use as a decorative element in Turkish-Islamic cemeteries (Altaylı, 1994: p.21). In Turkish belief, the cypress is closely associated with graveyards. Its presence by water and graves has made it both a symbol of life and death. Within the Turkish-Islamic belief system, the cypress embodies God's mercy. As it symbolizes the beloved, being near a cypress has been interpreted as a connection to God, while reaching the beloved (God) is seen as possible only through entering the cypress's domain—the grave (Kaplan, 2010: p.305).

The cypress's long lifespan and evergreen nature have made it a symbol of eternity. Planting it in cemeteries serves as a means of conveying the spirits of ancestors to the heavens, with its green color believed to signify that ancestral spirits are in paradise. This symbolism, revered since the Turkish creation myths and later in Islam, underscores the cypress's sacred status (Yavuz, 2006: p.281). In ancient Egypt, Lebanon, and Iran, societies revered tree species such as cedar, cypress, and juniper as sacred. Items made from these woods were integral to palaces, tombs, and temples (Şahbaz, 2018). In Zoroastrianism, the cypress symbolizes fire, and to the Greeks, it represents eternity, with the philosopher Plato recording his thoughts on cypress wood tablets. In Greek mythology, cypress is associated with Cupaerisios, a young man from Crete whom the god Zeus transformed into a tree as

a symbol of Apollo's love (Kaya, 2007: p.165). The cypress's loyal companion is the dove, a symbol that elevates the cypress above other trees. In the Turkish tale of *Kerem and Aslı*, Kerem plays his saz and speaks to the cypress tree upon seeing items belonging to Aslı, symbolizing steadfastness, truth, the Elif-Allah symbol, and the beloved (Hakverdioğlu, 2016: p.219).

4.1.3. Pine Tree (*Pinaceae*)

Locations: Fethi Paşa Grove, Edirnekapi

Key Features: The only tree species that does not shed its leaves.

Benefits: It purifies the air, is beneficial for asthma and cough, and its resin is used to produce pine gum.

Mythology: In Yakut beliefs, forest and tree cultures are deeply respected, with special reverence for the black pine. Women who desired children would lay a white horsehide beneath a black pine and pray for offspring. In Yakut mythology, black and red pines represent the male, while stone pines symbolize the female (Gezgin, 2017: p.51). The Altai Turks viewed a massive pine tree as a sacred entity, connecting the world's center to the heavens. According to the Karagas, small mystical beings, angered by humans who mocked them as they traveled on hares to deliver the elixir of immortality, chose instead to pour this elixir over pine, cedar, and fir trees, which is why these trees remain green year-round (Ergun, 2004: p.209). In Anatolian Turkish mythology, the wolf, a sacred figure, plays a role in the "Wolf Pine" myth, where a giant pine tree, representing divine protection, nourishes an abandoned child with its milk, symbolizing the nurturing aspect of divinity (Gezgin, 2017: p.51). In Greek mythology, Pan, the god of shepherds, wears a crown made of pine branches or carries a pine branch, symbolizing his connection to nature. According to legend, both Pan and Boreas (the north wind) loved the nymph Pitys. When Pitys chose Pan, a jealous Boreas pushed her off a cliff, and in compassion, the earth transformed her into a pine tree. When Boreas brushes against her branches, it is said Pity's spirit mourns. The word "pitys" in Greek means "pine tree," and in her memory, she offered her branches to make crowns for Pan (Gezgin, 2017: pp.50-51). In Chinese culture, the pine tree is believed to possess a spirit. Regular consumption of pine tea is thought to confer youthfulness and beauty, and its needles were used to stave off hunger, as it was believed that less eating could prolong life. The Chinese see the pine as a tree full of life, sharing its vitality generously with those around it, as it embodies a rich spirit (Gezgin, 2017: p.50).

4.1.4. Plane Tree (*Platanus Orientalis*)

Locations: Atik Valide Mosque, Mihrimah Sultan Mosque, Topkapı Palace's 1st, 2nd, and 3rd Courtyards, Archaeology Museum (Janissary Tree), Gülhane Park, Sultanahmet Square, Eyüp Sultan

Key Features: Known for its vibrant leaves, this tree has a striking appearance, making it popular in landscape design.

Benefits: Used in treating gout, rheumatism, and depression.

Mythology: The plane tree, renowned for its ability to "ignite

from within,” is often seen as an extraordinary tree and is referred to as “the tree whose fire comes from itself.” In ancient Iran, it symbolized wealth, abundance, fertility, and royalty. Among the people, the plane tree was believed to promote fertility and health, earning it reverence as the “desire tree” (Gezgin, 2017: p.57). In Egyptian mythology, the tree was associated with Hathor, one of Egypt’s greatest deities, the creative cow goddess of the universe. In Greek mythology, Zeus fell in love with Europe, whom he transformed into a magnificent bull to approach. She mounted him, and he swam to Crete, where, under a plane tree, they united, and this event sanctified the tree (Koç, 2024). The plane tree also has a place in the story of Noah’s Ark, as mentioned in both the Bible and the Quran. According to the narrative, God decided to flood the Earth due to human wrongdoing. God instructed Noah to build an ark using a plane tree. Noah waited 40 years for the tree to mature. When it did, he built the ark, covering it with pitch. The ark saved Noah, his family, and pairs of every species, while the rest perished in the floodwaters. Afterward, the ark came to rest, allowing its inhabitants to start anew (The Holy Bible, New International Version, 2011; Quran 11: pp.25-49). In Christian tales, Prophet Zechariah was pursued by King Herod’s men. He hid within the hollow of a tree, but his clothing caught outside, revealing his location to Satan, who informed Herod’s soldiers. The tree, often illustrated as a plane tree, was cut down with a saw, leading to Zechariah’s martyrdom (Aydın, 2013). In Ottoman history, the plane tree gained further significance during a turbulent period in 1656. Amid financial hardship, Janissaries revolted, demanding the heads of officials blamed for economic woes. The Sultan, Mehmet IV, yielded to their demands. In what is known as the “Çınar Incident” or “Vak’a-i Vak-vakiye,” 30 officials’ heads were hung from a plane tree in Sultanahmet Square. The bodies reportedly made a “vak vak” sound as they swayed, giving the event its name. This tree later became known as the “Janissary Tree,” marking it as a somber historical symbol (Aktepe, 1993; Aktaş and Sönmez, 2011).

4.1.5. Poplar Tree (*Populus Alba*)

Locations: Üsküdar

Key Features: Thin, smooth, and white-barked.

Benefits: Used in the pharmaceutical industry; valued in the treatment of rheumatism and stomach ailments.

Mythology: In Turkish mythology, the poplar tree is referred to as “tirek” or “terek,” meaning “pillar.” It is believed to connect heaven and earth, serving as a life-giving force. Poplar symbolizes a “father,” bringing the tribe together like a house’s central pillar, a place around which collective decisions are made. It is considered a bridge between the underworld (hell), our world (earth), and the heavenly realm (paradise) (Yıldız, 1998: p.49). The *Manas Epic* highlights the poplar tree as a symbol of death and rebirth. In one dream, Manas’s wife sees sunlight piercing the darkness and rising impossibly high, foreshadowing his resurrection, symbolized by the poplar. In another dream, Semetey’s wife sees a towering poplar in the sea, around which spirits and holy figures gather, asking for sacrifices. Troubled by this dream, she urges Semetey to cancel his journey. Ignoring her warning, he leaves and meets his fate shortly after (Yıldız,

1998: p.49). In Greek mythology, the story of Phaeton, son of the sun god Helios, features the poplar tree in a tale of ambition and tragedy. Phaeton wished to drive his father’s chariot. Helios reluctantly allowed it, but Phaeton lost control, bringing the sun too close to Earth, causing fires and dried rivers. To prevent further destruction, Zeus struck Phaeton with a lightning bolt. Overcome with grief, Phaeton’s sisters wept endlessly, transforming into poplar trees (Demiralp, 2020).

4.1.6. Oak Tree (*Quercus*)

Locations: Sultanahmet Square, Hagia Sophia, Yıldız Park, Eyüp, Dolmabahçe Palace

Key Features: Oak requires substantial water and has highly durable wood that is easily cut and shaped.

Benefits: Used in treating stomach and digestive issues; oak wood is valued for furniture and decorative items, and its acorns are used in dye-making.

Mythology: In Greek mythology, Dryads, like the Hamadryads, are tree nymphs, with “Drys” meaning oak in Greek. They are born with the oak tree they inhabit, living and dying with it. Some Dryads are immortal and serve as guardians of trees and forests, deeply grieving when harm comes to their trees. In the Celtic tradition, Druids, whose name derives from a term meaning “knower of the oak,” hold sacred rituals in oak forests. They harvest mistletoe from oak trunks using a golden sickle, considering the oak their holy tree. Past cultures, including the Germans, Slavs, and Celts, worshipped the oak, associating it with divine power and using oak wood for sacred fires (Güçlütürk, 2021). In Druid beliefs, the oak was seen as a divine choice, its very core was believed to house gifts from the heavens (Yılmaz, 2000). In the Torah, an angel of God is described as resting under an oak in the city of Ofra, making the oak a tree of reverence among Jews (Gezgin, 2017: pp.133-134). In Norse mythology, the god Balder, a symbol of beauty, innocence, and light, was betrayed by Loki and killed with a mistletoe arrow by Hod. His death is mourned with festivities where fires are lit, and the oak, seen as a symbol of fertility and abundance, is revered in his memory (Ergun, 2004: p.47).

4.1.7. Willow Tree (*Salix*)

Locations: Üsküdar, Acıbadem

Key Features: Typically found near water and grows quickly; contains salicylic acid, a key ingredient in aspirin.

Benefits: Used in cosmetics and medicine; known for its pain-relieving properties and benefits for eczema and appetite stimulation.

Mythology: In Western culture, the weeping willow is often associated with mourning and even linked to the devil, while in Eastern traditions, it symbolizes feminine grace and springtime. Japanese Ainu people believed that the backbone of the first humans was crafted from willow wood (Güçlütürk, 2021). In Greek mythology, the Hesperides, known as the “daughters of evening,” reside at the foot of Mount Atlas. Their land, rich in ambrosia, the food of the gods, is where they sing and dance daily. During the wedding of Zeus and the goddess Hera, Gaia (Earth) gifted the couple precious golden

apples, which Hera cherished and entrusted to the Hesperides for cultivation. When Herakles later stole these apples, the Hesperides were grief-stricken, and the gods transformed them into poplar, elm, and willow trees to console them. In Turkish culture, the willow is a sacred tree, often where the brave would set up camp beneath its shade. The tree was thought to imbue those who rested near it with qualities like domesticity, gentleness, and affection for children. Frequently home to small nesting birds, the willow nurtures and protects these creatures like a mother (Gezgin, 2017: p.172).

4.1.8. Acacia Tree (*Acacia Penninervis*)

Locations: Üsküdar, Acıbadem

Key Features: Thrives easily in temperate climates, producing white, red, or yellow flowers depending on the variety.

Benefits: Known for purifying the air, particularly in high-traffic areas; its fragrance is pleasant and it is beneficial for throat, urinary, and lung ailments.

Mythology: The acacia tree is mentioned numerous times in the Torah, where it is revered by the Jewish people as sacred. Among the offerings to God, the acacia is the only tree specified by name (Ergun, 2004:109). In both Christian and Jewish beliefs, the acacia symbolizes immortality. Before the rise of Islam, the pre-Islamic Quraysh tribe held an animistic belief system that honored three goddesses: Lat, Uzza, and Manat. Known as “the Daughters of Allah,” these deities are also referenced in the Quran. The worship of these goddesses took place within sacred acacia trees, considered the goddesses' dwelling place. According to tradition, only female children were sacrificed to honor them, while male children were left untouched (Gezgin, 2017: p.17).

4.1.9. Linden Tree (*Tilia*)

Locations: Eminönü

Key Features: Extremely soft and flexible; easy to work with.

Benefits: Known for its soothing effects, it alleviates colds, flu, and coughs during winter.

Mythology: In Greek mythology, Zeus and Hermes, disguised as mortals, visited the region of Phrygia. They wandered from house to house, testing the hospitality and kindness of the residents. However, none offered them food or shelter, even though the houses were filled with the aroma of feasts. After being turned away by everyone, the gods finally arrived at the humble home of an elderly couple, Baucis and Philemon, who welcomed them warmly. The couple shared their modest meal and tended to the gods with utmost care. Touched by their generosity, Zeus and Hermes revealed their true identities and invited the couple to follow them to a hill. When Baucis and Philemon looked back, they saw that the entire town had been flooded as punishment for its selfishness. Zeus transformed their simple home into a magnificent marble temple, with everything inside turned to gold. When the gods asked for their final wish, the couple requested to remain together as temple guardians until the end of their lives. As they grew old and approached death, they began to transform: Philemon into an oak tree, and Baucis into a linden tree. Thus, the trees

symbolize their eternal love and happiness (Gezgin, 2017: p.102).

4.1.10. Mulberry Tree (*Morus*)

Locations: Eminönü

Key Features: Thrives in temperate climates, especially in moist soil.

Benefits: Used in the treatment of cholesterol, diabetes, and skin ailments; also known to support the immune system.

Mythology: In Turkish culture, mulberry trees are regarded as sacred (Esin, 1979: 83). In the 5th century AD, it is recorded that the Göktürk khans planted mulberry or pine trees at the site of the underground god's domain, and, during the fifth and eighth months of the year, they would perform a ritual horse race around this tree (Işık, 2004: p.99). Centuries later, the mulberry tree features prominently in the legends of Hacı Bektaş Veli. One tale tells of Ahmet Yesevi sending Hacı Bektaş to Anatolia. During the journey, one of the dervishes threw a piece of burning mulberry wood from the fire towards the land of Rum. Ahmet Fakih caught this piece and planted it in front of the site where Hacı Bektaş would later establish his tekke (spiritual lodge). The wood sprouted immediately into a mulberry tree, which, according to legend, still stands today with its top portion appearing charred (Ocak, 1983: p.212).

4.1.11. Judas Tree (*Cercis Siliquastrum*)

Locations: Fethi Paşa Grove, Yıldız Park, Beşiktaş, Üsküdar, Bosphorus woods, Sultanahmet Square

Key Features: During its blooming season, the Judas tree offers a vibrant display of colors.

Benefits: Known to aid in digestion and act as a diuretic.

Mythology: The Akkadian word *argamannu*, meaning "purple," evolved into *argavan* in Turkish and eventually became *erguvan* (Judas tree) in modern Turkish (Öztürk, 2005: p.201). In Christian belief, one of Jesus's twelve apostles, Judas, gave Jesus the “kiss of death” to identify him to Roman soldiers. Following his betrayal, Judas's face turned a shade similar to the tree's purple blossoms, symbolizing his shame. According to legend, Judas hanged himself from this tree, thus giving the Judas tree its name. Its color, blending purple and pink, is believed to reflect his shame and blood (Doğruyol, 2003: p.58). In Western languages, it is often referred to as the "Judas Tree" (Britannica, 2018). In Islamic tradition, it is suggested that Judas was made to resemble Jesus and was crucified in his place. Before this event, Judas is said to have worn a purple garment, symbolizing betrayal (Koçak & Gürçay, 2015). In Istanbul, a local legend tells of Princess Haniçe, daughter of King Yağfur, who awaited her beloved's return. While drinking water at the Fountain of Topuklu, her beloved was captured by guards and cruelly burned alive by the city walls. Watching him burn, Haniçe went to the fountain, scooped a handful of water, and shed two tears, which turned the fountain water a deep red. Since that day, the Judas trees have bloomed in that red-purple shade, commemorating her love (Gürçay, 2019). In Byzantine times, the color purple, linked to Judas trees, was reserved for nobility and emperors, symbolizing unreachable power and

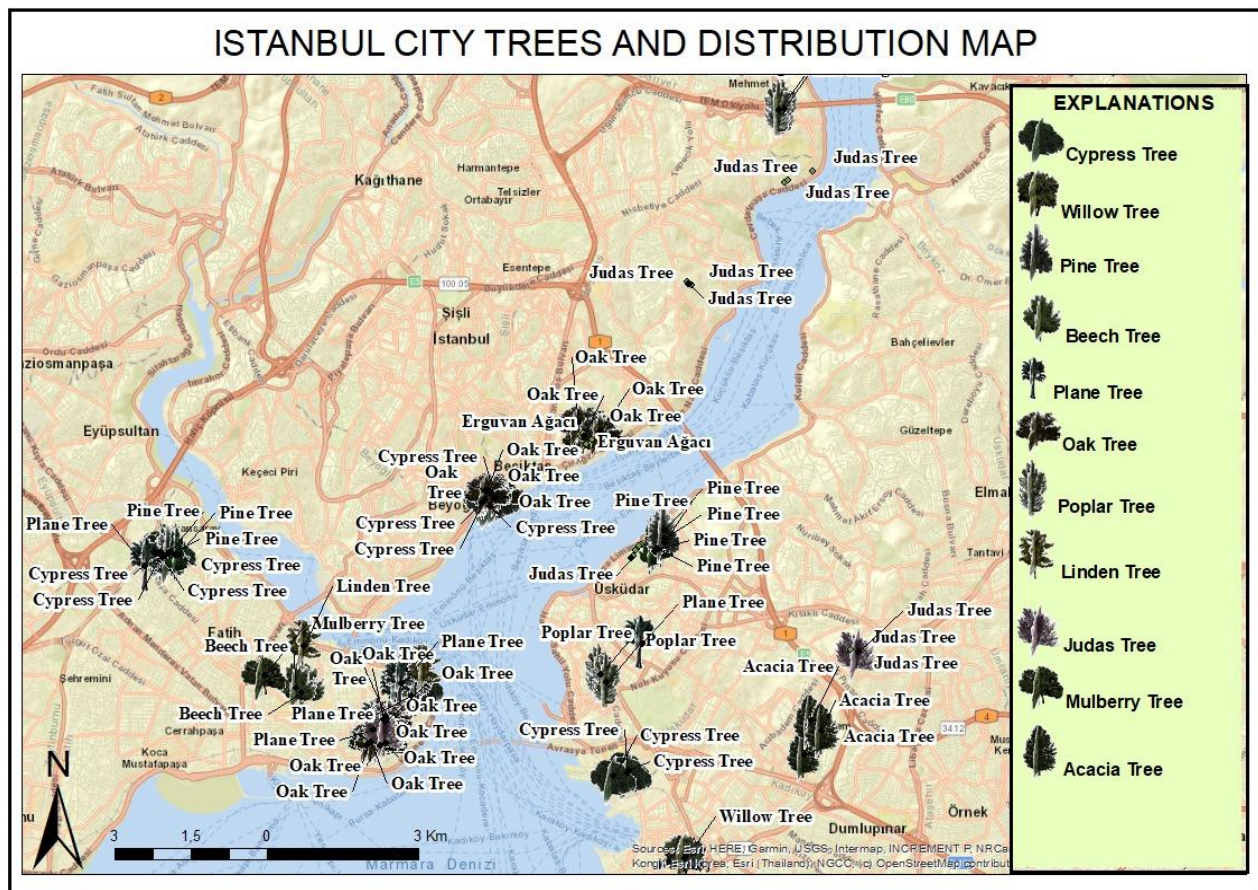


Figure 1. Mythological Trees and Their Distribution on Istanbul's Tourist Routes

Source: Prepared by the author.

class division. Only emperors wore purple capes, and the common people were forbidden from using this color. When Emperor Constantine declared Byzantium "New Rome" in 330 AD, it was during Judas tree blooming season—a date marked today as May 11 (Koçak & Gürçay, 2015). In Rome, purple also symbolized imperial power. Imperial infants were wrapped in purple cloth and referred to as *porphyrogenitus* ("born into the purple"). Roman soldiers draped Jesus in a purple cloth before his crucifixion to mock his title as "King of the Jews" (Koçak and Gürçay, 2015). In Ottoman history, Sultan Suleiman the Magnificent hosted the grand master of the Knights of Rhodes, L'Isle Adam, in a purple tent, emphasizing purple's significance as a symbol of authority. Even today, Christian cardinals wear purple robes, symbolizing high office (Özer, 2012: p.280). In ancient Egypt, purple signified nobility and was linked to the color of the sacred lotus flower (Doğruyol, 2003: p.57). In China, purple silk was favored for international gift exchanges (Koçak, 2009). Throughout history, Judas trees have symbolized Istanbul and Bursa, where their bloom is celebrated annually. Emir Sultan (1368–1429), an Ottoman mystic and the son-in-law of Sultan Bayezid I, held gatherings with his followers in Bursa during the Judas tree blooming season, now known as the "Judas Tree Festival" (Dağlı and Kahraman, 2008: p.13).

This figure could illustrate various tree species found in Istanbul and their specific distribution across notable areas, parks, and historical sites. The trees included might cover well-known species such as the plane tree (*Platanus*

orientalis) around Sultanahmet Square, Judas trees (*Cercis siliquastrum*) across Bosphorus woods, and cypress trees (*Cupressus*) in cemeteries like Karacaahmet. The illustration could also provide markers indicating the historical, cultural, and medicinal significance of each species in Istanbul, emphasizing their connection to local myths and the city's heritage.

4.2. Flowers

4.2.1. Rose (Rhodon-Rosa)

Locations: Haseki, Topkapı Palace, Sultanahmet, Eyüp Sultan

Key Features: Deciduous in winter; a long-lived, thorny shrub.

Benefits: Widely used in skincare products, cosmetics, pharmaceuticals, and the food industry.

Mythology: Among the most significant flowers in Turkish gardens, the rose holds a special place. During the reign of Sultan Mehmet the Conqueror, a section of the "Hasbahçe" garden at the New Palace (Topkapı Palace) was dedicated to cultivating roses (especially red and resin roses) to meet palace kitchen needs. This area became known as "Gülhane" (Rose Garden). It is believed that rose water and rose-based confections were made from these garden roses. The roses needed for palace gardens were primarily sourced from Edirne and its surroundings, and orders were sent to the local

authorities for regular rose sapling deliveries (Yıldız, 2014). In Islam, the rose is considered sacred and is associated with the Prophet Muhammad's fragrance. According to legend, roses sprouted from the Prophet's sweat drops as he ascended during the Mi'raj. Thus, rose water is widely used in Muslim societies (Açıkel, 2018). The red rose symbolizes divine grandeur and majesty (Schimmel, 2004). As Imam Ali felt his end approaching, he requested a bouquet of roses and held it as he passed away, giving the rose special significance for Bektashi dervishes (Uludağ, 2001). In Christianity, the white rose is associated with the Virgin Mary, symbolizing the moon, water, and purity (Koçak & Günaltay Başak, 2023). For Catholics, the yellow rose represents the Pope's emblem. The Jewish harvest festival Shavuot, celebrated on the sixth and seventh days of May, is also known as the "Rose Festival," where offerings and celebrations mark the holiday (Rock, 1909). The story of Hızır and İlyas, brothers separated by fate with İlyas on land and Hızır in the sea, underscores the rose's cultural importance. Every day, they prayed for a reunion, and it's believed Allah allowed them to meet once a year, on May 6, now celebrated as Hıdırellez, the spring festival. People believe that trees bow, waters sleep and that Hızır and İlyas meet under a rose bush, where wishes are left to be carried to the other realm at sunrise. People picnic, light fires to jump over, and celebrate the belief that Hızır attained immortality by drinking the "water of life" (Uca, 2007). In Greek mythology, Adonis, born from his transformed mother Smyrna (the myrrh tree), lives a third of his life underground and the rest on earth with his lover, Aphrodite. During a hunting trip, Adonis is mortally wounded by a wild boar—an act of jealousy by Ares, Aphrodite's lover. As Aphrodite rushes to him, her blood turns the white roses red, forever marking the rose as her flower (Gezgin, 2017: p.83).

4.2.2. Tulip (Tulipa Gerneirana)

Locations: Edirne, near aqueducts

Key Features: Prefers semi-shaded areas and has a brief bloom period of 15 days (late April to early May). Frequently used in decorative and landscape design, inspiring numerous works of art.

Benefits: Known for its diuretic, phlegm-clearing, and anti-inflammatory properties.

Mythology: The cultivation of the tulip, referred to as "Rumi" in the Ottoman Empire, predates the era of Grand Vizier Damad İbrahim Pasha. Documentation from the 18th century shows various records of efforts in flower cultivation, especially in works like *Şükûfenâmeler* and *Netâyicü 'l-ezhâr*. Tulip growing was not merely an individual hobby; flower cultivators gathered to share their experiences in communal settings. The tulip was known and appreciated in its wild form before any cultivation efforts began. Bulbs were imported to Istanbul from regions like Manisa, Kefe, Crete, Iran, and even "Frankish" (European) lands. As wild tulip varieties reached Istanbul, 18th-century cultivators focused on tulip breeding. The book *Şükûfenâme* briefly mentions the early efforts to cultivate and grow tulips, marking the beginning of new tulip varieties known as "Rumi" (Kumbar, 2018: pp.235-236). The tulip became the second most used flower after the rose in Ottoman gardens. This iconic flower, which gave its name to

the Tulip Era in Ottoman history, was not limited to gardens alone. In Ottoman art, the tulip motif appeared widely in architecture, tiles, textiles, miniatures, illumination, and crafts (Ersoy, 2011). In Islamic mysticism, the tulip symbolizes God (Allah). In Sufism, the perfect human, known as *İnsan-ı Kamil*, is represented by the Arabic letter *Elif*. The tulip's straight stem resembles this letter, symbolizing divine unity. Additionally, the Arabic spelling of both "Allah" and "lale" (tulip) uses the same letters, each with a numerical value of 66 in *abjad* (a numerological system in Arabic). Thus, the tulip is thought to represent the unity and beauty of God in Islamic mysticism. When written in Arabic, the tulip read backward reveals the word "hilal" (crescent moon), linking it to divine symbolism. The tulip was first referenced in poetry in Anatolia by the mystic Mevlana Jalaluddin Rumi (ILAV, 2022). In Greek mythology, the tulip is said to have sprung from the ground watered by the blood of Adonis, the god of the sun and vegetation, upon his death. The name "Adonis" comes from the Hebrew word for "master," or "Tammuz," known in Turkish as "Temmuz" (July). In Iranian mythology, it is said that when lightning struck a dewdrop on a leaf, the leaf burst into flames and transformed into a tulip. The black center of the tulip is believed to represent the charred mark left by the lightning (Ersoy, 2011).

4.2.3. Hyacinth (Hyacinthus Orientalis)

Locations: Fatih

Key Features: When properly cultivated, it can live for many years and bloom in all seasons. The plant purifies the air and emits a pleasant fragrance.

Benefits: Traditionally used in medicine as an appetite stimulant and a remedy for jaundice and gonorrhea for centuries.

Mythology: After the rose and tulip, the hyacinth became one of the most cultivated flowers in gardens. During the 16th century, Sultan Murad III issued a decree requesting hyacinth bulbs from Aleppo, indicating its presence in royal gardens. The hyacinth held a special place in the gardens of sultans, mystics, and people from all walks of life, even inspiring books. The *Sümbülname*, a manuscript housed in the Topkapı Palace Museum Library and written in the 18th century, is devoted to the hyacinth. This work, in which the hyacinth "speaks" and is engaged in conversations, merges refined examples of literature, painting, and calligraphy focused on this flower. The manuscript lists over thirty varieties of hyacinths, named based on their colors and shapes (Karaman, 2012: p.292). In Greek mythology, the hyacinth symbolizes rebirth. According to the myth, Hyacinthus, the young son of the King of Sparta, was the beloved friend of Apollo. One day, during a discus-throwing contest, Apollo's discus accidentally struck Hyacinthus in the head, causing his death. Heartbroken, Apollo exclaimed, "If only I could have died in your place!" and carried his friend's body on his shoulders. At that moment, a flower bloomed on the blood-stained grass, named "hyacinth" after Hyacinthus himself (Erhat, 1972: p.153).

4.2.4. Iris (Iris)

Locations: Eyüp Sultan

Key Features: Used in the production of essential and fixed oils. It is a low-maintenance, resilient plant.

Benefits: Known for its strong aphrodisiac properties.

Mythology: The Latin name for the iris flower, *Iris*, is derived from the Greek goddess Iris, who served as a messenger between gods and humans and symbolized the rainbow. In mythology, Iris was the handmaiden of Hera and depicted as a winged maiden enveloped in the colors of the rainbow. The iris plant is often found in cemeteries (Gezgin, 2017: p.173). In traditional Chinese medicine, the iris is associated with fertility and the birth of male children. In some regions of southern China, iris water is used in ceremonial baths; when mixed with wine and consumed, it is believed to extend life and enhance intelligence (Piante, 2000).

4.2.5. Daffodil (*Narcissus Pseudonarcissus*)

Locations: Dolmabahçe Palace, Ümraniye

Key Features: A delicate plant that wilts quickly but possesses a beautiful fragrance.

Benefits: Known for its calming and sleep-regulating properties.

Mythology: According to Greek mythology, Narcissus was the son of the river god Cephissus and the nymph Liriope. As a handsome young man, he attracted the admiration of many, particularly young women, but he was indifferent and even mocked them. One day, while out hunting, Narcissus came upon a spring and, exhausted, bent down to drink. In the calm water, he saw his own reflection—an extraordinarily beautiful face, perhaps the most beautiful he had ever seen. He fell deeply in love with his own image, unable to look away. Entranced by his reflection, Narcissus eventually wasted away, dying by the water's edge. In the spot where he perished, a flower bloomed, which was named Narcissus, or daffodil (Gezgin, 2017: p.147).

4.2.6. Water Lily (*Nymphaea Alba*)

Locations: Waterways

Key Features: Aquatic plant, revered as sacred in China and often associated with Buddhism. Symbolizes Buddha, representing relaxation, lightness, and peace.

Benefits: Beneficial for heart health.

Mythology: The water lily, also known as the lotus, is a beautiful flower that grows in wetlands, managing to keep its leaves clean despite emerging from the muddy water. In Hindu belief, water is considered feminine and fertile, and the lotus is seen as the reproductive organ of the waters, personified as the earth goddess. The lotus is a symbol of life, health, abundance, and prosperity. The goddess of the lotus, Lakshmi, represents rebirth and is often depicted sitting on a lotus beside the creator god Vishnu, symbolizing fertility and divine beauty. Vishnu is sometimes called "Padmanabha," meaning "lotus-navel," as a lotus emerges from his navel. Lakshmi's alternate name, "padma," translates to lotus. In Buddhist belief, the goddess of the lotus is connected to the sacred white elephant; in the "Churning of the Milky Ocean" myth, the lotus goddess Sri-Lakshmi and the white elephant Airavata are among the first to emerge from the ocean's milk. The goddess

promises prosperity to those who honor the white elephant. Buddha is depicted sitting on a lotus throne, symbolizing enlightenment. The thousand-petaled lotus, linked to Buddha, embodies spiritual awakening, with its roots in muddy waters symbolizing the cycle of birth, ignorance, and rebirth, while its stem rises above, representing the essence of Buddhist teachings (Piante, 2000). In ancient Egypt, the lotus symbolized the sun and rebirth, representing gods like Nefertem and Ra. Egyptian creation myths suggest that at the dawn of time, a lotus flower emerged from the waters, with the first-morning sun arising from its center (Gezgin, 2017: p.147). Among the Turks, the lotus is a symbol of beauty, wisdom, and elegance (Yılmaz, 2022).

4.2.7. Violet (*Viola Odorata*)

Locations: Sultanahmet

Key Features: Easy to cultivate and produces flowers quickly.

Benefits: Known for its stress-reducing and calming effects.

Mythology: In Greek mythology, Attis, whose name means "handsome," is a character caught between the desires of the hermaphroditic deity Agdistis and the mother goddess Cybele. King Midas of Pessinus also wishes to marry Attis to his daughter. However, Agdistis drives Attis mad, leading him to self-mutilate under a pine tree and ultimately die from blood loss. Upon hearing of Attis's death, Midas's daughter is overwhelmed with grief and takes her own life. From the ground where her blood was shed, violets are said to have sprung (Gezgin, 2017: p.130). In Roman mythology, violets are associated with the Manes, spirits of the deceased, whom the living seek to appease with offerings of wine, milk, honey, and sweet foods. During festivals honoring the Manes, people place violets on graves to keep these spirits content, thus ensuring harmony with the departed (Gezgin, 2017: p.131).

4.2.8. Jasmine (*Jasminum Officinale*)

Locations: Eyüp Sultan

Key Features: Known for its delicate white flowers and captivating fragrance.

Benefits: Widely used in the perfume and cosmetics industry.

Mythology: In the Indo-Pakistani region, Islamic poets have often used the jasmine tree as a symbol for Allah. It is believed that the jasmine tree grows in the heart of a devout individual, nourished by the repetition of the *shahada* (declaration of faith), until its fragrance envelops the person entirely (Gezgin, 2017: p.185). In Greek mythology, jasmine is associated with Persephone, queen of the underworld, as a symbol for her role in Hades, where she guides the souls of the dead. Throughout history, jasmine has also been linked to love, purity, beauty, and elegance (Koç, 2024).

4.2.9. Lily (*Lilium*)

Locations: Eyüp Sultan

Key Features: Prefers shrubbery, rocky, and arid areas.

Benefits: Known for its pain-relieving, anti-inflammatory, and swelling-reducing properties.

Mythology: In Greek mythology, the lily has a poignant origin story linked to Hyacinthus, a youth of stunning beauty who captivated the god Apollo. During a disc-throwing game, a misdirected disc struck Hyacinthus, leading to his tragic death. Apollo, heartbroken, transformed Hyacinthus's spilled blood into a flower, creating the mountain lily, or "Hyacinth" (Karakurt, 2019). According to ancient Persian belief, lilies are sacred to Hordad, the angel protecting water, and Mordad, the guardian of plants. The sixth day of each month was dedicated to these angels as "Hordadruz." Zoroaster was believed to have been born on Hordad's day, which is also anticipated to be the day of judgment. During the Renaissance, many paintings of Jesus's life included lilies to symbolize purity and virginity. In annunciation scenes where the archangel Gabriel informs Mary of her divine role, Florentine artists often placed a small lily in the corner as a symbol of purity (Gezgin, 2019: p.189). Additionally, across Istanbul, one can see chrysanthemums (*Chrysanthemum indicum*), symbolizing both sorrow and happiness; dahlias (*Pinnate Dahlia*), used for protection against snakes and evil spirits; wisteria (*Wisteria sinensis*), symbolizing patience and grace; and the judas tree (*Cercis siliquastrum*), a symbol of beauty, nobility, and humility (Piante, 2000).

5. Conclusion and Discussion

The Turks have lived in close harmony with nature since the earliest known periods of history. As a community rooted in nature, they engaged with many diverse states and

civilizations across vast geographies. Consequently, they were influenced by these societies and left their cultural imprint wherever they went. The transition of the Turks from a nomadic lifestyle to a settled one, as well as their adoption of Islam, represents critical turning points in their history. Upon arriving in Anatolia, the Turks established prominent states and developed unique arts. Nature, trees, and flowers have always been integral to Turkish life, and this connection only deepened with the establishment of gardens once they embraced a settled lifestyle. During the Seljuk era, palace gardens were known to contain various types of trees and flowers, especially fruit-bearing ones.

Before the conquest of Istanbul, the Ottoman Empire had already established several gardens in Bursa and Edirne. Early Ottoman gardens were an extension of the Seljuk tradition. However, following the conquest of Istanbul, the gardens of the era of Sultan Mehmed the Conqueror began to develop a distinctive identity. Flowers such as roses, tulips, and hyacinths started to be cultivated in palace gardens. Flowers were not merely grown for their aesthetic value; they also played a role in palace cuisine and were used in the daily lives of the sultans and the harem. The gardens exhibited a respectful, simple harmony with nature, valuing spiritual significance and assigning symbolic meaning to the elements within them. Roses, in particular, were cultivated in such abundance that they lent their name to locations like Gülhane (Rosehouse).

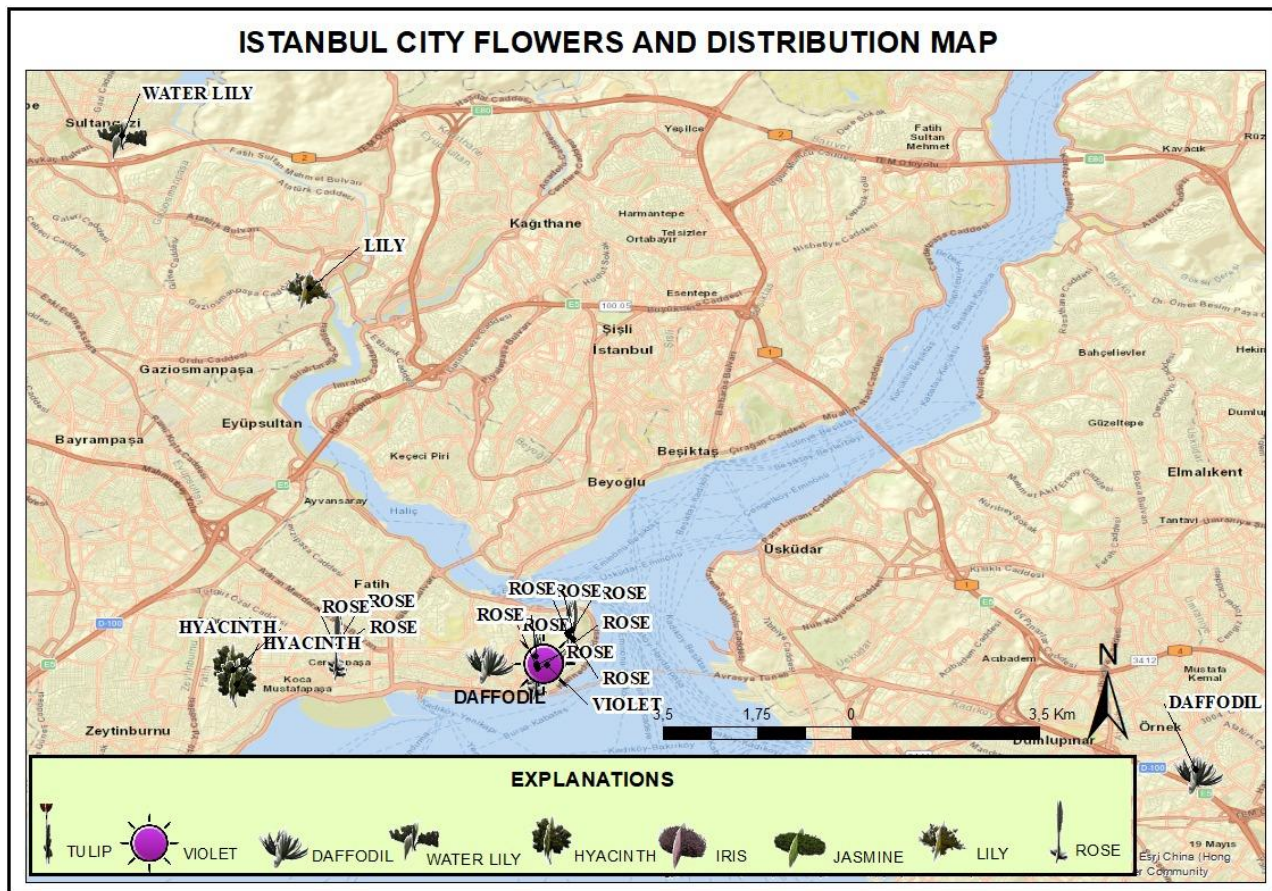


Figure 2. Mythological Trees and Their Distribution on Istanbul's Tourist Routes

Source: Prepared by the author.

Reflecting the legacy of their nomadic culture, the Turks placed great importance on outdoor living, resulting in a robust gardening tradition from small residences to palaces. These gardens prioritized functionality over aesthetics. Trees held the most significant place in Turkish gardens as symbols of sacred nature. Evergreens, representing eternity and providing shade, were often chosen for gardens, while cypress trees were preferred in cemeteries. Fruit trees were also commonly planted for their blossoms and yields. In the more private areas of gardens, special flowers with aesthetic appeal and pleasant fragrance were arranged with care, avoiding excessive color or variety. Water, recalling the paradise gardens, formed an essential part of Turkish gardens. The Turks favored moving or flowing water over still pools, and gardens situated by the sea or rivers often included fountains and pools. These gardens were designed to provide physical and spiritual solace, with natural and simple forms as the guiding principles. The materials, trees, and flowers used in Turkish gardens are significant in conveying the cultural identity of the societies that cultivated these spaces.

Mythological narratives hold significant importance in the profession of tour guide. Studies published after 2020 reinforce the significance of storytelling as a cornerstone of effective tour guiding. For instance, Leong et al. (2024) emphasize that storytelling not only enhances visitor engagement but also strengthens the emotional and cognitive connection between tourists and the destination, aligning with the modern demand for immersive travel experiences. As highlighted in the study by Özen et al. (2023), mythology and legends make tours more engaging, positively impact the destination's image and branding, and contribute to unforgettable tourism experiences for travelers. Recent research by Zhang et al. (2024) highlights that integrating mythological elements into tourism narratives creates a unique cultural depth, transforming tours into platforms for cultural education and entertainment. Additionally, Campos et al. (2023) explore the role of storytelling in sustainable tourism, suggesting that mythological narratives can help preserve and promote intangible cultural heritage. This aligns with the increasing focus on tourism's contribution to cultural sustainability, as myths and legends often serve as repositories of a community's values and history. Incorporating such narratives helps tour guides balance entertainment with the ethical responsibility of heritage preservation. This study is valuable as it presents the mythological origins of plants, which tour guides can share with their groups during tours, enhancing the cultural and historical context of the experience.

Theoretically, this research contributes to the body of knowledge on cultural heritage, mythology, and tourism studies by mapping the intersections between cultural narratives, historical transitions, and plant symbolism in Turkish gardening traditions. It expands on the influence of various belief systems—such as shamanism, Islam, and Western ideals—on Turkish garden design and plant selection, offering a detailed examination of the mythological roots of these traditions. This study advances theoretical frameworks in cultural tourism by connecting historical horticultural practices to contemporary tourism experiences, enhancing the interpretation of heritage landscapes in tourism research. Additionally, it provides insights into the role of

natural elements in myth-making and identity formation within Turkish culture, reinforcing interdisciplinary approaches that merge anthropology, history, and environmental studies.

This study has important practical implications, especially for the tourism and cultural heritage sectors. By uncovering the mythological and historical significance of plants in Turkish gardens, particularly in Istanbul, it provides a resource for tour guides to enrich the narratives they share with tourists. The integration of mythological stories can deepen visitors' understanding of Turkish culture, offering a more immersive experience. Furthermore, the findings support heritage preservation initiatives by highlighting culturally significant plant species, which can aid in the maintenance and conservation of historical gardens. For landscape designers and urban planners, this study emphasizes the importance of culturally relevant plant species, encouraging them to incorporate these elements in future projects, which can enhance the cultural and historical landscape of Istanbul.

5.1. Limitations and Suggestions to Future Research

The study is limited to Istanbul's historical peninsula and its tourist-frequented areas, excluding plant species in other parts of Istanbul, thereby providing only a partial representation of the city's overall distribution of plants. Future research could explore comparative studies on the mythological significance of plants across different cultures to understand similarities and differences in cultural symbolism related to nature. Further studies might also investigate how modern Turkish gardens integrate these historical and mythological elements in urban landscapes, potentially through qualitative interviews with landscape designers, cultural heritage professionals, and city planners. Another avenue for research could focus on the impact of mythological storytelling in tourism on tourists' cultural understanding and experience satisfaction, using empirical studies to assess how narratives influence visitor perceptions of Turkish culture. Additionally, given the role of gardens in public spaces, research could examine how residents engage with these spaces and perceive their cultural value, providing insights for community-centered conservation efforts.

Ethics Statement: Ethics committee approval was not obtained for this study as it did not require ethics committee approval. In case of detection of a contrary situation, TO&RE Journal has no responsibility, and all responsibility belongs to the author(s) of the study.

Author Contributions Statement: The author's contribution rate is 100%.

Conflict of Interest: As the study has a single author, there is no conflict of interest.

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