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Cultural landscape elements of Pire (Şeyh) Merdan first degree archaeological site, Mardin

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Keywords

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Abstract

Pire Merdan is a site located within the boundaries of Elmabahçe Neighborhood in the Artuklu district of Mardin province. Also known as Tizyan Roman Settlement, this area was registered as I. Degree Archaeological Site under Law No. 2863 in 2018, due to its status as a valuable immovable cultural heritage site requiring protection. The site contains numerous elements of historical architecture and archaeological significance. There is a lack of information and documentation regarding this area, which holds such significant historical, archaeological, and religious values. Therefore, the purpose of the presented paper is to contribute to the literature by documenting the archaeological, architectural, and religious elements of the sacred settlement area of Pire Merdan. The area was examined and photographed on-site for this study. The architectural features of the site were described and documented through the use of photographs. Further detailed investigations to be conducted in the future, estimating back to prehistoric periods, will provide clear conclusions both for archaeological literature and the history of the region.

Introduction

Mardin is a historical city located in the southeast of Türkiye. Known for its cultural and historical heritage, Mardin is also home to several sacred sites. One of the significant sacred areas in Mardin is Pire Merdan. Pire Merdan, also known as Tizyan Roman Settlement, is situated within the boundaries of Elmabahçe Neighborhood in the Artuklu district of Mardin province. Due to its status as a valuable immovable cultural heritage site requiring protection, the area was registered as a first-degree archaeological site under Law No. 2863 in 2018 [1].

The site is located in a valley approximately 2 km northeast of the settlement area. The terrain is mountainous, with fertile agricultural fields present. The geography, rich in water resources, has served as a settlement area in different periods of history [1].

This paper introduces the architectural, religious, and archaeological elements of Pire Merdan, a first-degree archaeological site and an important sacred area in Mardin.

Material and Method

In the first stage, a detailed photographic method was employed to investigate the architectural elements of the Pire Merdan Sacred Area in Mardin. Researchers visited the site and conducted thorough documentation through photography. In the second stage, explanations were provided using the photographs to introduce and describe the architectural features and elements of the area.

Results

Archaeological remains from the prehistoric period

It has been reported by the local population that there is a significant presence of flint stones, some of which are worked, on the dominant hill approximately 1 km walking distance southeast of the Pire Merdan site. It is estimated that the flint stones and nodules identified on the surface in the Pire Merdan settlement area were brought from this location. The most significant evidence of carrying traces of different cultures has been identified through surface examinations. Although the flint stones and tools identified on the surface near the location used as a pool may not be densely concentrated, they can be dated back to the prehistoric period (Figure 1).



Figure 1. The stones presumed to belong to the prehistoric period

Cave

Approximately 130 meters northeast of the section where the pool is located and about 70 meters southwest of the Pire Merdan Tomb, there is a rectangular-shaped cave structure carved into the main rock. The entrance to the cave structure is accessed through a 5-meter-long and 2-meter-high opening. Inside the cave structure, the inner part is carved into the main rock. The ceiling and walls are smoothly carved, and there are decorative arches, presumed to be embossed lintels, on the inner walls. These lintels are believed to be decorative elements that continue at the same level along the walls. At the end of the cave, there is a chimney-like architectural feature in the center of the ceiling. This suggests that it may have been used as a healing center or a place of worship during that period. The roof part of the cave is flat, and the chimney feature is covered with molded and processed stone (Figure 2, 3).



Figure 2. The exterior view of the cave structure



Figure 3. Interior detail photos of the cave structure

Remains of Roman-era architectural structures

Approximately 60 meters northwest of the cave structure, there are rectangular-shaped architectural remains that are presumed to belong to the Roman period. Some of the stones have been worked, indicating their association with the architectural structure in the area. Adjacent to the architectural remains, there is a damaged monolithic stone in the form of an obelisk, which is believed to be part of the same structure (Figure 4).



Figure 4. The stone structure in the form of an obelisk

There is an approximate distance of 10 meters between these architectural remains and the tomb. The remains are located in the western section of the tomb structure (Figure 5).



Figure 5. Archaeological architectural remains

Tomb

The tomb, located at the center of the site, is one of the most impressive architectural elements of the Pire Merdan Sacred Area. The tomb structure is oriented in a north-south direction and has a square-like plan with an open courtyard. It is constructed with rubble stone materials. The top of the structure is covered with a stone dome that is rounded downwards and tapers towards the top like a cone. The main entrance to the structure is provided through an iron gate with lintel-like forms located on the eastern facade. Above the gate, there is a square-shaped window at the top. Inside the space, in the southern section, there is the tomb sarcophagus belonging to Sheikh Merdan, extending east-west. The interior space is plastered with lime mortar and painted with white lime wash. The entrance to the tomb courtyard is through the lintel-shaped gate on the east side. The northeastern part of the courtyard is elevated in a terrace-like manner and used as a garden with trees. South of the gate entrance, there is a small area built with brick material. The external facades of the structure are made of concrete and painted with a synthetic green color. According to information obtained from the local villagers, it is mentioned that Pire Merdan is one of the twelve disciples of Sultan-Şeyhmus (Sheikh Mussa Ezzuli), who holds great importance in the region (Figure 6, 7).



Figure 6. Exterior details of the tomb structure



Figure 7. Interior details of the tomb structure

Conclusion

This paper examines the architectural features and elements of the Pire Merdan First Degree Archaeological Site, which is an important sacred area in Mardin. The architectural elements found in the area include stones presumed to belong to the prehistoric period, rectangular-shaped architectural remains believed to be from the Roman period, an obelisk, one cave structure, and tomb elements. When considering the site as a whole, it becomes evident that it has maintained continuity with distinct metaphors of different belief systems from ancient times onwards. Based on this notion, it strengthens the thesis that the settlement has been a sacred space where various rituals have been performed throughout its history.

During the months of September and October, the Pire Merdan Sacred Visitation area is visited intensively by local tourists. The site is located on a high hill, offering a panoramic view of the city. It is crucial to promote tourism in an area that possesses such significant historical, architectural, and archaeological elements while ensuring the preservation and sustainability of its landscape features. The documentation and inclusion of the site in the literature, as carried out in our study, are important initial steps. For future research, it is recommended to utilize technological tools such as terrestrial laser scanning or UAVs (Unmanned Aerial Vehicles) for three-dimensional documentation of the area [2-8]. Creating online virtual tours for tourism purposes can be achieved by documenting the site in 3D with these tools. Additionally, the three-dimensional documentation of the structure will serve as a valuable resource for experts during the restoration phase, providing a reference to the original state of the area in the event of any damage or loss in subsequent stages [9-15].

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