

# Artificial Identity Elements of an Historical City as Cultural Accumulation of Civilizations: Erzurum, a Case from Asia Minor

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**Abstract**—This paper aims to present urban identity elements of Erzurum and focus particularly on artificial environmental identity elements as an accumulation of cultures in the same geography but in different historical periods, one after the other. Cities are entities that gain a current form of urban space with the effects of different civilizations during the historical periods where the architectural elements of various cultures are interdependent. Erzurum is a historical city that has been inhabited by several civilizations in its history date back to 4,000 BC. The many civilizations hosted by the city in its history have resulted in a broad cultural diversity that is embedded within the urban space, like a palimpsest. Architectural traces of different civilizations in urban space have great value, in that they allow traces of various cultures to be legible side by side. In the context of this study, after discussing the key concepts as urban identity, artificial identity elements, and palimpsests, the settlement history of Erzurum is presented based on secondary sources and settlement areas of each civilization are determined on the map of the city. Then spatial traces are presented in terms of architectural structures for each civilization within their settlement boundaries. Then remarkable spatial traces from different historical periods that contribute also the urban identity of Erzurum are introduced. Consequently, the civilizations inhabited in Erzurum in its 6000 years settlement history, and level of embeddedness of these civilizations in urban space at architectural level will shed light on. Through this way, to what extent traces of different civilization could reach today and their contribution to the urban identity of Erzurum, as a historical city from Asia Minor are also discussed.

**Index Terms**—Artificial environment, architectural structures, Erzurum, urban identity.

## I. INTRODUCTION

This study focuses on Erzurum's urban space as a palimpsest, upon the artificial environmental elements, which make an important contribution to the urban identity, by conceptualizing these elements as the production of different cultures. The characteristics of urban space, which has been shaped with the effect of cultures as it is discussed through the concept of palimpsest landscape [1], [2], may have controversial features such as traditional and modern, organic and geometric and irregular and regular [3]. However, all of the artificial identity elements that were produced in different time periods by various civilizations contribute to the contemporary urban identity of Erzurum. From this point of view, the present study aims to present historical layers of

Erzurum that have been created as a result of the transformation of city space with the effects of cultural dynamics, in its history by specifically focusing on the architectural structures that were built in different time periods by different cultures. The artificial environment properties of Erzurum are the focus of the study based on the idea that the impact of human actions on the landscape can be observed at the levels of urban ecosystems, transport routes, human settlements and architecture/ archetypes [1].

As the case area, Erzurum has been selected since it is an important settlement for different civilizations in its history, which dates back to 4000 BC [3]-[8]. In order to highlight the historical richness in terms of its artificial identity elements, in other words, the creation of structure like a palimpsest, it is necessary to point out the important identity elements as cultural accumulation and to underline the main characteristics of Erzurum. Accordingly, in the scope of the present study, first, the concepts of urban identity, artificial identity elements, palimpsest and the literature on the urban identity of Erzurum are presented. Second, the settlement history of Erzurum is presented by particularly focusing on architectural structures produced in different periods, and the boundaries of the settlement areas of each civilization are determined on the map of the city. Within this context, spatial traces are introduced in terms of architectural structures for each civilization within their settlement boundaries. Then remarkable spatial traces from different historical periods that contribute also the urban identity of Erzurum are presented. Consequently, the civilizations inhabited in Erzurum in its 6000 years settlement history, and level of embeddedness of these civilizations in urban space will shed light on. Additionally, through this way, to what extent traces of different civilizations could reach today and their contribution to the urban identity of Erzurum, as a palimpsest from Asia Minor are discussed.

## II. LITERATURE REVIEW

### A. Concepts of Urban Identity and Palimpsest

The concept of identity could be defined as a means for cities to express themselves just as individuals, an environment, and a society. Urban identity is individuality of a space that makes it distinctive from other places [9]. This gains critical importance in our contemporary world where cities have lost their individuality and distinctiveness especially as cities increasingly start to look like one another. A strong urban identity has the potential to “serve as a pragmatic foundation for addressing the profound local and global challenges [10]”. However, a strong urban identity

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cannot be manufactured or created; it is a process in of itself [11].

Urban identity is a product of an existence, and the creation of an identity is the result of sustainability of the certain conditions/elements. Some of these elements are; visual and aesthetic values, physical properties, and social properties [12], and cultural heritage or traditions; quality and characteristics of society's needs; geography, topography, climate, factors created by the natural environment; technology created by the nation-state; and ability to change conditions [13]. On the other hand, the urban identity elements could be categorized into two groups: environmental identity elements that are categorized into two groups as natural environment properties and artificial environment properties, and social identity elements. Natural environmental properties include topographical properties and climate and flora; artificial environment properties are elements at settlement level (building, street, square, etc.), urban equipment (direction signs, lighting, trash cans, etc.) and symbolic elements (monumental architectural buildings, etc.). In addition, socio-cultural elements and socio-economical properties are part of the social elements of urban identity [14]-[18]. In short, an urban identity is accepted as "the sum of the components in the diagnostic quality which defines a city [15]" results in the creation of an identity that depends on the most significant and more effective components of a city.

As it is commonly accepted in the literature, cities are entities that can change permanently their appearances and their components and it can acquire new senses and functions [19]-[21]. From this point of view, the urban landscape is conceived as a palimpsest comprising identity elements specific of each civilization that inhabited in the different historical periods in the city [22]-[24]. By using the palimpsest concept, it is supposed that a new urban layer is superposed on the previous one [24]. The concept of the palimpsest is used to explain the construction stages of the architectural monuments and the urban morphology development during the eras [24], [25].

From this point of view, as stated by Valceanu et al., in order to analyse the current urban morphology, the concept of urban palimpsest can be centred on the urban components as: (1) architectural structures; (2) image of the city in terms of physical aspect of the urban space; (3) spatial dynamics of the city during the historical time periods; and (4) territorial development factors that mutually condition the current urban configuration and its dynamics. Among these four elements, within the context of the research, the main focus will be on the architectural structures as artificial environment elements of Erzurum's urban identity. However, depend on the presentation of the spatial development history of the city in different periods; the image of the city, the spatial dynamics of the city and the territorial development factors are partly emphasized.

#### *B. Literature on Artificial Identity Elements of Erzurum*

Erzurum is a city that has significant identity elements [26], [27]. Due to its remarkable identity elements, there are a substantial number of artificial elements that bear the mark of the several cultures that inhabited it during its 6000 years of

continuous settlement. Review on studies related to the urban identity of Erzurum revealed that a part of literature [7], [28], [29] touch on the issue in relation to urban transformation and/or urban regeneration. Additionally, the urban identity of the Erzurum Urban Protected Area [30] is focused. Some official reports also touch on the Erzurum's identity elements. Among them, according to Erzurum Special Provincial Administration [31], historical monuments are one of the important identity elements of Erzurum. It is commonly accepted that the city has significant cultural properties that make the city distinct from other cities of the country [32].

In the literature, while Atabeyoğlu et al. mainly focuses on the examples of historical civil architecture (traditional houses); Demircan presents main historical architectural structures as Erzurum Castle, Tepsi Minaret, Castle Mosque, Yakutiye Madrasa, Twin-Minaret Madrasa, Three Tombs, Rüstem Paşa Covered Bazaar, Lala Paşa Mosque, Ulu Mosque and Erzurum Bastions (Aziziye, Mecidiye, and Kiremitlik); Yavaş presents the most important monumental structures in terms of history of the city as Erzurum Castle, Ulu Mosque, Twin-Minaret Madrasah and Three Tombs. On the other hand, Altaş emphasizes Twin-Minaret Madrasa, Yakutiye Madrasa, Ulu Mosque, Lala Paşa Mosque, Erzurum Castle, and traditional Erzurum Houses as the important identity elements. In the same line Andaç also determines the identity elements of Erzurum, its historical and cultural background and architectural pattern are among the most significant features of Erzurum such as Congress Building, Erzurum Bastions, Yakutiye Madrasa, Lalapaşa Mosque, Three Tombs and Öşvank Church [32], [33]. Moreover, Andaç considers the Three Tombs, Twin-Minaret Madrasa, Erzurum Castle, Clock Tower, Ulu Mosque, other mosques, inns and public baths to be significant identity properties of Erzurum.

Although some of the monuments that are determined by different authors, as it is called in the present study artificial identity elements, show commonalities, some of them are only emphasized in the only one or two sources. In the following part, artificial identity elements are presented within the spatial development history of the city in different cultural periods. The presentation is also including partly the change in the image of the city, the spatial dynamics and territorial development factors depend on the concept of palimpsest, based on the idea that urban identity is shaped by the physical and cultural accumulation.

### III. SPATIAL DEVELOPMENT OF ERZURUM' URBAN SPACE AS PALIMPSEST

Erzurum, located in the Eastern Anatolia Region (Fig 1), has significant identity elements both in terms of environmental elements such as cold climatic conditions and upland areas compared to the middle and western parts of the country, and in terms of social elements such traditional foods and customs. However, the present study focuses on the artificial identity elements of the city, as a palimpsest in Asia Minor.

Erzurum was historically one of the most important settlement areas in Anatolia. The artificial environmental

characteristics combined with the natural environment of the city dates back to 4000 BC. Erzurum, located along the ancient Silk Road, has sustained its significance as a settlement area in Asia Minor throughout history. During its history, it was ruled by the Hurrians, Urartians, Cimmerians, Scythians, Medes, Persians, Parthians and their successors, Romans, Byzantines, Sassanians, Arabs, Saltukoğulları, Seljuks, Ilkhanid and their successors, Karakoyunlus, Timurids, Akkoyunlus, Safavids, and Ottomans, before becoming a city of the Turkish Republic in 1923 [4], [7], [35]-[39]. The many civilizations that inhabited the city during its 6000-year history have resulted in a broad cultural diversity that is embedded within its urban space [3]. The contemporary urban development of Erzurum began in and around the Erzurum Castle that was built in 900 BC during the Urartian period. However, Erzurum Castle, as it stands today, was built at the beginning of the 5th century when the city was under the rule of the Roman Empire and has been accepted as the oldest settlement area in the city [37], [38] (Fig 2, 3). In the selection of Erzurum as a settlement, the water sources around the castle have been effective. A dominant position of the castle to the Erzurum plain and the surrounding had a positive effect on the establishment of the economic ties of the city with its environment, and that enabled Erzurum became an important market in the region [39], [40]. Following the Roman Empire, Erzurum was passed under the dominance of Byzantines, Sassanians, and Arabs. However, the city re-passed under the rule of Byzantines again in the 10th century. Then it became an important defense point in the region and it has developed a lot during this period [38].



Fig 1. The geographic location of Turkey/Erzurum is highlighted [34].



Fig. 2. Erzurum Castle: The monument with legible traces dating back to the pre-11th century in Erzurum [41].

Since Erzurum Castle is the only monument with legible traces dating back to the pre-11th century in the city; in this part, the spatial development history of Erzurum is presented starting from the 11th century, when Turks became dominant

in the region. The city has been passed under the rule of Turks in the middle of 11th century, and there are many important structures both for Turkish-Islamic architecture and the history of the region. Spatial development of Erzurum is mainly presented within three periods: Saltukoğulları and Beyliks periods (11th-16th century); Ottoman Period (16th-20th century) and Turkish Republic Period (20th century-present) (Fig. 4).



Fig. 3. Erzurum Castle: The oldest settlement area of the city [42].

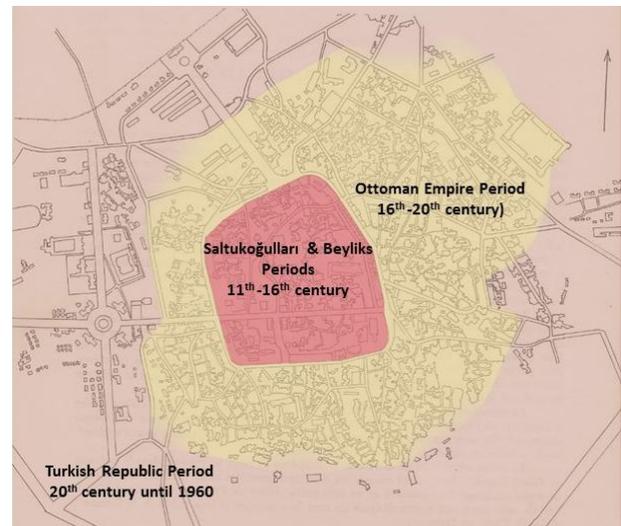


Fig. 4. Spatial Development Boundaries of Erzurum: from 11th century until 1960s.

#### A. Spatial Development during Saltukoğulları and Beyliks Periods (between 11th - 16th Centuries)

Erzurum, was given to Saltukoğulları after 1071 Malazgirt Victory, became the capital city of Saltukoğulları that conduct its dominance in the region between the years 1072 and 1202 [7]. During the Saltukoğulları period, significant construction activities have been experienced in the city. From this period, Castle Mosque, Tepsi Minaret, Ulu Mosque and Emir Saltuk Tomb<sup>1</sup> are the important monuments that have been reached today and make an important contribution to the urban identity [6, 26, 40, 43]. After Saltukoğulları, Erzurum remained under the dominance of Seljuks, (1202-1242) [35], and the city is one of the richest cities in terms of Seljuks' architecture. Twin-Minaret Madrasa that is commonly accepted as the symbolic monument of Erzurum, and Ahi Baba Tomb, Cimcime Hatun Tomb and Rabia Hatun Tomb, are structures symbolize the artistic level and architectural movement of the period in Erzurum [4], [44]. The important

<sup>1</sup> Melik Gazi Tomb that is also called as Emir Saltuk Tomb, is the biggest and the first built Tomb among the Three Tombs [4].

monument of Erzurum from Ilkhanid period in between 1242-1336 [35], are Yakutiye Madrasa and Ahmediye Madrasa [26]. During the Beyliks period, between 1335-1514 years [38], not any well-known architectural monuments has been built. The historical monuments in Erzurum, that are built especially in Saltukoğulları, Seljuks and Ilkhanid periods, has an important role in the conceptualization of the city as a cultural and artistic center. On the other hand, the area that is determined by the Ulu Mosque, Twin-Minaret Madrasa, Yakutiye Madrasa, Ahmediye Madrasa, and Inner Castle was the main residential area of the city until the 15th century (Fig 5, 6) [8], [39].



Fig. 5. Architectural Monuments from 11th-16th centuries: Ulu Mosque (12th century, Saltukoğulları) [45].



Fig. 6. Architectural Monuments from 11th-16th centuries: Twin Minaret Madrasa Madrasa (13th century, Seljuks) [45].

### *B. Spatial Development during Ottoman Empire Period (between 16th-20th Century)*

After the city passed into the hands of the Ottoman Empire in 1514, it was developed from top to bottom in the 16th century, and Erzurum Castle was restored [35], [39]. In the 17th century, as a result of the increasing commercial activity, public improvement activities were launched that saw urban development expanding outside the city walls, mostly towards the north, while the 18th century saw further urban development to the east and south [5], [39]. Having role as an important military base city of the Ottoman army, Erzurum has remained as borderline until the 18th century. After this date, since there was not any requirement to the castle, its stones were removed and then used in other construction [38]. Therefore, Erzurum was surrounded by walls until the 19th century, when the walls started to collapse and the traditional city pattern began to disappear with the construction of new houses, roads and road structures inside the walls. In the second half of the 19th century the city walls disappeared altogether, and thus a uniform ring road was formed [38].

During this period, the western border of the city had remained unchanged up until the 20th century [35], [39].

In Erzurum, there are many mosques, madrasa, bathhouse, -inn, fountain and some other monuments that built in Ottoman Empire Period and have reached today's. Important architectural structures that built in the period, contribute the urban identity are Rüstem Paşa Covered Bazaar and Lala Paşa Mosque from 16th century [4], [26], [39] (Fig. 7); Caferiye Mosque, Gürcü Mehmet Paşa Mosque, Kurşunlu Mosque and Madrasa Medresesi and Kırkçeşme Bathhouse from 17th century, and Pervizoğlu Mosque, İbrahim Paşa Mosque, Emir Şeyh Mosque, Saray Bathhouse and Hanım Bathhouse and some civil architectural structures from 18th century [39]. On the other hand, beginning from 1850, the limitations of the political conditions prevented any further development of the city, and so it remained within the borders of the settlement area defined in the previous century [35], [39]. However, during this period when Erzurum was under the dominance of westernization tendency as all other big cities of Ottoman Empire, important architectural structures has been built with the effects of I. National Architecture style, which was the dominant architectural movement in the period. Some important examples of this movement in Erzurum are Hükümet Building, Vali Konağı, Adliye Building, Congress Building Atatürk's House, Stone Barns and Mücedilli Mansion (Fig. 5), (Fig. 8).

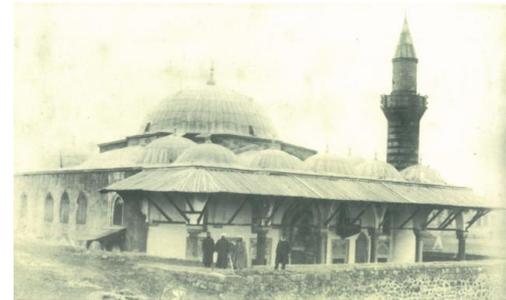


Fig. 7. The significant architectural examples from 16-20th centuries: Lala Paşa Mosque (16th century) [45].



Fig. 8. The significant architectural examples from 16-20th centuries: Hükümet Building (19th century) [45].



Fig. 9. Spatial Development of Erzurum in 20th century: Cumhuriyet Street [45].



Fig. 10. Spatial Development of Erzurum in 20th century: Halkevi Building (right) [46].

### C. Spatial Development during the Turkish Republic Period (1923- Present from 20th Century)

At the time of the establishment of the Turkish Republic, Erzurum had the appearance of a traditional Ottoman city with a traditional organic pattern and with the important examples of Turkish-Islamic Architecture [38]. However, after the foundation of the Turkish Republic, the development of Erzurum started to be redirected towards a modern planning approach. The plan prepared by architect/city planner J.H. Lambert in 1938–1939 led to the launch of a planned development process in Erzurum. In addition to other suggestions, the Lambert Plan suggested protecting the historical monuments in the city. The Lambert Plan was almost fully applied and has determined the urban structure of the city as it is today. As stated by Can, development beyond the western border of the city, which had remained unchanged up until the 20th century, began under the Lambert Plan. In the 20th century, as a spatial representation of the newly founded Turkish Republic, it was common in the other Anatolian cities that a Cumhuriyet (“Republic” in English) Square and Cumhuriyet Street was built (Fig 9). Moreover, important examples of modern architecture, which was dominant architecture movement in the period, were built in Erzurum. Erzurum High School (1939), Halkevi, İş Bankası, Tekel Building, Train Station Building are accepted as the most important examples of modern architecture until the 1960s in the city (Fig. 10).

## IV. CONCLUSION

Erzurum is one of the most important historical settlements located in Anatolia. Historical image of the city has not been lost until today especially the traces of the civilizations inhabitant in Erzurum after the 11th century. The madrasahs, mosques, shrines, tombs, baths, fountains, forts and historical doors belonging to various historical periods in Erzurum, have moved the cultures and architectural characteristics of the periods. Mosques, madrasahs and tombs are accepted as architectural structures that reflect the Turkish-Islamic character of Erzurum [47]. With the effect of these symbolic monuments after the 11th century, the city started to be looked like a Turkish-Islamic city with the effects of Muslim societies that became dominant in Erzurum starting from 11th century. Muslim societies generally either built new cities or worked to create a new culture to match the cities’ time, as it was realized in the case of Erzurum [3], [48].

However, among all the historical monuments that were built in three different historical periods, some of them make a more significant contribution to urban identity. Although as

stated by Yılmaz, it is known that the architectural structures built in Ottoman Period are not as monumental and magnificent as the structures built in Saltukoğulları, Seljukian and Ilkhanid periods because of the quality of the material used in the construction and the lack of embroideries. However, their contribution to urban identity could not be evaluated only depend on the quality of architectural monuments, but their visibility in the current urban space that could be changed according to urban design and planning decisions, and preservation attitude of the decision makers.

From this point of view, Cumhuriyet Street, built in the 20th century could be evaluated as an open-air museum [8], connecting the historical monuments built in different historical periods and represent different architectural movements, and cultures (Fig. 11- Fig. 15).

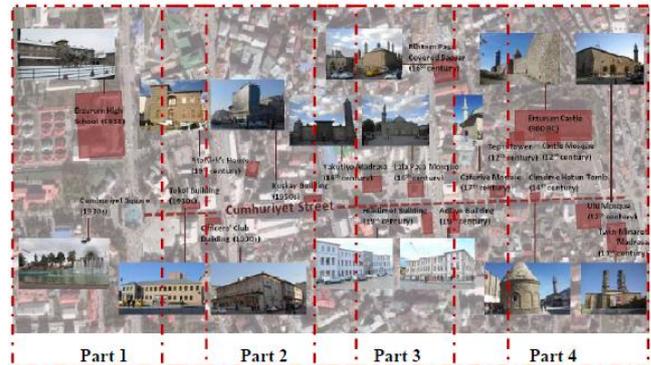


Fig. 11. Cumhuriyet Street and the historical monuments on the street.<sup>2</sup>

Having role as a commercial axis of Erzurum after the 1940s, the street make the palimpsest-like a structure of the city more experienceable both physically and visually. Therefore it could be argued that the monuments located more close to Cumhuriyet Street make more contribution to the urban identity of the city in the case of Erzurum. Designed as the linear spine of Erzurum Cumhuriyet Street started at Cumhuriyet Square, that was built as a prestige node on the western boundary of the city in the 1930s, extended to Twin-Minaret Madrasah. While Cumhuriyet Square has been built to represent the modern Turkish Republic, Twin-Minaret Madrasah has still been accepted as the symbol of Erzurum as a historical Turkish city. As can be follow-on Fig. 11, Erzurum High school, as the most important modern architecture of the city, has a contribution to urban identity with its close position to the Cumhuriyet Square as the beginning point of the spine of Erzurum. Although it has been destructed, Halkevi Building around the Square had an effect on urban identity until 2012. Starting with the Turkish Republic’ period monuments, Cumhuriyet Street continued with Tekel Building, Officers’ Club Building and Kuşkay Building, that are built in between 1930-1960 and accepted as modern architectural heritage. Then the street reached to a point that was religious, education and administrative center of different cultures in the city [3,8]. Located at this point, Yakutiye Madrasa from Ilkhanid period, Lala Paşa Mosque from Ottoman Period, Hükümet Building, Adliye Building and Stone Barns, from the westernization period of Ottoman

<sup>2</sup> Prepared on Google earth image by using the pictures from personal archive of the author.

Empire are the important monuments contributing to the urban identity. In addition to these monuments, even it is not located on the street, Tepsi Minaret from the Saltukoğulları period is also a part of the city silhouette. Then Cumhuriyet Street continued on to Cincime Hatun Tomb from Seljukian period and Caferiye Mosque from Ottoman Period. Ulu Mosque from Saltukoğulları period, Twin Minaret Madrasa from Seljukian period, and Erzurum Castle dated back to 900 BC. located at the end of the Cumhuriyet Street.

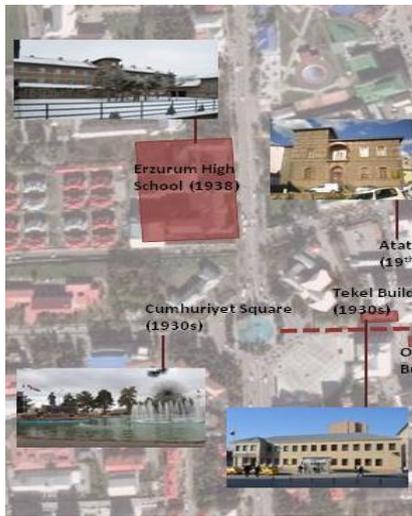


Fig 12. Cumhuriyet Street and the historical monuments on the street – part 1.

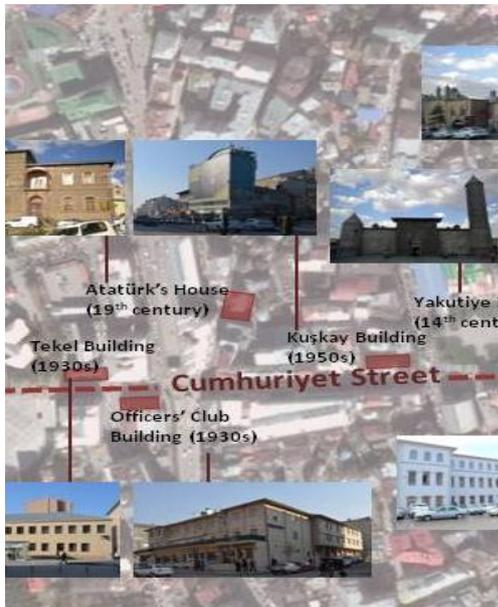


Fig 13. Cumhuriyet Street and the historical monuments on the street – part 2.

In addition to the monuments as visible as possible without any effort because of their locations, Atatürk's House, Müceldili's House and Stone Barns, from westernization period, Rüstem Paşa Covered Bazaar, Erzurum houses from Ottoman period and Three Tombs from Saltukoğulları and Seljukian periods are important identity elements with their close position to the spine of the city. At the end, the present study revealed that all of the monumental structures from different historical periods mostly after 11th century are too close together, side by side in Erzurum urban space. Artificial

identity elements of a city belong to a very different historical periods and urban space has been reached its current state by adding up the layers, and somewhere by giving place to the other and being disappearance. As a result, architectural monuments as a cultural accumulation of different cultures, like a palimpsest, have made a significant contribution to the urban identity of Erzurum.



Fig 14. Cumhuriyet street and the historical monuments on the street – part 3.

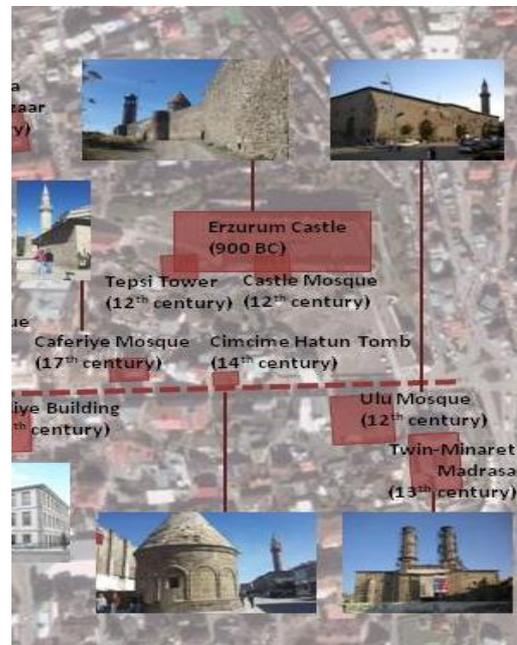


Fig 15. Cumhuriyet Street and the historical monuments on the street – part 4.

## V. DISCUSSION

The historical layers of a city enrich it and play an important role in making the city have a strong identity different from other cities. While the cities embedding its layers into an urban pattern, its architecture and its memory during the history; the identity of a city could be re-structured or its memory could be erased through a transformation of a

city. In order to preserve the original identity and remove it to the future, it is important to make the layers of the cities with multi-layers to be as visible as possible. Moreover, the layers could be experienced visually and physically in the daily life without a special effort.

As a result of the study, it is seen that Erzurum has a multi-layers structure dating from different periods as palimpsest; and traces of different cultures are legible in the urban space of Erzurum at the architectural level. Therefore, this multi-layered structure, like-palimpsest, makes a contribution to the urban identity. Erzurum is an example of palimpsest cities with its thousands of years of history. Urban space of the city has been reached its current state by adding up the layers, and somewhere by giving place to the other and being disappearance. Moreover, Erzurum has experienced relatively accelerated and planned transformation process after the proclamation of the Republic in the 20th century, as well as a slow transformation that has been realized naturally throughout its history starting from the prehistoric times. The many civilizations hosted by the city in its history have resulted in a broad cultural diversity that is embedded within the urban space and create a rich urban identity.

Erzurum's urban space could be defined as a set layer in which new layer overlaps the old one that was not fully erased. In terms of the legible multi-layers structure, it is a unique city. Traces of different periods in the city sits on top of each other, sometimes intermingled and often creates an unavoidable illusion. From the point of palimpsest cities have more powerful images and identities in mind, it is accepted that the cities with more legible layers have unique identities and have more diverse identity elements. Therefore, it is important to reveal the potential of Erzurum through the urban design decisions and implementations for the urban identity. On the other hand, especially because of the urban regeneration processes, the historical layer of the city, urban pattern and the examples of civil architecture has been lost day by day. As it is stated by Can the erosion that is realized with the intervention of humanity, the process started at the beginning of 20th century and increased gradually. As a result, as stated by Madran the speed of erosion has increased significantly during the 21st century.

Therefore, the current knowledge on urban palimpsest characteristics is very important and useful to plan the current and future evolution of urban systems. In our contemporary cities, like Erzurum, this is an issue should be overemphasized. Professionals, who have authority in the shaping urban spaces in the cities with multi-layers, should handle the issue within the frame of urban identity in addition to technical competence. Each intervention could be resulted in a destruction of the layered structure or pushed back the layers to a degree that cannot be seen. Therefore, experts and decision-makers who have the power and authority to interfere the urban space should act sensitively to urban identity during the urban memory demolished or re-building processes that are concerning the whole city and citizens.

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